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FORME DI NARRAZIONE
AUTOBIOGRAFICA
NELLE LETTERATURE SCANDINAVE

*FORMS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
NARRATION IN
SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE*

a cura di / edited by

Massimo Ciaravolo, Sara Culeddu,
Andrea Meregalli, Camilla Storskog

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I curatori

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The editors

INTRODUZIONE

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1. *Presentazione*

Questo volume riunisce i contributi di ventiquattro autori, invitati a una riflessione critica sulle forme di narrazione autobiografica nelle tradizioni letterarie danese, norvegese, svedese e svedese di Finlandia. I contributi trattano di testi scritti dal XVI agli inizi del XXI secolo e sono ordinati cronologicamente. Alla base del progetto vi è la convinzione che la teoria letteraria internazionale fornisca gli strumenti per un'analisi più approfondita e puntuale della narrazione autobiografica nell'area scandinava; e che, in un processo di arricchimento reciproco, la prospettiva critica internazionale possa ricevere una migliore conoscenza dei fenomeni in questa regione dell'Europa. La nostra proposta di lavoro agli autori – passata attraverso una proficua occasione di scambio, il IX Convegno Italiano di Studi Scandinavi svoltosi all'Università di Firenze dal 10 al 12 ottobre 2013 – è dunque partita dall'esigenza di connettere i centri e le periferie, la teoria universale e le declinazioni nazionali tanto nelle opere letterarie quanto nel sempre più articolato dibattito critico del Nord Europa. Il volume desidera così inserirsi in una tradizione consolidata di studi scandinavi sull'autobiografia e illuminare alcune zone di un territorio assai vasto, indagando testi ancora poco studiati o tornando a classici che ancora chiedono di essere interrogati. I saggi qui raccolti contribuiscono nel loro complesso a evidenziare il valore e la ricchezza dell'espressione autobiografica nelle letterature scandinave. Come ha osservato il critico svedese Arne Melberg, la Scandinavia presenta un campo di sperimentazione avanzata delle forme letterarie di autorappresentazione (2008: 23, 151)¹.

Il volume raccoglie articoli di autori collegati a vario titolo agli studi scandinavi italiani: in primo luogo studiosi italiani e scandinavi che operano nelle

¹ La Bibliografia a conclusione di questa Introduzione raccoglie solo gli studi critici, oltre a quelle opere letterarie che non sono altrimenti trattate nei contributi del volume. Per gli estremi bibliografici delle opere oggetto dei contributi, si rinvia invece ai riferimenti bibliografici in calce a ciascuno di essi.

INTRODUCTION

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1. *Presentation*

This volume gathers the contributions of twenty-four authors in a discussion about forms of autobiographical narration in the Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Finland-Swedish literary traditions. The contributions deal, in chronological order, with texts written between the sixteenth and early twenty-first century. Our project is based on the belief that international literary theory can be a significant analytical tool in the study of autobiographical narration in the Scandinavian area, and that, vice-versa, the international critical perspective can be enriched by the studies on this region of Europe. Our proposal to the authors – the outcome of some rewarding days of discussion at the Ninth Italian Conference of Scandinavian Studies, held at Florence University from 10 to 12 October 2013 – derives precisely from the need to connect centres with peripheries, international theory with the specific patterns emerging from Scandinavian literary works, as well as in the increasingly articulate critical debate in Northern Europe. Our volume hopes thus to join a well-established tradition of Scandinavian studies on autobiography, and to shed light on some areas of a vast territory, by analysing texts that are not yet well known, or by returning to classics that still provoke discussion. These essays contribute on the whole to emphasising the value and wealth of autobiographical expression in Scandinavian literature. As the Swedish scholar Arne Melberg has observed, Scandinavia offers a field of advanced experimentations with forms of literary self-representation (2008: 23, 151)¹.

The volume includes articles by scholars in the field of Scandinavian studies who are in some way connected to Italy: first of all Italian and

¹ The References at the end of this Introduction gather only works of literary criticism, besides those literary works that are not otherwise mentioned in the contributions of the volume. For the literary works that are discussed in the contributions, we refer to the References at the end of each essay.

università del nostro paese, ma anche un nutrito gruppo di studiosi italiani attivi all'estero presso università e centri di ricerca, e infine ricercatori e scrittori scandinavi che hanno un legame privilegiato con l'Italia. Ci fa piacere che questo soggetto plurale, pur formato in larga parte da studiosi di letteratura, includa autori che hanno voluto considerare la scrittura autobiografica da una prospettiva diversa, inerente ai rispettivi campi di studi quali la storia, la sociologia e l'antropologia. La pluralità si riflette infine nelle lingue in cui è scritto il volume, poiché si è lasciata agli autori la libertà di scegliere non solo l'argomento specifico e l'approccio metodologico dell'articolo ma anche la lingua in cui scriverlo. Sedici saggi appaiono così in inglese, cinque in italiano, due in svedese e uno in norvegese. Ogni articolo è provvisto di abstract in inglese. L'introduzione, infine, è proposta in italiano e in inglese.

Il dibattito sulla natura e gli scopi della narrazione autobiografica si è sviluppato dagli inizi del Novecento nelle aree tedesca, francese e anglosassone, fino a incrementarsi sensibilmente dagli anni Settanta a oggi. Per lungo tempo, nel Novecento, il canone di riferimento della riflessione ha riguardato testi scritti nelle aree delle lingue più note a livello internazionale e frequentate nella comunità scientifica, con l'aggiunta di qualche opera scritta in altre lingue europee, a partire dal latino dei *Confessionum libri XIII* di Agostino della fine del IV secolo (Agostino 2012, trad. di Reale, testo latino a fronte), con i quali si è soliti indicare l'inizio della tradizione autobiografica occidentale.

Il valore fondante di queste riflessioni ha incoraggiato negli ultimi decenni lo sviluppo del dibattito critico in altre aree linguistiche e tradizioni letterarie europee, tra le quali, a partire dai primi anni Ottanta del Novecento, quella scandinava. A tale interesse critico per l'autobiografia è corrisposto nella pratica letteraria – per ragioni che cercheremo di illustrare – un sempre più marcato desiderio di scrivere e leggere narrazioni biografiche e autobiografiche, attraverso forme che si sono evidentemente allontanate dai modelli canonici dell'autobiografia unitaria e cronologica quali possiamo trovare, oltre che in Agostino, in *Les Confessions* di Jean-Jacques Rousseau (circa 1766-1778; Rousseau 2010; *Le confessioni*, trad. di Cesarano 2009) e *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* di Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1811-1814, 1833; Goethe 2007; *Dalla mia vita. Poesia e verità*, trad. di Cori 1966).

Per altro, sebbene i capolavori autobiografici di Agostino, Rousseau e Goethe tendano similmente a una rappresentazione organica e totale, essi sono anche profondamente diversi tra loro. Agostino parla direttamente a Dio e legge la propria vita, dalla nascita alla maturità, nel segno dell'errore e della ricerca del vero; il punto di svolta è per lui la conversione al cristianesimo, che la divide in un prima e un dopo. Anche Rousseau vuole confessare al lettore la sua intimità più nascosta e le sue emozioni, e farlo senza riserve, per quanto laicamente; nella parabola di una vita intera prende forma il mito di una purezza originaria perduta e di una strenua ricerca di virtù e indipendenza, alla luce di un'esperienza adulta segnata da tormento, infelicità e conflittuali rapporti di dipendenza con il mondo delle lettere di cui

Scandinavian scholars working at Italian universities, but also a rather large group of Italian scholars who work at universities and research institutes abroad, as well as Scandinavian researchers and writers with a special relationship to Italy. We are pleased that this multifaceted group, although mainly formed by literary scholars, includes some authors who consider autobiographical writing from a different perspective, in accordance with their respective fields of research, such as history, sociology and anthropology. This plurality of perspectives is further reflected in the languages in which the volume is written, as we have left the authors free to choose not only their subject matter and methodological approach but also the language in which to write. Sixteen essays appear in English, five in Italian, two in Swedish, and one in Norwegian. Each essay is provided with an English abstract. Finally, there is a bilingual introduction in Italian and English.

The debate on the nature and purposes of autobiographical narration has been developing since the beginning of the twentieth century in the German-, French- and English-speaking areas, and has greatly accelerated since the 1970s. For much of the twentieth century the texts considered by critics belonged to the major international languages, which coincided with those mostly used in the scientific community, with few exceptions, such as the Latin of Augustine's *Confessionum libri XIII*, which dates from the end of the fourth century A.D. (Augustine 2012, trans. by James J. O'Donnell, contains the Latin text), a work that is generally considered the starting point of the autobiographical tradition in the Western world.

The ground-breaking value of these critical reflections has stimulated debate in other European language areas and literary traditions during the last decades, among which, since the early 1980s, Scandinavia. For reasons that we will try to explain, this critical interest in autobiography has gone hand in hand with a growing literary practice of writing and reading biographical and autobiographical narrations, works that have departed from the canonical models of unifying and chronological autobiography, such as we can find, apart from Augustine, in *Les Confessions* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (about 1766-1778; Rousseau 2010; *The Confessions*, trans. by Cohen 1981) and *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1811-1814, 1833; Goethe 2007; *The Autobiography of Goethe. Truth and Poetry: From my Own Life*, trans. by Oxenford 1848).

Although Augustine's, Rousseau's and Goethe's autobiographical masterpieces likewise strive for an organic and totalising representation, they also differ deeply from one another. Augustine speaks directly to God and views his life, from birth to maturity, in terms of error and a search for truth, the dramatic turning point being his conversion to Christianity. Rousseau too sets out to confess his most hidden intimacy unreservedly, albeit from a worldly perspective, in the process mythicising his life as the story of a lost, original purity and of a relentless search for virtue and independence, with reference to an adult experience marked by torment, unhappiness and con-

l'autore fa parte. Goethe concentra invece il racconto sui primi ventisei anni della sua vita, fino alla consacrazione come scrittore; la formazione dell'individuo, mosso dal precoce talento e dalla missione che sente verso l'attività poetica, è letta in stretto rapporto con il quadro storico, culturale e letterario di un'intera epoca.

Alcuni importanti studi – *Design and Truth in Autobiography* di Roy Pascal (1960), *Le Pacte autobiographique* di Philippe Lejeune (1975; *Il patto autobiografico*, trad. di Santini 1986) e, in area scandinava, *Levned og tolkninger. Studier i nordisk selvbiografi* del danese Johnny Kondrup (1982; *Vita e interpretazioni. Studi sull'autobiografia nordica*) – hanno cercato di distinguere il genere dell'autobiografia in senso stretto dalle forme contigue di scrittura intima e del sé come i saggi autobiografici, le memorie, i diari, le lettere, le descrizioni di viaggio, e di separarlo inoltre dai generi della biografia, da un lato, e del romanzo autobiografico dall'altro. Con gli anni Ottanta e Novanta gli orientamenti teorici hanno però messo in dubbio l'utilità dei tentativi tassonomici, anche alla luce della continua contaminazione tra le forme, specialmente in un clima che sempre più ama sperimentare con le diverse possibilità della narrazione autobiografica piuttosto che replicare modelli storicamente determinati. In linea con tali orientamenti, anche il nostro approccio accoglie la pluralità delle forme; da qui, anche, il titolo che abbiamo voluto dare al libro. Del resto è da un altro grande classico del tardo Cinquecento, *Essais* di Michel de Montaigne (1580, 1582, 1588; Montaigne 2009; *Saggi*, trad. di Garavini 2014), che ci giunge un diverso modello di rappresentazione di sé, non fondato sulla cronologia o sull'azione ma sulla raffinata disamina sotto forma di saggio filosofico: un sondare che tocca – come divagando, con andamento associativo ed episodico – la storia, le lettere, la condizione dell'uomo e l'intimità di chi scrive. Il procedimento di Montaigne è già sostenuto da un'idea non unitaria ma plurale, composita e instabile del soggetto (Melberg 2008: 9, 17-32).

2. Momenti del dibattito internazionale sull'autobiografia

Il saggio del filosofo Wilhelm Dilthey *Das Erleben und die Selbstbiographie* (Il vissuto e l'autobiografia; in Niggel 1998: 21-32), scritto tra il 1906 e il 1911, ha un ruolo pionieristico per il valore che attribuisce all'autobiografia come forma privilegiata di autocoscienza e interpretazione della vita. Dilthey, un padre dell'ermeneutica moderna, usa il concetto di *Erlebnis* (esperienza, vissuto) per indicare l'unità minima e distinta di significato che, attraverso la memoria e la selezione dei ricordi, emerge dalla successione di attimi temporali sconnessi. Attribuire significato alle esperienze è importante per potere percepire il flusso della vita come storia, nesso e continuità, e l'espressione piena di questo sforzo di comprensione dell'accadere storico è l'autobiografia, quando il soggetto rivolge lo sguardo alla propria vita.

flicting relationships with the world of letters in which he is actively involved. Goethe, instead, concentrates his narration on his first twenty-six years of life, up to his breakthrough as a writer. The *Bildung* of the individual, driven by his early talent and by the mission he feels towards poetical activity, is closely related to the historical, cultural and literary events of his epoch.

Some important studies – such as *Design and Truth in Autobiography* by Roy Pascal (1960), *Le Pacte autobiographique* by Philippe Lejeune (1975; *On Autobiography*, trans. by Leary 1989²) and, in Scandinavia, *Levned og tolkninger. Studier i nordisk selvbiografi* by the Danish scholar Johnny Kondrup (1982; *Life and Interpretations. Studies in Scandinavian Autobiography*) – have tried to distinguish the genre of autobiography *sensu stricto* from adjacent forms of self-representation, such as autobiographical essays, memoirs, diaries, letters, and travel accounts, and to distinguish it from biography on the one hand and the autobiographical novel on the other. During the 1980s and the 1990s critics have however questioned the theoretical usefulness of taxonomies, emphasising instead a constant contamination of forms, especially in a climate of increasing experimentation with different possibilities of autobiographical narration, rather than focusing on traditional models. Accordingly, our approach too favours a plurality of forms, appealing to another, late sixteenth-century classic, Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* (1580, 1582, 1588; Montaigne 2009; *The Complete Essays*, trans. by Screech 1991), which proposes a different model of self-representation, no longer based on chronology or action, but on a subtle examination in the form of a philosophical essay, touching, as by a series of digressions, on history, letters, the human condition and the writer's own inner life, an approach which already presupposes a plural, complex and unstable type of subjectivity (Melberg 2008: 9, 17-32).

2. Phases of the international debate on autobiography

The philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey's essay *Das Erleben und die Selbstbiographie* (in Niggli 1998: 21-32; *Lived Experience and Autobiography*), written between 1906 and 1911, played a pioneering role for the relevance it gave to autobiography as a primal form of self-consciousness and interpretation of life. Dilthey, one of the fathers of modern hermeneutics, used the idea of *Erlebnis* (lived experience) to define a basic unit of meaning emerging, through memory, from the inchoate flow of temporal fragments. Giving meaning to experiences is important in order to perceive life as story/history, with its consistency and continuity. According to Dilthey, the effort to understand history finds its full expression in autobiography, through the subject's gaze focused on his/her own life.

² This English edition contains parts of *Le Pacte autobiographique*.

Con gli studi di Roy Pascal, tra i quali il saggio *Autobiography as an Art Form* del 1959 (in Niggel 1998: 148-157) e il già menzionato volume del 1960, l'autobiografia è vista sempre più come forma estetica e genere letterario, oltre che come specifica espressione culturale dell'autocoscienza occidentale. L'autobiografia descrive la genesi e lo sviluppo della personalità dall'infanzia alla maturità, e gli eventi sono narrati se rilevanti per questo processo di formazione. Come per Dilthey, anche per Pascal l'autobiografia non racconta in primo luogo fatti ma esperienze vissute. Dunque, l'autobiografia non si pone come oggettiva storia di una vita ma come forma di interazione tra passato e presente nella coscienza dell'autore. Il carattere soggettivo, che per lo storico può costituire il limite dell'autobiografia in quanto fonte, è ciò che la promuove in quanto arte. Definendo l'autobiografia come specifico genere letterario, Pascal la avvicina al romanzo di formazione, e la distingue invece dalle altre forme di rappresentazione del sé quali il diario (che manca del punto di vista conclusivo e unitario), le memorie (rivolte più alle circostanze esterne che alla personalità intima), l'autoritratto (statico e senza accento sullo sviluppo della personalità) e la biografia (che lavora sui documenti e non sulla memoria personale). Come si è detto, e come si può verificare nei saggi di questo volume, tali forme si danno raramente pure e distinte, ma più spesso coesistono nello stesso testo.

Gli anni Settanta vedono un grande sviluppo della riflessione sull'autobiografia. Ingrid Aichinger, in un saggio del 1970, *Probleme der Autobiographie als Sprachkunstwerk* (in Niggel 1998: 170-199; Problemi dell'autobiografia come opera d'arte linguistica), sviluppa gli elementi delle riflessioni precedenti con una consapevolezza più spiccata delle difficoltà di distinguere nettamente l'autobiografia dalle forme contigue di scrittura di sé (oltre a diario, memorie e autoritratto letterario, sono indicati il romanzo autobiografico, la riflessione filosofica sull'io, le lettere, le descrizioni di viaggio e le apologie). Come per gli studiosi sopra menzionati, emerge pur sempre, anche per Aichinger, un canone occidentale dell'autobiografia in senso stretto, nel quale spiccano i nomi di Agostino, Rousseau e Goethe: l'accento è qui sulla rappresentazione della propria vita come nesso coerente e sviluppo della personalità; la tendenza è verso i tratti essenziali e la totalità. Anche per Aichinger l'autobiografia non è una cronaca o un *curriculum vitae* ma un atto di comprensione dell'io passato. Tale processo di significazione alla luce del presente richiede selezione, e il vissuto ricordato non equivale mai al passato «come è stato veramente» (la nota formula dello storicismo ottocentesco coniata da Leopold von Ranke); l'autobiografia propone un tipo di verità diversa da quella puramente fattuale.

James Olney (1972) contribuisce ad alimentare l'attenzione nei confronti della scrittura autobiografica. Il suo approccio non è formale, cioè interessato alla definizione del genere, e nemmeno storico-letterario, ma

With Roy Pascal's studies, among which his 1959 essay *Autobiography as an Art Form* (in Niggli 1998: 148-157) and the above-mentioned volume of 1960, autobiography is seen more and more as an aesthetic form and a literary genre, as well as a specific cultural expression of Western self-awareness. Autobiography describes the birth and development of personality from childhood to maturity, and events are narrated as relevant to this process of formation. As for Dilthey, even for Pascal autobiography does not report so much facts as lived experiences. Therefore, autobiography does not present itself as the objective story of a life, but as a form of interaction between past and present in the author's mind. The subjective trait, which can be considered the limit of autobiography as a source for the historian, is what distinguishes autobiography as art. By defining autobiography as a literary genre, Pascal relates it to the *Bildungsroman*, and distinguishes it from other forms of self-representation such as the diary (which lacks the final unifying point of view), the memoir (which describes one's external circumstances rather than one's inner personality), the literary self-portrait (which is static and does not emphasise the development of personality), and biography (which is based on documents and not on personal memory). As we have said, and as it is possible to observe in the essays of this volume, such forms seldom appear in a 'pure' fashion, but tend more often to coexist and merge within the same text.

The debate about autobiography increased considerably in the 1970s. Ingrid Aichinger, in her 1970 essay *Probleme der Autobiographie als Sprachkunstwerk* (in Niggli 1998: 170-199; Problems of Autobiography as a Linguistic Work of Art), develops her reflections with a clearer awareness of how difficult it is to separate autobiography from adjacent forms of writing of the self (besides diaries, memoir and literary self-portraits, she mentions autobiographical novels, philosophical meditations, letters, travel accounts and apologies). As for the previously mentioned scholars, however, a Western canon of autobiography in the narrow sense takes shape even for Aichinger, where the names of Augustine, Rousseau, and Goethe emerge. Here the emphasis is on the representation of life as a consistent development of one's personality; the tendency is towards the essential traits and totality. Even for Aichinger autobiography is not a chronicle or a *curriculum vitae*, but an act of present comprehension of one's past. Such a process demands selection, and lived experience never corresponds to the past «as it actually was» (the well-known formula of nineteenth-century historicism by Leopold von Ranke); autobiography proposes a different kind of truth from a purely factual one.

James Olney (1972) contributed to reinforcing interest in autobiographical writing. His approach was not formal, i.e. he was not interested in defining the literary genre or in considering literary history, but rather focused on ethical, philosophical and psychological aspects, seeing autobiography as a human endeavour that replies to chaos by searching for

di carattere etico-filosofico e psicologico. L'autobiografia è vista come l'attività umana che al caos risponde con la ricerca di nessi, ordine e senso; essa è dunque individuale ma è anche un atto comunicativo, poiché si basa su una condizione umana condivisa. Le «metafore del sé» sono per Olney quelle rappresentazioni traslate che dal continuo mutamento, instabilità e provvisorietà dell'io cercano di trarre un disegno (*design, pattern*) che dia significato alla nostra vita. Tali metafore si trovano, per Olney, nell'autobiografia e nella poesia (1972: 25, 29, 44-45). Il fatto che Olney individui le «metafore del sé» in due attività imparentate ma distinte, l'autobiografia e la poesia, ha, per quanto incidentalmente, delle conseguenze anche in relazione al genere letterario. Implicitamente, infatti, Olney esclude che la poesia possa costituire una forma autobiografica, probabilmente per il nesso ovvio che egli stabilisce tra autobiografia e narrazione.

Gli studiosi che si sono occupati di autobiografia e, con loro, diversi autori in questo libro, sono spesso tornati a un decisivo nodo formatosi sempre nel corso degli anni Settanta, determinato dalle posizioni antitetiche di Philippe Lejeune (1975) e Paul de Man (1979). Nel 1975 Lejeune parte da una definizione restrittiva, sia quando propone di distinguere il patto autobiografico da quello romanzesco (decidere se la materia narrata è composta da fatti accaduti o inventati), sia quando definisce l'autobiografia come racconto retrospettivo della propria vita, scritto in prosa e in prima persona, in cui l'autore, coincidente con il narratore e il protagonista, pone l'accento sulla ricerca del significato esistenziale. L'idea di fondo di Lejeune è che l'autobiografia nasca per un patto narrativo tra autore e lettore, un accordo che sulla base di specifici segni testuali e paratestuali permette di classificare un'opera come autobiografica. Egli coniuga così l'approccio strutturalista e narratologico di Gérard Genette a spunti provenienti dalla teoria della ricezione di Hans Robert Jauss e al suo concetto di «orizzonte d'attesa».

In un unico, breve ma assai incisivo intervento, de Man ha smontato le pretese euristiche che, come abbiamo visto, hanno preso forma nel corso degli anni Sessanta e Settanta. Similmente a Lejeune, de Man colloca l'autobiografia nello spazio comunicativo tra autore e lettore, ma per osservare, dalla sua prospettiva decostruzionista, come l'autobiografia possa al massimo rappresentare una figura della lettura e della comprensione del testo, poiché moventi biografici e proiezioni di sé si possono verificare, o venire meno, nella produzione di qualsiasi opera o nella sua ricezione. Quindi, se ogni testo può essere letto in senso autobiografico, non esiste un genere autobiografico dai confini oggettivamente tracciabili. In fondo questo non è molto diverso da quanto già osservava Olney (1972: 38-39), ma con de Man prevale il radicale dubbio decostruzionista verso la capacità del testo di riferirsi a un'esperienza di vita che esiste fuori del testo; tutto si risolverebbe, per de Man, nei tropi con cui il testo è costruito.

La posizione di de Man non ha comunque avuto effetti annichilenti sull'effettiva esistenza storica dell'autobiografia. Di fatto, alla messa in

meaning, order and consistency, and therefore as an individual activity but also a communicative act, as it is based on a shared human condition. The «metaphors of self» are, according to Olney, those tropes and representations which try to cull a pattern of consistency from the ongoing mutability and instability of individual life, so as to give it meaning. Such metaphors are to be found in autobiography and in poetry (1972: 25, 29, 44-45). The fact that Olney finds the «metaphors of self» in two related but distinct activities, autobiography and poetry, has, if somewhat incidentally, consequences with respect to the literary genre. Olney tends implicitly to exclude that poetry can represent a form of autobiography, probably owing to the obvious relation he sees between autobiography and narration.

Those who have studied autobiography, and among them the authors of this book, have often come back to a crucial point in the discussion, determined in the 1970s by the antithetical positions of Philippe Lejeune (1975) and Paul de Man (1979). In 1975 Lejeune started from a restrictive definition, both when he proposed to distinguish the autobiographical pact from the fictional pact of the novel (on the basis of whether the narrated material consists of facts or fictions), and when he defined autobiography as a retrospective prose narrative written in the first person singular, in which the author, identical with the narrator and the protagonist, deals with his/her life with an emphasis on its existential meaning. Lejeune's basic idea is that autobiography originates with a pact between writer and reader, an agreement which, thanks to specific textual and paratextual signs, defines a work as an autobiography. By doing so he combined Gérard Genette's structuralist and narratological approach with ideas coming from Hans Robert Jauss' theory of reception and his «horizon of expectations».

With a single, short but very incisive contribution, de Man deconstructed the heuristic claims which, as we have seen, took shape during the 1960s and 1970s. Like Lejeune, de Man placed autobiography in the communicative space between author and reader, but only to observe, from his deconstructive standpoint, how autobiography can at most represent a mode of reading or understanding a text, as biographical motives and projections of the self may always occur, or not, in any literary work and reception. Therefore, if any text can be read in an autobiographical sense, there is no such thing as an autobiographical genre with distinct, objective boundaries. This is after all not so different from what Olney already had observed (1972: 38-39), but with de Man the radical deconstructive doubt prevails; in his view the text fails to refer to a life experience that exists outside of it; everything is reduced to the tropes with which the text is constructed.

De Man's position has not had annihilating effects on the actual existence of autobiography. As a matter of fact, his radical questioning as a

discussione dell'autobiografia sancita in sede critica da de Man è seguita nell'ultimo trentennio una vera e propria esplosione delle forme di narrazione autobiografica, dentro e fuori la letteratura; proporzionalmente, si è assistito anche a un notevole incremento del discorso critico. Il dubbio radicale di de Man può quindi avere agito da stimolo produttivo, addirittura favorendo la disseminazione del momento autobiografico in più generi letterari, e dunque la presente, nuova vita dell'autobiografia fatta di contaminazioni e sperimentazioni (cfr. Niggel 1998: 593-602; Anderson 2011: 11-15). Lo stesso Lejeune, che non ha mai smesso di interrogarsi sull'autobiografia, ha costruito, attraverso numerose pubblicazioni dagli anni Settanta a oggi e un sito dedicato, una dettagliata mappatura *in fieri* della semiotica della narrativa autobiografica, dove ha saputo riconsiderare aspetti potenzialmente più normativi della sua teoria e delle sue definizioni di genere (Lejeune 1980, 2005, 2014). Così, ad esempio, ha constatato che un numero significativo di autobiografie è scritto in terza persona, arrivando a un'acuta consapevolezza della tensione tra unità e molteplicità che contraddistingue l'io e la nostra ricerca di identità, e che ci fa problematicamente oscillare tra impossibile unità e intollerabile divisione (Lejeune 1980: 32-59).

Un punto di vista diverso dal decostruzionismo è espresso da Paul John Eakin (1985), il quale non vede antitesi tra l'esigenza di verità dell'autobiografia e la presenza in essa di rappresentazioni finzionali. Per Eakin, la scoperta di sé si intreccia infatti con la creazione di sé. Autori del Novecento quali Mary McCarthy, Henry James e Jean-Paul Sartre mostrano, osserva Eakin, una spiccata consapevolezza delle aporie e tortuosità dell'atto autobiografico, e includono una componente romanzesca e immaginativa nel loro sforzo di conoscenza di sé e ricerca del vero. L'autobiografia si pone dunque come luogo di negoziazione artistica tra i vincoli del referente reale e storico e la libertà creativa, e anche per Eakin i materiali del passato sono plasmati e modellati per servire alle necessità della coscienza presente dello scrittore.

Uno stimolante contributo – anche per capire le ragioni del forte bisogno di biografia e autobiografia nella comunicazione contemporanea, letteraria e non – proviene dal sociologo inglese Anthony Giddens (1991). La fine del Novecento, con i grandi processi di globalizzazione della tarda età moderna, espone costantemente gli individui al rischio e alla sfida. È una condizione caratterizzata dal dubbio e dallo sfaldamento di ogni certezza, che produce un senso immanente di precarietà e, a volte, catastrofe. In tutto questo si inserisce l'identità di sé in quanto racconto, un progetto fondamentale per accettare la cultura del rischio in cui viviamo. Secondo Giddens dobbiamo produrre e tenere in vita narrazioni biografiche coerenti, per quanto provvisorie e destinate alla continua revisione. Si tratta di una biografia dalla natura fragile e tuttavia fondamentale per la nostra identità, anche eticamente, una forma di appropriazione dell'esperienza che si opponga all'impotenza in un ingranaggio sociale che,

critic has ushered in a veritable boom of forms of autobiographical narration, within and outside literature, in the last thirty years; and the critical debate has increased proportionally. De Man's doubt may therefore have acted as a stimulus, even favouring the dissemination of the autobiographical element in several genres which has characterised the new life of autobiography, made up of contaminations and experimentations (cf. Niggli 1998: 593-602; Anderson 2011: 11-15). Lejeune himself has continued unceasingly to investigate autobiography, building, through several publications since the 1970s, as well as through a website specifically dedicated to the purpose, a detailed mapping in progress of the semiotics of autobiographical narration, which has also permitted him to reconsider aspects of his theory and potentially restrictive and normative genre definitions (Lejeune 1980, 2005, 2014). He has thus observed, for instance, that a relevant number of autobiographies are written in the third person, and in this respect he has expressed a distinct awareness of the tension between unity and multiplicity in our search for identity, something which makes us problematically oscillate between impossible unity and intolerable division (Lejeune 1980: 32-59).

A different standpoint from deconstruction was expressed by Paul John Eakin (1985), who did not see a contradiction between the truth claims of autobiography and the presence of fiction in it. In his view the discovery of the self interacts with the creation of the self. Eakin examined twentieth-century authors such as Mary McCarthy, Henry James and Jean-Paul Sartre, who prove to be fully aware of the complexities of the autobiographical act, and include fictional, imaginative elements in their attempt at self-knowledge and search for truth. Autobiography is thus interpreted as a place of artistic negotiation between the obligations of referentiality and creative freedom, and even for Eakin the materials of the past are moulded to serve the writer's present needs.

A stimulating contribution that helps us to understand the reasons for the strong need for biographical and autobiographical narratives in contemporary communication, be it literary or not, came from the English sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991). The end of the twentieth century, with the huge globalisation process of the late modern age, constantly exposed individuals to risk and challenge, a condition characterised by doubt and the dissolution of all certainties, which produced a pervasive sense of precariousness, at times of catastrophe. In this general condition, storytelling as a form of self-identity became a fundamental project for coping with the culture of risk we live in. According to Giddens, we must produce substantial biographical narrations, and maintain them as ongoing projects, however provisional and subject to revision they prove to be: a type of biography which, though fragile, is nonetheless essential for our identity, even from an ethical point of view; a way of gaining life experience, and opposing impotence within a social machinery that,

promettendo emancipazione e libertà, produce piuttosto esclusione, differenza e marginalità.

Un altro tentativo di costruire il genere dell'autobiografia, osservandone le costanti e le variabili nel tempo in un ampio corpus di testi, è quello di John Sturrock (1993). Pur non condividendo l'assunto di de Man, secondo cui non si trova traccia della reale esperienza di vita nel testo autobiografico, Sturrock mette l'accento sulla letterarietà dell'autobiografia, sul suo conformarsi a strutture, pratiche retoriche e convenzioni di genere che si sono determinate nel tempo, da Agostino fino agli scrittori del Novecento. L'autobiografia vive proprio della tensione che si crea tra le esigenze di questi filtri formali e la volontà di unicità, sincerità, intimità e spontaneità che caratterizza l'atto autobiografico, e che spesso l'autore dichiara all'inizio della sua opera.

Sintetizzando gli esiti critici degli anni Ottanta e Novanta, Günter Niggel (1998: 593-602) osserva come non molti abbiano proseguito sulla strada della decostruzione, e come tuttavia il dibattito sull'autobiografia e la stessa pratica autobiografica si siano sempre più incentrati sulle questioni postmoderne dominanti: il rapporto tra realtà e finzione, fattualità e testualità, i dubbi sulle pretese di verità oggettiva e l'accento sulla creazione/invenzione della verità autobiografica. Niggel stesso indica, per l'autobiografia, la prospettiva della rappresentazione di un soggetto molteplice, plurale e discontinuo, che sperimenta con le forme del frammento e del mosaico. Anche l'intreccio di realtà e finzione, tratto tipico dell'autobiografismo contemporaneo, può essere letto come espressione della nuova soggettività. La sperimentazione e il carattere mutevole portano Niggel a ritenere perciò che l'autobiografia si possa meglio definire come «scrittura autobiografica».

A parte alcune visioni estreme, secondo cui l'autobiografia, in quanto pretesa di cogliere un soggetto e un'esperienza reali, risulta vana (Evans 1999), l'approccio postmoderno e decostruzionista ha mostrato di prendere sul serio l'esistenza storica, passata e presente, dell'autobiografia, e di non sminuire il problema del suo necessario rapporto con l'esperienza vissuta. Günter Waldmann (2000) e Linda Anderson (2011) osservano ad esempio come le teorie sull'autobiografia, dagli inizi del Novecento fino a Lejeune, abbiano teso a canonizzare *una* forma storica dell'autobiografia – cronologicamente ordinata, 'totale', borghese e maschile – che risulta ormai superata. Per Waldmann non esiste una forma 'naturale' di racconto autobiografico, mentre la forma canonica si è definita in relazione al modello del romanzo di formazione, forma che appare oggi problematica poiché presuppone un individuo coerente e unitario. Con la consapevolezza del soggetto frammentario e composito, osserva Waldmann, anche le forme dell'autobiografica cominciano a sperimentare nuove strade a partire dal modernismo degli anni Venti e Trenta del Novecento. Anche Anderson, la quale pure parte da Agostino, insiste sulla differenza: il sé ha voluto dire cose diverse per categorie periferiche e marginalizzate come le donne, e il femminismo ha visto nelle politiche

while promising emancipation and freedom, produces exclusion, alterity and marginality.

John Sturrock (1993) made a further attempt to construct the genre of autobiography by observing, through a wide range of texts, its consistent traits and changing patterns over time. While not sharing de Man's viewpoint about the lack of any real life experience in the autobiographical text, Sturrock considered autobiography as a literary artefact, with reference to the way it conforms to structures, rhetorical patterns and conventions which have been developing over the centuries ever since Augustine. The life of autobiography develops precisely through the tension between the obligations of these formal devices and the will to uniqueness, sincerity, intimacy and spontaneity which characterises the autobiographical act, and is often declared by the authors at the beginning of their works.

Summarising the critical outcome of the 1980s and 1990s, Günter Niggel (1998: 593-602) has observed that not many critics have continued in the direction of deconstruction, but also that the debate on autobiography, as well as its practice, have focused increasingly on dominant postmodern issues: interplay between reality and fiction, doubts regarding truth claims, emphasis on the creation/invention of the autobiographical truth in the text. The perspective indicated by Niggel is that of a representation of a multifaceted subject, experimenting with the forms of fragment and mosaic; even the intertwining of facts and fiction, a typical trait of contemporary autobiography, can be read as an expression of this new subjectivity. Given these elements of experimentation and mutability, Niggel thinks that a better definition of the genre would be «autobiographical writing».

Apart from some extreme positions, according to which autobiography, as a claim to grasp a real subject and a real experience, is futile (Evans 1999), the postmodern and deconstructive approach has proved to take seriously the historical existence, past and present, of autobiography, and not to disregard the problem of its necessary link to lived experience. Günter Waldmann (2000) and Linda Anderson (2011) have observed how theories of autobiography, from the beginning of the twentieth century up to Lejeune, have tended to give priority to *one* of its historical forms: the chronologically ordered, 'total', male and bourgeois version, which appears old-fashioned today. Waldmann believes in no single 'natural' form of autobiographical narrative, while the canonical form has been defined in connection with the developmental narrative of the *Bildungsroman*, a form that appears problematic today, in its taking for granted that there can be such a thing as a consistent, unified individual character. With a growing consciousness of the fragmented subject, Waldmann observes, even the forms of autobiography explored new ways in the modernism of the 1920s and 1930s. Although Anderson too starts her tradition with Augustine, she insists on difference: the self has meant different things for peripheral and marginalised categories such as women, and feminism

di questo genere letterario un'espressione della legge patriarcale che ha delegittimato la scrittura femminile nel corso del tempo.

3. *Percorsi critici in Scandinavia dagli anni Ottanta*

Come si è detto, un numero crescente di contributi critici scandinavi si è concentrato sull'autobiografia e i suoi dintorni, a volte scegliendo l'opera di uno specifico autore, spesso esaminando tradizioni e tendenze più ampie. Kondrup (1982), che raccoglie l'eredità critica da Pascal a Lejeune, considera l'autobiografia come genere distinto e tuttavia fortemente legato al romanzo di formazione. Attraverso capitoli dedicati a singoli autori egli individua un corpus di autobiografie in Scandinavia dal medioevo ai primi decenni del XX secolo, prendendo in esame autori e testi certamente importanti, ma senza includere altri ugualmente rilevanti. Al canone autobiografico quasi tutto maschile di Kondrup (fatta eccezione per la nobildonna svedese del Seicento Agneta Horn), Eva Haettner Aurelius (1996) affianca la tradizione dell'autobiografia femminile scandinava dal Seicento all'età romantica, intrecciando dunque la questione del genere letterario con la specificità del genere sessuale a lungo escluso dal canone.

Steinar Gimnes (1998) allarga ulteriormente il campo dell'autobiografia scandinava, concentrandosi su alcuni classici norvegesi dell'Otto e Novecento. Tra questi compare lo straordinario e inquietante *Paa gjengrodde stier* di Knut Hamsun (1949; *Per i sentieri dove cresce l'erba*, trad. di D'Avino 1995): ultimo libro di una lunga vita, testo composito e in bilico tra pesante lascito storico, per il sostegno di Hamsun al nazismo, e lieve *rêverie*, che vanifica qualsiasi sforzo di definizione di genere. Gimnes prende anche in esame testi autobiografici scritti da membri del colto ceto borghese dell'amministrazione norvegese, come forma di testimonianza e ricordo di sé rivolta a una cerchia ristretta di lettori, sottolineando così un altro aspetto della questione: l'autobiografia come forma di espressione e comunicazione che vive la sua vita non solo nella letteratura, né tantomeno nella sola letteratura 'alta'.

Come Hamsun in Norvegia, lo svedese August Strindberg ha interpretato sul finire dell'Ottocento la spiccata consapevolezza della contraddittoria pluralità del carattere che l'età borghese vorrebbe unitario, anticipando percorsi che con la psicanalisi e la letteratura modernista sarebbero diventati patrimonio condiviso nel corso del Novecento. Uno studio scandinavo fondamentale, anche per la sua ricaduta teorica generale, appare in tal senso quello del danese Per Stounbjerg (2005), dedicato alla prosa autobiografica di Strindberg, una scrittura caratterizzata dalla costitutiva incompiutezza e apertura verso successive revisioni del proprio io.

In relazione agli sviluppi della narrativa contemporanea il dibattito critico internazionale, in particolare francese e anglosassone, ha coniato il termine *autofiction*, per definire la sempre più frequente ma anche e soprat-

has seen in the politics of genre an expression of the patriarchal law which has delegitimised women's autobiographical writing in the course of time.

3. *Critical directions in Scandinavia since the 1980s*

As we have said, an increasing number of Scandinavian critical contributions have focused on the area of autobiography, sometimes by choosing the works of a single author, more often by examining broader traditions and tendencies. Kondrup (1982), who embraced Pascal's and Lejeune's critical legacy, considered autobiography as a distinct genre, but saw it also as strictly related to the novel of formation. Through chapters dedicated to single authors, Kondrup identified a body of Scandinavian autobiographies from the middle ages to the first decades of the twentieth century. Relevant texts and authors were thereby considered, but equally important works were left out. If Kondrup's canon was almost totally male (except for the seventeenth-century Swedish noblewoman Agneta Horn), Eva Haettner Aurelius (1996) took up the tradition of women's autobiography from the seventeenth century to the Romantic age, considering the question of literary genre from the perspective of the gender long excluded from the canon.

Steinar Gimnes (1998) broadened the field of Scandinavian autobiography by examining some Norwegian classics from the nineteenth and twentieth century. Among them we find Knut Hamsun's extraordinary and disquieting *Paa gjengrodd stier* (1949; *On Overgrown Paths*, trans. by Anderson 1967): a long life's last book whose form is a composite balance between controversial historical legacy, owing to Hamsun's support for Nazism, and light *rêverie*, a work that frustrates any attempt at genre definition. Gimnes also considered autobiographical texts that were written by the bourgeois, cultivated class of Norwegian civil servants, as a form of testimony and personal memory, addressed to a selected circle of readers. The attention paid to this production underscores another relevant aspect: autobiography is not a form of expression and communication that exists in literature alone, even less so in 'high' literature.

Like Hamsun in Norway, the Swedish writer August Strindberg, towards the end of the nineteenth century, analysed with keen awareness the contradictions of the modern character, in contrast to the bourgeois ideology, which clung to the notion of a consistent, unified personality. Strindberg was thus a forerunner of a perception that, thanks to psychoanalysis and modernist literature, would be widely shared in the course of the twentieth century. A fundamental Scandinavian study, even in terms of general theoretical relevance, is Per Stounbjerg's book about Strindberg's autobiographical prose (2005), by its nature incomplete and open to continual revisions of the self.

In connection with the development of contemporary prose, the international critical debate, especially in French and in English, has coined the term *autofiction*, to define the increasingly frequent, and above all conscious and playful, mixture of autobiography and fiction. Such tendencies

tutto consapevole, nonché spesso ludica, commistione di intenzione autobiografica e invenzione narrativa. Simili percorsi sono stati esplorati anche dalla più recente riflessione critica in Scandinavia. Nella miscellanea danese curata da Stefan Kjerkegaard, Henrik Skov Nielsen e Kristin Ørjasæter (2006) si esplora l'*autofiction* sia per come questa si esprime in opere di scrittori danesi e norvegesi contemporanei, sia in quanto pratica consolidata già in autori danesi classici dell'Ottocento. Nella stessa direzione va il volume di Poul Behrendt *Dobbelkontrakten, en æstetisk nydannelse* (2006; Il doppio contratto, un nuovo costrutto estetico), che, partendo dalle nozioni di «patto» e «contratto» proposte da Lejeune, per cui un testo propone al lettore un contratto che è o autobiografico o romanzesco, osserva la marcata presenza nella letteratura contemporanea danese e norvegese di patti narrativi che includono allo stesso tempo autobiografia e finzione. Diversi contributi del presente volume considerano l'uso del termine *autofiction*; spesso si constata però la difficoltà di districarsi nel ginepraio terminologico che tenta di mappare il vasto territorio che si apre tra romanzo e autobiografia 'puri'. La stessa impressione si ricava dallo studio svedese *Den tvetydiga pakten* (Ahlstedt, Karlsson 2011; Il patto ambiguo), che riprende e sviluppa il dibattito sull'*autofiction*. Una proposta interessante è quella di Jon Helt Haarder, che analizza il «biografismo performativo» (2005, 2007, 2014) in diverse opere della narrativa contemporanea danese e norvegese. Il termine indica il modo in cui le esperienze della propria vita sono trasformate in materiale estetico, prestazione artistica e consapevole messinscena da parte dello scrittore – una pratica che offre nuove possibilità alla comunicazione autobiografica.

Il già citato studio di Arne Melberg (2008) propone ancora percorsi di analisi dell'autobiografia scandinava con spirito di curiosità e apertura, e include così nuove opere nello spettro dell'indagine, sia opere del passato, come le autobiografie di Selma Lagerlöf e quelle di scrittori proletari svedesi degli anni Trenta, sia tendenze contemporanee, come la letteratura diaristica svedese. I nuovi diari mostrano, da un lato, fame di realtà, anche la più quotidiana e triviale, dall'altro si rifanno all'influente modello elettronico e multimediale del diario-blog, in cui la propria identità può essere continuamente stilizzata e modellata. Questi ultimi due elementi – desiderio di autenticità in un mondo percepito sempre più come finzione, e influsso sulla narrazione autobiografica letteraria dei modi e dei codici comunicativi dei social network – sono al centro della riflessione di due recenti contributi. Arrivando a valutazioni diverse, Per Thomas Andersen (2012: 676-678) e Hans Hauge (2012) prendono spunto dallo stesso caso letterario, che simboleggia la «svolta biografica» nella contemporanea letteratura norvegese e scandinava: il successo, ormai mondiale, dell'autobiografia in sei volumi *Min kamp* (2009-2011; *La mia battaglia*, trad. di Podestà Heir 2014¹) dello

¹ Con *La mia battaglia*, Feltrinelli ha annunciato la pubblicazione dell'intera opera in sei volumi, della quale è per ora uscito il primo *La morte del padre* (Knausgård 2014).

have recently been analysed by Scandinavian critics. In the volume of essays edited by Stefan Kjerkegaard, Henrik Skov Nielsen and Kristin Ørjasæter (2006) autofiction is examined as it appears in both contemporary Danish and Norwegian writers, and as an already well-established practice for some nineteenth-century Danish classics. Even Poul Behrendt's study *Dobbelkontrakten, en æstetisk nydannelse* (2006; *The Double Contract, a New Aesthetical Construction*) moves in a similar direction. Behrendt takes his cue from Lejeune's notions of pact or contract, according to which a text proposes to its readers a pact that is either autobiographical or fictional. Behrendt argues however that contemporary Danish and Norwegian literature abound in examples of 'double' narrative pacts, including both autobiography and fiction. Several essays in this volume tentatively employ the term *autofiction*, while observing how awkward and confusing terminology can be, when one tries to distinguish forms in the vast grey area between the novel and autobiography. The same impression is conveyed by the Swedish study *Den tvetydiga pakten* (Ahlstedt, Karlsson 2011; *The Ambivalent Pact*), which summarises and develops the debate about *autofiction*. An interesting proposal comes from Jon Helt Haarder, who analyses what he calls «performative biographism» (2005, 2007, 2014) in some contemporary Danish and Norwegian prose works. The term indicates the way in which the experiences of a writer's life are consciously transformed into aesthetic material and artistic performance, something which provides autobiographical communication with a new avenue of exploration.

The already mentioned study by Arne Melberg (2008) widens even more the field of Scandinavian autobiography in a spirit of curiosity and openness to include both works of the past, such as Selma Lagerlöf's autobiographies or those by the Swedish proletarian writers of the 1930s, and contemporary tendencies such as diaristic literature in Sweden. The new diaries display, on the one hand, a thirst for reality even in its most everyday facets; on the other hand they find a point of reference in the influential multimedia model of the blog, where one's identity can be continuously redesigned and remodelled. Both elements – a strong desire for authenticity in a world that is increasingly perceived as fake, and the influence of the communicative modes and codes of the social networks – are discussed in two recent contributions. Reaching different conclusions, Per Thomas Andersen (2012: 676-678) and Hans Hauge (2012) examine the same literary case, which more than any other symbolises the «biographical turn» in contemporary Norwegian and Scandinavian literature: the great success (by now a world success) of the six-volume autobiography *Min kamp* by Karl Ove Knausgård (2009-2011; *My Struggle*, trans. by Bartlett 2012-2015³). Hauge's critical study is at the same time an iconoclastic

³ Volumes One to Four have come out in English so far, published by Archipelago Books; see References.

scrittore Karl Ove Knausgård. Nel suo studio critico, che è anche un manifesto provocatoriamente iconoclasta, Hauge elegge Knausgård a ipostasi della recente «letteratura senza finzione» (*fiktionsfri fiktion*), affamata di realtà «così com'è», senza immagini o artifici letterari. In tal modo Hauge si ribella a ogni costruzione teorica che dal postmoderno in avanti ha visto la realtà come un costrutto linguistico e testuale. Per contro, Andersen sottolinea proprio l'affinità tra il progetto di scrittura di Knausgård e il blog, dove rimane oltremodo difficile separare chiaramente il referente reale, la vita 'vera', dalle forme creative di esposizione di sé.

4. *L'autobiografia nelle letterature scandinave: un punto di partenza soggettivo*

Come sottolineano Malcom Bradbury e James McFarlane, si può scorgere un particolare apporto degli autori scandinavi alla costruzione della soggettività moderna nella loro anticipazione delle inquietudini e fratture del Novecento (Bradbury, McFarlane 1991: 37, 42-44, 47; McFarlane 1991: 79-82, 85-88). Questo ha delle conseguenze per il discorso autobiografico. Lo si osserva a partire da tre autori di fama internazionale che operarono tra il 1840 e il 1910 circa, Søren Kierkegaard, Henrik Ibsen e August Strindberg. E ci sembra che le loro posizioni aiutino anche a comprendere meglio alcuni nodi dell'odierno dibattito critico sull'autobiografia. Da una parte Ibsen, dal carattere riservato e apparentemente assai lontano da pratiche autobiografiche, poteva dichiarare in una breve strofa che vivere è fare guerra ai troll nelle volte del cuore e del cervello, e che scrivere equivale a un giorno del giudizio su di sé (1878), enunciando così la matrice autobiografica di ogni scrittura letteraria. Su un altro versante troviamo Strindberg, dalla scrittura autobiografica esplicita e ipertrofica, il quale, come ha osservato Michael Robinson (1986), rende paradossalmente sfuggente e inarrivabile la persona storica e reale che parrebbe rivelare attraverso la continua contaminazione tra scrittura e vita. Come fondamento culturale di questi due scrittori si pone la filosofia dell'esistenza di Søren Kierkegaard che, in polemica con il panlogismo hegeliano, rivendica l'irripetibile esperienza del Singolo (*hin Enkelte*) a fondamento della conoscenza. Attraverso il gioco squisitamente letterario di maschere e pseudonimi, che sperimentano con punti di vista e possibilità all'interno dello stesso soggetto, Kierkegaard cerca la comunicazione indiretta della propria esperienza di vita, ma non tanto per svelare se stesso quanto per gettare un ponte verso il lettore e coinvolgerlo in un'altrettanto radicale interrogazione di sé.

La filosofa Adriana Cavarero ha interpretato la spinta profondamente etica del racconto biografico, inteso come ponte verso un'altra persona, atto

Precedentemente, per Ponte alle Grazie, erano usciti *La mia lotta*, 1, e *La mia lotta*, 2 (Knausgård 2010 e 2011, trad. di Raspanti).

manifesto pleading for «fictionless fiction» (*fiktionsfri fiktion*), thirsty for reality «as it is», without images or literary tricks. Knausgård is seen as the most outstanding example of this tendency, which, in Hauge's view, is a form of opposition to all postmodern theoretical constructions, with their emphasis on reality as a linguistic and textual artefact. On the contrary, Andersen points out the similarity between Knausgård's autobiographical project and the blog, where 'real life' is hardly separable from the creative forms of self-representation.

4. *Autobiography in Scandinavian literature: a subjective starting point*

As Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane argue, Scandinavian authors have given a particular contribution to the construction of modern subjectivity as forerunners of twentieth-century anxiety and fragmentation (Bradbury, McFarlane 1991: 37, 42-44, 47; McFarlane 1991: 79-82, 85-88). This seems to have consequences even for the autobiographical discourse. We can observe it through three internationally well-known writers, Søren Kierkegaard, Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, who were active from about 1840 to about 1910, and whose attitudes help us to better understand some aspects in the ongoing critical debate about autobiography. On the one hand Ibsen, though shy and apparently far from autobiographical practice in his writing, could declare in a short strophe that to live is to war with trolls in the vaults of the heart and mind, and that to write is to sit in judgement on oneself (1878), somehow positing the autobiographical matrix of *any* form of literary writing. On the other hand, we find Strindberg, who apparently exposes himself through his overt and 'excessive' autobiographical writing. However, as Michael Robinson has observed (1986), Strindberg's constant cross-contamination of life with literature makes his own real, historical person paradoxically slippery and unreachable for his readers. We can see Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy of existence as a cultural prerequisite for both Ibsen and Strindberg. In opposition to Hegelian panlogism, Kierkegaard defends the irreducible experience of the single individual (*hin Enkelte*) as the foundation of our knowledge. Through a specifically literary practice, Kierkegaard plays with masks and pseudonyms, and experiments with points of view and possibilities that coexist in a single individual. This indirect communication of his own life experience does not occur so much as a form of self-revelation, but rather as a bridge towards his readers, in order to involve them in an equally radical self-questioning.

The philosopher Adriana Cavarero has interpreted the profoundly ethical motive of biographical storytelling, meant as a bridge towards another person, a communicative act, an acknowledgement of the uniqueness in everyone's life story (2005: 46-64; trans. by Kottman 2000: 32-45). In a radio programme she expressed a fundamental idea:

comunicativo, riconoscimento dell'unicità nella storia di ognuno (2005: 46-64). In una trasmissione radiofonica ha espresso un concetto fondamentale:

la filosofia definisce il *che cosa* del genere umano in universale, e ritiene la singolarità, l'unicità, questo nostro esistere fatto *così* e non *altrimenti*, che in fondo dovrebbe interessarci molto, al di fuori del dominio del suo discorso e dei suoi interessi. Questa espulsione non è stata una semplice espulsione ma ha avuto delle conseguenze abbastanza gravi. L'unicità, ossia il fatto che ciascuno di noi sia un unico esistente così com'è, è diventata un fatto superfluo. Si scrive la storia dell'uomo, si elaborano le scienze sull'uomo, ma su di me, su di te, sull'unicità, su ciò che siamo, di questo non esiste la possibilità di una scienza, non c'è discorso. Tutto questo è il *superfluo*. Ebbene la letteratura, la narrazione, la narrativa, fa e ha sempre fatto esattamente il contrario. (1998; corsivo nell'originale)

Cavarero si ispira alla narrativa della scrittrice danese Karen Blixen (2005: 7-11, 179-187); nella pregnante definizione che dà della difficoltà della filosofia e del sapere in genere di considerare l'esistenza singola, ci sembra di leggere anche la fondamentale lezione di Kierkegaard, connazionale e maestro di Blixen, anche per quanto riguarda il racconto di sé attraverso l'uso delle maschere.

5. *La cicogna e la cometa*

La parola «autobiografia» contiene tre elementi costitutivi: il sé, la vita e la scrittura. Un assunto condiviso ma non ovvio è che la «vita» corrisponda a un flusso narrativo, e dunque, per l'autobiografia, a un racconto cronologico in prosa, un racconto che si vorrebbe anche 'completo', dai primi ricordi personali al momento della scrittura. È interessante osservare come due autori studiati in questo libro, Karen Blixen (BERNI, CANU) e Tomas Tranströmer (LOMBARDI) riescano sì a raccontarci la genesi delle rispettive personalità – obiettivo fondamentale del discorso autobiografico – ma collocandole in fasi assai diverse della vita, e contraddicendo inoltre l'assunto della 'completezza' del racconto. Per presentare versioni antitetiche di autobiografia, entrambe valide in relazione all'esperienza di vita narrata, gli scrittori utilizzano due immagini diverse, per quanto entrambe legate alle sfere della nascita, dell'annuncio e del racconto.

All'interno di *Out of Africa / Den afrikanske Farm* (1937; *La mia Africa*) Blixen colloca un breve racconto-parabola in cui alla parola si accompagna il disegno. I singoli elementi del racconto (che vede un uomo nel tentativo di porre rimedio a una perdita d'acqua che sta prosciugando il suo stagno) disegnano letteralmente, una volta riuniti sulla pagina, l'immagine di una cicogna. La scrittrice riflette così sul bisogno di comprensione a posteriori che è il movente del processo autobiografico. Se la vita presenta percorsi contorti, cadute, svolte imprevedibili e nuove partenze, quale idea scorgiamo dietro a tutto? Quale *disegno* compone il nostro de-

philosophy defines the *quid* of human kind as a universal, and considers singularity, uniqueness, this existence of ours made *like this* and not *otherwise* – indeed something which we should greatly care about – as being outside the range of its discourse and interests. This expulsion has not simply been an expulsion, but has had rather serious consequences. Uniqueness, i.e. the fact that each one of us is a unique existing being as he/she is, has become redundant. The history of mankind is written, human sciences are developed, but there is no possibility of science or discourse about me, about you, about uniqueness, about what we are. All this is *redundant*. Well, literature, narration and narrativity have always been doing just the opposite. (1998⁴; italics in the original)

Cavarero is inspired by the Danish writer Karen Blixen's storytelling (2005: 7-11, 179-187; trans. by Kottman 2000: 1-4, 139-144); in the pregnant definition she gives of the difficulty, within philosophy and science in general, of considering the single existence, we think it is possible to read Kierkegaard's fundamental legacy, a Danish writer and one of Blixen's masters, even as concerns self-narration through the use of masks.

5. *The stork and the comet*

The word «autobiography» consists of three elements: self, life and writing. A shared but not obvious assumption is that «life» corresponds to a narrative flow and, therefore, as far as autobiography is concerned, to a chronological prose narration, which is moreover supposed to be 'complete', from the first personal memories to the moment of writing. It is interesting to observe how two authors who are examined in this book, Karen Blixen (BERNI, CANU) and Tomas Tranströmer (LOMBARDI), succeed in relating to us the origin of their respective personalities – one of the main purposes of autobiographical discourse – while placing this origin in very different phases of life, as well as contradicting the assumption of a 'complete' story. In order to present versions of autobiography that seem antithetical but equally valid with reference to the narrated life experience, the writers use two images. They are different, although both of them are related to birth, glad tidings and storytelling.

In *Out of Africa / Den afrikanske Farm* (1937) Blixen inserts a short story or parable, where words are illustrated with drawings. The single elements of the story (about a man and his attempt to find a remedy for a runoff which is drying up his pond) literally draw, once united on the page, the image of a stork. In this way the writer reflects upon the need for understanding with hindsight, which is the motive of the autobiographical process. If life presents awkward paths, falls, unpredictable turns and new starts, what idea do we get of it all? What *design* does our destiny

⁴ My translation from the Italian original; see the Italian version of this Introduction.

stino? Quali elementi di per sé disparati riuniamo al fine di (ri)costruire una figura coerente? «Quando il disegno della mia vita è compiuto, vedrò io, vedranno gli altri una cicogna?» – è la domanda che la narratrice rivolge a se stessa e a noi. In quanto autobiografia, *Out of Africa / Den afrikanske Farm* prescinde, se non per brevi analessi, dalla vita della protagonista precedente al suo trasferimento in Africa. È l'esperienza africana vissuta in età adulta che sembra fare nascere la protagonista, sia come narratrice e scrittrice che come individuo guidato da un'idea mitica, stoica e tragica del destino.

BERNI sottolinea il legame elusivo con la realtà dei fatti nella narrativa autobiografica africana di Blixen. Non si tratta solo della circostanza che la narrazione è reticente sulla sfera intima ed evita la cronologia; Blixen, volendo scorgere il disegno del destino, crea il mondo della fattoria africana in base ai propri bisogni e alla propria visione, e lo crea a distanza. Tutta la narrativa di Blixen, rileva BERNI, si fonda sulla distanza e sulla cesura con un mondo perduto e rievocato: sia l'Europa prima della modernità, abbandonata per l'Africa nel 1914, sia l'Africa definitivamente perduta nel 1931.

Inversamente, CANU propone una lettura autobiografica di alcuni racconti storici di finzione che ruotano attorno alla questione dell'identità dell'artista, della sua ricerca e definizione. Attraverso il gioco degli pseudonimi e delle maschere, Blixen riesce, osserva CANU, a essere autentica vestendo i panni di altri. Da qui emerge anche come l'arte e la scrittura si configurino per Blixen come strategie contro il dolore, lo smacco e gli scherzi del fato. Nei contributi di CANU e BERNI appaiono con chiarezza i molteplici rimandi tra vita, lettere, narrativa e scrittura autobiografica che caratterizzano l'universo di Blixen. Lejeune, discutendo di André Gide, ha interpretato tale prassi come la consapevole costruzione di uno «spazio autobiografico» da parte dello scrittore, il quale indirizza così i modi di lettura del suo pubblico modello (Lejeune 1975: 165-196; Lejeune 1986: 189-227, trad. di Santini).

All'inizio della sua autobiografia *Minnena ser mig* (1993; *I ricordi mi guardano* o, come propone più fedelmente LOMBARDI, «I ricordi mi vedono»), Tranströmer evoca l'immagine di una stella cometa, in cui la parte essenziale sta nell'estremità più luminosa, la testa. Vuole così indicare che i tratti più importanti della nostra vita (per Tranströmer quelli che determinano la sua vocazione di poeta) si decidono nell'infanzia e nell'adolescenza; il resto, la lunga coda, è emanazione di quel nucleo. LOMBARDI rileva come i testi poetici del premio Nobel nel 2011, recentemente scomparso, si soffermino più spesso su un'illuminazione improvvisa nell'istante presente. Che poi tale epifania parta da lontano e dal profondo è qualcosa che Tranströmer, poeta e psicologo, sa bene, ma la sostanza autobiografica rimane per lo più implicita nei suoi versi. Solo nella breve autobiografia egli cerca di ordinare le esperienze vissute e raccontarle. Per l'adulto sessantenne è tuttavia difficile, attraverso la memoria, arrivare al nucleo della cometa. Nel testo gli accadimenti sono soprattutto interiori e non è semplice distinguere tra

consist of? What dissimilar elements do we unite so as to (re)construct a consistent figure? «When the design of my life is complete, shall I, shall other people see a stork?» – that is the question the narrator asks herself and us. As an autobiography, *Out of Africa / Den afrikanske Farm* ignores, except for some brief flashbacks, the protagonist's life prior to her moving to Africa. The African experience, lived as an adult, seems to give birth to the protagonist as a storyteller, a writer and an individual driven by a mythical, stoical and tragic conception of fate.

BERNI points out the elusive connection with real facts in Blixen's African autobiographical stories. It is not simply the circumstance that the narration is reticent about the intimate sphere and avoids chronology. As Blixen wants to glimpse the design of destiny, she creates the world of the African farm according to her needs and vision, and she does so at a distance. All storytelling by Blixen, BERNI observes, is based on an unbridgeable distance from a lost and remembered world, be it pre-World War I Europe, since she left for Africa in 1914, or Africa, definitively lost in 1931.

On the other hand, CANU proposes an autobiographical reading of some of Blixen's fictional stories, which are centred on the question of the artist's identity, on the search for and the definition of it. By playing with pseudonyms and masks, Blixen can, according to CANU, be authentic in disguise, wearing someone else's clothes. As a result, art and writing emerge as strategies against sorrow, loss and the quirks of destiny. In CANU's and BERNI's contributions, the several connections between life, letters, fiction and autobiographical writing that characterise Blixen's universe are visible. Discussing the work of André Gide, Lejeune has interpreted this approach as the writer's conscious construction of an «autobiographical space», which allows him to direct the reading strategies of his model public (Lejeune 1975: 165-196).

At the beginning of his autobiography *Minnena ser mig* (1993; *Memories Look at Me*, trans. by Fulton 2011, or, as LOMBARDI more literally proposes, «Memories See Me»), Tranströmer evokes the image of a comet, the brightest and most important part of which is the head. He wants thus to indicate that the essential traits of our life (for Tranströmer, those determining his vocation as a poet) are formed during childhood and adolescence; the rest, the long tail, is the emanation of that core. LOMBARDI observes how the poems by the recently deceased 2011-Nobel prize winner more often linger on a sudden epiphany in the present moment. That such epiphanies come from afar and from deep down is something that Tranströmer, as a poet and a psychologist, is well aware of, but the autobiographical substance remains mostly implicit in his verses. Only in his short autobiography does he try to order and relate his own actual experiences. For the over sixty-year old adult it is however difficult to reach the head of the comet through memory. In the text the events are mostly interior, and it is not easy to distinguish between reality, inner representa-

realtà, rappresentazioni intime e invenzione. Il confronto che LOMBARDI propone tra un brano da *Minnena ser mig* e la corrispondente bozza preparatoria manoscritta evidenzia la presenza di elementi finzionali nell'autobiografia e la sua tendenza alla concisione poetica e all'eliminazione di dati.

6. *Autobiografia e poesia*

Il poeta Tranströmer dedica dunque all'autobiografia uno specifico testo in prosa. Ma può l'autobiografia esprimersi in versi? I saggi di STORSKOG e di BORSOTTI tentano di rispondere a questa domanda. La soggettività lirica pare cosa diversa dal discorso autobiografico secondo Lejeune, il quale postula, almeno inizialmente, un *racconto in prosa* sulla genesi e lo sviluppo della propria personalità. Abbiamo anche visto come Olney individui, tra le «metafore del sé» due sfere distinte: autobiografia e poesia. STORSKOG rileva – sulla base di esempi tratti dalla poesia scandinava della seconda metà del Novecento (Sonja Åkesson, Helge Hagerup, Klaus Rifbjerg, Börje Ahlö) e di una riflessione teorica specifica attualmente in corso in Francia e in Scandinavia – come non sia il patto autobiografico di per sé, implicito o esplicito, a garantire che un componimento poetico possa essere letto come un discorso incentrato sull'io autobiografico del poeta. Piuttosto, le tendenze recenti della poesia scandinava mostrano una certa predilezione per il poema, genere di maggiore ampiezza, o per le poesie che formano una suite narrativa, anche come reazione alla pratica prevalente nel modernismo Scandinavo della *centrallyrik*, cioè la lirica breve incentrata sulla percezione del soggetto – un vissuto istantaneo e tipicamente lirico. STORSKOG invita così a riflettere sul carattere autobiografico della poesia, oltre che in queste tendenze narrative della poesia contemporanea, anche in quei componimenti fatti di tempo interiore più che cronologico, un tempo non lineare, deviante dalla logica discorsiva, per cui l'identità del soggetto si costruisca attraverso istantanee e accenni di autoritratto o autobiografia.

La suite poetica di Maja Lee Langvad (2006), oggetto del saggio di BORSOTTI, costituisce una versione di questa forma contemporanea, composita e «performativa» di autobiografia in versi. La scrittrice, in un gioco serio di «bricolage», costruisce la propria identità attraverso il riuso di testi di varia natura, letterari e non letterari (articoli di giornale, moduli, questionari, programmi politici); da questo assemblaggio risulta una nuova, poetica configurazione di senso. Al centro vi è sì l'intima ricerca della propria origine e identità, complicata dalla circostanza che Langvad è una danese di origine coreana, ma la storia personale diventa soprattutto, rileva BORSOTTI, uno strumento di indagine etica, filosofica e politica che tocca i temi dell'adozione internazionale e della definizione su base etnica della «daneità» da parte di forze culturali e politiche ostili agli immigrati. L'identità-bricolage produce così effetti stranianti, critici e sovversivi.

tions and invention. The comparison proposed by LOMBARDI between a passage of *Minnena ser mig* and the corresponding handwritten draft underscores the presence of fictional elements in the autobiography and its tendency towards poetical concision and elimination of facts.

6. *Autobiography and poetry*

The poet Tranströmer dedicates a specific prose text to autobiography, but can autobiography also be expressed in verse? STORSKOG's and BORSOTTI's essays try to answer this question. Lyrical subjectivity seems to be a different thing from the autobiographical discourse postulated, at least initially, by Lejeune, i.e. a *prose narrative* on the origin and development of one's personality. We have also seen how Olney identifies two different areas of «metaphors of self»: autobiography *and* poetry. STORSKOG observes – considering examples of Scandinavian poetry from the second half of the twentieth century (Sonja Åkesson, Helge Hagerup, Klaus Rifbjerg and Börje Ahlö) and linking them to the recent theoretical debate in France and Scandinavia – how the autobiographical pact per se, whether implicit or explicit, cannot assure that a poetic work will be read as a discourse centred on the poet's autobiographical self. Rather, recent trends in Scandinavian poetry show a certain inclination for the long poem or for poems linked into a narrative sequence, even as a reaction against the prevailing practice of *centrallyrik* in Scandinavian modernism, i.e. short poems centred on the subject's perceptions and based on a momentary, typically lyrical experience. Therefore STORSKOG invites us to reflect on the essence of the autobiographical features in this narrative tendency of contemporary poetry, as well as in those poems that take place in a prevalently interior, non-linear time that detaches itself from discursive logic, whereby the subject's identity can be constructed through snapshots or hints at self-portrait or autobiography.

Maja Lee Langvad's poetic sequence (2006), the object of BORSOTTI's essay, represents a version of contemporary, composite and «performative» autobiography in verse. The writer, in a serious game of «bricolage», constructs her identity by re-using texts of different origins, literary and non-literary (such as newspaper articles, application forms, questionnaires and political programmes). Such an assemblage creates a new, poetical and meaningful combination. The core issue is her personal search for origin and identity, a search that is complicated by the circumstance that Langvad is a Danish woman with Korean origins; her personal story becomes, however, as BORSOTTI argues, a device for an ethical, philosophical and political inquiry addressing international adoption and the ethnically-based definition of «Danishness» by those cultural and political forces that are hostile to immigrants. The bricolage identity produces thus puzzling, critical and subversive effects.

7. *Autobiografia e traumi della modernità: persecuzioni, migrazioni, marginalità*

La ricerca e (ri)costruzione della propria identità si impone in modo nuovo con il Novecento, in relazione a fenomeni economici e politici di portata globale, spesso violenti e tragici, che hanno costretto numeri altissimi di individui a fuggire o emigrare, a oltrepassare confini e acquisire nuove lingue e codici culturali (Melberg 2008: 7). Nel mondo globalizzato e 'flessibile' della contemporaneità può essere altrimenti il lavoro a emigrare, lasciando molti individui non solo senza occupazione ma spogliati della propria dignità e in un difficile vuoto di identità. Si tratta di realtà storiche che trasferiscono il loro portato nelle narrazioni autobiografiche, e diversi contributi di questo volume, oltre a quello già menzionato di BORSOTTI, si possono inserire in un simile contesto.

La storia dell'antisemitismo europeo e della Shoah si riverbera nei contributi di BASSINI e SEGALA. Analizzando il libro che Göran Rosenberg (2012) dedica alla memoria del padre, ebreo polacco sopravvissuto ad Auschwitz e trasferitosi in Svezia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale, BASSINI osserva come in questo caso biografia e autobiografia siano profondamente implicate l'una nell'altra. L'autore e narratore è figlio del protagonista, e l'urgenza che lo porta a ricomporre i frammenti della vita del padre – con un problematico esercizio di memoria e attraverso un'approfondita ricerca storico-documentaria – è indice di un pieno coinvolgimento del narratore e ha a che fare con una propria ricerca delle origini e dell'identità. Così il figlio, che per il padre rappresentò il «Progetto» del radicamento nella nuova realtà svedese, diventa co-protagonista. Anche nella letteratura della Shoah, osserva BASSINI, i confini tra verità, rappresentazione nel ricordo e costruzione letteraria sono sfumati. A ciò si aggiunge però una dimensione etica e storico-politica imprescindibile, che rafforza il patto referenziale dell'autobiografia: chi parla di Shoah si pone come testimone, diretto o indiretto, di una realtà che non sarebbe lecito falsare (Young 1988).

SEGALA si sofferma sull'autobiografia/romanzo (e la sua definizione del genere resta aperta) di Maja Magdalena Swiderska (2008), scrittrice danese di origine ebreo-polacca, figlia di persone fuggite dall'ondata di antisemitismo in Polonia alla fine degli anni Sessanta, nonché nipote di sopravvissuti alla Shoah. Attraverso sofisticate strategie narrative Swiderska rappresenta la ricerca della sua identità, intrecciata a quella della propria storia familiare; tale percorso esistenziale assume dimensioni storiche, geografiche e politiche, rappresentando inoltre una critica – così come accade per Maja Lee Langvad – dell'identità nazionale danese quando si mostra eccessivamente gelosa dei suoi confini. Molti aspetti formali del testo indagati da SEGALA sembrano confermare l'odierna tendenza al «biografismo performativo» indicata da Haarder: frammentarietà, montaggio non lineare di tempi e scenari diversi, commistione di elementi eterogenei provenienti da altri media e risemantizzati nel testo, pluralità di registri, teatralità e messa in scena di sé attraverso sdoppia-

7. *Autobiography and traumatic modernity: persecution, migration, marginality*

The search for and the (re)construction of one's identity becomes compelling in a new way during the twentieth century, with regard to global economic and political realities, often characterised by violent and tragic events which have obliged large numbers of individuals to flee or emigrate, to cross borders and acquire new languages and cultural codes (Melberg 2008: 7). In the globalised, 'flexible' world of today it is work itself, through the practice of outsourcing, that can emigrate, leaving many people not only without a job, but deprived of dignity and left to cope with a difficult void of identity. These historical realities become a part of autobiographical narrations, and several contributions in this volume, BORSOTTI's included, as mentioned above, can be seen in this light.

The history of European anti-Semitism and the Holocaust is reflected in BASSINI's and SEGALA's contributions. In his analysis of the book which Göran Rosenberg (2012) dedicates to the memory of his father, a Polish Jew who survived Auschwitz and moved to Sweden after World War II, BASSINI observes how in this case biography and autobiography profoundly cross-reference each other. The author-narrator is the protagonist's son, and the urge that drives him to piece together the fragments of his father's life – with a problematic exercise of memory as well as through detailed historical and documentary research – indicates the narrator's full involvement, and has to do with his own search for origins and identity. Thus the son, who for the father represented the «Project» of getting well-rooted in the new Swedish reality, becomes the co-protagonist. Even in Holocaust literature, as BASSINI points out, the boundaries between truth, representation through memory and fictional construction are not clear-cut. An inescapable ethical and historical-political dimension is however also implied, to reinforce the referential pact of autobiography: those who testify about the Holocaust, whether they do it directly or indirectly, deal with a reality no one should be allowed to falsify (Young 1988).

SEGALA considers the novel/autobiography (her definition of the genre remains open) of Maja Magdalena Swiderska (2008), a Danish writer with Polish and Jewish origins, a child of persons who fled the wave of anti-Semitism in Poland towards the end of the 1960s, as well as a grandchild of Holocaust survivors. Through sophisticated narrative strategies, Swiderska narrates her search for identity, intertwining it with the story of her family, an existential track that takes on historical, geographical and political dimensions, as well as expressing a critique – as in Maja Lee Langvad's work – of Danish national identity as an exclusive concern with defining its own boundaries. Many formal aspects of the text examined by SEGALA seem to confirm the present tendency towards «performative biographism» as indicated by Haarder: fragmentation, non-linear montage of time levels and settings, mixing of multifarious elements coming from other medias and re-used with a new meaning in the text, plurality of registers, staging of the

menti e rifrazioni. Se in tutto questo l'identità resta sospesa e inafferrabile, oltrepassare i confini e superare i generi noti sembra l'unica strategia (esistenziale e letteraria) percorribile per il soggetto.

Da questo punto di vista è interessante il caso studiato da D'AMICO dello scrittore norvegese Cornelius Jakhelln e del suo libro *Raseri*. Jakhelln si trova, per così dire, sull'altra sponda: quella di un soggetto etnicamente norvegese che non vuole censurare, bensì cercare di indagare e comprendere, anche in chiave critica, la propria nostalgia nei confronti di una Norvegia bianca, omogenea e stabilmente nazionale – una terra che non c'è più. La provocazione, sostiene D'AMICO, è che ciò avviene alla luce dei recenti sviluppi nella società: i dibattiti su immigrazione e xenofobia e, soprattutto, la rielaborazione del trauma nazionale dopo la strage di Utøya nel 2011. Sotto l'aspetto formale l'opera è ibrida e si presta a più definizioni di genere. *Raseri* appare in primo luogo un saggio autobiografico e politico in cui il «biografismo performativo» permette all'autore di esplorare le proprie contraddizioni, come osservandosi dal di fuori, ma anche di mettersi in scena, sdoppiarsi in due personalità e dialogare con i suoi ruoli di musicista rock, blogger e intellettuale pubblico. In tal modo può esternare la sua «rabbia» e dare voce a quelle opinioni radicalmente conservatrici che pure fanno parte della sua storia.

VILLANI si concentra sullo scrittore svedese Kristian Lundberg e sul primo volume (2009) della sua recente serie autobiografica, stabilendo un parallelo tra l'eredità dell'autobiografia proletaria svedese nata negli anni Trenta del Novecento e la nuova espressione di quella importante tradizione nel contesto dell'odierna Svezia neoliberista e postindustriale. Il protagonista, degradato a causa dell'alcolismo, intraprende un difficile percorso di risalita e riconquista della dignità personale, in cui il lavoro, qualsiasi esso sia, si impone come necessità. Questo permette all'autore, pur attraverso una narrazione autobiografica intima, che procede attraverso brani di prosa lirica, di soffermarsi in chiave amaramente critica sulla nuova realtà sociale di un proletariato impiegato nel lavoro interinale, ultra-flessibile e privato di ogni diritto e dignità. In questo mondo di ombre, semi-clandestino, fatto per lo più di colleghi stranieri, si instaurano rapporti di solidarietà ma nessuna vera coscienza di classe. Lo stesso protagonista, rileva VILLANI, non sente in fondo di appartenere ad alcuna classe, e il suo percorso di liberazione ed emancipazione non è sociale e collettivo, bensì si configura come un percorso di trasformazione individuale e spirituale. Si tratta di un percorso assolutamente necessario, ma è forse anche il segno di un tempo che ha smesso di credere nella storia.

8. *Autobiografia e fede*

Può sembrare singolare accostare il saggio di VILLANI, dedicato a uno scrittore svedese contemporaneo, a quello di ZULIANI, che presenta la

self through duplications and refractions. If, by all this, identity remains suspended and difficult to grasp, crossing borders and transgressing well-known genres and norms seem the only possible strategies at the subject's disposal, both existentially and literarily.

In this respect, the case examined by D'AMICO, that of the Norwegian writer Cornelius Jakhelln and his book *Raseri*, is interesting. Jakhelln positions himself, as it were, on the other side of the fence, as an ethnically Norwegian individual who does not want to censor his nostalgia for a white, homogeneous and stably national Norway – a land that no longer exists – but who wants, on the contrary, to examine and understand his nostalgia, even critically. The provocation, as D'AMICO argues, is that this attempt takes place in the aftermath of recent developments in society: the debates on immigration and xenophobia and, above all, the need to get over the national trauma in the wake of the Utøya massacre of 2011. From a formal point of view this work is a hybrid that lends itself to several genre definitions. *Raseri* appears mainly as an autobiographical and political essay, in which «performative biographism» allows the author to explore his own contradictions, as if observing himself from the outside, but also to stage himself, duplicate himself into two personalities and interact with his roles as a rock musician, blogger, and public intellectual. In this way he can express his «fury» and give vent to those radically conservative opinions that are nolens volens part of his story.

VILLANI focuses on the first volume (2009) of the Swedish writer Kristian Lundberg's autobiographical series, suggesting a comparison between the legacy of Swedish proletarian autobiographies, which started in the 1930s, and the new relevance that tradition has acquired in the context of present-day neoliberalistic, postindustrial Sweden. The protagonist, who has gone downhill from alcoholism, sets out on a difficult path of rehabilitation, in an attempt to recover his personal dignity through the necessary therapy of work, whatever it may be. This situation allows the author, albeit through a 'private' autobiographical narration, and through passages of lyrical prose, to direct his attention and keen criticism towards the new social reality of a working class employed in temporary jobs, utterly 'flexible', deprived of any right or dignity. In this world of shadows, mainly consisting of immigrant workers, bonds of solidarity are created, but without any real class consciousness. Even the protagonist, as VILLANI observes, does not feel in the end that he belongs to a class, and his way to liberation and emancipation is not social and collective, but passes through individual, spiritual transformation. It is an absolutely inevitable process, but perhaps also the sign of an epoch which has stopped believing in history.

8. *Autobiography and faith*

It may seem strange to connect VILLANI's essay, dedicated to a contemporary Swedish writer, to ZULIANI's essay, which presents the not too

ancora poco nota scrittura autobiografica dei gesuiti di origine scandinava nella prima età moderna. L'opera di Lundberg e le autobiografie dei gesuiti, per quanto lontane nel tempo, culturalmente e formalmente, sembrano però condividere un modello comune, che è anche un fondamento dell'autobiografia occidentale, le *Confessioni* di Agostino, che narrano la vita intera del protagonista alla luce della sua conversione al cristianesimo in età adulta. Come illustra VILLANI, la forza interiore che spinge il soggetto alla trasformazione e alla riconquista di una vita degna, poggia sull'astinenza dall'alcol, la scrittura, la presenza del figlio e la capacità di ritrovare il filo spezzato della preghiera e del dialogo con Dio.

ZULIANI racconta come alcune centinaia di giovani e meno giovani provenienti dalla Scandinavia si convertirono al cattolicesimo durante il Cinquecento e Seicento, anche per l'azione dei prestigiosi colleghi dei gesuiti aperti nelle aree baltica e centro-europea. Le molteplici pratiche di scrittura autobiografica dei neofiti erano previste e incoraggiate dalla stessa Compagnia di Gesù, anche su modello e impulso del padre fondatore Ignazio di Loyola, autore di esercizi spirituali, ma anche di diari e di un'autobiografia illuminata dalla conversione. La scrittura dei giovani gesuiti era individuale e collettiva insieme: le cosiddette confessioni generali scritte facevano parte della loro formazione; inoltre nelle lettere ai familiari essi dovevano informarli dei loro progressi, con la speranza di convertirli. ZULIANI ci offre così un interessante spaccato sulla pratica dei generi intimi nella prima età moderna, ricordando che essi si svilupparono nel segno della fede e della spiritualità.

L'autobiografia spirituale si manifestava evidentemente su entrambi i fronti del conflitto religioso, quello cattolico e quello protestante, che durante il Cinque- e Seicento si contrapposero nella cristianità occidentale anche con le armi. IULIANO torna a un importante testo in prosa scritto da una donna svedese attorno alla metà del Seicento. Nella descrizione della sua vita e delle sue afflizioni, la nobile Agneta Horn non solo fornisce una preziosa testimonianza diretta dei viaggi, delle guerre e della propria vita a seguito prima del padre e poi del marito, entrambi condottieri nella guerra dei Trent'anni, ma riscrive a modo di personale libro di preghiere la storia biblica di Giobbe, in quanto giusto sofferente, come modello della propria vicenda e come strategia per difendere la propria reputazione e memoria. L'opera di Horn, osserva IULIANO, evidenzia come la pratica dell'autoesame, introdotta dalla Riforma luterana, incoraggiò i generi intimi nella scrittura femminile della prima età moderna. Dalla Riforma in poi le donne della nobiltà svedese rilevarono il compito di redigere gli annali di famiglia, e progressivamente conferirono a quel genere cronachistico un tratto più introspettivo.

9. *Autobiografie in senso stretto?*

La questione della definizione dell'autobiografia in quanto genere letterario è, come si è capito, assai scivolosa. Solo poche opere analizzate in

well-known autobiographical writings by Scandinavian Jesuits in the early modern age. Lundberg's work and the Jesuits' autobiographies, however far from each other they may be in terms of time, culture and form, seem to share a common model, which is also a starting point of Western autobiography, Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine's conversion to Christianity as an adult sheds light on his whole life. As VILLANI shows, the inner strength that helps Lundberg to transform his life and make it worth living is based on abstinence from alcohol, writing, the presence of his son, and his ability to find his way to prayer and a dialogue with God.

ZULIANI relates how a few hundred more or less young Scandinavians converted to Catholicism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, even thanks to the action of the prestigious centres of education started by the Jesuits in the Baltic region and in central Europe. The new converts' multifarious exercises of autobiographical writing were implemented and encouraged by the Society of Jesus, according to the model and the impulse of their founding father Ignatius of Loyola, the author of spiritual exercises, but also of diaries and of an autobiography centred on his conversion. The neophytes wrote both individually and collectively: the so-called general, written confessions were part of their formation; besides, in the letters to their relatives they had to inform them about their progress, thus trying to convert them as well. ZULIANI offers interesting evidence of the practice of intimate genres in the early modern age, underscoring the fact that they developed in the context of faith and spirituality.

The spiritual autobiography appeared on both sides of the religious conflict within Western Christianity, which opposed, even with arms, Catholics and Protestants during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. IULIANO reconsiders an important prose text written by a Swedish noblewoman around the middle of the seventeenth century. In the description of her life and afflictions, Agneta Horn gave precious direct testimony of her life, her journeys and the wars she witnessed, as she followed first her father and then her husband, who both fought in the Thirty Years' War. Besides, in the same autobiography she rewrites the biblical story of Job, the righteous one who suffers, as a personal book of prayer and a model for her own story, even as a strategy to defend her reputation and memory. As IULIANO observes, Horn's work shows how the practice of self-examination, introduced by the Lutheran Reformation, encouraged the production of intimate genres in women's writings of the early modern age. From the Reformation onwards Swedish noblewomen took over the task of writing their families' chronicles, gradually giving that factual genre a more introspective trait.

9. *Autobiographies in the narrow sense?*

The issue of defining autobiography as a literary genre is, evidently, quite slippery. Only a few of the works examined in this volume can be

questo volume si possono intendere come autobiografie in senso stretto, secondo le indicazioni di Pascal e Lejeune. Tuttavia anche in questi casi le distinzioni e le peculiarità appaiono essenziali almeno tanto quanto i tratti di appartenenza al genere. IULIANO evidenzia le molteplici funzioni dell'opera di Agneta Horn, che l'autrice definì semplicemente «descrizione» della sua vita, e che oggi possiamo a buon titolo vedere come autobiografia in quanto racconto retrospettivo e introspettivo della propria vita dall'infanzia all'età adulta, dove l'accento è posto sul significato esistenziale. L'opera è però anche di memorie, intendendo con questo il racconto su persone vicine all'autrice e su accadimenti esterni dei quali ella fu testimone. L'atto autobiografico di Horn nacque peraltro in risposta a una disputa ereditaria e, come vedremo di seguito, la «scena giudiziaria» è socialmente e culturalmente preposta a generare strategie apologetiche e autobiografiche.

Il saggio di BERARDINI è dedicato a una delle opere di maggiore successo in Svezia durante l'Ottocento, ma anche periferica rispetto alla letteratura 'alta': l'autobiografia del famoso ladro Lasse-Maja (1833), che amava compiere le sue imprese travestendosi da donna. Una volta in carcere, Lasse-Maja adotta il modello autobiografico, sostiene BERARDINI, non tanto per un desiderio introspettivo e psicologico, quanto per raccontare la prepotente affermazione dell'individuo attraverso il suo estroso personaggio, e secondo gli stilemi del popolare romanzo di avventure, picaresco e di masnadieri. Per quanto il racconto cominci canonicamente dalla nascita, buona parte del libro è dedicato alla carriera, dunque alle avventure, di Lasse-Maja. Nel narrare le proprie imprese, in prima ma anche terza persona, Lasse-Maja produce un'immagine mitica di sé, esprimendo l'orgoglio dell'infrazione, della beffa e della ribellione all'ordine costituito.

L'autobiografia si sviluppa in ambito sia popolare che colto. Essa può muoversi al di fuori della letteratura e non avere obiettivi artistici. Personaggi pubblici della cultura, dell'economia e della politica desiderano scrivere di sé per lasciare una testimonianza, commentare la propria parabola nel tempo e presentare il contesto in cui hanno operato. NYGÅRD analizza le autobiografie scritte in età avanzata da Rolf Lagerborg (1942 e 1946), filosofo finlandese di lingua svedese con la vocazione dell'intellettuale pubblico, impegnato e scomodo. Lagerborg operava da una posizione doppiamente periferica: perché finlandese in Europa, e perché esponente della minoranza svedese in Finlandia. NYGÅRD illustra come la difesa della componente identitaria svedese in Finlandia coincidesse per Lagerborg con una posizione antinazionalistica, di stampo illuminista e cosmopolita, che lo spinse a oltrepassare i confini e portarsi al centro dell'Europa, in Francia. Le autobiografie appaiono così il lascito di Lagerborg quale intellettuale outsider contro «l'imperativo nazionale» finlandese nella prima metà del Novecento. NYGÅRD si concentra anche

understood as autobiographies in the strict sense of the word, according to Pascal's and Lejeune's parameters. Furthermore, even in these cases the distinctions and peculiarities appear at least as relevant as the shared features. JULIANO emphasises the different functions in Agneta Horn's work, which the author simply defined as a «description» of her life. Today we can correctly call it an autobiography, i.e. a retrospective and introspective narrative of her life from childhood to adult age, where the stress is placed on its existential meaning. The work is however also a memoir, i.e. a narrative about persons she knew and met, and external events she encountered. Moreover, Horn's autobiographical act originated as a defence in a lawsuit regarding an inheritance. As we shall see, the «judicial scene» was socially and culturally conducive to apologetic and autobiographical strategies.

BERARDINI's essay is dedicated to one of Sweden's nineteenth-century bestsellers, but also a marginal work, if seen from the perspective of 'high' literature: the autobiography of the notorious thief Lasse-Maja (1833), who liked to commit his crimes dressed as a woman. Once in jail, Lasse-Maja adopted the autobiographical model, as BERARDINI points out, not so much for an introspective and psychological need, but rather because he wanted to depict the proud making of the individual through his swashbuckling personage and according to the stratagems of the popular picaresque and robber novels. Although Lasse-Maja's story begins customarily with his birth, the main part of the book is dedicated to his progress and adventures as an adult. Through the tale of his deeds, in the first but also in the third person singular, Lasse-Maja produces a mythical image of himself, expressing the pride of infraction, derision and rebellion against the established order.

Autobiography develops in both popular and high culture. It can occur outside literature and be devoid of artistic goals. Public personalities in the worlds of culture, finance and politics may wish to write about themselves as a form of testimony, as a comment on their progress in time and a depiction of the context in which they have worked. NYGÅRD analyses the autobiographies Rolf Lagerborg wrote late in life (1942 and 1946). Lagerborg was a Swedish-speaking Finnish philosopher with a flair for being in the public eye as a controversial, engagé intellectual. His point of departure was peripheral in a double sense, as he was a Finn in Europe and represented the Swedish minority in Finland. NYGÅRD shows how Lagerborg's defence of Swedish identity in Finland corresponded to an antinationalistic, enlightened stance, which led him to break away from his provincial origins and move to France as the cosmopolitan centre of Europe. His autobiographies appear thus as the legacy of a marginalised Finnish intellectual who worked in the first half of the twentieth century against Finland's «national imperative». NYGÅRD focuses also on formal aspects, as Lagerborg writes as a scholar, in the third person, not strictly chronologically, with an ob-

sugli aspetti formali, in quanto Lagerborg, da studioso, scrive soprattutto in terza persona e in modo non strettamente cronologico, assumendo un approccio scientifico e oggettivante verso di sé e la propria vita, e sforzandosi di osservarsi dall'esterno. Tale oggettività pare d'altro canto in contrasto con il coinvolgimento intellettuale e ideologico ancora vivo del soggetto. NYGÅRD riflette infine sull'autobiografia come materiale di studio per lo storico: se è poco prudente utilizzarla come fonte documentaria, essa risulta invece utile per raccontare dall'interno la storia degli intellettuali, le loro pratiche e i campi culturali nei quali operarono.

L'autobiografia *Ett annat liv* (2008, *Un'altra vita*) di Per Olov Enquist, uno dei grandi autori svedesi contemporanei, ha prodotto vasta eco, sia perché l'autore, all'età di settantaquattro anni, ha potuto nel suo racconto abbracciare il lungo arco di una vita dagli anni Trenta al presente, intrecciando la storia personale a quella sociale e culturale, sia perché egli si espone confessando e analizzando la sua dipendenza dall'alcol a partire dal grande successo negli anni Settanta fino a un difficile percorso di disintossicazione e recupero verso «un'altra vita». Nella sua analisi, BAMPI mette a fuoco la natura complessa dell'autobiografia di Enquist, la quale propone, nel testo come nelle soglie paratestuali, un chiaro patto autobiografico e referenziale con il lettore, che parrebbe garantire la veridicità di quanto raccontato. D'altra parte, osserva BAMPI, l'intera opera narrativa e storico-documentaria di Enquist invita il lettore a dubitare del contenuto di verità degli enunciati, sottolineando la sostanza elusiva della verità, la difficoltà ad afferrarla e, dunque, l'imperativo dell'indagine verso una possibile verità. BAMPI porta l'attenzione su quelle spie nel testo, ma anche nel discorso attorno a *Ett annat liv*, attraverso le quali Enquist produce l'effetto di dubbio. Rientra in tale strategia anche la scelta dell'autore di raccontarsi in terza persona, con un'alternanza di empatia e distanza critica, come se l'individuo narrato fosse – dice Enquist – il personaggio romanzesco che l'autore conosce meglio di ogni altro.

Sempre a proposito della definizione del genere letterario, VILLANI considera l'opera di Lundberg un'autobiografia, piuttosto che un romanzo autobiografico. Lo studioso si riferisce al patto autobiografico di Lejeune e all'identità, segnalata nel testo e nel paratesto, tra autore, narratore e protagonista. *Yarden* ricorda formalmente, come si è detto, una sequenza di poemi in prosa, attraverso i quali si alternano diversi piani temporali, per ricomporre infine un percorso narrativo sulla vita del protagonista, dall'infanzia al presente aperto.

CARBONE si concentra su autobiografie scandinave dell'Ottocento, oltre che su memorie e lettere, per soffermarsi su un loro particolare momento, una ricorrente «microstoria» che si inserisce nel progetto autobiografico complessivo di diversi autori: l'incontro, spesso durante un viaggio in Italia, con il grande scultore neoclassico danese Bertel Thorvaldsen, attivo a Roma all'inizio del secolo. Per i connazionali danesi, in

jectifying and scientific approach towards himself and his life, in an effort to observe himself from the outside. On the other hand, such objectivity seems to clash with the subject's still very lively intellectual and ideological commitment. Finally, NYGÅRD reflects on autobiography as an object of study for the historian: while its use as source material is often misleading, autobiography does prove itself useful in describing the subjective history of intellectuals, their practice and the cultural fields in which they work.

The autobiography *Ett annat liv* (2008, *Another Life*) by Per Olov Enquist, one of the most outstanding contemporary Swedish authors, has met with a favourable response, both because Enquist, at the age of seventy-four, can describe a long life from the 1930s up to present time, connecting his personal story with the cultural and social context, and because he has dared to confess and scrutinise his alcohol addiction, which started in the 1970s, at the time of his great success as a writer, and ended after a difficult drying out period which offered him the reprieve of «another life». In his analysis, BAMPÌ focuses on the complex nature of Enquist's autobiography. *Ett annat liv* proposes, in the text as well as through its paratextual thresholds, a clear autobiographical and referential pact with the reader, which would seem to guarantee that what is told is true. On the other hand, as BAMPÌ observes, Enquist's entire oeuvre as a historical and documentary novelist invites the readers to doubt and question the truth claims of each statement, emphasising the elusive nature of truth, the difficulty of grasping it and, therefore, the compelling inquiry towards a possible truth. BAMPÌ pays attention to those clues in the text, as well as in the discourse around *Ett annat liv*, through which Enquist produces an effect of doubt. A part of this strategy is the author's choice to describe himself in the third person, oscillating between empathy and critical distance, as if the narrated individual were – in Enquist's words – the fictional character which the author knows best.

While defining the literary genre, VILLANI considers Lundberg's work an autobiography rather than an autobiographical novel, referring to Lejeune's autobiographical pact and to the identity, shown in the text and in the paratext, between author, narrator and protagonist. From a formal point of view, *Yarden* resembles, as we said before, a sequence of prose poems, where different temporal levels conspire to create a narrative development about the protagonist's life from childhood to the open-ended present.

CARBONE focuses on nineteenth-century Scandinavian autobiographies, as well as on memoirs and letters, in order to examine a particular aspect in them, a recurring item of «microhistory» seen as a part of a more general autobiographical project: the meeting, often during journeys to Italy, with the great Danish neoclassical sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, who lived and worked in Rome at the beginning of the nineteenth century. For his Danish fellow-countrymen, in particular the writers Adam Oehlen-

particolare gli scrittori Adam Oehlenschläger e Hans Christian Andersen e l'attrice Johanne Luise Heiberg, il rapporto personale con Thorvaldsen, icona della *Guldalder*, l'età aurea della cultura e dell'arte danese, simboleggia il riconoscimento di Thorvaldsen nei loro confronti. In diversi scrittori, intellettuali e artisti norvegesi, invece, la menzione di Thorvaldsen è più distante e meno coinvolta: una distanza critica nel caso dello storico dell'arte Lorentz Dietrichson, una chiara ma sobria ammirazione per lo scultore Gustav Vigeland.

10. Autobiografia e apologia

Come ha osservato Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani (1996), la tradizione autobiografica occidentale mutua alcune delle sue componenti centrali – confessione, diniego, testimonianza, difesa e accusa – dalla sfera giuridica. Non di rado la narrazione autobiografica prende anche concretamente le mosse da un processo, e in modo traslato l'aula del tribunale si amplia verso l'esterno, l'intera opinione pubblica, o si concentra nell'intimità, verso ciò che Ibsen definiva «il giorno del giudizio su di sé». Casi di questo tipo sono discussi in diversi saggi di questo volume, a partire da quello di ILLIANO su Agneta Horn, una vicenda che per altro mostra somiglianze con un'altra famosa autobiografia femminile degli anni Settanta e Ottanta del Seicento, quella della danese Leonora Christina Ulfeldt, che in *Jammers Minde* (Ulfeldt 2014; *Memorie dalla Torre Blu*, trad. di Zucconi 1971), iniziato durante la lunga prigionia, difende la sua causa contro l'accusa di alto tradimento. Anche BERARDINI sottolinea che il contesto da cui parte l'atto autobiografico di Lasse-Maja è la lunga detenzione in una cella, dopo la definitiva cattura: una costrizione fisica cui fa da contrappeso, nella ricostruzione della memoria e nell'immaginazione, la più grande libertà, ma anche la condizione che il protagonista infine sembra accettare come giusta conseguenza delle sue imprese, considerando chiusa la sua vita di brigante e permettendo così anche una lettura edificante del testo.

Il nesso tra narrazione autobiografica e aula di tribunale è stretto nel caso del saggio di Strindberg *Kvarstadsresan*, discusso da CIARAVOLO. Per raccontare in termini autobiografici e politici il processo che subisce nel 1884 per oltraggio alla religione, Strindberg inventa una serie di lettere indirizzate a un amico, che ripercorrono la genesi del libro incriminato, le novelle in *Giftas* (*Sposarsi*), e poi la denuncia, il sequestro dei libri, il processo a Stoccolma, dove infine viene assolto, fino al ritorno in Svizzera da dove era partito. In quei mesi il processo avveniva anche nell'opinione pubblica, poiché Strindberg, un progressista, era criticato dal suo stesso fronte a causa dell'antifemminismo presente in *Giftas*. *Kvarstadsresan* mostra così la precoce consapevolezza e creazione da parte di Strindberg di uno «spazio autobiografico» che, ancora prima della grande autobiografia *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*Il figlio della serva*) del 1886-1887, indirizza il

schläger and Hans Christian Andersen, and the actress Johanne Luise Heiberg, the personal relationship with Thorvaldsen – who was an icon of the *Guldalder*, the golden age of Danish culture and art – epitomises Thorvaldsen's acknowledgement of them. For Norwegian writers, intellectuals and artists, on the contrary, mentioning Thorvaldsen is a more detached and less emotional matter. We can observe a critical distance in the case of the art historian Lorentz Dietrichson, and a clear but sober admiration in the case of the sculptor Gustav Vigeland.

10. *Autobiography and apology*

As Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani (1996) has pointed out, the Western autobiographical tradition borrows some of its basic elements – confession, denial, testimony, defence and accusation – from the juridical process. Autobiographical narration is often also concretely connected to a trial, and in a figurative sense the courtroom is extended to a larger social space, all of public opinion, or concentrated within the inner sphere, what Ibsen defined as «sitting in judgement on oneself». Similar cases are discussed in essays of this volume, starting with IULIANO on Agneta Horn, a case which by the way shows similarities with the famous one we find in another female autobiography from the 1670s and 1680s, Leonora Christina Ulfeldt's *Jammers Minde* (2014; *Memoirs of Leonora Christina*, trans. by Bunnètt 2011), a book that was started during her incarceration, and was intended as a self-defence against the accusation of high treason. Even BERARDINI argues that the standpoint of Lasse-Maja's autobiographical act is that of his final long jail sentence. It is a physical constraint which is balanced by the unfettered freedom of reconstructing memory and imagination, but also a condition which the protagonist finally seems to accept as the obvious consequence of his deeds, considering his thief's life as definitively over, even to the point of leaving his text open to the implication of an edifying moral.

There is a close connection between autobiographical narration and the courtroom in Strindberg's essay *Kvarstadsresan*, presented by CIARAVOLO. In order to discuss, in autobiographical and political terms, the trial he had to undergo in 1884 for blasphemy against religion, Strindberg invented a series of letters addressed to a friend, describing the genesis of the indicted short-story collection *Giftas* (*Getting Married*), the accusation, the impounding of the books and the trial in Stockholm, in which Strindberg was found innocent, and finally his return to Switzerland, which had become his new home. In those months another trial was taking place in the courtroom of public opinion, as Strindberg, a progressive radical, was criticised by his own front because of his opposition to women's emancipation as expressed in *Giftas*. *Kvarstadsresan* shows Strindberg's early awareness and creation of an «autobiographical space», which, even be-

pubblico verso una lettura intima e biografica dell'opera dell'autore. Tale dimensione costituisce anche l'apologia del diritto alla contraddizione ideologica, al fine di potersi sviluppare autonomamente in quanto scrittore al di fuori degli obblighi imposti dal campo politico.

FINCO prende in esame il romanzo autobiografico e politico *Barbarskogen* (1908, Il bosco barbaro) dello scrittore svedese Karl Gustav Ossiannilsson, che rappresenta la presa di distanza dell'autore dal movimento operaio, da lui visto inizialmente come forza rigeneratrice. Il conflitto, spiega FINCO, si genera per un'equivoca attrazione, per altro frequente nella cultura europea del primo Novecento, tra il vitalismo irrazionalista, politicamente conservatore, e l'immaginario rivoluzionario del socialismo. Il contrasto tra Ossiannilsson e il critico letterario socialista Bengt Lidforss è rielaborato, attraverso la rappresentazione a chiave nel romanzo di finzione, ricorrendo al topos centrale del processo: non un vero processo giudiziario in questo caso, ma un atto di accusa politica e ideologica cui viene sottoposto il protagonista, un giornalista, da parte dell'organo socialista per cui lavora e delle masse operaie. La narrazione autobiografica si configura dunque, anche qui, come strategia di autodifesa.

11. *Soglie e paratesti*

Un'osservazione di Lejeune (1975) è che il patto autobiografico con il lettore si instaura spesso nelle parti introduttive del testo. Le prime pagine, le prefazioni o le epigrafi, o addirittura gli apparati esterni che confezionano il testo, come la quarta di copertina o la sua immagine – in breve, tutto ciò che Gérard Genette (1987; trad. di Cederna 1989) individua come «soglie» e «paratesti» – sono atti a suscitare le aspettative dei lettori e a indirizzarli. Questi elementi sono tuttavia non di rado rivisitati dal fondato dubbio decostruzionista, che obietta che la promessa di veridicità non è sempre affidabile. È interessante notare perciò come lo studio di BAMPI sull'autobiografia di Enquist, per quanto basato sulle premesse strutturaliste di Lejeune e Genette, accolga in conclusione, almeno in parte, lo scetticismo di de Man; mentre si promette la 'vera storia' dello scrittore svedese, anche in quanto ovvia strategia editoriale, quel contenuto vero è reso più elusivo nel testo. Similmente, STORSKOG sottolinea, per i componimenti poetici analizzati, il carattere quantomeno parziale delle indicazioni paratestuali presenti in alcuni titoli, che parlano di autobiografia o autoritratto. D'AMICO osserva come il disegno sulla copertina di *Rasari* annunci il desiderio di Jakhelln di osservarsi con un occhio esterno, il quale totalmente esterno non potrà ovviamente essere. Il complesso gioco di interazione tra autrice e personaggi si configura anche nell'opera di Maja Magdalena Swiderska, come mette in luce SEGALA, a partire dalla zona liminare del paratesto.

Un diverso caso di paratestualità/intertestualità è indagato da CULLEDDU nel suo saggio su Tarjei Vesaas. Lo scrittore norvegese, la cui ti-

fore his major autobiography *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*The Son of a Servant*) from 1886-1887, focused the reading public's attention on his intimate sphere, a dimension that also implied an apology for his right to ideological contradictions, which would enable him to develop freely and independently as a writer, without obligations towards any political camp.

FINCO examines the autobiographical and political novel *Barbarskogen* (1908, *The Barbarian Wood*) by the Swedish writer Karl Gustav Ossiannilsson, which represents the author's detachment from the workers' movement, which he had seen initially as a regenerating force. The conflict, as FINCO explains, originated from an equivocal attraction, frequent in European culture at the beginning of the twentieth century, between a politically conservative, irrational vitalism and the revolutionary ideas of socialism. The contrast between Ossiannilsson and the socialist literary critic Bengt Lidforss took on a fictional form in the *roman à clef*, by using the trial image: not a real judicial trial in this case, but an act of political and ideological accusation against the protagonist, a journalist, by the socialist newspaper he works for, and by the working masses. Even in this case autobiographical narration proves to be a strategy of self-defence.

11. *Thresholds and paratexts*

One of Lejeune's observations (1975) is that the autobiographical pact with the readers often takes place in the introductory parts of the text. The first pages, or the prefaces, dedications and mottos, or even more external elements such as the cover image or the blurb – in short, what Gérard Genette (1987; trans. by Lewin 1997) identifies as «thresholds» and «paratexts» – are aimed at arousing and directing the readers' expectations. These elements are however often revisited by a well-founded deconstructionist doubt, the objection that the promise of truthfulness is not always reliable. It is therefore interesting to observe how BAMPÌ's study on Enquist's autobiography, though based on Lejeune's and Genette's structuralist approach, finally accepts de Man's scepticism, at least in part; while the Swedish writer's 'true story' is promised, according to an obvious book-selling strategy, that 'true' content becomes relatively elusive in the text. Likewise, STORSKOG underscores, with reference to the poems she examines, the partial or misleading character of some paratexts, such as titles including the terms «autobiography» or «self-portrait». D'AMICO points out how the cover drawing in *Raseri* announces Jakhelln's wish to observe himself with an external eye, which can evidently never be totally external. The complex interaction between author and fictional characters is presented in Maja Magdalena Swiderska's work, as emphasised by SEGALA, starting from the liminal area of the paratext.

A different case of paratextuality/intertextuality is examined by CULEDDU in her essay about the Norwegian writer Tarjei Vesaas, whose

midezza e reticenza all'esibizione di sé connotano il personaggio 'mitico', espone la propria storia in un'autobiografia interiore, *Båten om kvelden* (La barca nella sera), frammentandola e affidandola alle voci dei personaggi più cari all'intera sua opera. All'osservazione del dialogo intratestuale, CULEDDU affianca quella di una polifonia intertestuale che coinvolge la poetessa Halldis Moren Vesaas, la quale scrive un'autobiografia collettiva intrecciando la sua voce a quella del marito, e Olav Vesaas, che raccoglie in un'antologia gli scritti autobiografici del padre e nello stesso tempo dialoga con lui attraverso gli elementi paratestuali e l'organizzazione del testo.

Un altro interessante caso di uso del paratesto è proposto da TAGLIANETTI, che prende in esame fiabe e leggende norvegesi raccolte da Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, un elemento centrale della cultura romantica nazionale norvegese. L'aspetto singolare è che *tutta* la dimensione autobiografica/autoriale in *Norske huldreeventyr og folkesagn* (Racconti e leggende popolari norvegesi) si concentra nei prologhi che fanno da transizione e soglia tra i lettori e la materia di origine orale, anonima e popolare, raccolta e scritta dall'autore. In queste cornici è segnalata l'esperienza dell'autore, il quale illustra in prima persona la circostanza in cui ha appreso un dato racconto, il territorio che ha percorso per raccoglierlo da un narratore orale, oppure l'episodio dell'infanzia a cui è legato il ricordo di un racconto, sentito allora per la prima volta. Come illustra TAGLIANETTI, il confronto con le fonti biografiche a disposizione permette di distinguere gli episodi autentici da quelli plasmati o creati ad arte. E dunque, anche qui, il patto autobiografico di veridicità risulterebbe falsato. Eppure questo confine labile tra realtà e finzione è necessario; l'autore e narratore impersona il punto di vista scientifico dello studioso del folclore nei confronti della superstizione popolare, ma anche quello dell'intellettuale romantico affascinato dal soprannaturale e dal senso del mistero che popola i racconti e le leggende. Nella commistione tra fatti vissuti, ambienti conosciuti e invenzione si costruiscono le cornici per creare l'atmosfera adatta ad assaporare tali racconti.

12. Morte e riapparizione dell'autore

Nei casi da loro studiati, CIARAVOLO, PERRELLI, CULEDDU e STORSKOG considerano un problema teorico e metodologico evidenziato dagli studi sull'autobiografia nel Novecento. Nella tradizione critica che si sviluppa con il formalismo russo, il New Criticism di matrice anglosassone, lo strutturalismo e il poststrutturalismo si pone l'accento sul funzionamento interno dei testi secondo strategie letterarie; l'analisi dei testi dovrebbe così potere prescindere dal biografismo di matrice positivista, secondo cui il significato dell'opera andrebbe ricondotto alla vita del suo autore. Per il suo carattere comunicativo, l'opera letteraria dovrebbe inoltre potere prescindere dalle intenzioni che l'autore poté ave-

'mythical' figure is characterised by shyness and unwillingness to show himself. Vesaas reveals his story in an intimate autobiography, *Båten om kvelden* (*The Boat in the Evening*), by making it fragmentary and letting it pass through the voices of some recurring, cherished characters in his work. Besides observing the intratextual dialogue, CULEDDU analyses an intertextual polyphony involving the poet Halldis Moren Vesaas, who writes a collective autobiography, in which her own voice is interwoven with her husband's, and Olav Vesaas, who gathers his father's autobiographical texts in an anthology, while establishing a dialogue with him through the paratextual elements and the way the texts are arranged.

Another interesting case of paratextual use is presented by TAGLIANETTI. He examines Peter Christen Asbjørnsen's collections of Norwegian fairy tales and legends, a central element of Norway's national and Romantic culture. The peculiar aspect is that the *whole* autobiographical/authorial dimension in *Norske huldreeventyr og folkesagn* (Norwegian Hulder Tales and Folk Legends) is concentrated in the prefaces, which constitute the thresholds between the readers and the originally oral, anonymous and popular material, collected and edited by the author. In these frames the author depicts his experience in the first person, describing the circumstances in which he heard a tale, the territory he walked through in order to receive it from an oral informant, or the episode in his childhood connected with the memory of a tale, when he heard it for the first time. TAGLIANETTI's comparison with the biographical sources at his disposal allows him to distinguish the authentic episodes from the adapted and invented ones. Even here the autobiographical pact promising truthfulness might therefore appear falsified. Yet, this uncertain boundary between reality and fiction is necessary; the author-narrator embodies the folklorist's scientific point of view towards popular superstition, but also the point of view of the Romantic intellectual who is fascinated by the supernatural and the sense of mystery the tales and legends are filled with. Mixing lived experiences, well-known environments and fiction therefore enables the author to create the suitable frames for the appreciation of his tales and legends.

12. *The author's death and reappearance*

In their case studies CIARAVOLO, PERRELLI, CULEDDU and STORSKOG consider a theoretical and methodological problem, discussed in the studies on autobiography in the twentieth century. In the critical legacy of Russian Formalism, New Criticism in the English-speaking areas, Structuralism and Poststructuralism, emphasis is laid upon the way texts are arranged internally, according to literary strategies; text analysis should therefore avoid forms of positivistic biographical approach, according to which the meaning of a literary work refers back to its author's life. Thanks to its communicative character, a literary work should, moreover, be able to disregard the

re nel produrla, e così parlare a nuove generazioni di lettori. Una simile visione è compatibile anche con la tradizione critica ermeneutica e con l'estetica della ricezione.

L'imporsi dell'autobiografia come genere letterario e il crescente interesse critico attorno ad esso hanno però messo in crisi il dogma della «morte dell'autore» che è stato alla base della concezione della letteratura per larga parte del Novecento (Melberg 2008: 7-9). Il patto autobiografico teorizzato da Lejeune pone l'accento sull'intenzione dell'autore in combinazione con le aspettative del lettore (Anderson 2011: 2), e tutto il filone autobiografico insiste, in un modo o nell'altro, sui legami della letteratura con la vita, e sul significato che attribuiamo all'esperienza nella realtà.

Secondo CIARAVOLO, i recenti studi su Strindberg e l'autobiografia, con il loro accento sul funzionamento dei testi in quanto letteratura, hanno avuto il merito di controbilanciare gli eccessi del biografismo positivista che ha caratterizzato per lungo tempo la tradizione critica. Tuttavia egli sottolinea nell'opera di Strindberg la forte traccia di storia vissuta, che nemmeno è lecito ignorare, come se la 'testualità' fosse scissa dall'esperienza. Per PERRELLI, invece, l'autobiografismo di Strindberg è legato in primo luogo alle sue strutture estetiche, alla sua visione del mondo e a suoi umori esistenziali, più che a fatti. PERRELLI si sofferma sulle «intersezioni» nella narrativa autobiografica/finzionale di scrittori svedesi, in particolare nel romanzo *Fru Ester Bruce* (1893; La signora Ester Bruce) di Ola Hansson, nel romanzo *Klostret* (1898; *Il chiostro*) di Strindberg, e nel racconto in francese *La Genèse d'une Aspasia* (1894; La genesi di un'Aspasia) sempre di Strindberg. Si tratta di opere nate da esperienze condivise nella colonia di scrittori e artisti scandinavi che vissero a Berlino nei primi anni Novanta del XIX secolo. Qui, a intense amicizie seguirono laceranti rotture, e ogni autore parla di sé e degli altri, producendo una visione prismatica della realtà da loro condivisa. In queste contaminazioni tra autobiografia e romanzo a chiave, osserva PERRELLI, Strindberg può denigrare gli altri, soprattutto le donne. La matrice reale esiste, tuttavia il racconto è parte di un progetto estetico, espressione di un'idea delle cose e del mondo, una costruzione letteraria sostanzialmente autonoma dal referente. Inutile, dunque, porsi il problema dell'oggettività o del valore storico-documentario di queste narrazioni, che sono piuttosto «costruzione di un personale copione esperienziale».

CULEDDU osserva la coincidenza temporale fra teorie sulla morte dell'autore (Roland Barthes nel 1968) e sull'autore come funzione del testo (Michel Foucault nel 1969) e un saggio di Dag Solstad su Vesaas del 1969. Solstad, tra i maggiori romanzieri norvegesi viventi (e autore nel 2002 di un'autobiografia, od opera di *autofiction*, che ha per titolo la sua data di nascita), osserva per contro come il lettore voglia trattenere dentro di sé, leggendo i testi di Vesaas, l'immagine della sua *persona*. Il desiderio stesso di Vesaas di ritirarsi in quanto autore dei testi produr-

author's possible intentions in creating it, and thus speak to new generations of readers. Such a standpoint is even compatible with the critical tradition of hermeneutics and reception theory.

The breakthrough of autobiography as a literary genre, and the growing critical interest in it, tend however to question the dogma of the «author's death», which was fundamental for the conception of literature during a large part of the twentieth century (Melberg 2008: 7-9). The autobiographical pact, as it is conceived by Lejeune, emphasises the author's intentions in combination with the reader's expectations (Anderson 2011: 2), and the whole autobiographical trend insists, in one way or another, on the connection between literature and life, and on the meaning we give to real, lived experience.

In CIARAVOLO's view, the recent studies on Strindberg and autobiography, with their stress on texts as literature, have meritoriously counterbalanced the excesses of the positivistic, biographical approach, long dominant in the critical tradition. He argues, however, that there is a strong trace of lived, historical experience in Strindberg's work, and that it is not possible to ignore it, as if textuality were separate from experience. On the other hand, in PERRELLI's view, Strindberg's autobiographical tendency is mainly related to his own aesthetic structures, his world views and his existential moods, more than to facts. PERRELLI examines the «intersections» in the autobiographical/fictional narrative works by Swedish writers, in particular the novel *Fru Ester Bruce* (1893; *Lady Ester Bruce*) by Ola Hansson, the novel *Klostret* (1898; *The Cloister*) by Strindberg, and the story *La Genèse d'une Aspasia* (1894; *The Genesis of an Aspasia*), written by Strindberg in French. All these works originated in the Scandinavian colony of writers and artists who lived in Berlin in the early 1890s, when strong friendships gave way to dramatic breakups. Every author speaks of himself and of others, producing a prismatic vision of shared reality. By mixing autobiography and *roman à clef*, as PERRELLI observes, Strindberg can denigrate others, especially women. The real matrix exists. The narrative is however part of an aesthetic project, an expression of his ideas about things and the world, a literary construction which is basically independent from its referent in reality. It is therefore useless to reflect upon the objectivity of these narratives, or upon their historical value as source material. Rather, they are «constructions of a personal script of experiences».

CULEDDU notes the temporal coincidence between theories on the author's death (Roland Barthes in 1968) and on the author as a function of the text (Michel Foucault in 1969) and an essay on Vesaas by Dag Solstad in 1969. Solstad, one of Norway's major contemporary novelists (and in 2002 the author of an autobiography, or work of *autofiction*, which has his birth date as a title), observes on the other hand how the readers want to keep the image of Vesaas' *persona* within themselves when reading his books. Vesaas' own wish to withdraw from his texts as an author seems

rebbe quindi l'effetto contrario. STORSKOG fa notare infine come proprio la contemporanea poesia, con i suoi elementi di narrativa, torni a forme di presenza autoriale e di referenzialità.

13. *Autobiografismo incompiuto*

L'autobiografismo di Strindberg è di tipo incompiuto, rivedibile e aperto. Poiché l'autore è mosso dall'imperativo di evolversi e sperimentare con i punti di vista, ogni versione del suo io è una tappa provvisoria, destinata a essere rivista alla luce di una nuova versione. Già nella prima metà degli anni Ottanta dell'Ottocento prende forma questa sua attitudine alla difesa della pluralità dell'io, come sottolinea CIARAVOLO. Il romanzo autobiografico *Klostret*, analizzato da PERRELLI, è un'opera di circa quindici anni dopo, che prosegue su questa strada. E in verità l'autobiografismo di Strindberg continuerà fino alle sue ultime opere.

Se Strindberg fu un antesignano della percezione dell'io moderno e incompiuto, la narrativa scandinava degli anni Trenta rielaborò tali spunti anche alla luce della psicanalisi e delle sperimentazioni del romanzo modernista europeo. In questo senso il romanzo del norvegese Aksel Sandemose *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* (1933 e 1955, Un fuggiasco incrocia le sue tracce) occupa una posizione fondamentale. PUTIGNANO illustra l'intreccio complesso tra verità e finzione e la relazione quasi simbiotica tra l'autore ed Espen Arnakke, il personaggio del suo romanzo, esito demoniaco e nasco-sto di sé. Il romanzo sul 'fuggitivo' è per Sandemose l'opera di una vita, ripubblicata dopo oltre venti anni dalla prima versione in una nuova edizione arricchita, e diverse volte chiosata dall'autore, il quale così infittisce, piuttosto che risolvere, l'ambiguità dei rapporti tra finzione e autobiografia. Per questo, osserva PUTIGNANO, la lettura biografica si è imposta anche nella tradizione critica, per cui non si può parlare di Espen e del suo fittizio paese natale Jante senza coinvolgere Sandemose e la storia della sua vita. Sandemose pare così un altro di quegli autori che creano uno spazio autobiografico dal quale i lettori difficilmente riescono ad uscire. Che Espen e il suo mondo siano inventati o realmente esistiti è tuttavia, in questo caso, questione secondaria, perché il proposito analitico, retrospettivo e terapeutico del racconto in prima persona di Espen investe in pieno il tema autobiografico di cui qui si sta trattando. Espen, che ha commesso un crimine, cerca di ricomporre le schegge della sua storia. Lo scavo interiore negli strati del ricordo si intreccia alla denuncia di impronta sociologica dei meccanismi di oppressione, omologazione e coercizione che uccidono, dall'infanzia, il libero sviluppo della personalità: è questa la «legge di Jante», un'espressione che tutti gli scandinavi conoscono. Paradossalmente, però, il romanzo di Sandemose non è una rivendicazione compiaciuta dell'io frammentario. L'urgenza autoterapeutica di Espen mira anzi alla ricomposizione delle fratture e alla comprensione dei traumi subiti, al fine di raggiungere un'imma-

therefore to produce the opposite effect. Finally, STORSKOG argues that contemporary poetry, with its narrative elements, returns to forms of authorial presence and referentiality.

13. *Unfinished autobiographism*

Strindberg's autobiographical writings are of an unfinished, revisable and open kind. As he is determined to develop and experiment with points of view, every version of his self is a temporary station, destined to be revised by a new version. As CIARAVOLO argues, this attitude in defence of the plurality of the self took shape even before the mid-1880s. Strindberg's autobiographical novel *Klostret*, examined by PERRELLI, was written approximately fifteen years later and continued with this approach, and in fact Strindberg's autobiographism would persist up to his very last works.

If Strindberg anticipated the perception of a modern and unfinished self, Scandinavian prose developed these elements in the 1930s, also in connection with psychoanalysis and the European modernist novel. In this respect the Norwegian writer Aksel Sandemose's novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* (1933 and 1955; *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*) played a prominent role. PUTIGNANO shows the complex web of truth and fiction, and the almost symbiotic relationship between Sandemose and Espen Arnakke, the hero of his novel, a hidden, demoniacal part of himself. The novel about the 'fugitive' is for Sandemose a lifelong work, republished in a new, enlarged edition after more than twenty years from its original version, and frequently commented on by the author, who thus complicates, rather than resolves, the ambiguous relationship between fiction and autobiography. For this reason, as PUTIGNANO observes, biographical readings have also dominated in the critical tradition, whereby it is not possible to deal with Espen and his fictional birthplace, the town of Jante, without involving Sandemose and his life story. Sandemose seems therefore another one of those authors who create an autobiographical space which his readers find it hard to evade. Whether Espen and his world are invented or really existed is however secondary in this case, because the analytical, retrospective and therapeutic intention in Espen's first-person narrative fully deals with the autobiographical topic which is discussed here. Espen, who committed a crime, tries to recompose the fragments of his own story. His intimate digging into memories is interwoven with a sociological critique of the mechanisms of oppression, standardisation and coercion that suffocate the free development of personality: this is the «law of Jante», an expression known by everyone in Scandinavia.

Paradoxically, however, Sandemose's novel is not complacent about the fragmented self. Espen's autotherapeutic urge aims, on the contrary, at resolving his fragmentation and understanding the traumatic events he has gone through, so as to assemble a consistent image of himself as

gine unitaria e coerente di sé in quanto adulto. Il punto di vista attuale del soggetto è decisivo per il suo progetto: poiché ora è padre, Espen desidera che l'infanzia dei suoi figli non sia l'inferno che la sua è stata per lui. Come evidenzia PUTIGNANO, l'autobiografia per Sandemose non può che essere aperta e incompiuta, poiché l'individuo è sempre in viaggio. L'autobiografia conclusa si configura invece come ulteriore prova della legge di Jante, una stabilizzazione coercitiva e altamente convenzionale dell'io.

14. Letteratura di viaggio e narrazione autobiografica

L'io che scrive di sé può essere viaggiatore, e il viaggio esteriore può esprimere ricerca interiore. Diversi contributi del volume illustrano questa relazione, anzi, a ben vedere sono poche le opere qui studiate che non contemplino in un modo o nell'altro il tema del viaggio. L'incontro tra i personaggi danesi che scrivono di sé e Thorvaldsen è spesso un momento tipico del loro viaggio in Italia (CARBONE). Il fatto che le cornici autobiografiche dei racconti di Asbjørnsen riprendano topoi quali il viaggio, il viandante, il territorio e il dono del racconto orale rimanda ad alcuni valori centrali per il progetto di costruzione dell'identità nazionale norvegese in epoca romantica (TAGLIANETTI).

Più in particolare, FERRARI si concentra su due resoconti di viaggio del noto esploratore artico e scienziato norvegese Fridtjof Nansen, prima attraverso la Groenlandia interna (1890), poi verso il Polo Nord con la nave Fram (1897). Nansen vanta una vasta produzione di libri di viaggio, tuttora ampiamente letti. La sua scrittura avviene sulla base di diari e appunti, e FERRARI riflette sul grado maggiore o minore di rielaborazione e costruzione a posteriori da parte dell'io narrante, anche in considerazione della variabile distanza temporale che separa l'esplorazione dalla scrittura. In questo caso i due libri furono pubblicati poco tempo dopo le imprese che descrivono. In generale, la traccia autobiografica che emerge dalle descrizioni corrisponde a ciò che FERRARI definisce la poetica e la filosofia di vita di Nansen, un personaggio dai vasti interessi e con uno spiccato profilo di umanista. Nansen si sofferma sul rapporto tra uomo e universo, vedendo l'uomo come parte della natura e non come colui che la domina. Il viaggio interiore del soggetto consiste nella sfida e nella scoperta di sé attraverso il contatto con gli elementi primordiali ed estremi dell'area artica.

MUSCARELLO presenta il diario di viaggio in Italia dello scrittore svedese Eyvind Johnson, premio Nobel nel 1974, tra i maggiori autori proletari, innovatore modernista della prosa svedese, anche autobiografica, e romanziere storico. Il diario fu pubblicato nel 1959 e si riferisce al viaggio di osservazione, ricerca e piacere che l'autore compì nel nostro paese nel 1958 in relazione a due dei suoi romanzi storici, una parte dei quali si svolge in Italia: *Molnen över Metapontion* (1957; Le nuvole su Metaponto) e *Hans*

an adult. The protagonist's present standpoint is decisive for his project: as he is a father now, Espen does not want his children's childhood to be the same hell it was for him. As PUTIGNANO argues, autobiography cannot be but open and unfinished for Sandemose, because the individual is always inevitably involved in his/her life's journey. The finished autobiography, on the contrary, proves to be further evidence of the law of Jante, a compulsory and highly conventional stabilisation of the self.

14. *Travel literature and autobiographical narration*

When writing about oneself, one can be a traveller, and the outward journey can express inward investigation. Several contributions in this volume exemplify this relationship between travel and self-investigation – or rather, only a few of them do not. The meeting between the Danish autobiographical authors and Thorvaldsen is often a topical moment of their journey through Italy (CARBONE). The fact that the autobiographical frames of Asbjørnsen's tales adopt topoi such as the trip, the wanderer, the territory and the gift of oral narration refers to some central values in the project of constructing a Norwegian national identity in the Romantic age (TAGLIANETTI).

More specifically, FERRARI focuses on travelogues by the famous Arctic explorer and scientist Fridtjof Nansen, first his crossing of Greenland (1890) and then his expedition towards the North Pole in his ship, the *Fram* (1897). Nansen wrote several still widely read travel books, the writing of which was based on diaries and notes, and FERRARI reflects upon the degree of retrospective construction by the narrator, even considering the varying temporal distance between his actual explorations and his writing about them. In this case the two books were published not long after the expeditions they describe. In general, the autobiographical pattern emerging from these descriptions corresponds to what FERRARI defines as Nansen's poetics and philosophy of life. Nansen, a person of broad interests and an outspoken humanist, dwells on the relationship between mankind and the universe, seeing the human species as a part of nature and not its dominator. The protagonist's inward journey consists of challenge and self-discovery through contact with the extreme ancestral elements of the Arctic area.

MUSCARELLO presents the Italian travel diary of Eyvind Johnson, Nobel prize winner in 1974, among the major Swedish proletarian authors, a modernist innovator of Swedish prose, autobiographical prose included, and a writer of historical novels. His diary, published in 1959, deals with the journey he made through Italy in 1958, mixing observation, research and leisure. The journey also refers to two of Johnson's historical novels, parts of which take place in Italy: *Molnen över Metapontion*, published a couple of years earlier (1957; *The Clouds above Metaponto*), and *Hans*

nådes tid (1960; *Il tempo di sua grazia*). Dal diario non emerge tanto l'interiorità di Johnson; esso illustra piuttosto il laboratorio creativo dell'autore, il suo metodo di viaggio, osservazione e ricerca. Se una cifra della grande narrativa storica di Johnson è il dialogo tra passato e presente, egli non può fare a meno, pur nella posizione del turista 'disimpegnato', di intrecciare l'osservazione dell'Italia contemporanea – chissà e malinconica, che sta cercando di risollevarsi dalle rovine della guerra – ai frammenti di passato che coglie sul suo percorso (la Magna Grecia, l'Italia longobarda) e che rivelano sempre qualcosa della condizione dell'uomo nella storia.

15. Scritture dialogiche dell'io

Per la natura sociale dell'uomo, non è sempre semplice o possibile separare l'autobiografia dalle memorie e dalla biografia, il racconto di sé dal racconto di un altro. Diversi contributi del volume si soffermano così sulla circostanza che l'autobiografia può aprirsi al ritratto altrui, come nel caso degli scrittori scandinavi che incontrano Thorvaldsen e lo rievocano (CARBONE). Inversamente la biografia può rivelare tratti autobiografici, che riguardano il soggetto narrante in relazione a un altro soggetto narrato. Halldis Moren Vesaas, ad esempio, dà ampio spazio al marito scomparso in un libro di ricordi personali e collettivi sulla parabola intellettuale della sua generazione. Sebbene Halldis faccia parlare Tarjei, non rinuncia ad affermare, magari in sordina, la propria visione più radiosa e meno crepuscolare della vita, quella che contrappone alla «barca nella sera» di Tarjei la propria «barca nel giorno» (CULEDDU). Tale attitudine si può anche inquadrare in una tendenza più generale dell'autobiografismo femminile, dove l'io è spesso decentrato o addirittura assente (Haettner Aurelius 1996: 51), una circostanza ripresa da STORSKOG nella sua analisi della poesia di Sonja Åkesson.

Lo sguardo rivolto oltre il proprio io può però caratterizzare anche la scrittura autobiografica maschile. Gli scrittori svedesi Göran Rosenberg (BASSINI) e ULF PETER HALLBERG dialogano entrambi con le proprie figure paterne scomparse, ed entrambi si ispirano a Walter Benjamin nel loro tentativo di redenzione del passato nel presente. Sulla scorta di Benjamin, la verità è intesa da HALLBERG non come una categoria afferrabile, ma piuttosto come un processo di comprensione profonda che si manifesta attraverso immagini sensibili, momenti privilegiati in cui gli sguardi e le parole delle persone si incontrano. Proponendo una sua versione dell'odierna commistione tra biografia, autobiografia e finzione, HALLBERG prende anche le distanze da un modello autobiografico egocentrico, che tende ad affermare il proprio io unico e irripetibile sul resto del mondo. È la tendenza che scorge nei narratori di *Min kamp* di Knausgård e di *En dramatikers dagbok* dello svedese Lars Norén, uscito in due parti (2008, 2013; Il diario di un drammaturgo), altro importante esempio della svol-

nådes tid, his next novel to be published (1960; *The Days of His Grace*). What emerges from the diary is not so much Johnson's inner life as his creative laboratory, his way of travelling, observing and investigating. If Johnson can display a dialogue between past and present in his major historical novels, he cannot but intertwine, even as an 'unengaged' tourist, his observations on contemporary Italy – noisy and melancholic, in its attempt to rise from the ruins of war – with the fragments of the past he can grasp on his way (*Magna Graecia*, Lombard rule in Italy), which always reveal something about the condition of mankind in history.

15. *Dialogic writing of the self*

Owing to the social nature of mankind, it is not always easy or possible to distinguish autobiography from memoir and biography, writing about oneself from writing about someone else. Some contributions in the volume highlight the circumstances that autobiography can open up to draw portraits of other people – as with the Scandinavian writers who met and described Thorvaldsen (CARBONE). On the other hand, biographies can reveal autobiographical traits, when the narrating subject is personally involved with the narrated character. Halldis Moren Vesaas, for instance, dedicated the greater part of a book of personal and collective memories about the intellectual development of her generation, to her deceased husband. Although Halldis lets Tarjei speak, she does not abstain from affirming, even if sotto voce, her more radiant and less crepuscular world view, contrasting Tarjei's «boat in the evening» with her own «boat in the daytime» (CULEDDU). Such an attitude can also be seen in connection with a more general tendency in women's autobiographical writing, where the self is often decentred or even absent (Haettner Aurelius 1996: 51), a circumstance considered by STORSKOG in her analysis of Sonja Åkesson's poem.

A gaze which goes beyond the self can however characterise men's autobiographical writing too. The Swedish writers Göran Rosenberg (BASSINI) and ULF PETER HALLBERG carry on a dialogue with their deceased fathers, and in their attempt to retrieve the past into the present, they both find inspiration in Walter Benjamin. Following Benjamin, HALLBERG does not consider truth as a category that can be grasped, but rather as a process of deep understanding, manifesting itself through tangible images and epiphanies, in which glances and words intertwine. While proposing his own version of the contemporary mixture of biography, autobiography and fiction, HALLBERG also criticises an egotistical model of autobiography, which tends to posit a unique and unrepeatable self against the rest of the world. He discerns such a tendency in the narrators of *Min kamp* by Knausgård and *En dramatikers dagbok* by the Swedish writer Lars Norén, published in two parts (2008, 2013; *A Playwright's Diary*), another outstanding example of the biographical turn in contemporary

ta biografica nella letteratura scandinava contemporanea. Relativamente al rapporto dello scrittore con la realtà e le persone vicine, HALLBERG considera inoltre – nel saggio qui proposto e nella sua opera narrativa – i casi coevi e opposti di Strindberg, il quale grazie alla scrittura riemerge rafforzato dalle ceneri della sua vita, e della scrittrice svedese Victoria Benedictsson, che attraverso i suoi diari constata la tragica frattura tra arte e vita e per questo soccombe.

A proposito del rapporto di un figlio con il padre, e con gli elementi della natura, il reticente Vesaas esplora in *Båten om kvelden* un motivo recondito, per CULEDDU una sorta di scena autobiografica originaria e immagine poetica fondamentale (paragonabile forse alla cicogna di Blixen e alla cometa di Tranströmer). L'immagine comprende un padre contadino, un figlio, un cavallo e il paesaggio, e parla dell'infrazione del ragazzo, del suo rifiuto di tramandare le conoscenze tradizionali e del suo bisogno di essere qualcos'altro, uno scrittore.

In conclusione, l'autobiografia può presentarsi come genere a sé stante, ma anche scorrere attraverso i più diversi generi letterari. Essa ci offre testi capaci di fare dialogare il vissuto interiore del soggetto con il mondo dei rapporti oggettivi, con il prossimo, la società, la politica e la storia. Perciò l'autobiografia mostra di possedere un carattere intrinsecamente dialogico, sia perché l'io si forma nella relazione con gli altri e con il mondo, sia, soprattutto, perché essa necessita di un interlocutore e produce un forte lettore implicito; ci si racconta per mettere ordine e dare un senso, ma soprattutto per essere ascoltati.

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Scandinavian literature. As to the writer's relationship to reality and the persons around him/her, HALLBERG considers, moreover – in the essay included in this volume, as well as in his oeuvre generally – the coeval and opposite cases of Strindberg, who, through his writing, could rise with new strength from the ashes of his life, and of the Swedish writer Victoria Benedictsson, who through her diaries observed a tragic cleavage between art and life, and therefore succumbed.

Concerning a son's relationship with his father and with the natural elements, the reticent Vesaas explores a hidden motif in *Båten om kvelden*, according to CULEDDU a sort of autobiographical primal scene and a fundamental poetic image (perhaps comparable to Blixen's stork and Tranströmer's comet). The image includes a father who is a farmer, a son, a horse and the landscape, and deals with the boy's transgression, in his refusal to transmit traditional knowledge and in his need to be something else, a writer.

To conclude, autobiography can manifest itself as an independent genre, but can also contaminate the most varied literary genres. It offers us texts which are capable of maintaining a dialogue between an individual's inner life and the objective world around him/her, his/her neighbours, society and history. Autobiography therefore proves to possess an essentially dialogic character, both because it develops through relationships with others and with the world, and, above all, because it needs a person to address and produces a strong implicit reader. We narrate ourselves to find an order and a meaning, but above all to be heard.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DOCUMENTS BY SCANDINAVIAN JESUITS FROM THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES: REMARKS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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1. Introduction

In this brief essay I intend to point out to those interested in Scandinavian autobiographical writings a rich and fascinating source that has been under-researched so far by historical and literary scholars alike. I refer to the documents written by the Scandinavian members of the Society of Jesus (in Latin *Societas Jesu*) during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

2. The Society of Jesus and Scandinavian Catholics

The Society of Jesus was established by Ignatius of Loyola in 1534¹. It is generally regarded either as a significant factor or as a characteristic result of that historical phenomenon often labelled by scholars – the terminology is actually still a matter of harsh debate (Jedin 1946; Firpo 2014: v-xix) – as the Catholic Counter-Reformation, i.e. the attempt by the Roman Catholic Church to react to the Protestant Reformation and to win back to the Catholic fold those territories that, since the 1520s, had turned to Protestantism. Among the various Roman Catholic religious orders that were established or reformed in the 1530s, 1540s and 1550s, the Jesuits soon became the most successful – we might say even the most fashionable – whether we look at the number of young and not-so-young men who petitioned to join the Society, or at the influence that Jesuits exercised inside and outside of Europe. The Jesuit Fathers, who took a special vow of obedience to the Pope and who were known for their staunch loyalty to him, were often appointed as missionaries, and within few years of its establishment the Society of Jesus was active not only in Europe, but in such faraway, exotic places as India, Ethiopia, China and South America (Hsia 1998).

¹ For a history of the foundation of the Society of Jesus and of its first years see O'Malley 1993.

The Jesuit Fathers, however, also strove to reconvert the much closer-by Scandinavia (Garstein 1963; Helk 1966; Garstein 1980). Their efforts were of two different kinds: on the one hand trying (with little success) to support Catholics still living in the Scandinavian countries by publishing abroad and then smuggling devotional literature into Scandinavia (Garstein 1992: 237-238); and, on the other, dispatching missionary priests to work locally (Karttunen 1908; Otto 1940).

Despite what is often assumed by scholars and non-scholars alike, Catholics did not disappear from Scandinavia with the introduction of the Protestant Reformation in the 1520s and 1530s (Kouri 1995; Schwarz Lausten 1995: 12-18). While the vast majority of the Scandinavian population embraced Lutheranism, a minority did not. Consequently, a small number of native-born Catholics, along with even fewer new converts to Catholicism, were still living in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Scandinavia but, by the 1560s and 1570s, with no priests to attend to their spiritual needs. In very few cases the protection and the benevolence of the monarch granted them the freedom to not hide their convictions (Garstein 1992: 117); however, as a general rule, they were 'closet Catholics' who had to outwardly conform to Lutheranism while they dissembled their true beliefs. The secretive way in which these men and women lived made it especially difficult for Catholic missionaries to reach out to and support them, while the fear of social and legal repercussions prevented the emergence of a 'Catholic recusancy' in Scandinavia similar to that of England (di Filippo Bareggi 2005).

On the other hand, the Jesuit Fathers opened centres of both lower and higher education – known as *collegia* – in Central and North-Eastern Europe, the aim of which was to attract Scandinavian students and, where possible, to convert them (Garstein 1992).

In the early sixteenth century the Scandinavian educational system was all but extinct (Garstein 1992: 7-39). Following the Reformation most of the conventual schools had been closed and many of the friars who taught there had left Scandinavia for Germany or the Netherlands. In addition, the holdings of monastic libraries were dispersed, and in some cases (most notably in Sweden) they were even destroyed (Nyberg 1997: 157-158). The Uppsala and Copenhagen universities were reformed as Lutheran institutions; however, the level of teaching could not compete with that of other European centres, so that most Scandinavian students studied abroad (Niléhn 1983; Helk 1987), attending a wide range of institutions, such as those centres famous in Scandinavia since the Middle Ages (most notably Bologna, Padua, Paris, Montpellier, Leuven and Cologne) and the now-fashionable Lutheran universities such as, obviously, Wittenberg (Schwarz Lausten 2001) but also Rostock and Greifswald, which were often preferred to other destinations because they were located on the Baltic Sea and easily accessible to and from Scandinavia (Kreslins 1996).

Calvinist institutions – Heidelberg, Geneva and Leiden – also became popular. Finally, it should be kept in mind that, at that time, students did not generally attend only one university, but would travel from one to another, often attracted by a professor, a program or a topic for which that institution was known. So it is not surprising that Scandinavians also reached the newly founded Jesuit *collegia*. Rather than being motivated by religious reasons, such men – and with them many other young European Protestants – were attracted by the reputation of academic excellence that such centres had quickly gained all over the continent (Garstein 1992: 40-65). The Jesuits were keen-witted teachers and their schools employed the latest pedagogical techniques, the so-called *ratio studiorum* (Brizzi 1981), which grouped students together according to their actual knowledge of the subjects, and whose instructors imposed the curriculum, with each class being preparatory for the next.

In the 1570s, the Jesuits followed up on the success of other ‘national’ colleges by adopting older plans (Lukács 1955) of opening certain institutions with the specific aim of attracting Scandinavian students. These were the *collegia* of Braunsberg, Olomouc, Dorpat and Vilnius, all founded between 1578 and 1584. Braunsberg, established in 1578 under the auspices of the Norwegian Jesuit Father Laurids Nilsson (champion of the Catholic Counter-Reformation in Scandinavia), was open to both Catholic and non-Catholic students, and soon became known in Europe as the Collegium Suecum, or the Swedish college, since up to three-quarters of its student body was originally from Scandinavia (Garstein 1992: 175-210). Scandinavian students, however, are also known to have attended other Jesuit centres – more religiously oriented ones – such as the Ferdinandeum of Graz, the Clementinum of Prague, or the Germanicum in Rome (Schmidt 1984; Garstein 1992: 103-174). Despite not discriminating on the basis of religion at the time of enrolment, the centres worked for the conversion of their students to Catholicism, often with notable success. Fearing the influence that these schools could have in their countries, in the early seventeenth century the Swedish and the Danish monarchs forbade their subjects to attend these centres. Remarkably, not everybody obeyed; still, Scandinavian attendance dropped drastically. But it was not yet the end, which occurred only with the Thirty Years’ War, when Braunsberg and other colleges were sacked by Protestant troops and never reopened.

3. Autobiography and Scandinavian Jesuit Fathers

Because of the missionaries operating in Scandinavia and, especially, because of the instruction they received at Jesuit schools (sometimes because of both), we know of a few hundred young Scandinavians

that joined the Roman Catholic Church between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Garstein 1992: 436-439). Of those who decided to receive Holy Orders, the majority joined the Society of Jesus. Because of some practices of the Jesuit Order, these men left us a great amount of autobiographical writing.

Ignatius of Loyola related his own conversion in his well-known autobiography, a work which was traditionally read by all the members of the Order as well as by those who intended to join it. Moreover, Ignatius's *Exercitia spiritualia* – soon to become the most important normative document of the Society – established the practice of both the 'examination of conscience' (a meticulous examination, to be performed at night, of the way a person had acted during the day) as well as of the 'general confessions' (regular confessions, often performed in written form, of the whole life of a Jesuit Father). Furthermore, those who intended to enter the Jesuit Order started their process of discernment by writing a general confession, followed by new general confessions, to be sent to their spiritual fathers on a regular basis². Another typical Jesuit document were the *littera* that the Jesuits had to write to their superiors in order to inform them of their progress in both their earthly mission and their spiritual journey. Finally, those Jesuits who had converted to Catholicism from another Christian denomination were often invited by their superiors to write to their relatives relating their experiences, with the unspoken but still very clear intent to convert them as well (Garstein 1992: 119-125).

A significant portion of these writings has survived; however, they have not been widely studied. The most notable exception concerns writings by the Norwegian Jesuit Father Laurentius Nicolai Norvegus (as the aforementioned Laurids Nilsson was known in Catholic Europe), which were edited by Johannes Joseph Duin and Oskar Garstein (1980). The volume is impressive: 400 pages long, with material from seventeen archives and libraries located in thirteen different countries, to mention only the unpublished documents. This collection is especially remarkable since Norvegus had already been the object of several scholarly studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Brandrud 1895; Perger 1896; Amann 1929; Baudet 1931; Garstein 1963; Helk 1966). Norvegus was indeed a unique figure, but this volume still gives an idea of how much material concerning Scandinavian Jesuits is waiting to be rediscovered and studied in archives in both Southern and Northern Europe (with the most easily accessible collections being of course those in Rome such as the Archivio Segreto and the Archivio della Compagnia di Gesù).

² The bibliography on Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* is especially vast. For an introduction to it, see Begheyn, Bogart 1991.

The autobiographical documents by Scandinavian Jesuits are in many ways exceptional and offer the opportunity to investigate several fields. Aside from their obvious relevance from a prosopographical point of view, more generally and most notably, their abundance would enable scholars to take a comparative approach along the model of the «social history of ideas» so successfully undertaken by Heiko Augustinus Oberman (1994: viii-xi); in Michael W. Bruening's words, it is «a method that seeks to explain the dynamic interaction between society and ideas, for the fundamental principle behind it is that intellectual currents both affect and are affected by social trends, institutions, and identities» (2005: xi). This approach is possible only when there is a significant number of surviving sources. Moreover, since the Jesuit Fathers wrote their autobiographical sketches on several different occasions, these documents – especially if written by the same Father over many years, as was the case for Laurentius Norvegus – enable us to investigate the evolution of the ideas shared by the Scandinavian Fathers, and to explore whether external factors (for instance, wars, religious and political events etc.) could have affected their views. I would like to point out a few aspects that seem to me especially interesting and worthy of further investigation.

It is significant that, with the exception of letters dispatched to relatives still living in Scandinavia, these documents were autobiographical sketches written by Scandinavians who knew that they were going to be read by non-Scandinavians. How did these Jesuits speak of their home countries? In what ways did they explain the cultural peculiarities of the Scandinavian North? At the time, descriptions of Scandinavia (such as for instance those by the Magnus brothers) were generally meant to appear in printed form, and risked being affected by such bias as personal and national pride or the need to praise a patron; the Jesuit ones, on the contrary, were not intended for such public and propagandistic use and, if used cautiously, could possibly prove to be more trustworthy. Another significant aspect concerns the fact that other Jesuits tended to consider the different Scandinavian countries as a whole. Since this period was a historical moment characterised by strong political tensions and cultural differences between the kingdoms of Denmark-Norway and Sweden-Finland (Gustafsson 2004), it would be of great interest to see how Scandinavian Jesuits dealt with this generalisation. Were they at ease with it, or did they feel somehow challenged or even embarrassed? Did they share, or come to share, a common identity?

In addition, such documents could prove to be especially relevant for those scholars interested in the history of Scandinavian languages in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For example, documents by recently arrived students could help us investigate the quality and the peculiarities of written Latin as it was taught and known in Scandinavia at the time. Those of later students could cast some light on the way the vernacular

language of the authors might have been influenced by Roman Catholic ecclesiastical Latin as well as by the languages spoken in the areas where the Jesuit Fathers had settled, which were sometimes Germanic (mostly the Netherlands, Austria and Germany), while others were Romance (such as Italy, France and Spain). (We know, however, of Scandinavian Catholics who also lived in Hungary, Estonia and in Slavonic countries)³. Lastly, in the letters written to their relatives in Scandinavian languages, the vocabulary concerning church and ecclesiastical matters is worth particular attention. Since by then, common words such as *bisp* or *præst* were widely used in Scandinavia to denote a Lutheran superintendent and a Protestant minister, how did the Scandinavian Jesuits deal with them? Did they employ them or did they prefer to use other terms? It would be of great significance to realise whether, as in other European countries, linguistic usage in early modern Scandinavia denoted a confessional identification.

Among the vast written production of Scandinavian Jesuits, one document in particular seems especially fascinating and worth mentioning. It is a letter addressed to the professors of the University of Copenhagen, published in Latin in 1602 (with a reprint in 1606), as well as in Danish in 1608⁴. It was a collective work, and although it was composed under the direction of Laurentius Nicolai Norvegus, the authors were students from Denmark and Norway who were still studying at the time with the Jesuit Fathers at Braunsberg and at other colleges (Duin, Garstein 1980: 362-363). The main aim of the letter was to explain why these young men had come to believe the Roman Catholic Church was the sole true church. To do so the work relies on a detailed analysis based on learned historical and theological explanations that occupy most of the treatise. In the conclusion, however, another point is raised: the fact that their new faith did not change their bonds of loyalty towards their king, whom they still regarded as the only lawful one. As in other European countries – most notably England (di Filippo Bareggi 2005) – the problem of Scandinavian Catholics was indeed to prove how their religious convictions did not alter their political loyalty. The text would deserve particular attention also from both literary and linguistic points of view. As for the former, since its bilingual edition/translation, the letter would prove a perfect case study for the analysis of the language of Scandinavian Catholics

³ A complete prosopographical study of the life of Jesuit-educated Scandinavian Catholic clergy is still missing. Oskar Garstein promised a two-volume edition of biographical sketches (Garstein 1995: 207) but it never came to light. Fragmentary sketches can be found, however, in his other works (Garstein 1980; 1992) and, for Danish-Norwegian ones, in Helk's (Helk 1966; 1987).

⁴ The Latin and Danish texts are published in Duin, Garstein 1980: 331-385.

(here to investigate whether it was characterised by specific features, and to what degree it was influenced by Latin). Most remarkably the letter permits some consideration on the nature of their autobiographical discourse per se. In the conclusion the reasons of these men, as well as their life experiences, are presented in the first-person plural. The fact that «we» was not meant as a simple rhetorical and artificial tool, but that, on the contrary, the text wanted to present the ideas of these students, is furthermore underlined by a literary ploy: at the end, the discourse evolves into a rapid-fire fictitious dialogue between the young Catholics and the University professors (starting with the assertion: «Already it seems to us to hear you objecting: “what are you doing, young men?”» to which they answer «We [...]»⁵). Here the students go on to present their spiritual journey and convictions. They speak – better, they present themselves as if they were speaking – in unison. What we seem to be in the presence of here is a fascinating case of ‘collective autobiography’, that is, the expression of a shared memory. But was it a real memory or a constructed one? Was it subjective or objective? Moreover, did such memories already exist when these men started writing this letter or were they the result of the process? All questions that are hard to answer. Logically, the process seems to imply a construction whose more or less implicit aim was to formulate a common memory and, probably even more important, a common identity. What is impossible to say, however, is whether these men were aware of it. In this respect the study of other autobiographical material by Scandinavian Jesuits could be very useful. Analysing them would go far to clarifying whether such shared memory was presented also in other documents, both for private and public use, as well as allowing us to gauge how much of what was written was actually characterised by a real subjectivity free of preordained models or, on the contrary, whether it was influenced by their teachers as well as by other autobiographical writings focused on conversion and easily accessible to them, such as Ignatius’s *Autobiography* or Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*.

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⁵ Duin, Garstein 1980: 357: «Videre iam videmur, vos audire: Quid, o Iuvenes, agitis? [...] Nos [...]».

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AGNETA HORN'S BESKRIFNING ÖFWER MIN WANDRINGESTIDH. A WOMAN'S VOICE FROM THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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Beskrifning öfwer min wandringestidh (Description of the Time of My Wanderings)¹ was written by Agneta Horn, a Swedish noblewoman who lived in the seventeenth century. In this book she recounts the events of her life, from her birth in Riga in 1629 up to the year 1652. Here the narrative stops; Horn died twenty years later, in 1672.

1. The manuscript tradition

The original autograph was found in 1885 by Ellen Fries, a scholar in social history, who discovered it in Uppsala, where it is still preserved. It was classified first as ms. X 240 (Horn), and then as UUB X 240 AH. Very little is known about the history of the manuscript: it had belonged to Bishop Olof Celsius, who lived between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, after whom the entire collection takes its name. He had probably inherited it from his father-in-law, the bibliophile Anders Anton von Stiernman.

The manuscript consists of ten quires, of which the first seven (a total of forty pages from 1a to 41b) are the autobiography. The last three quires (42a-47b) comprise reworked versions of several passages from the Bible.

These are the principal critical editions: the first one, *En självbiografi från sextonhundratalet* (Horn 1886; An Autobiography from the Seventeenth Century), edited by Ellen Fries, was published in three issues of the Swedish journal «Dagny», the periodical of Fredrika Bremer Förbundet (The Fredrika Bremer Society); the second one, edited by Sigrid Leijonhufvud, *Agneta Horns lefverne* (Horn 1908; Agneta Horn's Life), was published in Stockholm by Norstedt; the third one, *Beskrifning över min vandringstid* (Horn 1959), was edited by Gösta Holm. Anne Brügge authored an adaptation into modern Swedish (Horn 2012).

¹ All translations are mine.

Fries's 1886 edition contains only the first seven quires, while the remaining three are not even mentioned. Leijonhufvud's edition does not comprise the three final quires either, just providing a list of contents in the final annotations. Leijonhufvud's edition is, on the other hand, particularly interesting because of the final appendix which, in addition to the notes, also contains some letters by Agneta Horn and her relatives. These precious texts are an important complement to the episodes recounted in Horn's autobiography, shedding light on events not reported in the memoirs. In both editions mentioned the spelling is standardised and punctuation was inserted by the editors, while Holm's 1959 edition faithfully reproduces the original text and has therefore been chosen for this study.

The last three quires were edited and published by Stephen Mitchell (1985: 24-55) in a parallel text featuring the passages from the Bible on one side of the page and the corresponding reworked versions by Agneta Horn on the other².

2. Considerations about the genre

Critics have variously speculated on the possible reasons that prompted the author to write the description of her life story. On the one hand Fries (Horn 1886: 34), Leijonhufvud (Horn 1908: 7-8) and Mitchell (1985: 14-15) see in the book the author's attempt to clarify the origins of her misfortunes and tragedies; on the other, critics such as Magnus von Platen (1959: 32), Sven Stolpe (1973: 95) and Johnny Kondrup (1982: 115-116) emphasise the importance that Horn gives to her own personality and strong temper, and thus judge her work to be the expression of her egocentrism. Eva Haettner Aurelius draws attention to a more practical legal reason for Agneta Horn's endeavours, which many scholars today accept as correct: Agneta Horn is both a devout woman who, though tried by the hardships of her existence, shows her strong faith in God's will; but, at the same time she is proud and aware of her own merits, and eager to struggle for her rights (Haettner Aurelius 1996: 74-75).

Agneta Horn's text is one of the most important prose works of seventeenth-century Sweden. Though it is usually defined as an autobiography, the question of its literary genre is rather complex. In Swedish, the first occurrence of the word *självbiografi* (autobiography), is found in the journal of the Uppsala

² A short but interesting introduction to Agneta Horn's life and works is provided by Mitchell (1987); as for Agneta Horn's vicissitudes during the Thirty Years' War, see Gösta Holm (1986). Agneta Horn's text has been taken up by modern authors, who have expanded on her narrative. See, for instance, Agneta Pleijel's play, staged in 2014, *Efter mitt eget huvud – en 1600-talsfresko om Agneta Horn* (In My Own Way – A Seventeenth-Century Fresco about Agneta Horn), in which Agneta Horn is presented as a proud, wilful, passionate woman who wants to determine her own destiny.

Romantic movement «Phosphoros» in 1812, two centuries after Horn's *Beskrifning* was written, and carries its own specific semantic value, which is clearly different from that of *biografi*. Previously, the word *levernesbeskrivning* (life description) often followed by the specification *egenhändig* (written with one's own hand) had been used to identify a work whose narrator was also the main character (Haettner Aurelius 1991: 23).

Haettner Aurelius, moreover, points out that Agneta Horn did not display any awareness of the literary genre she had chosen, since she overlooked its stylistic features (such as narrative rhythm) and paid no attention to the characters' psychological traits, as she intended her writing mainly for herself and not for an audience³:

När Agneta Horn någon gång i mitten av 1600-talet skrev sin levnadsbeskrivning *Beskrifningh öfwer min älända och mycket wedervärtiga wandringestidh*, hade hon säkert inga planer på att låta trycka den. Levernesbeskrivningar hörde inte till de texter man tryckte: de var inte inlemmade i det litterära genresystemet och de hörde inte till den litterära offentligheten. [...] Den som skrev självbiografi före romantiken hade m.a.o. ingen idé om att hon eller han skrev en text som hade särskilda egenskaper vad gällde innehållet (jagets utveckling, personlighetens danande, livsförloppets samspel med personligheten), formen (retrospektiv, sammanhängande och fortlöpande berättelse med början, mitt och slut) och syfte (att visa mig själv, att tolka mig själv och mitt liv). (Haettner Aurelius 1991: 18)

When Agneta Horn wrote her life description *Description of my Misery and Very Tormented Wandering Time*, in the middle of the seventeenth century, she surely had no intention to publish it. Autobiographical writings were not regarded as texts to be printed: they had no function in the literary genre system or in the literary public sphere. [...] In other words, before Romanticism, the authors of autobiographies thought of their works without any definite idea as to content (self-development, creation of a personality, interaction between life processes and personality), form (a retrospective, coherent and continuous narrative with a beginning and an end), and purpose (revealing oneself, interpreting oneself and one's life).

On the other hand, should we wish to attempt a definition of Agneta Horn's text, we could say that it contains elements of autobiography, as she reports personal events chronologically from her childhood to her adult age with an emphasis on introspection, and memoirs, since the narrator is also a witness (cf. Kondrup 1982: 26-28); noticeable sections of the manuscript

³ The fact that authors of autobiographies may not be completely aware of the genre they are employing is an almost unanimously agreed-upon notion. However, as for Agneta Horn's autobiography, a BA dissertation defended at the University of Gothenburg (Claeson 1989) presents an argument that is diametrically opposed to Haettner Aurelius's claim, maintaining that Agneta Horn was in fact using well-established strategies derived from classical rhetoric in her autobiography.

consist of pages recording the military experiences of her husband Lars Cruus in the years 1647 to 1655, as well as those of her father, Gustav Horn, in Agneta's childhood years. The final part consists of pages with quotations from the Bible, in particular the *Book of Psalms* and the *Book of Job*.

3. The quires about military events

As for the language she uses, the second part of the work is undoubtedly the most interesting for modern readers: Agneta Horn describes in detail the journeys with her father when she was a child, and later with her husband (they were both officers in the Swedish army). She refers to the outcomes of the battles and their impact on everyday life, and to the names of the people involved, such as officers and politicians.

The text is not a simple chronicle focusing on episodes of war only, but also pays attention to other aspects of Horn's life, against the background of the Thirty Years' War. In particular, Horn emphasises how she endured the same difficult conditions, privations and diseases, as the Swedish soldiers:

24 ginge wi ifrån kamnitz om mårغان
 mädh krutwagnana och hela partiet
 och ginge forbi kurforsten af saxens
 lusthus, som liger strax vnder
 bemerwal, der di hafwa den mykna
 swarta stenen, och til skopa til natan.
 25 ginge wi der ifrån och kome på
 bemerwäldh. Och låge om natan i en
 liten fläk vnder anenbärg. Och war
 der et träflig högt bärg, som wi skule
 vp före. Och krutwagnana skule först
 vp. Och iag hölt der nere i dalen. Och
 skafwer sade, när den 3 krutwagen
 war vpkomin, til min man: "H[är]
 öfwerste, han skule läta sin fru koma
 åp mädh sin kare, tÿ thet blir hene alt
 för långt til at bida, heler om någon
 wagen ginge sönder, så kan hon inte
 koma fram i nat". Tÿ lät min man
 befala, at iag skule koma åp for bakan.
 Och iag gorde så. Män som iag war
 komin in i bÿn och min man steg af sin
 häst och sate sig på bänken hos mig,
 kom en hen ofwerstelögnant kläm
 så het in och sade, at han har set 6000
 man vnder anenbärg, som kome til
 oss marsserandez. (Horn 1959: 98-99)

On the 24th [of May] we departed from
 Chemnitz in the morning with the
 gunpowder carts and the whole division,
 and went past the Elector of Saxony's
 summer house, which was immediately
 beyond the Bohemian Forest, where
 there are very black rocks, and arrived
 at Zschopau in the evening. On the 25th
 we left there and reached the Bohemian
 Forest, where we slept in a dirty little
 place near Annaberg. There was a really
 high mountain that we had to climb. The
 gunpowder carts had to go up first. And I
 stopped down in the valley. And Schäffer
 told my husband, when the third cart had
 made it to the top, "Colonel, you should
 let your wife come up with your cart,
 otherwise it will be too much for her,
 or, if any cart should crash, she will not
 make it before morning". So my husband
 commanded that I go up the slope. And
 so I did. But as I arrived at the village
 and my husband dismounted from his
 horse and sat on the bench next to me,
 Colonel Klemm arrived, saying he had
 seen six thousand men, under Annaberg,
 marching against us.

What she writes about is documented by historical evidence and, despite some inaccuracies relating to the place names, her narration is faithful and reliable. The accurate descriptions of journeys and daily occurrences, such as the lack of supplies or the capture of an alleged spy, might suggest that the author used her father's and her husband's war diaries.

This section is also interesting insofar as it contains a number of new words, belonging to the semantic field of war, which first appeared in Swedish during the seventeenth century. Other words, already attested in common usage, here acquire a more specific meaning: for example the word *krut* (Horn 1959: 98, 100, 101, 110), both on its own and in the nominal compound *krutwagn* (gunpowder cart) of Low German origin, meaning «herb», synonym of the Swedish *krydda*, here used to indicate «gunpowder»; or *amt* (Horn 1959: 92; administration), also of Low German origin, which became part of the Swedish lexicon in the same period, used as an equivalent and etymologically similar word for the local term *ämbete*.

There are also many loanwords, generally terms that define roles and ranks in the army or weapons. They are taken from French, either directly or through the mediation of Low German, like *armmen* (Horn 1959: 4, 6, and 32 more occurrences; army); *dragoner* (Horn 1959: 46, 96, 97, 98; dragoons), specialised horsemen whose corps had been inserted into the Swedish Army by Gustav II Adolf at the beginning of the seventeenth century; *general* (Horn 1959: 101, 107; general) in nominal compounds; *generalisemus/generalizimus* (Horn 1959: 94, 95, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103; generalissimo), referring to Charles X Gustav; *gubernör* (Horn 1959: 74, 107; governor), generally with military powers; *komendant* (Horn 1959: 96, 101; commander); *kompeni* (Horn 1959: 112; company)⁴; *komfåj* and *löjtnant* (Horn 1959: 98; convoy and lieutenant); *musketerare* (Horn 1959: 46, 93, 94; musketeer); *ofitzirare/åfiserare* (Horn 1959: 93, 94; officer); *patrulien* (Horn 1959: 93; patrol); *såldat* (Horn 1959: 12, 51, 54, 55, 56; soldier). Words directly borrowed from Low German are also present, like *öfwerste/överste/överst* (Horn 1959: 96, 98, 109, 110; colonel), or *regemänte* (Horn 1959: 83, 101, and 32 more occurrences; regiment).

These examples clarify the fact that Agneta Horn's autobiography refers to the time span of the Thirty Years' War as characterised by linguistic exchanges and assimilations, since the Swedish army and the Protestant German army came into close contact as allies against a common enemy. This also explains why so many lexemes introduced into Swedish belong to the military semantic area. Not only does the large use of these loans in *Beskrifning öfwer min wandringestidh* bear witness to a significant

⁴ According to Hellquist 1948: 338 this word was first used in the military field at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

linguistic change, but it also stands as an important example of the changes occurring in the Swedish military world, on the model of the French army.

4. The third section: the Bible in *Beskrifning öfwer min wandringestidh*

The third section of the text is the least analysed by scholars, although it is of considerable critical and historical importance. As mentioned before, in 1985 Mitchell edited the text, which consists of reflections and prayers that the author wrote by adapting the biblical passages from the *Book of Job* and the *Psalter* to her private life. In this section Agneta Horn features the subject (herself) as a 'type', i.e. she chooses a biblical character to stand for herself; this subject is thus part of the divine order.

This section, though not easy to read, is of crucial importance since it reflects an actual trend in seventeenth-century Swedish literature, and particularly in women's literature. In a later study Mitchell maintains that, after the Reformation, literary self-analyses grew popular especially among women writers. Women's literary ambitions were legitimised by the writings of St. Bridget, who, despite her Catholic matrix, was a sort of *auctoritas*, a model to refer to (Mitchell 2002: 271-273). Estelle Jelinek has already pointed out how the autobiographical writings of seventeenth-century women were characterised by an intense introspective vision and strong religiosity, as opposed to men's autobiographies, such as Jesper Svedberg's or Gustav II Adolf's, conceived as narratives of *res gestae* (1986: 24). In this portion of the text, Agneta Horn presents her own life in a lyrical, epic and baroque style characterised by circumlocutions which imitate seventeenth-century preaching (Mitchell 1985: 77).

Probably Carl Carlsson Gyllenhielm's *Nosce te ipsum*, an autobiographical poem in *knittelvers* published as an appendix to the 1644 edition of *Schola captivitatis* (1632), served as a model for Agneta Horn, who in 1657 wrote a poem, a collection of thoughts in verse on her own life, in the *stambok* (a family register) of her friend Kerstin Posse (contained in ms. UUB Y 117k)⁵.

There is no evidence which links AH [Agneta Horn] to this work. Certain characteristics of Gyllenhielm's *Nosce te ipsum* strengthen the bond between it and *AH:s leverne*: the verbal echoes between their complete titles, the use of selected biblical quotations to form a continuous thought (a feature found on the verso of the title page of *Nosce te ipsum*), the 'intertextual' nature of the autobiographical poem with appropriate corresponding verses of the

⁵ The poem, also written in *knittelvers*, is to be found in Horn 1908: 208-209; a critical edition, followed by a translation into English, is given in Mitchell 2002: 281-283.

Bible cited in the margin, and the use of theme headings for the translated psalms. (Mitchell 1985: 78-79)

Agneta Horns Lefverne therefore fully reflects the emphasis on autobiography and self-analysis which was prominent in Protestantism and well-expressed in the literary production of the time. Yet it also deals with other matters, as can be seen in those sections of the text focusing on the account of her personal life and the war campaign she was involved in. Moreover, this section is also a resource for the study of language history: Agneta Horn copies passages from the Bible, but edits and alters the original material according to the spoken Swedish of her day. According to Mitchell, «her intentional changes of the quotations are at the level of meaning», while changes at the level of syntax and phonology are «presumably unintentional» (1985: 56).

As for the phonological aspects there are several lexemes that are worth noticing: the spellings she uses help us figure out how the spoken language of the time sounded. There are several cases of assimilation, like *ld>ll*, for example *elen* from *elden* (Horn 1959: 47, 57; fire), *herewäle* from *herravälde* (Horn 1959: 80; domination); *nd>nn*, *han* from *hand* (Horn 1959: 56; hand), *stun* from *stund* (Horn 1959: 16; while); *tn>n(n)*, *dråning(h)* from *drottning* (Horn 1959: 14; queen); *dn>n(n)*, *råna* from *rodna* (Horn 1959: 78; to blush); *ts>s(s)*, *masäken* from *matsäcken* (Horn 1959: 25; provision-bag); *ds>s(s)*, *gos* from *gods* (Horn 1959: 111; estates). Certain consonants are lost in consonant clusters, for example *tjysland(h)* instead of *tyskland* (Horn 1959: 4, 24, 85; Germany); final postvocalic *d* is lost both in stressed and unstressed position, for example *beske* instead of *besked* (Horn 1959: 98; information), *brö* instead of *bröd* (Horn 1959: 70; bread), *hva* instead of *vad* (Horn 1959: 60; what), *gärtru* instead of *Gertrud* (Horn 1959: 38), *hufe* instead of *huvud* (Horn 1959: 74; head). There is notable difficulty in the perception of the different pronunciations of voiced and voiceless plosives (labial and velar), which are often interchanged: *benningar* for *penningar* (Horn 1959: 11; money), *bart* for *part* (Horn 1959: 78; part), *kig* for *gick* (Horn 1959: 16; went). Moreover, the cluster *rd* turns into *l*, *gål(en)* for *gården* (Horn 1959: 30; backyard). The bilabial voiced stop and the bilabial voiceless stop function as epenthetic consonants in words such as *bekumpna* for *bekymra* (Horn 1959: 84; to worry), *gambla* (Horn 1959: 11) or *gampla* (Horn 1959: 21) for *gamla* (old), *onämpnd* for *onämnd* (Horn 1959: 63; unnamed)⁶.

⁶ For further details about linguistic aspects in Agneta Horn see Wessén 1926, Larsson 1927, and Gösta Holm's observations in his introduction to *Beskrivning över min vandringstid* (Horn 1959: xi-xxvii) and Holm 2000.

5. The autobiographical matter

Although political and military issues are interesting and peculiar in this noblewoman's life story, they are not the most prominent topics addressed; on the contrary, Swedish and European history both serve as a mere background for Horn's personal memories. The first and most conspicuous part of the text is in fact purely autobiographical, simply recounting events from the author's private life. Although Horn, as the granddaughter of Axel Oxenstierna (Lord High Chancellor of Sweden in the first half of the seventeenth century), had access to precise and detailed information, she just includes it tangentially in her narrative, focusing instead on the history of her family. The events are narrated in annalistic form, on the model of the *släktböcker*, collections of historical events arranged in chronological order, with an annalistic approach, which recorded the crucial events of a family's private life: births, marriages, deaths. A literary precedent, in the late Middle Ages, were the genealogical catalogues collected by ecclesiastical institutions; the most famous one in Sweden is the *Chronicon genealogicum*, compiled in the early sixteenth century by Anna Fickesdotter Bülow, abbess of Vadstena (Bülow 1718).

Furthermore the *släktböcker* recorded business transactions, land purchases, sales, inheritances, transfers of ownership, activities in which the ecclesiastical institutions had some economic interest. After the Reformation, church authorities no longer dealt with this kind of writing, and noblewomen were in charge of it (von Platen 1998: 104). A parallel evolution of the *släktböcker* can easily be hypothesised: the collection of family annals was gradually assuming a more intimate and introspective aspect, the genre itself gradually turning into autobiographical writing. Between 1500 and 1600 several samples of *släktböcker* can be listed. Sigrid Bielke, Agneta Horn's stepmother, wrote an autobiographical text in the form of annals (Bielke 1900): the date is written first, then the name of a person, the date of his/her birth or death, or other significant events (Haettner Aurelius 1996: 81). Another example is the work of Maria Christoffersdotter Stenquist, *Personalia*, whose manuscript is preserved in Uppsala (UUB X 255 ab, Cederhjelmiska Samlingen). Here the author refers to the text as an «underrättelse om herkomst och mina sallige föräldrars affkomst» (Mitchell 2002: 277; «information about my blessed parents' lineage and progeny»).

Agneta Horn's autobiography, too, can be related to the genre of the *släktböcker*, because it shares the same characteristics, both in structural and thematic terms: 1) events are arranged in chronological order, so as to highlight the current year first, then the month and the day, the day of the week and sometimes even the hour; 2) in this text, especially in the first part, the author collects all the key events of her family's life, such as births, christenings, engagements, marriages, deaths; 3) the recounting of the events is often supplemented by religious reflections, such as prayers or

supplications, in which the author invokes the protection of God, health for her children, and grace for the dead. This is how she reports her birth:

Anno 1629 den 18 Agusti och om en måndagsmorgon klåkan 7 är jagh, Agneta horn gustafsdåter, fødhit til dåna onda och för migh myket mödosama och bedröfweliga wården vti staden riga, mig siälf til al som största sårgh och wederwärtighet. Here min gudh, hiälp migh thena min swåra wårdh i thena min barndom och sedan. (Horn 1959: 3)

1629, 18 August, on a Monday morning, at seven o'clock I, Agneta Horn Gustafsdotter, was born here, in this evil and for me very hard and miserable world, in the town of Riga, to my great sorrow and displeasure. Oh my Lord, help me in this hard world during my childhood and after.

As previously suggested, Agneta Horn probably wrote her autobiography not completely aware of the genre she had chosen and with no interest in formal refinement; it is also arguable that she was influenced by existing models in producing an original autobiography, by merging the annalistic and genealogic genre, together with religious reflections.

Agneta Horn probably conceived her work as an annalistic text, with the simple aim of recording events with practical, not literary, purposes. It can therefore be assumed that the first readers of her writings were her children, to whom she intended to offer a detailed picture of the financial situation of the family. It is thus reasonable to assume, as suggested by Haettner Aurelius, that Horn's decision to write an autobiography derives from the contrasts with her stepmother Sigrid Bielke about inheritance, after the death of Gustav Horn, Agneta Horn's father and Sigrid's husband, in 1657 (Haettner Aurelius 1996: 91). As a matter of fact, Agneta Horn experienced a complex economic situation after her father's death. In Sweden, in the seventeenth century, the ancient custom of *morgongåva* was still in force, a tradition according to which noblemen had to give their wives a generous dowry in order to guarantee financial security in case of their own premature death. In 1627 Gustav Horn gave Kristina Oxenstierna, Axel Oxenstierna's daughter and Agneta's mother, a considerable dowry. In 1631 Kristina fell ill and died, leaving her husband and two children, one of whom died soon after. Agneta Horn was the only heir, and thus entitled to inherit her mother's dowry after her father's death. When she married Lars Cruus, Agneta Horn was still Gustav Horn's only heir, but in 1650 Gustav Horn and Sigrid Bielke had a child, Carl Gustav, who lived until 1654. In 1651, after Carl Gustav's birth, Gustav Horn gave his late wife's entire *morgongåva* to Agneta, on the condition that she would inherit it only after his death, so as to make it clear that Agneta was the only heir.

Gustav Horn died in 1657, without male heirs, and left an unsigned will, which considerably reduced Agneta Horn's inheritance: without this document Agneta would have obtained her mother's *morgongåva*

together with her father's inheritance, to be shared with her two half-sisters. According to Gustav Horn's unsigned will, instead, Sigrid Bielke would receive all housing and movables, and Agneta Horn be granted the sum of 8000 *riksdaler*. This reduction depended on the fact that Agneta had already and unduly benefited from the maternal dowry, at the time still owned by Gustav Horn, during her father's eight-year captivity. Sigrid Bielke vehemently accused Agneta Horn of taking advantage of dramatic circumstances (her father's captivity and her brother's death), and also of not having respected her father's will. The legal charge of pillaging was accompanied by an ethical condemnation, Agneta Horn being reproached as a greedy woman, who had shown no respect for her father's authority.

It is, therefore, clear that Agneta Horn's memoirs had a practical purpose: that of protesting her innocence, as Stefan Inderwies suggests (2009), arguing that Horn's *Beskrifning* cannot be associated with only one genre. Agneta Horn emphasises her absolute lack of greed and her will to assert and pursue her own rights and her need to protect her children's future capital. Moreover, in the text Agneta Horn intends to demonstrate that she is not a bad daughter and, for this reason, she never deals with the conflicts with her father: her enemies are aunt Ebba and aunt Karin, described as perfidious and envious women. For example, in the passages in which Agneta Horn narrates the events of Erik Sparre, a nobleman of ancient lineage and a suitor that Agneta rejected, she attributes exclusive blame to aunt Ebba, who wanted to arrange the match and fomented discord; thus Agneta emphasises the harmony that presumably existed between herself and her father. The latter would probably have been happy if Agneta had married Erik Sparre but, being presented here as a peaceful, docile man, he easily accepts his daughter's will (Haettner Aurelius 1993: 273), as the following passage clearly shows:

[...] och sade han åt mig: "Efter hans [Erik Sparres] syster är här, så wet iag wäl, at hon wil weta swar af mig och digh. Och säg mig nu, huadh iag skal svara". Der på iag swara kårt näy. Då sade min h[är] f[ar]: "Di swaran wil iag inte säya häne, vtan du må siälf säya. Tÿ iag wil ingen owän hafwa för din skul, som iag har tänkt til at skafwa mig wäner mädh". (Horn 1959: 60)

[...] and he told me: "As his [Erik Sparre's] sister is here, I know very well that she will want to get the answer from me and you. Now tell me what I have to answer". Then I briefly answered: "No". So my father said: "I do not want to give her these answers, but you can tell her yourself. I do not want enemies because of you, since I thought I would acquire friends thanks to you".

For these reasons, Agneta Horn's text can be considered as part of the tradition of autobiographical writings with an apologetic purpose, that is, works that aimed at justifying and motivating the author's behaviour and actions. There is also a coeval testimony in 1682, belonging to the same genre, *Egenhändigå Lefwenes-Beskrifning* (Life Description, Written with my Own Hand) by Maria Eufrosyne, Countess Palatine, Queen

Christina's cousin and King Charles X Gustav's sister (De la Gardie 1789). Haettner Aurelius compares the two cases:

När det gäller Agneta Horns och Maria Eufrosynes texter kan man anta att de har skrivits inom en juridisk offentlighet, i Maria Eufrosynes fall gränsande till en politisk. Båda texterna kan knytas till rättsliga tvister – i Agneta Horns fall till en mellan henne och hennes styvmor, i Maria Eufrosynes fall till reduktionens och förmyndarräfstens härjningar av hennes och makens Magnus Gabriel de la Gardies egendomar 1681. (1991: 20)

As to Agneta Horn's and Maria Eufrosyne's texts, they were probably written in a legal context, and, in Maria Eufrosyne's case, in an almost political one. Both texts can be related to legal controversies – in Agneta Horn's case, to the one between her and her stepmother; in Maria Eufrosyne's case, to the loss of her and her husband Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie's properties in 1681, due to the *reduktion* and *förmyndarräfssten* [economic measures of the time].

According to Haettner Aurelius, both Agneta Horn and Maria Eufrosyne's writings have a male 'predecessor', the poet Lars Wivallius, whose long letter to the court of appeal on the charges levelled against him had been elaborated and edited as an autobiography, *Lars Wivallius leverne* (Wivallius 1957; cf. Haettner Aurelius 1991: 21).

6. Conclusions

To sum up, Agneta Horn's work must, first of all, be analysed and classified according to the literary standards of the time when it was written. It also needs to be scrutinised in relation to Horn's private life, as well as to the social and historical events and customs of seventeenth-century Sweden. The text's introspective approach clearly reflects a trend of its time, common to most of women's writings. This is the reason why, by the same token, this work cannot simply be defined as a family chronicle or *släktbok*, though possessing most of the traits that characterised the *släktbok* genre, such as the collection of biographical and genealogical records and the annalistic form. In a modern perspective, Agneta Horn's book appears thus as an autobiography, a memoir and an annalistic, factual, chronicle-like text, whose function is not only that of a personal diary, as it also contains useful, practical bits of information. In this respect, the work bears important witness to a crucial shift in seventeenth-century Swedish culture and literature: after the Reformation, annalistic and registry writings, in the past the prerogative of the clergy, began to be compiled privately by aristocrats, especially noblewomen. This shift interestingly accounts for the transition, as for the process of data collection, from the public to the private sphere, and also for the fact that women were in charge of it.

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«THORVALDSEN AND ME»:
REPRESENTATIONS OF BERTEL THORVALDSEN AND
HIS SCULPTURES IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS BY
DANISH AND NORWEGIAN ARTISTS AND WRITERS IN THE
NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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1. Thorvaldsen: Icon or prop

The Dane Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844) was one of the best known sculptors of the nineteenth century. From his base in Rome, he undertook commissions for public monuments in many of the big cities of Europe. His sculptures, as well as his fame, travelled all over Europe and beyond, and copies of his works can today be found as far afield as Salt Lake City, Utah. It was not only through visual culture that Thorvaldsen's sculptures and fame circulated: texts are also crucial in helping us understand the impact of Thorvaldsen's works on European culture on a macro scale, and on individual places, objects and people on a micro scale. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Thorvaldsen's life and works have been portrayed in a number of biographies – the best known of which remain Just Mathias Thiele's two four-volume works: *Den danske Billedhugger Bertel Thorvaldsen og hans Værker* (1831-1850; *The Danish Sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen and his Works*) and *Thorvaldsens Biographi* (1851-1856; *Thorvaldsen's Biography*)¹ – travelogues, letters and literary works.

Although Thorvaldsen himself wrote a great number of letters – digitalised by Thorvaldsens Museum² – he never wrote an autobiographical narrative. His name does however turn up in many autobiographical narrations of his time. This article analyses and compares a number of these instances, focusing on autobiographical texts written by Danish and Norwegian artists and writers. Why was Thorvaldsen included in these texts? Is there any identifiable pattern in the way these authors represented this iconic Danish sculptor in their autobiographies? Is Thorvaldsen represented as a friend and companion, as an idol to admire, as an essential part of the historical context? Having identified some of the

¹ Please note that all the translations into English are my own.

² Thorvaldsen's letters are available via the Thorvaldsens Museum digital archive: <<http://arkivet.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk>> (04/2014).

theoretical implications behind the crossings between autobiographical and biographical accounts, I will address these questions, taking as my starting point the function of Thorvaldsen's presence in autobiographical accounts by famous Danish contemporaries: national authors Adam Oehlenschläger (1779-1850) and Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), and actress Johanne Luise Heiberg (1812-1890). These representations will be compared to those in autobiographical narrations by Norwegian artists and writers, including the writers Camilla Collett (1813-1895) and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832-1910), the art historian Lorentz Dietrichson (1834-1917), and the literary critic John Paulsen (1851-1924), known for his memoirs of famous personalities such as Henrik Ibsen. Did Norwegian artists share Denmark's sense of pride for Thorvaldsen and his works? Did Norway's political as well as cultural nationalism after the end of the union with Denmark and the constitution and brief independence of 1814 also have an impact on the role played by this Danish icon?

References to Thorvaldsen's life in other writers' and artists' autobiographical narrations are a clear example of what Stephen Greenblatt calls «cultural mobility», i.e. «the movements of texts, ideas and whole cultures [...] restless and often unpredictable» (2009: 7). Encouraging scholars to move away from the idea of a «coherent history», he calls for an examination of the «fragments», for an «engagement with specific cases» that emphasises their peculiar, particular and local character without necessarily trying to construct or reinforce an existing grand narrative (2009: 15). The examples presented in this article are reminiscent of Greenblatt's «microhistories of displaced things and persons» (2009: 17). By analysing references to Thorvaldsen and his works in the autobiographies of other artists and writers, the objective is not necessarily to conclude whether these narratives reinforce or undermine the macro narrative surrounding Thorvaldsen's celebrated life and achievements, but rather to examine how, on a micro scale, the different representations of this famous Danish artist are instrumental to the narrative strategies employed in these autobiographical texts. On a macro scale, on the other hand, these references may also be telling of Denmark's and Norway's national identity and cultural policy.

The texts analysed in this article are also clear examples of the crossings between autobiography and biography. Borrowing the terminology employed by Marilyn Yalom, I will refer to the grey area between these two genres as «biography-cum-autobiography» and «autobiography-cum-biography» (1990: 53). In gender studies the concept of «biography-cum-autobiography» has been developed in particular to explore the authorial voice of women who wrote from the position of the biographer in the nineteenth century. These women assumed a contingent role and became known not as independent individuals but for their relationship with famous men. In her contribution to the book *Revealing Lives:*

Autobiography, Biography and Gender, Yalom focuses on the biography of Victor Hugo written by his wife Adèle Hugo. She analyses this text as a possible autobiography of Adèle Hugo herself, stating that biographies of this kind can be read as a narrative of the men whose lives have been recorded as well as that of the women recording their lives (1990: 53-64).

In borrowing the ideas connected to the concept of «biography-cum-autobiography», with this article, I will explore the implications of the reverse perspective, the «autobiography-cum-biography», namely cases where the life of the narrator (man or woman) suddenly incorporates aspects of the life of someone regarded as a great person, a celebrity. This blurring of boundaries creates a connection between what Laura Marcus, in analysing nineteenth-century definitions of biography and autobiography, outlines as two temporal and literary modes of the time: biography as obituary, a narration of the «completely past» worthy of record and memory, and autobiography as the voice of a living person, a narration of the «completely present», which creates a tension between the concerns of the living and the parade of the self (Marcus 1994: 37-40). Using some of the categories outlined by Yalom when dealing with the crossings between biography and autobiography, I will thus explore different ways in which biographical elements from Thorvaldsen's life have been incorporated in someone else's autobiographical narration. Representations of Thorvaldsen and his life are integrated in the texts «obliquely» or «directly» (Yalom 1990: 62). «Directly», when the narrator speaks in a straightforward manner of his or her own experiences in connection to Thorvaldsen. In this case, the narrator dwells directly on episodes and anecdotes involving himself or herself and Thorvaldsen, and on meetings with the Danish sculptor himself, thus conflating autobiography and biography in such a direct manner that the narrator assumes shifting roles, from author to character. «Obliquely», when the narrator gives expression to a collective voice and makes himself or herself part of a community with very specific views on Thorvaldsen's life and contribution to the community itself, and when his or her voice merges into the making of the Thorvaldsen myth (Yalom 1990: 62).

2. Thorvaldsen: The glue that holds Denmark together

There is no doubt that for his Danish contemporaries Thorvaldsen remained an idol, a 'monument' both during his life as well as after his death. An important driver of this respect was the idea that homage was due to the man who, thanks to his works, had contributed to making Denmark's name internationally renowned at a time when Denmark itself was developing its cultural nationalism (Jørnæs 2007: 245-251; Glenthøj, Ottosen 2014: 258). It is therefore not surprising that those who could

claim to have a close relationship or even simply be acquainted with or have met this Danish icon did so.

Adam Oehlenschläger and Thorvaldsen met for the first time in Rome in 1809. It is in fact this meeting that is at the centre of the Oehlenschläger-Thorvaldsen relationship and that is represented in detail both in Oehlenschläger's first autobiographical narration, *Oehlenschlägers Levnet: fortalt af ham selv* (1830-1831; Oehlenschläger's Life: As Told by Himself) as well as in *Erindringer* (1850; Memories), an expanded edition of his autobiography (Oehlenschläger 1831: 222-223; Oehlenschläger 1850: 195-196). The first mention of Thorvaldsen in this text is connected to the writer's formative years. A young man of modest origins, Oehlenschläger apparently had a talent for drawing. For this reason he managed to obtain a position at the Royal Academy of Arts, the same academy where Thorvaldsen, too, had studied before leaving for his formative journey to Italy in 1789. Therefore, at that time little was known of the man who was to become Denmark's pride: «Om Thorvaldsen vidste vi dengang ikke videre, end at han havde været en fortræffelig Skolar, og nu var i Rom» (Oehlenschläger 1850: 62; Back then we did not know a lot about Thorvaldsen, only that he had had a splendid intellect, and that he was now in Rome). However, Oehlenschläger was well aware of Thorvaldsen's success when they first met in Rome in 1809. Their encounter appears particularly striking as, despite never having met before, they clearly behave as old acquaintances:

Hvor glad forbausedes jeg ved at see hans Jason, og alle de andre herlige Sager. Jeg kiendte hidindtil intet af hans Arbeider, og havde aldrig seet ham selv. Som jeg nu stod fordybet i at skue, og endelig kastede Øiet til en Side, opdagede jeg en temmelig slet klædt Mand med et regelmæssigt, aandfuldt Ansigt, smukke blaae Øine, med leerbestænkede Støvler, staae ved min Side og betragte mig opmærksomt. "Thorvaldsen!" raabte jeg. – "Oehlenschläger!" raabte han. Vi omfavnede og kyssede hinanden, og fra det Øieblik var Broderskabet sluttet. (Oehlenschläger 1850: 195)

How astonished and happy I was when I saw his Jason and all the other lovely pieces. Hitherto I had not known of his works and I had never met him in person. As I stood there absorbed in contemplation, I finally looked to one side and noticed a somewhat badly dressed man with a regular, brilliant face, beautiful blue eyes and clay-spattered boots standing by my side. He was looking at me attentively. "Thorvaldsen!" I cried out. – "Oehlenschläger!" he cried out. We embraced and kissed each other, and from that moment our kinship was formed.

Like many other Danish travellers, Oehlenschläger visits Thorvaldsen's studio in Rome. This space, where Thorvaldsen had created *Jason with the Golden Fleece*, the masterpiece that secured him his international fame, is represented as much more than a stop on a sightseeing tour: it is a place of pilgrimage where other artists can experience for themselves

how a Dane had been able to become an internationally esteemed artist. However, Oehlenschläger makes it very clear in the passage above that, as a renowned Danish poet himself, unlike other artists, he did not need to be introduced to Thorvaldsen. By 1809 Oehlenschläger had in fact already had his breakthrough, first with the poetry collection *Digte* (1803; Poems) and two years later with his collection *Poetiske Skrifter* (1805; Poetical Works), which included his *Aladdin*. While clearly implying that meeting Thorvaldsen was a great honour for him, Oehlenschläger is also keen to emphasise that he himself was about to follow the same path as Thorvaldsen and achieve a fame that would, one day, make them equally important in spreading Denmark's fame:

Jeg tænkte på vore barbariske Forfædre, som forðum, uden Kunstsands, saa tidt havde ødelagt Rom. Nu omfavnede to danske Kunstnere hinanden, af hvilke den ene kunde kappes med de ædleste Grækere; i den Yngres Bryst brændte i det mindste en kraftig, kiærlig Flamme, og et ungdommeligt Mod til at prøve noget meer end Sædvanligt. (Oehlenschläger 1850: 195)

I thought about our barbaric ancestors, who in olden times, without any sense of art, had so often destroyed Rome. Now two Danish artists, one of whom could have vied with the noblest Greeks, were embracing each other; in the younger breast was at least burning a powerful, affectionate flame and a youthful courage to try something out of the ordinary.

For Oehlenschläger and other artists arriving in Rome, Thorvaldsen was an idol, someone against whom they could measure their own fame. He was *the artist* who could give other artists his stamp of approval, and judge whether their artistic creations were of a high standard or not. Oehlenschläger therefore rejoices when Thorvaldsen, after having heard a few of his poems, states that he likes them (Oehlenschläger 1850: 196).

Hans Christian Andersen's representation of his first encounter with Thorvaldsen in his *Mit Livs Eventyr* (1855; *The Fairy Tale of My Life*) follows a narrative pattern that is very similar to Oehlenschläger's. Like Oehlenschläger, H.C. Andersen is taken to Thorvaldsen's studio by another artist already living in Rome. Before seeing the Danish master himself, Andersen sees the sculpture Thorvaldsen is currently working on, the bas-relief *Raphael*. Andersen acknowledges the fame achieved by his compatriot and is clearly touched by Thorvaldsen's decision to donate all his masterpieces to his home country (Andersen 1996: 160). Andersen, who had briefly met Thorvaldsen before, in Copenhagen in 1819, finally receives his stamp of approval. Besides making a positive remark about *Agnete og Havmanden* (1834; *Agnete and the Mermaid*), Thorvaldsen encourages Andersen to react with courage to the negative reviews this play has received and admits that, had he remained in Denmark, he would have received a similar reception: «Ja, ja, jeg kender dem hjemme! Mig var det ikke gaaet bedre, om jeg var bleven der! Jeg hadde maaskee ikke engang

faaet lov til at sætte en Modelfigur!» (Andersen 1996: 174; Yes, yes, I know them at home. I would not have fared better had I stayed there! I might not even have been allowed to make a model figure!). This passage appears to have a dual function in the narrative. First, it reinstates Andersen's talent: after all, the negative review could not have anything to do with the quality of the play if Thorvaldsen liked it and if the great sculptor himself would have been snubbed by Danish critics had he remained in his own country. Second, it grants Andersen the role of Thorvaldsen's confidant, as, after the above-mentioned comment, Thorvaldsen supposedly told Andersen about the dark sides of his youth in Denmark. Only at this point in the narrative does Andersen reach the same brotherly relationship that Oehlenschläger establishes with the Thorvaldsen character from the very beginning, thanks to the representation of his emotional first encounter with the sculptor.

The question of who knows the *real* Thorvaldsen is also the theme of Johanne Luise Heiberg's first meeting with Thorvaldsen. In her *Et Liv gjenoplevet i Erindringer* (1891; *A Life Re-lived through Memories*), she dedicates a whole chapter to this episode which took place in 1844, the year of Thorvaldsen's death. The representation of the meeting is preceded by a number of rumours about Thorvaldsen that supposedly questioned his intelligence, emphasising his scarce ability to engage in anything but his own art. As in Andersen's case, Heiberg stresses immediately how Thorvaldsen shows her a side of himself that no one else has experienced before. The two hours of the meeting are characterised as «uforglemmelige» (Heiberg 1891: 38; unforgettable). Thorvaldsen is said to have opened up to her revealing details of his childhood, youth, and journeys, and to have confided very private matters, such as his differences with King Fredrik VII and his ambivalent relationship with Oehlenschläger: «Jeg holder af ham [...] men hvor er han dog forfængelig» (1891: 40; I am fond of him [...] but how vain he is). As Heiberg herself concludes at the end of her narration, the aim of this anecdote is not to change the public image that Thorvaldsen has created of himself, but to reveal a glimpse of his 'real' personality.

Besides being clearly instrumental in supporting the autobiographical strategy of the texts of which they are a part, these narrations of Thorvaldsen's life all have a dialectical relationship with the great Thorvaldsen narrative, represented by the above-mentioned two four-volume official biographies by Thiele, *Den danske Billedhugger Bertel Thorvaldsen og hans Værker* (1831-1850) and *Thorvaldsens Biographie* (1851-1856)³. In Oehlenschläger's case

³ Thiele's works are the first biographies of the Danish sculptor. The initiative of compiling these volumes seems to have come from Thiele himself, as indicated by a letter from Thiele to Thorvaldsen dated 10 November 1826: «De vil maaskee endnu erindre, at jeg i de sidste Dage, som jeg tilbragte i det uforglemmelige Rom, meddeelte Dem en Plan jeg havde fattet, at anvende Tid og Flid paa at udarbejde Deres saa berømte

the representation of his first meeting is quoted in Thiele's work and, just like Oehlenschläger himself, Thiele is keen to emphasise the contrast between the warm reaction and the fact that Oehlenschläger and Thorvaldsen had never met each other before. In *Mit Livs Eventyr* Andersen claims to have been unaware of details now revealed in Thiele's work, such as for instance the difficult relationship between Thorvaldsen and the Swedish sculptor Johan Niclas Byström: «Jeg vidste ikke hvad vi nu kan læse i Thieles "Thorvaldsens Levnet", at der mellem Byström og Thorvaldsen engang havde været en Strid om deres gjensidige Dygtighed» (Andersen 1996: 166; I did not know what can now be read in Thiele's *Thorvaldsen's Life*, that there had once been a conflict between Byström and Thorvaldsen regarding their respective skills). With this brief acknowledgement Andersen gives away the fact that his own autobiography is informed, at least partially, by Thiele's work. Finally, in Heiberg's case, one of the anecdotes about Thorvaldsen, recounted as part of her meeting with him, is suddenly followed by a bibliographical reference «(Thiele 4, 27)» (Heiberg 1891: 39). As in Andersen's case, this sudden reference has the immediate effect of blurring the boundary between what appears to be the autobiographical narration of her encounter with the Danish master and Thiele's biographical narrative. While establishing the narrative of their direct personal relationship with the Danish sculptor, Oehlenschläger, Andersen and Heiberg are also keen to contribute to perpetuating the Danish myth of Thorvaldsen and to both inform the official narrative of his life as shaped in the work by Thiele and be informed by it.

On the whole, the «direct» integration of representations of Thorvaldsen in these three Danish autobiographical narratives is indicative not only of the importance for aspiring Danish icons to relate to Thorvaldsen and his achievements but also of the central place that the Danish sculptor had assumed in the strengthening of the country's cultural identity.

3. Thorvaldsen as part of the Danish furniture

Yet, was the Danes's interest in first meetings with Thorvaldsen shared by their Norwegian neighbours? As the texts analysed in the second part of this article seem to indicate, even though most Norwegian

Kunstnerbanes Historie» (Thiele 1826; You might still recall that during the last days I spent in unforgettable Rome, I informed you of a plan I had conceived: to spend time and diligence on composing the history of your famous artistic career). Largely based on Thorvaldsen's letters, which Thiele claims to have saved, *Thorvaldsens Biographie* has been and still remains today «the standard work in Thorvaldsen literature», despite the fact that, as Kira Kofoed points out, its author had been rather selective in his use of the material available to him (Kofoed 2014).

artists and writers acknowledged Thorvaldsen's fame and importance on an international scale, they clearly failed to display a fascination with his persona. Before considering these Norwegian «fragments», it is important to briefly outline Norway's political and cultural position. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Norway lacked autonomous administrative and cultural structures and institutions. Intellectuals were educated in Copenhagen – which remained an important cultural centre for Norwegians long after the separation from Denmark in 1814 – and artists trained at *Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi* (The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts) (Glenthøj, Ottosen 2014: 274-275). Even after the foundation of *Tegneskolen* (The Drawing School) in Christiania in 1818, Norwegian artists continued to be educated abroad where, like in Rome, they were often part of Scandinavian artistic communities, in which Danes played an important role (Malmanger 2003: 15). The Norwegian sculptor Hans Michelsen (1789-1859), for instance, started his apprenticeship in Stockholm and studied with Thorvaldsen in Rome (1820-1826) before taking on a number of Norwegian commissions. It is in the light of this ambivalent relationship of separation and union with Denmark following 1814 that we should interpret Thorvaldsen's «presence» in Norwegian autobiographical accounts.

A few scattered mentions of Thorvaldsen can be found in Camilla Collett's diaries and letters (*Dagbøger og Breve* 1933). While referring to his status as a central figure among Scandinavians in Rome, she treats Thorvaldsen as a contextual element. In addition, the fact that most of her references deal with the sculptor's relationship with Oehlenschläger emphasises that the celebration of his fame is a Danish rather than Scandinavian affair. She discusses, for instance, how, after a reading of his play, *Hakon Jarl* (1807), Thorvaldsen hugged Oehlenschläger and exclaimed: «Gud signe Dig, min Ven, og lade Dig skrive mange Verker endnu» (C. Collett, P.J. Collett 1933: 316; God bless you, my friend, and let you write many more works). Similarly, in their letters Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and his wife Karoline are appreciative of the work of this famous Danish sculptor. Yet again, Thorvaldsen is remembered in his Roman studio where he sat and drank his wine (Bjørnson 1912: 41)⁴. These brief references never lead to any major discussion between the two.

However, the most relevant 'absence' of Thorvaldsen's name in nineteenth-century Norwegian autobiographical texts is that encountered

⁴ In a letter to his wife Karoline on 30 December 1860, Bjørnson imagines Thorvaldsen in his atelier in Rome: «Her midt paa Pladsen et Vandspring, i det ene Hjørne af Pladsen Thorvaldsens gamle Atelier; her lige mod mig sad han hver Dag og drak sin Vin. I det samme Atelier arbejder nu hans bedste Elev og Roms største Billedhugger» (Bjørnson 1957: 41; Here at the centre of the square is a fountain, in one corner of the square is Thorvaldsen's old atelier, here just in front of me is where he sat every day, drinking his wine. In the self-same atelier there is now working his best student and the best sculptor in Rome).

in art historian Lorentz Dietrichson's narration. His *Fra min Vandringstid* (1875; From the Time of My Wanderings) is an autobiographical account that, more than any of the other texts discussed so far, borders on fiction. Rather than simply narrating his own experiences, Dietrichson tells stories or anecdotes he has supposedly heard during his journey. His section *Et Kunstnerliv* (An Artist's Life) is dedicated to a Danish painter who died in Rome and is buried in the Protestant cemetery, Asmus Carstens (1754-1798). Like any other artist he arrived «fattig paa jordisk Gods, men rig paa Haab og paa Kraft, og skulde dog bøjes og brydes, og sænkes i en tidlig Grav» (Dietrichson 1875: 80; Poor in worldly possessions, but rich in hope and in vigour, but he had to be bent and broken and lowered into an early grave). Just before his death, Thorvaldsen visits him. After this encounter the moral is clear: some artists, like Thorvaldsen, make it, while others do not. Fame does not depend on talent alone, but also on luck.

Although Dietrichson and Thorvaldsen were not contemporaries, it still appears rather odd that Thorvaldsen does not make a more significant appearance in the travel account of an art historian. Yet even in Dietrichson's publication on art history Thorvaldsen is only mentioned in passing. In his *Den norske Treskjærekunst* (1878; The Art of Norwegian Carving), Thorvaldsen's name appears again in combination with Carstens's (or should I say *after* Carstens's) when he lists the forefathers of neoclassicism: «[...] med Percier og Schinkel, med Carstens og Thorvaldsen den græske Nyrenaissance begynder, der leder til Striden mellom Classicisme og Romantik i vor Tids Kunst» (Dietrichson 1878: 77; with Percier and Schinkel, with Carstens and Thorvaldsen there began the Greek Neo-Renaissance, which led to the conflict between Classicism and Romanticism in the art of our time).

The above-mentioned examples make clear that it is not Thorvaldsen's personal cult that is treated in Norwegian autobiographical accounts, but his contribution to sculpture. This appears to be confirmed by an anecdote connected to Thorvaldsen's death, which can be found in Paulsen's Italian memoirs, *Mine erindringer* (1900; My Memories). The source of this story is a sculptor friend of Paulsen's. On the night of Thorvaldsen's death the apprentice left in charge of the studio is scared by a supernatural occurrence: a flash of light suddenly illuminates the statues in the middle of the night, as if to announce the death of their creator:

I det sekund, Thorvaldsen følte dødens komme, er hans sjel i denne lysform vendt tilbake til atelieret, hvor han hadde tilbragt sin meste tid, og skabt sine store, uforgjængelige arbeider [...]. Sin sidste, bevidste tanke har han skjænket til kunst, han elskede saa høit, og som han udelukkende levde for [...]. (Paulsen 1900: 87-88)

In the second when Thorvaldsen felt the arrival of death, his soul, in this radiant form, returned to his atelier where he had spent most of his time and where he created his great, imperishable works [...]. His last conscious thought was about art, which he loved so dearly and which was his whole life [...].

The one Norwegian artist who explicitly mentions Thorvaldsen's life and work as inspirational for his own career, is – to a certain extent not surprisingly – the sculptor Gustav Vigeland (1869-1943). In his letters, Vigeland constructs an autobiographical narrative of his life which begins and ends with Thorvaldsen (Gjengset 2000: 39). Thorvaldsen is represented as the ideal he strives towards at the beginning and at the end of his career. He therefore tells of how, as a young artist, he sneaked copies of Thiele's illustrated biography of Thorvaldsen home during the night:

Inogen tid hadde jeg hat lyst paa en bok, en stor bok eller rettere flere bøker, jeg blev syk efter dem, men jeg visste at det ikke nyttet at gaa til mor denne gang, værket var for dyrt, det kostet over hundre kroner. Det var Thorvaldsens værker av Thiele [...]. (Vigeland quoted in Wikborg 2001: 39)

For some time I had wanted a book, a large book, or rather several books, I was dying to get them, but I knew that it was no use talking to mother this time, the work was too expensive, it cost more than one hundred kroner. It was "Thorvaldsen's Works" by Thiele [...].

After his first visit to Thorvaldsens Museum in 1901, Vigeland continues to express his admiration for the work of this Danish master, in particular for his ability to shape the human body, in a letter to Dietrichson (Wikborg 2001: 58-60). Finally, in 1919 the Thorvaldsen Museum is alluded to as the inspiration behind the donation of all his works to Oslo (Wikborg 2001: 334). Like Thorvaldsen, Vigeland wanted all his works gathered in one place. Vigeland's attitude towards Thorvaldsen is clearly one of respect, but nowhere does this respect become veneration.

4. Macro and micro narratives

As Georg Brandes explains in one of his essays entitled *Danske Personligheder* (1899; Danish Personalities), in which, incidentally, Thorvaldsen is discussed despite not featuring as one of these Danish personalities: «Thorvaldsen var for de dalevende Danske ikke en stor Mand som en anden; han var dem Incarnationen af deres Fædrelands aandelige Storhed, Pantet og Symbolet paa Danmarks Rang mellem Europas Folk» (Brandes 1899: 544; For the Danes living at the time, Thorvaldsen was not a great man like anybody else; to them he was the incarnation of the spiritual greatness of their fatherland, the pledge and the symbol of Denmark's rank among the peoples of Europe). Represented as the glue that kept Denmark together, Thorvaldsen is the personality whom any Danish artist or writer would want to be associated with. For this reason, those who did have a close relationship with the Danish sculptor – such as the artists and writers examined so far, as well as today less well-known contemporaries, such as the Danish poet Ludvig Bødtcher

(1793-1873) – would exploit any possibility to bring up their relationship with Thorvaldsen.

The Danish texts analysed in this article are clear examples of how autobiographical engagement with Thorvaldsen's biographical material took place both obliquely and directly. The Danish narrators all give expression to a collective voice, the Danish voice of admiration for Thorvaldsen. At the same time, they also emphasise their personal relationship with Thorvaldsen, making the Danish sculptor a key character in the narrative of their own lives. By creating a connection between turning points in their lives and their encounters with this iconic Danish sculptor, they also attempt to support and contribute to the grand narrative of his life as established by Thiele's work and affirm their own importance within Danish culture and history.

Norwegian autobiographical narratives, on the other hand, remain focused on Thorvaldsen's artistic contribution rather than on his persona. Thorvaldsen is represented as part of the context, as a secondary character in someone else's autobiographical narration. Like any form of Danish influence to Norwegian culture in 1814, the cultural and artistic heritage represented by Thorvaldsen was not unproblematic at a time when Norway was deeply engaged in its nation-building process. The acknowledgment of Thorvaldsen's artistic contribution, combined with the lack of emphasis on the mythicisation of his figure, appears to be a good compromise between the acknowledgement and rejection of Norway's contacts with Danish culture (Glenthøj, Ottosen 2014: 268-271).

All these examples taken together also constitute a few of the many instances of how Thorvaldsen's biography has moved restlessly from text to text. What could be referred to as «The Thorvaldsen Myth» is made up of a set of fragments, complex and layered representations that involve micro and macro narratives. In Greenblatt's terminology, the encounter with Thorvaldsen in these texts is the result of a blend of «contingency, license and constraint» (2009: 90). In all these texts the narrator's physical encounter with Thorvaldsen and his works might well be determined by contingency, but the narrative process by which episodes of his or her life entangled with those of the Danish sculptor is not.

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LASSE-MAJA: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE MAKING OF THE INDIVIDUAL

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Lasse-Majas besynnerliga öden (Lasse-Maja's Peculiar Adventures) was published in 1833 and became, in the course of the nineteenth century, Sweden's best-selling autobiography; around forty different editions appeared (not to count the pirated ones), often abridged and in chapbook form. The most successful of them was the second one, which came out in 1840 through the new publisher Bonnier, with the more titillating title *Den byxlöse äfventyraren* (The Trouserless Adventurer). As a testimony to its undying popularity, we can mention an old man's answer during an interview with the Uppsala Folklore Research Centre (Folkminnesarkivet) in the 1930s: «Vad som lästes bland folket? Ja, det var mest Lasse-Maja och bibeln» (Molin 2006¹: 204; What did people read? It was mostly Lasse-Maja and the Bible).

Lasse-Maja's real name was Lars Larsson, later changed into Lars Molin. He was born in 1785 in the small village of Djupdalen, in Västmanland, the son of a well-to-do tailor. Restless and unwilling to settle down, he soon left his family to try his luck in Stockholm, becoming by and by one of Sweden's best-known bandits. His nickname, which combines a masculine and a feminine name, derives from the fact that he used to dress in women's clothes in order to disguise himself and catch his victims off guard. In his 'career' he was arrested and released several times, until he was eventually sentenced to life imprisonment in 1813, after stealing from a church in Järfälla.

The autobiography retraces Lars's life from his first years until 1833, though the main focus is on the period between 1808 and 1812, when he was already a famous thief. The aim of the autobiography is to be entertaining by exploiting the comic potential of Lars's many adventures (which stress his slyness as a thief and pay special attention to the funny misunderstandings caused by his ambiguous gender), while leaving his psychological and personal development in the background. The different

¹ Despite some spelling modernisation, this is the only unabridged edition of the text available on the market, and provides the reader with a critical afterword by Edvard Matz.

episodes are structured according to a recurrent scheme, with the hero trying to get to Stockholm in order to lead a free and comfortable life there, failing and having to start again from square one. One can nonetheless discern an underlying pattern in the narrative, which describes Lars's growing sense of his own individuality. The most interesting aspect of the text is the way in which it combines typical autobiographical elements with motives drawn from (popular) fictional genres. Investigating the interplay between these two sets of features not only reveals the specificity of this particular text but might even shed some light on the narrative and textual strategies of autobiography as such. Any autobiography tends, in a sense, to elaborate a narrative alter ego of the author, representing the essence of the author's life. The way Lars Molin constructs his autobiographical *persona* shows how fictionalisation (the appropriation of instruments and patterns typical of fictional narratives which gives shape to an individual's life and make it communicable) can serve the purposes of autobiographical writing.

This process of individualisation is already summarised at the beginning of the tale. In the very first paragraph Lars introduces his tale by defining his individual destiny against the backdrop of a universal and timeless order:

Gamla spåkäringar har påstått, att jag blev född under något visst tecken, som skulle utmärka de underliga öden jag genomgått i världen. Men under vilket tecken då? – *Vädurens*? Nej. Jag har inte alltid varit dum som ett får. – Icke *Oxens*, för jag har inte varit fallen för att träla och arbeta. – Inte heller *Skyttens*, för jag har inte haft lust för jakt. – *Stenbockens* då? Nej. Jag har alltid varit en dålig springare. Ännu mindre *Vattumannens*, för jag var aldrig någon drinkare. – *Kräftans* passar väl, för mina klokaste anslag har ofta gått baklänges. Men nästan hade jag glömt *Jungfruns* tecken! Hennes lånta dräkt gjorde mig ju så lysande i världen och under hennes mask doldes ofta skälmen. (Molin 2006: 5; italics in the original)

Old fortune-tellers have said that I was born under some particular sign that would leave its mark on the peculiar adventures I have been through in this world. But what sign? – *Aries*? No. I have not always been as dumb as a sheep – Nor *Taurus*, for I have never had any inclination to toil and labour. – Not even *Sagittarius*, for I have never liked to hunt. – *Capricorn* maybe? No. I have always been a bad jumper. Even less *Aquarius*, for I have never been a drinker. – *Cancer* might be fitting, for my smartest schemes have often gone backwards. But I had almost forgotten the sign of the *Virgo*! The dress she lent me made me distinguished in the world and under her mask the rascal was often hidden.²

² There are no published translations of *Lasse-Majas besynnerliga öden*. Therefore, all translations are mine.

Both the way in which Lars Molin sets his individual characteristics against those identified by the traditional beliefs of astrology, describing a shifting of focus from the universal to the particular, and the search for a kind of mask that can become truer than one's own self, are strategies employed throughout *Lasse-Majas besynnerliga öden*. In order to stress the sense of his own singular individuality, Lars Molin has to elaborate an alter ego that is 'more himself than he is'. He progressively transfers the significance of his own individual life onto the 'mythical' character Lasse-Maja. Whereas Lars Molin is inescapably limited (one might prefer to say determined) by his personal and social background, Lasse-Maja can cut across class and gender boundaries; whereas Lars is temporarily deprived of physical freedom, Lasse-Maja is once again on the loose in the stories he tells about him/herself. As we get closer to the end of the book, we can even notice that the third-person subject «Lasse-Maja» tends to replace the autobiographical «I»³. Lars Molin's life story thus becomes Lasse-Maja's autobiography even grammatically.

The importance of fictionalisation in Lars Molin's autobiographical project is highlighted by the fact that the act of narrating is itself given great prominence in the text, where Lars's ability as a storyteller is repeatedly stressed. The whole book is shot through with what we might call 'spontaneous autobiographical acts': the action stops, Lars meets some secondary character and retells his adventures up to that point, measuring the effects he obtains on his listener. On these occasions, he is revealed as an unreliable narrator, who tends to embellish the truth and is deeply preoccupied with trying to shape his own myth of himself. By taking a closer look at two examples, we can see that Lars employs narrativity to create a sense of personal uniqueness and stress the singularity of his individual life story:

Min yngsta syster såg mig noga i ansiktet. "Å, kors är det du, Lasse! Vad har du fått för en habit på dig? Var har du varit? Hur har du mått under tiden?" och tusende andra frågor. Jag berättade mycket för dem, allt stämde inte så noga överens med sanningen, jag berättade sådant som jag tyckte kunde passa. (Molin 2006: 30)

My youngest sister stared intently in my face. "Oh, it's you Lasse! What is it you're wearing? Where have you been? How have you been doing?" and a thousand more questions. I told them many things, not everything corresponded exactly to the truth, I told what I thought might be fitting.

Further on, he retells his story again to some comrades, again carefully evaluating their reactions and the feedback he gets from them:

³ For a discussion of the narratological problems raised by third-person autobiography, see Lejeune (1989: 5-8). Though first-person narrative is the classical mode of autobiography, even second-person and third-person narratives can be considered as belonging to the genre, as long as the basic conditions of identity between author and character, and between author and (implicit) narrator can be inferred from the text.

Nu berättade jag om mina äventyr för mina nya hedervärda kamrater, och de roade sig i synnerhet åt min färdighet att agera fruntimmer och ansåg den av högsta vikt för mig. Så snart du kommer på fri fot, sade de, kan du därigenom bana dig den säkraste och lättaste väg till de rikas skatter. (Molin 2006: 39)

Now I told my adventures to my new honourable friends, and they were especially delighted at my ability to act as a woman, and thought it was of the highest importance for me. When you are back on the loose, they said, that will help you find the easiest and safest way to the treasures of the rich.

Gradually, Lars learns to select and emphasise those episodes and elements that are likely to make the strongest impression on his audience. Not only do these characteristics make him recognisable and famous, thus contributing to his sense of self-importance, but they also become the defining traits of his identity. Much as the autobiography itself tends to become Lasse-Maja's autobiography, it is the fictitious character of Lasse-Maja who fully stands for Lars Molin's aspirations and individualist claims⁴.

In one of his essays, Philippe Lejeune states that autobiography should be considered as a human right (1986: 213). Though somewhat ironical, Lejeune's statement touches on the foundational relation between the literary practice of autobiography and the modern concept of the individual as an agent entitled to a definite set of rights, fully accountable for his or her acts, with wishes and desires, aims and values of his or her own.

Historical accounts of the development of the modern concept of the individual and of the literary genre of autobiography in the Western world, though identifying different starting points, all focus on the period between the Renaissance and the eighteenth century as a fundamental phase (Watt 1996: 235-242; Mascuch 1997: 13-18). There is consensus over the fact that, from the Renaissance through the Reformation and the Romantic movement, a complex process involving social, economic, philosophical and religious transformations, contributed to sanction «the primacy of the individual over the collective» (Watt 1996: 235), reinforcing what are recognised today as the basic tenets of philosophical and moral individualism. At exactly the same time, modern autobiography was becoming a common and recognised literary practice⁵.

⁴ I am not using «individualism» here as a synonym of «egoism» but as a set of philosophical, ethical and political stances. According to Stoutland (1990), three different claims can be distinguished within so-called philosophical individualism: an *ontological* claim on the reality of the individual as distinguished from the reality of society; an *epistemological* claim on the capacity for knowledge each individual has independently from society; and a *methodological* claim, according to which any social phenomenon should be reduced to facts about individuals.

⁵ It seems significant that the term «autobiography» first appeared in English at the end of the eighteenth century, together with the alternative form «selfbiography»;

According to Michael Mascuch (1997), autobiographical narratives (whether autobiographies proper or fictional narratives structured and presented to the reader as autobiographies) emerged as ideological resources to mediate and respond to rapid social and epistemological changes, becoming the perfect tool with which to represent the modern, individualistic mode of self-identity. The individual author, sole creator of a literary work – a historically determined phenomenon itself (see Woodmansee 1994: 35-40) – functions as a perfect metaphor for the individualistic self and its desire for self-determination. This is even truer for the author of autobiography; as Mascuch writes: «The modern autobiographer is [...] the prototype of the individualist self, and the modern autobiography is the ideal medium of individualist self-identity» (1997: 22-23).

The connection between individualism and autobiography is evident even in Philippe Lejeune's standard definition of the genre, which he describes as «retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality» (1989: 4). Once autobiography is defined as a *narrative* text, however, it becomes necessary to distinguish between so-called factual autobiography and other kinds of narratives which may take the form of fictional autobiography. Despite Lejeune's attempts at classification, it is not always easy to separate texts in neat categories, as the current debate on the terms «autobiography», «autobiographical novel» and «autofiction» shows (Gasparini 2008). Not only can any autobiographical text contain elements of fiction (by which I mean elements that cannot be validated epistemologically by comparison with something we hold to be 'the truth' outside of the text) and vice versa, but the various 'writings of the self' and fictional writings such as the novel, all share a common history, a common set of values and techniques that have made them valuable tools with which to explore social reality⁶.

Lejeune's well-known notion of the autobiographical pact can then be seen as an attempt to solve this problem. According to Lejeune's

both substantives were also of current use in Germany («Autobiographie» and «Selbstbiographie») during the second half of the eighteenth century (Folkenflik 1993: 1-3). According to the *Svenska Akademiens ordbok*, the Swedish term «självbiografi» started to be used at the beginning of the nineteenth century: <<http://g3.spraakdata.gu.se/saob/>> (03/2014).

⁶ See for example the role individualism plays in Ian Watt's theory about the rise of the novel, especially in his discussion of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (2001: 60-92). In Michael McKeon's review of Watt's hypothesis, the same elements of social and epistemological change that Mascuch identifies as relevant for the practice of modern autobiography are seen as fundamental for the development of the novelistic genre in general (McKeon 2000: 382-399).

theorisation, the autobiographical status of a text can only be asserted in a sort of dialogue between the text and the reader. In a sense, autobiography only exists to the extent that specific elements in the text, paratext and metatext allow the reader to interpret it as such. Along the same lines, Elizabeth W. Bruss (1976) stresses the relational nature of the autobiographical mode. According to Bruss, autobiography cannot be defined only by a set of formal elements, but should be considered as an Austinian speech act with a performative effect. The authors of autobiographies do not simply make statements about themselves: they actively create themselves through their writing, both turning themselves into characters within a narrative frame and taking the role of sole creators of their life story. At the same time, they also elicit a specific response in their audience, leading them to believe in the truth-value of the account. As an act, anyway, autobiography can only be situated in a particular context, within a specific net of relations, and it is only with reference to that context that it can be interpreted. And if it is a *narrative* act, then, the presuppositions necessary for interpreting an autobiographical text have to do with the definition of narrative and with the reader's ability to distinguish literary genres. The ability to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction depends on what Bruss calls «cultural artifacts» (1976: 8) which change meaning and range, appear or disappear according to the developments in the literary field.

Thus, when Lars Molin observes his audience's reactions to the spontaneous autobiographical acts that we have mentioned, he is not simply looking for an answer to that «Who am I?» which Mascuch identifies as the most relevant question for the individualist self (1997: 20); he is searching for clues as to what characteristics can make his autobiographical *persona* more alluring, interesting and convincing, with respect to his listeners/readers' expectations, and he is testing his audience's knowledge of the «cultural artifacts» with which he is structuring his life story. This process of rewriting (or rather, retelling) his individuality, according to signifying narrative elements and plots, also serves another end: it make Lars's self-chosen 'mask' more readable, and gives coherence and legibility to his life story. As Judith Butler (2005: 63-64) points out, what we tend to expect when we read (or listen to) an autobiographical account (no matter what genre it belongs to), is a coherent narrative of the self, even if (as, for example, psychoanalysis has shown) the 'truth' about that self might be better found somewhere else, in the fractures and inconsistencies. We expect a seamless *story*. Understanding autobiography, then, has more to do with interpreting how its narrative elements are employed in order to create a coherent story about its author than with assessing the truth of what is said. Autobiography is an ambiguous, polymorphic genre that appropriates, exploits and modifies common pre-existing narrative norms, in terms

of generic conventions, plots and subplots, and character construction, in order to convey the relevance and singularity of an individual story.

Formally, *Lasse-Majas besynnerliga öden* respects almost all the criteria that Lejeune has set for autobiography (even though, as we have already noted, it lacks the psychological insight and the focus on the development of a personality that Lejeune posits). Edvard Matz (1970) has even shown that most details in the tale are accurate. In his afterword to the latest edition of *Lasse-Majas besynnerliga öden*, however, Matz states that «litterärt är boken en skälmroman, inte en självbiografi eller memoar» (Molin 2006: 204; literally, the book is a picaresque novel, not an autobiography or a memoir). It might be more accurate to say that it is neither, or, better still, all three at the same time. This, and the episodic style of the narrative, might be partly due to its origins as an oral tale: as a matter of fact, we know today that Lars Molin was illiterate; his story was written down by what we would nowadays call an anonymous ghostwriter – an accountant from Uddevalla named Theodor Björck, according to Matz (Molin 2006: 204). But the tension between genre categories that Matz observes also points to the central problem of autobiography. The cooperation between the illiterate storyteller and the literate, learned ghostwriter, might then be seen as symbolically reproducing the dual process involved in any autobiographical act: taking the raw material of a life, which is considered worthy of being shared, and imposing on it a recognisable narrative form which makes use of novelistic elements, plots and situations⁷. All those narrative conventions that, seen through the eyes of a modern reader, would be interpreted as indexes of fictionality, were understood by contemporary readers as markers of authenticity: at the time *Lasse-Maja* was published, and well into the twentieth century, no one questioned its factual character, even if the appropriation of fictional elements by Lars Molin goes so far as to turn Lars into a sort of legendary figure, endowed with magical powers. Towards the end of the tale, Lars meets a peasant in Örebro, whom he has already robbed once; without revealing his identity, he tries to find out whether the police are on his trail. The following dialogue ensues:

⁷ Lejeune (1980: 232-250) sees ghostwritten autobiographies as an illustration of the practice of autobiography itself, which always has a dialogical quality. According to Lejeune, «la personne» the autobiography is about and «l'auteur» who writes it, are always different roles, and the autobiographical act takes up the raw materials concerning «la personne» and organises them in a narrative structure through the activity of «l'auteur». If Matz's reconstruction is correct, *Lasse-Maja* might be considered to fall into that class of texts that Lejeune calls «autobiographie en collaboration». Even Elizabeth W. Bruss stresses the «dual role» of the autobiographer, as both «the source of the subject character and the source for the structure to be found in his text» (1976: 10).

“Det vore gott om den stortjuven kom till mig en annan gång, jag skulle märka den kanaljen så att han skulle minnas mig så länge han levde...”

“Lasse-Maja akta sig nog” sade jag; “man säger allmänt att han kan trolla lite och därför gå ifrån dem när han vill”. “Något besynnerligt ser det ut” sade bonden, “ty mig och hela huset sövde han, och trots att han var starkt fångslad blåste han av sig både blacken och handklovarna. De sågs även att Lasse-Maja kan öppna alla lås endast med ett blåsande. En gång såg jag i Stockholm rida trämärren”. (Molin 2006: 154-155)

“I’d like that rascal to come back here again, I’d brand that scoundrel so that he would remember me as long as he lives...”

“Lasse-Maja is careful enough not to” I said; “people say he can even do some magic and get away from them whenever he wants”. “It’s quite odd” said the peasant, “for he benumbed me and the whole house, and though he was firmly bound, he got rid of the fetters and handcuffs. They even say that Lasse-Maja can open every lock with a breath. Once I saw him riding the wooden horse in Stockholm”.

The novelistic elements through which the individuality of the character of Lasse-Maja is stressed are chosen in accordance with the conventions of the *rövarroman* (robber novel), one of the most popular literary genres at the time. As Elisabeth Tykesson has shown, between 1801 and 1820 twenty-four different titles appeared (1942: 8-15). Most of them were translations (especially from German, occasionally from French), but there were even some Swedish originals. Even ‘high culture’ authors such as Carl Jonas Love Almqvist, Fredric Cederborgh and Erik Johan Stagnelius often showed interest in this particular genre and in the character of the bandit (Tykesson 1942: 123-131).

The interest in criminals and bandits was widespread in those days, not only in Sweden, but in all of Europe, and thievery was an often remarked-on social problem. Stories about bandits not only appeared in book form, but were also regularly featured in the daily press and, during the last part of the eighteenth century, many criminal biographies were also published, which, despite having a pretence of authenticity, still gave a romanticised image of the criminal. Eric Hobsbawm has offered a very detailed description of the social reality behind this phenomenon. According to Hobsbawm, banditry did not show any signs of a coherent political ideology and did not result in a definite political movement; bandits should be regarded as «symptoms of crisis and tensions» (2001: 29) in the social order rather than as revolutionaries. Among those who considered banditry an option, there were «men who [were] unwilling to accept the meek and passive social role of the subject peasant; the stiffnecked and recalcitrant, the individual rebels» (2001: 39-40). The definition of «individual rebel» seems particularly suited to describe Lars Molin, and it also explains why this specific kind of criminal, despite the threat it posed and the damages it caused, had such a wide cultural resonance. In their analysis of the roots of the so-called Swedish model, Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh show that the problem of the troubled relationship between individuals and their

community and tradition was highly relevant to the public and intellectual debate in those days, in which, they write, «individens frihet, förnuftig problemlösning och socialt ansvar var bärande element» (2012: 88; the individual's freedom, rational problem-solving and social responsibility were fundamental elements). Traits in common with what in Germany has been called *Räuberromantik* can be detected even in some trends in Swedish Romanticism. For example, Erik Gustav Geijer uses the figure of the viking or the heroes of the Norse sagas as prototypes of the modern concept of the individual and of his or her fight for freedom (Berggren, Trägårdh 2012: 87-93). The same hunger for individual freedom and the same fascination with heroism have a popular-culture counterpart in the figure of the bandit as embodied by Lasse-Maja. This is evident in the way *Lasse-Maja* makes use of one of the most common themes derived from the *rövarroman*: that of the noble bandit, a kind of Robin Hood-figure that embodied a (naive enough) dream of social justice, with whom readers from a lower social background were supposed to sympathise.

A perfect incarnation of the 'noble bandit-ideal' is Silver-Jan, an older convict whom Lars meets in jail when he is temporarily under arrest, and who is almost certainly an entirely fictional character:

Bland andra, som satt i arresten, fanns en som var känd som Silver-Jan, som i Sverige hade utmärkt sig som mästare i flera sorters tjuvnader; han gav mig flera allvarsamma förmaningar, bland andra den att aldrig stjåla från de fattiga utom i högsta nödfall, "utan gör som jag: jag har tagit från de rika och givit åt de fattiga" och "tag aldrig något med våld, utan bruka endast list" och "överlasta dig aldrig med starka drycker, för då blir du snart fast och får aldrig någon respekt". (Molin 2006: 39)

Amongst the others who were under arrest, there was one known as Silver-Jan, who had distinguished himself in Sweden for being a master at different kinds of theft; he gave me many sound admonitions, among others, never to steal from the poor except in case of dire need, "but do as I do: I have taken from the rich and given to the poor" and "never take with violence, use only your cunning" and "never get intoxicated with liquor, or you'll soon be caught and you'll never earn any respect".

The rules that Silver-Jan spells out are reminiscent of those elements which, according to Berggren and Trägårdh, were considered at the time the main characteristics of the modern individual and the perfect citizen. Lars almost always acts according to these rules, which makes most people like him and protect him. Paradoxically, by turning himself into an almost archetypal character – «en ny inkarnation av folksagans kloke pojke», as Frans G. Bengtsson describes it (1931: 270; a new embodiment of the smart boy of the folktale) – he depicts himself as being in possession of what it takes to assert his own individuality in a rapidly changing world.

Unfortunately, the sympathy and support he can elicit among peasants and his fellow bandits cannot keep him from the guards, who eventually arrest him. In the last scene, we see Lars sitting in jail, alone:

Men nu har jag slagit mig i ro och stadighet; jag börjar även bli för gammal för att göra några snedsprång; jag har även glömt bort hur man stjälar, så att om min tur kom att ännu en gång komma ut i världen, så skulle skåp och kistor nästan få vara i fred. Jag har nu fyllt 48 år och den 17 september 1833 var det jämnt 20 år sedan jag kom till Karlsten. (Molin 2006: 198)

But now I have settled down in peace and tranquillity; I'm even getting too old to wander off the track; I've even forgotten how to steal, so if I will ever have the chance again to go out into the world, cabinets and coffers will almost be safe. I have now turned 48 and on 17 September 1833 it was exactly 20 years since I came to Karlsten.

If we compare this last description to the first paragraph of the tale, it becomes clear that the whole of *Lasse-Maja* describes the same movement from the universal to the particular summarised in the opening lines of the book, from the condition of the individual immersed in a web of trans-historical social relationships to the individual alone with himself, seen in a definite moment in place and time. The convict's position is quite paradoxical: though deprived of physical freedom, Lars now appears for the first time fully able to retrace his steps up to the present moment. The cramped space of the cell becomes then the perfect backdrop against which he can set the representation of his individual self. Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani compares autobiography to judicial acts such as confessions and repentance or defence speeches. In both cases the subject is driven to defend his right to exist, and the right of his story to circulate in the public sphere. In that sense, autobiography can be seen as a performative (re)creation of the self, «une déclaration d'état civil, l'acte de naissance d'une personne qui assumerait son personnage» (1996: 47; a declaration of civil status, the birth certificate of a person who is going to take on his own character). The individualisation process brought about by the disciplinary apparatus of the prison, as described by Michel Foucault (1975: 92-105), appears then as an accurate metaphor for Lars's autobiographical enterprise: the autobiographical self is created through a complete identification with a criminal character, whose unlawful actions emerge, in the face of the judiciary power, as its most defining traits. Although he admits his faults and accepts the consequences, Lars still defends his criminal activity as the perfect symbol of his ideals and aspirations.

One might be tempted to say that, for Lars Molin, the ideal identification with his autobiographical self continued in real life. While he was serving his sentence in the fort of Karlsten, Lars Molin became a sort of local attraction, entertaining both his fellow prisoners and the villagers with tales from his life. Among his many admirers was even the future king Karl XIV Johan, who visited him in Karlsten and granted him royal pardon in 1838. After that, Lars toured the country, retelling his adventures and showing himself in *Lasse-Maja's* clothes. Carried outside of the text, his autobiographical alter ego eventually gave him the freedom he had so much longed for.

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«EN VAKKER LØRDAG I NOVEMBER 1836 KOM JEG».
FICTION AND HISTORICITY IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
FRAME STORIES OF PETER CHRISTEN ASBJØRNSEN'S
NORSKE HULDREEVENTYR OG FOLKESAGN

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One of the particularities about Peter Christen Asbjørnsen's legend collection, the *Norske huldreeventyr og folkesagn* (first published in 1845-1848; Norwegian Hulder Tales and Folk Legends¹), is that, unlike other folkloristic anthologies, all the legends featured are introduced by a frame story that explains the occasion in which the author heard the tradition he would then write down. Most of the frame stories are told in the first person². To the modern reader, it could seem that the author himself is the one who is talking, often recalling childhood memories or past events, but thanks to the biographical material we have today (letters from the author, prefaces to the editions edited by himself, scientific editions of his works, bibliographic studies by contemporary scholars) we can analyse each legend-introduction and distinguish what material is a real autobiographical note and what, conversely, is a fictitious report used by the author for the narration's sake. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the boundary between fiction and reality of the autobiographical notes in the frame stories is not so sharp, but that most of the frames are events which have really happened to the author, reworked to fit in with the narration environment.

As underlined recently by Olav Solberg:

Bruken av rammeforteljing fungerer hos Asbjørnsen bl. a. til å introdusere lesaren for forteljemiljø der det er naturleg at tradisjonsstoff blir lagt fram.

The use of the frame story functions in Asbjørnsen, among other things, to introduce the reader to the narrative environment where naturally the traditional material would be presented.

¹ A complete English edition of *Norske huldreeventyr og folkesagn* does not exist. A selection of these tales and legends was published as *Round the Yule Log. Norwegian Folk and Fairy Tales*, where the translation is based on a Norwegian selection (Asbjørnsen 1879). For the original editions, see footnote nr. 5.

² Only four tales out of twenty-nine are related in the third person; a possible justification of this choice is given in Hvam Hult 2003: 119-120.

Det er som det skal at folk på fisketur kjem inn på huldrefisk og huldretjørner, og at dei som er på reinsdyrjakt fortel jakthistorier på grensa til det overnaturlige. Ei signekjerring vil halde seg til forteljingar om signing og andre trolldomsknep, mens plankekjørarar vil hente forteljestoffet sitt frå ferder langs landevegen med tømmer og plank. (Solberg 2012: 86-87)

It is clear that people on a fishing trip came in contact with *hulder* fish and *hulder* tarns, and that those on a reindeer hunt tell hunting stories on the border of the supernatural. A healer woman will stick to tales about healing and other witchcraft tricks, while lumber-haulers will fetch their narrative material from their journeys along the country roads with timber.³

It is clear that Asbjørnsen has often used events or characters of the frame stories only to introduce the reader to the story he is going to read, cloaking them with a fake autobiographism. Most of the time, the author uses the same technique: the first person narrator leaves to collect tales and legends, or meets a storyteller in a conventional environment (the gravedigger in the graveyard, the woodcutters in a wood, the anglers by a lake or a river, the miller in a mill, and so on). Sometimes the journey between the starting point of the author and the meeting point with the storyteller is enriched by detailed natural descriptions, featuring place names, dates, local people or acquaintances of the author, to give more truthfulness to the telling. The break between the frame story and the legend told by the storyteller is underlined by the linguistic shift: the standard language of the frame switches to the dialect of the teller.

Besides these functions of introducing and giving more reality to the tale, the frame stories act also as an 'enlightening voice' against the superstitions of the informants. In many cases, the first-person narrator tries to explain to the uncultured storyteller the real nature of his supernatural encounters, as for example in the tale entitled *En halling med kvannerot* (A Hallingdaldweller with Angelica Root), where the frame narrator explains to the teller that the cowbells he heard from a deserted dairy were not those of the fairies, but most probably came from a cow herd that was passing through a distant valley, echoed by the steep mountain walls which surround it (Asbjørnsen 1949, 1: 100). Another example is when in the tale entitled *Matthias Skytters historier* (Matthias the Hunter's Stories), the narrator does not believe Matthias' story about his sighting of the *hulder* because of the vagueness and haziness of the story (cf. Asbjørnsen 1949, 1: 44). Unlike many other folk tale collectors, who belonged mainly to the clergy, Asbjørnsen was a man of science (a zoologist and botanist), and as such was one of the first folklorists to treat superstition as a consequence of poor education, as inferred by the author himself in the tale entitled *Ekebergkongen* (The King of Ekeberg; Asbjørnsen 1949, 1: 39), and not of idolatry or dealings with the devil.

³ Translations are mine when not stated otherwise.

Having said this, we should not think that Asbjørnsen is mocking his informants or trying to make them look like superstitious peasants. On the contrary, in many occasions he criticises the excessive stiffness of the so called cultured class, as in the tale entitled *En aftenstund i et proprietærkjøkken* (An Evening in a Squire's Kitchen), where the squire, contrary to the smith Kristen's fable-telling, which is going on in his kitchen, is depicted as a hard-hearted, insensitive person, interested only in politics and economy (Asbjørnsen 1949, I: 63-66).

Thus, we can consider that Asbjørnsen's main purpose in collecting legends and folk tales was, on the one hand, a means to preserve the traditional material from oblivion by immortalising it in the natural descriptions and characters of the frame story, and, on the other, to give the new Norwegian nation a completely autochthonous literature, a *særnorsk* (distinctively Norwegian) product in the vein of what the brothers Grimm had done in Germany with *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812-1815; *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. by Zipes 2014) or *Deutsche Sagen* (1816-1818; *The German Legends of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. by Ward 1981), a work which had already taken shape with the first collections of the *Norske Folkeeventyr* with Jørgen Moe (Asbjørnsen, Moe 1841-1844; 1852; *Norwegian Folk Tales*, trans. by Shaw Iversen, Norman 1963)⁴.

Norske huldreeventyr og folkesagn was published in three different editions by Asbjørnsen himself⁵; after his death in 1914, Anders Krogvig and Moltke Moe edited a new edition, strongly revised in its language but not in its contents (Asbjørnsen 1914)⁶. Other editions followed, illustrated as well, until Knut Liestøl's scientific edition (the one I will use for my analysis) was published in two volumes (Asbjørnsen 1949)⁷.

Although Asbjørnsen's notebooks tell little about his childhood (Liestøl 1947: 22), some biographers have nevertheless tried to reconstruct his first years (Krogvig 1923: 264-272; Hansen 1932: 9-36; Liestøl 1947: 22-30) from the frame stories featured in two tales. In the tale *Ekebergkongen* the author recalls his childhood memories, where, together with his friends, on Sunday afternoons, he would go up Ekeberg hill to

⁴ We know that when Asbjørnsen and Moe had many variants of the same tale, they decided to publish the one with a more 'Norwegian trait' (Hodne 1998: 104-111). Of equal importance is that the work of *for Norsking* (Norwegianisation) of the text continued until the last editions.

⁵ First edition in two volumes 1845-1848, second edition, expanded, in two volumes 1859-1866, third edition in one volume 1870. See final references.

⁶ Almost all the narrator's dialogues are written in the local language of the informant.

⁷ In 2012 a first complete Italian translation of the collection was published (Asbjørnsen 2012). See also Østberg 2011.

spend some hours in the open air. This tale was first published in 1837 in the journal «Nor», but previously, in 1835, the author had sent the core of the story, together with another legend entitled *Ammen* (The Nurse), by letter to the well-known folklorist and Holt parish priest Andreas Faye (1802-1869) without the introduction quoted above (Øverland 1902: 13-16). It seems then that Asbjørnsen wished to add an autobiographical memory from his childhood about a place whose stories (perhaps told by his mother? Cf. Asbjørnsen 1949, 1: 202) had stirred his imagination and that he could behold daily «fra vinduene hjemme» (Hansen 1932: 26; from the windows at home).

The description of Ekeberg hill is not an isolated case in which the author goes into detail about the places he had frequented in his childhood. In the frame story of another tale entitled *En aften i nabogården* (An Evening at the Neighbours'), he describes Dronningens gate, the street where Asbjørnsen's father had his glassworks (Asbjørnsen 1949, 2: 202). This was a place of real importance to the author, because it was there that he heard the first fairy tales and legends from the customers who came there from the surrounding areas of Oslo, bringing their own traditional material.

The depiction could be a perfect caption for a watercolour by Anna Diriks immortalising the crossroads between Dronningens gate and Tollbodgaten in the 1820s-1830s, the period of Asbjørnsen's childhood (Asbjørnsen 1949, 2: 358). In the painting one can see the *vannpost*, the public pump from which townspeople drew their water, on the corner between the two streets; the road surface consists of stones between which tufts of grass grow as described by the author, next to a procession of ducks and chickens, followed by a dog. These can be seen in the foreground on the left, while the gutter stretches crosswise, right through the middle of the street⁸. Therefore we can be sure that this report is a truthful account based on the author's reminiscences.

In the continuation of the introduction frame, Asbjørnsen adds other details concerning his childhood and the places where he played with the neighbours' children. He refers to many areas of Christiania, especially the graveyard of Vår Frelsers kirke, where together with friends, he went to spy on the graves in the crypt, with a mixture of terror and surprise: «Yndlingsplassene for meg og mitt nabolag var engen, hvor Børsen nu står, og kirkegården, hvorom slakterbodene er oppført. Mellem gravene, gravstenene og under de gamle kastanjetrær, der for lengst er jevnet med jorden, omhugget og bortført, gikk leken med fryd og gammen i de svale sommeraftener» (Asbjørnsen 1949, 2: 202; The favourite places for

⁸ The original painting is in Nasjonalmuseet in Oslo and was made by Anna Diriks in 1882 from a previous sketch, cf. Holck 1989: 99.

me and my neighbours were the meadow where now there is the Stock Exchange, and the graveyard, where the slaughterhouse has been built. Among the graves, gravestones and under old chestnut trees, which have long since been levelled, felled and taken away, our games proceeded with joy and happiness in the cool summer evenings).

All the information provided by the author (the building of the Stock Exchange and of the slaughterhouse in place of the Vår Frelsers kirke graveyard, the felling of the trees, the crypts of the wealthy families) are easily verifiable and already confirmed by Liestøl (Asbjørnsen 1949, 2: 358-359). However, a more interesting description is that of the farm where Asbjørnsen played as a child. In fact, given the lack of detailed information about the author's dwelling in Dronningens gate, it is fascinating to verify the truthfulness of the description of the neighbouring farm, to reconstruct the environment he grew up in: «Vår nabogården [...] var en gammel rønne, med et stort og rommelig gårdsrom, som på alle kanter var omgitt av pakkboder, lofter og mørke, hemmelighetsfulle ganger og skur» (Asbjørnsen 1949, 2: 202-204; Our neighbouring farm was an old hovel, with a big, roomy courtyard that was surrounded on all sides by storerooms, lofts and dark, mysterious passages and shacks). Hansen (1932: 17) and Liestøl (1947: 23) tend, like most scholars, to underline the historicity of the author's memories, but an interesting comparison contained in the tale entitled *En gammeldags juleaften* (An Old-fashioned Christmas Eve) provides further confirmation of the previously-reported description: «Det var en av disse gamle gårder i Tollbodgaden med dype vinduer, lange skumle ganger og trapper, mørke rom og lofter, hvor man uvilkårlig måtte tenke på nisser og spøkeri» (Asbjørnsen 1949, I: 110; It was one of these old houses in Tollbodgaden with deep windows, long, gloomy passages and stairs, dark rooms and lofts, where one instinctively thinks about pixies and spirits). As inferred by these few lines, the long gloomy passages and the dark lofts are the same dark mysterious passages and lofts of the previous tale, and even the street (Tollbodgaten) is the same as that of the «nabogården» (neighbouring farm). In addition, the first-person narrator – who in this case is not the author but a fictitious lieutenant on leave, temporarily stuck in at the farm with a bout of typhoid fever – will linger over a description of people bustling in and out of the grocery on the other side of the street, as he did in the previous tale. Therefore we can conclude that Asbjørnsen has added nothing false to the description or to the biographical data about his childhood.

It has previously been mentioned that some frame stories are instead totally fictitious and created as a narrative device for introducing the reader to the kind of stories about to be told. One of the most famous cases is the frame story of the tales entitled *Graverens fortellinger* (The Gravedigger's Stories) and *Fra fjellet og sæteren* (From the Mountains and the Dairies). In the preface to the second edition of *Huldreeventyr*,

Asbjørnsen himself states: «fru Collett har endog skrevet den største del af Indledningen til “Graverens Fortællinger” S. 163 til nederst paa S. 166 og ligesaa de indledende Ord til “Fra Fjeldet og Sæteren”, S. 192 til 194» (Asbjørnsen 1859-1866, 1: xxix; Mrs. Collet has also written most of the introduction to «Graverens Fortællinger» from page 163 to the bottom of page 166 and equally the introduction to «Fra Fjeldet og Sæteren» from page 192 to 194). However, a glance at the description of the scene preceding the meeting between the fake first-person narrator and the gravedigger, which is an original composition of the author, as it is positioned just after the end of Mrs. Collett’s introduction, will provide a deeper understanding of the technique used by Asbjørnsen to create the right atmosphere and to introduce the reader to a tale in which most of the legends have to do with witchcraft, death and encounters with the devil: «Det var en av disse kolde triste sommerdager, da jeg gjennem prestegårdshavens mørke alléer gikk hen til kirken. Regnet hadde holdt opp, men ved hvert vindstøt drysset det raslende ned imellem bladene fra trærnes kroner. Tåken og skyene drev lavt mellem toppene. Matt og grålig falt lyset over kirkegårdens graver og simple minner» (Asbjørnsen 1949, I: 162; It was one of these cold, sad summer days when I reached the church through the dark alleys of the parsonage’s garden. The rain had stopped, but with every wind gust it rustled among the leaves of the treetops. The fog and the clouds drifted low among the peaks. Pale and greyish fell the light over the churchyard’s graves and monuments). Asbjørnsen’s technique is clear: he gathers legends about witches, the Sabbath, the devil’s pact etc., communicated to him by informants or heard during his travels, and then inserts them in a corresponding context (the graveyard on a cold and gloomy summer day) which sets the mood for the stories that follow. What is more, he uses a character-narrator who has to deal with death every day (the gravedigger); the whole thing is framed by the first-person narrator, who contributes to the manner in which these legends are told.

The same technique is used several times by Asbjørnsen, varying however the truthfulness of the events. For example, in the first tale of the collection, *Kvernsagn* (Legends of the Mill), the first-person narrator recounts a fishing trip in the sawmill area around Oslo. We know of the author’s great love for fishing, hunting and walking in the woods (Bækkelund 2012: 126), and Asbjørnsen himself states at the beginning of the tale: «Når verden går meg imot, og det unnlater den sjelden å gjøre, når dertil gis noen leilighet, har jeg stedse funnet meg vel ved å anvende friluftsvandring som demper for min smule bekymring og uro». (Asbjørnsen 1949, I: 19; When the world goes against me, as it rarely avoids doing, when given the chance, I have always found it healthy to take a stroll in the open air to relieve some of my anxiety and restlessness). Therefore nothing prevents the reader from thinking that one day Asbjørnsen, as

it happens in the frame story of the tale entitled *En natt i Nordmarken* (A Night in Nordmarken), really did go fishing near the Maridal lake, and at night, when the frame narrator finds rest in a sawmill, he listens to stories about bewitched sawmills. It is clear that an autobiographical event has served, in this case as well, as a frame to stories heard by the author or sent to him by informants⁹.

The same applies to the hunting stories featured in the frame stories of the long tale entitled *Høyfjellsbilleder* (High Mountain Images). They are built on the author's real hunting experiences¹⁰, but they are put together as a «mosaikkarbeid» (Asbjørnsen 1949, 2: 298; mosaic work) of caricatures of characters the author had really met, of legends communicated to the author on different occasions, as well as of situations born from his imagination. This *modus operandi* of Asbjørnsen's has led some critics to evaluate as fictitious (erroneously, in my opinion) even those frame stories with precise time and place references. For example, at the beginning of the tale entitled *En tiurlek i Holleia* (A Grouse Hunt in Holleia) we read: «Fra Tyristranden gikk vi en av de første dager i mai – det var lenge før jaktloven utklekkedes – opp igjennem lien for den følgende morgen å være på en tiurlek i Skjær sjøhaugen [...]. Vi var fire, min venn kapteinen, jeg, en gammel skytter ved navn Per Sandaker over fra Soknedalen, og en rask gutt» (Asbjørnsen 1949, 2: 99; On one of the first days in May we went from Tyristranden – it was long before the hunt law was promulgated – up through the slope to watch, on the following morning, the grouse play in Skjær sjøhaugen [...]. There were four of us, my friend the captain, me, an old hunter called Per Sandaker from Soknedalen, and a high-spirited boy).

The law, which forbade hunting wood grouse from 1 April to 15 August, was promulgated on 4 August 1845. Skjær sjøhaug hill and Ask dairy were real places in Ringerike. The author's captain friend was General Johan Georg Boll Gram (1809-1973), with whom Peter Christen often delighted in hunting and open-air activities in the area described in the tale. Peder Hansen Sandager was a famous local bear hunter (Asbjørnsen 1949, 2: 328-330). All real data, inserted by the author in the fictitious frame story of a tale whose legends centre on supernatural birds and hares. The meticulous description of places, animals and even plants of the area allows the reader to assume that Asbjørnsen has really drawn from his hunting memories in Holleia, inserting local characters as well, to make everything look like a real autobiographical event.

Asbjørnsen's important three-year experience as private housemaster in Romerike, the place where he started to collect and write legends and

⁹ One is from Mrs. Collett; see Asbjørnsen 1859-1866, 1: xxvi.

¹⁰ As we read from his travel diary, Asbjørnsen really travelled in Gudbrandsdal in 1842, but the hunting lasted just a few hours; see Asbjørnsen 1949, 2: 297-298.

fairy tales (Hvam Hult 2003: 14), left many biographical traces in the various legends of the collection. Two characters the author surely met during his sojourn in Romerike were Mattis Skytter, the homonymous protagonist of the tale entitled *Matthias Skytters historier* (Matthias the Hunter's Stories), and Berthe Tuppenhaug, the homonymous protagonist of the tale entitled *Berthe Tuppenhaugs fortelling* (Berthe Tuppenhaug's Tales). About the first one Asbjørnsen relates:

En vakker lørdag i november 1836 kom jeg til min gode venn proprietæren i Nittedalen. Det var temmelig lenge siden jeg hadde vært der, og da han ikke er den mann, som mottar en gammel venn med et nytt ansikt, så måtte jeg bli og spise middag og drikke kaffe [...]. Etter husets skikk ble der brakt inn punsj [...] jeg så titt i den vakre datterens klare blåøyne, at jeg nesten glemte den til søndag avtalte jaktturen i Gjerdrum. [...] Jeg gikk da opp til Nybråten [...] og fikk fatt på gamle Matthias Skytter, som straks var ferdig til å følge og vise meg benveien over åsen. (Asbjørnsen 1949, I: 40-41)

A fine Saturday in November 1836 I visited my good friend, the squire in Nittedal. It was a rather long time since I had been there, and as he is not a man who welcomes an old friend 'with another face', I had to stay for lunch and drink coffee [...]. As was the house's custom, punch was brought in, [...] I looked into his beautiful daughter's clear blue eyes so often that I almost forgot the hunting trip of Sunday in Gjerdrum. [...] I then proceeded to Nybråten [...] and caught up with old Matthias the Hunter, who was soon ready to accompany me and show me the shortcut across the hill.

We know from the research of the local historian Øyvind Ribsskog (1966: 40-42) that Asbjørnsen already knew the landowner of Nittedal, Torger Holm, before he started his teaching in Romerike, and that Holm was renowned for his hospitality (Asbjørnsen 1949, I: 206). Besides, Torger's daughter, Elen Holm («den vakre datteren», the beautiful daughter), said that the author often visited her father (Ribsskog 1966: 41). The meeting with Matthias probably occurred on one of these occasions, and it is not unlikely to think that the hunter, fifty-eight years old back then (Ribsskog 1966: 42), really did guide Asbjørnsen to the shortcut from Nybråte to Kulsrud hill, where the journey would end. We know nothing of the hunting that took place the following day. This could be an excuse used by the author to explain his choice to turn down the shortcut, or it could be a real event, as Asbjørnsen himself states at the end of the tale: «fra tidligere jakter var vel kjent i egnen» (Asbjørnsen 1949, I: 50; From previous hunts I knew that area well).

Something different happens in the frame story of *Berthe Tuppenhaugs fortelling*. After a fox hunt and a banquet at the bailiff's, the first-person narrator, while skiing down a slope, smashes into a tree, breaking a ski and dislocating his foot. After having laboriously got to his feet and staved off a wolf pack he had previously caught sight of from a cliff, he manages to discern a hut in the thick of the wood and drag himself there. There

he meets the «signekjerring» (healer) Berthe Tuppenhaug, who with some magic formulas, a bandage and some brandy, manages to heal his dislocated foot. The whole frame story occurs in the neighbourhood of Fjeldstad and Gjerdrum where Asbjørnsen was a private teacher from January 1836 to the spring of the following year (Liestøl 1947: 50). The only time reference we have is February, and therefore the fox hunting and the feast at the bailiff's must have taken place in February 1836 or 1837. According to Ribsskog's research (1966: 24) in 1837 there was no *lensmann* (bailiff) in Gjerdrum, and so the hunt episode must have occurred in February 1836, when the *lensmann* of Gjerdrum was a certain Hans Bøhn (1792-1855). The rest of the story is the author's clearly fictitious reconstruction. Ribsskog has wisely showed (1966: 26-28) that Asbjørnsen could neither see the hut from where he was, lying by a river, nor precede the wolf pack to the river after having sighted it from the top of the cliff; in short, in Ribsskog's words (1966: 28): «Asbjørnsen hadde inga hasardiøs skiaking og gråbeinjakt på skaran i måneskinnet, men en rolig og god skitur» (Asbjørnsen did not have a risky skiing or a wolf hunt on the ice crust by moonlight, but rather a good tranquil ski trip).

The last frame story we shall analyse belongs to the tale entitled *En aften ved Andelven* (An Evening by the River And). The scene takes place in Eidsvoll, by the banks of river And, in Gudbrandsdal, where the author travelled in the summer of 1842. During his stay Asbjørnsen kept a «travel diary» (Reisejournal)¹¹, which allows us to follow his various movements and meetings in that period. From page 43 to page 40¹² of the diary dated 2 August we read: «Dud og pine, det er den beau ideal af en skotske Urret Elv» sagde Mr. L. da vi kom ned til Broen over Andelven i Bårilidalen, «her maa vi faa Urret, men den er ikke saa klar, den skud være saa klar som Kristal»» («Hell's bells! It is the beau idéal of a Scottish trout river» Mr L. said when we came down to the bridge over the river And in Bårilidalen, «here we can catch the trout, but it is not so clear, it should be as clear as crystal»). Following this bizarre presentation of Mr L.¹³, Asbjørnsen engages in a highly detailed description of the flora surrounding the river And, mentioning flowers such as «Spiræer» (spiraeas), «Skabioser» (scabiouses) and «Nardus» (bellflowers), and the technique used for fly-fishing. This is no surprise, as from these lines two important sides of the author emerge: the botanist, who could name and describe the Norwegian flora with flawless accuracy (this skill will return

¹¹ The original is in the Norsk Folkeminnesamling archive, catalogued as NFS P. Chr. Asbjørnsen 14.

¹² In the diary the pages are numbered backwards.

¹³ The English friend Robert Meason Laing, son of the writer Samuel Laing (Liestøl 1947: 122).

in many frame stories, endowing the places described with a traditional imprint¹⁴), and the fishing connoisseur, an aspect, the explanation of fishing techniques, that will be used in other frame stories such as *En natt i Nordmarken* (A Night in Nordmarken; cf. Asbjørnsen 1949, 1: 130-131) and *Makrelldorging* (Trolling for Mackerel; cf. Asbjørnsen 1949, 2: 264). The diary page ends with the arrival of the jurist Collett who will greet them with a «God aften» (Good evening).

This description of a summer evening by the river And served as an initial and final scene for the frame story of the tale entitled *En aften ved Andelven* (An Evening by the River And). Comparing the two versions, we see how Asbjørnsen uses these written memories to build a real autobiographical frame story¹⁵. He only replaces the name «Mr. L.» with the pseudonym «Sir John», and insists he met him there, while actually the Englishman had followed him from Christiania. The final «God aften» is not from jurist Collett, but from a peasant woman who will tell some legends to the author. From the diary to the tale, Asbjørnsen keeps the description of the fishing scene almost unchanged, even the tripmate's disarticulated language, a mix of Norwegian and English, which is written nearly verbatim. The only slight difference is that the tale is more flowing and rich in its description of nature, a normal thing once the author decided to transfer the written impressions of a diary to a literary context.

From this short survey, we have shown that Asbjørnsen used different typologies of frame stories to build up his narration. Most of the material featured refers to real events, experienced by the author during his fishing and hunting trips or from just spending time in the open air, in the natural areas around Oslo. Some material is also drawn from childhood memories, but reworked for the narration's sake. The main purpose of the frame stories is to prepare the reader for the kind of legend he is going to relate and, in a lesser degree, to lend greater truthfulness to the tales. To achieve this goal, Asbjørnsen uses various techniques, ranging from detailed descriptions of nature and character, such as the use of local customs and landmarks in the legends, to the inclusion of historical events that could reinforce the credibility of the first-person frame narrator. It is clear that some frame stories are completely fictitious and that some others (one at least) are true. However, Asbjørnsen's literary skill lies in his ability to create an extraordinary series

¹⁴ How much Asbjørnsen's descriptions of nature have taken root in the popular mind can be seen, for example, in the statement of Kristian Elster about the Krok forest (depicted in *En sommernatt på Krokskogen*; A Summer Night in the Krok Forest): «Anyone who ever walks the same way to the Krok forest has Asbjørnsen's story in mind» (quoted in Hvam Hult 2003: 69).

¹⁵ According to the dating of the various editions affixed by Asbjørnsen, the tale dates back to 1845, i.e. three years after the journey to Gudbrandsdal.

of descriptions, both of Norwegian nature and people's character traits, which stand alone in Scandinavian literature. Some folklorists (Kvideland, Sehmsdorf 1988:xxi) have criticised Asbjørnsen's choice not to render just the traditional material, stripped of the literary fictional side of the frame stories. In my view, such criticisms fail to grant due appreciation to the historical value of this work in shaping the new Norwegian national identity. Asbjørnsen largely contributed both to the creation of an autochthonous literature, which now could take its place in a European context, and to the debate on the forging of a national language, by using colloquial speech and dialects far from the Danish-influenced language of the upper classes.

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DUE DIARI DI VIAGGIO DELL'ESPLORATORE NORVEGENSE FRIDTJOF NANSEN COME NARRAZIONI AUTOBIOGRAFICHE

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1. La figura storica di Fridtjof Nansen e la sua autorappresentazione letteraria

Fridtjof Nansen nasce e muore a Oslo tra la fine del XIX e l'inizio del XX secolo (1861-1930), ma nel corso della vita il bisogno di conoscenza lo porta in luoghi molto lontani dalla natia Norvegia. Eredita dalla madre la passione per la vita all'aria aperta, per l'attività fisica e per lo sport, nonché un amore profondo e rispettoso per il mondo naturale (Christensen 1961: 1). Nel 1881 si iscrive alla facoltà di zoologia dell'università di Kristiania (Oslo), spinto dalle principali passioni che lo animavano all'epoca, il mondo animale e il disegno. Durante la sua esistenza, tuttavia, amplia i campi d'interesse all'oceanologia, alla meteorologia, alla neurologia, alla biochimica e poi anche all'etnologia, all'antropologia e alle scienze diplomatiche. Inoltre va menzionato il fatto che, pur non essendo egli uno scrittore di professione, i suoi racconti di viaggio divengono veri e propri best seller presso i suoi contemporanei (Vogt 2011: 110; Karlsen 2008: 195) e vengono tuttora ristampati e letti¹. La studiosa norvegese Åsfrid Svensen lo definisce «ordkunstneren» (Svensen 2011: 386; artista della parola). Va poi ricordata l'attività svolta in campo umanitario; infatti dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale Nansen accetta di collaborare con la Croce Rossa internazionale, che lo incarica di occuparsi dei molti rifugiati apolidi frutto del conflitto. Per costoro nel 1921 Nansen riesce a istituire e far sottoscrivere da più di cinquanta stati un documento personale internazionale, tuttora noto come «passaporto Nansen». Inizialmente concepito come un riconoscimento del fatto che i molti esuli russi in fuga dal regime sovietico effettivamente 'esistono', pur non avendo più una patria (Lenin li cancella con gesto simbolico dai registri statali, Huntford 1997: 635) né documenti d'identità, diventa poi un attestato, rilasciato dallo stato di residenza, con cui gli individui privi di nazionalità possono viaggiare, sposarsi, lavorare, nascere con uno status legale e istituzionale definito e regolarizzato (Huntford 1997: 634). Inoltre l'impegno di Nansen in campo umanitario viene riconosciuto con il conferimento del premio Nobel per la

¹ Le prime traduzioni italiane dei diari relativi alla spedizione in Groenlandia e a quella verso il Polo Nord sono recenti, rispettivamente del 2011 e del 2010.

pace nel 1922. Gioca anche un ruolo diplomatico cruciale nel processo che conduce la Norvegia all'indipendenza, con lo scioglimento dell'unione con la Svezia (1905). Pertanto Nansen può essere definito a buon diritto, oltre che scienziato ed esploratore, anche politico, diplomatico, filantropo e umanista.

Scrive quattordici opere di viaggio, tutte rielaborazioni a posteriori degli appunti presi sul campo, durante l'esplorazione di Groenlandia, mar Glaciale Artico e Siberia, e dell'Armenia dei profughi del primo conflitto mondiale. Per quanto concerne la dimensione autobiografica dei suoi 'diari', il fatto che si tratti di riscritture a posteriori costituisce un dato significativo, che li distingue nettamente da quelli di, per esempio, Robert Falcon Scott e Edward Adrian Wilson, esploratori antartici che perdono la vita durante la missione denominata Terra Nova (1910-1913). Costoro scrivono diari che vengono rinvenuti accanto ai loro corpi e che pertanto costituiscono testimonianze che non passano attraverso alcun processo di revisione successiva (Tuena 2010: 9). Viceversa, Nansen ha la possibilità di intervenire sul Nansen rappresentato una volta che, seduto a una scrivania, rilegge e mette mano agli appunti presi. Dunque il materiale narrativo passa attraverso due fasi di selezione – la prima è quella in cui Nansen sceglie in maniera più o meno cosciente quali elementi della realtà registrare durante i viaggi stessi, la seconda quella in cui tali elementi vengono riesaminati alla luce di differenti parametri – nelle quali trovano spazio non solo le notizie sugli aspetti geografici e storico-culturali ma anche le manifestazioni del pensiero dell'autore, che, in questo modo, sceglie come rappresentarsi e, di conseguenza, attraverso quale strada presentarsi al lettore. Sembrerebbero non esistere studi specifici sul processo di rielaborazione che ha trasformato le sue annotazioni nei testi che oggi leggiamo e risulta quindi difficile stabilirne la portata. Tuttavia la norvegese Silje Solheim Karlsen, studiosa di letteratura artica e dell'opera di Nansen, abbozza un'analisi di grande interesse, instaurando un parallelo tra letteratura odepórica e autobiografia e sottolineando che tali categorie condividono la distanza tra io narrante e io narrato (Karlsen 2012: 193), una distanza che la voce narrante può, di volta in volta, scegliere di minimizzare o enfatizzare. Afferma Karlsen:

[...] reiselitteratur er svært tvetydig; et sted mellom fakta og fiksjon uten at en trenger å skille mellom forfatter og forteller. Dette er eksempelvis også problemstillinger som dukker opp i forbindelse med fortellerinstansen i selvbiografien som sjanger. [...] Det virker å være en del likhetstrekk mellom fortellerinstansen i reiselitteratur og i selvbiografien, og reiselitteratur har gjerne memoarpreg og innslag av dagboknotater, brev og lignende. (Karlsen 2011: 34)

[...] la letteratura di viaggio è quanto mai ambigua; si colloca a metà strada tra i fatti e la finzione, senza che si debba distinguere tra autore e narratore. Le stesse questioni si presentano se si pensa all'istanza del narratore nel genere autobiografico. [...] Sembrerebbero esserci diversi elementi in comune tra l'istanza del narratore nella letteratura di viaggio e nell'autobiografia; la letteratura di viaggio assume spesso la forma memoriale e inserisce annotazioni di diario, lettere ed elementi simili.²

² Le traduzioni sono mie ove non altrimenti specificato.

Karlsen rimanda però a una fondamentale differenza tra i due generi, illustrata, per esempio, dallo studioso danese Lars Handesten nel suo saggio *Rejsebogen. En grænseoverskridende genre* (2004; Il libro di viaggio. Un genere che travalica i confini), vale a dire che il racconto di viaggio cattura fatti contemporanei, mentre l'autobiografia è racconto del passato (Handesten 2004: 78-79). Tuttavia Karlsen stessa è scettica su questa distinzione che, a suo avviso, può forse valere come regola generale ma diviene difficilmente sostenibile nell'applicazione pratica, al testo concreto. Tuttavia quella della distanza cronologica tra i fatti e la loro registrazione è una questione interessante, da tenere in considerazione in un discorso sulla letteratura di viaggio e sull'autobiografia.

Secondo Karlsen, che pure non condivide appieno il punto di vista di Handesten, il lasso di tempo che esiste tra l'esperienza e la sua scrittura costituisce in effetti un dato discriminante: assai diverse tra loro sono le opere di viaggio scritte da Nansen immediatamente dopo il ritorno e quelle che invece sono frutto di una rielaborazione profonda molti anni dopo. Karlsen si concentra sulle implicazioni di queste distanze prospettiche in un articolo nel quale mette a confronto *Blant sel og bjørn: min første ishavs-ferd* (1924; Tra foche e orsi: il mio primo viaggio nel mar Glaciale Artico) – testo in cui Nansen racconta della propria prima esperienza a bordo della nave Viking per la caccia alla foca – e i resoconti della traversata della Groenlandia e della spedizione della Fram, entrambi pubblicati appena un anno dopo il rientro. Karlsen parla di «fordoblinga av selvet» (Karlsen 2012: 194; duplicazione del sé) per descrivere il processo attraverso cui l'autore racconta se stesso, introducendo anche l'immagine metaforica di un testo – quello autobiografico appunto – in cui dialogano molteplici voci, vale a dire le voci di tutti i 'sé' che l'autore identifica e a cui dà spazio. Ad esempio, il narratore di *Blant sel og bjørn* è l'esploratore artico acclamato, il vincitore del Nobel per la pace, lo scienziato e il ricercatore di fama mondiale, mentre il protagonista narrato è un anonimo ventenne, entusiasta alla sua prima esperienza sul campo (Karlsen 2012: 193). Dunque l'autore colma la distanza, attribuendo al suo giovane sé competenze, conoscenze e coscienze proprie invece del Nansen di mezz'età che impugna la penna. A tal proposito osserva l'esperto di studi artici Henning Howlid Wærp: «Etterpå-perspektivet med mye kunnskapsstoff trenger stadig inn og gjør fortellingen litt belærende og doserende. Selve hendelsene det skrives om er blitt fjerne for Nansen» (2012: 238; Il senno di poi, con le molte conoscenze acquisite nel frattempo, si avverte in continuazione, rendendo la narrazione un poco didattica e pedagogica. Gli avvenimenti stessi sono ormai lontani per Nansen). Il lasso di tempo che intercorre tra i fatti narrati e la loro stesura si trasforma pertanto in un palcoscenico sul quale l'autore – in veste di regista – può creare e poi mettere in scena un se stesso costruito, un attore con il quale dialogare. Karlsen nota che la distanza cronologica tra

narratore e narrato in *Blant sel og bjørn* rimanda alla distanza caratteristica dell'autobiografia, mentre sembra ritenere più sfumata la caratterizzazione autobiografica dei testi nei quali la distanza cronologica tra narratore e personaggio narrato sia minore.

È questo anche il caso delle opere di viaggio sulle quali intende concentrarsi questo saggio, *Paa ski over Grønland* (Nansen 1890; *Nel cuore della Groenlandia. 1888: la prima traversata con gli sci*, trad. di Sapienza 2011)³ e *Fram over Polhavet* (Nansen 1897; *La spedizione della Fram*, trad. di Sapienza 2010), che presentano una genesi differente. Si può intanto notare che, se già Philippe Lejeune considera i diari «genere affine all'autobiografia» (1986: 13), in questo caso la vicinanza e l'ibridazione tra generi appaiono ancora maggiori, per il fatto che Nansen riprende la materia e la riorganizza a posteriori. Infatti, la prospettiva guadagnata con la revisione dei testi consente all'autore, una volta rientrato dalle esplorazioni, di pubblicare la sua produzione diaristica proprio come narrazione autobiografica (anche se non 'biografia'), vale a dire come «una creazione letteraria orientata verso l'individuazione di un significato personale» (Lise 2008: 5).

Paa ski over Grønland e *Fram over Polhavet* vengono dati alle stampe, come si è detto, all'incirca un anno dopo il rientro dalle spedizioni. Avviene una minore rielaborazione dei contenuti, i quali sono tuttavia organizzati secondo un disegno preciso⁴. Sebbene si possa ipotizzare una parziale sovrapposibilità tra narratore e personaggio narrato, in mancanza di quella distanza cronologica tra i due su cui si sofferma Karlsen, la dimensione autobiografica, intesa come racconto di sé e rappresentazione consapevole di un sé letterario, è parimenti presente: strumento principe della sua espressione è il linguaggio. Afferma Marianne Egeland:

³ Una prima versione di questo testo viene pubblicata nel 1890, subito dopo il ritorno della spedizione. Tuttavia nel 1928 Nansen stesso dà alle stampe una nuova versione, più breve della precedente, sulla quale si basano le ristampe e le traduzioni successive (Svensen 2011: 386). Davide Sapienza, curatore dell'edizione italiana (Nansen 2011), attinge a due traduzioni inglesi: una del 1890 (relativa quindi alla prima versione) e una del 2001 (relativa alla seconda versione), dando luogo in alcuni casi a una certa confusione.

⁴ In *Paa ski over Grønland*, ad esempio, vi sono numerosi inserti scientifici (tabelle, elenchi, resoconti) che si staccano dal resto della narrazione e hanno la funzione di rafforzare la credibilità e l'autorevolezza del Nansen scienziato: si tratta della sua prima grande impresa, considerata con scetticismo quando non apertamente criticata da molti, quindi l'autore sente di dovere dimostrare la propria serietà (Karlsen 2012: 196). In *Fram over Polhavet* ha invece già acquisito maggiore sicurezza nelle sue capacità (nonostante le critiche non manchino nemmeno in questo caso) e quindi si sente libero di integrare il discorso scientifico – rilevante nell'economia del testo – all'interno del testo stesso, lasciando insomma che lo scienziato parli con tono più sommesso e lasciando maggior spazio al poeta, al letterato, al filosofo.

Det subjektet som skriver i nåtiden, er [...] eldre og klokere enn det “jeg” han eller hun forteller om. Splittelsen mellom skrivende subjekt og omtalt subjekt/objekt forsøkes overkommet på flere måter, men hele tiden i og ved hjelp av språket. (Egeland in Karlsen 2012: 193)

Il soggetto che scrive nel momento presente è [...] più vecchio e più saggio di quell'“io” di cui parla. Si prova in diversi modi a superare la frattura tra soggetto scrivente e soggetto/oggetto di cui si scrive, ma sempre nel linguaggio e con l'aiuto del linguaggio.

E proprio così, attraverso il linguaggio, anche Nansen satura la distanza cronologica – in questi casi non molto ampia – tra l'io che racconta e l'io che viene raccontato. Un linguaggio che tende a sminuire le imprese che il narratore e protagonista compie, gli ostacoli che si presentano, le difficoltà incontrate; un linguaggio che è quello, di volta in volta, dello scienziato o del filosofo o del romantico, in una «multiplicity of discourses» (Karlsen 2008: 195; molteplicità di discorsi); un linguaggio che attinge volentieri alle suggestioni antico-nordiche, alla dimensione mitologica, alla gloria delle precedenti imprese di esplorazione, per collocarvi. Karlsen sottolinea che *Fram over Polhavet* inizia con un racconto fiabesco dagli echi norreni, nel quale l'autore va poi a inserire se stesso, in veste di esploratore, usando il pronome alla prima persona plurale: «This use of “we” illustrates how Nansen self-confidently writes himself into the tradition of brave and courageous explorers» (Karlsen 2013: 143; Quest'uso del “noi” mostra come Nansen si iscriva con sicurezza nella tradizione degli intrepidi e coraggiosi esploratori).

Lene Samuelsen, in un paragrafo della sua tesi di laurea (2010), analizza le strategie di autorappresentazione che Nansen attua in *Frilufts-liv* (1916; Vita all'aria aperta), una rielaborazione di testi scritti da Nansen in epoche diverse della sua vita, ripensati e rivisti per andare a comporre un'opera organica con la quale promuovere il contatto diretto dell'uomo moderno con la natura, anche alla luce del ruolo che nel frattempo l'autore stesso aveva assunto agli occhi della società norvegese e internazionale (Aasbø 2009: 15-18). Si tratta quindi di un'opera concepita come raccolta di saggi e articoli assemblata dall'autore stesso per promuovere l'abitudine allo sport e alla vita all'aria aperta: una filosofia ben precisa percorre come un filo rosso tutto il volume, sicché il portavoce e rappresentante di tale filosofia – il protagonista delle imprese narrate – viene sempre delineato con cura, secondo certi criteri che si possono definire ideologici. Afferma Samuelsen: «Nansen [...] vet hvordan han skal dramatisere seg selv og landskapet han ferdes i» (2010: 47; Nansen [...] sa come drammatizzare se stesso e l'ambiente in cui si muove). Infatti, in questo testo l'autore enfatizza la difficoltà delle imprese che intende compiere, grandi o piccole che siano, facendole sembrare quasi impossibili, di modo da accrescere la sua gloria quando poi le porta a termine, così come avviene in *Blant sel og bjørn* e proprio all'opposto, dunque, di quanto accade nei diari di viaggio della spedizione in Groenlandia e verso il Polo Nord. Pertanto si

può affermare che le strategie di autorappresentazione di Nansen variano grandemente al variare della distanza cronologica tra io narrante e io narrato.

Tentando di determinare in che misura ciò si concretizzi nei due diari oggetto di questo studio, sembra che in essi la volontà dell'autore di dare di sé una determinata immagine sia più sfumata. L'espressione diaristica di Nansen appare forse più autentica, poiché si concentra maggiormente sulla narrazione degli avvenimenti e sulla registrazione dei dati, piuttosto che sulla rappresentazione, anche ideologicamente connotata, che l'autore intende dare di sé e dei fatti. Nei diari di viaggio di Nansen viene interposto un filtro letterario – che colora in primis Nansen stesso – ma esso non ha come scopo primario di enfatizzare la dimensione eroica del protagonista, bensì quello di rendere fruibile al pubblico i dati raccolti dall'esploratore sul campo. Nansen pare avvertire in questi testi una minore necessità di plasmare se stesso secondo un'ideologia, perché i suoi resoconti sono innanzitutto espressioni della sua concezione del viaggio, dell'esplorazione e della natura, sua grande passione. Si può dunque affermare ragionevolmente che Nansen, nella revisione a posteriori in chiave letteraria di *Paa ski over Grønland* e di *Fram over Polhavet*, interviene sulla rappresentazione di se stesso in misura minore rispetto a quanto avviene in altri suoi testi, quali, per esempio, *Frilufts-liv* o *Blant sel og bjørn*.

2. L'emergere dell'io narrante nel rapporto tra uomo e natura

L'elemento cardine della poetica di Nansen – pur essendo in parte una licenza parlare di poetica riguardo a opere non strettamente letterarie – è sicuramente il rapporto tra uomo e natura, nonché il ruolo dell'uomo *nella natura*. L'aspetto più caratteristico di questo rapporto sembra essere per Nansen l'assenza di una frattura tra realtà sensibile e mondo interiore, in virtù di un legame simbiotico concepito all'interno di un pensiero di matrice tardo-romantica. In quest'ottica ogni esplorazione di terre ignote del pianeta corre parallela a quella delle terre ignote dell'io, come testimoniano i diari dell'esploratore norvegese, per cui l'impresa fisica e materiale è sempre di stimolo alla riflessione esistenziale: come afferma lo studioso tedesco Manfred Pfister «writing the Other can become a way of writing the Self» (Pfister 2007: 1; scrivere l'Altro può diventare un modo di scrivere il Sé). Davide Sapienza, curatore della traduzione dall'inglese all'italiano di *La spedizione della Fram* (Nansen 2010) e di *Nel cuore della Groenlandia* (Nansen 2011), afferma che i diari di viaggio di Nansen, «sono quasi un'espressione artistica, scientifica e puramente interiore: sono intrisi di umori e riflessioni» (Nansen 2010: 9). Le circostanze contingenti in cui Nansen si trova – gli ambienti, il clima, i fenomeni atmosferici – fungono anche da spunto per una

riflessione di portata esistenziale, per un'astrazione che non di rado ha un sapore spirituale, mistico e filosofico. Come afferma Luigi Monga: «Geographic displacement, as the most familiar element in human life, has easily become a symbol of an interior, non spatial operation» (1996: 7). Davide Papotti, studioso di geografia, afferma che proprio la dimensione esistenziale costituisce l'«ambiente naturale» in cui nasce la letteratura odepórica (2007). Così Nansen, di ritorno verso Bergen dopo una lunga traversata solitaria con gli sci nella Norvegia interna, si trova in cima a un crinale e può annotare sul suo taccuino: «Jo sandelig dette, det kan kaldes et Syn, man betages Veiret, man smelter hen, blir til intet, gaar over i, føler og lever med Naturen, kjender andre Magter, løftes mod uanedede Verdener, ser ligesom et Glimt af Evigheden» (Nansen 1950: 113; «È davvero una visione mozzafiato; sembra di perdere la propria identità e di fondersi con quello che ti circonda, sembra di avvertire le forze che ti elevano verso mondi ignoti, come per poter avere un bagliore di eternità», trad. di Sapienza; Nansen 2011: 11). In questa frase Nansen sintetizza la sua concezione dell'uomo all'interno della natura senza soluzione di continuità, come due dimensioni che si compenetrano.

Infatti, l'oggetto d'interesse primario degli scritti di carattere autobiografico di Nansen è il *mondo*, meglio se ignoto e ancora da conoscere, e i suoi luoghi fisici e metaforici che l'essere umano va a occupare. L'essere umano in questione assume di volta in volta i connotati dell'esploratore stesso o dell'uomo come astrazione filosofica, in una concezione simbolica e universale. Come sottolinea Samuelsen, «Nansen viser en unik evne til å se *det store* i *det små*» (2010: 5, corsivo nell'originale; Nansen mostra una rara capacità di vedere il *grande* nel *piccolo*) e tale capacità può anche essere considerata alla stregua di un canale privilegiato attraverso cui il particolare contingente e l'universale trascendente sono in costante dialogo.

Ma anche quando la sua scrittura assume i toni universali della filosofia, la persona e la personalità dell'autore affiorano nella narrazione in maniera incontrastata: è *sua* la voce che racconta, è *sua* la penna che prende appunti, è *sua* la mano che disegna, quando non scatta fotografie. Si tratta di istanze fortemente riconoscibili grazie al comune denominatore delle riflessioni filosofiche ed esistenziali: esse svelano al lettore l'attitudine dell'intellettuale ottocentesco che stabilisce l'intero tono della narrazione. Karlsen parla infatti di un narratore fortemente soggettivo che conferisce al racconto uno stile personale (2008: 198-199).

Nansen non si prefigge di compilare resoconti rigorosamente scientifici, impersonali e obiettivi ma nemmeno delle opere letterarie, e tuttavia una forte vena poetica, epica e romantica, si manifesta tra le pagine dei suoi diari quando s'interroga sul ruolo umano di fronte alla natura selvaggia e immensa, quando riflette sulla posizione dell'uomo nell'universo, quando si arresta di fronte alla contemplazione della vita

come mistero insolubile. Wærp parla di un Nansen lirico, in grado di descrivere la natura e ragionare sulla natura padroneggiando la materia letteraria in modo sicuro (2012: 240; 2014: 152).

Nansen concepisce l'uomo davanti alla natura in maniera assai diversa rispetto a quella degli esploratori suoi contemporanei. Nella prefazione a *La spedizione della Fram* Sapienza scrive: «Nansen confuta la brutale idea di Cartesio e dell'Illuminismo di assoggettamento della Natura a ogni costo. Il figlio del nord decide di “prendere nota delle forze della natura”, scegliendo di assecondarle, invece di contrastarle» (Nansen 2010: vi). Questa frase riassume efficacemente l'atteggiamento di rispetto che Nansen mostra verso il mondo naturale, atteggiamento che la studiosa norvegese Åsfrid Svensen, riferendosi a *Fram over Polhavet*, definisce «ærefrykt» (2011: 398; riverenza):

I skildringer som denne er naturen ikke opplevd som en motstander; de sterke skjønnettsintrykkene vekker ærefrykt og ikke kamplyst. Skildringer lar oss møte polarlandskapet sett gjennom øynene till en europeisk intellektuell; [...] hans naturopplevelse rommer langt mer enn den inbittne viljen till kontroll over naturen. (Svensen 2011: 398)

In descrizioni di questo tipo la natura non viene percepita come un avversario; le impressioni di grande bellezza suscitano riverenza e non bellicosità. Le descrizioni ci permettono di incontrare il paesaggio polare visto attraverso lo sguardo di un intellettuale europeo; [...] la sua esperienza va ben oltre l'ostinata volontà di controllo sulla natura.

Secondo il parere di Sapienza, tale attitudine deriva dal fatto che l'esploratore è un uomo del Nord e, per questo, intrattiene un legame privilegiato con la terra e l'ambiente. Fin dalla prima gioventù Nansen si appassiona alle lunghe escursioni sulla neve, abituandosi a fronteggiare gli imprevisti e le difficoltà del clima rigido e dei lunghi inverni bui. Egli è profondamente legato alla sua terra, in un rapporto empatico che gli consentirà di sopravvivere e trionfare in territori dalle caratteristiche analoghe. La conoscenza e l'amore per l'ambiente nordico sono infatti la chiave del suo successo come esploratore e, si può ipotizzare, anche il motivo dell'insuccesso di molti esploratori britannici o statunitensi, meno avvezzi agli ambienti polari e alle condizioni che pongono.

Samuelsen mostra inoltre come Nansen sia il primo ad attribuire un valore ideologico alla pratica della vita nella natura, un fattore che lo farà eleggere a fonte d'ispirazione dei movimenti di ecofilosofia che si svilupperanno in Norvegia negli anni Settanta (2010: 5). Il norvegese riflette infatti nei suoi scritti sull'importanza del contatto con la natura, in contrasto con la vita di città che allontana l'uomo dalla sua dimensione spirituale, strettamente connessa agli elementi primigeni. Egli invece concepisce la natura come una fonte d'ispirazione e un modello per una società più etica, giusta e funzionale. La natura diventa dunque per Nansen l'esempio da seguire ma anche l'obiettivo da perseguire per riuscire ad

averne una più profonda comprensione. Nansen si fa guidare dalla natura e ne ricalca i meccanismi anche per orientarsi nella dimensione esistenziale. Sapienza afferma a questo proposito:

È difficile trovare nei precedenti esploratori artici questo tipo di bussola dell'anima: la Natura. Nansen aveva fatto del suo rapporto con il territorio una ragione di vita [...]. È sufficiente soffermarsi sulle sue descrizioni dell'Artico per capire come questo legame sia la fibra stessa del suo sguardo, capace di influenzare persino le monolitiche certezze di Nansen scienziato. Più di una volta egli scrive, *ma noi cosa ne sappiamo davvero con tutto il nostro ragionare e raccogliere dati scientifici?* (Nansen 2010: iii, corsivo nel testo)

Quest'ultima frase è interessante perché mostra l'eclittismo del pensiero di Nansen, capace di conciliare il rigore dello scienziato con la scintilla del dubbio del filosofo. Sapienza parla infatti di «equilibrio tra la visione razionale e la percezione chiara di essere parte integrante della Natura Madre» (Nansen 2010: iii). Inoltre Nansen, pur non negandola, mette in discussione la possibilità dell'uomo di conoscere attraverso l'indagine scientifica, e questo elemento funge da ponte con l'altro tema centrale del suo pensiero, la posizione dell'uomo nel mondo. La riflessione attorno a questo argomento chiama in causa da un lato il vasto ambito degli studi geografici e cartografici dell'epoca, che mirano a stabilire l'esatta collocazione delle cose e a riprodurla, fissandola sulla carta, per avere la sensazione di averne il controllo; dall'altro lato conduce alla riflessione filosofica sulla posizione dell'uomo nell'universo: nonostante la relazione non conflittuale che Nansen intrattiene con il mondo naturale, nemmeno lui può ignorare la sproporzione tra uomo e natura, laddove il primo si riduce a un granello di sabbia quando si confronta con la potenza degli elementi, con la magnificenza e l'enormità delle montagne e del mare. Questa presunta sproporzione si dissolve però nella sua concezione dell'uomo come parte integrante della natura stessa, al pari di un blocco di ghiaccio o della luna. Tuttavia Nansen cercherà fino alla fine dei suoi giorni di instaurare con la natura una relazione pacificata, ricercando con i suoi viaggi i nessi che tengono unite tutte le cose, i rapporti che governano l'universo e una visione olistica, d'insieme, che abbia la capacità di spiegare se stessa.

3. *Paa ski over Grønland e Fram over Polhavet*

Le opere qui considerate sono i primi due resoconti scritti da Nansen, vale a dire quello della traversata della Groenlandia con gli sci (1888-1889) e quello della navigazione sul mar Glaciale Artico alla volta del Polo Nord, seguita dalla lunga prosecuzione a piedi insieme al compagno tenente Hjalmar Johansen (1893-1896).

Come già detto, in origine queste opere non vengono concepite da Nansen con un intento letterario né autobiografico, poiché lo scopo primario è testimoniare due imprese in grado di offrire nuove conoscenze al genere umano: nel primo caso si tratta dell'attraversamento dell'*inlandsis*, la calotta di ghiaccio continentale groenlandese, da est a ovest servendosi solo degli sci come mezzo di trasporto; nel secondo caso della possibilità di arrivare al Polo Nord (meta che l'esploratore non riuscirà a raggiungere, toccando tuttavia una latitudine senza precedenti) sfruttando le correnti artiche e il passaggio a nord-est, la via di collegamento tra l'oceano Atlantico e l'oceano Pacifico, aperto dal finno-svedese Nordenskiöld (spedizione Vega, 1878-1879).

Prima di organizzare una spedizione autonoma, Nansen si era imbarcato nel 1882 sulla nave Viking per la caccia alla foca, con lo scopo di condurre degli studi di biologia marina (viaggio descritto nel già menzionato *Blant sel og bjørn*), e negli anni 1882-1883 e 1883-1884 aveva compiuto lunghe traversate solitarie della Norvegia con gli sci (descritte in *Friluftsliv*). Un precedente che merita una menzione speciale è la traversata dello Jotunheim, la catena montuosa più elevata della Scandinavia, compiuta da Nansen a soli diciassette anni, nel 1878 (Huntford 1997: 17). Pertanto aveva già avuto modo di sperimentare e familiarizzare con i due mezzi di trasporto che l'avrebbero condotto attraverso la Groenlandia e a un passo dal Polo Nord: la nave e gli sci.

La passione per l'escursionismo sugli sci viene tramandata a Nansen dalla madre e lui la coltiva con ardore e perseveranza. Viceversa la «reticenza culturale verso lo sci» (Sapienza in Nansen 2011: 13) di Scott sancisce la sua tragica fine tra i ghiacci del Polo Sud. Invece l'impresa di Roald Amundsen ha esito felice, così come la traversata della Groenlandia e l'avvicinamento al Polo Nord di Nansen (una volta che lui e Johansen abbandonano la Fram con il resto dell'equipaggio a bordo per proseguire a piedi) proprio grazie a quel particolare mezzo di locomozione. Anche la nave Fram viene progettata da Nansen stesso, in collaborazione con l'architetto nautico scozzese Colin Archer, per poter essere intrappolata dai ghiacci al largo della Siberia, dagli stessi sollevata e sospinta attraverso il Polo Nord, per poi venire liberata in un punto tra la Groenlandia e l'isola di Spitzbergen. Questo nelle intenzioni iniziali. L'approccio di Nansen è innovativo: tutti gli esploratori polari precedenti ritengono che restare bloccati nel ghiaccio costituisca un ostacolo, mentre lui valuta l'ipotesi di sfruttarlo a proprio vantaggio, assecondando la forza della natura anziché contrastandola. Il suo pensiero è pragmatico ed empirico, basato sull'osservazione effettiva del modo in cui i materiali e le forme reagiscono agli stimoli degli agenti esterni. Mosso da questa ideologia aveva infatti sconsigliato Scott, che l'aveva interpellato per un parere sull'uso in Antartide di pony siberiani, avvezzi ai climi rigidi ma dotati di zoccoli dalla conformazione inadatta alle lunghe marce, specie sulla neve fresca, umida e pesante dell'estate polare.

All'osservazione concreta Nansen affianca inoltre uno studio approfondito delle spedizioni artiche contemporanee o appena precedenti alla sua epoca: conosce i viaggi verso Nord e i metodi impiegati da Sir John Franklin, John Ross, William Parry, Robert Peary, George Washington De Long e, specialmente, da Otto Nordenskjöld. Nansen studia i loro resoconti, li vaglia, isolando le criticità per ideare metodologie alternative da impiegare nelle sue proprie imprese. Tuttavia l'approccio di costoro all'esplorazione è assai diverso dal suo, come già detto. Scrive Sapienza: «La loro storia era quella di uomini figli di un'epoca che li aveva forgiati per "scoprire e conquistare" terre e mari già abitati dagli Inuit e così legittimare sogni e ambizioni nazionali» (Nansen 2011: 8). Pur essendo un nazionalista convinto, Nansen non desidera fare conquiste per la gloria della sua patria né tanto meno per la sua personale (quantomeno nelle sue dichiarazioni) ma tenta di incanalare l'irrequietezza interiore che incessantemente lo spinge verso l'ignoto, potenziale e agognata sede della pace dello spirito. Scrive ancora Sapienza: «In lui si muovevano potenti correnti sotterranee che in un momento di disperazione l'avrebbero indotto a citare Goethe e a dire: "Il Faust non ha mai raggiunto un luogo dove restare. Io non riesco neppure a intravedere un posto che valga questo tentativo"» (Nansen 2011: 9)⁵.

Questo dunque è il contesto storico e psicologico nel quale Nansen organizza la sua prima spedizione, l'attraversamento della Groenlandia sugli sci. Nella sua mente si è già definito il fondamento di tutta un'ideologia: la natura va assecondata, poiché ogni tentativo di piegarla non può che portare alla sconfitta, il che, nell'ambito di una spedizione polare, è spesso sinonimo di morte. Ma non solo: non deve essere la paura a generare il rispetto della natura, bensì la consapevolezza del fatto che l'uomo è parte della natura stessa e in tale veste può e deve giocare secondo le sue regole.

Molti dei predecessori di Nansen concepiscono dunque l'esplorazione come conquista per interesse economico, e spesso infatti le spedizioni sono sovvenzionate e sponsorizzate dagli stati per acquisire nuovi territori e nuove ricchezze, nella prospettiva colonialista tipica dell'epoca. Ma Nansen, che decide di attraversare la Groenlandia per smentire la credenza che essa abbia un cuore libero dal ghiaccio (Hestmark 2011: 83), «non deve conquistare nulla a nome di nessuno», come osserva Sapienza (Nansen 2011: 8), se non della propria sete di conoscenza. Anche a mio avviso l'elemento che maggiormente contraddistingue Nansen dagli altri esploratori coevi è il fatto che ciò che lo spinge verso territori sconosciuti sia innanzitutto un moto dell'anima, un anelito interiore, un'inquietudine che può parzialmente placarsi solo nel mondo, nella natura.

⁵ Sapienza trae questa frase dalla biografia di Huntford, il quale però non indica la fonte.

Durante la traversata della Groenlandia, Nansen si trova per la prima volta in mezzo ai ghiacci di una terra pressoché disabitata, nella solitudine che la compagnia di un piccolo gruppo di uomini ancora consente, alle prese con i mille inconvenienti pratici di un clima e di un ambiente estremi, ancorché attentamente studiati e ponderati prima della partenza. Eppure, nel corso dell'intero diario, quantomeno nella sua rielaborazione a posteriori, le difficoltà vengono raccontate con un tono lieve, che privilegia l'aspetto avventuroso rispetto a quello tragico (Svensen 2011: 388), anche se non di rado Nansen sente la prossimità della morte.

Tuttavia nella narrazione si può rintracciare più di una voce. Se da un lato si tratta indubbiamente dell'espressione di un uomo poliedrico – scienziato, filosofo ed etnologo – dall'altro è proprio in questo contesto che affiorano i molti 'sé', cui si è accennato in precedenza, attraverso cui l'autore medesimo intende rappresentarsi. Grazie all'intrecciarsi di voci diverse, Nansen costruisce i suoi 'sé' letterari – che con l'autore coincidono solo parzialmente – e poi li racconta, lasciandoli parlare. La voce dello scienziato è contenuta, misurata, annota fenomeni atmosferici e coordinate geografiche, così come la voce del capo spedizione, che elenca le scorte alimentari o l'equipaggiamento. Per contro, la voce del «naturfilosof» (Karlsen 2012: 202; filosofo della natura) è quella che si fa udire di più, che modula la melodia del pensiero di Nansen, dispiegandosi pienamente nelle considerazioni sulla natura, che non è nemica, non è avversa, non è matrigna: può certo presentare delle asperità, ma allora sta a Nansen, leader della spedizione, trovare il modo di venire a patti con esse. Ma se la meta è necessariamente il motore immobile dello scienziato, il viaggio può avere senso di per sé per il filosofo, che infatti scrive:

Oghvilken ulykke ersonskeet, Sei uomini alla deriva verso sud su un lastrone di
naar alt kommer til alt? Seks ghiaccio [...]. E se nonostante questo raggiungeremo
mennesker drivende paa la nostra meta, in quel caso di cosa potremo
et isflag sydefter. (Nansen lamentarci? E se non la raggiungeremo che cosa
1890: 95) accadrà? (Trad. di Sapienza; Nansen 2011: 138-139)⁶

Il significato del viaggio non è necessariamente il raggiungimento della meta ma può essere identificato con il viaggio stesso: Nansen trova il senso nell'immersione totale in un ambiente ignoto, aspro, incontaminato e dalla bellezza quasi indescrivibile, trova il senso nell'andare, nel muoversi, metafora della ricerca dell'anima.

Nansen è amante della natura in senso lato ma è profondamente e particolarmente legato all'ambiente nordico, la neve e il ghiaccio sono elementi

⁶ Sapienza traduce dalla versione inglese di Hubert Majendie Gepp (1919), che non si limita a tradurre ma, come si può notare, interpreta e amplia.

con cui sente di potersi misurare grazie alla grande padronanza degli sci e delle racchette da neve, inoltre conosce il buio e il freddo fin da quando è nato. Ha addomesticato alcuni fattori ambientali, è sceso a patti con l'inevitabilità di altri, e pertanto è libero di godere della magnificenza della Natura:

Mens de andre gaar tilkøis, tager jeg første vaggttørn for at fuldende mine skisser av landet, vilkes gjøres med stort besvær, da nætterne allerede er begyndt at blive mørke her, saa langt sydpaa. Alt er stilhed, ingen vind rører sig, selv den voksende donning formaar ikke at bryde freden. Maane er stegen stor og rund med sølsom, rødling glans op over isfladen i øst, en smal guldgldende stribe af kvelden er endnu synlig i nord. Under maane, yderst ude over isen et glinsende band af den rullende hav, indenfor og rundt omkring is og sne og intet andet, – bagenom det grønlandske alpenland med sine vidunderlig skjøne tinder mod en halvmørk, drømmende himmel. [...] Omgivelser og nutid svinder, livet sees i fjernt perspektiv, naturens storhed tvinger det ned. (Nansen 1890: 95)

Faccio il primo turno di guardia per finire i miei schizzi della costa. È molto difficile perché siamo talmente a sud che di notte comincia a fare buio. Presto i pensieri mi inducono ad abbandonare taccuino e matita per contemplare la notte. Vi regna un'immobilità assoluta, non tira un filo di vento e neppure il moto ondosso in aumento riesce a spezzare questa pace. È sorta la luna, grande e rotonda. Ha uno strano bagliore rossastro e risale dalle distese di ghiaccio a oriente mentre a nord c'è ancora una sottile striscia di luce dorata serale. In lontananza, sotto la luna e sopra il ghiaccio c'è una fascia luccicante che permette di vedere il mare aperto; all'interno di tutto questo e tutto intorno ci sono ghiaccio e neve, nient'altro che ghiaccio e neve: oltre, ci sono le Alpi di Groenlandia con le meravigliose e bellissime vette che si stagliano nel cielo buio e trasognato. [...] I pensieri e le forze della natura stessa sembrano permeare lo spazio. (Trad. di Sapienza; Nansen 2011: 137-138)

La studiosa inglese Helen Carr sottolinea come tra il XIX e il XX secolo si verifichi un mutamento essenziale nella letteratura di viaggio, che da scientifica e dettagliata (spesso con propositi esplicitamente didattici) assume un carattere di tipo maggiormente impressionistico, nel quale il vissuto soggettivo del viaggiatore diventa l'istanza principale (Carr 2002: 78; cfr. Karlsen 2013: 140-141). Le righe sopra riportate rappresentano un buon esempio di questa svolta impressionistica, cui Nansen aderisce appieno: «Nansen's intense relationship with nature is expressed by a number of poetic descriptions of the landscape, and in these descriptions, the narrative is highly subjective and emotional» (Karlsen 2013: 145; L'intenso rapporto che Nansen ha con la natura viene espresso in numerose descrizioni poetiche del paesaggio e in queste descrizioni la narrazione è fortemente soggettiva ed emotiva).

Se la traversata della Groenlandia si rivela un trionfo grazie all'utilizzo degli sci, la spedizione della nave Fram, anche se non raggiunge il Polo Nord, può considerarsi un successo perché tocca una latitudine mai raggiunta in precedenza. Viene concepita da Nansen secondo la medesima

filosofia, dato che anziché servirsi di una nave che tenti di andare contro le correnti del mare artico e di resistere alla morsa del ghiaccio, sceglie di assecondare e sfruttare la corrente, lasciandosi imprigionare dal ghiaccio e, divenuto tutt'uno con esso, farsi sospingere alla deriva. La Fram ha una speciale chiglia a forma di mezzo guscio di noce ed è costruita con un legname liscissimo, che non offre appiglio al ghiaccio. Infatti ciò che stimola Nansen a organizzare questo viaggio è la sfortunata esperienza dell'americano George Washington De Long, la cui nave *Jeannette* era stata stritolata dal ghiaccio vicino alle isole della Nuova Siberia nel 1879. Nansen capisce che cercare di contrastare gli effetti dei fenomeni atmosferici può avere solo conseguenze nefaste e quindi adotta la strategia contraria. Egli somma un'intuizione geniale, quella che l'Artico non è una terra, come credono i suoi contemporanei, ma un mare dotato di correnti, alla capacità di ribaltare il punto di vista e i presupposti, nel modo che Sapienza chiama «il capovolgimento della visione del mondo artico» (Nansen 2010: vii).

Grazie a questa capacità di ampliare e, all'occasione, ribaltare il proprio punto di vista, superando la disapprovazione e le polemiche che accompagnano le sue imprese, Nansen riesce anche questa volta a raggiungere il suo obiettivo: il Polo Nord non verrà toccato ma riuscirà a far tornare in patria sana e salva la Fram con tutto l'equipaggio, avendo lui raggiunto sugli sci per primo la latitudine di 86° 14'. Tale impresa consacra Nansen come padre dell'esplorazione polare moderna, in Norvegia e nel resto del mondo.

4. Conclusioni

I diari scritti da Nansen durante la spedizione in Groenlandia e quella a bordo della Fram rappresentano interessanti testimonianze della relazione che intercorre tra letteratura odeporica e letteratura autobiografica, tra raccontare del proprio viaggio e raccontare di sé. Inoltre esse possono essere prese in considerazione per il modo in cui il sé narrato si relaziona con il sé che narra: si può insomma osservare in che misura Nansen plasma e informa il Nansen della narrazione, in che misura scrive e racconta se stesso. Nansen vive una fase di mutamento della letteratura odeporica, collocandosi in un punto di svolta nel quale i resoconti di viaggio diventano, da scientifici, sempre più soggettivi e impressionistici. Il filtro della percezione e della voce di Nansen è chiaramente percepibile, come uno stampo che imprime le forme del pensiero tardo-romantico all'esperienza del viaggio vissuto. Ma non solo. La speciale concezione di Nansen riguardo al rapporto tra uomo e natura caratterizza tutta la narrazione, mettendo in luce gli aspetti che meglio ne esemplificano la simbiosi e la compenetrazione. Si tratta di due narrazioni concepite per

raccontare territori ignoti e imprese avventurose; e tuttavia esprimono in egual misura l'uomo che ne ha scritto, anche attraverso il modo in cui costui sceglie di rappresentare se stesso.

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KVARSTADSRESAN BY AUGUST STRINDBERG:
LETTERS AS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SPACE,
SELF-DEFENCE AND REASSESSMENT OF VIEWS

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1. Introduction

Can letters acquire the status of literature, and can they be considered as a form of autobiography? What happens when fictional letters, which refer to real events such as the publication of a short-story collection and a subsequent trial, serve the purpose of self-explanation and self-clarification? Why is such a hybrid epistolary form employed, and what effects does it create? These are some of the questions elicited by the peculiar essay *Kvarstadsresan* (*Journey into Detention*)¹, consisting of a sequence of twenty-six letters signed «August Strindberg» and dated from April to November 1884 (Strindberg 2009: 119-171). The aim of this article is to discuss the status, form and subject matter of *Kvarstadsresan*, by taking into account that Strindberg was a masterly letter writer, and that the year 1884 was one of the most productive periods of his correspondence (Dahlbäck 1994: 50, 56-58, 434).

If we refer to the theory proposed by Philippe Lejeune in *Le Pacte autobiographique* (1975: 7-46), letters should not be included in the area of autobiography, as they are not normally meant to be published. They are private documents, written before a narrative pact is established with a readership. Furthermore, Strindberg's life is generally represented on a day-to-day basis in letters, as well as in diaries, and therefore they lack a final point of selective retrospection² needed for the project of writing to become the genesis and history of one's personality and the design of one's destiny, the foremost aims of a traditional autobiography (Lejeune 1975: 15; Kondrup 1982: 22-25; Stounbjerg 2005: 50).

Writers can, however, also direct their readers' expectations towards what Lejeune has called «espace autobiographique» (autobiographical

¹ I make consistent use of the English titles of Strindberg's works as translated by Michael Robinson (2009). Whenever works or parts of works are not mentioned by Robinson, as in this case, the translations of titles are mine.

² Retrospection can otherwise occur within the ongoing narration even in letters and diaries.

space), formed by a series of works that may not be autobiographies in the strict sense, but that offer an indirect form of autobiographical pact (Lejeune 1975: 41-43). These types of writers, Lejeune adds (his case study being André Gide), are aware that their correspondence, too, will one day be part of their oeuvre (1975: 169-170). Scholars, Lejeune included, have eventually enlarged their initially quite restrictive definition of autobiography, also by observing how difficult it can be to determine a precise divide between autobiography proper and neighbouring forms, such as letters, diaries, memoirs, self-portraits and autobiographical essays (Kondrup 1982: 9-10, 22-25; Stounbjerg 2005: 414).

As for Strindberg, scholars seem to agree on the autobiographical function of his correspondence. Michael Robinson has observed that «the boundaries between different written discourses tend to dissolve into a single life of scription» for Strindberg, and that his letters represent «perhaps the quintessential method of self-representation» (1986: 29). By applying Lejeune's category, Kerstin Dahlbäck has come to similar conclusions; Strindberg arranged an important part of his oeuvre as an autobiographical space, and his letters must be considered as a part of that space (1991: 86, 89-90). Elena Balzamo has observed that Strindberg's use of letters makes them almost correspond to a diary, and that we can indeed read them as an autobiography (2009: 7, 10).

The fact that Strindberg is a kind of writer who has encouraged readers and critics to interpret his works as a biographical referent, has also had misleading effects in the field of Strindberg studies. Scholars have sometimes taken that biographical referent as the foremost truth to be looked for in the literary oeuvre, and the literary oeuvre as merely a tool for deciphering the psychology of a historical person called August Strindberg. In truth, the strong tradition of biographical research in Sweden has also made valid and necessary contributions, shedding light on circumstances and connections in Strindberg's very complex life. In this respect, Strindberg's letters have been used assiduously as source material. With about 10,000 letters recorded and edited (not considering important parts of his correspondence that have been lost), readers may have the feeling that they can follow Strindberg's life at a close distance day after day, from his early youth to his last years.

Against the positivistic habit of using Strindberg's works as a direct map of his life, an important reaction, inspired by post-structuralism, came with the studies by Michael Robinson (1986; 1992), Kerstin Dahlbäck (1991; 1994), Wolfgang Behschnitt (1999), Per Stounbjerg (2005; 2009) and Eszter Szalczer (2011: 9-14). These scholars have had the merit of considering Strindberg's autobiographical writing in terms of literary practice and intertextual strategies, sometimes with the drawback, as in Behschnitt's case, of making the historical referent, Strindberg's life experience, vanish behind «the author's figure» in the text (1999: 1-74).

The term «autofiction» has been proposed in the international theoretical debate of recent years in order to encompass a range of hybrid forms between autobiography and fiction (Ahlstedt 2011). *Kvarstadsresan* presents authentic material from the writer's life, as well as from the Swedish public debate, albeit through an overt fictional device; can it therefore be described as a form of autofiction? As a matter of fact, the border areas of autofiction are generally autobiography proper and the fictional novel, with the autobiographical novel falling somewhere in between, a situation which makes the use of this term problematic in the case of *Kvarstadsresan*, an autobiographical essay. Furthermore, autofiction is more often referred to the kind of contemporary prose that consciously plays with the ambiguities of fact and fiction, also as a result of the theoretical debate. The concept of autobiographical space, as an area including a variety of forms and genres, such as the essay, the letter or the travelogue, seems indeed more fruitful in the case of *Kvarstadsresan*, and so do the contributions by the above-mentioned scholars who have studied the specific problems of Strindberg's autobiographical writing.

2. Fictional letters as experienced life – actual letters as literature

There is an organic and sometimes genetic relation between Strindberg's letters and his literary output (Dahlbäck 1991: 89-90; Perrelli 1999: 12-13). Even *Kvarstadsresan* is an example of such a connection. The essay was written in November and December 1884 and published in April 1885 (Strindberg 2009: 410-416). It came after a dramatic turn in the author's life and one of the most crucial debates in Swedish public life during the 1880s, concerning the struggle between progressive and conservative forces, intellectual freedom of expression and criticism of authority, and the issue of women's emancipation (Strindberg 1982: 326-366). The fictional letters are addressed to the same silent and anonymous person, a Swedish friend who lives in Dijon, France, and works as a doctor; the sequence creates a subjective, autobiographical narrative, where the epistolary form may seem the thin frame of a pretext. It does, however, draw on the author's real experience of intense letter writing in 1884; in particular, the fictional letters can be said to echo Strindberg's authentic correspondence to several addressees from April to November 1884. Furthermore, epistolary fiction reveals a private space to the readership, making it public and political; the letter form becomes an autobiographical marker of the essay.

As *Kvarstadsresan* too shows, during the mid-1880s Strindberg was becoming aware of the literary use of letters. In late 1886, while working on *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*The Son of a Servant*), his most strictly autobiographical work, he wanted to include the actual letters exchanged

between him and his wife, Siri von Essen, as a part of it. In the naturalistic and fiercely anti-fictional view Strindberg was expressing in that period, those authentic documents from the beginning of their love story, called *Han och hon* (*He and She*), offered a better plot than any novel (1956: 356-358, 381-382; 1958: 17-87 *passim*). *Han och hon* was published posthumously, but it shows the writer's early awareness of the literary, and therefore public, quality of his letters (Robinson 1986: 94-98; Robinson 1992: vii-viii; Strindberg 1996b: 222-230). Moreover, Strindberg was suggesting that his correspondence in general, not only the exchange between himself and Siri, was part of a larger autobiography that had still to be published (1956: 381; 1958: 297; Dahlbäck 1994: 293-294). Later in his life, Strindberg came back to this idea, expressing the desire for all his autobiographical works to be gathered and published in *one* volume; again, his correspondence was included in this huge, hypothetical book. The variety of texts Strindberg mentioned in the lists, first sent to his German translator Emil Schering on 13 June 1904, and then to his publisher Karl Otto Bonnier a couple of weeks later, shows how pluralistic and inclusive his idea of autobiography was (Strindberg 1976: 38-39, 42-43; Robinson 1986: 11-13; Stounbjerg 2005: 25-26).

Strindberg's letters are indeed a masterpiece of Swedish literature, and we must consider them as a literary form in their own right (Dahlbäck 1994: 9-12, 275-294; Perrelli 1999: 11-13). Strindberg's correspondence is also relevant in terms of autobiography. His letters convey the lively images of a writer's multifaceted workshop over the years. Letters are often the first place in which Strindberg tries to discern his life paths in order to prepare himself for future projects, experimenting with viewpoints, staging new attitudes – always choosing for his purpose the most suitable addressee at that moment (Robinson 1992: viii-ix). This workshop, however, is not only a writer's secret room. Strindberg appears in his letters as an author fighting to earn his living on the literary market of high capitalism; he must therefore always promote and sell his product while conceiving it, exchange thoughts with publishers and editors, encourage translation. Therefore Strindberg's letters seem an extremely valuable source also from the viewpoint of the sociology of literature.

3. The origins of *Kvarstadsresan*

Strindberg and his family had moved to Paris in the autumn of 1883, and at the beginning of 1884 they moved again to Switzerland. Strindberg was full of projects and new ideas, had great expectations about broadening his horizons, discovering Europe and leaving behind the literary and political quarrels of his homeland, as vividly shown by his letters, especially from January to May 1884 (Strindberg 1954: 5-190

passim). He was in touch with the front of radical Scandinavian writers, artists and intellectuals (in particular Jonas Lie, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Carl Larsson and Pehr Staaff), with whom he shared a common cause. He was never so certain as now of his true calling as a socially committed writer. As such, he tended to regard fiction as suspect, and was drawn instead to the essay genre, seeing an ideal future form of literature in newspaper articles and other types of non-fiction (Ciaravolo 2012).

At the same time, however, Strindberg was striving to free himself from the political field. The attitudes he shows in his letters are therefore ambivalent and contradictory. In one sense, he was seeking legitimacy by acquiring a transnational profile, especially through the French language, showing that he was independent from Sweden. In another sense, he wanted to use his European perspective as a symbolic capital *within* the Swedish literary field, which he never really abandoned. Whatever he wrote, even in French, was also aimed at showing something to the Swedish reading public and literary establishment³.

In the summer of 1884, when his desire to create fiction reawakened, Strindberg wrote *Giftas* (*Getting Married*), his first collection of short stories about modern marriage⁴; a hot topic in Scandinavian cultural life, especially after Henrik Ibsen's play *Et dukkehjem* from 1879 (Ibsen 2008; *A Doll's House*, trans. by Stephens 2013) (Boëthius 1969: 50-63). He had considered taking a public stance on the subject for some years, and at last the moment had come (Boëthius 1969: 287-291; Strindberg 1982: 321-326). This was a turning point; Strindberg prepared himself for his «October campaign» (Strindberg 1954: 197)⁵, and returned more explicitly to the Swedish and Scandinavian literary field. Women's emancipation was not the only issue about which Strindberg's opinions diverged from the

³ The concepts of «symbolic capital» and «consecration», bestowed within the «literary field», when the writers strive for «autonomy» from the «field of power» (politics and economics), are borrowed from the theory of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1992). This theory is convincingly applied to the situation of Swedish literature in the 1880s by David Gedin (2004: 9-73). Pascale Casanova uses Bourdieu's categories to show that Paris was the central, international place for bestowing literary consecration on writers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (1999). Sylvain Briens has argued that Paris was, for the Scandinavian writers in the last decades of the nineteenth century, rather a «counter-field» and a «laboratory», which did not compromise their sense of a national, Scandinavian literary identity (2010: 43-108). The interaction between nationality, cosmopolitanism and European centres of consecration is explored in recent, interesting contributions by Scandinavian scholars, although not primarily referred to Strindberg; see Nygård 2010; 2011; 2012; Fulsås 2011.

⁴ The second collection, *Giftas II*, came out in 1886. Since then the first collection has been called *Giftas I*.

⁵ «Oktober-kampanjen». Conquering the book market during its high season, autumn, is typically conveyed by Strindberg with a war metaphor.

mainstream of Scandinavian democratic radicalism. He had occasionally voiced anti-Semitic prejudices. Moreover, he had consistently expressed doubts about the whole idea of progress based on civilisation, urbanisation and industrialisation. Strindberg's social utopia corresponded to a form of agrarian socialism inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His position was paradoxical. On the one hand, in spite of his modernity, he was also a nostalgic conservative (Ciaravolo 2012: 275-281); and on the other, everybody in the Scandinavian radical front looked up to him as *the* leading writer in Sweden, a role that in part he certainly wanted to embody.

At the beginning of October 1884, a few days after the publication of *Giftas* in Stockholm, Strindberg was prosecuted for religious blasphemy owing to a passage in the story *Dygdens lön* (*The Reward of Virtue*) that questioned the sacrament of Holy Communion (Strindberg 1982: 50-51). The main critical target of the story was the Swedish Church, and its social power to repress sexuality. As a result of the scandal, all the unsold copies of *Giftas* were impounded and Strindberg was summoned to stand trial in Stockholm. Although he initially argued that he was an expatriate and should therefore have the right to defend himself from Switzerland, he finally felt compelled to return home because his publisher Albert Bonnier would be held responsible and risk a jail sentence should Strindberg not appear (Bonnier 1931: 358-365).

Strindberg arrived in Stockholm on 20 October and was free to return to Switzerland after nearly a month when, on 17 November, a jury found him innocent. This trial is memorable in Swedish legal history as a landmark in favour of freedom of opinion and expression (Lundevall 1958; Modéer 1980). These external events, which apparently marked a great victory for the radicals against the conservatives and royalists, were, however, in strange contrast with what was going on in Strindberg's mind. Such inner focus makes *Kvarstadsresan* interesting. Strindberg's actual letters from the second half of 1884 also offer extraordinary psychological and stylistic evidence of this process, for during these months they reached a point of intense expressiveness. When, in November 1884, he intended to reconsider the *Giftas* issue and the trial retrospectively, he wrote *Kvarstadsresan*, an essay that publicly revealed a process of disillusion and disengagement already formulated in his letters.

4. *Kvarstadsresan*: form and subject matter

Kvarstadsresan uses some of the ingredients of Strindberg's actual correspondence, but at the same time differs from it. As a text examining the genesis, meaning, reception and consequences of *Giftas*, it illustrates the author's workshop as much as his actual letters do. Even the silent addressee reminds us of the instrumental use Strindberg could make

of his real correspondents, whose function often seems to be that of model readers and «blank screen» for Strindberg (Robinson 1992: ix). Fictionalising implies, however, selecting, ordering and applying retrospection to the real series of events (Dahlbäck 1994: 333). Strindberg's authentic letters, on the other hand, typically convey a state of turmoil, and deal with different topics and projects, addressed, as they are, to several individuals at the same time, and displaying a variety of moods, roles and positions. Compared to this unruly flow, *Kvarstadsresan* offers a constructed selection and forms a compact text (Dahlbäck 1994: 332-338), although this still implies the possibility of addressing many topics.

Kvarstadsresan is interesting due to the author's sense of uneasiness, caught as he was between his still strong social commitment and his scepticism regarding his potential political role. In the first part of the essay (the first letter in April), Strindberg proudly depicts himself as having been a driving force behind the cultural and political transformation in Swedish public life since the beginning of the 1880s, listing his literary merits starting from the novel *Röda Rummet* (2009: 119-121; *The Red Room*). With their unveiled descriptions of marital intimacy and conflict, the stories in *Giftas* are presented as the latest outcome of the author's radical social and aesthetic views (2009: 121-122). Strindberg presents himself as a radical socialist, and at the same time insists on the most controversial point of the whole issue: his opposition to women's emancipation.

In this respect the narrator has found a suitable model reader. The silent addressee is another cultivated Swedish expatriate living in a French-speaking country, who can apparently understand the writer, his European perspective and his critical distance from Sweden. Besides, the fact that he is a doctor allows an open discussion of marital intimacy, a central aspect in *Giftas*, as well as in *Kvarstadsresan* when describing the genesis of *Giftas*. The doctor helps the writer clarify his 'physiological' standpoint, according to which nature, through motherhood, has given woman a role that cannot be changed or denied through an absurd demand for equality (Strindberg 2009: 125, 130, 153-158).

In *Kvarstadsresan*, as well as in the preface to *Giftas* (1982: 9-30) and in his letters from the end of June to the end of August 1884 (Strindberg 1954: 228-304 *passim*), Strindberg can in fact mask his conservative standpoint behind progressive arguments. He refuses to accept the idea that women can play any other role besides that of wife, mother and homemaker by affirming that women's true emancipation will only be reached through socialism, a higher, future and vaguely postponed form of social liberation for all⁶. According to Strindberg, the real issue at stake

⁶ Strindberg's fundamental arguments against women's emancipation are examined in detail by Boëthius 1969: 285-402.

is not that of women against men, but that of the lower classes against the upper. In this way, *Kvarstadsresan* plays feminism off against socialism:

Ingen fråga har kommit så olägligt som kvinnofrågan nu. När samhället stod i två klara partier; de mätta och de hungriga, så splittrades de, och man fick två nya partier, nej slagfärdiga barrikad-arméer: män och kvinnor. Vart skall detta ta vägen! Och det hjälper icke att kasta in ett förnuftigt ord och säga att de hungriga även medtagit de hungriga kvinnorna i sitt program, att det icke finns ett socialistiskt parti som ej broderat kvinnan på sin fana. (Strindberg 2009: 129)

No issue has become so untimely at present as feminism. When society consisted of two distinct parties, the satisfied and the hungry, they split, and two new parties, or rather, quick-witted barricade armies, were formed: men and women. What will this lead to?! One drops in vain a reasonable hint, saying that the hungry have included hungry women too in their programme, that there is not a socialist party that has not embroidered a woman on its flag.⁷

No form of feminism will be needed in the socialist, rural society Strindberg dreams of; feminism is a bourgeois phenomenon (Boëthius 1969: 299-303, 378-402); Strindberg's strategy of showing himself as one who assumes the most advanced intellectual standpoint is evidently also a strategy of self-defence. And if it is true that Strindberg's letters are, in a certain sense, monologues and soliloquies (Robinson 1986: 29-30; Perrelli 1999: 15-16; Balzamo 2009: 9-10), they also display the author's hypersensitivity and touchiness towards his addressees' critical standpoints. In this sense they are dialogic, too. Albeit a monologue, *Kvarstadsresan* is in equal measure an answer, an apologetic reply to the objections raised by his real model readers on the radical front. His letter to Pehr Staaff from around 21 August 1884 is, in this respect, significant. Staaff was a friend, a radical intellectual and an editor at Bonnier's publishing house; he had read the manuscript of *Giftas* and had objected to the ideas about women's emancipation expressed in the stories (Strindberg 1954: 302-304; 1982: 331). *Kvarstadsresan* is an outcome of this process, first vividly depicted in the actual letters from August to December 1884, through which a growing anxiety turns into aggressiveness (Strindberg 1954: 302-390 *passim*). It must also be observed that a section of this essay was written and sent to Bonnier as early as 9 September 1884, before the publication of *Giftas* and before the trial (Strindberg 1954: 320-321; 2009: 412-413).

As Robinson writes, Strindberg «produces himself through writing» (1992: x). Even during the *Giftas* issue, he foresees, anticipates and, as it were, stages the following scenarios, which basically deal with his political

⁷ There is not a published English translation of *Kvarstadsresan*. Translations are mine when not stated otherwise.

isolation. In his fight for autonomy, however, he cannot but insist on his ideas. *Kvarstadsresan* gives the impression that the narrator needs isolation from the world outside, detachment from political parties, the conservative ones, of course, but also the progressive. A disquieting sense of the instability of all meanings permeates the essay. Is it a highly engaged writer who is talking to us, or a disengaged one? The perception of crisis is still vague, but the narrator feels that the ground is quaking under his feet: «Jag reser inte hem! Vad inverkan detta kan ha på min existens, det vet jag ej, men jag känner marken gunga» (Strindberg 2009: 138; I am not going back home! I do not know what effect this may have upon my life, but I feel the ground quake).

For Strindberg, the important question at stake here corresponds to what Pierre Bourdieu has described as the autonomy of literary creation from the political field (1992: 73-245). Strindberg is fundamentally aware that he must defend his sense of disharmony if he wants to maintain his autonomy as a writer. His freedom to experiment with viewpoints and his use of contradiction as literary material and strategy are too precious to him:

Helamitt författeri är ju bara ett ändrande av meningar, från det sämre till det bättre, ett desavouerande av mitt gamla hemvävda själv, en kamp mot gamla ideal (= fördomar), och därför är jag så full av motsägelse, så disharmonisk. (Strindberg 2009: 127)

My whole authorship is a sheer change of opinions, from worse to better, a repudiation of my old, homespun Self, a fight against old ideals (= prejudices); that is why I am so full of contradiction, so disharmonic.

Here, at an early stage, we see Strindberg's autobiographical project at its core. Autobiography becomes a performative act of self-renewal, an unceasing process of settlement with the past, a series of crises eliciting revision and regeneration (Robinson 1986: 42-44; Stounbjerg 2005: 17-19, 66-67, 103-105, 409-410; Stounbjerg 2009). In this respect there seems to be a direct line from *Kvarstadsresan* to Strindberg's major autobiographical project, the four volumes of *Tjänstekvinnans son*. It is also interesting to observe that the writer – in the same letter to Albert Bonnier on 4 October 1884, in which he sadly commented on the impounding of *Giftas* – proposed starting to work on his autobiography (Strindberg 1954: 336), which he had already proposed to Hjalmar Branting in July of the same year (1954: 256). Eventually, the personal crisis provoked by the *Giftas* issue must have acted as a spur and reinforced the autobiographical urge. Strindberg had to stand trial physically, in a courtroom, and symbolically, in the courtroom of national public opinion. As Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani has argued, autobiographical writing in the Western tradition borrows its basic patterns – confession, denial, testimony, defence or accusation – from the judicial process (1996: 7-48).

In *Tjänstekvinnans son* the form of the crisis that had deprived Strindberg of his faith in the lower classes, in woman and in God, would become perfectly clear. The seventh chapter *Kvinnan och Det Unga Sverige* (*Woman and Young Sweden*) in the fourth volume (Strindberg 1996a: 170-183), written in 1886-1887 but published for the first time in 1909, gives us a retrospective focus, making it easier for us to see the long-term consequences of the crisis which first appears in *Kvarstadsresan*. Strindberg's detachment from his older, politically committed Self, and from the constrictions of a political «programme» upheld in common with the other radical writers and intellectuals of *Unga Sverige* (Young Sweden), would become a leitmotiv during the period 1884-1887, and it took the form of Strindberg's increasingly extreme position on feminism.

The narrator's crisis in *Kvarstadsresan* is also expressed by his uneasiness in regard to the masses. As Robinson has observed, «it is in writing that Strindberg becomes master of himself and of his life» (1986: 64). In Strindberg we meet an intellectual who can, at any time, use his pen, but is unwilling to show himself and speak in public and elicit applause (Robinson 1986: 47-49, 61-67). The public demand for a leading political role was felt as a shock by Strindberg during his journey to, and his stay in, Stockholm, and it is also a leitmotiv in his actual letters from October to December 1884 (Strindberg 1954: 339-390 *passim*). The same state of mind is reflected in the narrator of *Kvarstadsresan*, here shortly before his journey to Sweden:

Brev hagla omväxlande med telegram. [...] Underklassen fordrar att jag skall komma hem och föra dess talan. De anse processen vara ett slag mot dem, som jag skall parera! – Sää! Jag skall sålunda bli folktribun! Hålla perrongtal, vara martyr! Svara på telegram! Göra landstigning eller tablå på järnvägsstation! Hela den romantiska apparaten, som jag själv belett, skall jag nu arrangera! Jag, en skrivbordsman [...]. (Strindberg 2009: 142)

Letters are hailing alternately with telegrams. [...] The lower classes demand that I return home to plead their case. They consider the trial as a blow against them, which I shall parry! – Very well! I shall thus become a tribune! Hold speeches at the railway platform, be a martyr! Answer telegrams! Make a landing or a tableau at the station! I will have to organise the whole romantic device, which I myself have ridiculed! I, a paperwork man [...].

The *Giftas* issue and the trial also led to Strindberg's quarrel with the elder Norwegian writer Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (Werin 1958; Hoem 2010: 409-424). It was a dramatic event, since Bjørnson was highly admired by Strindberg as the model of contemporary Scandinavian, radical and politically committed authorship. To this subject Strindberg had even dedicated an essay, written in French and published in Paris only a few months earlier (Strindberg 2009: 108-116, 405-409; Ciaravolo 2012: 286-287). During the *Giftas* issue, however, Bjørnson had started to write

letters telling Strindberg what to do and not to do (Dahlbäck 1994: 209-222). Strindberg, irritated by this patronising attitude, broke with Bjørnson by letter. This correspondence between Strindberg and Bjørnson, with its dramatic crescendo and abrupt conclusion, is a masterpiece of Scandinavian literature (Strindberg 1954: 352-356, 360, 367-368, 373; Bjørnson 1961: 196-197, 204-208). On this occasion Strindberg invented some of his best-known epistolary invectives, such as: «Var sann! Bjørnson! Du är falsk som en festtalare» (Strindberg 1954: 355; «Be truthful, Bjørnson! You are as false as an after-dinner speaker!»; trans. by Robinson; Strindberg 1992: 159). Strindberg even seems to stage his rupture with the radical front by choosing the most representative and symbolic addressee.

It is, however, important to observe that the quarrel with Bjørnson is omitted in *Kvarstadsresan*, since it was still unrepresentable in public⁸. In 1884 Bjørnson and Strindberg were both leading figures of the intellectual, radical front in Scandinavia. Like all autobiographical narrative, *Kvarstadsresan* is based on a selection of authentic material, and what is omitted is sometimes as relevant as what is included. The above expression contains, besides a good portion of malignity, the same dismissal of the role of public speaker we find in *Kvarstadsresan*. Bjørnson, on the other hand, felt at ease in that role.

5. Conclusions

Though apparently a victory, the *Giftas* issue marked the beginning of the radical front's retreat and political defeat in Sweden during the second half of the 1880s (Bonnier 1931: 368; Lundevall 1958: 167-170; Myrdal 1985; Gedin 2004: 296-317). Strindberg, who continued to live abroad until 1889, reacted in his own contradictory way by showing himself as a radical socialist in works such as *August Strindbergs Lilla Katekes för Underklassen* (*August Strindberg's Little Catechism for the Lower Classes*) in 1884, and *Utopier i verkligheten* (*Utopias in Reality*) in 1885, but finally taking a critical stance towards his past as a socially committed writer in the autobiography *Tjänstekvinnans son*.

A growing detachment from the intellectual's 'duty' to be socially committed clearly takes shape in *Kvarstadsresan*. And if it is true that Strindberg's hesitation in this respect went back at least to his first literary masterpiece, the historical drama *Mäster Olof* (*Master Olof*) of 1872 – in its display of a problematic lack of understanding between

⁸ This important exception to the fact that *Kvarstadsresan* remolds Strindberg's actual correspondence is not noted in Dahlbäck 1994: 332-338, the most thorough analysis of the essay.

ordinary people and the intellectual who wishes to defend their cause (Strindberg 1994: 57, 85) –, yet *Kvarstadsresan* marked the beginning of a dramatic turning point that drew the writer away from social issues for a long time to come. For this reason, *Kvarstadsresan* was disturbing and unworthy of consideration according to Strindberg's own model readers, such as his publisher Albert Bonnier, his friends and editors Pehr Staaff and Hjalmar Branting (Strindberg 1956: 7-9, 14-17; 2009: 413). Strindberg, who had embodied the victory of free thought against a conservative establishment during the *Giftas* issue (Gedin 2004: 296-304), was relentless in his attack against women's emancipation, which indeed would become an obsession throughout the rest of his career. Branting's disillusioned but firm and convincing argument in the essay *Strindberg och kvinnofrågan (Strindberg and Women's Emancipation)*, from 1885, was that the purported progressive socialist August Strindberg was in fact an out-and-out reactionary on that point (Branting 1927; Boëthius 1969: 285-286). These factors have traditionally made *Kvarstadsresan* a weaker text in Strindberg's oeuvre. In addition, the essay, which uses the epistolary form, lacks the stylistic brilliance and whimsical creativity of Strindberg's actual letters from the same period.

We can however see some merits in this essay. Its hybridism can be seen as a formal aspect, a crossing of genre borders, and a growing awareness of letters as being part of a larger autobiographical space. Hybridism refers however also to the content, as the autobiographical space becomes for Strindberg a space that allows ambivalence and contradictions, and where different points of view compete for the sake of the writer's self-renewal.

The fundamental ambivalence between political engagement and disengagement is already implied in the title of the essay. *Kvarstad* is an old-fashioned and rare word in Swedish. The semantic area it covers corresponds to «impounding», «confiscation» and «detention». Specifically, it refers to the impounded edition of *Giftas*, but also to the author's risk of jail time. More figuratively, it refers to the leitmotiv of the essay, the narrator's feeling of being held hostage in a political role that does not suit him. *Kvarstad* expresses Strindberg's recurrent and cherished self-image of one who is unjustly persecuted. On the other hand, as we have seen in the case of the *Giftas* issue, he cannot tolerate becoming a martyr on behalf of someone else's agenda.

Through fictional letters, a hybrid form is created in *Kvarstadsresan*, intertwining essay, self-defence, autobiography and travel journal. In this original form, Strindberg confesses his personal crisis by making it public. As Per Stounbjerg argues in his seminal study on Strindberg's autobiographical prose (2005), Strindberg practised, as a key figure of early European modernism, a form of *urenhed* (impurity) that he also applied to his autobiographical works. Through his blend of public and private space, of documents, facts and fiction, and through his experimentation with

forms, he blurred precise boundaries. As Stounbjerg concludes, however, Strindberg's impurity was not a fault but rather an expression of his anxiety, a valuable artistic practice and a path to knowledge (2005: 428).

Hybridism makes *Kvarstadsresan* a valuable case study, as it directs the reader's attention to the author's inner life and the development of his personality, with its doubts, uncertainties and revisions, thus contributing to define an autobiographical space, while being, at the same time, a political text discussing crucial issues of Swedish public life in the 1880s. Such a practice made Strindberg politically problematic, controversial and even unusable, but it promoted his literary autonomy.

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OLA HANSSON E AUGUST STRINDBERG.
INTERSEZIONI E TRASFIGURAZIONI AUTOBIOGRAFICHE
DALLA «CITTÀ DEI PECCATI»

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1. Qual è la *verità* di un'autobiografia letteraria? I fatti? Qualche volta, alcuni fatti espressi e narrati e, ovviamente, pure o soprattutto quelli omessi. In generale, la *verità* dell'autonarrazione si rinviene quando l'autore riesce a esprimere, nel tono e nei modi stilistici opportuni, la vividezza di certi *umori* dominanti in precisate *situazioni esistenziali*. Di più, però, non si può chiedere o raramente si dà. Il resto, anzi, proprio le dichiarazioni di assoluta oggettività da parte degli autori, quelle sì che sono menzogna pura. Tanto più che spesso (e sarà il caso di Strindberg) l'autobiografia si configura solo come un modo per definire personali strutture estetiche o la percezione esistenziale che si ha del proprio operare soggettivo e della propria funzione intellettuale.

Riconosco di aver tratto da Henrik Ibsen – probabilmente il meno autobiografico dei grandi nordici dell'Ottocento – alcuni termini introduttivi, visto che neanche lui poté sottrarsi dal dichiarare: «Ogni mia creazione si origina in un mio umore e in una situazione esistenziale» (Ibsen 2005: 426)¹. L'idea strindberghiana che «*uno scrittore sia soltanto uno che riferisce ciò che ha vissuto*» (Strindberg 1948: 190; corsivo nell'originale) si pone di fatto come qualcosa che, pur con differenti e più morbide declinazioni, riguarda non solo i principali esponenti del realismo nordico, ma anche – dopo il 'cambiamento dei segnali' alla fine del XIX secolo – coloro che miravano al suo trascendimento nel simbolismo, se non nel misticismo. Persino questi autori, ribelli a una pretesa arte *oggettiva*, non riuscirono sostanzialmente a perdere il contatto con l'impressione che la scrittura creativa e persino il saggio critico potessero trarre una vitalità peculiare e una verità essenziale dalla memoria, dall'osservazione diretta e dal coinvolgimento personale negli eventi.

Lo verificiamo in Ola Hansson, che nel 1893 pubblica a Kristiania *Fru Ester Bruce* (La signora Ester Bruce). Si tratta del classico romanzo decadente, che coglie la vita nel momento in cui riconosce l'irrimediabile fatalità e tardività dell'amore e i cui personaggi si fronteggiano più sul

¹ Le traduzioni dagli originali sono dell'autore del saggio.

piano dell'intuizione, della raffinata comunicazione psicologica, che di uno sviluppo avventuroso o incalzante degli eventi. Lars Åkesson è un giurista e un dandy, che, scapolo, sfugge a ogni progetto di matrimonio finché un'estate, in Scania, non incontra la malinconica, pallida e flessuosa Ester Bruce, una signora divorziata con una figlioletta che vive con lei; la donna ha una strana aria meridionale, che nel suo *dolorismo* arieggia Eleonora Duse (Perrelli 2009). L'attrazione che presto lega la coppia è un singolare istinto aristocratico e «una simpatia e un piacere tranquilli, del tutto impersonali» che fanno sì che Lars ed Ester si stagolino nobilmente rispetto alle altre figure e figurine di contorno del romanzo (Hansson 1920: 43). Insomma, un vero amore da *superuomini*, secondo la lezione nietzschiana rielaborata assai personalmente da Ola Hansson, uno dei suoi primi discepoli sul continente.

Pur non trovandoci propriamente di fronte a un'autobiografia, il romanzo sin dall'ambientazione appare pregno di assai consistenti echi personali e, viepiù, in quei capitoli nei quali si descrive – in una parentesi della sua intensa fascinazione per Ester – l'occasionale soggiorno di Åkesson a Copenaghen, dove ha modo d'incontrare l'ex marito della donna, il pittore Ödman, sentendo ovviamente scatenare in sé «un caos dei più forti e contraddittori sentimenti» (Hansson 1920: 87). Il ritratto di Ödman, specie nel capitolo XIII, è, del resto, piuttosto fosco e largamente affidato a un suo sodale, l'alcolizzato Randrup:

Ödman è un maniaco. In lui non c'è più un io; al contrario, solo un complesso d'idee fisse. Puro midollo, senza un cervello da tenere sotto controllo. [...] Ödman è un ammasso midollare. Il suo ultimo quadro l'avete visto? No? Il vasto mare, un bollente giorno di luglio; il mare tranquillo, lucente; l'atmosfera assolata. Davanti una striscia di spiaggia; la sabbia giallo-chiara irrita davvero la vista; si ha la netta sensazione di come bruci sulla pelle. E poi... posta in primo piano, in modo che si abbia l'impressione che sia in procinto di fuoriuscire dalla cornice e precipitare... Una donna. Nuda, distesa supina, le braccia tese a croce rispetto al tronco, una gamba, quasi una zampa, tutta stesa in lunghezza, quella posteriore acutamente piegata al ginocchio. La testa inclinata sul braccio davanti in basso e lei che ti fissa, ipnotica. Grandioso! Già, ma che succede? Non sarà mai che batta le ciglia alla forte luce del sole? O per la libidine? Ti striscia dentro manco ti si solleticasse sotto la pianta del piede e alla sensazione se ne prova vera ripugnanza. È qualcosa che proviene dall'espressione del volto, che è sfacciata, abietta. E poi dalla carnagione: si dovrebbe credere che il pittore visualizzi in retina colori cadaverici. Un'idea fissa, un'altra delle sue idee fisse; gli si fissano ovunque: nell'occhio, nell'orecchio, nel sesso. Ödman è un maniaco. E come t'intitola il quadro? *Madame Pan!* (Hansson 1920: 104-105)

Come si fa – continua Randrup – a individuare un tale riferimento mitico e classico-rinascimentale in «una puttana su una spiaggia estiva al sole»? Insomma: «Ödman sarà pure un genio, ma nessuno lo capisce.

No, proprio nessuno. E perché mai dovrebbe capirlo? Mica vuol farsi capire lui». Sicché, in fin dei conti, può anche darsi che «il maniaco» sia soltanto «un idiota» (Hansson 1920: 104-105).

Ed ecco che, finalmente, fa la sua comparsa il prodigo ma squattrinato Ödman, seguito dal suo scodinzolante assistente Peters. Si siede a tavola con Randrup e Åkesson e comincia a sproloquiare: «Il pittore parlava e parlava; nessun altro riusciva a interloquire. Non parlava a qualcuno di preciso; non sembrava neppure preoccuparsi se qualcuno stesse ad ascoltare; [...] lui chiacchierava e chiacchierava... ma senza un nesso, più passava il tempo e al ritmo delle bottiglie di punch che s'accumulavano sulla tavola». Così, il ristorante si svuota, ma l'insopportabile Ödman delinea grandiosi piani di mostre in Scania e poi attacca sulle donne, uno dei suoi argomenti preferiti: «Io la donna la conosco. Eccezioni? *Non esiste* eccezione alcuna. Quale eccezione? Già, perché... voi... vi... fate ingannare! Ingannare, dico!... Vedete, ci ho esperienza io. Dovreste proprio venire a scuola da me. Voi non lo sapete, ma, vedete, anch'io ho avuto una moglie... Ed... era... una... Adesso sentirete...». Hansson, perfidamente, a questo punto fa allontanare il pittore per qualche improvvisa necessità, sicché quando ritorna per completare il suo racconto non ritrova più Åkesson che, annoiato e segretamente offeso nei propri intimi sentimenti, ha colto l'occasione per dileguarsi. Purtroppo Randrup è crollato e dorme e a Ödman non resta, trionfo, che consolarsi con Peters: «Eh diavolo, se n'è andato! Paura ci aveva, sai!» (Hansson 1920: 109-110).

Al rientro in Scania, «con un calore e un sentimento solenni» mai provati prima (Hansson 1920: 111), Åkesson sente di avere recuperato una dimensione esistenziale più autentica e, giunto l'autunno, decide di dichiararsi all'amata. Ester non ne è sorpresa: l'attrazione era stata reciproca e istintiva. Tuttavia, la donna si rivela, decadentemente, «morta» nello spirito, consumata dalla volgarità e dai colpi della vita. La separazione dal «volgare» Ödman era stata dolorosa, ma fatta con piena consapevolezza personale e aveva forse dischiuso la prospettiva di una rinascita. Ester non sa tuttavia se, un giorno, non possa essere costretta ad ammettere di «avere troppo poco da offrire» all'uomo che finalmente sente di amare e i due si separano con affettuoso ma dolente reciproco rispetto (Hansson 1920: 137-143).

Nonostante l'incedere insieme solenne e minimalista (si direbbe oggi), pacato e ostentatamente aristocratico della narrazione di Hansson, i capitoli ambientati a Copenaghen, con al centro il personaggio gaglioffo di Ödman, rivelano un singolare scarto narrativo², per giunta nettamente

² Non ha affatto torto Adolf Paul a giudicare i capitoli contro Strindberg arbitrari e «senza alcun rapporto strutturato con il resto del romanzo, finendo solo per disturbare il delicato studio psicologico dell'anima femminile che il libro propone» (Paul 1930: 163).

satirico, confermando che persino *Fru Ester Bruce* non sfugge all'idea che un racconto debba partire da esperienze soggettive come da modelli osservati e criticati, divenendo, in tal senso, *à clef* o, per dirla in svedese, un *nyckelroman*. Se ci soffermiamo, pertanto, sul XIII capitolo di *Fru Ester Bruce*, Hansson focalizza in stretta sintesi alcuni personaggi ed eventi di cui era stato testimone a contatto con August Strindberg (su cui è appunto modellato l'odioso e misogino Ödman) durante il suo soggiorno berlinese nel 1892-1893.

2. Lo sfortunato incontro con Strindberg non era, per Hansson, un semplice tema autobiografico, ma uno snodo cruciale della vita, qualcosa che si potrebbe insieme definire *fatale e desolante* (proprio come appare implicito nella singolare risonanza del cognome Ödman). Soprattutto a partire dal novembre del 1888, Hansson e Strindberg avevano dialogato fittamente tra di loro. L'atto unico *Paria* del 1889 – cosa abbastanza sorprendente per un drammaturgo *indipendente* come Strindberg – era stato tratto (pur con una consistente rielaborazione) addirittura da una novella dell'amico, con il quale si era venuta a costituire una sorta di alleanza intellettuale, all'insegna di Friedrich Nietzsche, di una nuova «psicologia» sia lombrosiana sia inquisitiva e suggestiva alla maniera di Edgar Allan Poe e soprattutto del pessimismo (Holm 1957: 50-51).

Si trattava di un sodalizio mirante a rivoluzionare tanto i più vieti schemi dell'imperante realismo («Lo Zolismo, con la pittura della natura e la sua messinscena, non sembra più sulla cresta dell'onda», osservava infatti Strindberg. «Non c'è da stupirsi che io non voglia essere un'appendice, essendo abituato a stare in testa») quanto a contrastare il rampante spirito della Rinascenza, bandito, in quello scorcio di *fin de siècle*, da Verner von Heidenstam (Strindberg 1961: 212, 217-218, 391). Hansson stesso riconoscerà, in un suo saggio pubblicato in Germania nel 1891, che Strindberg, «poeta del soggettivismo», soprattutto nella sua drammaturgia della fine degli anni Ottanta, aveva attinto il «grande stile che dilata il destino umano a simbolo grandioso» (Hansson 1921b: 103, 109).

Fu grazie a Ola Hansson e a sua moglie, la letterata Laura Marholm, che, nell'ottobre del 1892 – subito dopo il doloroso divorzio da Siri von Essen – uno Strindberg precipitato nell'«inferno» e nella «*misère*» delle sue varie difficoltà esistenziali (Strindberg 1965: 65), poté abbandonare la Svezia per aprire una nuova fase a Berlino, dove in effetti conseguì persino qualche successo teatrale, sebbene fosse ormai soprattutto orientato verso gli esperimenti scientifici e la pittura, che «realizzava con la spatola piuttosto che col pennello» (Paul 1930: 43). Dopo poche settimane, però, l'insofferente Strindberg ruppe clamorosamente con i suoi benefattori, che finirono presto per ritrovarsi in ombra e isolati a causa della sua ingombrante presenza intellettuale (Holm 1957: 392-394), che di fatto divenne un riferimento per una variopinta colonia cosmopolita che si riuniva al locale Zum schwarzen Ferkel, famoso per i suoi 900 tipi di alcolici. Scrive Strindberg in *Klostret* (Il chiostro):

Ci si sentiva come a casa, se si era del giro, ma se capitava un estraneo curioso provava disagio oppure si sentiva come un intruso in una cerchia chiusa. Lì [...] c'era tutto [per sbrigare i propri affari persino letterari], tranne un orologio, per cui si perdeva la cognizione del tempo [...].

Proprio lì, al principio dell'ultimo decennio del secolo, si erano stabiliti gli emigrati nordici. Una curiosa mescolanza di talenti in cerca di riconoscimento, comprensione e pane; refrattari e arrabbiati nei confronti di coloro ch'erano rimasti in patria.

[...] Agli scandinavi s'erano intanto aggregati alcuni indigeni e un russo, attirati come tignole dalla luce che veniva dal Nord³, alla ricerca di calore, trovandovi però solo un gelo glaciale. Infatti, verso la fine di questo periodo, lo scetticismo s'era insinuato nel movimento e si era giusto in procinto di liberarsi dell'impasto fermentato del naturalismo. Gli stranieri pertanto trovavano solo feci dove s'erano aspettati nutrimento. Si stava in agguato per conquistare per primi la nuova formula dell'opera d'arte e letteraria del futuro. (Strindberg 1994: 16-17)

Al gruppo dello *Zum schwarzen Ferkel* appartenevano, tra gli altri, il letterato finlandese Adolf Paul e il botanico Bengt Lidforss (rispettivamente il *factotum* di Ödman, Peters, e Randrup, in *Fru Ester Bruce*). Tra i frequentatori di quel famoso locale c'era anche Edvard Munch, che tentava di affermarsi in Germania e con il quale Strindberg ebbe un rapporto assai contrastato, in primo luogo perché sussisteva tra i due una singolare concorrenza artistica, evidenziata da un aneddoto (forse spurio), per cui, all'epoca, all'affermazione dello svedese: «Io sono il più grande pittore della Scandinavia!», il norvegese avrebbe ribattuto: «In tal caso, io sono il più grande drammaturgo. Salute!» (Dittmann 1981: 94).

La rivalità fra i due avrebbe avuto un secondo cogente motivo: nel marzo del 1893 (poco prima di sposare Frida Uhl), Strindberg ebbe una breve tumultuosa relazione con una giovane pianista legata a Munch, la focosa *femme fatale* (ma anche intellettuale) norvegese, Dagny Juel. Costei – leggiamo in *Klostret* – era «una bionda alta e diafana, che pareva smagrita da una malattia; con un tono dolente e afflitto nella voce, parlava in maniera strascicata e aveva uno sguardo esausto» (Strindberg 1994: 39). In una lettera a Georg Brandes del 26 giugno 1894, Strindberg racconta:

Vivevo a Berlino, vedovo e in attesa del vento che mi trascinasse verso la terra ferma. Non avendo dimora, come altri alla deriva, frequentavo l'osteria per scambiare due chiacchiere con qualcuno. Ed ecco che si presenta un pittore norvegese con una donna: il pittore si dava le arie nei miei confronti (non sapeva infatti che io avevo avuto due donne, cosa di cui ritenevo non fosse il caso di vantarsi). La donna era incuriosita da Sg, il misogino, e il suo amante presuntuoso. In breve, feci onore a me stesso – e poi mi ritirai. Questo mandò la donna su tutte le furie. (Strindberg 1968: 107)

³ È la celebre espressione usata da Hermann Sudermann, nel 1893, per sancire la forte influenza della letteratura nordica in Germania in quel periodo, che Strindberg farà altresì coincidere con un «Rinascimento scandinavo» (Paul 1930: 75; Strindberg 1965: 104, 123-124).

La donna, in Strindberg, appare raramente con un'unica faccia, essendo creazione dei cangianti umori del maschio e, nello stesso romanzo autobiografico, leggiamo: «Ma era brutta e vestiva male tanto che, qualche volta, lui si vergognava all'idea di essere preso per un suo ammiratore. Allora, s'affacciava un'indicibile pietà nei suoi confronti, che lei scambiava per sottomissione»; questi sentimenti erano viepiù complicati dal naturale disagio nei confronti di Munch, ma soprattutto di Frida Uhl, di cui Dagny finiva per «rimandargli il riflesso, tanto che le loro immagini si confondevano» e interferivano (Strindberg 1994: 39-40). Va da sé che dobbiamo prendere queste memorie – come s'è premesso – con la piena coscienza che l'autobiografia restituisce, se va bene, qualche sentimento, ma poco di fattuale. Per esempio, chi darà il giusto ritratto di Dagny: la contraddittoria memoria di Strindberg o quella di Adolf Paul, che la descrive «bionda, snella, elegante e vestita con una raffinatezza che forse intendeva mettere in evidenza la flessuosità del corpo, ma evitando di esaltare troppo il profilo delle linee» ecc. (Paul 1930: 91)?

Certo è che il quadro descritto da Randrup, in *Fru Ester Bruce*, potrebbe essere attribuibile sia allo stile di Strindberg sia a quello di Munch, tanto più che la modella di Madame Pan è indubbiamente Dagny Juel, «l'unica donna, la cui influenza si riflette direttamente e ripetutamente nei lavori [munchiani] più significativi degli anni Novanta» (Dittmann 1981: 100)⁴. Certo è pure – se stiamo a quanto afferma Adolf Paul – che fu Dagny Juel «l'elemento che fece esplodere la cerchia che si riuniva ai tavoli» dello Zum schwarzen Ferkel (1930: 92). Dagny, infatti, sarebbe passata, con un rapido giro di amanti, dalle braccia di Munch a quelle di Strindberg per essere ceduta ad altri («[...] in un mese appena, s'era fatta quattro nazionalità»; Strindberg 1968: 108)⁵, ma poi sposare un'altra eminente figura dello Zum schwarzen Ferkel, lo scrittore polacco satanista Stanisław Przybyszewski (il «russo» cui accennava Strindberg, nelle sue opere altresì denominato Popoffsky, che aveva soccorso lo scrittore svedese dopo la sua rottura con gli Hansson)⁶. Fu così che Berlino da «città della rinascita» (Strindberg 1968: 6) si trasformò nella fantasia di Strindberg,

⁴ Si è ancora sottolineato che, nel 1893, Strindberg e Munch avrebbero esposto insieme a Berlino in una «mostra di [artisti] rifiutati» (Söderström 1972: 216-219).

⁵ Qualche dubbio che la Juel fosse davvero amante di Munch è sollevato, comunque, in Meyer 1985: 267.

⁶ Uno Strindberg particolarmente indiscreto si diffonde sulle vicissitudini erotiche di Dagny in una lettera a Georg Brandes del 26 giugno 1894: «Avevamo in precedenza accoppiato la madama a un polacco e L[idfors, suo pretendente,] divenne *Hausfreund* (in seguito, il Norvegese [Munch] e il Prussiano [Schleich] subentrarono come Amici degli sposini» (Strindberg 1968: 107-109). In effetti, anche la vita sessuale dei coniugi Przybyszewski sarebbe stata piuttosto libera e avventurosa e la povera Dagny Juel sarebbe stata assassinata in un albergo di Tbilisi da un amante, nel 1901 (Norseng 1991: 63).

assediato da questi fantasmi e dagli scrupoli morali – man mano che si sarebbe addentrato nella crisi religiosa narrata in *Inferno* – nella «città dei Peccati» (Strindberg 1974: 123).

Fru Ester Bruce di Ola Hansson si presenta tutt'altro che come un caso isolato di rievocazione in chiave soggettiva di questi eventi e delle figure che li animavano. Anzi, la cerchia di Zum schwarzen Ferkel si lasciò alle spalle una scia di racconti, memorie o saggi memoriali, più o meno *à clef*, reciprocamente abbastanza denigratori, che fanno intendere come quella singolare fervida fucina d'idee, di sbornie e d'intrecci sessuali, fosse anche un nido di vipere.

Bengt Lidforss, che pure aveva tradotto l'*Antibarbarus* di Strindberg in tedesco, avrebbe aperto il fuoco, in almeno due occasioni, contro le stesse teorie monistiche del suo autore, arrivando a sostenere che erano del massimo interesse più per lo psicologo che per uno scienziato. Da parte sua, Laura Marholm scrisse un saggio su Strindberg, nel quale si sottolineava la sua spiccata sospettosità, l'istintività apolide e l'incoerenza quasi programmatica del carattere dell'uomo e dell'opera, attribuite, razzialmente, al selvaggio «sangue finno-lappone» che gli scorreva nelle vene. Adolf Paul, nel 1895, maltrattò invece sia gli Hansson sia Strindberg (che denigrò pure nella novella *En charlatan* [Un ciarlatano] del 1895) nel romanzo *Med det falska och det ärliga ögat* (Con l'occhio falso e l'occhio onesto; Sprinchorn 1968: 39-40). Nonostante Strindberg fosse ossessionato per tutta la vita dalla coppia dei Przybyszewski – avvertiti (insieme a Munch) come pericolosi nemici giurati (cfr. *Inferno*) – solo Stanisław scrisse di lui, in due occasioni negli anni Venti, tutto sommato, con qualche considerazione, valutando tuttavia la misoginia dello svedese «una sadiana tortura di quella femmina che occultava dentro di sé» (cit. in Wilczek 1985: 140).

Strindberg naturalmente lesse sia il saggio della Marholm sia *Fru Ester Bruce* di Ola Hansson, le cui cattiverie attribuì comunque implacabilmente alla moglie (Strindberg 1968: 83), e – ligio al principio di non concedere la soddisfazione «di mettersi da solo contro il muro, mentre, impuniti, gli altri gli sparano addosso» (1968: 109) – non mancò, ovviamente, di dare una propria risposta letteraria. Anzi, *ad abundantiam*, ne diede almeno tre: immediatamente, con *La Genèse d'une Aspasié* del 1894, che fa parte della seconda serie di *Vivisektioner* (Vivisezioni) scritte in francese; nel 1898, nei primi due capitoli del menzionato romanzo *Klostret* (pubblicato nel 1966) che probabilmente deriva da un progetto letterario risalente al 1893 (Strindberg 1965: 189)⁷, ma che, nel 1902, verrà infine rielaborato (non senza palesi incongruenze) in *Karantänmästarens Andra Berättelse*

⁷ Pare che proprio lo Zum schwarzen Ferkel fosse stato altresì denominato 'il Chiostro' per la sua vaga somiglianza architettonica con una cappella, ma fors'anche – sospetteremmo – per un'assonanza fra *krogen* (l'osteria) e *klostret* (Strindberg 1972: 30-31; 1994: 15).

(Secondo racconto del maestro di quarantena). Questi ultimi due titoli sono ufficialmente riconosciuti dall'autore, nel 1898 e nel 1904, fra le opere che compongono il suo screziato piano autobiografico o «lefnadssaga» (Strindberg 1972: 28; 1974: 38).

Noteremo che, in tutti e tre i casi, *autobiografia* implica per Strindberg un forte travestimento di persone (nella versione del 1902, il protagonista – cosa che dev'essere costata un certo sforzo all'autore – si dichiara norvegese), di circostanze (sempre in questa versione, l'eroe si occupa di letteratura e di storia piuttosto che di alchimia), nonché uno slittamento di luoghi (per esempio, nella *Vivisezione* la vicenda è ambientata a Monaco, mentre da *Klostret a Karantänmästarens Andra Berättelse* si oscilla dalla Germania alla Danimarca) (Strindberg 1974: 208). Insomma, anche in questo caso, una trasformazione inventiva piuttosto profonda con una caratteristica contaminazione dell'autobiografia con la formula del racconto *à clef*.

3. Analizziamo ora brevemente *La Genèse d'une Aspasie* (Strindberg 2011: 208-212), che potremmo considerare una vivisezione autobiografica, ovvero, nello specifico, un'analisi a sfondo psicologico, che costituisce soprattutto lo schema dei primi capitoli di *Klostret* e, almeno cronologicamente, ha il vantaggio di essere prossima a *Fru Ester Bruce*. Ne *La Genèse d'une Aspasie*, Strindberg, sintetizzando un resoconto della sua vita a Berlino, si camuffa dietro il nome assai svedese di Per Andersson, pur presentandosi come uno scrittore danese chiamato a Monaco per risolvere le sorti della poesia bavarese in crisi.

In quella città, Andersson ha un allievo compatriota, tale Honson (e non è per nulla difficile capire di chi si tratta), che è accompagnato da una moglie (anche in questo caso comprendiamo senza problemi di chi si parla), la quale, a causa dei suoi limiti intellettuali, ambisce invano a divenire «la Jeanne d'Arc de la Jeune Bavière», sicché: «Enragée par ce mécompte elle fait venir le grand Andersson destiné au rôle de la glu par où les oisillons devaient être pris». Una situazione del genere non può reggere e avviene presto una rottura, mentre Andersson-Strindberg diventa il riferimento di quei «jeunes cerveaux» che – si riconosce quantomeno graziosamente – erano stati «préparés d'avance par son élève Honson». Pertanto: «Là il dissémine les graines de son intelligence mûre, de ses matériaux immenses d'observations sur la vie qu'il sait exploiter par sa faculté combinatoire reconnue».

La cerchia che si stringe attorno ad Andersson ha «cinq chef-apôtres»: un letterato polacco (Stanisław Przybyszewski); un pittore svedese, «portraitiste, privé de fantaisie» e per di più frustrato (nientemeno che Edvard Munch!), il quale, nella sua modestia (!), non sa fare altro che «peindre les visions souvent abstraites du maître», copiandone lo stile pittorico; un chirurgo bavarese di qualche talento artistico (Carl Ludwig

Schleich), che «rêvait une renaissance dans les sciences naturelles» comunque «déjà préparée par Andersson», il quale oltre che pittore, era pure «naturaliste et poète»; «le barde dithyrambique Munichois» (ovvero il poeta Richard Dehmel) e «le dernier des derniers, petit littéraire illittéraire» (Adolf Paul), nella sua assoluta meschinità, particolarmente protetto e nutrito intellettualmente da Andersson che, del resto, spende il suo genio senza risparmio: «L'art de la composition, les secrets du style, le flair de dénicher le prochain mouvement en avant des lettres».

Il racconto però si addensa attorno a un micro-nocciolo erotico-romanzesco. Il risultato di tanto impegno e tanta generosità è che quattro degli apostoli, divenuti autonomi, si allontanano da «la table du maître au Cochon Noir» (si noti che qui il nome del locale berlinese viene mantenuto), sicché – proprio come in *Fru Ester Bruce* – Andersson deve accontentarsi della compagnia del quinto, il quale, nonostante la sua nullità, si dà persino delle arie. Il maestro, allora, «poussé» dalla tipica dinamica dei geni maschili strindberghiani (si pensi ad Axel Borg di *I havsbandet* del 1890 [Strindberg 1982; *Mare aperto*, trad. di Ferrari 2014]) ovvero «par un besoin de rendre le superflu de son âme fertile, s'attache à une fille de famille qui l'aime» (e qui entra in scena la futura seconda moglie di Strindberg, l'austriaca Frida Uhl). Mancano però le condizioni economiche per un matrimonio e la fanciulla si allontana da Monaco, mentre Andersson «fait sa rentrée au Cochon noir», proprio nel momento in cui il pittore svedese v'introduce una sua amante, pianista di raffinata educazione, descritta più o meno con le stesse parole che abbiamo citato da *Klostret*: «Haute de taille, decharnée, usée par la boisson et les veilles, elle parlait d'une voix languissante comme brisée de larmes dévorées». Attirata dal genio di Andersson, di cui è fervente ammiratrice, gli piomba fra le braccia, abbandonando il pittore.

A contatto con lei, indubbiamente, Andersson ringiovanisce e, a sua volta, ravviva la donna liberandola «des angoisses et des remords d'une vie irrégulière, et elle se redresse, regagne l'estime de soi-même». Così, «le créateur admire sa création et au bout d'une semaine ils accomplissent l'union de leurs âmes». Presto, però, interviene il capovolgimento – tipicamente strindberghiano – dei sentimenti o degli umori: Andersson avverte all'improvviso la donna laida e volgare ed evita con lei il ripetersi della «chûte» (*sic*). Così, si ritira, ma non riuscendo a liberarsene, la cede all'amico medico.

La donna, nell'ambiente del Cochon noir, è diventata Aspasia⁸ e – anche in questo caso con la classica strindberghiana «haine féroce de l'obligée envers le créancier» – comincia a odiare sempre di più Andersson, il quale continua, imperturbabile, a dirigere con la sua intelligenza superiore i suoi

⁸ Aspasia era l'etera che sarebbe stata sposata da Pericle e che, con inessenziale variazione, in *Klostret*, si trasformerà in Laïs. Su Dagny Juel, Adolf Paul osserva lapidario: «Presto fu ribattezzata Aspasia. E fece onore a quel nome» (1930: 92).

apostoli, vere «poupées qui dansent devant lui». Anche il medico però si stanca presto della pretenziosa Aspasia e, con la complicità di Andersson, la gira al polacco. Quando il nuovo amante tornerà al Cochon noir con la sua fiamma, accolto da applausi che dobbiamo immaginare assai maligni, non sarà in grado di fronteggiare la presenza di Andersson e tenderà ad appartarsi con Aspasia. Dopo tutto, ne è innamorato e se ne assicura il possesso «contre des successeurs par un mariage légitime».

La cerchia del Cochon noir si scioglie quando pure Andersson si allontana per sposare finalmente Frida Uhl. A completare la parabola dell'artista senza fama ma «emancipata» da tutto – come scrive Strindberg in *Klostret* – meno che «dalla vanità femminile di comparire attorniata da un nugolo di uomini che poteva vantarsi di aver conquistato» (1994: 39), dopo un'estate tranquilla, in autunno, la novità: Aspasia inaugura un suo «salon» per gli intellettuali di Monaco, comparendo come «le génie régénérateur» dello spirito moderno e con l'aiuto di «le cercle du Chocon noir» si costituisce «en écoles moderne», volutamente dimentica di Andersson: «En leur demandant ce que c'est que le moderne, ils repondent: C'est nous!»⁹. Andersson viene considerato sorpassato: «Tout de même leur moderne c'est de l'Andersson pur!». Un anno dopo, si verificherà puntualmente l'esuberante produzione di una letteratura che denigra o plagia Andersson: «Eh bien, que voulez-vous? C'est la vie, quoi?» – conclude Strindberg – «Mais c'est de l'Aspasia en surplus» (2011: 212).

4. A ben vedere, sia in *Fru Ester Bruce* sia in *La Genèse d'une Aspasia*, il frammento autobiografico regola i conti, ma rivela pure preminenti intenti automitizzanti. Nel romanzo, nella figura di Åkesson a Copenaghen, Hansson si contrappone al volgare cosmopolita dissociato Ödman, esaltandosi come il fine superuomo intellettuale radicato nel suolo natio, ovvero nelle intense atmosfere di una Scania rurale (stridentemente contrapposta alla metropoli delle chiacchiere, delle manie e dei bagordi degli intellettuali), mettendo in campo la memoria autobiografica della tenuta di Källgården, nella quale Hansson aveva scritto *Sensitiva amorosa* (Holm 1957: 139-140, 361). Åkesson incarna pertanto il mito del contadino come aristocratico, che Hansson aveva tratto da Julius Langbehn, e il quadro di *Madame Pan* finisce per essere l'archetipo di una specie di *arte degenerata*, cui si riconnette sia la pittura di Strindberg sia quella di Munch, pseudoartisti così lontani da un nobile esponente della «pacatezza vitale» quale Arnold Böcklin, che aveva affrontato lo stesso mito («il più profondo, opaco e ricco d'interpretazioni che l'antichità

⁹ Una malinconica descrizione di questo *salon*, popolato da Lidforss e Munch, presumibilmente in preda ai fumi dell'alcol, è nelle memorie di Frida Uhl (Uhl Strindberg 1933, 2: 203).

abbia consegnato all'umanità» e, ovviamente, antitetico al cristianesimo; Hansson 1921a: 215, 217, 241). Il frammento autobiografico *à clef* occulta, insomma, una polemica culturale: per Hansson, sono i maestri di un pensiero forte – Nietzsche, Langbehn e Böcklin – i veri *interpreti e profeti* del futuro¹⁰, non quelli del dubbio e della disgregazione astratta, Strindberg e Munch.

Anche la *vivisezione* di Strindberg ha però uno spessore che trascende la mera denigrazione. Vari testimoni e, in particolare, Carl Ludwig Schleich, hanno indicato Strindberg come «la stella più splendente» di Zum schwarzen Ferkel (Schleich 1961: 62), ma Göran Söderström, con condivisibile equilibrio, ha affermato che non appare attendibile né il successivo distanziamento dei membri di quella cerchia dall'influsso dello svedese né l'idea della sua esclusiva centralità (1972: 200). Del resto, in *Klostret*, Strindberg stesso concede di avere dato, intellettualmente, e pure di avere preso, ovvero che «i pensieri nuovi nascevano in comune, sicché era difficile individuare chi li avesse messi al mondo» (1994: 18). Inutile quindi porsi il problema dell'obiettività de *La Genèse d'une Aspasie*, dove, più che altro – nonostante tutta la prevedibile sulfurea maldicenza – riscontriamo da parte dell'autore un doloroso intento o una pulsione di denudamento dell'essenza umana, di chi scrive e del suo prossimo, che alla fine spinge il racconto al di là della mera denigrazione. L'ingigantimento dell'io narrante e autobiografico, nonché, parallelamente, l'ipersensibile attenzione e tensione psicologica nei confronti dei personaggi che, tramite tale ingigantimento, filtra nella narrazione, mirano alla costruzione di un personale copione esperienziale, alla conferma di un amaro sapere di vita e di relazioni che ruota attorno a un'ossessione o a un fulcro ideologico, di fatto ricorrente nell'opera strindberghiana: il *parassitismo* intellettuale dei meschini e dei deboli a danno della generosità dei geni. Non stupisce che sia proprio il verbo *parasitera* che Strindberg usa non appena avrà sentore della pubblicazione di *Fru Ester Bruce*: «Sento che Ola Hansson-Marholm fanno i parassiti su di me in un nuovo romanzo» (Strindberg 1965: 364).

È, infine, molto significativo e caratteristico che Strindberg, ne *La Genèse d'une Aspasie*, pur nella strettissima sintesi del racconto, metta al centro della propria negativa relazione con la donna la nozione biblica di *chute*, rivelandosi non solo come l'artista che viviseziona, ma pure che enfatizza fatali mitici e pessimistici scenari simbolici della condizione umana. In *Klostret*, entrerà in gioco addirittura la Nemese che «non perseguita solo i colpevoli, ma anche gli esseri felici»; la vita appare, infatti, in balia di una «disarmonia che viene dall'esterno, con il vento, con la rugiada, la protratta luce del sole, la pioggia» e introduce «il malinteso»,

¹⁰ *Tolkare och siare* (Interpreti e veggenti) è il titolo di una raccolta di saggi del 1893-1921, tra l'altro, su questi autori, di Ola Hansson.

l'elemento «terzo», che spacca la perfezione della sintesi del maschile e del femminile, all'origine di ogni esistenza (Strindberg 1994: 50).

Dalla somma di queste suggestioni, l'autobiografia di Strindberg assurge a una sorta di scenario sostanzialmente gnostico, che si integra con la passionata smarrita percezione dell'erraticità della vita, dominata da forze oscure:

Che intrico l'animo umano! Come venirne a capo? Dall'odio al disprezzo, oltre la devozione e l'ammirazione, e poi ancora indietro, con un salto di lato e due ancora in avanti. Il bene e il male, il sublime e lo squallido, l'infedeltà insieme all'amore eterno, baci e schiaffi, accuse diffamatorie e ammirazione senza confini. (Strindberg 1994: 43)

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A BILL OF CHARGE
(AND SELF-DEFENCE) AND AS A PORTRAIT OF SOCIETY:
BARBARSKOGEN BY K.G. OSSIANNILSSON

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Despite his high productivity in different genres (poetry, novel, drama, essay), Karl Gustav Ossiannilsson (1875-1970) is probably not a very well-known writer even in the Swedish context. Yet, he was very famous at the beginning of the past century: his works, as well as his political positions, caused a real outcry, and these two aspects of his activity ran parallel for a certain time. This is shown by the reactions to his novel *Barbarskogen* (The Barbarian Wood), published in 1908 and described by different newspapers as «[e]n socialistdiktarens afräkning med partivännerna», «[e]n “uppgörelse”», «K G Ossiannilssons vidräkning med socialismen» (reported in Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 5; a socialist poet's reckoning with his comrades; a “breaking off”; K.G. Ossiannilsson's attack on socialism)¹. Most reviews highlighted the political and critical features of the book, thus contributing to its great success: as many as three editions appeared in 1908 alone, and two others the following year. The period from the end of 1908 to the spring of 1909 was, as a matter of fact, a time of intense debate in newspapers of all political tendencies, and *Barbarskogen* rapidly turned into a model for writers who wished to settle accounts with the socialist party². Ossiannilsson's later works attracted less attention, as we can verify from the scant number of critics who have been interested in his literary works³.

¹ All translations are mine. The first definition was for example used in the bourgeois newspapers «Östgöten» on 21 November 1908 and «Hernösands-Posten» on 2 December 1908 (Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 187).

² We mention here Leon Larsson's *Samhällets fiende* (The Enemy of Society) and Fredrik Persson's *Parasiter* (Parasites), both published in 1909. Such works gave rise to the so-called *barbarskogs litteratur* (*Barbarskogen*-literature, i.e. works written from a similar position and with the same purpose as *Barbarskogen*; see Öhman 2001: 80).

³ Apart from the two main works to which this paper is indebted, i.e. Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982 and Öhman 2001, studies on Ossiannilsson only appear in miscellaneous volumes (Jacobson 1961, Rehn 1974, Wolf 1975, Uhlén 1978), where, moreover, they sometimes play a marginal role (Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 6-7). Whereas Lehtilä-Ohlson introduces the analysis of the works with an in-depth treatment of the social, political

1. Ossiannilsson and his commitment in the socialist party

Karl Gustav Ossian Nilsson was born in Malmö and worked as a teacher, both in state schools and in private employment, until 1901, when he chose to fully devote himself to literature. In 1900 he had debuted as a poet with the collections *Masker* (1900; Masks), followed by *Hedningar* (1901; Pagans) and *Örnar* (1902; Eagles). His poems met with great success, were often mentioned in the press, and his public readings attracted crowds of listeners in different towns of Sweden. The most significant aspect of his first years as a writer was his remarkable popularity among Swedish workers, a phenomenon that eventually led to his participation in the socialist movement and to his successful, though short, political career⁴. This fact helped build the image of Ossiannilsson (he would sign his works with this name from 1914 onwards) as «den unge svenske folk- och arbetarskalden» (Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 9; the young Swedish people's and workers' poet). We may wonder if he was a true socialist, considering that he would soon leave the movement and the party, as previously mentioned, maintaining a very critical position, which he expressed, for instance, in his memoirs in the 1940s⁵.

Here we must face the great paradox of his role and his writings as far as his commitment is concerned. If we read the poems contained in the above-mentioned collections, we realise at once that they express an extreme individualism, an uncritical worship of heroes and leaders, an antidemocratic attitude, the belief in authority, and the praise of war as a means of purification for society. In his view of the world, Ossiannilsson was a man of his time and shared some of the principal tendencies of contemporary philosophical and political thought: in this context we can place him beside both Scandinavian (in Sweden Rudolf Kjellén, Vitalis Norström, Fredrik Böök and – partly – Verner von Heidenstam, in Norway

and philosophical context of that time, also giving a complete account for the reception of *Barbarskogen* by the press, Öhman investigates (once again in a miscellaneous work) the author's different strategies for an apologetic novel. More recently, Ossiannilsson's texts have mostly been included in anthologies, but see Ahlund 2007.

⁴ In 1902 Ossiannilsson was offered the honorary chairmanship of Malmö's branch of Socialdemokratiska ungdomsförbundet (The Socialdemocratic Youth Association), which had been founded in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö in 1897. In 1903 he was chosen as one of the representatives from Malmö at the first national congress of the association and was later allowed to write political articles and pamphlets for the party. In the same year Malmö's local branch broke with the national leadership and constituted an independent division of the movement (Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 10-18).

⁵ Lehtilä-Ohlson (1982: 7) warns, however, against the unreliability of these writings, in which the poet aims at reconsidering his commitment to the socialist party in a very different period from that of the events described.

above all Knut Hamsun) and European artists and thinkers (Friedrich Nietzsche, Georges Sorel, Maurice Barrès, Rudyard Kipling and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti)⁶. How could his message fascinate workers and common people? As it has been pointed out, his celebration of the vitalism of certain historical figures and his appeal to the new forces that would change the world might seem to coincide with socialist-inspired movements; indeed, both parties – Ossiannilsson and the workers – were victims of a misunderstanding, the writer seeing in those movements young revolutionary forces which could upset the social order, vital enough to match his own demands, and the workers (and socialist intellectuals) finding in his poems the revolutionary spirit they needed to conduct their own social struggles for justice, freedom and dignity (Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 84-86, Öhman 2001: 80-81). In other words, Ossiannilsson became a sort of intellectual and artistic counterpart for the political organisations, one (or one of several) that could provide them with necessary, fascinating images and allegories. After all, both were opposed to the present society and its establishment, but from two rather different perspectives, or even heading in opposite directions. Yet, these fundamental differences were not perceived, at least in the first years. On the contrary, the odd alliance was formed and the socialists even took the first step.

2. The row with Lidfors

In the political movement Ossiannilsson acted mainly as a poet and man of culture, occasionally reading his own and others' writings (mainly poems) during the meetings. But from 1903 to 1907 he also had occasion to develop his thoughts in articles and pamphlets (sometimes commissioned by Malmö's socialist youth club), in which he consistently

⁶ A summary of the main tendencies of that time is offered by Aspelin 1937; cf. also Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 100-112. If Nietzsche was of course the most influential author with his reaction to pessimism and scepticism through his worship of human action and will, all the personalities mentioned contributed to a somewhat common view of the world, which saw in democratic ideals and pacifism a potential obstacle to the development and assertion of the most genuine human forces: these could be expressed in war and military life as well as in revolutionary movements. Ossiannilsson observed: «Och den tro tiden behöfver är icke tron på en idé – idéer bryta ned, idéer nivellera – utan på personer, människor, oberoende och fria [...]. Tiden behöfver *härskare* (genom öfverlägsenhet) öfver *fria människor* (genom förstående tro)» (From a letter to Ellen Key on 30 September 1903; quoted in Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 103; italics in the original; And the belief our times need is not the belief in ideas – ideas spoil, ideas level – but in persons, people, independent and free [...]. Our times need *rulers* [through superiority] over *free people* [through understanding belief]).

tried to alert the workers and raise problems. One of these, a pamphlet entitled *Är du nöjd med din ställning?* (1904; Are You Satisfied with Your Position?), caused quite a stir, being the greatest contrast to date between Ossiannilsson and the movement, on account of its demagogical features (the main claim). The influential socialist literary critic Bengt Lidforss, in his review *Agitationens ABC* (The ABC of Agitation) which appeared in the newspaper «Arbetet» (Labour) on 13 August 1904, attacked Ossiannilsson, openly questioning the authenticity of his stake in workers' values (cf. Lidforss 1908).

Lidforss, trained as a scientist before becoming a humanist, had previously reviewed Ossiannilsson's poetry collections for «Arbetet», pointing out their limits, but also acknowledging their qualities. We may observe that from the very beginning he had expressed great suspicions about the poet, whom he considered overrated, and it is also noteworthy that he reacted with blunt criticism to an explicit political speech in the aforementioned quarrel. This led to a point of no return in his relationship with Ossiannilsson. In 1905 his review of the poet's fourth collection, *Svart och vitt* (Black and White), contained a very harsh final accusation of opportunism, which probably contributed to Ossiannilsson's moving to Gothenburg, where he started collaborating with the newspaper «Ny Tid» (New Time). This fact seemed, however, to establish a temporary peace between the two (for further details on these reviews, see Öhman 2001: 81-85).

But in 1907 Lidforss published *Socialistisk journalistik* (Socialist Journalism), an anthology of his writings, which included the harsh criticism of Ossiannilsson's pamphlet⁷. This reignited the row, since Ossiannilsson perceived it as a personal attack and now chose to use the cutting weapon of narrative in the form of his novel *Barbarskogen*. He would later describe this event not only as an inner need but also as a social necessity, thus taking on the role of spokesman for the entire category of freethinkers⁸. The preconditions of the birth of this work

⁷ This was not, however, the last act of the quarrel, which actually developed into a lively exchange of positions in «Ny Tid» (Ossiannilsson) and «Arbetet» (Lidforss). See Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 95-99. Not surprisingly, Lidforss published a very negative review of the novel, in which he stressed the excessive conditioning of its ideological features and its nature as *roman à clef*, which gave the novel a low aesthetic value (in «Arbetet» on 30 November 1908, see Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 119).

⁸ «Jag hade i själva verket alltsedan hösten 1904 haft klart för mig, att jag och socialdemokraterna måste komma till en uppgörelse. Den uppskötts på grund av Ingemar Lindblads vänlighet och förtroende. Den skulle kanske uppskjutits i ganska många år, om ej den oförsonlige Lidforss upprepat sitt anfall genom boken *Socialistisk journalistik*. Massangreppen på mig, när jag vågade försvara mig, öppnade mina ögon. Här dugde inte att tveka. Här gällde det min frihet som människa och diktare. Med ens

show, however, that Ossiannilsson's abandonment of the party was due, on the one hand, to his initial distance from socialist positions, and on the other to the personal contrast with Lidforss: these are the two planes on which the novel would be constructed, an aspect that would give his detractors further reason for complaint.

3. *Barbarskogen* as a portrait of society and an autobiographical novel

In the preface to the novel the author denies any direct reference to his own vicissitudes. Nevertheless, although all the characters bear fictitious names, and neither the time nor place of the setting is specified, there are several clues which hint at the real life in Malmö at that time; moreover, some letters by Ossiannilsson show his purpose of defending himself through this novel⁹. On the whole, the autobiographical features are not explicit, but easily recognisable if one knows the Swedish history of those years and, of course, is acquainted with the writer's life. This is further proved by the fact that all his reviewers interpreted the work in this way, thus rekindling the debate instead of quenching it.

If most of the novel, as the author's letters testify (see Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 113-118), was written in 1908 and therefore highly conditioned by his quarrel with Lidforss, we must not forget that he had begun it earlier as a precise project: the representation of Swedish society, above all the living

fattade jag, att mitt öde inte var endast mitt. Samma öde måste drabba alla självständiga människor, om en massrörelse segrade. / Så föddes tanken på romanen *Barbarskogen* eller som jag ursprungligen kallade den: I klasskampens tecken». (Ossiannilsson 1946: 47-48; Already in the autumn of 1904 it was actually clear to me that I should break with the Social Democrats. This breakup was delayed because of Lindblad's friendliness and trust. It might have been delayed for many years if the hostile Lidforss had not repeated his attack through the book *Socialistisk journalistik*. The mass attack on me, when I dared to defend myself, opened my eyes. Here it was useless to hesitate. Here my freedom as a man and a poet was at stake. I realised at once that my destiny was not mine only. The same destiny would come to concern all free human beings if a mass movement won. / This is how the project of the novel *Barbarskogen* was born, or as I initially called it: *I klasskampens tecken* [In the Sign of the Class Struggle]). Furthermore, the writer was disappointed by Hjalmar Branting's siding with Lidforss, Branting being the leader of the party and a future Swedish prime minister.

⁹ Just ten days after sending the manuscript, he wrote to his editor Bonnier: «*Skulle allmänheten, kritiken o.s.v. tala om hämnd, så förminskar det inte bokens köpvärde eller litterära värde (Dante hämnades också) [...]. Hällre än hämnd säger jag dock självförvar*». (Letter written on 17 September 1908, quoted in Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 116, italics in the original; *Should the public, the critics and others talk about revenge, this would not reduce the commercial or the literary value of the book (Dante took his revenge, too) [...]. Yet, rather than revenge I would say self-defence*).

conditions of workers. As he explained more than once, he was working on two novels on this subject and did not know until 1908 which one he would finish first (Ossiannilsson 1946: 48-49; Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 113-114). This novel represents the real situation of that time, even though most events alluded to transpire in a six-month span and take place in a town that resembles Malmö, although they actually took place over a longer period, from about 1890 to 1908, and in various places in Sweden (Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 137-151). Despite this historically inaccurate concentration of events, the work offers in this way a convincing setting of early twentieth-century Sweden. Undoubtedly, Ossiannilsson's initial project was to write a kind of social novel that could suit the demands of the socialist party, as it was based on chronicle. The author combined chronicle and invention, but in a way that did not compromise the historical and documentary value of the work. We can, however, observe that, if in the beginning the fictitious elements had been intended to make the characters more interesting – as writers of social or historical novels usually do – later on, the chief purpose of the author's revision became one of conveying a message that would condition the reader's attitude towards the characters (and the milieu they represent). The work therefore acquired stronger allegorical elements, so that it is often possible to identify a precise correspondence between several characters and real persons¹⁰.

The novel tells the story of a young teacher who is invited to join the editorial staff of the socialist newspaper «Framåt» (Forward) after having been dismissed from his school because of an article of harsh denunciation that he had sent to the same newspaper. Hall, this is his name, witnesses

¹⁰ This is particularly true for the editorial staff the protagonist Hall is invited to join and for other journalists he meets or hears of: for instance, the fictitious Nylén, Lunde («Framåt») and Antonsson (the founder of the same newspaper) stand for August Nilsson, Bengt Lidfors and Axel Danielsson, while Hällvik at the newspaper «Morgondagen» stands for Lindblad at «Ny Tid»; «Framåt» itself is a clear representation of «Arbetet» (Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 132-136). Ossiannilsson, however, later tried to put the significance of such a tempting correspondence into proportion: «Barbarskogen fick ibland heta nyckelroman. Beteckningen är knappast träffande. En nyckelroman är en roman, som ej kan förstås utan personlig bekantskap med modellerna. Men ingen sådan personlig nyckel är behövlig för att få ett begrepp om innehållet eller handlingen i Barbarskogen. [Romanen] har [...] ännu 1937, då hittills senaste upplagan utkom, fått betyget att vara lika frisk, som då den först utgavs, och snarare mera aktuell än 1908» (Ossiannilsson 1946: 54-55; *Barbarskogen* was sometimes called *roman à clef*. This definition is hardly correct. A *roman à clef* is a novel which cannot be understood without a personal knowledge of its models. But such a personal key of interpretation is not necessary for understanding the content or the plot of *Barbarskogen*. [The novel], [...] even in 1937, when the latest edition was published, revealed itself to be as fresh as it was in the first edition, and even more relevant than in 1908).

an accident at the harbour of his town during a strike and later becomes acquainted with the squalid conditions in which workers live. He appeals to the authorities, in the person of consul Ström, whose daughter was once a student of his, but does not find any help. His concern for the workers makes his popularity grow among them and, once on the editorial staff, he is sure that he will be free to express his opinions without censorship, thus contributing to social improvement. His initial enthusiasm clashes day after day with his colleagues' indolence, incompetence and arrogance. On some occasions he is even humiliated and cannot get his writings published. He soon realises that the newspaper is just an instrument for the party, not for the workers, and a place where journalists daily try to increase or at the very least defend their personal power. Because of internal struggles, Hall is paradoxically chosen as editor-in-chief, and in his new position he thinks he will be able to fight some important battles, but his uncompromising intellectual freedom leads him to adopt unorthodox, complex positions, in particular against a major controversial strike. Hostility towards him grows and eventually turns into outright ostracism, as is represented in one of the final scenes, in which the workers' annual meeting takes on the features of a trial, after which Hall decides to leave the editorial staff, abandon the party and devote himself again to his studies.

As is clear from the plot, Hall is consistently engaged in the improvement of society, but his sincere ideals come into conflict with petty personal interests and grudges throughout the novel. We can easily point out the features of a *Bildungsroman*: at the beginning Hall, a teacher and a committed intellectual, is disillusioned by the upper middle class and joins the working class; gradually, he distances himself from the other intellectuals (in the form of his fellow journalists) he happens to mingle with. While Hall still trusts the workers, whom his colleagues have sworn to represent and defend, these are on the contrary deceived by their own party. Hall eventually perceives the masses themselves as a stupid, violent, easily influenced, hardly innocent force, representing a kind of pure barbarism, whether embodied by the workers or by the so-called intellectuals, whose existence and actions limit individual freedom. This series of disillusionments does not lead Hall to any sort of victory, but it does help him to understand his personal place and purpose in society, and this awareness finds proud affirmation in the very last lines of the novel.

The analysis of the plot highlights the thesis sustained in the novel, which in turn provides the work with its necessary unity. Yet, the book is characterised by a somewhat fragmentary style, which is due partly to the brief period of its composition (and to the author's 'haste'), partly to the development of his project of self-defence. The first two chapters (in their almost definitive form) appeared in the newspaper «Svenska Dagbladet» in the summer of 1906, whereas he probably worked on most

of the novel (certainly from chapter five, where the main action begins, and onwards; Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 117) from the end of 1907, publishing the book in November 1908: the writing therefore took place right after the quarrel with Lidfors had rekindled. As is clear in the final version, the apologetic feature of the novel becomes evident only from chapter four, where the (at least seemingly) neutral characterisation of the protagonist, the detailed descriptions of the settings and the slow narrative rhythm turn into a tendentious representation, a more essential style and a marked and passionate rhythm. As far as tendentiousness and social satire are concerned, the author found a model in August Strindberg's writings, especially the novels *Röda Rummet* (1879; *The Red Room*, trans. by Schleussner 1913) and *Svarta fanor* (1907; *Black Banners*, trans. by Weaver 2010), on which he wrote essays in those years (Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 122-125). These features, however, seem to affect this novel much more profoundly than other works of that time, as if the author had found the proper instrument to express his strong social disappointment in *Barbarskogen* before dealing with other subjects in a plainer style or, at least, from a different perspective and attitude if compared with that of his first novel¹¹.

4. *Barbarskogen* as an apologetic novel: rhetoric and trial

From chapter four onwards, Ossiannilsson displays subtle strategies of work on the language (Öhman 2001: 87-94) in order to wage an explicit attack against Hall's enemies, that is to say on the institutional and intellectual organisation which aims at conditioning the masses by exploiting their instincts and need to conform. The author's purpose lies in his desire to reveal the decisions of a political group in its different forms, in order to demonstrate how he (Hall as well as Ossiannilsson himself) was forced to leave the workers' movement. This kind of defence therefore concerns the author's public life, as a poet and a politician, not his private one. The rhetorical strategy is however deeply linked with the autobiographical features of the novel: Ossiannilsson is involved in the issue; in particular he is the plaintiff who tries to defend himself by discrediting the opposing party.¹²

¹¹ See his comments on his following novels, in particular *Slätten* (1909; *The Plain*), *Havet* (1909; *The Sea*) and *Ödets man* (1912; *The Man of Destiny*), in Ossiannilsson 1946: 58-61.

¹² This fundamental condition affects the structure of the novel and its overall rhythm: in particular, the plot is marked by four main meetings between Hall and the masses, by which he is initially both attracted and intimidated, later on perceiving his own role to be that of antagonist to the workers. We may observe that the average length of the chapters (25 on the whole) increases after the first short ones, up to chapter 12, the longest one in

To achieve his purpose he actually represents himself as two distinct characters: the young idealist teacher and journalist Hall, and the experienced socialist poet Wide, who knows the movement (the party, the editorial staff, the workers) very well and has suffered from their cruel attacks and their perverse logic. This expedient makes the novel yet again a *Bildungsroman*, but in a different way from the one previously mentioned, since here the main character is observed from the outside: Wide expresses Ossiannilsson's opinions after he has left the movement, while Hall is the person Wide was many years before. Wide was once appreciated by everyone and has now become a sort of guide for Hall. Not accidentally, and as a further autobiographical feature, Wide looks like Ossiannilsson (Öhman 2001: 86). Hall apparently lacks any kind of prejudice and is, moreover, marked by a strong humanity, which naturally allows him to understand and even sympathise with some of his enemies.

As we soon realise when reading the novel, Hall has not given up his role as educator, though he is no longer a teacher: his new work as a journalist suits his desire to raise the consciousness of his readers (no longer his students); and, all the more so, he adopts this attitude as a daily duty and is convinced that the masses can be improved through intellectual activities, such as reading newspaper articles. These will be, in his opinion, his real weapons for waging his social battles. But Wide explains drastically that the masses cannot be changed and that their popular support may even conceal a danger for individual freedom:

Massan låter inte förvandla sig [...]. Dess lösen klingar i alla länder: proletärer, förenen eder, förenen eder till massan! [...] Den ler åt våra uppfostrings-, våra försoningsplaner, ler ett brett, illmarigt massleende, och leendet skall en gång äta upp oss, likt en leende boa constrictor, en leende Leviathan, en leende Midgårdssorm. Solidariteten skyddar oftast stillaständet och barbariet [...]. Solidaritet förutsätter svag individualitet, böjlig vilja, grova instinkter [...]. (Ossiannilsson 1927: 276-277, 305)

The masses do not let themselves be changed [...]. Their slogan echoes in all countries: proletarians, unite, unite to a mass! [...] They laugh at our plans for education and reconciliation, make a broad, sly, mass smile, and that smile will one day eat us up, like a smiling *boa constrictor*, a smiling Leviathan, a smiling Midgard Serpent. Solidarity usually protects inactivity and barbarism [...]. Solidarity presupposes a weak personality, bent will, rough instincts [...].

the first half, where Hall gets acquainted with his working environment, his colleagues' taste for anecdotes and their view of life, and is, besides, involved in a discussion about strikebreakers. Afterwards the plot is split into shorter chapters, which become even shorter towards the end, with the very significant exception of chapter 24, as long as chapter 12, which reports the 'trial' against Hall during the annual meeting. This provides a sort of symmetry in the novel, but above all it reveals its apologetic character.

Statements like this are also meaningful as examples of Wide's strongly aristocratic use of language. On several other occasions in the novel he passionately talks about the vitality of ancient cultures in opposition to modern decadence. Here the fundamental ideas of education and reconciliation are opposed to social hatred, a feeling (and its subsequent attitude) encouraged by the party and the socialist-inspired movement Wide has directly experienced. Hall and Wide are marked not only by a student-teacher relationship, but also by a real dialectic: Hall's reasoning is based on the opposition between nature and culture and on the saving power of the latter; Wide objects that the masses act to destroy civilisation and cannot be redeemed: if they ever represent nature, as in Hall's view, then it is a terrible, frightening, and not at all fascinating expression of human nature. This idea inspires several metaphors in Wide's speech and eventually leads to the main image of the barbarian wood¹³.

This fundamental difference between Ossiannilsson's two alter egos displays the difficulties met by intellectuals in their relationship with the masses, but it still lacks the necessary degree of formalisation, i.e. the superior value which guides Hall and which is the decisive proof of his freedom, causing his defeat within the party and at the same time expressing his spiritual superiority. In other words, the young protagonist has had many occasions to show his own sensibility and sensitivity toward all forms of social hypocrisy, but after several disillusionments he needs – in the author's view – a further reference to save himself (and his ideas) despite the moral misery around him. This higher value is «mänsklighet» (humanity), which gives rise to Hall's unquenchable desire to remain an educator of the masses and denotes his moral superiority (Öhman 2001: 87-90). This most noble value can be defined as sensitivity, comprehension, intellectual honesty, freedom of thought, all genuine human qualities which are threatened by powerful forces (the forest of institutions) and by the general stupidity and aggressiveness of people (the barbarians). Hall actually perceives this state of things already in his first meetings with the workers, but it fully dawns on him only with Wide's help. This is the 'philosophical' theory sustaining the novel, and this message is conveyed through a series of metaphors. We can observe that, in a novel written in a straightforward, concrete style, nearly all the figurative speech comes from Wide, who here replies to Hall:

¹³ An element clearly showing the tendentious aspect of the novel is evident in the incident of Wide's harangue before some members of the editorial staff, who however make no serious reply (Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 156).

Trädet, sade ni, redaktör, ja, var och en av dessa organismer, arbetarkommuner, är ett träd, varje Folkets Hus är ett växande, skuggande träd, och alla tillsammans äro en väldig, erövrande storskog, sammanbunden med småskogar av fattighus och fattigkvarter, med snår av eländets nässlor och törne. Den stora klasshatsrörelsen är en väldig barbariets urskog, och i dess skugga tälta hunnerhorderna, civilisationens förödare, den anryckande, million-hövdade massan. (Ossiannilsson 1927: 274)

The tree, you said, editor, yes, each one of these organisms, workers' unions, are a tree, every People's House is a growing and shadowing tree, and all together they are an enormous and dominating forest, connected with little woods of poor houses and poor quarters, with thorns of misery nettles and wild roses. The great movement of class hatred is an enormous forest of barbarism, and hordes of Huns camp in its shadows: destroyers of civilisation, the mobbing mass of a million people.

This last harsh accusation against the party and any social organisation presents not only Wide's straightforward view of the world, but, maybe ironically though certainly on purpose, it also represents the stages of Hall's progress throughout the novel, from his encounter with the party (due to his acquaintance with social poverty) to his direct experience of the masses. Wide's declaration highlights the perverse relationship between people and political institutions, thus implicitly suggesting that its nature is that of an unsolvable mess. We can easily take «mänsklighet», humanity, as the fundamental metaphor, which both provides the novel with a consistent theme – present from the beginning, but nearly always beneath the surface – and this theme (the philosophical characteristic of the novel after the political one) with a proper and suitable language. The novel follows a strategy of short, conditioning, tendentious descriptions, which later acquire their apt linguistic formulation. The awareness of the strategy casts a new light on Hall's attitude towards the other characters: from the beginning he has examined the workers during their meetings and pointed out their uniformity, their mass-like being (as opposed to «mänsklighet»), their merely gregarious existence, which becomes crystal clear by contrast whenever someone (like Hall) takes his distance from them (Öhman 2001: 88). Eventually, Hall perceives unequivocally the danger of such a levelling power.

He remembers Wide's words during the workers' annual meeting, when his positions about the strike are strongly criticised, and he undergoes a real trial, which eventually leads him to quit his newspaper job, after having understood that his enemy was not his own class (the bourgeoisie) or the socialist machinery, but the masses themselves¹⁴.

¹⁴ «Som två antagonister hade de två, han och massan, vägt varandra under dessa sex månader. Han med sin kulturs frihet och fördomar, massan med sin stelnade halvkultur. Han med sin individualism, som betraktade socialismen som medel att

However, he maintains all his ideals despite his defeat on the social plane (he is considered an academic, thus a bourgeois, to be rejected by the proletarians) and the professional level (he is dismissed by the direction of the newspaper).

5. Conclusions

Ossiannilsson's writings and political action express in a paradoxical but meaningful way most of the contradictions of the political and philosophical thought of his time, showing a typical early twentieth-century intellectual, open to many suggestions from different parts of Europe, a victim of radical ideals and rapid social changes, but also skilful in using his position, contacts and talents to improve his favour among workers.

His novel *Barbarskogen*, developed as a reaction to a personal (political and literary) attack by an influential critic, adopts and integrates different literary genres, thus showing the potentialities of autobiographical works, and possesses the features of a social novel, a *Bildungsroman*, and of a detective novel in its trial sub-plot¹⁵. However, despite its heterogeneous traits, the work finds its unity in the rhetorical strategy adopted by the author, who moulds each aspect of the novel according to the purpose of his attack against the socialist party, in particular on certain individuals (and characters) who are hostile to him, and of his self-defence. This strategy is carried forward with subtleness and affects both the shaping of the characters and the construction of most of the events presented in the novel.

nå friheten. Massan med sin socialism, som bemötte individen som en fara, vilken stod i vägen för målet, som inte var frihet, utan makt. Han med sin hänsynslösa tankeanarkism. Massan med sin hänsynslösa sifferdogmatism. Han överklassen, massan underklassen. Han, som trott sig kämpa mot samhället, medan han blott fört striden mot massan. Han, som trott klasskampen stå mellan redaktör Hall och konsul Ström» (Ossiannilsson 1927: 338-339; Like two opponents, he and the mass had sized each other up during the last six months. He with his cultural freedom and prejudices, the mass with its petrified half-culture. He with his individualism, which looked at socialism as a means to achieve freedom, the mass with its socialism that perceived the individual as a danger, interfering with the way to the goal, which was not freedom but power. He with his unscrupulous anarchy of thought, the mass with its unscrupulous dogmatism of numbers. He the upper class, the mass the lower class. He, who had believed he was fighting against society, whereas he was just conducting his struggle against the mass. He, who had believed that the class struggle was between editor Hall and consul Ström).

¹⁵ Öhman's study convincingly shows how trial features are skilfully and deviously interwoven into the warp of the whole novel, so as to constitute lines of defence and charge long before this aspect of Hall's case becomes evident.

Ossiannilsson's book is not without flaws: these can be traced, in particular, in the excessive use of caricatural features, in the evident imbalance between the exponents of the different positions (pros and cons Hall/Ossiannilsson) and in some longwinded digressions (Öhman 2001: 99-101). As has been noted, the author makes use of different kinds of material without being able to integrate them all (Lehtilä-Ohlson 1982: 118-119). A further defect may be his taste for anecdotes, which, however, he uses to depict the indolence of certain characters on the editorial staff.

Initially conceived as a portrait of society, Ossiannilsson's project step by step acquired a philosophical and existential dimension by representing modern human beings as victims of stupid, perverse social mechanisms. Society is presented as the primary enemy of freedom of thought and expression: paradoxically, while making this criticism, Ossiannilsson also reveals his antidemocratic tendencies, thus becoming a full-fledged member of the society he criticises, instead of just an acute observer of it. As we understand from the plot, Hall is defeated, abandoned by the party and most of the workers; but he is eventually represented as the moral victor and, most likely, as a man of the future, if we consider his conclusive (but still controversial) thoughts in the last lines of the novel:

Hall vinkade. Ett led öppnade sig beredvilligt och de båda överklassbarnen försvunno i den breda, böljande kolonnen. Musiken rungade, fanorna lyste, röda, blåa och vita, likt brokiga, nyutslagna blommor – det fläktade och vajade, människoträdet bredde sig över dem, det oerhörda stamträdet, som vuxit i millioner och växer i millioner år. Och de två voro blott två knoppar, som nyss sprungit ut i en vårens stund och nu växte tätt bredvid varandra, syskon till varandra och syskon till alla, alla, alla människor. (Ossiannilsson 1927: 353-354)¹⁶

Hall beckoned. A way opened up quickly and the two children of the upper class disappeared under the broad, billowing column. The music rumbled, the banners sparkled, red, blue and white, like colourful, newly blossomed flowers – everything moved and swayed, the human tree grew over them, the unprecedented family tree, which had been growing for millions of years and would continue to grow for millions of years. And the two of them were nothing but two buds, which had just bloomed in a spring moment and now were growing very close to each other, siblings to each other and siblings to all, all, all human beings.

The controversial features lie in the ambiguity about the paternity of these last considerations: are they Hall's or the narrator's? Do they express Hall's paternalism in his attempt to point out a superior reconciliation or,

¹⁶ Hall is here at the Labour Day march with consul Ström's daughter, Elsebet, who turns out to be his touchstone and saviour when he risks falling into despair because of the others' hostility. About the role of some female characters in Hall's development, see Öhman 2001: 105-108.

on the contrary, the social hypocrisy according to which everyone wants to be everyone else's brother, in a general trend toward uniformity¹⁷. The protagonist has, however, offered the reader a twofold perspective through his personal experience: an inner perspective, and, later, an external social perspective, if society can be considered as the complicated network of relationships, which are promoted by (political) institutions. Ossiannilsson's language, the original purpose of which was to paint a detailed portrait of the life of the working class in the Sweden of his days, developed into a more lively but also more tendentious and rhetorical language of a struggle between ideologies (the socialist and the bourgeois) which, eventually, expresses the (no less tendentious) desire for freedom from perverse political and social conditionings.

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¹⁷ Öhman (2001: 107-108) suggests that this last passage was meant to find a way out of the polemic with his detractors and the party, an aim which, as we know, was not achieved.

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SCIENCE AND POLITICS IN THE SCHOLARLY AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ROLF LAGERBORG

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In a self-portrait published in 1972, the historian Fernand Braudel seeks to consider himself «in some fashion as an object of history» (Braudel 1972: 448). The autobiography of the Finnish philosopher Rolf Lagerborg (1874-1959) is written in the same spirit: «Hur vore det att studera sina skrifter *som om man intet visste om författaren? Nämligen icke något introspektivt*. I stället skulle man ur yttre data, indicier, hörsägen, dagböcker och brev leta ut “vad Rolf Lagerborg var för en individ”» (Lagerborg 1942: 28, italics in the original; What would it be like to study one’s own writings *as if* one knew nothing about the author? Nothing *introspective*. Instead, based on external data, evidence, hearsay, diaries and letters try to find out “what kind of an individual Rolf Lagerborg had been”)¹. Inspired by the Enlightenment physician-philosopher Julien Offray de La Mettrie, who suggested that life writing could be seen as an area of research like any other, Lagerborg’s self-portrait belongs to a tradition of objectivising autobiography, not uncommon in scholarly memoirs. One of the characteristic features of such narratives is the resemblance between the style of the autobiography and the methodology used by the authors in their scholarly work (Aurell 2006: 438). The empirical-analytical language in Lagerborg’s book reflects his commitments to an anti-idealist philosophy and defence of naturalistic models in the human sciences. In his native country in the early twentieth century this was, as will be shown, as much an ideological statement as it was a scientific one.

Before turning to the question of style and genre in relation to Lagerborg’s position within the scientific and cultural field in Finland, I will briefly present the author as a scholar and an engaged intellectual, as his name is hardly recognised today outside the narrow field of Finnish intellectual history. In the latter part of the article, I will turn to a discussion of the potential and problems related to the use of autobiographies as sources for a socio-cultural study of intellectuals. The case of Lagerborg provides a starting point for exploring the predicament of cosmopolitan

¹ All translations are mine if not stated otherwise.

intellectuals in nationalist Finland, against the background of a changing geo-cultural landscape at the end of the Russian period in Finnish history and the country's independence in 1917. The memoirs revolve around topics such as the struggle of intellectual freedom against religion and nationalism, and the entanglement of these in a young nation; the role of the Swedish minority culture and language in Finland; the country's position between Russia and Scandinavia, its relation to the European cultural capitals and Western civilisation. The author's viewpoint in approaching these questions is peripheral in a dual sense. He belongs to an intellectual field at the very margins of the European cultural space, and within this space he represents the declining Swedish-speaking fraction in bilingual Finland, where nation building in the nineteenth century revolved around the question of language, with Finnish gradually establishing itself as the main cultural and official language of the emerging nation-state.

1. Against the grain

Rolf Lagerborg was a philosopher, writer and public intellectual, active from his academic debut in the last years of the nineteenth century until the 1950s². Throughout his career he fashioned himself as an outsider intellectual and managed to cause a few remarkable scandals within Finnish academia and beyond. Three of these are worth mentioning here. Firstly, as a lifelong enemy of Lutheran morality and member of an association of freethinkers, he succeeded in 1903 in obtaining a civil marriage at a time when this was not recognised by Finnish law. Together with his fiancée he staged the marriage based on a clause of an ancient law, which made it possible for a man and a woman living together to be 'condemned' to marriage by a judge. The same day he published an extensive newspaper article on the question of Church marriage (Lagerborg 1942: 110-117). The event was one in a series of 'Lagerborg affairs', attesting to his preferred strategy of influencing public opinion by causing scandals. Did it work? Towards the end of his life he was doubtful: «Att mitt jag som skribent gjort väsen av sig, därom är intet tvivel. Mycket väsen – för ingenting?» (Lagerborg 1942: 26; There can be no doubt that I as a writer have managed to create a stir. Much ado – about nothing?).

For the intellectual historian, however, the controversies that surrounded Lagerborg's name are rewarding objects of study, as his provocations tended to clearly bring out the various positions and issues

² For an intellectual history of the philosophy and cultural radicalism of Rolf Lagerborg see Jalava 2005 and Heidegren 2004.

at stake in the cultural field. An academic 'scandal' at the very start of his career concerned the relationship between science and politics. After his dissertation in moral philosophy was rejected at the University of Helsinki in 1900, due to his constructivist view of morality, he travelled to Paris and defended a French version of the thesis three years later. At the Sorbonne, a jury led by Émile Durkheim awarded him the highest grade (indeed, Lagerborg remained a durkheimian throughout his life). This experience established a pattern of seeking support abroad for controversial positions at home. If the strategy worked, it was because small countries like Finland were, in the words of Lagerborg himself, after all superlatively anxious about their outward reputation (1946: 380).

At other times his provocations triggered political controversies, as in yet another 'Lagerborg affair' in the spring of 1931. This time the scandal spread far beyond the university. It had been building up in the first decades of the century, when Lagerborg, by playing the role of the provocative cosmopolitan intellectual in nationalist Finland, had gained a controversial reputation in patriotic circles within and beyond academia; Finland could not afford to be independent, he claimed, and would be far better off in a personal union with neighbouring Sweden (Lagerborg 1946: 9). Lagerborg apparently crossed the line when, in an interview for the newspaper «Aftonbladet» in Sweden, he expressed, ever so subtly, satirical criticism of his native country. This was seen as an intolerable provocation in the atmosphere of so-called True Finnishness in interwar Finland. It was not the first time Lagerborg had made sarcastic remarks about the so-called Lapua movement, the right-wing agrarian populist movement which at the time was close to staging a fascist coup d'état in Finland. The affair provoked an acceleration of earlier demands for making the University of Helsinki monolingual (only Finnish instead of Finnish and Swedish), as well as public demonstrations against Lagerborg, pressuring the president to cancel an earlier decision to appoint Lagerborg extraordinary professor of philosophy at the university (Klinge 1978: 143-150; Lagerborg 1946: 149-163). At stake in the affair was the tension between the freedom of expression of intellectuals and national concerns, at a time when the university in Helsinki was still at the centre of the country's political and ideological struggles.

These and other episodes in Lagerborg's self-portrait demonstrate the consequences of the main distinguishing feature of the cultural field in Finland, which from the mid-nineteenth century was divided into rival fractions around the question of language. Having formed the Eastern part of the Kingdom of Sweden for centuries, Finland began to emerge as a political unit only after having been incorporated into the Russian empire during the Napoleonic wars. In the early stages of state formation Swedish was still the language of the elites, until the mid-nineteenth century, when a successful linguistic nationalism led to the voluntary conversion of the majority of the educated elites from Swedish to Finnish. The conversion

was however not total, and Swedish remained an official minority language. Ever since, the Finnish cultural field has been characterised by parallel institutions, audiences, educational systems, press, book markets etc. The duality was already established when Lagerborg began his career in the last decade of the nineteenth century. He became one of the main proponents of 'cultural Swedishness' in Finland, a position that, in opposition to the Finnish movement, maintained that Finland's relationship with European culture was mediated through Scandinavia and the Swedish language. Furthermore, he was part of a cosmopolitan group of intellectuals around the journal «Euterpe» (1901-1905), oriented towards Paris and French culture, not least because Germany was associated with the cultural and ideological orientation of their national opponents.

A self-declared outsider, Lagerborg is an example of the many small-country intellectuals before and after him who, especially when those countries are young, have defended critical positions vis-à-vis the national imperative. In his analysis in *Les Testaments trahis* Milan Kundera (1993; *Testaments Betrayed. An Essay in Nine Parts*, trans. by Asher 1996), describes small countries as something other than quantitative, as a predicament or a faith. According to Kundera, the small nations form «another Europe», whose development coincides with, but is independent from, that of the big nations. «When Nietzsche noisily savaged the German character», he writes, «when Stendhal announced that he preferred Italy to his homeland, no German or Frenchman took offense; if a Greek or a Czech dared to say the same thing, his family would curse him as a detestable traitor» (trans. by Asher; Kundera 1996: 193). A recurring theme in Lagerborg's book is precisely this kind of criticism of the multiple constraints of small-country intellectuals, which led him to seek alternatives abroad and mobilise internationality in local debates. Moreover, he laments the tragedy of small numbers in his native intellectual field, which stood in the way of specialisation in culture and science. Throughout his career he sought refuge from national constraints in internationality, border-crossing intellectual networks and voluntary exile abroad. Lagerborg writes in his youth from Paris in 1901: «Endast här ute kan jag i mitt specialfack finna en fåra att plöja, som är min och helt min» (cited from his journal, in Lagerborg 1942: 250; It is only here that I in my own discipline can find a field to till that is mine and only mine). At home, he complains, every field of culture was subjected to the national imperative, which dominated scientific discussions to excess. This, in combination with a lack of critical mass and a general eclecticism, made life difficult for both scientists and cultural avant-gardes³.

³ This problem was also discussed in Italy, where Antonio Gramsci (1929-1935) complains about the lack of specialised audiences in the cultural peripheries, and the consequences of this for the avant-gardes.

2. Style and genre

Lagerborg's memoirs consist of two books. The first volume is entitled *I egna ögon – och andras. En bok om att känna sig själv* (1942; In my own eyes – and in the eyes of others. A book about knowing oneself). The second part bears the title *Ord och inga visor. Från ett folkvälde på villovägar. Av «rebellen» Rolf Lagerborg* (1946; In plain words. From a democracy gone astray. By the «rebel» Rolf Lagerborg). The narration does not follow a strict chronology, and while the first volume focuses on his life and career, the second part deals with his role as a critical intellectual in interwar Finland. With the exception of a more personal first chapter, Lagerborg underlines the objectivising character of his self-portrait by choosing a third-person narrative mode. This mode matches the analytic and empiricist language of the book, which in turn mirrors his professional habitus as a positivistic philosopher opposed to subjectivist idealism in the human sciences⁴. The scientific ambition of the self-portrait corresponds to Fernand Braudel's objectivising model in his already mentioned autobiography, or what another French historian, Pierre Nora, in the 1980s discussed under the label of «ego-histoire», in exploring the possibilities of the historians to turn themselves into the historians of themselves (Passerini, Geppert 2001). Lagerborg's memoirs are, on the one hand, characterised by such a scientific approach, which, in addition to the third-person narrative, is underlined by the academic structure of the book and the use of footnotes. On the other hand, the memoirs also represent a playful exercise of objectivising life writing, in which the author is hardly detached from the controversial public debates that he comments on, and they contain eloquent passages and citations illustrating his career as a writer and essayist. In Lagerborg's own analysis, life writing served therapeutic purposes for dealing with a persistent inferiority complex («Vaurien» was his preferred pseudonym). Throughout his career he had been undecided about whether to pursue his career as a scientist or devote himself to writing. For his autobiography he had been composing and gathering material since the age of 29, when he writes in his diary: «En briljant idé: skriva en monografi över mig själv, grundad på förhandenvarande anteckningar, excerpt, manuskript, brev och främst naturligtvis det tryckta» (cited in Lagerborg 1942: 410; A brilliant idea: to write a monograph about myself, based on notes, excerpts, manuscripts, letters and published material of course).

Paul Valéry once claimed that there is no theory that is not in fact a carefully concealed part of the theorist's own life story (cf. Davis 2009: 2).

⁴ See Aurell 2006: 438: «Constructionist historians' autobiographical style is empirical and analytical, applying in their autobiographies the same methodology used in their monographs».

In Lagerborg's case things are not so carefully concealed and we can see a close relationship between his commitment to scientific objectivity, a commitment that in itself was already entangled with ideological positioning, and his role as an engaged intellectual. The style of the autobiography reflects his disciplinary orientation towards the new science of sociology and his empiricist ideals, which were connected to his critique of an alliance between Finnish nationalism, Christian idealism and subjectivist philosophy that dominated scientific and cultural debates. Academic culture in Finland at the time was oriented towards Germany and the humanist ideal of *Bildung*, an almost metaphysical concept emphasising education as self-cultivation, and founded on the notion of an inner core of humanity, which could be reached through introspection. Against this view, the durkheimian Lagerborg conceived of education as a social formation of the individual. In this respect, the "objectivist" stance of his autobiography mirrors his scientific ideals: a sociological view of society that he, together with his mentor, the sociologist Edvard Westermarck, defended against Christian idealism, and a behaviourist position in psychology, from which he attacked every form of subjectivist philosophy of the soul (see for example Heidegren 2004: 282-288).

The relationship between professional standpoint and individual agenda was a recurring feature of Lagerborg's career, illustrated for example by his acute critique of Henri Bergson, the philosophical celebrity of his time. His criticism, as he himself notes, was less based on the philosophical content of Bergsonism than on its potential for promoting a general irrationalism in society, through the widespread popularity of Bergson's introspective philosophy of intuition, which Lagerborg had come across in Paris in the early years of the century (1942: 380-381). The humanities and philosophy in particular, it should be added, were highly politicised subjects in Finland at the turn of the twentieth century. Lagerborg's internationalism, empiricism and sociological ideals merged with a cultural and ideological struggle against Finnish nationalism, making him a controversial figure in many circles. His autobiography serves to justify his life and career choices as a critical intellectual and as a cosmopolitan. In the foreword he confesses that his specialty had been to reveal and tear down false conceptions, and that his vice was self-interest (1942: 14).

The autobiography is furthermore structured as a kind of collage-work consisting of numerous citations from his personal archives, newspaper articles, letters and diary entries: «En klippbok polemik och recensioner [...] med kommentarer» (Lagerborg 1942: 410; A commentated scrapbook of polemics and reviews). In his "comments" he combines an analytical language with self-irony. He is on the one hand the detached observer of his own life, systematically documenting and contextualising key moments of his intellectual career with footnotes. On the other hand, he is still very much in the process of defending his position within the

intellectual field in Finland as an outsider against the grain. Then again, self-fashioned marginality may well be an essential leitmotiv of the entire genre of scholarly autobiographies (Passerini, Geppert 2001: 14). Moreover, cosmopolitan intellectuals in peripheral contexts have a specific interest in stressing the contrast between core modernity and the backwardness of their native countries, as well as their own detached position in a backward environment. Highlighting their participation in transnational intellectual networks and claiming that “real modernity” was only to be found in the European cultural centres where they had travelled, enabled intellectuals such as Lagerborg to fashion themselves as the peripheral representatives of the advanced modernity of the centres (Nygård 2011b). Indeed, Lagerborg mentions travelling in «the wine countries» and being away from Finland as his main sources for inspiration (1942: 245-246).

3. Autobiography and the socio-cultural history of intellectuals

As mentioned, the provocative tone of Lagerborg’s autobiography and his position as a self-conscious outsider should be seen in the context of the dynamic of the intellectual field in Finland at a time of heated debates over language and national identity. From the latter half of the nineteenth century a Finnish-speaking intellectual and social elite had been asserting itself at the expense of the Swedish-speaking urban middle and upper classes that Lagerborg belonged to. Moreover, European intellectuals in general were faced with challenges in the form of expanding mass democracy, the professionalisation of politics and the democratisation of higher education, all affecting the role of intellectuals as a social elite. The first of these contexts has already been mentioned; the Swedish language and culture in Finland had in a short timespan been downgraded to a marginal position. Intellectuals such as Lagerborg, who regarded Sweden as the historical mediator of Western civilisation in Finland, struggled to accept the rapidly changing cultural and political climate. In the autobiography he positions himself as a modern enlightenment philosopher defending critical reason against the religious nationalism of populist movements in the interwar period⁵.

In a micro-perspective these transformations profoundly affected Lagerborg and other Swedish-speaking urban intellectuals, who began to emphasise culture over politics, and gathered around literary reviews such as «Euterpe» and «Argus». Whereas the previous generation, i.e. their fathers, held prominent positions in the country’s political, administrative and economic life – as lawyers, civil servants, landowners

⁵ See especially chapter XXIV in Lagerborg 1946.

and industrialists – the sons, under the pressure of Finnish nationalism, were increasingly excluded from these positions (Mustelin 1963: 26–27; Nygård 2011a). Instead, they turned to culture. We can perhaps see a parallel here to Pierre Bourdieu's claim in *Les Règles de l'art* (1992; *Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. by Emanuel 1996) that the modern concept of the intellectual contains an element of turning an objectively dominated position into a kind of virtuous exclusiveness. According to Bourdieu, this is a key aspect of the ideological metamorphosis by which intellectuals from Flaubert to Sartre turn their exclusion from worldly power and privileges into a freely chosen virtuous predicament (1998: 349; Nygård 2011a).

The Danish critic and cultural authority Georg Brandes is the paradigmatic example of this intellectual role in late nineteenth-century Scandinavia; indeed, Lagerborg and the other members of the «Euterpe»-group sometimes referred to themselves as Brandesians. Brandes, along with the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen, exemplifies a striking feature of Scandinavian cultural debates at this time, namely the tendency among the avant-gardes to influence national debates from a distance, during long periods of voluntary exile abroad. This constitutes an additional dimension to the interplay between culturally dominant and dominated positions, and between autonomy and heteronomy in the intellectual field. Internationality was mobilised, as repeatedly demonstrated in Lagerborg's account of his life, by small-country intellectuals in their defence of the autonomy of the cultural field in relation to politics. In a peripheral Finnish or Scandinavian context, networks, travels abroad and symbolic alliances with foreign intellectuals served to underline the detached position that 'free' intellectuals claimed for themselves and on which they based their political interventions from a critical distance, guaranteed by the relative autonomy that came with their position as members of a scientific or cultural field. Lagerborg's account of his cosmopolitan upbringing and international outlook, his tendency to contrast national constraints and backwardness with international freedom and modernity, and his mobilisation of the symbolic capital that came with international recognition and networks, call attention to how the relationship between the national and the international was perceived by the cosmopolitans of peripheral small nations as analogous with the relationship between heteronomy and autonomy in the intellectual field.

The recourse to internationality merged with the search for alternative modes of having an impact on public debates. Indeed, Lagerborg had witnessed the 'birth of the intellectual' (at least the neologism) from up-close during the Dreyfus affair in Paris, the preferred location for numerous Scandinavian writers, artists and intellectuals at the turn of the century. The memoirs include excerpts from his diary where he comments on the role of Émile Zola and the implications of his political

intervention. By re-examining the case against the Jewish captain Alfred Dreyfus, Zola effectively went against public opinion, which during the affair sided with the army and the church against the falsely accused Dreyfus. Zola, Lagerborg remarks, had given voice to another form of critical public opinion for which he considered himself accountable (1942: 226). The affair produced an ideal-typical figure of the modern intellectual personified by Zola in his collective mobilisation of writers, artists and scientists in the name of universal reason and cultural authority (Charle 1990: 97-99). Lagerborg identifies with this ideal and justifies his defiant antipatriotism in independent Finland with another reference to La Mettrie, according to whom philosophers should have the courage to speak the truth and not let themselves be deterred by biased political motives (Lagerborg 1946: 9). The entire second volume of Lagerborg's autobiography revolves around his defence of independent reasoning against state power and the religion of nationalism in the period of prohibition laws, so-called True Finnishness, black shirts and leather boots in interwar Finland.

4. Conclusion

The autobiography of Rolf Lagerborg belongs to a tradition of scholarly self-portraits dating at least as far back as the eighteenth century. Such narratives bear witness to a form of self-representation that is explicitly informed by modern scientific ideals. For sure, even when they attempt to establish a critical distance between the subject and the object, they are, like all autobiographical texts, determined by the perspective of the writer. Historians therefore tend to regard them as at best highly subjective, and at worst as deliberately misleading in claiming to provide first-hand knowledge of 'what really happened' (see for example Pascal 1960, ch. V; Weintraub 1975). Lagerborg himself cites the *New Testament* (John 5:31): «Om jag vittnar om mig själv, så är mitt vittnesmål icke sannt» (Lagerborg 1942: 415; If I bear witness of myself, my testimony is not true).

Despite the inevitable difficulties involved in using autobiographical narratives as historical sources, approached with some degree of caution and attention to contextualising the subject as well as his/her arguments and positions, they are valuable documents for historians by providing detailed information on the practicalities of intellectual life and shedding light on the internal logic, conflicts and networks of cultural fields. The object of such an approach is the history, structure and dynamic of an intellectual field rather than the individual per se⁶.

⁶ See Charle 1990 for a broad-ranging comparative demonstration.

When put into the comparative framework of European intellectual spaces, Lagerborg's experiences resemble the predicament of contemporary intellectuals in other national contexts, with or without linguistic or ethnic minorities. His laments about the constraints of small-country intellectual fields are mirrored by Franz Kafka's writings on the literatures of small nations, and James Joyce is another example of the strategy of accumulating symbolic capital abroad against cultural nationalism at home (Corngold 2004: 282-283; Casanova 2008; Casanova 2011: 28-29). In this light, Lagerborg's self-portrait sheds light on a broader pattern of intellectuals against the grain in countries with a strong national imperative, their mobilisation of international symbolic capital and the authority of science in national ideological debates. This pattern continues in Lagerborg's retrospective defence of his position in the heated cultural, linguistic and ideological struggles in Finland before and after the First World War. His choice of the third-person narrative mode corresponds to the spirit of positivism and empiricism that characterised his career as a sociologically oriented philosopher. This empiricism, in turn, is connected to the entanglement between the intellectual and the political field in early twentieth-century Finland, where position-taking in debates between positivism and idealism had clear ideological connotations. In these debates, internationally oriented intellectuals occupied an ambiguous position. Like Lagerborg, they were, at one and the same time, accused of betraying national Romanticism and praised for their European contacts, blamed for being too involved elsewhere and applauded for their cultural mediation⁷.

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⁷ The work on this article was carried out with funding from the Academy of Finland.

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NARRARE LA DISTANZA. AUTOBIOGRAFIA E PROSPETTIVA NELL'OPERA DI KAREN BLIXEN

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Come altri autori prima e dopo di lei, Karen Blixen ha costruito su un'impalcatura autobiografica alcune opere comunemente considerate un resoconto, per quanto soggettivo, della sua vita, ma sul cui vero legame con la realtà dei fatti sarebbe possibile discutere a lungo. Le opere che trattano il suo rapporto con l'Africa – il 'filone africano' della sua prosa, da *Den afrikanske Farm* (*La mia Africa*, trad. di Drudi Demby 1959), pubblicato nel 1937, al saggio *Sorte og hvide i Afrika* (*Negri e bianchi in Africa*, trad. di Berni, in Blixen 1995: 11-50), abbozzato come conferenza nel 1938 e pubblicato postumo, e infine a *Skygger på græsset* (*Ombre sull'erba*, trad. di Gariglio 1985b), del 1960 –, e che hanno origine dal suo soggiorno in Kenya dal 1914 al 1931, vengono contrapposte al filone narrativo dei racconti e dell'unico romanzo – da *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* (1934; *Sette storie gotiche*, trad. di Scalero, Motti 1978) a *Gengældelsens Veje* (1944; *I vendicatori angelici*, trad. di Candian 1985a) a *Sidste Fortællinger* (1957; *Ultimi racconti*, trad. di Motti 1982) – quasi si tratti di realtà contrapposta a finzione. Più che in altri autori è vero invece che esiste un'unità di intenti nel considerare il mondo narrato, autobiografico o meno, e che il filo sottile che unisce l'intera sua opera è riconoscibile al di là della materia trattata.

Per quanto riguarda il 'filone africano' è facile cogliere la differenza tra le opere che lei stessa consegnò al pubblico nel corso della sua vita e il materiale soprattutto epistolare che dopo la sua morte ha continuato a essere pubblicato in varie edizioni, dalle *Breve fra Afrika* (*Lettere dall'Africa*, trad. di Berni 1987) del 1978 alle lettere successive al periodo africano di *Karen Blixen i Danmark* (1996; *Karen Blixen in Danimarca*) e infine alle *Breve fra Afrika* in quattro volumi pubblicate nel 2012 in Danimarca, in una edizione che arricchisce la prima con molto materiale inedito e che rappresenterà uno strumento di ricerca molto più puntuale dell'edizione del 1978, destinata soprattutto al pubblico dei non specialisti. Tale differenza è in sé un dato interessante, ma non solo come esercizio accademico, quanto piuttosto come indice di una distanza dal contesto narrato che caratterizza l'intera produzione narrativa della scrittrice.

Parlare delle divergenze che affiorano paragonando la lettura di *Den afrikanske Farm* e delle *Breve fra Afrika* pubblicate molti anni dopo è un

argomento che avrebbe bisogno di molto spazio e soprattutto un tema capace di produrre infinite sfumature, perché non si tratta semplicemente di distinguere la realtà dall'invenzione letteraria, la documentazione diretta non destinata alla pubblicazione dalla narrazione meditata. Del resto anche tra le lettere stesse – come traspare soprattutto da quelle di argomento simile – esiste per esempio, nella descrizione dei fatti, una differenza di prospettiva che deriva soprattutto dal destinatario. Più attente a non toccare argomenti scottanti, evocative quasi di un mondo romantico, le lettere inviate alla madre o a 'zia Bess'; più dirette, accorate, piene di sottintesi e talvolta persino dolorose le lettere indirizzate al fratello Thomas, soprattutto dopo il suo lungo soggiorno alla fattoria dal 1921 al 1923, durante il quale lui stesso fece esperienza della vita africana e divenne un confidente più profondo di quanto non fosse prima del 1914. Basterebbe scorrere alcuni episodi presenti nei messaggi alla madre e a Thomas, come quelli citati da Frans Lasson nell'introduzione alle lettere, per scoprire quell'«istinktive publikumsfornemelse» di cui proprio Lasson parla nelle stesse pagine (1978: 13; 1987: 15; istintivo senso del pubblico).

Ma il passaggio dalla realtà narrata ai parenti, sebbene con diverse angolazioni, al risultato narrativo del periodo africano descritto in *Den afrikanske Farm* alcuni anni dopo, è molto più complesso. L'intenzione iniziale di Karen Blixen, è noto, era quella di costruire un libro documentario sull'Africa, che rompesse con la tradizione narrativa delle descrizioni del continente come terra di battute di caccia e avventure: fin dall'inizio lo scopo è quello di scrivere della vita alla piantagione, del rapporto dei bianchi con i nativi, della loro vita quotidiana. I presupposti c'erano, per esempio la volontà di allontanarsi dallo pseudonimo e pubblicare con il proprio nome per la prima volta, di marcare la differenza tra la finzione – l'opera narrativa pubblicata come Isak Dinesen – e la 'realtà' del 'filone africano', pubblicato come Karen Blixen, e infine l'esigenza di pubblicare il libro come scrittrice già affermata affinché l'impatto sull'opinione pubblica fosse maggiore. In un primo momento c'era l'intenzione di costruire un libro documentario «hvortil, hvad der fortælles, virkelig er sket. Det skal være Sandheden om de Sorte, som jeg selv har mødt og oplevet den» (Taaning 1935: 84, corsivo nell'originale; in cui tutto ciò che viene narrato è *accaduto davvero*. Deve essere la verità sui neri come io l'ho incontrata e l'ho vissuta¹). Si trattava dunque di dare all'opera una «dokumentarisk intention» (Kjældgaard 2007: 427; intenzione documentaria) che andasse ben oltre l'autobiografia, come i *Masai-Hæfte* (Quaderni masai) che la scrittrice iniziò a comporre in

¹ L'intervista è ripubblicata in Juhl 1984: 83-86. Quando non diversamente indicato, come in questo caso, le traduzioni sono di chi scrive.

Africa, taccuini manoscritti con descrizioni etnografiche sul popolo dei Masai, dei quali inizialmente scrive all'editore Robert Haas il 24 marzo del 1934: «I have to have these published under my real name, as they deal with real facts and people» (Blixen 1996, I: 127).

Nella realtà il lavoro andava a rilento e man mano che procedeva aumentava il distacco non già in direzione della finzione, ma tra la composizione di un libro documentario e l'astrazione, la presa di distanza dal narrato per trasformarlo in qualcosa di diverso. Fin dal titolo, che presto divenne *Ex Africa* – mutuato dalla poesia sull'Africa (il primo scritto sul continente che l'aveva adottata), scritta durante il lungo soggiorno in Danimarca nel 1915 per malattia e pubblicata solo nel 1925 (Blixen 1925) – e fu poi sostituito, nella versione inglese, passando dalla proposta di Huntington di *Marvels out of Africa*, nella lettera del 21 giugno 1937 (Blixen 1996, I: 244-245), attraverso *African Dream* e *African Pastorale* proposti da Haas in una lettera del 31 agosto (Juhl 1984: 64-66), che marcavano l'assenza di aspirazioni realistiche, per poi approdare infine a quell'*Out of Africa* che indicava perfettamente la distanza acquisita, perché l'opera non era scritta in Africa, ma sull'Africa a distanza di anni, una presa di distanza espressa dalla stessa Blixen quando affermava di aver bisogno di allontanarsi per poterne scrivere, come si vedrà in seguito.

Anche il contenuto indica bene l'allontanamento, fin dall'incipit al passato – «Jeg havde en farm i Afrika» (Blixen 2007: 15; «In Africa avevo una fattoria», trad. di Drudi Demby; Blixen 1959: 21) – che sottolinea la perdita e dà al libro un tono narrativo, per passare all'assenza di una prospettiva temporale, che impedisce al lettore – finché non ha avuto accesso alle lettere che restituiscono tale prospettiva – di rendersi conto della successione degli eventi, persino della durata del soggiorno africano. E per giungere alla estrema carenza di elementi personali: manca quasi ogni riferimento al matrimonio con Bror Blixen, al rapporto con Denys Finch Hatton, alle difficoltà economiche, e il tono epico è determinante mentre ogni elemento concreto viene lasciato nel vago. Come afferma Hannah Arendt, «*Out of Africa*, which is often called autobiographical, is singularly reticent, silent on almost all the issues her biographer would be bound to raise» (1968: 100). E del resto il film di Sydney Pollack che riprende il titolo dall'opera non è basato sul testo, ma in gran parte sulla biografia di Judith Thurman che precede la pellicola solo di pochi anni (Kjældgaard 2007: 434).

Cosa definisce quindi la differenza tra *Den afrikanske Farm* e le lettere? Non la non veridicità in assoluto, ma appunto la distanza dall'universo narrato, che trasforma l'opera in un libro in cui si cerca di tracciare, o per meglio dire di scorgere, un disegno, come nella storia della cicogna inserita nel testo. La necessità della Blixen di prendere le distanze dalla realtà per poter scorgere il disegno del destino fa di *Den afrikanske Farm* un libro in cui il paese, i nativi, la fattoria si trasformano nell'Africa perduta più

che nell'Africa vissuta, in un'aspettativa romantica, e soprattutto in un elemento simbolico strumentale al resto della sua opera narrativa.

Karen Blixen, suo malgrado, aveva dovuto prendere le distanze dal continente per riuscire a descriverlo, come affermava già nel 1935, in un'intervista dopo la pubblicazione di *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger*: «Jeg kunde lige saa lidt have skrevet om mit Liv der, som man kunde skrive om et Barn den Dag, man begravede det. Man maa have Tingene paa Afstand» (Bonnesen 1935: 250; Non potevo scrivere della mia vita lì, come non si potrebbe scrivere di un figlio il giorno in cui viene sepolto. Bisogna prendere distanza dalle cose)². Si trattava di una necessità esistenziale, psicologica. «Det er højst bemærkelsesværdigt [...] at vi i størstedelen af vores tilværelse forholder os ikke til verden og tilværelsen selv, men til en verden og en tilværelse, som vi selv har skabt og defineret», afferma Mogens Pahuus nel suo libro sulla *Weltanschauung* di Karen Blixen (1995: 91; È estremamente degno di nota [...] che per la maggior parte della nostra esistenza non ci rapportiamo al mondo e all'esistenza in sé, ma a un mondo e a un'esistenza che abbiamo creato e definito noi stessi), ed è esattamente questo il motivo che accomuna i testi africani e il resto dei racconti all'interno della produzione della scrittrice. Senza creare un suo universo, senza prendere le distanze facendo degli anni africani un mondo che assumeva una struttura partendo dalla sua visione della vita, e non il contrario, non sarebbe mai riuscita a scrivere dell'Africa consegnandola al mito, tracciandone un disegno compiuto.

Den afrikanske Farm è dunque inserito in un disegno già tracciato quando, pochi anni prima, l'autrice si era posta nello stesso modo nei confronti dell'Europa e della Danimarca all'atto di scrivere *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger*, e come avrebbe fatto alcuni anni dopo con le altre sue raccolte. Per quanto riguarda i racconti, il primo elemento di conferma lo fornisce lei stessa, nell'introduzione all'edizione danese, quando afferma che «en stor Del af *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* er tænkt, og noget af den er skrevet, i Afrika, og de Steder i min Bog, der handler om Danmark, maa tages mere som en dansk Emigrants Fantasier over danske Temaer end som noget Forsøg paa Virkelighedsskildring» (Blixen 1964: 7; gran parte delle *Sette storie gotiche* è pensata, e un po' è scritta, in Africa, e i passi del mio libro che parlano della Danimarca devono essere considerati più le fantasie di un emigrante danese su temi danesi che un tentativo di descrivere la realtà)³.

Vero è infatti il parallelismo sottolineato da Robert Langbaum che se Karen Blixen ha bisogno di allontanarsi dall'Africa per poterne scrivere, è in Africa invece che si allontana dalla Danimarca, trasformandola nella

² L'intervista è ripubblicata in Rostbøll 1980: 246-253.

³ La traduzione della citazione è di chi scrive, poiché l'edizione italiana dei racconti, eseguita a partire dalla versione inglese, non contiene l'introduzione.

fantasia di un emigrante danese: «While a great deal of *Seven Gothic Tales* was “thought of [...] and some of it written in Africa”, *Out of Africa* was [...] entirely conceived and written after she got back to Europe» (Langbaum 1964: 119). In Africa aveva iniziato a comporre i primi embrioni della sua narrativa, come confessa in una lettera del 10 aprile 1931 al fratello, quando ormai sta per abbandonare per sempre il continente: «Saa har jeg, i disse vanskelige Maaneder, foretaget mig, hvad vi Søkende gør, naar vi ikke ved, hvad vi ellers skal gøre» (Blixen 1978a, 2: 224; «In questi mesi difficili ho fatto quello che noi fratelli facciamo quando non sappiamo che altro fare: ho cominciato a scrivere un libro», trad. di Berni; Blixen 1987: 390). Già da qualche anno infatti l'idea di una serie di racconti, basata su quella che in seguito, mitizzando se stessa, faceva risalire alle serate davanti al camino in cui si dedicava a raccontare a Denys, era diventata realtà. «Naar han kom til Farmen, spurgte han mig om jeg havde nogen Historie at fortælle. Jeg havde digtet mange Eventyr og Historier mens han havde været borte. Om aftenen gjorde han sig bekvemt paa Gulvet foran Kaminen med alle Husets Puder spredt omkring sig» (Blixen 2007: 187; «Quando veniva alla fattoria mi chiedeva: “C'è una storia per me?”. Io ne avevo preparate tante, durante la sua assenza. La sera, disposti tutti i cuscini davanti al caminetto, si approntava una specie di divano», trad. di Drudi Demby; Blixen 1959: 250): così, all'inizio degli anni Venti, erano nati i *Nine Tales by Nozdref's Cook*, che contengono in embrione *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger*.

L'unica realtà cui la scrittrice può rapportarsi è perciò un mondo scomparso, lontano, quello dell'Europa abbandonata nel 1913, il continente che la Prima guerra mondiale aveva definitivamente cambiato. Un mondo ideale che per lei era rimasto fermo e nel quale non sarebbe mai più riuscita ad ambientarsi dopo la tragedia africana. «Jeg løb ind i Armene paa Eventyret, som et rædselsslagent Barn søger Trøst i sin Billedbog», afferma il barone von Brackel in *Den gamle vandrende Ridder* (Blixen 1964: 103; *L'antico cavaliere*; «mi rifugiai in un mondo fantastico, come un bimbo infelice nel suo libro di fiabe», trad. di Scalero, Motti; Blixen 1978b: 103), e nello stesso modo Karen Blixen trovò rifugio in un universo lontano dalla vita reale.

Incapace di rapportarsi con un mondo che aveva abbandonato da tempo e che perciò era cambiato e per lei era ormai in qualche misura incomprensibile, nei racconti la Blixen ricorre alla descrizione di una società scomparsa e ideale, che non ha più riscontri con la realtà, ma la cui lontananza è ormai inevitabile e le è a un tempo necessaria per poterne identificare il disegno. Ormai il metodo della distanza era quello; perduto il contatto con l'Africa, aveva perduto anche il contatto con la Danimarca, ritirandosi in un mondo idealizzato, una copertura, un rifugio, e «da hun fandt ud af at lægge fortællingerne 100 år tilbage i tiden var tildækningen på plads», afferma Bo Hakon Jørgensen (Juhl, Jørgensen

1981: 232; quando riuscì a collocare i racconti 100 anni indietro nel tempo la copertura era completa).

Il modo di rapportarsi all'universo narrato, trasferito dai racconti ai testi africani, è lo stesso e rimane costante nelle successive opere. Vero è infatti che di tutta l'opera narrativa della Blixen solo un paio di racconti toccano l'epoca contemporanea, mentre tutti gli altri trattano una società in cui gli strati sociali erano regolati da norme in cui la scrittrice vedeva rispecchiarsi gli stessi rapporti che legavano le persone in Africa, o per meglio dire gli stessi rapporti che nella sua visione delle cose legavano le persone in Africa. Una struttura sociale idealizzata, sia per quanto riguarda l'Africa sia nell'analisi di un'Europa di tempi scomparsi, una deliberata evasione nel passato alla quale la Blixen affianca consapevolmente uno stile che si rivela espressione di altri tempi, più vicino al racconto romantico che al realismo della sua epoca, ma anche vicino alla narrazione orale, facendo ricorso a «modelli narrativi arcaici, in cui è fondamentale la digressione, o l'innesto a scatole cinesi di vicende che si incastonano l'una nell'altra» (Fusini 1996: 13-14), come pure l'uso costante di uno pseudonimo e di una lingua diversa sono strumenti per prendere le distanze dall'universo narrato.

Tutto questo, la fuga in temi e atmosfere lontani e il ricorso a «modelli narrativi arcaici», le procurò qualche problema soprattutto in patria, poiché ciò che poteva apparire affascinante a un pubblico americano era considerato stucchevole da molti critici danesi, come nella ben nota recensione di Frederik Schyberg, che attribuiva il grande successo americano all'esotismo dei personaggi e delle ambientazioni, e considerava il libro «et litterært Illusionsnummer» (1935: 230; «un numero di illusionismo letterario», trad. di Berni; Schyberg 1994: 80). Ma una via era ormai tracciata, prima con *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger*, poi con *Den afrikanske Farm*, in seguito con *Vinter-Eventyr* (1942; *Racconti d'inverno*, trad. di Motti 1984), il suo libro più danese, ma sempre costruito su un mondo ideale fatto di rapporti sociali idealizzati persino nella tragedia, come *Sorg-Agre (Il campo del dolore*, trad. di Motti 1997), e più tardi con il resto della sua produzione. «Til grund for alt, hvad Karen Blixen skrev af litteratur, ligger der en regel, som hun også i dette tilfælde fulgte: at man ikke bør være på for nært hold af begivenheder, når man skal berette om dem» (Alla base di tutta la letteratura che Karen Blixen scrisse c'è una regola che lei seguì anche in questo caso: che non bisogna essere troppo vicini agli avvenimenti, quando li si deve raccontare), come afferma Lasse Horne Kjældgaard nella sua postfazione all'edizione critica di *Den afrikanske Farm* (2007: 421).

La distanza dal tempo narrato caratterizza quindi in pari misura i testi africani e i racconti, portando l'autrice a cercare una prospettiva di allontanamento dal contesto per poter intravedere in entrambi i casi una visione d'insieme che in tal modo assume significati simbolici

rappresentando un'aspettativa romantica più che una descrizione della realtà. E se la trattazione del 'filone africano' rappresenta una necessità esistenziale in rapporto più stretto con la realtà vissuta, e solo come tale si distingue dal resto della sua produzione, alla prova della composizione non si discosta sensibilmente dalla ricerca di significati simbolici, dalla ricerca della cicogna, che caratterizza l'intera produzione di Karen Blixen: una fuga psicologica nel tempo narrato che rappresenta un sicuro rifugio per esorcizzare la perdita, che è caratteristica di tutta la sua vita e dunque di tutta la sua opera.

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THE NAMES IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ISAK DINESEN/KAREN BLIXEN

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Karen Blixen was known by many names, both in her private and in her public life. She was born Karen Christentze Dinesen on 17 April 1885 in Rungsted, north of Copenhagen, on the coast facing Sweden. Today the house, called Rungstedlund, is a museum dedicated to her life and writing. She died in that same place on 7 September 1962, at the age of seventy-seven. As a writer she is known by the pseudonym Isak Dinesen, especially in the United States where she first met success, but also in other countries. Only in Germany were her books published under the name of Tania Dinesen. She also used other *noms de plume*: Osceola for the publication of her first juvenile short stories and Pierre Andrézel for her novel *Gengældelsens Veje* (1944)¹. Family members, such as her husband and her most intimate friends, called her Tanne, while for her English friends she was Tania.

So many names for one person, who did not want to be imprisoned in a definition that was too specific. Even though she loved her art, she did not want to be considered a writer, because she did not want to be «a piece of printed matter» (Dinesen 1984: 196). Yet, in her lifetime, she discovered that being an artist was an essential part of her identity, the most fulfilling one. She did not always externalise this part of herself, for instance when she lived on her farm, in Kenya, but at a certain point it seemed as if she did not have any other choice than to put into writing the stories that had followed and befriended her.

I will try to retrace her steps, in particular through one of her characters, Pellegrina Leoni. Pellegrina is the protagonist of *The Dreamers*, which is part of *Seven Gothic Tales*, her first collection of short stories, which Karen Blixen published in English in 1934, when she was almost fifty years

¹ *Gengældelsens Veje* was published by Gyldendal on 2 September 1944. Karen Blixen translated the book into English, and it was published under the title *The Angelic Avengers* in Great Britain (Putnam, London 1946) and in the United States (Random House, New York 1947). She always considered this novel as a kind of «illegitimate child» (Langbaum 1964: 196) and not as a part of her literary production; it was more of a diversion for Blixen during wartime.

old. Pellegrina could to a certain extent be considered as a kind of alter ego of the artist, in the sense that she also refuses to be trapped in one particular social role. She discovers that she does not want to be trapped in her own and other people's expectations. Pellegrina is a world-famous opera singer, loved for her extraordinary voice. Her happiness depends on this gift and on the fame it has given her, so, when she loses her voice in an accident, she feels like a dead woman. Although she tries to commit suicide, she feels that she has too much life in her and she 'revives'. She decides not to depend on just one identity any longer and from that time on she continually reinvents herself, changing her name and moving to a new place as soon as she risks being identified with one role. What she used to experience on stage becomes her everyday life, and although she has buried the opera singer, she is still an artist. «What, then, happens to her qualities – her vitality, intelligence, imagination – after she has ceased to be Pellegrina? She is a great artist still, but an artist in life, playing roles as she used to on the stage and giving happiness through these roles» (Langbaum 1964: 97). Or, as Susan Hardy Aiken explains:

The text suggests that *being oneself* is not the same as being *one self*. Paradoxically, Pellegrina Leoni is most herself when she is least herself. She "lives" most intensely as operatic actress. A plural *figure* or moving *character* who "sings" many roles in many voices, giving double meaning to the term *poly-phony*. For her "real life" is fiction – and vice versa: the very inter-changeability of those terms and the irresolvable ambiguity of their statement emblemizes the sorts of paradox Dinesen plays out through Pellegrina. (1990: 59; italics in the original)

The name «Pellegrina» comes from *pellegrino*, i.e. pilgrim, and refers to someone who goes beyond her/his own city or land and is therefore always a stranger. The artist seems to need the condition of being a stranger in order to look at reality with fresh eyes and a new, more detached attitude, in the same way as Pellegrina and Karen Blixen wish to go beyond a strict definition of their identities. Pellegrina's last name, Leoni, relates to the fact that Karen Blixen was called «a lioness»², like the animal she loved because of its fierceness and wildness and its difficulty in surviving captivity.

² In a letter to Ingeborg Dinesen, her mother, she wrote: «...Mon jeg forresten nogensinde sendte Dig, eller Tommy var det vist, – et Brev fra en gammel Gun-bearer, adresseret til: Lioness von Blixen, – og som begyndte: Honourable Lioness –? Saaledes bliver jeg nu almindelig tituleret og synes det er flot» (Blixen 1978, 2: 160; «... Incidentally, I wonder if I ever sent you, – or perhaps it was Tommy, – a letter from an old gun-bearer, addressed to Lioness von Blixen, – and that began: Honourable lioness –? This is how I am generally addressed and I think it is rather grand», trans. by Born; Dinesen 1981: 362).

But then, who is Karen Blixen and who is an artist according to her? «Who are you?» is the question with which Cardinal Salviati starts to tell his own story in *The Cardinal's First Tale* (Dinesen 1986: 3), part of the collection *Last Tales*, published in 1957. Langbaum affirms that this story «sums up in its plot and meaning the essence of all Isak Dinesen's work» (1964: 26). Cardinal Salviati is a complex character. When he was born he had a twin brother who was destined to become an artist, while he himself was meant to become a priest. One of the two twin babies died in a fire accident, but was it really the artist who died? This ambiguity remains and throughout the story emerges as a common characteristic of the artist and the priest, both considered to be «the bow of the Lord», that is «that frail implement, mute in itself, which in the hand of the master will bring out all music that stringed instruments contain, and be at the same time, medium and creator» (Dinesen 1986: 20-23). In a letter to her brother Thomas, written on 5 September 1926, Karen Blixen refers to herself as a catholic priest: she felt that she was not living a 'normal' and common life and if she wanted to be really free she had to live in a state of loneliness:

Højest af alt, hvad jeg besidder, sætter jeg min Frihed [...]. Jeg kan ikke besiddes og ønsker ikke at besidde, – og Gud skal vide at det kan være tomt og koldt, men det er ikke lummert og ikke indeklemt. Paa dette punkt ved jeg ogsaa at jeg maa acceptere min Skæbne 'betingelsesløst', thi hvor meget jeg kan længes efter noget mere fast og intimt i mit Liv, saa 'unddrager' jeg mig, naar det kommer til Kritten, og dette gentager sig bestandig for mig. Jeg har jo sagt at jeg gjerne vilde være katholsk Præst, og det staar jeg ved, – og det er noget nær det jeg er, – men han skulde vel være mere end et Menneske, hvis han ikke undertiden kunde sukke dybt ved at se Lamperne tændes i Hjemmene og Familiekrederen samles. (Blixen 1978, 2: 68-69)

I prize my freedom above everything else that I possess [...]. I cannot be possessed and have no desire to possess, – it can be cold and empty, God knows, but it is not cramped or stifling. I know that I must accept this aspect of my life 'unconditionally' too, for however much I may long for something more secure and intimate in my life, when the crunch comes I back out of it, and this recurs continually. You know that I have said that I would like to be a Catholic priest, and I still maintain this, – and I am not far from being one, – but he would have to be more than human if he did not sometimes heave a deep sigh on seeing the lights lit in the windows and the family circle gathered together. (Trans. by Born; Dinesen 1981: 281-282)

It is through a story that the reader discovers the identities of the artist Pellegrina Leoni and the priest Cardinal Salviati. It is Salviati who says that «the divine art is the story» (Dinesen 1986: 24), because it is «a manifestation of the divine order, and the characters are called into being to act out the story [...] whereas the novel takes a critical and relativistic attitude toward communal values» (Langbaum 1964: 30).

“Hard and cruel it may seem,” said the Cardinal, “yet we, who hold our high office as keepers and watchmen to the story, may tell you, verily, that to its human characters there is salvation in nothing else in the universe. If you tell them – you compassionate and accommodating human readers – that they may bring their distress and anguish before any other authority, you will be cruelly deceiving and mocking them. For within our whole universe the story only has authority to answer that cry of the heart of its characters, that one cry of heart of each of them: *“Who am I?”* (Dinesen 1986: 26; italics in the original)

Karen Blixen asked herself the same question, particularly when she had to leave her farm in Africa in 1931. It is possible to hear an echo of her search for identity in her letters from Africa and in the story of the stork (Blixen 1978, 2: 54-55), which is also included in *Out of Africa* (Blixen 1954: 213-215). When she went back to Denmark she had to write to earn her living. She would have preferred to stay in Kenya where she had been living for seventeen years. Like Pellegrina, who loses her voice, Karen Blixen lost everything when she lost Africa: her life, her home, and the man she loved. But the writer, just like the opera singer, succeeded in rising from her ashes when she had to decide between life and death.

In a letter to her brother Thomas, she wrote:

Du maa ikke tro att jeg er en saadan Pjalt, at jeg ikke har tænkt over, om det vilde være det bedste, om jeg tog Livet af mig, og været parat til at gøre det, om jeg virkelig skulde komme til den Overbevisning at det var det. For at slippe for at leve paa den Maade, som jag gør nu, vilde vel forresten Verdens største Pjalt være parat dertil. Men jeg synes, at det vilde ikke hjælpe. Det, som jeg længes efter, er jo: Liv, og det som jeg frygter og flygter for, er Tomhed og Tilintetgørelse, – og hvad andet kan man haabe at opnaa ved at dø? Jeg vil forfærdelig gerne leve, jeg vil forfærdelig nødig dø. (Blixen 1978, 2: 30)

You must not think that I am so spineless that I have not considered whether it would not be best if I were to take my life, and be prepared to do so if I really came to the conclusion that it was. Surely the greatest coward in the world would be prepared to do it to escape such a life as I have now. But I do not think it would help. For what I long for is after all life, and what I fear and take flight from is emptiness and annihilation, – and what else can one hope to achieve by dying? I want so terribly to live, I want so terribly not to die. (Trans. by Born; Dinesen 1981: 249)

In *The Dreamers* Marcus Coccoza, Pellegrina’s friend and ‘guardian angel’, who in a particular moment is telling the story of his friend, echoes the same impossibility to die:

The truth was that, as she had said, she could not die. In one way or another, she had too much life in her. [...] All the same, my powders had worked a change in her. She had done with death. Dead tired, she had risen, in a way, from the dead. (Dinesen 2002: 297)

Karen Blixen became a pilgrim who found her 'home' in storytelling: «Stories had saved her love, and stories saved her life after disaster had struck. "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them." The story reveals the meaning of what otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings» (Arendt 1970: 104). The art of telling stories helped her to make a living, but especially to process her loss, helping her to give a sense to what she had experienced. In this way she could distance herself and would not risk being trapped by her own destiny. Storytelling became a way to express the life force that had helped her to survive when she had lost everything that was of value to her. Her tragedy became an opportunity to live and to be born again and to realise that there was something that went beyond herself and her own limits. This is the ground in which the artist was born: she became an instrument that received a mission in a particular moment of her life, just as Cardinal Salviati considers himself «the bow of the Lord». It was a very strong experience, which passed close to death and brought with it the awareness of a call. A kind of meeting with the truth that marked her existence, even physically. After such a meeting, even her name 'had to' change to indicate the metamorphosis.

Pellegrina has a scar on her neck, from the fire in which she lost her voice. From then on, she will not be Pellegrina Leoni anymore, but Olalla, Rosalba or Lola. Another storyteller who appears in Karen Blixen's *The Dreamers* is Mira Jama, «the much renowned storyteller», and he appears without nose or ears: «he had, at some encounter with his destiny, had the nose and ears cut clear off» (Dinesen 2002: 237). The loss suffered by Pellegrina is an experience of death, but ends up giving her a deeper awareness of herself and the world she is living in.

When Karen Blixen, marked by illness and loss, returned from Kenya to Denmark and to her mother's house, she had to find a new way to respond to life. She would call herself Isak, which means «the one who laughs». The story refers to that of Sarah in the *Old Testament*. Sarah, Abraham's wife, is unable to have children until her old age. When an angel announces the birth of a son, Isaac, to her, Sarah laughs because it seems incredible that her desire should be fulfilled in her dotage. The angel reproaches her for laughing at God's will. It was from Sarah's laugh of skepticism and bewilderment that the name Isaac was born. Karen Blixen experienced the same condition of skepticism and bewilderment in becoming an artist and giving birth to her late-born books.

In another story, *The Blank Page*, included in *Last Tales*, the main character, a woman, does not have a name, or at least the reader does not know if she has one. She is «the storyteller», who represents them all. Maybe that is why it is not important that she identifies herself with a single name. She becomes one with all her ancestors of storytellers and represents more the myth of the storyteller than herself, a myth that transcends her, just like the stories she tells:

You want a tale, sweet lady and gentleman? Indeed I have told many tales, one more than a thousand, since that time when I first let young men tell me, myself, tales of a red rose, two smooth lily buds, and four silky, supple, deadly entwining snakes. It was my mother's mother, the black-eyed dancer, the often-embraced, who in the end – wrinkled like a winter apple and crouching beneath the mercy of the veil – took upon herself to teach me the art of storytelling. Her own mother's mother had taught it to her, and both were better storytellers than I am. But that, by now, is of no consequence, since to the people they and I have become one, and I am most highly honored because I have told stories for two hundred years. (Dinesen 1986: 100)

The idea of being an artist is not something abstract or magic, but is generated from self-awareness, from living one's life fully and gaining experiences, whether happy or sad. Furthermore, the artist's life involves the surrounding world and what she calls «God», a character often present in her storytelling and in her life. Maybe it is His/Her hand that guides her through incomprehensible human vicissitudes, and even the experience of death, as she says in *Out of Africa*:

When in the end, the day came on which I was going away, I learned the strange learning that things can happen which we ourselves cannot possibly imagine, either beforehand, or at the time when they are taking place, or afterwards when we look back on them. Circumstances can have a motive force by which they bring about events without aid of human imagination or apprehension. On such occasions you yourself keep in touch with what is going on by attentively following it from moment to moment, like a blind person who is being led, and who places one foot in front of the other cautiously but unwittingly. Things are happening to you, and you feel them happening, but except for this one fact, you have no connection with them, and no key to the cause or meaning of them. The performing wild animals in a circus go through their programme, I believe, in that same way. Those who have been through such events can, in a way, say that they have been through death – a passage outside the range of imagination, but within the range of experience. (Blixen 1954: 327-328)

This passage through death seems to be a necessary path for the birth of the artist Isak Dinesen. Reaching the end of an experience is not negative if it leaves a message, if a meaning can be discerned from it. In a letter to her mother, Tanne explains:

...Jeg tænker saa tidt paa Ord i Biblen: "Jeg slipper Dig ikke, før Du velsigner mig." Jeg synes der er saa dyb Mening, noget saa stort i det; jeg regner det næsten for mit 'Valgsprog' her i Livet. I alle Forhold, i alt, hvad man oplever i Verden, synes jeg at det har saa dyb Gyldighed; endogsaa med denne Farm og dette Land, skønt I vel vil finde det latterligt, kommer jeg tilbage til det.

...I think so often of those words in the Bible: "I will not let thee go before thou blessest me." I think there is such deep meaning, something so glorious in them; I almost take it to be my 'motto' in this life. I feel that it applies so profoundly to all circumstances, to everything that one experiences; even where this farm and this land are concerned, although no doubt you may find it laughable, come back to it.

Det har været det sværeste for mig, at i mit Ægteskab har jeg ikke kunnet gennemføre det, – skønt Bror og jeg virkelig er skiltes som gode Venner.

Mensaas synes jeg ogsaa, at naar man siger det, saa maa man ogsaa gaa ind paa, give sit Minde til at slippe det, som virkelig har givet én sin Velsignelse. Det er jo næsten hver Dag i Livet at en Tid, et Forhold er forbi; man kan ikke stride imod det. Men naar det har givet én sin Velsignelse, saa er det blevet tilbage, som man aldrig kan miste. (Blixen 1978, I: 178)

The hardest thing for me has been that I have been unable to carry it through in my marriage, although it really was as good friends that Bror and I parted. But I do consider also that when one says these words, then one must agree and consent to let go of that which really has given one its blessing. For it happens almost every day of one's life that a time, a circumstance is past; one cannot struggle against that. But when one has received a blessing, one has that to keep that can never be lost. (Trans. by Born; Dinesen 1981: 136)

I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me is also the title of one of the chapters of *Out of Africa* (Blixen 1954: 235-237).

In comparing Karen Blixen with her characters and in particular with Pellegrina Leoni, I am not attempting to suggest that they are one and the same person. It is more a question of examining how the author mirrors herself in her characters, as if it were a game, a way of finding herself. She tells stories of her life and her imagination, using distance, leaving space so that their cathartic force can be enhanced. Karen Blixen and Pellegrina Leoni are not one and the same, and even though one was born from the other, each of them lives her own life. Their stories are free to get detached from one another. A characteristic of the storyteller is that she does not claim to possess her stories, nor to be their creator, but rather a vehicle of a tradition that is much vaster. She is able to make them her own in telling them, or living them, under many names.

Karen Blixen had a great appreciation of Thomas Mann's work *Joseph und seine Brüder*³, written between 1933 and 1943, in which Mann gives a fitting portrait of the storyteller and his condition of eternal wanderer:

Des Erzählers Gestirn – ist es nicht der Mond, der Herr des Weges, der Wanderer, der in seinen Stationen zieht, aus jeder sich wieder lösend? Wer erzählt, erwandert unter Abenteuern manche Station; aber nur zeltender Weise verharret er dort, weiterer Wegweisung gewärtig, und bald fühlt er sein Herz klopfen, teils vor Lust, teils auch vor Furcht und

And this storyteller's star – is it not the moon, the Lord of the Way, the wanderer, who, in his stations, frees himself from each to move on? Whoever tells a story wanders through many situations in his adventures, but only pitches a tent at each, waiting for further directions, and soon feels his own heart pounding, in part out of desire, but in part also out of fear and

³ «Isak Dinesen [...] knew "by heart" the *Joseph Novels* (1934 on) where she would have found the same ideas. She loved the novels, she said, because they were comic and charming» (Langbaum 1964: 55).

Fleischesbängen, aber zum Zeichen jedenfals, daß es schon weitergeht, in neue, genau zu durchlebende Abenteuer, mit unabsehbaren Einzelheiten, nach dem Willen des unruhigen Geistes. (Mann 1962: 52)

the apprehension in his bones, yet always as a sign that the road now opens onto new adventures that he must experience precisely, in all their incalculable detail, for that is the will of the restless spirit. (Trans. by Woods; Mann 2005: 38)

Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen must have been fascinated by these traditions of storytellers, as many of her characters belong to this category of people with a restless spirit, e.g. Pellegrina, Mira Jama, the woman in *The Blank Page*, the Cardinal, as well as herself. In their lives, a substantial transformation has taken place and becomes visible through a change in physical appearance (a scar, a mutilation, an illness) and/or a change in name. The truth of the names and appearances lies in their continuous transformation and in the stories that are born from them.

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DANGLING BETWEEN FICTION AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY: AKSEL SANDEMOSÉ AND THE UNQUIET QUEST FOR THE SELF

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1. Aksel Sandemose. An imposing character

Whoever studies the work of the Danish-Norwegian writer Aksel Sandemose is sooner or later going to fall into the snare of the inextricable tangle of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, which is characteristic of his entire literary output. The autobiographical theme, which runs like a thread throughout Sandemose's whole production, infringes on his fiction as well, and has been commented on in a wide series of texts and critical essays – which will be discussed and analysed in the present paper – written by himself over the years as a commentary on his own work.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that the vast majority of Sandemose's biographers consider his literary and fictional production as a primary source of information about his life, particularly in what concerns his childhood and adolescence.

I will limit myself to citing a few examples of authoritative biographies of Aksel Sandemose. Almost all the biographers intentionally combine the sphere of reality – represented by the writer's name – with fiction – represented, for example, by the reference to the town of Jante, vividly pictured in the novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* (*A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*, trans. by Gay-Tiff 1936), first published in 1933 and, in a revised edition, in 1955. In 1965, a few months after Sandemose's death, Johannes Væth, a long-time friend of his, published the biography *Aksel Sandemose og Jante* (*Aksel Sandemose and Jante*). As would be expected from the title, Væth gets part of his information about Sandemose's early years from the novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* and, more generally, from the novels in which Espen Arnakke, the main character of the above-mentioned work, figures. In the introduction to his biography, Væth declares:

Sandemose var en digter med en frodig og samtidig stærkt virkelighedsbundet fantasi. Han gav sin erindringsbog, *Rejsen til Kjørkelvik*, den goetheske undertitel *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, digtning og sandhed. Denne etikette kunne han have sat på alt, hvad han harskrevet. (1965: 14)

Sandemose was a writer endowed with exuberant imagination, which, at the same time, was firmly anchored in reality. He gave to his book of memories, *Journey to Kjørkelvik*, the Goethean subtitle *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Poetry and Truth. He could have used this same label for everything he wrote.¹

Other significant, more recent, biographies also flirt with the same ambiguity: *Janteloven – Aksel Sandemose. En biografi* (1989; *The Law of Jante – Aksel Sandemose. A Biography*) by Ole Storm, and *Mannen fra Jante. Et portrett av Aksel Sandemose* (1999; *The Man from Jante. A Portrait of Aksel Sandemose*) by Espen Haavardsholm. Though different in their approach to the subject matter – the life of the writer Aksel Sandemose – the two books in question already reveal from their front covers, to what degree Sandemose's life was intertwined with the history of the fugitive Espen and, more generally, with Sandemose's works of fiction.

The list could continue with other examples. One of the most recent is *Flyktningen: Aksel Sandemose* (2004; *The Fugitive: Aksel Sandemose*), a biography and psychoanalytical interpretation of Sandemose's literary work, written by his son Jørgen Sandemose. This is of particular interest, since Jørgen Sandemose obviously has access to a wider range of information than anyone else. On the other hand, his approach to the life and work of Aksel Sandemose can be biased by his proximity to the writer. However, what is interesting here is that, once again, the biography's title flirts with the identification between Aksel Sandemose and Espen Arnakke, *the fugitive*².

What appears true for Sandemose's biographies also holds true for studies that are mainly concerned with the analysis of his literary production. Sooner or later, Sandemose's life manages to attract the attention of anyone who analyses his works of fiction. Interest in Sandemose's life has occasionally proved irksome, as for Petter Aaslestad in his review of Anna Forssberg Malm's and Jens Andersen's psychoanalytical studies – respectively *Kollisioner* (1998; *Collisions*) and *Vildmanden* (1998; *The Wild Man*) – which deprecates how critics of Sandemose's fiction have often

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

² For an accurate and thoroughgoing analysis of the main biographical works on Aksel Sandemose, see Steen Andersen 2009. In his essay, Steen Andersen does not limit himself to an analysis of the main biographies of Aksel Sandemose, but also gives the reader a wide overview of the more or less explicitly autobiographical texts that the author wrote over the years. In so doing, Andersen reveals the many internal incongruities that characterise Sandemose's self-narration and -presentation, how the writer was used to constantly elaborating and revising his own public figure, mixing up the account of his life with episodes drawn from his own fictional texts.

displayed excessive, abnormal interest in his personal life: «Få nordiske forfattere fra det tyvende århundre har opplevd maken til fetisjering» (Aaslestad 1999: 370; Few Nordic writers of the twentieth century have experienced such fetishisation).

The boundaries that divide real life from fictional narrations are, as concerns Sandemose, extremely blurred and fragile; far from being surprising, this uncertainty has been purposely created and encouraged by the writer himself, who developed a whole 'mythology' around his own person, and enriched and nourished it with ambiguous, romanticised accounts of his past³, a habit that led Anna Forssberg Malm, in referring to Sandemose, to write:

Texter av en författare som i så hög grad fikcionaliserar sitt författande, sin roll och position, är svåra att hantera utan att komma in på författarens person, om också inriktningen är icke-biografisk. Ja, vad gör man med en författare som själv är den förste att blanda bort korten? (1998: 15)

Texts of a writer who fictionalises his writing, his role and his position to such an extent, are difficult to approach without encroaching on the writer's own person, even when the approach is not biographical. But what can one do with a writer who is the first to confuse the issue?

What should we then make of the autobiographical dimension in Aksel Sandemose's probably most famous work, *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*? Like the vast majority of Sandemose's literary works, *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* places itself within an ambiguous, intermediate space between different literary genres. In this regard, Erik Christensen wrote: «For at sige det kort og brutalt: læseren véd ikke ret, om bogen efter forfatteren Sandemoses intention skal læses som fiction eller som en form for selvbiografisk nøgleroman» (1998: 203; To make a long story short: the reader does not really know whether the book, in Sandemose's intention, should be read as fiction or as a kind of autobiographical *roman à clef*). This is why any attempt to contextualise and label the novel in accordance with a well-defined literary tradition can only be futile. What is still interesting, though, is to question and understand the meaning and purpose of the autobiographical inserts, which – while being part of the narrative plot – constantly refer to Sandemose's real life and experience.

I will focus on what Sandemose wrote to describe the unique relationship that bound him to Espen Arnakke. To support my analysis, I will consider a selection of articles and essays written by Sandemose in the years that followed the publication of the book. I will quote extracts from the two

³ For an in-depth analysis of Sandemose's often contradictory self-narratives, see Steen Andersen 1998. In his essay, the author analyses the complex, ambivalent relationship between Sandemose and a good number of his fictional characters, first of all Espen Arnakke.

literary journals written, edited and published by Sandemose in the Thirties and Fifties respectively – *Fesjå* (1986; Cattle-show) and *Årstidene* (1999b; The Seasons) – and from a posthumously published autobiographical fragment, *Det fryser bestandig hardest i solrenningen*, written in 1941 (1991; It Always Freezes the Most at Dawn). I am aware that the subject of my interest is extensive; much has been written about it and, although I will examine a substantial collection of writings and studies, I do not expect to be exhaustive, nor do I presume, in this context, to reach a definitive conclusion about the controversial relationship between Aksel Sandemose and Espen Arnakke. Nevertheless, by providing an overview of the topic, I will try to give my personal interpretation of the singular interlacing of the author's life with his hero's adventures and vicissitudes. Now, before proceeding with my analysis, I would like to give a short introduction to the novel, highlighting those aspects which are most relevant for my analysis.

2. *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*. The 1955 version

En flyktning krysser sitt spor appeared for the first time in 1933, published by Tiden norsk forlag, but I will refer here to the second edition of the novel, which was privately released in 1955. In his *Forord til boken om Janteloven* (Preface to the book about the law of Jante) Sandemose asks his readers to consider the new version as the definitive one (1999a: 10-19). This includes both a thoroughly revisited 1933 edition, including *Der stod en benk i haven* (1937; There Was a Bench in the Garden). The latter is, in the words of the writer, «et dårlig maskert tillegg til *En flyktning*» (1999a: 14; a poorly disguised addendum to *A fugitive*), and focuses on the childhood and adolescence of Espen Arnakke, the narrating voice in *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*.

As for the literary genre of the narrative in question and its literary classification, it is quite significant that the subtitle of the 1955 edition – *Espen Arnakkes kommentarer til Janteloven* (Espen Arnakke's Commentaries on the Law of Jante⁴) – completely diverges from that of the previous version – *Fortelling om en morders barndom* (A Story of a Murderer's Childhood⁵) – which decidedly placed the work within the fictional narrative genre. This discrepancy between the two subtitles could indicate Sandemose's wish to go beyond any attempt of genre-determination or, again, his desire to surround his work with a certain ambiguity.

⁴ There is no published English translation of the 1955 version of *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*. However, an American translation of the first edition is available (1936). When the quoted text occurs identically in both versions, I will use the American translation. Otherwise and unless differently specified, translations are mine.

⁵ In the American translation of *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* the subtitle is omitted.

En flyktning krysser sitt spor occupies a special place in the writer's production; it is a *Lebensroman*, a work the composition of which has engaged most of Sandemose's life, with the narration evolving and growing contemporarily alongside its author. In the introduction to the 1955 version, Sandemose even predicted future rewritings of his *Fugitive* and, in doing so, reiterated his need for an unbroken dialogue with the main character Espen, a tormented, sullen figure whose soul is closely entwined with that of the author.

Therefore, although *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* is most certainly no canonical autobiography, the autobiographical theme is an undercurrent which flows through the whole narration, tightly interwoven with the fictional plot. This novel is studded with personal inserts which trace an inward path into the writer's own experience. The autobiographical discourse chooses as its privileged medium a hybrid territory between novel and memory, and this is especially clear in the introduction of the 1955 version, where Sandemose provides many correspondences between himself and Espen (Andersen 2009: 109).

3. *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*. An inward journey

Sandemose's *Fugitive* is a maze of complex narrations; it mirrors the problematic nature of the writer's tortuous personality which, according to him, has its roots in the years of his childhood and adolescence (Sandemose 1999a: 11-19). Sandemose grew up in the small Danish town of Nykøbing, which is in part reflected in the fictional town of Jante as described in *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*⁶.

The description of the perverse mechanisms which regulate the small society of Jante unfurls into a sociological commentary; from the latter the autobiographical pattern takes its origin, interwoven in a complex web of narrative threads. *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*'s narrating voice belongs to the tormented Espen Arnakke. His storytelling arises from a desire to retrieve the traumatic memories of his childhood and adolescence; in so doing, Espen gains a clearer comprehension of himself and finally understands the ultimate reason for the murder he committed. This crime is the natural result of having grown up in the dystopian society of Jante, a twisted variant of democracy, where – for the good of the community – the individual is crushed into an anonymous mass. Every Jante inhabitant

⁶ «Skildringene av byen Jante er i de ytre omriss tatt fra byen Nykøbing på øya Mors (Morsø Morsland) i Limfjorden» (Sandemose 1999a: 12; The descriptions of the town of Jante mirror in their external outlines the town of Nykøbing on the island Mors – Morsø, Morsland – in the Limfjord).

fears his or her neighbour and, at the same time, is ready to be the first to attack, taking revenge on the weaker for the injustice and pain that he/she has had to endure.

The narration starts *in medias res*, with the initial shocking revelation: «Jeg slo en gang et menneske ihjel» (Sandemose 1999a: 21; Once upon a time I killed a man). From that moment on, Espen travels back in time along the paths of his own words. Following the winding threads of memory, he eventually crosses the «tracks» that he once trod. The rude John Wakefield, the man killed by Espen, is the embodiment of Jante's violence, its repressive, humiliating nature. When he meets Espen, the burden of a haunting past triggers the violent reaction of the young main character. At that very moment the humiliating memories from his past suddenly reemerge, exploding like gunpowder: «Det brast. Enten det nu kom av at sprengradningen var for stor, eller hva det kom av. [...] John Wakefield sonet for det hele Jante» (Sandemose 1999a: 388; 490; It broke out. Either because the explosive charge was now too big, or for whatever other reason. [...] John Wakefield atoned for all of Jante).

To understand the meaning of Espen's story, it is necessary to point out that the murder of John Wakefield is not a rebellion against Jante; it is, rather, an act perfectly in line with its narrow mentality, which expresses itself in continual brutal actions at all levels. However, the trauma Espen suffers from his crime spurs him to react and transcend it. His rebellion against Jante expresses itself in the desire to recall his past, to finally be able to reconstruct a coherent image of himself. It is certainly no accident that in the *Forord til En flyktning krysser sitt spor* Sandemose emphasises the cathartic aspect of his writing, presenting himself as a man who, through his act of storytelling, had escaped from the stifling environment of his childhood origins, in other words from «skyggen av Janteloven» (1999a: 11; the shadow of Jante).

As suggested in the introduction to the novel, at the same time as Espen Arnakke begins to recall his early life, Sandemose starts narrating. The fictional plot becomes the space of memory, the road that leads the author towards his own past. Even though this ultimate purpose of writing is not explicitly mentioned in the book, the author leaves obvious clues to that effect. As Johannes Væth observes:

Den reviderede og udvidede udgave af *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* fra 1955 er et nærliggende eksempel på, hvor flydende grænserne i Sandemoses forfatterskab kan være mellem selvbiografiske bidrag og komponert arbejde. Forordets Aksel Sandemose og jeg-personen i den efterfølgende fortælling, Espen Arnakke, optræder snart med hver sin identitet, snart med en fælles. (1975: 76)

The 1955 revised and extended version of *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks* provides a good example of how frail the boundaries between autobiographical contribution and work of imagination can get in Sandemose's literary production.

The Aksel Sandemose of the introduction and the narrating I of the story that follows, Espen Arnakke, appear sometimes each with his own identity, sometimes with a common one.

There are some extremely obvious similarities between the author and his character, such as their year of birth, their family structure; even Espen's outer appearance and body malformations truthfully mirror Sandemose's, and Espen's traumatic experience as an immigrant in Newfoundland echoes, to some extent, Sandemose's own (J. Sandemose 2004: 232)⁷. The list of similarities between the two goes on, but what is more striking is the description of Jante, the gloomy setting of Espen Arnakke's – and, to some extent, also Aksel Sandemose's – unhappy earlier life.

The small provincial town is the scenario in which the threads of Espen's memories unfold. If in the introduction to the novel Sandemose admitted that Nykøbing served him as a model for Jante, on a different occasion – on the pages of his literary journal *Årstidene* (The Seasons) – he went even further and declared that Jante had not been a metaphor for Nykøbing; Jante *was* Nykøbing:

Men jeg ville fortelle om gjensynet med det som var Nykjøbing og som jeg i en indre prosess kalte Jante. [...] Det mest av alt var en reise i det indre. [...] Nykjøbing lå der, men Jante var borte. Mitt barndomshjem i Færkenstræde, det lå der, [...] men det var ikke et barndomshjem, det var bare et hus. (Sandemose 1999b: 521-522)

But I wanted to tell about my return to what Nykøbing was, which I, in an inner process, named Jante. [...] It was mostly a journey within my inner self. [...] Nykøbing was there, but Jante had gone. My childhood home in Færkenstræde was there, [...] but it was not a childhood home, it was just a house.

Jante is the name that Nykøbing takes on in the writer's memory. The fictional town is the living memory of how Nykøbing was in the past, the land of a lost childhood, the *eventyrland* (the land of fairy tales) which turned out to be a living hell.

4. The most unhappy age. Remembering childhood and adolescence

In his novel, Sandemose tries to reveal the pain suffered during his childhood and adolescence, the unhappiest period of his life:

⁷ The biographer here presents an unusual, bitter portrait of his father's life and literary production, focusing on the particularly strong link between the writer's life experience and his work. Regarding Sandemose's highly romanced travel accounts, cf. Steen Andersen 2009: 89.

Det er en alminnelig overtro at barn er lykkelige [...]. Det som ligger mange år tilbake får ofte i erindringen en høy himmel over seg. Den himmelen er det en god gjerning å rive ned, den er et teppe som hindrer den voksne ikke bare å se det for forbrydelser som er begått mot ham selv, men også de han selv begår. Mens barna lider laller vi imbesilt om den lykkelige barndom. (Sandemose 1999a: 111)

It is a common superstition that children are happy [...]. Past conditions, after many years have elapsed, often take on in retrospect a decidedly heavenly aspect. It would be an act of mercy to destroy this celestial illusion, for it is a gaily painted screen which hides from the sight of the adult not only the felonies committed against him as a child but also the felonies he himself commits against other children.

While the children suffer, we go on babbling idiotically on the subject of happy childhood. (Trans. by Gay-Tiffit; Sandemose 1936: 111)

Sandemose describes both childhood and adolescence as «imperfect ages», a disharmonious time that the adult does not want to remember, as if it were something to be ashamed of. All the dreams, the enthusiasm and the passions that characterise those years are belittled and mocked in Jante; there is no place for personal aspirations in a society based on the oppression of the individual. Adults therefore try to forget the painful years of their early lives, and formulate empty tales of a happy childhood: «Forsøk å glemme det» (Sandemose 1999a: 386; «Try to forget it», trans. by Gay-Tiffit; Sandemose 1936: 230) is the refrain that accompanies every person's childhood and adolescence in Jante.

In reality, nothing is forgotten and memory remains hidden in a secret chamber of the inner self. «Men «glemselen» rommer en stor fare, den betyr jo at man samler på sprengstoff» (Sandemose 1999a: 204; «But «forgetfulness» is fraught with great danger; it indicates that one is storing up explosives», trans. by Gay-Tiffit; Sandemose 1936: 270). Repressed memories are a reservoir of explosives ready to detonate.

Being young in Jante is described, with bitter irony, as an unforgivable guilt; children and adolescents must pay for the broken dreams of the older generation. Adults avenge the early loss of their childhood on their own offspring. This is the reason why, in Jante, «barn skal knekkes i tid» (Sandemose 1999a: 451; Children must be broken, crushed in time).

Sandemose's narration delves deep into the nooks and crannies of childhood's and adolescence's reminiscences, in order to investigate the crises and humiliations that have undermined the personality's harmonious development:

Du skal huske at du har vært barn. Du skal huske Eventyrland, at du må finne forsvar og komme levende igjennom. (Sandemose 1999a: 388)

You shall remember that you have been a child. You shall remember the land of Fairy Tales so that you can protect yourself and survive.

In *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*, Sandemose again runs through his memories, remembering personal experiences and then elaborating and

presenting them in a narrative form through Espen's voice. The process of digging up episodes and experiences from the past allows the character – and his creator – to reach a greater insight into the development of his own personality.

The intimate interdependence between fiction and reality, repeatedly suggested by the author, is sometimes blatantly asserted. As an example, it is interesting to consider what Sandemose wrote in his *Efterskrift til En flyktning krysser sitt spor* (1986; Postscript to *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*), a sort of appendix to the novel. The postscript consists of eighteen chapters, in which the writer narrates additional episodes of Espen's life. In one of these chapters Sandemose openly refers to an episode from *En flyktning krysser sitt spor – Sultekunstneren* (1999a: 130-135; *The Hunger Artist*) – in which he describes how Espen, obsessed by the fear of being fat and ugly, resolves to eat only as much as will allow him to survive.

In order to «belyse eller utvide beretningene fra En flyktning» (Sandemose 1986: 111; enlighten or widen the events narrated in *The Fugitive*), Sandemose endows *Efterskrift til En flyktning krysser sitt spor* with exact reproductions of the notes he wrote during the years of his adolescence. These consist of meticulous accounts of the paltry amounts of food consumed by the young Aksel and, consequently, by Espen. In what seems to be an attempt to stress the authenticity of Espen's story, the author inserts reproductions of personal documents into his fictional work⁸.

For the writer, the need to consciously bring to light buried images from the past through Espen's voice reflects his quest for the *fil rouge* of his own existence: this is also a possible task for autobiography.

5. Sandemose and autobiography

In 1941 Sandemose had experimented with the autobiographical genre, writing the very short fragmentary collection of memoirs *Det fryser bestandig hardest i solrenningen*, which was published only after his death. It covers the most important moments of the author's life, dwelling on a few key events, such as the decision to move to Norway and adopt the Norwegian nationality and language. Interestingly enough, this short autobiographical narration begins by declaring the autobiographical genre as unrealisable:

⁸ Of course, here one could ask another question. Must we take Sandemose at his word when he claims that the documents shown in *The Postscript* are really authentic? Such a question would inevitably lead to a much wider discussion about the authenticity of any autobiographical writing.

Det har vært en drøm hos mange mennesker å gi en beskrivelse av sitt liv. Det lar seg ikke gjøre å beskrive et liv. En ser tingene i det lyset de fortøner seg nå idag, men slik var de jo ikke. Goethe har sett det da han brukte uttrykket “Dichtung und Wahrheit”. (Sandemose 1991: 9)

It has been a dream for many people to give a description of their lives. Life cannot be described. One sees the things under today's light, but they were not like that. Goethe was aware of this when he used the expression “Dichtung und Wahrheit”.

The author questions the very possibility of an objective narration of one's own life, unaltered by the mechanisms of memory or by poetic elaboration. In this unfinished autobiography, the narrator's voice vibrates with emotion only when he describes the moment in which he felt the need to abandon his old life and adopt both a different language – Norwegian – and a different identity (1991: 23-27).

Autobiography, like any kind of codified genre, cannot but collide with the author's need to escape any restriction or constraint; Sandemose's urge to break away from any form of (literary) convention appears particularly strong in the case of autobiography, a narration that tries to hem in life – the most iridescent and intangible of subjects – within orderly, rational schemes. The act of narrating, as with any attempt to define, inevitably stiffens «l'io in una maschera di superficie, dietro la quale il soggetto non può mai veramente accedere con un possesso pieno» (Battistini 1990: 170; the Self in a surface mask, behind which the subject can never gain access with full possession).

In his literary production – and in particular in *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* – Sandemose closely analyses the difficulties met by the writer when involved in an autobiographical work; the first problem is the fundamental binomial of autobiography: individual – (hi)story. The story told by the writer does not always coincide exactly with the objective and documented reality, which nevertheless is its substrate and nourishment. Similarly, one must reflect on the true nature of the individual, after all the subject of any autobiography. Once again, in *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*, Sandemose questions the possibility of identifying any historical person:

Det finnes ikke noe historisk individ og har aldri gjort det. Det finnes strømmer, vekst, forløp. [...] Hvordan finne det faste punkt i en fortsatt vekst? Det vi kaller en historisk person er et forløp vi har forsøkt å omslutte med et navn. Ethvert individ er en illusjon. [...] Mennesket er identisk med sin reise. Mennesket er en reise. Det er veksten, det er reisen mot målet som er realitet,

The historical individual does not exist, nor has it ever existed. There are streams, growth, process. [...] How to find a touchstone within an ongoing growth? What we call a historical individual is a process, which we have tried to confine within a name. Each individual is an illusion. [...] Human beings coincide with their journey. A human being is a journey. The growth, the journey towards the aim are the only reality,

og det som blir igjen er sagnet om den døde, liksom det som var, sagnet eller legenden om den levende. [...] Du lever i sagnet om deg selv. (Sandemose 1999a: 199)

and what remains is just the legend of someone who is dead, just as what existed was the tale or the legend of someone who lived. [...] You live in your own legend.

In view of the above, the historical individual is just a mere human convention; any attempt to define an individual cannot but fail, as every person is a part of the never-ending process of growth and transformation. Continuing along this train of thought, Sandemose questions the value of the individual's name. The name loses its sacred value, revealing itself as one of the oldest conventions of society:

Lenge grunnet jeg på hvordan en elv kunne ha navn, het den også Storelven ute på sjøen som den blandet seg med? I begynnelse var den smal [...] var det sånn riktig Storelven? Vannet i den i dag er ikke det samme som i går, men alltid sa de det var Storelven. [...] Livet blir ikke det minste ladd med mening på grunn av et navn, samt livets tre seremonier i kirken. Men det er [...] Jantes forsøk på å stabilisere mennesket på basis av navn og alder. (Sandemose 1999a: 113)

For a long time I wondered how a river could have a name. Was it called *Storelven*, the Big River, also out in the sea, where water mixes? It was small at the source [...] was it already the real Big River? The water that flows in it today is not the same as yesterday, but they always called it the Big River. [...] Life does not gain any deeper a meaning because of a name, together with the three ceremonies in church. This is rather [...] Jante's attempt to fix the individual on the basis of name and age.

As illustrated by the river-metaphor, the individual is an uninterrupted process of change. The need to fix the identity of an individual by crystallising it in a name that serves the purpose of defining its bearer forever reflects society's wish to fit each member within its structures. The individual, enclosed within an identity which is accepted by society, is deprived of any possibility towards further development or change. Creativity can express itself only in people who are free to determine themselves moment after moment. According to Sandemose, giving a specific name to a person is therefore an act of violence, whose aim is to perpetuate the continuity of the collective.

Together with a name, through christening, every person receives a predetermined place and role in society. Jante is full of adults who have not had the chance to truly grow up. Their psychic development was blocked before they could start questioning society and its laws. It is therefore no wonder that Aksel Sandemose, born Axel Nielsen, decides at some stage to formally change his name, as he feels that it no longer corresponds to him. The surname he chooses, Sandemose, is in fact the name of his mother's birthplace, Sandermosen in Norway, comprising a few houses in the woods on the outskirts of Oslo. This choice shows that, from that moment onwards, Sandemose begins to consider his existence from the point of view of a radical

change; in the near future he would leave for Norway where he would spend the rest of his life, becoming a Norwegian citizen and adopting Norwegian (*bokmål*) as the language of his artistic activity.

6. Sandemose and the issue of name. «Espen» and «Aksel»

To emphasise the intimate nature of the relationship that binds him to Espen Arnakke, Sandemose invites his readers to identify with the *Fugitive's* main character and narrative voice, which functions for Sandemose as a sort of Conradian «Secret Sharer». In the introduction to the 1955 version of *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*, Sandemose indirectly suggests his kinship with the character:

Det fortellende Jeg i boken er Espen Arnakke [...]. Fornavnet tok jeg fra visen om tvillingsønnene til Asser Rig, Esbern og Aksel, senere Esbern Snare og biskop Absalon. For øvrig går Espen-navnet igjen i den danske grenen av slekten [...]. (Sandemose 1999a: 12)

The narrating I in the book is Espen Arnakke [...]. I took his name from the ballad about the twin brothers, Asser Rig's sons, Esbern and Aksel, later known as Esbern Snare and Bishop Absalon. Furthermore, the name Espen recurs in the Danish branch of the family [...].

Sandemose explains how the choice of the name was inspired by Esbern Snare, a historical figure who has entered Danish folklore. It is no coincidence that Esbern, the warrior, was the twin brother of Aksel, better known as Absalon, bishop of Roskilde. In an indirect way, Sandemose refers here to his unique relationship with Espen, which is mirrored in the bond between Aksel-Absalon and Esbern. The latter is the dark side of the writer, his restless twin, a tormented soul haunted by the demon of vengeance.

The identification between the writer and the fictional character is further suggested by Sandemose in *Murene rundt Jeriko* (The Walls Around Jericho), another collection of autobiographical and sociological essays from 1960:

Et menneskes alter ego er en kopi av mennesket selv. Det var aldri Espen [...]. Han var en utspalting av forfatteren og manglet noe siste og avgjørende, byggedriften, evnen til samling. En kan også si det slik at den demonen forfatteren var besatt av, hadde fritt spillrom hos Espen Arnakke. Og likevel, jeg må uten avkortning ta alt ansvar på hans vegne. Det plaget meg at sønnen min skulle hete slik. Bøkene om Espen kunne virke suggestivt på en bærer av navnet når han i alle fall også mer eller mindre var sønn av den diktete Espen. (Sandemose 1978: 110)

A person's alter ego is a copy of that very person. Espen cannot be defined in those terms. [...] He was a split part of the writer and lacked something ultimate and decisive: the urge to construct, a capacity to collect. It could be said that the demon that possessed the writer had been set free in Espen Arnakke. And, nevertheless, I am fully responsible for him. It grieved me that my son should bear his name. The books about Espen could be suggestive to someone who bore that name, especially because, after all, he was, more or less, the narrated Espen's son.

The quoted statement shows how Espen is not a *Doppelgänger* of the writer, but rather a fragment of Sandemose, his *utspaltning* (split part). By calling the fictional Espen the father to his own son, Sandemose reiterates the fact that the main character of *En flyktning* is part of himself. With his words, the writer seems to suggest that Espen dwelled within Aksel, or more precisely incarnated a stage of the writer's life, a period of subjugation and later of violent, blindly destructive rebellion, from which he only gradually and painfully freed himself.

7. Espen and the quest for self-awareness. A modern confession

The awareness of an internal split within the ego is a typical topic in contemporary literature, in which human interiority is often portrayed as a chaotic jumble of voices and realities; only a constant yearning for self-awareness – a synthetic force – prevents the individual from falling into a schizophrenic division of the inner self. The need to find the ability to synthesise and harmonise within oneself is also the ultimate purpose of a genre that has much in common with autobiography: confession.

According to the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano, the confession genre, which initially appeared as a religious narrative, has evolved during the modern era to become an internal process aimed at recovering a unifying principle inside the fleeting multiplicity which makes up the individual⁹:

La Confesión parece así un método para encontrar ese quien, sujeto a quien le pasan las cosas [...]. Mas, lo grave es ser un extraño para sí mismo, haber peridido o no haber llegado a poseer intimidad con sigo mismo; andar enajenado, huésped extraño en la propia casa. [...] [En la Confesión] se trata de unir lo que al unirse formará un solo ser. (Zambrano 2004: 107-108)

Confession appears therefore as a way to find [...] this subject to whom things happen [...]. The worst case is when one is a stranger to oneself, having lost or not having reached a familiarity with oneself, alienated, a foreign guest in one's own home. [...] [Confession] is about uniting what, once joined together, is going to form a unitary being.

⁹ While mainly engaging in a close examination of examples taken from the classical, biblical and Christian tradition, Zambrano extends her analysis to more modern writers, philosophers and thinkers, from Jean Jacques Rousseau to Friedrich Nietzsche, Marcel Proust and André Breton, just to name a few. In the last chapter of *La Confesión. Género literario – Los hombres subterráneos* (2004: 107-115; The Confession. Literary Genre – The Underground Men) – Zambrano identifies the most tragic aspect of many modern and contemporary individuals in their lack of any inner coherence, that is of an inner core of quietude and repose. The subject is split in tormented fragments – or characters – who struggle and long to become a unity; once again, the philosopher indicates confession as a way to make whole this fragmented existence.

In the same way Sandemose, through his confession, hopes to retrieve an alienated part of himself, memories from his past that have remained hidden in the most remote corners of his soul. In the introduction to *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*, he begins his lamentation with the words of Psalm 129 *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine* (Sandemose 1999a: 15). In so doing, the writer suggests that his novel could be read as a form of religious confession. This is, however, a special one, raised to a heaven without a God, cast into the depths of the writer's own soul. There are no saviours in Jante. The confession of the atheist Sandemose does not hope to be an act of redemption; it is rather a means by which the author achieves a more profound level of self-awareness. While Espen never succeeds in growing up to be a 'unitary being' and remains forever a fragment, a tormented and unredeemed character, Sandemose finds his way to self-awareness and to an existence not dominated by chaos and hatred, by forcing himself to repeatedly face his doomed, demonic self, in a sort of cathartic process.

With *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*, Sandemose walks again along the paths he trod in his youth, to meet and finally cross his own tracks. The novel offers its author the chance to take leave from a part of himself – embodied in Espen – which is haunted by Jante's shadows. Once he has done that, the writer can finally advance in his life, while Espen continues to live as a character in what Sandemose writes about him:

Noen har spurt mig om jeg er Espen Arnakke. Han og jeg, vier Dichtung und Wahrheit. [...] Men jeg fryktet at Espen Arnakke [...] levde videre efter at Aksel Sandemose var død, at hans navn skulde leve og være det som var igjen av oss [...]. Det undte jeg ham ikke. Og jeg lever for engang å bli mig selv [...]. Jeg vil ikke være Espen [...], slik at jeg aldri risikerer å bli søilehelgen ved siden av ham foran Nasjonalteatret. (Sandemose 1986: 98)

Someone asked me if I am Espen Arnakke. He and I, we are *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. [...] But I feared that Espen Arnakke [...] would live on after Aksel Sandemose's death, that his name would live and be the only thing that was left of us [...]. I grudged him that. And I live to finally become myself [...]. I do not want to be Espen [...], so I shall never risk turning into a statue of a stylite saint by his side in front of the National Theatre.

After having told the story of his youth through the words of the narrative voice of *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*, Sandemose can finally bid farewell to Espen, his old Self. The Demon Espen Arnakke, though, will remain forever alive in literature.

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POLYPHONY AND STRATEGIES IN TARJEI VESAAS'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DISCOURSE

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1. Introduction: the limits of autobiography

The lively debate on autobiography during the last decades does not only express the will of a normative reflection on literary genres but calls for wider consideration, involving both the author's standpoint and the relationship between reality and fiction in literature. It appears obvious that these two aspects – the role of the author in the literary text and the need or possibility of discerning reality from fiction in literature – imply each other.

The critical reflection concerning the position of the author himself in the text can be summed up in a simplifying overview. If we start with the so-called School of Prague and the consequent critical focus on the linguistic aspects of the text, proceed through the statement of the distinction between implicit and explicit author (Booth 1961), and end up at the post-structuralist notion of «death of the author» in 1968 (Barthes 1984) or the consideration of the author as «function of the text» the following year (Foucault 2001), the real author seems to undergo a gradual, theoretical estrangement from the text, if not a «degradering» (Kjerkegaard, Skov Nielsen, Ørjasæter 2006: 11; degradation), which changes its connotations and acquires new meaning with Philippe Lejeune's work on autobiography, which first appeared in the 1970s (1975; 2005). On the one hand, the empirical writers with their own identities and names return to the centre of the literary debate, getting dragged into the interpretation of their works, while on the other we witness an outburst of literary experiments on the boundaries between reality and fiction and of a critical debate on the literary text as a hybrid place combining apparently incompatible planes. Consequently, the concept of autofiction arises and branches out from this theoretical and philosophical unrest (Colonna 2004; Gasparini 2008; Ahlstedt, Karlsson 2011).

This study will analyse *Båten om kvelden* (1997a; *The Boat in the Evening*, trans. by Rokkan 2003), originally published by Tarjei Vesaas in 1968, in the light of recent theories on autobiography, involving different texts that take part in the author's autobiographical discourse, such as *I Midtbøs bakkar* ('The Hills of Midtbø) and *Båten om dagen* ('The Boat in the

Daytime), which date respectively from 1974 and 1976, by Halldis Moren Vesaas (2007)¹, and *Tarjei Vesaas om seg sjølv* (1985; Tarjei Vesaas about Himself) by Olav Vesaas. Such an investigation will lead the scholarly studies on Vesaas into a yet unexplored territory, and it will also call back into question those very theories on autobiography, as they will be applied to a kind of writing that occupies a place before and beyond the definitions of autobiography as given by Lejeune and his successors. Prior to the normative work on autobiography and its 'deviations', *Båten om kvelden* seems to create a totally new model of autobiography, complying only with the writer's deepest requirements. This text then induces us once again to consider the question of what autobiography is, and how it is possible to define it. As Paul de Man observes:

[...] autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition; each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm. [...] Autobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. (1979: 920-921)

In this essay I intend to approach the analysis of *Båten om kvelden*, and the passage entitled *Slik det står i minnet* («As It Stands in the Memory»), in particular, through a 'polyphonic' path leading, from outside to inside, towards the author's most intimate voice. I will begin by observing Halldis Moren Vesaas's attempt to let the voice of the author move in from outside through a sort of 'collective autobiography'; next, I will present the relationship between the voices of Tarjei and Olav Vesaas in the collection of autobiographical writings titled *Tarjei Vesaas om seg sjølv*; and, as a conclusion, I will focus on *Båten om kvelden* and on the polyphony within *Slik det står i minnet*, paying particular attention to the autobiographical strategies, the author's standpoint, the active involvement of the reader, and the relationship between reality and fiction.

2. The transfiguring voice of the other: collective autobiographies by Halldis Moren Vesaas

A few years after Tarjei's death in 1970, Halldis Moren Vesaas wrote two books of memories which actually tell a collective history: *I Midtbøs bakkar* and *Båten om dagen*. A poet and leading figure of the cultural life of

¹ These texts are collected in a single volume entitled *I Midtbøs bakkar. Minne frå eit samliv* (The Hills of Midtbø. Memories from a Lifetime Together) in 2007. In this essay I intend to use this latest edition.

Norway since the Thirties, Halldis Moren conciliates various needs in this text: the need to gather her own memories as an intellectual, an artist, a woman, a mother and a wife, and the need to tell the story of an era of radical transformation for Norway (from the Thirties, through World War II, to the participation of intellectuals in the construction of modern Norway) but, above all, the need to let Tarjei Vesaas, the man and the writer, surface through the events, the documents, and, not least, through his own voice.

Halldis, while not surrendering her own voice, prefers to put Tarjei in the foreground, almost overlapping her voice with the voice of her husband. This intention already transpires from the titles: *I Midtbøs bakkar* is the title of a slightly «murky» poem (H.M. Vesaas 2007: 7) by Tarjei Vesaas from 1953 (T. Vesaas 2007: 165-166), while the other title, *Båten om dagen*, clearly echoes that of Tarjei's last work, *Båten om kvelden*, which is also his most admittedly autobiographical book². The evening boat is transfigured through Halldis's voice into a daytime boat. The light of day that enlightens her pages may not be related to a tale of a younger age, but rather to the narrating voice and its intent: a clear, simple, positive word meant to offer the reader coherent images, strongly relying on their 'meaning' and aimed at enlightening the landscape of past life. In the same way, the 'evening' in Tarjei Vesaas's book, a metaphor of old age, is not an object of the narration (which dwells principally on memories of childhood and youth), but rather a point of view, a place and a time from which to turn and look back, receive, compose and restore an image of a life, which necessarily appears «splintra» (splintered) in his own eyes. Halldis embraces the perspective of light and wholeness against dusk and fragmentation, and her book appears as a bright (auto)biography in response to her husband's crepuscular autobiography. What produces this difference in brightness is both the nature and the intention of the two narrations: while Tarjei's text is a journey through his own history and interiority, during which his discretion drives him to *hide*, Halldis's text purposes to *show* the whole world a collective experience, which sometimes assumes the traits of a fairytale, because of the harmonious way in which events are linked to each other. The doubling into a narrating self and a narrated self, even on a chronological plane, is typical of autobiographical writing and offers an opportunity for reorganisation that Halldis uses in order to reconstruct the story in the desired light:

² Both titles seem to be borrowed from Tarjei and converted from a *murky* tone to a *bright* one. As regards *I Midtbøs bakkar*, Halldis Moren writes that: «[...] når det vart eg som skreiv den boka, vart det ei bok om livet i dei helt konkrete bakkane. Bakkar som for meg aldri har vore noka anna enn det dei er [...]» (H.M. Vesaas 2007: 9; [...] since I was the one writing this book, it would become a book about our life in the absolutely concrete hills. Those hills that, to me, have never been anything but what they are [...]).

Når noko som har vore godt er definitivt slutt, gjer minnet det enda betre enn det var. Minnet snur og vender på det det har samla, tilslører somt og forgyller anna, skyv unna det det helst ville ikkje skulle vore der, drar det det er glad i fram i lyset. (H.M. Vesaas 2007: 241)

When something beautiful is ultimately over, memory makes it even better than it was. Memory twists and rearranges what it has collected, it hides something while it gilds something else, it deletes the unwanted while bringing the dearest into light.³

The text by Halldis Moren Vesaas is an autobiography whose reflexive aspect (*autós*) is apparently parenthetical, as it is a narration of her own self *and* of another person, in which she ostensibly focuses on the other while actually reaffirming herself. Is it possible to write the truth about someone who seems to be a part of ourselves? Halldis raises the question many times, afraid that her delivery, her transmission of knowledge may be marred by betrayal:

Det å teie om det mest intimt personlege var elles noko som hørte miljøet til, Tarjei hadde den same blygskapen sjølv. Det er blant anna det som gjer at den som skulle kjenne han best av alle må spørje seg sjølv: kjende eg han i grunnen? (H.M. Vesaas 2007: 35)

To keep quiet about one's most personal things was a typical trait of the environment and Tarjei shared such discretion. Also because of this, the person who should have known him better than anyone else keeps on asking herself: did I really know him?

Kven er du i grunnen, du som eg skulle kjenne så godt? (H.M. Vesaas 2007: 127)

Who are you, really? You, whom I should know so well?

Stundom sa eg til han: Du skulle skrive dine memoarar. Men nei, det ville han ikkje. Eg trur han ville kjent det som eit diskresjonsbrott, og det var noko av det siste han ville gjere seg skuldig i. (H.M. Vesaas 2007: 282)

Sometimes I used to tell him: you should write your memoirs. But no, he did not want to. I think he would have considered it a lapse of discretion, and that was the last thing he would have wanted to blame himself for.

Her tale of life is thus hybrid and polyphonic, since the voices of the two protagonists, integrated in a memory plot reconstructed from the overall point of view of the author, intersect and interact, leaving the reader with several questions about the lights and shadows of memory but also about the nature of characters in autobiography and about the possibility of an autobiographical truth: if the author feels a 'duty of honesty' towards her dead husband, for example, we can ask ourselves which of the two characters is more fictional, Halldis or Tarjei, the 'I' or the 'you'.

³Translations are mine if not stated otherwise.

3. The inaudible voice of the other: autobiographical collaboration in *Tarjei Vesaas om seg sjølv*

Olav Vesaas's text, which I will briefly introduce, can be considered as a step forward on an imaginary path towards the most intimate voice of Tarjei Vesaas. It is once again a text which contains a mixture of voices, thus a polyphonic construction in its way, but also a very different operation compared to Halldis Moren's.

Tarjei Vesaas om seg sjølv is in fact edited, more than written, by his son Olav. The latter actually just writes a brief declaration of intent and some short passages to introduce or link different fragments; apart from that, he lets his father speak. The text is in reality a collection of writings by Tarjei Vesaas, in which he focuses on himself. One, in particular, entitled *Om skrivaren* (About the Writer), is a previously unpublished autobiographical tale, which Tarjei often used on public occasions to talk about himself and his writing and which Olav scattered in bits and pieces throughout the book as a sort of ongoing theme. The remaining material belongs instead to very different genres: newspaper articles signed by Tarjei Vesaas, sketches, letters, unpublished manuscripts and pages from his diaries, but, above all, short stories, poems and excerpts from novels.

Olav's voice is thus audible throughout the selection and in the reorganisation of the written material, and is, at the same time, both a decisive and an almost inaudible voice, while Tarjei's prevails. It is known that an autobiographical text is characterised both by the narrative element and the selective/constructive one, as both contribute to the final result, and the voice of Olav, although inaudible, makes itself felt. The son reconstructs the story but lets his father tell it, and we hear their voices cross each other, especially in the selection of those passages that the son *considers* autobiographical, without their being explicitly so. Olav *reads* and *understands* them as autobiographical (cf. de Man 1979), suggesting that other readers do the same.

Olav's purpose with this book is to give voice to «Tarjei Vesaas's teiende tale om seg sjølv» (O. Vesaas 1985: 9), his father's «silent discourse on himself», and in doing so he produces a text in which Tarjei is simultaneously subject and object, both author and theme. We confront a piece of autobiographical writing that is not an autobiography: we read what Tarjei Vesaas is supposed to have written about himself, but it is precisely the subject's narrative will that is lacking, while such an autobiographical project takes place in what fatally happens to be Tarjei Vesaas's last book, namely *Båten om kvelden*.

4. Voices of the self: *Båten om kvelden* as an inner autobiography

Båten om kvelden is composed of two introductions in verses, *Første fortale* (First Preface) and *Andre fortale om dette splintra biletet frå den seine båten* (Second Preface about this Splintered Picture from the Loitering Boat),

and sixteen numbered prose texts with lyrical inserts. Even before the publishing stage, the author seems to question the genre of his literary creation. In a relatively late version of the *Second Preface*, the subtitle reads «om ein splintra roman frå den seine båten» (about a splintered novel from the loitering boat)⁴. The text is therefore temporarily defined as a «splintered novel», a definition that will be removed and substituted, or better bypassed, in the definitive version with the fragmented image conveyed by the loitering boat, namely the image of a life.

Even if the book is hard to classify, it is immediately perceived as an autobiography, and when the author is asked to write an 'orientation' to the text for the publishing house, he answers that the definition of «indre sjølvbiografi» (inner autobiography, which does not come originally from the author but from a radio interview with the editor Brikt Jensen), is the most suitable one⁵.

To define one's own autobiography as «inner» means emphasising exploration instead of exposition, trying to hide and reveal oneself at one and the same time. As Tarjei Vesaas observes:

Ville fortelje litt om meg sjølv – med I wanted to tell something about my-
 mange om-skrivinga. Kunne liksom ve- self – with many circumlocutions. It
 re høveleg tid til dette no etterkvart. [...] seemed as though the moment had
 Forfattaren er vel gjerne tilstades i alle come. [...] Of course the writer is always
 sine bøker, men her skulle det vera litt present in all of his books, but here I
 nærare enn før. (O. Vesaas 1995: 397) wanted to be even closer.

Tarjei Vesaas resorts to some autobiographical concepts, such as the reprocessing of personal experience, writing about the self, memory and time, without ever explicitly lending his own name to the character, who paradoxically becomes more objectified the more he is identified with the author, and is introduced with the impersonal «ein» (one) in moments of maximum intimacy. Furthermore, he never defines his text as a real autobiography, but as an «inner» one at best. In other words, Vesaas maintains an ambiguous approach to the autobiographical genre, probably because of the clash between an authentic 'autobiographical urge' and the legendary discretion that distinguishes, if not defines, Tarjei Vesaas as a public figure and writer.

Vesaas's discretion and shyness are, in fact, some of the main features of the 'myth' that arises around his person: in an article of 1969 entitled

⁴ My italics.

⁵ «Brikt Jensen i Gyldendal har kalla det ein "indre sjølvbiografi". Det kunne ikkje eg komi på – men det er ikkje langt frå sanninga» (from *Om Skrivaren*, O. Vesaas 1985: 230; Brikt Jensen of Gyldendal defined it an "inner autobiography". I would not have come to it – but it is not far from the truth).

Myten om Vesaas (The Myth of Vesaas), which is also, or mainly, an essay on *Båten om kvelden*, Dag Solstad invites the reader to a discussion about the canonised image of his elder colleague. Solstad starts from the relation of trust established between the writer and his readers and critics, and states that, when we read, we carry with us Vesaas's mighty personal image. Such an image is not a disturbing element standing *between* the book and the reader, but a necessary and unavoidable part of the book, something characteristic. Solstad writes:

[...] i hvert fall ville jeg savne noe helt [...] I at least would feel as if something
 vesentlig hvis jeg skulle lese for eksempel essential were missing if I was to read for
 Fuglane, Det store spelet og Båten om example *The Birds, The Great Cycle* or *The*
 kvelden uten å ha mitt bilde av den *Boat in the Evening* without having the
 skrukkete mannen fra Vinje med meg. image of the wrinkled man from Vinje in
 (1969: 41) front of me.

One cannot help noticing how Vesaas's need to disappear causes the person of the author to be felt as 'essential' during the reading experience. Solstad's essay was published almost at the same time as Barthes's essay about the «death of the author» (1968), but while Barthes wants to free the text from the standpoint of the author, aiming to indicate its independence from the encumbering author, Solstad stresses the value of carrying with us the image of the writer during the reading. Solstad maintains that in *Båten om kvelden* Vesaas breaks with his own myth in order to let his writing fulfil his autobiographical needs, especially in the most intimate chapters of the book, namely the first and the fifteenth prose passages, *Slik det står i minnet* and *Tonen* (*The Melody*), dedicated to the memory of his father and mother. «I disse kapitler er Vesaas naken, så maskeløs naken som et menneske kan være» (Solstad 1969: 43; In these chapters Vesaas is as denuded and unmasked as a man can be).

But forty years after Solstad's article, in his study on Vesaas entitled *Skyggebilder* (2007; *Shadows*), Kjell Ivar Skjerdingstad interprets the writer's timidity in terms of 'coquetry', of course not referring to the biographical person but to his writing, a writing – according to Skjerdingstad – of partially hiding and covering in order to attract his readers's attention and awaken their curiosity, senses and intuition. Veils and masks, layers of snow falling down to cover silhouettes and figures, crepuscular lights to make the profiles uncertain, cause his readers to whet their vision, trapped as they are in a strategy of seduction and beauty (Skjerdingstad 2007: 24-25, 65-66).

This strategy reaches its peak in Vesaas's most personal and autobiographical book, where we witness the deployment of all the motifs that are dearest to the author: the pre-adolescent young man, the horse, the birds, the snake, the lake, the current, the boat, the fir forest. Recurring motifs, personal refrains, which reveal themselves as masks of the self,

worn to unmask oneself. If it is true that «Ein sjølv står i bøkene i alle slags forkledningar» (from *Om skrivaren*, O. Vesaas 1985: 144; We are present in our own books under any kind of disguise), in *Båten om kvelden* Vesaas uses these *figures of the self* to narrate himself in an organic way that contrasts with the splintering within the plot, which instead mirrors the work of memory. In *Båten om kvelden* the autobiographical need finds a «samlande grunnplane», a cohesive ground for the fragments of memory: «Det er den same hugen som viser seg frå ymse sider» (O. Vesaas 1995: 397; It is the same spirit that shows itself from different perspectives), as the writer states⁶.

Båten om kvelden is a narration of the self where the self contains both life and writing, as Steinar Gimnes observes:

Når Vesaas nemner sjølvbiografiske kategoriar som “minne, omskrivne opplevingar, sterke kjensler og draumar”, kan vi også oppfatte dette som litterære motiv, som representerer Vesaas’ forfatterskap. ‘Sjølvbiografisk’ knyter vi da til diktaren Vesaas, ikkje først og fremst til den biografiske personen. I stor grad er det slik i *Båten om kvelden*. Leseopplevinga er prega av gjenkjenning av motiv frå forfatterskapet, som dannar eit bilde av ein forfattarinstant. Boka er framfor alt ‘sjølvbiografisk’ i denne tidinga. (2013: 438)

When Vesaas mentions autobiographical concepts such as “memory, reprocessed experiences, strong feelings and dreams”, we can acknowledge them also as literary motifs that represent Vesaas’s writing. Therefore we link the adjective ‘autobiographical’ primarily to Vesaas the writer, and not to his biographical persona. Most of all, this is what happens in *The Boat in the Evening*. The reading experience is characterised by the identification of motifs present in his entire production, which gives us the image of a writer-standpoint. The book is ‘autobiographical’ mainly in this sense.

Vesaas seems to ask his ideal reader to recognise him and carry him along during the reading: not the «skrukkete» Vesaas from Vinje, as Solstad suggests, but his books, his motifs, his masks.

5. Reflections of memory and reflections of the self in *Slik det står i minnet*

The passage *Slik det står i minnet* shows a recurrent triptych in the writing of Vesaas, composed of a father, a son and a horse caught in a working context. Apart from this passage from *Båten om kvelden*, this ‘refrain-motif’ is also found, for example, in the novel *Det store spelet* (1997b: 7-202; *The Great Cycle*, trans. by Rokkan 1967) of 1934, considered as autobiographical by most critics (T. Vesaas 1997b: 7-202), and in the poem *Hesten* (2007: 40-41; *The Horse*, trans. by Greenwald 2000: 14-17), in the collection *Kjeldene* (The

⁶ All quotes from O. Vesaas in this paragraph are Tarjei Vesaas’s own statements, unless otherwise indicated.

Sources) of 1946, where the writer stages, in different ways, from different perspectives and with different results, the inner conflict of a boy who has to choose between following the path and work expectations prescribed by his father and community, i.e. farming, and taking an alternative road, a personal and creative one. The conflict between working the soil and writing, between the continuation and the break of family tradition, is enacted. The father represents authority, a knowledge and a duty both silent and natural; the boy, on the other hand, embodies the yearning for dreams, escape and verbal communication; the horse, in the end, is the figure where all characters and motifs from the mentioned texts converge and reflect, because of its physical presence and its wide symbolic range (Culeddu 2013: 67-84).

This is the scenery of *Slik det står i minnet*: a fir forest with the three characters at work to open a path through the snow, under the falling snow. The silence is absolute and the light is uncertain, with walls of mist enclosing the landscape. The focus continuously shifts between outside and inside, and the subject is, alternately, «det store barnet» (the big boy), «eg» (I) and the impersonal «ein» (one); the point of view and the narrating voice shift between the boy and the horse for the whole passage.

Only the father is inaccessible both to the reader and the son. In contrast with the polyphony of the narration and of the thoughts, all three keep silent while dreaming of a way out.

When the horse hurts its leg, the boy is asked to disinfect the wound with his urine: a transmission of ancient knowledge, a remedy that comes from centuries of cohabitation of man and horse. But the boy cannot do it and in rejecting this transmission opens a deep rift with which he breaks with the farming tradition of his land, the history of his family, his paternal line, and his duty, as firstborn, of inheriting land and farm. The boy dreams and dares to follow his way out, but a sense of shame mixed with a sense of victory struggles within him, a sense of guilt and a sense of fatality: the boy, in fact, is also the adult author who remembers, looks backwards and knows that it was his destiny to break with tradition and become a writer (cf. Gusdorf 1980), although that deep rift, that wound, still hurts:

<p>Det store barnet ber svien. Skal minnast denne hendinga til livs ende. [...] Det store barnet ber svien, uformeleg, men med noko i seg som vil setje seg fast for godt. (T. Vesaas 1997a: 24)</p>	<p>The big boy bears the hurt. He will remember this to the end of his life. [...] The big boy bears the hurt, a shapeless burden, but one that will settle for good. (Trans. by Rokkan; T. Vesaas 2003: 29)</p>
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The 'shapelessness' of the hurt finds its poetical shape at last, chaotic like a time of simultaneity, where the Self can be the hurt boy, the writing adult and the absolving witness all at once. In *Det store spelet*, Vesaas explores the possibility of embracing and receiving the paternal legacy

through the conciliatory choice made by Per, the main character; in the poem *Hesten* the writer is faced with the troublesome questions deriving at the same time from his father, his own conscience and the face of a horse behind the studio window: what are you doing? What is your job? What does a poet do? (cf. T. Vesaas 2007: 41; trans. by Greenwald). In this late prose passage, instead, Vesaas tells us about his own choice and the pain of that choice. He describes them «slik det står i minne», as they are in memory. The reader confronts an autobiographical truth and a truth of the memory, which expresses itself in the form of fragmentation, the polyphonic and undefined ways of recollection, a truth that is transfigured by the masks of the self and the mask of time. As regards autobiographical truth in *Det store spelet*, Tarjei Vesaas expresses himself in this way, declaring his faith in the truth of literature:

No er det urett å stemple Det store spelet som direkte skildring av min eigen barndom. Personane stemmer ikkje, heller ikkje hendingane, heller ikkje utgangen for Per – men likevel er det sant. Det er sannare enn den klinkande sanninga i eit noggrant referat ville vera. (O. Vesaas 1985: 78)

It is not correct to label *The Great Cycle* as a direct representation of my childhood. The characters do not fit, the facts do not fit, and the final decision of Per does not fit – nonetheless it is true. It is truer than the bare truth of facts in a detailed report could ever be.

6. Conclusions

Autobiography is the art of curing a *real* wound with words, traveling the path of memory and reconstructing a plot which is deeply *true* and *fictional* at the same time. Although Vesaas, for both personal and aesthetic reasons, keeps himself at a distance from autobiography in the formal sense and creates a plot where nameless characters and figures act, he is nonetheless able to establish a close and intimate relationship with the reader, a relationship that goes beyond Lejeune's «autobiographical pact». The reading of *Båten om kvelden* is a journey through the most sensitive moments in the poet's story. The closeness between the poet and the reader is mainly built on two levels: the plurality of paratextual and intertextual elements, especially *Minne frå eit samliv* and *Tarjei Vesaas om seg sjølv*, in which we can enter into contact with an 'unintentional' voice of the author, and the masked self-representation, the revelation of Tarjei Vesaas behind the masks of his anonymous characters (animals and landscapes included), which flow all together into *Båten om kvelden* like threads of a life-long plot. What finally appears evident is that an autobiographical truth does not need any statement, but rather the collaboration between an authentic polyphony and one or more fictional frames where all the voices of the self are gathered.

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EYVIND JOHNSONS VÄGAR GÅR ÖVER METAPONTO

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När Eyvind Johnson år 1974 tilldelades Nobelpriset i litteratur tillsammans med Harry Martinson började jag leta efter ett verk som hade någonting att göra med Italien. Jag hade med intresse och stor lust läst några av Johnsons böcker och framförallt tyckt om den självbiografiska *Romanen om Olof* (1934-1937) i fyra delar och den historiska romanen *Strändernas svall* (1946). Jag skyndade mig då att översätta *Vägar över Metaponto. En resedagbok* (1959) till italienska, eftersom jag ansåg den lämplig för att i Italien introducera denna stora författare som var helt okänd i mitt hemland.

Anledningen till mitt val var att Johnsons resa år 1958 hade stark anknytning till den historiska romanen *Molnen över Metapontion*, som författaren hade publicerat 1957. Romanens huvudperson, Klemens Decorbie, genomlever samma erfarenheter och träffar samma personer som Johnson i verkligheten under sin förra resa år 1956. Johnson hade dessutom rest i södra Italien och besökt Metaponto två gånger innan, 1953 och 1955, då han samlade material till sin roman.

Vägar över Metaponto innehåller också upplevelser från tidigare resor. I slutet av reseskildringen, efter ett besök i Benevento, befinner sig Johnson också i Cividale och i Pavia, på platser där hans nästa verk *Hans nådes tid* (1960) skulle komma att utspela sig, och i spåren av dess romankaraktärer. I Zürich hittar han en kopia av den longobardiska jungfrun Landoaldas gravsten, och detta ger honom idén till en av huvudpersonerna i *Hans nådes tid*, Angila (Johnson 1959: 79).

När Johnson i Pavia tänker på arbetet med sin kommande roman, skriver han: «En författare som söker saker som han redan har skrivit om» – orden följer med från Udine och Cividale. Även ett Papija, ett Ticinum har jag skildrat med inträngande osakkunskap» (1959: 78-79).

Eftersom några punkter under arbetet med översättningen av reseskildringen inte var klara för mig skrev jag till författaren, som svarade mig med stor artighet, övertygad om att jag hade valt rätt bok för att introducera honom för de italienska läsarna. Johnson tillade dessutom: «Italien har, som Ni säkerligen känner till, under årens lopp kommit att betyda så mycket för mig och min fru – och för flera av mina böckers utformning. Och resultatet av många resor därnere har för oss blivit en djup tacksamhet mot

italiensk kultur och italiensk vänlighet mot främlingar, som i likhet med mig visserligen hjälpligt kan läsa italienska, ofta endast med stöd av en ordbok, men sannerligen inte *tala* Ert språk (... ett troligen vanligt turistöde)»¹.

När jag hade översatt boken skrev jag till några italienska förlag. Några av dem svarade och verkade intresserade, men till slut blev det ingenting. Mitt förslag blev alltså avvisat och kort efteråt fick jag ett erbjudande om att översätta *Drömmar om rosor och eld* (1949; *Sogni di rose e di fuoco*, övers. Muscarello 1978) för förlaget UTET, som publicerade en skriftserie med översättningar av verk skrivna av Nobelpristagare i litteratur. Jag ägnade mig då på heltid åt detta krävande arbete. Nyligen har förlaget Iperborea publicerat *Hans nådes tid* (1960; *Il tempo di Sua Grazia*, övers. Sanesi 2005) och dessa två romaner är allt som finns av Eyvind Johnson i italiensk översättning. Numera är jag trots allt övertygad om att jag valde rätt, och kanske ändå något förlag med tiden kommer att visa intresse för att publicera reseskildringen.

Under ett föredrag vid Sveriges Klassikerförbund år 1967 återkom Johnson till sitt intresse för södra Italien och sade apropå sin resa från 1955:

En gammal dröm uppfylldes när jag kom till Metaponto andra gången. Där finns en lång sammanhängande sandstrand... Jag minns att jag, i den romantiska förnimmelse att ha nått ett av mitt livs mål, gick så långt ut i sanden att jag mötte det sista av dyningen som rullade in. Jag sträckte fram handen och rörde vid Joniska havet och kände djup tillfredställelse över att ett främmande hav på detta sätt blev mitt. (cit. efter Stenström 2006)

Stenström kommenterar:

Att erövra ett nytt hav och göra det till sitt var för Eyvind Johnson ett symboliskt sätt att uttrycka något som har med flykt att göra men också med befrielse: flykt bort från smärtsamma erfarenheter men också befrielse genom erövring av ny kunskap och ny livserfarenhet. På den långa resan genom livet blev det klassiska kulturarvet för Johnson just detta, dels en flyktmöjlighet från en odräglig europeisk nutid men dels också en källa till befrielse, vidgade vyer och fördjupad livsinsikt. (2006)

Vid detta tillfälle fick Johnson idén till sin roman *Molnen över Metapontion*. Vi vet att han ännu inte hade besökt Grekland när han publicerade *Strändernas svall* 1946 och att han inte hade sett Egeiska havet, vilket hände först 1961. Förkärleken för Grekland, Storgrekland och den klassiska världen utvecklades hos Johnson under hans ungdomsår, då han under inflytande av Emil Zilliacus läste de antika klassikerna: «Han har skrivit det finaste som jag läst på svenska om Metaponto, det handlar om en trettio år sedan» (cit. efter Lindberger 1990: 270).

¹ Brev i min ägo daterat 5 januari 1974.

Som vid andra tillfällen kan en historisk person, kanske nämnd endast en enda gång i något dokument, som huvudpersonen Daniel Drouin i *Drömmar om rosor och eld*, eller Xenofons alter ego, Temistogenes, huvudpersonen i *Molnen över Metaponto*, samt många andra, studeras och bearbetas av författaren under flera år för att slutligen kanske komma med i en roman.

I ett brev från 1949 bekräftar Johnson Goethes tanke om att

[...] resor är bildande. [...] Goethe menade antagligen inte att det är nödvändigt att skriva reseberättelser om allt, men han syftar onekligen på livets rikedom och variation. Och ännu djupare: på det upplevdas värde, på förändringens förmåga att ge kunskap om världen. (Johnson 2006: 247)

Johnson menar visserligen att vi inte kan omfatta vår värld känslomässigt för att göra den begriplig, men han anser också att det är «ett högmod utan gräns» att förneka vad han kallar stämningarnas, känslolntryckens, syn- och ljudbildernas upplärnings- och förkortningsarbete (2006: 246). Genom resor vänder vi oss ut «mot en större och vidare värld och inte mot en mindre» (2006: 248). Om de skandinaviska resenärerna skriver Johnson:

Det beska resenären upplever kan bli en lektion i konsten att betrakta nordiska värden och det fina han möter kan rucka på vanföreställningar och dämpa tomt och meningslöst skryt. Vi är inte sämst i världen och inte bäst [...]. Den gode resenären är den som både ger av det han har med sig hemifrån, om det är värt att ge bort [...]. Vi-är-alltid-bättre-känslan beror på grov okunskap om de andra. (2006: 249-250)

Johnson uppmanar unga människor att resa för att lära känna och uppleva världen, och förstå att

Vi har ett hävdelsebehov, som är naturligt, och som vi inte kan kväva, men det är inte nödvändigt för vår nationella lycka att ha upptäckt Amerika före Columbus eller att ha uppfunnit de flesta av de stora uppfinningarna. Det är mycket nödvändigare att vi försöker ta reda på hur världen är beskaffad, hur människans själ kan göras rikare, hur vägarna till mänsklighetens lycka går. Våra bidrag till den allmänna kulturen är ändå stora: så som alla kulturfolks är det. Vi är inte ensamma. (2006: 251)

Thure Stenström jämför Eyvind Johnsons resesätt med Sartres. Trots att de båda författarna och Nobelpristagarna var välkända för sitt politiska engagemang,

råkade [de] använda alldeles samma litterära symbol för den oengagerade livshållningen. De skildrade [...] med förkärlek den oförbindlige turisten, han som nöjer sig med att resa omkring och betrakta världens nöd, som underlåter

att opponera sig, ingripa, engagera sig. Både Sartre och Johnson var själva flitiga resenärer, och båda turistade för egen del gärna i Medelhavsländerna, i eller nära Rom och Hellas. Troligtvis har båda åtminstone någon gång känt frestelsen att genom resor och för den delen även antikstudier få undslippa nuets politiska konvulsioner. (2006)

Vägar över Metaponto är som sagt en liten bok, bestående av snabba reseanteckningar, dagbokssidor, anteckningar nedklottrade i all hastighet i väntsalen på någon italiensk station, på tåg, bussar, hotell, och under promenader. Johnson är en människa från norr. I söder ser han det som är annorlunda, andra tiders kultur, nöden hos människor som lider på grund av sina sociala villkor, av det dåliga landsstyret, nutida makthavares och forna tiders tyranners egoism. Men i boken finner vi också de utmärkande dragen hos resenären Eyvind Johnson, han som sökte historiska och mänskliga perspektiv, som forskade i människans historia och skildrade själslivet bortom tid och rum. Apropå detta påpekar Birgit Munkhammar: «Själva föreställningen om att vägen framåt och uppåt börjar med resan bakåt, neråt eller inåt mot det egna, lagrade eller förträngda förflutna tycks nästan vara konstitutiv för Eyvind Johnson» (2000: 161).

Under sin ungdom, som Johnson berättar om i *Romanen om Olof*, kunde han sitta i timmar och läsa om de förtrollade länderna runt det avlägsna havet, Medelhavet, där civilisationen föddes (1972: 31-32, 174-176). När han nu besöker dessa länder är han en vuxen man, en erkänd författare, som känner till det onda som finns bakom civilisationen, blodet som har spillts, miljoner numera glömda människors slaveri. Det är inte länge sedan Europa kom ut ur andra världskriget, den största tragedi som någonsin hade upplevts. Men ändå upprepades tragedin i Ungern utan att någon rörde ett finger för att försvara demokratin. I ett tal som Johnson höll vid en studentdemonstration den 6 november 1956, sade han: «Ungerns nederlag är ett nederlag för mänskligheten [...], tragiken i Ungern och de moln som har stigit upp ännu längre bort och gör många vilsna, rör oss» (cit. efter Lindberger 1990: 275).

I talet finner vi ordet *moln*, en synonym till den betungande tragedi som återfinns i romanens titel. Johnson uppvisar inte längre det naiva förtroende han hade som sjuttonåring, när han sålde godis på en biograf i norra Sverige. På den tiden tittade han på *Quo Vadis* och trodde att Nero var en historia från det förflutna (Johnson 1971: 34-35). Nu vet Johnson att Nero inte är död. Han har ibland kallats Karl den Store, han har varit påve, Mussolini, Hitler, och Stalin, och tyvärr kommer han att återuppstå i skepnad av nya tyranner. Angående synen på ondskan i Johnsons författarskap påpekar Alessandro Bassini: «Nella visione storica di Johnson è presente l'idea di un'umanità in perenne lotta contro se stessa, di un ciclico scatenarsi della violenza annientatrice. Dall'antichità fino ai giorni nostri – anzi, sin dal tempo storico del mito – l'umanità cade apparentemente senza scampo nel gorgo della violenza» (2011: 273; Ur Johnsons historiska synvinkel är

idén om en mänsklighet i ständig kamp mot sig själv närvarande, liksom tanken på det ständigt återkommande förödande våldet. Från antiken till våra dagar – ja, till och med allt sedan mytisk tid – går mänskligheten synbarligen under utan räddning i våldets virvel)².

När Johnson är i Rom skriver han i reseskildringen, med en ironisk och fantiserande hållning: «En fönsterglugg lyser högt uppe i ett för ett par decennier sedan genom fascismen illa beryktat palats vid Piazza Navona. Som ett ilsket öga. Vi har olika teorier om vem kan hålla sig däruppe, så sent på kvällen. Till slut enas vi om att det måste vara en diktator som trots allt kom undan och har hållit sig gömd där; förslagvis Hitler» (1959: 20)³.

På sin resa letar Johnson efter stämningen i böckerna som han redan har skrivit och i de som han vet att han kommer att skriva, böcker som utspelar sig i en historisk italiensk miljö. Han har med sig sina karaktärs vålnader och spelar ut dem mot miljöer, stämningar och det italienska lynnet. I sitt yrke som författare måste han, som han vid flera tillfällen utprepar, uträtta sina ärenden: besöka ett museum, ett slott, söka en dorisk kolumn eller en medeltida gravsten, vilka alla utgör ämnen och stoff till romaner och berättelser som han redan har skrivit, eller som han kommer att skriva. På detta vis blir besöket en granskning, han söker bekräftelse för en tänkt verklighet, en sporre för att utveckla sina idéer i fantasin. Ibland handlar det om ställen som han möter för första gången, trots att han känner till dem mycket väl då han redan har beskrivit dem i sina böcker med hjälp av historiska fakta och sin fantasi. I dessa fall kommer tvivlen men samtidigt försvaret: «Men till slut, säger jag mig, har ju inte så många författare sett Himmelriket eller Helvetet och ändå med till synes stor sakkunskap skrivit om dessa orter» (1959: 39).

Eyvind Johnson är som sagt också en vanlig turist, som har med sig en kamera, läser turistbroschyrer, lider av värmen, letar efter skuggan, en kall öl, en god middag. Men ibland är han mer nyfiken på de mänskliga detaljerna hos ett folk än av monumenten. Han nämner större och mindre städer, betydande och mindre betydande orter, byar, ställen, stadsområden, luft, hav. I synnerhet blir det Neapel, Metaponto, Taranto, Benevento, Venedig. Här talas om museer, antika ruiner, men framför allt om människorna som Johnson träffar, museivakter, gamla och unga, kunniga och fåvitska, de stolta och nästan naiva ägarna till antikviteter. Vi möter taxichaufförer, hotellportier, en kusk, en stadspolis, en gatsopare, en stationsinspektör, en kypare, en fiskare, en gammal kvinna på en balkong, fattiga barn i trasor, i förtid åldrade kvinnor, en ingenjör, med vilken han länge konverserar på ett tåg, några herdar. Dessa är de verkliga

² Min översättning.

³ Här förväxlar Johnson torgen och menar det berömda fönstret i Mussolinis arbetsrum på Piazza Venezia.

huvudpersonerna, de som Johnson verkligen vill se under sin resa. Även om de antika monumenten är oerhört fascinerande och solnedgången på Tarantos hav är en fantastisk syn, är Johnsons öga mest intresserat av de vanliga italienska människorna.

Johnson går och går i flera timmar genom de italienska städerna på jakt efter någonting som han definierar som folkets själ, eller snarare, sökande efter något som kan bekräfta det han redan vet: att människan är sig lik överallt och i alla tider. Allt beror på vem som bestämmer. Dessa monument har byggts sten på sten av små människor och av stora som inte längre finns och som aldrig tycks ha funnits. Ändå existerar de fortfarande. Det förflutna och nutiden blandas ihop, det är fråga om förnyelse, inte om död. Det nutida *I love you* flyter ihop med de antika visorna på dialekt som sjungs av Tarantos fiskare. Olika ord men samma innehåll.

På alla platser Johnson besöker finns en liten berättelse, en anekdot, en sägen värd att minnas. Sidorna blandas och material tillfogas, nutiden och dagboksidorna från något år innan smälter samman: skvallerhistorier om Villa Gina i Brissago, teaterföreställningarna som gavs av ett litet teatersällskap från Milano, Tarantos hyfsade självmord där unga män för att hylla en flicka svalde gift framför henne men med en läkare i närheten, så att de överlevde och firades som hjältar, denna stads sammanfattade historia, oredan i Sannios museum i Benevento under reparation, Ungarettis klingande röst på Unescos författarkonferens i Venedig, och Silvio Pellicos öde. När Johnson befinner sig i Venedig berättar han utförligt om Barone Corvos tragiska öde. I verkligheten var denne en engelsk författare som bodde i staden och länge försökte att bli känd. Tyvärr var han på grund av sitt storhetsvansinne grälsjuk och svår, blev osams med allt och alla och dog ensam i armod 1913.

När Johnson stiger på tåget som ska ta honom från Neapel till Metaponto, upptäcker han i trängseln nationalkaraktären hos ett bullrande och manstarkt folk. Det är människor som samlas på stationens perrong med många paket och knyten, omringade av en massa barn. Man bönfaller alla Paradisets helgon och ber dem ingripa så att alla passagerare ska få plats på det överfulla tåget. Och alla klarar det. Det är ett mirakel (Johnson 1959: 24-25).

Vid flera tillfällen vill Johnson bevisa i sina romaner att människan i själva verket alltid är sig lik överallt i hela världen: «människoöden förr och nu är likartade, och även individens liv förlöper som ett återvändande till utgångspunkten; varje strävan mot ett mål utmynnars i passivitet och resignation» (Meyer 1976: 59). Och Tormod påpekar: «Liksom fallet är i *Strändernas svall* förenas EJ:s strävan att i berättelsen gestalta denna uppfattning av den mänskligas fundamentala likhet genom historiens förändringar med en strävan att luckra läsarens tidskänsla och frammana en illusion av att tidsavstånd upphävts, att då och nu smälter samman en verklighet gemensam för alla tider» (2012: 42).

Men i alla fall tycker han att det italienska folket skiljer sig i sin karaktär från de dystra nordiska personerna i några av Johnsons romaner. Italienarna är artiga, uppmärksamma, naiva i sin iver att göra sig listiga, men också hos dem finns det någonting som inte är glädje och som skaver i själen. Det är inte det lättsinniga, schablonartade Italien med mandoliner och serenader som vi finner i många utländska och skandinaviska litterära verk: det är ett vemodigt bullrande Italien som håller på att återhämta sig. Johnson tycker att över det Italien han möter finns ett slags andligt damm, som i form av resignation och vanmakt gör att människorna lever som de lever, ibland *tvungna* att hitta en utväg. Ur denna synvinkel får Beneventos gatsopare ett symbolvärde: inlindad i stora dammoln sopar han skräp från den ena sidan av gatan till den andra och sedan hopar han det i ett portvalv, för att dagen därpå igen sopa ut det på gatan och på så sätt försäkra sig om arbete. Det blir en Tantalos plåga: ovanpå de italienska människorna tynger ett flera sekler gammalt damm som svårligen kan sopas bort, det finns en kollektiv urgammal hunger, det finns människor i överflöd (1959: 63).

Och här bedömer svensken, som ändå begriper vilka ansträngningar som görs för återuppbyggnaden, att en av Italiens olyckor är den höga nativiteten. Varken traditionen, lagarna eller kyrklig uppfostran hjälper. Härifrån kommer Johnsons sociala grubblerier och hans frågor utan svar: «Men vad vet man om framtiden, den och katolska kyrkans fortsatta makt att behärska småbondesängarna och skapa överbefolkning?» (1959: 45).

Ändå blandas verkligheten starkt med fantasin, så att vi ofta inte kan urskilja var den ena slutar och den andra tar vid, i ett oavbrutet spel, återsken och motsvarigheter som slingrar ihop sig och fogas samman på olika tidsplan. Mer symboliska än allt annat är de votivkrukskärvor som Johnson tar upp från marken: «Jag böjer mig ner mot gruset och tar upp små, tjocka amforabottnar, söndertrampade krukhandtag och skärvor med teckning i svart. [...] Det är rester av kärll som kanske brändes på Platons tid eller långt före den» (1959: 36-37).

I romanen *Molnen över Metapontion* kommer Klemens Decorbie att få ett hörselintryck av den stund då skärvan gick sönder: «Om man lyfte den mot örat, hörde man kanske kraset i den ännu, stora *pang* fanns kanske kvar» (Johnson 1965: 204; kursiv i originaltexten). Tormod påpekar: «Förhållandet mellan de olika tidsskiktetna? I Decorbies medvetande liknar således ett system av kinesiska askar: nuet rymmer det personliga förflutna vilket i sin tur rymmer det långt avlägsna historiska förflutna» (2012: 46). I romanen kan vi återuppleva stunden då den votivkruka, kanske just den vars skärvor Johnson tar upp, gick sönder. Den gamla urtiden blir omedelbart levande, och detta visar att tiden och rummet endast är konventioner med begränsad giltighet och att människan alltid är sig lik med sina känslor och passioner, sina värden och brister, sitt elände och sina själarörelser.

Litteratur

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FATHER AND SON: DAVID AND GÖRAN ROSENBERG'S LIVES IN *ETT KORT UPPEHÅLL PÅ VÄGEN FRÅN AUSCHWITZ*

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On 26 November 2012 *Ett kort uppehåll på vägen från Auschwitz* (2012; *A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz*, trans. by Death 2014) by Göran Rosenberg won the August Prize, probably the most prestigious literary award in Sweden, in the category *Årets svenska skönlitterära bok*, roughly translatable as «best Swedish fiction book of the year». It is important, in order to avoid semantic confusion, to keep in mind that the word *skönlitteratur* is a calque of the French expression *belle-lettres* and does not imply any specific degree of fiction. Despite what the idea of 'fiction' in the English translation seems to indicate, *Ett kort uppehåll* (thus shortened from here on) actually avoids all sorts of fictional invention, marking a difference compared to previous literary works of the same kind in the Swedish Holocaust literature. The aim of this paper is to show how Rosenberg's text always strives to stick to real events, not only when it reconstructs with historical precision the liquidation of the Łódź ghetto and the hero's transfer from one labour camp to another after his liberation from Auschwitz, but also when it provides an intimate look at the childhood of a boy in post-war Sweden and what it meant to grow up with a father who was a Holocaust survivor¹. In doing this, it develops a narrative structure that blurs the only seemingly clear-cut boundaries between biography and autobiography.

As the term «fiction» does not fit as a possible definition of Rosenberg's book, so also «Auschwitz» seems out of place. Despite

¹ The particular style of the book, verging on the novel but never indulging in fiction, was already highlighted by the first reviewers: «Han skriver här med romanens självklara kraft, trots att det är en verklig berättelse» (Greider 2012; His narration has the power of a novel, even though it is a true story); «*Ett kort uppehåll* [...] är så nära en stor roman man kan komma, utan att den för ett ögonblick lämnar verkligheten» (Kindstrand 2012; *Ett kort uppehåll* [...] is as close as it can get to a great novel, but it does not leave reality for a second); «Såväl litterärt som journalistiskt har Göran Rosenberg på ett enastående sätt bidragit till den svenska berättelsen om Förintelsen» (Liljestrand 2012; As both a writer and a journalist, Göran Rosenberg has contributed to the Swedish Holocaust literature in a unique way). All translations from Swedish are mine, except for the quotes from the English translation of *Ett kort uppehåll*, *A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz*, translated by Sarah Death, edited by John Cullen.

what the title suggests, the story is not at all about the Nazi concentration camp, but rather about what happened to David Rosenberg, the author's father, *after* Auschwitz. Most of the book is therefore set in Södertälje, an industrial town south of Stockholm, where David settles in 1947, together with his wife Hala. Like most Jewish Holocaust survivors, they dream of emigrating to the United States or Israel, and consider Sweden only as a brief stopover. One year later though, the possibility of reaching the United States or Israel almost shrinks to nil, partly because of bureaucratic restrictions, partly because their first son Göran is born. The 'pause' on the road from Auschwitz becomes definitive, and Södertälje figures as the last station of David Rosenberg's long journey.

The author's choice to tell the story of his childhood and his father's life places *Ett kort uppehåll* in the category of so-called «second generation Holocaust literature», that is to say, literature written by descendants of Holocaust survivors². The first scholar to draw attention to this generation was Helen Epstein, in 1979, with her pioneering work *Children of the Holocaust. Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (Epstein 1988). At the age of 29, Epstein began to notice that «although "war is hell" had become a truism of American Literature, few writers pursued the destruction that did not end with a peace treaty» (1988: 33). Holocaust survivors had psychological wounds that never healed, and were forever stalked by a shadow that seemed also to creep over their offspring: they behaved as if they had never really got out of the concentration camps. As their children perceived this, they silently stored impressions within themselves, in a place that Epstein, speaking about her own childhood, defines as her «iron box»: «My parents did not understand what I was doing. Like most survivors, neither imagined how, over the years, I had stored their remarks, their glances and their silence inside me, how I had deposited them in my iron box like pennies in a piggy bank» (1988: 335). The result of her research, made up of many interviews with people of different origins, education and social backgrounds, showed striking similarities in the second-generation Holocaust survivors' perception of their upbringing. All parents were usually hard workers, tended to be overprotective, and emphasised the importance of getting a good education, a well-paid job and elevated social status, mostly to remain safe from the outer world: if they or their children did not perform well enough, some evil was bound to befall them. As a consequence, children of Holocaust survivors often grew up in an environment that, on the one hand, encouraged them

² A clear-cut definition of the members of the second generation is still up for debate. Epstein (1988) limited her investigation to the sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors, but other scholars, such as Grimwood, take a broader view on this 'second generation' by including people who grew up «in close proximity to survivors» (Grimwood 2007: 3).

to set a high value on hard work, honesty and respectability, while on the other it instilled them with fears of persecution, marginalisation and insufficiency. Another recurrent aspect is the unwillingness of the parents to talk with their children about the Shoah, which, in some cases, verged on outright refusal³.

A few years after the publication of Epstein's study, some literary works also started to investigate, often from an autobiographical perspective, what it meant to belong to this generation, and during the last twenty-five years this type of literature has expanded worldwide. Surely one of the first and most significant contributions to this new genre was the graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, originally published in two parts in 1986 and 1991 (Spiegelman 1997). In this book the author alternates the description of his father's imprisonment at Auschwitz with that of his own work as a cartoonist sitting at his desk and drawing the strips that make up the story; a metafictional device that enabled him to express his mixed feelings towards the paternal figure (love and anger, inferiority complex and remorse).

The first Swedish example of this kind of literature appeared rather early, when Suzanne Gottfarb published *Systrarna Blaumans hemlighet* (1987; *The Blauman Sisters' Secret*). The novel consists of two parts: the first tells the story of a young woman, Mira, who grows up with her mother and her aunt in Stockholm. In the second part, the focus shifts to the controversial relationship between the two sisters, who, after surviving Auschwitz, react in different ways to their new life in Sweden. In the Nineties, Susanne Levin published two novels, *Leva vidare* (1994; *Life Goes On*) and *Som min egen* (1996; *As my Own*), narrating the story of Lea, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor of Hungarian origin, who grows up in post-war Uppsala. As Anders Ohlsson points out, in these novels there is a strong need to heal a wound, to fill in the crack between the self and the outside world: «Denna strävan kan jämföras med begreppet Tikkun, som i den kabbalistiska föreställningsvärlden innebär ett försök att genom handlingar återställa eller göra helt det som slagits i spillror» (2002: 199; *This effort can be compared*

³ Epstein's work soon became a milestone in Holocaust studies and paved the way for further research. Alan L. Berger talks about the «psychological legacy» of the Shoah, for both survivors and their children: «For this generation, the Holocaust means the eternal presence of an absence, that is those who were murdered in the Shoah» (A.L. Berger, N. Berger 2001: 1). Also in Sweden some studies have recently started to investigate this phenomenon. Judith Beerman Zeligson, for example, comes to the same conclusion as Epstein: «Till andra generationen räknas de vars föräldrar överlevt de tyska koncentrationslägren [...]. Under uppväxten fick många med sig föräldrarnas livskraft och överlevnadsvilja. Men med i vuxenåldern följde också en kollektiv skugga» (1998: 59; *To the second generation belong those whose parents survived the German concentration camps [...]. During their upbringing, many inherited their parents' strength and will to survive. But as they became adults, they were also pursued by a collective shadow*).

with the concept of *Tikkun*, that in the Kabbalistic vision of the world implies an attempt to repair or reassemble through actions what has fallen down to pieces). For Mira and Lea this mission can be accomplished in different ways, for example by getting to know the truth behind what happened to their relatives during the war, but also through pregnancy, so that the Jewish lineage can be carried on. Mira, in *Systrarna Blaumans hemlighet*, first has an abortion, but then gets pregnant again by a Jewish man. Lea, the alter ego of Susanne Levin, cannot have children and she decides, after many miscarriages, to adopt two children from South America.

Although based loosely on the authors' lives, these novels could hardly be considered autobiographies. Some elements, even crucial, are authentic and verifiable, but they are blended into a fictional plot or are useful only as a background⁴. Many scholars have pointed out that Holocaust literature of any latitude tends to make a 'crossover' between different genres, defying a clear-cut definition. Sicher claims that the Holocaust novel «blurs the already fuzzy generic boundaries of autobiography and fiction, memoir and fantasy, historical documents and realist novel. The incredible invites the surreal, and the absurdity of mass death defies narrative conventions of life stories, the Bildungsroman, or the epistolary form» (2005: xii). Also Ohlsson emphasises the mix of autobiography and fiction in Levin's works: «*Leva vidare* och *Som min egen* [...] balanserar i likhet med mycket annan förintelselitteratur på gränsen mellan självbiografi och fiktion» (2002: 178; Just like many other examples of Holocaust literature, *Leva vidare* and *Som min egen* [...] are on the borderline between autobiography and fiction). Up to this point, then, second generation Swedish Holocaust literature presents an autobiographical matrix that develops into fiction.

Ett kort uppehåll follows a different path. Rosenberg intertwines the autobiography of his early life with David Rosenberg's biography through an affectionate monologue that the author addresses to his father, now deceased. This particular narrative structure enables further discussion of some of the topics raised so far about Holocaust literature and autobiography.

Philippe Lejeune, in *Le Pacte autobiographique*, states that the condition *sine qua non* for a book to be considered an autobiography is the possibility (implicit or obvious) it gives the reader to establish a correspondence between author, narrator and protagonist: «Le pacte autobiographique, c'est l'affirmation dans le texte de cette identité (auteur-narrateur-personnage) renvoyant en dernier ressort au *nom* de l'auteur sur la couverture» (1975:

⁴ Suzanne Gottfarb is not a child of Holocaust survivors. She has taken inspiration from what happened to some of her relatives, but radically modified many aspects (names, circumstances, relationships between characters). As for Susanne Levin, her mother was a Hungarian Holocaust survivor and the author herself adopted two children from South America.

26, emphasis in the original; «The autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of this identity (author-narrator-protagonist) referring back in the final analysis to the name of the author written on the cover», trans. by Leary; Lejeune 1989a: 14). Starting from this definition, Lejeune elaborates two taxonomies for separating biography from autobiography and autobiography from novel.

A few years later, Paul de Man asserted that the effort to define autobiography as a literary genre, justified by the «uncontested readability of the proper name» was highly questionable, because it suggested that the referent determines the figure, whereas it could also be the opposite: «Is the illusion of reference not a correlation of the structure of the figure, that is to say no longer clearly and simply a referent at all but something more akin to a fiction which then, however, in its own turn, acquires a degree of referential productivity?» (1979: 920). Questioning that a referent could be used as a touchstone to establish the authenticity of an utterance, de Man came to the conclusion that autobiography was a «figure of reading that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution» (1979: 921). For de Man, then, there cannot be such a thing as a pure autobiography in the way described by Lejeune, inasmuch as any text basically includes autobiographical elements.

Lejeune and de Man somehow represent the opposite poles of the debate about autobiography. Between them, many other scholars have contributed to draw the cartography of what Stephen A. Shapiro called «the dark continent of literature» (1968: 421-454), trying to set criteria and temporal limits and to establish which themes should be allowed or not in autobiography. Scandinavian critics, too, reflect these opposite approaches. Johnny Kondrup summarises the debate by separating «traditionalister» from «relativister» (1982: 17-31). The traditionalists aim at codifying rules in order to define autobiography as a literary genre, whereas the relativists adopt a broader perspective, considering autobiographical any text that somehow deals with the life of its author and concentrate on how this element manifests itself. This dichotomy has been conceptualised in another way by Eakin, who claims that critics (and some autobiographers) like Lejeune place the self before the language, whereas critics like de Man assert that the self presented in autobiographies is actually a result of the language (Eakin 1985: 181-191).

Any attempt to analyse Rosenberg's book with Lejeune's first definition would be discouraged by the fact that the protagonist, at least in the first half, is not the author, but his father. The convergence of author-narrator-protagonist in the same person retrospectively telling the story of his or her life is therefore missing, and *Ett kort uppehåll* would probably be discharged as a hybrid that fails to satisfy one of the normative criteria.

On the other hand, perhaps we do not need to go so far as to summon de Man's theory to rehabilitate the book's autobiographic *Geist*. As mentioned before, many parts (and basically the entire second half) narrate the story of the Rosenberg family from the point of view of young Göran. While Gottfarb and Levin adopt pseudonyms and disguise their stories in a novelistic fashion, Rosenberg uses his real name⁵ and tells the story of his father and himself in a way that tries to be as authentic as possible. As to the description of his father's arrival in Sweden and the lapse of time before he himself was born, Rosenberg relies entirely on letters that David sent to his future wife. He quotes these letters and comments on them, but he is always very cautious not to add anything invented (that is to say 'fictional') to what he could not possibly have witnessed. From the very beginning, he makes it clear that he wants to avoid any 'speculation' about his father's arrival in Södertälje: «Men vad han tänker om framtiden den där augustikvällen 1947 är ju bara spekulation från min sida och jag vill helst inte spekulera, och framförallt vill jag inte gå hans liv i förväg» (2012: 10; «But what he thinks about his future on that August evening in 1947 is mere speculation on my part, and I'd rather not speculate, and most of all I don't want to run ahead of his life», trans. by Death; Rosenberg 2014: 7). Rosenberg seems to be aware of how strong the temptation to 'dramatise' his father's life can be, and his cautiousness indicates a firm intention to resist it.

This urge for truthfulness informs the entire book and emerges in different ways: whenever the author needs to fill in the gaps or investigate specific circumstances, he quotes from newspaper articles and historical documents, discusses books and essays about the Holocaust, the liquidation of the ghetto of Łódź, anti-Semitism, and the history of Södertälje. The historical background of his father's early life is reconstructed with a precision that allows the author to reflect on and speak his mind about the events, but leaves no space for invention. When he travels to northern Germany to reconstruct his father's displacements from Auschwitz to Ravensbrück, and from there to Wöbbelin, he is helped by the scholar Dr Karl Liedke. When he describes the liquidation of the ghetto of Łódź, he quotes Chaim Rumkowski's famous speech and Primo Levi's critique of it (Rosenberg 2012: 43-68). This need to stick to reality does not fade away when Göran focuses on the more intimate dimension of his childhood home: there is no historical record about what happened inside the perimeter of the

⁵ At the beginning of the book, Rosenberg also explains why his parents decided to call him Göran: «Namnet är viktigt, har vännerna sagt. Ett främmande namn sticker ut och det blir en belastning. Det tänkta namnet Gershon, efter Barnets farfar, slås därmed ut av Göran» (Rosenberg 2012: 21; «The name is important, their friends have told them. A foreign name stands out and becomes a handicap. The name they initially chose, Gershon, after the Child's paternal grandfather, is therefore superseded by Göran» trans. by Death; Rosenberg 2014: 20).

small apartment by the railway station of Södertälje where he grew up, no documents (except for some photos) about the family situation other than his own memories. Like Epstein, Rosenberg also opens the «iron box» where he has stored his collection of childhood feelings, and when he does it, he tries to avoid «förnumstighetens och efterklokhetens och efterrationaliseringens allt förkrympande perspektiv» (2012: 27; «all-narrowing perspective of hindsight wisdom and rationalisation», trans. by Death; Rosenberg 2014: 27), the tendency to give to a certain episode a meaning that it does not (or did not) have. When Rosenberg remembers his childhood, he is well aware of this risk. After describing his early memories from when he was five years old, he admits the trickiness of autobiographical recollection, how tempting it feels to put together fragments that are disconnected and mould them into shape:

Alltså, för att vara uppriktig, av dessa händelser minns jag i bästa fall skärvor. Den tidiga morgonen med sopåkarna är skärvor av sovande lägenhet, solvarm trottoar, sötsura sopor, slamrande sopkärl, smutsoljiga overaller och klubbigt galonsäte mot bara ben. Jag är inte ens säker på att skärvorna är verkliga, än mindre på att jag fogat samman dem rätt. Jag är inte heller säker på att det är skärvorna jag minns, om man med minnas menar att aktivt erinra sig något. [...] Reflexer därför, snarare än skärvor. (Rosenberg 2012: 28)

Actually, to be perfectly honest, what I can remember of these events is fragmentary at best. The early mornings with the garbage men are fragments of the sleeping apartment, the sun-warmed pavement, the pungent yet sweet smell of the garbage, the clatter of the dumpsters, the dirty, oily overalls, and the vinyl seat sticking to my bare legs. I'm not even sure if the fragments are real, still less whether I've put them together correctly. I'm not sure I remember the fragments either, if remembering means actively recalling something. [...] Reflexes, rather than fragments. (Trans. by Death; Rosenberg 2014: 28)

Like most traditional autobiographers, Rosenberg starts the investigation of his life by describing the world as it unfolds for the first time in front of his eyes: the early mornings, the silence in the apartment, the warm pavement outside the door, the garbage men. Later, he will describe the games he played with other children, the summer days by the lake and the red colour of the rowanberries in early autumn. The final goal of these autobiographical pages is precisely to rescue early memories from oblivion, to record what cannot be found in a history companion. Rosenberg describes this attempt to catch the first glimpses of his childhood as a «minnesövning», an exercise of memory⁶.

At this point, one might think that *Ett kort uppehåll* is thus composed of two specular parts: the biography of a father and the autobiography of his

⁶ Rosenberg used this expression in the spring of 2013 during a private conversation with me.

son, the first narrated with painstaking historical accuracy and the second with an indefatigable search for authenticity. This is true as long as it does not imply that a sharp line separates these dimensions, not only because the events do not always follow a chronological order, but also because they are mixed in the same narrative discourse, they shape and give substance to each other, beyond the simple biological relationship that ties a father to a son. Rosenberg's childhood is that of a second generation Holocaust survivor, and it is thus marked by the experience of his father in the concentration camps and, before that, during the liquidation of the ghetto of Łódź. At the same time, Göran's upbringing is a fundamental part of the new life that David hopes to be able to start in Sweden.

When David becomes aware that Södertälje is his last stop on the road from Auschwitz and builds a family, he shows the same attitude as that of the Holocaust survivors described by Epstein. He is an incredibly hard worker and sets a high value on the importance for his child to learn the local language. David's «Project» is initially to create a strong bond between his family and the new country. If his son can feel at home in Södertälje, maybe he could also settle down here. Behind this eagerness, though, Auschwitz memories haunt him. Like most Jewish Holocaust survivors, David has no place to return to (the liquidation of the ghetto of Łódź has cancelled his world) and cannot freely decide where to settle, a situation that rekindles his fears of marginalisation and persecution. By becoming fully integrated into Swedish society, perhaps the risk of another persecution would disappear, ideally putting an end to the diaspora of the Rosenberg family. This is why it is so important that Göran has a *real* Swedish name and learns the language, because he has to make Sweden his new homeland⁷:

Barnet ska göra Platsen till sin så att en ny värld ska bli möjlig för dem är det Projekt som snabbt fyller den lilla lägenheten med sina osynliga inventarier av drömmar och förväntningar. Vad de två nyanlända behöver är ju inte tak över huvudet utan fast mark under fötterna, och där Barnet ska slå rot kanske även de med tiden kan bottna. (Rosenberg 2012: 18, emphasis in the original)

The Child shall make the Place his own so that a new world becomes possible for them as well is the Project that rapidly fills the small apartment with its invisible inventories of dreams and expectations. What the two newly-arrived need is not a roof over their heads, but firm ground beneath their feet, and if the Child can take root somewhere, perhaps they too, in time, will find a foothold. (Trans. by Death; Rosenberg 2014: 16)

As Göran grows up and his memories become clearer, we see that his father's psychological condition becomes more and more unstable. After working for several years at Scania, David wants to move on. In the little town

⁷ As Grimwood suggests, we should not forget that second generation Holocaust survivors are usually the first generation of immigrants (2007: 3).

of Södertälje though, where the local economy is dominated by large truck manufacturers, this seems to be rather difficult. His attempts to get a better job or to start a business are all frustrated for one reason or another. This, together with the denial from the German authorities to acknowledge that he suffers from any permanent physical injury due to his imprisonment in Auschwitz, plunges him into a deep depression. During a period of hospitalisation in a mental clinic, David evades surveillance and commits suicide.

Göran's autobiographical act cannot set aside his father's biographical tale, not only because David's tragic destiny is the most traumatic experience of his childhood, but because it appears as the ultimate consequence of the Shoah. As Epstein (1988) claims, Holocaust survivors were never completely liberated from the concentration camps and carried inside themselves fears of persecution that could fatally take over. David's repeated failures to free himself from a job that does not satisfy him any longer surely frustrate his dreams and expectations, but the 'shadow' that ultimately drives him towards suicide is that of Auschwitz, the same shadow that crept not only over intellectuals (such as Primo Levi or Jean Améry, often quoted in the book), but basically over every Holocaust survivor. Part of this shadow also creeps over the survivors' descendants, affecting their lives as well. This is why Göran's childhood tale is centred on the relationship with his father. As in *Maus*, where Spiegelman shows himself as he urges his father to recall his memories from the Shoah, Rosenberg organises the text as a sort of monologue that he addresses to his father as if the latter were still alive. The use of the first person singular, the narrative present and the free indirect style strengthen the autobiographical character of the narration and, at the same time, dissolve the boundary that separates Göran's childhood tale from the last part of David's biography⁸. Narrating his early life in Södertälje as a son of a Holocaust survivor, the author must unavoidably come to grips with his father's life Project, being himself a fundamental part of it, the only one that David manages to accomplish fully. *Ett kort uppehåll* appears therefore as one of the «grænseformer» (borderline forms) of autobiography mentioned by Kondrup, which emphasise a special relationship between two individuals, so that the narration about the life of one is inescapably tied to that of the other⁹.

⁸ Lejeune, in *The Ironic Narrative of Childhood: Vallès*, claims that the use of the first person, the narrative present and the indirect free style, together with «features characteristic of the orality» are the most effective techniques to narrate childhood memories (Lejeune 1989b).

⁹ According to Kondrup, these «borderline autobiographies» can be of two types, either the associate-authorship or «værker som behandler et gensidigt forhold og kaster lys over to individuelle skæbner» (1982: 22; works that deal with a mutual relationship and shed light over two individual fates).

David fails to change his life in Sweden and is pushed back into the shadow of Auschwitz, but he accomplishes at least a part of his project. Göran, in fact, has managed to make the new country his own place, where all possibilities are available, as the final words of the book suggest: «För mig en plats med alla horisonter öppna. För dig en plats med alla horisonter stängda» (2012: 284; «For me a place with all horizons open. For you a place with all horizons closed», trans. by Death; Rosenberg 2014: 321).

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«VISSERLIGEN SANT MEN KNAPPAST SANNING»:
THE CONSTRUCTION OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
DISCOURSE IN P.O. ENQUIST'S *ETT ANNAT LIV*

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In 2009 the Swedish author Per Olov Enquist¹ was awarded for the second time the prestigious Augustpriset (August Prize) for his work entitled *Ett annat liv* (Another Life), in which he recounts his own life from his childhood in Hjoggböle, in the Thirties and Forties, to the early Nineties. The title *Ett annat liv* takes the end of Enquist's long period of alcohol abuse as the starting point of a new life. Although the matter treated is undoubtedly based on the writer's own life, *Ett annat liv* offers a fertile ground for analysing the relationship between his search for truth – a major theme in Enquist's literary production – and his autobiographical writing. In the present article I will offer some observations on this relationship, using Philippe Lejeune's and Gérard Genette's theoretical work as a background². Special attention will be devoted to analysing the way in which the construction of autobiographical discourse is carried out both within and outside the text.

In his seminal study *Le Pacte autobiographique*, written in 1975, Lejeune provides an overview of the major characteristics of autobiography, based on an extensive study of texts belonging to the French literary culture of various epochs³. He defines the relationship between author and reader

¹ For an introduction to some of the major themes in Enquist's work, see Shideler 1984. After Shideler's, no other major introductory work has been published on Enquist. More recent studies on some of the themes in Enquist's oeuvre include, amongst others, Bredsdorff 1991 and Ekselius 1996.

² So far, *Ett annat liv* has received scant attention in international scholarship. The only relatively detailed study devoted to it that I know of is An Willems's MA thesis (2008/2009), available online, which refers to Lejeune's work as a major reference point. In the present article, the perspective adopted is partly different, in that it includes Genette's notion of paratext in order to illustrate the ambiguous and even contradictory nature of Enquist's *Ett annat liv*. Furthermore, the aim of this paper is to offer some observations on how the autobiographical discourse is constructed, thus contributing towards widening the scope of the analysis as presented in Willems's thesis. Kvist 2012 also contains some interesting material on *Ett annat liv*.

³ Since the publication of Lejeune's study, discussion about autobiography as a genre has mainly revolved around whether it is possible to distinguish autobiography

in autobiographical writing as a contract. Such a contract, Lejeune claims, «supposes that there is identity of name between the author (such as he figures, by his name, on the cover), the narrator of the story and the character who is being talked about», trans. by Leary; Lejeune 1989: 12). Along with the autobiographical contract, Lejeune introduces the notion of a referential pact, which is based on the nature of autobiography and biography as referential texts:

Exactly like scientific or historical discourse, they claim to provide information about a reality exterior to the text, and so to submit to a test of verification. Their aim is not simple verisimilitude, but resemblance to the truth. Not “the effect of the real”, but the image of the real. (Trans. by Leary; Lejeune 1989: 22)

According to Lejeune, all referential texts «entail [...] a referential pact, implicit or explicit, in which are included a definition of the field of the real that is involved and a statement of the modes and the degree of resemblance to which the text lays claim» (trans. by Leary; Lejeune 1989: 22).

One of the most interesting aspects of Lejeune’s study is the relevance attributed to the position of the readers and their role in the hermeneutic process. On the assumption that literature is first and foremost a communicative act, autobiographical texts acquire full meaning when they enter into a dialogue with the reader. However, such a dialogue is not built only on the content of the text itself. Of paramount importance to the interpretation of the text are indeed also those elements that, especially since Genette’s studies, are customarily labelled as paratexts:

More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, or – a word Borges used apropos of a preface – a “vestibule” that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an “undefined zone” between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Philippe Lejeune put it, “a fringe of the printed text which in

– and the autobiographic novel – from another kind of narrative, which has been tentatively called *autofiction*. However, as Eva Ahlstedt (2011) has recently pointed out in an overview article, the current state of the debate is such that it is still not even clear what is meant by autofiction. Thus, given the uncertainty surrounding the notion of autofiction, and given the limited scope of my essay, I have preferred to stick to Lejeune’s definition of the *espace autobiographique*, which still offers a good starting point for any study of autobiographical writing. It may be added that the more recent developments in the field of autobiography studies, mainly in France, are directly connected with Lejeune’s pioneering work.

reality controls one's whole reading of the text." Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it. (Trans. by Lewin; Genette 1997: 1-2; italics in the original)

On the basis of the notions described above as a methodological framework, the construction of autobiographical discourse in *Ett annat liv* appears to rest upon two main pillars: on the one hand, the account of the writer's life as presented in the text, and on the other elements surrounding the text, i.e. the paratext in all its multiform manifestations. As will be shown below, the information provided by the two sources is not homogeneous. The differences that arise from the comparison between textual and paratextual clues indeed reveal the complex nature of Enquist's work.

Following Genette's description of the paratext as a threshold, we will first look at how *Ett annat liv* is presented in the space surrounding the narrative itself.

Let us start from the peritext. The book cover is the physical space in which the contract with the reader is sealed. The illustration of *Ett annat liv* would seem to leave no doubt about the identity of the protagonist. Indeed, under the author's name and the title there is a large picture of Enquist sitting on a chair against a dark background. If one looks at the epitext⁴, though, things appear more controversial. On Norstedts's website, *Ett annat liv* is described as a book of memoirs («Den är en memoarbok som med humor, värme och nyfikenhet beskriver ett livsöde som format ett av vår tids stora författarskap»); it is a memoir describing, with humour, warmth and curiosity, a destiny which has formed one of the great authorships of our times⁵. However, in an interview published in 2012 in the magazine «Vi», Enquist denies that *Ett annat liv* is a collection of memories from his life:

⁴ Epitext and peritext are terms used by Genette to describe textual material that is placed outside the book (epitext) and within it (peritext). The epitext can be further divided into public (e.g. interviews) and private (e.g. letters). On both terms see Genette 1997: 3-6.

⁵ <http://www.norstedts.se/bocker/utgiven/2008/Host/enquist_per-olov-ett_annat_liv-inbunden/> (07/2014). Translations are mine throughout unless otherwise stated.

Det är inte mina memoarer. Jag har alltid tyckt att memoarer är pretentiösa och har sagt mig att några sådana ska jag då aldrig skriva. Och så hatar jag när någon till exempel träder ut ur garderoben med en sådan här historia i kvällspressen [...]. (Quoted from Kvist 2012: 18)

These are not my memoirs. I have always thought that memoirs are pretentious, and I have said to myself that I will never write any. Furthermore I hate when somebody, for example, comes out with such a story in the evening press [...].⁶

Quite remarkably, the identification of the author with the protagonist of the story is established most clearly in the peritext, not in the text. Indeed, the back cover of the book features a short quotation by Enquist himself that is meant as a brief presentation of the whole story:

Han föds den 23 september 1934 i Hjoggböle, en bondby i norra Västerbotten. Han lämnar sin by, blir författare, reser långt. Allt går så bra, sedan går det mycket illa. Den 6 februari 1990 börjar ett annat liv. Boken handlar om detta.

He was born on 23 September 1934 in Hjoggböle, a farmers' village in northern Västerbotten. He leaves his village, travels far and wide. Everything goes fine, then it goes very bad. On 6 February 1990 another life begins. The book is about this.

The discrepancies that arise from comparing the different kinds of information provided by various sources located in the paratext can be explained as depending on different purposes. On the one hand, the publishing house foregrounds the intimate dimension of the story told in *Ett annat liv* in order to advertise the book in the most effective way possible. On the other, we have Enquist's well-known inclination to involve the reader in an intricate and demanding hermeneutic game, made up of contradictions and deviations, as will be shown below.

So far, in short, the paratextual level. Let us now turn to the textual level. As shown above, the protagonist of the story is the author himself. Although the narration is in the third person, it is an autodiegetic narrative, in which the narrator relates events he is supposed to have experienced⁷. Enquist explains this choice as arising from the difficulty of writing in the first person. Only the use of the third person⁸, he claims, could enable him to keep some critical distance:

⁶ On facts and fiction in Enquist's work, see especially Willems 2008/2009.

⁷ When discussing the different forms that autodiegetic narrative can take, Lejeune (1989: 5-6) mentions Genette's classification of different kinds of 'voice' to give support to the idea that even narratives in the third person can be counted among the examples of autodiegetic narratives.

⁸ The use of the third person is one of the elements that remind the reader of *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*The Son of a Servant*), the autobiographical account of August Strindberg's life in four parts. The same attitude towards the narration of personal matters in Strindberg's autobiography can be found in Enquist's own autobiography. In a preface to *Tjänstekvinnans son*, Strindberg wrote: «Om författaren verkligen, som han stundom trott, experimenterat med ståndpunkter eller

Det kändes pretentiöst och lite smetigt. Därför bytte jag till tredje person och då blev det mycket enklare att skriva med värme och även kritisk distans. "Enquist" blev en romanfigur. En romanfigur som jag känner bättre än någon annan. (Westberg 2008)

It felt pretentious and a bit ingratiating. I therefore changed to the third person, so then it got much easier to write with warmth and even critical distance. "Enquist" became a fictional character. A fictional character that I know better than anyone else.

Describing oneself as one of the characters in a novel acquires special relevance in the context of the present essay. Indeed, the identity of name between author, narrator and protagonist is, following Lejeune's reasoning, what makes *Ett annat liv* an autobiographical account of Enquist's life. This leads to the important question of how the reader should assess the truth claims that are intrinsic to any autobiographical work and that are strictly related to the referential pact as defined by Lejeune. In the case of Enquist, this fundamental question proves even more relevant in that the notion of truth and its role in the artistic process are central to Enquist's philosophical universe (Syréhn 2000). As a documentarist⁹, Enquist gives shape to his stories by blending factual and made-up elements in a way that makes it extremely difficult for the reader to decide what is truthful (and trustworthy) and what is not. Even when it comes to analysing the description of real events and historical figures, as is often the case with many of Enquist's works¹⁰, truth

inkarnerat i olika personligheter, polymeriserat sig, eller om en nådig Försyn experimenterat med författaren, må framgå ur texterna för den upplyste läsaren. Ty böckerna äro ganska uppriktigt nedskrivna, icke fullständigt naturligtvis, ty det är omöjligt» (1989: 377; Whether the author, as he thought at times, really experimented with viewpoints or incarnated himself in various figures, polymerised himself, or whether a merciful Providence experimented with the author, is for the enlightened reader to draw out from the texts. For the books are written quite sincerely, albeit of course not completely, as it is impossible). A proper discussion of all motifs from Strindberg's work would exceed the scope of this essay.

⁹ On Scandinavian documentarism in the twentieth century, see especially Houe, Rossel 1997. On the relationship between facts and fiction in the documentary novel, see especially Hansen 1996: 21-27.

¹⁰ Most of Enquist's works deal more or less indirectly with historical figures. Since 2000 his literary activity has focused on such figures as Pierre and Marie Curie (*Boken om Blanche och Marie*, 2004; *The Story of Blanche and Marie*, trans. by Nunnally 2006), Petrus Lewi (*Lewis resa*, 2001; *Lewi's Journey*, trans. by Nunnally 2005), Struensee and King Christian VII (*Livläkarens besök*, 1999; *The Royal Physician's Visit*, trans. by Nunnally 2001). Another major figure that has inspired him in more than one work is August Strindberg, on whom Enquist wrote, amongst other things, a kind of biography for the Swedish television (*Strindberg: ett liv*, 1984; Strindberg. A Life), and a play (*Tribadernas natt*, 1975; *The Night of the Tribades*, trans. by Shideler 1977). Other names from Scandinavian culture that become protagonists of other works by Enquist are H.C. Andersen and J.L. Heiberg (*Från regnormarnas liv*, 1981a; *Rain Snakes: A Family Portrait from 1856*, trans. by Dessau 1981), Knut Hamsun (*Hamsun. En filmberättelse*, 1996; Hamsun. A Screenplay), and Selma Lagerlöf and Viktor Sjöström (*Bildmakarna*, 1998; *The Image Makers*).

is not necessarily what guides the writer – not even a documentarist – in the artistic process, nor is it the final aim of writing: «[...] vi bör vid det här läget ha lärt oss, att något inte behöver vara sant, bara för att det är dokumentärt. Det är lättare att ljuga med dokumentarism, än med fiktion. Något behöver ju inte vara “sant”, bara för att det har “hänt”» (Enquist 1981b: 121; By now we should have learnt that something is not necessarily true only because it is documentary. It is easier to lie with documentarism than with fiction. Something does not need to be “true” only because it has “happened”).

In Enquist's view, rather than reduplicating reality, literature should clarify and foreground the elements that the writer deems relevant in the story («att lyfta fram, tydliggöra och gestalta det relevanta i det som har hänt»; Enquist 1981b: 121) he is about to tell from the sources he has used. Hence, it is safe to assert that lies are part of the creative process as much as is the search for truth. Truth, though, is elusive: not something one can grasp but rather something one can strive for. Thus the search¹¹ is itself more relevant than any attempt at «trying to pin down a “verifiable truth” about any individual or sequence of events», as Rochelle Wright (1996: 414) puts it. In addition to this, one should also consider Enquist's not infrequent warnings about his own unreliability, especially when he writes or talks about himself¹².

As will be shown in what follows, *Ett annat liv* is indeed replete with clues that more or less directly appeal to the reader's attention in seeking to evaluate the content of the story in terms of veridicity. In the limited scope of the present article I will focus on some of the clues that, more or less explicitly, seem to invite the reader to take a critical stance towards what is being narrated.

One of the most interesting scenes is where young Per-Ola¹³ is forced by his pious and rather strict mother to confess his sins. Since he believes that he has none to confess, he makes one up:

¹¹ The main character in *Legionärerna* (1968; *The Legionnaires*, trans. by Blair 1973), Enquist's breakthrough novel, is indeed called the Investigator («Undersökaren»). On *Legionärerna* and Swedish documentarism in the Sixties see Jansson 1987: 68-76 and Hansen 1996: 218-240.

¹² By way of example, in an interview with Henrik Kyhle, Enquist says: «Författare ljuger ju nästan alltid som hästar om sig själva» (Kyhle 1985: 169; Writers lie almost always like rugs about themselves).

¹³ The fact that the name of the protagonist is Per-Ola, and not Per Olov, is probably another clue in Enquist's game with the reader, a game in which the identity of the protagonist and the author is constantly negotiated by Enquist himself. In support of this view, one might add that Per-Ola is also the name given to Enquist's elder brother, who died immediately after birth. This fact enhances young Per-Ola's uncertainty (i.e. Per Olov) about his own identity. See Enquist 2008: 23.

Han löser då dilemmat, efter att tre lördagar å rad till sin egen och moderns besvikelse ha tuggat i gräset utan synd, genom att dikta en synd. Han bekänner, under tårar, att han vid besöket å Koppra i Forsen för att handla stulit en karamell av handlaren när denne såg åt sidan. (Enquist 2008: 28-29)

He then solved the dilemma, after having bitten the dust without sin, to his mother's and his own disappointment, for three Saturdays in a row, by making up a sin. He confesses in tears that during a visit to Koppra in Forsen to buy something he stole a piece of candy from the shop when the owner looked aside.

I think there is more to this scene than meets the eye. Considering that the protagonist is the young writer, we are led to think that the confessional game that is represented here is, at a different level, the one the author engages in with the reader. Furthermore, the expression «att dikta en synd» becomes even more relevant if one considers the double meaning of the verb «dikta» ('to compose' and 'to invent'). Writing is thus equal to fabricating things, and literature adds to reality and enriches it.

Of crucial importance for understanding the nature of *Ett annat liv* is also the passage in which Enquist tells us about how he started out on his career as a writer by drawing maps¹⁴. The comparison between drawing and writing is revelatory of the nature of both activities in Enquist's mind:

Eftersom det är synd att ljuga eller tilldika känner han sig villrådlig. Att tilldika är ju tillåtet endast om det sker i andlig syfte, för att förklara Jesu gärningar och underverk [...]. Men att rita kartor är ju något annat. Ingen granskar heller vad han gör. Ingen ser över hans axel för att bestraffa lättfärdighet, tecknen är abstrakta, kartorna skenbart likartade [...]. Först ritar han landskap som är vackra och riktiga, sedan som de borde vara [...]. Han är i allt detta ensam om hemligheterna. Han kan inte avslöjas. Kartorna liknar skenbart byn, men är inte byn. (Enquist 2008: 51-52; italics in the original)

As it is a sin to lie or make up things, he feels at a loss. To invent is permissible only if it is done with a spiritual intent, to explain Jesus's deeds and miracles. Yet drawing maps is something else. Nobody checks on what he does. Nobody looks over his shoulder to punish moral laxity, the signs are abstract, the maps seemingly similar [...]. First he draws landscapes that are beautiful and correct, then as they should be [...]. In this he is the only one to know his secrets. He cannot be unmasked. The maps apparently resemble the village, yet they are not the village.

As with drawing maps, Enquist suggests, writing stories is depicting things in a way that makes them *appear* real.

Another passage that is relevant to our purpose is one in which Enquist recounts the period of his military service:

¹⁴ *Kartritarna* (The Cartographers) is the title of a collection of short stories and essays published by Enquist in 1992. One of the stories in the collection bears the same title.

Han refererar gärna till svåra umbäranden, till exempel två månader i tält i januari i skogarna utanför Hällnäs, med outhärdlig kyla, samt vintermanövrar i Tärnabyfjällen. Visserligen sant, men knappast sanning. Han har svårt att kontrollera dessa poetiska överdrifter. (2008: 132)

He refers often to difficult hardships, for example the two months in a tent in January in the forests outside Hällnäs, in the unbearable cold, as well as winter manouvers in Tärnabyfjällen. Surely true, yet hardly the truth. He finds it difficult to avoid such poetic exaggerations.

Here the author highlights the fact that, whenever it comes to retelling facts from the past, he takes poetic liberties with his memories. As was seen above, the main purpose of literature is not that of reconstructing events in an objective way. We will come back to the expression «visserligen sant, men knappast sanning» at the end of this article.

Another interesting textual clue in this respect is the one in which Enquist tells the reader about the life of the Danish actress Johanne Luise Heiberg, whose house at Sortedammen he was able to see from the window of his flat in Copenhagen:

Där skrev hon sina memoarer, "Et liv". [...] Hennes memoarer var före publiceringen granskade och förkortade av hennes vänner, så att icke livets smuts måtte vidläda hennes minnen. Det strukna publicerades senare i en särskild volym, korta eller långa fragment med det förbjudna. Så fick det bli. (2008: 400)

There she wrote her own memoirs, "Et liv". [...] Before publication her memoirs were checked and shortened by her friends so that the dirt of life might not be included in her reminiscences. What was left out was then published in a special volume, short or long fragments with what was prohibited. This is what should happen.

The fact that memories can be selected and rewritten to serve a given purpose is surely another interesting clue that the author leaves to the reader to interpret.

Sometimes the author's warnings take a more general, almost gnomic tone, as when the narrator affirms, quite peremptorily, that «misstänksamhet är en dygd, sanning ett tvivelaktigt begrepp» (2008: 146; suspiciousness is a virtue, truth a dubious notion): a principle that contains *in nuce* Enquist's whole philosophical universe and its influence on his writing. Strictly connected with this is the recurrent theme of the suspicion of being deceived, which crops up here and there in the narrative. The expression «tänk om man fört oss bakom ljuset» (what if they have deceived us), that is repeatedly used by Enquist in *Legionärerna* to refer to the gloomy story of the so-called *baltutlämningen* (the deportation of Baltic soldiers from Sweden in 1946)¹⁵, may be

¹⁵ This is how Phil Holmes sums up the story of the extradition: «In May 1945, as the war came to a close, a large number of soldiers of the German army fled to Swe-

interpreted, amongst other things, as his appeal to his readers to be cautious and suspicious.

From all the above, I think, we can draw some tentative conclusions about how Enquist constructed *Ett annat liv*. As in most of his previous works, the author appeals to his readers' willingness to believe and at the same time invites them to be sceptical¹⁶. On the one hand, by writing an autobiographical account of his life he seals a pact with the reader by establishing, in a seemingly uncontroversial manner, the identity of author, protagonist and narrator. This is done both at the level of the text and at that of the paratext. On the other hand, though, both paratext and text are marked by the presence of signals of different kinds which are meant to warn the (attentive) reader against a simplistic interpretation of the story. Once sealed, however, the pact with the reader is not conclusively binding. Whenever he is warned against the trustworthiness of the story, the pact is dissolved and the reader is at a loss when trying to determine the relationship between narration and factual reality.

In other words, Enquist wants the reader not to fall victim to the illusion of grasping the truth. Through this strategy, the author is also able to hide behind a glass window, one that, despite its transparency, never grants the observer (i.e. the reader) a clear view. This leads us back to the

den. Among these were 167 men from the formerly independent Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. They were all interned in camps in Sweden. In November 1945 the Swedish government announced its intention of returning these Baltic soldiers to their homelands, now of course part of the Soviet Union. The internees, fearing Russian reprisals, protested at this decision by means of hunger strikes, self-mutilation and even suicide. On 26 January 1946, 146 of these men were taken aboard the Soviet vessel *Be-loostrov at Trelleborg*» (1999: 370-371). Chapter 7 in *Ett annat liv (En expedition; An Expedition)* is devoted to the description of the investigations that led to *Legionärerna*.

¹⁶ Talking about his novel *Magnetisörens femte vinter* (1964; *The Magnetist's Fifth Winter*, trans. by Britten Austin 1989), Enquist says: «Jag försökte konstruera en berättelse med skenbar auktoritet, med skenbar historisk tyngd – men en berättelse som vid närmare granskning visar sig vara artificiell, konstruerad, ohistorisk [...]. Den som går längre in ser att min berättelse är artificiell, förstår att den måste betraktas med misstro – men jag vådjar om tilltro» (Branting 1967: 58; I tried to construct a narrative with apparent authority, with apparent historical weight – yet a narrative that upon closer examination proves artificial, fabricated, unhistorical [...]. Those who take a step further in see that my narrative is artificial, and understand that it must be treated with suspicion – still, I appeal for belief). In the same interview, the author explains the role of the writer in contemporary society: «Att visa på ett sätt att bearbeta verklighetsmaterial. Det jag kan ge är ett av många möjliga; inte det slutgiltiga. Men jag kan tvinga läsaren att ta ställning, till materialet, till mig, till mitt sätt att bearbeta materialet. Gör han det, då är jag nöjd» (Branting 1967: 58; To point to a way of recasting material from reality. What I can give is one out of many possible ways, not the definitive one. Yet I can force the readers to take a position, on the material, on me, on my way of recasting the material. If they do so, I'm satisfied).

quotation that was used in the title of this article: «Visserligen sant men knappast sanning». This expression, I believe, is the key to approaching *Ett annat liv* as a whole. As seen above, for Enquist any attempt at defining truth is doomed to fail. As much as a story may be based on true events, truth becomes elusive as soon as a standpoint is taken in relation to it, and this is certainly the case with any form of narration. For the author of *Ett annat liv*, the golden rule that one should stick to, when reading about something that is presented as truthful, is expressed by the words put in the mouth of the Investigator, the protagonist of *Legionärerna*: «Godta inte en presentation, tänk själv, var misstänksam. Det finns ingen helgonlik objektivitet, ingen yttersta sanning, befriad från sina politiska utgångspunkter. Pröva, var misstänksam. Ifrågasätt» (Enquist 1968: 242; Do not accept a presentation, think for yourself, be suspicious. There is no sacred objectivity, no ultimate truth, free from its own political starting point. Try, be suspicious. Call into question; my trans.). These words acquire a general validity in Enquist's philosophical universe and recur in slightly varied forms throughout his literary production. As a general warning, they may apply to *Ett annat liv*, too. As a retrospective narrative, this work is the result of a selection and montage of memories – either real or presented as such – made by the author to convey an image of his own life, leaving out those aspects that he does not want to share with the reader. Paraphrasing Paul de Man¹⁷, one could say that if autobiography creates life, in the case of Enquist's account what is created is «ett annat liv», another life: the one, we are led to believe, that he has not lived in the very form in which it is presented to the reader.

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¹⁷ «We assume that life *produces* autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest that, with equal justice, the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of its medium?» (de Man 1979: 920; italics in the original).

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A NARRATIVE OF A TRANSFORMATION IN *YARDEN* BY KRISTIAN LUNDBERG

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1. Introduction

Kristian Lundberg is one of the most renowned poets of the recent Swedish generations. He is a native of Malmö, where he was born in 1966 and still resides. After a difficult childhood, Lundberg had a tumultuous life because of alcohol addiction. However, he has now been practicing complete abstinence for several years. A fervent believer, Lundberg has followed a path that has led him from Lutheranism to Catholicism, religion playing a very important role in much of his literary work. In the Eighties he joined a group of poets from Malmö called *Malmöligan* (The Malmö League) and debuted in 1991 with the poetry collection *Genom september* (Through September). He was nominated for the prestigious Swedish literary prize Augustpriset in 2005 with the poetry collection *Job*.

Yarden, published in 2009, is an autobiography revolving around a period spent as an hourly worker in difficult working conditions. Kristian¹ is forced to look for a new job as a result of the financial hardship in which he ends up because of heavy debts to the tax authorities, but being one of the most important Swedish poets is not worth anything in the labour market (Ekman 2009). He finally manages to find a job at Yarden through a staffing agency on a contract whereby he is paid by the hour.

Yarden is a fenced-off area in the port of Malmö (Lundberg 2009: 26), where large cargo ships arrive to load or unload cars; in this fenced-off area the cars are parked, waiting to be boarded on the next cargo ship. When Kristian enters Yarden, he has a feeling of leaving the world beyond the fence (2009: 29). Kristian's job involves moving and washing the cars. The book describes the endless hours of this labour-intensive work outdoors

¹ Historic author and homodiegetic protagonist of autobiographies are not automatically equivalent. «Kristian» is used in this paper to stress the protagonist and first person narrator of *Yarden*; in the other cases with «Lundberg» both the homodiegetic protagonist and the historical author can be meant. *Yarden* has not been translated into English; all the translations of the quoted passages into English are mine.

in the winter cold, which along with snow, rain or wind penetrates to the bone; the abuse suffered at the hands of his superiors; the inadequate pay; and a sense of solidarity he establishes with the men of the work team, in which he is the only Swede. The fear of losing their jobs makes the workers at Yarden endure abuse, and many of them have another job to make ends meet. Then, after a culminating incident of abuse, Kristian leaves his job at Yarden and starts working at a DHL parcel sorting terminal.

The narrative begins *in medias res*, when Kristian is already working at DHL, and proceeds to review his experience at Yarden. He says that he often happens to think of his mother when crossing the fence at Yarden; a cue to a parallel account of his difficult childhood in extreme poverty. Kristian comes from a family of five brothers and sisters and a deranged mother, who is unable to take care of her children; the father has abandoned the family, and Kristian does not even consider him a real father. He describes the relationship to his parents and family as estrangement: «Vi är främlingar; syskon av samma föräldrar – där Mor stavas vansinne och Far stavas frånvaro» (2009: 20; We are strangers; siblings of the same parents – where Mother is spelled madness and Father is spelled absence). Lundberg recounts the suffering endured during his childhood and the continual, sudden changes of residence, which the mother forced on the children in order to escape from her debts. The adult Kristian has a son who lives with him and he makes sacrifices for his child in order to grant him a better life.

2. *Yarden* as a work of proletarian literature

Autobiographies are always difficult to define and delimit; as such, autobiographies have to do with a person's life, but they can be about much more than the story of a life. As evidenced by de Man (1979: 920), life produces the autobiography; consequently, autobiographies often «shade off into neighbouring or even incompatible genres». In my view, *Yarden* can also be classified in the genre of proletarian literature, or *arbetarlitteratur* in Swedish². The first step will be a brief overview of the theoretical formulation of the autobiographical genre, in order to see which traits of *Yarden* meet the theoretical conditions required for autobiographies; then, I will investigate the possibility of defining *Yarden* as a work of proletarian literature.

A seminal work dealing with autobiography is Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacte autobiographique* (1975); in this book, Lejeune defines autobiography as a «récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre

² The term *arbetarlitteratur* is the most used; other terms for the same genre are *arbetardiktning*, *proletärdiktning*, *proletärlitteratur* (Nilsson 2006: 10).

existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité» (1975: 14; «Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality», trans. by Leary; Lejeune 1989: 4).

First, according to Lejeune, in order for a work to be defined as an autobiography, an identity must be established between the author, the narrator, and the homodiegetic protagonist; this condition is amply fulfilled in *Yarden*, as shown by the following passage: «[...] jag kan garantera dig att under arbetets titel står mitt namn: "Asbestsanerare – Kristian Lundberg" eller varför inte "Toalettstädare – Kristian Lundberg"» (Lundberg 2009: 89; [...] I can assure you that under the working title my name is written: "Asbestos Decontamination Man - Kristian Lundberg" or why not "Toilet Cleaner - Kristian Lundberg"). In this case the identity between author, narrator, and protagonist is defined in an obvious way. According to Lejeune (1975: 27), this identity can be established in two ways: a) implicitly, at the level of the author-narrator connection, i.e. through the use of titles or an initial section in which it is made clear that the first person refers to the name of the author as shown on the book cover; b) in an obvious way, i.e., by having the name of the narrator-protagonist coincide with that of the author, which is stated on the book cover. The identity between author, narrator, and protagonist is what Lejeune (1975: 25-26) calls the autobiographical pact; the book cover bearing the author's name is essential for establishing the autobiographical pact and distinguishing an autobiography from an autobiographical novel.

Other traits of the autobiographical narrative, that is, the form of language and the subject treated, are variables that may not be substantially fulfilled; an autobiography, in addition to being the description of an individual life and the history of a personality, can also include elements of social and political history (Lejeune 1975: 15). The presence of these elements depends on the motives and purposes of the autobiography.

By taking Lejeune's theoretical formulation as a starting point, it is my belief that *Yarden* can be considered as a work of proletarian literature as much as an autobiography. In a seminal work on Swedish proletarian literature, Lars Furuland and Johan Svedjedal (2006: 23) state that the term 'proletarian literature' can stand for literature: 1) by authors with roots in the working class; 2) about workers and manual labourers; 3) for workers. Magnus Nilsson (2006: 14) explains that working-class writers can be either authors who come from working-class families or authors who have carried out working-class activities themselves. Lundberg tells of his experience as a manual worker, but he does not write only about himself; he gives voice to all workers who, like him, are forced to work in conditions of hardship and exploitation. *Yarden* is therefore a work by a working-class writer *about* workers, but not *for* workers; 'literature for

workers' can be defined as literature published through publishers and magazines of the labour movement (Furuland, Svedjedal 2006: 24).

According to Nilsson (2006: 20), the ideological content of a work is more important than the living conditions of the author, and class consciousness is considered a fundamental criterion for identifying proletarian literature. As Nilsson (2006: 18) points out, also by quoting the doctoral thesis of Brigitte Mral, proletarian literature takes sides with the working class and dramatises experiences, ideas and aims of the working-class movement. Swedish proletarian literature hinges in an essential way on Marxism, at least in Nilsson's interpretation: in his view, the main purpose of proletarian literature is to produce a counter-ideology, i.e., oppose the ideology that reflects the interests of the ruling class, which, according to Marx and Engels, is the bourgeoisie or middle class (Nilsson 2006: 20). Class consciousness implies that the proletariat realises that it has different interests from those of the middle class (Nilsson 2006: 21).

Autobiography is one of the forms of proletarian literature. Ivar Lo-Johansson, one of the most important proletarian authors of Swedish literature, wrote a series of novels in eight volumes called *En proletärförfattares självbiografi* (1951-1960; A Proletarian Writer's Autobiography); the last novel of this series is entitled *Proletärförfattaren* (1960; The Proletarian Writer). Lo-Johansson's style was defined by Sven Delblanc as «berikad realism» (Furuland, Svedjedal 2006: 190; enriched realism), which refers to the concreteness and, at the same time, the symbolism characterising the observation of reality and literary style. Nilsson also counts autobiography among the forms of proletarian literature. Autobiography as such has an essential connection with the identity of the author. Nilsson (2006: 150) argues that proletarian authors have sometimes used different autobiographical forms to delineate their class identity. The reason for claiming their background as workers is that these authors believed that whoever is, or has been, a worker, enjoys the ideal conditions for describing the working class. The work of proletarian literature, then, implies not only a connection with the question of identity, but also with the problem of identification with the working class. As a consequence, the autobiographical work of proletarian literature offers an ideal context for addressing these two issues as two sides of the same coin.

Identity and identification are two essential aspects in *Yarden*, which, in my view, belongs to the tradition of Swedish proletarian literature.

3. Class stratification and social pessimism

The precarious, degrading conditions experienced by Kristian at Yarden give rise to a series of reflections on his social status and the class stratification that permeates Swedish society. The concept of social class is

a leitmotif that runs throughout the text; the semantic sphere concerning social class is present in various expressions, mostly in compound nouns framing the idea of *klass* (class): *klassresa* (class shift)³, *klassstillhörighet* (class belonging), *klassmärke* (social class marker), *klasskamp* (class struggle), *klassförakt* (class contempt), *klasshat* (class hatred), *klassresenär* (class drifter), *medelklass* (middle class), *medelklassgetto* (middle-class ghetto).

In *Yarden* Lundberg outlines a highly stratified society and he himself claims more than once that he feels social hatred, namely «*klasshat*» (2009: 78, 93, 96). *Yarden* itself is the emblem of this social stratification, with a clear demarcation between the labourers, who work outdoors in the cold, and the managers who keep warm in their offices. This constant emphasis on class stratification reveals a solid class consciousness, and one can infer that this is a strategy through which Lundberg provides *Yarden* with its ideological content. In my view, this is precisely what Lundberg does when he emphasises class stratification; some of the aforementioned compounds related to social class, such as *klassstillhörighet*, *klasskamp*, *klasshat*, clearly underline the opposition between the various social classes. The idea of a society sharply divided into classes is also found in the two later works of Lundberg, *Och allt skall vara kärlek* (2011; And Everything Will Be Love) and *En hemstad: berättelsen om att färdas genom klassmörkret* (2013; A Home Town: the Story about Travel through Class Darkness), which together with *Yarden* form a trilogy.

One of the fundamental aspects of the leitmotif of social class is travel along the social ladder, *klassresa*. This aspect helps us understand the trouble caused by the author's discomfort. Lundberg had hoped to rise at least from the degradation and misery of his childhood through poetry and literature, but the work at *Yarden* involves a return to that state of degradation, namely a reverse class shift since Lundberg, ironically, had already worked at *Yarden* in his youth before becoming a poet. Lundberg describes this class regression in the following way: «Jag byter social miljö. Det är en slags hemkomst. Klassresan är en baklängesresa nu» (2009: 31; I am changing social environment. It is a kind of homecoming. The class shift is a reverse shift now). In his father, Lundberg finds a counter-example with respect to himself, namely that of a successful class shift which, however, resulted in the abandonment of his family (2009: 78-79).

³ According to the dictionary of the Swedish language *Norstedts Svenska Ordbok* (Allén 2004: 578) *klassresa* is synonymous with *skolresa*, i.e., «school trip»; the dictionary of the use of the Swedish language *Norstedts Svenskt Språkbruk* (Svenska Språknämnden 2003: 597) shows that *klassresa* can also be used metaphorically to mean a «shift up or down the social ladder», i.e., «a change of social class»: *klassresa* is used in *Yarden* in this second meaning. Therefore by «class shift» what is intended is, of course, a movement between social classes.

It is no coincidence that the experience at Yarden makes Lundberg relive his childhood in a parallel tale made up of memories and flashbacks. His childhood presents both an analogy, represented by the condition of degradation and poverty, and a contrasting element symbolised by his father. Lundberg relates that his father had completely abandoned the family after becoming rich. Later on, his father suddenly turns up on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, but only to offer his children the chance to work at his birthday party, on condition that they do not disclose their family tie to him. Kristian refuses, and Lundberg notes how those who have made a class shift are always afraid of being unmasked: «Och klassresenären är alltid rädd för att avslöjas: "Titta! Han var bara en vanlig jobbare! Det var som vi trodde!"» (2009: 80; And the class drifter is always afraid of being unmasked: "Look! He was just an ordinary labourer! Just like we thought!").

By returning to Yarden, Lundberg is convinced that he has returned to square one and clearly defines himself as a closed circle: «Jag är en sluten cirkel nu. Jag är tillbaka där jag började, fastän jag är en annan» (2009: 80; I am a closed circle now. I am back where I started, although I am another person). He knows that he is back at the starting point, but at the same time he is conscious of the fact that between his first and second time at Yarden, experience has changed him, and he is no longer the same person. This awareness has dramatic implications, almost resulting in a sense of alienation, because Kristian now realises that he no longer belongs to any place or social group: «Min klassresa fick mig att sväva fritt i luften. Jag tillhörde ingen eller ingenting» (2009: 85; My class shift made me float in the air. I belonged to no one or nothing).

The problem of class belonging is strongly felt by Lundberg. Belonging to or identifying with a social class is closely linked with the identity of the author: Lundberg feels he does not belong to the working class anymore because of his class shift, but also because he is a different person. The connection between class belonging and identity is a recurring theme in proletarian literature. Nilsson (2006: 104) explains that belonging to a certain class is often experienced as an essential requirement for being able to represent it. This implies that questions related to identity are therefore considered more important than those related to ideology. The authors who problematise their class belonging feel that one cannot understand and represent a group overtly without being part of it (Nilsson 2006: 104); as a consequence, only those who have a background as workers can write about the working class (Nilsson 2006: 100). Social identity is certainly an important factor for a proletarian writer, but it can be problematic. Nilsson (2006: 104) criticises this general view about proletarian literature and questions the very principle that there is a stable connection between identity and ideology, which is basic to the definitions of proletarian literature, as it concentrates on the proletarian background of the author. He maintains, by contrast, that ideology is much more important than class

identity, and should therefore be given priority when defining proletarian literature. As mentioned above, the ideological content of a proletarian literary work lies in its siding with the working class, thus expressing proletarian class consciousness (Nilsson 2006: 104).

Nilsson's approach to ideology is theoretically well grounded, but it cannot be applied to *Yarden*. I argued above that there is an ideological consciousness in *Yarden*, but it is also true that class belonging seems to be a crucial issue to Lundberg, to the extent that he even calls his own class belonging into question. As I see it, in *Yarden* there is actually a connection between identity and ideology. Besides, Nilsson himself maintains that proletarian autobiography is connected in an essential way with the author's affirmation of class identity.

4. The frame of Barros's theory of autobiographical narrative

This paper will try to apply Carolyn Barros's theory of autobiographical narrative to *Yarden*. Barros interprets autobiographies as narratives of transformation, identifying therein three rhetorical and heuristic perspectives: *persona*, *figura*, *dynamis* (Barros 1998: 11-18). The *persona* is the 'who' of the transformation, that is, the 'I' of the autobiographical narrative. The *figura* stands as the image or the metaphor for the kind of change described in the autobiography. The *dynamis* is defined as the motive force to which the *persona* attributes the change. This theoretical approach to the autobiographical narrative seems suitable for *Yarden*, since Lundberg himself more than once proves aware of being in a state of flux and of having changed, for example when he says «Allt står i förändring» (2009: 16; Everything is in the process of change), thus implying that change is an unceasing process. So the question is to identify the change experienced by the author.

5. Existential pessimism

In order to comprehend Lundberg's suffering we must first consider the hardships experienced during his childhood and later at *Yarden*. In different circumstances Lundberg reveals a pessimistic view of the world in which he sees himself as abandoned. It is especially when he recalls two episodes from his unhappy childhood spent with his unstable mother that this pessimistic conception is apodictically and strongly asserted as horror: «Världen är bara skräck. Ensamhet» (2009: 83; The world is just horror. Loneliness); «Det är som nu: kaos och skräck, ingenting annat. Det som nu är bokensatsen i mitt liv var en gång allt som rymdes i hennes» (2009: 101; It is like now: chaos and horror, nothing else. What is now

sediment in my life was once all that her life contained). In both cases the context of the quotes is the evocation of particularly dramatic moments in his childhood caused by his mother's insanity, and these moments are now relived as horror.

But the present is not much better. Kristian is tormented by his insecure work situation at Yarden, where he suffers constant abuse at the hands of his superiors. Thus, he feels that his life is subject to forces beyond his control, and as a consequence his state of poverty and insecurity is worsened. He sees himself abandoned to a destiny that he is unable to master or even understand in its minimal terms, and therefore gives expression to this pessimistic view by metaphorically comparing himself to a pinball ball tossed back and forth unable to choose its own path: «Jag kastas som en flipperkula; fram och tillbaka» (2009: 16; I am thrown like a pinball ball; back and forth); «En flipperkula som kastas omkring utan förmåga att själv välja min väg» (2009: 66; A pinball ball thrown around without the ability to choose my own path).

This metaphor for the impossibility of self-determination seems to recall a very similar metaphor employed by Lars Gustafsson in his novel *Sorgemusik för frimurare* (1983; *Funeral Music for Freemasons*, trans. by Sandstroem 1987), in which the character Jan Bohman compares himself to a billiard ball:

Man når så småningom den ålder, där så att säga huvuddragen i ens liv redan verkar avgjorda. Liksom i den klassiska 1800-talsfysikens inferno av biljardbollar som, en gång givna sin massa, sin riktning och sin effekt, inte kan hamna någon annanstans än i de hål där de hamnar, är man själv så att säga hjälplöst spunnen in i nätet av komponenter och resultanter och ser sig som ett klot som rullar mot en grav i det gröna bordets bortre hörn. (Gustafsson 1983: 72-73)

One eventually reaches the age when, so to speak, the main features of one's life already seem to be settled. As in the inferno of billiard balls of classic nineteenth-century physics, which, once given their mass, their direction and their effect, cannot end up anywhere but in the holes where they end up, one is, so to say, helplessly spun into the net of components and resultants and feels like a ball rolling towards a grave in the green table's farther corners.

The inferno of billiard balls described by Jan Bohman has clear philosophical implications, as evidenced by the reference to nineteenth-century physics: the reference is to mechanism, a philosophical trend which explained nature and man in terms of mass, inertia, motion of particles and physical forces (Alberigo *et al.* 2005: 695). Mechanism is a materialistic view of the world and man, which is part of determinism (Alberigo *et al.* 2005: 252), a notion that permeated philosophical speculation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was theorised in its most complete form by the French philosopher Pierre-Simon Laplace. Determinism postulates a causal link in all phenomena; therefore, given a cause or a law, only *one* effect

can occur. In my view, the metaphor of the billiard balls aptly exemplifies a deterministic conception of reality: once given their mass, their direction and effect, billiard balls cannot end up anywhere but in the holes where they end up. This means that there is no possibility of spontaneous or random variation, or free finality. Determinism denies any type of finalism in nature and in the course of events, and, in some cases, even the existence of a superior metaphysical entity (Alberigo *et al.* 2005: 695). Jan Bohman's deterministic view implies that there is no self-determination and that man's life is at the mercy of forces beyond his control: the subject therefore, just like a billiard ball, cannot determine his own trajectory, his own path.

Therefore, if one bears in mind the aforementioned philosophical implications, the image of the billiard balls starkly conveys the idea of man's abandonment to himself and his existential solitude. Game is a recurring motif in Gustafsson, for example in the novel *Tennisspelarna* (1977; *The Tennis Players*, trans. by Sandstroem 1983), but Lundberg's pinball metaphor is not, in my opinion, coincidental, and should rather be considered as a precise intertextual reference to Gustafsson's billiard ball. It is just this intertextuality that gives more pregnancy to the hypertext, i.e., to Lundberg's text. The difference is that Lundberg's purpose is to emphasise the context of his difficult social situation while Gustafsson's metaphor has a specifically philosophical value, although in both cases the sense of existential abandonment and hopeless solitude emerges.

6. God's absence

In such a pessimistic framework, it seems that Lundberg also loses his religious faith. This is a pivotal aspect of another of his autobiographical works, *Allt och denna lycka av ingenting* (2000; *Everything and This Happiness from Nothing*), too, which bears the subtitle *En biografisk dikt* (A Biographical Poem), where the presence of Christ is constant. Lundberg thinks of him, prays to him and maintains that Christ means hope (2000: 18). By contrast, in *Yarden* everything is loneliness, frost, horror, alienation: «Helvetet är också vi», Lundberg even says (2009: 16; *We are hell too*).

On a day of hard labour at Yarden, Lundberg happens to recall a phrase of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam: «Jag tänker på Omar Khayyam som skrev att det var först genom förnedringen som han kunde känna Guds närvaro. Min bild är annorlunda. Förnedring är inte frihet» (2009: 119; *I think of Omar Khayyam who wrote that it was only through humiliation that he could feel the presence of God. My picture is different. Humiliation is not freedom*). Khayyam feels the presence of God in the moments of worst humiliation, like those afflicting Lundberg, who clearly disagrees, since for him, when a man is humiliated he is not only abandoned to himself, but is also not free. As Michel Ekman notes (2009), in *Yarden* God and Christ are

remote in «life's abysses». God reappears in Kristian's life only towards the end of the text, after the experience at Yarden is over, i.e., at the time when Lundberg writes the autobiography: in the last few pages of the book we actually see Lundberg pray to God in front of his sleeping son.

7. The importance of writing

Lundberg wonders whether his story is worth being told; we do not get any answers to this question, but we can surely deduce that it is very important for him to tell it. Lundberg reflects upon his activity of narrating and writing, and narrative constitutes another important leitmotif that recurs throughout the entire text in forms of the verb *berätta* «to tell» and of the noun *berättelse* «tale». From his continual reflections we can deduce the importance he attributes to writing. Poetry, or rather, writing poems, is not just a lifeline without which he would cease to exist, but also a mission. In an interview with Lennart Göth, Lundberg says that he has been writing since the age of seven, despite the fact that this might have seemed awkward («genant») in the social environment in which he grew up; in this interview he considers writing as a call from God, not as a personal choice, and in particular he explains what writing means to him: «Jag började plötsligt se mig själv över axeln, på något vis började jag förfölja mig själv» (Göth 2008: 39-40; I suddenly began to look through myself, somehow I started to persecute myself). So writing is a means for him to find, or even to persecute, himself; a similar statement is also found in *Yarden*: «Det är mig själv jag jagar» (2009: 32; It is myself I am chasing).

The autobiographical narrative provides Lundberg with the ideal setting to carry through his intention of self-persecution, but also his quest for truth. In the prologue, Lundberg employs a metatextual perspective and speaks directly to the reader with four bare, concise, aseptic sentences, where the white space takes on prominence and significance:

Jag prövar mitt tilltal.	I try my address.
Jag vill att ni skall se det jag känner.	I want you to see what I feel.
Ord för ord. Mening för mening.	Word by word. Sentence by sentence.
(Lundberg 2009: 10)	

Lundberg's purpose with the narration is therefore clear and unequivocally declared from the very beginning. The lines above are a statement of truth, and, as such, a fulfilment of the autobiographical pact. The autobiographical pact, in fact, is not only the formal identity between author, narrator, and protagonist. As Lejeune explains on the website created by himself and entitled *Autopacte*, the autobiographical pact is the commitment of authors to tell of their own lives (or a portion or aspect of their lives) in a spirit of truth (Lejeune 2006: «C'est l'engagement

que prend un auteur de raconter directement sa vie (ou une partie, ou un aspect de sa vie) dans un esprit de vérité»).

8. The *figura*

The considerations by Lundberg on how he sees his writing activity give us an important key to understanding his autobiographical narrative, which can be interpreted as a quest for the self, an attempt to overcome the duality of the I. But Lundberg is also in search of his own humanity. The work experience at Yarden is one that dehumanises, that can reduce people to things, objects, and this is clearly stated on two occasions: «Jag sammanfattar: på botten av en brunn. Jag kommer inte upp. Jag är ensam. Jag bygger mitt liv på det, på den ensamhet som nu stiger upp genom mig. Det är en ensamhet som får mig att förvandlas; från människa till bara ting» (2009: 28; To summarise: at the bottom of a well. I cannot get out. I am alone. I build my life on it, on the loneliness that now rises through me. It is a loneliness that transforms me; from a human to just a thing). This point is later developed: «Jag vill tala om arbetet som avhumaniserar oss, som gör oss till ting bland ting» (2009: 97; I want to talk about the work that dehumanises us, that makes us turn into things among things).

At the beginning of *Yarden* Kristian appears at the bottom of a well; the account of this dehumanising work experience is filled with references to the alcohol addiction that characterised a dark period in Kristian's life. Faced with an alienating, dehumanising reality, looking back and writing his own story is the only way to save his humanity and not to be reduced to a mere thing:

Nu när jag skriver detta kommer det ett plötsligt åskväder [...]. Vi är små elektriska varelser som lever under en oerhörd tyngd. Varje människa är en reservoar av minnen och hopp. Om jag inte tittar tillbaka; om jag inte stannar och låter världen stiga upp genom mig, förvandlas jag snart nog till ett ting, en sten, ett träd, ett avstånd.

Också detta åskväder som jag nu fångar i berättelsen finns i mig. (2009: 21-22)

Now as I am writing this, a thunderstorm has suddenly started up [...]. We are small electric creatures living under an enormous weight. Every human being is a reservoir of memories and hope. If I do not look back; if I do not stop and let the world rise up through me, I will quickly be transformed into a thing, a stone, a tree, a distance.

Even this thunderstorm, which I now seize in the narrative, is within me.

We can see from this passage that the story is present in him like a thunderstorm of which he also feels the weight; narration is here seen as a means of looking back at one's «reservoir of memories and hope» and then stopping in a retrospective view. Failing to stop in this narrative act would mean for Lundberg to become a thing, an object.

The two last quotes delineate two possible types of transformation: a negative transformation from human to thing that is passively undergone by the subject, and a positive transformation from thing to human being that is instead actively performed by the subject.

Referring to Barros's aforementioned theory, according to which autobiography is a narrative of a transformation, this paper aims to advance the thesis that the second type of transformation is what gives *Yarden* its deepest meaning. In this autobiography, Lundberg describes an endless struggle for the assertion of the self, beyond the dehumanising social dynamics that reduce human beings to things. The *figura* in Lundberg's autobiographical narrative, i.e., the metaphor for change, is therefore precisely this continuous search for his own humanity. As has been previously pointed out (section 6), writing plays an important role in this process; the search for the author's own humanity is performed through writing as a means of looking back at his own story, that is through writing meant as an autobiographical device. The search for the author's own humanity also has a much more concrete and dramatic aspect, which is recovery from alcoholism⁴. By regaining his humanity, Lundberg can also regain control over his own destiny, which seemed to be lost at *Yarden*.

As stressed by Ekman (2009), Lundberg reflects on the ability of human beings to be good to others. One might add that Lundberg also reflects on what it is to be human; these meditations come from the degradation experienced at *Yarden*, but also from the feeling of solidarity that had been established among the workers: «Ofta stannar tanken vid det: vad gör en människa? Jag kan inte svara på det. Ibland tänker jag att det som skapar en människa är förmågan att välja det goda» (2009: 51; My thought often lingers upon this: what makes a person? I cannot answer. Sometimes I think that the ability to choose what is good is what creates a human being).

In this search for what is good and human Kristian can fight the bestial side, the reptile, as he calls it, which is hiding within him: «Jag vet att jag är en människa; att jag tänker och känner som en människa, att det som är reptil och rovdjur i mig måste bekämpas, förvägras plats» (2009: 20; I know that I am a human being; that I feel and think like a human, that what is reptile and predatory in me has to be fought, denied a place). Lundberg himself states that he hunts himself by writing. This goal seems to be reached in the final epilogue, in which the author claims to have climbed up from his personal abyss by narrating and re-creating his own story: «Detta är vad det blev; en nedstigning i hamnens larmande helvete, och för att kunna överleva på botten av mig själv var jag plötsligt tvungen att återskapa min historia» (2009: 143; That is the way it went; a descent

⁴ The role of recovery from alcoholism will be treated more closely in section 9.

into the port's boisterous hell, and in order to survive at the bottom of myself, I was suddenly forced to recreate my story).

9. The *dynamis*

What remains to identify is the *dynamis*, i.e., the motive force of the change. It is Lundberg himself who gives a cue to the matter; in the prologue he says that he wants to tell his story so that his son can read it, thus making his book a spiritual testament to his teenage son: «Efter en tid tänker jag att jag tecknar ner detta för att min son skall få läsa det» (2009: 10; After a while I get the idea that I am writing this down so that my son can read it).

This sentence is a clear statement about the motive force to which the *persona* attributes the change: if Lundberg finds himself through writing, his son, who urges him to take this direction, would seem to be the *dynamis*.

Lundberg never reveals the name or the age of the child; yet the latter's presence hovers throughout the book. The child is often mentioned in connection with the condition of poverty, for example when Lundberg regrets not being able to give his son the money to go to the cinema (2009: 55). The present condition of poverty can be connected to what has been shown with regard to his failed class shift: Lundberg is in straitened circumstances because of his reverse class shift. In this light, the parallel story of his childhood assumes all the more significance if viewed in relation to the hardships that now his son too has to bear: despite the fact that he has been devastated by his childhood and by the relationship to his parents, and despite all his present hardships, Kristian wants to give his son a better life. His son is at the same time a hope for Lundberg, enabling him to regain his faith, and the only time we see Lundberg pray is, as mentioned before, in front of his sleeping child.

It must be remarked that Lundberg is not only speaking to the child but to everyone; in the following passage it is possible to detect a further aspect of the *dynamis*:

Jag sänder ut detta: som en dödsstjärna vars ljus når fram långt efter det att det redan är försent. Jag säger till min son: "Var inte rädd, låt inte de andra få ta makt över dig!" Ibland tänker jag på min text som en flaskpost som jag kastar ut i det oroliga grå havet bara för att hoppas på att det finns någon, någonting där på andra sidan som kan plocka upp den och för ett tag i alla fall känna sig mindre ensam. (2009: 32)

I am sending this out: like a death star the light of which arrives when it is much too late. I am saying to my son: "Do not be afraid, do not let the others take power over you!" Sometimes I think of my text as a message in a bottle that I throw out into the restless grey sea only in the hope that there is someone, something on the other side who can pick it up and even if just for a while feel less alone.

Lundberg is certainly writing to his son because he wants to save him from being exploited, but at the same time he wants the message of *Yarden* to arrive as far away as possible, like the light of a star or a message in a bottle.

10. Conclusions

In *Yarden* Lundberg describes his work experience at the port of Malmö, an experience which he explicitly defines as degrading and dehumanising. Through repeated flashbacks the narrative returns to the author's childhood, thus creating a parallel account. What do the experience at Yarden and his childhood have in common? First of all poverty, which, according to Lundberg, limits freedom (2009: 55). Lundberg conveys this sense of slavery to which poverty reduces one's life by comparing himself to a pinball ball tossed about in all directions by imponderable forces beyond his control. What are these forces that according to Lundberg determine the course of life? Two passages from *Yarden* may give an answer to this question:

Får man inte lätt ett löjets skimmer över sig om man som medelålders centrallyriker plötsligt börjar tala om ett sådant diffust begrepp som klasskamp? Kanske. Jag vet inte. Årligt talat: jag bryr mig inte. Det är inte längre en abstrakt mening, en formel utan innehåll, det är en dynamisk process som redan pågår – och där vi står som ständiga förlorare. Vi för inte klasskamp. De gör. De som redan äger. (2009: 53)

Hur mycket måste man förlora innan man blir mänsklig? Under nätterna när jag står och kastar paket på Godsföretaget kommer tankarna glidande, känslan av att vara fastlåst i ett öde som jag själv inte kan bemästra, kanske är det den egentliga definitionen på klass – känslan av frihet kontra känslan av ofrihet. (2009: 129)

Does one not easily become ridiculous if, as a middle-aged lyricist, one suddenly starts talking about such a vague concept as class struggle?

Maybe. I do not know. Honestly: I do not care. It is no longer an abstract idea, a formula without content, it is a dynamic process that is already under way – one in which we stand as permanent losers. We do not conduct any class struggle. They do. Those who already own.

How much do you have to lose before you become human? During the nights when I throw parcels at the shipping company the thoughts glide in on me, the feeling of being stuck in a fate that I myself am not able to master; maybe it is the actual definition of class – the feeling that one is free versus the feeling that one is not free.

Thus, to Lundberg it is the upper class, those who have money, who determine the lives of others, as if they were gods. Those who have money possess not only the economic power but also the power to decide the fate

of the have-nots, to the extent that any concept of class struggle becomes vain. Freedom is the real difference between the social classes: poverty enslaves.

Class consciousness and siding with proletarian interests are part of an ideological content that makes *Yarden* a work of proletarian literature. *Yarden* is full of reflections on class stratification, which lead Lundberg to a pessimistic view of society, as is seen from the two passages quoted above. The concept of social class is one of the leitmotifs of *Yarden*, which, as has been previously noted, is also the story of a reverse class shift. The reflections on Lundberg's reverse class shift are deeply intertwined with his awareness of having changed: «Jag är tillbaka där jag började, fastän jag är en annan» (2009: 80; I am back where I started, although I am another person). Lundberg claims to have returned to square one, and, as mentioned above (section 2), he also defines himself as a closed circle because of his return to *Yarden*. This circularity is to be understood from a social point of view: Lundberg fails in his attempt at social improvement and returns to the starting point; at the same time, however, he is aware of the fact that he has changed, and it is this awareness that leads him into a limbo of social alienation⁵. This failed attempt at social improvement calls into question Lundberg's social belonging, which in turn calls into question his credentials for writing about the working class.

Because of the importance that Lundberg ascribes to his own process of change, Barros's theory of autobiographical narrative as a narrative of a transformation is relevant to *Yarden*. Barros's theoretical approach implies that there is a «before» and an «after» the autobiographical narrative, after which the subject is transformed; the transformation of the subject, or, as Barros calls it, the *persona*, does not need to be a material change, but can also be a spiritual, philosophical or religious one. In *Yarden* Lundberg himself says that he has changed:

Allt står i förändring. Det händer att jag tänker mig att det finns rester, skuggor kvar av den person som jag har varit, så när jag fattar beslut eller genomför handlingar skapar det ekon också tillbaka i tiden, till den varelse jag var för sexton år sedan, den person jag trodde mig vara för sex månader sedan. (2009: 16)

Everything is in flux. Sometimes I imagine that there are traces, shadows left of the person I have been, so when I make decisions or commit actions, this also creates echoes back in time, to the being I was sixteen years ago, the person I thought I was six months ago.

⁵ See the quote at the end of section 2.

The change described in the passage above is a spiritual change, and it seems to be fulfilled by the time Lundberg is writing the book, even though the current ‘I’ also includes shadows of the ‘I’ of sixteen years ago. But what is this change? An answer to this question can be found in the following passage:

<p>Jag har varit nykter i över femton år och det är först nu jag på nytt börjar längta efter att dricka. Jag går in till min son när han sover. Jag ber till Gud. Jag försöker skriva en meningslös dikt, försöker komma ihåg vad insatsen en gång var – vad jag verkligen ville säga – kosta vad det kosta vill. Att jag en gång bestämde mig för att vara människa; mänsklig oavsett vad det kostade mig. (2009: 127)⁶</p>	<p>I have been sober for over fifteen years and it is only now that I begin to crave for a drink again. I go into my son’s room when he sleeps. I pray to God. I try to write a meaningless poem, try to remember what the bet once was – what I really wanted to say – cost what it may. I once decided to be human; human no matter what it would cost me.</p>
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I believe this passage gives us a key to understanding the work. The author was an alcoholic up to sixteen years before, when he decided to become human again: he defeated his alcohol addiction but still has to fight against the temptation to drink again. For this reason I have tried to show that the *figura* is precisely this search for his humanity that involves recovery from alcoholism. The other aspect of the *figura* is the constant inner search that is performed not only through introspection, but also through the physical act of writing, i.e., by narrating his story. During this inner journey Lundberg reflects on what it is to be human and fights against the reptile within him; at the end of the transformation he has also regained his faith, which seemed to be lost. I also surmised that the *dynamis* is his son, who must have been about fifteen years old at the time of the story, before whom Lundberg prays, maybe in order not to fall into the temptation of alcohol, which, by his own admission, he now begins to crave for again. In this light it is also possible to understand the cry or the claim for humanity «Jag är en människa» (2009: 18; I am a human being). To Lundberg being human is a goal that is not easily attainable, achieved through the struggles of life, like those he narrates in *Yarden*.

In *Yarden* we witness a continual search for the self, an achievement of one’s own humanity and identity, a constant struggle to overcome the double and the reptile, that bestial or non-human side that the author feels within himself. Lundberg, at the same time, is aware that this search is never-ending and that the self is constantly changing.

⁶ This is the passage referred to in section 7; it is quoted here entirely because it can be read as a confession from both a religious and an autobiographical point of view.

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THE BORDER BREAKING BUNCH
DI MAJA MAGDALENA SWIDERSKA. AUTOBIOGRAFIA
COME RICERCA DI IDENTITÀ ESISTENZIALE E
LINGUISTICA NELLE SCRITTRICI (POST)MIGRANTI

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Autobiografia, identità, scrittura femminile e migrazione sono parole che delineano un territorio vastissimo dove entra in gioco una molteplicità di dimensioni che agiscono simultaneamente. Sarà quindi opportuno fare una breve premessa al fine di inquadrare l'angolazione da cui si vorrà esaminare tale incrocio di tematiche nell'opera prima di una scrittrice danese contemporanea, Maja Magdalena Swiderska.

Nell'epoca della globalizzazione, autobiografia e migrazione sono componenti apparentemente inscindibili del carattere implicitamente nomadico dello scrittore moderno. Già nel Novecento i temi dell'emigrazione e dell'esilio avevano contribuito alla ridefinizione del concetto di identità, un concetto che non poteva più attingere soltanto all'appartenenza a un contesto nativo e nazionale. Negli ultimi vent'anni, però, il numero sempre crescente di scrittori migranti o post-migranti, attratti per ovvie ragioni nell'orbita dell'autobiografismo, è divenuto un fenomeno letterariamente e sociologicamente interessante, soprattutto nel Nord Europa, e in particolare in Svezia, Norvegia e Danimarca, in Belgio e nei Paesi Bassi. Qui per la prima volta ci si confronta con una varietà multiculturale nel mondo delle lettere e inoltre con una significativa presenza di donne di diversa origine etnica che arricchiscono il tema della migrazione con una dimensione di genere. In tale contesto, l'infittirsi di esperienze e percorsi identitari narrati dalle donne costituisce uno spazio letterario con una sua specificità, sia che essa si configuri come conquista di una nuova libertà di esprimersi – penso alla svedese di origine iraniana Marjaneh Bakhtiari e al suo *Kalla det vad fan du vill* (2005; Chiamalo come diavolo vuoi) – sia che essa rappresenti la ricerca di sé oltre l'origine multiculturale e il bilinguismo, come nel caso della Swiderska, danese di origine ebreo-polacca.

La letteratura della migrazione crea processi osmotici e una mescolanza di religioni, culture e lingue che sempre più spesso viene fatta oggetto di analisi e di studi comparativi sia negli esiti sociali sia negli esiti formali. Nel misurarsi con un fenomeno che sta permeando la letteratura transnazionale, il rischio da evitare è quello di mettere in primo piano il background dell'autore trascurando gli elementi tematici e stilistici che

accomunano queste storie di esilio, migrazione o diaspora a qualsiasi altra forma di romanzo tradizionalmente considerato come parte di un canone letterario nazionale. Nel suo libro *Migration and Literature: Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie and Jan Kjærstad* Søren Frank, autore anche di altri articoli e saggi sull'argomento, sottolinea la necessità di operare una distinzione tra *migrant literature* e *migration literature*, dove la prima si riferisce all'identità biografica che sta dietro all'opera, mentre la seconda si interessa delle caratteristiche intratestuali di una determinata opera (Frank 2008: 8-9). Da comparatista quale egli è, Frank sostiene che studiare il romanzo contemporaneo in relazione alla migrazione apre prospettive nuove perché il romanzo, più di altri generi, è capace di attraversare i confini nazionali (2010).

L'autobiografia, d'altro canto, è un genere ambiguo tra il letterario e il privato che, dalla teorizzazione di Lejeune (1975) in poi, ha rivelato in modo molto vitale la sua resistenza ad essere incapsulato in una definizione. Ad ogni tentativo di ribaltare o delimitare lo statuto autobiografico si è aggiunta una nuova prospettiva in cui il soggetto che scrive può trasformarsi in oggetto di interesse per il lettore ed entrare così in una comunità interpretativa (Behrendt 2006: 59-60). Indubbiamente, l'autobiografia è una forma di scrittura referenziale che mette in primo piano la storia della vita individuale o della personalità di chi la narra. Nello scrivere di sé, l'autore è alla ricerca di un senso della vita; il raccontarsi è un modo per trasformare relazioni date per scontate e per ricreare, attraverso questo gesto, la propria identità. Nel suo fondamentale libro sulla prosa autobiografica di Strindberg *Uro og urenhed* (Inquietudine e impurità), Per Stounbjerg afferma (si cita qui dal riassunto finale in inglese):

Autobiography depicts the routes of a life through a historical, geographical and social world. What holds it together is, however, not the referential facts, but the self-interpretation of a *subject* concerned with his own identity. (Stounbjerg 2005: 432; corsivo nell'originale)

Più che l'identità di nome conta quindi il fatto che leggiamo il testo come se le tre istanze di autore, narratore e protagonista fossero la stessa persona. Questo è esattamente l'approccio suggerito nell'opera il cui titolo, a questo punto, va citato per intero, ossia *The Border Breaking Bunch. Roman* (Swiderska 2008). La storia riguarda il rapporto della scrittrice con il suo passato familiare, che è anche un intreccio di motivi politici, culturali e linguistici aventi origine in una parte dell'Europa diversa dalla Danimarca. Il contenuto è quindi di natura autobiografica ma, a trasgredire il famoso 'patto' codificato da Lejeune, ecco comparire la categoria della finzione già nel titolo. L'autrice giustappone infatti all'inglese «The Border Breaking Bunch», che fa riferimento a una storia esterna ai confini nazionali, il sottotitolo danese, e quindi locale, «Roman», ossia romanzo. L'esplicitazione della natura ambivalente

della narrazione pone il romanzo sulla scia di *Fils. Roman* di Doubrovsky (1977), che voleva presentarsi come un 'vero' romanzo pur essendo una 'vera' autobiografia, e quindi la narrazione della Swiderska potrebbe essere assimilata alla categoria dell'*autofiction* (D'Intino 1998: 148-150). Non giova però al nostro discorso definire in questa sede quello che a fatica si caratterizza come un genere letterario, tante e multiformi sono le soluzioni inventate dagli scrittori, e in particolare da quelli danesi in questi ultimi anni. Un nome per tutti: Suzanne Brøgger (Andersen 2009). Nel caso di *The Border Breaking Bunch* ci troviamo di fronte a un'opera che ambisce a raggiungere una complessità culturale e linguistica particolare rispetto al contesto nazionale in cui si colloca e che per farlo mette in atto una strategia di integrazione della diversità che conduce ad una riformulazione dell'identità locale (Larsen 2005: 30)¹. Per dimostrarlo, cercherò di illustrare alcuni momenti significativi del romanzo in rapporto alle scelte estetiche dell'autrice.

Il romanzo viene pubblicato nel 2008 e un anno dopo la Swiderska riceve il premio della Fondazione Munch-Christensen destinato, in quella particolare tornata, a opere che si distinguessero per originalità, uso audace della lingua e capacità di divulgare racconti non solo belli ma rilevanti. Alla sua uscita, critici letterari come Lars Bukdahl di «Weekendavisen» vedono in quest'opera di debutto la caparbieta di chi vuole distinguersi da tutti gli altri². Altri sottolineano il carattere disincantato e giocoso, tragico e liberatorio dei percorsi «su e giù per la tana del coniglio» alla ricerca di un'identità (Ping Huang 2008). Mai Misfeldt (2008) evidenzia piuttosto un'attitudine all'interrogazione che sfida la certezza del limite con una insolita energia linguistica.

L'allusione di Marianne Ping Huang al coniglio bianco di *Alice in Wonderland*, peraltro esplicito nel 'prologo' del testo, si rivela in effetti una efficace chiave di lettura per la storia narrata dalla Swiderska, una storia che vuole indurci a seguire le dolorose vicende umane, collettive e individuali che la riguardano da vicino come penetrando in un mondo sotterraneo fatto di paradossi, assurdità e nonsenso. La ricostruzione dell'identità biografica – e linguistica – dell'autrice avviene per scansioni

¹ «En integrationsstrategi udmærker sig ved ikke at udelukke det fremmede, men ved at bruge distancen mellem kendt og fremmed som fundament for genskabelse af det lokale» (La strategia dell'integrazione si caratterizza per il fatto di non escludere la diversità, ma di servirsi della distanza tra ciò che è familiare e ciò che è diverso come fondamento per la trasformazione dell'identità locale). La traduzione dei passi che citerò è mia.

² «Og sikke et privilegium på at læse en bog, en debutbog endda, dersom en selvfølgelighed insisterer på at være sin helt egen underlige flyvefisk» (E che privilegio leggere un libro, per di più un'opera prima, che con la massima disinvoltura insiste a voler essere uno strano pesce volante); citazione riportata nel risvolto di copertina di Swiderska 2011.

temporali non lineari dove l'ironia con cui si osservano i piccoli eventi apparentemente insignificanti stempera la drammaticità della ricerca della verità. Nell'accingersi alla rappresentazione di sé, la Swiderska trova insomma un buon trampolino di lancio nell'attacco sferrato da Lewis Carroll alla presunta razionalità del linguaggio non meno che alla presunta razionalità della società vittoriana. L'esigenza di dar voce a contenuti autobiografici si associa quindi in quest'opera a un proposito trasgressivo nei riguardi della cultura maggioritaria danese in cui si vuole aprire una breccia con l'innesto di una storia diversa dal discorso che si identifica con la cultura nazionale. Il tema del confine è quindi un leitmotiv; sul piano diegetico, esso rappresenta il filo rosso che tiene insieme le storie di un passato familiare e personale traumatico: la fuga di tre generazioni di ebrei polacchi, quella della nonna dal nazismo, quella dei genitori dal regime comunista al tempo della campagna antisemita del 1968 e, infine, quella della protagonista stessa da una vicenda sentimentale finita male. Ma non va trascurata la componente di teatralità insita nella rappresentazione di sé che la scrittrice intraprende ad ogni tappa riflessiva e autoanalitica del percorso a ritroso nella propria storia remota oppure nel passato molto prossimo della sua vita di donna. La zona paratestuale del romanzo, frangia di transizione che secondo Lejeune è anche quella zona di transazione dove si manifesta l'istanza autoriale (1975: 45), è infatti del tutto simile alla didascalia di un testo teatrale. Non a caso, la compagnia danese Verdens Mindste Teater (Il teatro più piccolo del mondo) ha curato una versione teatrale del romanzo.

Si comincia quindi con *Medvirkende* (Swiderska 2008: 5; Personaggi):

M

Mama Es + Mr. Möi den Monokulturelle
Fortælleren aka Lady M.I.G.
Sister C og andre tilfældige fra tilfældige
tider og steder

M

Mama Es + il Sig. Möi il Monoculturale
Il narratore aka Lady M.E.
Sister C e altre persone casuali da tempi e
luoghi casuali

A ben vedere, il narratore aka Lady M.E., solitamente esterno al testo, viene situato nel paratesto alla stregua di un attante, mentre gli altri personaggi hanno nel nome o nell'iniziale la lettera 'M', tranne Sister C a cui, come vedremo, viene riservato un ruolo speciale. Quando poi ci si addentra nella narrazione, più che in uno svolgimento diacronico, siamo trasportati in un'alternanza di scene e personaggi colti come da una macchina da presa in luoghi e tempi diversi; la voce narrante usa quasi sempre il tempo presente, salvo che nei casi in cui si accentua la prospettiva temporale. La prima sequenza è quella di Mama Es, un personaggio surreale che concentra in sé il destino di ubiquità tipico dei fuggitivi. La sua identità nominale è divisa tra il ruolo archetipicamente materno e le spinte pulsionali; di lei ci viene detto che non comunica verbalmente, sta bene solo nella folla anonima, ama il paté di fegato coi lamponi e il suo indirizzo e-mail è: «mama@es.reality».

M., che non a caso è l'iniziale di Maja, è la proiezione figurale più riconoscibile della scrittrice. Nell'anticamera della narrazione, in una sorta di prologo, il lettore è accolto da un «Velkommen / eller ned i jorden er denne vej» (2008: 9; Benvenuto – o sottoterra si va di qua), come all'ingresso di uno scavo nella memoria, a cui però Mama Es, 'l'eroina' del romanzo, non collabora. Per questa ragione nel capitolo successivo, intitolato *Forord* (Prefazione), il narratore di prima persona dichiara programmaticamente che il suo intento è di risalire alle origini di M.: «Med det i-hånden-havende ønsker jeg at oplyse om baggrundene, om, hvad der engang har været sandhederne for M.» (2008: 17; Con la presente desidero dare informazioni sulle cause di quel che un tempo sono state le verità per M.), e subito il progetto si allarga:

Kort sagt handler det om at være et menneske blandt andre. Det handler om at krydse grænser. Grænser i livet og livets grænser. Dem, man vil krydse, dem man tvinges til at krydse – og dem, man ikke vil krydse – og dem, man ikke kan krydse. (2008: 17)

In breve, si tratta di essere persone tra altre persone, si tratta di varcare i confini. I confini nella vita e i confini della vita. Quelli che si vogliono attraversare, quelli che si è costretti ad attraversare, quelli che non si vogliono – o non si possono attraversare.

Questi ultimi sono i limiti della memoria. La storia che la Swiderska non vuole e non può narrare per intero è la diaspora di una famiglia sparita dalla Polonia nella seconda metà del Novecento e ormai sparsa in molti continenti. I genitori della scrittrice giunsero per l'appunto da esuli in Danimarca come altri tremila polacchi di origine ebrea messi al bando dal regime comunista per soffocare la contestazione studentesca del marzo 1968. Il romanzo presenta invece la rielaborazione di quella esperienza traumatica, mai narrata dai protagonisti, da una prospettiva soggettiva, simbolica e frammentaria (Mrozewicz 2014: 113-116)³. Ciò non toglie che, a dispetto dell'apparente 'nonchalance', la scrittrice dimostri di saper tenere molto bene le fila di una complessa e dolorosa vicenda politica ed esistenziale che approda sostanzialmente ad un problema di identità: «det fremmede liv blandt fremmede» (2008: 19; la vita da straniera tra stranieri). Quindi la prefazione non è solo una dichiarazione di intenti, ma anche l'esplicitazione della sua poetica:

³ Mrozewicz individua nel tema della rielaborazione estetica dell'esperienza dell'esilio vissuta dai genitori e della ricerca di una relazione con i luoghi di origine un comune denominatore tra il romanzo della Swiderska e i documentari di due cineasti danesi di origine ebreo-polacca della stessa generazione, Jacob Kofler (*Statsløs* 2004; Apolide) e Jacob Dammas (*Kredens* 2007; Credenza). La studiosa si rifà al concetto di «postmemory» o memoria della memoria, elaborato da Marianne Hirsch (1997) per sottolineare che le rivisitazioni creative di un passato familiare traumatico in questi casi sono caratterizzate, a differenza della «memoria», da una distanza tra le generazioni e da una condizione di sospensione che vale tanto per i confini quanto per l'identità nazionale del narratore.

Sidst, men på ingen måde mindst (nærmest størst), handler det om, hvordan vi fortæller om os selv – altså skaber historien om os selv. Det handler om det sprog, vi bruger. Det handler om at have et sprog, at være en del af et sprog, at opleve, hvordan sproget er en del af én, at kunne udtrykke sig og føle et sprog. At kunne sige om et sprog, at det er ens eget. At indgå i et sprogligt fælleskab. At vælge at sige, samt vælge at tie. [...] Og det er blevet tydeligt hvordan tavshed kan være det stærkeste, forenende kraft. Ærligheden findes ofte der, hvor ordene holder op. I de afbrudte fortællinger, de afbrudte samtaler, i afbrud af enhver slags. (2008: 19-20)

Per ultimo, ma niente affatto da meno (semmai il contrario), si tratta di capire come ci raccontiamo – insomma come creiamo la storia di noi stessi. Si tratta della lingua che usiamo, del fatto di avere una lingua, di essere parte di una lingua, di sentire come la lingua fa parte di noi, di potersi esprimere e di sentire una lingua. Il poter dire di una lingua che è la propria. Entrare in una comunità linguistica. Scegliere di dire, ma anche di tacere. [...] Ed è diventato chiaro che il silenzio può essere l'elemento più forte e più unificante. La sincerità comincia là dove finiscono le parole. Nei racconti spezzati, nelle conversazioni interrotte, nelle interruzioni di ogni genere.

Ecco dunque come il tema dell'autobiografia viene a coincidere con l'atto dello scrivere e, in particolare, con il problema dell'identità linguistica, tanto pressante da contaminare qualsiasi certezza convenzionale, ivi compresa quella dell'amore o della capacità di amare.

Per prima cosa, nel titolo del capitolo che rappresenta il primo dei quattro stadi attraverso cui si dipanano i fili della storia, sospesa tra finzione e ricerca di identità, si pone la domanda: «(Hvad) skaber et menneske?» (2008: 25; (Che cosa) forma una persona?). È l'antica questione su chi o che cosa contribuisca a formare la personalità, ma l'autrice (o la voce narrante) sembra impaziente di iniziare un viaggio a cui si è preparata con un accurato lavoro di ricerca, anch'esso esplicitato. Quindi il tono si fa animato per incoraggiare la macchina narrativa a partire, e le parole divengono indispensabili, seppur recalcitranti, compagne di viaggio:

Klar, parat, allez allez. Pisker rundt og samler ind. Et ord her, et helt andet ord der. Det næste ord protesterer og løber sin vej, på en hvirvlende og let svævende facon. Det er aldeles sit eget og vil ikke være med. Det er vigtigt, råber M. efter det, men for sent. Nogle gange må vi åbenbart acceptere manglerne. (2008: 26)

Bene, pronti, allez allez. Mi do da fare e raccolgo tutto. Una parola qui, un'altra del tutto diversa lì. La parola successiva protesta e se ne va per conto suo in modo vorticoso e fluttuante. È indipendente e non vuole accodarsi. È importante, le grida M., ma troppo tardi. Evidentemente a volte dobbiamo accettare i vuoti.

Da questo momento comincia la parte più intensa del romanzo, quella che presenta la vita come una serie di ripetizioni, «Livet atter eller livets at'er» (2008: 7; La vita di nuovo o le circostanze della vita). Una coazione a ripetere, forse? Il vecchio espediente ottocentesco del ritrovamento casuale di un quadernetto in una lampada appartenuta alla vecchia zia di Varsavia, ormai scomparsa, viene usato per far luce su alcuni momenti

cruciali della storia europea del Novecento in parallelo con la 'preistoria' di M. Nel capitolo *At bruge og misbruge magt* (2008: 57; Usare e abusare del potere), ad esempio, siamo a Varsavia il 5 marzo del 1953: «M. er minus 23 år. Stalin dør» (M. ha meno 23 anni. Stalin muore). Più avanti, nel capitolo *At overleve* (2008: 72; Sopravvivere), siamo a Varsavia nel marzo del 1968, quando infuria la campagna anti-semita di Gomulka: «M. er minus otte år. Der er røg. Og skudsølver» (M. ha meno otto anni. C'è fumo. E colpi di arma da fuoco). Solo al di fuori della narrazione, nella terza di copertina, apprendiamo che Maja Magdalena Swiderska è nata nel 1976 a Copenaghen, anzi a Riget, il complesso ospedaliero più grande della capitale.

Il lettore è insomma continuamente incuriosito e disorientato dalla episodicità delle informazioni e dall'assenza di una posizione ideologica che faccia da collante. Si ha l'impressione che la realtà contenda lo spazio alla finzione che viene suggerita, ma senza sufficiente energia. E in effetti, quanto più urge il problema dell'identità tanto più entra in campo una rifrazione della personalità in figure diverse e talvolta antitetiche. Si ha quindi un Mr. Möi, che si aggrappa alla sua appartenenza etnica; la protagonista M., che intraprende un viaggio a Varsavia per partecipare senza molta convinzione al funerale dell'ultima zia; e poi, a parte il narratore aka Lady M.E., una sorta di alter ego, una Sister C che entra in campo a più riprese a colpetti di hula-hoop avvolgendosi in spirali di parole in libertà. A queste sue performance, intitolate *Puf* (Spintarella) e ripetute per i tre 'capitoli' successivi, è affidato lo svolgimento di una trama incostante. Nel cerchio iniziale, ad esempio, viene rilanciata in modo diretto la provocazione dell'appartenenza linguistica:

1. Forst var ordet. Men hvilket ord. Ikke det danske ord – i hvert fald. Et universelt ord, måske. Et smertende smertens skrig. (Da skriget stilnede af, begyndte jeg at tage fat. Ganske langsomt og undrende i begyndelsen og helt alene. Det var ikke et spørgsmål om at tro, for dengang vidste jeg. Forst nu ser jeg håbløsheden. Men også det er blot den mindste parentes). (2008: 79; corsivo nell'originale)

1. In principio era la parola. Ma quale parola. Non la parola danese – in ogni caso. Una parola universale, forse. Un urlo di dolore angoscioso. (Quando l'urlo si placò, cominciai a capire. All'inizio molto lentamente e del tutto da sola. Non si trattava di credere, perché allora sapevo. Solo ora vedo l'insensatezza. Ma anche questa è solo la parentesi più piccola).

Il fraseggio spezzato, il ritmo sincopato della frase, così come della costruzione dell'io, richiama pur senza evocarlo un passato drammatico e un difficile apprendistato esistenziale. Il romanzo, però, non indugia sulle impasse, il movimento è un movimento in avanti. Maja Magdalena Swiderska riesce insomma a compiere la non facile trasformazione alchemica di una storia che gli stessi protagonisti non hanno voluto ricordare in un romanzo originale che sfoggia una pluralità di registri. Il versante giocoso e ironico della lingua danese viene esplorato con un entusiasmo da neofita (non ci si aspetta forse una buona competenza linguistica da un immigrato di seconda generazione?) e con un'audacia che ne sfida continuamente le

possibilità sonore nella ricerca di assonanze, di variazioni nelle ripetizioni e di una predisposizione al paradosso. Nel recensire il romanzo alla sua uscita Marianne Ping Huang (2008) lo paragonava a una installazione dove il lettore è sempre spinto avanti e deve cavarsela da solo tra voci, luoghi, aneddoti, atti linguistici e ready made. E in effetti una parte significativa e integrante del testo scritto è costituita da immagini: foto di oggetti, luoghi e perfino carte geografiche in bianco e nero con un unico comune denominatore: l'obiettivo li ha ripresi nella loro nudità disarmante, senza il pur minimo tentativo di ricavarne un'emozione estetica. Così per la targa della strada in cui viveva la famiglia di M. a Varsavia, Aleja Przyjaciól, la foto di una lampada al soffitto che nasconde un quadernetto passato di generazione in generazione, delle uova sode o il dolce al cioccolato che è un must per M. quando si trova a Varsavia. Ma io ricorderei anche il concretismo danese degli anni Settanta, Per Højholt e Dan Turèll, la contaminazione della poesia con impressioni visive e musicali.

Dalle pagine di *The Border Breaking Bunch* traspira insomma un forte sentimento del vissuto, anche nei frammenti di canzoni pop del repertorio anglo-americano posti ad esergo dei dieci capitoli di questo romanzo. Non meno degli oggetti, le canzoni sono impresse nella storia individuale e collettiva, la Swiderska lo sa bene. Anch'esse fanno parte del gioco, e in effetti qua e là sorprendiamo la scrittrice a 'contrabbandare' nelle giocose spirali frammenti autobiografici di grande malinconia: basta avere la pazienza di inseguire le parole nei loro avvolgimenti circolari, come:

Når Sister C er boheme, hedder hun noget ganske andet. Så sidder hun altid i en sydeuropæisk storby med sin violette drink, sine mørke lokker, jadegrønne øjne og rødakerede negle. Når Sister C er boheme, holder hun en pause fra alle andre og ikke mindst sig selv. Så omgås hun kunstnere og konstaterer med en sukkende hovedrysten, at hun har opgivet alle andre. Der sidder hun hele dagen, og om natten danser hun dramatisk tango. Når Sister C er boheme, har hun en hemmelighed. Hun skriver pop sange helt i smug. For det er kun som boheme, at Sister C kan overleve overlevelsen. (2008: 110)

Quando Sister C è bohémien, ha un altro nome. Allora se ne sta col suo drink violetto in una metropoli mediterranea, i riccioli scuri, gli occhi verde giada e le unghie laccate di rosso. Quando Sister C è bohémien, si apparta da tutti e soprattutto da se stessa. E così frequenta artisti e constata con un malinconico cenno del capo di aver rinunciato a tutti gli altri. Passa così tutto il giorno, e la notte balla il tango appassionatamente. Quando Sister C è bohémien, ha un segreto: scrive di nascosto canzoni pop. Perché è solo da bohémien che Sister C può sopravvivere alla sopravvivenza.

Altrove, però, il tono diventa più serio ed ecco comparire la Convenzione delle Nazioni Unite che all'articolo 2 definisce il genocidio elencando una serie di azioni che vengono compiute con lo scopo di annientare un gruppo nazionale, etnico, razziale o religioso. La protagonista M. ha appena subito un piccolo sopruso e allora non le resta che lasciare, nell'elenco di casi che rispondono al dettato della Convenzione, e che lei aggiorna continuamente,

due pagine in bianco, con tanto di righe e virgole predisposte, dove inserire i nomi di chi si macchia di quel crimine. Sta al lettore decidere come riempire lo spazio vuoto per il giudizio storico dei posteri: è un lascito pesante, un memento di responsabilità che per una volta balza in primo piano rispetto alla precedente confusione di tracce e di indizi tipici dell'*autofiction* (Bianchini 2014). E non è l'unico appello alla collaborazione che venga rivolto al lettore. Nella seconda parte del romanzo l'impalcatura romanzesca si infittisce di congegni visivi che sfiorano ancora una volta la teatralità. Quando si tratta di affrontare il tema dell'amore (o del disamore), ovvero «At elske eller det uomgængelige og uranselige plot» (2008: 124; Amare, ossia l'ineludibile e imperscrutabile trama), la narrazione ripescava dalla memoria dell'adolescenza i sentimenti di ambivalenza nei rapporti familiari: «For sådan er det, med dem, man elsker. Man ønsker, de er der, og man ønsker dem væk» (2008: 124; Perché è così con le persone che si amano. Si desidera che siano vicine, e si desidera che vadano via). E mentre si oscilla tra sentimenti opposti, di appartenenza e di alienazione, le pagine si popolano improvvisamente di riquadri vuoti: sono le foto dell'album di famiglia che sfilano una ad una come i personaggi di *Umarla Kłasa* (1975, 2004⁴; *La classe morta*, trad. di Marinelli 2003) di Tadeusz Kantor scrupolosamente evocati da didascalie più o meno estese: «Det her er M.s bedstefar» (2008: 130; Questo è il nonno di M.); «og her er M.s bedstemor» (2008: 130; ed ecco la nonna di M.). A volte, l'immaginazione del lettore viene nutrita da una ricostruzione spaziale e temporale:

Her er Mor og Far dengang, de stadig var forelskede. M. husker det ikke, men det så åbenbart sådan her ud. Her er de i Frederiksberg Have, hvor de har ridset symbolet på deres kærlighed ind i et træ. (2008: 132)

Questi sono la mamma e il babbo quando erano ancora innamorati. M. non lo ricorda, ma evidentemente allora era così. Sono nel parco di Frederiksberg, e hanno inciso il simbolo del loro amore su un albero.

Il viaggio nel passato sfumerà poi nella conclusione del viaggio nel presente, quel soggiorno a Varsavia che le ha fatto riscoprire le cose che fanno parte di lei, ma anche che il suo posto è altrove. Al momento di imbarcarsi sull'aereo per tornare a Copenaghen, M., la protagonista, non pensa affatto di tornare sui suoi passi, di volgere la testa indietro. Il lettore condividerà il sentimento di indeterminatezza dell'io narrante all'atto di questa partenza che chiude col passato, poiché «Man lærer at leve med savnet. Det ved M., man skal» (2008:150; Si impara a convivere con la nostalgia. M. sa bene che è necessario).

⁴ La prima edizione integrale in polacco della pièce di Kantor è del 2004, successiva dunque alla traduzione in italiano di Luigi Marinelli (Kantor 2003). Marinelli consegnò il manoscritto originale sul quale aveva lavorato al curatore delle opere complete in Polonia (2004). Ringrazio Luigi Marinelli per aver fornito questi riferimenti bibliografici.

Del resto l'epigrafe del libro lo aveva annunciato in modo inequivocabile e con tutta l'autorità del diritto:

Article 15

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality. (2008: 6)

Dentro e fuori il romanzo l'identità autobiografica viene insomma affermata e negata continuamente nel momento in cui essa entra nel campo della finzione; la Swiderska utilizza tutti gli spazi possibili per disseminare la narrazione di quegli *effets de vie*, o realia, se si preferisce, che aumentano o diminuiscono il grado di verosimiglianza. Nell'orbito del romanzo si insegue il tentativo della scrittrice di raggiungere una verità attraverso delle strategie testuali piuttosto sofisticate. Tale verità è però data per inafferrabile: nell'evocazione del passato, così come nell'analisi del presente, lo stesso io narrante è inaffidabile perfino sul piano dell'enunciazione, oscillante tra una lingua del cuore e una lingua dell'intelletto, ma soprattutto incline a pensare che nessuna lingua basti a dire l'indicibile.

E tuttavia, per tornare all'ipotesi iniziale di questo mio percorso in un territorio dove confluiscono tematiche diverse come autobiografia, migrazione, identità (ivi inclusa la specificità di genere, che non ha potuto essere esplorata in questa sede) il tentativo di scomporre gli elementi dell'ambizioso patchwork rappresentato da *The Border Breaking Bunch* induce a sottoscrivere l'elogio dell'"impuro" fatto già diversi anni fa dallo scrittore norvegese Jan Kjørstad:

Den nye roman må nødvendigvis være uren, ikke som noget eklektisk, men som noget organisk, naturligt. Den viser os romanens uudholdelige frihed ved at sprænge grænserne for det accepterede og forventede. Dens form er genreløs, fordeler sig i forskellige båse, samtidig. I sin hæmningsløse tolerance kan den rumme det ubehagelige, det grimme, det kasteløse; den er fuld af metamorfoser, ekstremer, minoriteter, alternativer. [...] Den urene roman er en bog uden absolutter, en roman, der ikke garanterer os noget som helst, ud over at den vil præsentere menneskelige muligheder. (1999: 17)

Il nuovo romanzo deve necessariamente essere impuro, non come qualcosa di eclettico, ma come qualcosa di organico, di naturale. Questo ci mostra l'insostenibile libertà del romanzo di andare oltre ciò che è accettato e prevedibile. La sua forma è priva di genere, si scompone sotto varie etichette, simultaneamente. Nella sua disinibita tolleranza esso può contenere ciò che è spiacevole, brutto, emarginato; è pieno di metamorfosi, estremi, minoranze, alternative. [...] Il romanzo impuro è un libro privo di assoluti, un romanzo che non garantisce assolutamente niente a parte il fatto di presentare delle possibilità umane.

Quale che sia la definizione (autobiografia? *autofiction*? autonarrazione?) da dare alla storia con cui la Swiderska narra di sé sullo sfondo di un passato da cui prende le distanze, essa si rivela come un esempio significativo di come la letteratura e la lingua possano, nel momento stesso in cui

sfidano l'identità locale, riaffermare la loro appartenenza ad un sistema globale o universale capace di contenere una pluralità di esperienze e di informazioni. La spazialità diffusa che si genera nell'attraversamento dei confini offre questa possibilità: portare al centro qualcosa di marginale e periferico, includere piuttosto che escludere, accostare diverse visioni e fasi della vita in una prospettiva che accoglie gli estremi e crea delle alternative.

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SINNE, SELVINNSIKT OG DET POLITISK UKORREKTE. RASERI AV CORNELIUS JAKHELLN

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Cornelius Jakhelln, født i Kristiansand i 1977, er en forfatter med en omfattende produksjon bak seg, som inneholder sju diktsamlinger, tre romaner, en barnebok og en operalibretto. I tillegg til forfatteryrket er han gitarist og vokalist i bandene *Solefald* og *Sturmgeist*, som vi i denne sammenhengen vil, med litt forenkling, omtale som tilhørende sjangeren svartmetall (*black metal*). I denne artikkelen ønsker jeg å omtale hans bok *Raseri* (2011) og dens forhold til en sjangerutvikling i norsk samtidslitteratur som ble kalt «den biografiske vendingen». Med dette begrepet refererer kritikeren Siss Vik (2002) til en bølge av norske og nordiske romaner med selvbiografiske trekk publisert rundt årtusenskiftet, som ga opptakten til et av tiårets viktigste litterære fenomener i Norge og ellers i Norden. Ane Farsethås (2012) har skrevet om en vending tilbake til virkeligheten, med hvilken hun identifiserer en økende interesse for livshistorier, selvframstillinger og fakta i '00-årenes norske litteratur. Hans Hauge (2012) har skrevet om en fornyelse av nordisk, og særlig norsk, skjønnlitteratur gjennom oppfinnelsen av en ny sjanger som han kaller «fiksjonsfri fiksjon», eller en type romanlitteratur hvor personene er virkelige.

Denne (selv)biografiske vendingen har stilt nye krav til forfattere og skrivemåte. Sjangre har måttet fornyes, gjennomtenkes, omformes, grenser har måttet sprenge; Karl Ove Knausgård's seksbindssaga *Min kamp* (2009-2011) er blitt et vannskille som har utløst en stor debatt og satt nye standarder for samtidslitteraturen. Norske forfattere har måttet, på en eller annen måte, ta stilling til biografisk og selvbiografisk skrivning. *Raseri* er et interessant tilfelle i den biografiske vendingen og et godt eksempel på dens tendens til sjangeroverskridning. Den inneholder visselig selvbiografiske trekk, men man kan stille spørsmål om hvorvidt det er en selvbiografi eller en biografi om en litterær forfatter – en forfatterselvbiografi? Dessuten består mesteparten av teksten ikke av selvbiografisk fortelling (eller «fiksjonsfri fiksjon»), men av essays med selvbiografiske innslag – noe som henger sammen med forfatterens definisjon av boka som «selvbiosofi». I tillegg har fortellerstemmen et ganske særegent forhold til det politisk ukorrekte og til aktuelle temaer

i norsk offentlighet, som innvandring, fremmedfrykt og debatten som fulgte den nasjonale tragedien 22. juli 2011.

Bokas fullstendige tittel er *Raseri. En hvitings forsøk på en selvbiografi*. «Raseri» er et nøkkelbegrep gjennom boka og selve utgangspunktet for Jakhellns selvbiografiske forsøk. Han skriver i innledningen: «Hvorfor føler jeg så ofte sinne? Kunne sinnet drevet meg fra fornuften og inn i barbariet? Kunne raseriet ledet meg, en ung, nordisk mann med filosofisk utdanning, inn i en radikaliseringsprosess med drap eller selvmord som mulig resultat?» (2011: 23). Her sikter forfatteren til skolemassakren i den finske bygda Jokela i 2007, der en elev drepte åtte personer blant medelever og ansatte og til slutt tok sitt eget liv. Morderen hadde brukt kallenavnet «Sturmgeist89» på noen sosiale medier, noe som liknet mye på navnet på ett av Jakhellns band. Dette gav Jakhelln en del hodebry, i og med at noen journalister mistenkte at hans band kunne ha inspirert massakren (2011: 163-166). Jakhelln hevder at han har følt det samme raseriet mot omverdenen som den finske eleven, men han understreker at han har latt det løpe fritt i kunst, delvis med tanke på å unngå farlige konsekvenser (2011: 20).

Raseriet er imidlertid ikke resultatet, snarere utgangspunktet for et forsøk på å forstå sine egne følelser, tanker og skrifter. Som tidligere nevnt er *Raseri* ikke en selvbiografisk fortelling, men en samling av essays med selvbiografiske trekk og med en til dels instrumentell funksjon. Jakhelln har behov for å forstå hvem han er. Som det står i det første kapitlet: «det må være lov å innrømme det: Jeg forstår ikke hvorfor jeg skriver som jeg gjør. Hatet. Sinnet. Jeg har fulgt et spor, løpt langs skinnegangens lineære skafott og endt opp foran tunnelåpningen vi nå står foran, raseriet og mørket på innsiden» (2011: 33). Her viser Jakhelln at han ikke sitter med svar, men med et sett med spørsmål han prøver å besvare. Han er stundom dypt uenig og i strid med seg selv: «Eg er min eigen fiendsmann», som han skriver ved å sitere dikteren Olav Aukrust (Jakhelln 2011: 43-45). Senere i artikkelen vil vi se hvordan denne uenigheten utvikler seg i skrivemåten.

Jakhellns forståelsesprosess krever en metode som han kaller «selvbiografi». Begrepet er i og for seg ikke originalt og baseres på «biosofien» til den norske filosofen Peter Wessel Zapffe (1899-1990). Zapffe var, sammen med Arne Næss, en av Norges fremste filosofer og er blant annet kjent for avhandlingen *Om det tragiske* (1941) og traktaten *Indføring i litterær dramaturgi* (1961), der han utdyper sin biosofiske metode. I utgangspunktet var Zapffe eksistensialist, men lesningen av den estiske biologen Jakob von Uexküll fikk ham til å utvikle et syn på menneskelivet som var sterkt påvirket av naturvitenskap. Zapffe er interessert i «hvad der er nødvendig trafik under forutsætninger som er tilstede for alle mennesker til enhver tid, forutsætninger som ikke kan tænkes forandret uden at baade "menneskenaturen" og "dens kosmiske vilkaar" blir nye» (sitert i Gundersen 1999: 77).

Med den vitenskapelige metoden går Zapffe på jakt etter de objektive vilkårene for det tragiske i menneskeskjebnen, som han definerer som «forholdet mellom interessens faktiske, fortløpende tilstande, og et tænkt, efterlængtet, drømt, hypotetisk, idealt forløp» (Zapffe 1999: 70). Men hva legger Zapffe i begrepet «det tragiske»? Ved å støtte seg til biologien behandler han mennesket som 'interessebærer' i kampen for tilværelsen (dvs. et individ som må skaffe seg mat, pare seg osv.), men med en vesentlig forskjell vis-à-vis alle andre dyr: Det har fått et overskudd av sjelsevner som skaper et enormt begjær etter mening som universet ikke klarer å tilfredsstille. Som Dag Olav Hessen påpeker:

Mens alt annet liv arbeider seg oppover asymptoten mot tangeringen av det biologisk optimale, så fortsatte menneskets kurve utover dette optimumspunkt. [...] Belønningen var rollen som skapningenes suverene herre, men evolusjonen hadde et Janusansikt der det ene var det opprinnelige og livsbejænde, mens det andre smilte livstrett og ironisk med triste øyne – det hadde spist av kunnskapens tre. [...] Vi er blitt vår egen fiende, primært i form av et svarløst rop på mening og rettferd ut i det mørke rom. (1999: 87)

'Evolusjonens Janusansikt' er kilden for det tragiske, som skal undersøkes med biosofien. Som Zapffe skriver i *Indføring i litterær dramaturgi*: «med "biosofi" menes en filosofi, et teoretisk syn på tilværelsen som orienterer seg mot biologien og dens annekser (paleøontologi [sic] osv.) og i tråd hermed forholder seg empiristisk til alle sine problemer» (1999: 66-67). Det må understrekes at biosofien ikke er et filosofisk system, men snarere en metode, et redskap som kan brukes til å finne det objektivt tragiske. Dette gjelder også Jakhellns «selvbiosofi», som han definerer ved å bruke et sitat fra *Indføring i litterær dramaturgi* som epigraf:

Evnen til på én gang å kunne leve og samtidig likesom utenfra å betrakte sig selv, sitt liv og sin død som del av en totalitet med eller uten 'sammenheng', fremtræder i biosofisk lys som en art «kortslutning» i naturen – et prærøgtiv som, tror vi, intet andet av livets barn er blit velsignet og forbandet med. Dyret hviler i en selvfølgelig enhet av væsen og miljø, sålånge der ikke opstår aktuelle onder. Menneskesjælen er fra naturens hånd ensom og rådvild, fremmed for sitt ophav, hjemløs i sitt billede av en uhyre omverden, like ufattelig som sjælen er for sig selv. (Zapffe 1999: 79; Jakhelln 2011: 11)

Jakhelln slutter seg til Zapffe når det gjelder menneskets «tragiske» tilværelse. Han forsøker, med sin selvbiosofi, å granske seg selv objektivt og se på sitt liv *utenfra*, som en del av en totalitet. Dette vises allerede i maleriet på omslaget, som skildrer en uniformert Jakhelln som spiller på sin egen synsnerve som om den var en fiolin (fig. 1). Ideen bak bildet er at forfatteren betrakter seg selv utenfra gjennom det utskårne øyet, samtidig som han skaper kunst av det gjennom spillingen. På liknende biosofisk vis prøver han å granske én av forutsetningene for det tragiske

ved sin «skjebne», nemlig raseriet. Bruken av den selvbiosofiske metoden henger også sammen med valget av essayistikken framfor fiksjonsfri fiksjon; essayets utgreiende og reflekterende form åpner for en objektiv tilnærming til selvinnsikten.

Men fungerer den selvbiosofiske metoden i *Raseri*? Opp til en viss grad forsøker forfatteren å gjøre rede for sitt raseri på en mest mulig objektiv måte. Han bruker til og med fotnoteapparatet for å gi ordet til «Espan», en konsekvent kritisk stemme som setter Jakhellns påstander på prøve; pseudonymet skjuler den norske forfatteren og biografen Ivo de Figueiredo (Jakhelln 2011: 385). Videre underbygger Jakhelln sine argumenter med faglitteratur. Når han prøver å fortolke sine raseriutfall, bruker han Richard Dawkins's memeteori, og med dette identifiserer han et «Vikingvirus» (Jakhelln 2011: 50) som har infisert ham. Forfatteren viser til et studieopphold i Paris i 2004, da han, som «ung og velmenende intellektuell fra et av verdens rikeste land [...] tenkte på meg selv som god, på Norge som et godt land, og på nordmenn som et godt folk. [...] Memene jeg brakte fra Norge: En falsk medmenneskelighet, og en hyklersk humanisme» (2011: 55). Gjennom møtet med en av Europas mest flerkulturelle byer og oppholdet i innvandrerstroket 20. arrondissement, utviklet Jakhelln som «hvitig» en følelse av å være objekt for rasisme fra personer med ikke-vestlig bakgrunn. Som et resultat av dette begynte han det han kalte «en radikaliseringsprosess» (2011: 23) og skrev diverse blogginnlegg som grenset til fremmedfrykt. Raseri går igjen som begrep i disse innleggene. Syv år etter, mens han skriver på boka, ser han med ubehag på disse uttalelsene. Likevel innrømmer han at kultursjokket har gjort ham mer oppmerksom på egen kultur og identitet: Siden han flyttet til Berlin i 2007, har hans litterære og musikalske produksjon vært sterkt fokusert på den norrøne og den norske kulturarven.

Denne prosessen har imidlertid noen mørke sider, innser han i boka, som omfatter både hans raseri og hans ubehagelige tvil om selv å ha blitt fremmedfiendtlig. Her forsøker Jakhelln å analysere sitt eget hat, blant annet ved flere essays om svartmetall som «hatets egen musikk» (Jakhelln 2011: 102) og hvorvidt dette kan ha påvirket hans utvikling. Han tyr til Aristoteles for å forklare hatets rolle i denne musikk sjangeren:

Hatet kan betraktes som black metals effektive årsak (*causa efficiens*), mens sinnet er dens formale årsak (*causa formalis*). Black metal blir til i hat og lyder som raseri. [...] Der et raseriutbrudd er av kortere varighet, kreves det hat – i en eller annen sublimert form – for å kunne levere black metal. (Jakhelln 2011: 108)

I svartmetallmiljøet er raseriet sterkt knyttet til den kunstneriske skapelsesprosessen, og hatet, i *sublimert*, og dermed *kunstnerisk* form, blir utgangspunktet for det musikalske uttrykket. Jakhelln skriver om sin personlige utvikling og musikalske produksjon:

Ble jeg hjemsoekt og lamslått av svartmetallen fordi den gav meg en ny identitet? Ble min psykologiske tilstand som tidligere mobbeoffer [...] forsterket av black metal? [...] Et minne fra OL på Lillehammer i 1994, hvor jeg hadde hengt langs løypen og sett glimt av femmilrennet: På vei ned igjen så jeg på massene av folk i sneen, med ryggsekker og flagg og barn alle vegne. Jeg følte en dyp forakt for det jeg så på som en udifferensiert masse. (2011: 118)

Som tidligere nevnt understreker Jakhelln flere ganger at raseriet hans kun er blitt uttrykt i musikalsk form, og han påpeker også at svartmetall som «hatets musikk» ikke er politisk i utgangspunktet (2011: 107). Likevel innser han at radikaliseringsprosessen han har gjennomgått, blandet med hans musikalske raseri, kunne ha fått tragiske konsekvenser. Er han selv blitt en ekstremist? Jakhellns tvil om sin egen fremmedfiendtlighet når høydepunktet når han bestemmer seg for å ta en selvtest om hvorvidt han slutter seg til nazismen. Testen er basert på ca. 100 kjennetegn på den nazistiske ideologien som han henter fra Harald Ofstads bok *Vår forakt for svakhet* (1971). Jakhelln ender opp med fire og et halvt ja (dvs. punkter ved ideologien som han støtter) og 93 nei, og konkluderer med at han ikke er nazist. Det kvantitative resultatet ser ut til å tilfredsstillende ham: «[...] nå vet jeg hvor jeg står etter mitt personlige landssvikoppgjør. Jeg overlater til leseren å felle sin egen dom» (2011: 265).

Den siste setningen er verdt å merke seg, for leserens vurdering av denne og andre episoder kan være betydelig annerledes enn Jakhellns. Måten Jakhelln framstiller seg selv på i essayene er ofte mindre objektiv enn det den selvbiografiske metoden ville forutsette. Det er nemlig en annen dimensjon ved boka: dens posisjon som forfatterbiografi. Mye av det som står i *Raseri* handler ikke om Cornelius Jakhelln som individ, men om Cornelius Jakhelln som forfatter av musikk og skjønnlitteratur. Marianne Egeland stiller følgende spørsmål til forfatterbiografien som sjanger: «Hvordan skal biografien kunne fremstille et heller begivenhetsløst liv på en engasjerende måte? [...] Biografen [vil] uvegerlig få problemer med å knytte tette forbindelser mellom et alminnelig, borgerlig liv og et ekstraordinært verk» (2000: 109-110).

Hvordan forholder *Raseri* seg til dette spørsmålet? I denne sammenhengen spiller det ikke en stor rolle om produksjonen til Jakhelln er «et ekstraordinært verk» eller ikke; hans uklare posisjon i *Raseri* (forfatter av yrke, forfatter av boka, biosofisk essayist og objekt for disse essayene) åpner opp for andre innganger til teksten enn den rent objektive og selvbiografiske. For å forstå dette kan man introdusere et begrep som har vist seg å være særdeles produktivt i debatten om den biografiske vendingen, nemlig «performativ biografisme». Med dette begrepet identifiserer den danske forskeren Jon Helt Haarder «en subjektiv insisteren på retten til det private og til å optræde med det på kunstens egne betingelser. [...] Performativ biografisme innebærer, at biografiske opplysninger ikke hentes uten for teksten som angivelse

af tekstens kontekst eller oprindelse, men optræder som et æstetisk virkemiddel i teksten» (2005: 5). I likhet med fiksjonsfri fiksjon setter et performativt biografisk verk virkelige, ikke-fiktive elementer i sentrum. Men performativ biografisme postulerer i tillegg en *estetisk* rolle for de biografiske elementene, som opptrer på egne betingelser og ikke bare som elementer i plottet. I denne estetiske dimensjonen spiller det «performative» elementet en nøkkelrolle. Ifølge Haarder: «“Performativ” i begrepet performativ biografisme betoner for det første det singulære, begivenheden. [...] Det offentlige rum i almindelighed og massemedierne i særdeleshed kan fungere som en scene, hvorpå forfattere og andre kan lege med egen eller andres identitet. Der er et element af teatralitet eller iscenesættelse på færde» (2005: 6).

Jakhelln gjør en ganske utstrakt bruk av dette performativt (selv-)biografiske elementet; selviscenesettelsen, kombinert med bokas heterogene natur (essaysamling? forfatterbiografi? selvbiografi?) åpner opp for et interessant tilfelle av sjangerblanding (Haarder skriver bl.a. at performativ biografisme nettopp «udspiller seg i de blandede felter», 2005: 6). Vi har sett at Jakhelln ofte ikke er enig med seg selv, og at han lurar på om svartmetall ikke har gitt ham «en ny identitet» (2011: 118). I *Raseri* veksler Jakhelln mellom to fokaliseringsinstanser (og av og til to fortellerstemmer) som svarer til henholdsvis Cornelius Jakhelln og Sturmgeist; som sagt er sistnevnte også navnet på ett av bandene hans. Boka har til og med to innledninger, et «vorspiel à la Sturmgeist» og et «forord à la Cornelius Jakhelln». Men hvem er denne Sturmgeist? Jakhelln omtaler ham som «en parasitt som har infisert meg i snart et tiår» (2011: 23), altså helt siden radikaliseringsprosessen fant sted i Paris. Og videre: «Han bruker meg som vertsorganisme, og er en størrelse som muligens svarer til betegnelser som “min indre fascist”, “min indre kødd”, “min indre svinhund”» (2011: 23). Dette er et retorisk grep, også fordi Jakhelln og Sturmgeist har liknende utseende (tittelen på omslagsmaleriet er nettopp “Sturmgeist”). På sin litterære blogg opptrer forfatteren til og med med dobbelnavnet Cornelius Jakhelln/Sturmgeist (<<http://www.sturmgeist.no>>, 11/2014).

Bruken av Sturmgeist har ganske vesentlige konsekvenser for *Raseri*, særlig når det gjelder Jakhellns tendens til å være i strid med sine egne meninger. Ved å hoppe inn og ut av kroppen (og fortellerstemmen) til Jakhelln, kan Sturmgeist si alt som Jakhelln ikke tør si og som grenser til det politisk ukorrekte. Som retorisk element blir Sturmgeist en slags buffer, et panser som forfatteren kan bruke til å fremme sine poeng uten å bli spist opp av tvilen om sin egen radikaliserings og/eller av selvsensur. Nettopp behovet for å unngå selvsensur er tett forbundet med bokas formål, som Jakhelln skriver i forordet: «Når jeg velger å offentliggjøre disse tekstene, så skjer det også fordi jeg ønsker svar på følgende spørsmål: Er jeg borger i et samfunn som tillater radikal tenkning og åpenhet i spørsmål om

ytringsfrihet? Hvor stor aksept, enn si respekt, har dette samfunnet for avvikende tenkning i identitetsspørsmålet?» (2011: 25). Dette åpner for mange litterære muligheter som jeg ikke har plass til å omtale innenfor rammene for denne artikkelen. Jeg vil derfor begrense meg til et godt og et problematisk eksempel.

Det gode eksemplet er en modig kronikk med tittel *Æren og demokratiet*, som Jakhelln skrev for «Morgenbladet» kort etter terrorangrepet på Utøya 22. juli 2011. I kronikken, som er gjenoptrykt i boka, bryter Jakhelln med slagordene til statsminister Jens Stoltenberg om å møte terror med mer toleranse og mer demokrati. I kronikken skriver Jakhelln at han tar Breiviks «raseri» mot det moderne flerkulturelle samfunnet «på alvor» (2011: 221), fordi han selv har følt det under sin radikaliseringsprosess (2011: 223). I motsetning til Breivik, som han uttrykker sterk avsky for, forsto han at det kunne ha alvorlige konsekvenser både for hans egen mentale helse og for andre, og klarte å redde seg selv ved «å uttrykke sinnet i ord og lyd» (2011: 224), dvs. gjennom bandet *Sturmgeist*. Jakhelln knytter begrepet «ære» til diskursen om det nye, flerkulturelle Norge:

Det som en gang var en homogen befolkning, er blitt flerfoldig i sin sammensetning. Utviklingen er irreversibel. Våre forfedres Norge er borte for alltid. Der ligger et dypt savn, men også store muligheter det kan være vanskelig å få øye på for enkelte. Vi er mange som sliter med å finne vårt rettmessige hjem i det ensrettede samfunnet de kaller Det nye Norge. [...] Per i dag stikker offentligheten fingrene i ørene for enhver som understreker sitt norske opphav. [...] I mørke øyeblikk har jeg tenkt at min ære er blitt trakkert på. (2011: 222)

Jakhellns argumentasjon er ikke ensidig nostalgisk (han peker på at integreringsprosessen byr på muligheter), og den setter fingeren på et aktuelt problem i nåtidens debattklima i Norge, nemlig stigmatiseringen av de som uttrykker stolthet over sin norske identitet og etnisitet¹. Som Jakhelln fortsetter:

[Jeg har tenkt] at det offisielle Norge aller helst ville ha utslettet stoltheten jeg føler over min egen identitet. I mai 1814 uttalte admiral Jens Schow Fabricius disse ordene på Eidsvoll: «Enige og tro til Dovre faller». Jeg vil gjerne være enig med og tro mot min tippipoldefar admiralen og mot Norge, men gudene skal vite at jeg har slitt med motivasjonen i et tiår. (2011: 222)

¹ En side ved dette problemet er forholdet til fortiden og spesielt til den norrøne kulturarven, som Jakhelln har vært inspirert av helt siden Paris-perioden. Som en konsekvens av nazistenes appropriasjon av norrøne symboler, blir den førkristne kulturarven fortsatt møtt med skepsis i den norske offentligheten. Jf. Bringsværd 2002: 328, der forfatteren appellerer om å gjenoppta disse symbolene i offentligheten og dermed unngå å overlate dem til de høyreekstremer.

Jakhellns posisjon kan virke kompromissløs og ubehagelig, men i de store linjene er diskursen fokusert og poengtert; Jakhelln holder hodet kaldt og fokuserer på selve opphavet til 22. juli-tragedien, noe mange hadde en tendens til å glemme i de sørgelige dagene etter hendelsen. Spesielt bekymret er han for det han kaller «kommentarfeltfascistene», altså «tikkende bomber» eller potensielle Breivik-er, som han ofte vender seg direkte til i kronikken. «Problemet er at de åpenbart lenge har følt seg marginalisert i Jens Stoltenbergs demokrati. De [...] føler at det ikke er plass til deres meninger i samfunnet de arbeider for og betaler skatt til» (2011: 223). Imidlertid argumenterer Jakhelln for at ytringsfrihet ikke bør hindres på grunn av frykt for slike tikkende bomber:

Jeg opplever at mediene og ekspertene de bruker i kjølvannet av den 22. juli, begår en feil: I stedet for å praktisere mer demokrati, slik statsministeren formulerte det, vil de legge lokk på diskusjonen av gjerningsmannens motiver og skriftet han har utgitt. [...] At de forholder seg pedagogisk til oss som borgere, gjør meg rasende. Som om ikke vi kan danne oss vår egen mening; som om vi ikke er i stand til å tenke selvstendig. (2011: 222-223)

Til slutt trekker han inn sine erfaringer fra Paris og opptøyene som fulgte i forstedene i 2005, og trekker en parallell mellom de norske, fremmedfiendtlige «tikkende bombene» og andre generasjons innvandrerungdommer: «I Det nye Norge er det ingen som kan fange opp de unge trærne som vakler i skogen. Vi har ingen subkultur å by dem, som er mer attraktiv enn militant religion, jihad eller kontrajihad» (2011: 225). Han konkluderer med en appell til de «tikkende bombene»:

Å overvinne seg selv og ens egne problemer krever større styrke enn å skyte uskyldige tenåringer. [...] Det finnes folk der ute som kan hjelpe deg. De kalles psykologer og psykiatere, og er reddere for deg enn du er for dem. Nå bør Norge sørge for at de som trenger oppfølging, får det umiddelbart. (2011: 229)

Selv om kronikken er signert Cornelius Jakhelln og han ikke viser direkte til Sturmgeist, skimter man denne fokaliseringsinstansen mellom linjene i kronikken. Sturmgeists kompromissløse vesen gir fortellerstemmen mulighet til å uttrykke ting som forfatteren anså som nødvendige å skrive på det tidspunktet, selv om det norske folk fortsatt var i sjokk og sto fast ved slagordene om toleranse og demokrati. Åpningen til radikal tenkning gjør det mulig for Jakhelln – desinifisert av Sturmgeist mot slutten av kronikken – til å betrakte både 22. juli og dets opphav med kaldt hode. Lest i ettertid er denne kronikken et betydelig bidrag til den tidlige debatten om 22. juli, og jeg tror ikke at det hadde vært like radikalt og poengtert om Sturmgeist ikke hadde vært en del av Jakhellns skrivevirksomhet.

På den annen side har leken med det politisk ukorrekte noen bivirkninger, som nok en gang trekker inn Sturmgeist. I 2010 grunnla Jakhelln Third Rebel, «en litterær og musikalsk tankesmie med militær struktur» (Jakhelln 2011: 185), som et ledd i den såkalte Art Militia, en internasjonal kunstnergruppe organisert på paramilitær basis. På nettsiden til Third Rebel står «Major Sturmgeist» oppført som leder (<<http://thirdrebel.blogspot.no/p/about.html>>, 11/2014), og han opptrer med den samme uniformen som vises på omslaget til *Raseri*. Under mottoet «si vis artem, para bellum» forklarer Art Militia sitt kunstneriske syn på følgende måte:

In the struggle to define and operate in a separate territory, the militia takes itself all too seriously – volunteers are not actors, uniforms are more than mere appearance. The project can be described as a social sculpture in a very limited format, an attempt to transplant the mechanics of a very particular social realm into the world of art – juxtaposing elements generally considered mutually exclusive. In this impossible balancing act military method becomes a tool for making art, and *esprit de corps* an aesthetic goal. (<<http://www.artmilitia.org/art-militia.aspx>>, 11/2014)

Den tilsynelatende mangelen på selvironi og flørtingen med militær estetikk er ikke helt problemfrie, særlig fordi insigniene for Art Militia likner på Waffen-SS sine, og noen har hevdet at eikløvet på dem rett og slett er SS-inspirert (<<http://www.artmilitia.org/art-militia.aspx>>, 11/2014). I en ganske heftig debatt i Third Rebels e-postliste forklarer Jakhelln seg slik:

I admit that I also was a bit shocked by discovering that the SS used oak leaf insignia – I thought mainly they consisted of the SS runes. Nevertheless, I persist in using the Art Militia insignia as I think they look awesome – as aesthetic objects – in a rather minimal way. I have (mostly) had it with blood and skulls, but wish to preserve the subversive attitude of black metal. (2011: 195. Debatten er gjengitt i sin helhet i Jakhelln 2012: 128-134)

Man kan bare spekulere på om Jakhelln/Sturmgeist virkelig ikke hadde noen anelse om insignienes konnotasjon, eller om det ligger et bevisst ønske om å provosere bak det hele. Uansett, når han likevel vil fortsette å bruke dem, viser han et karakteristisk kjennetegn ved svartmetallmiljøet, som han uttrykker sin tilknytning til i forklaringen. Den britiske sosiologen Keith Kahn-Harris har kalt denne attityden «reflexive anti-reflexivity», eller «knowing better but pretending not to know» (2007: 145).

Reflexive anti-reflexivity allows members to draw on almost any image or discourse within the scene, however offensive it may be to some members, while at the same time allowing them to “back away” from the full implications of their actions. It may be that much of the racist, sexist and homophobic discourse within the scene is not entirely ‘serious’. (Kahn-Harris 2007: 151)

Når det gjelder referanser til totalitære ideologier, kan «reflexive anti-reflexivity» brukes «in order to maximize the transgressive potential of racist [eller nazistisk, fascistisk, osv.] discourse, without becoming irrevocably enmeshed in outright fascist activity» (Kahn-Harris 2007: 152-153). Jeg er overbevist at dette er tilfelle også for Jakhellns bruk av nazistisk konnoterte symboler. Som han forklarer i *Raseri*:

Så hvorfor i helvete gjør jeg det? Kanskje fordi jeg vet at det blir bråk. [...] Kanskje fordi jeg vil tro at friheten i kunsten er absolutt. Kanskje fordi jeg sliter med å finne min plass i en offentlighet som sier at (bortimot) alt av ytringer er tillatt, men som ikke nøler med regelrette karakterdrap på den som krysser den usynlige grensen. (2011: 196-197)

Det må bli opp til den enkelte å bestemme om slike kunstneriske argumentasjoner (eller provokasjoner?) kan godtas. Som Kahn-Harris påpeker, blir det vanskelig å utelukke krenkelsespotensialet for slike visuelle ytringer, men samtidig har den underliggende ironien i «reflexive anti-reflexivity» hindret at høyreekstremismen har tatt over svartmetallmiljøet (2007: 155). Jakhelln selv ser ikke ut til å være sikker på at hans provoserende ytringer, både skriftlige, musikalske og visuelle, er et godt valg: «jeg lurer fortsatt på om jeg er den bortskjemte gutten som skuslet bort en stor sjanse» (2011: 198). Som andre steder i boka viser han at han ikke er helt enig med seg selv.

Det er mulig at nettopp denne uenigheten med seg selv, som gjenspeiler fordoblingen Jakhelln/Sturmgeist, ødelegger for bokas objektivitet, og at *Raseri* dermed svikter som selvbiografi. Men på den annen side åpner det performativt biografiske elementet, som nettopp understrekes av denne fordoblingen, for refleksjoner og ytringer som hadde vært svært vanskelig innenfor rammene for selvbiografisk essayistikk. Man kan gjerne være uenig med Jakhellns mange kompromissløse meninger, men han forblir en av de få i Norge som har turt å reise slike problemstillinger på en reflektert måte og uten å ende opp i fremmedfiendtlig vås. Slik sett viser *Raseri* at den biografiske vendingen, med sin tendens til sjangeroverskridning, også har potensial for en mer nyansert og problematisert betraktning av et samfunn i endring, og at poengterte diskusjoner om det nasjonale traumat fra 2011, også med utgangspunkt i selvinnsikten, er noe den norske offentligheten fortsatt har behov for.

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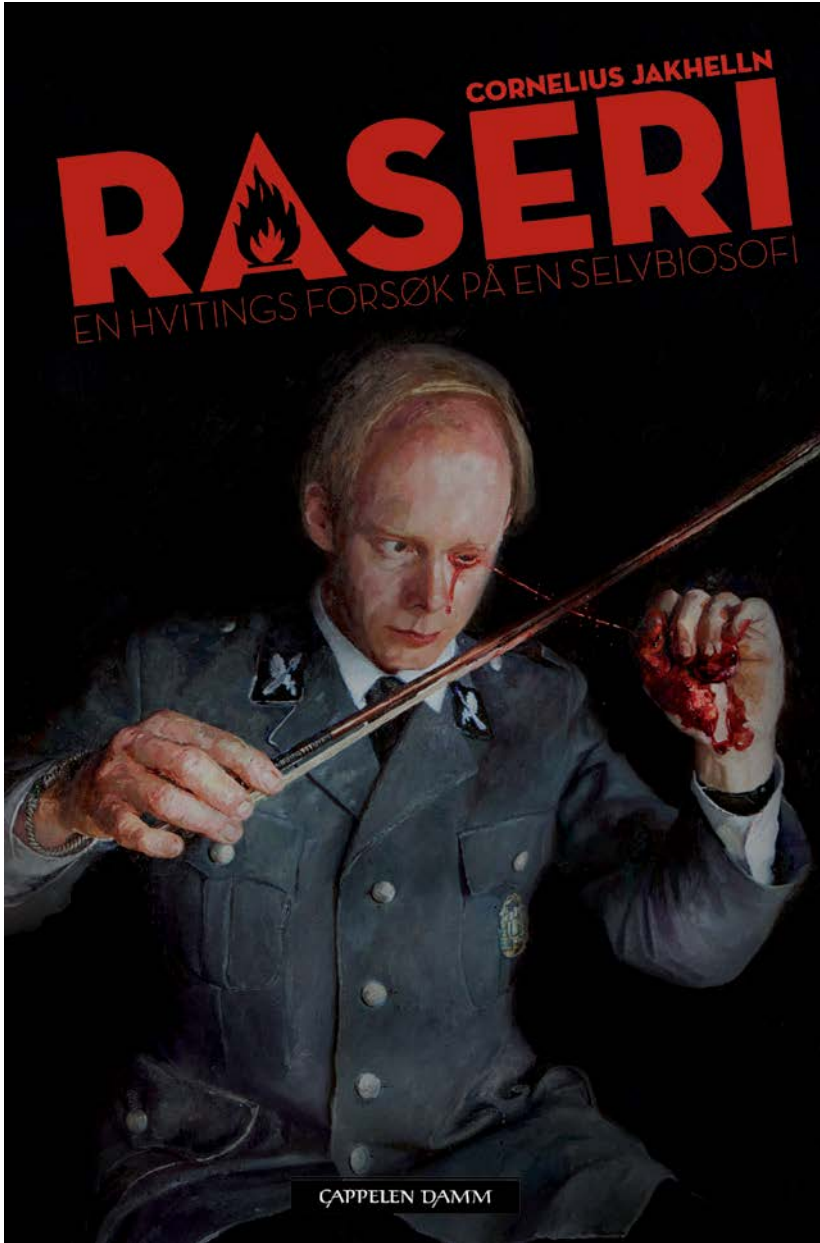


Fig. 1 - Cornelius Jakhelln, *Raseri* (2011), Cover Picture. Courtesy of Cappelen Damm

TOMAS TRANSTRÖMER
TRA AUTOBIOGRAFIA POETICA E POESIA AUTOBIOGRAFICA

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Mi concentrerò qui sulle problematiche relative ad alcuni testi autobiografici di Tomas Tranströmer. Illustrerò questioni di tipo formale e contenutistico relative in parte alla sua cosiddetta autobiografia, *Minnena ser mig* (Tranströmer 2012: 433-477; *I ricordi mi guardano*, trad. di Tiozzo 2011a), in parte concernenti altri scritti, che ho ricevuto recentemente da Tranströmer stesso. Si tratta di inediti, tra i quali ho scelto di analizzare uno dei manoscritti preparatori al primo capitolo di *Minnena ser mig*, intitolato *Minnen* (Ricordi), poiché contiene interessanti elementi autobiografici, illuminanti nei riguardi della sua poetica.

Minnena ser mig, letteralmente «I ricordi mi vedono», è un piccolo libro dal contenuto autobiografico, pubblicato da Tomas Tranströmer nel 1993, quando già era stato colpito dall'invalidante malattia che gli impedisce da più di vent'anni di parlare e di esprimersi in enunciati lunghi e complessi. Il frammento e l'immagine potente e fugace, da sempre suoi mezzi espressivi privilegiati, sono stati nel suo stato afasico ancora più affinati ed elaborati sino a raggiungere le vette della poesia *haiku* in *Den stora gåtan* del 2004 (2012: 377-431; *Il grande mistero*, trad. di Lombardi 2011b). Oggi, negli incontri personali, Tranströmer si esprime a gesti, cerca immagini e frammenti di testi, indica parole e lemmi su dizionari ed enciclopedie per spiegare il suo universo¹. Mette materialmente insieme ritagli di giornale, biglietti, annotazioni, discorsi in occasione di cerimonie: ne possiedo alcuni che, insieme alla moglie Monica, mi ha personalmente affidato e che avrebbero dovuto far parte di una sua seconda autobiografia.

Come Jakob Paludan e, recentemente, Lars Norén, Tranströmer pensava di pubblicare non una, ma più autobiografie. Ora dona la sua documentazione occasionalmente a noi traduttori e studiosi per continuare

¹ Tomas Tranströmer è morto a Stoccolma il 26 marzo 2015, lasciando un grande vuoto nel mondo letterario internazionale per il quale, nonostante fosse afflitto da una dolorosa malattia da oltre venti anni, continuava a essere essenziale punto di riferimento e illuminante guida intellettuale.

a costruire il mosaico della sua opera e della sua vita. Oppure li presenta in allestimenti di mostre, come quella allestita alla Nobelhuset di Stoccolma, inaugurata nel maggio 2013, dove manoscritti, edizioni preziose e collezioni di insetti della sua infanzia erano posti gli uni accanto agli altri.

Il costante dialogo di contenuti e forme che percepiamo immediatamente tra un testo e l'altro di questo autore – testi che ritroviamo ampliati o ridotti, trasformati in altri generi, nelle varie fasi della sua produzione – ci indica nell'intertestualità la via giusta da percorrere nell'esame delle sue opere. Mostrerò quindi come in questa prosa si ritrovino, seppur variate e corredate da elementi cronologicamente e spazialmente maggiormente vincolanti, tematiche espresse nella sua poesia in associazioni più libere e prive di limiti temporali o spaziali: un procedimento in cui si registra chiaramente l'intenzione autoriale di ordinare e rappresentare le fasi, da Tranströmer ritenute cruciali, della formazione della sua identità: infanzia e adolescenza.

Inoltre, dall'analisi di varianti redazionali autografe manoscritte (in parte dattiloscritte) di brani di *Minnena ser mig* – avute dallo stesso Tranströmer – e dal confronto con la versione definitiva a stampa, si delinea il metodo letterario alla base della genesi di questo testo. Si vedrà al contempo quanto il margine tra fiction e realtà sia labile e sfumato e impossibile da definire con esattezza: aspetto, questo, legato alla definizione del genere autobiografia.

Volendo inquadrare dunque *Minnena ser mig*, occorre fare alcune considerazioni sul problema dell'autobiografia come genere o piuttosto come 'non genere', se si seguono le argomentazioni di studiosi come Paul de Man (1984: 68).

Come fa notare Annegret Heitmann (1991: 144-147), il dibattito sul concetto di genere – nonostante i tentativi del poststrutturalismo di eliminarlo in quanto fondamento essenziale per il giudizio su un'opera letteraria – è rimasto acceso, concentrandosi sovente proprio sull'autobiografia. Menziono qui una serie di studiosi, quali Marc Eli Blanchard (1982), Philippe Lejeune (1977), Porter Abbott (1988), Robert Alter (1975), Johnny Kondrup (1982, 1991), Sidonie Smith e Julia Watson (2001), che ne affermano le ragioni di essere, sebbene Marc Eli Blanchard ritenga una questione di non facile soluzione stabilire i limiti tra le definizioni di romanzo autobiografico e memorie (1982: 105-106), aspetto che anche la definizione di Lejeune mette in luce, data la peculiare coincidenza, che viene a verificarvisi, tra autore, narratore e protagonista dell'opera (Lejeune 1977: 343). Studiose come Astrid Jensen e Jytte Jonker (1978: 103-135) hanno cercato di distinguere tra memorie e autobiografia, pur vedendone la forte correlazione, considerando le prime più tese alla rappresentazione del sé, dell'interiorità del soggetto, la seconda più volta a delineare il corso di una vita. E aggiungono anche che entrambe sono comunque caratterizzate da un racconto veritiero desunto dalla realtà: elemento molto difficile da stabilire se si tratta di ricostruire vicende intime o comunque molto personali, come nel nostro caso.

Sempre Astrid Jensen e Jytte Jonker (1978: 110) sostengono che è il prologo, l'inizio, a manipolare il lettore, facendogli credere che il testo che segue sia un'autobiografia, memorie raccontate in modo fedele e aderenti alla realtà. Dunque si baserebbe su un'illusione, elemento che induce il già citato Paul de Man a dichiararne la morte in quanto genere, proprio per l'inconciliabilità di una risoluzione convincente tra fiction e realtà².

Tzvetan Todorov descrive l'evoluzione dell'autobiografia nel corso del XX secolo, notando come sempre più essa sconfini nella digressione, evolvendo continuamente verso nuove forme poiché: «[...] un text n'est pas seulement le produit d'une combinatoire préexistante [...], il est aussi une transformation de cette combinatoire» (Todorov 1970: 11; [...] un testo non è soltanto il prodotto di una combinazione preesistente [...], è anche una trasformazione di questa combinazione)³. Vi si percepisce una decostruzione del principio di identità, indicando la continua tensione tra soggettività e oggettività.

Con autobiografie come quella di Nabokov *Speak, Memory* (1967; *Parla, ricordo*, trad. di Ragni 2010) la forma cronologica diacronica viene sostituita da impressioni, scene, ricordi, immagini. Abbiamo anche gli esempi di Walter Benjamin, con *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* (1966; *Infanzia berlinese*, trad. di Bertolini Peruzzi 1973), e di Lillian Hellman, con *An Unfinished Woman* (1969; *Una donna incompiuta*, trad. di Campioli 1983)⁴.

Si tratta di una tipologia frammentaria e non lineare, secondo la distinzione operata da Georges Gusdorf tra autobiografie dei politici, che mirano a descrivere la parte che essi hanno avuto negli avvenimenti storici e politici, senza toccare il sé, l'io profondo, e quelle che invece descrivono processi interiori costituendo una sorta di via alla comprensione di sé, nella quale tuttavia non è possibile distinguere tra verità o fiction (1956: 113), come nel caso di Tranströmer⁵.

² L'autobiografia, come genere fortemente incentrato sull'individuo, si è notevolmente sviluppata e diffusa in concomitanza con l'ascesa della borghesia; non è stata abbandonata dal modernismo che l'ha invece trasformata, arricchendola e dando vita ad interessanti espressioni letterarie. La ricerca sull'autobiografia viene convenzionalmente fatta partire da Georg Misch, allievo di Wilhelm Dilthey, che, a partire dal 1907, pubblicò la sua *Geschichte der Autobiographie* in otto volumi.

³ La traduzione è mia ove non altrimenti specificato.

⁴ L'esempio più estremo della crisi del concetto di identità è rappresentato dall'opera di Gertrude Stein *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 1933 (*Autobiografia di Alice Toklas*, trad. di Pavese 1938). In altri casi si nota una frammentazione dell'io, come in Peter Weiss, *Abschied von den Eltern*, 1964 (*Congedo dai genitori*, trad. di Manacorda 1965), o la trasformazione del soggetto in lingua come in Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, 1977 (*Frammenti di un discorso amoroso*, trad. di Guidieri 1979).

⁵ Si pensi allo *erindringsroman* (coltivato da August Strindberg e da Karen Blixen, ad esempio), dove chiaro è il rapporto tra l'io di ora e l'io di allora, secondo un principio di selezione facilmente ripercorribile.

La frammentarietà tipica del discorso poetico di Tomas Tranströmer caratterizza anche la sua autobiografia *Minnena ser mig*, ma il tentativo non è quello di riprodurre nell'immediato l'istante del ricordo che riaffiora, la folgorazione, l'illuminazione fugace. Questo ruolo è affidato da Tranströmer alla poesia, come appare dall'omonimo testo della raccolta *Det vilda torget* (La piazza selvaggia) del 1983, un esempio eloquente della sua esperienza dei ricordi più significativi, dove è l'io che viene agito dai ricordi:

Minnena ser mig

En junimorgon då det är för tidigt
att vakna men för sent att somna om.

Jag måste se ut i grönskan som är fullsatt
av minnen, och de följer mig med blicken.

De syns inte, de smälter helt ihop
med bakgrunden, perfekta kamaleonter.

De är så nära att jag hör dem andas
fast fågelsången är bedövande.
(Tranströmer 2012: 279)

Iricordi mi vedono

Un mattino di giugno, troppo presto
per svegliarsi, troppo tardi per riprendere sonno.

Devo uscire nel verde gremito
di ricordi, e mi seguono con lo sguardo.

Non si vedono, si fondono totalmente
con lo sfondo, camaleonti perfetti.

Così vicini che li sento respirare
benché il canto degli uccelli sia assordante.
(Trad. di Lombardi; Tranströmer 2011c: 133)

Vi si riporta un'esperienza quasi di trance, uno stato semicosciente, tra il sonno e la veglia, in cui riemergono elementi dimenticati, oscurati dalla luce della vita quotidiana. Sono «camaleonti perfetti», è difficile distinguerli; ma solo ora, in quel peculiare stato semicosciente, l'io riesce ad avvertirli con tutti i suoi sensi in un universo misterioso e vivo, e tuttavia per la maggior parte del tempo invisibile. Il testo descrive una compresenza di tempi, una dimensione dove i confini temporali non esistono più e le barriere sono cadute.

Nella prosa dell'autobiografia, questo movimento centrifugo, di apertura dell'io, che si percepisce in molti testi poetici di Tomas Tranströmer, è in qualche modo riequilibrato da una forza contraria. Vi si registra un chiaro tentativo di ordinare le esperienze, anche quelle interiori, innanzitutto cronologicamente – al fine di ricostruire un'identità: si parte dalla primissima infanzia, seguono gli anni della scuola elementare e l'adolescenza. Anche tematicamente vi si individuano (attraverso le intitolazioni dei capitoli che ce li indicano) i nuclei fondanti della sua personalità umana e poetica. Il principio ordinatore si fa portatore del progetto testuale, esprimendo giudizi guida: non si racconta tutta la vita, ma se ne selezionano gli snodi essenziali, secondo principi esplicitati dai titoli dei capitoli: *Minnen* (Ricordi), *Museer* (Musei), *Folkskola* (Scuola elementare), *Kriget* (La guerra), *Bibliotek* (Biblioteca),

Realskola (Ginnasio), *Exorcism* (Esorcismo), *Latin* (Latino). Il testo si interrompe con i quindici anni del protagonista: nella convinzione che, a questo punto, l'io sia formato.

Dunque troviamo presenti nel nostro testo due grandezze formali tipiche di certe autobiografie: il principio selettivo e la struttura cronologica.

Fin dalle due parole che ne segnano l'inizio, esso è fortemente connotato dalla presenza di un io ordinatore: «Mitt liv» (2012: 435; *La mia vita*)⁶. L'aggettivo possessivo indica in modo chiaro e deciso al destinatario del testo la categoria dell'appartenenza, contrastando con la sfumata pluralità del titolo del paragrafo *Minnen* (Ricordi), e di quello dell'intera opera «I ricordi mi vedono» (*sic*). Il soggetto si riappropria di questi frammenti per dare loro un senso: hanno prodotto la sua vita. Ce lo comunica subito con il lapidario periodo senza verbo, costituito da due elementi di grande forza espressiva, cui seguono altre tre frasi brevi che proiettano il sé nell'universo:

När jag tänker de ordens er jag framför mig en ljusstrimma. Vid närmare betraktande har ljusstrimman formen av en komet med huvud och svans. Den ljusstarkaste ändan, huvudet, är barndomen och uppväxten. Kärnan, dess allra tätaste del, är den mycket tidiga barndomen där de viktigaste dragen av vårt liv bestäms. (Tranströmer 2012: 435)

Quando penso a queste parole vedo davanti a me una striscia di luce. A guardarla più da vicino, la striscia di luce ha la forma di una cometa con testa e coda. L'estremità più luminosa, la testa, è l'infanzia e l'adolescenza. Il nucleo, la parte più densa di tutte, è la primissima infanzia dove si decidono i tratti più importanti della nostra vita.

La metafora della cometa indica dunque la sua vita, della quale dapprima scorge una striscia luminosa, poi la testa, la coda. E si afferma: «Jag är nu långt ute i kometsvansen, jag är sextio år när jag skriver detta» (2012: 435; Ora sono lontanissimo, nella coda della cometa, ho sessant'anni mentre scrivo questo).

Il soggetto colloca se stesso ora nella parte più rarefatta, con meno esperienze significative. L'io ha iniziato un processo di raccolta di dati, osserva la sua vita da una posizione meno luminosa cercando di scorgerne i tratti fondamentali, consapevole che il loro nucleo primario è nella testa. Ma questi si vedono poco, sono lontani: «Jag försöker minnas, jag försöker tränga fram dit. Men det är svårt att röra sig i dessa förtätade regioner, det är farligt, det är som om jag skulle komma nära döden» (2012: 435; Cerco di ricordare, cerco di spingermi fin lì. Ma è difficile muoversi in queste regioni addensate, è pericoloso, è come se mi avvicinassi alla morte).

⁶ Sebbene esista una traduzione italiana, la traduzione dei brani relativi a questa opera, qui e di seguito, è mia.

Una prosa densa di immagini, metafore, un linguaggio cadenzato e musicale, ricco di ripetizioni, assonanze, allitterazioni, pause di silenzio.

Sappiamo quanto sia importante il silenzio per Tranströmer, tanto quanto la musica. Gli attimi di silenzio, le pause nella musica sono celebrate in *Kort paus i orgelkonserten* (Tranströmer 2012: 275; *Breve pausa nel concerto d'organo*, trad. di Lombardi, Tranströmer 2011c: 127-129), una delle sue poesie più significative.

Superfluo far notare quanto questa prosa tenda fortemente alla poesia. Se la suddividessimo in versi, funzionerebbe perfettamente come testo poetico. Del resto, gli sconfinamenti tra prosa e verso in Tomas Tranströmer sono continui. Assai labile appare il confine tra i suoi testi poetici dai versi più lunghi, come *Näktergalen i Badelunda* (*L'usignolo di Badelunda*), replica allo strindberghiano *Näktergalen i Wittenberg* (Strindberg 1988; *L'usignolo di Wittenberg*) e *Det blå huset* (*La casa blu*):

Näktergalen i Badelunda

I den gröna midnatten vid näktergalens nordgräns.
Tunga löv hänger i trance, de döva bilarna rusar mot
neonlinjen. Näktergalens röst stiger inte åt sidan, den
är lika genomträngande som en tupps galande, men
skön och utan fåfänga. Jag var i fångelse och den besökte mig.

Jag märkte den inte då, men nu. Tiden strömmar ned
från solen och månen och alla tick tack tick tack-
samma klockor. Men just här finns ingen tid. Bara
näktergalens röst, de råa klingande tonerna som slipar
natthimlens ljusa lie.

(Tranströmer 2012: 319)

L'usignolo di Badelunda

Nella verde mezzanotte al confine nord dell'usignolo.
Pesanti foglie pendono in trance, le auto sorde si precipitano
contro la linea di luce al neon. La voce dell'usignolo non si trae in disparte,
è penetrante come il canto del gallo, bella e senza superbia.
Mi fece visita in prigione.

Allora non la notai, solo ora la noto.

Il tempo fluisce dal sole e dalla luna e scorre dentro ogni tic tac
degli orologi riconoscenti. Ma qui il tempo non c'è. Soltanto
la voce dell'usignolo: i crudi toni squillanti che affilano la luminosa
falce del cielo notturno.

(Trad. di Lombardi; Tranströmer 2011c: 165)

Det blå huset

Det är en natt med strålände ljus. Jag står i den tätå skogen och ser bort mot mitt hus med sina disblå väggar. Som om jag vore nyligen död och såg huset från en ny vinkel.

Det har stått mer än åtti sommar. Dess trä är impregnerat med fyra gånger glädje och tre gånger sorg. När någon som bott i huset dör målas det om. Den döda personen målar själv, utan pensel, inifrån. [...] Stillastående brottsjöar av ogrås, pagoder av ogrås, framvällande text, upanishader av ogrås, en vikingaflotta av ogrås, drakhuvuden, lansar, ett ogråsimperium! (Tranströmer 2012: 288)

La casa blu

È una notte di sole splendente. Sono nel fitto del bosco e guardo lontano verso la mia casa dalle pareti azzurrine. Come se fossi appena morto e vedessi la casa in una luce nuova.

È in piedi da più di ottanta estati. Il legno è impregnato quattro volte di gioia e tre volte di dolore. Quando qualcuno che vi è vissuto muore, viene ridipinta. Il morto stesso la pittura, senza pennello, dall'interno.

[...] Immobili ondate di erbacce, pagode di erbacce, il testo fluente, upanishad di erbacce, una flotta vichinga di erbacce, teste di drago, lance, un impero di erbacce! (Trad. di Lombardi; Tranströmer 2011c: 139)

Tornando all'inizio dell'autobiografia, è alla luce di queste affermazioni guida, così solenni e cariche di significati, che l'autore chiama il lettore a leggere quanto segue. Non è un prologo ragionato, tradizionalmente concepito: pensiamo ai prologhi di autobiografie come quella della nobildonna svedese del Seicento Agneta Horn, figlia del generale Gustav Horn e nipote del cancelliere Axel Oxenstierna (Horn 1959: 10). Tuttavia ci fornisce una chiave di lettura che ha in parte le sue radici nella professione di Tomas Tranströmer, psicologo (oltretutto di carceri minori). L'abitudine a lavorare e a manipolare i sogni, i ricordi sfumati dell'infanzia, senza dubbio ha contribuito all'organizzazione del testo autobiografico. Non sappiamo se quanto si racconta corrisponda a realtà, ma l'aspettativa del destinatario del testo è un'aspettativa di verità – che però è soggettiva. Ed è l'autore stesso il destinatario ultimo del suo testo.

L'impossibilità di stabilire esattamente che cosa sia realtà e cosa fiction quando si ricostruisce un'esperienza personale attraverso momenti interiori, come nota anche Gusdorf (1956: 107), in *Minnena ser mig* è accentuata dall'ambiguità insita del linguaggio ricco di metafore (la cometa dell'inizio è paradigmatica), dunque improntato alla doppiatezza che caratterizza queste figure retoriche. Tuttavia, per quanto sia difficile dipanare nel ricordo l'esperienza interiore dal fatto, la disamina di una variante manoscritta, stesura precedente di un brano del capitolo *Minnen*, che si trova tra le carte donatemi da Tranströmer, prova che l'autore modifica i dati della realtà.

La variante che chiameremo B coincide con la versione a stampa, e recita: «Morfar, Carl Helmer Westerberg, föddes 1860. Han var lots och min mycket nära vän, 71 år äldre än jag. Egendomligt nog hade han samma åldersrelation till sin egen morfar, som således var född 1789: Bastiljen stormades [...]» (Tranströmer 2012: 436; Il nonno, Carl Helmer

Westerberg, nacque nel 1860. Era pilota e mio grandissimo amico, più grande di me di 71 anni. È strano che ci fosse la stessa differenza di età tra lui e suo nonno, che era quindi nato nel 1789: presa della Bastiglia [...]).

Nel testo manoscritto di seguito riportato (del quale abbiamo deciso di mantenere in traduzione le parti barrate), che chiameremo variante A e costituiva la versione precedente, possiamo leggere:

Morfar, Carl Helmer Westerberg föddes 1860. Han växte upp i byn Gatan på Rummarö och gick i skolan 3 månader varje år under vinter 5 år under perioden 1867-72⁷. Han gick till sjöss och kom så långt som til Portugal.

Detta var för att kunna bli lots som sin far [...] gick i arv i skärgårn [...]. Några år efter det han pensionerades föddes jag. Han blev min bästa vän under 30-talet. Det är egendomligt att tänka sig att en av mina vänner var så gammal. Hade han, som jag, haft en god vän som var 71 år äldre hade denna äldste vän varit född 1789 när franska revolutionen samma år franska revolutionen startade och flera år innan Anckarströms kula [corretto con 'skrotsalva'] gjorde slut på Gustav III. Det är alltså fråga om långa kliv. Vilken lång kabel som går genom historien! (Tomas Tranströmers handskrifter).

Il nonno, Carl Helmer Westerberg, nacque nel 1860. Crebbe nel villaggio di Gatan sull'isola di Rummarö e andò a scuola per tre mesi d'inverno ogni anno per cinque anni nel periodo 1867-72*.

Andò per mare e arrivò fino in Portogallo. Questo per divenire pilota come suo padre [...] ereditò i viaggi nell'arcipelago [...]. Alcuni anni dopo che fu andato in pensione, nacqui io. Divenne il mio migliore amico negli anni '30. È curioso pensare che un mio amico fosse così vecchio. Se lui avesse avuto, come me, un amico di 71 anni più vecchio di lui, questo amico più anziano sarebbe nato nel 1789, quando la Rivoluzione francese lo stesso anno in cui era scoppiata la Rivoluzione francese e parecchi anni prima che la pallottola di Anckarström mettesse fine alla vita di Gustavo III. Si tratta quindi di lunghi passi. Che lungo cavo passa attraverso la storia!

Riflettendo sulla genesi del testo, possiamo facilmente notare l'eliminazione di dati, di informazioni, di dettagli, come un aspetto essenziale del processo creativo di Tranströmer anche nella prosa e, dunque, una forte tendenza alla concisione che per l'autore è l'essenza stessa del linguaggio poetico. Ma l'elemento che più ci interessa è che quanto afferma nella versione finale non corrisponde alla realtà: l'autore passa, nella variante B, dalla sfera della similitudine della variante A (se lui avesse avuto un amico di 71 anni più vecchio di lui, sarebbe nato nel 1789 ecc.) al metodo metaforico, con cui si afferma l'identità di due enunciati (lui aveva lo stesso rapporto di amicizia con suo nonno, di 71 anni più anziano di lui, nato nel 1789, l'anno della Rivoluzione francese). Compie dunque il salto semantico, proprio del metodo metaforico, dalla similitudine all'identità.

Emerge poi un altro dato significativo: l'autore opera una trasfigurazione della realtà, modificandola in qualcosa di diverso, crea coincidenze con la

⁷⁷ Al margine sinistro vediamo l'indicazione «Kolla!», «Controllare!».

storia (tra microcosmo e macrocosmo), come se volesse indicare analogie e corrispondenze dietro i misteri della vita. Tranströmer non spiega, non enuncia teorie, ma in brevi frasi paratattiche suggerisce delle coincidenze che ci fanno pensare alle *Historiska miniatyrer* di August Strindberg (1997; Miniature storiche), raccolta del 1905 ispirata da corrispondenze e coincidenze tra individui e storia.

Ma torniamo ai titoli dei capitoli di questo testo: *Minnen, Museer, Folkskola, Kriget, Bibliotek, Realskola, Exorcism, Latin*. È evidente che l'autobiografia si ferma agli anni della sua giovinezza, all'inizio del liceo (ai quindici anni: la testa della cometa) e che la sua formazione intellettuale, la scuola elementare, il liceo, il museo, la biblioteca, il latino hanno avuto una parte fondamentale nella sua vita, secondo quanto afferma nel prologo: la cultura classica, il mito, persino la metrica.

Si vuole delinearne un'evoluzione interiore, legandosi di tanto in tanto a eventi esterni che hanno un'importanza relativa: gli altri non sappiamo come fossero veramente, sono filtrati dalla sua memoria e si confondono nella rappresentazione di sé.

Il rapporto tra 'ora' (l'io a 60 anni, età in cui l'autore scrive l'opera) e 'allora' struttura l'idea del testo. Un'«autoriflessività» (Heitmann 1991: 147) che si sviluppa assieme alla ricezione del lettore in un rapporto anticonvenzionale.

In questa lunga riflessione, il soggetto ordina e dà un senso alle sue esperienze di allora, vedendovi le cause di aspetti essenziali di ora. Ad esempio, giudica la separazione tra casa e scuola – da lui voluta e perseguita perché i compagni non si accorgessero della sua diversità, in quanto figlio di genitori divorziati – la causa della separazione tra vita privata e società che ha sempre mantenuto viva. Racconta, nel capitolo *Folkskola*, che i suoi interessi per la botanica e la zoologia rimanevano fuori dalla scuola; non ne parlava con i compagni (Tranströmer 2012: 447-450). Vuole tuttavia comunicarci la passione (di allora) per i cataloghi e le denominazioni di insetti e piante, secondo la tradizione tutta svedese che nasce dalle classificazioni botaniche di Linneo ed è alla base delle minute descrizioni dei suoi testi poetici (di ora).

Confrontando questi con *Minnena ser mig*, si nota nella prosa un tentativo di limitare sostanzialmente la grande libertà associazionistica tipica della poesia, tentativo che si esplica attraverso l'oscillazione tra una tipologia di autobiografia del tutto libera – come Svend Bjerg indica ad esempio in quella del già citato Jakob Paludan, dove la psicologia del profondo si esprime in libero sfogo in annotazioni sparse di immagini oniriche, registrazioni dell'inconscio che si manifesta, non cronologicamente ordinate (Bjerg 1983: 140) – e una rappresentazione di un'identità stabilizzata. Svend Bjerg sostiene che Paludan scrive più autobiografie in diversi momenti della vita proprio per seguire il naturale riaffiorare del ricordo, procedimento adottato anche da Lars Norén nella sua opera autobiografica (2008; 2013). La psicoanalisi – e sappiamo

quanto questa conti per Tomas Tranströmer – ha negato l'unità dell'io e la possibilità di scegliere quando si ricorda (Bjerg 1983: 140).

Tuttavia Tranströmer seleziona ed elimina, tende alla concisione, vaglia e ritaglia. Per il naturale riaffiorare del ricordo, usa da sempre il mezzo espressivo che per eccellenza può dare voce alle intense sensazioni e al senso magico dell'esistenza: la poesia.

Abbiamo visto però come il linguaggio poetico impregni anche la sua prosa autobiografica: le figure della poesia si fanno portatrici di significato anche nel capitolo *Exorcism*, dove cerca di descrivere la terribile angoscia nella quale sprofondò a 15 anni (Tranströmer 2012: 468-471). Nel capitolo si annotano esperienze parapsicologiche con grande naturalezza, vista la presenza di medium e guaritori nella sua famiglia: «Vinter när jag var 15 år träffades jag av en stor ångest. Jag fångades in av en strålkastare som sände mörker i stället för ljus» (2012: 468; L'inverno dei miei 15 anni, fui preso da una grande angoscia. Ero imprigionato da un faro che diffondeva tenebre invece di luce).

Un ossimoro: il faro, un elemento che solitamente diffonde luce, qui diffonde il suo opposto. È un'immagine che affonda le radici nel surrealismo pittorico e letterario, anticipata nel poema in prosa *Funchal* della raccolta *Sanningsbarriären* (Barriera di verità), del 1978: «En högtalare som utsänder tystnad [...]. En bok som bara kan läsas i mörkret» (Tranströmer 2012: 267; «Un altoparlante che diffonde silenzio [...]. Un libro che può essere letto solo al buio», trad. di Lombardi; Tranströmer 2011c: 123), dove enumera una serie di paradossi nel tentativo di esprimere «den innersta paradoxen» (2012: 267; «l'intimo paradosso», trad. di Lombardi; Tranströmer 2011c: 121), ciò che gli altri in noi non possono vedere. «Det som bara kan möta sig själv» (2012: 268; «quel che può solo incontrare se stesso», trad. di Lombardi; Tranströmer 2011c: 121).

Impegnato nella ricerca di esprimere l'ineffabile, il grande mistero, nel poema in prosa *Funchal* non si cura di richiamare l'assurdità della situazione rispetto alla realtà; nella prosa di *Minnena ser mig* dice invece che cosa il faro avrebbe dovuto diffondere. Nello stesso capitolo parla di *ond makt* «potere malvagio»: «Jag hade upptäckt en ond makt» (Tranströmer 2012: 469; Avevo scoperto un potere malvagio), una potenza malvagia, malefica, che egli non comprende e che lo circonda. Qui angoscia, buio, notte sono contrapposte a luce, libro, giorno. La lettura è un'arma. La sua cultura (scuola, musei, biblioteche) un fronte contro un'angoscia misteriosa che lo afferra alla gola, per spiegare la quale ricorre ad esempi dalla cinematografia, come *Il testamento del dottor Mabuse* di Fritz Lang (Tranströmer 2012: 469), capolavoro del cinema espressionista. I poeti della tradizione simbolista, da Baudelaire al Pär Lagerkvist di *Ångest* (Angoscia) descrivono un'analogo sensazione nei loro testi.

Sappiamo che *Minnena ser mig* avrebbe dovuto contenere dell'altro, o comunque era *to be continued*, doveva continuare; ma, per ragioni in parte

dipendenti dalla malattia di Tranströmer, ciò non è avvenuto, come se mi avesse affidato anche il compito di ordinare quei fogli sparsi, quegli schizzi, quei ricordi. Ho intenzione di tradurli e di lavorare su questi frammenti di memorie; e con grande rispetto intendo ricomporli.

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«SKRIVA “JAG” OCH MENA DET, GÅR DET?» OM SJÄLVBIOGRAFISK DIKT I NORDEN

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1. Inledning

«Skriva “jag” och mena det, går det?», står det i den svenska författaren Elise Ingvarssons dikt *Mönstren och Kristus* (2005: 81). Texten är i detta sammanhang intressant åtminstone av två orsaker: dels problematiseras i frågeställningen det lyriska subjektet, dels förhåller sig dikten öppet till Sonja Åkessons poesi, som ofta knyter an till det självupplevda – genombrottsdikten från 1963 *Självbiografi (replik till Ferlinghetti)* (1994: 146-156) samt *Självporträtt* från år 1959 (1994: 68) är två exempel. Syftet med följande artikel är att betrakta några nordiska diktare som likt Sonja Åkesson i ovannämnda verser verkar upprätta självbiografiska kontrakt med läsaren. Genom några exempel på självporträtt och självbiografier i versform är min avsikt att försöka begrunda dessa texters särart inom ramen för självbiografiskt skrivande. För att komma fram till en reflektion över självbiografisk poesi skriven på skandinaviska språk vill jag ta vägen via den litteraturteoretiska diskussion om diktjag och självbiografi som förts i Frankrike och dra in den på nordisk mark, där den tillsynes är relativt okänd¹.

Försöken till att definiera och identifiera självbiografisk diktning är få och sporadiska i Skandinavien. Att forskningen på detta område är så knapp är något av en paradox, antyder Stefan Kjerkegaard – en av de få nordiska litteraturvetare som gjort insatser inom detta problemfält – eftersom det handlar om en under de senaste åren kraftigt uppblomstrand genre med en lång och rik historia (2010: 114; 2012: 189). Balansgången mellan självbiografi och fiktion är alltså ingen uppseendeväckande nyhet inom poesin och intresset för problematiken har kanske just därför låtit vänta på sig. I ett par artiklar, senast 2012, fastslår Kjerkegaard att «forskningen i det selvbiografiske digt er stort set ikke-eksisterende i nordisk og international litteraturteori» (2012: 189).

Av påståendet att döma förbigås den franska forskning som sedan mitten av 1990-talet har undersökt jag-problematiken i samband med

¹ Jag vill tacka Laila Flink Thullesen som gjorde mig uppmärksam på denna forskning.

det lyriska subjektet och självbiografisk vers. I mars 1995 anordnades i Bordeaux den tre dagar långa konferensen *Le Sujet lyrique en question*, som ledde till två publikationer: *Le Sujet lyrique en question* (Rabaté, de Sermet, Vadé 1996) samt *Figures du sujet lyrique* (Rabaté 1996); Centre international de poésie i Marseille arrangerade år 2000 konferensen *Poésie & Autobiographie* och publicerade konferenshandlingarna under samma namn (Audinet, Rabaté 2002b); på initiativ av Philippe Lejeune grundades år 1992 Association pour l'autobiographie et le patrimoine autobiographique² vars tidskrift, «La Faute à Rousseau», vek februarinumret år 2002, *Poésie et autobiographie*, för dessa frågor; tidskriften «Modernités» gav år 2007 ut ett temanummer med titeln *L'irressemblance. Poésie et autobiographie*, innehållande bidragen från en ny konferens i Bordeaux. Jag tror att dessa forskningsinsatser – visserligen blygsamma i jämförelse med den outtömliga bibliografi som beaktar självbiografi på prosa³ men ändå snarare *intensiva* än «ikke-eksisterende» – i kombination med Kjerkegaards studier, kan berika den spirande diskussionen om självbiografisk poesi i Norden.

2. Teoretisk bakgrund

Samtidigt som det har argumenterats för ett självfallet inbördes närhetsförhållande mellan dikt och självbiografi, har det från andra håll höjts röster som positionsbestämt dessa kategorier som varandras motpoler. Dominique Combe (1996) framhåller att det synsätt som velat koppla diktjaget till dess biografiska upphovsman ofta har ställts i motsats till en tradition som förvägrat självbiografisk status åt ett allt igenom fiktivt och icke-referentiellt lyriskt jag. Éric Audinet är inne på den förra linjen när han menar att de svårigheter som uppstår när samtidslyrikens förhållande till självbiografiskt skrivande diskuteras, beror just på de två kategoriernas nära samband: «l'autobiographie est peut-être le cœur même, caché, de l'expérience poétique, [...] réfléchir sur la place de l'autobiographique dans la poésie contemporaine serait comme réfléchir sur la place de l'eau dans le verre» (Audinet, Rabaté 2002a: 14; självbiografien är kanske den poetiska verksamhetens hemliga hjärta, [...] att reflektera över vilken plats det självbiografiska har i samtidslyriken skulle vara som att reflektera över vattnets plats i glaset)⁴. Philippe Lejeune, å andra sidan, utslöt som bekant diktkonsten från sin första definition av självbiografien som en «récit rétrospectif en prose» (1975: 14; en retrospektiv prosaberättelse).

² <<http://autobiographie.sitapa.org/>> (03/2014).

³ Se t.ex. <<http://www.autopacte.org/>> (03/2014).

⁴ Alla översättningar är mina egna, om inget annat anges.

Poesin kunde, enligt Lejeune, svårligen uppfylla *alla* de krav som ställdes på genren (ett liv i sin helhet, en personlighetsutveckling). Dikter som uppvisade självbiografiska element förvisades istället till en gråzon, Lejeunes «*espace autobiographique*» (1975: 41-43), d.v.s. skönlitterär fiktion baserad på författarens egna erfarenheter. Ett trettioital år efter *Le Pacte autobiographique* publicerade Lejeune den korta essän *Écrire sa vie en vers* (2002a). Denna text gör inga anspråk på att vara ett utkast till en ny teori och är snarare ämnad att läsas som en (själv)motsägelsefull presentation av några franska exempel på livshistorier skrivna på vers, dikter som «*commencent au début par la naissance de l'auteur, explorent étapes par étapes sa formation, l'histoire de sa personnalité, inscrivent cette histoire dans un contexte précis, avec des noms, des dates etc.*» (2002a: 30; börjar från början med författarens födsel, utforskar steg för steg dennes utveckling, historien om den egna personligheten, och placerar berättelsen i ett visst sammanhang, med namn, datum o.s.v.). Det finns alltså belägg för att man kan skriva sitt liv på vers, att dikt och självbiografi kan kombineras. Men hur kan denna kombination se ut? Vilka berättartekniska strategier kan leda till en förening?

Innan vi kommer fram till några exempel, ännu en kort avstickare till Frankrike och Danmark. Att teoribildningen kring självbiografisk diktning har haft svårt att ta fart beror enligt Dominique Combe (1996: 39) och Stefan Kjerkegaard (2010: 114-115) på att nykritiken, strukturalismen och narratologin dels koncentrerade sig på prosa (och därmed marginaliserade poesin), dels gjorde sig av med författaren och den autoreferentiella diskursen. Trots att dikten under 1900-talet generellt har rört sig från bunden vers mot prosadikt; från kort, modernistisk stämningslyrik mot narrativa långdikter – en tendens som i Skandinavien kulminerat i det som Kjerkegaard kallar «den nye selvbiografiske bølge inden for nordisk poesi» (2012: 208) – tycks kritiker och teoretiker vara överens om att de analysmetoder som uppstått kring självbiografisk prosa inte utan vidare låter sig överföras till dikten, därför att kommunikationssituationen är en annan och språket följer sina egna (lyriska) regler: «*La poésie a ses manières propres de parler, suggestion, ellipse, fulgurance, illumination. [...] Ce que dit le poème n'est pas transposable dans un autre type de discours, sauf à perdre tout ce qui en fait, sur le plan du charme et du sens, l'irréductible singularité*» (Ray 2002: 29; Poesin uttrycker sig med sina egna medel; antydningar, ellipser, plötsliga ingivelser, insikter. [...]) Diktens budskap kan inte översättas till en annan form utan att det som utgör dess egenhet både som skönhetsupplevelse och på betydelseplanet går förlorat). Det har hänvisats (Kjerkegaard 2012: 192-193, 197-198) till Roman Jakobsons kända modell enligt vilken dikten och dess budskap *dominerar* av den poetiska funktionen: avsändarens (och mottagarens) roll blir därför både mindre relevant och ambivalent. «Poesi er (i sin reneste form) altid en udsigelse, der først og fremmest tjener sig selv, dernæst noget

andet, fx en fortelling eller en fiktion, noget selvbiografisk», sammanfattar Kjerkegaard (2012: 198).

Det har också diskuterats huruvida diktens omskapande av standardspråket även innebär ett omskapande av jaget som står i vägen för det 'ärlighetskontrakt' (Lejeune 1975: 36-37) som självbiografen förväntas ingå med läsaren. Extrema stilövningar vare sig på prosa eller vers, detaljer som i själva verket kanske avslöjar mer än de döljer av författarens identitet, har setts som ett hinder för framställningens äkthet. I ärlighetens namn har man i enlighet med genreförväntningarna ofta förespråkat ett rakt språk, fritt från konstgrepp och språkmässig akrobatik: «l'autobiographie, c'est la vie livrée crue, sans travail», ironiserar å andra sidan Lejeune apropå denna tumregel (2002b: 26; självbiografi, det är när livet levereras rätt, utan bearbetning). Man kan undra om det ändå inte är rimligt att tänka sig att det mest kongeniala formatet för en diktares livshistoria står att finna just i diktformatet, speciellt om självframställningen har för avsikt att förmedla en så 'äkta' och 'verklighetstrogen' självbild som möjligt. Att lyriken, just *tack vare* sitt avstånd till standardspråket, ibland kan tänkas vara det enda lämpliga formatet för en självbiografisk diskurs med en viss vinkling, t.ex. av den typ som inte strävar till att ge en helhetsbild av livet utan hellre försöker gestalta avstegen från tillvarons logik eller psykologisk tid i stället för kronologisk. Éric Benoît har påpekat att en självbiografi på vers, skriven på ett språk som laddats med poetisk funktion, kan vara den enda utvägen för att skildra det fragmentariska, delade subjektets osammanhängande livshistoria: «poésie pour représenter [...] l'impossibilité pour le sujet de se ressaisir ou de se représenter en termes d'autobiographie: une autobiographie dont le centre de gravité serait l'histoire d'un sujet autobiographiquement irréprésentable» (2007: 31; versform för att göra rättvisa åt omöjligheten [...] i subjektets försök att ringa in sig själv eller framställa sig självbiografiskt: en självbiografi vars tyngdpunkt ligger just i självframställningens omöjlighet).

3. Frågeställning och syfte

Kjerkegaards «arbeitsdefinition» av självbiografisk dikt presenteras som tudelad: «Med selvbiografisk digt menes [...] enten digte, hvori der er sammenfald mellem digterens navn og udsigelsesinstansen, [...] eller digte eller digtsamlinger, der via parateksten definerer sig som selvbiografiske» (2010: 114; 2012: 190). Av detta följer: (1) att författaren till självbiografisk vers förväntas tydligt meddela läsaren sin avsikt; (2) att förhållandet mellan diktjag och författarjag ses som stabilt och verkar utesluta möjligheten att sambandet mellan de två jagen kan finnas på många olika nivåer och bero på skiftande grader av närhet och avstånd.

Definitionen påminner dessutom om det explicita eller implicita kontrakt som författaren till en självbiografi på prosa, enligt Lejeune (1975: 27), upprättar med läsaren.

Mot denna hypotes kan vi ställa dikter utan självbiografiska kontrakt (Kjerkegaards namnidentitet eller upplysande paratext) men med självframställande drag. Hur ska vi till exempel hantera Gustaf Frödings dikt «*Skalden Wennerbom*» (1894: 67-69), där citationstecknen ingår som en del av titeln och verkar antyda att Wennerbom bör ses som ett täcknamn i en självbiografisk diskurs? Hur ska vi se på rolldikter innehållande klart markerade självbiografiska element (Lejeunes «*contexte précis*», «*noms*», «*dates*»), vars 'jag' trots allt inte kan likställas med författarjaget?

Kjerkegaard har i sina studier givit sig i kast med samtida skandinavisk (främst dansk) dikt, därför att just denna bedöms som speciellt rik på den typ av berättande, självframställande poesi som bäst anses representera en diktgenre som Kjerkegaard ser som en motreaktion till 1900-talets modernistiska lyrik. Jag vill i det följande pröva den, i mitt tycke, inte helt oproblematiska arbetsdefinitionen på en handfull dikter av tidigare datum, som på olika sätt (och med lejeunsk terminologi) ingår självbiografiska kontrakt med läsaren och uppvisar de egenskaper som efterlyses i hypotesen: Sonja Åkesson, Klaus Rifbjerg och Helge Hagerup har alla skrivit dikter eller diktverk som i paratexten utger sig för att vara «*självpporträtt*» eller «*självbiografier*». Två dikter av den finlandssvenska poeten Börje Ahlö ger oss i stället anledning till att reflektera över huruvida det är rimligt att anse att självbiografisk poesi produceras bara av den (enkla) orsaken att namnet på diktjag och författarjag sammanfaller.

4. Undersökning I: paratextuella element

Undersökningens första del gäller utsagan enligt vilken den paratextuella informationen i sig själv bör ses som tillräcklig för att beteckna dikten som självbiografisk. Jag vill börja med att reflektera över i vilken mån det kanske snarare finns orsak att betrakta paratextens anvisningar som bristfälliga, otillförlitliga eller rentav vilseledande, just när det gäller diktformatet.

Eva Lilja (1991: 17, 28-29; 1997: 117) argumenterar tvärsäkert *emot* att Sonja Åkessons dikt *Självbiografi* ska läsas som en självbild av den biografiska författaren: «*Självbiografi* er blevet misforstået som Sonja Åkessons egen selvbiografi. Sådan er det naturligvis ikke» (Lilja 1997: 117). Lilja menar att undertiteln (*replik till Ferlinghetti*), tydliggör att dikten inte är annat än en pastisch på Lawrence Ferlinghettis *Autobiography* (1958: 60-66). Angående det lyriska jaget i dikten betonar Lilja att det handlar om ett persona-jag: ett nytt slags diktjag, typiskt för 1960-talets

nyenkelhet; en rollfigur som skiljer sig från högmodernismens jag som ansågs ha fäste längst inne i den skrivandes själ (1991: 28, 41-47). Amelie Björcks syn på samma dikt är mera nyanserad och hänvisar, genom Lisbeth Larsson, till «synen på självbiografen som en form av försvar eller genmäle [som] har varit starkt utbredd inom 1980-1990-talens självbiografiforskning» (Björck 2008: 98). Apropå rolldikt hos Sonja Åkesson påpekar Björck dessutom att den psykologiska sanningen inte «utesluter [...] rolltaganden så länge självupplevda känslor och mekanismer kan överföras på rollen och situationen» (2008: 100).

Närhetsgraden mellan det textuella och det biografiska subjektet är onekligen svårbestämbar trots mängden av detaljer som förankrar texten i författarens egen livshistoria, och Åkessons avsikt kan mycket väl tänkas vara att i första hand göra sig till språkrör för den svenska hemmafrun som social grupp. Till Liljas och Björcks resonemang vill jag ändå tillägga att dikten, just p.g.a. valet av titel som alltså kan anses peka bort från det självbiografiska och tillbaka igen, egentligen belyser en tydlig linje i den kvinnliga självbiografins natur: man berättar om sig själv genom att fokalisera på andra (jfr. Haettner Aurelius 1996: 51, som här också citerar Shari Benstock: «The self that would reside at the center of the text is decentered — and is often absent altogether — in women's autobiographical texts»). Titeln upplyser oss mycket riktigt om att Åkessons *Självbiografi* ska läsas som ett svar på Ferlinghettis *Autobiography* och innehållsmässigt fogar sig diktjaget följdaktligen i att stå i skuggan av mannen i den amerikanska förlagan:

Självbiografi (replik till Ferlinghetti)

Jag lever ett lugnt liv
 på Drottninggatan 83 a på dagarna.
 Snyter ungar och putsar golv
 och kopparpottor
 och kokar rotmos och pölsa.

Jag lever ett lugnt liv
 i närheten av tunnelbanan.
 Jag är svensk.
 Jag hade en svensk uppväxt.
 [...] (1994: 146)

Den anaforiska upprepningen av pronomet «jag» blir på sätt och vis vilseledande: tyngdpunkten ligger inte så mycket i koncentrationen på det egna jaget som i den självförringande jämförelsen med den manliga identiteten i Ferlinghettis dikt (jfr. också Hasselgren 1984). Han är bildad, beläst och berest, hon framställer sig som otillräcklig i motsvarande roller. Han är Ikaros, den gränsöverskridande diktaren utrustad med vingar, hon är otymplig, puckelryggad och förvisad till hemmet på Drottninggatan.

Förfaringssättet enligt vilket de egna livserfarenheterna och biografiska fakta blandas med ren fiktion och stöps i en tidigare förlagas form bör rimligtvis vare sig ses som ett problem eller som en nyhet inom den självbiografiska genren: «jag har övat mig i anpassning», skriver Åkesson träffande längre fram i dikten (1994: 149). Det är en gammal sanning att självbiografen väljer att visa upp en version, en mask eller en tolkning av sig själv för läsaren och inte sällan utnyttjar förebilder och schabloner som ställföreträdare för det egna jaget.

Med sin motdikt skriver Sonja Åkesson alltså in sig en lång tradition av kvinnligt självbiografiskt skrivande i vilken ett självporträtt framträder och görs tydligt genom berättelser om andra. Samma drag är lättöverskådligt i Åkessons korta dikt *Självporträtt*. Trots titeln reserveras banvaktens själlösa flicka endast en treradig strof medan de andra, folket «som hade en själ» får mer än dubbelt så stort utrymme. Det biografiska jaget, enligt titeln själva föremålet för betraktelsen, befinner sig alltså även grafiskt i diskursens utkant så att det centrala blir perifert; ett drag som avslöjar diktjagets självuppfattning:

Självporträtt

Banvaktens jänta hade ingen själ,
hade bara hjärta, galla, nerver
och ett fräknigt tryne.

Folk som hade en själ,
av dem fordrades ingenting
för stunden.
De klämdes aldrig av skymningstången.
De lyssnade förtroligt till träd.

Somliga hade systrar bland björkarna.
Somliga var sorgsna och förnöjda ändå.
Somliga kunde tala till Gud. (1994: 68)

Vid sidan av *Självbiografi (replik till Ferlinghetti)*, vilken med sina nästan 300 versrader blir en berättande långdikt som närmar sig prosans revir, framstår det ordknappa självporträttet som en stillbild av det som Karl Lagerlöf har kallat Åkessons «fulla ofullkomliga närvaro» (1975: 62). Titeln ger oss också anledning till att reflektera över vilken typ av erfarenheter en självbiografisk betraktelse förväntas rymma. Inom prosan har Michel Beaujour gjort ett försök att definiera det litterära självporträttet i förhållande till självbiografen. Han utgår från att det är avsaknaden av ett fortlöpande berättande (1992: 2) som skiljer det förra från den senare, och ser parollen «I won't tell you what I've done, but I shall tell you *who I am*» (1992: 3, kursivering i originaltexten) som en inledande riktlinje för självporträttets poetik.

Helge Hagerups dikt *Selvportrett i feber* (1987) är ett annat exempel på en typ av självframställande dikt som siktar på att återge en stillbild av jaget snarare än att skildra den klassiska självbiografins personlighetsutveckling. Dikten utgör också ett prov på att den 'individuella sanning' som vi förväntar oss att få ta del av i en självbiografi inte skyggar för det oniriska. Feberhallucinationerna i dikten löser upp gränserna mellan diktjaget och omvärlden. Porträttet av det isolerade och passivt registrerande diktjaget spelas ut mot omgivningen (en stad, röster från gatan, ett havslandskap). Jagets och omgivningens egenskaper är i ständig förvandling och sinsemellan utbytbara: «En by som vender ansiktet mot nord / har diktet sitt novembermørke i mit rom» vs. «Jeg / er et geografisk tomrom / på kartet, en utforsket øy i havet» (Hagerup 1987: 13, 15). Liksom Åkessons *Självpöträtt* handlar det om en dikt som utger sig för att vara självbiografisk men utan att bilda en sammanhängande berättelse. Hur ska vi handskas med den?

I Jean Starobinskis reflektion över stilen i självbiografisk prosa görs följande åtskillnad mellan (själv)biografi och (själv)porträtt: «Biography is not portrait; or if it is a kind of portrait, it adds time and movement. The narrative must cover a temporal sequence sufficiently extensive to allow the emergence of the contour of life» (1980: 73). I diktsamlingen *Under vejr med mig selv. En uttidig selvbiografi* från 1956 presenterar Klaus Rifbjerg (1977) en självbiografi på vers som följer den klassiska prosaberättelsens kronologi men som uppvisar ellipserna, antydningarna och det fragmentariska, som snarare hör hemma i poesin. Också Rifbjergs titel är en replik till en äldre förlaga, Henrik Pontoppidans självbiografi *Undervejs til mig selv* från 1943, och är, i förhållande till traditionen, «uttidig» därför att den skrevs av en 25-årig debutant. Till skillnad från Pontoppidans självbiografiska band handlar det om en tunn liten bok som ändå, på ett ungdomligt, uppnosigt sätt, vågar utge sig för att vara genmäle till en titan.

Rifbjergs självbiografiska projekt bygger upp ett subjekt genom att återberätta dess livshistoria från allra första början till skrivande stund: ett utvecklingsperspektiv som kompositionsmässigt gör *Under vejr med mig selv* till något av det mest konventionella man kan tänka sig i genren. Det handlar om femton korta dikter som kan beskrivas som punktnedslag i ett levnadsförlopp, vilket till största delen utgörs av barndom och ungdom. Om tidsperioden som här tas i beaktande kan anses vara tillräckligt lång för att den kontur av ett liv som Starobinski efterlyser ska kunna skönjas, är Rifbjergs avsaknad av tidsdistans till det berättade sällsynt och kongenial: det mogna perspektivet på den egna levnadshistorien som den klassiska självbiografien gör anspråk på uteblir, och den lekfulla behandlingen av ämnet tar färg av författarens 'omogna' inställning till sitt material trots att humorn, enligt författaren själv, bör ses som «skydds nät» i en seriös diskurs (Clausen 1966: 184). Avståndet till genrens traditionella exemplar blir synligt redan i de tre inledande dikterna: Rifbjerg skildrar sitt eget befruktningssögonblick, sig själv i fosterstadiet och är med om sin egen förlossning. Ett smakprov:

Foster

Festligste maade at opleve Himmelbjerget!
 Som en natugle
 sidder jeg med varme øjne i mørket.
 Jeg fosterfisk
 en lille gummimand
 med gæller
 under mors hjerte.
 Vi er paa vandretur i Jylland.
 Aah, Horsens anet gennem en navle!
 [...] (1977: 8)

Det är både fyndigt och nyskapande: i sin kända diskussion om egenskaperna hos de figurer som lever i litteraturen skriver E.M. Forster att födseln har förbigåtts av författarna. Den litterära figuren föds utanför baksidan och tas med i handlingen först när han eller hon är i stånd till att delta i den. «Between Sterne and James Joyce, scarcely any writer [...] has tried to work back towards the psychology of the baby's mind and to utilize the literary wealth that must lie there. Perhaps it cannot be done» (Forster 1961: 51). Genom fosterturisten på Himmelbjerget visar Rifbjerg att det låter sig göras – till och med i en självbiografi på vers.

5. Undersökning II: namnidentitet

Första delen i Kjerkegaards hypotes till definition förutsätter alltså att diktarens namn sammanfaller med namnet på det lyriska jaget för att man ska kunna tala om självbiografisk poesi: «digte, hvor forfatterens navn optræder i selve teksten, har den fordel, at man ikke behøver at inddrage paratekster og paratekstuelle elementer for at argumentere for brugen af selvbiografisk stof» (2012: 191-192). I Börje Ahlös diktsamling *Iskuggan av ditt leende* (1972) kan man inte blunda för att många dikter handlar om sin upphovsman. I *Min födelse* och *Ett löv* intar egennamnet «Börje» och den underfundiga kryptonymen «A-löv» (en dubbeltydig ordlek som alluderar på författarens efternamn samt på känslan av tillhörighet till de socialt utslagna och alkoholiserade a-lagarna) en grafiskt viktig position. Kompositionsgreppet enligt vilket namnet på subjektet i den självbiografiska diskursen får stå sist i den avslutande versraden, gör att det starkt privata fördröjs och förskjuts men kanske just därför träder fram i hela sin (sorgliga) styrka:

Min födelse

Kom hals över huvud fram
 ur min moders sköte.
 Kunde knappt andas...

Men skvåka kunde jag
 – sa farsan –
 sedan barnmorskan först klappat till
 mej på stjärten.
 Doktorn kom en stund senare
 såg med stor tillfredsställelse
 på detta barn
 som sedermera skulle få namnet Börje. (1972: 42)

Också här är det frågan om ett subjekt i underläge som påminner om banvaktens jänta i Sonja Åkessons *Självporträtt* och, mera generellt, om Margareta Fahlgrens syn på tendenser hos det kvinnliga självbiografiska jaget, vilket hon definierar som «underordnat» (1987). Titeln på Ahlös diktsamling klargör dock att känslan av att stå i skuggan av en annan inte är könsbunden, utan att det snarare handlar om ett mönster som kan observeras inom den självbiografiska genren, vilket Fahlgren också påpekar när hon talar om detta drag som «den "masochistiska" strategin» (1987: 20) i texter som kan anses representera «en kvinnlig form av självbiografi» (1987: 24, min kursiv). Huvudpersonen i Ahlös självbiografiska diskurs presenteras efter att föräldrarna, barnmorskan och doktorn har gjort entré. Det nyfödda barnet, liksom den socialt utslagne, som med humoristisk distans likställs med vardagliga inventarier i dikten *Ett löv*, befinner sig i samma sekundära position – trots att bägge i själva verket är centralfigurer i sina sammanhang:

Ett löv

Jag är ett löv
 – varför inte en tillbringare,
 eller en stol,
 eller en dragharmonika?
 – Nej, jag är ett löv,
 ett A-löv. (1972: 11)

6. Avslutande diskussion

Frågan om självbiografins väsen kvarstår: är detta självbiografi på vers? Är det självbiografiska knutet till egennamnet eller bör det hellre sökas i andra aspekter av dikten, till exempel i stilen? Jean Starobinski beskriver stilen som ett textuellt element med ett inneboende autoreferentiellt värde («implicit self-referential value»; 1980: 74), och för den läsare som är bevandrad i Ahlös poesi är denna stillsamt absurda humor onekligen ett av författarens mest kännsbaka signalement. Eller är det snarare mittledet – *bio* – i ordet «självbiografi» som här saknas, själva livet, de historiska händelserna, Starobinskis ovannämnda «tid och rörelse»? Kan man alternativt tänka sig att de båda texterna bör läsas

som porträttdikter, skärvor av en självbild, ansatser till en livshistoria, d.v.s. som en av många möjliga former självbiografin kan anta?

Definitionen på självbiografisk diktning måste i sista hand bero på läsarens förväntningar på självbiografins poetik. Genren självbiografi är inte exklusiv för prosan, men förväntningshorisonten har inte sällan förutsatt åtminstone en narrativ diskurs – som förvisso kan förekomma i versform lika väl som i löpande text. Vad händer om ett narrativt sammanhang uteblir? När inslaget av kortare eller längre berättelse saknas kan diskursen mycket väl betecknas som självbiografisk, men som självbiografi sonderfaller texten i isolerade självporträtt och fristående självreflektiva studier. Möjligheten att foga samman bitarna till en helhet överlämnas då till läsaren. Jag tänker mig att den stora skillnaden kanske ligger i den avsikt diktaren har med sin livsskildring: om den självbiografiska diskursen siktar på att förmedla ett levnadsförlopp skapas en versberättelse vars vägar korsar den narrativa prosans. När självbiografin splittras i fragment utan anspråk på att skapa en sammanhängande historia letar sig dikten istället fram längs lyrikens egna stigar styrd av språkets poetiska funktion, av versradernas uppdelning och av det tomrum som diktens grafiska form skapar på sidan.

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FIND HOLGER DANSKE:
ARTICULATING COMPLEXITY THROUGH BRICOLAGE

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1. Introduction

In an effort to add to the discussion of how cultural and ethnic diversity is articulated in contemporary Denmark, this paper analyses *Find Holger Danske* (2006; Finding Holger Dane, trans. by Haveland¹), the autobiographical work of the Korean-born Danish writer Maja Lee Langvad. I will approach the text from an anthropological perspective, focusing on how, through the process of appropriation and bricolage, Lee Langvad yields an autobiographical work that attempts to rewrite the way selfhood and otherness are understood and categorised in contemporary Denmark.

Maja Lee Langvad was born in South Korea in 1980, and was adopted by a Danish family soon after her birth. She belongs to the largest group of transnational adoptees in Denmark, with approximately 20,000 South Korean children adopted between 1970 and 2007 (Schmidt 2009). *Find Holger Danske* is a literary work that combines poetry and pastiche. Rather than presenting a linear narration of her life history, the author rewrites and reassembles a variety of sources to address complex issues surrounding adoption, ethnicity and national identity in contemporary Denmark. She engages her audience in an active pursuit, challenging her readers to «find Holger Danske». The title alludes to *Kan du finde Holger?*, the Danish version of the popular children's book *Where is Wally?* by the English writer Martin Handford (1987). While in Handford's comic book readers try to spot Wally (or Holger, in Danish) amid different groups of similarly clad characters, here the reader is invited to undertake a more complex search. The title also refers to Holger Danske, the legendary warrior who lies in a century-long sleep, ready to defend Denmark whenever the country is in serious danger.

¹ In this article I use the English translation by Barbara J. Haveland, which has not yet been published – it is used mostly in international poetry readings.

2. Poetic bricolage to reconfigure new meanings

Lévi-Strauss's concept of bricolage provides a good framework for studying the structure and style of this poetic work. Bricolage refers to the ability of rearranging pre-existing elements in order to build new structured sets (1966: 21). Lévi-Strauss describes the artistic process as a mix of scientific method and bricolage. The scientific method, unlike bricolage, tends to create events out of structures; the engineer starts with an abstraction and manipulates it until he reaches the final result. The artist mixes these two approaches – scientific method and bricolage – and «by his craftsmanship he constructs a material object, which is also an object of knowledge» (trans. anon. 1966: 22). In like manner, Lee Langvad, by sampling and repurposing several different sources, seeks to reconfigure new meanings. Bricolage is not just a strategy for intertwining the personal and the political into an artful narrative, but it also conveys the author's urgency to *re-make* identity as we know it.

In this poetic work, the author is driven by an almost anthropological interest in exploring how family and ethnic relations are codified and represented in Denmark. Nigel Rapport has compared literature and anthropology as corresponding ways of *rewriting* social realities: the author's creative process, in both disciplines, gives life to a personal construction of the world (Rapport 1994: 26). This process of rewriting is taken up quite literally by Lee Langvad, who throughout the book incorporates and appropriates the work of other authors as well as official documents and newspaper articles. A less known work by the Swiss author Max Frisch, *Fragebogen* (1972; Questionnaire), has inspired the questionnaires that open the book (Lee Langvad 2006: 9-11, 14-17, 21-24); the structure in the poem about Danish politician Pia Kjærsgaard (Lee Langvad 2006: 36) is inspired by the poem *The Dream* by the Russian writer Daniil Kharms (in *Incidences*, trans. by Cornwell 1993); and the last section of the text, featuring Holger Danske and Holger Nydanske (Lee Langvad 2006: 59-60), is inspired by a poem in Kurt Schwitters's *Anna Blume und andere* (1986; Anna Blume and Others). In addition, Lee Langvad freely borrows from proverbs, Aksel Sandemose's *Jantelov*, the Danish slang dictionary, the Danish newspapers «Information» and «Politiken», forms from the ministry of immigration and a book by the right-wing political party Dansk Folkeparti.

Bricolage is a method of creation that implies reassembling and decontextualising – it creates a new perspective and at the same time, as it happens in *Find Holger Danske*, it is an effective way to articulate dissent and to produce entirely different meanings. Let us look at the example of Section 3 in *Find Holger Danske*, where Lee Langvad rewrites Sandemose's *Jantelov*. *Janteloven*, the Law of Jante, was formulated by the Danish-born Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose in his novel *En*

flyktning krysser sitt spor (1933; *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*, trans. by Gay-Tiffit 1936). It is a fictional collection of laws modelled on the Law of Moses, which highlights and codifies the norms of a close-minded, provincial and suppressive society. This is how Lee Langvad appropriates Sandemose's text:

Dette er Danskerloven:

1. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du er født i Danmark.
 2. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du snakker flydende dansk.
 3. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du er dansk statsborger.
 4. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du bor i Danmark.
 5. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du respekterer de danske love.
 6. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi dine bedsteforældre tror det.
 7. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du hejser Dannebrog i din have.
 8. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du kalder nogle for nydanskere.
 9. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du vil dø for Danmark.
 10. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du føler dig dansk.
- (Lee Langvad 2006: 46)

This is the Danelaw:

1. Do not think you are a Dane because you were born in Denmark.
 2. Do not think you are a Dane because you speak fluent Danish.
 3. Do not think you are a Dane because you are a Danish citizen.
 4. Do not think you are a Dane because you live in Denmark.
 5. Do not think you are a Dane because you respect the laws of Denmark.
 6. Do not think you are a Dane because your grandparents think you are.
 7. Do not think you are a Dane because you fly the Danish flag in your garden.
 8. Do not think you are a Dane because you call some people New Danes.
 9. Do not think you are a Dane because you would die for Denmark.
 10. Do not think you are a Dane because you feel Danish.
- (Trans. by Haveland)

Through a sort of situationist *détournement*, Lee Langvad appropriates a text most Danes are familiar with, giving it a new, subversive meaning. *Danskerloven* is juxtaposed with an authentic copy of Maja Lee Langvad's certificate of Danish citizenship – adding a further ironic layer to her reinterpretation of the Law of Jante. In Sandemose's fictional rules of behaviour, the collective social structure and its norms are more important than the individual himself – who is perceived, in fact, as worthless. The first rule: «Du skal ikke tro at du *er* noe» (Sandemose 1933: 85, italics in the original; «Thou shalt not believe that thou *art* something», trans. by Gay-Tiffit; Sandemose 1936: 77) is the clear, vicious foundation of this process of undermining the individual. In *Find Holger Danske*, the author subverts the scheme, addressing the concept of being Danish: «Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker». Maja Lee Langvad provokes the readers by inducing them to reflect on how a political agenda of integration based on the concept of Danishness could be equally suppressive and close-minded in an ethnically diverse society. Family ties (having Danish grandparents), the display of symbols (the Danish flag), language proficiency, the right to

citizenship, the possession of a residency permit are elements associated with being Danish, or with successful integration.

In *Find Holger Danske* there is a constant tension between the author's complex, transnational identity, and the limiting, ethnically defined national identity of the majority. According to Sherry Ortner, human action is both constantly constrained by the social and cultural order and always acting upon such order, making and transforming it (1996: 2). I argue that, through the process of bricolage, Lee Langvad acts on given structures – both textual and ideological – in an attempt to transform them by giving voice to a social critique. In several cases, the result is absurd and provocative:

Pæredansk	pear Danish
æbledansk	apple Danish
blommedansk	plum Danish
banandansk	banana Danish
(Lee Langvad 2006: 48)	(Trans. by Haveland)

In this poem she plays with the term *pæredansk*, which means «authentically Danish». Lee Langvad takes the expression literally and substitutes the pear first with an apple, then a plum, and lastly with a more exotic banana, creating a new, humorous expression: «banandansk». The poem appears on the page following the one reproducing her Danish citizenship certificate – which is, as mentioned earlier, ironically juxtaposed with *Danskerloven*. The author uses literary collage to re-contextualise the sources she draws on and, through a thoughtful juxtaposition of personal certificates and poetry or pastiche, she ties her private story to the contemporary social debate on national belonging. In the same section of the book, Lee Langvad contrasts an original copy of her residence permit, which she received upon arrival in Denmark and before gaining Danish citizenship, with another vignette:

dansk
danks
dnaks
dnask (2006: 43)

Here the author plays with the word «dansk», turning it into the meaningless «dnask» etc. through a series of non-sense anagrams. By incorporating her residency permit and her citizenship certificate in the book, Maja Lee Langvad provides us with the evidence that she is Danish as the result of a series of lengthy bureaucratic steps – her *danskhed* («Danishness») has been officially legitimised through a legal process or, as Bourdieu would call it, a «rite of institution», i.e. all the official public declarations that allow the recipient to be identified with a specific group of people, or a social entity, such as a state or a nation (trans. by Nice;

Bourdieu 2000: 175). According to Bourdieu «these acts of performative magic both enable and require the recipient to become what he is, that is, what he has to be» (trans. by Nice; Bourdieu 2000: 243). By juxtaposing her playful poem with the two certificates, Lee Langvad humorously comments on the arbitrary process of imposing a national (and cultural) identity on transnational adoptees. The poems sound almost like magic spells, parodying the process of creating identities by way of formulas and documents – and creating new arbitrary categorisations.

The process of the literary collage used in *Find Holger Danske* is not just a way to see things from a different perspective. Collage is often used by artists to «bring into view what has traditionally been marginalized and denied visibility», in order to produce greater cultural awareness (Morales Cox 2011: 200-201).

3. Reframing selfhood through creative appropriation

It is important to contextualise Lee Langvad's work within the new wave of Danish autobiographical poetry that has flourished in the past ten years. Christel Wiinblad, Morten Søndergaard, Lone Hørslev, Martin Glaz Serup, Naja Marie Aidt, Eva Tind Kristensen and Mette Moestrup – to name just a few – have, together with Lee Langvad, made important literary contributions to what has been defined as a new kind of hybrid poetry that blends genres and materials (Rostbøll, Friis 2012: 4). While the approach of these authors resembles to some extent the style and approach of Danish poetry from the Sixties and the Seventies, its novelty has been ascribed to the new and more powerful ways in which they interact and engage with their public, as well as to a more subtle – and often more humorous – take on the concept that the private is political, frequently touching on complex global issues (Rostbøll, Friis 2012: 6). Let us take a closer look at how the autobiographical elements in this poetic work are used as a springboard to investigate and criticise wider issues, in particular those underlying transnational adoption and the politics of inclusion and integration in Denmark. In an interview, Lee Langvad explained: «Jeg oplever ikke min bog som selvbiografisk i den forstand, at den handler om mig selv som person. Jeg har udelukkende brugt af min selvbiografi for at sætte fokus på adoption på et mere filosofisk og etisk plan» (Fangel 2006; I don't see my book as autobiographical in the sense that it is about myself as a person. I have only used my autobiography to focus on adoption on a more philosophical and ethical level²). Lee Langvad is the first poet in Denmark to draw attention to transnational adoption in her work. Three

² Translations are mine if not stated otherwise.

years after the publication of *Find Holger Danske*, another Korean-Danish poet who as a child had been adopted – Eva Tind Kristensen – debuted with *do* (2009), a literary work addressing issues of ethnic identity and thus joining in the debate on adoption first addressed by Lee Langvad.

A good example of the use of bricolage as a subversive strategy is Lee Langvad's modification of her personal documents. Through the process of appropriation, Lee Langvad incorporates into the text two different versions of her medical and social report for adoption: a photocopy of the authentic certificate and a ready-made version that she has modified (Lee Langvad 2006: 8-13). The first certificate has been filled out in English by the authorities with her name («LEE Chun Bok»), nationality («Korean»), date of birth, place of birth («presumed to be born in Seoul City, Korea»), Mother's name and Father's name («unknown»), weight and length at birth, name of the receiving institution that took care of the child, and other details related to medical conditions. In the second certificate, the author modifies her personal information through collage, introducing different details. Her Danish name, Maja Lee Langvad, takes the place of her Korean name; her date of birth is substituted with her date of arrival in Denmark; under «place of birth» she writes the name of Copenhagen airport, and instead of «unknown» she fills in the form using the names of her Danish parents. Furthermore, the author adds the label «ønskebarn» (wanted child), inviting the reader to reflect on the ambiguous condition of the adopted child – deeply wanted by her adoptive parents but abandoned by her biological mother. In an interview with the Danish newspaper «Kristeligt Dagblad», Lee Langvad has declared: «Der er mange klicheer om adoptivbørn, som jeg gerne vil gøre opmærksom på og gøre op med. For eksempel den, at man er et ønskebarn. [...] Man skal nærmest være taknemmelig over, at man er kommet hertil, og at man er et ønskebarn» (Hornemann 2006; There are many clichés about adopted children, and I would like to draw attention to them and break away from them. For example, the cliché about being a wanted child. [...] It's almost like you must be grateful that you came here, and that you are a wanted child).

Bricolage allows Maja Lee Langvad to question clichés and standard categorisations. She enriches and further expands the two versions of her adoption report with three questionnaires. The first is for her biological mother; the second is for her adoptive mother and the third is for herself. During the adoption process, prospective adoptive parents have to fill out a number of forms with many questions. In these questionnaires, Lee Langvad asks *her own* questions, sharing a series of queries with the reader. The questionnaires are also inspired, as mentioned earlier, by Max Frisch. However, unlike the Swiss author, who in *Fragebogen* invites the reader to answer questions on various themes, Lee Langvad does not explicitly demand the direct participation of her readers, who instead are indirectly engaged. The author asks personal questions about guilt,

emotional attachment, infertility and regret, drawing the reader into the personal and quite unsettling process of *making sense* of her own life story. Through her questions Lee Langvad causes puzzlement, bringing the reader closer to her own understanding of reality.

The questionnaires also address the themes of ethnic and biological belonging, kinship and citizenship. In the questionnaire for her biological mother she asks:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>4. Synes du, det er vigtigt at kende sit biologiske ophav? Og hvis ja: Hvorfor?
[...]</p> <p>13. Anser du mig for at være koreaner, fordi jeg har koreansk blod i årerne? Og hvis ja: Mener du da, at jeg indtil nu har opholdt mig i udlandet?
(Lee Langvad 2006: 9-10)</p> | <p>4. Do you think it is important for a person to know their biological origins? And if yes, why?
[...]</p> <p>13. Do you consider me Korean because I have Korean blood in my veins? And if yes, do you believe that I have been living abroad until now?
(Trans. by Haveland)</p> |
|---|--|

Question number 4 is repeated in the questionnaire intended for her adoptive mother, in which Lee Langvad asks further questions about the importance of biological ties and about her racial belonging:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>9. Betragter du mig som dit biologiske barn? Og hvis ja: tillægger du forholdet mellem to mennesker, som er biologisk beslægtet, en værdi i sig selv, eftersom du betragter mig som dit biologiske barn?
[...]</p> <p>13. Betragter du mig som hvid?
(2006: 15)</p> | <p>9. Do you consider me your biological child? If yes: do you confer a value in itself to the relationship between people who are biologically connected, since you consider me your biological child?
[...]</p> <p>13. Do you consider me White?
(Trans. by Haveland)</p> |
|--|---|

In all three questionnaires, the author asks what nationality she really is. Is she Danish, Korean, both or neither? As mentioned earlier, in the authentic copy of Lee Langvad's medical and social adoption report, her citizenship is stated as Korean, in the ready-made copy it is Danish. Neither version seems to capture a reality that is far more complex, as the author suggests by expanding the certificates with the questionnaires. Through bricolage, Lee Langvad creates new adoption documents, and the result is both puzzling and critical, suggesting multiple allegiances rather than one fixed identity.

Other artists have adopted the method of modifying official documents in an attempt to articulate and affirm marginalised perspectives. In a similar fashion, the Puerto Rican artist Adal Maldonado has issued a series of fictional passports as part of *El Puerto Rican Passport Project* (1994). The aim was to comment on the ambiguous national identity of Puerto Ricans, who

are officially US citizens and hold US passports, but do not have the right to vote in the United States. The Puerto Rican passports issued by Maldonado are modelled on the American passport and contain out-of-focus portraits of their holders to underline their complex identity. The passports also bear a stamp by «El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico» and have no expiry date, and the official statement on the signature page is written in Spanglish, a blend of Spanish and English. Maldonado has written that one of the goals of the project is to question the significance of citizenship, «either assumed or bestowed» (1994). One could argue that identification documents such as passports and adoption reports are both deeply private to the individual and at the same time quintessentially *public*. By acting upon them, re-making them, Maldonado and Lee Langvad attempt to subvert the status quo by revealing how identities are produced and categorised, physically bringing the private into the public arena. In line with the Puerto Rican passport project, Maja Lee Langvad's artistic appropriation of her own adoption documents is an attempt to foreground the existence of complex, hybrid identities that defy mainstream categorisation, while opening multiple threads of inquiry about issues of belonging in transnational adoption.

4. Reconfiguring otherness: racism and multiculturalism in Denmark

In Section 2 of *Find Holger Danske*, Lee Langvad appropriates another document from her adoption process, addressing the issue of racism and ethnic belonging in transnational adoption. She presents excerpts from a brochure that the Danish Adoption Centre (now AC International Børnehjælp) sent to prospective adoptive parents in 1979. The brochure lists a number of descriptions featuring detailed phenotypical traits of children of different nationalities. These are two of the excerpts quoted by Lee Langvad:

Koreanske børn er lyshudede og har sort hår og sorte, mandelformede øjne. Koreanerne er et af de højeste asiatiske folk, og børnene er derfor ikke specielt små i forhold til danske børn.

[...]

Børn fra Sri Lanka er som regel meget mørkhudede med sort hår og sorte øjne, og de er spinkle sammeliget med danskere. (2006: 29)

Korean children are light-skinned and have black hair and black, almond shaped eyes. Koreans are among the tallest Asian people, so children are not particularly short compared to Danish children.

[...]

Children from Sri Lanka are generally very dark with black hair and black eyes, and they are slender compared to Danes. (Trans. by Haveland)

It is striking how demeaning the descriptions are – not only because they objectify the children almost as commercial products in a catalogue, but also because they describe in detail the various shades of skin colour and specify the children's different degrees of resemblance to Danes or Europeans. In an anthropological study of the practice of adoption in the

United States, Modell argues that social workers have long supported the concept of blood thickness, a deeply rooted cultural conviction that «blood holds people together and that, consequently, the more evidently an adoptive family replicates a blood family, the more enduring it is likely to be» (2002: 7). This research shows how adoptive parents in Western countries often find it easier to bond with a familiar-looking child, with an individual that presents some similarity of traits (and ethnicity) to family members. In the very first page of *Find Holger Danske*, Lee Langvad subverts the common assumption of blood thickness with this vignette:

blod er tykkere end vand
blæk er tykkere end vand
mælk er tykkere end vand
tykmælk er tykkere end vand
(2006: 7)

blood is thicker than water
ink is thicker than water
milk is thicker than water
buttermilk is thicker than water
(Trans. by Haveland)

Lee Langvad takes the metaphor in a literal sense, substituting blood with «tykmælk» (buttermilk, a traditional Danish dairy product), thus transforming the proverb into a humorous *non sequitur*. By presenting excerpts from the Adoption Centre brochure, the author invites the reader to reflect on the racist implications of the concept of blood thickness. In Section 2 of *Find Holger Danske*, she sets out to connect the racial comments in the adoption brochure with issues of stigmatisation and racial stereotyping in Danish society at large. Through the process of bricolage, Lee Langvad contrasts the text from the Adoption Centre with a few poems deconstructing a number of racist Danish terms, a poem describing Pia Kjærsgaard's dream of finding a *perker* (derogative term for Muslims³) under her bed, and two clippings from the Danish Slang Dictionary with the definitions of terms such as «kineserpike med det røde: lille knækpølse med ketchup⁴» (Lee Langvad 2006: 31; Chinese dick with red sauce: small hot dog with ketchup, trans. by Haveland). Transnational adoptees are rarely understood as a minority group in Denmark (Su Rasmussen, Park Sorensen 2011: 237). By means of literary collage, Lee Langvad not only highlights the minority status of transnational adoptees, but foregrounds the immigrant status of the adopted child. Throughout the book she incorporates her personal adoption documents, residency and citizenship certificates, connecting autobiographical elements as part of a wider social critique culminating in Section 4 with a discussion of

³ While the term is used in a derogatory way in the context of this poetic work, it should be noted that *perker* has acquired slightly new and different meanings in recent times. See for example: <<http://www.b.dk/nationalt/jeg-mener-ikke-at-perker-kun-er-forbeholdt-muslimer>> (12/2014).

⁴ In Danish slang “det røde” also means “to have one’s menstrual cycle”.

immigration and integration policies in Denmark. Hans Hauge has noted that the immigrant in Danish literature and media is, for the most part, a Muslim (2013: 39). In *Find Holger Danske*, by contrast, Lee Langvad conjures a complex portrait of the transnational adoptee. Furthermore, in the last section of the book, she focuses on the anomalous and marginalised condition of asylum seekers and refugees in Danish society.

Around the time this book was published, the political situation in Denmark was marked by an unprecedented surge of anti-immigration sentiment. The Dansk Folkeparti, the right-wing populist political party established in 1995, was rapidly gaining popularity. The party first entered the Danish parliament in March 1998 with 13 mandates. In February 2005, the Dansk Folkeparti gained 13.3% of the vote, and obtained 24 mandates in Parliament. The party has a strong focus on preserving Danish culture and traditions, strengthening Danishness, supporting those Danes who belong to the weakest socio-economic groups, developing a strict immigration policy and opposing multiculturalism. According to the official political statement of the Dansk Folkeparti:

Danmark er ikke et invandrerland, og Dansk Folkeparti vil ikke acceptere, at landet udvikler sig til et multikulturelt samfund. [...] Udlændinge, der ønsker at blive i Danmark, bør bestræbe at blive danske af sind og ånd.

Denmark is not an immigrant nation, and the Dansk Folkeparti will not accept that the country becomes a multicultural society. [...] Foreigners who want to stay in Denmark have to become Danish in mind and spirit.⁵

In order to preserve the values and norms that are at the basis of *danskhed*, the party shows a fierce opposition towards multiculturalism, denying the possibility of any form of hybridisation of Danish culture or contamination with other cultures. According to the Dansk Folkeparti, minorities are non-existent, and immigrants have to become Danish in mind and spirit. Once again, by means of appropriation, the author decontextualises and repurposes a series of texts – starting from the book *Danmarks fremtid – dit land, dit valg* (Thulesen Dahl *et al.* 2001; Denmark's future – your country, your choice) published by the Dansk Folkeparti, highlighting and challenging stereotypes and categorisations.

Lee Langvad rewrites a paragraph from the book in order to reveal the rhetoric underlying the party's xenophobic stance. The original text explains that Danes experience discrimination in their own country because refugees have the right to obtain a place to live within three months after being granted asylum, supposedly often 'jumping ahead' of Danish citizens

⁵ From the website of the Danish Parliament: <http://www.ft.dk/~media/Pdf_materiale/Pdf_publicationer/Informationsark/Partier/dansk_folkeparti%20pdf.ashx> (02/2014).

who have been waiting for an apartment within the same system (Thulesen Dahl *et al.* 2001: 175). Lee Langvad reformulates the text into a humorous pastiche using a synecdoche; she replaces the Danish citizens in the original text with Holger Danske: «Dagligt diskrimineres Holger Danske i sit eget land» (2006: 52; Holger Dane is discriminated against every day in his own country, trans. by Haveland). In this pastiche, the refugee becomes Holger Udanske (Holger Non-Dane) who jumps ahead of Holger Danske in the waiting list for available apartments: «Det kan kun blive en dårligt start på det, der ellers skulle have været en succesrig integration» (2006: 52; This is a bad start to what would have otherwise been a successful integration, trans. by Haveland). Besides Holger Danske and Holger Udanske, the author introduces a third character – Holger Nydanske (Holger New Dane), the immigrant. *Nydanske* is the Danish term indicating immigrants, often second-generation. The effect of this ‘mad lib’ is an incongruous tale that reveals the racist rhetoric articulated by the Dansk Folkeparti.

Holger Udanske and Holger Nydanske are slight variations on Holger Danske – revealing that current ways of categorising otherness in Danish society are articulated from a majority perspective: one can be a Dane, a New Dane or a Non-Dane. It has been noted how, starting from 2001, fears of losing social and cultural «sammenhængskraft» (cohesion) began to dominate the Danish public debate, and the concept of *danskhed* – intended as a homogeneous, ahistorical entity – became a crucial way to safeguard unity (Bech Albertsen 2013: 207). By the process of bricolage, *Find Holger Danske* engages the reader in a process of creative disruption, bending textual and ideological structures to articulate a more complex and critical perspective. What began as a personal quest to make sense of her biographical narrative emerged as an important critique of issues of identity and citizenship in Denmark. This quest now continues in her newest poetic work, *Hun er vred – et vidnesbyrd om transnational adoption* (Lee Langvad 2014; *She is Angry – Witnessing Transnational Adoption*), in which she takes a closer look at issues pertaining to transnational adoption.

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AN APPEARANCE THAT DOES JUSTICE TO THE SECRET.
THE WRITER'S PERSPECTIVE
ON AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND NARRATION

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How does the concept of 'truth' in narration turn autobiographical elements into fiction? In my novels I have interwoven autobiography and narration, not only using material from my own life or from my father's notebooks on life in *Europeiskt skräp* (2009; *European Trash. Fourteen Ways to Remember a Father*, trans. by Anderson, Cassady 2013), but also through incorporating other 'autobiographies', i.e. the actor Erland Josephson's life and autobiographical sketches in *Livets mening och andra bekymmer* (Hallberg, Josephson 2010; *The Meaning of Life and Other Troubles*). In my latest novel *Strindbergs skugga i Nordens Paris* (2012; *Strindberg's Shadow in the Paris of the North*), Victoria Benedictsson's autobiographical writings in *Stora boken* (*The Great Book*), published posthumously (1978; 1982; 1985), and the mixture of fact and fiction in August Strindberg's letters and novels, are the starting point of my own family saga from 1887 to the present time. What is the artistic and human problem of revealing the 'truth' about yourself and others, in life and letters, and how does fiction treat this dilemma?

I will try to explore the concept of 'truth', using Walter Benjamin's description of it from *Das Passagen-Werk* (1983; *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Eiland, McLaughlin 1999), as something which can never be fixed or stated, but still as a category of deep insight and understanding:

Die Kategorie der Ähnlichkeit, die für das wache Bewußtsein nur eine sehr eingeschränkte Bedeutung hat, bekommt in der Welt des Haschisch eine uneingeschränkte. In ihr ist nämlich alles: Gesicht, hat alles den Grad von leibhafter Präsenz, der es erlaubt, in ihm wie in einem Gesicht nach erscheinenden Zügen zu fahnden. Selbst ein Satz bekommt unter diesen Umständen ein Gesicht (ganz zu schweigen vom einzelnen Wort) und dieses Gesicht sieht dem des ihm entgegengesetzten Satzes ähnlich.

The category of similarity, which for the waking consciousness has only minimal relevance, attains unlimited relevance in the world of hashish. There, we may say, everything is face: each thing has the degree of bodily presence that allows it to be searched – as one searches a face – for such traits as appear. Under these conditions even a sentence (to say nothing of the single word) puts on a face, and this face resembles that of the sentence standing opposed to it.

Dadurch weist jede Wahrheit evident auf ihr Gegenteil hin und aus diesem Sachverhalt erklärt sich der Zweifel. Die Wahrheit wird ein Lebendiges, sie lebt nur in dem Rhythmus, in dem Satz und Gegensatz sich verschieben um sich zu denken. (Benjamin 1983: 526; M 1a, 1)

In this way every truth points manifestly to its opposite, and this state of affairs explains the existence of doubt. Truth becomes something living; it lives solely in the rhythm by which statement and counterstatement displace each other in order to think each other. (Trans. by Eiland, McLaughlin; Benjamin 1999: 418; M 1a, 1)

In Benjamin's thinking truth is like clouds or smoke, something moving as soon as you see it – but still holding something beautiful and sacred, without which we are at a loss.

Translating *Das Passagen-Werk* and *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* (Benjamin 1950; *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, trans. by Eiland 2006) from German to Swedish in the Eighties, I came to believe that in Benjamin's prose writing there was a development from a more philosophical-poetical prose, the one that for example characterises his insights on the *flâneur* or the collector, and his more intimate prose writings in *Einbahnstraße* (Benjamin 1928; *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Underwood 2009) and *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*, where especially the notion of time leads Benjamin to try to look at the past as something which can only be understood and fulfilled through an act of understanding where the past echoes through the present – a Proustian way of letting nothing in one's life go unattended, close to the autobiographical impulse. And also aimed at an awakening to remembrance:

Proust konnte als ein beispielloses Phänomen nur in einer Generation auftreten, die alle leiblich-natürlichen Behelfe des Eingedenkens verloren hatte und, ärmer als frühere, sich selbst überlassen war, daher nur isoliert, verstreut und pathologisch der Kinderwelten habhaft werden konnte. Was hier im folgenden gegeben wird, ist ein Versuch zur Technik des Erwachens. Ein Versuch, der dialektischen, der kopernikanischen Wendung des Eingedenkens inne zu werden. (Benjamin 1983: 490; K 1,1)

Proust could emerge as an unprecedented phenomenon only in a generation that had lost all bodily and natural aids to remembrance and that, poorer than before, was left to itself to take possession of the works of childhood in merely an isolated, scattered and pathological way. What follows is an experiment in the technique of awakening. An attempt to become aware of the dialectical – the Copernican – turn of remembrance. (Trans. by Eiland, McLaughlin; Benjamin 1999: 388; K 1,1)

These aesthetics in Benjamin, I have come to believe, form his notion of *Rettung* (salvation), as well as ideas about the resurrection of the past and the collective awakening from a *Traumzustand*, a dreamlike condition which often happens to coincide with bad politics or historical danger. This

reverberation is understood by Benjamin as a knowledge of the senses, and he uses the expression «Das Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit» («the now of its recognisability»):

<p>Das gelesene Bild, will sagen das Bild im Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit trägt im höchsten Grade den Stempel des kritischen, gefährlichen Moments, welcher allem Lesen zugrunde liegt. (1983: 578; N 3,1)</p>	<p>The image that is read – which is to say, the image in the now of its recognisability – bears to the highest degree the imprint of the critical moment on which all reading is founded. (Trans. by Eiland, McLaughlin; Benjamin 1999: 463; N 3,1)</p>
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Is this not really what the old biographers were doing when they, with the distance of a historian, were trying to reconstruct an unknown individuality and its fate from the mere reading of ancient sources? And we all know that it was Goethe and Dilthey who emphasised the dialectics of past and present in the mind of the author – to shape the form in which «Dichtung und Wahrheit» (Poetry and Truth) would coincide. And where is it more at stake than in the effort to remember, worship, criticise or comment on a life, be it someone else's or one's own?

As Günter Niggel states in *Studien zur Autobiographie* (2012), the three parts of this compound – *autos*, *bios* and *graphein* (self, life and writing) – show that autobiography lies in the confrontation between literary description of the self and historiography (2012: 39). Niggel quotes Alain Robbe-Grillet, who on the question «What has my life been, and what am I now?» gave the answer: «I have the feeling that I consist of pieces, of fragments» (cf. Niggel 2012: 47). By doing so, Niggel places us on the spot of our broken-down notion of the self.

As further described by Linda Anderson in her interesting study *Autobiography* (2011), the historians of the self, such as Augustine, John Bunyan, James Boswell and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, all focus on life and letters. But they always display an element of estrangement. In the case of Rousseau's *Confessions* the topic is always: «simply myself». As Rousseau posits: «I am made unlike any other I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different» (quoted in Anderson 2011: 41). Linda Anderson states that Rousseau's notion of truth becomes conflated with truthfulness, «the non-verifiable *intention* of honesty on the part of the author» (Anderson 2011: 41; italics in the text). The difference from my understanding of Benjamin's or my own writings is that Rousseau sees autobiography as so emphatically transparent. Jean Starobinski has pointed out Rousseau's project as the reading of himself as an open book (Anderson 2011: 42). At the same time Rousseau's self becomes freed when alone, writing, while the others and the outer world become enormously threatening.

The estranged solution was followed up by almost all autobiographical writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a sharp dividing line made clear by Freud, stating the power of the Unconscious. Through Freud's studies we learn about the intermingling of essay and biography, for example in Freud's *Studien* from 1925, where he claims that his philosophical and psychoanalytical writings are more true to himself than his actual remembrances and intended autobiographical writings (Anderson 2011: 57-66).

This theme was followed up by many autobiographical writers in the twentieth century, who questioned the self and its representation. It is not only that the essence of the novel, from Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* onwards, comes to resurrect and honour the everyday life of someone or his past, but also that the representation of this past comes to intermingle with the form, so that the style or the narration can no longer be seen as expressing a true self or excluding it from others, as in the case of Rousseau, but rather that what is being expressed is really a representation of experiences in time. The referential problem being not so much what happened or how to tell it, but rather a problem of identity and the portrayal of identity as such. Through Louis-Ferdinand Céline the novel gets its nihilistic twist of identity, through Italo Svevo its ironical turn, and through Thomas Mann a more educated and well-spoken reference to art and life as a kind of unity. But with all these twentieth-century writings one thing is clear: autobiography is no longer separated from the novel, no longer clear memoir; autobiography starts being the topic of the novel, and the pieces of life that are used come to define and change its form.

In my latest novel, *Strindbergs skugga i Nordens Paris*, I refer to Swedish literature and the autobiographical problem in August Strindberg and Victoria Benedictsson, actually using the difference in their approach towards life and letters as a tool to understand the autobiographical notions of the Modern Breakthrough. As a narrator of herself, Victoria Benedictsson clings primarily to her diary, where she deals with what she calls a bottomless desire to see and understand, undergoing a process of intensified living through the annotations and the 'spying' on her *amant*, the notorious Don Juan, Georg Brandes. But at the end, when Benedictsson is facing her treatment by Brandes as dehumanising, she states: «Är det Georg Brandes som har knäckt mig? Nej. Det är allt det falska, som jag bäddat ned mig i för att behaga honom, som gjort det» (Benedictsson 1985: 350; Is it Georg Brandes that has crushed me? No. It is all the falsity that I have undertaken in order to please him that has destroyed me¹). When her writing can no longer be true, she loses her I:

¹ Translations are mine if not stated otherwise.

«Min sorg? Hvad sørjer jag öfver? Öfver förlusten af mitt "jag"» (1985: 378; My grief? What am I grieving for? For the loss of my "self"). She loses her energy to write and therefore cannot survive, as she can no longer get life into what she writes.

One could say that this problem never occurs to Strindberg, as there seems to be no period in his writing life when the process of writing casts a spell on the person. Especially not while in Denmark. In his worst circumstances, he writes his best works. And the question of how his writing might endanger his life is never asked. Benedictsson, on her part, especially in her most factual analyses of Georg Brandes's flatness and vanity, distinguishes between knowledge through books and a clarity about life beyond convictions, which she aims at in her writing. But life itself deprives her of it. She herself describes the ruinous aspect of her fate in terms of a humiliation, having succumbed to falsity and been subjected to an influence stronger than her own will. For her, this leads to suicide: «Han har varit mitt lifs stora händelse. Han är vändpunkten. Bekantskapen med honom bestämmer över heder och ära, öfver lif och död» (1985: 367; He has been the great event of my life. He is the turning point. My relationship with him takes precedence over honour and dignity, over life and death). For Strindberg things are different. Thanks to his writing, he succeeds in living through complexities and dangers, sacrificing the people closest to him, like Siri von Essen in *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* (Strindberg 1999; *The Defence of a Madman*, trans. by Sanders, Garton 2014). Thereby he saves himself. At times his powerful will almost wipes out the existence of others, but later, when confronted with feelings of loss and regret, his scrutiny of the past overcomes his own opinions and strategies. It is as if his writing guides him towards a jurisdiction far from his hot-blooded temper and blind insights, towards a redemption in language itself, which is permanently redefining his own values. This is how the truth of fiction teaches him the lesson about himself that leads to the questioning of life as such in *Inferno*, the picture of life as hell: «Vi befinna oss redan där nere! Jorden är helvetet, detta med överlägsen sinnrikhet byggda fängelse, där jag icke kan taga ett steg utan att såra andras lycka, och där de andra ej kunna förbli lyckliga utan att tillfoga mig smärta» (Strindberg 1994: 205; We are already down there! Earth is hell, this prison constructed with superior wisdom, where I cannot take one step without wounding other people's happiness, and where the others cannot be happy without doing me harm).

Yet we have in Virginia Woolf a great representative of a different perspective: her novels seem to investigate a more female and perhaps more sensitive flux of identity, understood as a searching for and a venturing into the self. In Woolf there is a definite link between life, diary and fiction, the expression as an unbounded space where identity is founded. In her diary she writes:

There looms ahead of me the shadow of some kind of form which a diary might attain to. I might in the course of time learn what it is that one might make of this loose, drifting material of life; finding another use for it than the use I put it to, so much more consciously & scrupulously, in fiction. (Quoted in Anderson 2011: 88)

Linda Anderson describes how for Woolf «Victorian biography was both artless and dull, it produced “fossils” rather than “living” people [...]. She tried to imagine a different kind of biography which could bring together fiction’s attention to the “intangible personality” and the “inner life” with the veracity and substance of historical fact» (2011: 90). For me the most interesting part of Woolf’s imaginings and re-imaginings of space, the whole concept of ‘a room of one’s own’, is that of an uncharted unconscious, a possibility of thinking identity beyond the certainty and closure demanded by what Woolf herself referred to as «the damned egotistical self» (quoted in Anderson 2011: 89). In this sense Woolf’s project differs completely from contemporary Scandinavian autobiographical writings, be it Karl Ove Knausgård’s close-writing of his own life as a heroic struggle which takes precedence over all, or Lars Norén’s diaries with their complete forgetfulness about all others, their full concentration on the narrator, the chronicler, the diarist, as a machine man, *une machine de l’écriture*, as in Hoffmann’s adventures, without morals, just explanatory feelings and statements about the self: «June 18, 2003: Igår ringde jag till henne och sa allt det som jag tänker, utan att ha tänkt igenom det. Jag berättade hurdan jag är och hur jag tror jag vill ha det. Jag beskrev hur pedantisk, komplicerad och sjukligt rigid jag är, hur medveten jag är om att jag försöker förvandla mitt liv till en befästning» (Norén 2008: 18 juni 2003²; Yesterday I called her and told her everything I was thinking about, without having thought things through. I told her how I am, and how I think I would like things to be. I described how pedantic, complicated and rigid I am, how aware I am that I am trying to construct my life as a fortress). I consider this trend of biographical writing as being a shield in the sense of war, a fortress with the narrator as king, as one of the most dominant tendencies of contemporary autobiographical writing. I see, however, alternatives that, I feel, are more true to life and art.

What Virginia Woolf describes so well as a problem, for instance in *A Sketch of the Past* (Woolf 1989), that we know very little about our being in the past if we are not able to analyse the unseen forces of society that are playing with us, seems to me the link both to Walter Benjamin’s project of analysing nineteenth-century Paris as a space for understanding his own situation, or my project of telling stories by circling around and

² Norén’s diaries do not have page numbers, but only the dates of every entry.

celebrating a dead father, a person who paid no attention to practicalities or money but worshipped art as a saviour of individuality and identity. We are all facing the fact that life differs from our own representation of ourselves – and to find out more about this discrepancy seems to me the task of a novel turning more and more to autobiography rather than that of an autobiographical hyper-genre, claiming identity as a category, like the king of a nation state (the novel), without recognising how outdated most kings and nations are.

One of the writers whom I admire most, Claudio Magris, analyses in *L'anello di Clarisse* (1984; Clarisse's Ring) Austrian literature, of which he is a foremost expert, and in the marvellous chapter entitled *Grande stile e totalità* (1984: 3-31; Grand style and totality) he dwells on the injustice between ideal and reality, truth and life, value and norm. Magris states that in contemporary literature grand style is not mimesis of life and its flow, but its reduction to the most important, which I find a very good definition. And Magris goes further: grandness is lost, he says, and in the small style, in fragments of life, the narrator in ironical longing is on a quest for grandness. The question whether life can be understood as a whole coincides with the effort of writing, thus constructing truth as a thing to work on and represent, also in Benjamin's sense of being in everlasting change. As such, identity is always a struggle, and the grand style gets connected to the ultimate questions about history and life, about everyday reality and its meaning.

Most importantly for me, Magris describes, in his essay on Hugo von Hofmannsthal and his *Der Brief des Lord Chandos* (Magris 1984: 32-62; The Lord Chandos Letter), how Hofmannsthal escapes the seduction of life by just flowing away, and how in all this fin-de-siècle literature in Vienna there was something very common to our world, the Habsburg experience of a downfall as sunrise. The end of a whole culture was perceived as a very near future, Magris writes. But despite this, he clearly points to writers such as Hofmannsthal and Robert Musil and how they managed to hold their ground in truthfulness and transformation, change and stability, so that the lack of any certainties or of a definite truth, rather than pointing to life as hell or the lack of meaning, for them defined the grand style.

Claudio Magris's writing pays profound homage to Hofmannsthal's words about the secret of life being the antithesis, and at the same time the connection, between truthfulness and change (Magris 1984: 59), an essence which interprets life and art, as a kind of sacred task for the writer and the living. This autobiographical aspect became clearer to me when writing *Europeiskt skröp*. And I still feel that Claudio Magris in *Microcosmi* (1997; *Microcosms*, trans. by Halliday 1999) has brought narration closest to incorporating and condensing the aspects of *autos*, *bios* and *graphein*. In his novel *Microcosmi* it is almost as if there were no difference between the narrator and Trieste, the living artists and the people of Trieste and the

dead. In one of the most beautiful passages, the narrator is contemplating the stillness of the forest, and we as readers suddenly understand, in the echo of a sentence, that someone dear to the narrator has died:

La figura seduta accanto nell'erba, vicina in quell'ora e negli anni, si era alzata dal prato ai margini della foresta – dov'eravamo stati entrambi ad attendere che le cose emergessero dal buio, emergere preannunciato dall'inconfondibile odore dell'alba, o che la stella del mattino si spegnesse proprio in cima all'abete rosso di fronte, subito dopo invisibile in quello scintillio – e si era incamminata lentamente verso e oltre quella porta di luce, entrando e svanendo nella chiarezza impenetrabile, sottratta allo sguardo. (Magris 1997: 101)

The figure sitting nearby in the grass, close both at that moment and over the years too, had stood up in the meadow at the forest's edge where we had both been waiting for the things to emerge from the dark, to emerge foretold by the unmistakable smell of dawn, or for the morning star to fade out at the apex of the red fir opposite, suddenly invisible in the brightness. Then the figure had set off slowly towards and in through that door of light, entering and fading in the impenetrable clarity, out of sight. (Trans. by Halliday; Magris 1999:100)

And at the end of *Microcosmi*, when the narrator is seeking shelter from the rain in the Church of the Sacro Cuore (Magris 1997: 265-273), one gets the feeling about autobiographical writing that it is like a turning to others in a dark place, where there is something open and holy that defines the encounter, and those elements of life are suddenly shown like parts of a dream or like looking at a photo album backwards, from the end to the beginning. And as the narrator ultimately envisages, life and death are a bit like jumping into the sea, maybe to leave the fear of emptiness for the fullness of an experience where the ego is contained by something greater, something that also embraces all other lives, and to which the narrator of *Microcosmi* might be led by his sons, a leading defined both by nature and choice, by forces bigger than the individual and yet stemming from within his soul.

One might say I have come to favour a style like that of Claudio Magris and Victoria Benedictsson because it holds and guards the secret and honours it. This great style has also that old Austrian quality of coping with duration and change, which might be the most important aspect of truthfulness in autobiography. This was also what Victoria Benedictsson called «truth» in writing, something she connected to the image of justice and morals for her persona, but did not feel could be sustained in her own life. Her diaries, *Stora boken*, should maintain a truth that caused her death, she thought: «Lif ända ut i pennspetsen – se der min lösen!» (Benedictsson 1985: 372; Life all the way out into the point of the pen – there is my solution!). Her lover, Georg Brandes, uses literature for different means and struggles, but literature is a fundamental part of her life, in the sense that she wishes to connect it to her own character. She

knows that she is right, but cannot live – that is the paradox: «Han egde intet att ge mig, ty tomhet var hela hans rikedom. Hvarför ser jag då icke efter om jag icke till äfventyrs eger någonting i mig sjelf? Hvem säger mig att den lärdom han diat sig till ur böcker är bättre än den karaktär och den erfarenhet jag fått genom att få lifnära mig på verklighetens torra bröd?» (1985: 351; He had nothing to give me, because hollowness was all his riches. Why do I not search to see if not by chance there is something in my own self? Who tells me that the knowledge he has been suckling from books is better than the character and the experience I have gained through being nurtured on by the dry bread of reality?).

In confronting such circumstances, I cling here to the old formula that truth is not a revelation which destroys the secret, but an appearance that seeks to give justice to it.

No matter what the cost.

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INDICE DEI NOMI

L'indice comprende i nomi degli autori e dei personaggi storici e letterari. Al nome dei personaggi letterari segue tra parentesi il titolo dell'opera in cui compaiono. In parentesi tonda si indicano anche le varianti di uno stesso nome ricorrenti nel volume. In parentesi quadra appaiono poche aggiunte esplicative dei curatori. Si segue l'ordine alfabetico scandinavo, collocando le vocali Æ, Ø, Å (AA), Ä, Ö dopo la Z.

The index includes names of authors as well as names of historical and literary characters. The names of literary characters are followed by the title, given in brackets, of the work in which they appear. Variant spellings of the same name are also given in brackets when occurring in the volume. Square brackets contain few explanations added by the editors. The Scandinavian alphabetical order is used, whereby the vowels Æ, Ø, Å (AA), Ä, Ö follow Z.

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CONTRIBUTORS AND ABSTRACTS

Massimiliano Bampi, «*Visserligen sant men knappast sanning*»: the Construction of Autobiographical Discourse in P.O. Enquist's *Ett annat liv*

Abstract

In 2009 the Swedish author P.O. Enquist was awarded for the second time the prestigious Augustpriset for his work entitled *Ett annat liv* (Another Life), in which he recounts his own life spanning a period from his childhood in Hjoggböle to the early 1990s. Although the matter treated is undeniably based on the writer's own life, *Ett annat liv* offers a fertile terrain for assessing the relationship between the search for truth, a major theme in Enquist's literary production, and the issue of truth claims in autobiographical writing. The aim of the present article is to make some observations on the narrative construction of the autobiographical discourse in *Ett annat liv*. In particular, Lejeune's and Genette's studies will be used to investigate the mechanisms behind the construction of a dialogue with the reader.

Biographical Note

Massimiliano Bampi graduated in 1999 from the University of Trento. He holds a PhD in Germanic Philology and Linguistics from the University of Siena (2004). Since 2004 he has been working as Assistant Professor in Germanic Philology at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, where he also teaches Swedish literature. His main research interests include the role of translation in medieval Sweden, the development of the *fornaldarsögur* as a genre of saga literature, and the reception of medieval literatures in modern Europe (especially Scandinavia). In the field of modern Scandinavian literatures, he has authored articles on Strindberg, Tranströmer and Enquist.

Alessandro Bassini, *Father and Son: David and Göran Rosenberg's Lives in Ett kort uppehåll på vägen från Auschwitz*

Abstract

2012 August Prize winner *Ett kort uppehåll på vägen från Auschwitz* (*A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz*) by Göran Rosenberg belongs to what is

generally known as second generation Holocaust literature. The book develops on two narrative planes. The first, devoted to the journey that takes the author's father, a survivor of Auschwitz, to Södertälje, has a historical-biographical character, whereas the second, in which the writer recollects the memories of his childhood, is specifically autobiographical. This peculiar structure is complicated by the fact that the two planes are intertwined throughout the book. My analysis focuses on how these perspectives interact, with emphasis on the narrative technique adopted by the author, defined by himself as a *minnesövning* (memory exercise), similar to the «memory excavation» elaborated by Walter Benjamin in his *Berlin Chronicles* and in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*. Although *Ett kort uppehåll på vägen från Auschwitz* is not an autobiography in the strict sense, I will try to show how the urge for truthfulness is a defining feature and marks a difference from previous examples of second generation Holocaust literature in Sweden, such as Suzanne Gottfarb's and Susanne Levin's works.

Biographical Note

Alessandro Bassini graduated in Scandinavian Studies at the University of Milan and obtained a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Trento with a dissertation about the Finland-Swedish writer Kjell Westö: *Notes from the Suburbs. The Image of Helsinki in a Selection of Works by Kjell Westö*. His field of research primarily concerns contemporary Scandinavian literature, especially Nobel Prize winner Eyvind Johnson, Kjell Westö and second-generation migrant literature. He has translated several novels from Swedish into Italian, including *Ett kort uppehåll på vägen från Auschwitz*.

Andrea Berardini, *Lasse-Maja: Autobiography and the Making of the Individual*

Abstract

Lasse-Maja's autobiography was published for the first time in Sweden in 1833 and came out in various best-selling editions throughout the nineteenth century. The retelling of the numerous crimes and adventures of the notorious thief Lars Molin (known as Lasse-Maja for his habit of disguising himself as a woman) occupies an ambiguous place in the system of literary genres. Despite displaying the textual signals of autobiographical narration, it also draws upon the literary conventions of fictionalised criminal biographies and *rövarromaner*, which were extremely popular at the time. Because of its fundamental ambiguities, the text is an illuminating example of the interplay between 'reality' and fiction, which is at the core of any autobiographical narrative, but it also reveals the interconnections of the autobiographical genre and the rise of the modern individualistic self. Lasse-Maja's adventures show how the self-construction of the autobiographical subject reflects the emergence of social trends which stress the individual's desire for autonomy.

Biographical Note

Andrea Berardini has obtained a PhD in Comparative Literature (2015) at the University of Genoa with a research project on the representation of artists in nineteenth-century women's literature. His main fields of interest are gender studies, the sociology of literature and the history of the novel.

Bruno Berni, *Narrare la distanza. Autobiografia e prospettiva nell'opera di Karen Blixen*

Abstract

The paper aims at examining, through a re-reading of Karen Blixen's works, the different relations with the reality narrated in the texts of the African thread – from *Letters from Africa* to *Out of Africa* –, the relationship between the partial truth of the letters and the fiction of the autobiographical novel, the boundary between autobiography and narration, but extending to the investigation of the psychological distance from the narrated time that characterises, almost in equal measure (with rare exceptions), the African texts and the tales, and drives the author to seek a perspective of alienation from the context so as to be able to grasp in both cases, at a distance, an overview which takes on symbolic meanings by virtue of representing a romantic expectation rather than a faithful portrait of reality.

Biographical Note

Bruno Berni studied German and Nordic literature at the University of Rome and in Copenhagen. Since 1993 he has been chief librarian and research manager at Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici in Rome. He taught Danish language and literature at the University of Urbino from 1994 to 1998, and Danish language at LUISS University in Rome from 1996 to 2001. Since 1987 he has published a number of translations of classical and modern literature, mainly Danish but also Swedish, Norwegian and German. For his work as a translator he has been awarded several prizes in Denmark and Italy, such as Hans Christian Andersen Prisen (2004), Den Danske Oversætterpris (2009), and Premio Nazionale per la Traduzione (2012). He has written essays on Scandinavian authors in Italian and in Danish, edited monographs and bibliographies and reviewed Scandinavian works for national dailies.

Valeria Borsotti, *Find Holger Danske: Articulating Complexity through Bricolage*

Abstract

This article analyses *Find Holger Danske* (2006), the autobiographical poetic work of Korean-born Danish writer Maja Lee Langvad, from an anthropological perspective. By creating a complex postmodern pastiche that incorporates her own adoption papers, articles, official documents and a

series of questionnaires for herself, her adoptive mother and her biological mother, the author articulates a critique of Danish integration policies and of issues of transnational adoption. This structural and stylistic analysis draws on Lévi-Strauss' concept of bricolage, focusing on how the creative process of rearranging different sources and styles leads to the reconfiguration of new meanings. I discuss how, through creative appropriation, the author reframes selfhood and otherness in contemporary Danish society, exploring themes of ethnic identity, kinship, racism and multiculturalism.

Biographical Note

Valeria Borsotti holds a BA in Foreign Languages and Literatures from Bergamo University and an MS in Anthropology from Copenhagen University. She is interested in social epistemology, multiculturalism, interdisciplinary research methods and applied anthropology. As a Master's student she carried out her field research in the San Francisco Bay Area, focusing on issues of ethnicity, participation and community-building in a multicultural context. She is a research assistant at the IT University of Copenhagen.

Paola Canu, *The Names in the Life and Works of Isak Dinesen/Karen Blixen*

Abstract

The writer Karen Blixen is known by different pseudonyms (Isak Dinesen, Tania Blixen, Osceola and Pierre Andrézel), and even in her private life she was called Tanne, Tania, the Baroness, the Lioness. All these names suggest her search of an identity, in particular, of her identity as an artist. The article examines how she variously mirrors herself in her characters, in particular in Pellegrina Leoni (*The Dreamers in Seven Gothic Tales*). Her characters, just like Karen Blixen, experience a metamorphosis in their lives. A change in their names marks a new stage in their existence and underlines that transformation. Her *Letters from Africa* provide a point of comparison between her life and that of her characters, showing how Karen Blixen wrote about herself in a process that led her to adopt the vocation of *storyteller*.

Biographical Note

Paola Canu was born in Sweden from Italian parents. When she was fifteen years old, she moved with her family to Alghero, Sardinia. After high school she studied at the University of Florence and obtained a degree in Modern Languages and Literature (English and Swedish), with a thesis on Karen Blixen entitled: "*The Bow of the Lord*": *The Figure of the Artist in the Fiction of Karen Blixen*. She then worked as a Swedish language lecturer at the University of Florence in 2006-2007. In 2013 she obtained a degree in Early Childhood Education, University of Florence, with a thesis that investigates the relationship between educators, parents and children in the context of early childhood services.

Elettra Carbone, «*Thorvaldsen and Me*»: *Representations of Bertel Thorvaldsen and His Sculptures in Autobiographical Texts by Danish and Norwegian Artists and Writers in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century*

Abstract

The Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844) was one of the most influential and prolific artists of the nineteenth century. For this reason, it is not surprising that Thorvaldsen and his statues appeared in travelogues, autobiographies and letters throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this paper I analyse how Thorvaldsen was represented in the autobiographical narrations written by Danish and Norwegian artists and writers of the time. Why was Thorvaldsen included in these texts? Did the way Thorvaldsen was represented in these texts change over the course of this period? Was he represented as a dear friend and companion, as an idol, as an essential part of the historical context, or as a representative of an older generation? Using as my starting point a number of examples from autobiographical texts by Danish and Norwegian artists, I examine the ‘cultural mobility’ of the figure of Thorvaldsen.

Biographical Note

Dr Elettra Carbone is Teaching Fellow in Norwegian at the Department of Scandinavian Studies, UCL. She holds a PhD in Scandinavian Studies, an MA in Comparative Literature and a BA in Scandinavian Studies with Management Studies, all from UCL. She has co-edited *Lyset kommer fra sør: Italias frigjøringskamp sett av datidens norske forfattere* (Gyldendal, 2011) and *Nordic Publishing and Book History* (Norvik Press, 2013), and her PhD thesis *Nordic Italies: Representations of Italy in Nordic Literatures between the 1830s and the 1910s* will soon appear as a monograph (Nuova Cultura, forthcoming). A number of her academic articles feature in peer-reviewed journals and volumes. Her current research interests include representations of Italy in Nordic Literatures, the cultural mobility of Thorvaldsen’s sculptures through print culture, and the reception of the Norwegian Constitution in European literature. She also works as Editorial Assistant for Norvik Press Ltd, UCL.

Massimo Ciaravolo, *Kvarstadsresan by August Strindberg: Letters as Autobiographical Space, Self-defence and Reassessment of Views*

Abstract

Kvarstadsresan (Journey into Detention), published in April 1885, is an autobiographical essay on the genesis, publication and reception of the author’s controversial short stories about marriage in *Giftas (Getting Married)* from 1884. The reception included the legal action against Strindberg for blasphemy, his journey from Switzerland to Stockholm in autumn 1884 in order to face trial, and his final acquittal. The text consists of fictional letters

written by Strindberg from April to November, 1884, to an addressee without a name or a voice. In my article I discuss the status, form and subject matter of this essay, bearing in mind that Strindberg is a great letter writer of world literature, and considering the uses and functions of his real correspondence, in particular during the intense year of 1884. In addition, the article focuses on the strategies of self-defence in *Kvarstadsresan*, in order to detect the signs of the writer's disengagement from his role as a politically committed writer fighting for the democratic cause – a crucial reassessment in Strindberg's world view and in his literary profile in the mid-1880s. With *Kvarstadsresan* Strindberg defined his autobiographical space at an early stage, and showed his inclination towards a literary and autobiographical use of letters.

Biographical Note

Massimo Ciaravolo is Associate Professor of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Florence. He is the author of a book on Hjalmar Söderberg as a literary critic (1994), of a book on the reception of the *flâneur* among Finland-Swedish writers at the beginning of the twentieth century (2000), and of a chapter on this generation in *Finlands svenska litteratur* (2000, new edition 2014). He has co-edited *L'uso della storia nelle letterature nordiche. Le lingue nordiche fra storia e attualità* (2011), and published a number of academic articles on major Scandinavian writers and their representations of the experience of modernity at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. He has also written on the Swedish literature of the Holocaust and translated Scandinavian literature into Italian. The work of Strindberg is his major field of research at present.

Sara Culeddu, *Polyphony and Strategies in Tarjei Vesaas's Autobiographical Discourse*

Abstract

In this essay I analyse *Båten om kvelden* (1968; *The Boat in the Evening*) by Tarjei Vesaas and the passage under the title of *Slik det står i minnet* (*As It Stands in the Memory*) in particular, through a 'polyphonic' path towards the most intimate voice of the author, from outside to inside. I initially observe the attempt of Halldis Moren Vesaas to let the voice of the author move in from outside through a sort of 'collective autobiography'; then I present the relationship between the voices of Tarjei and Olav Vesaas in the collection of autobiographical writings entitled *Tarjei Vesaas om seg sjølv* (1985; *Tarjei Vesaas about Himself*); and finally I focus on *Båten om kvelden* and on the polyphony inside *Slik det står i minnet*, paying particular attention to the autobiographical strategies, to the standpoint of the author, and to the relationship between reality and fiction.

Biographical Note

Sara Culeddu was Temporary Researcher in Comparative Literature and Language Studies at the University of Trento (2012-2013), where she obtained a PhD in Comparative Literature and Language Studies in 2011. In 2005 she graduated Summa cum Laude from the University of Florence with a degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures. Her thesis was about Nordic, European and Comparative Literature. From 2008 to the present she has been adjunct professor in Scandinavian Literature, Contemporary Scandinavian Literature and Translation Studies at the University of Milan. Throughout this time, she has also been working as a literary translator from Norwegian, Swedish and Danish. She has published multiple academic articles in the field of Nordic and comparative literature as well. Her other research interests include philosophy, anthropology and translation studies.

Giuliano D'Amico, *Sinne, selvinnsett og det politisk ukorrekte. Raseri av Cornelius Jakhelln*

Abstract

The article focuses on *Raseri. En hvitings forsøk på en selvbiografi* (*Fury. A White Man's Attempt at an Autobiography*) by Cornelius Jakhelln (2011). It analyses the implications of the label «autobiography», based on a concept proposed by the Norwegian philosopher Peter Wessel Zapffe, and discusses whether and how this book can be considered a literary (auto)biography. The article also addresses the book's political implications, with special attention to Jakhelln's position towards extremism. In this sense *Raseri* is not only a refreshing contribution to the ongoing debate on autobiographical fiction in Norway, but also a peculiar example of 'trauma literature' in the wake of the terror attacks on 22 July 2011.

Biographical Note

Giuliano D'Amico is Associate Professor of Scandinavian Literature at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, Norway. He is the author of *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy. Enrico and Icilio Polese's Ibsen Campaign* (Edizioni di Pagina, 2013), and has co-edited the anthologies *Den engasjerte kosmopolitt. Nye Bjørnson-studier* (Novus, 2013) and *Lyset kommer fra sør. Italias frigjøringskamp sett av datidens norske forfattere* (Gyldendal, 2011). He has also been active as a literary translator from Norwegian into Italian.

Alessia Ferrari, *Due diari di viaggio dell'esploratore norvegese Fridtjof Nansen come narrazioni autobiografiche*

Abstract

Fridtjof Nansen's travel diaries *Paa ski over Grønland* (trans. as *The First Crossing of Greenland*) and *Fram over Polhavet* (trans. as *Farthest North*)

offer an example of how travel writing and autobiographical writing can mingle, showing the author's personality and philosophical mindset. The most relevant feature of Nansen's thinking is the relationship between man and nature, where the first is nothing more than a well-integrated element of the latter. The success of Nansen's endeavours lies in fact in this attitude towards nature, since he tries to comply with nature instead of challenging it, as a lot of previous explorers did with tragic results. Nansen crosses Greenland skiing and reaches very close to the North Pole because he plays by the same rules as nature. In his diaries it is possible to read about both his experience as expedition leader and his philosophical attitude.

Biographical Note

Alessia Ferrari has studied Scandinavian Languages and Literature at Università degli Studi di Milano. She has a PhD degree in contemporary Scandinavian literature, with a dissertation about crime fiction. Her main areas of interest are modern and contemporary Nordic literature, Nordic cultures and languages.

Davide Finco, *Autobiography as a Bill of Charge (and Self-defence) and as a Portrait of Society: Barbarskogen by K.G. Ossiannilsson*

Abstract

A very prolific author, K. G. Ossiannilsson (1875-1970) was a poet, novelist, essayist and playwright. The lyrics with which he debuted in the early years of the twentieth century made him very popular even within the working class. He was then attracted by socialist-inspired movements, in which he participated, although he soon broke with them because of his disappointment in the Social Democratic Party for – as he said – the inconsistency between its ideals and its rigid political practice and mindset. His project of a novel about the Swedish society of the time (focusing especially on the workers' movement) therefore took on strongly autobiographical features, and the writer – under the guise of fictional characters – portrayed his own story (and troubles), formulating an indictment of the leaders of the movement and challenging their ideals and political rhetoric.

Biographical Note

Davide Finco is Research Fellow at the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Genoa, where he teaches Scandinavian culture and literature. He obtained a degree (2005) in German literature with a study on Jacobsen's influence on Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910). His doctoral thesis (2010) deals with children's literature between Scandinavia and Italy in the second half of the twentieth century. He is currently working on the representation of society in Scandinavian literature from 1870 to 1930. His research interests concern literature and

society, history, children's literature, the Scandinavian novel and the relationships between modern German and Scandinavian authors.

Ulf Peter Hallberg, *An Appearance That Does Justice to the Secret. The Writer's Perspective on Autobiography and Narration*

Abstract

In his essay the author explores notions of 'truth' in autobiographical fiction, borrowing the terms of «salvation» and «resurrection» of the past from the German philosopher Walter Benjamin. The questioning of the self becomes a means by which autobiographical writing moves to the centre of the twentieth-century novel, where uncertainty is a main issue. His analysis of the nineteenth-century Swedish novelists August Strindberg and Victoria Benedictsson shows how morality or amorality in writing can mean life or death for the author. In his conclusion, he points to the writings of Claudio Magris as approaching Benjamin's notion of salvation: an 'appearance' in writing which brings justice to the notion of «truth» as a «truthfulness in change».

Biographical Note

Swedish author Ulf Peter Hallberg has lived in Berlin since 1983. Hallberg's highly acclaimed essay-novel *The Flâneur's Gaze* (1993) describes Eastern and Western Europe after the fall of the wall. In novels like *Grand Tour*, *Legends & Lies*, *European Trash*, *The Meaning of Life and Other Troubles* (with Erland Josephson), Hallberg has developed a cosmopolitan, existential style, shifting between settings in Sweden and abroad, and mixing facts and fiction. His latest novel *The Great Amusement Park* (2012) tells a family saga from 1887 to the present, in Copenhagen and Malmö. Hallberg has translated Shakespeare, Schiller, Walter Benjamin and others into Swedish. He teaches creative writing and *atelier de traduction* at Études germaniques et nordiques, Paris-Sorbonne, and lectures in the USA and Italy.

Angela Iuliano, *Agneta Horn's Beskrifning öfwer min wandringestidh. A Woman's Voice from the Seventeenth Century*

Abstract

Agneta Horn was a Swedish noblewoman who lived in the seventeenth century, and her autobiography is interesting for historical, social, linguistic and literary reasons, and often addresses the crucial events of the time, such as the Thirty Years' War. The language Horn employs, especially the military jargon, is rich in loanwords from Middle Low German and French, thus reflecting the changes that Swedish was undergoing in the seventeenth centu-

ry. Apart from the linguistic and historical aspects, Horn's autobiography is noteworthy also for its formal diversity and articulation, possibly attributable to the influences of a variety of literary genres. It is a female autobiography, a genre that was gaining popularity at the time (Queen Christina also authored her own autobiography); it is a *släktbok*, i.e. a collection of personal notes that recount the private and economic events of a family; it is a war diary, since Horn's husband was in the army and she followed him during his military campaigns; it is finally a book of prayers, which comprise a considerable portion of the text, especially its final section.

Biographical Note

Angela Iuliano graduated in Swedish Language and Literature at L'Orientale University of Naples. She obtained a PhD in Germanic Philology and Linguistics with a thesis on *Erikskrönikan's* prologues at the University of Siena/Arezzo. She is presently a post-doctoral Research Fellow in Swedish Language with a research project entitled *Poetry and Historiography in Heimskringla*. Since 2010 she has held a position as Swedish Language Adjunct Professor at L'Orientale University of Naples.

Maria Cristina Lombardi, *Tomas Tranströmer tra autobiografia poetica e poesia autobiografica*

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the peculiar relationships between Tomas Tranströmer's autobiography *Minnena ser mig* and his poems. I try to underline the formal and thematic correspondences which link between the prose of this text and some of the poems of Tranströmer (Nobel Prize winner in 2011), in order to show both his literary method and the pattern of this work's compositional lines.

Biographical Note

Maria Cristina Lombardi is Associate Professor of Nordic languages and literature at the University of Naples L'Orientale. She obtained an MA from the University of Florence in 1983 (Dissertation: *The Swedish Novel Doktor Glas by Hjalmar Söderberg and its European Context*) and a PhD in Germanic philology at the University of Florence in 2001 (Dissertation: *Friðbjófsrímur, Rhetorical Figures in Medieval Icelandic Poetry*). She received a research fellowship from the Swedish Institute and studied critical methods (at PhD level) under Prof. Kjell Espmark at the University of Stockholm in 1984-1985. She serves on the editorial board of the academic journal AION, Germanic section, published by the University of Naples L'Orientale, in addition to being a member of the PhD programme in literary, linguistic and comparative studies at the same university. In 2006 she was awarded the Natur och Kultur prize

by the Swedish Academy for her work as a literary translator. Her main research fields include: Scandinavian languages and literatures; Nordic philology; rhetorical figures in medieval Icelandic poetry; translation studies. She has translated many modern and medieval literary works from both Swedish and Icelandic into Italian. She has translated Tomas Tranströmer, the 2011 Swedish Nobel Prize winner, thus introducing him to Italian readers.

Maria Pia Muscarello, *Eyvind Johnsons vägar går över Metaponto*

Abstract

Vägar över Metaponto (Roads through Metaponto) is a small travel book that helps readers understand the writer Eyvind Johnson, his affairs and his spirit as a careful observer, detached from the things of the world. The book contains pages of his diary about his trip to Italy completed in 1958, but also about his previous trips in 1953 and 1955, the purpose of which was to seek and discover, with an open mind and without preconceptions, the environment and characters that appear in his historical novels *Molnen över Metapontion* (1957; *The Clouds over Metapontion*) and *Hans nådes tid* (1960; *The Days of His Grace*). Once again Eyvind Johnson sought and found the atmosphere and emotions felt during his boyhood, when in the extreme North of Sweden he read about the fabulous Mediterranean, the countries whose shores it caresses, the legends set along its coasts, and the historical characters of its past. Johnson also analyses the personality and spirit of the common people that still live in those lands, and of their daily struggle for survival. He finds constant confirmation of the idea that human beings in all times and places have been equal and felt the same joy, pain, emotions and passions.

Biographical Note

Maria Pia Muscarello taught Nordic Languages and Literature at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature at the University of Turin from 2000 to 2013. She graduated from the University of Uppsala with a degree of Philosophies Kandidat (BA) and in Modern Arts at the University of Turin. After having taught at high school level, she worked for many years for the IRRSAE-Piemonte, where she supervised «Theater in the Schools», organised conferences and published related essays. She has translated works from Swedish into Italian for the publishing houses UTET, Mursia, Libreria Stampatori, Ubulibri, among which *The Red Room* by August Strindberg and *Dreams of Roses and Fire* by Eyvind Johnson. She is the author of essays on Scandinavian literature and has written numerous literary entries for the UTET Encyclopedia. In November 2004 she organised the international conference *Scandinavian Countries in the Lands of Asti* (Piemonte, Italy), for which she received, together with Renzo Pavese, the Asti-Piemontese in the World Award. In 2011 she edited the literary anthology *Voices from Sweden* (Edizioni Mercurio).

Stefan Nygård, *Science and Politics in the Scholarly Autobiography of Rolf Lagerborg*

Abstract

The autobiography of the Finnish philosopher, writer and public intellectual Rolf Lagerborg (1874-1959) belongs to a tradition of objectivising scholarly self-portraits. After presenting the author as a philosopher and an engaged intellectual at the turn of twentieth-century Finland, the article discusses the style and content of Lagerborg's memoirs in relation to his professional role, as well as his social position as a member of an increasingly marginalised Finland-Swedish intelligentsia. The latter part of the article addresses the potential and problems related to the use of autobiographies as sources for a socio-cultural study of intellectuals. The case of Lagerborg provides a starting point for exploring the predicament of cosmopolitan intellectuals in nationalist Finland, against the background of a changing geo-cultural landscape at the end of the Russian period in Finnish history, and the country's independence in 1917. Lastly, despite the inevitable difficulties involved in using autobiographical narratives as historical sources, the article argues that, on condition that such narratives are approached with some degree of caution and attention to contextualising the subject, they can be valuable documents for intellectual historians, in that they provide detailed information on the practicalities of intellectual life and shed light on the internal logic, rules and conflicts of cultural fields.

Biographical Note

PhD Stefan Nygård is an Academy of Finland Researcher at the Department of History, University of Helsinki, and Visiting Fellow (2013-2014) at the European University Institute in San Domenico di Fiesole near Florence. He is an intellectual historian currently working on a comparative history of peripheral intellectual fields (Finland and Scandinavia) in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. His other scholarly interests and publications deal with the relationship between culture and politics, the social history of philosophy, cultural transfers, and the history of the avant-gardes.

Franco Perrelli, *Ola Hansson e August Strindberg. Intersezioni e trasfigurazioni autobiografiche dalla «città dei peccati»*

Abstract

This paper focuses on the analysis of the personal transfigurations – through novels and stories indirectly based on facts and real circumstances – as developed by Ola Hansson and August Strindberg, against the background of the various autobiographical writings produced in the Berlin circle at Zum schwarzen Ferkel in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The main theme will be the intersection of different narrative strategies for narrating oneself and others, by bending autobiography to self-mythisation.

Biographical Note

Franco Perrelli is Full Professor of Performing Arts at the University of Turin, Department of Art, Music, Theatre and Cinema (DAMS). He is a specialist in Scandinavian and contemporary theatre. Many of his essays have been translated abroad. Among his most important monographs: William Bloch. *La regia e la musica della vita* (Milan: Led, 2001); *Storia della scenografia* (Rome: Carocci, 2002; new ed. 2013); *Echi nordici di grandi attori italiani* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2004); *La seconda creazione. Fondamenti della regia teatrale* (Turin: Utet, 2005); *I maestri della ricerca teatrale. Il Living, Grotowski, Barba e Brook* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2007; Pirandello Prize 2009); *Strindberg: la scrittura e la scena* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2009); *Ludvig Josephson e l'Europa teatrale* (Acireale-Rome: Bionanno, 2012); *Bricks to Build a Teaterlaboratorium. Odin Teatret and Chr. Ludvigsen* (Bari, Edizioni di Pagina, 2013).

Elena Putignano, *Dangling between Fiction and Autobiography: Aksel Sandemose and the Unquiet Quest for the Self*

Abstract

The present article offers an analysis of the autobiographical insights in Aksel Sandemose's novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*. The paper focuses especially on the novel's second edition (1955), which contains most of the author's autobiographical and metaliterary reflections. The blend of fiction and reality, which is quite common in Sandemose's literary production as well as in the reports of his journeys, is especially complex with regard to Espen Arnakke's story. This ambiguity appears strikingly in the introduction to the revised version of *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*, as well as in a number of collateral writings which have appeared over the years, and in which Espen's story is thickly intertwined with autobiographical issues. Although the writer never defined the novel unequivocally as autobiographical, he explicitly insisted on the ambiguous relationship that bound him to the tormented character of the fugitive Espen, stressing his hero's 'hybrid' and partially autobiographical nature.

Biographical Note

Elena Putignano is currently attending her third year as a PhD student in Scandinavian (Norwegian) Literature at the Università degli Studi di Milano. She wrote her BA thesis on Peter Weiss's early Swedish text *De besegrade* (*The Vanquished*). She obtained an MA in German and Norwegian Literature with a thesis in comparative literature, on the influence of Henrik Ibsen's work on

Gerhart Hauptmann's theatre. Her current PhD project deals with the artistic representation of childhood and adolescence in Norwegian literature, with examples drawn from the fin-de-siècle period to the present.

Anna Maria Segala, *The Border Breaking Bunch di Maja Magdalena Swiderska. Autobiografia come ricerca di identità esistenziale e linguistica nelle scrittrici (post)migranti*

Abstract

Autobiographical narration is a central feature of migration literature, as it represents the outsider's point of view, a minority discourse compared to a majority which determines the cultural and artistic standards. Having to cross borders of various kinds is inherent in each experience of exile. Maja Magdalena Swiderska's novel *The Border Breaking Bunch* chooses this particular angle as a thematic approach to the description of the narrator's journey to Warsaw, her family's home city, which also represents an inner journey towards the awareness of a complex identity where language plays a major role. The aim of my paper is to show how the different 'selves' created by the author interplay with dislocation in place and time, and how the autobiographical truth is constantly threatened by the fictional project.

Biographical Note

Since 2007, Full Professor of Nordic Languages and Literature at Sapienza – Università di Roma. She has studied different aspects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Scandinavian literature. In particular: the short story, in articles on K. Blixen and Helle Helle; the realistic mode in Strindberg's prose; drama (K. Abell, P.O. Enquist, J. Fosse); fin-de-siècle motives in S. Claussen and H. Bang; avant-garde poetry in the 1920s. In 2005 she organised, contributed to and then edited the proceedings of the first International Study Conference in Italy on H.C. Andersen, *Fairy Tale and Modernity in H.C. Andersen* (Roma 2010). Her translations are: from Danish, H.C. Andersen's *Metalsvinet*, S. Kierkegaard's *Stadier paa Livets Vei*; from Swedish, Strindberg's *Ensam*. Other publications concern: self-translation in K. Blixen (*Babette's Feast*) and interactions between Italian and Scandinavian culture: *Odin teatret tra Italia e Danimarca*, in *Analecta Instituti Danici*, 2013 and *Fortuna di Machiavelli nei Paesi scandinavi* (forthcoming in *Enciclopedia Machiavelli*, Treccani).

Camilla Storskog, «Skriva "jag" och mena det, går det?» *Om självbiografisk dikt i Norden*

Abstract

«Writing "I" and meaning it, can it be done?», is a question raised by the Swedish writer Elise Ingvarsson in the poem *Mönstren och Kristus* (2005).

Ingvarsson's text is relevant to the discussion of the relationship between autobiography and poetry for at least two reasons: on the one hand, it calls attention to the problem of the lyrical vs. the empirical 'I'; on the other, it openly refers to Sonja Åkesson's poetry, which often calls upon the poet's own experiences, *Själviografi (replik till Ferlinghetti)* and *Självpporträtt* being two examples. In my essay, I discuss – in addition to Åkesson – authors such as Klaus Rifbjerg (*Under vejr med mig selv. En utidig selvbiografi*) and Helge Hagerup (*Selvportrett i feber*), who, in the paratextual elements of their poetry, seem to draw up autobiographical contracts with the reader. Two poems by the Finland-Swedish poet Börje Ahlö will serve to examine the hypothesis whereby autobiographical poetry is produced when the names of the 'lyrical I' and the poet correspond. The road to a reflection on autobiographical poetry in Scandinavia will run through the theoretical discussion of the lyrical subject and autobiography that has recently taken place in France. Can poetry combine with autobiography? What does this combination look like and what textual strategies does it engage?

Biographical Note

Camilla Storskog, PhD, is Assistant Professor in Scandinavian Studies at the University of Milan, where she has been teaching Scandinavian literature since 2003. Her main research interests include encounters between verbal and visual language (literary impressionism, illustrated books, graphic novels, comics), but she has also worked on subjects such as autobiography, travel writing and the historical novel.

Luca Taglianetti, «*En vakker lørdag i november 1836 kom jeg*». *Fiction and Historicity in the Autobiographical Frame Stories of Peter Christen Asbjørnsen's Norske huldreeventyr og folkesagn*

Abstract

Unlike other folkloristic anthologies, all the legends featured in Peter Christen Asbjørnsen's *Norske huldreeventyr og folkesagn (Norwegian Hulder Tales and Folk Legends)* are introduced by a frame story that explains the occasion on which the author heard the traditional tale he would then write down. Most of the frame stories are told in the first person. To the modern reader, it could seem that the author himself is the one who is talking, often recalling childhood memories or past events, but thanks to the biographical material we have today, and through an analysis of the techniques used by the author, it is possible to distinguish what material is a real autobiographical note and what, conversely, is a fictitious report used by the author for the narration's sake. This paper argues that most of the time Asbjørnsen uses the frame stories to give more reliability to his tales, and that the boundary between fiction and reality of the autobiographical notes in the frame

stories is not so sharp, but that most of the frames are events which really happened to the author, reworked to fit into the narrative context.

Biographical Note

Luca Taglianetti is a scholar and translator of Norwegian literature. His field of research includes Scandinavian folk beliefs, legends and ballads. After having obtained an MA in Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Salerno, he was *gjesteforsker* (visiting fellow) at the University of Oslo, which resulted, in 2012, in the publication of the first complete translation into Italian of Peter Christen Asbjørnsen's *Norske huldreeventyr og folkesagn* (never published in any other foreign language since its first edition). He has also published the first complete translation of Andreas Faye's *Norske Folke-Sagn* (2014). Since 2012 he has been an honorary member of Asbjørnsenselskapet (Asbjørnsen Society).

Bruno Villani, *Autobiography as a Narrative of a Transformation in Yarden by Kristian Lundberg*

Abstract

The text examined in this paper is the autobiographical novel *Yarden*, published in 2009 by the Swedish writer and poet Kristian Lundberg. This novel revolves around Lundberg's work experience as a day-labourer at Yarden in the port of Malmö, recounting the precarious, harsh working conditions that he and his workmates had to endure. While Kristian is at Yarden, a chance thought of his mentally unstable mother introduces another parallel story which, through continual flashbacks, describes his difficult childhood marked by his father's abandonment of their family. Lundberg depicts a world in which he sees himself as lonely and condemned to a destiny that he is unable to understand or change, to the extent that he likens himself to a pinball ball which is cast about haphazardly. Several motifs are identified in *Yarden*, above all class struggle, God's presence and Lundberg's reflections on what humanity is. In this light, this paper interprets *Yarden* as a means or an attempt by the author to find his own humanity. Lastly, the paper also analyses *Yarden* in the light of Barros' theory of autobiography as a narrative of transformation.

Biographical Note

Bruno Villani graduated in 2004 in Foreign Languages and Literatures at L'Orientale University of Naples, where he majored in Swedish Language and Literature. In 2006 he obtained two fellowships for a research project on Lars Gustafsson, to be carried out at the University of Stockholm. Since 2006 he has been living in Stockholm, and in the meantime he obtained a Bachelor's degree in Italian from the University of Stockholm in

2010 and a PhD in Germanic Philology at the University of Siena/Arezzo. He has also been studying German at the University of Stockholm and at Mälardalen University in Sweden, and he spent a semester in Cologne, Germany, in 2014. An article of his about the Scandinavian god Baldr was published in the periodical *Annali – Germanic Section* (2013), under the auspices of L’Orientale University of Naples.

Federico Zuliani, *Autobiographical Documents by Scandinavian Jesuits from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Remarks for Further Research*

Abstract

The article deals with the autobiographical documents produced by Scandinavian Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Due to very specific habits of the Jesuit Order, a large production of autobiographical material (mainly general confessions and letters, to both their religious superiors and their relatives and friends in Scandinavia) has survived to the present day. The peculiarities of these documents are examined and suggestions for further research discussed.

Biographical Note

Federico Zuliani is a PhD student at The Warburg Institute, University of London. He studied at the Universities of Milan, Copenhagen and Geneva. His areas of research are religious minorities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in Denmark and Italy, and the history of biblical exegesis.

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