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The Functions of Autoreception

Karl Ove Knausgård as Author-Critic and Rewriter

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Comparative Literature

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Declaration

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Ida Hummel Vølle

Abstract

Karl Ove Knausgård made his entry into the literary field as a critic in the 1990s, and he has since 1998 made his mark as a novelist and essayist. The six-volume autobiographical work *Min kamp* (2009-2011) is in essence about what it means for him to be an author. This thesis investigates Knausgård's strategies as a critic, essayist, and as the author of *Min kamp* to position himself and his poetics within the literary field and a literary tradition. Specifically, it examines the functions of autoreception, i.e. self-criticism, implicit in Knausgård's role as an author-critic, an author who writes literary criticism, and as a rewriter, an author who rewrites his own texts *and* the context and poetic intentions of his previous texts. Thus, this thesis aims to answer the question *what are the functions of criticism and of rewriting for Karl Ove Knausgård as an author?*

Part I outlines a new framework of autoreception devised for examining the functions of criticism and rewriting. The proposed common denominator is that both function to establish, position, and validate an author-image. Ultimately, a new understanding of the narration in *Min kamp* as autoreceptive is offered. Part II examines a largely unexplored area of Knausgård's work, namely the strategies of Knausgård as a critic prior to publishing his first novel, and how Knausgård rewrites himself during this period in *Min kamp*. Part III focuses on Knausgård's rewriting of the period between writing his second novel and up until he begins writing *Min kamp*. It investigates the strategic functions of the narrative structure, the functions of the essayistic and critical passages, and the functions of the distance and unity between past and present author-images that Knausgård creates in his rewriting.

This thesis thus aims to contribute to the scholarship regarding Karl Ove Knausgård by conducting an author-study that examines the relationship between criticism and poetics. In addition, it aims to contribute to a broader field of research by offering a theoretical and methodological framework of autoreception, which works across the boundaries of critical, essayistic, and literary texts.

Lay Summary

Karl Ove Knausgård began his literary career as a critic in the 1990s, and he has since 1998 made his mark as a novelist and essayist. The autobiographical work *Min kamp* (2009-2011) is in essence about what it means for him to be an author. In this thesis, I examine Knausgård's work as a critic, essayist, and as the author of *Min kamp*. I focus specifically on the strategies he uses to position himself as an author and his own views on literature within the literary field and a literary tradition. In order to analyse these strategies, I develop a framework of autoreception, i.e. tools to analyse how the author is self-critical of his own work in the texts that he writes, and how the author implicitly highlights what is of literary value in his own writing. My interest lies in how writing criticism on other authors and how rewriting his own texts and the context of writing them functions to establish and validate Knausgård as an author. I illustrate, by analysing the strategies that Knausgård used as a critic before publishing his first novel, how Knausgård writes about this period in *Min kamp*, and how Knausgård writes about the period between writing his second novel and beginning to write *Min kamp*. With this thesis, I contribute to the scholarship on Karl Ove Knausgård with an in-depth analysis of how his views on literature develop over time, and I provide a broader field of literary research with a framework for analysing the functions of self-criticism.

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Notes on References and Translations

Throughout this thesis I reference Karl Ove Knausgård's six-volume work *Min kamp* (2009-2011) by indicating the volume using the Roman numerals I-VI, followed by the page number. *Min kamp* I-V have been translated by Don Bartlett, while the final volume was translated by both Don Bartlett and Martin Aitken. As opposed to the original text, each volume has in the English translation been given an individual subtitle: *A Death in the Family: My Struggle 1*; *A Man in Love: My Struggle 2*; *Boyhood Island: My Struggle 3*; *Dancing in the Dark: My Struggle 4*; *Some Rain Must Fall: My Struggle 5*, *The End: My Struggle 6*. All citations from *Min kamp* are from the original text, with the English translation appearing in the footnotes as MS [*My Struggle*], followed by the Roman numerals I-VI and the page number.

Knausgård's first novel, *Ute av verden* (1998), has according to Worldcat.org been translated by James Anderson and Kari Dickson in 2003, with the title *Out of the World*. However, this translation was never completed and published. Therefore, the one instance where I cite from *Ute av verden* the provided translation is my own. Knausgård's second novel, *En tid for alt* (2004), has been translated by James Anderson and has been published under two titles: *A Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven* in 2008, and *A Time for Everything* in 2009 and in 2015. The translations I provide for this text are from the latter edition.

When citing a work, the in-text citation in brackets indicates the publication date of the referenced edition. When a work is first mentioned, the date that follows in brackets indicates the original publication date. For instance, using Knausgård's first novel as an example, when this work is first mentioned it is the original publication date that appears in brackets: *Ute av verden* (1998). When I cite from the novel it appears as (Knausgård 2010c). The original publication date for all works appear in the bibliography in the following format: Knausgård, Karl Ove. 2010c. *Ute av verden*. 1998. Oslo: Tiden Norsk Forlag. Unless indicated in the bibliography, the date of the edition referenced is the original publication date.

In all instances where the original language of a cited source is Norwegian, Danish, or Swedish, the citation is provided in the original language, with an English translation in the footnotes. Unless indicated by a reference to a translated source, all translations from Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish are my own.

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Introduction

Jeg kunne ikke tro det var sant, så jeg sa det til meg selv igjen og igjen. Jeg skal debutere. Romanen er antatt. Jeg er forfatter.¹

Karl Ove Knausgård, *Min kamp* V (2010)

In 1990, a little over a year after he completed his studies at Skrivekunstakademiet i Hordaland and had begun studying literature at the University of Bergen, twenty-one-year-old Karl Ove Knausgård made his debut as a literary critic, writing for the local student newspaper, *Studvest*.² For eight years Knausgård's primary position in the literary field was that of critic, writing about other authors' works for newspapers and for literary journals, before making his debut as a novelist with *Ute av verden* (1998).³ The novel, which is about a young man who flees from his life as a teacher in northern Norway and goes home to Kristiansand after his relationship with a thirteen-year-old pupil is discovered, was highly successful. For instance, Knausgård was the first debutant ever to win the Norwegian Critics' Prize for Literature. Six years later he published his second novel, *En tid for alt*, where he, in part, wrote alternative biblical literature set in Scandinavia, for which he was nominated for The Nordic Council's Literature Prize.⁴ While Knausgård was a well-recognised author in Norway, his status in the late 1990s and the mid-2000s is incomparable to the position he gained during and after the serial publication of his six-volume, over 3,600-page autobiographical novel *Min kamp* (2009-2011).

This thesis is about Karl Ove Knausgård as a critic and as an author: Knausgård as a critic prior to becoming a published novelist, and as the author of *Min kamp*. Specifically, it is about how Knausgård positions, evaluates, and validates himself in the literary field through the role of critic, and as the author of *Min kamp*. It is about the strategies employed by Knausgård as a critic with ambitions to become an author, and about how Knausgård writes about himself as a critic, aspiring author, and as a novelist in *Min kamp*. What are the

¹ "I couldn't believe it was true, so I repeated it to myself again and again. I'm going to make my debut. The novel has been accepted. I am a writer." (MS V: 603)

² Skrivekunstakademiet i Hordaland is known as The Penmanship Academy in Hordaland in English, and it is a school for creative writing established in 1985.

³ Translation of the title: *Out of the World*.

⁴ Translation of the title: *A Time for Everything*. For *En tid for alt*, Knausgård also was won 'P2-lytternes romanpris', awarded by listeners of the NRK [Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation] radio station P2, as well as 'Sørlandets litteraturpris', a prize awarded to authors with a connection to the two counties Aust-Agder and Vest-Agder.

functions of criticism for Karl Ove Knausgård in his endeavour to become an author? What are the functions of the way Knausgård writes about himself as a critic and author in *Min kamp*? How do Knausgård's critical texts, and the narrative technique and structure of *Min kamp*, reflect Knausgård's self-reading and self-criticism, i.e. *autoreception* of himself as a critic and author? It is questions like these that I aim to answer in this thesis.

Knausgård's earliest critical activity and the eight years he spent in the literary field as a critic before publishing his first novel are aspects of Knausgård's career that have not gained much attention in previous scholarship. Arguably, this is due to how both the public and scholarly interest in Knausgård experienced an unparalleled boom following the publication of *Min kamp*. In other words, the questions that arose from the autobiographical novel seem to have left most of the other aspects of his work in the literary field in the shadows. This is perhaps understandable, as in the Scandinavian context there are few authors that have created a more widespread commotion, and few texts have been subject to such a prevalent, idiosyncratic reception, oscillating between tabloid gossip and scandal on the one hand, and high-tempered scholarly discussions on the other, than Karl Ove Knausgård and his autobiographical novel.

In Norway, the nearest comparable example might be found in the trials that followed the publication of Agnar Mykle's *Sangen om den røde rubin* (1956).⁵ While the trials were concerned with the erotic depictions in the novel, another significant point in the debate was the relationship between literature and reality: how the novel was a *roman à clef*. *Min kamp*, in contrast, is not a *roman à clef* but openly autobiographical, and, with a few exceptions, real people figure in the novel under their real names.⁶ During the two years in which the serial publication took place, members of Knausgård's family spoke out about the ethical violations and inaccuracies made by the author; journalists set out to fact-check what Knausgård had written; and prominent scholars and authors entered into polemics about the genre and interpretational criteria that could best generate an understanding of the work.⁷ In

⁵ Translation of the title: *The Song of the Red Ruby*.

⁶ The most notable exception is that of Knausgård's uncle, his father's brother, who in the novel is anonymised as "Gunnar". Knausgård's father is not named by name until the final volume.

⁷ For instance, a few weeks after the publication of volume I in September 2009, fourteen anonymous members of Knausgård's family sent an open letter to the newspaper *Klassekampen*, accusing the author of lying and threatening the publishing house, Forlaget Oktober, with a lawsuit (cf. *Klassekampen*, Schøitz og Knausgård 2009). Following the publication of the fifth volume in 2010, Knausgård's ex-wife Tonje Aursland appeared in a radio documentary where she spoke about how it felt to involuntarily become a character in a novel (Hesthamar 2011). During the primary reception, tabloid journalists sought out many of the people that appear in the novel, for example Knausgård's childhood friend Geir Prestbakmo, some of his former teachers, author Stig Sæterbakken who appears in *Min kamp* II (Ramnefjell 2010), and Knausgård's former pupils at the school

this respect, as Espen Børdahl has pointed out, the subtitle of *Min kamp* – *Roman*⁸ – created a much more widespread debate than Knausgård's reference to Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (Børdahl 2017: 41). What unites the ethical, journalistic, and scholarly aspects of the primary reception is precisely the question of the relationship between reality and literature, with the underlining questions concerning the relationship between Knausgård as the author and the Karl Ove Knausgård that is written about in the text.

The first three volumes of *Min kamp* were published in September, November and December 2009. Relatively early on in the serial publication, *Min kamp* generated debates and questions regarding how to classify the text, and whether or not *Min kamp* represented something completely new in literature. This continued throughout the publication of volume IV, V and VI, in February 2010, June 2010, and November 2011 respectively, and persisted in the years following the serial publication. For instance, *Min kamp* has been named a “romandokumentar” (Lorentzen 2010); “hyper-fiksjon” (Kjærstad 2010); a “litterær kentaur”, with the body of a novel but the head of a biography which we lack terms to describe (Melberg 2010); a code that consists of ambiguous and manipulative oscillations between fiction and reality (Tjønneland 2010); an example of what Poul Behrendt (2006), in an expansion of Philippe Lejeune's distinction between the referential and the fictional contract (cf. Lejeune 1982), defined as *the double contract* (Haugen 2010; P. T. Andersen 2012: 677); *leak literature* (Frantzen 2010), *autonarration* (Behrendt 2011), “fiktionsfri fiktion” (Hauge 2012), *autofiction* (Kjerkegaard and Munk 2013; Marttinen 2015; 2017), and *performative biographism* (Haarder 2014).⁹ In the first doctoral thesis written about *Min kamp*, Claus Elholm Andersen makes a case for reading the text as a *novel*, arguing that it falls into a modernistic tradition, and seeks to examine what he refers to as the novel's literariness: what makes *Min kamp* “litteratur, og ikke liv” (C. E. Andersen 2015: 85).¹⁰ What Andersen attempts to do is to separate what he sees as *Min kamp* as the sensation and phenomenon, and *Min kamp* as a novel, implicitly following what author Jan Kjærstad requested in his opinion article

on Senja in Northern Norway where he worked during the academic year 1987-1988, whom he writes about in volume IV (Kristensen 2010).

⁸ *Novel*. The English translations do not have the subtitle indicating that it is a novel.

⁹ “documentary novel”; “hyper-fiction”; “literary centaur”; “fiction-free fiction”. Hans Hauge first introduced the term to describe *Min kamp* in 2010, in *Weekendavisen* and in the journal *Synsvinkler*, but here I refer to the monograph published in 2012. In addition, the term performative biographism was also first applied by Haarder in 2010, but here I refer to the monograph published in 2014.

¹⁰ “literature, and not life”

following the publication of the first three volumes: “en lesning av Knausgård's bok som ren tekst, der støyen rundt er forsøkt filtrert bort” (C. E. Andersen 2015; Kjærstad 2010).¹¹

In this thesis I do not aim to settle any generic disputes concerning *Min kamp*, or to contribute with a new generic term to describe the text. For my purpose it is sufficient to say that *Min kamp* is an autobiographical novel. Furthermore, I do not aim to contribute to an understanding of what may or may not make *Min kamp* new, part of a tradition, or part of a literary, social, and cultural tendency in Scandinavian literature. While I concur that these points must be addressed to provide a comprehensive understanding of *Min kamp* as a literary project, *and* as a literary sensation and phenomenon, this is not the objective of this thesis. I return to this below. My interest with regards to *Min kamp* lies in the characteristic narration, and the function of the narrative technique and structure, and function of the relationship between Karl Ove Knausgård as the author, narrator and protagonist in *Min kamp*.

Moreover, my interest lies in what for example Toril Moi has pointed to as the core theme in *Min kamp*: it is about Karl Ove Knausgård, and what it means for Karl Ove Knausgård to write *Min kamp* (Moi 2011).¹² I would add that it is also about what it means for Karl Ove Knausgård to *become* and to *be* an author. For instance, in an interview with the Swedish author Jerker Virdborg, Knausgård highlighted these aspects of the text after the serial publication was completed:

Redan när jag skrev *Ute av världen* hade jag en tanke om en trilogi, men jag kunde inte fortsätta där den slutade, och skrev då i stället en helt annan bok, nämligen *En tid för allt*. *Min kamp* kan ses som ett slags backstagetext till de båda tidigare böckerna, för den handlar om den som har skrivit dem. Tanken är att läsaren ska se hur de bilder och tankar som finns gestaltade i de två första romanerna kunde transformeras till litteratur, och hur min verklighet, där idéerna föddes, såg ut.¹³ (Virdborg 2012: 22)

Knausgård's own understanding of what *Min kamp* is about should of course not dictate all research on the topic. Therefore, I underline that I do not discredit the thematic readings

¹¹ “a reading of Knausgård's book as pure text, with an attempt to filter away the surrounding noise”

¹² Here I refer to Moi's original article in *Morgenbladet*, however it was later translated into English (cf. Moi 2013).

¹³ “Already when I was writing *Out of the World* I thought about a trilogy, but I could not continue from where it left off, and instead I wrote a completely different book, namely *A Time for Everything*. *My Struggle* can be viewed as a kind of backstage text to both of the previous books, because it is about the person who has written them. The idea is that the reader will see how the images and thoughts that are created in the first two novels could be transformed into literature, and what my reality, where the ideas were born, was like.”

that aim to use *Min kamp* to illustrate tendencies in contemporary society and literature, such as Ane Farsethås' (2015) reading of *Min kamp* in light of David Shields' (2010) concept of *reality hunger*, Inge van de Ven's (2016; 2017) reading of *Min kamp* as connected to contemporary self-representation in the digital age; Stefan Kjerkegaard's (2017) argument that it is an attempt to defy contemporary media culture; or Per Thomas Andersen's (2016a; 2016b) reading of *Min kamp* as indicative of after-honour culture in the late modern welfare-state. Rather, it is to emphasise, as Per Thomas Andersen also does in a different context, that ultimately *Min kamp* is about Knausgård as an author (P. T. Andersen 2012: 677). In other words, while the text is a highly detailed examination of Knausgård's life from childhood up until the time of finishing *Min kamp*, where Knausgård writes about his relationship with his father and his father's death in 1998, about his family life in Malmö, his youth on Tromøya and in Kristiansand, the years spent working as a teacher in northern Norway, and his student days in Bergen, in this thesis I focus on the aspects of the text that relate to his struggles of becoming and being an author, and how they are narrated.

When Moi highlights the theme of Knausgård as an author, her point is that this calls for a reading of the text that is based on the premises set by the author in the text, and not on what she names the exhausted clichés of the hermeneutics of suspicion, or what Trygve Riiser Gundersen names the anxieties of tactility between author and work in the Norwegian literary field (Moi 2011; Gundersen 2009). I leave the question of whether or not this is a fair description of the primary reception and of the Norwegian literary climate out of the equation, but rather point to Moi's view of how *Min kamp* places a specific fact in the foreground:

[...] nemlig at det finnes noen som skriver, og at den som skriver, alltid skriver ut fra sin egen erfaring og sitt eget syn på verden.¹⁴
(Moi 2011)

This does not mean that absolute trust should be placed in the author, which Moi emphasises by pointing out that recognition of the author's premises should not be confused with *admiration* of said premises (Moi 2017), but merely that they should not be ignored.¹⁵ In this respect, it is the premises set by Knausgård as the author regarding the narrative technique

¹⁴ “[...] namely that the author exists, and that he always conveys the world as he sees it based on his own experiences and his own world view.” (Moi 2013: 206)

¹⁵ For a discussion on Moi's description of the scholarly field as pertaining to exhausted clichés as well as a discussion on trusting versus critical readings of *Min kamp*, see for example Kjersti Irene Aarstein's doctoral thesis “Vold og visjoner i sjetten bind av Karl Ove Knausgårds *Min kamp*” (2018).

that Poul Behrendt is interested in when he names the text *autonarration* (Behrendt 2011), which I build on in my examination of the narration in *Min kamp*.¹⁶

With the term autonarration, Behrendt aims to redefine the understanding of *fiction* that in his view dominated the primary reception of *Min kamp*. Behrendt highlights that fiction should not be understood as ‘free from references to reality’ or ‘in opposition to reality’, but rather that the fictional aspect in *Min kamp* lies in the *narration* – in the *telling* of Karl Ove Knausgård’s life (Behrendt 2011: 296-297). He argues that the narration constitutes a *fremstilling* of the self – where the Danish word can signify both production, representation, and reproduction in an artistic form, and that the fictional aspect lies in the *bevidsthedsrepræsentation* – representation of consciousness, and not in *begivenhedsfiktion* – where the narrated events are fictional (ibid.: 297-298). Building on this premise, Behrendt warns against a one-to-one understanding of the Knausgård who writes *Min kamp* and what is commonly referred to as Karl Ove in *Min kamp*, and he provides in my view a concrete and sound justification for considering a separation between Knausgård as the author and Karl Ove as the protagonist and narrator. By sound, I mean that the separation is based on the characteristic narration in the text: *Min kamp* is dominated by a narration where Karl Ove as the narrator remains on the same diegetic level as Karl Ove the protagonist. In other words, it is not *presented* as a retrospective narrative narrated by Knausgård as the author, even though it *is* Knausgård who writes the narrative from his current perspective as an author. While Behrendt’s understanding of the narrative serves as the starting point for my analysis of the relationship between Knausgård as the author and Karl Ove as the protagonist and narrator in *Min kamp*, in this thesis I propose to expand Behrendt’s approach to incorporate the *functions* of this narrative technique: as implicit *autoreception* of Knausgård as an author past and present.

Before I present the aims and outline of this thesis, it is necessary to touch on the two forms of autoreception that I operate with in my analysis, which along with how I expand Behrendt’s view of *Min kamp* as autonarration will be detailed in-depth in part I. Further, it is crucial to distinguish my approach from the way Jon Helt Haarder applies the term autoreception in what is perhaps the most influential concept used to categorise *Min kamp*, namely *performative biographism*.

¹⁶ Behrendt has adopted the term autonarration from Arnaud Schmitt’s (2005) analysis of Henry Roth’s *Mercy of a Rude Stream* (1994-1998).

Two Forms of Autoreception

The neologism *autoreception* was first introduced to the field of literary research by Stefan Iversen in 2010, functioning as an umbrella term for practices, but most significantly, *texts* that are about or reflect an author's reading of their own textual production (Iversen 2010: 48). Admittedly, self-reading and self-criticism is a phenomenon that is a part of every author's production, for example in the way the writing process consists of drafts, making changes, revising and discarding. However, the manner of self-reading that Iversen refers to with the term is limited to the autoreception of a work *after* it is published (ibid.: 48). As Iversen points out, autoreception can take on explicit and implicit forms. For example, the most explicit forms can take place during interviews with the author post-publication, in prefaces, or in texts where the author writes about his or her poetics. The implicit form that Iversen focuses on lies in the *rewriting* of a work: writing and publishing a new version of a previously published text (ibid.: 48-49).¹⁷ Rewriting is autoreceptive in the way the author makes changes to preexisting material, and the differences between the original and rewritten version carry with them signs of self-reading: the author has revised, negotiated or retreated from previous standpoints (ibid.: 49). Thus, rewriting specific texts bears the mark of autoreception as it can demonstrate a development of the author's poetics.

However, in the case of Karl Ove Knausgård it is necessary to consider another aspect of rewriting that Iversen also highlights in his analytical examples, which is that rewriting does not merely consist of rewriting *specific texts* (ibid.: 49-62).¹⁸ Rather, it also consists of strategies of rewriting, which in turn must be analysed with regards to the rhetorical and narrative technique. This is the kind of rewriting that I predominantly focus on in relation to Karl Ove Knausgård and his autobiographical novel. Within the narrative of *Min kamp*, Knausgård as the author rewrites the context of writing his previous fictional and critical texts, which must be considered as autoreceptive in relation to narratology.

¹⁷ Iversen also points to metareceptive passages within the work as implicit autoreception, without expanding or defining 'metareceptive' passages further. However, he seems to be referring to metaliterary commentaries within a literary work that reflect self-reading. Depending on the narrative and rhetorical situation, I would argue that these instances could in fact be a more *explicit* form of autoreception than Iversen suggests. For instance, as I show below, Haarder focuses on metaliterary passages, specifically from volume VI, when he analyses autoreception in *Min kamp* (cf. Haarder 2014: 217-233).

¹⁸ Iversen illustrates this by analysing the rewriting the Danish author, journalist and filmmaker Jørgen Leth conducts in the autobiographical work *Det uperfekte menneske* (2005-2016), and the rewriting in Danish author Claus Beck-Nielsen's *Selmordsaktionen* (2005). With regards to Leth, Iversen points to examples of how Leth alternates between citing his previous texts and recreating the act of writing them by rewriting them from the perspective of an older and more eloquent author. Iversen argues that the strategies are related to representations of memory; a destabilisation between the past and present Leth.

Specifically, it must be considered in terms of how the narration is primarily not a retrospective evaluation, self-reading or self-criticism, but in light of what Behrendt names autonarration: a representation of Karl Ove’s consciousness as an author and a critic at a specific time in his life. This means that I expand Iversen’s approach to include the practice of rewriting not just a specific text after it has been published, but to Knausgård as the author rewriting the context of writing texts as if from the perspective of Karl Ove in the past.

Furthermore, as Iversen emphasises in his definition, autoreception concerns texts that *reflect* self-reading and self-criticism. As I see it, this allows for yet another expansion of the umbrella term. Adding to Iversen’s perspective, in this thesis I emphasise the self-reading and self-criticism imbedded in the double role of the author-critic. As T. S. Eliot observes in “The Function of Criticism” (1923), the categories *critical* and *creative* should not be kept too far apart, as the author must be acutely self-critical in forming their creative work (Eliot 1932a: 30). In other words, criticism, as with rewriting, is undoubtedly an inherent part of the writing process, in the sense that the author must continuously evaluate their texts while writing. In addition, the author may write explicitly and critically about their own texts, creative method, or literary production. However, in relation to the author-critic, my interest does not lie in explicit self-reading in critical texts and essays that are directly concerned with the author’s poetics, but largely in texts concerning *other* authors and their writing. Here I draw on Sissel Furuseth’s theoretical framework and extensive study of the phenomenon of authors who write criticism in the Norwegian context (Furuseth 2015). My focus lies on how the author-critic’s evaluation of literature can reflect how the author views *himself* as an author and his own work, and how the author, or aspiring author and critic, can utilise criticism to create and define a space for himself in the literary field.

Thus, in this thesis I operate with two forms of autoreception, united in how they both carry with them traces of self-reading and self-criticism: the author-critic and the author as rewriter.

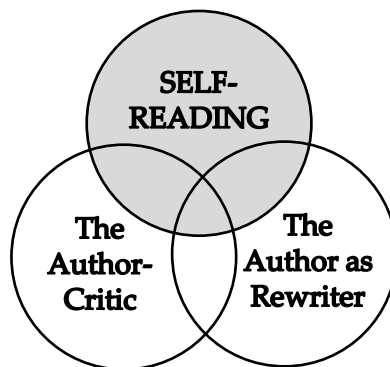


Fig. Introduction.a Forms of Autoreception

As indicated in the figure, the author-critic and the author as rewriter can overlap. Throughout this thesis I point to significant instances where the two forms of autoreception intersect in Karl Ove Knausgård's writing. Compared to the author as rewriter, where I focus on rewriting *within* a literary text, in this thesis I focus predominantly on non-fictional criticism and Knausgård as critic prior to becoming an author. Yet, as I also consider criticism within *Min kamp*, it is necessary to view the criticism in light of the rhetorical and narrative context. Specifically, are the critical statements made by the protagonist and narrator Karl Ove attributable to the current point of view of Knausgård who is writing the text? I address the issues of non-fictional and fictional rewriting and criticism in the theoretical and methodological framework that makes up part I of this thesis.

Delimitations: Reception and Autoreception

As mentioned above, Jon Helt Haarder also adapts Iversen's term autoreception in his own concept, performative biographism. Haarder first introduced the concept of performative biographism in 2003, and he has since argued that it incorporates a tendency in late modern Scandinavian literature: authors use themselves and other real people in an "æstetisk betonet interaktion med læserens og offentlighedens reaktioner" (Haarder 2014: 9).¹⁹ The way Haarder defines this as a tendency is perhaps one of the reasons why the term has been widely accepted, as Haarder deems it is applicable to a number of texts, and not merely to *Min kamp*. Haarder's example of performative biographism *par excellence* is the Danish author and artist formerly known as Claus Beck-Nielsen and his *Selvudslettelser* (2002) and *Claus Beck-Nielsen (1963-2001)* (2003). Another example, which Haarder also discusses, could be the Danish poet and film director Jørgen Leth's autobiographical work *Det uperfekte mennesket* (2005-2016), which caused a great deal of scandal in Denmark during the publication. Furthermore, the tendency may be illustrated with texts like Carina Rydberg's *Den højste kassen* (1997), Stig Larsson's *Natta de mina* (1997), Erlend Loe's *L* (1999), Dag Solstad's *16.07.41* (2002), Nikolaj Frobenius' *Teori og praksis* (2004), Tomas Espedal's *Gå. Eller kunsten å leve et vilt og poetisk liv* (2006), Maja Lundgren's *Myggor och tigrar* (2007), and P.O. Enquist's *Ett annat liv* (2008).

¹⁹ "aesthetically accentuated interaction with the reader and the reactions of the public"

For Haarder, performative biographism aestheticises the threshold between literature as an aesthetic contemplation and public act on the one hand, and everyday, private and personal matters that are usually kept out of the public sphere on the other (Haarder 2014: 114-115).²⁰ This is part of what makes *Min kamp* well situated in the concept, as Knausgård discloses his private life in a seemingly all-inclusive, brutally honest manner: he writes about his problems with premature ejaculation, his infidelity towards his first wife, and his quarrels with his second wife, author Linda Boström Knausgård, as well as her struggles with depression. However, another key phenomenon that Haarder defines as part of his concept, is the way performative biographism incorporates the *feedback loop* between author, text and the literary public *into the text*. Here Haarder draws on Erika Fisher-Lichte's definition in relation to performance art, where she argues that the feedback loop functions as a circuit of interactions between the performer and the audience, which in turn has a bearing on the work itself (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 39-40; Haarder 2014: 109-110). It is in relation to the feedback loop that Haarder in passing draws on Iversen's term autoreception, arguing that it constitutes the interaction between the reception and the author behind the work (Haarder 2014: 138-140). In *Min kamp*, this is expressed in the way *Min kamp* VI becomes a metanarrative to the series, as Knausgård writes about the publication, reception, and consequences of writing and publishing the previous volumes. Thus, Haarder focuses on the feedback loop that makes its way into *Min kamp*, and on what can be named *explicit* instance of autoreception in volume VI.

Further, for Haarder, the interaction between the reception and the autoreception illustrates another important trait of performative biographism, as he reads the sixth volume as Knausgård's attempt to regain control over his *author-image*: the image of himself he has created in the narrative and the public image of him following the controversial publication (Haarder 2014: 115, 224-226). However, due to the continuous feedback loop between the

²⁰ In this respect, Haarder draws on a combination of Jürgen Habermas, Erving Goffman and Joshua Meyrowitz concerning the public sphere, backstage and onstage social interactions, and the creation of a middle region, and further relates this to the changes in what he sees as author-functions, drawing on Michel Foucault's term (Haarder 2014: 47-53; cf. Foucault 1979). In Haarder's view, the modernistic author-function entails a strict separation between the personal and literature due to the doctrine of autonomy, and how art subsidies from the welfare state came with a demand that literature must approach universal relevancy (Haarder 2014: 35-42). He contrasts this with what he names the political author-function in the 1960s and 70s, which he sees as combatting the doctrine of autonomy, and where the private becomes political in literature, and in turn the heteronomy becomes a guarantee for its wider public relevance (ibid.: 42-47). Haarder argues that the author-function of performative biographism is *semionautic*, thus recontextualising Nicolas Bourriaud's term (cf. Bourriaud 2009: 113; 2010: 18). In this author-function the author is a semiotic explorer, who in Haarder's view brings the existing doctrines, norms, frames and regulations of the relationship between author-text-reader into their literary production for literary exploration (Haarder 2014: 64-67).

work and the public reactions, the author is unable to regain control of what Haarder names the partly self-created “Knausenstein monster” (Haarder 2017: 253-255). In this respect, Haarder’s approach adheres to dominant notions within autobiographical theorisation, for example Paul de Man’s understanding of how the autobiographical writing project “veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause” (de Man 1979: 930), or what Paul John Eakin names the myths and illusions of autobiographical writing. While Haarder does not draw explicitly on Eakin’s work, there are similarities in the way Eakin regards autobiographical writing in terms of the myth of *self-determination* and *self-representation*: “I write my story; I say who I am; I create my self [sic]” (Eakin 1999: 43). For Eakin, this is an illusion in the sense that our self is in fact created relationally, in our relations with others (ibid.). To illustrate this aspect with regards to the *author* in performative biographism, Haarder draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the author-image, which is comparable to Eakin’s point:

Few social actors depend as much as artists, and intellectuals in general, for what they are and for the image they have of themselves on the image that other people have of them and of what they are. “There are some qualities,” writes Jean-Paul Sartre, “that come to us entirely from the judgments of other people.” This is the case with the quality of the writer, a quality which is socially defined and which is inseparable in every society and every age from a certain social demand which the writer must take into account; it is even more clearly the case with the writer’s reputation, that is, the idea a society forms of the value and truth of the work of a writer or artist. (Bourdieu 1969: 95)

Bourdieu’s as well as Haarder’s point is that the author is socially defined, in an interaction between the author, the work, the reception of the work and the public’s image of the author (cf. Haarder 2014: 30). In other words, the public understanding of the author-image plays a significant part in the *authoring* of the author-image. This is, for Haarder, what is expressed in the feedback loop, and signals why the public reaction and the consequences of *Min kamp*, or the noise as Kjærstad (2010) named it, cannot be separated from *Min kamp* as a literary work.

The influence of Haarder’s concept of performative biographism in the Scandinavian literary field and the field of autobiographical literature can be demonstrated by how for example Per Thomas Andersen in *Norsk litteraturhistorie* (2012) names *Min kamp* a part of this tendency (P. T. Andersen 2012: 677). Furthermore, in recent doctoral theses on *Min kamp* this approach has been prominent. For example, in “Litterær fremstilling som handling og terskelfenomen. Performance, performativitet og liminalitet hos Jonny Halberg, Kjersti

Annesdatter Skomsvold og Karl Ove Knausgård” (2018), Anne Berit Lyngstad examines *Min kamp* in relation to performativity and how this constitutes a tendency in autobiographical literature.²¹ Kjersti Irene Aarstein, on the other hand, does not keep the overall focus on performativity in her thesis, but argues that the way in which *Min kamp* actively engages with the reception in volume VI makes a strict separation between *Min kamp* as a phenomenon and as a novel insufficient when aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the text (Aarstein 2018: 16-25).

I agree with the points made in previous research that *Min kamp* should not be viewed in isolation, neither in the sense of being “ren litteratur”, as Claus Elholm Andersen seems to argue (C. E. Andersen 2015: 12), nor in the sense that it should be isolated from its reception, and from being a part of a tendency or a tradition in Scandinavian literature, if the aim is a comprehensive understanding of *Min kamp* as a work and a literary phenomenon in contemporary Scandinavian literature.²² However, this is not my aim in this thesis. As pointed to above, I do not aim to engage in generic or thematic discussions regarding the way *Min kamp* does or does not conform to a tendency or a tradition. Directly with regard to performative biographism, I do not aim to analyse *Min kamp* in terms of an aestheticisation of the threshold between literature and reality; or how *Min kamp* can be used to theorise autobiographical writing. Most significantly, however, in relation to how Haarder utilises the term autoreception, I do not focus on the reception of *Min kamp*.²³ Where Haarder focuses on what can be labelled *explicit* instances of self-reading and self-criticism, specifically in *Min kamp* VI, I focus on *implicit* instances of autoreception in rewriting and in criticism, predominantly in *Min kamp* I, II and V. Thus, although analysing the *explicit* self-reading and self-criticism constitutes a highly valuable and fruitful approach to *Min kamp*, I do not bring the notion of the feedback loop into this thesis.

My focus on implicit autoreception is important to emphasise, as this is one of the most prominent ways my study sets itself apart from previous research. The reason for this focus is threefold. First, it is due to the scope of the study which prevents me from considering autoreception alongside the reception. Second, I am not just concerned with

²¹ English title of Lyngstad’s thesis: “Life Writing as Act and Threshold Phenomenon: Performance, Performativity and Liminality in the Work of Jonny Halberg, Kjersti Annesdatter Skomsvold and Karl Ove Knausgård.”

²² “pure literature”

²³ For a more elaborate overview of the primary reception and the scholarly reception, see for example Claus Elholm Andersen’s doctoral thesis “På vakt skal man være” (C. E. Andersen 2015: 14-34), or Henrik Keyser Pedersen’s (2018) comprehensive bibliography of reviews, articles, and opinion pieces written about *Min kamp*.

Min kamp, but also with what I see as Knausgård's implicit self-reading and self-criticism *as a critic of other authors*. Third, it is due to how my interest in *Min kamp* lies in how not only the content, that is, what Knausgård writes about himself as the author of *Min kamp* in *Min kamp*, as well as of *Ute av verden* and *En tid for alt*, but also how the form – the narrative technique and structure – may in itself indicate autoreception of the author writing *Min kamp*. Thus, as opposed to Haarder's emphasis on how the author cannot control the way his author-image is understood, I view this as preceded by the premise that the author attempts to control his author-image. What this amounts to is a thesis that aims to investigate the functions of the strategies employed by Karl Ove Knausgård as a critic and author. With the focus on implicit autoreception, the very brief overview of the reception and the scholarly interest in *Min kamp* that I have presented here serves to underline a contextual factor regarding the position in the literary field that Knausgård now occupies, which is important to keep in mind at the outset of this thesis.

Despite *Min kamp* being a controversial text during the time of publication, it firmly secured Knausgård's status, position and domain in the literary field. Since *Min kamp*, Knausgård has become a prominent contributor in cultural and literary debates, most notably in the controversy concerning the International Ibsen Award in 2014 and the winner, Austrian author Peter Handke, who has been published in Norwegian by Knausgård's own publishing house Pelikanen, and in a polemic concerning the debate climate in Sweden.²⁴ Furthermore, despite having stated in the ending of *Min kamp* VI that he will now no longer be an author (cf. VI: 1116), Knausgård has continued to write, and has between 2012 and 2018 published twelve works: the two essay collections *Sjelens Amerika* (2013) and *I kyklopernes land* (2018); three long essays in the three photography books *Alt som er i himmelen* (2012), *Nakker* (2014) and *På jorden* (2015), compiled with Swedish photographer Thomas Wågström; *Hjemme-borte* (2014), containing letters between Knausgård and author Fredrik Ekelund concerning football and the World Cup in Brazil in 2014; the tetralogy usually referred to as *Årstidene* (2015-2016); *Så mye lengsel på så liten flate* (2017), about Edvard Munch in relation to the exhibition Knausgård curated for the Munch Museum in 2017; and *Uforvarende* (2018), a short text based on a lecture he held at the 2017 Windham-Campbell

²⁴ Knausgård was an avid defender of both Peter Handke as an author, and of the committee awarding Handke with the International Ibsen Prize. In 2015 Knausgård published an opinion piece in *Dagens Nyheter*, where he described Sweden as “cyklopernas land [the land of the cyclopes]” (Knausgård 2015b).

Prize ceremony.²⁵ He has also gained a large international readership, and the first volume of *Min kamp* has at the time of writing this been translated to twenty-two languages, while *Ute av verden*, *En tid for alt*, and *Årstidene* have been translated to four, seven, and eight languages respectively.²⁶ What this signifies is that following *Min kamp*, Knausgård has become one of the most well-known authors in Norway, as well as one of the most read contemporary Norwegian authors internationally.

Thesis Aims and Outline: A Focus on Functions

In the following I define the aims of this thesis that I have touched on above and outline the structure to the study. I aim to contribute to the research on Karl Ove Knausgård by providing an understanding of how criticism and rewriting, non-fictional and fictionalised, can signal autoreception of the author, and what the functions of this may be. With regard to non-fictional criticism, my purpose is to investigate the functions of criticism for Knausgård as an author prior to becoming a novelist. In relation to the research on *Min kamp*, I aim to contribute with an understanding of the narration as implicitly marked by self-reading and self-criticism. Particularly with regard to the narratological technique and structure, I aim to challenge an understanding of the narration that Knausgård has contributed to uphold, both in interviews and in *Min kamp* itself – that the narrative was written in great haste, with spontaneity, and is therefore appears to be largely unedited.²⁷ For instance, Jon Helt Haarder and Per Thomas Andersen have pointed to this aspect of the text, naming it a part of Knausgård's writing concept (P. T. Andersen 2012: 677-678; Haarder 2014: 215). In this respect, I aim to show how the aspects of *Min kamp* regarding Knausgård as an author may be viewed with a greater degree of strategic effort on behalf of Knausgård as the author rewriting his past author-images, by way of strategies of rewriting. Thus, this relates to my aim of providing an understanding of how Knausgård rewrites himself as a critic and author, and what the functions of the rewriting may be. These aims are united in

²⁵ Translation of the titles: *The America of the Soul*, *In the Land of the Cyclopes*; *In Heaven on Earth*, *Necks*, *On Earth*; *Home and Away*; *The Seasons Quartet*, (*Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring*, *Summer*); *So Much Longing in So Little Space*; *Inadvertent*.

²⁶ This is according to Henrik Keyser Pedersen's bibliography of work by and about Karl Ove Knausgård, see www.bibliografi.no.

²⁷ For example, in an interview just under a month before the first volume was published, Knausgård stated that he had set himself the task of writing ten pages a day, without considering the quality of what he had written (see Holmlund 2009).

the overarching research question that I investigate in this thesis: *what are the functions of criticism and of rewriting for Karl Ove Knausgård as an author?*

The thesis is divided into three parts, and further into six chapters. In part I, I develop a theoretical and methodological framework of autoreception, focusing on the strategies involved in the double role of author-critic, and in rewriting. In chapter 1 I focus predominantly on the functions of non-fictional criticism and rewriting, and how this relates to self-reading and self-criticism. In chapter 2 I turn my attention directly towards criticism and rewriting that occurs within the textual frame of *Min kamp*. In this chapter I focus on the narrative technique in terms of the relationship between Knausgård as the author and Karl Ove as the protagonist, and I outline my understanding of the fictionality of *Min kamp*. In this respect, I draw on Behrendt's analysis, but I propose that in order to incorporate the functions of the narrative technique, Behrendt's understanding of *Min kamp* as autonarration should be developed to what I name *autoreceptive narration*.

Part II focuses on Knausgård as a critic prior to becoming a published novelist. Due to the scope of this study, this is not a comprehensive overview of every critical text Knausgård wrote between 1990 and 1998. Rather, through selected examples I investigate the autoreceptive strategies Knausgård employs in his position as critic with ambitions to become an author. Parallel to the dominant focus on Knausgård as a critic, I investigate how Knausgård rewrites himself as critic and wannabe-author in *Min kamp* V. In chapter 3 I focus on Knausgård as what I have named a student-critic in the early 1990s. Student-critic refers to both his status as a student of literature, his role as a critic in predominantly student-oriented media, and his position as a student and apprentice in the literary field of criticism. Chapter 4 focuses on the period 1996-1998, when Knausgård establishes himself as a critical voice in the field, writing reviews for the daily newspaper *Klassekampen*. This chapter closes with the final critical essay Knausgård wrote before publishing his first novel, and I investigate the strategies he utilises as a soon-to-be author to establish a position for himself in the literary field and tradition.

In part III I focus more exclusively on strategies of rewriting in *Min kamp*. In the introductory remarks and as the starting point, I outline what I see as the key factors that Knausgård sets up as most significant to his author-image: 1) his autogeography, that is, the places he has lived, 2) his autobiography, as in his own experiences, and 3) his phenomenological ambition. Further, in chapter 5, I expand the autoreceptive narration by taking a closer look at the narratological *structure* in *Min kamp* I and II, and I argue that

narrative fore- and backshadowing within the text must be considered in light of implicit self-reading done by Knausgård as the author. In chapter 6 I investigate Knausgård's rewriting as strategies of creating both distance and continuity between his past and present poetics and struggles as an author. I relate this to the autogeographical, the autobiographical and the phenomenological by conducting a close-reading of how he rewrites writing *En tid for alt* and the inception of *Min kamp*.

Finally, in the conclusion I point to how Knausgård's autoreception continues beyond *Min kamp*, and I exemplify by taking a brief look at Knausgård as curator of Edvard Munch and the exhibition *Mot skogen – Knausgård om Munch* (2017).²⁸ In the conclusion I also present the six main contributions that I make to a larger corpus of research on Karl Ove Knausgård as a critic, rewriter and an author.

²⁸ English title of exhibition: *Towards the Forest – Knausgård on Munch*

I

A Framework of Autoreception

1 The Author-Critic and Rewriter

A critic cannot be fair in the ordinary sense of the word. It is only about things that do not interest one that one can give a really unbiased opinion, which is no doubt the reason why an unbiased opinion is absolutely valueless.

Gilbert in Oscar Wilde's *The Critic as Artist* (1891)

A key notion that dominates the theoretical view of this thesis is that no criticism is without interest or agenda. The same can thus be said for self-criticism, i.e. autoreception: the author has an intention, and this intention is visible in a multitude of rhetorical strategies within the critical and the rewritten text. In texts that concern the author's own work and poetics, the rhetorical strategies and self-interest are more often than not readily apparent. The author will usually, more or less explicitly, highlight aspects of their work that they deem to have literary value, that approach an important or pressing question that literature must address, or emphasise the qualities and significance of their creative method.¹ When rewriting a previously published text, the authorial intention can also be more or less explicitly disclosed: the author makes changes to reshape the text according to a development in their poetic views or position in the literary field.²

With regard to criticism in the form of reviews and essays concerning other authors, however, the premise that there is no such thing as agendaless criticism brings with it problems relating to impartiality, objectivity, and conflicts of interest on behalf of the author-critic. Questions that would arise in an analysis of the author-critic in this light could for example be: is the author-critic fair in his critique of the object-text? Are the points made valid and convincingly argued? However, in this thesis, these 'problems' are in fact the object of study as I highlight the strategic functions of the criticism of other authors: how does the

¹ In the interest of transparency, as well as a further illustration of the premise that no criticism is without agenda, this thesis is a critical work and thus displays interest and agenda. The most immediately apparent is the fact that it is a doctoral thesis, which clearly indicates that my agenda is to obtain a PhD. However, diving further into metatextual reflection and to illustrate the point regarding authors' texts concerning their own work, I am also naturally guilty of emphasising, more or less explicitly, how my work approaches key questions that the scholarship on Knausgård must address, as well as how other researchers in the field have failed to address them sufficiently.

² To continue the parallel drawn in the previous footnote, during my research I have indeed rewritten parts of my analyses, ranging from substituting a word for a different word, to changes in register and tone, to rewriting or discarding whole chapters. Still, the point is not to draw attention to this issue as problematic, but rather to offer a reflection and illustration of how common this practice is when writing, whether it be scholarly, critical or literary texts.

criticism serve the author-critic's agenda?³ Therefore, the point is not to evaluate how well or how fairly the author-critic captures the strong or weak points of the object-text. Rather, the object-text must be kept in mind with the perspective of how the author-critic utilises the text for his own interests as an author.⁴

Authorial Strategies

In this thesis I draw on Sissel Furuseth's fusion of the perspectives provided by Pierre Bourdieu and Harold Bloom (Furuseth 2015: 35-43).⁵ First, the combination draws on a Bourdieuan understanding of strategy, specifically regarding how the author navigates and positions himself within the literary field. In other words, the author is viewed as a subject and agent that seeks to gain a position of status or to negotiate his position in the social field of literature. However, a simplistic Bourdieuan perspective can run the risk of neglecting the texts as texts, that is, reducing them to pawns in the author's power play. Highlighting the strategic functions of autoreception does not by default consider all acts and traces of self-reading and self-criticism as categorically conscious efforts, that is, in the sense that the author is always calculating in his approach to literature. Put differently, while the author is navigating, positioning and defining a space for himself in the social field of literature, it is important not to exclude the view of these strategies as *textual* and *literary*. To highlight this aspect, it is beneficial to draw on the more psychological and intertextually oriented theorisation provided by Bloom.

In a Bloomian understanding of poetic influence, the author will conduct creative misreadings of his predecessors as a way to clear imaginative and creative space for himself (Bloom 1997: 5). In fact, Bloom makes the bold claim that the main Western literary tradition

³ To conclude these reflections in the footnotes, regarding how the theoretical framework applies to my own text, this thesis is also a critical work on another author's work: it is a critical work about Knausgård's work. This means that I have made active choices when I have selected the material for analysis, and further made active choices regarding which aspects of Knausgård's work should be highlighted. These choices serve me as a scholar in my aim to answer the research question, which, of course, has also been defined by me.

⁴ I thus take a different approach than Sissel Furuseth. Furuseth aims to highlight the double role of the author-critic as a historical and broader phenomenon, and is interested in the idiosyncrasies of this type of reception. Thus, she incorporates the point of view that the author-critic's critical texts can benefit the object-text and the author that is the subject of the criticism (cf. Furuseth 2015: 30-47).

⁵ Furuseth also utilises Paul de Man's *Blindness & Insight* (1971) and Michael Riffaterre's "Litteraturkritikkens diskurs [The Discourse of Criticism]" (1994) to add a perspective regarding the rhetoric of criticism in terms of settling ambivalence in the object-text, and a perspective regarding the paraphrastic nature of criticism: the critical text appropriates the language of the object-text in order to comment on it. However, I do not focus on both the critical text and the object-text, but rather on how criticism functions in terms of positioning the author within the literary field.

would not exist without its “history of anxiety, self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism” (ibid.: 30). Misreading does not entail misunderstanding the ‘true’ nature of a given text. Rather, Bloom’s point seems to be that strong and dynamic misreadings generate further literary production. While Bloom is strictly speaking concerned with misreadings of literary texts that generate new literary texts, he still emphasises the applicability to literary criticism (cf. Bloom 1982: 16). The misreadings may serve different purposes in the different stages of the author’s career, related to the status of the literary antagonist in comparison with the literary predecessor. For example, the relationship between a young and an established author can in the early stages be characterised as a desire for closeness, followed by periods where the younger author struggles for emancipation and distancing, before the younger but now established author returns to the elder with a sense of reconciliation and recognition.

As Furuseth points out, the combination of Bourdieu and Bloom may seem strange at first glance, particularly with regard to Bourdieu’s emphasis on how cultural production is always socially situated, while Bloom insists on an aesthetic essence beyond the structures of history, class and gender (Furuseth 2015: 36). Moreover, in *The Anatomy of Influence* (2011) Bloom laments how some readers have reduced his theory of influence to what he alludes to as Bourdieu’s “naked quest for worldly power” (Bloom 2011: 7-8). Bloom states that his concerns have always been *literary*, as opposed to being concerned with the author’s calculated pursuit of power and mammon, which is how he reads the theories of Michel Foucault and Bourdieu, grouping them together as New Cynicism (ibid.). However, in connecting Bloom’s concept of poetic influence and his redefinition of influence as “*literary love, tempered by defense*” with Bourdieu’s notion of strategic manoeuvrings in the social field of literature, Furuseth places emphasis on the significance of the *battle* as a force in the history of literature (Bloom 2011: 8, emphasis original; Furuseth 2015: 36). By combining these perspectives two strategic aspects can be highlighted simultaneously: Bloom highlights literary, psychological and intertextual aspects of the struggles of the author, while Bourdieu provides sociological aspects of literary production.

The value of connecting both Bourdieu’s and Bloom’s perspectives lies in the understanding of how the author clears a way for his own writing in the literary field and tradition. The poetic influence I focus on concerns the way in which the author uses other authors to benefit his own writing. Thus, this is not a Bloomian analysis of Karl Ove Knausgård’s *anxiety* of influence per se. Rather, it is the critical, strategic and literary use of

his influencers in literary criticism and in *Min kamp* that is at stake. Further, it is not my aim to conduct a strict Bourdieuan analysis of the Norwegian literary field and Knausgård as a writer. As Toril Moi has pointed out, a comprehensive Bourdieuan analysis of a given field, a writer, and their textual production requires thorough and highly time-consuming sociological mapping (Moi 1997: 505). For instance, Bourdieu's seminal analysis of Gustave Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869) in *Les Règles de l'art* (1992) demanded an intensive recording of nineteenth-century France in order to position Flaubert within a specific literary field at a given time (cf. Bourdieu 1996).⁶ Moi notes that even with a dedicated ensemble of researchers it still took Bourdieu ten years to conclude this endeavour. Therefore, I hasten to underline that this is not my aim: I do not intend to provide a map of the Norwegian literary field in order to position Knausgård within it. Rather, my interest lies in the strategies Knausgård utilises in positioning himself and his work within the contemporary literary field and a literary tradition, and the strategies used by Knausgård to define the part of the field in which he aims to set up camp.

While the question of intent on behalf of the author may to some degree be relevant in every literary analysis, it is perhaps particularly relevant to address when considering authorial strategies. In the case of Karl Ove Knausgård, the material regarding his intent as an author is extensive, not only with *Min kamp*, but in the essays concerning his poetics. However, the focus on strategies does not subject the analysis of the author-critic and the author as rewriter to the methodological downfall of the intentional fallacy. What I regard as intent on behalf of the author can be located in the rhetorical strategies within the texts that bear the traces of self-reading and self-criticism.

As Tore Rem (2002) dwells on in his study of the Norwegian author Alexander Kielland, intention constitutes a complex aspect of Bourdieu's theoretical stance. In Rem's understanding, Bourdieu introduced the concept of *habitus* as a way to fuse the traditions of objectivism and subjectivism in sociology: to simultaneously pay heed to structuralism without neglecting the significance of subjectivity, and vice versa (Rem 2002: 21). The habitus consists of a system of dispositions, Rem explains, which are products of both the subject's history and of collective histories, as well as experiences the subject has gained in the literary field (ibid.). While I do not conduct any mapping of Knausgård's habitus in this thesis, the concept can serve to explain my view on intention and strategy.

⁶ English translation of *L'Éducation sentimentale: Sentimental Education*, and of *Règles de l'art: The Rules of Art*.

An agent in the literary field will naturally have agendas and interests, but the strategies employed will be the consequence of their understanding of reality, which is determined by what Bourdieu calls habitus: their personal, family and class history. In Rem's view, this signifies that a strict application of Bourdieu's notion of strategy leaves little room for active intent, but rather that the subject makes "pre-refleksive og kvasi-instinktive valg" based on their habitus and the possibilities for position-taking offered by the literary field (ibid.: 22).⁷ While this has led to accusations of determinism, which Rem to some extent repeats, Moi (1997) explains that the determinism has been widely misunderstood and exaggerated in scholarly application. Instead of creating a categorical, binary opposition between voluntarism and determinism, i.e. active intent and compulsion, Moi sums up Bourdieu's understanding of strategy as "to make something of what the world makes of us" (Moi 1997: 502). This means that choice is involved in strategy, but that the choices available may be bound to the position the agent occupies in the field. It is this understanding of strategy and intent I draw on in this thesis.

When Bourdieu's sociological approach to how the author navigates the literary field is understood as Moi suggests, "to make something of what the world makes of us", the criticism performed by Bloom regarding cynicism seems to become less severe. Rather than being reduced to the author's cold-hearted pursuit of power and mammon, strategy and intent should be considered in terms of making something of oneself in the literary field. This seems to be in line with the view that Rem takes in his study of Kielland, entitled precisely *Forfatterens strategier* (Rem 2002: 22-23).⁸ Rem argues that the author has a degree of necessary insight into how the field functions in practice and into the strategies available, and he is therefore able to position himself in such a way that it benefits his own work (Rem 2002: 23). In other words, the author, or an agent in the literary field who seeks to become an author, for instance via the role of critic, is presumed to have a degree of knowledge about existing paths to take in order to achieve this goal. Within this view there is in fact a space for Bloom's own theoretical position, for example regarding creative misreadings and wilful revisionism (cf. Bloom 1997). In making something of oneself based on what the literary field and the literary tradition makes of us, misreadings can be seen as one of the strategies for navigating and position-taking available to an author.

⁷ "pre-reflective and quasi-intuitive choices"

⁸ English translation of the title: *The Strategies of the Author*

Still it is important to emphasise, as Rem does, that the author's insight into available strategies does not entail a "total strategisk kontroll over egen karriere og sine egne verks skjebne [...] [forfatteren] kan aldri helt ut klare å se spillet fra utsiden" (ibid.).⁹ However much the author may seek to control, for example, the reception of his work, he cannot monopolise the power to define himself or his work. In relation to Knausgård's work, and as mentioned in the introduction, Jon Helt Haarder has emphasised the lack of control Knausgård as the author experienced when *Min kamp* turned into an unparalleled literary phenomenon in Norway, by pointing to how the feedback loop between the author, the work, and the literary public makes its way into the sixth volume of *Min kamp* (cf. Haarder 2014: 201-233; 2017: 253-255). I, however, am interested in the attempts at controlling the way the author or the work is viewed, specifically the more implicit strategies the author uses to assume control. Thus, the lack of full strategical control is preceded by the premises that the author intends to control the way he is viewed and read – he aims to control his *author-image*. Again, Haarder defines the author-image, drawing on Bourdieu, in relation to the argument he makes concerning the feedback loop in performative biographism: the image the author has of himself may not correspond with the image the literary public has, and the author cannot ignore the public's perception of him (Haarder 2014: 30; Bourdieu 1969: 95). To be clear, I do not dispute this: the author-image is dependent on an interaction with the literary public and the reception of the author and the work. However, this does not mean that the author does not aim to control the image of himself; the inability to assume total control should not exclude the point of view that the author has an image of himself as an author that he aims to convey to the literary public.¹⁰ It is the authorial strategies of portraying and controlling the author-image, the author-image here being defined as the author's poetic aims and the value the author gives to his poetics, that I suggest as a relevant object of study.

As the aim of this thesis is to examine the functions of criticism and rewriting, I focus on the strategies in the two forms of autoreception, the author-critic and the author as rewriter, and how this aids Knausgård as an author. The question thus is: what are the

⁹ "total strategic control over his own career and the fate of his own works [...] [the author] can never fully view the game from the outside."

¹⁰ In fairness, this is not Haarder's point either. However, his focus lies on the feedback loop, and how the author deals with the reception of his work, ultimately locating the author-image as something that lies *outside* the author.

strategies for controlling the author-image that are implied in the double role author-critic, and for the author as rewriter?

Criticism as an Entry Point and as Self-Canonisation

The practice of authors operating in the literary field as critics has a longstanding tradition, and many authors begin their literary career by writing *about* literature. Below I give three historic examples from three canonised Norwegian authors to illustrate the autoreception implied in critical activity.

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson made a name for himself prior to becoming a fictional author when he in 1854 published a highly critical review of the anthology *En Nytaarsbog*.¹¹ Notable members of the older generation of authors had contributed with texts to the publication, such as Johan Sebastian Welhaven, Andreas Munch, Per Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe. In his critical text, Bjørnson kindled the hope that “en ny Digterslægt” would soon drive out these authors’ out-dated Romantic tendencies (Bjørnson 1854).¹² In opposition to the established tradition, he called for a literature without the quixotic ideas that had been allowed to grow “naar man altid gaar og seer bort fra Virkeligheden ind i en sygelig Drømmeverden” (ibid.).¹³ Thus, Bjørnson utilised his literary predecessors to actively distance himself from their poetic aims, and his first novel, *Synnøve Solbakken* (1857), can partially be seen as a response to his own call.¹⁴

In his article on the critical relationship between Arne Garborg and Henrik Ibsen, Jahn Holljen Thon shows how Garborg utilised Ibsen during different stages in his career, and how this served a double purpose: for the literary public Garborg established himself as skilful and knowledgeable by writing about one of Norway’s most internationally recognised authors, while simultaneously nurturing his own literary production (Thon 2003: 121).¹⁵ For example, Thon demonstrates how Garborg bought his ticket of admission to the literary field by writing relatively risk-free criticism about Ibsen’s work, and made use of strategies that elevated the significance of his own critical texts, such as naming his reviews an

¹¹ Translation of the title: *En Nytaarsbog: A New Year’s Book*

¹² “a new author generation”

¹³ “when one always turns the gaze away from reality and towards an unhealthy dream world”

¹⁴ *Synnøve Solbakken* is considered to be a late Romantic work, or a Poetic-Realist work, where Bjørnson maintains to a certain extent the Romantic idea of Norwegian peasant culture, but also does not shy away from a more realistic depiction of the social problems imbedded in the same culture.

¹⁵ Similarly to Rem, Thon seems to retain the view that analyses of an author’s navigations in the literary field must allow for a degree of intentionality on behalf of the author (cf. Thon 2003: 123).

independent “kritisk studie” or “Afhandling” (ibid.: 123-124).¹⁶ Before and after his literary breakthrough with *Bondestudentar* (1883), the radical Garborg actively distanced himself from Ibsen poetically and politically, until he, in his obituary for Ibsen in 1906, substituted criticism for identification with the deceased master (Thon 2003: 124-126).¹⁷ Thon thus demonstrates the purposes criticism can serve at different points throughout an author’s career, where the final stage of reconciliation can benefit the author-critic in the way he connects his own poetic views to an established, canonised author.

Knut Hamsun is perhaps the most well-known historical example of how criticism serves the author at the onset of his career. Similar to Bjørnson and Garborg, Hamsun worked to distinguish a space in the literary field for himself and his own writing. In “Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv” (1890) he berates his Realist predecessors, and famously asks the question:

Hvad om Literaturen i det hele taget begyndte at beskæftige sig lidt mere med sjælelige Tilstande, end med Forlovelser og Baller og Landture og Ulykkeshændelser som saadanne?¹⁸ (Hamsun 1966: 42)

Hamsun goes on to ridicule the literary public that reads only for futile entertainment, and calls for a literature that deals with human psychology beyond the superficial, thus locating literary value in texts that place “hele det ubevidste Sjæleliv” in the foreground as the object of literary enquiry (ibid.).¹⁹ Hamsun requests that literature concern itself with more “*individuelle Tilfælde*” rather than types and tropes, as this would be more in line with the psychological reality of the modern human condition (ibid., emphasis original).²⁰ In short, Hamsun pointed to the benefits and value of a text like his own breakthrough novel, *Sult* (1890), published earlier that same year.²¹ Thus, this critical essay and later Hamsun’s lecture tours in 1891 served a dual purpose: tearing down the old, for example the shallow amusement literature practised by Ibsen and Kielland, and establishing the new – the critical

¹⁶ “critical study”; “Thesis”

¹⁷ English translation of *Bondestudentar: The Making of Daniel Brant*, translated by Marie Wells.

¹⁸ English translation of “Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv”: “From the Unconscious Life of the Mind [Soul]”; “What if literature overall began concerning itself a little more with psychological states [the conditions of the soul], than with engagements and balls and excursions to the countryside and accidents as such?”

¹⁹ “the entire unconscious life of the mind [the soul; the psyche]”

²⁰ “*individual cases*”

²¹ English translation of *Sult: Hunger*. “Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv” was published in the first issue of *Samtiden* in 1890, after the publication of *Sult*.

essay functions as advertisement for *Sult* as *the* new.²² In other words, Hamsun promoted himself as the author of acutely relevant, modern and contemporary literature.

The examples above demonstrate the more or less explicit self-reading and self-criticism that are implied when authors write criticism, and how they function to position the author at the frontline of the literary battlefield. Bourdieu effectively synthesises the tendency:

“Making one’s mark”, initiating a new epoch, means winning recognition [...] of one’s difference from other producers, especially the most consecrated of them; it means, by the same token, creating a new position, ahead of the positions already occupied, in the vanguard. (Bourdieu 1983: 340)

When using criticism as an entry point, the author-critic functions both as a player, the drafter of the teams, where the opposing team may or may not consist of straw men in the sense that the opposition between the teams might be a fallacy from the beginning, and as the referee in the game for recognition in the literary field. In the double role as player and referee, the author-critic is necessarily biased in their own favour. Furthermore, he uses his advantage of having studied the opposing team extensively and believes he has found their collective weakness. In the critical texts that signal a more or less implicit autoreception, the player-referee will inevitably come out victorious.

What this indicates is that the author and the author-image is created through reading: reading as a continuous process of evaluating and creating poetics in the interaction with and study of other authors (cf. Furuseth 2015: 33-35). This is comparable to Bloom’s understanding of poetic influence, where he places direct emphasis on the connection between love of literature and the love of power:

I have come to the conviction that the love of poetry is another variant of the love of power [...]. We read to usurp, just as the poet writes to usurp. Usurp what? A place, a stance, a fullness, an illusion of identification or possession; something we can call our own or even ourselves. (Bloom 1982: 17)

The author-critic is dependent on a literary space of his own, where he can claim authority and power. However, for the author-critic, criticism does not purely consist of acts of rebellion and usurpation. While a significant aim may be to create a new position, the author-critic is equally concerned with establishing himself as part of a literary tradition.

²² See Rem (2002) for a survey of how Hamsun criticise Kielland.

As Furuseth points out, the author-critic oscillates between the will for power and the desire for submission, specifically, to submit their own work to canonisation and tradition (Furuseth 2015: 34). The examples pointed to above can illustrate the oscillation. In “Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv”, for instance, Hamsun elevates his own poetics by belittling the poetics of his predecessors. Thus, if this is seen as Hamsun making a comparison between himself as an author and his predecessors as authors, the comparison is arranged in Hamsun’s favour: Hamsun orchestrates his own coup for power in the contemporary literary field, asserting his superiority by portraying his forerunners as incompetent and unapt to effectively address the modern condition. In this case, criticism functions to confirm Hamsun’s entry into the literary field as a fictional author via his critical work. However, as demonstrated by Thon, the opposite approach can also function to confirm the author’s relevance and status. While creating a distance to Ibsen benefited Garborg at a certain point in his career, ultimately, the mature Garborg actively brought attention to his close association with Ibsen’s poetics. In particular, he focused on what Ibsen can teach the younger generation: the importance of will and perseverance.

Han [Ibsen] var ein av desse heilvaksne karane, som ikkje minst me norske, med vaar drøymarhug og veike vilje hjartelig treng um aa sjaa. [...] det som trengst til aa gjera heilt mannsverk, er vilje [...] anten det gjeld “stort” eller “smaatt” livsarbeid.²³ (Garborg 1906)

Garborg thus ingratiated himself with a great master. Viewing this as a strategy, this was not primarily to flatter the recently deceased Ibsen, but rather it can be seen as directed at the literary public and his own work: in pointing to the aspects of Ibsen’s poetics and literary determination that benefited his own status and work as an author, “Garborg bruker Ibsen og bidrar slik til sin egen kanonisering” (Thon 2003: 126).²⁴ What this signifies is that in *elevating* the literary quality of the author subject to criticism, the author-critic may implicitly evaluate and elevate *himself* as an author. By associating himself with a canonical author, in varying degrees of visible intentionality, the author creates a connection between a literary tradition and his own work. Thus, this is what is meant by the author-critic as self-canonising and by the author yearning to submit to a literary tradition. In other words, the proximity

²³ “He [Ibsen] was one of these fully-grown men, that especially we Norwegians, with our tendency to dream and our weak will, wholeheartedly need to see. [...] what is needed to do an honest man’s work is will [...] be it either a ‘grand’ or ‘small’ life’s work.”

²⁴ “Garborg uses Ibsen and thus contributes to his own canonisation”

the author-critic creates in his critical texts to tradition and canonised authors has a validating function. This is, however, not to say that the author-critic has complete power over his own canonisation. Several other factors are in play, many of which can be related to issues of power structures in the literary field, such as class, race, and gender. Rather, the point is to highlight this as a possible strategy. When the author-critic, not in “the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity” asserts the immortality of his predecessors, as T. S. Eliot puts it, this signals a recognition of a specific tradition that the author cares to be seen in light of (Eliot 1932b: 14).²⁵

The double role of author-critic thus carries with it functions related to establishing a position in the literary field by ostensibly creating a new space for the author, but it can also function to validate the author-image in relation to a poetic tradition. As I demonstrate in this thesis, these strategies are not mutually exclusive, in the sense that the author-critic utilises either the one or the other, and are not categorically tied to the age, maturity or perceived status of the author-critic. Rather, it is the dual function of criticism that the author-critic continuously balances between in his autoreceptive writing and practices.

Rewriting Criticism: A Methodological Example

The concept of rewriting that I focus on most extensively in this thesis is not the autoreception implied in rewriting a previously written text. However, this plays a role, for example in part III where I show how some of the essayistic passages in *Min kamp* are rewritten versions of texts that Knausgård published prior to *Min kamp*. Still, it is mainly the autoreception that is implied in the strategies of rewriting, specifically with regard to the narrative technique and structure of *Min kamp*, that is of interest. Chapter 2 is dedicated to outlining the autoreception in the narration, focusing on the implied self-reading and self-criticism in the separation between Karl Ove as protagonist-narrator and Knausgård as the author and rewriter, while I deal extensively with the autoreception in the narratological structuring of *Min kamp* in chapter 5. Nevertheless, the author as rewriter of previously published texts deserves attention: how does rewriting imply self-reading and self-criticism? This is what I aim to show in the following methodological example, which incorporates both the autoreception implied in criticism and in rewriting.

²⁵ Note that Eliot makes this claim with regard to poets and poetry, however the same principle applies to the author-critic.

I shall now point to three instances where Knausgård operates as a critic of Hamsun's second novel *Mysterier* (1892).²⁶ Furuseth also points to these three examples to illustrate the significance of the rhetorical situation of criticism (cf. Furuseth 2015: 54-61). For my purpose, these instances of Knausgård as an author-critic of Hamsun are highly fitting as they demonstrate both forms of autoreception that I discuss in this thesis, as well as illustrating how they can interact. Furthermore, this brief analysis lays the foundation for the argument I make in chapter 6 regarding Knausgård's strategic use of Hamsun in *Min kamp*.

In 2008, Knausgård published the essay "Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?" in the anthology *Norsk litterær kanon* (2008).²⁷ The anthology was the result of a canonisation project organised by the Norwegian Festival of Literature in Lillehammer, where the goal was to determine the twenty-five most influential texts in Norwegian literary history. In *Min kamp* VI Knausgård touches on *Mysterier* again, and in 2013, Knausgård published a rewritten version of the 2008 essay under the new title "Sjelens Amerika", making it the title essay of the essay collection *Sjelens Amerika. Tekster 1996-2013*.²⁸ For the autoreceptive functions of criticism and rewriting, it is highly relevant that the two versions of this text are dated one year prior to, and two years after the serial publication of *Min kamp* respectively: the differences between the two versions reveals the traces of Knausgård's self-reading, not just of the original critical essay but of *Min kamp* and himself as an author.

In both versions of the two essays, Knausgård seeks to examine *Mysterier* comparatively, and to place it within Hamsun's authorship, i.e. to relate the novel to a wider understanding of Hamsun's poetics. He thus discusses the novel in relation to *Sult* (1890), *Markens grøde* (1917), *Landstrykere* (1927), *Ringens slutt* (1936), and *Paa gjengrodde stier* (1949), but also in relation Hamsun's essays, in particular "Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv" (1889) and "Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv" (1890).²⁹

In the 2008 essay Knausgård places explicit emphasis on how *Mysterier* fails to live up to the highpoints in Hamsun's literary production. In fact, he begins the essay with an almost defiant dismissal of the novel:

Mysterier hører ikke til blant Hamsuns beste romaner; i forhold til *Sult*, som kom ut to år tidligere, er den en åpenbar nedtur, og den når heller ikke høydene til de beste av Hamsuns senere verk: les *På*

²⁶ English translation of *Mysterier*: *Mysteries*

²⁷ Translation of the titles: "Would you like me to pinch your puff?"; *Norwegian Literary Canon*

²⁸ "The America of the Soul"

²⁹ English translations of the titles: *Hunger*; *Growth of the Soil*; *Wayfarers*; *The Ring is Closed*; *On Overgrown Paths*; "The Cultural Life of Modern America"; "From the Unconscious Life of the Mind [Soul]"

gjengrodde stier etter at du har lest *Mysterier*, og du vil forhåpentligvis forstå hva jeg mener. Er det noe som preger *Mysterier*, er det noe som skinner gjennom alle dens gester og innfall, er det forfatterens ønske om å vise hva han kan. Det er som om han er fylt av en vilje til storhet som romanen ikke klarer å absorbere, og derfor flyter over av. *Mysterier* er ikke skrivekunst, det er en demonstrasjon av skrivekunst.³⁰ (Knausgård 2008b: 161)

In other words, Knausgård argued that Hamsun's will for greatness made the novel, ultimately, a failure. The reason for the failure, Knausgård argues, is that *Mysterier* does not correspond with Hamsun's main poetic aim, which, referring to "Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv", Knausgård sees as being concerned with the disparity between literature and life:

Litteraturen er enkel, skjematisk, strukturell, sammenhengende, harmoniserende, forklart; livet er komplekst, usystematisk, usammenhengende, vilkårlig, disharmonisk, uforklart. Hvordan få språket til å bevege seg ut av systemene og inn i livet, slik det leves, det er Hamsuns spørsmål denne høsten 1890 [...].³¹ (ibid.: 163)

As Knausgård argues, this is what Hamsun had managed to demonstrate in his first novel *Sult*, in part by eliminating the established norms of the novel (ibid.: 163-164). Here Knausgård highlights the function of criticism for Hamsun that I have pointed to above. He points out that "Fra de ubevidste Sjæleliv" was a rationalisation of what *Sult* achieved after the fact: with the essay, Hamsun consolidated what he had presented as new, general poetics with his own novel: "han hadde alt gjort alt det han der sa at litteraturen måtte gjøre" (ibid.: 164).³² Related to this, Knausgård poses the question – what can Hamsun write after having achieved so much in his first novel?³³

The reason that *Mysterier* falls short of the mark, that is, the mark that Knausgård sets up as the admirable, overarching poetic question in Hamsun's oeuvre, is the manner in which

³⁰ "Mysterier does not belong among Hamsun's best novels; compared to *Hunger*, published two years earlier, it is an obvious let-down, and it does not achieve the level of Hamsun's best later works: read *On Overgrown Paths* after you have read *Mysterier*, and you will hopefully understand what I mean. If there is anything that characterises *Mysterier*, if there is anything that shines through all its gestures and whims, it is that the author desires to show what he can do. It is as if he is filled with a will for greatness that the novel cannot absorb, and therefore it is overflowed by this ambition. *Mysterier* is not the art of writing, it is a demonstration of the art of writing."

³¹ "Literature is simple, schematic, structural, coherent, harmonising, explained; life is complex, disorganised, incoherent, arbitrary, discordant, unexplained. How to get the language [of literature] to move out of the systematic, and into life, the way it is lived, that is Hamsun's question in the autumn of 1890 [...]." This passage is also included in "Sjelens Amerika" (Knausgård 2013e: 95).

³² "[in *Hunger*] he had already done everything he said literature must do". This point is also included in the rewritten version (cf. Knausgård 2013e: 96).

³³ The same question is kept in the rewritten version (cf. Knausgård 2013e: 97).

it oscillates between overstating and not being able to bear the burden of its own ambition (ibid.: 161-162, 165).

Skildringen av hovedpersonen Nagel er ikke bare subtil, men demonstrativt subtil, hans sjeleliv er ikke bare beskrevet nyansert, men demonstrativt nyansert, hans mange innfall er ikke bare overraskende, men demonstrativt overraskende.³⁴ (ibid.: 161)

Hamsun commits the sin of aiming for what Knausgård somewhat nebulously calls “det store”, seemingly referring both to demonstrating that he is a great author and to the grand questions of grand narratives, “på en så markskrikerisk og selvpromoterende måte at det må skjære i ørene på alle som er i besittelse av et minstemål av litterært gehør” (ibid.: 165).³⁵ The objection is closely related to Knausgård’s view of Hamsun and his oeuvre as representative of a type of modernism that explicitly does not promote the grand narrative nor the grand questions (ibid.: 187-188). Instead, the value and greatness Knausgård sees in Hamsun is related to the focus on precisely the individual cases, and his ability to give meaning to the seemingly small, insignificant and ordinary (ibid.).

As an author-critic, Knausgård shows that he is not willing to merely praise a text by a canonical author like Hamsun just for the sake of it, which, considering the publication context, is perhaps in itself somewhat puzzling. As Furuseth points out in her analysis of the 2008 version of this text, the passages concerning Hamsun’s failures border on a deliberate provocation (Furuseth 2015: 57). Yet, as she also suggests, it may reveal something about Knausgård as the author-critic: Knausgård’s annoyance with Hamsun and belittling of *Mysterier* may be rooted in self-criticism; he might see himself in the young Hamsun (ibid.: 58). As will become evident in the analysis of Knausgård as a critic and author in the following parts of this thesis, this is highly likely, as I show that Knausgård is also guilty of demonstrating his will to greatness.

In *Min kamp* VI, Knausgård returns briefly to *Mysterier* in the essay “Navnet og tallet”.³⁶ While he does not explicitly mention his essay from 2008, it seems clear that it is

³⁴ “The depiction of the protagonist Nagel is not only subtle, but ostentatiously subtle, his inner life [life of the soul] is not only described in a nuanced manner, but in an ostentatiously nuanced manner, his many whims are not only surprising, they are ostentatiously surprising.”

³⁵ “the grand/great”; “in such a charlatanic and self-promotional manner that it is jarring for anyone who possesses the bare minimum of a literary ear.” This point is omitted in “Sjelens Amerika”.

³⁶ “The Name and the Number”. Although it could be argued that as this criticism appears within the narrative of *Min kamp*, and thus falls under fictionalised criticism, which I discuss in chapter 2, I include Knausgård as a critic of Hamsun in *Min kamp* VI here. This is because it takes place in the long essay “Navnet og tallet”, and not in a specific diegetic time. I explain the significance of diegetic time with regards to criticism in chapter 2.

what he has in mind when writing about Hamsun's poetics, and his development from *Sult* to *Mysterier* (VI: 398-400). Thus, the critical statements made here indicate a self-reading of a previously written text. At this point Knausgård is more favourably inclined towards the novel:

Mysterier er kanskje ingen vellykket roman, men den inneholder noen helt enestående passasjer, hvor Hamsun forsøker å gå enda lenger inn i nået og beskrive de nesten helt forutsetningsløse bevegelsene som foregår i et sinn i et bestemt, men vilkårlig øyeblikk.³⁷ (VI: 400)

Here he does not name the novel an obvious let-down (cf. Knausgård 2008b: 161), although he is not willing to name it a successful novel. Still, the emphasis he places on Hamsun's depictions of the present, and the ability to convey what takes place in the mind of an individual at a given point in time, can be read as signifying more than a mere dutiful acknowledgment of Hamsun's poetic intention. While this allows for at least parts of *Mysterier* to correspond with what he sees as Hamsun's aim, it can also be understood as a nod to how Knausgård views *Min kamp*. As mentioned, I touch on the function of using Hamsun in specific contexts in *Min kamp* more explicitly in part III. What this illustrates at this point is that the self-reading is not limited to Knausgård's past text on Hamsun, but in fact to his own work as an author. As Furuseth also notes, it is as if Knausgård points to Hamsun in order to connect him to what interests Knausgård – "selvskrivning" (Furuseth 2015: 58).³⁸ Knausgård implicitly ties Hamsun's work to his own work, but at the same time names the object-text an unsuccessful novel. This demonstrates the point made in the previous section concerning how the author-critic balances between partly defying *and* partly submitting his work to an established literary tradition, a tradition which Knausgård in 2008 explicitly argues began with Hamsun (Knausgård 2008b: 188). For instance, five hundred and seventy pages after discussing *Mysterier* in the sixth volume, Knausgård writes the following about *Min kamp*:

Det har vært et eksperiment, og det har vært mislykket, for jeg har aldri engang vært i nærheten av å si det jeg egentlig mener og beskrive det jeg egentlig har sett, men ikke verdiløst, i alle fall ikke helt [...] det jeg har skrevet om, har utelukkende vært vanlige hendelser, det har ikke vært noe oppsiktsvekkende med noe av det, slike ting hender hele tiden, hver eneste dag, og alle vet også at det

³⁷ "*Mysterier* is perhaps not the most successful of novels, yet it does contain some quite unrivalled passages in which Hamsun endeavours to venture still further into the now and describe the almost completely unattached stirrings of a human mind at any given moment." (MS VI: 408)

³⁸ "self-writing"

hender; både alkoholisme, utroskap, psykisk sykdom og onani
[...].³⁹ (VI: 970-971)

Here Knausgård highlights that he has rewritten about life as it is, life as “komplekst”, “usammenhengende”, “vilkårlig”, and “disharmonisk” (cf. Knausgård 2008b: 163), thus pertaining to a question and aim that he seems to outline for both Hamsun and for *Min kamp*: “Hvordan få språket til å bevege seg ut av systemene og inn i livet, slik det leves” (ibid.).⁴⁰ In short, Knausgård implicitly sets up his project as a continuation of Hamsun’s canonical writing, thus partly validating his own aim.

The use Knausgård makes of Hamsun becomes apparent in the rewritten version of “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?”, published after the *Min kamp*-project was concluded. In the rewritten, 2013 version “Sjelens Amerika”, Knausgård has omitted the most defiant passages concerning the failures of *Mysterier*. Most notably, the original and rebellious introduction has been substituted with a more favourable reading of the opening passage of *Landstrykere* (1927). *Landstrykere* begins with two travelling musicians who stage a fight between them in order to win sympathy for the defeated musician, and to loosen the purse strings of the people of the village. Knausgård argues that the idea established here, that life is a game where everyone is constantly cheating everyone else, runs through the entire novel (Knausgård 2013e: 87). He uses this point to show that the sentiment is not indicative of the bitter and hard-earned insights of the older Hamsun, but rather demonstrates Hamsun’s ability to describe “selv det minste livet og det minst levende i det, med en kraft og intensitet og glede”, in a manner where even the seemingly empty and meaningless aspects of life are given significance (ibid.).⁴¹

Det er som om det verdiløse også har en verdi, det meningsløse
også en mening, bare gjennom det faktum at det finnes, gjennom
at det er en del av livet.⁴² (ibid.)

³⁹ “It has been an experiment, and it has failed because I have never even been close to saying what I really mean or describing what I have actually seen, but it is not valueless, at least not completely [...] what I have written about have been exclusively everyday events, there has been nothing sensational about any of it, these things happen all the time, every single day, and everyone know they do: alcoholism, infidelity, mental illness, masturbation [...]” (MS VI: 1010)

⁴⁰ “complex”, “incoherent”, “arbitrary”, and “discordant”; “How to get the language [of literature] to move out of the systematic, and into life, the way it is lived”

⁴¹ “even the smallest life and the least vibrant [living, alive] in it, with a force and intensity and joy”

⁴² “It is as if the worthless also has value, the meaningless also has a meaning, merely in the fact that it exists, in the fact that it is a part of life.”

Thus, Knausgård is well on his way to tying *Landstrykere* to the poetic value that he finds in Hamsun. However, where he in 2008 focused on the faults of *Mysterier* in terms of living up to Hamsun's otherwise supreme literary exploration of the topic, in 2013 Knausgård has changed his tune:

[Temaet er ikke] nytt for den eldre Hamsun, men fulgte ham gjennom hele forfatterskapet, og kanskje var som mest akutt allerede i hans andre bok, *Mysterier*, som kom ut i 1892, altså 35 år før *Landstrykere*, da Hamsun var en relativt ung mann på 33.⁴³ (ibid: 87-88)

While Knausgård maintains the point that *Mysterier* is not flawless and that it cannot fully come to terms with its inner contradictions, the novel has now gone from being a disappointment and a jarring self-proclamation of Hamsun's greatness, to perhaps the most acute exploration of life, meaninglessness and being. Although the rewriting in the remainder of the text is minimal, consisting of excluding or rephrasing the most severely critical passages of “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?”, the rewritten introduction sets the tone of the essay with a noticeable effect. By connecting *Mysterier* to his reading of *Landstrykere*, Knausgård is able to connect the former to Hamsun's oeuvre in a way that is favourable for Hamsun and for *Mysterier* as an intensely Hamsunian-text.

Still, the rewritten criticism is also easily viewed as favourable for Knausgård. The younger, pre-*Min kamp* Knausgård was eager to point out where Hamsun went wrong, while the established, post-*Min kamp* Knausgård finds it beneficial to implicitly point out the poetic influence of Hamsun in his own work – it ties himself to a canonical author. In addition, as Furuseth also considers, after having published a colossal novel about himself and his own writing, maintaining the point that *Mysterier* is overrun with Hamsun's demonstrative will to power and greatness would perhaps *not* benefit Knausgård – it might have come across as hypocritical (cf. Furuseth 2015: 58). In this sense, Knausgård has conducted self-criticism by excluding the most explicit points where his readers in 2013 may have reacted with anything from amusement to fierce accusations of hypocrisy, due to how his criticism of Hamsun could be read as being applicable to Knausgård himself. The rewriting therefore indicates an author who has considered his past text from the position he now occupies and with his author-image post-*Min kamp* in mind. However, this does not mean that the more implicitly

⁴³ “[The theme is not] new for the older Hamsun, but dominated his entire oeuvre, and perhaps most acutely already in his second book, *Mysterier*, published in 1892, that is, 35 years before *Woyfarers*, when Hamsun was a relatively young man of 33.”

ironic aspects of the critical text have been discarded. For example, as critic Bernhard Ellefsen points out in his review of the essay collection, Knausgård's description and underlying annoyance with Nagel's will for greatness and with "den plutselige avskrellingen av alle lag i forsøket på å finne en endelig beveggrunn, det innerste, kjernen" still borders on being implicitly hypocritical, as this could just as well be a description of how Knausgård has portrayed himself in *Min kamp* (Knausgård 2013e: 110; Ellefsen 2013).⁴⁴

Still, the point is not to merely identify the potentially hypocritical aspects and call them autoreception.⁴⁵ Rather, it is to highlight the way the changes in the text may benefit Knausgård as an author. As pointed out above, with the rewritten introduction Knausgård sets himself up as a sympathetic reader, which in turn can facilitate his own readers to make a sympathetic comparison: to submit his poetic aims in *Min kamp* to a "hamsunsk krav om livsfølelse", as Ellefsen names it (Ellefsen 2013).⁴⁶ Furthermore, as I argue in part III, with *Min kamp* Knausgård pays great heed to the value of continuity in his own poetics, which may have left him more inclined to look a bit longer and harder for a correspondence between *Mysterier* and Hamsun's oeuvre.

In summation, the altering, discarding, and new inclusions indicate that Knausgård may not only have developed his view of Hamsun, but the view of his own author-image. Another important illustrative function of this example is that it shows how the two forms of autoreception are interconnected in Knausgård's work. In the next chapter, I develop the notion of the relationship between the two forms of autoreception, and show how the strategies of rewriting inform the view of the protagonist-narrator Karl Ove as an author-critic within *Min kamp*. In this chapter I have focused on how non-fictional criticism can benefit the author-critic. It is in particular part II of this thesis that makes use of the autoreception imbedded in the non-fictional author-critic, where I investigate Knausgård as an aspiring author and critic. The critical texts and the rhetorical strategies are therefore considered in terms of how Knausgård uses criticism as an entry point to the literary field, utilising strategies of both defiance and ingratiation.

⁴⁴ "the sudden urge to peel away all the layers in the attempt to find an ultimate, innermost motive, the core". This passage also appears in "Vil de tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?" (Knausgård 2008b: 175)

⁴⁵ To be clear, hypocrisy in itself does not equal self-criticism. Hypocrisy indicates an inability to reflect on how one's own actions are in fact similar to or the same as the actions of others that one criticises. Rather, self-criticism in this case entails what can be understood as, at least partial, awareness of hypocrisy and as an attempt to rectify this.

⁴⁶ "Hamsunian demand for a feeling for life"

2 Autoreceptive Narration

The critical activity finds its highest, its truest fulfilment in a kind of union with
the creation in the labour of the artist.

T. S. Eliot, "The Function of Criticism" (1923)

A key interest in the primary reception and research regarding *Min kamp* has been the generic classification of the text, and by extension, the relationship between Knausgård as the author, protagonist and narrator of *Min kamp*. As outlined in the introduction of this thesis, my aim is not to settle any generic disputes or contribute with a new generic term. Instead, I refer to *Min kamp* as an autobiographical novel. This is in part for pragmatic reasons, but most importantly it is because my interest lies not in any supposed generic boundaries between the autobiography and the novel. Rather, it is the function of the narration, the function of the narrative technique, and the function of the relationship between Knausgård as the author, protagonist and narrator that I investigate in this thesis. Specifically, I examine how these aspects of the text function as autoreception.

In this chapter I expand the concept of rewriting as autoreception in the case of Karl Ove Knausgård. While I consider rewriting in *Min kamp* in a similar manner as I outlined in the previous chapter, that is, Knausgård as a rewriter of his own text, I now emphasise the strategies of rewriting within the diegesis of *Min kamp*. By this I mean that Knausgård rewrites the poetic intentions, aims and context of writing his previously published text, which includes his critical texts and his literary texts, i.e. his two novels. To do the function of this type of rewriting justice, it is necessary to consider the rhetorical and narratological situation within the text. Therefore, I demonstrate how I see the relationship between what I name Knausgård as author and Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator by outlining a new term for the narration and narratology in *Min kamp*, *autoreceptive narration*, which entails a focus on the function of the narration.

Significance of Diegetic Time

As Poul Behrendt argues, elevating certain passages, dialogues, or indications of thoughts within *Min kamp* to the thoughts of Knausgård as the author neglects to consider the narrative technique and narratology, and by extension, does not pay sufficient attention to

the *diegetic time* in which these statements are made (Behrendt 2011: 323). The diegesis is important to consider, since *Min kamp* is dominated by a narration where the narrator remains on the same diegetic level as the protagonist: it is not *presented* as a retrospective narrative narrated by Knausgård as the author. For example, in “Autonarration som skandinavisk novum” (2011) Behrendt warned against a simplistic understanding of *Min kamp* as Knausgård’s response to his own call for arms against fiction as a whole, and against how passages in *Min kamp* I and II relating to revolts against fiction “er gået Norden over som forfatterens egne allermost aktuelle tanker om litteraturens væsen her og nu” (ibid.).¹ For instance, Behrendt refers to this essayistic passage from *Min kamp* II:

De siste årene hadde jeg mistet mer og mer tro på litteraturen. Jeg leste, og tenkte, dette er det noen som har funnet på. Kanskje var det det at vi var fullstendig okkupert av fiksjon og fortellinger. At det hadde gått inflasjon i det. Uansett hvor man vendte seg, var det fiksjon å se. [...] Det var en krise, jeg følte det i hver del av kroppen, noe mett, smultaktig bredte seg i bevisstheten, ikke minst fordi kjernen i all fiksjonen, sann eller ikke-sann, var likhet, og at avstanden den holdt til virkeligheten, var konstant. Altså at den så det samme. Det samme, som var vår verden, ble serieprodusert. Det unike, som de alle snakket om, ble dermed opphevet, det fantes ikke, det var løgn. [...] Jeg klarte ikke skrive i det, det gikk ikke, hver eneste setning ble møtt med tanken; men det her er jo bare noe du dikter opp. Det har ingen verdi.² (II: 535)

Behrendt’s point is that when passages like these are attributed to Knausgård as the author, readers neglect the text as *autonarration*: as an ordering, structuring and retelling of Knausgård during different periods of his life. Credit should be given to Behrendt here, as his early emphasis on this particular kind of separation between Knausgård as author, protagonist and narrator and the importance of diegetic time is illustrative of his skilled reading of *Min kamp*. When writing the article “Autonarration som skandinavisk novum”, the sixth volume

¹ “have been spread around the Nordic countries as the author’s most current thoughts on the nature of literature here and now.” Regarding a simplistic understanding of the revolt against fiction, it seems clear that Behrendt is particularly critical of Hans Hauge’s (2012) oxymoronic view of *Min kamp* as “fiktionsfri fiktion [fiction-free fiction]”.

² “Over the recent years I had increasingly lost faith in literature. I read and thought, this is something someone has made up. Perhaps it was because we are totally inundated with fiction and stories. It had got out of hand. Wherever you turned you saw fiction. [...] It was a crisis, I felt it in every fibre of my body, something saturating was spreading through my consciousness like lard, not least because the nucleus of all this fiction, whether true or not, was verisimilitude and the distance it held to reality was constant. In other words, it saw the same. This sameness, which was our world, was being mass-produced. The uniqueness, which they all talked about, was thereby invalidated, it didn’t exist, it was a lie. [...] I couldn’t write like this, it wouldn’t work, every single sentence was met with the thought: but you’re just making this up. It has no value.” (MS II: 630-631)

of *Min kamp* had yet to be published. However, in *Min kamp* VI, Knausgård highlights precisely what Behrendt has argued:

[...] hele tiden hadde [jeg] forsøkt å skrive meg inn mot den tiden handlingen foregikk i, ikke minst gjennom å legge refleksjonene så tett mot jeg-ets alder som mulig. Tiåringen reflekterte om smågodt, niogtyveåringen om popmusikk, trettifemåringen om foreldreskap.³ (VI: 66)

Knausgård also points to this strategy extratextually, for example in an interview with Jesse Barron in *The Paris Review* where he discussed the essayistic passages in *Min kamp*:

[...] I can use the essayistic digressions in a narrative sense. I have essays representing myself at twenty-five, which are really, really stupid, and say a lot of things that are purely infantile and idiotic. Then, five years later, I'll have another essayistic part that relates to that, but is a bit more sophisticated. Something has happened. There is a kind of narration in the essayistic things which you don't do as a straight essayist. As an essayist, you just write. You don't use yourself in that sense. You don't provide the stupid essay to show how age changes your thinking [...]. (Barron 2013)

Knausgård thus emphasises that maintaining a distance between himself as the author and himself as protagonist-narrator in a specific diegetic time was an explicit textual strategy. What Behrendt outlines analytically and Knausgård meta- and extratextually is that the diegetic time is highly significant when considering literary critical statements made by the protagonist-narrator, as the narrated events and the essayistic passages in *Min kamp* need to be viewed in light of the narrative technique. In other words, in an analysis of the author's poetics and author-image it is necessary to consider whether the focalisation, to use Gérard Genette's term (cf. Genette 1983: 189-194), is that of Karl Ove as the narrator-protagonist, or Knausgård as the author.

Somewhat ironically, however, in his 2011 article Behrendt actually failed to pay sufficient attention to the diegetic time. Behrendt claimed that the text passage from *Min kamp* II that I have cited above is a reflection that is placed in the diegetic time 2004 (cf. Behrendt 2011: 323), when in actual fact it is placed very specifically in the diegetic time 26

³ “[...] I'd tried to write my way into the period in which each narrative took place, not least by matching my reflections as closely as possible to the age of the first-person narrator [...]. The ten-year-old reflected on sweets, the twenty-nine-year-old on pop music, the thirty-five-year-old on parenting.” (MS VI: 64)

February 2008, i.e. the day before Knausgård began writing *Min kamp*.⁴ Thus, Behrendt created a faulty premise for his analysis of what does and does not constitute Knausgård's poetics, or at least what Knausgård outlines as his poetics (cf. *ibid.*: 324ff).⁵ Behrendt corrects this, however, in the article "Face off" (2017), which I discuss in relation to the narratological structure of *Min kamp* II in chapter 5. Despite the inaccuracy, Behrendt's initial point still stands. When aiming to locate what the *author* claims to be his present poetic views, meticulous attention must be paid to the diegetic time. This relates to a methodological clarification when considering the autoreception of the author-critic in *Min kamp*: an analysis of literary critical statements made by an author-critic in *Min kamp* must begin by taking into account the focalisation and the diegetic time in which they take place.

With the term that I propose in this chapter to describe the function of the characteristic narration, i.e. autoreceptive narration, I unite the concept of author-critic and author as rewriter within the text by highlighting the relevance of the diegetic time, and the act of rewriting himself that Knausgård as the author conducts in *Min kamp*. The starting premise for the classification of the narration as autoreceptive is that throughout *Min kamp* there is a lack of separation between the narrator and the narrated protagonist in *Min kamp*. By this I mean that the narrator Karl Ove remains on the same diegetic level as the narrated protagonist Karl Ove. Knausgård as the author who is writing the text steps in at times during the narrative, but for the most part keeps a distance from the narration. The result is that explicit, retrospective evaluation of himself at different points in his life, that is, from the position of the author who is writing *Min kamp* between 27 February 2008 and 2 September 2011, is minimal.⁶ However, in this thesis I aim to show that the narration still indicates implicit autoreception of both the present, rewriting Knausgård and the past,

⁴ 27 February 2008 as the day Knausgård began writing *Min kamp* is indicated most explicitly on the final page of *Min kamp* where it is stated that the text was written between 27 February 2008 and 2 September 2011 (cf. VI: 1116).

⁵ With reference to *Min kamp* II, pages 533-535, Behrendt incorrectly dates the diegetic time of the passage from volume II. Behrendt inaccurately states that this is made in an essayistic reflection by Karl Ove as the narrator-protagonist in 2004, who is about to present *En tid for alt* at a talk in Kristiansand. Further, he sees the statement that precedes the passage as indicative of the author's ironic self-deprecation of these thoughts: "At dette var gamle tanker, som jeg ikke lenger mente, var ikke så viktig. Det viktigste var at jeg sa noe [It didn't matter too much that these were old ideas and I no longer believed in them. The important thing was that I said something]." (II: 535; MS II: 630). Here Behrendt makes two inaccurate claims: 1) the passage about Karl Ove losing faith in fiction takes place in the diegetic time 26 February 2008. 2) The preceding passage that Behrendt views as self-deprecating does not refer to these reflections, but rather to the points Karl Ove has jotted down on the plane from Copenhagen to Kristiansand, and that he is going to talk about during his two readings at the University of Agder and at Agder Folk High School (see II: 533-535; MS II: 629-630).

⁶ Knausgård indicates the time frame for writing *Min kamp* at the end of volume VI, see page 1116. To be clear, direct retrospective evaluation does occur, most dominantly in volume VI, and most explicitly in for example the diary entry from 28 August 2011, five days before *Min kamp* was finished (VI: 932-939).

rewritten Karl Ove. Thus, my interest lies in the function of the separation between Knausgård as the author and Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator.

Knausgård and Karl Ove

The diegetic times of the different volumes of *Min kamp* can be charted in the following schematic outline (table I.a). The emphasis has been placed on *overarching* and *dominant* diegetic time and place, and it should not be read as a full overview of *Min kamp* as such.⁷ Volume III proves to be the most illustrative example to demonstrate the differences in focalisation between Knausgård and Karl Ove. Here, there are only a few exceptions to the rule, i.e. the protagonist-narrator is almost exclusively Karl Ove at age six to age thirteen, while Knausgård as the forty-year-old author keeps a distance from the narration.⁸

VOLUME	DIEGETIC TIME	DIEGETIC PLACE
I	2008	Malmö
I	1984-1985*	Tveit, Kristiansand
I	2004	Stockholm
I	1998**	Kristiansand
II	2002-2008***	Stockholm, Malmö, Kristiansand, Arendal, and Tromøya
III	1975-1982	Tromøya
IV	1984-1988	Kristiansand and Håfjord****
V	1988-2002	Bergen*****
VI	2009-2011*****	Malmö and Oslo

* Omitting associative analepses to past events, past in relation to the diegetic time, for example to 1982-1983 (cf. I: 65-116).

** Omitting associative analepses, for example to the diegetic time and place 1988-1991 in Bergen (I: 323-341).

*** Omitting the insertion of the diegetic time and place 1999, Biskops-Arnö, where Karl Ove meets Linda Boström (II: 182-194)

**** Håfjord is the fictional name given to the village Fjordgård on Senja.

***** Omitting for instance the diegetic place Reykjavík and Norwich, where Karl Ove lived for a few months in 1992 and 1995 respectively (V: 414-430; 512-522)

***** Omitting for example the interjection of the diegetic time 2007-2008 (cf. VI: 856-920), as well as the essay “Navnet og tallet” (VI: 389-812)

Tab. I.a Overview of Overarching Diegetic Time and Place in *Min kamp*

⁷ Detailed overviews of *Min kamp* I and II can be found in part III.

⁸ The diegetic time is indicated by the fact that in the beginning of the volume Karl Ove is just about to start school, in 1975, and that the volume ends with him finishing the seventh grade, in 1982.

In the third volume, the narrative begins as a third-person narration, where a family is arriving at their new house on Tromøya outside Arendal in 1969. The characters are presented as the father, the mother, the eldest son Yngve, and his eight-month-old brother (III: 7). The external focalisation continues for a few pages, before Knausgård as author steps in:

Jeg husker selvfølgelig ingenting av denne tiden. Det er helt umulig å identifisere seg med det spedbarnet mine foreldre tok bilder av, ja, så vanskelig at det nesten virker galt å bruke ordet “jeg” om det [...]. Er den skapningen den samme som sitter her i Malmö og skriver dette, førti år gammel, på en overskyet septemberdag i et rom fylt av sus fra trafikken utenfor og høstvinden som uler gjennom det gammeldage ventilasjonsanlegget [...]?⁹ (III: 11)

Knausgård as the author is clearly indicated here, by reference to where and when he is writing. What follows is Knausgård as the author reflecting on memory, and how his first years, 1968-1974, are as good as obliterated, before the focalisation gradually turns to the diegetic time of Karl Ove as a six-year-old. This means that the narrator's ability to reflect on the situations, actions and consequences remains on the level that can be expected of Knausgård as the child protagonist, without a retrospective narrator imposing knowledge on the narrative.

For example, the summer before Karl Ove starts school, his father tries to teach him to swim (III: 38-40). From the perspective of an adult, the methods his father employs are not pedagogically apt, and Karl Ove has a hard time getting him to realise that it is not the water or swimming that he finds frightening. Rather, it is the depth of the water that scares him, and the spot his father has chosen is one where he can barely see the bottom (III: 38). After a few failed attempts, his father throws him a life jacket, but because of the depth of the water Karl Ove still cannot bring himself to swim out from the costal rocks where he is standing. Eventually, Karl Ove is brought to tears, and after his father has tried to physically drag him into the water, to Karl Ove's desperate protests, his father gives up (III: 39). Later that afternoon, following a silent and tense car journey home, Karl Ove hears his father tell his mother that he is afraid of water, and Karl Ove thinks to himself: “Det var ikke sant,

⁹ “Of course, I don't remember any of this time. It is absolutely impossible to identify with the infant my parents photographed, indeed so impossible that it seems wrong to use the word ‘me’ [...]. Is this creature the same person as the one sitting here in Malmö [...] the forty-year-old [...] writing this one overcast September day in a room filled with the drone of the traffic outside and the autumn wind howling through the old-fashioned ventilation system [...]?” (MS III: 6)

men jeg sa ingenting, jeg var jo ikke dum heller” (III: 40).¹⁰ Throughout this ordeal, the focalisation of both the narrator and the direct speech of the protagonist remains on the level of Karl Ove as a six-year-old, and no retrospective examination of the employed method of teaching a child to swim is offered by Knausgård as the author.

The third volume rarely breaks from the narrative technique, but there are a few notable exceptions which illustrate the differences in focalisation. The autumn Karl Ove starts fifth grade, 1979, his father moves to Bergen to study, and here Knausgård as the author steps into the text: “Det kan ha vært det året pappa slapp taket i oss” (III: 334).¹¹ In this instance, Knausgård as the author appears and provides information from his present position as a forty-year old man that the ten-year-old boy does not have, specifically about the future events regarding his relationship with his father. Knausgård as the author also refers to a conversation he had with his father in the summer of 1991, where his father reveals to him that he had an affair while he lived in Bergen between 1979 and 1980 (*ibid.*).¹² In the next paragraph, Knausgård as the author reflects on the tyrannical hold his father had over him, and how his absence in the house was a relief to his ten-year-old self, before the focalisation of Karl Ove in 1979 gradually resumes.

Another example of the distance between Knausgård as the author and Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator can be found in the diegetic time 1981. It is the summer between sixth and seventh grade, and Kajsa, Karl Ove’s girlfriend of only a few days, comes to watch him during football practice. She announces she has something to tell him: “Fortelle meg? Skulle hun gjøre det slutt?” (III: 376).¹³ The question is posed by Karl Ove as the twelve-year-old narrator, indicating that in the diegetic time, he does not know what Kajsa is going to say, while Knausgård as the forty-year-old author presumably remembers, or at least knows the outcome he intends to reconstruct in the narrative. Karl Ove’s fear is for the moment unwarranted, as Kajsa is not breaking up with him, but invites him over to her house on Saturday (III: 377). They ride around on their bikes for a while, before Karl Ove asks:

Skal vi ta tiden og se hvor lenge vi kan kline? [...] Tor klarte ti minutter. Vi skal klare mer enn det.¹⁴ (III: 379)

¹⁰ “It wasn’t true, but I said nothing. I wasn’t stupid.” (MS III: 41)

¹¹ “That might have been the year Dad lost his grip on us.” (MS III: 385) The Norwegian original implies that this was a choice made by the father, as a voluntary act of letting go.

¹² The diegetic time 1991 is indicated with the statement that it was the summer before he moved to Iceland, where he lived from January 1992 to May 1992 (cf. V: 414-430).

¹³ “Tell me? Was she going to finish it [break up with him]?” (MS III: 434)

¹⁴ “Shall we time how long we can kiss? [...] Tor managed ten minutes. We can beat that.” (MS III: 438)

But the make-out-session becomes an exhausting affair of rotating tongues, saliva, teeth against braces, and aching jaws. Karl Ove as the narrator counts the minutes, and he decides that they only really need to keep going for ten minutes and one second to beat Tor's record (III: 380). But when ten minutes have passed, an idea emerges:

Men vi kunne jo slå ham ettertrykkelig? Femten minutter, det burde gå. Bare fem minutter igjen, det. Men det verket i tungen, det var som om den vokste i munnen, og spyttet, som man ikke merket så mye til når det var varmt, ga nesten en ekkel følelse når det rant nedkjølt nedover haken. Tolv minutter. Det er kanskje nok? Nok nå? Nei, litt til. Litt til, litt til.¹⁵ (III: 380-381)

When they break apart after fifteen minutes, Karl Ove is exceedingly proud of having broken Tor's old record by such a large margin. Kajsa, however, does not say much, other than that she should be getting home (III: 381). Karl Ove also makes his way home, and that evening he lies awake fantasising about their upcoming date on Saturday. He realises that they have yet to agree on a time, and on Saturday he calls Kajsa to confirm. But to Karl Ove's surprise and utter confusion, instead of settling on a time for the date, Kajsa breaks up with him.

Gjorde hun det slutt? Men ... Vi hadde bare vært sammen i fem dager! [...] Hvorfor? Akkurat nå som det hadde begynt å gå så bra? Akkurat den dagen vi skulle være alene hjemme hos henne? Hun likte meg for noen dager siden, så hvorfor likte hun meg plutselig ikke nå? Var det det at vi ikke hadde pratet så mye? [...] Faen i helvete, altså. Faen i ville jævelhelvete heller. Jævla møkkafittedritt, altså.¹⁶ (III: 383)

Clearly, this is not the reaction of Knausgård as the forty-year-old author, but rather Knausgård rewriting himself as a twelve-year-old who has just been broken up with. Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator is full of a childlike naïveté about romance and intimacy, while Knausgård as the author, who undoubtedly has the ability to reflect on the chain of events, refrains from offering a retrospective explanation.

¹⁵ "But we could beat him by a large margin. Fifteen minutes, that ought to be possible. Five left then. But my tongue ached, it seemed to be swelling, and the saliva, which you didn't notice much when it was hot, left you with a slight feeling of revulsion when it ran down your chin, not quite so hot. Twelve minutes. Isn't that enough? Enough now? No, a bit more. A bit more, a bit more." (MS III: 439)

¹⁶ "Was she finishing it? But ... we'd only been going out for five days! [...] Why? Now that things had started to click? On the day we were going to be alone in her house? She liked me a few days ago, so why didn't she like me now? Was it because we hadn't talked much? [...] Bloody hell. Bloodyfucking hell. Bloodyfuckingcuntinghell." (MS III: 441-442)

This is the narrative strategy that dominates *Min kamp*, and part of what Behrendt has named autonarration, which emphasises that the fictional aspect lies in the *fremstilling*, in the narration of the self, and in the representation of a past consciousness, and not in the events as necessarily fictional (Behrendt 2011: 297-298).¹⁷ While I agree with Behrendt's point, I supplement and expand Behrendt's understanding with the argument that this can be put to use in terms of autoreception, thus demonstrating a function for the narration in *Min kamp*.

From Autonarration to Autoreceptive Narration

To date, Behrendt has conducted the most systematic narratological study of *Min kamp* (cf. Behrendt 2011; 2012; 2015; 2017). The characteristic feature that Behrendt identifies in the narration is that in *Min kamp* Knausgård utilises free indirect discourse (FID) in the first-person in a manner that matches the relationship between narrator and character in *third-person* narratives (Behrendt 2011; 2012).

In third-person narratives, FID can be used to narrate the consciousness, thoughts and emotions of characters, through the voice of the narrator. In contrast to FID, direct discourse (DD) and indirect discourse (ID) provides indications of thought (e.g. She thought: "Enough is enough! I have to do something" (DD); She thought that enough was enough and that she had to do something (ID)). FID omits the indication of thought, thus giving the third-person narrator free and immediate access to a character's thoughts (e.g. Enough! She had to do something).¹⁸ Behrendt argues that *Min kamp* shows how FID can be used not only in third-person narration as a way to convey the consciousness of one or multiple characters, but in the first-person narration to convey the consciousness of *one* person or character *across time*. With this, Behrendt seeks to push the narratological limit that Käte Hamburger and Dorrit Cohn outlined for first-person retrospective self-narration in *Die Logik der Dichtung* (1957) and *Transparent Minds* (1978) respectively, by pointing out how Hamburger's and Cohn's distinctions between third- and first-person narration does not apply to *Min kamp* (Behrendt 2011: 319-320; 2012: 84-89).¹⁹

¹⁷ As I mentioned in the introduction, the Danish word *fremstilling* can signify both production, representation, and reproduction in an artistic form.

¹⁸ See appendix I for the Voice-over model in third-person simple past tense narration.

¹⁹ English title of *Die Logik der Dichtung*: *The Logic of Literature*.

Regarding Hamburger, it is specifically the term *epic preterite* and the function of simple past in third-person fictional narration that Behrendt wishes to modify. In Hamburger's understanding, the epic preterite functions so that even in a narrative written in the simple past tense, there is still a *presentification* of events in the narrative: "*the preterite loses its grammatical function of designating what is past*" (Hamburger 1993: 66, emphasis original). Hamburger illustrates the tendency by for example pointing to how a sentence like 'Tomorrow was Christmas' can function as FID in a novel.²⁰ The sentence combines the temporal adverb 'tomorrow', indicating future, and the simple past tense 'was', while still depicting a 'present' situation within the story: "But in the morning she had to trim the tree. Tomorrow was Christmas" (ibid.: 73).²¹ Hamburger sets as a premise that in third-person narration there is no real statement-subject that orients the temporality, i.e. it is not attached to a real experiencing I, and that this is why the past tense relinquishes its function of strictly designating the past (ibid.: 73-74). Thus, for Hamburger, it is only the third-person narration that can constitute fiction in the exact sense, as the fictional lies not only in the narrated events, but in the narration itself: the epic preterite in FID is inherently and indisputably fictional in the way a narrator can know and have access to the mind of one or multiple characters in a story (ibid.: 59-60). According to Hamburger, in first-person narration there is always a statement-subject which orients the temporality of the narration as past, present and future from their perspective, as well as having a credible and mimetic narrative access to their own consciousness (ibid.: 60).

Contrarily, Behrendt argues that *Min kamp* demonstrates both the effect of epic preterite and how fictional representation of consciousness, in the manner Hamburger ascribes exclusively to third-person narration, can occur in first-person simple-past narration (Behrendt 2011: 319-320). That is, how the representation of the consciousness of the protagonist-narrator Karl Ove creates a presentification, and not a retrospection, of the narrated events and thoughts, all the while being a first-person narration in simple past tense.

Behrendt expands his critique of Hamburger to Cohn's Hamburger-inspired understanding of the distinction between first- and third-person narratives. In *Transparent Minds*, Cohn claimed that the first-person narrator, contrary perhaps to what one might expect, has less free access to his past psyche than a third-person narrator, due to the all-

²⁰ It is worth noting that Hamburger's notion of the epic preterite is primarily applicable to Germanic languages.

²¹ Hamburger's example of FID is taken from Alice Berend's *Babette Bomberling's Bridegrooms* (1915).

knowing narrator that dominates third-person narration (Cohn 1978: 144). In first-person narration, the narrator's retrospection depends on

[...] fundamentally different optics: there is no magic mirror corresponding to the magic lens, only the "telescoped level of time" of which Proust speaks, and by which he means a "real" psychological vision conditioned by memory. This frequently prompts a first-person narrator to mention the plausibility of his cognition, particularly when it involves the most inchoate moments of his past. (ibid.)

For Cohn, this means that first-person narration is conditioned by the limitations of mimetic credibility, that is, the credibility of what can be known and remembered (ibid.: 145). Comparatively, in third-person narration there is little demand for this sort of credibility, as by definition FID is an incredible narration of a character's thoughts by an omniscient third-person narrator. However, Cohn argues, the *experiencing* self, or the protagonist, is still limited in third-person narration, as he is "fettered to his present moment of experience; he cannot know his future self, nor how that self will be affected by its present experience" (ibid.). In other words, the protagonist is confined to the third-person narrator's telling, and he does not have the ability to tap into future events. The protagonist in first-person narration, on the other hand, is according to Cohn "always viewed by a narrator who knows what happened to him next, and who is free to slide up and down the axis that connects his two selves [i.e. past and present selves]" (ibid.). It is in particular this last point that Behrendt contradicts: in the majority of *Min kamp*, the narrator is tied to the narrated situation of the protagonist and cannot connect the 'present' experience with 'future' experiences, that is, present and future in relation to the diegesis. Thus, for Behrendt the narration in *Min kamp* shows that a first-person narrator can occupy the position that Cohn and Hamburger made exclusive to the third-person narrator (Behrendt 2011: 319-323).

Behrendt's point is that Knausgård's use of FID indicates that the author conveys the thoughts of himself as protagonist-narrator at different stages in his life, all joined in the pronoun "I", but not in the way that entails an all-knowing first-person narrator (ibid.). Furthermore, the first-person narration is not limited by the boundaries of mimetic credibility in terms of what Knausgård as the *author*-narrator can know or remember. This is because the narration is not a retrospective representation of a consciousness; there is no one-to-one identity between the I's in the narration. Thus, credibility is not what is at stake in the narration of what Karl Ove felt and thought when he kissed a girl when he was twelve

years old (cf. III: 379-381). Rather, it is a fictionalisation of a younger Knausgård's inner voice through FID in the first person; of the thoughts and emotions he had in a certain period of time, but as an I who does not have knowledge about future events. Thus, Karl Ove as the first-person narrator and the protagonist is “spærret inde i sin egen historie på fuldstændig samme måde som karakteren i en tredjepersonsfortælling”: predominantly, there are no psychologising explanations or thematic comparisons across diegetic times from Knausgård as the author that can disengage the protagonist from the narrated events (Behrendt 2011: 321).²²

As Karl Ove as the first-person protagonist occupies the role of the narrator, this means that the representation of consciousness in FID as well as depictions and description which are reminiscent of character-independent discourse (CID), are attributed to Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator in different stages of his life (Behrendt 2011: 318-323; 2012: 88). Thus, Behrendt argues that in *Min kamp* the distinction between CID-statements and FID-statements is ambivalent, which breaks down the distinction between CID as narrator-dominant and FID as character-dominant discourse (Behrendt 2011: 317-318; 2012: 86-88). In other words, there is predominantly no separation between the narrator and the protagonist. Behrendt argues that it is the fundamental uncertainty between narration in FID and CID in *Min kamp* that makes up the Ambiguous Discourse (AD) that is responsible for the readers equating the consciousness of the author with the representation of the consciousness of the protagonist-narrator (ibid.).²³ For Knausgård, however, the function of the AD is such that it allows him as the author writing *Min kamp* to immerse the protagonist-narrator Karl Ove in the plot; to create a fictional representation of his consciousness across time, and create a presentification of the narrated consciousness.

Nevertheless, as Behrendt rightly points out, the narration comes from the hand of the older Knausgård: it is Knausgård as the author who creates the presentification (Behrendt 2012: 78). No matter how convincing the autonarration is in conveying an authentic or authentic-like rendition of Knausgård as, say, a young boy, it is still Knausgård as the author who writes. What I argue, therefore, is that the narrator *implicitly* occupies the position of an all-knowing narrator via the fact that the narration is written by Knausgård as author who is rewriting himself. Put differently, while Knausgård as the author is obviously not all-knowing

²² “encaged in his own story in exactly the same way a character in a third-person narration is”

²³ See appendix II for Behrendt's Fifth Aspect of the Voice-over model in first-person simple past tense narration.

in the sense he has the ability to remember every thought or conversation he has ever had, it can be assumed that he knows the outcome of the main struggles his rewritten protagonist-narrator Karl Ove faces within the diegesis of the text. Thus, if the autonarration that Behrendt points to is developed a step further, i.e. if it is not only seen as a literary method of representing consciousness across time, but as rhetorical strategy on behalf of the author who writes, new and more widespread functions of the narration can be revealed, namely its autoreceptive functions.

In relation to *Min kamp*, I am interested in Knausgård's narration of the struggles of becoming and being an author, that is, Knausgård rewriting himself as an author in different stages of his career. My claim is that the manner in which Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp* rewrites himself as an author in different diegetic times is implicitly autoreceptive, i.e. indicates self-reading and self-criticism, of him as the author who is writing *Min kamp*. In other words, while Knausgård's rewriting of himself as an author can be viewed as a narrative representation of Karl Ove as an author in the past, this narrative representation simultaneously reflects back on Knausgård's author-image at the time of writing *Min kamp*. It is this reflection that I argue is the autoreceptive function of the narration and of the rewriting in the following chapters of this thesis, and most explicitly in part III where I focus more directly on *Min kamp*.

In the illustration below, however, I provide an initial demonstration of how author-images are rewritten using the narrative technique, that is, the characteristic strategy of maintaining a separation between Knausgård as the author and Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator, and how this is implicitly autoreceptive of *past* author-images. This is what I focus on in part II. In part III, specifically in chapter 5, I expand the autoreception further to include the narrative structuring as autoreceptive, particularly in relation to how Knausgård as the author utilises the literary devices of foreshadowing and backshadowing in rewriting his past author-images.

Rewriting Author-Images

To define and illustrate what I mean by rewriting author-images, I point to the diegetic time 1987 in *Min kamp* IV. This volume takes place in the diegetic time 1984-1988, and begins with eighteen-year-old Karl Ove having just arrived in northern Norway in 1987 where he is going to work as a teacher for a year. Karl Ove's overarching ambition is to become an author, and his author-image is tied up with the authors he reads and likes, for example Lars

Saabye Christensen, Jack Kerouac, Agnar Mykle, Jens Bjørneboe, J. D. Salinger, and Charles Bukowski:

Bøker om unge menn som ikke fant seg til rette i samfunnet, som ville ha noe mer ut av livet enn rutiner, noe mer ut av livet enn familie, kort sagt, unge menn som avskydde borgerligheten og søkte friheten. De reiste, de drakk seg fulle, de leste og de drømte om den store kjærligheten eller om den store romanen.²⁴ (IV: 9)

The job he has secured is merely a means to an end: he will spend the year writing, and when the year is over, he will travel around Europe, and write more (IV: 9-10). The reflections that occur in this diegetic time concerning being and becoming an author are not, directly, the reflections of Knausgård as the forty-one-year-old author who is writing this: for instance, Knausgård is at the time of writing a family man, a father of three, and his life is made up of routines. Rather, it is a narrative representation of Karl Ove's romantic, youthful and naïve view of what being and becoming an author looks like. For example, after having written his first short story, he is positively underwhelmed by the strain of writing:

– Det var mye lettere å skrive enn jeg hadde trodd [...].
... ja, det var bare å skrive. Ingen heksekunst, akkurat.²⁵ (IV: 101)

As I demonstrate in part II, his future struggles will change his view on writing diametrically within the next year, thus indicating that in the narrative representation of Karl Ove in 1987 he has no knowledge about future events. Knausgård's rewriting of Karl Ove's author-image is also full of suggestions concerning his limited knowledge about literature, literary terms, and literary periods, for example when he comes across a description of James Joyce's *Ulysses* as a main work of modernism.

[...] med modernismen forstod jeg lave, raske racerbiler, flygere med lærhjelmer og skinnjakker, zeppelinere svevende over skyskraperne i glitrende, men mørke storbyer, datamaskiner, elektronisk musikk.²⁶ (IV: 35)

²⁴ "Books about young men who struggled to fit into society, who wanted more from life than routines, more from life than a family, in short, young men who hated middle-class values and sought freedom. They travelled, they got drunk, they read and they dreamed about their life's Great Passion or writing the Great Novel." (MS IV: 3)

²⁵ "It was much easier to write than I'd thought [...]. ... yes, all I had to do was write. It wasn't difficult at all." (MS I: 111)

²⁶ "[with modernism] I imagined low-slung racing cars, pilots with leather helmets and jackets, zeppelins floating above skyscrapers in glittering but dark metropolises, computers, electronic music." (MS IV: 34-35)

Again, this understanding of modernism is not a representation of what Knausgård as the author understands with the term, but indicative of the limited knowledge that Karl Ove has during this diegetic time, and he is in the diegetic time unaware of the gaps in his knowledge. In a similar representation of how Karl Ove views his own skill and knowledge, he compares the first short story he ever wrote to a short story he has read by Ernest Hemingway:

Jeg hadde lest en novelle av Hemingway, den handlet om en gutt som ble med faren sin, som var lege, ut i en indianerleir, det var noen som skulle føde der, det gikk ikke så bra, såvidt jeg husket, mulig det til og med var noen som døde, men uansett, etter at de hadde vært der, dro de hjem igjen, og det var det. Alt rett fram. Novellen min var like bra som den, det visste jeg. Miljøet var annerledes, med det var jo fordi Hemingway skrev i en annen tid. Jeg skrev i vår tid, og da ble det slik.²⁷ (IV: 97)

Knausgård rewrites the context and the inspiration of writing his first literary text, immersed in the perspective of Karl Ove as an eighteen-year-old aspiring author, however, to reiterate my point, it is not Knausgård as the forty-year-old author who views his short story as equal to Hemingway's. Still, it is important to underline that while the narrative representation of Karl Ove's hubris is at times cringe-inducing, it is not directly ironic, in the same way that it is not directly evaluative — the autoreception is not explicit. For example, when Karl Ove ponders the literature that he appreciates at age eighteen (cf. IV: 9), there seems to be a subtle indication of how Knausgård's present life, as the forty-one-year-old author writing this, is diametrically opposed to the life he foresaw for himself. As he has outlined in extensive detail in *Min kamp* II, his days are filled with routines and family life. Therefore, however implicit the self-reading may be, when analysing the autoreception in the narration two notions must be kept in mind simultaneously: it is a rewriting of the protagonist-narrator Karl Ove as an author, *and* it is Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp* rewriting himself in a specific diegetic time.

When the narrative representation of the author-images is considered as acts of rewriting by Knausgård as the author, this lends credence to the lack of explicit distancing between Knausgård and Karl Ove that has been pointed out by, for example, Peter Sjølyst-Jackson in a different context (Sjølyst-Jackson 2017: 86-87). While the diegetic time frames

²⁷ "I had once read a short story by Hemingway, it was about a boy who accompanied his father, who was a doctor, to an Indian reservation – a woman was giving birth, it didn't go so well, as far as I remember, perhaps the woman even died – anyway after they had been there they went back home and that was that. All very straightforward. My short story was just as good, I knew that. The context was different, but that was because Hemingway wrote in a different era. I wrote in today's world, and that was why it was as it was." (MS IV: 107)

the narrated thoughts and essayistic reflections about literature and poetics in a specific time in Knausgård's career, the rewriting is not done in a manner that indicates that Knausgård as the author categorically distances himself from his past poetics. For instance, within the diegetic time 1987, Knausgård as the author is not explicitly ironic regarding the limitations in his knowledge and skill as an author when he was eighteen years old. Rather, in his rewriting, Knausgård attempts to reproduce the mindset of himself as a young, aspiring author who has no idea how much he will struggle during the twelve years it takes him to publish his first novel. As I show in the following parts of this thesis, particularly in part III where I deal extensively with the function of the narrative technique as a strategy, the lack of explicit distancing from his past author-image functions to simultaneously create distance and unity between Knausgård's author-images past and present. Thus, I propose that autoreceptive narration allows Knausgård as the author to rewrite Karl Ove as an author pertaining to a strategy of concurrently discarding and validating his past and present literary values, and in turn allows Knausgård to create a poetic continuity in his author-image.

Rewriting the Author-Critic

As I have now shown the importance of the narrative technique, the focalisation, and the diegetic time in *Min kamp*, it should hopefully not come as a surprise that the significance of these factors applies to Knausgård rewriting himself as author-critic. This is a perspective that has been ignored by some scholars, particularly in the primary reception and scholarship.

In the first monograph on *Min kamp*, published in 2010 i.e. during the serial publication of *Min kamp*, Eivind Tjønneland was highly critical of Knausgård as a critic and reader: in fact he argued that there was nothing critical nor insightful about the way Knausgård reads literature (Tjønneland 2010: 45-49). In Tjønneland's view, Knausgård fetishises books as objects, concerned only with their mysterious power to emanate an aura of knowledge, and not with the actual knowledge itself (ibid.: 46; cf. I: 218). Tjønneland demonstrates this by pointing to a passage in *Min kamp* I, where Karl Ove merely mentions books by authors that he "bladde litt i"; "kikket litt på"; "forsøkte meg en stund på" but "lærte ingenting, forsto ingenting" (Tjønneland 2010: 47; I: 326-327).²⁸ These authors include critics such as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze, and poets like Gunnar Ekelöf, Ezra Pound, Osip Mandelstam and Olav H. Hauge (I: 326-327).

²⁸ "leafed through"; "had a look at"; "had a go at"; "learned nothing, understood nothing" (MS I: 367)

However, what Tjønneland at this time fails to consider is the diegetic time in which this occurs: in the early 1990s, when Karl Ove has just begun studying literature at the University of Bergen and has made a new, well-read friend that he follows “som en dum liten hund” – Espen Stueland (I: 326).²⁹ For Karl Ove in this diegetic time, it is not the knowledge or insight that a critic like Adorno can provide that concerns him, rather it is the mere fact that “Jeg var en som leste Adorno!” (I: 327).³⁰ The same faulty premise can apply to Tjønneland’s views on the essayistic passages, which he sees as declining in quality throughout the serial publication (Tjønneland 2010: 116). Tjønneland attributes this to the speed at which Knausgård had to write volumes three and four (ibid.). While he may have a point, and Knausgård could in fact have provided his readers with a justification after the fact (cf. VI: 66; Barron 2013), Tjønneland does not consider the possibility that the lack of quality in for example the essayistic passages in volume IV could be due to Knausgård’s strategy of using essays as a representation of his age and maturity.³¹

Dean Krouk, on the other hand, has pointed to this strategy in a comparison between Karl Ove’s reading of Paul Celan’s “Todesfuge” (1948) in volume V and “Engführung” (1959) in volume VI (Krouk 2017: 186-189).³² Karl Ove’s first encounter with Celan occurs at Skrivekunstakademiet in Bergen in the diegetic time 1988, and as a reader he focuses on his emotional response to the aesthetic aspects of the text: “Jeg synes det er helt fantastisk. Helt enestående. Jeg har aldri vært borti noe sånt før” (V: 197).³³ As Krouk points out, a significant part of the *Bildung* Karl Ove undergoes in *Min kamp* is precisely related to his development as a reader, and perhaps influenced by the aesthetics of autonomy that dominated the late 1980s and 1990s, he does not consider in full the historical reality “Todesfuge” points to: the Holocaust (Krouk 2017: 187). When Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp* revisits Celan in the essay “Navnet og tallet” in the sixth volume, he reflects on the shame that he now feels when thinking about how he once read the poem as beautiful, “siden dets tema ikke var det vakre og sublime, men det vakre og sublimes motsetning, utryddelsen av jødene” (VI: 411).³⁴ In *Min kamp* VI he spends a considerable amount of time

²⁹ “like a brainless puppy” (MS I: 367)

³⁰ “I was someone who read Adorno!” (MS I: 367)

³¹ Note that Tjønneland only had access to volume I-IV, as the last two volumes were published after *Knausgård-koden* (2010).

³² “Death Fugue” or “Fugue of Death”; “Stretto”

³³ “I think it’s fantastic. Absolutely brilliant. I’ve never read anything like it.” (MS V: 211)

³⁴ “The Name and the Number”; “since its theme was not the exquisite and the sublime, but the exquisite and the sublime’s antithesis, the extermination of the Jews.” (MS VI: 420)

on Celan's poems, returning to his work on multiple occasions throughout the essay "Navnet og tallet" (VI: 388-812).

In Krouk's analysis, he points to a highly relevant clarification regarding the purpose of his examination: the purpose is not to rewrite or criticise Knausgård's reading of Celan, but to underscore the importance of the reading of Celan for *Min kamp*, specifically the ethical and aesthetical reflections Knausgård makes (Krouk 2017: 185). Just as I pointed to regarding non-fictional critical and essayistic texts in chapter 1, this is also how I read Karl Ove as author-critic: the significant aspect for autoreception within *Min kamp* lies in how Knausgård as the author utilises the rewritten criticism to benefit his author-image. Without reducing Knausgård's reading of Celan in *Min kamp* VI to pure autoreceptive strategy, it constitutes a frame for him as the author to discuss his own struggles, and to ponder questions relating to language, literature, and the representation of reality.³⁵ Therefore, I view the criticism of a specific text and author in a specific context and a specific diegetic time in light of its strategic function. I pursue this analytical purpose in relation to *Min kamp* most explicitly in part III. In this respect, the intertextual references, the critical evaluations of a given text and a given author, and the exploration of poetics in the essayistic passages within *Min kamp* must be considered as being placed there with agency and intention on behalf of Knausgård as the author. This thus marks another significant instance of interaction between the two autoreceptive forms that I investigate in this thesis: Karl Ove as author-critic and Knausgård as rewriter.

In closing this chapter and part I, which has set out the overarching theoretical and methodological approach I take, I provide a schematic outline of the forms and proposed functions of autoreception that I investigate in parts II and III (table I.b). By viewing *Min kamp* as autoreceptive narration, the question of identification between the protagonist-narrator-author that dominated the primary reception and research can be shifted to a question of the development of an author-image. In other words, the notions of a separation between the author and the protagonist-narrator can instead be seen as a separation between the author and the author-images past. However, this does not signify that the diegetic time should be viewed as the be-all and end-all for the rewriting of a specific author-image. Similarly, Knausgård's attempts to control the author-image should not be approached

³⁵ See Kjersti Irene Aarstein's doctoral thesis "Vold og visjoner i sjetten bind av Karl Ove Knausgårds *Min kamp*" (2018) for an in-depth analysis of Knausgård's reading of Paul Celan's "Engführung", and a comparison between Knausgård's readings of Celan and of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (Aarstein 2018: 169-206).

without a critical eye. This is what I consider by emphasising the narrative technique as rewriting, and in turn as a strategy for Knausgård as the author.

SELF-READING AND SELF-CRITICISM	
The Author-Critic	The Author as Rewriter
Literary criticism: texts about other authors <i>In Min kamp:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The protagonist-narrator Karl Ove as author-critic and as reader 	Rewriting previously published texts <i>In Min kamp:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rewriting the context of writing texts • Rewriting the author-image • Rewriting the author-critic
Functions Strategical navigation and positioning within the literary field and literary tradition Implicit evaluation and validation of the poetics of the author-image	

Tab. I.b Forms and Functions of Autoreception

II

Becoming an Author-Critic

Introductory Remarks to Part II

According to *Min kamp* IV and V, the period 1990-1998 stands in sharp contrast to 1987-1989 in terms of Karl Ove's authorial ambition and confidence. As I touched on in chapter 2, in the diegetic time 1987-1988 in *Min kamp* IV Karl Ove seems hubristic of his own abilities as an author, and he displays limited ability to reflect on skills required to produce texts of high literary quality. He reads canonised literature without gaining much understanding, always posing the same question to himself when reading: "Kunne jeg skrive som det?" (IV: 12).¹ His acceptance to Skrivekunstakademiet in 1988 fuels his view that he is an author, albeit an unpublished one (V: 131). However, while the ambitions remain largely intact, Karl Ove experiences a decreasing belief in his own abilities after his year at Skrivekunstakademiet (1988-1989), resulting in a fearful and bitter half-acceptance that his literary abilities may be limited to writing about literature: he is condemned to write criticism. The following period, 1990-1998, is marked by Karl Ove attempting and failing, and finally succeeding in publishing his first novel.

Karl Ove Knausgård began his critical activity in the student newspaper *Studvest* in 1990, where he reviewed books and interviewed authors until December 1994. From December 1992 to March 1994, Knausgård worked at Studentradioen in Bergen as part of his alternative civilian service.² Here he made items for the cultural programmes, conducted interviews and reviewed literature. From 1993 to 1996 he was a critic for the literary journal *Vinduet*, and from August 1996 to the end of the year he was a critic for the newspaper *Klassekampen*.³ Before the publication of his debut novel *Ute av verden* (1998), he published one essay in the journal *Vagant* in 1998, and he later became an editor for the journal, from 1999 to 2002.⁴ In addition, and more sporadically, he wrote texts and criticism for *Morgenbladet* and *Kritikkjournalen*. His published fictional texts before *Ute av verden* are limited, and consist only of two short stories: "Déjà vu" (1992) published in *Vinduet*, and "Søvn"

¹ "Could I write like that?" (MS IV: 7)

² Knausgård's work at Studentradioen, the student radio in Bergen, was thus the alternative for his initial compulsory military service.

³ Knausgård also reviewed two books for *Klassekampen* in 2002, Per Andreas Persson's short story collection *Jeg går nå og kommer aldri tilbake*, and Thure Erik Lund's *Compromateria*.

⁴ Although he didn't write critical pieces in *Vagant* until 1998, Knausgård made his debut in the journal in 1995, with an interview of Rune Christiansen. See "Verden som fanger blikket og blikket som setter verden fri", *Vagant Bilag*, 3/4, 2-12. He published an additional essay in the double issue 3/4 in 1998, but I do not include it in my analysis, as it was published after *Ute av verden*.

(1996) published in an anthology of new fiction from Tiden Norsk Forlag.⁵ The relationship between Knausgård as a critic and as an aspiring author who finally succeeds in publishing his first novel in 1998, Karl Ove as an aspiring author in *Min kamp* in the diegetic time 1990-1998, and Knausgård as rewriter in *Min kamp* forms the focal point of part II of this thesis.

Part II is divided into two chapters, where chapter 3 investigates Knausgård's earliest literary criticism as a student-critic and aspiring author, while chapter 4 focuses on Knausgård as a more established critic and soon-to-be author. Simultaneously, each of these chapters considers Knausgård's rewriting of this period in *Min kamp*. Both chapters are united in the overarching aim of this thesis, that is, to analyse the functions of criticism and rewriting for Knausgård as an author. In part II I focus on the functions related to using criticism as an entry point to the literary field. For the rewritten author-image in *Min kamp*, I suggest that Knausgård rewrites himself as an aspiring author and critic in *Min kamp* as a figure of hopeless despair in order to make the achievement of finally publishing a novel, and later gaining international renown with *Min kamp*, a great feat – he is the author who was victorious against all odds.

When reading Knausgård's critical texts from 1990-1998, a potential methodological issue must be addressed: it is at times difficult not to read Knausgård's literary criticism in light of *Min kamp*. This is partly because the critical activities as well as Knausgård's earliest fictional publications are included in *Min kamp*, and partly due to the autoreceptive narration in the text: due to the presentification of the narrative, Karl Ove's thoughts about his critical activity stand the risk of being read as the actual thoughts and justification for his critical point, and thus become the defining way of reading Knausgård as a critic between 1990 and 1998. Furthermore, it is at times almost impossible not to consider the irony of certain aspects of Knausgård's criticism: throughout his critical activity prior to writing *Min kamp*, Knausgård makes critical statements that could now just as easily be applied to *Min kamp* itself. For instance, while he was critical of the way the Norwegian author Stig Sæterbakken writes about Adolf Hitler in *Det nye testamentet* (1993), Knausgård himself will later in his career attempt a similar endeavour, specifically in the final volume of *Min kamp*.⁶ Knausgård's

⁵ "Déjà vu"; "Sleep". To be completely accurate, Knausgård also published an erotic short story along with Asbjørn Jensen under the pseudonym Karl Asbjørn Gaarder in *Cupido: Bladet for kåthet og glede* in 1990. In addition, one previously unpublished essay written during this period is included in *Sjelens Amerika*: "Ti år". Although "Ti år" is not dated, *Sjelens Amerika* includes texts from 1996 to 2013, and the other previously published and unpublished texts are dated between 2007 and 2013. I thus conclude that "Ti år" was most likely written in 1996.

⁶ Translation of the title: *The New Testament*. Knausgård writes about Adolf Hitler in the essay "Navnet og tallet [The Name and Number]" (VI: 389-812).

treatment of Hitler was in turn criticised, for example by historian Sten Reinhart Helland (Helland 2015; 2016). Venturing too far into these ironies would perhaps give an impression of the critical texts as being nearly prophetic, as if Knausgård as a critic was somehow able to be autoreceptive of his future poetic views and undertakings as an author. I must therefore clearly state that it is not my intent to suggest anything of the sort. My point is rather that it is crucial that the critical activity should be analysed in its own right, as exhibiting implicit autoreception of Knausgård's author-image at the time, and in relation to strategies for gaining entry into the literary field. In other words, as points for analysis these texts should not be demoted to fill a function of fact-checking Knausgård's rewriting in *Min kamp*, but rather be considered as freestanding texts at the time of publication. Considering that one of my aims with this thesis is to investigate Knausgård as a critic prior to publishing *Ute av verden*, it is important to stress that his critical activity deserves isolated attention. In this perspective, the near-prophetic ironies between Knausgård's earliest critical activity and *Min kamp* functions to show how he develops as an author, and how the author is created through reading: reading as a continuous process of evaluating and evolving in the interaction with and study of other authors (cf. Furuseth 2015: 33-35). That being said, as my interest lies in both the double role of author-critic and the author as rewriter, I argue that a significant aspect of the autoreceptive narration is in fact how Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp* implicitly reads his own critical activity in light of the *Min kamp* project, and how the rewriting functions within the narrative. I thus simultaneously maintain the point of view that reading the critical texts via *Min kamp* is methodologically justified.

Condemned to Criticism

As a final introduction to part II, it is necessary to outline the background provided by *Min kamp* V, that is, to the diegetic time 1988-1990, and how Knausgård rewrites the context of beginning to write criticism. Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator is as mentioned preoccupied with the idea of criticism as a condemnation, as well as criticism being the back-alley, unworthy route to take into the literary field.

Volume V begins in 1988, when Karl Ove is hitchhiking back to Kristiansand after his summer holiday. He has continued working on the novel *Vann over/vann under*, which he had started writing in northern Norway (cf. IV: 408), and that he in turn aims to publish

within the next year, “litt avhengig av hvor lang tid det tok med trykkingen og sånt” (V: 15).⁷ His acceptance to Skrivekunstakademiet has further increased his belief in his own talent, and upon moving to Bergen he is eager to tell his new acquaintances that he is an author, describing himself as a fusion between Knut Hamsun and Charles Bukowski, and that he is working on a novel at the moment (V: 30). However, his year at Skrivekunstakademiet is portrayed as a year of personal failure and a harsh realisation of his shortcomings. His limited knowledge of literature is exemplified by Karl Ove being unfamiliar with the authors teaching the courses, the Norwegian authors Ragnar Hovland, Jon Fosse and Rolf Sagen, who he refers to as “noen obskure Vestlandsforfattere” (IV: 450), as well as several of the authors discussed during the classes.⁸

In the discussion of the writing samples the students submitted as part of their application to Skrivekunstakademiet, his classmates and Hovland generously compare Karl Ove’s story-telling abilities to that of Norwegian author Lars Saabye Christensen, but also state that his text consists mostly of clichés (V: 76-77). Karl Ove is confused and angry after the class: clichés are a literary cardinal sin. However, he rationalises the criticism by putting it down to pretentiousness, and their preference for poetry (V: 77). In the subsequent seminars on poetry, Karl Ove becomes more acutely aware of his limited understanding of the craft. He is again criticised for using mostly clichés, and is distraught after Fosse tells him that he should only keep one word in the poem he submitted for discussion: “widescreen-himmel”, as it is the only original phrase he has produced (V: 114).⁹ In a somewhat immature act of provocation, Karl Ove writes a poem consisting only of one word repeated over and over again: “FITTE” (V: 117-118).¹⁰ The childlike act of revenge brings a sense of satisfaction and jubilation to Karl Ove, imagining what the others will say: “At det bestod av klisjéer, og at jeg måtte stryke alt, bortsett fra ett ord? Ha ha ha!” (V: 118).¹¹ However, when the time comes for him to read the poem in class, the shame of letting the others know how much Fosse’s words affected him stops him from going through with it (V: 122).

⁷ *Water Above/Water Below*; “depending on how long it took to print and that kind of thing” (MS V: 10)

⁸ “some obscure Vestland writers” (MS IV: 520). Note that this should be read not as a representation of how Knausgård as the author sees Hovland, Fosse and Sagen at the time of writing *Min kamp* IV in 2010, but as indicative of the limited knowledge that Karl Ove has during the diegetic time 1988. The comment about these authors should thus be read as Knausgård as rewriter being somewhat sarcastic about his past self: about how he in the diegetic time was unaware of the gaps in his literary knowledge.

⁹ “widescreen-sky” (MS V: 121)

¹⁰ “CUNT” (MS V: 123-125)

¹¹ “The text consisted of nothing more than clichés and I would have to cross everything out, except for one word? Ha ha ha!” (MS V: 125)

Throughout the volume there is a dissonance between Karl Ove's portrayal of himself to his friends, family, and acquaintances, and the failure he experiences at Skrivekunstakademiet, indicative of his oscillation between hubris and an overwhelming inferiority complex. He revels in the feeling of being different from the other students in Bergen: he is studying writing, he is an author, and is offended when his ambitions are not taken seriously (V: 137-145). The dissonance is mirrored in the way Karl Ove tends to view his own writing as good, only to be named cliché-ridden and immature at the academy (V: 150). At times, he gives in to the thought that they are right:

[...] det gikk ikke en dag uten at noe nedsettende om meg ble sagt, det vil si, noe nedsettende om tekstene mine. Ingen mente det slik, det ble kalt kritikk, det skulle være til hjelp, men i mitt tilfelle var det så håpløst fordi det ikke fantes noe *annet* i tekstene, som kunne veie opp kritikken. Det *var* umodent, det *var* klisjéfyllt, det *var* overfladisk, og jeg *var* virkelig ute av stand til å trenge dypere ned i bevisstheten, der det vesentlige for en forfatter befant seg.¹² (V: 193, emphasis original)

Yet, some words of praise eventually come his way, although they add to Karl Ove's slow realisation that he is not an author, but that he could become a critic.

One instance of praise occurs in an essay-writing seminar at Skrivekunstakademiet. In the diegetic time 1989, Karl Ove submits a text on *The Lord of the Rings*, even though he is aware that the work “ikke gikk inn under litteraturen som lærerne foretrakk og underviste om” (V: 205).¹³ To his surprise, Jon Fosse commends his precise language, and his talent for non-fiction writing (ibid.). However, Karl Ove views the complement as double-edged: “betydde det at framtiden min lå i litteratur om litteratur, og ikke i litteraturen selv?” (ibid.).¹⁴ In *Min kamp V* this scene is narrated over only eight lines, and it is inserted in the text between Karl Ove's narration of his failures in terms of writing, his binge-drinking, his struggles with money, and seeking out author Øystein Lønn to get comments on a short story he has written (V: 203-206). It seems as though this short paragraph functions to show that a seed has been sown – the idea of himself as a critic – in one of the few instances where he received positive feedback at Skrivekunstakademiet. However, the fleeting attention Karl

¹² “[...] not a day passed without something disparaging being said about me, or rather something disparaging about my writing. No one meant it as such, it was called critique and supposed to be constructive, but in my case it was so useless because there was nothing *else* in my texts to compensate for the criticism. It *was* immature, it *was* clichéd, it *was* superficial and I *was* truly incapable of penetrating deeper into my own consciousness, where the essence of a writer was to be found.” (MS V: 206, emphasis original)

¹³ “didn't fall into the category of literature the teachers favoured and taught” (MS V: 220)

¹⁴ “did it mean that my future lay in literature about literature and not in literature itself?” (MS V: 220)

Ove pays to the idea at the time, that is, Knausgård as the author rewriting himself as a creative-writing student who will not accept anything less than becoming a great novelist, indicates that Karl Ove is not willing to nourish it and let it take root.

Nevertheless, the thought slowly begins to sprout, and is revisited in a summary of the insights Karl Ove has gained during the academic year 1988-1989: maybe Fosse is right, maybe he should put his talents to use in writing *about* literature (V: 225). Again, this is presented in a short paragraph consisting only of a few lines. However, the seedling is again quickly trampled and discarded:

Jeg skulle knuse hver jævla en av dem. Og det var ikke noe problem heller. Jeg kunne bare fortsette og fortsette og fortsette. De kunne fornede meg, de kunne ydmyke meg, det hadde de alltid gjort, men jeg kom aldri til å gi opp, det fantes ikke i meg, mens alle de andre idiotene, som trodde de var så jævlig bra, de hadde ingenting i seg, de var helt tomme.¹⁵ (V: 229)

This is a near-perfect repetition of Karl Ove's reaction to his older brother Yngve mocking his naïve assumption that a publishing house would be interested in the first fictional texts he wrote in the diegetic time 1987 (cf. IV: 402-403).¹⁶ As implicit autoreception of the author-image by Knausgård as the rewriter, the repetition of this sentiment indicates that perhaps not much insight has been gained at all, or at least, Karl Ove is not willing to accept the possibility of ultimately failing to write. He sends the manuscript he has been working on during the year to the publishing house Cappelen: "det kunne hende de så noe i det jeg skrev som ikke Jon Fosse og Ragnar Hovland så" (V: 225).¹⁷ However, it is later rejected.

The following academic year, 1989-1990, Karl Ove enrolls at the University of Bergen to study literature. Here he has his first encounter with modern and postmodern literary theory under the guidance of notable scholars such as Per Buvik, Arild Linneberg and Atle Kittang, whom he respects to the point where "det hadde vært som om gudene hadde gått

¹⁵ "I could crush every bloody one of them. And it wouldn't be a problem either. I could just go on and on and on. They could belittle me, they could humiliate me, they always had, but I would never give up, it wasn't in my make-up, while all the other idiots, who thought they were so bloody clever, they had nothing inside them, they were completely hollow." (MS V: 247)

¹⁶ "Jeg skulle faen ta meg vise hele jævla forpulte verden hvem jeg var og hva jeg var laget av. Jeg skulle knuse hver jævla en. Jeg skulle gjøre alle stumme. Det skulle jeg. Det skulle jeg. Det skulle jeg faen ta meg gjøre. Jeg skulle bli så stor at ingen kunne nå meg. Ingen. Ingen. Aldri. Ikke noen faens gang. Jeg skulle faen ta meg bli den største av alle. De jævla idiotene, altså. Jeg skulle faen ta meg knuse hver jævla en av dem." (IV: 403)

"I'll bloody show the whole sodding fucking world who I am and what I am made of. I'll crush every single one of them. I'll render every single one of them speechless. I will. I will. I bloody well will. I'll be so big no one else is even close. No one. No. One. Never. No bloody chance. I will be the bloody greatest ever. The fucking idiots. I'll crush every single one of them." (MS IV: 465)

¹⁷ "they might see something in my writing that Jon Fosse and Ragnar Hovland hadn't" (MS V: 242)

ned fra Olympen om de hadde satt seg sammen med oss i kantinen” (V: 288).¹⁸ During his time as a literature student he gains further confidence in his ability to write papers, which he complacently prefers to call essays, stating that it was merely about concealing what you didn’t know by using a jargoned language, and appearing to provide original insight by drawing unexpected connections between concepts (V: 288-289). He meets Espen Stueland, whom he describes as not only intimidatingly well read, but as his best friend and a much more talented writer than himself (V 265; 243; 290). Reading Espen’s texts leaves Karl Ove with feelings of admiration, but also of jealousy, a feeling often reiterated when he reads literature he knows he is not able to write himself:

[...] jeg [var] dømt til å bli en litteraturviter eller kulturskribent, han [Espen] til å bli det han var: poet, dikter, forfatter.¹⁹ (V: 302)

In *Min kamp* V, Espen and later Tore Renberg function as avid conversation partners, and friendly consultants concerning Karl Ove’s own writing. However, they also set “meg selv og mitt eget liv i relief”: their talent, knowledge and subsequent success as authors brings what Karl Ove views as his ultimate failure to the foreground as a constant reminder (V: 432).²⁰ Espen is accepted to Skrivekunstakademiet the following academic year (1990-1991), which turns out to be a fruitful experience as he publishes his first poetry collection, *Sakte dans ut av brennende hus* in 1992.²¹ Karl Ove, on the other hand, continues his university studies, and in the autumn of 1990 begins writing reviews for the student newspaper *Studvest*.

This is the prelude context provided by *Min kamp* V for Knausgård’s critical activities. In the period 1988-1990, Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator swings between hope and hopelessness, youthful arrogance and crippling self-doubt. There is a sense of Karl Ove feeling misunderstood, or that he puts his lot down to circumstance, as his failure does not represent who he truly is and what he can do. This sentiment is most prominent when he is intoxicated:

Seks timer senere satt jeg på et nachspiel i Fosswinckels Gate og tenkte på hvor begavet jeg var, at det virkelig ikke var noe problem det med skrivingen, jeg var full av kraft, jeg eide verden, *egentlig*.

¹⁸ “it was as if the gods had descended from Mount Olympus to sit among us in the canteen” (MS V: 311). Note that in the original text this is presented as a hypothetical, *if* they were to sit down next to them, which they never do.

¹⁹ “[...] I was doomed to becoming a literary critic or a cultural correspondent, he [Espen] was becoming what he was: a poet, a writer, an author.” (MS V: 327)

²⁰ “me and my life into such stark relief” (MS V: 468)

²¹ Don Bartlett’s translation of the title *Sakte dans ut av brennende hus*: *Slow Dance from a Burning House* (MS V: 467)

Det så ikke sånn ut, det var jeg den første til å innrømme, men *egentlig* var det slik.²² (V: 357-358, emphasis original)

Thus, the rewriting of the author-image at the time focuses on the disparity between the talent and will to greatness he sees in himself, and the lack of results and recognition from the literary establishment.

²² “Six hours later I was at a party in Fosswinckels gate, thinking how talented I was, writing actually wasn’t a problem, I was full of energy, I *really* did own the world. That wasn’t how things were, as I would have been the first to admit, but *really* they were.” (MS V: 388, emphasis original)

3 Knausgård as Student-Critic

Det er i anmeldelsen anmelderen kan få et navn og et liv, og jo tydeligere utsagn, jo tydeligere liv. Nyanserte forbehold er kjedelige å trykke. Men det er tilfredsstillende å være hun som mener noe kontroversielt, som tar verkets skaper ned fra pidestallen og er den første som sier at keiseren er naken.¹

Nina Faber in Erlend Loe's *Vareopptelling* (2013)

As pointed out in part I, literary criticism is not without interest or agenda. Karl Ove Knausgård's position in the literary field as a student-critic and his own aspirations as an author therefore affect both the way he writes criticism, and how the criticism is read now. In this chapter I investigate the strategies of the young Knausgård in the period 1990-1993, pertaining to making a name for himself in the literary field. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the term student-critic in the title of this chapter refers to three factors: Knausgård as a student of literature at the University of Bergen, Knausgård's role as a critic in predominantly student-oriented media, and Knausgård as a student and apprentice in the literary field of criticism. As a student-critic, Knausgård is eager to prove himself, not only to his peers but, towards the end of this period, to a wider audience and to critical authorities in the field.

Demonstrations of Literary Knowledge

In Erlend Loe's novel *Vareopptelling*, a disgruntled poet in her sixties, Nina Faber, issues her revenge on a critic writing for the student newspaper at the University of Oslo, *Universitas*.² Under the headline "Fabelaktig svak Faber", the young student-critic Roger Kulpe had crushed her comeback poetry collection *Basporos*, pointing out that she must be surrounded by a group of terrible advisors, and that her treatment of Istanbul mostly consists of mere banal reflections to the point of being fiercely insulting for Kulpe as a reader (Loe 2014: 40, 45).³ With Kulpe's review, Loe captures a trope in student criticism, which also marks

¹ "It is in the review that the reviewer can make a name and a life for herself, and the clearer the statements are made, the clearer that life is. Nuanced reservations are boring to print. But it is satisfying being the one who has a controversial opinion, the one who brings the creator of the work down from the pedestal and the one who is the first to say: the emperor is naked."

² Translation of the title *Vareopptelling*: *Taking Stock*.

³ "Fabulously weak Faber"

Knausgård first critical text: a clever title, accusations towards the publisher, and self-proclaimed, superior knowledge about the topic the object-text aims to treat.

A common denominator of Knausgård's earliest reviews in the student newspaper *Studvest* is a will to show the reader that he is a well-read critic: how his knowledge about literature, literary history, and literary theory surpasses the average reader. Knausgård's first published critical text was a review of Atle Næss' seventh novel *Kraften som beveger* (1990).⁴ The novel takes place in Florence, simultaneously in the Middle Ages and in modern times, where the television screen is a force of power and where scientists split atoms. The plot is centred on the protagonist, the apothecary Dan, who is in love with Bea, thus mirroring Dante Alighieri's love for Beatrice. Knausgård states that mirroring Dante makes Næss' project ambitious, and somewhat pedantically acknowledges that while Næss is not the first to write about this topic, it does not mean that the topic is exhausted (Knausgård 1990). The key point in the object-text that Knausgård highlights is how the all-consuming power of television has moved the culture of Florence from writing to image, resulting in a trivialisation of reality and a washing out of culture. Knausgård points to the lack of originality of this critical point, but still sees the language Næss uses as the main problem.

Man kan ikke kritisere fordummingen i samfunnet med et fordummende språk. Og det går heller ikke an å la en person som er modellert ut i fra Dante tenke at "minuttene var seige som karamellmasse". Det er kitsch. Kraften som beveger er kitsch.⁵ (ibid.)

The sentiment that the text is kitschy, in its mixture of old and new, its criticism and clichéd parables, is echoed in the crushing title Knausgård gives his review. "Middelaldersk Næssquick" plays on both the content of the novel and Næss as a middle-aged author, and on Næss' last name and the chocolate milk powder produced by Nestlé.⁶ This signals that Knausgård as a critic finds the text overpoweringly sweet, somewhat artificial, and ultimately an intermediate, short-cut product by an author who should know better.⁷ Pejoratively naming the text kitsch, Knausgård brings the value of this text as literature into question, which functions to elevate his own taste: he implies that his own knowledge of Dante and

⁴ Translation of the title: *The Power that Moves*

⁵ "You can't criticise the dumbing down of society with a dumbed down use of language. And it's not possible to let a person who is modelled after Dante think 'the minutes were as viscous as caramel.' It's kitsch. The power that moves [Kraften som beveger] is kitsch."

⁶ Næss was 41 years old at the time of publishing *Kraften som beveger*.

⁷ "Middle-Aged Næssquick" [pronounced like Nesquick]

literary quality surpasses the banal understanding that Næss demonstrates in his appropriation of his predecessor. Knausgård ends the review by flattering Næss for his ambition, stating that Næss is attempting the impossible by letting Dante be the starting point for a novel about the modern condition. Yet, he encourages Næss to be more self-critical, to provide original thoughts, and to seek competent help from a consultant (ibid.). Again, in this statement Knausgård places his own knowledge of literature and writing above Næss', implying that Næss should seek help from people who actually understand Dante: people like Knausgård himself.

Knausgård's self-proclaimed superiority and eagerness to establish himself as a young intellectual critic is marked by further elevations of his own taste. For example, he begins his review of Øystein Lønn's *Thomas Ribes femte sak* (1991) in *Studvest* by referring to literature he usually avoids:

Romaner skrevet av middelaldrende menn og som handler om reiser tilbake, reiser som skal leses som *indre* reiser, med utførlig leserinstruks på baksiden, bør prinsipielt overses. Likeledes kriminalromaner som handler om etterforskere som egentlig etterforsker seg selv. Det var med slike fordommer jeg ga meg i kast med romanen til Lønn – fordommer jeg var blitt grundig kvitt da jeg begynte å lese den for andre gang.⁸ (Knausgård 1991c: emphasis original)

In this statement Knausgård implicitly demonstrates what he believes to be an established view amongst scholarly, high-brow critics: popular literature, in this case crime fiction, usually equals bad literature. However, he is nonetheless willing, and seems delighted and surprised, to be proved wrong by Lønn. True to poststructuralist literary theory, in his review Knausgård highlights how the text questions the relationship between fiction and reality, displayed in the way the narrator is untrustworthy, making the words written on the page merely one way of interpreting the world. Yet, he still finds some blemishes, which again is a common trait in Knausgård's earliest reviews and perhaps indicative of the criticism he himself had received at Skrivekunstakademiet, in Lønn's at times unskillful use of lazily crafted metaphors that serve no real purpose for the text.⁹

⁸ Translation of the title: *Thomas Ribe's Fifth Case*. "Novels written by middle-aged men that are about journeys back, journeys that are to be read as *inner* journeys, with detailed instructions for the reader on the back cover, should be ignored on principle. The same goes for crime novels about detectives that are really investigating themselves. It was with prejudices of this kind that I began Lønn's novel – prejudices I had been thoroughly ridden of when I began reading it for the second time."

⁹ Note that this is if Knausgård's rewriting of himself at Skrivekunstakademiet in *Min kamp V* is taken at face-value.

A similar aim to display an understanding of poststructuralist theory, and literature informed by this, is present in Knausgård's review of Kjartan Fløgstad's *Kniven på strupen* (1991).¹⁰ Here he states, and often repeats in his early criticism: "God litteratur er urefererbar, heter det" (Knausgård 1991a).¹¹ Knausgård has nevertheless made an attempt to describe both the plot and the text's criticism of post-industrial Norway in the 1980s. However, Knausgård is more concerned with praising the work's digressions, metaphors, narrative strategies, and intertextuality, marking it as a postmodern text. He plainly states, without further clarification, that the literary references to Knut Hamsun and Arne Garborg are interesting, and that the theoretical connections to Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas are made with Fløgstad's characteristic blend of popular and scholarly appeal. Knausgård again seems to implicitly place himself in league with the scholarly on this point, substantiated solely in his ability to recognise these references.

Drawing a parallel between *Kniven på strupen* and Fløgstad's *Det 7. klima* (1986), he argues that they are linked in Fløgstad's interest in language: "maktens språk, språk som makt – hvor ideologi og språk blir to sider av samme sak" (Knausgård 1991a).¹² Yet, in comparing the two, Knausgård hails *Det 7. klima* as a strong, highly political work, finding societal criticism in the text's demonstration of the breakdown of communication, while *Kniven på strupen* does not manage to have the same political weight. Rather, Knausgård somewhat belittlingly names *Kniven på strupen* a well-crafted "underholdningsroman", but claims that it lacks the provocative violations and exceedances of literary and lingual norms to have the same impact as *Det 7. klima* (ibid.).¹³ Without this provocation, Knausgård states, the novel is "ufarlig" (ibid.).¹⁴ As I discuss below, in relation to Knausgård later naming Fløgstad one of the ten most overrated authors in Norway, there is some development in how he views Fløgstad's use of language theory in his writing, and further in the evaluation of the quality of Fløgstad's work in general. But at this stage, in 1991, he proudly and self-assuredly claims to have fully grasped Fløgstad's writing.

The understanding of high-quality literature as having some form of significant impact, particularly that it is in some way dangerous, dominates Knausgård reviews of Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands* (1991) and Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991).

¹⁰ Translation of the title: *Knife to the Throat*.

¹¹ "It is said that good literature cannot be summarised."

¹² Translation of the title: *The 7th Climate*. "the language of power, language as power – where ideology and language are two sides of the same coin"

¹³ "entertainment novel"

¹⁴ "not dangerous/harmless"

In both instances it is literature's power to exceed boundaries he highlights. For Knausgård, Rushdie transgresses the boundaries of literature, religion, and politics, and when Knausgård describes the effect of *The Satanic Verses* (1988), he highlights how the aftermath of the publication is an embodiment of the conflict Rushdie wished to address in the text (Knausgård 1991b). Knausgård seems fascinated by this transgression, which presents one of the prophetic ironies found in his earliest criticism: during and after the serial publication of *Min kamp*, the aftermath becomes a great concern for him as an author. In his review of *Imaginary Homelands*, Knausgård's respect for Rushdie is acutely felt. In fact, the respect seems to go so far that he does not pose any critical questions to Rushdie nor to his writing, save describing the texts included in the essay collection simultaneously as arrogant and elegantly insightful (ibid.). This marks Knausgård's tendency to view certain authors as above and beyond any criticism.

Similarly, his respect and admiration for Ellis shines through in the review of *American Psycho*. Although admitting that the descriptions of violence are just as horrid as the rumours would have it, Knausgård argues that the question of whether the text is immoral is reductive, rendering the novel "ufarliggjort" (Knausgård 1992a).¹⁵ Drawing a parallel to *The Satanic Verses* being reduced to *the* blasphemous text, Knausgård argues that reducing the violence to a question of morality lies outside the text. In his view, this only becomes relevant in the meeting between text and reader: when fiction meets reality. Again, this also presents a prophetic irony, as the question of morality, and the boundaries of literature, have been key issues that Knausgård has been forced to address, not just with *Min kamp*, but also with *Ute av verden*.

With Ellis, Knausgård focuses on connecting the form and content in *American Psycho*, highlighting the observational style of the language alongside the seemingly unmotivated atrocities performed by a subject in crisis. Knausgård states that the combination of metropole and Patrick Bateman as a subject in crisis calls for a comparison with Hamsun's *Sult*, implying that the parallel is not limited to the framing of the plot, nor to the view of them as *fin de siècle* novels. There is also a parallel in the way the narrator in both texts gives equal space to seemingly relevant and irrelevant events: an unmemorable meal is given the same amount of attention as a bestial murder, and it is conveyed in the same neutral language.

¹⁵ "å ufarliggjøre": the act of making something not dangerous, harmless, non-threatening

Snart glir disse voldsscenenene inn i teksten på samme måte som beskrivelsen av stereoanlegg eller klesdraktene eller hva de spiser på restaurantene de frekventerer. For Bateman er det ingen forskjell.¹⁶ (Knausgård 1992a)

It is clear that Knausgård elevates the narrative style to a mark of quality, not just in what is arguably a favourable comparison with Hamsun's poetics, but also in that he tries to convey precisely this combination of murders and stereotypes in condensed form in the title he gives the review: "Blodig alvor na na na".¹⁷ By actively keeping the question of morality out of the text and seemingly creating a protagonist and a narrator that has no ability to question his actions, Knausgård reads *American Psycho* as "en syk bok om et sykt samfunn", a society in which murder and evil acts are condoned and condemned conditionally:

Drapene her er ikke verre enn dem du finner i hvilken som helst krig. [...] Forskjellen er at der [i krig] [...] er fraværet av [respekten for mennesket] akseptert.¹⁸ (ibid.)

As with Rushdie, Knausgård calls for a non-reductive reading of Ellis' work that does not reduce him to an author who captured a generation. Rather, for Knausgård, Ellis' novel has an enormous social-critical and transgressional potential as the *fin de siècle* novel of the twentieth century (ibid.).

Comparing Knausgård's critical evaluation of authors like Rushdie and Ellis on the one hand with how he views less renowned authors at the time like Næss on the other, a pattern presents itself.¹⁹ Knausgård as a critic zealously hails, almost without question, the internationally recognised authors he seems to admire, while Næss, who as a minor author he might see as being more in direct competition with himself, is given a different treatment. Lønn and Fløgstad seem to occupy the middle-ground, as they are treated with the respect two Norwegian contemporary greats deserve. Comparatively, in *Min kamp* I and V Knausgård rewrites his earliest and disappointing interaction with Lønn at Skrivekunstakademiet in the diegetic time 1989, and a disastrous interview with Fløgstad in

¹⁶ "Soon the scenes of violence slip into the text in the same way as the description of stereos or clothing or what they eat at the restaurants the frequently visit. For Bateman there is no difference."

¹⁷ "Bloody serious na na na". Alternatively, "Deadly serious na na na". It is also a reference to the Norwegian band Dum Dum Boys' debut album, which was entitled precisely *Blodig Alvor Na na na na na* (1988).

¹⁸ "a sick book about a sick society"; "The murders here are not worse than those you find in any war. [...] The difference is that there [in war] the absence of [the respect for the human being] is accepted."

¹⁹ In 1990-1991 Knausgård's implicit view of Næss as minor author is justifiable. Between 1975 and 1990, Næss had published six novels, two young adult novels and one children's book. In the late '90s, Næss became a prominent biographer, and his oeuvre consists of biographies of Henrik Ibsen, Galileo Galilei, which he received the Brage Prize for in 2001, Edvard Munch, Leonardo da Vinci, and Martin Luther.

the diegetic time March or early April 1991 (V: 205-207; I: 336-340).²⁰ However, while both events lead to Karl Ove's bitter and somewhat defiant attitude towards these two literary authorities, the underlying feeling seems to be shame: about his own abilities as a writer and as an interviewer respectively. Still, as a critic of Fløgstad and Lønn in September and October 1991 respectively, it seems as though Knausgård would like to have them on his side as potential future allies. However, they are not as immune to critical evaluation as Rushdie and Ellis seem to be.

As touched on above, Knausgård's negative reviews in the period 1990-1992 are marked by a vague, at times unspecified, at times mocking, criticism of language and metaphors. Further it is distinguished by how he tends to lament the lack of originality, and, highly related to this, how he directs his criticism more or less explicitly at the publisher and editor for accepting the text. Here an agenda can be found: as a young aspiring author, Knausgård may be feeling wronged by the publishing industry for not being able to recognise his own talents. Knausgård thus plays the part of revengeful critic.

His review of seven Norwegian short story collections in December 1992, by "Fire etablerte forfattere, to debutanter og en med den vanskelige andreboken", maintains the revengeful tendency (Knausgård 1992c).²¹ While he seems indifferent to Magnar Johnsgaard's *Veivokteren* (1992), and praises Hans Herbjørnsrud's *Eks og sett* (1992), the two other authors that Knausgård classes as established, based on number of publications, are all but slaughtered.²² Finn Carling's *Antilopens øyne* (1992) and Tore Tveit's *Jegeren* (1992) are placed in the first of the two categories he outlines for his review: texts that should be hidden away, collecting dust in a badly lit library, as opposed to texts that are actually worth reading (ibid.).²³ Knausgård seems outraged by Carling and Tveit, and implicitly exasperated with the publishing houses, as he expects some form of quality when reading authors who have published books for the last forty and eighteen years respectively. For example, in Carling's case, Knausgård takes offense in the comparison the publishing house has made between Beckett and Carling on the cover: "Jeg kan ikke se at Gyldendal skulle ha noen grunn til å håne Beckett på en sånn måte" (ibid.).²⁴ Bringing the comparison closer to home, Knausgård contrasts the Swedish author Stig Larsson to Carling. Knausgård holds Larsson as the ideal,

²⁰ Lønn was a guest teacher at Skrivekunstakademiet.

²¹ "Four established authors, two debutants, and one with the difficult second book"

²² Translations of the titles: *The Road Guardian*; *Ex and Seen/Ex and Zed*.

²³ Translations of the titles: *The Eyes of the Antelope*; *The Hunter*.

²⁴ "I cannot see any reason why Gyldendal would mock Beckett in such a way"

and the effect Larsson's writing has on the reader is what Carling, and seemingly *every* author, should aim to achieve. Knausgård admits that he is unable to pinpoint exactly why and how Larsson is so good and why Carling is so bad — “Larson [sic] har *det*, hva nå *det* egentlig er” — but it is clear to Knausgård that Carling does not have what it takes (ibid., emphasis original).²⁵ Therefore, it seems to be a great compliment when Knausgård states that Jonny Berg's (Jonny Halberg) second short story collection *Gå under* (1992) manages to approach Larsson's feelings of intensity, presence, and of being important for the reader.²⁶

Knausgård's treatment of debutant authors is where the motif of the wronged aspiring author who is competing for recognition in the literary field takes its most acute autoreceptive form. About Kari Saanum's debut *Kraftverk* (1992) Knausgård writes that the publisher should have waited before putting this collection on the market, and that perhaps the inconsistency of Saanum's style is due to her inability to recognise when she writes well (ibid.).²⁷ Although he states that the other debutant, Håvard Syvertsen with the collection *Nå ville han ikke tenke på det* (1992), seems more secure in his writing, he still berates him for showing no signs of any distinguishing or unique traits: “originalitet, på en eller annen måte, må til” (ibid., emphasis original).²⁸ He further states that reading Syvertsen's collection, which Knausgård sums up to be about everyday realism, is unengaging, implying that it is a waste of time: “Du betaler ikke to hundre kroner for å kjede deg og lese om en manns problemer med seg sjøl og livet sitt” (ibid.).²⁹ This statement is almost bursting with prophetic irony, considering that everyday realism and writing about the struggles of his own life is what made Knausgård an internationally recognised author. However, in the context of 1992, the autoreceptive tendencies are not limited to reading the critical statements retrospectively in light of *Min kamp*. As this review preceded the publication of his own debut short story, “Déjà vu” by a mere week, the criticism regarding novelty and ability to recognise good writing might extend beyond the explicit reproach of the publishing houses, and be implicitly directed at himself.

A final trait of note for the earliest critical texts in the period 1990-1992 is that although Knausgård's critical opinion spans from deprecating to an uncritical praising of authors, the critical texts do not deviate widely from a general consensus about the object-

²⁵ “Larson [sic] has *it*, whatever *it* really is”

²⁶ Translation of the title: *Go Under*.

²⁷ Translations of the title: *Power Plant*.

²⁸ Translations of the title: *He Did Not Want to Think About It Now*. “originality, in one way or another, is necessary”

²⁹ “You don't pay two hundred kroner to be bored and read about a man's problems with himself and his life”

texts nor of the authors' skills. In other words, in his criticism Knausgård adheres to and respects their status as established or canonised authors. For that reason, at this point in time there is little risk involved in writing negatively about Atle Næss, Finn Carling, and Tore Tveit, or about debutants like Kari Saanum and Håvard Syvertsen. Fløgstad and Lønn, on the other hand, are authors whom he may be seeking the approval of, or, if read alongside *Min kamp* I and V, to regain the approval of. Moreover, the fascination for Rushdie, Ellis, and Larsson confirms his role as a progressive and young critic, just as the appraisal of literature rooted in postmodernism and poststructuralism confirms that he is a literature student in the early 1990s. His critical opinions are highly typical of a critic with ambitions of becoming an author, so much so that whatever potential his literary views had for being radical and consensus-defying then, they now serve to mark him as a child of his time.

Imitating a Literary Tradition

Knausgård's short story "Déjà Vu" was published in a special issue of *Vinduet* dedicated to publishing thirty texts from thirty debutants. Reading this text alongside his earliest critical activity can reveal an autoreceptive relationship between his harsh criticism of the debutant writers' lack of originality, and his own admiration for and dependency on the infallible literary predecessors in his own writing. This is because "Déjà vu" exhibits a clear influence, to the point of being an imitation, from the fantastic short story tradition of for example Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges, specifically in the attempt to transgress narrative laws.

At the outset, the unnamed narrator in "Déjà vu" attempts in a pastiche-like manner to establish himself as earnest and truthful, aiming to perhaps suspend, for the moment, reader hesitation.³⁰

Jeg er klar over at denne historien jeg nå akter å fortelle nok kan fortone seg urealistisk, endog usann eller løgnaktig for enkelte. Dem kan jeg bare forsikre at det jeg her skriver er den fulle og hele sannhet: jeg forteller det som skjedde, eksakt, presist – slik jeg opplevde det. Selvsagt kan enkelte detaljer ha unnsloppet minnet mitt, det er mange år siden disse begivenheter fant sted. Men

³⁰ In Tzvetan Todorov's seminal definition, the fantastic relies on both the character and the reader remaining hesitant about whether an ostensibly supernatural event may be explained by the laws of nature, to the point where the reader must reject a poetic and allegorical reading (Todorov 1975: 24ff). Although Todorov's definition largely focuses on supernatural events in a narrative, the demarcation criterion of the fantastic may be expanded to include a disruption of narrative law.

nettopp deres uvanlige karakter gjør at jeg husker dem bedre en
mangt annet som har hendt meg. Nåvel.³¹ (Knausgård 1992b: 74)

The story the first-person narrator wishes to tell concerns the events that happened to him while travelling through Europe by train. On an overnight journey to Florence, the protagonist becomes fascinated with another passenger, specifically with the contents of his mysterious suitcase. He decides to follow him and ends up sneaking into his room in the middle of the night to steal the suitcase. The fantastic narrative transgression occurs as he finds that the suitcase contains a manuscript where the narrative reassurance of the truthfulness of this story, as well as the first-person narrator and protagonist's thoughts, have been written down exactly as they are narrated in the beginning of the short story itself.

Knausgård's use of the uncanny, ambiguous narrative is highly reminiscent of for example Cortázar's *Continuidad de los parques* (1964).³² In Cortázar's story, the protagonist is presumably murdered by a character in the novel he is reading. However, the narrative vertigo that Cortázar creates is much more seamless and gradually pushes the narration of the protagonist reading the novel towards a metaleptic transgression of the diegetic levels: the diegetic level of the protagonist is gradually fused with the narrative of the novel he is reading. Comparatively, Knausgård makes the transgression clear when the protagonist finds the manuscript:

Jeg begynte å lese:
Jeg er klar over at denne historien jeg nå akter å fortelle nok kan
fortone seg urealistisk, endog usann eller løgnaktig for enkelte,
leste jeg.³³ (Knausgård 1992b: 79)

Quickly, the protagonist comes to the realisation that it is himself and his past thoughts that the manuscript describes, and the two narrative levels become intertwined. However, the text suspends the reader's ability to untangle the diegetic levels, further tying the story to Cortázar, as in "Déjà vu" it is not clear exactly when the narration changes from what the protagonist reads in the manuscript to a narration of what happens to the protagonist after

³¹ "I am aware that the story I now intend to tell may probably sound unrealistic, even un-true and mendacious for some. However, I can assure them that what I write here is the full and whole truth: I'm telling you what happened, exactly, accurately – as I experienced it. Of course, certain details may have slipped out of my memory, many years have gone by since these events took place. But it is precisely their unusual character that makes me remember them better than many other things that have happened to me. Oh well."

³² In English this text is called *Continuity of Parks*.

³³ "I am aware that this story that I now intend to tell can probably sound unrealistic, even un-true and mendacious for some, I read."

having read it. Seemingly, the protagonist is discovered by the owner of the suitcase, and flees into the night:

Jeg var fra meg av redsel. Jeg løp uten noen plan, uten noe mål; jeg løp blindt innover i byen, til jeg ikke orket mer og måtte stanse.
Jeg var forstumlet. Hva hadde skjedd, hva hadde jeg lest?
Jeg befant meg ved en park.³⁴ (ibid.: 80)

The protagonist ends up spending the night in the park. The following day he goes to see the statue of David, and with a hammer that he somewhat mysteriously finds in his pocket, attacks the statue. He is taken into custody and tries to explain to the police what has happened. Here the diegetic level abruptly changes, suggesting that the flight, the night in the park, and the defilement of the statue of David were all events that the protagonist read in the manuscript he found. As the protagonist places the sheets of paper he has been reading back into the pile, he is (again) discovered by the man with the suitcase.

– Du har lest det? sa han [...]. Jeg kastet meg mot ham, han falt overende og jeg løp det jeg maktet forbi ham, ned trappene og ut på gaten. Jeg var fra meg av redsel. Jeg løp uten noen plan, uten noe mål; jeg løp blindt innover i byen, til jeg ikke orket mer og måtte stanse.
Jeg var forstumlet. Hva hadde skjedd, hva hadde jeg lest?
Jeg befant meg ved en park.³⁵ (ibid.: 81)

Therefore, as with Cortázar's *Continuidad de los parques*, the reader's hesitation as a trait of the fantastic is aimed at the narratological aspects of the story. The ending suggests a continuation of the narrative vertigo, as if the protagonist is caught in a never-ending déjà vu mirroring Cortázar's Möbius strip of metaleptic transgressions.

Knausgård implicitly seems to give himself credit for his own writing within the story, via the protagonist reflecting on the language in the manuscript he finds:

Han hadde absolutt noe å fare med, så vidt jeg kunne se.
Typebeskrivelsen, som indirekte kom til syne gjennom jeg-

³⁴ "I was beside myself with fear. I ran without purpose, without an aim; I ran blindly into the city, until I could not run anymore and had to stop.

I was perplexed. What had happened, what had I read?
I was by a park."

³⁵ "You have read it?", he said [...]. I threw myself towards him, he toppled over, and I ran as fast as I could past him, down the stairs, and out onto the street. I was beside myself with fear. I ran without purpose, without an aim; I ran blindly into the city, until I could not run anymore and had to stop.

I was perplexed. What had happened, what had I read?
I was by a park."

personens språk og hans måte å se verden på forekom meg sannsynlig.³⁶ (ibid.: 79-80)

Knausgård as the author thus points the reader to what he seems to view as marks of quality, which functions as autoreception within the text: as intratextual self-reading and metaliterary commentary. Yet, viewing this in light of the criticism he has directed at the authors he reviewed, especially the two debutants, it seems ironic to the point of being implicitly autoreceptive for Knausgård to uphold the ideal of originality, considering his clear dependency on the fantastic tradition in his own debut text. The dependency was also noticed by *Fædrelandsvennen*, the regional newspaper in southern Norway and the only newspaper that mentioned Knausgård's text specifically in their review of the special edition of *Vinduet*.

Det sikreste, spenstigste, mest spennende bidraget er signert en utflyttet kristiansander. Karl Ove Knausgård heter han og bidrar med prosateksten "Déjà Vu". Med henspeiling på selve tittelen kunne en saktens si at susjettet virker kjent. Men jeg syns ikke det gjør noe.³⁷ (Sørgaard 1993)

Sørgaard thus alludes to how the text seems familiar, possibly referring to the similarity with Cortázar, but that this does not impede the quality. In addition, it should be noted that Sørgaard places emphasis on Knausgård's connection to Kristiansand, where *Fædrelandsvennen* is published, opening up for the possibility that the reviewer has given Knausgård the home advantage.

"Déjà Vu" marks Knausgård's own inability to free himself from influence, so much so that it becomes an act of imitation. To paraphrase Knausgård's criticism of Hamsun's *Mysterier* in 2008 (cf. Knausgård 2008b: 161), the young Knausgård yearns to show the reader what he can do, and what he knows: the text thus becomes a demonstration of the art of writing, specifically the art of writing like Cortázar. Thus, as with the earliest criticism, Knausgård's first published literary text is indicative of the young aspiring author yearning to make his knowledge and skill known. If the earliest critical and literary activity is viewed in relation to the context provided by *Min kamp V*, it seems as if Knausgård's strategy for combating his feelings of inferiority is founded on precisely these acts of imitation: imitation

³⁶ "He certainly had something to offer, as far as I could see. The character description, which became visible indirectly through the P's language and his way of seeing the world seemed plausible to me."

³⁷ "The most secure, most buoyant, most exciting contribution is by an émigré Kristiansander. Karl Ove Knausgård is his name and his contribution is a work of prose, "Déjà Vu". With reference to the title itself, one could certainly say that the topic seems familiar. But I don't think that matters much."

of the critical criteria that dominate the literary field and the theorisation that he wants to show he understands.

Karl Ove as Critic: An Inferior Parasite

Knausgård as rewriter in *Min kamp V*, writing the text in 2010, might be aware of how his actions as a critic during this time places him almost stereotypically within a framework of the young aspiring author and student-critic eager to make a name for himself in the literary field. However, relating to the autoreceptive narration, there is no explicit examination of, for example, Karl Ove's anxiety of influence. In other words, by focusing on how Karl Ove as an aspiring author and critic ridicules and dismisses other authors in his critical work, but without explicitly offering a retrospective understanding of himself in light of for instance Bloom's concept, Knausgård maintains the rewriting of his author-images through the narrative strategy that dominates *Min kamp*. Thus, it could be argued that Knausgård as rewriter aims to pour as much fuel on the fire as possible, letting the anxiety shine through for the reader in its own right.

Knausgård writes about his first review briefly in *Min kamp*: "Jeg slaktet Atle Næss' roman om Dante ettertrykkelig" (V: 414).³⁸ In the same sentence he connects this review, as well as his perceived expertise on Dante, to the text on Ellis' *American Psycho*, which in actual fact was written nearly two years later:

[...] og jeg skrev en helside om *American Psycho*, som også var forbundet med Dante, i det at hovedpersonen leser en graffiti på en vegg på vei gjennom byen i en taxi, *oppgi alt håp, du som trer inn her*. Porten til helvete her, nå, å satan, det var bra. For en roman det var. For en roman.³⁹ (ibid., emphasis original)

The review of Ellis is one of the very few instances in *Min kamp V* where Karl Ove as critic hails the reviewed work: the rewritten critical activity within the diegesis usually consists solely of his acts of slaughter. According to volume V, Karl Ove's peers viewed him as a devoted reader of Dante and *Divina Commedia* during his first years at university, after Espen turned him on to the work (V: 304; 266). As for Ellis, Karl Ove hears about his debut novel

³⁸ "I slaughtered Atle Næss's novel about Dante" (MS V: 448)

³⁹ "[...] and wrote a whole page about *American Psycho*, which also had a connection with Dante in that the protagonist reads some graffiti on a wall travelling through town in a taxi: LASCIA TE OGNI SPERANZA, VOI CH'ENTRATE [Abandon all hope, ye who enter here]. The gates of hell here, no, Jesus, that was good. What a novel it was. What a novel." (MS V: 448-449, capitalisation original)

Less Than Zero (1985) from Asbjørn, a friend of his brother Yngve, just after he has started at Skrivekunstakademiet in 1988 (V: 130). In the diegetic time 1989, in the résumé of what he has learned during his year at Skrivekunstakademiet, Karl Ove divulges his strategy to mask what he now sees as his shortcomings as a writer: to market a subcategory of the modern, American novel as his ideal genre, thus marketing Ellis as one of his idols (V: 225). In the rewriting of his author-image, the reviews seem to function for Karl Ove as an attempt to confirm the image he had portrayed to his peers at the time: a young student with authorial ambitions who knows his Dante and adores Ellis. In other words, by placing these reviews that in actual fact were published nearly two years apart not only in the same diegetic time but in the same sentence, they function as proof of how Karl Ove views his competence and knowledge. For Karl Ove in the diegetic time, the reviews of Næss and Ellis demonstrate his knowledge of one of the great classics, as well as his recognition of a contemporary transgressive author like Ellis, by dismissing and saluting the execution and relevance of the intertextual reference respectively.

In Knausgård's rewriting of the context of writing his debut short story, "Déjà vu", Karl Ove has been jotting down ideas and trying to write short stories for months, all of which he has now discarded. One evening, looking through his notebook, he haphazardly decides to pursue the idea "*mann med koffert i togkuppé*" (V: 424, italics original).⁴⁰

Neste morgen var jeg ferdig. Ti sider. Jeg var glad, ikke fordi det var bra, men fordi det var ferdig, og fordi det var så mange sider. De siste to årene hadde jeg skrevet mellom femten og tyve sider sammenlagt. Ti sider på en natt var overveldende. Kanskje det kunne bli en novellesamling til sommeren likevel?⁴¹ (ibid.)

By presenting this topic as chosen at random, as well as the speed at which the text was allegedly written, it is almost as if Knausgård as rewriter is excusing himself for having published this short story: he is acutely aware of its imitative nature.

In the same scene where Espen tells Karl Ove that *Sakte dans ut av brennende bus* has been accepted for publication, Espen mentions the special debutant issue of *Vinduet* and encourages Karl Ove to submit a text (V: 431). The correlation of these events, Espen becoming an author proper and Karl Ove submitting "Déjà vu" for consideration without

⁴⁰ "*man with a suitcase in a train compartment*" (MS V: 460, italics original)

⁴¹ "The next morning I had finished it. Ten pages. I was happy, not because it was good but because it was finished and because there were so many pages. Over the last two years I had written in all somewhere between fifteen and twenty pages. To write ten pages in a night was amazing. Perhaps there might be enough for a collection of short stories by summer after all?" (MS V: 460)

much hope (V: 432), functions within the narrative to accentuate the inferiority he now feels with regard to his own abilities. To Karl Ove's disbelief his text is one of the thirty accepted out of the fifteen hundred contributions:

De måtte ha blandet meg med en annen. Kramsgård eller
Knutsgård eller noe sånt.
Jeg lo.
Jeg hadde blitt antatt!⁴² (V: 437)

Karl Ove's reaction can be read as further evidence of Knausgård as rewriter's autoreception of the short story: he seems to implicitly indicate to the reader that when he views this text retrospectively he deems it not worthy of publication, but something he in good humour can now view as a sign of immaturity.

When the issue is published, Karl Ove reads the reviews in "alle de store avisene", in which the focus seems to be on comparing this debutant issue with the defining debutant issue of *Vinduet* in 1966 (V: 438).⁴³ As Knausgård writes, the 1966 debutant issue contained texts by writers who would later become renowned authors, for example Øystein Lønn, Espen Haavardsholm and Knut Faldbakken: "så alle så etter muligheten for at en like sterk generasjon skulle være underveis" (ibid.).⁴⁴ The overall conclusion, as Karl Ove sees it, is that sadly this is not the case, and he plainly states that while some of the reviewers highlighted authors with potential, he was never one of them (ibid.). However, as shown above, this is not accurate: *Fadrelandsvennen* mentions Knausgård specifically (cf. Sørgaard 1993), albeit the reviewer highlights his contribution more as a local news story, which may be a plausible reason for Knausgård either purposely omitting it or forgetting it. The function within the diegetic time in *Min kamp V* is to underline the self-deprecation, as Karl Ove deems the lack of mentions understandable. In his view, his story was one of the weakest contributions and should not even have been accepted (V: 438.). This is further emphasised by Karl Ove as "Déjà vu" comes up again later in the diegetic time 1993. Having just become acquainted with Karl Ove at Studentradioen, Tore Renberg seeks out the debutant issue of *Vinduet* on his own initiative, and they briefly talk about how it is clearly inspired by Borges and Cortázar

⁴² "So they must have mixed me up with someone else. Kramsgård or Knutsgård or something.
I laughed.

I had been accepted!" (MS V: 474)

⁴³ "all the big newspapers" (MS V: 475)

⁴⁴ "everyone had an eye on the possibility that an equally strong generation might be in the offing" (MS V: 475)

(V: 449). The self-deprecation continues as Karl Ove tells Tore that although a publication in *Vinduet* may sound good, the story itself is bad (ibid.).

As the rewriter, Knausgård seems to continue to portray a dissonance between the way he views himself and the way others see him. However, contrary to how this dissonance is portrayed in volume IV and in the beginning of volume V, it is now his friends and acquaintances who view his abilities and successes as more impressive than he does himself. This is underlined in the way he implicitly positions himself between Espen and his new friend Tore: Espen as the promising debutant and author proper, and Tore as the younger aspiring author who has sixteen rejections and no publications under his belt (V: 448). Tore looks up to Karl Ove, and Karl Ove is aware of how his literary achievements may appear to him. This is further fuelled in the diegetic time 1993 as Karl Ove has been asked to write reviews for *Vinduet*, which expands his potential for making a name for himself in the literary field. But for Karl Ove it seems to be only a matter of time before he is called out, and Tore's admiration for him will fade:

Når jeg så det gjennom Tores øyne, forstod jeg hvordan det kunne virke. Men slik ville det bare virke i de få ukene det ville ta før han virkelig kjente meg og forstod hvordan det hang sammen, at jeg var en wannabe som egentlig ikke kunne skrive, fordi jeg ikke hadde noe å si, men som ikke var ærlig nok mot meg selv til å ta konsekvensen av det, og derfor forsøkte å få en fot innenfor den litterære verdenen, for enhver pris. Ikke som en som skapte noe selv, en som skrev og ble publisert, men en snylter, en som skrev som de andre skrev, et sekundærmenneske.⁴⁵ (V: 454)

Karl Ove views his critical activity and his literary imitations as evidence of being an inferior, second-rate human, as a parasite in the literary field, and that criticism is his only desperate point of entry into the realm of literature. In this realm he will never be crowned king, as he is doomed to remain a court jester whose role is to praise, admire and entertain, never to rule.

For Knausgård as rewriter, his strategy may be to make his revenge against the literary field seem even more impressive and grandiose for the reader. No matter how much Karl Ove doubts his own literary abilities within the diegesis of *Min kamp* V, the reader is

⁴⁵ "I realised how this might seem through Tore's eyes. But it would only be like this for the few weeks it would take him to get to know me properly and suss out what was what, I was a wannabe who was actually unable to write because I had nothing to say, who wasn't honest enough with himself to draw the appropriate conclusion and was therefore trying to get a foot in the world of literature at any cost. Not as someone who created something himself, someone who wrote and was published, but as a parasite, as someone who wrote as others wrote, a second-rater." (MS V: 492)

now reading the fifth volume in his highly successful series, and thus is aware that he will become one of the defining contemporary literary figures of Norwegian literature. Yet, in Knausgård's autoreceptive narration of himself as an aspiring author and critic, the doubt he feels never spreads to his ability to understand what constitutes good and bad literature, merely that he is unable to create it himself other than in attempts at imitation and demonstration. Rather, returning below to the critical activity itself, during his time at Studentradioen Knausgård places explicit emphasis on his ability to objectively evaluate literary quality.

Killing Idols: The Ten Most Overrated Authors

If Knausgård's critical activity at *Studvest* was in part marked by hailing the skill and originality of literary predecessors, he makes a break from this in the fifteen-minute segment containing a list of the ten most overrated authors in Norway broadcasted by Studentradioen in Bergen in April 1993 (Knausgård 1993a).⁴⁶ Contrary to his reviews of for example Rushdie and Ellis, in this segment no author is immune to ridicule and criticism, neither by way of international or national renown nor canonisation. That being said, the segment should probably be understood as a somewhat satirical piece by way of its format, context and audience. Simultaneously, however, it can still be read as a representation of a young, provocative, and ambitious literary voice, who may feel compelled to sneer at established giants in the literary field. Throughout the analysis of this segment, therefore, it is necessary to keep in mind both the possibility of reading the radio segment as humoristic and the possibility of reading it as indicative of an aspiring literato, that is, not to view these readings as mutually exclusive.

In the radio segment, Knausgård reads from a prepared text, with a different voice reading the authors' rankings on the list. Although he displays assertiveness and confidence, throughout the segment Knausgård's tone of voice is fairly neutral, without much emotion or feeling.⁴⁷ Before giving his list, Knausgård makes a few methodological clarifications. He points out that an evaluation of overrated authors would usually be dependent on the milieu the critic belongs to, as this would inform the criteria for rating the work as more valuable than its "egentlige verdi" (Knausgård 1993a).⁴⁸ Knausgård states that he does not belong to

⁴⁶ See appendix III for a full transcript and English translation of "De ti mest overvurderte forfattere".

⁴⁷ In the transcript I have indicated instances where Knausgård places stress on words or parts of speech by using italics.

⁴⁸ "true value"

any kind of milieu, and is therefore capable of conducting a “fri, utvungen og objektiv vurdering av andres vurderinger av bøker” (ibid.).⁴⁹ Further, he makes some clarifying comments about two types of critics: the intellectuals, who write criticism, and the simple critics, who write journalistic reviews. He further distinguishes between the intellectuals’ interest in form and style, while the simple critics focus on content. The different interests naturally result in different evaluations, and Knausgård’s point is to highlight the conflict between high-brow and low-brow criticism, implying pretentiousness in the first category and lack of literary knowledge in the second. He states that he does not belong to either category, nor is he being paid for this review, further assuring the listeners that they are guaranteed an “ukorrupt” run-down (ibid.).⁵⁰ In other words, Knausgård attempts to thoroughly assure the listeners that he is unbiased and without interest or agenda.

By claiming to be completely objective and free, Knausgård is setting himself up to be a critic of utopian dimensions. If read as satirical critique, this justification could perhaps be attributed to Knausgård performing the role of an unbiased critic, or at least a critic who views himself as unbiased. If read in earnest, Knausgård seems to establish himself as a critic who has the ability to see and do what an entire literary field has been unable to: evaluate texts and authors for what they really are without a personal agenda. However, in giving assurances, Knausgård might be involuntarily giving away that there is an agenda. Comparable to a child who without being probed exclaims “I haven’t been in the cookie jar!”, Knausgård inadvertently calls the agendaless criticism into question. Yet, that does not mean the distinction between the intellectuals and the simple critics, or the problem of the subjectivity of taste, is taken out of the blue. Rather, the addressed conflict is certainly well-known in the field of criticism, and thus not a gratuitous clarification.

From least to most overrated of the overrated, the list contains:

- 10: Milan Kundera
- 9: Jon Fosse
- 8: Samuel Beckett
- 7: Dag Solstad
- 6: Thomas Bernhard
- 5: Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- 4: Ole Robert Sunde

⁴⁹ “free, unconstrained, and objective assessment of other people’s assessment of books”

⁵⁰ “un-corrupted”

3: Marcel Proust

2: Kjartan Fløgstad

1: James Joyce

Beginning with Kundera, Knausgård states that while his books are boring, “drittkjedelige for å være nøyaktig”, there is no getting around the fact that they are good (Knausgård 1993a).⁵¹ However, the problem for Knausgård seems to be the univocal consensus and insistence of Kundera’s relevance for the contemporary novel. In opposition to this, Knausgård disparagingly deems Kundera’s emphasis on the fictionality of his characters as posed quasi-intellectualism, which some critics have wrongfully perceived as a mark of quality literature.

Similarly, the disparity between the boringness of his work and the allotted cult status is the overarching problem Knausgård also finds in Jon Fosse.

Den [kult]statusen har han fått av folk som ikke vil være som andre folk. De er avhengige av et objekt de kan dyrke. Se så bra! Og dette objektet må være så sært at *ingen* andre vil finne på å like det.⁵² (ibid., emphasis added based on stress in original recording)

As mentioned in the introduction to part II, Fosse was one of Knausgård’s teachers at Skrivekunstakademiet. Going by the renditions of the criticism Karl Ove receives during his year as a student there in volume V (cf. V: 113-123), it is not unlikely Knausgård feels particularly vengeful towards Fosse. In the radio segment he claims that Fosse has missed the most basic qualitative criterion: variation. “Han har et forråd på et par hundre ord, som blir gjentatt og gjentatt og gjentatt” (Knausgård 1993a).⁵³ While he commends Fosse’s aim of tying everyday events to existential questions, Knausgård claims that this is done in a manner that is completely robbed of insight, and as a result becomes “utrolig uvesentlig” (ibid.).⁵⁴ Coincidentally, and to foreshadow his critical texts in *Klassekampen* that I discuss in chapter 4, in 1996 Knausgård seems to change his tune, and joins the cult of Fosse as he names *Melancholia II* (1996) the best book of the year (Knausgård 1996a; 1996d). Yet, in this radio segment, Fosse, as well as the other authors, seems to be considered to be much ado about nothing.

⁵¹ “bloody boring to be exact”

⁵² “This [cult] status has been given to him by people who don’t want to be like other people. They rely on an object they can worship. Look, how wonderful! And this object has to be so peculiar that *no one* else would dream of liking it.”

⁵³ “His vocabulary consists of a couple of hundred words that are repeated and repeated and repeated.”

⁵⁴ “unbelievably irrelevant”

The nothing is seemingly quite literal when it comes to Beckett and *Waiting for Godot* (1955). Knausgård flat out names it a disappointment: “Når jeg leser bøker, vil jeg lese om *noe*, hvem gidder å lese om ingenting?” (Knausgård 1993a: emphasis added based on stress in original recording).⁵⁵ Again, if read in earnest, this seems quite contrary to his view of Beckett in the review of the seven short story collections in December 1992, where Knausgård was outraged with the comparison between Finn Carling and Beckett:

Becketts tekster er, som alle vet, uten ett ord for mye. Han skrev kortere og kortere for hver gang, nærma seg nullpunktet, ingenting [...].⁵⁶ (Knausgård 1992c)

However, in the radio segment Knausgård provides some resistance against Beckett, questioning the nothing as a mark of quality. In this respect, it could be argued that Knausgård is posing as an anti-intellectual: both Beckett and Fosse is a favourite among the elitist, intellectual critics that Knausgård claims to not belong to.

A theme begins to emerge in Knausgård’s list, and not surprisingly Norwegian author Dag Solstad is, as the others, labelled as being boring and repetitive. However, this is not only relating to the topics he writes about, but the mere fact that all his books seem to be about himself: “Dag Solstad er en kjedelig person som skriver om sin egen kjedelige person” (Knausgård 1993a).⁵⁷ Knausgård highlights that Solstad is an example of an author who has been “geniforklart av både de enkle og de intellektuelle” (ibid.).⁵⁸ But alas, in Solstad’s case that is not as one might expect a sign of quality, as Knausgård claims he is never able to get past the glorification of his own person and his great heroic deed: joining AKP(m-l), the Worker’s Communist Party (Marxist-Leninists).⁵⁹

⁵⁵ “When I read books, I want to read about *something*, who can be bothered to read about nothing?”

⁵⁶ “Beckett’s texts are, as everyone knows, without one superfluous word. He wrote shorter and shorter each time, approaching zero, nothing [...]”

⁵⁷ “Dag Solstad is a boring person who writes about his own boring person”

⁵⁸ “declared a genius by both the simple [critics] and the intellectuals”

⁵⁹ In his swansong review for *Studvest*, Knausgård’s ironic tone towards Solstad continues, but mingled with a more sympathetic reading as he writes: “Kjedsomhet er dypt undervurdert [Boredom is deeply underrated]” and he wants to “slå et slag for de kjedelige bøkene [strike a blow for the boring books]” (Knausgård 1994). While he also points to Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Ole Robert Sunde, and Jon Fosse in this text, he uses Solstad as the prime example of a master of boredom – boredom as a skilful concentration of nothing, boredom as giving value to things and events that would ordinarily not be of concern (ibid.). He seems to view *Roman elleve, bok atten* (1992) and *Genanse og verdighet* (1994) in a slightly more positive light than the rest of Solstad’s works, as here Knausgård claims that Solstad moves from boring monomania to a concentration of boredom. However, both novels seem to sabotage themselves in what Knausgård sees as a near-impossible task: to make literature out of the impenetrably boring, namely middle-aged tax collectors and high school teachers.

Number six on the list, Thomas Bernhard, is called repetitive with regards to his critical tone, which Knausgård views as characterised by a bitter and incompressible inability to find anything positive to write about (ibid.). Dostoyevsky, on the other hand, he finds entertaining, but not as high-brow literature with psychological insights as the intellectuals would have it, but merely as an entertaining melodrama: “For meg er Dostojevskij jevngod med kiosklitteratur” (ibid.).⁶⁰ In a claim somewhat reminiscent of the critique imbedded in Hamsun’s idiosyncratic parody of Dostoyevsky in *Sult* and *Mysterier*, Knausgård states that Raskolnikov and Prince Myshkin are underdeveloped characters with no psychological depth, making the texts “billige” but still rather amusing books (ibid.).⁶¹

Jumping to the third name on the list, he dismisses yet another canonised author with haughty ease, by naming Marcel Proust’s attention to detail in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927) nauseating: “Tittelen er uvanlig dekkende, for den tanken dukker opp igjen og igjen mens du leser Prousts verk: alt du kunne ha gjort istendenfor all den tid du taper” (ibid.).⁶² To further foreshadow the analysis of a future critical text that I discuss in chapter 4, if this statement regarding Proust is taken in earnest, then Knausgård’s view of Proust changes diametrically during the next few years, as the essay “Den sommeren jeg ringte til Marcel Proust” (1998) is characterised by deep-felt admiration.⁶³

As number four and number two on the list, Knausgård places the two Norwegian authors Ole Robert Sunde and Kjartan Fløgstad. It is perhaps with these authors that Knausgård highlights most vigorously the conflict between the intellectuals and the simple critics. The intellectuals view Sunde as one of Norway’s most important contemporary authors, while the simple critics see him as incomprehensible (Knausgård 1993a). Here Knausgård is referring to the debate regarding Sunde’s *Naturligvis måtte hun ringe* (1992) between journalist Fredrik Wandrup and literary scholar Arild Linneberg. Wandrup ridiculed Sunde’s text as unintelligible and impenetrable chaos, which left him feeling almost offended

⁶⁰ “For me, Dostoyevsky is equal to pulp fiction”

⁶¹ “cheap”. The parody I am referring to has been explored by for example by Martin Nag, where he uses the term parody to include Hamsun’s unconscious or half-unconscious continuations of Dostoyevsky (Nag 1993: 29-30). Nag shows how Hamsun attempts to magnify and multiply the “sjælelige Rørelser [stirrings/movements of the soul]” in the character of Raskolnikov via the first-person narrator in *Sult*, and how Nagel in *Mysterier* can be read as a parody of several of Dostoyevsky’s characters, among them Raskolnikov and Prince Myshkin (ibid.: 29-35).

⁶² “The title is exceptionally encapsulating, as the thought pops up again and again while you are reading Proust’s work: everything you could have done instead in all the time you lose”

⁶³ “That Summer I Rang Marcel Proust”

with the patience that it expected of him as a reader (Wandrup 1992).⁶⁴ Linneberg, on the other hand, saw *Naturligvis måtte hun ringe* as a text that set a new standard for the Norwegian novel, and that in creating an unreadable novel, Sunde displays modern chaos theory in both content and form (Linneberg 1992).⁶⁵ Wandrup responded to Linneberg, arguing that both Linneberg and Sunde have a complete disregard for the reader, illustrating how they both operate within a cultural vacuum of literary theorisation (Wandrup 1993).⁶⁶ Knausgård, as the free and objective reviewer, sarcastically mocks Sunde's "påklistra kvasi-intellektualitet" and, like Wandrup, sardonically scorns the adherence to modern chaos theory, as it takes its form simply in the fact that the book itself is chaotic and unreadable: "Genialt." (Knausgård 1993a).⁶⁷ As Knausgård sees it, and again just like Wandrup, this ultimately results in making a mockery of his readers. Even though he does not mention Wandrup specifically, Knausgård seems to paraphrase his criticism of Sunde, and Wandrup's later response to Linneberg. Arguably, this shows that if the radio segment is understood as an attempt to dismiss established authors as a young independent critical voice, Knausgård is still highly dependent on, in this case, journalistic critical authorities in the field, not to mention on imitating their critical opinions. Further, it distances Knausgård from the influence of

⁶⁴ Wandrup argues, referring to the words of Swedish author Olof Lagercrantz, that a novel "forsyner leseren med et oversiktlig univers i en kaotisk verden [supplies the reader with an orderly universe in a chaotic world]" (Wandrup 1992). In this respect, he names Sunde's *Naturligvis måtte hun ringe* a complete failure. He continues by stating that many modern texts attempt to combine the orderly with creating uneasiness and doubt in the reader's mind, and represent a "oppløst subjekt, som det heter hos moteriktige modernister ['dissolved subject', as modernists so fashionably call it]". For Wandrup, Sunde manages to do neither as the text is unintelligible and impenetrable. Commenting with disbelief on Gyldendal's claim that Sunde is "i sentrum av norsk litteratur [at the centre of Norwegian literature]", he doubts that Sunde's work has sparked any kind of significant interest among Norwegian readers, noting that Gyldendal has been unwilling to release the sales numbers for Sunde's previous text, *Kontrapunktiske* (1987).

⁶⁵ Linneberg claims that no other novel can compare to Sunde's when it comes to resisting quick reading, "(les: markedstilpassa konsumkultur) [i.e.: market-oriented consumerist culture]" (Linneberg 1992: 62). He compares *Naturligvis måtte hun ringe* to Fløgstad's *Det 7. klima*, stating that Sunde has succeeded in what Fløgstad only partly managed to do: create an unreadable novel, if measured by traditional norms. He sees it as a radical breakdown of the grand narrative; as an anti-novel; a montage of plot fragments; "en fenomenologisk undersøkelse av sjølbevisstens historiske karakter [a phenomenological examination of the historical character of self-consciousness]"; a novel that focuses on both reality and logic, aesthetics and epistemology, as well as content and form as chaos.

⁶⁶ Wandrup names the reader "litteraturforbrukeren [the consumer of literature]", arguing that they deserve respect (Wandrup 1993). He ridicules Linneberg's argument that *Naturligvis måtte hun ringe* displays chaos theory in both content and form: "Ja vel, der kom bjella på katten [Okay, the cat has been belled]". For Wandrup, Linneberg seems to use Sunde to confirm his own theoretical convictions, and neither Linneberg's nor Sunde's respective enterprises benefit anyone other than themselves. Thus, the problem, as Wandrup sees it, is that both Sunde and Linneberg operate in a cultural vacuum that asserts a view of art that isolates both the artist and the work, as well as the academic critic, in their own universe, rendering their work to be left without recipients.

⁶⁷ "[forcibly/not naturally] affixed quasi-intellectualism"; "Genius."

Linneberg, who taught Knausgård at the University of Bergen, and who he in *Min kamp V* claims to have had great power over him as an established literary scholar (V: 288).

Fløgstad has according to Knausgård alternated between camps, by being named too simple by the intellectuals and too difficult by the simple critics at different stages in his career (Knausgård 1993a). Comparable to the dismissal of Sunde's chaos theory, Knausgård names Fløgstad's *Det 7. klima* an assertion of modern language theory "som bare to-tre stykker har hørt om her i landet" (ibid.).⁶⁸ Thus, Knausgård concludes in his continued anti-intellectual manner that anyone who claims to have understood the work has not understood anything at all, as the work is, in its self-referentially theoretical manner, incomprehensible. *Kniven på strupen*, on the other hand, is in the radio segment deemed too banal and obvious, as it overstates its point concerning yuppiedom and post-industrial Norwegian society during the 1980s. This then stands in contrast to Knausgård's review of *Kniven på strupen* in *Studvest* shortly after its publication in 1991, as well as his understanding of *Det 7. klima* in the same review (Knausgård 1991a). The development from 1991 to 1993 underlines the point made above: in 1991 Knausgård was highly concerned with his own perceived superiority as a reader, demonstrated solely in his ability to spot intertextual and theoretical references. In the radio segment, however, Knausgård portrayed superiority seems instead to be directed at critics who uncritically take intertextual references and complex theorisation as marks of quality without further justification. By Knausgård's own account, the simple critics' praise of *Kniven på strupen* was merely a self-satisfied joy at being able to understand the text and its references, thus forgetting to approach it with a critical attitude (Knausgård 1993a). Therefore, if this is viewed as an implicit self-reading of the 1991 review of Fløgstad, then this would place Knausgård and his 1991 reading in the simple critic category, highlighting the autoreceptive relationship between the two readings of Fløgstad. While he is still critical of the judgments and taste that govern the criticism of the intellectual critics, as well as the inaccessibility of a work like *Det 7. klima*, by now calling *Kniven på strupen* banal he places himself on the side of the intellectuals. Yet, simultaneously, he places himself above and against the typical intellectual critic, by implying that the language theory in *Det 7. klima* serves no other purpose than being purposefully inaccessible. Again, this stands in contrast to his previous view of *Det 7. klima* as a fiercely political and satirical text (cf. Knausgård 1991a). Thus, in the radio segment it seems as though Knausgård may wish to distance

⁶⁸ "which only two or three people in this country have heard of"

himself from both groups and both readings, further consolidating his superior and utopian abilities as a critic.

The dismissals of both canonised authors and established critical judgment reach a totality as he provocatively only has one sentence to spare the final and most overrated author: “Om James Joyce er det bare ett å si: han er enormt overvurdert” (Knausgård 1993a).⁶⁹ Dismissing Joyce in such a way may give further evidence to a satirical reading of this radio segment. Viewing the dismissal in light of *Min kamp* V provides additional proof of the irony of this statement. Karl Ove’s admiration of Joyce is made abundantly clear, for example in his discussions with Tore Renberg, who is also active in Studentradioen, but is “mer en Beckett-mann” (V: 448).⁷⁰ Offering only one sentence to describe Joyce in the radio segment may be an admittance that Knausgård himself is part of the cult of Joyce, contributing to the glorification of him as an author, and thus it could be a humoristic nod to his fellow members of Studentradioen.

Whether or not the points made are taken satirically, the radio segment may still display a simultaneous autoreception of Knausgård’s view of himself as an aspiring author and critic. Here I highlight two autoreceptive points in which I aim to keep both possibilities in mind. The first point relates to the authors discussed in the segment, while the second relates to the role of being a literary critic.

First, the segment should not be viewed simplistically, that is, solely as either an act of ridicule or of disrespect towards the canonised authors themselves. Rather, it can be viewed as an implicit evaluation of Knausgård’s own respect for his literary predecessors. With the exception of Kundera (cf. criticism of Kundera in IV: 371, and V: 150-151), within the diegetic time of *Min kamp* IV and V many of these authors figure as near-godlike creatures: unassailable and irreproachable, as idols to be worshiped and followed. As Karl Ove states, his relationship with the great authors is filled with “like mye nytelse som sjalusi, like mye glede som fortvilelse” as the same thought always lingers: “jeg må skrive slik, jeg kan skrive slik, det er bare å skrive, det er ingen kunst” (V: 340; 470).⁷¹ Put in Bloomian terms, this signals that the relationship with his literary predecessors is characterised by literary love, tempered by defence – defence against feelings of inadequacy. In an act of

⁶⁹ “About James Joyce there is only one thing to say: he is extremely overrated.”

⁷⁰ “more of a Beckett man” (MS V: 468)

⁷¹ “enjoyment and jealousy, happiness and despair, in equal portions”; “I have to write like this, I can write like this, go for it, it is not an art” (MS V: 370; 510)

killing these idols, Knausgård may have reached a point where their unassailability must be questioned, not just for himself as critic, but for his own ability to write.

Second, it could be seen as a way of asserting his own authority as a critic, specifically as someone who has the ability to call out both the intellectual and the simple critics, with a combination of anti-intellectualism and anti-populism. The simultaneous dismissal of the authors as superior writers and of both critical camps can thus be seen as a strategy to build critical ethos as a reliable 'I'll say it like it is' critic, who pays no heed to consensus. In doing so, Knausgård may be conducting an autoreceptive evaluation of his own consensus-driven criticism up until this point. However, the context is an important factor to consider here. It should be pointed out that the ability to build critical ethos with this radio segment, broadcasted to students in Bergen, can be considered limited precisely due to the audience and potential for impact being limited. Further, if emphasis is placed on a satirical reading, the transmission context, i.e. student-oriented media, may indicate that the agenda behind the segment was merely to amuse and entertain.

When viewed in relation to the rewriting of the author-image in *Min kamp* V, where Knausgård as rewriter degrades the role of critic as something he is condemned to become, the segment can be understood as an implicit questioning of the field of literary criticism in general. Incorporating both the possibility of a satirical and more earnest reading, his harshness towards both critical camps may express simultaneous mockery and recognition of the appealing power attributed to literary critics. As the opportunities in the field of criticism increase, gradually Knausgård's acceptance of the role he felt condemned to seems to follow. As I show in the next section, when Knausgård takes the step from student-oriented media to national media, the defiance he seems to display against norms in the field of literary criticism is less ferocious than it is in this particular radio segment.

Knausgård for *Morgenbladet*

In 1993 Knausgård begins writing texts and criticism in nationally distributed newspapers and journals.⁷² He continues to write for *Studvest* until 1994, and the gradual transition into national media in the period 1993-1994 is marked by Knausgård aiming to establish himself

⁷² Knausgård writes his first review in *Vinduet* in 1993, on the Czech-Norwegian author Michael Konupek's *I sin tid* (1993). In this review he continues to demonstrate his poststructuralist schooling, and maintains the theme of calling the object-text boring, irrelevant, and totally robbed of intelligent insights (Knausgård 1993b: 29-30).

as a critic in the literary field. In 1993 Knausgård writes two critical texts for the weekly newspaper *Morgenbladet*. Knausgård's strategy seems to be to mirror the language of established, academic critics, and by extension to justify his newfound position as a critic in nation-wide media by continuing the strategy of proving his knowledge of literature. Knausgård's first review in *Morgenbladet* is a short essayistic text on *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*, the first volume in Thomas Mann's four-part series *Joseph und seine Brüder* (1933-43), in relation to it having been translated to Norwegian in 1993.⁷³ The second is a review of young Norwegian author Stig Sæterbakken's second novel, *Det nye testamentet*.⁷⁴ In both texts, Knausgård seemingly aims to show the breadth of his understanding of twentieth-century literature, perhaps to justify his role as a novice critic for one of the most esteemed newspapers in Norway in terms of intellectual journalism. These two critical texts function to further suggest two tendencies in Knausgård's critical activity: 1) the reliance on critical authorities, and 2) the continued strategy of his 'slaughtering' of young authors with whom he is competing with for recognition in the literary field.

To Depend on Authorities

Knausgård's essay "Manns myter" illustrates his dependency on established critical authorities in the literary field.⁷⁵ However, I give fair warning that this example is subject to some degree of speculation, specifically about the interaction that may have occurred between Knausgård's essay on Mann and Alf van der Hagen's very similar review of Mann's text on the NRK radio programme *Kritikertorget*. As I touch on below when discussing the rewriting of this diegetic time in *Min kamp* V, the suspicion of a potential interaction between the two texts is strengthened by the fact that Knausgård was first intended to review *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* on *Kritikertorget*, and in the fifth volume Knausgård as rewriter describes how he went to NRK to record the programme (cf. V: 464-465).

There is an overarching tendency in Knausgård's criticism of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* in *Morgenbladet*: it is fairly vague, and it seems to be directed at an audience that have already read the object-text. Knausgård defines *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* as being about the emergence of a society in the past, and the appearance of God (Knausgård 1993c). In this respect, Knausgård contrasts the text to the rest of Mann's work, which he sees as an exploration of

⁷³ English translation of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*: *The Stories of Jacob/The Tales of Jacob*, the first instalment in the four-volume work *Joseph and His Brothers*.

⁷⁴ Translation of the title: *The New Testament*.

⁷⁵ Translation of the title of Knausgård's review: "Mann's Myths"

the dissolution and decay of his contemporary bourgeois society, and the absence of God. He compares the way in which Mann creates a distance between the narrator and the narrated to Joyce's exploration of this, connecting it to a theoretical stance held by Maurice Blanchot:

Kall det fortellerens tapte uskyld. Maurice Blanchot kaller det andre grads naivitet; fraværet av naiviteten.⁷⁶ (Knausgård 1993c)

Without clarifying the reference to Blanchot further, which thus seems to function as mere namedropping, Knausgård goes on to argue that the narrator in *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* sets up the texts as a historic novel, where the narrator makes a dive into the deep well of the past, making an active choice to use the story of Abram as the starting point for both the story and for history. Knausgård somewhat nebulously states that the narrator "liker å gå utover sitt mandat, de rammene formen setter [...] fortellerens nåtidige blikk [gjør det til] en lesning på *bakgrunn* av historien" (ibid., emphasis original).⁷⁷ Seemingly, Knausgård aims to comment on how the narrator interferes in the textual diegesis, and how the narrator draws parallels to the time of writing, i.e. early 1930s Germany, by exemplifying with this text passage:

Jakob tjente en Gud hvis vesen ikke var ro og hvilende verdighet, men en Gud med planer for det som skulle komme, en Gud i hvis vilje uavklarte, mektige og verdensomfattende begivenheter var i sin vorden, en Gud som selv, sammen med sin egen vilje og planer for verden, var i ferd med å bli til, en uroens Gud, en bekymringens Gud, en Gud som ville søkes og som det fremfor alt gjaldt å holde seg fra, bevegelig og tilgjengelig for.⁷⁸ (Mann 1993: 44; cit. in Knausgård 1993c)

However, within Knausgård's essay the suitability of this as an illustrative passage is not clear, as he fails to comment on how it demonstrates the tendency for the narrator to create parallels between Jacob's time and Mann's contemporary times. What it seems to illustrate, however, is the argument that Knausgård touches on only in passing, relating to the development of the image of God in Judeo-Christian theology. In this respect, and in the

⁷⁶ "Call it the narrator's lost innocence. Maurice Blanchot calls it second-degree naïveté; the absence of naïveté"

⁷⁷ "likes to go beyond his mandate, the framework set by the form [...] the narrator's contemporary perspective [makes it] a reading *based on* history"

⁷⁸ "[Jacob] served a God whose nature was not rest and comfortable repose, a God of future plans, within whose will grand and indefinite and far-reaching things were in the making, who, along with His brooding plans and His will for the world, was Himself actually only in the making and thus a God of unsettling uneasiness, a problem God, who wanted to be sought out and for whom one had to make oneself ready to move at all times." (Mann 2005: 38)

same, rather unclear manner, he highlights the narrator's use of 'we' in the examination of how myth is created, further aiming to tie the exploration of myth to Mann's biography and the correlating events in Nazi Germany. He argues that *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* was an attempt to reclaim

[...] myten som nazistene misbrukte, perverterte. Mytens arketyperiske preg, *forenklingen*, gjør at den er enkel å passe inn i et fundamentalistisk system, ledes og brukes, uten refleksjon.⁷⁹ (Knausgård 1993c: emphasis original)

In short, the text is dominated by statements without further examination or explanation, as if Knausgård in posing as an intellectual reader of Mann presupposes his references are common knowledge for the readers of *Morgenbladet*: no qualification nor explanation is necessary, as he perhaps assumes he is writing for an already initiated audience. In *Studvest* and at Studentradioen, by comparison, Knausgård demonstrates his knowledge by making connections which he, to an extent, qualifies and explains. Thus, in the student-oriented media he assumed a role of a critic who teaches the reader something, as if to say 'I know more than you.' In this essay on Mann, however, it is as if Knausgård is trying to not only convince the reader that he is a skilled reader of Mann, but also to make it clear that 'I am one of you', 'I am a part of the intellectual literary field'.

As mentioned, Knausgård's essay on Mann seems to make very similar points as renowned critic Alf van der Hagen makes in his review of the translation of the first book in the *Joseph und seine Brüder*-series, which aired on the NRK P1-program *Kritikertorget* the day after Knausgård's essay was published in *Morgenbladet*. Van der Hagen also comments on the narrator, who he says takes up "en slags klovnerolle, som lærd historiker, og krydrer språket med lange digresjoner og spekulasjoner om hva som egentlig skjedde" (Hagen 1993b).⁸⁰ He, like Knausgård, also argues that there are instances where the narrator makes direct connections with contemporary times, and exemplifies with an extended, and thus more illustrative, version of precisely the same passage as Knausgård uses in his text. Where Knausgård cuts off in the text passage quoted above, van der Hagen continues:

Føler ikke også vi noe lignende? Er ikke rastløsheten også vår [sic] lodd? Har ikke også vi fått et hjerte som ikke finner ro? Fortellerens himmellegeme – er ikke det månen, veiens herre, vandreren som

⁷⁹ "the myth which the Nazis abused, perverted. The archetypal character of the myth, the *simplification*, makes it easy to fit into a fundamentalist system, directed and used, without reflection"

⁸⁰ "a kind of clown role, as a schooled historian, and flavours the language with long digressions and speculations about what really happened"

går inn i sine faser bare for å forlate dem igjen? Den som forteller er lik den som vandrer fra sted til sted under stadig nye eventyr. Må han en sjelden gang bli på et sted, er det bare for en stund og i et telt mens han venter på nytt signal på oppbrudd.⁸¹ (Mann 1993: 44-45; Hagen 1993b)

Here van der Hagen also explicitly includes an instance of the ‘we’ that Knausgård refers to, arguably managing to capture the tendency of paralleling the story to a contemporary ‘we’ more accurately. Van der Hagen goes on to connect the full passage to a reading of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* that centres on the gradual creation of a more humanistic image of God, and further to how the text is about “jødenes eldste historie” (Hagen 1993b).⁸² By pointing to the myth as primordial in Jewish theology, he argues that Mann intended to demonstrate a utilisation of history and myth that differed from what “de tyske nazistene gjorde i sin rasistiske pervertering av mytene” (ibid.).⁸³ Thus, van der Hagen seems to reiterate Knausgård’s point, but presents the argument in a much more lucid manner.

To be clear, this is not to claim that Knausgård plagiarised van der Hagen’s review or vice versa. For one thing, Knausgård’s text was as mentioned published in *Morgenbladet* the day *before* van der Hagen’s review aired, and the texts are not verbatim copies of each other. Nor is it to say that van der Hagen plagiarised Knausgård: as *Kritikertorget* aired on Saturdays and was generally pre-recorded, van der Hagen’s review had most probably been recorded before Knausgård’s review was published in *Morgenbladet* on Friday. Furthermore, it is possible that both Knausgård and van der Hagen modelled their criticism on a common source, which could explain the similarities. The point is rather that when reading the two texts side by side, it seems clear that van der Hagen’s review fills in the gaps and clarifies the theoretical statements, connections, and references that Knausgård fails to make explicit, which in Knausgård’s text impedes the communication between critic and reader.

I consulted with van der Hagen in January 2018, and he confirmed that Knausgård did in fact come to NRK and read his own review of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* for *Kritikertorget*. This is also confirmed in van der Hagen’s interview with Knausgård after the publication of *Ute av verden*, where van der Hagen states: “*jeg husker du prøvde deg som bokanmelder hos meg i*

⁸¹ “Do we ourselves know the feeling? Have we not also been ordained to restlessness and given a heart that knows no repose? 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 stations in his adventures, but only pitches a tent at each, waiting for further directions [...]” (Mann 2005: 38)

⁸² “Judaism’s oldest story”

⁸³ “the German Nazis did in their racist perversion of the myths”

Kritikertorget på begynnelsen av 90-tallet? (Hagen 2000a: 208, italics original).⁸⁴ In other words, there is a confirmed interaction between Knausgård as a critic and van der Hagen as a critic in 1993. However, Kringkastingsarkivet, the broadcasting archive at the National Library of Norway has no record of Knausgård ever appearing on *Kritikertorget*. The 18 September 1993 edition of *Kritikertorget* contains a discussion, reading and review of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*, but the review is the above-mentioned review read by van der Hagen himself. Judging by the fact that Knausgård does not appear in the programme, in our correspondence in January 2018 van der Hagen proposed that he and his fellow producers may have found it too weak to air.

Again, the course of the events is subject to speculation, but it is possible that Knausgård originally read the critical texts for *Kritikertorget* but having been made aware that it would not appear in the broadcast, he sent it to *Morgenbladet* for publication instead. Further, van der Hagen may then have decided to re-record the review himself, sharpening, clarifying and connecting the critical points made by Knausgård. If the scenario is as suggested, the dependency on a critical authority like Alf van der Hagen when attempting to establish himself as a new critical voice is not that of direct imitation of established critical opinions. Rather, the dependency takes the form of the need for approval of his skill as a new aspiring intellectual critic, an approval that Knausgård evidently did not receive from van der Hagen. Moreover, if it is presumed that the text Knausgård had originally written for *Kritikertorget* is the text that was published in *Morgenbladet*, it signals a dependency in terms of how his text has trouble standing on its own feet. In fact, the critical points Knausgård makes are not clear without the experienced intellectual critic van der Hagen's clarifying review. Nevertheless, even if the speculation is left out of the equation, Knausgård's essay on Mann displays a continuation of his acts of demonstrating his literary knowledge and critical competence, and his aim to be accepted as a voice in the field of criticism.

Competitive Exclusion

Knausgård's second text in *Morgenbladet* is a review of *Det nye testamentet*, Stig Sæterbakken's second novel. Sæterbakken was only two years older than Knausgård, and in 1984, at age 18, he published his first poetry collection, and had since the debut published four works. Already with this information it might be possible to guess the general sentiment of

⁸⁴ "I remember you had a go as a reviewer in [my programme] *Kritikertorget* in the early '90s"

Knausgård's review of a young author-competitor text: it is an overly ambitious, imitative work that fails to live up to expectations (Knausgård 1993d).

For Knausgård, *Det nye testament* is an echo of grand masters like Fløgstad, Joyce, Bernhard, Cortázar, Calvino, or Dante: “bare svakere, slik ekko alltid er” (ibid.).⁸⁵ While Knausgård here criticises Sæterbakken for the cardinal sin of imitation, he is also critical of the way Sæterbakken's novel concerns a man's quest for Adolf Hitler's secret diaries and thus for an understanding of Hitler beyond the surface of imagery (ibid.). Comparing Sæterbakken's text to Don DeLillo's *Running Dog* (1978), Knausgård argues that DeLillo manages to humanise Hitler in a concentrated and focused story, while Sæterbakken is simply unable to get past the boundary of Hitler as a historical figure of mythical dimensions (ibid.). Elaborating on the imitative nature of *Det nye testamentet*, Knausgård calls it too copious in its 1980s-styled sampling, the problematisation of language, the emphasis on the text as text, and the discrepancy between description, representation and experience (ibid.). Still, the problem does not seem to be the sampling in itself, as Knausgård seems eager to make it clear that he is very well aware of what Sæterbakken has tried to achieve, but rather the imitative manner in which Sæterbakken throws all of this into the text at once. It is spewed out on “Sæterbakkens printer-rail” as a demonstration, thus failing to function as a valuable textual device that could fulfil the text's potential (ibid.).⁸⁶ Arguably, what Knausgård demonstrates is that he, with his profound understanding of canonised literature and contemporary theorisation, is able to spot Sæterbakken's demonstration. For Knausgård, it is as if the wonder child Sæterbakken has been able to get away with his imitative acts, considering his recognition as a young author with multiple publications, and it is time Knausgård puts things right: he can see beyond the obscuring veil of intertextuality, which has wrongly blinded the literary field. Thus, the review functions to set Knausgård up as superior to Sæterbakken, but also to defy the members of the literary field who have made Sæterbakken a new young voice, as they seem to have forgotten that all that glitters is not gold.

The review of Sæterbakken is perhaps one of the critical texts that displays the greatest amount of prophetic irony, in terms of *Min kamp*'s connection with Adolf Hitler. As

⁸⁵ “only weaker, as echoes always are”

⁸⁶ “Sæterbakken's printer rail”. The title of the review may refer to the length of the novel, which has demanded a great deal of paper to be printed, and Knausgård may thus be implying that producing a long text has been Sæterbakken's key objective: quantity over quality. Moreover, the title can be understood as a play on “Interrail”, perhaps indicating that Knausgård views the novel as rushing from topic to topic aiming to cover as much ground as possible, rather than settling long enough on a theme to explore it in-depth.

mentioned in the introduction to part II, the irony lies in how eighteen years later, in the essay “Navnet og tallet” in *Min kamp* VI, Knausgård ventures on a similar quest as Sæterbakken makes, and attempts in part to create an understanding of Hitler that goes beyond the mythical image.⁸⁷ In 1993, however, this review functions in terms of Knausgård as a aspiring author cutting down the competition he faces from a young author, who is also battling for the same limited resources in the literary field, and further ties in with the motif of Knausgård as a figure who has been wronged by the literary establishment. Thus, it can be seen as a strategy of self-promotion in the field of criticism, specifically of his own literary competence which he declares surpasses Sæterbakken’s competence.

Criticism as the Glass Wall

In *Min kamp* V, when Karl Ove begins to receive more and more critical freelance work in national media and journals, he cannot help but continue to view the apparent success as doubled-edged:

Utellukkende positivt var det ikke, for den veien alt dette pekte mot, var kritikerens, ikke forfatterens, og det var nesten slik at det ville ha vært bedre å gjøre noe helt annet, for som bokanmelder så jeg nederlaget i øynene hver gang jeg skrev. Jeg kunne skrive om litteratur, se om den var god eller dårlig, og på hvilke måter den var det, men ikke bevege meg utover det. Det stod en vegg av glass mellom meg og litteraturen: jeg så den, men var adskilt fra den.⁸⁸
(V: 459)

The glass wall between him and the literary field is further underlined in the rewriting of the diegetic time 1993 by again placing the deprecating thought in relation to Espen’s literary success. Espen has made it to the other side: his debut poetry collection has been well-received, and he has joined the editorial team at *Vagant*, where he can discuss literature with writers like Henning Hagerup, Bjørn Aagenæs, Arve Kleiva, Pål Norheim, Jonny Berg and Rune Christiansen (V: 460). As a rewriter, Knausgård seems to further illustrate the discrepancy between Karl Ove’s failings as an author and how his peers may perceive him

⁸⁷ In her thesis, Kjersti Irene Aarstein points out how Knausgård’s treatment of Hitler in volume six stands in debt to Sæterbakken, in particular Sæterbakken’s essay “Hitler – en metafor for Tyskland” (1994) (Aarstein 2018: 186-187).

⁸⁸ “This was not altogether positive, for the path this was indicating was that of a critic, not a writer, and I almost felt it would have been better to do something else because as a book reviewer I looked defeat in the face every time I wrote. I could write about literature, could see whether it was good or bad and describe in which ways, but I couldn’t move beyond that. There was a wall of glass between me and literature: I saw it, but I was separate.” (MS V: 498)

as successful as a critic. This is emphasised in the narration by how his Sæterbakken review and the offer to review Thomas Mann's *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* on *Kritikertorget* are placed in this context.

Karl Ove as critic in the diegetic time 1993 is particularly annoyed by Sæterbakken's imitation of Thomas Bernhard, and states that even though it had been ages since a young author had dared to take a chance of this magnitude, it fell short of the mark (V: 464). He spends a full night writing the review, and in the morning reads it out for Tore:

Jeg skrev at romanen var som en kjempekuk, imponerende ved første øyekast, men for stor til at blodet klarte å løfte den opp og gjøre den funksjonsdyktig, den ble bare halvstiv. Tore lo så han skrek da jeg leste det.
– Skal du skrive *det* i Morgenbladet? Ha ha ha! Det *kan* du ikke, Karl Ove! Det *går* ikke!
– Men bildet er jo dekkende, det er akkurat slik den romanen er. Stor og ambisiøs, ja vel, men *for* stor og ambisiøs.⁸⁹ (V: 464, emphasis original)

However, Tore talks him out of using the analogy, implying that it would not be well-received in *Morgenbladet*. Instead the published review consists of a longer argument of how the different aspects of the text fail to come together and create the necessary movement and tension. The change suggests that the gradual transition from local student-oriented media to national media results in Karl Ove being forced to tone down some of his provocative imagery, adapting to a widespread critical context and to his more mature audience. While Karl Ove still 'slaughters' most of the novels he reviews, as Knausgård as rewriter puts it in *Min kamp* V, there seems to be an implicit rewriting of himself as becoming increasingly accepting of his role as critic. In his wish to be taken seriously he must adapt to more conventional jargon of criticism in national media and journals, and not resort to vulgar metaphors.

In the diegetic time 1993 Karl Ove is highly concerned with getting noticed in a positive way by the literary establishment. This is the main narrative function of the review of Sæterbakken's *Det nye testamentet* in *Morgenbladet* in *Min kamp* V, as Knausgård as rewriter places the call he received from Alf van der Hagen, asking if he will review Thomas Mann's

⁸⁹ "I wrote that the novel was like a giant dick, impressive at first sight but too big for the blood to create a fully functional erection, it only got semi-stiff. Tore screamed with laughter when I read it out.

'Are you going to write *that* in *Morgenbladet*? Ha ha ha! You *can't* do that, Karl Ove! *No way!*

'But it's an apt image. That's exactly what the novel is. Big and ambitious, yes, but *too* big and ambitious.'" (MS V: 504)

Die Geschichten Jaakobs for *Kritikertorget*, directly after the narration of the Sæterbakken review (V: 464). However, the call from van der Hagen must have occurred before the Sæterbakken review: “Sæterbakkens printer-rail” was published on 22 October 1993, while “Manns myter” was published on 17 September, and the episode of *Kritikertorget* aired on 18 September. To be clear, the purpose of pointing out inaccuracies like this is not to fact-check the events presented in *Min kamp*. Rather, as with Knausgård as rewriter placing the review of Næss and Ellis in the same diegetic time, it is the function of the narrative structuring in terms of autoreception of his author-image that is of interest. In this respect, placing these events as cause and effect within *Min kamp* V serves to highlight how Knausgård’s critical activity became a door-opener into the room where it happens: where critics are not viewed as parasites, but as well-reputable members of the literary establishment. Within *Min kamp* V and for Karl Ove, *Kritikertorget* represents the highest order of critics.

To illustrate this, it is necessary to provide a very brief contextualisation of the radio programme. *Kritikertorget* was broadcasted for the first time on 6 May 1990 and was led by Alf van der Hagen. Although van der Hagen outlined the aim of the programme to be “en møtesplass mellom det akademiske og journalistiske, en utfordring til akademikere om å uttrykke sine meninger i kort form”, it quickly established itself as a high-brow literature institution (cit. in Jul-Larsen 2016: 517).⁹⁰ *Kritikertorget* identified itself as a “radiotidsskrift”, and as Kristoffer Jul-Larsen points out, the programme often consisted of monologues delivered by a single critic offering their interpretation and evaluation of a given text (ibid.: 519).⁹¹ However, the form demanded much of both its listeners and its critics, and the programme would eventually be criticised for being exclusionary (ibid.: 517-519). In other words, *Kritikertorget* became an embodiment of the conflict between academic and journalistic critics.

When Karl Ove receives the call from van der Hagen in *Min kamp* V, he is exceedingly flattered:

Kritikertorget var uten sammenligning det viktigste litteraturprogrammet, alle de gode kritikerne anmeldte der, [Henning] Hagerup så vel som [Arild] Linneberg, og nå hadde jeg fått en fot innenfor. De ville ringe igjen, jeg ville bli en stemme, hver lørdag ettermiddag ville den lyde, navnet mitt ville bli et å regne med. Knausgård sier jo at det er et overvurdert forfatterskap,

⁹⁰ “a place for academic and journalistic criticism to interact, a challenge to academics to express their views concisely”

⁹¹ “radio journal/periodical”

er du enig i det? Knausgård trekker romanen fram som bokhøstens høydepunkt, hva sier du til det? Klart jeg er smigret, den mannen vet jo hva han sier.⁹² (V: 464-465)

Karl Ove imagines this as his breakthrough as a critic: he will become a name to be reckoned with, someone to refer to, “den nye stemmen, den nye generasjonens kritiker”, in the same way that he has referred to and looked up to established critics for the past three years (V: 465).⁹³ Here, Knausgård as rewriter seems to be implicitly ironic on behalf of his past, rewritten self, as emphasis is placed on the naïveté of Karl Ove imagining himself as gaining immediate power and influence in the field of criticism. Furthermore, Karl Ove’s description of *Kritikertorget* consolidates a view of what kind of critic he would like to be: “van der Knausgård”, an academic critic with a strong and clear foundation in literary theory (ibid.).

Karl Ove goes to NRK and records his review, but van der Hagen does not seem too pleased with what he has written and how he performs during the recording:

[...] da vi avsluttet, hadde jeg inntrykk av at han egentlig ikke mente at det var godt nok, men at han avsluttet fordi vi ikke kunne holde på i all evighet uten å gjøre framskritt.⁹⁴ (ibid.)

Still, when the review aired Karl Ove makes everyone he knows listen to it, and everyone seemed to think that it was a good critical piece (ibid.). But alas, no request was made for him to come back to *Kritikertorget*, and the invitation into the holy of holies is revoked.

As the episode did in fact air without Knausgård’s review, it seems as though Knausgård in rewriting himself in the diegetic 1993 was correct in his impression that van der Hagen was underwhelmed by the review. Regardless of this seemingly being an instance where Knausgård misremembers, or does not divulge the full extent of the story, the point within the diegetic time 1993 is clear: although he was not invited back to NRK and *Kritikertorget*, “noe hadde begynt å skje med navnet mitt” (ibid.).⁹⁵ The path on the way to becoming a critic, and perhaps more importantly, a serious academic critic, seems to take

⁹² “*Kritikertorget* was the most important literature programme in Norway by a long chalk, all the good critics reviewed there, [Henning] Hagerup as well as [Arild] Linneberg, now I had a foot in the door. They would ring again, I would become a known voice, it would be heard every Saturday afternoon, my name would be one to be reckoned with. Knausgård asserts his writing is overrated, do you agree? Knausgård has chosen your novel as the pick of the crop this autumn, what do you say to that? Naturally I’m flattered. The man knows what he is talking about.” (MS V: 504)

⁹³ “the new voice, the new generation of critics” (MS V: 505)

⁹⁴ “[...] and when we finally stopped I had the impression he didn’t think my rendition was good enough, he was stopping because we couldn’t keep on going ad infinitum without making any progress” (MS V: 505)

⁹⁵ “my name was doing the rounds” (MS V: 505)

form as the entry point he is destined to take into the literary field. This is not the entry point that Karl Ove covets, but an option that allows him to be close to literature as the dream of becoming an author seems to slip further and further away.

The Struggles of a Student-Critic

In conclusion, as a young critic with ambitions of becoming an author, Knausgård follows a pattern of adhering to consensus in the literary field, before gradually attempting to establish his own critical voice. The strategic use of criticism is dominated by tendencies to balance between ingratiating himself with his predecessors and beginning to question the authority they have been given by the literary field. Further, when Knausgård as a critic dismisses the younger or minor authors in more direct competition with him, often playing the part of disgruntled literato who is offended in the face of what he sees as incompetence, this pertains to a strategy of elevating his own literary competence and knowledge.

Reading Knausgård's period as a student-critic retrospectively, that is, with the knowledge that he will become an established author in the literary field, it seems as though Knausgård rewrites himself with the intent of showcasing his naïveté to the full extent. The implicit autoreception in the rewriting thus lies in the way Karl Ove is a near-stereotypical aspiring author and student-critic. Within this period in *Min kamp* V, there are only a few instances where Knausgård rewrites himself as a critic that is impressed, the only clear instance being the review of Ellis in 1992 (cf. V: 414). The dominant tendency for Knausgård as a rewriter is to name them acts of slaughter. In portraying himself as a harsh critic, this functions to show how criticism for a time became the only option for Karl Ove, and how he as a critic could revenge himself on the literary field that did not see his potential as an author. Furthermore, there is a strategic function to the narrative structuring. In rewriting his critical activity, Knausgård seems to have taken care to place it explicitly in context with either his failings as an author and, for example, Espen's success, or to place the narration of reviews in correlation with one another to consolidate the rewritten image of himself: a young aspiring author with potential and with, in his own view, a solid literary and theoretical schooling, who will battle on to become an author even when the path of criticism seems to be laid out for him.

4 Towards Author-Critic

The strategies of the agents and institutions that are engaged in literary struggles, that is, their position-takings [...], depend on the *position* they occupy in the structure of the field, [...] on the degree to which it is in their interest to preserve or transform the structure of this distribution and thus to perpetuate or subvert the existing rules in the game.

Pierre Bourdieu, "Principles for a Sociology of Cultural Works" (1986)

In *Min kamp* V, the diegetic time 1994-1995 is dominated by the narration of how Karl Ove met, fell in love with and married his first wife, Tonje. During this time, he makes attempts at writing fiction, for example he moves to Norwich for three months with this intention, but is soon faced with an overpowering inferiority complex: "Hvem var jeg som trodde jeg kunne skape noe som ville interessere andre enn min mor og min kjæreste?" (V: 521).¹ Upon coming home to Bergen, Karl Ove's feelings of inadequacy take their hardest blow yet, as his short story "Zoom" that he had submitted for Skrivekunstakademiet's anniversary anthology is rejected (V 463; 523). This leads Karl Ove to one of the many instances where he swears off writing (V: 523). Functioning to set Karl Ove's failures even more starkly in relief, directly after the rejection from Skrivekunstakademiet, Knausgård as rewriter has placed the acceptance of Tore's first publication, *Sovende floke* (1995) (V: 524).² Tore, who is four years his junior, has now surpassed Karl Ove's success in the literary field: Karl Ove is but a critic, while Tore and Espen, as well as his uncle Kjartan, are authors proper (V: 531). In short, it seems as though everyone he knows who has ever tried is now an author. But adhering to the rewriting of the author-image that battles on even when all hope seems to have faded, and despite having sworn off fictional writing, he continues to make final and desperate attempts (*ibid.*). At the same time, he resumes his university studies, this time in art history, now beginning to view himself more and more as an academic and a critic (V: 534). In 1996 he continues to publish reviews for *Vinduet*; he publishes the short story "Søvn" in an anthology where Tore is one of the editors, and a few months later Eivind Røssaak calls him up to ask if he wants to become a critic for *Klassekampen* (*ibid.*).

In this chapter I focus on Knausgård as a critic and Karl Ove as a critic and soon-to-be author in the period 1996-1998. The period is marked by Knausgård developing as a

¹ "Who did I think I was, believing I could create something which could interest anyone apart from my mother and my girlfriend?" (MS V: 566)

² Translation of title *Sovende floke*: *Sleeping Tangle*.

critic, a role which, contrary to the satirical view of academically-oriented critics in the radio segment about overrated authors (cf. Knausgård 1993a), he will by the end of 1996 defend vigorously in a polemical debate concerning *Klassekampen's* cultural journalism and literary criticism. He maintains the tendency to display and adhere to a poststructuralist theoretical understanding, which he will also end up admitting is a way of strategically embellishing his review with jargon language. In his final critical essay before publishing his first novel, Knausgård enters into a polemic with authors of his own generation, and the critical points he makes in this essay must be viewed in light of his newfound position: he is about to become a debutant author himself.

Knausgård for *Klassekampen*

In his first review in *Klassekampen* in August 1996, Knausgård is fairly negative of Jan Kjærstad's *Erobreren* (1996), the sequel to *Forførelsen* (1993).³ Knausgård places Kjærstad as the “tabloide emblemet på postmodernisme og alt vanskelige i norsk litteratur”, but stresses that he does not criticise the text based on the theoretical and poetic stance that informs Kjærstad's writing (Knausgård 1996d).⁴ In fact, Knausgård seemingly aims to show the reader that he understands perfectly well what Kjærstad aims to do, not just in *Erobreren* and *Forførelsen*, but throughout his oeuvre, drawing on Kjærstad's outline of his poetic views in *Menneskets matrise* (1989).⁵ In other words, Knausgård feels the urge to point out that it is not his own limitations as a critic that are the cause of his negative view of *Erobreren*. Rather, the problem with the texts seems to be that the intentions are too clear. Knausgård argues that the text is too proud of its theoretical points, and thus far too forceful and dominating towards the reader: there is no give and take between reader and text, the reader is served with ready-made thoughts and systems. As Knausgård sees it, *Erobreren* balances between “lesning og avlesning”, thus it does not fulfil its full potential (Knausgård 1996d).⁶ In terms of autoreception, the implication is that Knausgård as a critic begins to question Kjærstad's

³ English translations of *Forførelsen* and *Erobreren*: *The Seducer* and *The Conqueror*. The trilogy about Jonas Wergeland was completed with *Oppdageren* [*The Discoverer*] (1999). *The Seducer* has been translated into English by Barbara J. Haveland.

⁴ “tabloid emblem of postmodernism and everything that is difficult in Norwegian literature”

⁵ Translation of *Menneskets matrise*: *The Matrix of Man*.

⁶ “reading and reading off”. In English there is no clear differentiation between “lesning and avlesning”, and therefore the difference is perhaps not immediately clear. In Norwegian *avlesning* is for example used to describe a meter reading, indicating that the reader is a passive recipient of information: there is no exchange between the numbers on the meter and the one reading them, it is a purely functional registration of information.

status, and suggests that Kjærstad has overreached the relevance and value of a postmodern approach to literary content and form.

Knausgård writes that Kjærstad has since his debut in 1980 been criticised for the unwillingness to give his characters a sense of depth, thus they are viewed as cold, mechanical and constructed (ibid.). However, *Forførelsen* silenced this critical view, and all critical views it would seem, as Knausgård characterises the reception of the first volume in the Jonas Wergeland-trilogy as “skamros” (ibid.).⁷ Here Knausgård seems to conduct an autoreceptive self-reading: he might implicitly be referring to himself as part of this reception of *Forførelsen*. This becomes clear if the 1996 review is compared to Knausgård’s own critical view of *Forførelsen* in 1993, when he interviewed Kjærstad for *Studvest*. In 1993, Knausgård’s respect for Kjærstad’s status in the field is represented explicitly in the narrative segments of the interview, here by referring to the many epithets attached to his name:

Jeg kan forstå at mange trodde de kjente Jan Kjærstad. Forfatteren, redaktøren, konstruktøren, postmodernisten. Mannen uten hake. Så kom *Forførelsen*.⁸ (Knausgård 1993e)

Forførelsen seems to have caught Knausgård and, as he implies, the literary public off-guard, forcing him to revise his own image of Kjærstad as an author. The result of this ostensible re-evaluation in 1993 seems to be an even more iconising image. In the interview, Knausgård makes his feelings of inferiority in the face of greatness clear to the reader, by transcribing the questions he asked verbatim in the text:

- I essaysamlinga di, *Menneskets Matrise*, forsvarer du deg mot en del sånne typiske ting du har blitt anklaget for, som at bøkene dine er kalde og konstruerte og sånn. Ehh... det kommer jo veldig ofte igjen. Har du tenkt på... det har du selvfølgelig... men at det kan være noe i det, bare at de som har skrevet det bare ikke kan si nøyaktig hva det er?⁹ (ibid.)

⁷ *Skamros* can perhaps be best translated as “extravagant praise”, with the implication that it is exaggerated and uncritical.

⁸ “I can understand that many people though they knew Jan Kjærstad. The author, the editor, the constructor, the postmodernist. The man with no chin. Then came *The Seducer*.”

⁹ “In your essay collection, *The Matrix of Man*, you defend yourself against some of those typical things that you have been accused of, like how your books are cold and constructed and stuff. Uhm... this comes back again and again. Have you thought about... of course you have... but have you considered that they might be right, the people who have written that, but they just don’t know exactly what it is [that makes your books cold and constructed]?”

This can also be read as Knausgård hesitating to ask critical questions: it is a very different endeavour to criticise one of the greatest in Norwegian contemporary literature to their face than from the comfortable confines of, for example, a studio at Studentradioen.¹⁰ Nevertheless, comparing the 1993 and the 1996 texts concerning Kjærstad, it seems as though Knausgård is conducting an autoreception of himself as a critic, and of his ‘skamrosing’ of his literary predecessors. Somewhat ironically, fourteen years later the tables will turn: Kjærstad will be the one claiming that the literary public blindly hails Knausgård’s *Min kamp*, and that it seems “umulig å slå inn en kile av tvil i en beundring som er så massiv, for ikke å si nesegrus” (Kjærstad 2010).¹¹ Thus, as an author-critic in 2010 it is Kjærstad who now must defend his own position in the literary field.

The image of Jon Fosse, on the other hand, seems to have gone through the opposite development. If the radio segment on Studentradioen that I discussed in chapter 3 is taken in earnest, Fosse has gone from being an overrated author robbed of insight (cf. Knausgård 1993a), to a near-genius who manages to approach, going by Knausgård’s reference to Adorno, “det som gjør kunst til kunst og ikke bare en form for alternativ refleksjon” (Knausgård 1996d).¹² In a Kantian-inspired understanding of art, Knausgård claims that *Melancholia* (1995-1996) lies on “grensa til erkjennelsen, som drar seg unna og forsvinner i det øyeblikk det lar seg gripe i en forståelse, et begrep” (ibid.).¹³ Further, the narratology, the language, and the repetitive phrases that in 1993 were signs of Fosse’s inability to vary, are elevated to marks of literary quality, as it creates an almost claustrophobic intensity that Knausgård as a reader has a near-physical reaction to: “Det er vondt å lese” (ibid.).¹⁴ Perhaps as an implicit autoreception of himself as a critic, and as a way of excusing his previous ridicule of Fosse, Knausgård names *Melancholia I* and *II* as clearly representing something new in Fosse’s novels. For instance, Knausgård states that he reacted negatively towards *Melancholia I* in 1995, however his perspective changed after reading the sequel as it broadened the horizon offered by the first volume. Together, Knausgård argues, they manage to concentrate “det for alle like” in the refraction between the individual and

¹⁰ Note that Kjærstad was not one of the ten most overrated authors on Knausgård’s list in 1993.

¹¹ “impossible to drive in a wedge of doubt in an admiration that is so massive, not to mention prostrated”

¹² “what makes art art and not just a form of alternative reflection”

¹³ “the boundary of recognition, that pulls itself away and disappears as soon as it lets itself be grasped in an understanding, in a concept”

¹⁴ “It hurts to read [it]”

universal (ibid.).¹⁵ Thus, contrary to his view of Fosse as unbelievably irrelevant in April 1993 (Knausgård 1993a), in September 1996 Knausgård argues that Fosse with *Melancholia II* has created a work of art that captures the true value of art (Knausgård 1996d).

These two reviews mark Knausgård as autoreceptive with regards to his own critical views: both can be seen as an implicit self-reading of Knausgård as a student-critic. However, there is another significant tendency in his development as a critic, which refers to an autoreception not just of his previous critical views, but an autoreception of himself as a young, aspiring author: his treatment of debutant author-competitors has undergone a development.

Criticism of Debutants Revisited

Compared to his dismissals of Kari Saanum and Håvard Syvertsen in 1992 (cf. Knausgård 1992c), in 1996 Knausgård's treatment of debutant authors is marked by a greater degree of generosity. However, this has more to do with how Knausgård as a critic is generous with how he qualifies his critical points, and the time he spends explaining and justifying his dismissals, since the overarching view of debutants being too imitative is maintained. For example, he names Henrik Nor-Hansen's debut novel *Krater på krater* (1996) an attempt at copying Stig Larsson's *Autisterna* (1979): although he cannot fault him for wanting to write like Larsson, Knausgård sardonically states that it seems unnecessary as *Autisterna* already exists (Knausgård 1996f). Knausgård's point is that Nor-Hansen does not bring anything new to the field, either in terms of content or form.

Five days after the review of *Krater på krater*, Knausgård reviews five debutants where he further elaborates his point regarding the necessity of the new, as he explains his interest as a critic in debutants:

[...] er denne boka begynnelsen på noe, noe større, et sterkt forfatterskap? Har den en tone eller en stemning i seg jeg ikke har sett før? Annekterer den et ikke-litterært tema til litteraturen, kort sagt: *er det noe nytt her?* Det er anmelderens spørsmål til debutboka. Svaret er, av erfaring, som oftest et betinga nei. Skulle det være ja, blir det nølende: det nyes natur er jo av en sånn art at det nettopp *ikke* likner alt jeg liker å tenke på som god litteratur. Selvfølgelig

¹⁵ "that which is the same for all". This might be a reference to a line from Gunnar Ekelöf's poem "Tag och skriv". I have therefore used the corresponding line from Muriel Rukeyser and Leif Sjöberg's 1967 translation of the poem, "Open It, Write".

derfor [sic] så mange skjellsettende bøker så ofte har en refusjonshistorie bak seg.¹⁶ (Knausgård 1996c: emphasis original)

In other words, Knausgård sees the new in literature as something that is able to introduce non-literary themes in a text, and views the nature of the new as something that does not resemble anything that he already thinks of as quality literature. Knausgård's outline of the new proper partly marks himself in opposition to authors who depend on tradition in literature, partly setting the new proper as an unachievable goal for a debutant. This view of the new at this point in time, two years before Knausgård's own debut, is important to stress. As I discuss below in the section "A Call for the New", in 1998 Knausgård approaches this differently and in a manner that benefits the position he occupies in the literary field at the time, that of a soon-to-be author, where he allows for a more direct relationship between the tradition created by literary predecessors and contemporary, new literature.

Nevertheless, in 1996 Knausgård is fairly sympathetically inclined towards the debutants, considering that while he confirms that the answer to the question posed is no, as none of these texts deal with the content in a way that he has not seen before, he still adds in the end of his review that "noe annet ville vært sensasjonelt" (Knausgård 1996c).¹⁷ In this review Knausgård claims that the demand of innovation is not categorical, in the sense that lack of novelty does not pose a problem in and of itself. Rather, it is when a debutant and the text claim to approach the material in a new way that problems arise. While Knausgård thus seems much more considerate of the struggles a debutant faces, he still dismisses *all* of the object-texts: Magne Drangeid has made it too easy for himself by not taking any chances with his language; Marit Thaulow and Anders W. Cappelen's depictions of naïveté have been done before; Torkil Damhaug creates too much order with his happy ending; and Grethe Ørbeck would do better to depict a chaotic mind in a less chaotic way (ibid.). Still, the significant development that has occurred since his student-critic days is that he offers an explanation for the debutant's struggles, which is arguably not based solely on condescension or on spitefully placing the blame on the publishing houses for accepting the text. Instead, Knausgård points to the Danish poet Søren Ulrik Thomsen's essay *En dans på gloser* (1994-

¹⁶ "[...] is this book the beginning of something, something bigger, a strong authorship? Does it have a tone or a mood that I have not seen before? Does it annex a non-literary theme into literature, in short: *is there anything new here?* That is the reviewer's question to the debut book. The answer, from experience, will usually be a conditional no. If it were a yes, it would be given cautiously: the nature of the new is of such a kind that it specifically does *not* resemble everything that I like to think of as good literature. That is of course why so many momentous books often have a history of several rejections."

¹⁷ "anything else would have been sensational"

95), where Thomsen outlines the process of artistic creation. Specifically, what Knausgård refers to is Thomsen’s bell-curved graph of the creation of nine imaginary poems all centring on the same content, with pure content and pure form placed in opposite ends.

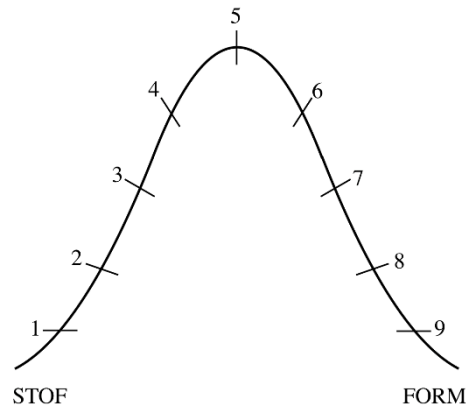


Fig. II.a Thomsen’s Bell Curve of Artistic Creation (Thomsen 1996: 14)

According to Thomsen, the first poem created will not be formally on a par with the content, as the author struggles with the content that “presser sig voldsomt på” but cannot yet be captured in an appropriate form (Thomsen 1996: 14).¹⁸ The process continues until the poem reaches its qualitative peak when it finds the optimum balance and tension between content and form (ibid.). However, the marginal benefit of formally processing the content decreases as the poet continues beyond the peak, as the form will outgrow the content due to the intricate familiarity with the content that the poet has now gained. The poet will attempt to perfect the form in version after version, which results in it becoming baroque and ornamental, thus losing the necessary tension between content and form.

While Thomsen highlights this as a struggle that faces the author throughout their creative practice, in Knausgård’s paraphrasing this becomes a problem that dominates the writer before the debut:

Skalaens ytterpunkt er klassiske førdebut-problem: romanen som blir skrevet ut fra et voldsomt driv, et stoff som presser seg fram, til romanen som blir holdt for lenge, filt og gnikka i stykker.¹⁹ (Knausgård 1996c)

¹⁸ “ferociously forces itself out”

¹⁹ “The extreme ends of the scale are classic pre-debut problems: the novel is written in a tremendous drive, with content that forces itself out, until the novel is held for too long, filed and sanded to pieces.”

Knausgård thus alters, or misreads, Thomsen's bell curve which relates to artistic creation in general, to a problem debutants face before they make their debut as authors. In the review, he warns the debutants against letting the obsession with form take over as it leaves the content to be overshadowed completely. By shifting the focus from a general to a pre-debut-problem, he might be writing just as much to himself as he is writing for the debutants. The advice he provides to the debutants regarding how to approach the new in literature, how to get the balance between form and content right, and how to make their texts matter in an original way is perhaps what Knausgård is facing at the time, as an aspiring author.

Defending Criticism

As Furuseth and Thon point out, the field of criticism in the 1990s was typically marked by professional critics displaying a clear influence from poststructuralist theories of text:

[...] og dermed hyppig henviste til "skrift", "meningsdannelser", "overskridelser", "doble bevegelser", "dialogiske rom" og "nærværende fravær" [...].²⁰ (Furuseth and Thon 2016: 533)

In the early and mid-1990s, Knausgård thus proves to be a fairly typical critic. As with the earlier critical activities discussed in the previous chapter, and in his reviews of Kjærstad and Fosse discussed above, Knausgård uses language to describe the texts indicative of a critic schooled in poststructuralist theory, but it is also indicative of a critic eager to demonstrate this schooling. This is not only evident in the language used, but also in the dominant understanding of what art and literature is and what it should do.

The tolerance for this kind of critical language was perhaps greater in for example the literary journals *Kritikjournalen* and *Vinduet*, as well as in *Studvest* where it is not surprising that the criticism written by literary students and novice critics was influenced by the norms of the theoretical language championed by their professors.²¹ However, the majority of Knausgård's criticism in 1996 was published in *Klassekampen*, a left-wing newspaper with proletarian roots, and during the autumn of 1996 a debate relating precisely to the language and content of the literary criticism in the newspaper took place. In late October that year,

²⁰ "and thereby frequently referred to 'text', 'the formation of meaning', 'transgressions', 'double movements', 'dialogical spaces', and 'present absence'"

²¹ This is comparable to the stages of poetic influence discussed in chapter 2: the relationship that a young, novice critic has with an established critic may in the early stages be characterised by a desire for closeness, which can be expressed in attempts at imitation.

Knausgård entered into the debate in order to defend his role as an academic critic with a 1990s university schooling.

To briefly outline the polemic, it commenced in mid-October when Red Electoral Alliance politician Anders Ekeland initiated a petition concerning the newspaper's cultural journalism. The petition was later printed in *Klassekampen*, stating that “kvasiintellektuell tåketale i kulturstoffet [til *Klassekampen*] er blitt faretruende høy” (Ekeland 1996).²² The petition accused the newspaper of having turned into a narrow, snobbish, elitist paper, thus forgetting its mandate as a left-wing newspaper. For example, the petitioners pointed to articles about Harold Bloom and Friedrich Hölderlin, and an interview with Julia Kristeva, and argued that this was indicative of *Klassekampen* being oblivious to its origins as a “stor og folkelig” newspaper (ibid.).²³ In response, chief editor for *Klassekampen* Paul Bjerke commented that Ekeland and the petitioners seemed to have missed the point (Helgheim 1996). Bjerke states that Kristeva, as “ein av dei fremste feministiske teoretikarar i vesten”, is discussed in “leiande radikale miljø”, arguing that Ekeland and his sympathisers make up “syttitalsradikalistane” and are thus not in touch with the contemporary intellectual left-wing movements (ibid.).²⁴ A few days later, journalist Solveig Mikkelsen responded that it was Bjerke who had missed the mark, as the real question revolved around how the cultural writers had no interest in “å formilde stoffet sitt til leserne på en interessant måte”:

Skriventene skriver for hverandre, pøser på med fremmedord for fremmedordenes skyld, og har åpenbart glede av å være uforståelige... [...]. Det virker som det er tilstrekkelig for dem at kompisene deres på Blindern nikker anerkjennende til artiklene deres.²⁵ (Mikkelsen 1996)

Mikkelsen concludes by calling for a dialogue between the journalists and the newspaper's readers based on respect and not on condescension (ibid.).

On 23 October, historian Erling Sandmo accused the petitioners of laying claim to what “vanlige folk forstår, og ikke minst hva de ikke forstår [...] hva andre er interessert i å

²² “quasi-intellectual nebulous speech [fog speech] in the cultural pieces [in *Klassekampen*] has become alarmingly frequent”. Red Electoral Alliance (RV: Rød Valgallianse) was originally an alliance between AKP(m-l), the Workers' Communist Party (Marxist-Leninists) and independent socialists.

²³ “stor og folkelig” is best translated as “broad and large, and for the people”.

²⁴ “one of the most prominent feminist theorists in the West”; “leading radical circles”; “seventies radicals”

²⁵ “to convey their content to the readers in an interesting way”: “The writers write for each other, they fill their texts with foreign words for the sake of using foreign words, obviously enjoying not being understandable... [...]. It seems as though the approving nods their articles get from their buddies at Blindern [the University of Oslo] are sufficient for them.”

lese, og hva det er politisk viktig å vite noe om” (Sandmo 1996).²⁶ In Sandmo’s view, this indicates cultural arrogance in its own right, as the petitioners dismiss critical thinkers such as Kristeva “fordi hun er vanskelig” (ibid.).²⁷ This is the ball that Knausgård picks up, as he writes his own opinion piece the following day. Knausgård claims that the debate has painted the cultural journalists and the literary critics as a poseurs in the emperor’s new clothes, and that the rhetoric used by the petitioners and their supporters is riddled with normative, puritan and judgmental views about the language critics should use (Knausgård 1996b). He defends both the role of the critic and of intellectualism in criticism, consolidated in a defence of “den vanskelige kulturen”:

I den gode teorien ser du med en annens blikk på verden, *tenker mot en annens tanke*. Om det skulle skje i et språk du sjøl bruker og kjenner, står det i fare for å forsvinne, inn i en likhet.²⁸ (ibid., emphasis original)

In other words, Knausgård places the value of literary criticism and theory in the fact that it conveys something different and other than oneself, other than one’s knowledge and beliefs, thus combatting confirmation-biased journalism. In his view, texts on Kristeva or Hölderlin can point the reader to aspects of reality that they have either not seen or been conscious of before. Knausgård closes with the point that a radical newspaper that does not allow this, that is, the possibility of an alternative view of the world, ceases by default to be radical (ibid.).

Comparing Knausgård’s scoffing at intellectual and simple critics alike as a young student-critic at Studentradioen to his defence of the difficult in literary theory and criticism, the transformation may be summed up as the difference of being on the outside looking in, and now being on the inside looking out. In contrast to the view he takes in the autumn of 1996, in the radio segment from 1993, Knausgård seemed to ridicule for example Fløgstad’s *Det 7. klima* and the adherence to modern language theory “som bare to-tre stykker har hørt om her i landet”, thus displaying a tendency towards anti-intellectualism (ibid.).²⁹ Furthermore, in this radio segment Knausgård seemed to set himself up to be a utopian, free

²⁶ “ordinary people understand, and especially what they don’t understand [...] what others are interested in reading, and what it is politically important to know something about”

²⁷ “because she is difficult”

²⁸ “(the) difficult culture”; “In the good theory you look upon the world with the other’s gaze, *thinking towards another’s thought*. If that were to happen in a language you use and know yourself, it faces the danger of disappearing, into likeness.”

²⁹ “which only two or three people in this country have heard of”. Note that in chapter 3 I kept the possibility of the radio segment being largely satirical in mind.

and objective critic who was above the petty disagreements between the intellectuals and the simple critics. Now, in 1996, he feels the urge to explicitly defend his own position and significance in the literary field as an academic and intellectual critic. The defence could be tied up in more prosaic justifications, for example his need for an income, where writing criticism for *Klassekampen* paid his bills. However, the defence could also be seen in light of how the petition may have been perceived as an attack on intellectualism: Knausgård as a critic schooled in poststructuralist theory must defend his own *raison d'être*, the relevance of his knowledge, and the value of academic criticism as a whole. Put bluntly, if he does not defend his own significance, it would be the same as admitting his irrelevance in the literary field; he hasn't become what he had dreamed of becoming, an author, and it is by writing criticism that he can be close to literature and utilise his competence.

The debate continued until the end of the year.³⁰ Knausgård revisits the debate in December in his final critical text for *Klassekampen* before the publication of *Ute av verden*. Here he makes his exasperations with the petitioners clear as he gets ready to give a list of the best books of 1996, sarcastically implying that this is what the opposition has been seeking: "Litteraturkritikk uten begrunnelse, endelig. Endelig" (Knausgård 1996a).³¹ Compared to the opinion piece above, Knausgård now willingly admits that he frequently sins against the clear and accessible criticism that the petitioners seem to call for, but implies that this is the occupational hazard of a critic:

³⁰ Scholar Arild Linneberg joined the debate the same day Knausgård published his review of the five debutants. In a somewhat ironic, satirical tone he made it clear that in his opinion *Klassekampen's* readers had no reason to complain, urging them to compare the newspaper's cultural journalism to for example Oskar Negt's and Alexander Kluge's *Public Sphere and Experience* (1972), or Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) (Linneberg 1996). He argues that the petitioners as well as the readers who criticise *Klassekampen* for being too difficult, are illustrative of a capitalistic view of journalism as a service for the consumer; journalism as easily accessible goods. Linneberg points out that journalists and media houses usually respond by monolithically simplifying the language to comply with the forces of the market, and this is what *Klassekampen* as a left-wing newspaper must combat (ibid.). In other words, Linneberg sees the criticism as misdirected and it should instead focus on the deterioration of the media as a whole: "det er konsumentjournalistikken som raserer den offentlige samtalen, ikke mer eller mindre vellykka innlegg av litteraturvitere i Klassekampen [it is consumer journalism that is demolishing the public conversation, not more or less successful pieces by literary scholars in *Klassekampen*]" (ibid.). The day after Knausgård published his opinion piece, a counter-petition to Ekeland's original petition was published. It was initiated by author Terje Holtet Larsen and signed by a number of Norwegian authors such as Ole Robert Sunde, Jan Kjørstad, Jon Fosse, Stig Sæterbakken, Dag Solstad, Ragnar Hovland, Klaus Hagerup and Vigdis Hjorth (Holtet Larsen 1996). In an interview that corresponded with the publication of the counter-petition in *Klassekampen*, Holtet Larsen stressed that the point was not to express support for either Eivind Røssaak as the cultural editor or for the culture journalistic pieces as such, but to highlight that Ekeland and his sympathisers should not lay claim to the superior power of defining what left-wing journalism should be (Brekke 1996). The counter-petition focused on how the writers in the cultural section should indeed aim to make their writing accessible, but rejected the claim that the writers lacked the will to represent left-wing ideas (Holtet Larsen 1996).

³¹ "Literary criticism without justification, finally. Finally."

Klart jeg jåler det til for meg mens jeg skriver! Klart jeg kjenner noen litterater jeg konspirerer med! Klart dagsformen preger mine anmeldelser! ³² (ibid.)

Knausgård thus presents this as a matter of fact, and not as a newly discovered problem that the petitioners were able to skilfully pinpoint as imbedded in the role of critic. In the lead-up to his list of the best books of 1996, Knausgård connects the act of list-making to Erlend Loe's protagonist in *Naiv. Super* (1996), a text that was highly acclaimed by both the academic and the journalistic critics.³³ In *Naiv. Super* the twenty-five-year-old protagonist, struggling to cope with the demands of adult life, regresses to an infantile state. As Knausgård points out, for the protagonist the tendency to make lists constitutes the liberating privilege: “å mene uten å begrunne”; the pleasure of “å dyrke seg sjøl fram gjennom fordringsløse preferanser” (Knausgård 1996a).³⁴ It is the privilege of a child, but Loe demonstrates that in an adult the effect is comical and absurd. Knausgård continues by drawing a parallel to Proust's list-making in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, both as a child and as a young man, emphasising that the list has been a refuge for stating preferences without being challenged prior to Loe's concretisation of this in the Norwegian context in 1996.

Knausgård's rhetorical and educational point with this comparison is to build an argument concerning judgments based on a popular and accessible text, i.e. *Naiv. Super*, that deals with this problem in a simple yet highly fitting manner. Therefore, the pedagogical aim with this review is to show how Loe's text illustrates a larger problem in terms of judgment: the unsubstantiated opinion implies freedom and infantilism, and is a privilege that self-respecting, educated critics do not have. It is as if he is telling his readers that the problem of the protagonist in *Naiv. Super* is the problem critics face on a daily basis. Knausgård would seemingly also love to merely make lists stating his preferences in the manner of the child's privileged unassuming freedom, “uten det utrolig slitsomme og stadig kravet til begrunnelse, begrunnelse, begrunnelse, hengende over meg” (ibid.).³⁵ However, as Knausgård outlines aesthetic judgment as a vast and baffling field of philosophy, he thus implies that it is unreasonable to demand that the judgments made by critics should be conveyed simply, clearly, and rationally, as they are in its nature complex, difficult and elusive. Ordinarily,

³² “Of course I embellish and show off while I write! Of course I know some literati I conspire with! Of course my current state and mood influence my reviews!”

³³ The English title: *Naive. Super*, translated by Tor Ketil Solberg.

³⁴ “to have an opinion without having to justify [it]”; “to cultivate oneself through undemanding preferences”

³⁵ “without the unbelievably tiresome and constant demand for justification, justification, justification, hanging over me”

Knausgård will take on the responsibilities that come with being an *adult* critic, but now Knausgård revels in the opportunity of merely making a list:

Årets beste bøker. Stol på meg.

Roman: Jon Fosse *Melancholia II* (Samlaget)
Dikt: Rune Christiansen *Anticamera* (Oktober)
Essays: Espen Stueland *Å erstatte lykke med eit komma* (Samlaget)
Debutant: Steiner Opstad: *Tavler og bud* (Kolon)
Beste Solstadroman: Dag Solstad: *Professor Andersens natt* (Oktober)
Verste Solstadroman: Arild Dahl: *Hennes meningsløse kys*s (Gyldendal)³⁶
(ibid.)

Thus, Knausgård ends his time at *Klassekampen* as an unpublished author-critic defending academic, intellectually difficult criticism, marking him as having, to a degree, come to terms with the task he has been appointed to undertake. As pointed to above, the defence of criticism should be related to his position in the literary field. It should therefore be seen a pragmatic justification for his own role as a critic, rather than an idealistic and categorical understanding of the value of the type of intellectual criticism that marked the 1990s in Norway. In other words, this illustrates that the critic is always to some extent concerned with a personal agenda, as Knausgård employs strategies of defence to protect the status quo if this is in his own interest.

Yet, this defence becomes somewhat of a swansong for Knausgård as a typical 1990s critic. In his next critical text, published 18 months later, Knausgård has become exasperated with the language used by critics such as himself in the early and mid-1990s. Again, the newfound view in June 1998 should be viewed in light of his position, as well as the strategical function criticism can have for a soon-to-be-author: creating, defining and defending the position he wishes to occupy in the literary field.

³⁶ “The best books of the year. Trust me.

Novel: Jon Fosse *Melancholia II* (Samlaget)
Poetry: Rune Christiansen *Anticamera* (Oktober)
Essays: Espen Stueland *Å erstatte lykke med eit komma* (Samlaget)
Debutant: Steiner Opstad: *Tavler og bud* (Kolon)
Best Solstad novel: Dag Solstad: *Professor Andersens natt* (Oktober)
Worst Solstad novel: Arild Dahl: *Hennes meningsløse kys*s (Gyldendal)”

Breaking the Glass Wall

In *Min kamp* V, Knausgård as rewriter does not extensively narrate his time as a critic for *Klassekampen*. In fact, he does not rewrite any of his published reviews, save referring to them collectively: they are, as the majority of his reviews in the diegetic time 1990-1993, all characterised as acts of slaughter (V: 535). Rather, the corresponding period in *Min kamp* focuses predominantly on the hope of finally managing to break into the literary field as an author proper.

In the diegetic time of late 1996, Karl Ove attends a dinner to celebrate the publication of a new issue of *Vagant*, which he has contributed to with an interview with the poet Rune Christiansen. This is an instance where Knausgård as rewriter either misremembers, or strategically places an event that could not have occurred in the stipulated diegetic time: the interview with Christiansen was published in 1995, thus prior to Knausgård becoming a critic in *Klassekampen*.³⁷ However, in *Min kamp* V, the narrative structuring of these events functions to emphasise the image of Karl Ove as an author who did not give up despite his overwhelming sense of inferiority.

At the *Vagant* dinner, Karl Ove feels cripplingly subordinate to the other dinner guests: Kristine Næss, Ingvild Burkey, Henning Hagerup, Bjørn Aagenæs, Espen, and Tore (V: 534). Even though he is in the company of the established literary names he wants to be associated with, he is unable to say and contribute anything to the conversation. For example, Henning Hagerup, “den beste kritikeren i sin generasjon” asks Karl Ove a few polite questions, and Karl Ove merely refrains from answering (*ibid.*).³⁸ Five hours pass and he still has not spoken, he wants to leave, but seems incapable of doing so:

[...] i den forsamlingen, som utelukkende bestod av forfattere og kritikere, kunne jeg ikke snakke, jeg hadde ingenting å komme med, jeg var en idiot, en rødmende, stum liten dritt som [...] trodde han, med sine slakter i Klassekampen og sine lysende karakterer, i det minste hadde *noe* å komme med, men det hadde jeg ikke, jeg var ingen, null, ja, så liten var jeg at jeg ikke engang klarte å gå fra bordet. Jeg klarte ikke snakke, og jeg klarte ikke gå. Jeg var fanget.³⁹
(V: 535, emphasis original)

³⁷ See Knausgård, Karl Ove, 1995. “Verden som fanger blikket og blikket som setter verden fri”, *Vagant Bilag*, 3/4, 2-12.

³⁸ “the best critic of his generation” (MS V: 580)

³⁹ “[...] in that gathering, which consisted exclusively of writers and critics, I couldn’t speak, I had nothing to offer, I was an idiot, a blushing tongue-tied little shit [...] thinking that with his savage reviews in *Klassekampen* and his glowing grades he at least had *something* to offer, but I had nothing, I was a nobody, a zero, indeed such

The sense of entrapment that Karl Ove feels may not only be limited to the actual dinner itself. It can be read allegorically as an entrapment in the shadowy side-lines of literature: Karl Ove is trapped in criticism. The separation between Karl Ove and the literary field is no longer the solid glass wall he described in the diegetic time 1993 (cf. V: 459): a door seems to have appeared via his work as a literary critic. However, Karl Ove is left standing at the threshold with his imposter syndrome, too intimidated to act for fear that he will be told to turn around.

Karl Ove's sense of inadequacy is further mirrored in the narrative structuring of the events 1) being asked to review books for *Klassekampen*, 2) the *Vagant* dinner, and 3) the subsequent event of meeting with an editor at a publishing house for the first time. As mentioned, the *Vagant* issue in question was in actual fact published eight months before Knausgård became a critic for *Klassekampen*, thus the dinner celebrating the issue would most likely not take place at the end of 1996. Narrating these as simultaneously occurring events creates a notion that it is Karl Ove's sense of subservience in relation to established figures in the literary field that now makes up the glass wall, not merely the act of having to resort to literary criticism as his only option. In the following scene, Karl Ove meets with editor Geir Gulliksen at Tiden Norsk Forlag, who has agreed to a meeting, to Karl Ove's disbelief:

[...] [jeg] kunne nesten ikke tro at det hendte, jeg hadde en avtale med en forlagsredaktør i Oslo. Nå hadde det kommet i stand gjennom Tore [Gulliksen er Tores redaktør], og nå hadde jeg ingenting å vise ham, men likevel, jeg *stod* faktisk her, jeg *hadde* faktisk en avtale, det kunne ingen ta fra meg.⁴⁰ (V: 537, emphasis original)

Prior to and during the meeting, Karl Ove seems baffled by the sheer notion that this is actually happening: now more than ever he is standing on the threshold to the literary room where he wants to be. In the meeting, Gulliksen states that he thought the short story "Søvn" was "*jævlig bra*", and he asks Karl Ove if he is working on anything new (*ibid.*, emphasis original).⁴¹ Karl Ove shakes his head, but he says that he has been thinking about starting a

a nonentity that I couldn't even get up from the table. I couldn't speak and I couldn't leave. I was trapped." (MS V: 581)

⁴⁰ "[...] [I was] hardly able to believe this was happening, I had an appointment with an editor in Oslo. Tore had engineered it [Gulliksen is Tore's editor], this was true, I had nothing to show him, this was true too, but I *was* actually standing here, I *did* have an appointment, no one could take that away from me." (MS V: 583, emphasis original)

⁴¹ "*damn good*" (MS V: 583, emphasis original)

larger project (ibid.). The reader of *Min kamp* knows that Karl Ove has attempted to start several novels since the late '80s, but never with the support of an editor that can grant him entry to the field as an author. Karl Ove promises to send Gulliksen something as soon he has anything new to show him. While he leaves the meeting still feeling inferior, thinking that Gulliksen had to get back to reading manuscripts and meeting with real and important authors, a hope has been kindled:

[...] jeg hadde fått en fot innenfor, nå var jeg ikke bare et navn, men også et ansikt, og han hadde lovet å lese det jeg sendte til ham.⁴² (V: 538)

In the diegetic time January 1997, Karl Ove goes to Kristiansand to begin writing, and Knausgård as rewriter rewrites extracts of disjointed pieces of texts that he has produced during the past two years (V: 539-543). When beginning his new novel, Karl Ove's writing is sparked by the idea of it taking place in Kristiansand and in Bergen, and he begins writing scenes that are recognisable as content from *Ute av verden* (V: 544, 547-550).⁴³ Slowly but surely the writer's block seems to be cleared, and when Karl Ove encounters residues of the blockage, "bladde jeg gjennom en av bøkene jeg hadde liggende, særlig Proust, og fylt av stemningene fra det fantastiske rike språket, fortsatte jeg" (V: 544).⁴⁴ After three months he sends sixty pages to Gulliksen, and to Karl Ove's surprise, Gulliksen is full of praise and encourages him to keep writing (V: 550-551). In the diegetic May 1997, after having sent yet another three hundred pages of material, Gulliksen offers him a contract (V: 554). Karl Ove is stunned by the realisation that he has now, finally, achieved the role in the literary field he has coveted for the past decade: "Jeg skal debutere. Romanen er antatt. Jeg er forfatter" (V: 554-555).⁴⁵

Knausgård thus rewrites Karl Ove as having endured and overcome the struggles he has faced in becoming an author. The event of first meeting Gulliksen and getting his novel accepted for publication is narrated briskly: the five-six months between meeting Gulliksen and having his novel accepted span over a mere thirteen pages, compared to the five hundred

⁴² "[...] I had a foot in the door, now I wasn't just a name but also a face, and he had promised to read what I sent him." (MS V: 584)

⁴³ Cf. Karl Ove's decision to begin the novel by letting a young man return to his hometown, Kristiansand and meet up with a friend from high school, Kent, which creates an analepsis to the protagonist's high school years (V: 544). In *Ute av verden*, this occurs in the middle of the novel (cf. Knausgård 2010c: 369-383).

⁴⁴ "Whenever I dried up or I thought it wasn't good enough I leafed through one of the books I had with me, particularly Proust, and, invigorated by the atmospheres of the fantastic world and the clear language, I went on." (MS V: 592)

⁴⁵ "I was going to make my debut. The novel has been accepted. I am a writer." (MS V: 603)

pages of failure that make up *Min kamp* V up until this point. This emphasises the rewritten image of Karl Ove as an author for whom the flood gate has suddenly opened, and that it was opened at the first sign of someone with the power to grant him access to the literary field as an author and who believed in him.⁴⁶

In the diegetic time of the summer 1997 Karl Ove comes up with the idea of letting his twenty-six-year-old protagonist Henrik Vankel work as a teacher in northern Norway, and encouraged by Tore, lets him fall in love with a thirteen-year-old pupil, Miriam (V: 556-557).⁴⁷ With this event and the subsequent near discovery of this relationship, Karl Ove is able to create a narrative motivation for the protagonist's sudden return to his hometown Kristiansand, and a motivation for why the story is being told in the first place. When making this change to the text, his view of himself as an author in the diegetic time changes dramatically:

Følelsen jeg hadde, var fantastisk. Jeg hadde gått i over ti år uten å få til noen ting, og så plutselig, ut fra ingenting, var det bare å skrive. Og det jeg skrev, var av en slik kvalitet, sammenlignet med det jeg tidligere hadde holdt på med, at det overrasket meg hver eneste kveld jeg leste gjennom det jeg hadde skrevet natten før.⁴⁸
(V: 559)

Suddenly, Karl Ove's view of himself as an author is filled with much more confidence and self-assurance, spurred on by the encouragement from Gulliksen.

In addition to Gulliksen's support, the solution to the struggles Karl Ove has been facing, i.e. as Knausgård as rewriter implicitly presents the struggles via Karl Ove as the author in the diegesis, is to write what he knows: to write about places he knows, and about events he has experienced, and let these two factors shape the text. For readers of *Ute av verden* and of *Min kamp*, the events narrated in volumes I-V are recognisable as events that have been fictionalised in *Ute av verden*. Furthermore, the biography of his protagonist, Henrik Vankel, is highly similar to Knausgård's own biography: he grew up on Tromøya, his family moved to a suburb of Kristiansand the summer before Henrik started eighth grade, he moved to Bergen to study, before moving to northern Norway to work as a teacher at the

⁴⁶ Knausgård emphasises this effect in his homage to Geir Gulliksen as an editor in the essay "Dit ut der fortellingen ikke når" (Knausgård 2013b).

⁴⁷ Originally, Karl Ove named the protagonist of *Ute av verden* Henrik Møller-Stray (cf. V: 556).

⁴⁸ "The feeling I had was fantastic. I had spent ten years writing without achieving anything, and then all of a sudden, out of nowhere, it was just flowing. And what I wrote was of such quality, compared with what I had produced earlier, that I was surprised every evening when I read through what I had written the night before."
(MS V: 609)

age of twenty-six (cf. Knausgård 2010c: 354-359). Thus, the two latter events have been reversed compared to Knausgård's own biography. Pointing forward to part III of this thesis, writing about self-experienced places and events constitutes the dominant poetic method and aim that I argue Knausgård as rewriter strategically outlines for his entire oeuvre in *Min kamp*.

Knausgård published nothing between his final review in *Klassekampen* in December 1996 and his critical essay in *Vagant* in June 1998, arguably as he has spent “to år av livet mitt, dag og natt” writing *Ute av verden* (cit. in Sandnes 1998b).⁴⁹ *Ute av verden* was finished in late April 1998, and the essay in *Vagant* bears the mark of Knausgård as a confident critic who is about to become a published author, and who is strategically carving out a space for himself and his work in the literary field.⁵⁰

A Call for the New

In relation to the publication of the first 1998 issue of *Vagant*, Espen Stueland was interviewed as a member of the editorial team by Cathrine Sandnes in *Dagsavisen*. The interview focused on how this issue of *Vagant* marked “et teoretisk tidsskifte”, or as Stueland put it: “Vi vil finne et fruktbart smeltingspunkt mellom samtid og teori” (cit. in Sandnes 1998a).⁵¹ Stueland emphasised how *Vagant* had consistently, since it was established in 1988, been criticised for being too academic and theory-heavy, and while the new editorial team still sought to honour that tradition, they simultaneously sought to create a stronger connection between current events and literature. The issue was entitled “Bekjennelser”, which Stueland saw as a contemporary tendency in literature in a broad understanding of the word: as a noun, and as a verb, *å bekjenne*.⁵² The broad understanding of the word was also what Sandnes refers to in the title she gave the interview: “Bekjenner seg til samtiden” (Sandnes 1998a).⁵³

⁴⁹ “two years of my life, day and night”

⁵⁰ Knausgård has dated the time of writing *Ute av verden* on the final page of the novel: “10.01.1997 – 28.04.1998” (Knausgård 2010c: 698).

⁵¹ “a theoretical time shift”: “We want to find a fruitful fusion between present day and theory”

⁵² *Bekjennelser* is a noun that can mean *confessions*, but the verb *å bekjenne* can mean *to confess, to acknowledge, and to profess*. Arguably, the editorial team has played on the multitude of meanings, judging by the different interpretations and approaches in the accepted contributions in this issue.

⁵³ Sandnes also seems to play on the multitude of meanings of *bekjennelser* and *å bekjenne*, but it is perhaps most readily translated as “Professing oneself/themselves to the contemporary times/present day”.

The issue of *Vagant* consisted of sixteen texts, and included essays by Ragnar Hovland, Jonny Halberg, and Eirik Vassenden. Further, it included a translation of Pierre Rivière’s confession and explanation for his motive in the murder of his mother, brother and sister in 1835, as well as a translation of an extract from Michel Foucault’s seminar on the Rivière case.⁵⁴ As Stueland pointed to in the interview with Sandnes, the issue certainly honours its theory-heavy tradition, and whether all the contributors remained committed to the diet prescribed to reduce the weight of theory can be a subject for debate. Knausgård’s contribution, however, seems to fall directly and explicitly in the more light-hearted category, as it appears in the issue with the additional title “Vagant light”: the title used for the journal’s more humorous contributions.

In Knausgård’s essay, “Den sommeren jeg ringte til Marcel Proust”, he begins by describing a trip to Paris where he, at a museum, finds a list of old phone numbers.⁵⁵ Among the unbeknownst names, he sees:

*Proust, Marcel. 102 Boulevard Hausmann. Ved siden av sto telefonnummeret hans: 29205. [...] Proust var en man kunne ringe til.*⁵⁶
(Knausgård 1998a: 76, emphasis original)

Knausgård goes into an exploration of this insight, as it somehow fixes his idea of Proust as a real human being, someone who has existed in a specific moment in time and in a specific place. At the museum, Knausgård picks up the receiver of an old telephone, and imagines himself calling Proust, “at det gikk an å slå et nummer og få kontakt med en sentral et sted i historiens dyp” (ibid.: 77).⁵⁷

Hva i all verden skulle jeg si? *Mitt navn er Karl-Ove [sic], jeg er en stor beundrer av Dem og synes nesten at jeg kjenner Dem. Det er derfor jeg ringer. Jeg vil at De skal vite at jeg finnes.*⁵⁸ (ibid., italics original)

The imaginary phone call sets the scene for what Knausgård aims to discuss in his essay: the connection between literature and technology, between literature and the time it is written

⁵⁴ Both translations are by Gerd Kvanig, and both original texts appear in *Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma sœur et mon frère... Un cas de parricide au XIXe siècle* (1973), which contains essays from the seminar led by Foucault.

⁵⁵ “That Summer I Rang Marcel Proust”

⁵⁶ “*Proust, Marcel. 102 Boulevard Hausmann.* Next to it was his phone number: 29205. [...] *Proust was someone you could call.*”

⁵⁷ “that it was possible to dial a number and be connected to a switchboard somewhere in the depths of history”

⁵⁸ “What on earth should I say? *My name is Karl-Ove [sic], I am a great admirer of yours and almost feel like I know you. That is the reason I’m calling. I wanted you to know that I exist.*” Note that Knausgård is using the formal pronouns De and Dem when addressing Proust.

in. Specifically, he aims to counter statements made by fellow Norwegian authors John Erik Riley and Nikolaj Frobenius, who along with writer and critic Tor Eystein Øverås have just taken over as editors for the journal *Vinduet*, *Vagant's* fiercest competitor in the field.

In an interview in *Morgenbladet* in January 1998, Riley and Frobenius had discussed the new author generation, and Knausgård argues that they wrongly claimed to speak for an entire generation of authors, a generation that includes Knausgård, when they stated:

Så dere ser en klar forskjell på forfattere fra deres generasjon og foreldregenerasjonen?
Frobenius – Ja, jeg syns de er langt mer interessert i skyttergravsteknikken. For meg er leirer irrelevant.
Riley – Feil å plassere folk i båser. Folk på vår alder godtar alt, så lenge det funker.⁵⁹ (Abrahamsen 1998; cit. in Knausgård 1998a: 77-78)

In his simultaneously critical and humoristic essay, Knausgård analyses what he sees as the contradictions in these statements: when Frobenius and Riley place the elder generation of authors in the trenches, this does in fact equal pigeonholing, an act they concurrently and proudly claim to oppose (Knausgård 1998a: 78). Knausgård delves into the analogy of the trenches proposed by Frobenius, satirically taking it as far as it can go: he imagines authors like Dag Solstad, Kjartan Fløgstad, Einar Økland, and Kjell Askildsen, prominent Norwegian authors of the older generation and veterans of literary combat, patiently waiting in their trench for the enemy to appear, that is, the younger literati. The veterans have sent out Jan Kjærstad as a scout, who, with his oscillation between modernist and postmodernist literature, seems well suited to survey “ingenmannslandet mellom to fronter, man følger ham nøye, man er litt redd for at han skal desertere og slutte seg til fienden” (ibid.).⁶⁰ Across the field they spot Riley and Frobenius leaving the enemies’ trenches: they have lost interest in the conflict.

*Det er jo som å skyte sauer, sier Einar Økland til Kjartan Fløgstad.
Hold an! sier Dag Solstad. Det er for lett! Det er sikkert noe lureri et sted.
Og Fløgstad, som misliker kampen intenst og aller helst vil være hjemme og pusle med sitt, nikker enig, det samme gjør Økland, selv om det rykker i avtrekksfingeren. Inntil videre, sier han. Vi*

⁵⁹ “Do you see a clear difference between authors from your generation and the parental generation? Frobenius – Yes, I think they are much more interested in the trench techniques. For me camps are irrelevant. Riley – Wrong to place people in pigeonholes. People our age accept anything, as long as it works.”

⁶⁰ “this no-man’s-land between the fronts, they watch him closely, a little afraid that he might desert and join the enemy”

*beholder Jan der ute, så venter vi og ser hva som skjer. Ok?*⁶¹ (ibid., italics original)

Knausgård's point with this humoristic digression is first to ironise Frobenius and Riley's self-proclaimed superiority over the veterans in their characterisation of the old and the new generation. Secondly, he aims to problematise the idea itself, the idea of a new generation and the new in literature: "For når bordet er ryddet er bordet tomt og må fylles på nytt. Og hva skal stå der?" (ibid.).⁶² Thus, Knausgård implies that sweeping away the old is counter-productive, as it is what contemporary literature builds on, and takes as a starting point. Knausgård further relates this to, as Furuseth and Thon point out, Riley's call for literature and criticism that discusses its relationship with the digital, and Knausgård pokes fun particularly at the call for writing about the internet (Abrahamsen 1998; Furuseth and Thon 2016: 531). Knausgård outlines Riley's and Frobenius' logic as follows: if the new is good, if the open is good, and the internet is both new and open, then contemporary literature should set out to write about how the new, that is, the internet, characterises us today. However, Knausgård disagrees. To build his own argument, he returns to the telephone, and argues that no technological invention since has been as ground-breaking, revolutionary and "genuint *nytt*" (Knausgård 1998a: 78, emphasis original).⁶³ Knausgård argues that photography, radio, television, and the internet are merely developments and extensions of the telephones' ability to transgress and equalise time and space. Further, drawing on the work of French philosopher Michel Serres, Knausgård argues that the invention of the telephone correlates with a time when notions of the enclosed, confined and bounded became derogatory synonyms of narrow-mindedness, as well as with the idea of the new and open being attributed positive connotations (ibid: 78-79). The question is then what kind of traces the telephone left in literature at the time when it became publically accessible, i.e. during authors like Proust's and Joyce's time. In other words, Knausgård follows the logic of Riley and Frobenius as a method to deconstruct the validity of their argument, and he aims to take a closer look at the impact the telephone had on people at the time when it was new.

⁶¹ "It's like shooting sheep, says Einar Økland to Kjartan Fløgstad. *Hold on!* says Dag Solstad. *It's too easy! It's probably some trick.* And Fløgstad, who dislikes the battle intensely and would much rather be at home minding his own business, nods in agreement, as does Økland, even though his trigger finger twitches. *For now,* he says. *We'll keep Jan out there, and then we'll wait and see what happens. Okay?"*

⁶² "For when the table is cleared the table is empty and must be set again. And what should it be set with?"

⁶³ "genuinely *new*"

First, Knausgård wishes to assure the reader that he understands the manner of impact Riley and Frobenius are referring to: he understands that it is not the new as an item that Frobenius and Riley call for, rather the new as a system, and how it affects the way of life (ibid.: 79). He then goes on to exemplify with James Joyce, and argues that Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* (1922) on the one hand engages with the telephone as an object, and only as an object, that exists in contemporary time: it is neutral, it is habitual (ibid.). Systemically, on the other hand, *Ulysses* moves in the opposite direction of what the telephone makes accessible in terms of equalising time, space and experience: it dives into a specific human consciousness at a specific time. The text goes “inn dit hvor ingen andre medier kan følge etter, inn dit hvor det kan tenkes og føles [...], det er litteraturens privilegium” (ibid.: 79-80).⁶⁴ Literature demands a different type of technology, and in Knausgård’s view the technology of literature

[...] setter opp grenser og lager båser og på den måten gir tiden et *sted*. Det er litteraturens oppgave. Og har litteraturen tålmodighet nok til å vente der ganske rolig og ikke løpe rundt som en tulling på jakt etter det nye, vil det nye før eller siden komme til litteraturen av seg selv.⁶⁵ (ibid.: 80, emphasis original)

Thus, quality literature is for Knausgård not marked by chasing the new: literature must create boundaries by giving the time it conveys a distinct location. Conducting a similar exploration of Proust, Knausgård finds a different affect: Proust objectifies nothing, nothing is treated habitually, thus in *À la recherche du temps perdu* the telephone receives a loving and exalting welcome speech as “et fullverdig medlem av tingenes verden” (ibid.).⁶⁶ The literary effect is thus that the telephone is seen as if for the first time, and seems to demonstrate for

⁶⁴ “in there where no other media can follow, in where there are thoughts and feelings [...], that is literature the privilege of literature”

⁶⁵ “[...] establishes boundaries and pigeonholes and in that way gives time a *place*. That is the task of literature. And if literature has the patience to just calmly wait and not run around like a fool seeking the new, the new will come to literature sooner or later.”

⁶⁶ “a full member of the world of things”. Knausgård refers for example to the following passage from *Le Côté de Guermantes* [*The Guermantes Way*] (1920-1921): “For this miracle to happen, all we need do is approach our lips to the magic panel and address our call – often with much delay, I agree – to the Vigilant Virgins to whose voices we hear every day but whose faces we never get to know and who are the guardian angels of the dizzy darkness whose portals they jealously guard; the All-Powerful Ones who conjure absent beings to our presence without being permitted to see them; the Danaids of the unseen who constantly empty and refill and transmit to one another the urns of sound; the ironic Furies who, just as we were murmuring a private word to a loved one in the hope we are not overheard, call with brutal invasiveness: ‘This is the operator speaking’; the forever fractious servants of the Mysteries, the shadowy priestesses of the Invisible, so quick to take offence, the Young Ladies of the Telephone!” (Proust 2002: 130)

Knausgård a positive example of how the new can be given meaning in literature, through a representation of subjective, phenomenological experience.

Knausgård's point is to argue that literature will not become new merely by being about or resembling the new, and especially not if authors keep looking for the new in the ever-developing technology of communications (ibid.). This is firstly because the internet follows a pattern of communication that equalises time, space and experience, which is in Knausgård's view the opposite of what literature does. Second, it is due to how the novelty of the internet will pass, just as the novelty of the telephone has passed. Reading the text today, in 2018, may serve to prove Knausgård's point in 1998:

Om tyve år vil vi smile når vi leser den [sic] nå så tåpelige ordet *internett* som vi i dag smiler av *sjølproletarisering*, da har det fått noe rørende ved seg, fordi ønsket om å være på lag med det nye står ensom igjen når tiden har falmet. Om nye tyve år vil også det ha falt bort og ordet kan omsider falle til ro og slappe av, endelig betyr det bare seg selv.⁶⁷ (ibid., italics original)

Knausgård thus calls for a contemporary literature that moves past the new as content, but instead focus on how narrated events are marked by their time, and how they are always filtered through a subject and a consciousness, which is what makes literature a privileged form of expression. He concludes the essay by urging contemporary literature to direct the gaze inwards:

Det er ikke det som skjer *der ute* som avgjør hvilken retning litteraturen skal ta, blikket må rettes den andre veien, innover, innover, innover, inn dit hvor alle forandringene avleirer seg, det eneste stedet hvor forandringene som skjer i samfunnet er merkbare, det eneste stedet de eksisterer.⁶⁸ (ibid., emphasis original)

While the impact of this "Vagant light" essay should not be exaggerated, as autoreception Knausgård conducts at least five instances of strategic positioning and navigation. 1) As a critic his views on the battle between the established and the new has changed diametrically since his earliest critical activity, and is now marked by resolutions, or

⁶⁷ "In twenty years we will smile when we read the now so silly word *internet*, just like we smile at *self-proletarianisation* today, it will then have something touching about it, since the wish to be on the side of the new will be left behind, lonely, when that time has faded. In another twenty years this will also have lapsed, and the word can eventually settle down and relax, finally it only signifies itself."

⁶⁸ "It is not what happens *out there* that decides which direction literature should take, the gaze must be directed the other way, inwards, inwards, inwards, in there where all the changes manifest themselves, the only place where the changes happening in society are noticeable, the only place they exist."

by peace. To continue the war analogy developed in this essay, Knausgård has laid down his weapons in the war his young author-colleagues implicitly still rage, while they simultaneously claim to have no interest in literary battles. Knausgård, who has now become a kind of conscientious objector, aims to remind his fellow young authors of what they owe their literary predecessors, as they have made the cot they now sleep in.

Further, 2) the call for the new in literature, which Knausgård outlined as a key qualitative mark in his previous readings of debutant authors, has been modified greatly. In 1996 Knausgård saw the new as an annexing of a non-literary theme in literature, and the new as approaching topics in a way that is novel to the field and tradition of literature in its entirety (cf. Knausgård 1996c). Following Knausgård's past logic, Riley's suggestion that authors should write about the internet could thus fulfil the qualitative mark he defined in 1996. In 1998, however, Knausgård argues that the new cannot be called or summoned – the new is like a cat:

Kjælen smyger det nye seg [...] inntil litteraturens ben mens det maler og maler. Litteraturen bøyer seg ned og klør det nye bak øret, de koser litt før det nye springer ut i verden igjen og litteraturen kan fortsetter [sic] med sitt.⁶⁹ (Knausgård 1998a: 80)

In other words, the cat will come to the one who doesn't call it. For Knausgård, forcing the new on literature does not result in making literature new, nor does it show sufficient engagement with and representation of contemporary times. Developing his animal analogy, Knausgård implies that Riley and Frobenius treat the new as if it were a dog that happily and obligingly comes running with its tail wagging whenever it is called. This dog brings with it words that are supposed to represent the new: “*Informasjonssamfunnet, globaliseringen, mediestrømmen [...] kvantemekanikken, det digitale, urbaniseringen*” (ibid., italics original).⁷⁰ In short, it brings with it buzz words that function to give the impression of contemporariness and immediate relevance for our time. This brings Knausgård on to the third instance of autoreception of him as a critic, as 3) he states that every era has its list of “dumme, selvtilfredse ord” that it throws at literature.⁷¹ Although he does not state it explicitly, it seems

⁶⁹ “The new affectionately snuggles up against the legs of literature, purring and purring. Literature bends down and scratches the new behind the ear, they cuddle a little before the new runs out into the world again, and literature can continue with what it was doing.”

⁷⁰ “*the information age, globalisation, the media stream [...] quantum mechanics, the digital, urbanisation*”

⁷¹ “dumb, self-satisfied words”

as if he is including himself in an implicit self-reading when he criticises the jargon language that has dominated literary scholarship and criticism for the past decades:

For en litteraturviter i 1998 er det umulig å ta ordet *den andre* i munnen uten å kjenne seg kvalm, det samme gjelder *det uutsigelige* eller *karnevalistisk*, for den saks skyld. Så langt går det at til og med den omvendte strategien, å være kritisk til disse ordene, også fører til sukk og kvalme.⁷² (ibid., italics original)

Thus, keeping in mind the theme of confessing and professing in this issue of *Vagant*, this can be read as Knausgård's clandestine confession as a critic: he himself has sprinkled the same terminology and concepts throughout his critical texts, but seemingly it has gone so far that being critical of these words provokes a similar reaction. Instead, absolution may be found in professing the new and contemporary, not through trendy vernacular, but through a commitment to a subject and a consciousness as it experiences a particular time and place.

In defending the literary predecessors against his covertly trigger-happy colleagues, Knausgård establishes a trench of his own, which is related to 4) him mapping out a space for himself as an author. Essentially, what Knausgård seems to be calling for is literature that places value on subjective experience of a certain place in a certain time, and how this can be represented in a manner that is media-specific to literature – he is calling for texts like his upcoming novel *Ute av verden*. *Ute av verden* is not new in its format nor in its themes, but it directs the gaze inwards, at a subject's relationship with the past, with memory, and with place. In other words, or more accurately Knausgård's words in October 1998 after the publication of his debut novel, *Ute av verden* pertains to a strategy of depicting the present day by placing the subject

[...] midt i verden og satse på at forandringen i samfunnet manifesterer seg i deg selv, at man har historien med seg. Min roman skal være en rapport fra samtiden.⁷³ (Sandnes 1998b)

Thus, only a few months after he published "Den sommeren jeg ringte til Marcel Proust", Knausgård answers the call he made in his essay, providing the literary field with an example of what new literature should do and how contemporary times should be manifested in literature.

⁷² "For a literary scholar in 1998 it is almost impossible to utter the word *other* without feeling nauseous, the same goes for *the ineffable* or *carnivalistic*, for that matter. It has gone so far that even the reverse strategy, to be critical of these words, also brings with it sighs and nausea."

⁷³ "[...] in the world and hoping that the changes in society manifests itself in you, that you carry history with you. My novel is intended to be a report from contemporary times."

Finally, connecting the content of the essay to the publication of *Ute av verden* adds an additional layer to the autoreception, as Knausgård 5) implicitly validates his forthcoming work by tying it to the works of Joyce, in the exploration of human consciousness, and to Proust. Comparing Knausgård's own description of *Ute av verden* in the interview with Sandnes with the value he finds in Proust, the similarities are apparent. For Knausgård, Proust's mastery lies in the ability to capture

[...] et reservoar av historie og mytologi [som] aktualiseres og får feste i nåtiden, mens nåtiden får fortid og blir med det fratatt sin ellers vulgære status mange av dens innbyggere gir den og dermed seg selv: *vi er de første, vi er de eneste*.⁷⁴ (Knausgård 1998a: 80, italics original)

As with his comments on *Ute av verden* in the interview with Sandnes, here Knausgård highlights the relevance of history and tradition for contemporary times in Proust's writing. Therefore, by praising Joyce's and Proust's respective treatment of the new, the present, the past, and of the subjective experience in literature, Knausgård makes it clear that they are his literary predecessors: Proust and Joyce, and now Knausgård adhere to an ideal of filtering the new, the contemporary, and the world through a subject and a consciousness. Taking care to note that Knausgård's essay is not comparable to, for example, Knut Hamsun's lecture tours in 1891 in scale or in impact, herein lies the function of the double-role author critic that I outlined in part I: in one stroke, Knausgård has created space for himself and his own poetics not only in the contemporary literary field, but also in a great tradition of canonical writers.

The Triumph and Upcoming Struggles

Det sies at litteraturkritikeren er som en evnukk i et harem: Ingen vet bedre hvordan det skal gjøres, men ingen er mindre i stand til å gjøre det.⁷⁵ (Torsen 1998)

These were the opening lines of a piece published in *Dagsavisen* in October 1998 about authors who had made the journey from critic to author. The piece highlights how many of

⁷⁴ “[...] a reservoir of history and mythology which becomes relevant and is consolidated in the present, while the present receives a past and is thus stripped of the otherwise vulgar status many of its inhabitants give it and thereby themselves: *we are the first, we are the only ones*.”

⁷⁵ “It is said that the literary critic is like a eunuch in a harem: no one ones better how it is done but is less capable of doing it.”

the years' debutants, as well as young authors who had made their debut before 1998, came from *Vagant* and the publishing house Tiden Norsk Forlag (ibid.).⁷⁶ Among them we find Karl Ove Knausgård:

Jeg ville bli forfatter lenge før jeg ble kritiker. Jeg jobbet som kritiker fordi jeg ville være i nærheten av litteraturen, på samme måte som jeg studerte litteraturvitenskap og gikk på Skrivekunstakademiet. Men den kunnskapen du tilegner deg som litteraturteoretiker bruker du overhodet ikke når du skriver. Det har ingenting med hverandre å gjøre.⁷⁷ (ibid.)

When Knausgård states that writing fiction and writing criticism are completely unrelated, he is arguably referring to the knowledge he has gained in literary theory through his academic studies. This may perhaps be related to how literary theory began to lose its standing towards the end of the 1990s, both in literary practice and criticism, as was emphasised by Stueland regarding the *Vagant* issue where Knausgård published “Den sommeren jeg ringte til Marcel Proust” (cf. Sandnes 1998a). Eirik Vassenden also pointed to this a few years later, arguing that the tendency for younger authors in the late 1990s was to move away from their academic and theoretical schooling in their literary output (Vassenden 2001: 68-69).⁷⁸ However, if the statement is pushed even further, to a point where it signifies that there is no tangible relationship between literature and criticism, then, with these chapters on Knausgård as a critic prior to the publication of his first novel, I have hopefully proved him wrong. From his earliest critical activity, Knausgård's ambitions as an aspiring author-critic implicitly shine through his reading of other authors, and his critical evaluations are marked by a desire to prove himself worthy in the literary field. As he succeeds in getting his manuscript for *Ute av verden* accepted, his critical activities shift towards creating a defined space in the field that he as an author and his text can occupy. Without explicitly mentioning his work as a critic, in an interview with Alf van der Hagen in *Dialoger 3: Stemmeskifter* (2000),

⁷⁶ For the debutants, Ingild Torsen lists Linn Ullmann, Pål Norheim, Karl Ove Knausgård and Ernst Ernst (pseudonym for Arve Kleiva), and for the young authors Tore Renberg, Torunn Borge and John Erik Riley.

⁷⁷ “I wanted to be an author long before I became a critic. I worked as a critic because I wanted to be close to literature, in the same way I studied literature and went to Skrivekunstakademiet. But you do not use knowledge you obtain as a literary theorist at all when you write. The two have nothing to do with each other.”

⁷⁸ Vassenden's view may at first glance seem to contradict some of the points made in chapters 1-4 regarding how young critics and authors have a tendency to follow the patterns set out by the older, established generation, especially when it comes to theoretical influence. However, there is no clear contradiction. Rather, it corresponds with the framework that the tendency for the younger generation in the early stages of their careers might be to imitate and display a desire for closeness to one's critical and literary predecessors, before reaching a stage that is characterised by a desire for emancipation and distancing. It should still be pointed out, with reference to my analysis in part II of this thesis, that these stages may overlap, and they should not be regarded as exclusively reserved for either novice or more established critics and authors.

Knausgård points to the prominent necessity for a debutant author to make his mark, as Bourdieu put it, or to usurp the field, as Bloom argued (cf. Bourdieu 1983: 340; Bloom 1982: 17):

Problemet med å være debutant er jo at du må rydde deg plass og si: Her kommer jeg! Dermed må du definere deg i forhold til den litteraturen som allerede eksisterer. Da er det lett å ta avstand fra noe og trekke noe annet i tvil – som en slags strategi. Det skjer jo hele tiden, og er ikke alltid så fint å se på, samtidig er det noe veldig *sunt* over det, synes jeg, at de etablerte estetikkene blir utfordret.⁷⁹ (cit. in Hagen 2000a: 210, emphasis original)

Following this statement, Knausgård reiterates the points made in “Den sommeren jeg ringte til Marcel Proust”, as he states that he is simultaneously well aware of how parts of the path available to a debutant author have been trodden by his literary predecessors (ibid.). Thus, in this retrospective reflection, Knausgård implicitly points to the function of his last critical text prior to becoming a published author.

In *Min kamp* V, Knausgård rewrites himself as an envious and at times vengeful critic, without offering an explicit retrospective evaluation of his conduct. The dominating driving force for Karl Ove is to create a name for himself, and to gain access to the literary field. Both Knausgård and the reader are of course aware that Karl Ove’s fears throughout 1990-1998, of not making a name for himself in the literary field as an author, will be proved wrong, considering that the reader is currently reading the fifth volume of the highly successful *Min kamp*. This may therefore be an implicit reflection of Knausgård’s present author-image, where he emphasises the struggles he faced to become an author as a long-fought battle, overcome by defiance and determination. Still, due to the presentification of the narrative, Karl Ove is rewritten as if not having the knowledge of the success he will have in the future.

Returning to the question of the relationship between literary practice and literary theorisation, and to point forward to the next part of this thesis, Knausgård’s position does not strictly speaking belong to the tendency Vassenden outlined in his article in 2001. In fact, Vassenden mentions Knausgård specifically as an example of an author that balances between the poles of the newer generation’s tendency to denounce theoretical schooling and

⁷⁹ “The problem with being a debutant is that you have to clear a space for yourself and say: Here I come! Therefore, you have to define yourself in relation to the literature that already exists. Then it is easy to distance yourself from something and create doubt about another thing – as a kind of strategy. That happens all the time, and it is not always a nice thing to see, but at the same time there is something very *healthy* about it, I think, that the established aesthetics are challenged.”

the older generation's adherence to literary theory in their practice (Vassenden 2001: 69).⁸⁰ I have also demonstrated this balancing act between the new and the old in the analysis of "Den sommeren jeg ringte til Marcel Proust", in the sense that Knausgård seems well aware of what he owes his predecessors. Therefore, as Vassenden points out, Knausgård does not fit into the motto van der Hagen gives *Dialoger 3*, "Kast alle papirene, det er så befriende", but rather advocates for a fusion of the old and the new (Vassenden 2001: 69).⁸¹ For instance, there is a theoretical defence of his writing imbedded in how Knausgård maintains a strategy of keeping his work as an author separate from himself, by referring to *Ute av verden* as *selvgeografi* – autogeography – rather than autobiographical.

For å komme unna slike spørsmål [hvilke deler av romanen som ligger tettest opptil Knausgårds virkelighet], har jeg pleid å si at *Ute av verden* er en *selvgeografi*. Henrik Vankel har bodd på de samme stedene som meg – Tromøya, Kristiansand, Nord-Norge – og det har vært helt nødvendig for meg å bruke kjente elementer, og så drive dem videre, blande sammen det fullstendig fiktive og det nær autentiske, slik at begge deler tar farge av hverandre.⁸² (Hagen 2000a: 219, emphasis original)

The term *selvgeografi* was in fact presented to him by Vassenden, who is Knausgård's friend and later a fellow editor of *Vagant* (cf. V: 583). While Knausgård thus allows for some interconnection between his writing and his biography, he still seems hesitant to allow explicit tactility between the author and the work. In the interview with van der Hagen, Knausgård emphasises the absolute necessity of having to use familiar material in his writing, while still maintaining a formal distance between himself and the protagonist and story of the novel.

As I pointed to in the section "Breaking the Glass Wall", Knausgård as rewriter in *Min kamp* presents the solutions to the struggles he has faced as an aspiring author as writing what he knows – writing autogeographically and autobiographically – became the method

⁸⁰ In this respect, Vassenden emphasises the difference between the approaches to literary theory in *Dialoger: Samtaler med ti norske forfattere* (1993), containing interviews with Dag Solstad and Einar Økland *Dialoger 2: Åtte forfattersamtaler* (1996), with interviews of Jan Kjærstad and Tor Ulven, and *Dialoger 3: Stemmeskjifter* (2000), where, in addition to Knausgård, van der Hagen interviews Erlend Loe, Cathrine Grøndahl, Tore Renberg, and Linn Ullmann.

⁸¹ "Throw all the papers away, it is so liberating". This is a line from a song by the Norwegian band deLillos, "Kast alle papirene" (1999). "The most cowardly (or the least naïve)"

⁸² "In order to avoid these kinds of questions [which parts of the novel that are closest to Knausgård's own reality], I have got into the habit of naming *Ute av verden* an *autogeography*. Henrik Vankel has lived in the same places as me – Tromøya, Kristiansand, northern Norway – and it has been absolutely necessary for me to use familiar elements, and then drive them forward, mixing the completely fictional with the near-authentic, so that both aspects are coloured by each other."

for literary release. In the following part of this thesis, I focus my investigation on Knausgård's rewriting of the period of writing his second novel *En tid for alt* (2004) and the period leading up to beginning to write *Min kamp*. In both instances, the theoretical schooling that Knausgård displayed as a critic in the period 1990-1998 seems to create further struggles for Karl Ove as an author. Yet, Knausgård makes strategic uses of the autogeographical and the autobiographical in his rewriting of his past-author image, not just as a method for writing, but as the primary poetic aim and value of literature.

III

Strategies of the Rewriter

Introductory Remarks to Part III

As an introduction to part III, I will now provide a brief overview of the previous perspectives concerning the significance of the *autogeographical* in Karl Ove Knausgård's work, before outlining how my approach expands the way this concept has been utilised in readings of *Min kamp*. The point of this exploration of previous approaches is to argue that it is possible to keep the focus on 1) the thematically autogeographical aspects of the text, 2) autogeography as a method, while still 3) considering the relationship between Knausgård as the author and Karl Ove as protagonist-narrator. I argue that exploring the *rewriting* in *Min kamp*, and specifically the rewriting of Knausgård's literary endeavours as being fuelled by autobiographical events and autogeographical places, i.e. subjective experience, reveals 4) a strategic function of creating a *continuity* in Knausgård's poetics across time. In other words, the hypothesis I drive in the chapters that make up part III is that Knausgård as rewriter via autoreceptive narration simultaneously creates distance, but also, and most significantly, unity between his past and present author-images, thus implicitly making the claim that *Min kamp* is the inevitable fruit of all his labours.

The most comprehensive reading of *Min kamp* in relation to autogeography has been conducted by Anna Karin Rühl in her doctoral thesis “*‘Selvgeografi’ – Placing the Works of Karl Ove Knausgård and Tomas Espedal*” (2015). As the theoretical framework for her exploration of *Min kamp*, Rühl draws on works in human geography and phenomenology of place. She argues that human geography and phenomenology go hand in hand when it comes to place, joined in the distinction between *space* and *place*: places “do not simply exist in the world, they are *created* through intentional human interaction with the environment” (Rühl 2015: 27, emphasis original). While taking care to mention that the terms space and place are at times used interchangeably in scholarship, Rühl emphasises that space is generally understood as an empty container, as abstract coordinates on a map, while place is understood as meaningful localities (ibid.: 22-31). However, place as meaningful localities does not imply an essential quality of the place, but rather, as Rühl underlines, “the intentionality of human interaction with a specific location” and being “charged with existential meaning” (ibid.: 26, 29). From this, Rühl connects place to the self using, for example, philosopher Edward Casey's understanding of “no place without self and no self without place”: human engagement with space is necessary to create place, and place is necessary to makes sense of human existence (Casey 2001: 684; Rühl 2015: 30). In other

words, place becomes both identity content, drawing on Paul John Eakin's use of the term, and a necessary component in our efforts to make sense of the world.¹ In relation to *Min kampf*, Rühl's aim is to conduct a thematic analysis of the protagonist-narrator's engagement with his own geography, his autogeography, at different stages in his life.

In my view, Rühl rightly argues that the term autogeography, used by Knausgård to describe *Ute av verden* after being told by Eirik Vassenden that the work was just that, can be used to describe *Min kampf* as well (V: 583; Rühl 2015: 31). As I briefly outlined in chapter 4, *Ute av verden* is autogeographical in the sense that Knausgård uses the places he has lived and knows as a frame for the events in the text, but still maintains a distance and refutes the autobiographical nature of the events depicted in the novel. In other words, at the time of publishing his debut novel and, essentially, up until the serial publication of *Min kampf* commenced, Knausgård firmly maintained that the relationship between himself and Henrik Vankel lies in merely having lived in the same places. However, when reading *Min kampf* in relation to *Ute av verden*, it becomes clear that many of the events depicted either correspond with or are at least inspired by events that are presented as autobiographical in *Min kampf*.²

As the author of *Ute av verden*, Knausgård used autogeography as a method to create literature: he used places he knows but filled them with supposedly fictional events. I agree with Rühl's point when she argues that *Min kampf* is in part autogeographical in a similar manner, in the way that the places Knausgård has been and lived in are used to recall environments of the past, but that *Min kampf* differs from *Ute av verden* in the way that it does not reject the autobiographical, as it is from the geographical Knausgård claims to reconstruct the autobiographical events that took place there: "memories/memoirs" can arise from place (Rühl 2015: 32-33). However, I propose to expand the view of autogeography to not just a question of themes of place and as a creative method, but to a question of poetics and autoreception.

As an illustrative passage regarding how autogeography is used as a method in *Min kampf*, Rühl builds on this reflection in *Min kampf* I:

Bortsett fra noen enkelthendelser [...] husket jeg så godt som ingenting fra barndommen. Det vil si, jeg husket så godt som ingen av hendelsene i den. Men rommene de utspilte seg i, husket jeg.

¹ The arguments regarding place and identity are quite similar to Eakin's understanding of narrative and identity: that narrative and identity cannot be separated as narrative is identity content (cf. Eakin 1999).

² Ane Farsethås has written about corresponding scenes in *Ute av verden*, *En tid for alt*, and *Min kampf* (cf. Farsethås 2015).

Alle stedene jeg hadde vært på, alle værelsene jeg hadde vært i, husket jeg. Bare ikke det som hendte i dem.³ (I: 191)

As Rühl rightly points out, this reflection, made in the diegetic time 2004, seems to be a bewildering and contradictory statement considering the level of detail in which Knausgård narrates the events of his life in *Min kamp* (Rühl 2015: 6-7). In fact, in *Min kamp* there are numerous claims regarding Knausgård's and Karl Ove's unreliable memory (e.g. II: 458; III: 14-15; V: 7), which in a simplistic understanding would imply that the events are fictional. For Rühl, the discrepancy between the meticulous detail in the narration of past events and the simultaneous repeated claim that he remembers very little from his past indicates firstly that Knausgård reconstructs the autobiographical events, and secondly that he uses his memory of place as a mnemonic device for literary, autobiographical production (Rühl 2015: 3-4; 32-33). Thirdly, the discrepancy seems to be the dominant reason she sees for upholding Claus Elholm Andersen's identification of *Min kamp* as a novel in the sense that she maintains a separation between the "extra-textual Knausgård" and what she names his literary "alter ego", Karl Ove (ibid.: 2, 105, 118). Thus, Rühl methodologically and pragmatically ignores the question of the relationship between the extra-textual Knausgård and the textual Karl Ove, by referring to Andersen's call for a thematic approach beyond the debate of reality versus fiction, and aiming to conduct a "'traditional' literary analysis" with a focus on place (ibid.: 6-7; 179).

In this respect, my view regarding the separation between Knausgård and Karl Ove differs from Rühl's and is more in line with Behrendt's view, which I outlined in chapter 2. In Behrendt's narratological analysis he shows how certain statements within the text have led to the text being read as fiction, in the sense that the events are fictional. For instance, Behrendt points to the statement that the sociologist Geir Angell Øygarden (hereafter Geir A), Karl Ove's best friend, makes in *Min kamp* II: that Karl Ove forgets absolutely everything (II: 458; Behrendt 2015: 86). However, as I touched on in both the introduction and in chapter 2, Behrendt wishes to underline his point that fiction does not stand in opposition to reality when viewing *Min kamp* as autonarration. The fictional lies in the narration and in the *bevidsthedsrepræsentation*, the representation of consciousness, and not as *begivenhedsfiktion*, where the narrated events are fictional (Behrendt 2011: 297-298). Thus, Behrendt pushed

³ "Apart from one or two isolated events [...] I remembered hardly anything from my childhood. That is, I remembered hardly any of the events in it. But I did remember the rooms where they took place. I could remember all the places I had been, all the rooms I had been in. Just not what happened there." (MS I: 211)

the discussion regarding reality versus fiction that marked the primary reception and parts of the scholarly debates surrounding *Min kamp* beyond a simplistic understanding, which can crudely be characterised as attempts at distinguishing facts from fibs. Behrendt's distinction between a fictional representation of consciousness and fictional events signifies that the act of remembering within the narrative is not de facto autobiographical, in the sense that it is not necessarily fuelled by actual autobiographical memory, nor is it necessarily an actual representation of the thoughts that went through Karl Ove Knausgård's mind at a specific time. Rather, within *Min kamp* the remembering is claimed to be autogeographical in the way Knausgård constructs the events of the past in writing by drawing "det som finnes ut fra skyggene av det vi vet", and what Knausgård claims to know and remember are the places he has been (I: 192; Behrendt 2015: 86-87).⁴ Therefore, Behrendt emphasises that Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp* aims to demonstrate the power of autogeographical memory in the creation of literature (Behrendt 2011: 308-309). Thus, while Rühl balances between the theme and mnemonic device of place in *Min kamp*, claiming to not consider the relationship between the author and protagonist-narrator, Behrendt adds an entry point for considering the autogeographical alongside the relationship between Knausgård and Karl Ove.

Yet, while arguing for a separation between Knausgård and Karl Ove, Rühl still approaches notions of intention on behalf of Knausgård as the author within the text. In fact, the main hypothesis Rühl drives in her thesis with regards to *Min kamp* suggests that it is the extra-textual Knausgård who offers autogeography as the key for his ability to reconstruct past events and write such a vastly detailed autobiographical text (Rühl 2015: 3). Thus, Rühl, as well as Behrendt, builds on the explanation Knausgård implicitly offers in *Min kamp* for his ability to give and method to giving vivid depictions of the past. In other words, Rühl implicitly, but, in my view, rightly considers autogeography a mnemonic device not just for Karl Ove as the author within the narrative, but also for Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp*.

Autogeography, Autobiography and Phenomenology

In part III of this thesis, I aim to show how Knausgård as rewriter creates the author-image that informed the writing of *Min kamp* through strategic instances of autoreception. Put differently, the purpose is to pinpoint the poetic aims and values that Knausgård as rewriter

⁴ "the essence of what we know out of the shadows" (MS I: 212-213)

outlines for *Min kamp*, and to show how Knausgård employs strategies to create a continuity of these poetics across time, that is, in the rewriting of past author-images. Thus, the objective is to demonstrate how the rewriting of his past author-images reflects the present author-image that informs the writing of *Min kamp*.

I propose the Knausgård's author-image is related to three interrelated components: autogeography, autobiography and subjective, poetic phenomenology. To begin with the latter, I argue that the phenomenological exploration that Knausgård pursues in his poetics should not be regarded in terms of a single, strict, philosophical tradition of phenomenology. By this I mean that highlighting the phenomenological aspect of Knausgård's poetics is not an attempt to impose a specific phenomenologist's work on *Min kamp*, such as the work of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, or Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Rather, it should be viewed more pragmatically in relation to what Knausgård and Karl Ove as author-critic and rewriter outlines as the poetic value of literature and art when he writes about his own writing and about other authors. As Ariane Mildenberg writes in *Modernism and Phenomenology* (2017), phenomenology is first and foremost a return "to the pre-reflective and therefore the taken-for-granted dimension of experience" (Mildenberg 2017: 3). Put differently, it is a return to a state of pre-theorisation of the world, objects, and phenomena, and thus the task for the author seems in part to be to defamiliarise the world, objects, and phenomena beyond habitual perception. I therefore suggest that the dominant understanding of phenomenology that Knausgård outlines as part of his author-image when writing *Min kamp* is a reduction of phenomenology in literature, rather than a philosophical exploration: to write the world as *becoming*, as being created and as becoming meaningful through lived experiences. In this perspective, the task that Knausgård outlines for himself as an author is to write beyond the familiar and habitual to reveal pre-theorised experiences. As a note, this is certainly not a poetic aim that is unique to Knausgård: neither what I see as the phenomenological ambition, nor the fact that authors use their biography and geography in their writing can be said to be uncommon. However, it is not my point to claim that it is. Rather, my aim is to show the strategies Knausgård as rewriter employs to emphasise these as *key* values in literature, and what the function of placing emphasis on a specific task for himself as an author may be.

As an initial illustration of Knausgård's phenomenological ambition, I shall give two examples. First, in the diegetic time 2007 in *Min kamp* VI, Karl Ove, on holiday with his family in Las Palmas, reads the Polish author Witold Gombrowicz's *Dzienniki* (1953-1969)

(VI: 873-899).⁵ Karl Ove as an author-critic, that is, Knausgård rewriting Karl Ove prior to writing *Min kamp*, connects Gombrowicz to something that he remembers reading in a text by Gilles Deleuze, when he was a student in Bergen:

[...] noe jeg uopphørlig kom tilbake til, det var tanken om at verden alltid er i sin vorden, at den hele tiden blir til rundt oss, men at det, øyeblikkets kontinuerlige skapelse, forsvinner inn i det vi vet om det.⁶ (VI: 898)

The text Karl Ove refers to is the short article “Littérature et la vie” (1993), where Deleuze in fact opens the essay by making the exact same connection between Gombrowicz and writing as becoming (Deleuze 1997: 225).⁷ As the rewritten author-critic in the diegetic time 2007 this is what Karl Ove also wishes to seek in his own writing: “Med hele min sjel visste jeg at det var [...] dit, inn i det vordende, det blivende, det alltid kommende, skrivningen min måtte bevege seg” (VI: 874).⁸ This is reminiscent of the value Knausgård as author-critic finds in Knut Hamsun’s poetics in the essay “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” (2008), which I discussed in chapter 1, and which constitutes the second initial example of Knausgård’s phenomenological ambition.

In this essay, Knausgård finds a fundamental poetic and phenomenological value in the battle that Hamsun fights, or at least, in the struggle that Knausgård as author-critic outlines for Hamsun: to bridge the gap between literature and life (Knausgård 2008b: 163). Knausgård points to how Hamsun closes the gap by writing literature that does not consist of sublime values and grand narratives, since a life as it is lived does not consist of these things; life consists of a series of everyday, insignificant and ordinary events: drinking coffee on a Sunday afternoon, doing the laundry on a Wednesday morning (ibid.: 187). In this respect, Knausgård draws a parallel between Gombrowicz and Hamsun, arguing that Gombrowicz insightfully claims that literature that is only preoccupied with the grand and

⁵ English translation of Witold Gombrowicz’s *Dzienniki: Diary* by Lillian Vallee [alternatively *Diaries*], and it is the English translation that appears in the bibliography. The diegetic time is indicated by Linda being pregnant with John. However, Karl Ove also states that it was nearly four years since his last novel, *En tid for alt* (2004), was published (VI: 876). This would then indicate that the diegetic time is 2008. Yet, I still maintain that the stronger indication of the diegetic time is the fact that Linda is pregnant with John, who was born in the autumn of 2007.

⁶ “which I came back to time after time: the idea that the world is permanently in the making, that it is constantly evolving around us, but that this ceaseless creation from moment to moment merges into what we already know about the world.” (MS VI: 937)

⁷ English translation by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco: “Literature and Life” (1997).

⁸ “With my heart and soul I knew [...] my own writing had to go in that direction, into the emerging, the developing, the ever-evolving.” (MS VI: 912)

sublime ideas is dead: literature of this kind condemns real human life to the shadows (ibid.: 187-188). Amidst ordinary human existence it is difficult to take, for example, Martin Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* seriously: the idea might be sublime and of grand significance, but has no bearing on the way a life is lived (ibid.). Thus, the value and greatness Knausgård sees in Hamsun is related to his ability to capture individual cases of experiencing and being in the world, and his ability to give meaning to the seemingly small, insignificant and ordinary objects and phenomena of life (ibid.). Still, this does not mean that Knausgård as author-critic firmly discredits Hamsun, and by extension Gombrowicz as contributors to grand and sublime questions in literature. Rather, the criticism is directed at literature that *only* asks these questions, without considering life as it is lived (ibid.: 188).

Although in the following chapters I highlight how Karl Ove and Knausgård as rewriter deals with what can be seen as literary and theoretical issues in *Min kamp*, it is important to emphasise that the majority of the narrative is concerned with everyday experiences, ordinary existence and familiar phenomena. In other words, I suggest that Knausgård as an author-critic in “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” attempts to validate his own poetic ambition in relation to the value he finds in both Hamsun and Gombrowicz, pertaining to the autoreceptive function of criticism as self-canonising, which I outlined in chapter 1.

Furthermore, Sissel Furuseth's analysis of Knausgård as an author-critic in the critical essay on Hamsun provides entry points for the phenomenological ambition that Knausgård implies that he shares with Hamsun.⁹ Furuseth points out that Knausgård gives explicit poetic value to Hamsun's ability to capture *det uferdiges kraft* (Knausgård 2008b: 184; Furuseth 2016: 175).¹⁰ Knausgård uses this term to highlight what he sees as the relevance of Hamsun's first two novels, *Sult* and *Mysterier*, which in turn is what makes them relevant for readers today:

Den verden de skildrer, er vår egen, slik den var da den ble dannet, full av det uferdiges kraft, ennå ikke forstenet i ferdige systemer.¹¹
(Knausgård 2008b: 184)

⁹ Furuseth references the rewritten essay “Sjelens Amerika” (2013), however I reference the original essay from 2008.

¹⁰ “the power of the unfinished”

¹¹ “The world they depict, is our own, as it was when it was formed, full of the power of the unfinished, not yet fossilised in established systems.”

As Furuseth argues, *det uferdige kraft* is viewed by Knausgård as a literary quality that trumps the finished and established systems in the world, that is, the restlessly drifting and the nascent becoming is preferable to the firmly fossilised (Furuseth 2016: 175). Put differently, Knausgård sees *Sult* and *Mysterier* as attempts at pre-habitual, pre-theorised, and pre-reflective depictions of modernity and the modern world, thus implicitly categorising them as works with an inherent phenomenological value.¹²

The poetic, phenomenological value can be further connected to the metaphoric *Amerika* that Knausgård utilises in “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” and places in the foreground in the rewriting of this essay by giving in the new title “Sjelens Amerika” (2013). For Hamsun, as Knausgård sees it, America stands as a symbol both for uprootedness, the mass-human, modernity, and for a ‘new world’ in the making.¹³ It is the metaphoric America as the ‘new world’ in the making that is relevant in this case, as Furuseth argues that Knausgård implicitly gives poetic value to the metaphoric figure of the *nybygger* and the metaphoric *nybyggerånd* in Hamsun’s works (Knausgård 2008b: 183ff; Furuseth 2016: 175).¹⁴ For Knausgård as author-critic, it is therefore specifically how the symbolism of the settler can be transferred to literary endeavours and to poetics that is of interest. As he sees it, Hamsun depicts the world as a *nybygger* who is trying to build a sense of belonging and meaning, dwelling in a ‘new world’ as it is being created. Thus, Knausgård highlights a phenomenological dimension in Hamsun’s poetics: Hamsun dwells on and in the world as it is becoming (Furuseth 2016: 179).¹⁵ As the author-critic, Knausgård seems to imply that it

¹² With reference to my analysis in chapter 1, in “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” Knausgård categorises *Mysterier* as a failed attempt, due to how it overstates its intentions, while in the rewritten version of this essay, “Sjelens Amerika” (2013), he is more favourably inclined towards the phenomenological ambition in Hamsun’s second novel.

¹³ Knausgård and Hamsun use the term America to signify the United States of America.

¹⁴ settler; settler spirit.

¹⁵ Although I do not consider the phenomenological aspect in Knausgård’s poetics in terms of a specific school of thought, it is worth pointing out that Furuseth identifies that the phenomenological dimension refers to phenomenology in the Husserlian sense, while I would argue that it is more reminiscent of Heideggerian phenomenology. As for example Richard Schacht (1972) outlines, Husserlian phenomenology is at its core epistemological, dependent on the notion of transcendental subjectivity, inductive generalisation, and concerned with ideas or essences in the Platonic sense. Heideggerian phenomenology is fundamentally an ontological and existential enterprise, viewing phenomenology as first and foremost a methodology, and in turn rejects transcendental idealism and transcendental subjectivity as the object of study. As Knausgård in the essay “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” highlights, for instance, Hamsun’s ability to bring meaning to phenomena of ordinary existence, as well as arguing that life as it is lived is not concerned with questions of sublime value, seems more in line with Heidegger’s focus on the concretely existing human being and ordinary experience. However, as I show in the analysis of the diegetic time January 2004 in *Min kamp* I in chapter 6, Knausgård rewrites Karl Ove as battling with conflicts related to transcendental idealism, which in turn could be more reminiscent of Husserlian phenomenology.

is the position of the settler that the author must occupy: literature should capture the world as it emerges, and as it is experienced and given meaning by a subject.

Therefore, the ambition that unites these two examples, which is stated explicitly via Karl Ove as author-critic in the diegetic time 2007 in *Min kamp* VI and implicitly by Knausgård as author-critic in the critical essay on Hamsun in 2008, relates to a question of how he himself as an author can occupy this position. The answer seems to be implied in the essay on Hamsun, as Knausgård again connects Hamsun and Gombrowicz: Knausgård praises Hamsun as the first representative of the “skitten modernism, en midt-i-verden-modernisme” that Gombrowicz advocates, and acclaims the poetics that lie in this (Knausgård 2008b: 188).¹⁶ This type of modernism signifies that in order to capture the way a life is lived in literature, there is a categorical demand for including both the highs and lows of human existence. It is only through inclusive poetics, where equal attention and value is given to everyday things and events, that ordinary existence can have meaning, which Knausgård again ties to Hamsun’s ability to “fylle alt rundt seg med liv og mening, selv et par skolisser, et fly over en ås, en avrevet avisbit” (ibid.: 189).¹⁷ Thus, this connects the phenomenological with the autobiographical and autogeographical: the subjective experiences, subjective engagement, and subjective intentionality towards the world, places, objects and phenomena have a meaning-giving function. Both the autobiographical and the autogeographical demonstrate a subject’s experiences and engagement with the existing world, how the subject makes sense of his inner and outer world, and how the subject ascribes meaning to his existence in the world.

In the case of Karl Ove Knausgård as an author, I propose that in *Min kamp* the autobiographical and the autogeographical are not only set up as a reoccurring theme and a method for him to write, but rather that he creates an intricate link between autobiography, autogeography, and poetics founded on subjective phenomenology as a long-attempted literary ambition. As mentioned above, the hypothesis that guides part III is that Knausgård as rewriter strategically creates distance and shows a development of himself as an author, while simultaneously creating a powerful unity between his past and present poetics, rendering the writing and completion of *Min kamp* to stand as Knausgård reaping the benefits

¹⁶ “dirty modernism, an in-the-middle-of-the-world-modernism”

¹⁷ “fill everything around him with life and meaning, a pair of shoe laces, a plane over a hill, a torn off piece of newspaper”. Note that in this passage Knausgård is referring explicitly to *Paa gjengrodde stier* (1949) but sees it as an extension of *Sult* (1890), and he is making the point that both Hamsun’s last and first novel are marked by a protagonist with an internal dignity that nothing external can shake.

of all his struggles. This is what I aim to demonstrate in the following chapters. Chapter 5 serves to expand the autoreceptive function of the narration in *Min kamp* I and II, by highlighting the narratological structure and the literary devices of foreshadowing and backshadowing as autoreceptive, alongside the narrative technique I outlined in chapter 2. This chapter lays a foundation for the analysis of Knausgård as a rewriter and Karl Ove as an author-critic in chapter 6. Chapter 6 aims to show the strategies Knausgård as the rewriter employs to create a continuity of the poetics that have guided him as an author. I begin with an analysis of the diegetic time 2004, and the rewriting of Karl Ove's author-image during the writing of his second novel, *En tid for alt* (2004). The focus then turns towards the diegetic time January 2008 to May 2008 in volume II, and the rewriting of the inception and writing of the first volume of *Min kamp*.

5 Expanding Autoreceptive Narration

Life as it is lived is not storylike, and so we may suspect that whatever story we choose to tell about it will alter it. Lives include all sorts of extraneous details leading nowhere, but good stories do not. Narratives are most successful if they display a structure, which is hard to find in life.

Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom* (1994)

When considering *Min kamp* in terms of autoreceptive narration, it is necessary to view 1) the rewriting of Karl Ove as an author-critic, 2) the intertextual references within the text and 3) the exploration of poetics in the essayistic passages as having been placed in a specific diegetic time with agency and intention on behalf of Knausgård as the author. In other words, the premise for an examination of autoreception is that the narration has a strategic function. In chapter 2 I focused on the narrative technique in *Min kamp* as autoreceptive: the characteristic narrative strategy is such that there is a separation between Knausgård as the author and Karl Ove who is rewritten as an author in a specific diegetic time. However, despite the narrative strategy, it is still Knausgård as the author who rewrites his author-image from his current perspective. Thus, the manner in which he rewrites himself as an author in different diegetic times is implicitly autoreceptive of him as the author who is writing *Min kamp*.

In part II I focused on Knausgård's critical activity, but simultaneously pointed to the motif that dominates the rewriting in *Min kamp V* which may be tied to Knausgård's present author-image: Karl Ove as an aspiring author fighting his way into the literary field. In addition, I touched on the function of how Knausgård as rewriter structured certain events in *Min kamp V* related to his critical activity. For instance, how certain critical texts are narrated in the same diegetic time, despite having been published years apart, or how his failings as an author are narrated alongside his perceived success as a critic. In this chapter I expand on the strategic and autoreceptive function of the narrative by considering the narratological structure of *Min kamp I* and *II* in an in-depth analysis. The full autoreceptive force of the narratological structure is made clear in chapter 6, where I aim to demonstrate how *Min kamp* does not just consist of individual instances of self-reading, but that the rewriting of past author-images contains a multitude of fore- and backshadowing to other diegetic times, other events and reflections within the text, and to other texts Knausgård has

written. In other words, rather than melodies played by single instruments, the different strategies create a symphony of autoreception.

As outlined in chapter 2, the characteristic narration of *Min kamp* is dominated by presentification of the diegetic time, where Karl Ove as the narrator-protagonist has no knowledge about future events. In this respect the narration in *Min kamp* mimics the actual temporality of lived life, for as Gary Saul Morson argues, when living through an experience there is no inherent guarantee that an event will prove to be significant in the future, or will fit into a meaningful pattern (Morson 1998: 599). However, narrative structuring still emphasises the significance of certain events for future outcomes. This is the privilege of narrative art, which, while it may aim to record the textures of everyday life, renders the temporality and continuity radically different from real life (ibid.). Relating this to *Min kamp*, Knausgård as the author is undoubtedly aware of the outcome of key events and struggles that he rewrites Karl Ove as facing. Thus, in the rewriting Knausgård can structure the narrative and create implicit connections between ‘present’ and ‘future’ narrative events.¹

In *Narrative and Freedom* (1994) Morson argues that foreshadowing in a literary text is immediately recognisable for what it is – a literary device – as in real life we do not experience foreshadowing (Morson 1994: 45). This is due to the fact that foreshadowing indicates a backwards causality, as if a future event was indicated in past events; the future casts shadows on the past (ibid.: 48). As a narrative device, foreshadowing creates anticipation in terms of the future plot. Furthermore, in rereading a text when the outcome is known, foreshadowing plays into the idea that the outcome was readily visible in the narrative all along, as if the outcome was inevitable. This in turn makes the structuring of the narrative acutely visible as done by the author, or as Morson puts it:

Foreshadowing directs our attention not to the experience of the character but to the design of the author, whose structure is entirely responsible for foreshadowing. (ibid.: 49)

In other words, when I highlight the foreshadowing in *Min kamp*, its significance is related to Knausgård as the author and rewriter. Specifically, it plays into the notion of continuity that I argue Knausgård as author creates between ‘present’ and ‘future’ author-images within the narrative.

¹ Heta Marttinen approaches something similar when she discusses *Min kamp* as a natural and unnatural narrative, particularly by focusing on narrative strategies that characterise fictional narrative structuring, but without putting the strategies explicitly in the context of autoreception (see Marttinen 2017).

The same principle thus applies to Knausgård's strategy of implicit backshadowing of past author-images. The term backshadowing, a neologism coined by Michael André Bernstein, is interrelated with foreshadowing, as it can be defined as retroactive foreshadowing, or foreshadowing after the fact (Bernstein 1994: 16; Morson 1994: 234).² Similar to foreshadowing, it creates the effect that the events of the past inevitably led to the present, but now viewed retrospectively with knowledge of the outcome. As Morson explains:

[...] backshadowing may be based on three significant times: the period under examination; the outcome of that period; and the present, in which the backshadowing observer passes judgment on the earliest period. (Morson 1994: 234)

Transferring this to *Min kamp*, the rewritten author-images, and to autoreception, the three significant times would correlate to 1) the rewriting of Karl Ove as an author in a specific diegetic time; 2) Karl Ove becoming aware of the outcome of an event while Knausgård as author has known all along; and 3) Knausgård as rewriter, reflecting his present author-image in the past author-image time.³

However, in *Min kamp*, the foreshadowing and backshadowing is highly complex. First, this is because the foreshadowing and backshadowing is related both to the narratological structure and the diegetic time, which in *Min kamp* does not follow a linear, chronological progression (see chapter 2, table I.a). Second, the foreshadowing and backshadowing of past, present, and future author-images is predominantly done implicitly via Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator, and not in the few instances where Knausgård as the author dominates the focalisation. In order to grasp the complexity, which I analyse in chapter 6, a detailed narratological outline of the two first volumes of *Min kamp* is necessary.

² Bernstein focuses on backshadowing in terms of historiography, while Morson is, comparatively, more concerned with backshadowing in narrative fiction. However, both discuss backshadowing in terms of the fallacy of reducing the historical or narrative past to a well-plotted story.

³ As a note, both Bernstein and Morson are concerned with the trope *they/he/she should have known what was to come* (Bernstein 1994: 16; Morson 1994: 234). This is what Morson seems to refer to when claiming that backshadowing passes judgment on the past. In other words, for Morson backshadowing indicates that past actions, opinions and behaviour are treated with irony and superiority, as if the outcome or solution was clear from the beginning (Morson 1994: 236). However, in the case of Knausgård's narrative structuring and rewriting of past author-images, this is predominantly done without a clear sense of irony or superiority, pertaining to what I argue throughout part III is a strategy for creating a simultaneous distance and unity between past and present author-images.

Narratological Outline of *Min kamp I*

The first volume of *Min kamp* can be outlined schematically in the following way (table III.a):

PAGE	DIEGETIC TIME & PLACE	EVENT
I 7-11	Unspecified	“For hjertet er livet enkelt [...]” Paradox of repression of death and iconodulist culture
I 11-28	Spring 1976, Tromøya / 2008	Karl Ove sees the face in the water, and tells his father / Knausgård age 39 reflects on his dualistic image of his father Ambiguous narration
I 29-42	27 February – 4 March 2008, Malmö	Outlines his life as it is now
I 43-45	2008 / 1982 – 1985	Transitional and retrospective narration
I 45-186	December 1984 – July 1985, Tveit & Kristiansand*	Karl Ove aged 15–16
I 189-225	January 2004, Stockholm	Karl Ove trying to write his second novel
I 225-435	July 1998, Kristiansand**	The death of his father

* This refers to 1984-85 as the overarching diegetic time and place, however the narration makes associative jumps to other diegetic times in the past. Thus, the narratological strategy remains for the most part intact, as the jumps in time are to past events and not future events from the perspective of Karl Ove in 1984–85.

** Again, this refers to the overarching diegetic time and place, but is not to say that there are no associative jumps to past events. For example, the narration goes back to when Karl Ove, living in Bergen, first got word of his father’s death (I: 228-229); and the narration traces Karl Ove’s relationship with his brother Yngve, as well as their time together in Bergen (I: 319-341).

Tab. III.a Narratological Outline of *Min kamp I*

The volume opens with what has become one of the most recognisable lines from the *Min kamp* series: “For hjertet er livet enkelt: det slår så lenge det kan” (I: 7).⁴ Then follows an essay with an, at this point, un-identified narrative voice, about what happens to the body after death occurs, from the physiological chain of events to the social practices of dealing with dead bodies. This leads the narrator on to reflections about the paradox of, on the one hand, a public and collective repression of the physical reality of death, and, on the other hand, how death and disaster is endlessly portrayed in our media culture (I: 8-9). The narration then turns to how the image of death in the media has no weight: the serial

⁴ “For the heart, life is simple: it beats for as long as it can.” (MS I: 3). See appendix IV for full citation of the opening paragraph. The fact that this line is considered to be readily recognisable to readers is, for example, supported by how NORLA (Norwegian Literature Abroad) included this quote on the Knausgård bookmarks distributed at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2017 to promote the launch of the website Books from Norway.

reproduction of the dead and dying gives the deceased individuals no time or place, and only a few of these images may actually register in our memory for a longer period of time (I: 10-11).

Suddenly, the narration changes to the first person, as the essay shifts towards a specific news story about a shipwreck in the north of Norway, an image which evidently has lingered in the memory of the narrator:

Jeg sitter alene og ser det, en gang på våren, antageligvis, for min far er ute i hagen og arbeider. Jeg stirrer på denne havoverflaten uten å høre hva reporteren sier, og *plutselig stiger omrisset av et ansikt fram*. Jeg vet ikke hvor lenge det er der, noen sekunder, kanskje, men lenge nok til at det gjør et enormt inntrykk på meg.⁵ (I: 11, emphasis original)

In the insertion of the narrator as Karl Ove Knausgård himself, there is not yet a clear distinction between Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator and Knausgård as the author. The lack of separation between of Karl Ove and Knausgård is marked by how the narration is kept in the present tense (“sitter”, “ser”, “er”, “arbeider”, “stirrer”, “sier”, “*stiger*”, “vet”, “er”, “gjør”), creating a presentification of Karl Ove’s perspective, however Knausgård as the author adds words signifying hesitation in terms of the accuracy of the narrated events (“antageligvis”, “kanskje”).⁶ In the diegetic time, later designated by Knausgård as the author as being 1976 (see I: 15), Karl Ove has a strong urge to tell someone about the face in the water. As his mother and brother are not home, he runs outside to tell his father. The narration continues as Karl Ove/Knausgård, mixing present tense with vocabulary and phrasings not readily available to an eight-year-old.⁷ For example, he analyses his father’s mood: “Det er ikke i ansiktsuttrykkene det ligger, men i kroppsholdningen, og det er ikke med tankene man avleser den, men med intuisjonen” (I: 12).⁸

⁵ “I am sitting alone watching, it is some time in spring, I suppose, for my father is working in the garden. I stare at the surface of the sea without listening to what the reporter says, *and suddenly the outline of a face emerges*. I don’t know how long it stays there, a few seconds perhaps, but long enough for it to have a huge impact on me.” (MS I: 8)

⁶ “am sitting”, “am watching”, “is working”, “stare”, “says”, “*emerges*”, “know”, “is”, “makes” (Bartlett translates this as *to have* in the infinitive); “probably” (Bartlett translates this as “I suppose”), “perhaps”.

⁷ Knausgård as the author explicitly states that this occurred in spring 1976, probably in spring, and that he was eight years old at the time. However, Knausgård was born on 6 December 1968, which would mean that if this occurred in spring 1976, he would still have been seven years old. However, I am going to use the age stated in the text.

⁸ “This is apparent not from his facial expressions but his physical posture, and you do not read it with your mind but with your intuition.” (MS I: 8)

His father asks whether the face could have been a diver, but Karl Ove explains that it was not a person, but a kind of image he saw in the water. As Karl Ove turns to leave, his father asks if it was an image of Jesus. Surprised at the lack of mockery in his father's tone, as his father "finner det litt pinlig at jeg er kristen", Karl Ove firmly states that it was not Jesus (I: 12).⁹

The narration then changes to being placed clearly in the diegetic time 2008, as Knausgård states that now he is seven years older than his father was the evening he saw the face in the water (I: 13). He gives a brief presentation and analysis of his father's life up until that spring evening, before Knausgård as the author outlines his dualistic image of his father:

[...] på den ene siden ser jeg ham som jeg så ham den gangen, med åtte-åringens øyne, uforutsigbar og skremmende, på den andre siden ser jeg ham som en jevnaldrende, gjennom hvis liv tiden blåser og stadig river større biter av mening med seg.¹⁰ (I: 15)

The dualistic image of his father has thus been emphasised in the narration up until this point, as the perspective has oscillated between Karl Ove, age eight in 1976, and Knausgård, age thirty-nine in 2008. Furthermore, the effect of the narration ties in with a point Knausgård makes about spatial and temporal distance to the world of his childhood. Knausgård reflects, in an implicit phenomenological examination, on how the world was filled with meaning when he was a child, every step was an opportunity, and every opportunity a joy. However, as an adult the same events, the same places, the same steps have lost their inherent significance (I: 13). He puts this down to how growing up is about attaining the correct distance to objects and phenomena, a distance that gives us knowledge but is also the enemy of meaning (I: 15).

Når oversikten over verden blir større, blir ikke bare smerten den forårsaker mindre, men også meningen. Å forstå verden er å stille seg i en bestemt avstand til den.¹¹ (I: 14)

⁹ "finds it rather embarrassing that I am a Christian" (MS I: 9).

¹⁰ "[...] on the one hand I see him as I saw him at that time, through the eyes of an eight-year-old: unpredictable and frightening; on the other hand, I see him as a peer through whose life time is blowing and unremittingly sweeping large chunks of meaning along with it." (MS I: 12)

¹¹ "As your perspective of the world increases not only is the pain it inflicts on you less but also its meaning. Understanding the world requires you to keep a certain distance from it." (MS I: 11-12)

Having attained a spatial and temporal distance to his childhood, and the meaning he ascribed to the world then, Knausgård is now able to view his father with more understanding:

[...] hans dagers mening [var] ikke samlet i enkeltstående begivenheter, men spredt ut over flater så store at de ikke var mulige å fange opp med annet enn abstrakte begreper. "Familie" var ett, "karriere" et annet.¹² (I: 13)

Therefore, as Rühl also points out, the notion Knausgård describes here is that moving from the child's to the adult's perspective has both its rewards and its price: the pain he may have felt at the time is to a certain degree surpassed by understanding, although the meaning ascribed to every experienced phenomena has been lost in the process (Rühl 2015: 65; 2017: 162). This becomes an important autogeographical and phenomenological theme that is revisited at key points throughout the six-volume novel.

When returning again to that spring evening thirty-two years previously, the perspective of Karl Ove as a child now dominates the narration. For example, after Karl Ove has told his father it was not Jesus he saw in the water, his father tells him not to run when making his way back inside the house. Karl Ove age eight, who knows his father's rules about running both inside and in the vicinity of the house, and had made sure to not let his father see him run, is completely baffled: "Hvordan kunne han vite at jeg hadde løpt?" (I: 16).¹³ He answers this later, still as the protagonist-narrator in 1976: "Han hadde selvfølgelig *hørt* meg! Skrittene da jeg løp på singelen!" (I: 22, emphasis original).¹⁴ In other words, this marks a focalisation and free indirect discourse that is firmly that of Karl Ove, and not of Knausgård as the author.

Yet, at times the narration changes to that which seems to be Knausgård as author. Later that same evening, Karl Ove surreptitiously observes his parents watching the evening news, waiting to see if they will also see the face in the water. However, the news report about the shipwreck is not the same as the one Karl Ove saw. He hears his father laugh, and assuming that he is laughing at him, Karl Ove is filled with an intense feeling of shame. Here, the narration seems to briefly change to the perspective of Knausgård at age thirty-nine, as

¹² "[...] the meaning of his days was not concentrated in individual events but spread over such large areas that it was not possible to comprehend them in anything other than abstract terms. 'Family' was one such term; 'career' another." (MS I: 10)

¹³ "How could he know that I had run?" (MS: I 13)

¹⁴ "Of course. He had *heard* me! My feet running on the shingle!" (MS: I 20)

he retrospectively examines his childhood: “Kraften i den plutselige skammen var den eneste følelsen i barndommen som kunne måle seg med redselen i intensitet” (I: 27).¹⁵ These are not the reflections of an eight-year-old boy, examining the intensity of shame, but of an adult retrospectively making sense of how this evening in 1976 ended: with Karl Ove crying himself to sleep.

Following the introductory essay and the narration of the spring evening in 1976, a page break resembling a chapter break marks the change in diegetic time: the narrative changes to Knausgård age thirty-nine, who now firmly indicates the time of writing: 27 February 2008.

NÅR JEG SITTER HER OG SKRIVER DETTE, har det gått over tretti år. I vinduet foran meg ser jeg vagt gjenskinnet av mitt eget ansikt. Bortsett fra øyet, som glinser, og partiet like under, som matt reflekterer litt lys, ligger hele den venstre delen i skygge. To dype furer går ned pannen, en dyp fure går ned langs hvert kinn, alle likesom fylt av mørke, og når øynene er stirrende og alvorlige, og munnvikene såvidt går nedover, er det umulig å ikke tenke på dette ansiktet som dystert.

Hva er det som har satt seg i det?

Idag er det den 27. februar 2008. Klokken er 23.43. Jeg som skriver, Karl Ove Knausgård, ble født i desember 1968, og er altså i skrivende stund 39 år. Jeg har tre barn, Vanja, Heidi og John, og jeg er gift for andre gang, med Linda Boström Knausgård. Alle fire ligger og sover i rommene rundt meg, i en leilighet i Malmö, hvor vi har bodd i halvannet år.¹⁶ (I: 29)

Following the indication of the time of writing, Knausgård, in a near-confessional manner, writes about how he in conversation with others never says what he really thinks, and how he has stopped drinking as it has in the past made him lose control over himself (I: 29-30). Returning to the question posed, what has made his face so gloomy, he states that it has to do with the fact that he does not let anyone see or reach him: to see who he truly is (I: 30). The text then goes into a short, essayistic reflection about how the eyes are the only feature

¹⁵ “The force of the sudden shame was the sole feeling from my childhood that could measure in intensity against that of terror” (MS: I 26).

¹⁶ “As I sit here writing this, I recognise that more than thirty years have passed. In the window before me I can vaguely make out the reflection of my face. Apart from one eye, which is glistening, and the area immediately beneath, which dimly reflect a little light, the whole of the left side is in shadow. Two deep furrows divide my forehead, one deep furrow intersects each cheek, all of them as if filled with darkness, and with the eyes staring and serious, and the corners of the mouth drooping, it is impossible not to consider this face gloomy.

What has engraved itself in my face?

Today is 27 February [2008]. The time is 11.34 p.m. I, Karl Ove Knausgaard, was born in December 1968, and at the time of writing I am thirty-nine years old. I have three children – Vanja, Heidi, and John – and am in my second marriage, to Linda Boström Knausgaard. All four are asleep in the rooms around me, in an apartment in Malmö where we have lived for a year and a half.” (MS: I 27)

of the face that does not age, which Knausgård connects to one of Rembrandt's late self-portraits, and to his daughter, Vanja (I: 30-31).

With a paragraph break marked by an asterisk, the time of writing is indicated as 4 March 2008, just after 8 a.m. (I: 32).

Jeg sitter inne på kontoret, omgitt av bøker fra gulv til tak, og hører på det svenske bandet Dungen mens jeg tenker på det jeg har skrevet og hvor det leder hen.¹⁷ (I: 32)

Where it leads him to, for now, is to a short summation of his life as it currently is: six years ago, he left Bergen and his first wife Tonje, moved to Stockholm, and he now lives in Malmö, where he is fighting the ever-ongoing battle of combining everyday life with trying to write (I: 32-40). There are two key points to highlight in the text passage dated 4 March 2008. First, Knausgård rhetorically asks the questions “Hvordan havnet jeg her? Hvorfor var det *slik* det ble?”, indicating that this is in part what the text he is currently writing, i.e. *Min kamp*, will aim to answer (I: 32).¹⁸ Second, and related to the first point, he states he has no emotional attachment to the city he can see from his seventh-floor apartment near Triangeln in Malmö (ibid.). He knows the view, he knows the city, but he does not ascribe any meaning to the place. However, this is for Knausgård not altogether a negative effect of having moved to a new place as an adult: “Kanskje har jeg vært ute etter akkurat det, for det finnes absolutt noe i det tilknytningsløse jeg liker, kanskje til og med trenger” (ibid.).¹⁹ Within the narrative so far, Knausgård's reference to the lack of attachment to the place he lives in seems to be an implicit reference to the reflection made in the opening essay and in the narration of the 1976 scene (cf. 13-15). As I pointed to above, the spatial and temporal distance not only to his childhood but to the places of his childhood seems to have had a healing effect on Knausgård, in terms of the pain he may have attached to them, particularly to childhood memories of his father, but emancipation has also had its price – the meaningfulness of a place and of the world may have been lost. The implication is that breaking the spatial and temporal bonds to the past creates a paradox for the writing of *Min kamp*. At this point in

¹⁷ “I am sitting in my office, surrounded by books from floor to ceiling, listening to the Swedish band Dungen and thinking about what I have written and where it is leading.” (MS I: 30)

¹⁸ “How did I end up here? Why did things turn out like this?” (MS I: 31)

¹⁹ “Perhaps that is precisely what I have been searching for, because there is something about this lack of attachment that I like, may even need.” (MS I: 30) Knausgård's obsession with the past is indicated by him as the author in this diegetic time, for example in how he during his time in Bergen spent a near-pathological amount of time thinking about the past, and further that this was why he “ikke bare leste Marcel Prousts roman *På sporet av den tapte tid*, men nærmest drakk den [I not only read Marcel Proust's novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* but nigh on imbibed it]” (I: 33; MS I: 32).

Min kamp I, Knausgård states that he is unsure of where the essayistic passages he has written so far will lead. However, it will lead him to writing about the past, and paradoxically it seems to be the rootlessness he feels in the place where he currently is that allows him to do so. Furthermore, when Knausgård rewrites the inception of *Min kamp* in the second volume, it becomes clear that the spatial and temporal distance to the places of his past acts as an implicit trigger. I touch on this below and discuss this further in chapter 6.

In a page break, again resembling a chapter break, the narration gradually takes on the form of the characteristic narrative strategy. Knausgård as the author starts by stating that when his father was the same age that he is now, thirty-nine, he gave up his life and started afresh: “Jeg var seksten år den gangen, og gikk i første klasse på Kristiansand katedralskole” (I: 43).²⁰ In what can be called a transitional and expository narration, Knausgård goes through some key events that occurred before his parents’ separation: the move from Tromøya to Tveit, a suburb of Kristiansand, in 1982; the discovery of the joys of drinking during the Norway Cup football tournament in the summer of 1984; and his mother’s move to Bergen at the beginning of the academic year 1984-1985 for further studies, at first leaving Knausgård to live alone with his father, before his father suggested that Knausgård should move in to the small apartment his grandparents owned in Kristiansand (I: 44). Following the exposition, the overarching diegetic time of the narration arrives at the beginning of December 1984, before moving to New Year’s Eve, on to Easter 1985 when his parents separate, until the diegetic time ends with Karl Ove coming home to his father’s house to find him having a garden party in July 1985 (I: 45-186). This concludes “Del 1” of *Min kamp*.²¹

In “Del 2”, still in the first volume, the narration turns directly to a few days in the beginning of January 2004, with only some expository lines about how Karl Ove acquired an office in downtown Stockholm at the end of 2003 (I: 189).²² These few days are made up of Karl Ove trying to write his second novel, having conversations with Linda, who is anxious about giving birth to their first child; flipping through books; looking at works of art; reflecting on the connection between literature and the world. This diegetic time makes up a significant and complex instance of rewriting a past author-image, which I analyse in-depth in chapter 6. The last reflection in the diegetic time January 2004 is related to the

²⁰ “I was sixteen years old at the time and in the first class at Kristiansand Cathedral School” (MS I: 42).

²¹ “Part One”, *Min kamp* is divided into nine parts, with the essay “Navnet og tallet [The Name and the Number] being placed between parts eight and nine in volume VI.

²² “Part Two”

ambiguous role of death, backshadowing the reflections in the opening essay (cf. I: 8-9), and in a mere line break the narration changes to July 1998 and the first time Karl Ove viewed his father's body at a funeral agency in Kristiansand (I: 225). From here to the end of the first volume, July 1998, with the circumstances surrounding his father's death and funeral, remains the overarching diegetic time.

Rewriting in *Min kamp I*: Finding an Opening

In the following I point to how a specific aspect of *Min kamp*, the opening, had been in the making years prior to it being included in the novel. This is significant because I argue that Knausgård as rewriter implicitly points the reader towards this fact within *Min kamp*.

During the first ten pages of *Min kamp*, there is no indication of the first-person narration that dominates the majority of the text. In an extratextual self-reading of these ten pages, Knausgård states:

Åpningen, de første ti sidene, hadde jeg jobbet til og fra med i flere år, lenge før det selvbiografiske ble retningen, og representerte kvalitet for meg, det vil si, det var setninger av den høyeste kvalitet jeg kunne prestere.²³ (Knausgård 2013b: 384)

In fact, Knausgård had not merely been working on this essay for years, as he states in this self-reading: he had published several versions of the text prior to it appearing as the opening to *Min kamp*. In 2001 Knausgård published the short text "Livet vender tilbake", containing parts of the opening essay on the heart and death, and in 2004 he published a rewritten version of the same texts (Knausgård 2001c; 2004).²⁴ In 2002, Knausgård published three short texts in Cappelen Damm's annual anthology *Signaler*. Under the title "Verden som driver seg selv", each of the short texts are merely numbered 1-3.²⁵ "Verden som driver seg selv: 1" includes imagery, phrases and analogies that appear in both versions of "Livet vender tilbake" and in the opening essay of *Min kamp*, but it does not include the opening line "For hjertet er livet enkelt" (Knausgård 2002).²⁶ However, a version of the opening line appears in Knausgård's second novel, *En tid for alt* (2004). The last instance of rewriting of the essay

²³ "I had been working on the opening, the first ten pages, on and off for many years, long before it took an autobiographical direction, and it represented quality for me, that is to say, the sentences were of the highest quality that I am capable of."

²⁴ Translation of the title: "Life returns"

²⁵ Translation of the title: "The world runs itself"

²⁶ "For the heart, life is simple."

on the heart and death, before it appears in *Min kamp*, occurs in the essay “Om framtiden” published in the journal *Samtiden* in 2008.²⁷ The first paragraph of this version is identical to the opening paragraph of *Min kamp*. The significance of this rewriting is that it shows a development in Knausgård’s writing in the period after he has published *Ute av verden* up until the ‘perfected’ version appears in *Min kamp* I in 2009, where its narrative function is in part to frame the autobiographical text, and in part to frame the first volume as a text about the death of his father. Furthermore, it shows how Knausgård eventually turns more explicitly towards the autobiographical, and it lends credence to the claim made in *Min kamp* I that he has attempted to write about his father and his death for a long time (cf. I: 196), which I discuss in chapter 6.

On 2 April 2001, Tiden Norsk Forlag published three short texts written by Knausgård: “Farmor”, “Arkadisk” and “Livet vender tilbake”.²⁸ “Livet vender tilbake” begins with the recognisable line for *Min kamp*:

For hjertet er livet enkelt: det slår så lenge det kan. Så stopper det. Før eller siden, en eller annen dag, opphører denne stampende bevegelsen av seg selv, og hjertet blir liggende urørlig i brysthulen. Blodet begynner å renne ned mot kroppens laveste punkt, temperaturen synker; en veldig kraft trekker den stadig nærmere omgivelsenes temperatur, på lignende måte som forskjellige bakterier snart vil trekke kroppen nærmere omgivelsenes former, for slik er det, livet er unntaket, det døde er regelen, og så snart det døde får sjansen, kaster det seg over oss, river og sliter i kroppen vår til alle spor er borte og vi endelig er utlignet.²⁹ (Knausgård 2001c)

This description of the heart is the opening of *Min kamp* in condensed form: the heart beats without interest or agenda, and the fact that it will stop, and the decomposition process will commence in a fixed pattern, is universal for all human beings. However, what follows differs from the opening essay of volume I. In *Min kamp* the heart is not explicitly attributed to a specific individual, while “Livet vender tilbake” turns the attention to the body the heart

²⁷ Translation of the title: “About the future”

²⁸ “Grandma” (*Farmor* signifies that it is a paternal grandmother); “Arcadian”; “Life returns”

²⁹ “For the heart, life is simple: it beats for as long as it can. Then it stops. Sooner or later, one day, this pounding action will cease of its own accord, and the heart will remain motionless in the chest cavity. The blood will begin to run down towards the body’s lowest point, the temperature will drop, a powerful force will simultaneously draws it ever closer to the temperature of the surroundings, similarly to how different bacteria soon will draw the body closer towards to the forms of the surroundings, for this is the way it is, life is the exception, death is the rule, and as soon as death gets the chance, it throws itself at us, ripping and tearing our body until all traces have vanished and we are finally equalised.”

belongs to: an anonymous runner whose heart has just stopped, but who is saved by passers-by administering chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth. Narrated in an analogy of the circus coming back to town, life returns to the body.

The rewritten version of this text, published under the same title in 2004 in *Vinduet*, includes the same three opening sentences. However, Knausgård expands the description of how death is dealt with practically. In both texts, the narration shifts from how consciousness disappears to how the body will soon be discovered and moved:

Snart vil noen finne den, en kald kropp blir sjelden liggende lenge i fred, de vil tilkalle assistanse, få den fraktet bort, ned i en sykehuskjeller, mens man venter på å få den gravlagt eller brent opp.³⁰ (Knausgård 2001c; 2004: 53)

In the rewritten 2004 version the practice of quickly moving the dead out of sight and down to a hospital basement is preceded by reflections on the frequency of death, on how the heart may live on by way of organ transplantation, and on how death is the great equaliser.

Det skjer hele tiden, og som oftest i det skjulte, men ikke alltid, for hver eneste dag klippes det opp brystkasser på operasjonssaler rundt omkring på verdens sykehus, og mange av de hjertene som slår sine slag der, glatte og nakne og badet i lys, makter ikke påkjenningene, og stanser opp under legenes skamløse blikk. Andre hjerter blir skåret ut av sine bryst, kjølt ned og fraktet i helikopter eller fly til en ventende kropp, som det er forventet at det skal fylle med sine livgivende slag. Det uverdige over at dette hjertet kommer til å slå sitt siste slag i en fremmed kropp, og råtne opp sammen med fremmede organer, fjernt fra dem det er en gang oppstod sammen med, er det ingen som tenker på. Og hvorfor skal vi. I døden er alle like, de aborterte som de av bilpansre [sic] knuste, de hjerneslagrammede som de lungekreftsyke. I det den inntreffer, vil alle kroppens temperaturer bli trukket nærmere omgivelsens temperaturer [...].³¹ (Knausgård 2004: 53)

³⁰ “Soon someone will find it, a cold body is seldom left alone for a long time, they will call for assistance, get it removed, down to a hospital basement, awaiting burial or cremation.”

³¹ “It happens all the time, most often out of sight, but not always, because every single day chests are cut open in operating rooms in hospitals around the world, and many of the hearts that beat their beats there, smooth and naked and bathed in light, cannot take the strain, and stop under the shameless gaze of the doctors. Other hearts get cut out of their chests, cooled down and transported by helicopter or plane to a waiting body, which it is expected to fill with life-giving beats. No one thinks about the unworthiness of the fact that this heart will beat its last beats in a strange body, and rot together with strange organs, far away from the ones it once originated along with. And why should we. In death everyone is equal, the aborted equal to those crushed by car bonnets, the stroke victims equal to the lung cancer victims. When it occurs, all bodies will be drawn closer to the temperature of the surroundings [...].”

From here on out the two versions of “Livet vender tilbake” are identical, differing only in some changes in punctuation and spelling corrections. What marks the two first versions of the text that will later be incorporated into the opening of *Min kamp*, is how the heart and death are at first not ascribed to an individual, but rather narrated on a general level, with the narration kept in the present tense. In both texts, when the owner of the heart is made known, it is still an anonymous subject: an unknown, unnamed person whose heart stopped, presumably while going for a run in the woods. The generality, the anonymity, and the narrated tense emphasise the constant reoccurrence of death, as a common fate shared by all mortals.

However, in the short text Knausgård published between the writing and rewriting of “Livet vender tilbake”, the heart and the death are ascribed to a specific individual: Knausgård’s own father. In “Verden driver seg selv: 1” Knausgård writes about his father’s death, describing death itself as “nådeløs” and “det for alle like” (Knausgård 2002), reminiscent of the view of death in “Livet vender tilbake”.³² In a rewriting of the pattern death follows, Knausgård directly connects the physiological chain of events to his father, accentuated in the narration in the past tense:

[...] etter at *han* hadde falt om og hjertet ble liggende urørlig i brysthulen, da blodet begynte å renne ned mot kroppens laveste punkt, hvor det samlet seg i en liten kulp, synlig fra utsiden som et mørkt og bløtlig felt på den stadig hvitere huden, alt mens temperaturen sank, lemmene stivnet og tarmene tømte seg. Disse første timenes forandringer foregikk så langsomt og ble utført med en slik utvilsom sikkerhet at de hadde noe nesten rituellet over seg [...].³³ (Knausgård 2002: 91, emphasis added)

The narration then changes to the present tense, again refocusing on the universality of the chain of events by highlighting the common pattern when death drives out life.

[...] som om livet kapitulerer ifølge bestemte regler, en slags *gentlemen’s agreement*, som også de dødes representanter retter seg etter, idet de venter til livet har trukket seg ut før de starter

³² “merciless”, “that which is the same for everyone”

³³ “[...] after *he* collapsed, and his heart remained motionless in the chest cavity, when the blood began to run towards the body’s lowest point, where it was collected in a small pool, visible from the outside as a dark, soft patch on ever whiter skin, as the temperature sank, the limbs stiffened, and the intestines drained. These changes in the first hours occurred so slowly and took place with such inexorability that there was something almost ritualistic about them [...].” (emphasis added).

invasjonen av dette nye landskapet feltherren deres har erobret.³⁴
(*ibid.*, italics original)

This 2002 rewriting, even though it does not contain the “For hjertet er livet enkelt” opening, is more similar to the opening passage of *Min kamp* than the 2001 and 2004 versions of “Livet vender tilbake”. Following the passage cited above, death as a military commander leads the text on to a warfare analogy, where death as a destructive force invades every part of the body.³⁵ The analogy emphasises the inherent and shared pattern of death, and thus creates an increasing distance from the death of the individual, his father.

While this analogy can also be found in *Min kamp I*, it appears there in a much more condensed form. The rewriting in *Min kamp I* signals that perhaps Knausgård found his elaborate metaphoric use of parts of the human anatomy being occupied by war-raging bacteria too extravagant: as an act of demonstration of his formal abilities (cf. Knausgård criticism of Hamsun in Knausgård 2008b). Still, the most significant difference is that in the opening of *Min kamp* Knausgård resumes narrating the physiological events in the present tense, and he makes no explicit connection between the heart that stops and the death of his father. In fact, in the opening essay in *Min kamp*, there is no mention of his father’s death, nor is the narrative voice made explicitly apparent as being that of Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator or Knausgård as the author. Therefore, as mentioned above, in *Min kamp* the text seems to function not only as an overture to a text that will be revealed to be about his father and his death, but also to an autobiographical text about how a specific life is lived.

In *En tid for alt*, a version of the opening line of *Min kamp* appears in Henrik Vankel’s reflections about death. Here it is again connected to the practice of transplantation, as in the 2004 version of “Livet vender tilbake”, but it is now further connected to the intentionless beating of the heart that will continue to beat no matter whose chest cavity it occupies:

Hjertet slår, lungene puster, blodet strømmer. Men for hvem? Se, det er spørsmålet. [...] For hjertet er alle like. Alt det vil, alt det kan, alt det gjør, er å slå.³⁶ (Knausgård 2012: 526)

³⁴ “[...] as though life capitulates according to specific rules, a kind of gentleman’s agreement, to which the representatives of death also adhere, inasmuch as they always wait until life has retreated before they launch their invasion of the new landscape their commander has conquered.”

³⁵ See appendix V for full citation and translation of the warfare-and-anatomy analogy in “Verden driver seg selv: 1”.

³⁶ “The heart beats, the lungs breathe, the blood flows. But for whom? That, you see, is the question. As far as the heart is concerned everyone is the same. All it wants to do, all it knows how to do, all it can do, is beat.” (Knausgård 2015e: 485-486)

As Ane Farsethås points out, there are two main differences between the heart and death reflections in *En tid for alt* and *Min kamp*. First, in the former these lines do not constitute memorable or key passages, while in the latter “For hjertet er livet enkelt” is one of the most cited and most recognisable lines of the novel (Farsethås 2015: 284-285). Second, the point made in the former essayistic reflection seems to be that the practice of transplantation seems to expunge the boundaries between living and dead, while in the opening of *Min kamp* I the distinction between death and life is made absolute (ibid.). However, Farsethås does not touch on the preceding reflections in *En tid for alt* that may implicitly connect the heart not to an anonymous, universal body, but instead to Henrik Vankel’s father. For Henrik Vankel, heart transplantation seems to signify that a part of the deceased lives on, as if nothing has happened (Knausgård 2012: 523-527). This point seems to be implicitly connected with Henrik Vankel’s father, as it is the recollection of his death that leads him on to thoughts about the heart and death (ibid.: 523). The boundary between the dead and the living that transplantations dissolve thus seems to be implicitly connected with memories of his deceased father. Despite having passed away, his presence is still felt in Henrik Vankel’s memories of him, which still influences his actions and thoughts as if his death had not occurred. Considering the similarities between Henrik Vankel and Knausgård, not just the autogeographical but also the biographical similarities, it is not an undue deduction that Knausgård is in part writing about his own feelings towards his father’s death.

In the last instance of rewriting the heart-and-death motif, “Om framtiden”, the opening paragraph is identical to the opening of *Min kamp*. Furthermore, this essay consists of more similarities with the first volume, as what follows the introductory reflection about the heart and death is recognisable as essayistic passages that in *Min kamp* are placed in the diegetic time 2004 (see Knausgård 2008a: 104-106, 108-111; I: 218-225). The last section of “Om framtiden” returns to what in *Min kamp* I is the paragraph that follows the heart-and-death opening, concerning the simultaneous repression of real death and reproduction of death in images (see Knausgård 2008a: 111-113; I: 8-10), before closing with the demystifying reflection on the ordinariness of death that brings the first volume to an end in the diegetic time 1998:

For mennesket er bare en form blant andre former, som verden uttrykker igjen og igjen, ikke bare i det som lever, men også i det som ikke lever, tegnet i sand, sten, vann. Og døden, som jeg alltid hadde betraktet som den viktigste størrelsen i livet, mørk, dragende, var ikke mer enn et rør som springer lekk, en gren som

knekker i vinden, en jakke som glir av en kleshenger og faller ned på gulvet.³⁷ (Knausgård 2008a: 113; I: 435)

Considering that the essay “Om framtiden” contains the opening, middle, and end of the first volume of *Min kamp*, Claus Elholm Andersen has fittingly described this essay in passing as a “ur-*Min kamp*”; a concentration of *Min kamp* (C. E. Andersen 2017: 32).³⁸ This 2008 essay can therefore be viewed in terms of Knausgård as author-critic, who with the essay “Om framtiden” is preparing the literary field for *Min kamp*, which he is currently writing, by identifying the key issues that the text addresses. However, it seems highly significant that in *Min kamp* parts of this essay are rewritten in a specific diegetic time: as essayistic reflections made by Karl Ove in January 2004 – when he is trying to find a way to develop his second novel *En tid for alt*. In chapter 6 I therefore pursue the function of rewriting the essay in this specific time, and, in particular, how it functions to connect Knausgård’s past and present author-image.

Narratological Outline of *Min kamp II*

As both Rühl and Behrendt have identified, the narration and diegesis of *Min kamp II* follows a V-structure, where the overarching diegetic time remains in the period 2002-2008 (Rühl 2015: 97-99; Behrendt 2017: 116-118). The V-structure thus indicates diegetic mirroring, that is, the narration begins in the diegetic time 2008, making its way ‘down’ in analeptic jumps to 2006, 2005, 2003, and 2002, before making its way ‘up’ again to 2008, revisiting specific, mirrored events in the different diegetic times.

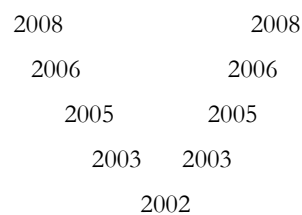


Fig. III.a Anachronic Mirroring in *Min kamp II* (Behrendt 2017: 117)

³⁷ “For humans are merely one form among many, which the world produces over and over again, not only in everything that lives but in everything that does not live, drawn in sand, stone and water. And death, which I have always regarded as the greatest dimension of life, dark, compelling, was no more than a pipe that springs a leak, a branch that cracks in the wind, a jacket that slips off a clothes hanger and falls to the floor.” (MS I: 490)

³⁸ “prototypical *Min kamp*”. Stefan Kjerkegaard also points to how this essay has been included and rewritten in *Min kamp I* (cf. Kjerkegaard 2017: 177-178).

However, Behrendt also identifies that the diegetic point zero in the second volume is in fact not 2002 and Karl Ove's move to Stockholm from Bergen, but rather 1999 and meeting Linda at Biskops-Arnö (Behrendt 2017: 116-119). In Behrendt's reading of the narratology, and the insertion of Biskops-Arnö as the narrative point zero, he argues that he has found an alternative Knausgård code to Eivind Tjønneland's satirical, emotionally driven, chronology-dismissing code (cf. Tjønneland 2010). In a more detailed schematic outline, Behrendt specifies the mirroring events in the narration, as well as the insertion of 1999 in the diegesis (see table III.b).

Tjønneland presented his Knausgård-code in 2010 after the fourth volume had been released, where arguing that *Min kamp* can be condensed in the following formula: "Knausgård-koden = abstrakte virkelighetsreferanser + interjeksjonen ååhh" (Tjønneland 2010: 75).³⁹ In formulating the code, Tjønneland draws on *Studvest's* satirical outline of a five-point Knausgård code, where the fifth element reads: "Kast kronologien ut av vinduet og operer i stedet med store blokker av tidsperioder som du hopper fra og til på måfå for å gjøre leseren desorientert" (cit. in Tjønneland 2010: 58).⁴⁰ What Behrendt argues, in contrast, is that in the second volume there is a visible structure, where the events before and after the narration of 1999 are viewed in a new light due to the revelation of Karl Ove's intense love for Linda. Furthermore, Behrendt's identification provides resistance to the idea of the narrative as spontaneous and unedited, a notion that Knausgård had contributed to prior to the publication by claiming that when writing *Min kamp* he not given much thought to quality, but had rather followed a categorical, self-induced demand of writing ten pages a day (cf. Holmlund 2009). Following suit, some scholars seem to view *Min kamp* as being a stream-of-consciousness-like text that is fuelled by a compulsive necessity: the author's "bulimiske skrift" as Camilla Schwartz names it (Schwartz 2017: 96).⁴¹ However, as Behrendt identifies, the text and its structure may have been subject to more conscious effort on behalf of the author. Moreover, as I argue in chapter 6, there may be an autoreceptive function imbedded in the manner in which Knausgård creates the idea of it being necessary for him to write *Min kamp*, most notably through instances of shadowing.

³⁹ "The Knausgård code = abstract references to reality + the interjection oohh"

⁴⁰ "Throw the chronology out the window and instead operate with large blocks of time periods that you jump back and forth between on a whim in order to make the reader disoriented."

⁴¹ "bulimic writing"

MK1 p. 29: 27 February 2008, 23.43:

“I vinduet foran meg ser jeg vagt gjenskinnet av mitt eget ansikt ...”*

MK2 PAGE	DATE & PLACE:	EVENT:
7-19	July 2008 Malmö	On the way home from an unsuccessful holiday
23-65	Nov. 2006 Malmö	On the balcony after the children’s birthday party
65-102	Feb. 2005 Stockholm	The encounter with the Russian woman on the stairs
116-121	Dec. 2003 Stockholm	New Year’s Eve
	Mar. 2002 Stockholm	The arrival from Bergen: a) The reunion with Geir** (122-168) b) The reunion with Linda (168-227)
Meeting Linda on Biskops-Arnö, June 1999 (179-94)		
274	Dec. 2003 Stockholm	New Year’s Eve
333	Feb. 2005 Stockholm	The encounter with the Russian woman on the stairs
511	Nov. 2006 Malmö	On the balcony after the children’s birthday party
518	July 2008 Malmö	On the way home from an unsuccessful holiday
[535 554	26 Feb. 2008 Kristiansand	The revolt against fiction
	27 Feb. 2008, 23.43:	After coming home from Kristiansand: “I vinduet foran meg ser jeg vagt gjenskinnet av mitt eget ansikt ...”

* “In the window before me I can vaguely make out the reflection of my face ...”

** Geir Angell Øygarden

Tab. III.b Behrendt’s Knausgård code in *Min kamp II* (Behrendt 2017: 118, my translation)

Despite minor inaccuracies in Behrendt’s identification of the diegetic time, for example the scene at Biskops-Arnö actually takes place in the diegetic time of late June *and* early July 1999, his examination of the structure in *Min kamp II* provides an entry point to autoreceptive narratological elements in *Min kamp*. Firstly, Behrendt identifies how Karl Ove in *Min kamp VI* rewrites the context of deciding to add the events at Biskops-Arnö in 1999 to *Min kamp II*, instead of keeping it, as planned, in *Min kamp V* since that volume focuses

on the diegetic time 1988-2002 (Behrendt 2017: 114-116).⁴² Secondly, and most relevant for this thesis, here Behrendt approaches Knausgård as rewriter within *Min kamp*, by pointing to how the diegetic time 27 February 2008 marks the beginning of *Min kamp*, and how this creates a mirroring between volumes I and II.⁴³ However, Behrendt does not consider the rewriting of the context leading up to Karl Ove beginning *Min kamp* in full, nor the instances of autoreception that occur between the repetition of these lines in *Min kamp*, that is, what is narrated in *Min kamp* I and II up until Knausgård rewrites the inception of *Min kamp*. Most crucially, in his analysis Behrendt neglects the rewriting of the diegetic time late January 2008 up until Karl Ove begins writing *Min kamp*. I argue that pursuing the interactions between *Min kamp* I and II further can reveal the autoreceptive and strategic functions of Knausgård's narratological mirroring, which prove to be more complex than Behrendt indicates.

Diegetic Mirroring Expanded

Before outlining the diegetic time in *Min kamp* II that I argue needs to be examined in detail, I will first provide an overview of the diegetic mirroring and the V-structure that both Rühl and Behrendt have pointed to. The second volume begins with an indication of the time of writing, 29 July 2008, and Knausgård as the author stating that the first part of the novel, that is *Min kamp* I, was finished on 26 June 2008 (II: 7).⁴⁴ The narration then turns to an exposition of the events since finishing the first volume, before it changes to the characteristic narrative technique and the diegetic time mid-July 2008 as Karl Ove and his family are on their way home from a rather unsuccessful holiday (II: 9). They stop at a run-down amusement park, and Heidi's donkey-ride acts as the mirroring event in this diegetic time (II: 19). This leads the narration on to a characterisation of each of Karl Ove's three

⁴² In Behrendt's reading of volume II, and in proposing the alternative Knausgård-code, he draws on Knausgård's rewriting in volume VI of his last-minute decision to include the first meeting with Linda in volume II (cf. VI: 825-826). Although Behrendt's identification of Knausgård's last-minute change to volume II easily fits under autoreception, and Knausgård's narration of this in *Min kamp* VI constitutes rewriting, it is rather the significance and the function of interaction between *Min kamp* I and II that is of interest here.

⁴³ To be clear, Behrendt is of course not the first to point out that *Min kamp* II ends with Karl Ove beginning to write *Min kamp* I, as this is readily apparent in the text. See for example Haarder 2014: 213-214. However, Behrendt highlights the diegetic time, which is significant for my purpose.

⁴⁴ *Min kamp* II opens with an indication of the time of writing: "29. juli 2008". The second sentence in the text is "Den 26. juni ble jeg ferdig med første del av romanen [...]" [I finished the first part of the novel on June 26] (II: 7; MS II: 3). The fact that Knausgård writes "første del av romanen" might be confusing to the reader, as *Min kamp* is not only divided into six volumes, but also nine parts. Still, I am confident that Knausgård is referring to what was to become *Min kamp* I and not part 1 here. When writing this on 29 July 2008, neither the division of the text nor the publication format was firmly decided upon yet, which Knausgård gives a rendition of in volume VI (VI: 63-66). However, as this is the opening of the second volume, it would seem logical that this marks him moving on from the first to the second volume in terms of writing content.

children, before settling in diegetic place and time Malmö, November 2006, and the day of the birthday party of one of Vanja's friends from kindergarten (II: 19-24).

The gradual change from diegetic time November 2006 to February 2005 takes the form of Karl Ove, on the balcony after the children's birthday party, pondering the longing for more reality and presence, and the reason for the loss of meaning ascribed to the world (II: 67-68). This turns to a reflection on how the world seemed to open and become more intense in the spring of 2002, when he moved to Stockholm and met Linda (II: 69).⁴⁵ The narration then moves quickly through an exposition of the time from falling in love with Linda in 1999 to the birth of their first child Vanja and Karl Ove writing his second novel, both in 2004, to Karl Ove as a stay-at-home father during the time after having finished *En tid för allt*, before arriving in the diegetic time February 2005, when Karl Ove is on his way to Rhythm Time with Vanja at Stockholm City Library (II: 69-74).

The mirroring event in the diegetic time and place Stockholm, February 2005, is Karl Ove's meeting with their neighbour in their joint stairwell, a Russian woman, who he describes as the neighbour from hell (II: 102). The encounter with the Russian woman marks the associative transition from February 2005 to December 2003, as Karl Ove examines the reasons for the dispute between her, and Linda and himself (II: 102-115). The narration then arrives at New Year's Eve 2003, another mirroring event in the narrative structure (II: 116). The evening is spent with four friends, among them Geir A, and it is Karl Ove's reflections concerning his relationship with Geir A that generates the transition to March 2002 and Karl Ove's sudden move to Stockholm (II: 120-126).⁴⁶

In March 2002, following Karl Ove's separation from his first wife Tonje, Geir A and Linda are the only people he knows in Stockholm (II: 168-169). He meets up with Linda, and later that evening begins telling Geir A what happened at Biskops-Arnö the first time they met, and the diegetic time changes to late June and early July 1999 (II: 182-194). Karl Ove, who is married to Tonje at the time, becomes infatuated with Linda, and one drunken night he decides to tell her how he feels about her, but Linda rejects him in favour of his fellow Norwegian author, Arve Kleiva (II: 189-190). Karl Ove reacts by going back to his

⁴⁵ To be precise, Karl Ove is referring to the time when he met Linda again in March 2002. However, Karl Ove has yet to reveal at this point in the text how and where he met Linda: in 1999 at a writing seminar on Biskops-Arnö.

⁴⁶ Behrendt inaccurately identifies Karl Ove's date of arrival in Stockholm as 16 March 2002 (Behrendt 2012: 79; 2017: 119), probably based on the date found in Geir A's email to Karl Ove discussing the move (II: 143). However, it is indicated earlier in the text that during the first email exchange with Geir A, on 16 March, Karl Ove asks if it suits Geir if he travels to Stockholm the next day, that is 17 March 2002 (II: 126).

room, throwing a glass against the wall, and methodically cutting his face with the shards (II: 190).

When the story of the disastrous writing seminar in 1999 ends, the diegetic time of 2002 resumes, as if Karl Ove has been narrating the events to Geir A (II: 194). From here the narration follows a fairly chronological development from 2002-2008, revisiting the mirrored events: New Year's Eve 2003 (II: 247-307), the encounter with the Russian woman on the stairs in February 2005 (II: 333), Karl Ove on the balcony in Malmö after the birthday party in November 2006 (II: 511), and Heidi riding the donkey at the amusement park in July 2008 (II: 518). The narration then makes yet another analeptic jump, to the time leading up to Karl Ove beginning to write *Min kamp*. It is this analeptic jump that I argue must be explored in detail, and which I provide a brief outline of in the following section.

Rewriting in *Min kamp* II: Beginning *Min kamp*

On the way home from the unsuccessful holiday in July 2008, Karl Ove reflects on how this is only the fourth time he has driven since getting his driver's licence (II: 518). This association leads to a gradual analeptic change in diegetic time, to the end of January 2008 and the day of Karl Ove's first driving test, which he failed (II: 519-520). The consequence of failing the driving test is that the plan to take his family to the south of Norway by car, as a family trip in connection with Karl Ove's readings at the University of Agder and Adger Folk High School at the end of February, falls through (II: 521).

Therefore, Karl Ove flies to Kristiansand on his own on 26 February 2008, and upon arrival at Kjevik Airport Karl Ove makes the reflections that Behrendt (2017) calls the revolt against fiction: how he has lost faith in literature and the made up (II: 535).⁴⁷ Karl Ove meets up with Geir A, who is in Arendal to attend his mother's funeral, and they drive around Kristiansand and Arendal, and to Tromøya on 27 February (II: 541-553). That evening, on 27 February 2008, having returned home from the trip to the south of Norway, Karl Ove writes a short piece of text:

Halv tolv gikk jeg inn på soverommet og skrudde på pc-en, åpnet et nytt dokument, begynte å skrive.

⁴⁷ The diegetic time is not specifically indicated in the narrative, but appears in the published version of the text passage that Karl Ove begins writing upon arriving home from his trip to southern Norway: *Min kamp* I (cf. II: 554; I: 29).

I vinduet foran meg ser jeg vagt gjenskinnet av mitt eget ansikt. Bortsett fra øyet, som glinser, og partiet like under, som matt reflekterer litt lys, ligger hele den venstre delen i skygge. To dype furer går ned pannen, en dyp fure langs hvert kinn, alle likesom fylt av mørke, og når øynene er stirrende og alvorlige, og munnvikene såvidt går nedover, er det umulig å ikke tenke på dette ansiktet som dystert.

Hva er det som har satt seg i det?

Neste dag fortsatte jeg.⁴⁸ (II: 554, italics original)

In the context of the second volume, these constitute the first lines Karl Ove wrote of what would become *Min kamp*, and that in *Min kamp* I appear on page 29, only not in italics. This is thus an instance of rewriting within the text, and the precluding events is a rewriting of the context of the inception of *Min kamp*. In accordance with the narrative strategy, Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator appears as having no knowledge of what was to grow out of these few lines, and he continues the next day with the idea that he wants to get as close to his own life as possible (II: 554). In the diegetic time Karl Ove is writing *Min kamp* I and continues to do so until volume II ends in the diegetic time May 2008 (II: 562-563). Following the narratological V-structure of *Min kamp* II, the reader knows that the first volume was finished on 26 June 2008 (II: 7). Thus, this expansion of the diegetic mirroring shows that a narratological outline should include the mirrored events of finishing and beginning *Min kamp* I. I have therefore developed Behrendt's model to include this expansion, as well as added the event of finishing *En tid for alt*, as I discuss this in chapter 6 (see table III.c).

⁴⁸ "At half past eleven I went into the bedroom and switched on my computer, opened a new document, and began to write:

In the window before me I can vaguely see the image of my face. Apart from the eyes, which are shining, and the part directly beneath, which dimly reflects light, the whole of the left side lies in shade. Two deep furrows run down the forehead, one deep furrow runs down each cheek, all filled as it were with darkness, and when the eyes are staring and serious, and the mouth turned down at the corners it is impossible not to think of this face as sombre. What is it that has etched itself into you?

The next day I continued." (MS II: 653-654, italics original)

Note that in Bartlett's translation of this passage in volume II the text differs slightly from the corresponding passage in volume I, while in the original text the two passages are identical. For readers of the English translation it would then seem as if the passage as it appears in volume I is a rewritten version of the passage in volume II, i.e. rewritten in the sense that Knausgård as the author has made alterations.

PAGE	DIEGETIC TIME & PLACE	EVENT
II 7	29 July 2008, Malmö	Time of writing Mirrored event: <i>Min kamp I</i> was finished on 26 June 2008
II 7-10	26 June – mid-July 2008, Malmö, Tjörn, Göteborg	Transitional, expositional narration Describes the unsuccessful holiday, on the way home
II 10-19	July 2008, south of Göteborg	On their way home from an unsuccessful holiday Mirrored event: Heidi riding a donkey
II 19-24	2006, Malmö November 2006 Malmö*	Transitional narration: Vanja's riding experience Day of the children's birthday party
II 24-69	November 2006 Malmö	Children's birthday party Mirrored event: Karl Ove on the balcony after the party
II 69-74	2003-2005 Stockholm	Transitional, expositional narration: Moving to Stockholm, falling in love with Linda, birth of Vanja, everyday life as a stay-at-home Dad
II 74-102	February 2005, Stockholm	Rhythm Time Mirrored event: Encounter with the Russian woman
II 102-115	December 2003, Stockholm	Transitional, expositional narration: An account of the troubles with the Russian woman
II 116-122	31 December 2003, Stockholm	Mirrored event: New Year's Eve
II 122-126	1989, Bergen – March 2002, Stockholm	Transitional narration: Relationship with Geir A
II 126-182	March – April 2002, Stockholm	Reuniting with Geir A; Reuniting with Linda
II 182-194	June – July 1999, Biskops-Arnö & Stockholm	Seminar for debutant writers; meeting Linda for the first time
II 194-307	April 2002 – 31 December 2003, Stockholm**	Relationship with Linda, awaiting the birth of Vanja Mirrored event: New Year's Eve
II 307-329	January 2004, Stockholm	Karl Ove trying to write <i>En tid för allt</i> , the birth of Vanja
II 329-333	Spring 2004 – February 2005, Stockholm	Karl Ove finishes <i>En tid för allt</i> (1 August 2004) Mirrored event: Encounter with the Russian woman
II 333-511	February 2005, Stockholm	Everyday life with Linda and Vanja; Conversations with Geir A; Finding out that Linda is pregnant with Heidi
II 511-518	November 2006, Malmö	Mirrored event: Karl Ove on the balcony after the party Finding out Linda is pregnant with John
II 518-520	July 2008, south of Göteborg	On their way home from an unsuccessful holiday Mirrored event: Heidi riding a donkey
II 520-562	January – May 2008, Malmö, Kristiansand, Arendal, Tromøya	Karl Ove fails his driving test; travels to the south of Norway Mirrored event: Begins writing <i>Min kamp</i>

* This refers to November 2006 and the children's birthday party as the overarching diegetic time, however the narration makes associative jumps to other diegetic times in the past. For example, the party in Stockholm where Linda gets locked in the bathroom (II: 34-38).

** This refers to the overarching diegetic time and place. This not to say that the whole plot takes place in Stockholm. For example, Karl Ove and Linda go on holiday to Tromøya, Larkollen and Jølster during the summer of 2003 (II: 262-268).

Tab. III.c Narratological Outline and Mirroring in *Min kamp II*

Behrendt emphasises the intersection and mirrored events in *Min kamp* I and *Min kamp* II, in terms of the revolt against fiction on 26 February, and how the intersection commences explicitly in the diegetic time 27 February 2008 with the verbatim repetition of the paragraph beginning with the sentence “I vinduet foran meg ser jeg vagt gjenskinnet av mitt eget ansikt” (I: 29; II: 554).⁴⁹ He argues that with the indication of time of writing, and the inclusion of the first lines written for *Min kamp*, Knausgård shows the reader how the revolt against fiction led to writing *Min kamp* (Behrendt 2017: 119). While I, to an extent, agree that this is part of what Knausgård as rewriter strategically outlines as the catalyst for *Min kamp*, I still argue that this is not the only igniting spark in the diegetic time 26-27 February 2008. In rewriting the beginning of *Min kamp*, Knausgård implicitly creates a connection between autogeography and writing, as the trip to Tromøya, the place of his childhood, and writing the first lines of *Min kamp* occur on the same day. In other words, I argue that revisiting his childhood geography is what Knausgård as rewriter implicitly and strategically points to as the spark that ignited him to write *Min kamp*.

In Rühl’s analysis of autogeography in *Min kamp* she compares the meaning ascribed to place from Karl Ove’s perspective at different times in his life. Rühl highlights how Karl Ove as narrator and protagonist sees the places of his past from the perspective of a child in volume III, and how he views them when returning to these places as an adult in volume II (Rühl 2015: 61-66; 2017: 159-162). Most significantly in this context, Rühl highlights how at the end of volume II, when Karl Ove returns with Geir A to places he has lived in southern Norway, he reflects on how these places have *no* inherent meaning, but rather how the meaning was formed by his active engagement with and intentionality towards them as meaningful (II: 552-553; Rühl 2015: 62-63; 2017: 160).

The strength of Rühl’s analysis lies in the fact that, by identifying the different intentionality and ascription of meaning to places at different times in his life, she implicitly establishes a thematic connection between 1) the end of volume II and the reflections regarding place and meaning, 2) Knausgård’s reflections in the opening essay of *Min kamp* I and on 4 March 2008 concerning place and meaning (cf. I: 13-15, 32) and 3) volume III, which focuses on Karl Ove as a child and his relationship with place and meaning (Rühl 2015: 61-66; 2017: 159-162). However, Rühl does not expand this connection beyond a thematic exploration and therefore does not consider what this may signify for Knausgård

⁴⁹ “In the window before me I can vaguely see the image of my face” (MS I: 27; MS II: 654).

as the author of *Min kamp*. In other words, she does not consider the implicit autoreceptive function of the narratological structure, the reoccurring theme of place and meaning, and the function of the backshadowing and foreshadowing that occurs in volumes I and II.

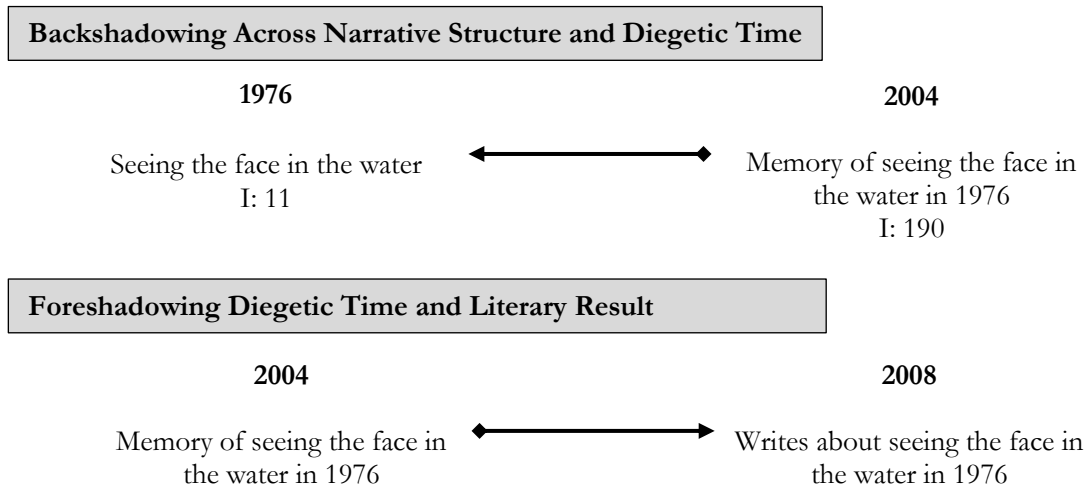
Thus, neither Behrendt, in his identification of the precluding context of writing *Min kamp* as the revolt against fiction, nor Rühl, in her identification of Karl Ove's realisation of the lack of inherent meaning of place in the diegetic time 26-27 February 2008, consider in full how Knausgård rewrites the context of the inception of *Min kamp*, and what the rewriting means in terms of autoreception – they do not consider the strategic function of the rewriting. In the diegetic time 26-27 February 2008, neither Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator nor Knausgård as the author point explicitly to these two events, that is, the revolt against fiction and the effects revisiting his childhood place, as an ignition for the *Min kamp*-project. Still, I argue that there is a definite strategic, autoreceptive function in the narrative structuring of these events, which relates to the poetic aim and value Knausgård as author gives *Min kamp*. I pursue this in chapter 6.

Shadowing as Autoreception

In the following chapter I show how Knausgård as rewriter of his past and present author-images uses fore- and backshadowing to create distance, but most importantly unity between his author-images across time. The shadowing, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, is quite complex as it runs across not just the narratological structure of *Min kamp*, but across diegetic times. This is why I in this chapter have focused on outlining in detail the two first volumes of *Min kamp*, as they dominate the analysis in chapter 6.

To exemplify, and to point to the first instance of rewriting an author-image that I analyse in the following chapter, a key scene in the diegetic time 2004 illustrates the complexity. When Karl Ove in 2004, in the middle of *Min kamp* I, reflects on the event of seeing the face in the water in 1976 (I: 190-191), an event which appears in the beginning of the volume (I: 11), Knausgård as rewriter employs backshadowing both in terms of the narratological structure and the diegetic time, i.e. from the middle to the beginning of *Min kamp*, and from 2004 to 1976. However, Karl Ove in the diegetic time 2004 does not have knowledge of the future: that he will use the 1976 event in the opening of his third novel, *Min kamp*. Thus, it is Knausgård as the author rewriting the diegetic time 2004 that simultaneously backshadows and foreshadows the opening of *Min kamp*, written in 2008. In

other words, it foreshadows the literary result of the reflections made about the event in 1976 in the diegetic time 2004.



Tab. III.d First Shadowing in the Diegetic Time 2004 in *Min kamp* I

In this instance, the observant reader is aware of both the foreshadowing and the backshadowing. However, at other times the foreshadowing is not apparent without the outcome of an event being known. That is, the foreshadowing becomes apparent, however explicitly or implicitly it may be done by Knausgård as the author, when the narrative is reread and the result is known. Therefore, to re-contextualise Morson and Bernstein's points in terms of *Min kamp*, and in terms of self-reading and self-criticism, the autoreceptive function of shadowing that I investigate in the following chapter is that Knausgård as the rewriter can create a harmony between his past and present ambitions and poetics, thus generating a sense of inevitability: *Min kamp* is what he has been working towards all along. For as Morson emphasises, the literary devices of shadowing draw attention to the structuring of the narrative as a narrative, and in turn creates a rhetorical coherence between events that lead to a specific outcome (Morson 1994: 45-49). While the narrative technique in *Min kamp* consists of strategies of presentification of the diegetic time – Karl Ove as the narrator-protagonist has no knowledge of events that succeed the narrated time – Knausgård as the author rewriting Karl Ove as an author, is aware of events that will follow. Thus, the notion of narrative shadowing relates to the hypothesis that dominates part III in this thesis: that Knausgård as the author creates a near-teleological unity between the past and present, specifically with regards to his author-images, leaving *Min kamp* to be the necessary outcome of his struggles.

6 Rewriting Roots and Beginnings

Responding to the flux of self-experience, we instinctively gravitate to identity-supporting structures: the notion of identity as continuous over time, and the use of autobiographical discourse to record its history.

Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Becomes Stories: Making Selves* (1999)

As Paul John Eakin points out in relation to autobiographical narratives, the notion of continuity across time functions as an identity-supporting structure: that there is a continuation of who we are through a vast amount of self-experience (Eakin 1999: 20). This is easily transferred to autoreception and to the rewriting of author-images in *Min kamp*. In the autobiographical rewriting of himself as an author, Karl Ove Knausgård demonstrates that he has developed as an author, but more significantly, as I argue in this chapter, creates a continuity of his poetics across time. This is not to say that there is, in actual fact, continuity between Knausgård's past and present author-selves, but rather that in his rewriting Knausgård creates a strong indication of unity between past and present ambitions. In this respect I disagree with for example Camilla Schwartz' point of view: "Den skriveproces vi ser udfoldet i *Min kamp* handler [...] ikke om at fremmane sammenhæng og mening, men handler snarere om at frigøre sig fra forskellige narrative, opslidende meningsstrukturer" (Schwartz 2017: 95).¹ While Schwartz goes on to conduct a psychoanalytic reading of the relationship between Karl Ove and his father, and does not focus on Knausgård and Karl Ove as an author, it is still a generalisation of *Min kamp* and the writing process it is the result of. In this chapter I demonstrate the continuous links that are made by Knausgård as the author between author-images past and present, focusing on instances of shadowing, i.e. foreshadowing and backshadowing as a strategy of rewriting, arguing that this adheres to an autoreceptive function of creating unity between Knausgård's author-images. Specifically, I examine the rewriting of the diegetic time January 2004, the inception of *En tid for alt* and of *Min kamp*, and how this relates to the poetic value of the autobiographical, autogeographical and phenomenological. As the title of this chapter suggests, I propose that an overarching theme in Knausgård's rewriting is concerned with roots and beginnings: the roots of place, the roots of tradition, the roots of memory, and the roots and beginnings of *Min kamp*.

¹ "The writing process we see unfolded in *My Struggle* is not about evoking connections or meaning, but rather it is about emancipation from different narrative and gruelling structures of meaning."

Shadowing a Memory

In the diegetic time January 2004 in *Min kamp* I, Karl Ove and Linda are expecting their first child, and Karl Ove has acquired an office through one of Linda's friends, where he is trying to develop what will later become *En tid for alt*. During Karl Ove's first working day, after having tried for thirty minutes to find a new entry point for his second novel, Karl Ove lets his gaze wander aimlessly around the office, until he spots something in the parquet floor: "Plutselig så jeg at kvistene og årringene kanskje to meter bortenfor stolen hvor jeg satt, dannet et bilde av Kristus i tornekorne" (I: 190).² At first, Karl Ove has no reaction to this: he merely registers the image, and gets up to make himself a cup of coffee. But as he is filling the kettle with water, he suddenly remembers something that occurred in his childhood – in a news report about a shipwreck, he suddenly saw an image in the water (ibid.). This generates an atmospheric memory of his childhood:

I løpet av det sekundet det tok å fylle tekokeren, så jeg stuen vår for meg, det teak-kledde fjernsynet, skimmeret av snøflekker hist og her i den skumrende åsiden utenfor vinduet, havet på skjermen, ansiktet som plutselig viste seg i det. Med bildene fulgte også stemningene fra den gang, av vår, av byggefelt, av sytti-tall, av livet i familien slik det var da. Og med stemningen, en nesten vill lengsel.³ (ibid.)

In the diegetic time 2004, Karl Ove reflects on how strange it was that he suddenly remembered seeing the face in the water, as he had not thought about it since then. In fact, as pointed to in the overview of Rühl's analysis of *Min kamp* in the introduction to part III, Karl Ove claims that apart from a few singular events, he remembers nothing from his childhood. What he does remember, however, are the rooms where the events occurred (I: 191). This scene thus acts as a simultaneous foreshadowing of what has become the opening of *Min kamp*, and in terms of narratological structure and diegetic time, as a backshadowing to when Karl Ove saw the face in the water in the spring of 1976 (cf. I: 11; table III.d).

² "I noticed that the knots and grain, perhaps two metres from the chair where I was sitting, formed an image of Christ wearing a crown of thorns." (MS I: 210). Note that in the original text, "Plutselig" indicates that this happens *suddenly*.

³ "In the second it took to fill the pot, I saw our living room before me, the teak television cabinet, the shimmer of isolated snowflakes against the darkening hillside outside the window, the sea on the screen, the face that appeared in it. With the images came the atmosphere from that time, of spring, and the housing estate, of the seventies, of family life as it was then. And with the atmosphere, an almost uncontrollable longing." (MS I: 211-212)

In previous scholarship this scene has been given a fair amount of attention due to a possible intertextual reference: as both Behrendt and Andersen point out, the image of Christ in the parquet floor is, to a certain extent, comparable to Marcel Proust's Madeleine cake in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, as both function as catalyst for recalling, ostensibly, forgotten childhood memories (Behrendt 2011: 310; C. E. Andersen 2013: 167-168). While, in my view, Andersen makes some undue assumptions in his analysis of this scene, specifically regarding the relationship between Knausgård and Proust, he makes a valid point in arguing that the scene is in all probability staged and placed in the diegetic time 2004, as opposed to being an accurate and true rendition of an actual memory (C. E. Andersen 2013: 170-171).⁴ In doing so, he directly refutes Hans Hauge's claim that the memory of the face in the water is the primordial scene of *Min kamp* (Hauge 2012: 159), and instead justly asks the question what the function of the staging is (C. E. Andersen 2013: 171). However, as I see it, Andersen is too categorical in focusing on the functions relating to a possible intertextual reference to Proust, and thereby does not fully consider the other functions this scene may have. Specifically, while he touches on the relationship between this scene in 2004 and the opening of *Min kamp*, he overlooks other aspects of how the use of foreshadowing and backshadowing functions as autoreception of Knausgård as the author.

In this respect, Behrendt hits closer to the mark: while also comparing it with Proust's Madeleine, he argues that the connection between the scene in 2004 and the memory from 1976 indicates how autogeography plays a part in the creation of *Min kamp* (Behrendt 2011: 308-309). Therefore, Behrendt briefly touches on parts of the argument that I pursue in the following: how the scene functions to demonstrate the power and literary value of autogeographical memory for Knausgård's writing. In rewriting a sudden flash of a memory

⁴ Andersen sees the resemblance to Proust as indicative of Knausgård's anxiety of influence, arguing that it is an attempt to revise Proust, as in Andersen's view, *À la recherche du temps perdu* is the work Knausgård with *Min kamp* struggles to liberate himself from (C. E. Andersen 2013: 168-169). According to Andersen, the revision of Proust consists of exchanging the sense of taste for the sense of vision as the catalyst for past memories, and of reversing the causation. He argues that while Proust shows the cause, the Madeleine cake dipped in tea, and then the effect, the flood of past memories, Knausgård first shows the effect by narrating the event of seeing the face in the water, and then the cause, seeing the image of Christ in the wooden floor in Stockholm in January 2004 (ibid.). However, in my view, it is unclear how the reversed causation equals a revision of Proust, and further how this demonstrates anxiety of influence. Andersen continues by claiming that the revolt against Proust is an illusion, as Knausgård has planted the scene to deal with his anxiety of influence on a meta-textual level (ibid.: 172). This could be more feasible; however, the main issue is that I disagree with Andersen's premise: that Knausgård is attempting to combat the influence from Proust. Instead, I would argue that it is more probable that the scene acts as Knausgård's version of the Madeleine cake, and contrary to Andersen's understanding of the scene as an example of Knausgård's anxiety of influence and attempt at revising Proust (ibid.: 168-169), it is possible to view this scene as Knausgård submitting his own text to the literary tradition of Proust, as part of a self-canonising strategy. However, this is not the perspective I pursue here.

from his childhood that the reader has already become acquainted with and seen the literary result of (cf. I: 11), Knausgård as rewriter indicates to the reader that *Min kamp* has been latent in his mind since 2004.⁵ By this I am not claiming that Knausgård actually and necessarily saw the face of Christ in the wooden floor of his office in Stockholm in 2004, but rather that the scene is placed here with strategic intention to connect the author-images past and present: to connect this autobiographical and autogeographical memory with his author-image in 2008 and with *Min kamp*.

Shadowing the Literary Outcome

In accordance with the narrative strategy, the connection between the image of Christ and the opening of *Min kamp* I is not made overt, as the link between the memory of the face in the water and Karl Ove's longing for the atmosphere of his childhood place is at first not directly related to the act of writing. In other words, Karl Ove in 2004 is unaware of how the memories and ideas reflected upon here will evolve into the text Knausgård as the author is currently writing. Instead, it is implicitly connected to writing a few paragraphs later, indicating that Karl Ove in the diegetic time 2004 may have had a near prophetic sign of how he could achieve what he sees as the goal of writing:

Å skrive handler om å trekke det som finnes ut fra skyggene av det vi vet. Det er det skrivning handler om. Ikke hva som skjer der, ikke hva slags handlinger som utspiller seg der, men *der*, i seg selv. Der, det er skrivings sted og mål. Men hvordan komme seg dit?⁶ (I: 192, emphasis original)

With “skyggene av det vi vet”, Knausgård as rewriter seems to refer to two things.⁷ First, it seems to be related to the autobiographical and autogeographical memory Karl Ove has just had, which is rewritten as having up until this point resided in the shadows of what he knows: it seems to have been forgotten, but when it is recalled it creates a deep sense of longing for the past. Therefore, Knausgård as rewriter implicitly connects his longing for the intensity of an experience in his childhood, that is, the experience of seeing the face in the water, and the experience of his childhood place, to the principal aim of writing. As Behrendt also points

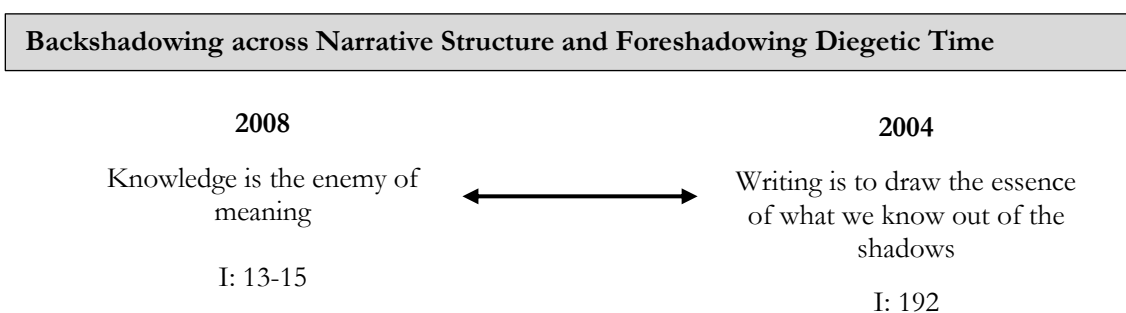
⁵ As I discuss in the closing of this chapter, Knausgård as rewriter may further be making a claim that *Min kamp* has been latent in his mind prior to 2004 as well.

⁶ “Writing is drawing the essence of what we know out of the shadows. That is what writing is about. Not what happens there, not what actions are played out there, but *there* itself. There, that was writing's location and aim. But how to get there?” (MS I: 212-213, emphasis original)

⁷ “shadows of what we know”

out, this passage sums up the fundamental subjective phenomenological ambition of the *Min kamp* project: the ultimate aim of writing is not to capture *what* happens in a place, but to create a presentification in an experience *there*, anchored in the first-person perspective (Behrendt 2017: 122). Put differently, this passage in the diegetic time January 2004 seems to act as a glimpse into how Knausgård, with *Min kamp* will use what Karl Ove somewhat nebulously refers to as “*der*”, i.e. place, to reconstruct his partly forgotten experiences in literature.⁸

Second, “skyggene av det vi vet” creates yet another fore- and backshadowing to the opening of *Min kamp*, particularly with regard to the relationship between *meaning* and *knowledge*. In the opening essay, Knausgård writes that growing up and gaining knowledge about the world implies obtaining the correct distance from objects and phenomena, but that this distance is simultaneously the enemy of experiencing the world, objects, and phenomena as meaningful (I: 13-15). Here, knowledge seems to be equated to the habitual, to what becomes taken-for-granted, and, in turn, the familiar and habitual cannot be seen as unique and meaningful. This same sentiment seems to be imbedded in the phrase “skyggene av det vi vet”: knowledge and the habitual cast shadows on meaning, obscuring them from our sight. Therefore, when Karl Ove in the diegetic time 2004 foreshadows this view that is part of the opening of *Min kamp*, it unites the statements made in the diegetic time 2004 and 2008 in the phenomenological poetic aim that writing consists of unlearning these habits: to go beyond the obscuring shadows that knowledge casts.



Tab. III.e Second Shadowing in the Diegetic Time 2004 in *Min kamp* I

⁸ “*there*”

However, the question Karl Ove poses, “[...] hvordan komme seg dit?” (I: 192), seems to be further complicated by the essayistic reflections regarding meaning and knowledge that occur in this diegetic time.⁹ I return to this in the next section.

The simultaneous back- and foreshadowing to the opening essay in *Min kamp* continues in the next few pages, but is supplemented by a back- and foreshadowing to a key event in the first volume: the death of his father in 1998.¹⁰ Karl Ove, who in the diegetic time 2004 is sitting on a bench outside his office drinking his coffee and smoking a cigarette, reflects on how the life he sees on the streets of Stockholm follows a disinterested regularity for the city itself: “Like lite som hjertet bryr seg om hvilket liv det slår for, bryr byen seg om hvem som fyller dens ulike funksjoner” (I: 194).¹¹ The description of the hustle and bustle of Stockholm thus echoes the intentionless beating of the heart that opens *Min kamp*. The simultaneous fore- and backshadowing is further emphasised in how Karl Ove sums up his reflections “Det var livet jeg så; det var døden jeg tenkte på” (ibid.).¹² As he returns to his computer and the text he is working on, what has sparked the thought about death seems to be implicitly explained:

I flere år hadde jeg forsøkt å skrive om min far, men ikke fått det til, sikkert fordi det lå for nært livet mitt, og dermed ikke så lett lot seg tvinge inn i en annen form, som jo er forutsetningen for litteratur.¹³ (I: 196)

The attempts may refer to the way he in *Ute av verden* writes about Henrik Vankel’s father in a manner that, in light of *Min kamp*, is similar to his own relationship with his own father. In addition, it may refer to how he will use the intentionless heart as a motif in the novel that Karl Ove, in the diegetic time January 2004, is currently writing – *En tid for alt*. However, the implicit connection made here between the intentionless beating of the heart, death, and writing about his father, indicates that Knausgård may be conducting an implicit self-reading of the previous attempts at utilising the heart-and-death motif that I outlined in chapter 5.

⁹ “[...] how to get there?” (MS I: 212-213)

¹⁰ Backshadowing in terms of diegetic times (from 2004 to 1998), and foreshadowing in terms of the narratological structure: the narration of his father’s death is placed directly after the narration of the diegetic time January 2004. See table III.f.

¹¹ “In the same way that the heart does not care which life it beats for, the city does not care who fulfils its various functions.” (MS I: 215)

¹² “I saw life; I thought about death.” (MS I: 215)

¹³ “For several years I had tried to write about my father, but had got nowhere, probably because the subject was too close to my life, and thus not so easy to force into another form, which of course is a prerequisite for literature.” (MS I: 217)

In the first attempt, “Livet vender tilbake” (2001), there is no explicit connection made to the death of his father. Rather the heart and the death are attributed to an anonymous, impersonal subject.¹⁴ In “Verden driver seg selv: 1” (2002), on the other hand, Knausgård transferred the imagery used in “Livet vender tilbake” directly to the death of his father, albeit without the opening line regarding the intentionless heart. However, the result at the time was arguably a detached depersonalisation: in describing the inherent pattern that the death of his father followed, Knausgård does not approach his actual father as an individual. Instead, in trying to force the personal into another form, he ends up letting form take over his description of his death, for instance by using an over-the-top version of the warfare analogy, where death is a destructive force that drives life out of the body (cf. Knausgård 2002: 91-92).¹⁵ Knausgård’s implicit autoreception of these texts in the diegetic time 2004 is further supported by the fact that when it reappears in *Min kamp* I, it is in a condensed form, and the heart that stopped is at first not attributed to a specific individual.

In the diegetic time 2004, Karl Ove does not make an explicit connection between the memory of seeing the face in the water, his poetic aim, and the seemingly sudden reflection about how he had tried writing about his father for many years. In other words, in this diegetic time he does not connect these memories and reflections that, in part, make up the opening of *Min kamp*. Rewriting Karl Ove in 2004, Knausgård creates a distance between his past and present author-images, in the sense that he deems himself unable to write about his father. This seems to be partly due to his understanding of what literature is: taking the personal and giving it a different form, as he did in *Ute av verden* in accordance with his high modernistic author-image at the time (cf. V: 587).¹⁶ However, as the reader is now halfway through a text that opens with an elegant, literary combination of the reflections that in the diegetic time 2004 appear without a clear connection, Knausgård as rewriter creates a unity between his past author-image by alluding to how he, with *Min kamp*, managed to create literature out of the thoughts he had been battling with for years. Furthermore, from the perspective of the rewriter, mentioning the urge to write about his father foreshadows the

¹⁴ I am only referring to the 2001 version of “Livet vender tilbake” here, to accommodate the diegetic time January 2004, which means that the rewritten version that appears in *Vinduet* would not yet have been published.

¹⁵ See appendix V for the full version of the warfare analogy in “Verden driver seg selv: 1”.

¹⁶ “Min litterære identitet da jeg ga ut *Ute av verden*, var høymodernismens, under hvilken himmel norske forfattere som Ole Robert Sunde, Svein Jarvoll, Jon Fosse, Tor Ulven og den tidlige Jan Kjørstad tilhørte. [My literary identity when *Out of the World* was published was high modernism, under the umbrella of which came such Norwegian writers as Ole Robert Sunde, Svein Jarvoll, Jon Fosse, Tor Ulven and early Jan Kjørstad.]” (V: 587; MS V: 639)

change in diegetic time to July 1998 and the death of his father thirty pages later, where he takes on the challenge that he has yearned to rise to.

Back- and Foreshadowing across Narrative Structure and Backshadowing Diegetic Time		
2008	2004	1998
The heart-and-death essay	←→ Karl Ove has attempted to write about his father	→→ The death of his father
I: 7-11	I: 194-196	I: 225-435

Tab. III.f Third Shadowing in the Diegetic Time 2004 in *Min kamp I*

These reflections in January 2004, through the function of back-, and foreshadowing to past and present author-images act as the initial indication of the two interrelated autoreceptive themes that dominate the rewriting of the author-images prior to beginning *Min kamp*: 1) that Karl Ove is eager to write a text like *Min kamp*, but at this stage deems himself unable to do so.¹⁷ In the diegetic time 2004 Knausgård as rewriter elaborates on the cause of the struggle he is up against in a longer essayistic contemplation that follows the reflections discussed in this section. By rewriting what seem to be deep-felt contradictions, and by rewriting himself as willing but incapable to pursue the sudden autobiographical and autogeographical memory and writing about his father and his death, 2) Knausgård strategically elevates his feat in *Min kamp* to a long and hard struggle he has faced for years.

Diagnosing the Author-Critic's Struggles

Within the essayistic passages in the diegetic time January 2004, Knausgård as rewriter outlines the cause of his struggle to write in a series of contradictions he could not get past, relating to the struggle between knowledge and meaning that is introduced in the opening essay of *Min kamp* (cf. I: 13-15). Andersen has created a fitting medical analogy for the essayistic reflections in this diegetic time: Knausgård identifies the symptoms, presents a diagnosis, and implicitly proposes a cure for his discomforts: a text like *Min kamp* (C. E.

¹⁷ To clarify, this indication is initial in terms of narratological structure and not diegetic time, as it is the first instance of rewriting a past author-image in the *Min kamp* series.

Andersen 2017: 27). Further, to transfer a term Andersen uses to synthesise a different aspect from the reflections in the diegetic time 2004 to the original essay “Om framtiden” from 2008, the autoreceptive function of the author-critic is comparable to “hypokonderens selvmedicinering” (ibid.).¹⁸ Although Andersen does not explicitly put this term to use in relation to autoreception, it constitutes a highly fitting analogy to author-criticism as strategically carving out spaces in the literary field that the author can fill. In “Om framtiden”, Knausgård simultaneously acts as the literary public health specialist who identifies an overarching problem, the patient presenting the index case, and the medical researcher working on a cure. While I adopt Andersen’s medical analogy in my analysis, my interest lies in the strategic function of rewriting the symptoms of his struggles, which were originally presented in “Om framtiden”, specifically in the diegetic time 2004 in *Min kamp* I.¹⁹

The fact that parts of the essayistic reflection in January 2004 that I discuss in this section are a rewriting of the essay “Om framtiden”, with the tense changed from present to past, may at first glance be viewed as a complication. If it is presumed that “Om framtiden” was written in 2008, and that Knausgård in this essay writes about, to re-contextualise Behrendt’s phrase, his “allermest aktuelle tanker om litteraturens væsen her og nu” (Behrendt 2011: 323), then this could potentially discredit the essay in *Min kamp* as being a representation of Knausgård’s author-image in 2004.²⁰ In other words, this essay could be viewed as evidence of Knausgård having these poetic ideas and thoughts in 2008, and not in January 2004 as he claims in *Min kamp* I. However, this is not a complication in the framework of autoreception. Rather, it serves to underline my methodological and theoretical point regarding the self-reading and the self-criticism imbedded in the narration and in the narratological structuring of *Min kamp*, and how the rewriting of a past author-image reflects the present author-image. Ultimately, despite the lack of retrospective narration, there is no question that it is Karl Ove Knausgård as the author who writes the text, between 27 February 2008 and 2 September 2011, and thus implicitly rewrites his author-image from this perspective.²¹ Or, to be specific, if this writing consists of cuts and pastes from previous texts, it is still Knausgård as the author who organises the text as a

¹⁸ “the hypochondriac’s self-medication”. Andersen uses this term to argue that in the diegetic time 2004, Karl Ove reverses the causation of his discomforts: as with the hypochondriac, it is the idea of the disease that decides the symptoms that are present.

¹⁹ See appendix VI for a comparative outline of “Om framtiden” and the rewriting of this essay in *Min kamp* I.

²⁰ “most current thoughts on the nature of literature here and now”

²¹ As previously mentioned, Knausgård indicates the time frame for writing *Min kamp* at the end of volume VI, see page 1116.

narrative. This means that it is Knausgård as the author who actively places the reflections included in “Om framtiden” in the diegetic time January 2004. Thus, part of what I examine is the function of rewriting this essay and placing it in the diegetic time when he is trying to write his second novel, and specifically the function of this for Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp*.

As I see it, it is significant that parts of “Om framtiden” are rewritten in the diegetic time in which Karl Ove is attempting to write his second novel. Thus, it seems to be a highly fitting narrative location for contemplations regarding struggles related to writing. Furthermore, while Knausgård rewrites a past author-image, it is in accordance with the narrative strategy not done with a sense of ironic distance, which could signal that the current author-image excuses or belittles his past poetics. Rather, the rewriting simultaneously reflects the current author-image, which means that two notions of poetics must be kept in mind at the same time: the rewritten past and the implicit present. Therefore, I propose that Knausgård as rewriter does not merely present *Min kamp* as the solution: he also proposes the text Karl Ove is currently writing, *En tid for alt*, as a temporary treatment for the symptoms he presents with in 2004. In the following I argue that the rewriting of the past author-image emphasises both the distance and unity between the poetic aims that inform *En tid for alt*, and that this is further implicitly related to the poetic aims in *Min kamp*. The essayistic reflections, i.e. the rewritten passages from the essay “Om framtiden”, therefore function not only to outline a space in the literary field for the latter text, but equally function to validate the former.

The Struggle between Meaning and Knowledge

When the essayistic passage in January 2004 is reduced to its core, Karl Ove is battling with three interrelated contradictions related to conflicts of meaning and knowledge: a conflict between inherent essentialist meaning and his theoretical schooling in poststructuralist theory.

First, in the diegetic time January 2004, Karl Ove on the one hand values artistic depictions of meaning in reality, implicitly tying them to an ontology reminiscent of transcendental idealism, but on the other hand he has internalised a poststructuralist understanding of how the notion of capturing an essential reality in art is naïve and romantic. For example, he cannot shake the feelings of meaningfulness that emerge as he looks at

Constable's *Cloud study 6 September 1822* (I: 206-207). In the face of this work of art, all lines of critical reasoning disappear, and he is left telling himself:

*Ja, ja, ja, lød det da. Det er der det er. Det er dit jeg må. Men hva var det jeg bejaet? Hvor var det jeg måtte?*²² (I: 208)

The emotional response and the location of artistic value, that Karl Ove is unable to express, seems to be the ability to capture an essential and meaningful experience of the world, and in this instance, of clouds. Transferring this to literature, as Karl Ove yearns to do, the aim of writing must therefore be to capture an essential experience like the one he has when looking at Constable's studies in words and in literature, thus giving it a literary rather than a pictorial expression. However, simultaneously Karl Ove states that he knows that emotional responses and a true depiction of reality in art have no value, but not without lamenting the result: "Da var det ikke mye mening tilbake" (*ibid.*).²³ In other words, while he carries with him a conviction that the value of art lies in capturing inherent meaning, he still dismisses this value based on his schooling that tells him that inherent meaning is an illusion.

Second, he battles with a wish to regard the world as inherently open, unknown, real and meaningful, which is at the same disputed by feelings that the world is closed, known and constructed (I: 218-219). This conflict also appears in "Om framtiden" (cf. Knausgård 2008a: 105-106), but is in the diegetic time 2004 directly tied to his schooling in poststructuralist theory. He states that his initial reaction to the poststructuralist idea of the world as constructed in language, which he first encountered at Skrivekunstakademiet and later at the University of Bergen, was to reject the notion by employing "sunn fornuft":

[...] for det var jo meningsløst, pennen jeg grep om, skulle den være språk? [...] Nei, det var en latterlig tanke. Verden var verden, det jeg tok på og støtte mot, pustet og spyttet, spiste og drakk, blødde og kastet opp.²⁴ (I: 219)

The level of rejection is in itself debatable, regarding how Knausgård as a student-critic and an aspiring author-critic demonstrates his schooling in poststructuralist thought (cf. chapters

²² "Yes, yes, yes, I heard. *That's where it is. That's where I have to go.* But what was it I had said yes to? Where was it I had to go?" (MS I: 231)

²³ "There was not much meaning left in that." (MS V: 230)

²⁴ "sound common sense"; "[...] for it was obviously meaningless, the pen I held, was that supposed to be language? [...] No, that was a ridiculous idea. The world was the world, which I touched and leaned on, breathed and spat in, ate and drank, bled, and vomited." (MS I: 244)

3 and 4). However, within the diegetic time 2004 Knausgård as rewriter states that it took years for him to form an understanding of what was meant by the world being constructed in language. The understanding was ostensibly formed after having read a quote by Nietzsche in a book on art and anatomy.

[...] det stod at “også fysikken bare er en uttolkning og en tilrettelegging av verden, og ikke en forklaring av verden”, og det stod at “vi har tilmålt verden en verdi ved hjelp av kategorier, *som gjelder for en rent fingert verden*”.²⁵ (I: 219-220, emphasis original)

What Karl Ove understood from this, was that the world is seen as superstructure, as spirit, and as abstract (I: 220). Within the diegetic time 2004, Karl Ove seems to ignore the point in the quotation from Nietzsche: the natural sciences do not constitute an explanation of the world but rather an interpretation and an arrangement. This misreading of Nietzsche is emphasised when he states that this in fact generated the *feeling* in him that everything is explained, understood, and comprehended (I: 221).²⁶ Yet, as in “Om framtiden”, Karl Ove’s instinct is that this feeling is deeply untrue, “siden vi egentlig ikke vet noen ting om noe”, but he still cannot get past the constructivist view he outlines here (I: 220; Knausgård 2008a: 106).²⁷

What it leads him to, both in “Om framtiden” and in the diegetic time 2004 is the understanding that the world in itself is fictional: the constructions of the world in language equals fiction. In 2004, Karl Ove further ties the feeling of total comprehension of the world to how the world is equalised in the constant reproduction of images:

Hele den fysiske verden har blitt [...] innlemmet i det imaginæres veldige rike, fra Sør-Amerikas regnskoger og Stillehavets øyer til Nord-Afrikas ørkener og Øst-Europas grå og slitte byer.²⁸ (I: 220)

In other words, the logic Karl Ove employs here is that if everything is incorporated into the imaginary realm, then everything inevitably becomes fiction, and, in turn, its value and meaning is equalised: nothing is unique or seen as it is in itself. Fiction as the great equaliser

²⁵ “[...] saying that ‘physics too is an interpretation of the world and an arrangement of the world, and not an explanation of the world,’ and that ‘we have measured the value of the world with categories *that refer to a purely fabricated world.*’” (MS I: 244, emphasis original)

²⁶ This misreading of Nietzsche has also been pointed out by Peter Sjølyst-Jackson (cf. Sjølyst-Jackson 2017: 86)

²⁷ “since we actually know nothing about anything” (MS I: 245).

²⁸ “The whole physical world has been [...] incorporated into the immense imaginary realm from South American rain forests and the islands of the Pacific Ocean to the North African deserts and Eastern Europe’s tired, grey towns.” (MS I: 245)

is a simultaneous back- and foreshadowing to the opening essay in *Min kamp*, in terms of narratological structure and diegetic time respectively, however in the opening the equalising effect is tied to how the constant reproduction of images of *death* in the media makes death and dead bodies lose their weight and meaning: “De er ingen steder og alle steder” (I: 11).²⁹ I return to this back- and foreshadowing in the next section.

In the diegetic time 2004 Karl Ove’s point is that the equalising power of fiction defies any form of essentialism to be captured in a phenomenological experience, as essence and meaning have been removed by our extensive knowledge of everything and everywhere. Therefore, as in “Om framtiden”, this leads Karl Ove to an ostensible rejection of fiction in literature as the way to combat fiction, that is, fiction in literature cannot combat the constructed fiction that we perceive as reality (I: 221; Knausgård 2008a: 108). In other words, fiction cannot capture the essentialism that he seems to seek, as the near-mystical essence he is after is seemingly not fictional.

Third and finally, Karl Ove outlines a conflict between art that keeps an objective distance to the world on the one hand, and subjective depictions of the world in art on the other. He relates the former to the feelings of meaningfulness that he gets while looking at certain works of art from before the twentieth century, for example Rembrandt’s self-portrait as an old man, Turner’s sunset, and Caravaggio’s *Cattura di Cristo nell’orto* (I: 221).³⁰ While he cannot pinpoint the meaningfulness, he seems to view it as being in some way subliminal: “verden likesom trådte fram fra verden”, signifying that the ideal world made a mysterious and fleeting appearance in our constructed and fictional world (I: 222).³¹ In other words, Karl Ove seems to continuously hold up transcendental idealism as his ontological view: somehow, there is another, real world where meaning resides, and it is *this* realism that should be affirmed in art. This ontology becomes not just a matter of artistic experience, but of personal experience as well, as Karl Ove connects the indescribable meaningfulness of these artworks to an experience he had when travelling from Stockholm to Gnesta on a commuter train.³² He recounts the joy in just sitting there, watching the passing industrial landscape during sunset, listening to the automatic doors of the new train:

²⁹ “They were nowhere and everywhere.” (MS I: 7)

³⁰ English translation of Caravaggio’s *Cattura di Cristo nell’orto: The Taking of Christ*.

³¹ “the world seemed to step forward from the world” (MS I: 247)

³² As a note, in both “Om framtiden” and *Min kamp* I, the time indicated for this experience is stated to be “noen måneder tidligere [a few months earlier]” i.e. sometime in late 2007 or early 2008, and the autumn of 2003 respectively (cf. Knausgård 2008a: 108; I: 221). However, in terms of rewriting in the context of *Min kamp*, it matters little when or if this actually happened: the function within the diegetic time 2004 is for Knausgård to pinpoint what he what he means by a meaningful experience of the world.

Det jeg opplevde forekom meg å være av enorm betydning. Enorm betydning.³³ (I: 221)

Again, he is not able to pinpoint the significance or the meaningfulness of this experience, but implies that it seems to have been a rare moment of clear-sightedness into the “fremmede og gåtefull” – to the ideal world of meaning (I: 222).³⁴ Thus, connecting this back to Karl Ove’s discomfoting feelings towards his poststructuralist schooling, it seems as though he refutes nominalism precisely due to these sudden, inexpressible instances of sublime, essential meaning that can emerge from both a work of art and personal experiences.

However, contrary to these experiences of meaning, he states, by way of his theoretical schooling, that he is aware that the thoughts are romantic and outdated (I: 221). For instance, Karl Ove reflects on how art had up until the Age of Enlightenment been associated with the divine, how the divine had been transferred to nature in Romanticism, and how humans were subordinate to the divine and nature in both paradigms respectively (I: 222-223). These notions, related to a higher order of meaning, seem to be more attuned to what Karl Ove seeks. However, he points to how in the context of Norwegian art history a change occurred with Edvard Munch, leaving the pervious perspectives redundant (I: 223). For the first time, in Karl Ove’s view, humans and subjectivity took up all space in art, reversing the order of subordination:

Det er som om det menneskelige sluker alt opp i seg, gjør alt til sitt. Fjellene, havet, trærne og skogen, alt er farget av det menneskelige. Ikke menneskets handlinger og ytre liv, men menneskets følelser og indre liv. Og da mennesket først hadde tatt over, ser det ikke ut til at det var noen vei tilbake [...].³⁵ (ibid.)

For Karl Ove in the diegetic time, the view of Munch presented here seems to carry with it a critique of how everything is created and given meaning by human subjects, as this subjective meaning seems to reject an essential, subliminal meaning. For as Karl Ove concludes, art after Munch gradually gave up the notion of objectivity, and in turn, “den siste rest av noe utenfor det menneskelige, har blitt oppgitt” (I: 223-224).³⁶

³³ “What I experienced seemed to me to be of enormous significance. Enormous significance.” (MS I: 246)

³⁴ “things other and mysterious” (I: 247)

³⁵ “It is as if humans swallow up everything, make everything theirs. The mountains, the sea, the trees and the forest, everything is coloured by humanness. Not human action and external life, but human feelings and inner life. And once man had taken over, there seemed not to be a way back [...]. (MS I: 248)

³⁶ “the final remnants of something outside the human world have been abandoned” (MS I: 249)

Within the essayistic reflections in the diegetic time 2004, as well as in “Om framtiden” Karl Ove proposes a cure to rid himself of the three main contradictions that make up his diagnosis: “bejae det eksisterende, bejae tingenes tilstand, altså boltre meg i verden istedenfor å lete etter en vei ut av den” (I: 221).³⁷ That is, instead of searching for and attempting to capture the essential meaning of an ideal world, he should affirm and revel in the existing world, whether it is a fictional construction or not. Yet, the conviction that inherent meaning exists seems so deep-rooted in him that he becomes further entangled in the conflict, despite knowing that it is romantic, outdated and essentialist (ibid.). Following this examination of the conflict that Karl Ove faces, the question is: what are the autoreceptive functions of the rewriting of this author-image as battling with notions of meaning and knowledge in the diegetic time 2004?

Courses of Treatment

The essayistic reflections in the diegetic time January 2004 point in three directions: *Min kamp*, *Ute av verden*, and *En tid for alt*.³⁸ First, they point towards *Min kamp* as the text where Knausgård decided to pursue subjectivity in full force and “la tanken på å nå det sublime ligge” (II: 555).³⁹ In other words, it foreshadows the solution that Knausgård as rewriter presents in the inception of *Min kamp* in the second volume: the ostensible realisation that sparks the writing of *Min kamp* is that meaning is not inherent. In volume II, and in sharp contrast to the nostalgia for his childhood place imbedded in Karl Ove’s memory of seeing the face in the water in 1976 (cf. I: 190-191), Karl Ove revisits Tromøya in the diegetic time 27 February 2008, the day he begins writing *Min kamp*, and he is thoroughly underwhelmed. Knausgård as rewriter thus contrasts the meaning he attached to his childhood place to how he as an adult sees it as it is: without mystery, without essence, without inherent meaning.

Det er jo så lite her. Det er jo ingenting. Det har jeg aldri sett før.
Det er jo ingenting. Og så var det alt en gang. [...] Alle stedene jeg
hadde i meg, som jeg hadde sett for meg så uendelig mange ganger
i løpet av livet mitt, passerte forbi utenfor vinduene, helt
utstrålingsløse, helt nøytrale, slik de var, egentlig. Noen knatter, en
liten bukt, en forfallen flytebrygge, en kil, noen gamle hus innenfor,

³⁷ “affirm what existed, affirm the state of things as they are, in other words, revel in the world outside in instead of searching for a way out” (MS I: 245)

³⁸ The point that the rewriting of the diegetic time points forward to both *En tid for alt* and *Min kamp*, and backwards to *Ute av verden* has also been made by Ane Farsethås, but only in passing and without considering the autoreceptive function of this (Farsethås 2015: 283-284).

³⁹ “shelved any idea of aiming for the sublime” (MS II: 655)

en slette som falt ned mot vannet. Det var alt. [...] Lite og stygt, men alt som var.⁴⁰ (II: 552-553)

Seeing it as it is thus seems to provide Karl Ove with the ability to let go of the ideal world as the true form of realism to be pursued in art, and to create an alliance between fiction and the representation of reality from the perspective of a subject. Furthermore, within the diegetic time 2004, the specific mention of Munch and how his landscapes are completely coloured by human emotions further seems to foreshadow the implied realisation that subjective intentionality towards the world is the creator of meaning in the diegetic time 27 February 2008. In this way, the essayistic reflections in the diegetic time 2004 function to foreshadow a future development of the author-image: instead of seeking the mysterious instances where a transcendental and ideal world appears to provide meaning, he should seek the meaning that is created in the dynamic interaction between a subject and the existing world.

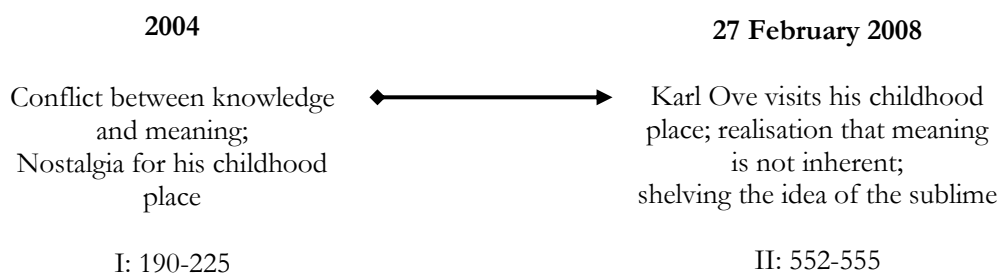
Moreover, the essayistic reflections act to frame the notion of death that connects the opening, middle, and end of *Min kamp*. The unity between author-images that occurs in back- and foreshadowing within *Min kamp* can be explained by how these ideas and essayistic passages first appeared in the essay “Om framtiden”, where the rhetorical connection between the ideas is made clear by the fact that it is presented as a textual unity over ten pages. Thus, in *Min kamp* I, the rewriting of parts of this essay here acts as a transition to the diegetic 1998, and the first time Karl Ove saw a dead body with his own eyes, which is placed directly after the diegetic time January 2004 (cf. I: 225). In other words, the essayistic reflections within the narrative paves the way for writing about what he has attempted to write about for years – his father and his death.

Before the transition, Knausgård as rewriter backshadows the reflection of how death seems to operate in two realities that occurs in the opening of *Min kamp* (I: 8-11). However, in this transition, Knausgård as rewriter seems to move away from the mysticism and transcendental idealism that mark the conflict in the preceding essayistic reflections in the diegetic time 2004. Instead, death is on the one hand given a fictional construction with an equalising effect, i.e. how death is portrayed in constant images, news reports and so on,

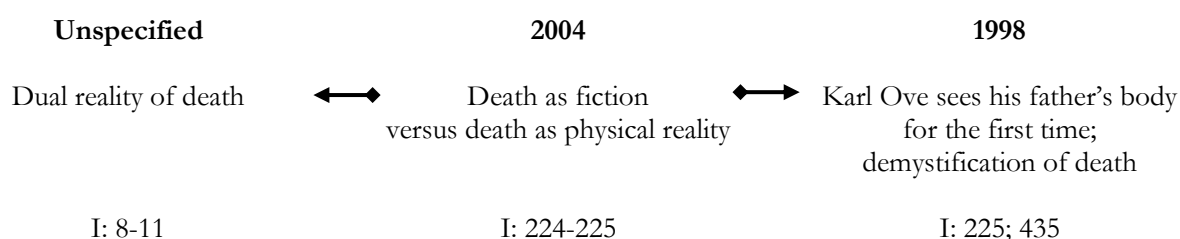
⁴⁰ “This is so small. There isn’t anything here. I’ve never experienced that before. There’s nothing at all. And at one time it was my everything. [...] All the places I had carried inside me, which I had visualised so many, many times in my life, passed outside the windows, completely aura-less, totally neutral – the way they were, in fact. A few crags, a small bay, a decrepit floating pier, a narrow shoreline, some old houses behind, flatland that fell away to the water. That was all. [...] Small and ugly, but all there was.” (MS II: 651-652)

without weight and meaning, and on the other hand a physical, material dimension, a dead body as it is, i.e. how the concrete, existing reality of death is collectively repressed (I: 224-225). Therefore, within *Min kamp*, this foreshadows the ending of the first volume – the demystification of the physical and concrete dimension of death that occurs after Karl Ove has seen his father’s body for the second time (I: 435). Implicitly, this realisation seems to reflect the author-image of Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp*, as it signifies that death is inherently ordinary and not a sublime entity outside the existing world. Put differently, it seems to relate to the poetic aim and the cure to the struggle that *Min kamp* offers: letting go of notions of the sublime and pursuing the existing world as it is.

Foreshadowing the Inception of *Min kamp* across Narratological Structure and Diegetic Time



Shadowing Opening and Ending of *Min kamp* I



Tab. III.g Shadowing *Min kamp* in the Diegetic Time 2004 in *Min kamp* I

Second, and related to the foreshadowing of *Min kamp*, the essayistic reflections point backwards to *Ute av verden*. In this respect, comparing the struggle that Knausgård as rewriter outlines for Karl Ove to the critical points made in the essay “Den sommeren jeg ringte til Marcel Proust” (1998) and their implicit relation to *Ute av verden*, which I discussed in chapter 4, may reveal an initial strategic function of the theoretical contradictions in the diegetic time 2004. In both instances, the point regarding how technologies of communication, i.e. the

ability to have extensive knowledge about the world, have an equalising effect on time and space and by extension on value and meaning, is present (cf. Knausgård 1998a: 79-80; I: 224-225). The solution to the problem of equalisation that Knausgård as author-critic proposed in 1998 was precisely for literature, as a privileged form of expression, to filter the world through a subjective consciousness (cf. Knausgård 1998a: 79-80). In other words, this seems to contradict the objective, essential source of meaning that Karl Ove seeks in the diegetic time 2004, and thus, if taken at face value, indicates that a substantial development has occurred in his poetic endeavours.

If seeking to view the ideas in the diegetic time 2004 as a continuity of the understanding of literature in 1998, a possible explanation could be that the subjective consciousness that Knausgård had in mind in 1998 was more a figure of transcendental subjectivity in literature than an actual individual subject. However, considering that the essayistic reflections in the diegetic time 2004 are in part a rewritten essay published in 2008, the continuity and development become more complex. That is, it is a rewritten essay from 2008 that is in part used to represent the thoughts and author-image of Karl Ove in 2004, and ideas that seem to, in part, contradict what Knausgård aims to achieve with *Min kamp*: filtering the world through an actual, individual, subjective consciousness. Yet, the contradictions between *Min kamp* and the reflections in the diegetic time 2004 should not be considered a contradiction in a categorical sense, but instead an implicit and strategic point forward to *Min kamp* as a course of treatment for his struggles.

In my view, Knausgård as rewriter of the diegetic time January 2004 strategically outlines a way to return to the key idea that dominated his essay “Den sommeren jeg ringte til Marcel Proust”: that literature must direct its gaze inwards, towards subjective experiences of the world in a certain place and a certain time. Therefore, it is as if Knausgård as rewriter signals that it was necessary for him to hit a conceptual reset-button, ridding himself of the bonds of both his romantic, essentialist notions of meaning and the bonds of strict, poststructuralist nominalism. He must revert to poetics that to a greater extent resemble his view when writing *Ute av verden*, but without the abstraction of the personal, autobiographical and the autogeographical in the alter ego Henrik Vankel. Thus, this falls under my suggestion that the conflict presented in the diegetic time 2004 functions to elevate the significance of the struggle that Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp* had to overcome to write his autobiographical text – to elevate his personal triumph against the knowledge and theoretical schooling that had created the ostensible distance to the world.

Finally, the essayistic reflections in the diegetic time 2004 point forwards, in terms of diegetic time, towards *En tid for alt*. In 2004, Karl Ove seems to set up a theoretical barrier against the personal and subjective in his writing. This seems to be related both to the aim of creating literature that deals with something essential, and in turn to his understanding of literature that calls for an abstraction of the personal and subjective. In rewriting the writing of *En tid for alt* it seems as though Karl Ove aims to fuse these perspectives, where the motif of angels acts as the physical connection between the ideal and the existing world (cf. I: 222). This connection between the essayistic reflections and *En tid for alt* is also indicated in “Om framtiden” (cf. Knausgård 2008a: 109). However, in the original essay Knausgård makes it clear that the connection between the contradictions and angels occurred in the past, while in *Min kamp* I it is presented in accordance with the narrative strategy and presentification.⁴¹ While in *Min kamp* I the essayistic reflections ends with a transition to the diegetic time 1998 and the death of his father, *Min kamp* II picks up the diegetic time January-February 2004, when Karl Ove is finally able to develop the text he has been working on into his second novel. In Knausgård’s rewriting, the poetic value and methodological necessity of the autogeographical and the autobiographical, the personal and subjective trickle through the ostensible barriers, thus creating both a distance and unity between the past and present author-images.

A Temporary Treatment

As a finished and published text, *En tid for alt* begins with an unidentified first-person narrator who, 500 pages later, is identified as Henrik Vankel, i.e. the protagonist from *Ute av verden* and Knausgård’s autogeographical alter ego. Between the introduction and the revelation of the narrator, the novel focuses on the fictional angel scholar Antinous Bellori, before the narrative shifts to an alternative telling of stories of Cain and Abel, and Noah and the biblical flood myth.⁴² In this alternative telling, the location of the biblical stories has also been altered, as they are set in a recognisable Scandinavian landscape. Throughout the text, the role of the angels is investigated, in particular what is described as their fall from heaven

⁴¹ In “Om framtiden” the connection is made in the following way: “At det fremmede og gåtefulle *er* noe som ankommer oss, *ledet en gang* tankene mine mot englene [The fact that things other and mysterious *are* relevant to us *had once led* my thoughts to angels] [...]” (Knausgård 2008a: 109, emphasis added). In *Min kamp* I, comparatively, it is made in this way: “At det fremmede og gåtefulle *var* noe som ankom oss, *hadde ført* tankene mine mot englene [The fact that things other and mysterious were relevant to us *had led* my thoughts to angels] [...]” (I: 222; MS I: 247, emphasis added).

⁴² In *En tid for alt* the character inspired by the biblical Noah is named Noak.

down to earth. At the end of the text, the angels are connected with Henrik Vankel's biography by way of something his father told him one summer when they, along with his brother Klaus, encounter a dead seagull on an evening crabbing trip.

– Du visste at måkene en gang var engler? sa han. [...]

Pappa bøyde seg ned på huk, rakte meg lykten og tok måken varsomt i hendene. Den så nesten levende ut i det konsentrerte lyset. Pappa foldet ut vingene, og løftet noen av fjærene på brystet til side.

– Ser du? sa han. [...]

Jeg bøyde meg fram. Og da så jeg det. En bitteliten arm, ikke lengre enn ytterleddet på fingrene mine, tynn som en ståltråd, lå inntil brystet under vingen.⁴³ (Knausgård 2012: 521-522)

In their fall from grace, the angels have turned into seagulls. The novel ends with a diegetic time change, to adult Henrik Vankel, who finds himself alone on an island where he spends his days reading and harming himself.

Prior to the essayistic reflections discussed above, in the diegetic time January 2004 in *Min kamp* I Karl Ove is trying to develop what will become *En tid for alt*.

Romanen var egentlig ferdig, det var en merkelig sak på hundreogtretti sider, en liten fortelling om en far og to sønner på krabbefiske en sommernatt, som gled over i et langt essay om engler, som igjen gled over i en fortelling om den ene av de to sønnene, nå voksen, og livet hans noen dager ute på en øy i havet, hvor han bodde alene og skadet seg selv.⁴⁴ (I: 189)

This summary of what Karl Ove has written so far is identifiable as content in the finished novel. Karl Ove's editor is willing to publish it as it is, but after having consulted his friend and fellow author Thure Erik Lund, who tells him it is not a novel in its current form, Karl Ove decided to keep writing (*ibid.*).

Jeg hadde arbeidet på romanen i fem år, og da kunne ikke det som så kom, være puslete. Og dette ga fra seg for lite. Samtidig lå løsningen i den eksisterende teksten, det visste jeg, den hadde noe

⁴³ “Did you know that seagulls were angels once?” he said. [...]

Dad squatted down, handed me the torch and carefully picked up the gull. It looked almost alive in the concentrated light. Dad spread out the wings, and pushed some of its breast feathers aside.

‘Can you see?’ he asked. [...]

I bent forward. And then I saw it. A tiny little arm, no longer than the tip of my finger, thin as a piece of wire, lay against its breast under the wing.” (Knausgård 2015e: 481-482)

⁴⁴ “My novel was actually finished, a strange hundred-and-thirty page affair, a short tale about a father and his two sons who were out fishing for crabs one summer's night, which led into a long essay about angels, which in turn led into a story about one of the sons, now an adult, and some days he spent on an island where he lived alone and wrote and self-harmed.” (MS I: 209)

jeg ville jage. Det føltes som om alt jeg ville, befant seg der, men i en komprimert form.⁴⁵ (I: 196)

The notion that this is the novel in condensed form rings true: Karl Ove has at this point written what ends up being the ending of *En tid for alt*. Therefore, part of the struggle that Karl Ove faces in this diegetic time is how to evolve the text into what will become the finished novel. However, in *Min kamp I* the novel itself seems to become secondary to the struggles that occurs in the essayistic reflections outlined above, as they dominate the narration. In fact, there are few direct connections between Karl Ove's essayistic thoughts and the novel he is trying to write, save the indication that the dual relationship angels have with both the realm of the divine and the human realm is positioned to act as the perfect representation of the conflict between essentialism and the existing world (cf. I: 222). Yet, there are implicit connections made, particularly in the narrative structuring of the diegetic time January 2004: the power of autogeographical memory and autobiographical events emphasised in the recollection of the memory of the face in the water and the aim of writing is placed between the two quotations above (cf. I: 190-196). However, these connections to the autobiographical and autogeographical are made clearer if they are considered a foreshadowing to *Min kamp II*, where the writing of what will become *En tid for alt* is revisited and completed.

In *Min kamp II*, in the diegetic time October 2002, Karl Ove recollects how he found the autobiographical inspiration he needed to begin his second novel in the weeks before he moved to Stockholm, that is, in February-March 2002:

[...] den historien som hadde vekket meg, om en far som dro og fisket krabber en sommernatt med sine to sønner, den ene åpenbart meg, som fant en død måke jeg viste pappa, han sa at måkene en gang hadde vært engler, og vi dro derfra i båten med en bølge levende og kravlende krabber. Geir Gulliksen hadde sagt "der har du åpningen din", og dette hadde han rett i, men jeg visste ikke hvor den ledet hen, og det hadde jeg kjempet med de siste månedene.⁴⁶ (II: 229)

⁴⁵ "I'd been working on a novel for five years, and so whatever I wrote could not be lacklustre. And this was not radiant enough. Yet the solution lay in the existing text, I knew that, there was something in it I was after. I felt as if everything I wanted was there, but in a form that was too compressed." (MS I: 217)

⁴⁶ "[...] the story that had aroused my interest about a father who went crabbing one summer's night with his two sons, one obviously me, I found a dead seagull I showed dad, he told me seagulls had once been angels, and we left in the boat with live crabs crawling inside a bucket on deck. Geir Gulliksen had said 'There's your opening', and he had been right, but I didn't know where it would lead, and I had been grappling with it for the last few months." (MS II: 267)

In this recollection, while Karl Ove clearly ties the boy in the story to himself, Knausgård as the rewriter makes the extent of the autobiographical event somewhat ambiguous by first narrating the story in the third person, before changing to the first person. That is, it is not clear whether it is Karl Ove's actual father that told him that the seagulls were once angels, or if it is the father in the story that tells the boy in the story this.

Nearly two years later, Karl Ove is still struggling to find a use for the story that he wrote in February 2002. When the second volume revisits the diegetic time January 2004, the narration is dominated by the other major event in this diegetic time: the birth of Linda and Karl Ove's first daughter, Vanja. However, just before Linda goes into labour, Karl Ove begins writing about the prophet Ezekiel, "som jeg hadde satt i gang for på en eller annen måte å gjøre om materialet om engler til fortelling, som Thure Erik [Lund] så riktig hadde etterlyst, og ikke bare en essayistisk gjennomgang av fenomenet" (II: 314).⁴⁷ Yet, Karl Ove is still struggling, especially with the temporal and spatial distance between himself and 600-500 BCE Jerusalem and Babylon.

Dette drev jeg på med, forsøkte å gestalte, uten å få det til, rekvisittene var så få, sandaler, kameler og sand, stort sett bare, kanskje en og en annen karrig busk i tillegg, og mitt kjennskap til den kulturen omtrent lik null [...].⁴⁸ (II: 314-315).

The solution comes to him a few days after the birth of Vanja, having realised that he cannot write a novel "full av sandaler og kameler", and he finds two notes he had written some time ago: "Bibelen utspilt i Norge", and "Abraham i Setesdalheiene" (II: 329).⁴⁹ At first he finds it a ridiculous idea, simultaneously too big and too small to fit his novel, but now that the idea has come back to him, he cannot let it go:

[...] faen heller, jeg begynner og ser hva som skjer. Satte Kain til å slå med slegge på en stein en skumring i et skandinavisk landskap.⁵⁰ (ibid.)

⁴⁷ "which I had started in order to rework the angel material into a story, as Thure Erik had quite rightly suggested, and not just an essayistic account of them as a phenomenon." (MS II: 368)

⁴⁸ "This is what I was doing, I was trying to create a gestalt, although without much success – there were so few props, sandals, camels and sand, not much more, perhaps the odd sparse bush as well – and my knowledge of the culture was close to zero [...]." (MS II: 369)

⁴⁹ "about sandals and camels" [full of sandals and camels]; "The Bible enacted in Norway"; "Abraham in the Setesdal Hills" (MS II: 386)

⁵⁰ "[...] to hell with it, I'll start and see what happens. I had Cain hitting a rock with a sledgehammer in a Scandinavian landscape at dusk." (MS II: 386)

Karl Ove's doubts almost get the better of him, until he reads what he has written out loud to Linda, who thinks it is fantastic and encourages him to continue (ibid.).

As indicated in the summary of *En tid for alt* above, this is recognisable content from the finished novel. What this suggests is that Knausgård as rewriter implicitly creates a similar methodological entry point as in *Ute av verden*: in order for him to write, and to write well, he must connect his writing not just to autobiographical events, but also to a geographical place he is familiar with and can attach meaning to. For Karl Ove, it is not sufficient to be familiar with a place by way of images, readily available in our iconodule time. Rather, the place must be authentic for him on a personal level, in the sense that he must have actively engaged with it himself. Thus, placing the biblical stories in the alternative Scandinavian landscape he knows so well opens the flood gate for Karl Ove in the diegetic time February 2004. After having attempted to write for five years, he finishes his second novel on 1 August (II: 331), six months after employing the autogeographical method.⁵¹

While Knausgård as rewriter is somewhat ambiguous in volume II about whether the crabbing trip and his father telling him that seagulls were once angels is an autobiographical event, the 'true' event is narrated in the third volume. A late August evening, in the diegetic time 1981, Karl Ove, Yngve and their father go crabbing around Torungen, a small island off the coast of Tromøya (III: 396-397).

– Hva er det du har funnet? sa pappa bak meg.
Jeg snudde meg, og han lyste på ansiktet mitt med lommelykten.
Jeg hevet vegrende hånden.
– En død måke, sa jeg.⁵² (III: 397)

In the rewritten 'original' scene from 1981 in *Min kamp* III, his father did not tell Karl Ove that the seagulls were once angels. It is further indicated as fiction by Karl Ove in the diegetic time February 2002 in volume V, a few weeks before he leaves Bergen for Stockholm:

Jeg begynte på nok en korttekst, la handlingen til attenhundretallet, men lot alt som fantes nå, finnes, og stedet hvor det foregikk, var Tromøya, men likevel ikke, en helt annen historie lot seg ane, og i den parallelle verdenen, som lignet på vår, men ikke var det, lot jeg Yngve, pappa og meg selv ta båten ut til Torungen en sommernatt. Jeg beskrev den natten som jeg husket den, med ett unntak: måken

⁵¹ In *En tid for alt*, the time of writing is indicated on the finale page as 1 March 2002 to 2 August 2004 (Knausgård 2012: 560).

⁵² "‘What have you found?’ dad said from behind me. I turned and he shone the torch on my face. I raised a hand in defence. ‘A dead seagull’, I said.” (MS III: 458)

pappa lyste på med lommelykten, fikk et par små, tynne armlignende utvekster like under vingene. De hadde vært engler, lot jeg ham si, og da visste jeg: det er en roman. Endelig, det er en roman.⁵³ (V: 606)

For Knausgård as rewriter, the alteration of this autobiographical event, that is adding the fictional element of the seagulls as angels, as well as placing the event in an autogeographical place that simultaneously is and is not Tromøya, is thus how he deemed himself able to write his second novel.

Therefore, unity with Knausgård's present author-image at the time of writing *Min kamp* and the past author-image writing *En tid for alt* is created in the rewriting of how an autobiographical event and autogeographical memory seem to spark the writing. Specifically, it seems to be the sudden memory of the face in the water in 1976, which foreshadows and backshadows the opening of *Min kamp* and is set up as the latent, igniting spark for his autobiographical novel, and it is the memory of his crabbing trip with his father in 1981 that ignites the writing of *En tid for alt*. Karl Ove's sudden longing for his childhood in the diegetic time 2004 thus functions as an overture for both the rewriting of the inception of *Min kamp* and *En tid for alt*, united precisely in Knausgård's autobiography and autogeography as the poetic ignition. Furthermore, unity is created in the necessity of autogeography for Knausgård's writing: just as with *Ute av verden*, literary value is for Knausgård dependent on his ability to ascribe meaning to the place that the subjects he writes about reside in.

Primordial Roots

Adding to the autobiographical and autogeographical poetics, *En tid for alt* can be seen as Knausgård's literary illustration of his view of the relationship between past and contemporary times, outlined both in his efforts as author-critic in "Den sommeren jeg ringte til Marcel Proust", reiterated in condensed form in both "Om framtiden", and again in the essayistic reflections in the diegetic time 2004: "samtiden [er] en dør som står og slår i historiens vind" (Knausgård 1998a; 2008a: 105; I: 218).⁵⁴ In all three instances where the sentiment appears, it refers to the point that while our extensive knowledge of the world has

⁵³ "I had started another short text, located it in the nineteenth century, but let everything that exists now exist then, and the scene was Tromøya yet it wasn't, a completely different story emerged, and in this parallel world, which resembled ours but wasn't, I had Yngve, dad and me taking a boat to Torungen one summer's night. I described the night as I remembered it, with one exception: the seagull dad shone his torch on had a pair of small thin arm-like growths beneath its wings. They had once been angels, I had him say, and then I knew: this is a novel. Finally, a novel." (MS V: 661)

⁵⁴ "the present time [was] an open door that stood flapping in the wind of history" (MS I: 242)

an equalising effect of time and place, the fact that our present is shaped by a vast and unfathomable past must not be forgotten. In *En tid for alt*, Knausgård anchors an alternative telling of historical and biblical tales in the contemporary subject Henrik Vankel, first implicitly then explicitly, as the narrator is not revealed as Vankel until the end of the text when the connection is made between seagulls and angels. Thus, the task of the author that is outlined in 1998, in the rewriting of the essay “Om framtiden” in the diegetic time 2004, and in the rewriting of *En tid for alt*, seems to be to show how a subject in the present day has been shaped and informed not just by a shared history, but by a personal history. In the case of Henrik Vankel this takes the form of the revelation of seagulls as angels, told to him by his father. In this sense, *En tid for alt* acts as a temporary treatment to the contradictory symptoms that Karl Ove faces in the diegetic time 2004, as it fuses the perspective of the divine and mysterious with the physical world in the figure of the angels. Simultaneously it maintains the poetic ideal that marked *Ute av verden* and will mark the future, in terms of diegetic time, autobiographical novel *Min kamp*: representing the world as filtered through a subject. In fact, in *En tid for alt* this last point is taken almost to its limits, as it is not just the existing world but primordial history and biblical literature that towards the end of the narrative are revealed to have been filtered through Henrik Vankel’s contemporary subjective consciousness. By rooting the present day and the subject in primordial history and literature, it seems as though Karl Ove had to abandon the original title that he had given his second novel in the diegetic time 2004: *Sjelens Amerika* (I: 217).⁵⁵ Karl Ove, in accordance with the narrative strategy, does not connect this to a future text where this phrase plays a key role, namely “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” (2008), which was later rewritten under precisely this title: “Sjelens Amerika” (2013).

As outlined in the introduction to part III, in “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” Knausgård connects the America of the soul to Knut Hamsun’s works and poetics. America in part stands as a symbol of upheaval, uprootedness, the masses in the modern world in the making, and in part for the ‘new’ world, the world as becoming. In Knausgård’s view, this is mirrored in Hamsun’s characters making their appearance in his texts as if being cast into the modern world without history or roots (Knausgård 2008b: 183-184).⁵⁶ For instance, neither the first-person narrator in *Sult* nor Nagel in *Mysterier* has a backstory; both characters are merely inserted into the place Kristiania and a southern Norwegian coastal

⁵⁵ English translation of the preliminary title: *The America of the Soul* (MS I: 241)

⁵⁶ The same argument appears in the rewritten essay, “Sjelens Amerika” (Knausgård 2013e: 120-121).

town respectively. While the symbolism obviously stayed with Knausgård as a writer, it seems impossible to apply this symbolism to his second novel. This is due to the fact that *En tid for alt* does not merely insert the subject into a rootless, contemporary time but rather connects Henrik Vankel's story to the very roots of history and literature: to primordial, biblical literature.

However, Knausgård as rewriter still seems to be referencing this essay in the diegetic time January 2004, which in turn implies a foreshadowing both in terms of diegetic time and narratological structure to the diegetic time 2008 in *Min kamp* II, where the metaphoric use of the America of the soul is rekindled. In rewriting the diegetic time 16-27 February 2008 and the inception of *Min kamp*, the symbolism of "Sjelens Amerika" plays a significant role in identifying not only Karl Ove's struggles, but also his poetics and the literary tradition he submits his author-image to.

Returns to the Place of Childhood

The diegetic time January 2004 in *Min kamp* I is in part marked by Karl Ove's sentimental longing for his childhood place by way of a sudden memory from 1976. This diegetic time was followed, in terms of the narratological structure of the text, by the diegetic time July 1998 and his father's death. Karl Ove must thus return to the place of his youth, Kristiansand, where he lived from the age of thirteen to eighteen.

Arriving by car from Stavanger, when Karl Ove begins to recognise the landscape of Southern Norway, it generates a brief recollection of his mindset as a child (I: 272). As he and Yngve drive into Kristiansand, Karl Ove reflects that it is as if he has driven into a memory, where the landscape and the places are merely props to the memories of his youth (I: 272-273). However, as props, the return to these places is not narrated with the same intensity or as soothing the longing felt in January 2004 (cf. I: 190).

In Rühl's analysis of the return to Kristiansand in the diegetic time 1998, she argues it is the adult gaze upon place that inhibits a sense of fulfillment of Karl Ove's longing and deprives him of experiencing them as meaningful (Rühl 2015: 60). However, she mistakes the return to Kristiansand as a return to Karl Ove's "boyhood island" – to Tromøya (ibid.).⁵⁷ The difference between Kristiansand and Tromøya might be significant for Karl Ove, in the

⁵⁷ With the term "boyhood island" Rühl is referencing Don Bartlett's translation of *Min kamp* III, which is given the additional title *Boyhood Island*.

sense that the former is not the place of Karl Ove's childhood, but rather of his adolescence up until the point of legal adulthood. In other words, while the place is significant for Knausgård, as he has been able to utilise Kristiansand methodologically in creating literature out of the autogeographical in *Ute av verden*, it is not the place that Knausgård as a rewriter has created a sense of longing to in narration that precedes the diegetic time 1998 in *Min kamp* I. Rather, it is predominantly Tromøya that Karl Ove longs for (cf: 190).⁵⁸

Furthermore, at the beginning of volume I, Knausgård claims that growing up is about obtaining the correct distance from the world, from objects, and from phenomena (I: 15). This distance, for Knausgård, equals knowledge and understanding, but is also the enemy of meaning (I: 14-15). Kristiansand can thus be considered the place where Karl Ove began to attain this distance from the world, and thus began to lose the supposedly childlike ability to ascribe meaning to seemingly ordinary localities: the habitual begins to take over his view of the world. Therefore, it may not be merely the adult gaze that renders the places as props, or as Rühl puts it "as a lifeless stage" (Rühl 2015: 60), but perhaps that a sense of deep, inherent and meaningful attachment to Kristiansand was curtailed as a result of growing up.

Yet, the distinction between the adult and the child gaze on place that Rühl establishes in her analysis is significant. This is because an ostensible realisation that places have no inherent meaning upon the return to Tromøya seems to be an implicit spark that ignites the writing of *Min kamp* in the diegetic time 27 February 2008, as well as becoming the solution to the struggles between meaning and knowledge that Karl Ove faces in the diegetic time January 2004. However, I view this in relation to what I see as Knausgård's strategy to create a continuity in the author-images that he rewrites in *Min kamp*, and relating to the value he gives the autobiographical, autogeographical and phenomenological. Thus, rather than being a rewriting of the actual events and thoughts that went through Knausgård's mind in the days leading up to the inception of *Min kamp*, Knausgård as author simultaneously foreshadows and backshadows the literary result of his ponderings. An initial indication of how the realisation is a strategic and rhetorical construction can be found in the fact that the realisation is not new. It appears in *Ute av verden* in 1998 as well, where Henrik Vankel reflects on the rootlessness, inauthenticity and lack of inherent meaning in a *byggefelt* from the 1970s in southern Norway, and therefore on the paradox of the insatiable

⁵⁸ This is indicated in the diegetic time 2004 when Karl Ove remembers seeing the face in the water and is filled with a longing for the 1970s and his family's house on the housing estate.

longing he feels towards his childhood place (Knausgård 2010c: 355-357).⁵⁹ However, as with the rewriting of the essay “Om framtiden” from 2008 in the diegetic time 2004, the point is not whether the realisation *actually* occurred at the time that Knausgård indicates in his rewriting. Rather, it is the function of rewriting the implicit epiphany (cf. “Det har jeg aldri sett før”, II: 552) in the specific diegetic time 27 February 2008 that is of interest, specifically as it correlates with when the first few lines of *Min kamp* were written.

The Inception of *Min kamp*

As outlined in the narratological overview of *Min kamp* II in chapter 5, this volume begins and ends with finishing and starting to write *Min kamp* I respectively (see table III.c). Having made the trip down the narratological V-structure, the volume returns to diegetic time July 2008, when the Boström-Knausgård family are driving home from the holiday Karl Ove took after having finished *Min kamp* I. Here, the narrative makes an analeptic jump to January 2008, i.e. before he begins writing *Min kamp*, via Karl Ove’s recollection of his failed driving test. The consequences of failing his driving test is that the plan to take his family to Kristiansand by car, as a concurring trip in relation with Karl Ove’s readings at the University of Agder and Adger Folk High School at the end of February 2008, falls through, and Karl Ove must travel to Kristiansand on his own.

For the planned family holiday, Karl Ove and Linda wanted to take a detour to Sandøya outside Tvedestrand for a few days, as Karl Ove for several years had envisioned Sandøya as the perfect place for them to live (II: 521).

Landskapet var akkurat som det jeg hadde vokst opp i, og som jeg lengtet tilbake til, bortsett fra at det ikke var det, ikke var Tromøya eller Arendal eller Kristiansand, som jeg for alt i verden ikke ville vende tilbake til, men noe annet, noe nytt. Av og til tenkte jeg at lengselen etter det landskapet vi vokste opp i, var biologisk, likesom nedfelt i oss. At det instinktet som kunne få en katt til å vandre flere hundre kilometer på jakt etter det stedet den kom fra, også var virksomt i oss, menneskedyret, på nivået med de andre dypt arkaiske strømningene i oss.⁶⁰ (ibid.)

⁵⁹ Don Bartlett translates *byggefelt* as “housing estate” or “[houses] on an estate”.

⁶⁰ “The countryside was exactly like the area I had grown up with, and for which I felt such a deep yearning, except that it wasn’t, it wasn’t Tromøya or Arendal or Kristiansand, which I would not have returned to for the whole wide world, but something different, something new. Sometimes I thought the longing for the terrain we had grown up with was biological, somehow rooted in us, that the instinct which could make a cat travel several hundred kilometres to find the place it came from also functioned in us, the human animal, on a par with other deeply archaic currents within us.” (MS II: 614)

Sandøya thus seems to be the place where he can get as close to the sentimental longing he has for the place he grew up in, which he deems to be a basic human instinct, but without having to face specific and potentially painful memories of his own childhood and youth, predominantly relating to his relationship with his father.

As autoreception, this reflection on the place of his childhood acts as the first instance of fore- and backshadowing in the diegetic time January-February 2008 concerning the inception of *Min kamp*, and the relationship the inception has with autogeography. Here, Knausgård as rewriter creates a complex instance of simultaneous foreshadowing and backshadowing. In the diegetic time the narration is heading for the inception of *Min kamp*, thus foreshadowing the relationship between the self, the place, and creating meaning in the world which will come to dominate *Min kamp*. Furthermore, it is a subtle foreshadowing of the third volume, as volume III exclusively concerns Knausgård's childhood and his childhood world that he "for alt i verden ikke ville vende tilbake til" (II: 521).⁶¹ Yet, it is also a backshadowing to volume I, where Knausgård as the author touches on the dualistic image of himself as a child, of his father, the rootlessness that seems necessary for him to write, and his longing for his childhood (I: 13-15; 32; 190).

Moving forward to the diegetic time 26 February 2008, Karl Ove arrives at Kjevik Airport in Kristiansand. Immediately upon arrival, the reflections turn towards the autogeographical. Karl Ove reflects that even though he lived merely ten kilometres from the airport from the age of thirteen to eighteen, and "landskapet var fullt av minner", the place does not seem to stir up much in him seeing it this time around (II: 532).⁶² He ponders whether this may be due to not having been there for two years; or "kanskje fordi jeg var lenger unna det enn noen gang", implying that in the spatial and temporal distance between himself and the landscape, something has been lost; or whether it is because "jeg selv ikke hørte til her og aldri hadde gjort det" (ibid.).⁶³ This leads him on to reflections about how to explain and understand someone's life:

Et liv er enkelt å forstå, de faktorene som bestemmer det, er få. I mitt var det to. Min far, og det at jeg ikke hadde hørt til noe sted.⁶⁴
(ibid.)

⁶¹ "would not have returned to for the whole wide world" (MS II: 614)

⁶² "the countryside was full of memories" (MS II: 627)

⁶³ "perhaps because I was further away than ever"; "I didn't belong here myself and never had done." (MS II: 627-628).

⁶⁴ "A life is simple to understand, the elements that determine it are few. In mine there were two. My father and the fact that I had never belonged anywhere." (MS II: 627)

As Haarder has pointed out, this is a precise concentrate of volume I, which is dominated by the death of Karl Ove's father, the circumstances of his parents' divorce, and New Year's Eve 1984/1985, which Haarder sees as both symbolically and concretely representing Karl Ove as a teenager without spatial and social affiliations (Haarder 2014: 216). Thus, for Knausgård as rewriter, these three lines function within the diegetic time as simultaneous foreshadowing and backshadowing of writing *Min kamp*, as the condensed answer to the questions posed in the beginning of volume I: how did he end up here, and why did things turn out like this? (I: 32).

Furthermore, upon arrival at Kjevik, Karl Ove reflects on how the last scene in *Ute av verden*, when Henrik Vankel is reunited with Miriam, takes place precisely at this airport (II: 533). This leads him on to thoughts which are mirrored in the diegetic time January 2004 (cf. I: 191): he can recall all the places he has been, and through these places he can reconstruct the atmosphere engulfing them, but not exact conversations, nor exactly what these places look like (II: 533). The same goes for the literature he reads, as he tends to forget the plots but never the places in which they had occurred (*ibid.*). As an autoreceptive strategy by Knausgård as rewriter, this reminds the reader yet again of the necessity of geographical familiarity in his view of literature: place and literature go hand in hand, not just for Karl Ove as a reader but for both Karl Ove and Knausgård as an author.

Still at Kjevik, Karl Ove ponders what he is going to talk about during his readings: he is going to talk about how his two novels were written, and how he struggled enormously before something slowly started to take shape (II: 534). He is going to discuss language and form: "Formen trekker deg ut av deg selv, skaper avstand til ditt jeg, og det er den avstanden som er betingelsen for nærheten til andre" (*ibid.*).⁶⁵ However, Karl Ove states that these are old thoughts that he no longer believes (II: 535). This rings true as it is reminiscent of points of view he championed in the critical texts he wrote in *Klassekampen* in 1996 (cf. Knausgård 1996b). It is in this context that the revolt against fiction, as Behrendt calls it in the article "Face off" and which I pointed to in chapter 5, occurs. Contrary to the old thoughts he will touch on in his talk, Karl Ove has lost his faith in literature, since he has lost faith in the fictional (II: 535). This exasperation with fiction, as in the diegetic time January 2004 in *Min kamp* I (cf. I: 219-221), is not merely directed at fiction in literature, but fiction as the key component for both knowing and understanding our world: everything is presented in a

⁶⁵ "Form draws you out of yourself, distances you from yourself, and it is this distance that is the prerequisite for closeness to others." (MS II: 630)

narrative form – literature, documentaries, news reports – everything follows the same structure (II: 535). For Karl Ove, this type of fiction signifies an equalisation of the world, and leads him to, at first, reject the value of fiction: it is all made up, and therefore it is worthless. Instead, Karl Ove now only finds value and meaning in diaries and essays, literature that does not have a narrative plot or is about something, but only consists of “en stemme, den egne personlighetens stemme, et liv, et ansikt, et blikk man kunne møte” (ibid.).⁶⁶ Thus, he firmly rejects the old thoughts that he is going to discuss during his readings: it is specifically the literature that does not create a distance to the I, and that instead creates a meaningful encounter between two subjects, i.e. the reader and the writer, that he values highest of all (ibid.).

Hva er et kunstverk, om ikke blikket til et annet menneske? Ikke over oss, og heller ikke under oss, men akkurat i høyde med vårt eget blikk. Kunst kan ikke oppleves kollektivt, ingenting kan det, kunst er det man er alene med. Man møter det blikket alene.⁶⁷ (ibid.).

The way Karl Ove, that is, Knausgård as rewriter, outlines the gaze of another human being as what makes art art, is a clear fore- and backshadowing, in terms of diegetic time and narratological structure respectively, to the first few lines he writes in *Min kamp*: the description of his own face reflecting in the window (I: 29; II: 554). Furthermore, while the author Witold Gombrowicz is not mentioned explicitly at any point in the first two volumes of *Min kamp*, this may be a subtle reference to the value Karl Ove finds in his diaries, which, as I outlined in the introduction to part III, he touches on explicitly in the diegetic time 2007 in *Min kamp* VI (cf. VI: 898), and in the essay “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” (Knausgård 2008b: 187-188). Knausgård as rewriter thus creates a validation and a necessity to write *Min kamp*, as this is where the value of art lies. However, in the diegetic time 26 February, he gets stuck in a circular argument:

Dit kom tanken, der støtte den mot veggen. Var fiksjonen verdiløs, ble verden også det, for det var gjennom fiksjonen vi nå så den.⁶⁸ (II: 536)

⁶⁶ “a voice, the voice of your own personality, a life, a face, a gaze you could meet.” (MS II: 631)

⁶⁷ “What is a work of art if not the gaze of another person? Not directed above us, nor beneath us, but at the same height as our own gaze. Not directed above us, nor beneath us, but at the same height as our own gaze. Art cannot be experienced collectively, nothing can, art is something you are alone with. You meet its gaze alone.” (MS II: 631)

⁶⁸ “That was as far as the thought got, it hit a wall. If fiction was worthless, the world was too, for nowadays it was through fiction we saw it.” (MS II: 631)

For Karl Ove, if the perceived reality is just that, constructed in fiction, it is simultaneously also through this ordering that the world is interpreted and understood. Therefore, if the fictional as a construction and as a way of understanding and creating meaning is deemed worthless, then the world itself is worthless. Thus, Karl Ove implies that it is in narrative construction and artistic reproduction that meaning emerges, signalling that the rejection of fiction is not a *fundamental* rejection of fiction. If it were a categorical rejection, this would dismiss what Knausgård claims to strive for in *Min kamp*: representing the world and a life as it is experienced and lived by a single subject at different stages in his life, and which other subjects can meet precisely due to the narrative structuring and the fictionalisation of the representation of a consciousness, of a personal gaze, and of a voice across time. Therefore, it can instead be viewed as a foreshadowing, in the diegetic time, to the understanding of fiction that marks *Min kamp*.

In the final notable reflection that Karl Ove makes at Kjevik Airport in the diegetic time 26 February 2008 he compares himself as an author to Espen (Stueland) and Tore (Renberg). As Karl Ove sees it, Espen is not interested in the romantic gaze but directs all his focus towards rationalism and the world outside, while Tore worships the contemporary and despises literature that is non-communicative, inaccessible, and vain (II: 536-537).

[...] både Espen og Tore var i verden med hele seg, og så ikke noe galt i det, tvert imot. Det var det jeg også måtte gjøre, bejæ alt i Nietzsches forstand, for det fantes ikke noe annet. *Dette var alt vi hadde, dette var alt som fantes*, og så skulle man si nei til det?⁶⁹ (II: 537, emphasis added)

This notion of what Karl Ove as an author can learn from Espen and Tore is thus yet another backshadowing of the diegetic time January 2004, and the contradictions he faces then: between romantic longings to an ideal world on the one hand, and the existing world on the other. However, in the diegetic time 26 February 2008, Karl Ove's reflections are marked more by a sense of acceptance and determination: he must affirm the existing world, as the existing world is all there is (cf. I: 219-221). Furthermore, it foreshadows Karl Ove coming to terms with his childhood place the next day, 27 February 2008, as "Lite og stygt, *men alt som var*" (II: 553, emphasis added), and thus an aspect that must be pursued in his writing.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ "[...] Espen and Tore didn't do anything by halves, and I saw nothing wrong with that [alternatively "both Espen and Tore were entirely in the world, and they didn't see anything wrong with that], on the contrary, that was what I also had to do, affirm life, in a Nietzschean sense, for there was nothing else. *This was all we had, this was all that existed*, and so should we say no to that?" (MS II: 633, emphasis added)

⁷⁰ "Small and ugly, *but all there was*." (MS II: 652, emphasis added)

Although it is not made explicit by either Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator or by Knausgård as the author, within the narrative the return to Tromøya as an adult in the diegetic time 27 February seems to act as an implicit trigger for Karl Ove to cease and desist his search and longing for inherent meaning, and pursue creating subjective meaning in a specific form of autobiographical fiction. The implicit resolution is indicated by how it is upon his arrival home from the return to the places of his childhood that Karl Ove writes the first few lines that will end up becoming *Min kamp*: “*I vinduet foran meg ser jeg vagt gjenskinnet av mitt eget ansikt*” (II: 554, italics original).⁷¹

As mentioned above, the first sentence Karl Ove wrote for what would become *Min kamp* should firstly be considered in light of the mode of literature that Karl Ove outlined as truly valuable the day before: literature that consisted of a voice, a life, a face and a gaze that the reader could meet (II: 535). Secondly, it should be compared to a highly similar line that appears in the opening of *Ute av verden*: “*I vinduet var nå bare det uklare gjenskinnet av rommet reflektert. Mitt eget utydelige ansikt*” (Knausgård 2010c: 8).⁷² In *Ute av verden* it is the unclear face of Knausgård’s autogeographical alter ego Henrik Vankel that is reflected in the window, while in *Min kamp* it is made explicitly clear that it is Knausgård’s own face. As Ane Farsethås points out, these two lines in the respective novels both function to indicate a shared theme and aim in the texts: attempts at defining the subject, at defining what makes the subject who they are (Farsethås 2015: 248). Adding to this point, the rewriting of this line in *Min kamp* can be considered in terms of the conceptual reset button that Knausgård as rewriter in the diegetic time 2004 implies that he needs. That is, he must return to his beginnings as an author, to the filtering of the world through a subjective consciousness, but now explicitly through his own consciousness.

The next day, Karl Ove continues writing what will become *Min kamp* with a great sense of urgency and with the idea of getting as close to his own life as possible (II: 554). He therefore writes about Linda, John, Heidi and Vanja (II: 554; cf. I: 32-42). The following day he writes some high modernistic passages about faces (II: 554, cf. I: 30-31), and the next day he begins writing about the spring his father moved out (II: 555, cf. I: 43ff).

⁷¹ “*In the window before me I can vaguely see the image of my face.*” (MS II: 654, italics original)

⁷² “*Now the window only reflected the unclear contours of the room. My indistinct face.*”

[...] selv om jeg hatet hver setning, bestemte jeg meg for å bli værende der, jeg måtte bli ferdig med det, fortelle historien jeg så lenge hadde forsøkt å fortelle.⁷³ (II: 555)

The story Karl Ove as author seems to refer to is the story of his father's death, which he is building up to by providing a backstory of his relationship with his father. Thus, Knausgård as rewriter backshadows the reflections in January 2004 about how he had tried for a long time to create literature out of the death of his father (cf. I: 196).

Dwelling on the time 1984–1985, Karl Ove as author in the diegetic March 2008 finds a note that says “poser med øl i grøfta”, which refers to how he and his friend Jan Vidar, both underage, struggle to acquire beer for New Year's Eve (II: 555; cf. I: 68).⁷⁴ Karl Ove decides he can pursue this motif: it could work if he managed to “gi tilstrekkelig faen og la tanken på å nå det sublime ligge” (II: 555).⁷⁵ Thus, Knausgård as rewriter again backshadows the diegetic time January 2004, and the past author-image that placed the value of art and literature on the sublime (cf. I: 218-225). Eventually Karl Ove, in the diegetic time March 2008, finishes the narration of 1984-1985, ending in July 1985 and his father's garden party (II: 561; cf. I: 173-186), and he can begin writing about his father's death (II: 561; cf. I: 225-435). The second volume comes to an end two months later, in the diegetic time May 2008, when Karl Ove is nearing the end of writing about the death of his father in 1998 (II: 563).

Thus, in a schematic outline of the inception of *Min kamp* as Knausgård rewrites it in volume II, it is necessary to highlight 1) the fore- and backshadowing that takes place, and 2) the interaction between the writing and the rewriting of the writing (see table III.h). Throughout the diegetic time 26-27 February 2008 Knausgård as rewriter implicitly foreshadows Karl Ove's upcoming literary endeavour, while simultaneously backshadowing, in terms of narratological structure, previous conflicts related to writing and meaning in the narrative. This signifies that Knausgård as rewriter creates an explicit unity between his struggles and the necessary result: *Min kamp*.

⁷³ “[...] even though I hated every sentence I decided to persist, I had come to terms with it, to tell the story I had tried so long to tell.” (MS II: 654-655)

⁷⁴ “bags of beer in the ditch” (MS II: 655)

⁷⁵ “I wasn't too bothered [alternatively: undertook sufficiently not to give a fuck] and shelved any idea of aiming for the sublime.” (MS II: 655)

PAGE	DIEGETIC TIME & PLACE	EVENT
I 29	23.43, 27 Feb. 2008, Malmö	“I vinduet foran meg ser jeg vagt gjenskinnet av mitt eget ansikt ...”
I 30-31	Unspecified	Two essays about faces and eyes
I 32-42	4 March 2008, Malmö	Outlines his life as it currently is: Linda, John, Vanja, Heidi
I 43	2008/1984-85	Begins narrating his parents’ separation
I 68	31 December 1984, Tveit	Hides beers in a plastic bag in a ditch
I 173	July 1985, Tveit	His father’s garden party
I 218-225	January 2004, Stockholm	Essentialism, the sublime vs. nominalism, meaning vs. knowledge
I 225	July 1998, Kristiansand	Views his father’s body for the first time
II 523-524	16 February 2008, Malmö	Talks to Geir A about Hamsun as simultaneously rootless and longing to belong
II 524	16 February 2008, Malmö	Talks to Geir A about Anselm Kiefer and Simon Schama
II 532-533	26 February 2008, Kristiansand	Flies to Kjevik Airport, Kristiansand The two most significant components in his life: his father and that he has never belonged anywhere
II 533	26 February 2008, Kristiansand	Reiterates the point that he can remember all places, but not events
II 534-535	26 February 2008, Kristiansand	Run-through of what he is going to talk about in his two readings Rejects as old thoughts
II 535	26 February 2008, Kristiansand	Value of literature lies in a personal voice; a face; a gaze you can meet
II 536-537	26 February 2008, Kristiansand	Compares himself to Espen and Tore. Karl Ove must “beja alt i Nietzsches forstand” “Dette var alt vi hadde, alt som fantes, og så skulle man si nei til det?”
II 540-541	26 February 2008, Kristiansand	First reading at the University of Agder, 7 people attend
II 541-546	26 February 2008, Kristiansand	Meets up with Geir A, drive around Kristiansand
II 548	26 February 2008, Søgne	Second reading at Adger Folk High School, 50 people attend
II 549	26 February 2008, Arendal	Drives to Arendal with Geir A
II 551-553	27 Feb. 2008, Tromøya	Drives around Tromøya with Geir A “Lite og stygt, men alt som var”
II 553-554	approx. 22:00, 27 Feb. 2008, Malmö	Arrives back home
II 554	approx. 23:30, 27 Feb. 2008, Malmö	After coming home from Kristiansand: “I vinduet foran meg ser jeg vagt gjenskinnet av mitt eget ansikt...”
II 554	28 February 2008, Malmö	“Neste dag fortsatt jeg [...]”: writes about Linda, John, Vanja, Heidi
II 554	29 February 2008, Malmö	“Neste dag [...]” noen høymodernistiskaktige passasjer om ansikter”
II 555	1 March 2008, Malmö	“Neste dag [...]” writes about the spring his father moved out
II 555	March 2008, Malmö	Finds a note, “poser med øl i grøfta” (New Year’s Eve 1984)
II 555	March 2008, Malmö	“[...] gi tilstrekkelig faen og la tanken på å nå det sublime ligge”
II 561	March 2008, Malmö	Finds a note about his father’s garden party (July 1985)
II 561	March 2008, Malmö	Begins writing about his father’s death (July 1998)
III	1975-1982, Tromøya	Rewrites his child gaze on Tromøya

Tab. III.h Rewriting the Inception of *Min kamp*

The function is thus to create a continuation of the author-images that have been rewritten in *Min kamp* up until this point, predominantly between the narrative representation of Karl Ove as an author in the diegetic time 2004, and the literary end result of his struggles. By using the literary devices of shadowing, Knausgård as rewriter therefore strategically and rhetorically creates an inevitability of writing *Min kamp*. Herein lies the autoreceptive function of creating a sense of necessity and urgency: it contributes to implicitly validating Knausgård's poetic aims in his autobiographical novel.

However, there are three points in table III.h that need further discussion: Karl Ove as author-critic of 1) Knut Hamsun, and of 2) Anselm Kiefer and Simon Schama in a phone conversation with Geir A in the diegetic time 16 February 2008, and 3) the foreshadowing of and connection between the return to Tromøya in volume II and volume III of *Min kamp*. These three points are interrelated. The strategic function of Karl Ove as author-critic in this specific time, ten days before he travels to southern Norway, is revealed as implicit foreshadowing when the outcome in the diegetic time is known, that is, that Karl Ove is about to begin writing *Min kamp*.⁷⁶ In this shadowing, Knausgård as rewriter simultaneously elevates the poetic significance of *Min kamp* by implicitly tying the work to a strong literary, artistic, and scholarly tradition via Karl Ove as an author-critic discussing the works of Hamsun, Kiefer and Schama. When viewed in relation to Karl Ove as author-critic here, as well as the rewritten author-images in the diegetic time prior to beginning *Min kamp*, I show that Knausgård sets up the third volume as the next necessary poetic endeavour for him as an author, as it unites the struggles of longing for his childhood place and dwelling in the world as becoming.

Roots and Rootlessness

In *Min kamp*, especially volumes II and VI, Knausgård as rewriter often uses conversations with Geir A as an alternative to the essayistic reflections. By this I mean that Knausgård rewrites Karl Ove as an author-critic in dialogues with Geir A, which at times consist of long monologues, mostly from Karl Ove. These monologues and dialogues are often highly detailed, playing into the understanding of fiction that marks *Min kamp*: Knausgård as rewriter can obviously not remember every word of every academic or personal discussion he had with Geir A, but recreates these conversations in *Min kamp* pertaining to the

⁷⁶ The diegetic time is not explicitly indicated in the text as 16 February, but rather by how Karl Ove tells Geir that he is flying to Kristiansand in ten days (II: 525).

presentification and the narrative strategy. Thus, these dialogues are reminiscent of the essayistic reflections, and should in turn be viewed in light of the function they fulfil in a specific diegetic time.

The first instance of Karl Ove as author-critic in the diegetic time 16 February 2008, during the phone call with Geir A, occurs as the conversation turns to vitalism in connection to soil and heritage (II: 523). Karl Ove brings up Hamsun as a complex figure, arguing, in an implicit reference to the argument he makes in “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” and a backshadowing to the original title of *En tid for alt*, that Hamsun was rootless and, in that way, modern “i amerikansk forstand” (ibid.).⁷⁷ Simultaneously, Karl Ove argues, Hamsun despised America, the mass-human, and the rootlessness that the idea of America entails: “Det var seg selv han foraktet” (ibid.).⁷⁸ For Karl Ove, this creates an irony that is in some way substantial in terms of literature, as it says something fundamental about human existence. Yet, in the context of the diegetic time 16 February 2008, Karl Ove does not explicitly offer an explanation as to why or how, nor does he elaborate on the symbolism of America. For Knausgård as rewriter, however, who is implicitly referencing “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” he seems to be touching on the argument regarding Hamsun’s poetics: that it oscillates between modernity and tradition.

Here Knausgård as rewriter implicitly points to an argument he made in this essay: that Hamsun is connected with his characters, particularly in the way many of them display a sense of rootlessness (Knausgård 2008b: 179ff). As mentioned in relation to how the original title of *En tid for alt* was *Sjelens Amerika* (cf. I: 217), characters like the first-person narrator in *Sult* and Nagel in *Mysterier* seem to appear suddenly in the modern world without history or roots (Knausgård 2008b: 183-184). However, in the essay “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?”, Knausgård argues that Hamsun himself is riddled with the paradox of describing the lack of and an urge for belonging; to the rootlessness of modernity and the roots in tradition, in heritage and the soil (ibid.: 184). This duality is, for Knausgård, expressed in Hamsun’s writing, and he illustrates by comparing the character of Isak from *Markens Grøde* and Nagel in *Mysterier*:

[...] Isak har i alle fall en misjon, en dypere mening med det han gjør; Nagel har ikke noen slik grunn, og stiller seg da også flere ganger spørsmålet hvorfor han egentlig er der, ikke ulikt en turist som har gått i stå i et hjørne av verden. Byen, det er den gamle

⁷⁷ “in an American sense” (MS II: 617)

⁷⁸ “It was himself he despised.” (MS II: 617)

verden, de som bor der, har ingen vanskeligheter med tilhørighet eller meningsløshet, det er Nagels problemstillinger, og tilsynelatende uløselige, for i sitt forsøk på å unnslippe det like og stereotype masse mennesket, slik det har vokst fram i den første moderniteten, unnslipper han samtidig det tilhørendeskapende, og den friheten han da vinner, blir ikke brukt, kan ikke bli brukt til annet enn å søke etter mening. Og når den ikke finnes, siden mening og tilhørighet er to sider av samme sak, le av det hele, eller avslutte det.⁷⁹ (ibid.: 183-184)

Reading Knausgård's comparison of Isak and Nagel alongside *Min kamp* I and II, there seems to be a clear autoreceptive element to Knausgård's understanding of Nagel, and further in his understanding of Hamsun, as he sees Nagel's conflict as Hamsun's own conflict (ibid.: 184). In the beginning of *Min kamp* I and towards the end of *Min kamp* II, Knausgård outlines his struggles as nearly identical to Nagel's/Hamsun's problems: meaning and belonging are two sides of the same coin, and while not belonging to a place creates freedom, it is simultaneously the enemy of meaning (cf. I: 13-15, 32; II: 532).

In the 2008 essay, Knausgård contrasts Hamsun's ambivalence to rootlessness and progress in the external world, filled with both fascination and disgust, to the more significant ambivalence this created in his inner world:

[...] hvor dragningen mot tilhørighet og tradisjon kun var noe som tilhørte tankene, og konstant må ha blitt motsagt av følelsene, eller hva det nå var som drev ham fra sted til sted, og som gjorde at han aldri over tid knyttet seg til noen miljøer, eller til andre mennesker overhodet, for om han kanskje aldri hadde tenkt tanken helt ut, må det ha vært tilstede i ham: Sjelen hans tilhørte Amerika.⁸⁰ (Knausgård 2008b: 184)

Again, Knausgård's description of Hamsun may just as well be a condensation of the sentiments relayed in *Min kamp* I and II up until the diegetic time 16 February 2008: in

⁷⁹ "At least Isak has a mission, a deeper meaning with what he is doing; Nagel does not have such a reason, and justly asks himself the question what he is really doing there several times, not unlike a tourist who has come to a standstill in a corner of the world. The city is the old world, the people who live there have no difficulties with a sense of belonging or feelings of meaninglessness, those are Nagel's issues, conceivably unresolvable, because in his attempt to escape the indistinguishable and the stereotypical mass-human, such as it has been cultivated in early modernity, he simultaneously escapes what creates the sense of belonging, and the freedom that he then wins is not spent, cannot be used for anything other than seeking meaning. And when that does not exist [alternatively: cannot be found], as meaning and belonging are two sides of the same story: laugh at the whole thing or end it."

⁸⁰ "[...] where the pull towards belonging and tradition was only something that belonged to his thoughts, and had to have been constantly opposed by his feelings, or whatever it was that drove him from place to place, and that caused him to never attach himself to any milieu over time, or to other people at all, because even though he may never have properly thought about it, it had to have been present in him: his soul belonged to America."

rewriting his author-image between 2004 and 2008, Knausgård rewrites Karl Ove as having an irresistible pull towards nostalgia and towards the place of his childhood when the world was full of meaning, however the attraction of his past places is still mingled with painful feelings and memories. As he touched on in the beginning of *Min kamp* I, moving from place to place, and the rootlessness this implies, is liberating, but at the same time does not allow him to get attached to a new place or to the people he meets (cf. I: 30-32). In other words, Knausgård's soul also belongs to the metaphoric America.

The points made about Hamsun in the diegetic time 16 February 2008 have four interrelated autoreceptive functions. First, the implicit reference to “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” connects Hamsun to Knausgård, or, at least, the rewritten Karl Ove as author-critic in the period 2004 to 2008, on an existential level: they both display a simultaneous pull towards roots and rootlessness, and the rootlessness seems to cause a degree of self-contempt. Second, it foreshadows the notion of rootlessness that Karl Ove in the diegetic time 26 February outlines as one of the key components for understanding his life, along with his relationship to his father (cf. II: 532). Third, it foreshadows the ‘return’ and relishing of his roots in *Min kamp* III: the pull towards his childhood soil. Finally, it ties his forthcoming literary endeavour with *Min kamp* not only existentially to Hamsun, but functions to validate Knausgård's struggles as struggles shared with Hamsun: the struggles of balancing between the contradictions of a romantic longing for belonging, and the modern condition of rootlessness. By making this implicit connection between himself as an author and a canonised author, Knausgård strategically elevates his struggles to be more significant than mere toils of an ostensibly hyper-reflective and sentimental author. Rather, it submits Knausgård to a literary tradition, that he in “Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?” claims began with Hamsun (Knausgård 2008b: 188).

Landscape, Memory, and Writing

The second instance of Karl Ove as critic in the conversation with Geir A on 16 February occurs as the discussion turns from Hamsun to landscape, art, and memory. Karl Ove states that in his opinion Anselm Kiefer's *Varus* (1976) is the best work of art created after the Second World War, perhaps even in the twentieth century (II: 524).

En skog, du ser bare trær og snø, med røde flekker noen steder, og så er det noen navn på tyske diktere skrevet i hvitt. Hölderlin, Rilke, Fichte, Kleist. [...] Hva er det bilde av? En skog. Hva

handler det om? Jo, men det er jo Auschwitz. Hva er forbindelsen? Tanker handler det ikke om, det når helt ned i dypet av kulturen, og det kan ikke uttrykkes med tanker. [...] Bildet heter *Varus*, det var en av de romerske hærførerene, såvidt jeg husker? Som tapte et stort slag i Germania? Linjene går altså fra syttitallet og helt tilbake til Tacitus. Det er Schama som trekker den i *Landscape and Memory*, den boken jeg leste, vet du.⁸¹ (ibid.)

The statement that *Varus* is the best work of art post-World War II, and the fact that Karl Ove mentions the historian Simon Schama at this point in the diegetic time seem highly significant in terms of autoreception of past, present and future author-images.

In *Landscape and Memory* (1995), Schama distinguishes between nature as raw matter and landscapes by way of how our perception, myths, memories and obsessions creates culture out of nature (Schama 1996: 10-14). He takes as his starting point that forests, rivers and mountains are “culture before they are nature; constructs of imagination projected onto wood and water and rock” (ibid.: 61). In other words, Schama affirms that collective memory of nature creates landscapes, and further how the collective memory is primed by mythical, historical, and artistic representations of these landscapes. In his analysis of Kiefer’s *Varus*, as Karl Ove mentions to Geir A, Schama draws a line from 1) The Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 CE where Germanic tribes led by Arminius defeated Roman legions led by Varus, to 2) the bards of the of battle running from Tacitus’ *Annals* to Romantic depictions in literature and philosophy, to 3) mythologising of this battle in the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germanic nationalism and in Nazism as the historical beginning of Germanness; as the primal symbol of Germany’s cultural identity; and the legitimisation of a unified Germany under one leader, and lastly to 4) the atrocities committed in the name of nationalism in the 1930s and ‘40s (ibid.: 127-129).⁸²

In the diegetic time 16 February 2008, Karl Ove gives artistic value to both Kiefer’s ability to depict such a wide span of history and the world in one painting of a forest, as well as Schama’s analysis that highlights how memories reside and create landscapes. However, after having called *Varus* the best work of art since the Second World War, Karl Ove raises

⁸¹ “It’s of a forest. All you can see is trees and snow, with red stains in places, and then there are some names of German poets written in white. Hölderlin, Rilke, Fichte, Kleist. [...] What does it depict? A forest. What’s it about? Well, Auschwitz of course. Where’s the connection? It’s not about ideas, it reaches right down into the depths of culture, and it can’t be expressed in ideas. [...] The picture is called *Varus*. As far as I remember, he was a Roman army commander who lost a decisive battle in Germany. The line goes right back from the 70s to Tacitus. Schama traces it in *Landscape and Memory* [you know, that book I read].” (MS II: 617-618)

⁸² The Battle of Teutoburg Forest is also known in German as *Hermannschlacht* or *Varusschlacht*, and Arminius is also known as Hermann.

issues regarding the realm of images, fiction and representation of the world. These issues are thus a backshadowing of the representations of death in the opening of *Min kamp* and in the diegetic time January 2004 (I: 8-9, 224-225), while simultaneously a foreshadowing of the understanding of fiction that Knausgård cultivates in *Min kamp*. Karl Ove laments that the idea of depicting the magnificence of the world died out with the Baroque age, because as Karl Ove sees it, when art and literature ceased to focus on the physical world, the world itself disappeared: “Vi har jo bare bilder av den” (II: 524).⁸³ He states that he writes to combat this, “for å ta tilbake verden” (ibid.).⁸⁴ At the same time, it is not the existing, physical world that we find ourselves in he means, rather it is “verden som ligger i Kiefer’s trær. Det er kunst. Ingenting annet” (ibid.).⁸⁵ Kiefer is thus somehow the ideal, conveying the world the way art should, and yet, the paradox is not lost on Karl Ove in the diegetic time 16 February 2008: he is aware that in trying to outline how to take back the world from the images and representations of it, he claims that it is precisely an image, a painting, a work of art that is able to do so (II: 525). This irony is thus mirrored in the upcoming reflection in the diegetic time 26 February, where he first seems to reject fiction as ‘made up’; as having an equalising effect of the world, objects and phenomena, before offering the point that if fiction is worthless then the world itself is worthless (II: 535-536): it is through fiction, or in this case, through Kiefer’s artistic representation of a forest, that the world is seen and can be seen.

However, comparing *Min kamp* to Karl Ove’s praising of Kiefer and Schama, Karl Ove will in his upcoming literary endeavour focus on *subjective* meaning of landscapes conveyed to another subject in art, while Kiefer and Schama focus on how *collective* memory shapes landscapes as meaningful places. Kiefer’s *Varus* and Schama’s analysis thus seem to epitomise the view that “samtiden [er] en dør som står og slår i historiens vind” (Knausgård 2008a: 105; I: 218), as both highlight how the history of the Teutoburg Forest and the consequences of the mythologisations of its history are made apparent in a single image.⁸⁶ Considering *Min kamp* as a text in terms of length, and being utterly subjective in terms of memory, history, meaning and mythologisation of landscapes, Karl Ove’s future artistic pursuit goes in the opposite direction of Kiefer’s. He will pursue the meaning given by the gaze of the subject in a lengthy literary exploration, i.e. *Min kamp*, rather than in a single

⁸³ “We only have pictures of it.” (MS II: 618)

⁸⁴ “to recapture the world” (MS II: 618)

⁸⁵ “the world in Kiefer’s trees. That’s art. Nothing else.” (MS II: 618)

⁸⁶ “the present time [was] an open door that stood flapping in the wind of history.” (MS I: 242)

image. Thus, considering the contrast between Kiefer, Schama and Knausgård, the question becomes: what is the significance and function of the criticism in this diegetic time?

The implication for Knausgård as rewriter, through Karl Ove in the diegetic time 16 February 2008, is that he simultaneously deems Kiefer's *Varus* as reaching the highest value of art, which he may have attempted to aim at in *En tid for alt* by letting primordial history and literature flow through and shape a contemporary subject, but that it is still firmly out of reach for him as an author. Karl Ove cannot capture collective meaning of landscapes, as his ability to write well is and has always been dependent on the autobiographical and the autogeographical – on subjective meaning. Thus, when Karl Ove ten days later, in the diegetic time 26 February, claims that the artistic object is the personal gaze and the personal voice that cannot be experienced collectively (II: 535), he implicitly outlines his own abilities as an author: he must aim for another value of art.

Still, Karl Ove as author-critic, that is, Knausgård as rewriter of the diegetic time leading up to the inception of *Min kamp*, is still able to implicitly unite himself with Kiefer and Schama on two points: 1) meaning is not inherent to a space but conditioned by the intentionality of human engagement with place and landscape, and 2) artistic representation or narrative structuring is necessary to give meaning to the world.⁸⁷ As Karl Ove in the diegetic time 16 February 2008 is getting ready to go to his childhood place, and Knausgård as rewriter is approaching the inception of *Min kamp*, Knausgård as rewriter implicitly validates his poetic aims in relation to Schama's scholarly aim:

Landscape and Memory [tries to be] a way of looking; of rediscovering what we already have, but which somehow eludes our recognition and our appreciation. Instead of being yet another explanation of what we have lost, it is an exploration of what we have found. [...] *Landscape and Memory* is [...] an excavation below conventional sight-level to recover the veins of myth and memory that lie beneath the surface. (Schama 1996: 14)

Instead of Schama's overarching aim of analysing collective memory as giving shape to nature as culture, Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp* turns the task categorically inwards:

⁸⁷ Note that in human geography, *place* and *landscape* tend to be differentiated. For example, Tim Cresswell argues that "Landscape is an intensely visual idea. In most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it. This is the primary way in which it differs from place. Places are very much things to be inside of" (Cresswell 2004: 10). In other words, the distinction is founded on place being places of internal dwelling, and landscapes as external localities to observe. Furthermore, going on Schama's *Landscapes and Memory*, landscape implies a collective human engagement with geographical localities. However, in terms of autogeography and *Min kamp* a distinction between place and landscape is not what is at stake. Rather, places and landscapes are something to keep in mind simultaneously as geographical localities that a self engages with.

to an excavation below his own conventional sight-level, beyond habitual perception, and to capture how subjective intentionality creates meaning.⁸⁸ In other words, Schama and Knausgård share the aim of drawing what we know out of the shadows. Via Kiefer and Schama, Knausgård as rewriter fore- and backshadows the resolution of the struggles between meaning and knowledge that Karl Ove finds in the diegetic time 26-27 February: to revel fully and completely in how meaning is created in the world, the world as it is created by the subject's meaningful engagement with it.

The Child as *Nybygger*

While Karl Ove as author-critic of Hamsun, Kiefer and Schama in the diegetic time 16 February 2008 can be viewed as Knausgård as rewriter submitting *Min kamp* to a tradition as well as foreshadowing *Min kamp* in general, it can also be viewed as foreshadowing the third volume specifically. By pointing to Hamsun's oscillation between roots and rootlessness, the metaphoric America and the subtle reference to "Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på puffen?"⁸⁹, Knausgård as rewriter quite possibly has the poetic value of the *nybygger* and *nybyggerånd* in mind, which I outlined in the introduction to part III (cf. Knausgård 2008b: 183ff).⁸⁹ The phenomenological function of the metaphoric *nybyggerånd* is that the *nybygger* dwells in the 'new world' as it is becoming, attempting to build a sense of meaning and belonging. The author must therefore aim to capture this pre-familiarised, pre-reflective meaning-giving process in literature. Relating this to Knausgård's reference to Schama, via Karl Ove as author-critic, the author should aim to rediscover "what we already have but which somehow eludes our recognition and our appreciation" and "recover the veins of myth and memory that lie beneath the surface" (Schama 1996: 14). For Knausgård, *Min kamp* III seems to attempt precisely what he outlines in his reading of Hamsun and what Schama outlines as his scholarly ambition, but through the poetic gaze of Karl Ove as a child. The child is perhaps the ultimate *nybygger*, dwelling on and in the existing world, and for Knausgård as the author rewriting the child gaze, it functions to excavate the origins of his mythologisations of both his own memory and of his first autogeography. In this sense, the link that Rühl establishes between volumes I, II and III, as a continuous theme of place, has been expanded to a poetic continuity. Thematically, volumes I and II are marked by Karl

⁸⁸ This is not to say that subjective memory has no place in Schama's work. In fact, while he traces collective memory as shaping landscapes, he simultaneously lets the reader in on his personal journey through a number of landscapes (cf. Schama 1996: 3-7, 23-38, 517-522).

⁸⁹ *Settler* and *settler spirit*.

Ove longing for his childhood place, and the ends of volume II and volume III are marked by returning to this place, with the adult and child gaze respectively. However, the third volume seems to fulfil not only the longing for roots and beginnings, but to have been implicitly outlined as the inevitable endeavour Knausgård must embark on to fulfil his poetic, phenomenological ambition.

As outlined in chapter 2, volume III begins with an external focalisation by a third-person narrator who gives a panoramic overview of Tromøya on an August day in 1969, where a family is arriving by bus at their new home in the newly built *byggfelt* (III: 7-11).⁹⁰ This bird's-eye view, as Rühl also points out, functions as an aerial mapping of Tromøya which at the moment is not filled with any significance for the third-person narrator (Rühl 2015: 44). In other words, they are empty spaces without meaning. In a paragraph break, the narration changes to internal focalisation, as Knausgård as the author steps in to the text: "Jeg husker selvfølgelig ingenting av denne tiden" (III: 11).⁹¹ After an examination of his lack of memories from the first six years of his life, and an attempt at reconstructing what he can from photographs from that time, Knausgård rewords the realisation that his childhood place is small and ugly in the diegetic time 27 February 2008 in volume II: "Dette slumhytteaktige provisoriumet er det jeg kaller min barndom" (III: 14).⁹² Thus, as the author, Knausgård remains distant to his childhood place from the perspective of himself as an adult, who is currently sitting in Malmö writing this in September 2009 (III: 11). However, for Knausgård as the author of *Min kamp* III writing himself as a child entails stripping away the knowledge and distance he has gained in relation to the world. Relating this to the contradictions between knowledge and meaning that Karl Ove battled with in the diegetic time January 2004, it seems as though the innocent gaze of a child functions to give a literary representation of the world as inherently open, unknown, real and meaningful (cf. I: 218-219). Furthermore, the landscape of childhood seems to embody the phenomenological, autogeographical and autobiographical ambition:

For landskapet i barndommen er ikke lik de landskap som siden følger, de er på en helt annen måte ladet. I det landskapet hadde hver stein, hvert tre betydning, og både fordi alt der ble sett for første gang, og fordi det ble sett så mange ganger, har det avleiret seg dypt i bevisstheten, ikke bare vagt og omtrentlig, slik landskapet utenfor den voksnes hus fortøner seg om øynene

⁹⁰ As mentioned, Don Bartlett translates *byggfelt* as "housing estate" or "[houses] on an estate".

⁹¹ "Of course I don't remember any of this time." (MS III: 6)

⁹² "This ghetto-like state of incompleteness is what I call my childhood." (MS III: 10)

lukkes og det skal manes fram, men nesten uhyrlig presist og detaljert.⁹³ (III: 15)

What Knausgård as the author outlines here, backshadowing the reflections about his lack of attachment to the view from his apartment in Malmö in *Min kamp* I (cf. I: 32), is that the child gaze oscillates between seeing the place as new and being thoroughly familiar with the landscape. However, this is not the familiarity of the habitual gaze, which is what according to Knausgård must be defamiliarised in literature: the child does not interact with the world based on objects or phenomena being taken for granted. Rather, all the details of the landscape of childhood are charged with an unparalleled meaning which they have been given through active, pre-conscious, pre-theorised engagement with the surroundings. Moreover, intimate knowledge of the childhood landscape trumps what Knausgård outlines as our extensive knowledge of the world through images (cf. I: 11, 220). This is because, for Knausgård, the meaning attached to it is subjective and self-experienced, while the images of the world presented to us on a daily basis through technologies of communication entail a levelling of place: its uniqueness is lost. Knausgård's introductory reflections in the third volume thus function to steadily filter away his adult gaze, and gradually the narration transitions into the perspective of Karl Ove as a child who relishes the places of his childhood world.⁹⁴ For instance, in an oscillation between the focalisation of Knausgård as the forty-year-old author and Karl Ove as a child, Knausgård as the author ponders how he only has to close his eyes and imagine himself stepping out the front door of his childhood home to transport himself back to this world (III: 15).

Singelen i oppkjørselen, på sommeren nesten blåaktig i fargen.
Bare det, barndommens oppkjørsler! Og de syttitallsbilene som
stod i dem! Bobler, Padder, Taunuser, Granader, Asconær,
Kadetter, Consuler, Ladaer, Amazoner ...⁹⁵ (III: 15-16)

⁹³ [...] for landscape in childhood is not like the landscape that follows later; they are charged in very different ways. In that landscape every rock, every tree had a meaning, and because everything was seen for the first time and because it was seen so many times, it was anchored in the depths of your consciousness, not as something vague or approximate, the way the landscape outside a house appears to an adult if they close their eyes and it has to be summoned forth, but as something with immense precision and detail." (MS III: 11)

⁹⁴ The full transition to Karl Ove as the protagonist-narrator in the diegetic time 1975 is made on page 25. The diegetic time is indicated by Karl Ove just having started first grade. In Norway in 1975 children started school the year they turned seven.

⁹⁵ "The shingle in the driveway, almost bluish in colour of the summer. Oh, that alone, the driveways of childhood! And the 1970s cars parked in them! VW Beetles, Citroën DS 21s, Ford Taunuses, Granadas, Consuls, Opel Asconas, Kadetts, Ladas, Volvo Amazons..." (MS III: 11-12)

In the first glimpse of childhood a sense of inexplicable meaning is conveyed, implicated in how Knausgård as the author must resort to adding exclamation marks and listing types of cars rather than providing justifications. Further, when repeating the list of what existed in his childhood place (cf. II: 552), the simplicity of this world generates a sense of wonder and opportunity, substituting the underwhelming feeling in the diegetic time 27 February.

Hvor gikk vi?
Inn i skogen.
Ned til Ubekilen.
Ned til flytebryggene.
Opp til broen.
Ned til Gamle Tybakken.
Bort til fabrikken som støpte plastbåter.
Opp til fjellet.
Inn til Tjenna.
Opp til B-Max.
Ned til Fina.
Hvis vi da ikke bare løp rundt i veien vi bodde i, eller hang utenfor et av husene der, eller satt på kantsteinen eller oppe i det store kirsebærtreet som ingen eide.
Det var alt. Det var verden.
*Men for en verden!*⁹⁶ (III: 18, emphasis added)

As pointed to in chapter 4 with regards to Knausgård's list of the best books on 1996 and Erlend Loe's *Nain. Super* (cf. Knausgård 1996a), list-making implies presentation without the demand of justification, which in turn is the unassuming privilege of the child. Listing objects and the places of childhood in this way thus seems to be an implied focalisation of Karl Ove as a child. Knausgård as the author steps in with the statement "Det var alt. Det var verden", illustrating the adult point of view that this world was small and now seems insignificant.⁹⁷ However, Karl Ove as child seems to deliver the last evaluating statement, "Men for en

⁹⁶ "Where did we go?"

Into the forest.

Down to Ubekilen, to a bay.

Down to the pontoons.

Up to Tromøya Bridge.

Down to Gamle Tybakken.

Over to the plastic boat factory.

Up into the hills.

Along the Lake Tjenna.

Up to B-Max.

Down to the Fina petrol station.

Unless, that is, we just ran about in the road where we lived, or hung around outside one of the houses there, or sat on the kerb, or in the big cherry tree that no one owned.

That was everything. That was the world.

But what a world! (MS III: 15, emphasis added)

⁹⁷ "That was everything. That was the world."

verden!”, indicating that the small and insignificant was everything for him at one point in time.⁹⁸ As Rühl convincingly argues, the places included in the list of Karl Ove’s world indicates that he and his friends engage with and give meaning in equal extent to natural places, such as the forest and Ubekilen, as to constructed, standardised, and purely functional places such as the supermarket B-Max and Fina petrol station (Rühl 2015: 51-53; 2017: 151). Fina is for Karl Ove and his peers “den like fantastiske som onde bensinstasjonene”, as it was here they would buy their sweets when B-Max was closed, but it is also riddled with dangers as it is a favourite hang-out of the high schoolers who tended to bully the younger children (III: 103-107). As Knausgård pointed out via Henrik Vankel in *Ute av verden*, and alludes to in the opening of *Min kamp* III, the villa area Tybakken in itself could also be classed as a purely functional place, as it was created in as standardised response to the increasing mobility of the population and housing demand in Norway during the 1960s and ‘70s, and has no inherent connection with local history of the area (III: 10, 18; Knausgård 2010c: 354-359). But, as Rühl also points out, for Karl Ove as a child and his peers alike, this does not stop them from engaging with their surroundings nor from ascribing them with authenticity and meaning (Rühl 2015: 39-42; 2017: 151). This does not only apply to the familiar landscapes, but also to places that are discovered by Karl Ove as a child.

For instance, in the diegetic time September 1975, Karl Ove and his friend Geir Prestbakmo go exploring down a path they had heard about, and suddenly find themselves in a place “vi aldri hadde vært før” (III: 97).⁹⁹ Their small world of Tybakken has thus been expanded as they, after running towards a sudden sound of shots in the distance, stumble upon what seems to them a truly wonderful and magnificent place full of opportunity:

[...] et enormt, treløst område fullt av søppel, badet i sol.
 En søppelplass!
 En søppelplass i skogen!¹⁰⁰ (III: 97-98)

The refuse tip is not viewed from the perspective of an adult, who might react with anything from a disheartened shoulder shrug to outrage at what seems to be a site for illegal dumping. Instead, Karl Ove as the six-year-old protagonist-narrator goes on to describe everything they find with marvel and curiosity:

⁹⁸ “But what a world!”

⁹⁹ “we had never been before.” (MS III: 108)

¹⁰⁰ “bathed in sunshine, there was an enormous clearing full of rubbish.

A refuse tip.

A refuse tip in the forest!” (MS III: 109)

Jeg så sofaer, stoler, bord og lamper. Jeg så ski og sykler, fiskestenger, lysekroner, bildekk, pappkartonger, trekasser, isoporesker og haug etter haug med tykke bulende plastsekker. Det vi hadde foran oss, var et landskap av ting kastet.¹⁰¹ (III: 98)

The refuse tip becomes a place for hidden treasures that Karl Ove and Geir Prestbakmo add to their map of the world, which they return to on multiple occasions.

Herein lies the poetic value of the child gaze, and the simile of the child and *nybygger*: both fill ‘new’ and perhaps the smallest or even most discourageable of places, objects and phenomena with significance, rendering the world as something to be discovered, as always becoming and emerging. Pointing forward to Knausgård’s texts after the publication of *Min kamp*, and emphasising the significance of the child’s gaze for Knausgård as an author, in the *Årstedene* series (2015-2016) he attempts to pursue the same poetic effect from a different angle.¹⁰² Narrated in an innocent style, Knausgård seems to flip the narratological style of *Min kamp* III on its head: instead of narrating the events, objects, and phenomena via himself as a child learning about the world, it is narrated *to* a child – to his unborn daughter. The form of the first two instalments of the *Årstedene* series, *Om høsten* and *Om vinteren*, alternates between letters to Knausgård and Linda Boström Knausgård’s unborn daughter, and essays resembling encyclopedic texts about different objects or phenomena, such as “Epler”, “Ensomhet”, “Oppkast”, “Kosedyr”, “Sukker” and “Vaner” (Knausgård 2015c; 2015d).¹⁰³ The final letter in *Om vinteren* is addressed to his newborn daughter, born on 28 January 2014 (Knausgård 2015d: 187). *Om våren* differs from the previous two volumes, as it takes a more novelistic form resembling the narrative style in *Min kamp*. Instead of short essays and letters, there is an overarching plot and a clearly indicated diegetic time: a day in the life of Karl Ove Knausgård and his family, specifically 30 April 2014.¹⁰⁴ In the final volume *Om sommeren* the form of the first two volumes resumes, with essays like “Kortbukser”, “Bananfluer”, and “Sirkus”, but the letters have been substituted for Knausgård’s diary entries from the months

¹⁰¹ “I saw sofas, chairs, tables and lamps. I saw skis and bikes, fishing rods, chandeliers, car tyres, cardboard boxes, wooden chests, polystyrene containers and heap upon heap of fat, bulging plastic bags. What lay before us was a whole landscape of abandoned goods.” (MS III: 110)

¹⁰² *Årstedene* is the common name used for the series that in English is known as *The Seasons Quartet*: *Om høsten* (2015), *Om vinteren* (2015), *Om våren* (2016), and *Om sommeren* (2016) The English titles have omitted the preposition “om”, meaning *about* or *in*, and are merely translated as *Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring*, and *Summer*.

¹⁰³ “Apples”, “Loneliness”, “Vomit”, “Stuffed Animals”, “Sugar” and “Habits” (Knausgård 2017a; 2018g)

¹⁰⁴ The diegetic time is indicated by the fact that it is Valborgmässoafton, Walpurgis Night (cf. Knausgård 2016b: 181).

June and July 2016 (Knausgård 2016a).¹⁰⁵ Still, despite differences between the volumes, the narrations' addressee remains the same throughout: his youngest daughter.

However, this is not to say that the insights are aimed at children: they are aimed at an adult readership. This readership, to re-contextualise Knausgård's ponderings in *Min kamp* I, has grown up and obtained the correct distance to objects and phenomena, a distance that provides knowledge but is also the enemy of meaning (I: 15). Thus, what Knausgård has outlined and attempted in *Min kamp* continues in the *Årstidene* series in a condensed and concretised form, relating to what he sees as the key task of literature and art: to break down the distance created by fossilised knowledge and facilitate an experience of the world as meaningful and new (cf. Knausgård 2008b). The *Årstidene* series thus marks a continuity and development of Knausgård's author-image directly related to the author-image that validated and created the necessity of the third volume through strategies of rewriting.

The Autogeographical and Autobiographical Instinct

[Jeg] satte [...] meg ned og fortsatte å skrive. Lot de to tiåringene gå rundt i skogen. [...] Plutselig hørte de skudd. De løp nedover mot stedet hvor lyden hadde kommet fra, og kom til en søppelfylling midt i skogen. To karer lå der og skjøt rotter. Da det skjedde, spente likesom noe seg opp i meg, en bue av glede og kraft, jeg kunne plutselig ikke skrive fort nok, teksten lå hele tiden litt etter fortellingen, og det var en vidunderlig følelse, blank og glitrende [...].¹⁰⁶ (IV: 31)

This is the rendition of Karl Ove finding an opening to the first short story he ever wrote in the diegetic time 1987, on the evening he arrived in Håfjord in Northern Norway. The story continues with the two ten-year-old boys, Gabriel and Gordon, rummaging through the refuse tip after the two men who have been shooting rats leave:

[...] de to ungene dro opp to stoler og et bord i skogen, satt der og leste pornoblader, den ene, han som het Gabriel, stakk pikken inn i en flasketut, og kjente plutselig et forferdelig stikk, da han trakk

¹⁰⁵ "Short Trousers", "Banana Flies", "Circus" (Knausgård 2018e)

¹⁰⁶ "[...] I sat down and went on writing. I had the two ten-year-olds walking around in the forest. [...] Suddenly they heard a shot. They ran over to where the sound had come from and saw a rubbish dump in the middle of the forest. There were two men lying on the ground shooting at rats. Whereupon something seemed to flash through me, an arc of happiness and energy; now I couldn't write fast enough, the text lagged slightly behind the narrative, it was a wonderful feeling, shiny and glittering." (MS IV: 30)

den ut, var det en bille på hodet. Gordon lo så han ramlet om i lyngen.¹⁰⁷ (ibid.)

This is mirrored in three scenes from volume III, where Karl Ove and Geir Prestbakmo also observe two men shooting rats on the day they found the refuse tip in the woods (III: 98); a day in the diegetic time late 1976 when they make an outside living room out of chairs they find at “den hemmelige søppelplassen” (III: 183); and in September 1978, returning to the refuse tip to look for porn magazines, when Karl Ove inserts his penis into an empty bottle (III: 282).¹⁰⁸ The rewriting of this story, where Gabriel is implicated as Knausgård’s first fictional alter ego, is thus a simultaneous foreshadowing and backshadowing to volume III: it is a rewriting of the refined, matured version of these stories in reverse chronological order.

In this chapter I have focused on *Min kamp* I and II, and instances where Knausgård rewrites himself as an author proper, i.e. when he has become a published author. I have shown that Knausgård as rewriter uses strategies of shadowing within the narrative to create a continuity of his author-images across time, and emphasised the shadowing as an acutely authorial and literary strategy rather than an accurate representation of how real life is lived: shadowing is not experienced in real life. To be clear, determining the accuracy of Karl Ove Knausgård’s representation of himself in *Min kamp* has not been the aim at any point during this thesis. Instead, with regards to *Min kamp*, I have highlighted how rewriting himself as an author and critic in different diegetic times reflects Knausgård as the author who is writing *Min kamp*. I conclude chapter 6 by bringing part II and III full-circle, as I point out how Knausgård rewrites his author-images in the diegetic time 1987 in volume IV, that is, as an aspiring author and prior to becoming familiar with literary theorisation. The rewriting of this author-image thus serves to underline what I have demonstrated in this chapter: Knausgård’s strategies of rewriting function to validate *Min kamp* as the necessary, inevitable result of his struggles as an author.

In the diegetic time 1987, Karl Ove is exceedingly proud of having finished the short story about Gabriel and Gordon on his first attempt, and is eager to show it to anyone and everyone (IV: 32). He deems it to be of high quality and, as I touched on in chapter 2, compares it to the writings of Ernest Hemingway (IV: 97). While Knausgård in rewriting his

¹⁰⁷ “[...] the two boys pulled up two chairs and a table in the forest and sat there reading porn magazines. One of them, the one called Gabriel, stuck his dick in a glass bottle and suddenly felt a terrible stinging pain, he pulled it out and there was a beetle on the end. Gordon laughed so much he fell back into the heather.” (MS IV: 30)

¹⁰⁸ “the secret refuse tip” (MS III: 209)

past author-image may be offering this comparison with implicit irony, and in turn be evaluating the eighteen-year-old Karl Ove's abilities as limited, he is simultaneously pointing to how the autobiographical and autogeographical tendencies were present in his writing from the beginning. In other words, Knausgård as rewriter sets writing autobiographically and autogeographically up as his original instinct as an aspiring author. In doing so Knausgård as rewriter outlines the roots of his author-image, and considering the struggles Karl Ove faced in volumes I and II regarding writing, it further implies to the reader that his instinct was suppressed as his knowledge about literature and literary theory increased. Further, it indicates to the reader that he was able to locate his instinct again and create literature out of his childhood experiences in *Min kamp* III. Although Knausgård rewrites his author-image during this diegetic time as starting out as overly confident, before gradually becoming full of self-doubt in volume V, there is no categorical dismissal of the implied poetic ideas as having been unsalvageable indications of immaturity. Rather, when viewed in light of the analysis I have conducted in this chapter, the rewriting of his first fictional texts that takes place in Karl Ove's childhood autogeography acutely reflects, foreshadows and backshadows the future and present author-image, in terms of diegetic time and narratological structure respectively.

The reflection of the present author-image in the rewriting of the past is not only apparent in Knausgård's rewriting of his first stories, but also in the poetic method that Karl Ove employs in the diegetic time 1987. Having now written five short stories about Gabriel and Gordon, Karl Ove reflects on his ability to transport himself back to Tromøya and the villa area Tybakken:

Det merkelige med det var hvor nær det lå. Å sette seg ned foran skrivemaskinen var som å åpne en dør inn dit. Hele landskapet steg opp i meg og trengte det jeg befant meg i, helt til side. Der var veien utenfor huset, der var den store granen med bekken rennende forbi, der var jordbakken ned mot Ubekilen, steingjerdet, fjellnabbene, båthuset, den skakke falleferdige brygga, holmen, med alle måkene. [...] Da følte det ikke som om det var barndomslandskapet som hadde trengt seg inn i nåtidslandskapet, men omvendt, at det var barndomslandskapet jeg egentlig satt i, og nåtidslandskapet som trengte inn i det utenfra. Ble jeg avbrutt, kunne det gå en hel time eller mer før barndomslandskapet igjen var enerådende.¹⁰⁹ (IV: 355)

¹⁰⁹ "What was strange was how close the place was to me. Sitting in front of the typewriter was like opening a door to it. The scene rose inside me in its entirety and repressed everything around me. There was the road outside the house, there was the tall spruce with the stream running past, there was the slope down to Ubekilen, the stone wall, the rocky outcrop, the boathouse, the crooked rickety pontoon, the island with all the seagulls.

This fore- and backshadows the opening essay in *Min kamp* III, where Knausgård as the forty-year-old author shuts his eyes and imagines walking through the landscape of his childhood (cf. III: 15-16). What this signifies in terms of autoreception and strategies of rewriting, is that Knausgård implicitly lays claim to what he will later define as a hallmark of his writing in one of Karl Ove's earliest poetic reflections: the power and value of autogeographical memory for him as an author.

Furthermore, the continuity of the view of fiction that marks *Min kamp* is created in the form of Karl Ove as an author-critic in the diegetic time 1987, where he makes a comparison between Milan Kundera and Knut Hamsun. Karl Ove contrasts what he describes as his intuitive dislike for how Kundera stresses the fictionality of his stories, to his love of the closeness to the world in Knut Hamsun's writing (IV: 370-371). This is expressed in the way he berates Kundera for highlighting the story as a story:

[...] personene [var] bare "personer", noe han hadde funnet opp, man forstod at de ikke fantes, og hvorfor skulle man lese om dem da?¹¹⁰ (IV: 371)

For Karl Ove, Hamsun stands as the polar opposite:

[...] ingen gikk like langt inn i sine karakterers verdensnærver som han, og det var det jeg foretrakk [...] det fysiske og realistiske i *Sult*, for eksempel. Der hadde verden en tyngde, der var selv tankene fanget, mens tankene hos Kundera hevet seg opp over verden og skaltet og valt med den som de ville.¹¹¹ (ibid.)

In Karl Ove's analysis of Kundera and Hamsun the degree of adherence to the narrative strategy, where the narrator is on the same diegetic level as the protagonist and thus equal to Karl Ove's age and maturity, can be questioned. However, leaving the question of credibility out of the equation, that is, whether it is credible that Karl Ove as the eighteen-year-old, immature and unschooled aspiring author would focus on concepts like "verdensnærver"

[...] I didn't feel as though my childhood surroundings were intruding on the present but vice versa: I was really back in my childhood, and it was the present that was intruding. If I was interrupted, a whole hour or more could pass before Tybakken would be in the ascendancy again." (MS IV: 408-409)

¹¹⁰ "the characters were only 'characters', something he had invented, you knew they didn't exist, and so why should you read them?" (MS IV: 428)

¹¹¹ "no one went as far into his characters' world [alternatively, characters' presence in the world] than he did, and that was what I preferred [...] the physicality and the realism of *Hunger*, for example. There the world had weight, there even the thoughts were captured, while with Kundera the thoughts elevated themselves above the world and did as they liked with it." (MS IV: 428)

and the world as having weight when reading Hamsun, the point remains the same.¹¹² Knausgård as rewriter creates a strong unity between the value Karl Ove found in Hamsun in 1987 and as an author-critic in 2008, specifically in the implied connection he creates between Hamsun's and his own poetics in the essay "Vil De tillate meg å ta Dem litt på Puffen?". In this sense, Karl Ove as a critic of Kundera and Hamsun can be read as related to the ambition that Knausgård outlines both for literature in general as an author-critic and as the author and rewriter in *Min kamp*: to capture a subject's presence and experience of the world through a fictional representation of consciousness, but without explicitly emphasising the fictionality this entails.

Finally, relating this back to Karl Ove's reflection of his method of using Tybakken and Tromøya in his first fictional writing, Knausgård as rewriter of his past author-image creates a starting point for his poetic struggles as an author. These struggles seem to be outlined as always having been connected with issues of fiction that creates a distance to the world, meaning as having been lost, and further that the remedy is active engagement with the world, objects and phenomena in literature, since what Karl Ove longs for in the diegetic time 1987 is his childhood landscape and his child gaze on the world.

Da trærne var trær, og ikke "trær", bilene biler, ikke "biler", pappa
pappa, ikke "pappa".¹¹³ (IV: 355)

This again shadows the reflections of the landscape of childhood and the child gaze in the opening of *Min kamp* III (cf. III: 15-16), but also the longing to write about his father in the diegetic time 2004 (cf. I: 196). Thus, while Knausgård as rewriter may evaluate his initial author image as immature and in progress, he consolidates *Min kamp* as a longstanding poetic struggle that he has faced since starting out as an author, and that it was a struggle it was inevitable he should tackle head-on in his autobiographical novel. Moreover, Knausgård creates unity between past and present author-images by implicitly making the validating claim that his autobiographical, autogeographical and phenomenological instincts were right.

¹¹² Bartlett translates "verdensnærvær" in this context as "characters' world". I supplied an alternative: "characters' presence in the world".

¹¹³ "When the trees were trees, not 'trees', cars not 'cars', when dad was dad, not 'dad.'" (MS IV: 409)

Conclusions and Continuations

Å skrive er å skrive gjennom fordommene, til verden på den andre siden, slik den kunne være da vi var barn, fantastisk eller skremmende, men alltid rik og åpen, uten at det av den grunn er barnslig, det er blikket, hvor noe ses som for første gang, som er det vesentlige.¹

Karl Ove Knausgård, “Dit ut der fortellingen ikke når” (2013)

On 12 December 2013, Edvard Munch’s 150th birthday, Karl Ove Knausgård gave the closing speech for the yearlong anniversary celebration *Munch 150*, which had begun in January with an opening speech by His Majesty King Harald V of Norway. In his speech, Knausgård described Munch’s works as having the ability to address the beholder in a way that words cannot, and he stated that his works show a completely unguarded artist’s meeting with the world. He emphasised that the meeting with the world was in Munch’s paintings not portrayed as mimetic representation but as an experience of reality expressed artistically. Further, he highlighted the emotional exposure in Munch’s works, even in the undramatic everyday motifs he painted, and connected the appeal of Munch to the universality of emotions (Knausgård 2013d).² Knausgård’s speech planted the seed for what would three and a half years later have grown into the exhibition *Mot skogen – Knausgård om Munch*, the third most popular exhibition at the Munch Museum in Oslo since it opened in 1963.³

Already in the igniting spark for the exhibition, the implied autoreception is apparent: in his speech Knausgård points to values in Munch’s work that are highly similar to the values he has implicitly emphasised in his own work. In the conclusion of this thesis, I wish firstly to point to how Knausgård’s autoreception and the functions of autoreception continue beyond *Min kamp*, by taking a brief look at Knausgård’s curation of Edvard Munch. The intended double effect of these closing reflections is to highlight some of the key functions of autoreception that I have examined, and to spark further interest in the

¹ “To write is to write through the prejudices, to the world on the other side, such as it was when we were children, fantastic or frightening but always rich and open, that is not to say that it is childish: it is the gaze, where something is seen for the first time, that is essential.”

² The speech was later printed in *Klassekampen* under the title “Hudløs i verden [Skinless in the world]”.

³ English title of the exhibition: *Towards the Forest – Knausgård on Munch*.

In the foreword to the catalogue for *Mot skogen*, the director of the Munch Museum, Stein Olav Henrichsen, directly refers to Knausgård’s speech in 2013 as what sparked the idea of a Munch exhibition curated by Knausgård himself (Henrichsen 2017: 11). When the exhibition finished in October 2017, 127,827 people had seen *Mot skogen – Knausgård om Munch* (Henrichsen 2018: 9). The two most visited exhibitions in the museum’s history were *Munch 150* (2013) with 140,379 visitors, and *Van Gogh+Munch* (2015) with 171,975 visitors (Henrichsen 2014: 12; 2016: 10).

framework for future analyses of the author, critic and rewriter. This will be followed by an outline of the six main contributions to the research field that I have made with this thesis.

Knausgård on Munch

In May 2017, five and a half years after the publication of the last volume of *Min kamp*, the Munch Museum opened its doors to the exhibition co-curated by Knausgård and the museum's permanent curator Kari J. Brandtzæg, consisting of just under 150 of Edvard Munch's works. None of the curated works, with the exception of *Solen* (1910), can be considered as defining Munch motifs: no *Melankoli* (1891-1892), no *Skrik* (1893), no *Vampyr* (1893-1895), in short, none of the iconic works from the 1890s relating to a personal, existential angst, and none from what Munch himself called *Livsfrisen*.⁴ In fact, many of the works had never before been brought out of storage and exhibited. In *Mot skogen* the works were shown without titles or wall texts, with the exception of the theme of the four exhibition rooms, "Lys og landskap", "Skogen", "Kaos og kraft", and "De andre", and four Knausgård quotations about Munch and art.⁵ The four wall texts, one for each room, were clearly indicated in the exhibition space as being quotes by Karl Ove Knausgård, and were all related to the purpose of art, Munch's talent and aims as an artist, and the connection between artistic representation and the world.

Kunst handler like mye om å lete som å skape. Men i så fall, etter hva? Etter innganger til virkeligheten, etter åpninger til verden.⁶ (Knausgård 2017e; 2017b: 30; 2017c: 78)

Kunsten å male er å se, og så gjøre avstanden mellom det sette og det malte så liten som mulig. Munchs store begavelse lå i hans evne til å male, ikke bare det blikket så, men også det det var ladet med.⁷ (Knausgård 2017e; 2017b: 50; 2017c: 8, 91)

Munch var opptatt av hvordan et bilde kunne forandre et annet bilde, hvordan relasjonen og konteksten skapte noe mer enn de enkelte verkene, en klang, som han kalte det. Og slik er det med menneskene også, sammen er vi mer enn enkelte individer, og det

⁴ Translation of the titles: *Melancholy*, *The Scream*, *Vampire*, *The Frieze of Life*. *Livsfrisen* refers to a series of existential and iconic paintings where Munch aimed to capture the psyche of modern life.

⁵ "Light and Landscape", "The Forest", "Chaos and Energy", and "The Others".

⁶ "Art is just as much about searching as it is about creating. But if that is so, searching for what? For ways of entering reality, of entering into the world." (Knausgård 2017d: 30)

⁷ "The art of painting is to perceive, and then to make the distance between the perceived and what is painted as small as possible. Munch's great talent lay in his ability to paint not only what the gaze perceived, but also what lay behind that gaze." (Knausgård 2017d: 50)

er i den andres ansikt vi lever, ikke i vårt eget, det ser vi ikke.⁸
(Knausgård 2017e; 2017b: 72)

Og det er det alt sammen handler om, er det ikke? Nærvær.
Nærvær til et menneske, nærvær til et landskap, nærvær til et rom,
nærvær til et tre. Og nærværet til maleriet som løfter mennesket,
landskapet, rommet, treet fram.⁹ (Knausgård 2017e; 2017b: 94;
2017c: 234)

While the exhibition space was nearly wordless in its presentation, tying into the theme of seeing a new and unprejudiced side of Munch by exhibiting lesser-known works, the published textual material was extensive. Knausgård published *Så mye lengsel på så liten flate. En bok om Edvard Munchs bilder* (2017) to coincide with the exhibition, and parts of this book were reproduced in the museum catalogue, also authored by Knausgård.¹⁰ In addition, Knausgård wrote the script and recorded the audio guide for *Mot skogen*. Furthermore, during the preparations, Knausgård asked Norwegian filmmaker Joachim Trier to take part in a film about Munch, his paintings, the places he had lived in and painted, and participate in discussion with Knausgård on their relationship with one of Norway's most internationally renowned artists. It is largely the film, *Den andre Munch* (2018) that I focus on here, as Joachim Trier makes highly relevant observations concerning the relationship Knausgård implicitly establishes between Munch and himself.

Den andre Munch, directed by documentary filmmaker Emil Trier, Joachim Trier's brother, was released in June 2018, one year after the exhibition took place.¹¹ The film opens with a clip of Knausgård presenting the exhibition to an international press corps in May 2017, before making an analeptic jump to September 2016 at Villa Stenersen, where Knausgård and Joachim Trier are conversing about their relationship with Munch and the selection of works Knausgård has made for the upcoming exhibition.¹² In the following scenes, Trier and Knausgård visit some of the places in the south-east of Norway where Munch resided during his life: Kragerø, Jeløya in Moss, and Åsgårdstrand. During their visit

⁸ "Munch was preoccupied with how one picture could alter another picture when placed beside it, how the relationship and context created something greater than the individual works, a resonance, as he called it. And that is how it is with people too. Together we are more than separate individuals; it is in the face of the other that we live, not in our own. Because that we cannot see." (Knausgård 2017d: 72)

⁹ "And that is what it's all about, isn't it? Presence. The presence of a human being, the presence of a landscape, the presence of a room, the presence of a tree. And the presence of a painting that lifts a human being, a landscape, a room, and a tree to the fore." (Knausgård 2017d: 94)

¹⁰ The English translation of this text is due for publication on 26 March 2019, under the title *So Much Longing in So Little Space. The Art of Edvard Munch*.

¹¹ Translation of the film title: *The Other Munch*

¹² Villa Stenersen was the home of art collector and Munch-biographer Rolf Stenersen.

to Munch's summer house at Åsgårdstrand, Knausgård and Trier turn the conversation towards Munch's hospitalisation at a psychiatric facility in Copenhagen in 1909, and Trier comments on how Knausgård has predominantly chosen works from after his hospitalisation: "maleriene etter villskapen" as Trier puts it (*Den andre Munch* 2018).¹³ Knausgård follows up on this point, and comments on the change after 1909:

[Knausgård] Det jeg liker med Munch [i den senere fasen] er at han maler hele tiden, og at det er ikke så nøye. Det er ikke så farlig. [...] Og det er noe som jeg selv tenker.
[Trier] Karl Ove, det er jo som å høre deg for tiden! Det er jo akkurat det du sier! Du sier: 'Nå skal jeg ikke tenke så mye på kvalitet, nå vil jeg bare skrive.'¹⁴ (ibid.)

In the film, this is the first instance where Trier connects Knausgård as an author to Munch as an artist, and this becomes a topic he returns to on several occasions throughout their conversations. In relation to the arguments I have made in this thesis concerning the author-critic, Trier highlights the self-interest involved in the double role: Knausgård implicitly views Munch in light of his own work and his own position as an author.

Half way through the film, Trier and Knausgård are given the opportunity to browse the Munch Museum's archives. Knausgård shows Trier some of the paintings he has chosen for the exhibition, and talks about his fears and anxieties concerning how it will be received. Trier, returning to the similarity between Knausgård and Munch, asks if Knausgård is conscious of the fact that the majority of the curated works are from a period when Munch was about the same age that Knausgård is now. Both Knausgård and Trier smile at this realisation, and Knausgård states that he has not considered the connection, and that he chose the works on pure intuition. The only thing he was adamant about when he began planning the curation, was that he did not want to bring the iconic Munch into it. This is because, Knausgård argues, it is easier to actually see Munch as an artist and to see the work itself when looking at something that is not iconic, something you have not seen reproduced on posters, mugs and tote bags: when you see something that has not been seen before. This statement is thus connected with the phenomenological ambition that Knausgård outlines for himself as an author: seeing beyond the habitual and facilitating a pre-theorised, pre-

¹³ "the paintings after the wildness"

¹⁴ "[Knausgård] What I like about Munch [in the later phase] is that he paints all the time, and he is not so meticulous. It's no big deal. [...] And that is something that I think about as well.
[Trier] Karl Ove, that is just like you nowadays! That is just what you say! You say: 'Now I am not going to think about quality so much, now I just want to write.'"

reflective gaze, in this case on Edvard Munch. In other words, Knausgård implicitly points to how the premise for the exhibition is rooted in his own poetics. Further, as Knausgård elaborates on in *Så mye lengsel på så liten flate*, he views the iconisation of Munch's motifs as going against what Munch tried to achieve in his art:

[...] ved siden av van Goghs solsikker og Monets liljedammer, Picassos *Guernica* og Matisse's dansende kvinner er Munchs *Seriké* kanskje vår tids mest ikoniske bilde. Det betyr at bildet alltid allerede er sett, og at det ikke lenger er mulig å se det som for første gang, og når så mye av det Munch investerte i det maleriet nettopp handlet om fremmedgjøring, nettopp handlet om å se verden som for første gang, gjennom å skape en avstand som ikke var fortrolig, er det klart at *Seriké* på sett og vis er ødelagt for oss som kunstverk.¹⁵ (Knausgård 2017c: 16)

In his conversation with Trier in the film, and as a suggested answer to the question of what his interest in the later Munch's works may signify, Knausgård states that he is particularly interested in the point that Munch in his later phase focused merely on painting and not on attempts at creating masterpieces, thus reiterating part of the point he made when Trier first made the connection at Åsgårdsstrand. Trier continues to drive through his point about the similarities between Munch and Knausgård, and between the curated works and Knausgård as an author: “[...] jeg føler jo at noe av det du tør å gjøre er å speile deg der du er nå, Karl Ove Knausgård, som en kjent kunstner” (*Den andre Munch* 2018).¹⁶ Knausgård interrupts Trier, stating again that this perceived courage and mirroring stems from it being done unconsciously, as he has not considered the connection before. However, Trier persists in arguing that the stage Knausgård is at now in his career is comparable to Munch's later phase:

[...] når Munch har utlevert alt det personlige og gått litt lei. Og så sier han ‘nå vil jeg male noe annet, jeg vil se på verden, kanskje bare ta for meg noe enkelt, bare for å male’.¹⁷ (ibid.)

¹⁵ “[...] next to van Gogh's sun flowers and Monet's lilies, Picasso's *Guernica* and Matisse's dancing women, Munch's *The Scream* is perhaps the most iconic painting of our time. This means that the painting is already seen, it is not possible to see it as if for the first time, and when so much of what Munch invested in the painting had to do with precisely defamiliarisation, with seeing the world as if for the first time, by creating a distance that was not familiar, it is clear that in a way *The Scream* is ruined for us as a work of art.”

¹⁶ “[...] my feeling is that part of what you dare to do is to mirror yourself where you are at now, Karl Ove Knausgård, as a famous artist.”

¹⁷ “[...] when Munch has exposed all the personal and is bit tired of that. And then he says ‘I want to paint something different now, I want to look at the world, perhaps just concentrate on something simple, merely to paint’.”

At this remark, Knausgård looks hesitantly at Trier, then nods carefully and apprehensively. Eagerly, Trier connects the intuitive selection of Munch's later paintings with Knausgård as an author after *Min kamp*:

Og du har begynt å ta for deg noe enkelt bare for å skrive. Du kommer sikkert til å ha masse faser igjen i forfatterskapet ditt, men det er jo – du har jo kjørt full gass på utleveringen av det personlige, og det indre, og minnene, og livet ditt ... Og nå har du satt deg ned og skal beskrive en tannbørste.¹⁸ (ibid.)

Both Knausgård and Trier chuckle at this last remark, as it refers to one of the short essayistic texts in Knausgård's *Årstidene* series (2015-2016), entitled precisely "Tannbørster" (see Knausgård 2015d: 165-168).¹⁹ Trier continues: "Og så skal du velge Munch og så gjør du det intuitivt ... og så ender du opp med å velge hans fase da han [maler] – ikke tannbørsten, men kålen i åkeren eller treet i skogen" (*Den andre Munch* 2018).²⁰ Here Trier is referring to the curated paintings *Kålåker* (1915), and the multiple versions of *Høst i almeskogen* (1919-1920) and *Vår i almeskogen* (1923-1925), works they have just been discussing.²¹ At this remark, Knausgård looks down at the floor, seemingly finding the comparison uncomfortable. Trier resumes, still in an encouraging and energetic manner, that this shows that Knausgård has curated with his heart and with his own knowledge, and that this is a great starting point for an exhibition. Knausgård glances up gratefully at Trier and begins "Da har jeg én som ...", before Trier supplies: "Ja, du har én som heier på deg!" (ibid.).²²

As I see it, what Trier is approaching here is the autoreceptive function of Knausgård as a curator of Munch: Knausgård has mirrored his own standpoint as an author to what he sees as valuable in the later Munch's aesthetics. Further, it demonstrates that autoreception is not always done consciously, and thus does not render an analysis of autoreception in the downfall of the intentional fallacy. Rather, if we chose to accept Knausgård's continuous reassurance that the similarities between the chosen works and himself are not a result of conscious efforts, then Trier's analysis signals that the autoreception is apparent in the

¹⁸ "And you have also begun concentrating on something simple, merely to write. Surely you have many more stages to come in your career, but it is – you have gone full throttle on exposing the personal, your inner life, and your memories, and your life ... And now you have sat down and described a toothbrush."

¹⁹ "Toothbrushes" (see Knausgård 2018g: 145-148).

²⁰ "And now when you select Munch's works you do it intuitively ... and then you end up selecting the phase when he [paints] – not the toothbrush, but the cabbage in the field or the tree in the forest."

²¹ Translation of the titles: *Cabbage Field, Elm Forest in Autumn, Elm Forest in Spring*.

²² "Then at least I have one person who ..."; "Yes, you have someone on your side!"

curation itself, as an implicit rhetorical strategy. Knausgård as curator is Knausgård as critic of Munch, and in turn, Knausgård as autoreceptive author-critic.

In *Den andre Munch*, a few days before the opening of *Mot skogen*, Knausgård shows Trier around the exhibition space where the staff are busy hanging the curated works. Trier asks if Knausgård is worried about locking down a specific narrative about the exhibition, in other words, if he is concerned about being too forceful in guiding the visitors on what they should see and take from these particular works. However, Knausgård emphasises that he has taken the opposite approach:

Nei, jeg har tenkt at det [har vært] veldig viktig å få fram det jeg har tenkt, sånn at det skal bli inngangen. [Det var en] ren defensive strategi [...] hvis det her skulle bli slakta og var en total fiasko og 'det her er ordentlig, ordentlig dårlig', så er det viktig at jeg prøver å fortelle hva dette er.²³ (*Den andre Munch* 2018)

When Knausgård refers to his approach as a defensive strategy, this statement points to a key tendency in Knausgård's oeuvre: as the author of *Min kamp*, Knausgård has demonstrated himself as being highly concerned with the intentions behind his work as well as with attempts at assuming control of the way his work is viewed. This tendency is part of what I have named the autoreceptive function of the author as rewriter. In this thesis I have shown how Knausgård in *Min kamp* simultaneously creates distance and unity in his author-image across time as an implicit attempt to validate his poetics. In relation to *Mot skogen*, Knausgård has continued his strategies of rewriting by writing extensively about his thought process and understanding of Munch's aesthetics during the time of preparing the exhibition. In *Så mye lengsel på så liten flate* the autoreceptive narration from *Min kamp* continues to some degree, but the retrospective self-evaluation is at times more direct. Moreover, he has taken the initiative to make the documentary film *Den andre Munch*, where he explains his thinking even further. It may well be that it is the extensive material surrounding the exhibition that Trier is in fact referring to when he poses the question above since, as mentioned, the exhibition space itself has very few textual primers, save the four Knausgård quotations. However, Trier may also be referring to the fact that Knausgård himself as the curator, as the author of *Min kamp* and as an established figure in the Norwegian cultural field, has a

²³ "No, I have thought that it [has been] very important to make it clear what my thinking has been, so that this becomes the entry point. [It was a] purely defensive strategy [...] if this were to be slain or a total fiasco and 'this is really, really bad', then it is important that I try to communicate what this is."

bearing on how the exhibition is understood: perhaps the exhibition is bound to be viewed in light of or even as a continuation of *Min kamp*.

As autoreception, in the conversation with Trier Knausgård highlights the function of defence that lies in providing extensive insight into his own poetic and aesthetic justifications, and the defence imbedded in the rewriting of how these views came into being, both in *Så mye lengsel på så liten flate* and in the museum catalogue, but also in taking the initiative to make the documentary film. However, as I have argued throughout this thesis, the autoreceptive function expands beyond a mere explicit and direct defence. By direct defence, I mean that Knausgård's textual examinations of Munch function as justifications for Knausgård's choices as a curator, for his interpretations of Munch as an artist, his understanding of singular works, and of Munch's oeuvre. Yet, for the functions of the author-critic that I have explored in this thesis, the significant aspect is not whether Knausgård's view of the object-text, object-painting or object-artist is justified. Rather, the form of defence that I find more stimulating in terms of an analysis of autoreception, and which underlines my findings in this thesis, is how it functions to defend and validate Knausgård's poetics via how he views Munch's aesthetics. In other words, the connection Knausgård implicitly creates between his own work and the most celebrated Norwegian artist generates a defence and validation of Knausgård as an author. The defence for Knausgård's interpretation of Munch is thus a dual and circular defence imbedded in the functions of the author-critic: Knausgård validates Munch's aesthetics and Munch validates Knausgård's poetics.

Knausgård as Author-Critic and Rewriter

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate the function of autoreception in Karl Ove Knausgård's works. Specifically, I have examined his critical works prior to becoming an author, and Knausgård as a rewriter in *Min kamp*. In the following I will outline the six main contributions I have made in this thesis.

As the starting point, I defined the core question that this thesis would answer: *What are the functions of criticism and of rewriting for Karl Ove Knausgård as an author?* In order to answer this question, I have developed a theoretical and methodological framework of autoreception. Working across the boundaries of criticism, essayistic texts, the autobiographical and the fictional, the framework allows for a consideration of texts in terms

of how they function to promote, establish, position, and validate the author in the literary field. This framework constitutes the first contribution I make in this thesis, to both a broader field of literary research as well as the scholarship on Karl Ove Knausgård's writing. Within the framework of autoreception, and as my second contribution to the scholarship on Knausgård, I have provided the field with a new view of the narrative technique in *Min kamp* as *autoreceptive narration*. Thus, this thesis has in part been a narratological study of *Min kamp*, where I have expanded the previous approaches by focusing on the functions of what I see as an autoreceptive, narratological strategy.

In part II I put the new theoretical and methodological framework into practice by investigating Knausgård's entry point into the literary field as a critic in the years before becoming a published author. Knausgård as a critic is in general an uncharted area, and Knausgård as a critic prior to his debut as an author has never before been explored to this extent. Thus, this makes up my third contribution to the research field on Knausgård. In the analysis I pointed to the strategies employed by Knausgård as a young aspiring author and critic in order to create a name and space for himself in the literary field. These strategies are united in the autoreceptive function of self-elevating Knausgård's own literary knowledge and competence. Furthermore, criticism functioned as an aid in establishing a space for his own debut novel in the literary field and in a literary tradition. Adding to this, I simultaneously examined how Knausgård rewrites himself as an aspiring author and critic in *Min kamp* V. In previous research this particular aspect of the fifth volume has not received much attention, and this is therefore my fourth original contribution to the scholarship on *Min kamp*. The point was not to fact-check Knausgård's rewriting in *Min kamp*. Rather, it was to show how the autoreceptive narration of himself as a critic functions to emphasise the rewritten author-image as an aspiring author. In *Min kamp* V, Karl Ove balances between a crippling inferiority complex and a will to greatness, and the motif of Karl Ove as a critic and aspiring author seems to embody the tension between his failures and ambitions. Knausgård rewrites himself as condemned and trapped in criticism, but, in what may be an implicit reflection of Knausgård's present author-image pertaining to overcoming long-fought struggles, Karl Ove manages through feats of will and perseverance to break into the literary field as an author.

While the functions of Knausgård's critical activity dominated part II, part III focused more directly on *Min kamp* and the autoreceptive strategies of rewriting within the text. I expanded the autoreceptive narration beyond the narrative technique of keeping Karl

Ove as the protagonist and narrator on the same diegetic level, and I showed how Knausgård as the author employs *shadowing* within the narrative as an autoreceptive strategy. This constitutes my fifth main contribution, as my analysis suggests that the view of the narration as unstructured and consisting of unedited text flows, a view which Knausgård himself has contributed to creating, is insufficient. My interest has been the function of the narrative technique, structuring and shadowing as autoreception, and I have shown that the common denominator lies in strategies of validation, of both past and present author-images. I argued that Knausgård outlines his present author-image as consisting of three interrelated factors – autogeography, autobiography and subjective, poetic phenomenology – and I showed how Knausgård as rewriter creates a continuity of his author-images across time, particularly through instances of narrative shadowing. The function of this, which is my sixth contribution, is that Knausgård can accentuate that he has evolved as an author without dismissing his previous literary endeavours, and he can indicate to the reader that for him the value of literature has largely remained consistent, despite his struggles as an author.

As this is the first study dedicated to the functions of autoreception in Karl Ove Knausgård's work, there is certainly potential for an expansion of the focus that I have taken here. As I briefly demonstrated in the examination of Knausgård's curation of Edvard Munch, Knausgård continues to operate as an author-critic, employing strategies of connecting his own poetics to an established tradition. When considering Knausgård's autoreception after *Min kamp*, future perspectives must include the point that he has now become an internationally renowned author, and in turn that his poetic intentions are widely known in the literary field, leaving most of what Knausgård writes and does to be viewed in light of *Min kamp*. Henrik Keyser Pedersen has pointed to this tendency when he states that he reads everything Knausgård has published from 2012 onwards as “kapitler i et imaginært bind 7 av ‘Min kamp’” (Keyser Pedersen 2015).²⁴ In other words, Knausgård's subsequent writing is to some extent bound to be understood as paratexts to his autobiographical novel or vice versa. Keyser Pedersen's view can easily be transferred to Knausgård as a curator, critic and rewriter of his experience of working on the exhibition *Mot skogen*, where the continuation of Knausgård's poetics has been noted, and not just by Joachim Trier. For instance, several of the critics in their reviews of *Så mye lengsel på så liten flate*, for example

²⁴ “chapters in an imaginary volume VII of ‘Min kamp’”

Sindre Hovdenakk, Fredrik Wandrup and Bjørn Gabrielsen, pointed to the similarities between how Knausgård interprets Munch and Knausgård's own work:

Knausgårds metode er å gå rett på sak, nærmere bestemt inn i et Munchmaleri av en kålåker. I bildet finner forfatteren blant annet det han kaller en lengsel hos kunstneren etter å forsvinne og bli ett med verden. Og vips er vi inne i en fortolkningsramme som kan legges på det aller meste av det Knausgård skriver, nemlig historien om en enorm, monologisk følelseskraft som trumfer det formalt upresise. Form og formler må brytes ned for at kunstneren, enten han maler eller skriver, kan få sagt det han vil.²⁵ (Hovdenakk 2017)

Gjennom 'Min kamp'-serien, men kanskje særlig tre av årstidsbøkene [*Om høsten, Om vinteren, Om sommeren*], har forfatteren fått god trening nettopp i å forsøke å se verden på ny, på en måte som kombinerer barnets blikk med den intellektuelle og beleste kunstnerens analytiske innsikt. Slik opplever han også Munchs kunst.²⁶ (Wandrup 2017)

Siden Knausgård er Knausgård, handler denne boken også om ham. Av og til direkte, ved å fortelle om sin hverdag, om å sitte oppe etter barna har lagt seg, og røyke og se på Munch-bilder, slike ting som man forventer i en bok fra denne hånd. Andre ganger kan beskrivelsene hans av Munch ganske lett overføres på ham selv og hans eget verk, for den som vil spekulere i slikt.²⁷ (Gabrielsen 2017)

First, my hope is that I have provided future analyses of Knausgård as an author, critic, rewriter and curator with a framework that extends beyond the realms of 'speculation', as Bjørn Gabrielsen alludes to, by anchoring the analysis in this thesis in the functions of autoreception. Second, these three critics illustrate Keyser Pedersen's point and highlight the autoreception in Knausgård's text on Munch: the aim of seeing the world as if it was new, the focus on emotions, and the inherent subjective and autobiographical nature of Knausgård's writing all link him to Munch. Third, that the similarities are readily apparent to

²⁵ "Knausgård's method is getting straight to the point, more specifically right into a Munch painting of a cabbage field. In the painting the author finds, for instance, what he calls the artist's longing to disappear and become one with the world. And hey presto, we have entered into the same interpretational framework that can be applied to most of Knausgård's writing, namely the story of an enormous, monological emotional force that trumps the formally unprecise. Form and formulas must be broken down so that the artist, whether he paints or writes, can express what he wants [to express]."

²⁶ "Throughout the *Min kamp* series, but perhaps especially in three of the seasons books [*Autumn, Winter, Summer*], the author has had good practice in attempting to see the world as new, in a way that combines the gaze of the child with the intellectual and well-read artist's analytical insight. This is also how he sees Munch's art."

²⁷ "Since Knausgård is Knausgård, the book is also about himself. Now and then directly, as he narrates his everyday life, staying up after the children have gone to bed, smoking and looking at Munch paintings, the type of things you would expect from a book by this hand. Other times his descriptions of Munch can rather easily be transferred to himself and his own work, for anyone who wishes to speculate in such things."

these three critics is indicative of how Knausgård's poetic aims have become well-established and familiar in the literary field in the years during and after the publication of *Min kamp*. As Knausgård has admitted in a different context, “alle tekstene mine er grunnleggende like, undersøker grunnleggende det samme, det eneste som gjør at de ikke er identiske, er de ulike temaene disse tankene brukes på” (Knausgård 2013f: 80).²⁸ In this respect, his phenomenological view on literature and art that he affirms in his writing after *Min kamp* can be summed up with the following statement that he makes in an essay on Anselm Kiefer: “Våre øyne ser det våre tanker har lært dem, og kunstnerens oppgave er å avlære, det vil si ødelegge de former verden viser seg i, og løfte den fram i nye” (Knausgård 2014d).²⁹ Herein lies also the value that Knausgård finds in Munch: the ability to capture the intentionality and openness of a gaze that meets the world and in turn fills it with meaning, which clearly connects the painter to the author. As a whole, Knausgård seems to have rooted the very idea of the exhibition, seeing Munch as new, beyond the iconic, beyond the familiar, beyond the preconceived understanding, in what he established as his poetic ambition in *Min kamp*, and has continued to promote in his writing post-*Min kamp*. Thus, while Knausgård as a curator and critic of Munch, consciously or unconsciously, looks for aesthetic values that tie his poetics to Munch, critics of Knausgård, having read *Min kamp*, *Årstidene* and possibly the many essays where he writes about literature and art, know to look for this tendency in his writing.³⁰

In other words, Knausgård's position in the literary field and the literary public's familiarity with *Min kamp* as a project have made the autoreceptive tendencies and strategies in Knausgård's work more readily visible. Knausgård has at this point undoubtedly defined his domain, so much so that the name 'Knausgård' has weight next to the name 'Munch', and he has gained the power to justify and validate the need for a re-definition of Munch as an artist. Moving forward calls for further expansions of the framework of autoreception, where Knausgård's position as an internationally recognised author is considered alongside what are becoming more and more explicit autoreceptive strategies. For when Knausgård is put under pressure, for example by Joachim Trier before the opening of *Mot skogen*, he gives

²⁸ “[...] all my texts are fundamentally the same, fundamentally speaking they examine the same [things], the only thing that ensures that they are not identical is the different themes these thoughts are applied to [...]”

²⁹ “Our eyes see what our thoughts have taught them, and the task of the artist is to unlearn, that is, to destroy the forms in which the world shows itself, and make it appear in new [forms].”

³⁰ Since finishing *Min kamp*, Knausgård has written essays on for example Francesca Woodman, Cindy Sherman, and Sally Mann, which all appear in the essay collection *Sjelens Amerika* (2013). See “Velkommen til virkeligheten [Welcome to Reality]”, “Grisemennesket [The Pig Human]”, and “Det uutømmelige presise [The Inexhaustibly Precise]”.

in to explicit comparisons, in which new tendencies may emerge that can expand the functions of autoreception:

[Knausgård] Nå bare glemmer vi det at det er pinlig å sammenligne seg med Munch...

[Trier] Ja, ja, kjør på!³¹ (*Den andre Munch* 2018)

³¹ [Knausgård] Let's just forget about the fact that it is embarrassing to compare oneself to Munch...
[Trier] Yes, yes, on you go!

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Appendices

Chapter 2 Autoreceptive Narration

I The Voice Over-model in third-person simple past narration (Behrendt 2011: 312)

Den narrative stemmes register (horisontalt-dynamisk)				
← Fortællerdominans		Karakterdominans →		
← Ydre		Indre →		
← Diegese		Mimesis →		
← Datering		Deiksis →		
← Objektiv		Idiomatisk →		
Det diskursive register (vertikalt-statisk)				
	1. aspekt	2. aspekt	3. aspekt	4. aspekt
	Karacteruafhængig situationsskildring CID: Character-independent Discourse	Indirekte genfortalt bevidsthed ID: Indirect Discourse	Dækket direkte bevidsthed FID: Free Indirect Discourse	Direkte citert bevidsthed DD: Direct Discourse
Person:	Tredje person han/hun/de	Tredje person han/hun/de	Tredje person han/hun/de	Første person jeg/vi
Tanke-inkvit:	÷ Tankeinkvit	+ Tankeinkvit (tænkte, at ...)	÷ Tankeinkvit	+ Tankeinkvit: (tænkte: "...")
Tempus:	Præteritum	Præteritum	Præteritum	Præsens
Syntaks:	Helsætnings-Struktur	Ledsætnings-Struktur	Helsætnings-Struktur	Helsætnings-Struktur

Translation of The Voice Over-model in third-person simple past narration

The register of the narrative voice (horizontal-dynamic)				
← Narrator dominance		Character dominance →		
← Outer		Inner →		
← Diegesis		Mimesis →		
← Dating		Deixis →		
← Objective		Idiomatic →		
The discursive register (vertical-static)				
	1. aspect	2. aspect	3. aspect	4. aspect
	CID: Character-independent Discourse	ID: Indirect Discourse	FID: Free Indirect Discourse	DD: Direct Discourse
Person:	Third person he/she/they	Third person he/she/they	Third person he/she/they	First person I/we
Thought indicative:	÷ Thought indicative	+ Thought indicative (thought that ...)	÷ Thought indicative	+ Thought indicative: (thought: "...")
Tense:	Simple past	Simple past	Simple past	Present
Syntax:	Main clause structure	Subordinate clause structure	Main clause structure	Main clause structure

II The Voice Over-model in first-person simple past narration (Behrendt 2011: 318)

Den narrative stemmes register (horisontalt-dynamisk)				
← Fortællerdominans		Karakterdominans →		
← Ydre		Indre →		
← Diegese		Mimesis →		
← Datering		Deiksis →		
← Objektiv		Idiomatisk →		
Det diskursive register (vertikalt-statisk)				
	1. aspekt Karakteruafhængig situationsskildring CID: Character- independent Discourse	2. aspekt Indirekte genfortalt bevidsthed ID: Indirect Discourse	3. aspekt Dækket direkte bevidsthed FID: Free Indirect Discourse	4. aspekt Direkte citert bevidsthed DD: Direct Discourse
Person:	Første person	Første person	Første person	Første person
Tanke- inkvit:	÷ Tankeinkvit	+ Tankeinkvit (tænkte, at ...)	÷ Tankeinkvit	+ Tankeinkvit: (tænkte: "...")
Tempus:	Præteritum	Præteritum	Præteritum	Præsens
Syntaks:	Helsætnings- Struktur	Ledsætnings- Struktur	Helsætnings- Struktur	Helsætnings- Struktur
	5. aspekt Ambivalens AD: Ambigious Discourse			

Translation of The Voice Over-model in first-person simple past narration

The register of the narrative voice (horizontal-dynamic)				
← Narrator dominance		Character dominance →		
← Outer		Inner →		
← Diegesis		Mimesis →		
← Dating		Deixis →		
← Objective		Idiomatic →		
The discursive register (vertical-static)				
	1. aspect CID: Character- independent Discourse	2. aspect ID: Indirect Discourse	3. aspect FID: Free Indirect Discourse	4. aspect DD: Direct Discourse
Person:	First person	First person	First person	First person
Thought indicative:	÷ Thought indicative	+ Thought indicative (thought that ...)	÷ Thought indicative	+ Thought indicative: (thought: "...")
Tense:	Simple past	Simple past	Simple past	Present
Syntax:	Main clause structure	Subordinate clause structure	Main clause structure	Main clause structure
	5. aspect Ambivalence AD: Ambiguous Discourse			

Chapter 3 Knausgård as Student-Critic

III Transcript of “De ti mest overvurderte forfattere”, Studentradioen, 22.04.1993

Jeg har fått i oppdrag å lage en liste over de ti mest overvurderte forfatterne i Norge. Før jeg setter i gang, er det et par punkter som må avklares. Ordet “vurdere” kommer fra det tyske *werderen* og betyr opprinnelig å bestemme verdien av noe. Å overvurdere skulle da bety å verdsette noe høyere enn det det egentlig er verdt. Det sier seg sjøl at sånne vurderinger ofte blir tilfeldige, at de blir avhengige av den som vurderer, hvilket miljø han tilhører og så videre. Problemet er altså å bestemme hva en bok er verdt, for så bruke det som utgangspunkt til å finne ut hvilke bøker som er verdsatt høyere enn dens egentlige verdi. I denne sammenhengen har jeg den fordel at jeg ikke tilhører noe miljø. Jeg står med andre ord fullstendig fritt, og er i høy grad kapabel til å foreta en fri, utvungen og objektiv vurdering av andres vurderinger av bøker.

Neste punkt som må avklares i denne sammenhengen, er rollen til de som vurderer. Grovt sett kan disse deles inn i to hovedgrupper. Den første kaller jeg de intellektuelle. Disse har alle en høy utdanning, fortrinnsvis innen litteraturvitenskap, og er ofte bare løselig knyttet til bladene de skriver for. Den daglige donten har de vanligvis på universitetet. Disse skriver ikke anmeldelser, de skriver kritikker. De har det til felles at de alle skriver svært lange kritikker, og alltid, uten unntak, med et språk du må være universitetsutdanna for å skjønne. Bøkene de skriver om har det til felles at de svært ofte er svært vanskelige å forstå for andre enn folk med tilknytning til universitetet. Hvis de skulle slumpe til å skrive en kort kritikk, kan du være sikker på at de ikke liker boka, fordi den er for lite subtil, med andre ord fordi folk kjøper og leser disse bøkene. Den andre hovedgruppa velger jeg å kalle de enkle. De enkle skriver anmeldelser i dagsavisene. Disse anmelderne liker i motsetning til de intellektuelle disse bøkene som folk flest leser. Mens de intellektuelle er veldig opptatt av hvordan bøkene er skrevet, konsentrerer de enkle seg om innholdet. Når vi så skal snakke om overvurderte bøker, sier det seg sjøl at de enkle vurderer andre ting over seg enn de intellektuelle. De enkle vil mene at en bok alle de intellektuelle går god for, som de sjøl ikke liker, er overvurdert, mens de intellektuelle er nedlatende overfor de bøkene de enkle liker, fordi de enkle liker det. Så det er et komplisert og uoversiktlig felt vi her beveger oss ned i. Men som sagt så står jeg fritt: jeg tilhører verken de enkle eller de intellektuelle, dessuten får jeg ikke penger for denne vurderinga, så dere er garantert en ukorrupt og objektiv gjennomgang.

Rent praktisk så begynner vi på bunn, med den minst overvurderte av de mest overvurderte forfatterne. Gjør dere klar for den tiende mest overvurderte forfatteren i Norge.

Nummer 10: Milan Kundera

Kundera var en av de som flyktet fra Praha rundt 1968. Han slo seg senere opp som eksilforfatter i Frankrike, og er en av de avisene maser om at må få Nobelprisen. Da hans hittil siste bok kom ut, skrev Tove Nilsen i Dagbladet at dette sannsynligvis var den største samtidsromanen hun ville lese i sin levetid. Alle bøkene til Kundera handler om det samme: et trekantforhold, gjerne med et ektepar involvert. Med dette som utgangspunkt, prøver Kundera å si noe om menneskenes vilkår her på jorda. Personens fiksjonalitet blir hele tida understreka til det kjedsommelige. Hva er vitsen med romanpersoner som handler som personer i det virkelige liv, når det understrekes at det er det de ikke er? Det blir bare påtatt akademisk og kvasi-intellektuelt. Selvfølgelig er Kundera kjedelig, drittkjedelig for å være nøyaktig, problemet er at han *er* bra, det er ingen vei utenom. Når mange nok sier mange nok ganger at noe er tilfellet, er det lett å gå med på det. Det er lett å tro at dette er bra når du leser Kundera, at dette er normen på kvalitetslitteratur. Det er det ikke. Det er akademiske, metafysiske trekantforhold som foregår i Praha på 60-tallet med personer som ikke er personer, men fiksjoner.

Nummer 9: Jon Fosse

Jon Fosse har de siste tre-fire åra fått en tilnærma kultstatus i Norge. Den statusen har han fått av folk som ikke vil være som andre folk. De er avhengige av et objekt de kan dyrke. Se så bra! Og dette objektet må være så sært at *ingen* andre vil finne på å like det. Jon Fosse er den kjedeligst mulige forfatter tilgjengelig. Han har et forråd på et par hundre ord, som blir gjentatt og gjentatt og gjentatt. Fosse har ikke fått med seg det meste elementære kravet til kunst: variasjon.

Han nikkar og han ser ho begynner å gå nedover gata, og han tenkjer at ho må ikekje berre gå, tenkjer han, og han begynner å gå etter henne og han tenkjer at han må spørje henne om noko, tenkjer han, og han går like bak henne og så spør han henne om ho vil ha ein røyk, ho svarar ikekje, går berre vidare, og så stansar ho og ho ser mot han.

Ikke bare er setningskonstruksjonen monoton, men også selvfølgelig handlinga. Det dreier seg om ensomme menn som enten sitter og tenker et sted, enkle tanker om et eller annet banalt, eller om ensomme menn som gjør enkle ting, som å gå eller å sitte. Det eneste unntaket er boka *Stengd gitar*, som faktisk lar seg lese, hvis du da ser bort ifra alle gjentakelsene, naturligvis. Å forsøke å knytte sammen det enkle og hverdagslige til større ting, som eksistensen, selve livet og alle spørsmålene som knytter seg til det, er prisverdig. Men må det være så kjedelig og blotta for innsikt? Det er ikke interessant med folk som går og tenker på mora si, det er faktisk helt utrolig uvesentlig.

Nummer 8: Samuel Beckett

Beckett er en av de som blir hausa opp av de intellektuelle. Han starta i sin tid som sekretær for sin landsmann James Joyce, og endte opp som en skikkelig kanonisert og geniforklart forfatter. Problemet med Beckett er at han ikke skriver om noen ting. De som forsvarer han vil vel da si at han skriver om ingenting, som om det gjorde noen forskjell. Når jeg leser bøker, vil jeg lese om *noe*, hvem gidder å lese om ingenting? Da er det like greit å la være å lese. Forskjellen mellom å lese om ingenting og ikke å lese er minimal. *Mens vi venter på Godot* heter det mest kjente skuespillet til Beckett. Det handler om to personer som sitter og kjeder seg mens de venter på en fyr. Denne ventinga blir ikke fylt med noen ting, annet enn at de for eksempel tar av seg støvlene og snakker lenge om det. Som alle vet, siden Beckett skal være jævlig bra, og dere alle leser det som er jævlig bra, så kommer aldri Godot. Jeg for min del følte meg snytt da jeg så det for første gang.

Nummer 7: Dag Solstad

Dag Solstad blir geniforklart av både de enkle og de intellektuelle. Man skulle tro at det var et kvalitetskriterium, at alle kan finne noe de liker hos Solstad. Sånn er det ikke dessverre. Solstad skriver også bare om én ting: hvordan en person, som gjerne kommer fra en liten østlandsby, drar inn til Oslo for å studere på 60-tallet. Han får seg jobb et eller annet sted i Norge, gjerne som lektor. Etter noen kjedelige år, går han inn i AKP(m-l). Som dere vet, er dette livshistorien til Dag Solstad sjøl. De eneste bøkene som ikke handler om dette, er den forferdelige krigstriologien han ga ut på 70-tallet. Språket til Solstad er omstendelig og krøkkete. Men det hadde vært til å leve med, hadde det ikke vært for det grå og triste innholdet. Dag Solstad er en kjedelig person som skriver om sin egen kjedelige person, hvis store heltegjerning og vendepunkt her i livet var å bli med i et politisk parti.

Nummer 6: Thomas Bernhard

Thomas Bernhards stjerne har vært stigende her i landet de siste årene. Han er en av de du må ha lest for å kunne si at du følger med. Bernhards bøker ligner også alle på hverandre, ikke i handlinger denne gang, som hos Solstad, kanskje fordi det ikke finnes noen handling å snakke om. De ligner på hverandre fordi de alle er holdt i samme tone. Bernhard må ha vært en bitter mann, bøkene hans er bare sure oppstøt fra Wien. Han kritiserer og kritiserer og kritiserer. Alt er negativt, alt mellom himmel og jord. Jeg savner en balansert fremstilling av virkeligheten hos Bernhard. Alt er da ikke så svart som han vil ha det til?

Nummer 5: Fjodor Dostojevskij

Dostojevskij er en litt verre forfatter å forholde seg til. Jeg liker faktisk å lese Dostojevskij, men av helt andre grunner enn det litteraturviterne vil hevde var bra ved boka. De snakker om hans dype psykologiske innsikt, og om romanens dialogiske karakter. For meg er Dostojevskij jevn god med kiosklitteratur. Det er ekstremt melodramatisk, folk gjemmer seg bak skap og tjuvlytter, mens andre raser gjennom rommet og hylar og skriker, en tredje kan ligge og vri seg i feber. De er sentimentale, de er vulgære, rett og slett underholdende. Noen dyplokkende psykologi har jeg aldri sett hos Dostojevskij. At Raskolnikov, for eksempel, får samvittighetskvaler og blir kristen etter å ha drept den gamle dama, trenger man ikke psykologisk innsikt for å dikte opp. Det er jo opplagt. Det samme med fyrst Mysjkin i *Idioten*, et forsøk på å lage det ultimate gode mennesket. At han må bli dum, er jo soleklart. Billige bøker altså, men som tross alt er ganske underholdende.

Nummer 4: Ole Robert Sunde

Dette navnet ble kjent etter høstens kulturdebatt i Dagbladet. Krigen mellom de enkle og de intellektuelle brøt ut, men det var en konflikt som lenge hadde ligget i vannskorpa. De enkle mener at Sunde er uforståelig, de intellektuelle vurderer ham som en av de viktigste norske forfatterne. Hans siste bok skal visstnok forholde seg til moderne kaosteori. På hvilken måte? Jo, boka er sjøl kaotisk. Genialt. At Sunde er overvurdert, blir klart når

du tenker på den enorme positive omtalen han får hos de intellektuelle. Kanskje kjenner du noen intellektuelle sjøl? Spør de i så fall om de har lest Sunde. Jeg vedder at de ikke har. En forfatter alle mener er bra, men som ingen har lest, fordi boka er uleselig selvfølgelig. Hele handlinga tar bare noen minutter, likevel er boka enormt tjukk. Sunde har skrevet ned alt han kommer på, og samla det sammen, og utrolig nok fått et forlag til å gi det ut. Dagboknotater kan være en fin sjanger, det finnes nok av bevis på at det fungerer i verdenslitteraturen, men da må det være ordna på en eller annen måte, enten tematisk, eller kronologisk. Å klippe de opp og lime de sammen helt vilkårlig blir bare kaotisk, og fører til at boka blir totalt uleselig. Ole Robert Sunde håner leseren med sin påklistra kvasi-intellektualitet.

Nummer 3: Marcel Proust

Marcel Proust er kjent for én bok. Denne boka er til gjengjeld på mer enn et dusin bind. *På sporet av den tapte tid* heter den. Tittelen er uvanlig dekkende, for den tanken dukker opp igjen og igjen mens du leser Prousts verk: alt du kunne ha gjort istedenfor all den tiden du taper. Proust var ingen kjent forfatter i sin samtid, men han var kjent som spaltist, nærmere bestemt sosietetsspaltist. Proust var vel bevandra i Paris' mondene sirkler. Det er det han skriver om i *På sporet av den tapte tid*. Han skriver om sin egen barndom, han skriver om sin egen ungdom, og han skriver om sitt eget voksne liv i sosietet i Paris. Det gjør han med en nesten kvalmende detaljrikdom. Han kan beskrive noen kjolekniplinger i over ti, tjue, kanskje til og med tredve sider. Proust er riktignok flink til å skrive, men det veier ikke opp det faktum at han ikke har noe å si. Alle de "touchy" og spennende emnene han kunne tatt opp, som sin egen homoseksuelle legning for eksempel, lar han ligge. I stedet skriver han om sin brennende kjærlighet til en eller annen kvinne, som kjent da må være falsk. Proust tilhørte de heldige her i livet: han hadde godt med penger og venner som var høyt på strå. Det er prosaen hans prega av, her er sosial samvittighet betegnelse på at du har glemt en middagsavtale med grevinnen av Lautrec. Likevel blir dette verket regna som en av modernismens viktigste. Det som ikke engang er modernistisk.

Nummer 2: Kjartan Fløgstad

Kjartan Fløgstad har en underlig karriere som forfatter, i alle fall i forhold til kritikken av forfatterskapet hans. Da boka *Det 7. klima* kom ut på slutten av 80-tallet, ble det grusomt slakta av de enkle, fordi Fløgstad skrev uforståelig og fordi ordspilla og blødmene hans ikke beveger seg særlig høyere enn mot et pubertalt nivå. Den samme boka ble rost til himmels av de intellektuelle. Neste bok fra saudabuen het *Kniven på strupen*. Den ble tiljubla av de enkle, mens de intellektuelle mente at den var for enkel. Jeg er enig i alle disse vurderingene. *Det 7. klima* er vanskelig, men det skal ikke være noen innvending mot noen bok. Problemet er at den er vanskelig på en akademisk måte. Fløgstad skrev om moderne språkteori som bare to-tre stykker har hørt om her i landet. Det hadde vært greit om det hadde vært populærvitenskapelig framstilt, sånn at vi kunne lære noe av det. Sånn som det er nå, er kodene koda, bare de aller mest kunnskapsrike kan få noen ting i det hele tatt ut av Fløgstad. Og den språkfilosofien han forfekter postulerer jo at språket bare er språk, at den ikke relaterer seg til en verden utenfor, språket er ikke referensielt, men bare et system av forskjeller. Dermed får alle de som sier at de ikke forstår Fløgstad rett, fordi den i følge sine egne postulater ikke lar seg forstå, mens de som sier at de forstår den, ikke har forstått noen ting. Om Fløgstad sjøl har forstått det, det tviler jeg på. For han har presentert oss for et uløselig dilemma. Han har skrevet en bok som i prinsippet er uforståelig. Forstår du den, så forstår du den ikke. Neste bok fra Fløgstad var akkurat motsatt. Den var enkel å forstå for alle parter. Den tok for seg jappetidas Norge, den etterindustrielle festen som varte i tre år, fullfinansiert av oss folk flest. Men her er ironien og tvetydigheten redusert til de helt enkle og helt banale sannheter. Det er forjævelig at vi brukte så mye penger i Norge på 80-tallet, og at avisene er så dårlige, spesielt VG og Dagbladet. Men det er ikke så jævlig at det er vits i å lese noen bok om det.

Nummer 1: James Joyce

Om James Joyce er det bare ett å si: han er enormt overvurdert.

Translation of "De ti mest overvurderte forfattere", Studentradioen, 22.04.1993

I have been tasked with making a list of the ten most overrated authors in Norway. Before I begin, a few points must be clarified. The word "vurdere" [evaluate, rate] comes from the German *werden* and originally means to decide the value of something. To overrate would then mean to value something higher than its actual worth. It goes without saying that such evaluations are often random, that they are dependent on who does the evaluation, what kind of milieu he belongs to and so on. The problem is thus to decide what a book is worth,

and then use this as a starting point to find out which books are valued higher than their true value. In this respect I have the advantage of not belonging to any milieu. In other words, I stand completely free, and I am highly capable of conducting a free, unconstrained, and objective assessment of other people's assessment of books.

The next point that needs clarification in this context, is the role of the evaluators. Roughly speaking, these can be divided into two main groups. The first I call the intellectuals. They are highly educated, preferably within literature, and are often only loosely connected to the magazines they write for. Their daily work is usually at the university. They don't write reviews, they write criticism. What they have in common is that they all write very lengthy criticism, and always, without exception, in language you need to have a university education to be able to understand. The common denominator for the books they write about is that they are often very difficult to understand for people not associated with the university. If they happen to write a short critical text, you can be sure that they do not like the book, because it is not subtle enough, in other words, because people buy and read the books. The other main group I will call the simple [critics]. The simple [critics] write reviews in the daily newspapers. These reviewers, unlike the intellectuals, like the books that ordinary people read. While the intellectuals are very concerned with how books are written, the simple [critics] focus on the content. In talking about overrated books, it goes without saying that the simple [critics] overrate different books than the intellectuals. The intellectuals will say that a book all the intellectuals vouch for, but that they don't like themselves, is overrated, while the intellectuals are condescending towards those books that the simple [critics] like, because the simple [critics] like them. So it is a complex and confusing field we are descending into. But as mentioned, I am free: I belong neither to the simple [critics] nor the intellectuals, moreover I am not paid for this evaluation, so you are guaranteed an un-corrupted and objective run-down.

For practicality, we begin at the bottom, with the least overrated of the most overrated authors. Get ready for the tenth most overrated author in Norway.

Number 10: Milan Kundera

Kundera was one of the many who fled from Prague around 1968. He later established himself as an exiled author in France, and is one of the authors that the newspapers go on about as a Nobel Prize candidate. When his last book to date came out, Tove Nilsen wrote in Dagbladet that this was probably the greatest contemporary novel that she would read in her lifetime. All of Kundera's books are about the same thing: a love triangle, often involving a married couple. With this as a starting point, Kundera attempts to say something about the human condition. The characters' fictionality are constantly underlined to the point of boredom. What is the point of characters who are about people in real life, when it is underlined that that is what they are not? It becomes merely feigned academic quasi-intellectualism. Of course Kundera is boring, bloody boring to be exact, the problem is that he *is* good, there is no way around it. When enough people repeat enough times that something is the case, it is easy to go along with it. It is easy to think that this is good when you read Kundera, that this is the norm for quality literature. It isn't. It is academic, metaphysical love triangles taking place in Prague in the '60s with people who are not people, but fictions.

Number 9: Jon Fosse

Jon Fosse has in the last three to four years achieved a near-cult status in Norway. This status has been given to him by people who don't want to be like other people. They rely on an object they can worship. Look, how wonderful! And this object has to be so peculiar that *no one* else would dream of liking it. Jon Fosse is the most boring author possible out there. His vocabulary consists of a couple of hundred words that are repeated and repeated and repeated. Fosse has missed the most elementary criterion of art: variation.

He nods and he sees that she begins to walk down the street, and he thinks that she mustn't just go, he thinks, and he begins to go after her and he thinks that he must ask her something, he thinks, and he walks just behind her and he asks her if she wants a cigarette, she doesn't respond, just keeps walking, and then she stops and looks towards him.

Not only is the sentence construction monotone, but of course the plot is as well. It is about lonely men who are either sitting and thinking somewhere, simple thoughts about something banal, or about lonely men doing simple things, like walking or sitting. The only exception is the book *Closed Guitar*, which actually allows itself to be read, if you ignore all the repetitions, of course. To attempt to tie the simple and everyday to greater

things, like existence, life itself and all the related questions, is commendable. But does it have to be so boring and so robbed of insight? People going around thinking about their mother is not interesting, it is in fact unbelievably irrelevant.

Number 8: Samuel Beckett

Beckett is one of those authors who is hyped up by the intellectuals. He started out as a secretary for his fellow countryman James Joyce, and ended up being a truly canonised and genius-declared author. The problem with Beckett is that he doesn't write about anything. Those who defend him would probably say that he writes about nothing, as if that made a difference. When I read books I want to read about *something*, who can be bothered to read about nothing? Then you may as well not read. The difference between reading about nothing and not reading is minimal. *Waiting for Godot* is the name of Beckett's best-known play. It is about two people who are bored while they wait for some guy. The waiting is not filled with anything, other than for example them taking off their boots and talking about that for a long time. As everyone knows, since Beckett is supposed to be damn good, and you all read what is damn good, *Godot* never shows up. I for one felt cheated when I saw it for the first time.

Number 7: Dag Solstad

Dag Solstad has been declared a genius by both the simple [critics] and the intellectuals. You would think that this was a criterion of quality, that everyone can find something they like in Solstad. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Solstad is also someone who writes about only one thing: how a person, often from a small town in eastern Norway, goes to Oslo to study in the '60s. He gets a job somewhere in Norway, often as a high school teacher [lektor]. After a few boring years he joins AKP (m-l). As you know, this is the biography of Dag Solstad himself. The only books that are not about this are the terrible war trilogy he published in the '70s. Solstad's language is laborious and tortuous. But you could live with that, had it not been for the grey and bleak content. Dag Solstad is a boring person who writes about his own boring person, whose great heroic deed and turning point in life was to join a political party.

Number 6: Thomas Bernhard

For the last few years Thomas Bernhard's star has been rising in Norway. He is one of those you have to have read to be able to say that you are paying attention. All Bernhard's books also resemble each other, this time not in their plot as with Solstad, maybe because there is no plot to speak of. They resemble each other because they all keep the same tone. Bernhard must be a bitter man; his books are merely acid refluxes from Vienna. He criticises and criticises and criticises. Everything is negative, everything and anything. I miss a balanced presentation of reality in Bernhard's works. Surely everything cannot be as dark as he would have it?

Number 5: Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Dostoyevsky is slightly more difficult to deal with. I actually like reading Dostoyevsky, but for completely different reasons than what the literary scholars claim makes it a good book. They talk about his deep psychological insight, and about the novel's dialogical features. For me Dostoyevsky is equal to pulp fiction. It is extremely melodramatic, people hide behind cupboards and eavesdrop, while others charge through the room howling and screaming, and a third may be in bed with a raging fever. They are sentimental, they are vulgar, and, simply, entertaining. I have never detected profound psychology in Dostoyevsky. That Raskolnikov, for example, feels remorse and becomes a Christian after having killed the old lady, is not something you need psychological insight to come up with. It is so obvious. The same goes for Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, an attempt at creating the ultimate good man. That he has to be stupid goes without saying. Therefore, they are cheap books, but still entertaining ones.

Number 4: Ole Robert Sunde

This name became well-known during this autumn's culture debate in *Dagbladet*. War between the simple [critics] and the intellectuals broke out, although the feud had been simmering for a while. The simple [critics] think that Sunde is incomprehensible, the intellectuals class him as one of Norway's most important authors. His last book apparently deals with modern chaos theory. In what way? Well, the book is in itself chaotic. Genius. That Sunde is overrated becomes evident when you think about the enormous amount of praise he receives from the intellectuals. Perhaps you know some intellectuals yourself? In that case, ask them if they

have read Sunde. I'll bet they haven't. An author that everyone thinks is good, but no one has read, because the book is unreadable, of course. The whole plot takes only a few minutes, nevertheless the book is enormously thick. Sunde has written down everything he can think of, gathered it together, and as mind-boggling as it is gotten a publisher to publish it. Diary notes can be a nice genre, there is plenty of evidence of it doing well in world literature, but it has to be ordered in one way or another, either thematically or chronologically. Cutting it up and pasting it together at random becomes mere chaos, and the book ends up being completely unreadable. Ole Robert Sunde mocks the reader with his stuck-on quasi-intellectualism.

Number 3: Marcel Proust

Marcel Proust is known for one book. This book has, in return, a dozen volumes. *In Search of Lost Times* is its name. The title is exceptionally encapsulating, as the thought pops up again and again while you are reading Proust's work: everything you could have done instead in all the time you lose. Proust was not a well-known author in his time, but was a well-known columnist, more specifically a high society columnist. Proust was well versed in the cultured circles in Paris. That is what he writes about in *In Search of Lost Times*. He writes about his childhood, he writes about his youth, and he writes about his life in high society Paris. He does this with an almost nauseating richness of detail. He can describe some lace on a dress for over ten, twenty, maybe even thirty pages. Proust is good at writing, all the same, but that doesn't outweigh the fact that he has nothing to say. All the "touchy" and exciting topics he could have addressed, like his own homosexuality for instance, he leaves untouched. Instead he writes about his burning love for some woman, which then, as everyone knows, must be a lie. Proust belonged to the fortunate people in life: he was financially well off and had friends in high places. This characterises his prose, here social conscience equals forgetting a dinner date with the Countess of Lautrec. Nevertheless, this work is counted amongst the most important modernistic works. All the while not even being modernistic.

Number 2: Kjartan Fløgstad

Kjartan Fløgstad has had a strange career as an author, at least in terms of the criticism of his oeuvre. When the book *Det 7. klima* came out towards the end of the '80s, it was savagely slaughtered by the simple [critics], because Fløgstad wrote incomprehensibly, and because his puns and witticisms do not move past a pubertal level. The same book was praised to the skies by the intellectuals. The next book from 'saudabuen' [the man from Sauda in Rogaland] was called *Kniven på strupen*. It was exultantly applauded by the simple [critics], while the intellectuals thought it was too simple. I agree with all of these evaluations. *Det 7. klima* is difficult, but that should not be an objection against any book. The problem is that it is difficult in an academic way. Fløgstad wrote about modern language theory, which only two or three people in this country have heard of. It had been all well and good if this had been presented in the manner of popular science, so that we could learn something from it. As it is now, the codes are coded, only the most knowledgeable can get anything at all out of reading Fløgstad. And the language theory he advocates postulates that language is just language, that it does not relate to a world outside, language is not referential, only a system of differences. Therefore, all the people who say they have understood Fløgstad correctly, since according to the book's own claims it cannot be understood, have not understood anything at all. I doubt that Fløgstad has understood it himself. Because he has presented us with an unsolvable dilemma. He has written a book that on principle is incomprehensible. If you understand it, you don't understand it. Fløgstad's next book was the complete opposite. It was simple for all parties. It dealt with the yuppie time [jappetiden] in Norway, the post-industrial party that lasted for three years, fully financed by us common folk. But here the irony and the ambiguity is reduced to utterly simple and banal truths. It is damn appalling how much money we spent in Norway during the '80s, and that the newspapers are so bad, especially VG and Dagbladet. But it not so appalling that there is any point reading a book about it.

Number 1: James Joyce.

About James Joyce there is only one thing to say: he is extremely overrated.

Chapter 5 Expanding Autoreceptive Narration

IV Opening paragraph of *Min kamp I*, with translation by Don Bartlett.

“FOR HJERTET ER LIVET ENKELT: det slår så lenge det kan. Så stopper det. Før eller siden, en eller annen dag, opphører denne stampende bevegelsen av seg selv, og blodet begynner å renne mot kroppens laveste punkt, hvor det samler seg i en liten kulp, synlig fra utsiden som et mørkt og bløtlig felt på denne stadig hvitere huden, alt mens temperaturen synker, lemmene stivner og tarmene tømmes. Disse første timenes forandringer foregår så langsomt og blir utført med en slik sikkerhet at de har noe nesten rituelt over seg, som om livet kapitulere ifølge bestemte regler, en slags *gentlemen's agreement*, som også det dødes representanter retter seg etter, idet de alltid venter på livet har trukket seg ut før de starter invasjonen av det nye landskapet. Da er den til gjengjeld ugjenkallelig. De enorme svermene med bakterier som begynner å spre seg ut i kroppens indre, kan ingenting stanse. Hadde de forsøkt seg bare noen timer tidligere, ville de straks ha møtt motstand, men nå er alt stille rundt dem, og de trenger stadig dypere inn i det fuktige og mørke. De når de Haverske kanaler, de Lieberkühnske krypter, de Langerhanske øyer. De når Bowmans kapsel i Renes, Clarks søyle i Spinalis, den svarte substans i Mesencephalon. Og de når hjertet. Fortsatt er det intakt, men frarøvet bevegelsen, som hele dets konstruksjon er innrettet mot, har det noe underlig ødslig ved seg, lik et anlegg arbeiderne har måttet forlate i hui og hast, kunne man tenke seg, de urørlige kjøretøyene som lyser gult mot skogens mørke, brakkene som ligger tomme, vognene i taubanen som henger fullastede en etter en oppover fjellsiden.” (I: 7, emphasis original).

“For the heart, life is simple: it beats for as long as it can. Then it stops. Sooner or later, one day, this pounding action will cease of its own accord, and the blood will begin to run towards the body's lowest point, where it will collect in a small pool, visible from the outside as a dark, soft patch on ever whiter skin, as the temperature sinks, the limbs stiffen and the intestines drain. These changes in the first hours occur so slowly and take place with such inexorability that there is something almost ritualistic about them, as though life capitulates according to specific rules, a kind of gentleman's agreement, to which the representatives of death also adhere, inasmuch as they always wait until life has retreated before they launch their invasion of the new landscape. By which point, however, the invasion is irrevocable. The enormous hordes of bacteria that begin to infiltrate the body's innards cannot be halted. Had they but tried a few hours earlier, they would have met with immediate resistance; however, everything around them is quiet now, as they delve deeper and deeper into the moist darkness. They advance on the Haversian canals, the crypts of Lieberkühn, the islets of Langerhans. They proceed to Bowman's capsule in the kidneys, Clark's column in the Spinalis, the black substance in the mesencephalon. And they arrive at the heart. As yet, it is intact, but deprived of the activity to which end its whole construction has been designed, there is something strangely desolate about it, like a production plant that workers have been forced to flee in haste, or so it appears, the stationary vehicles shining yellow against the darkness of the forest, the huts deserted, a line of fully loaded cable buckets stretching up the hillside.” (MS I: 3-4)

V “Verden driver seg selv: 1”, Warfare-and-anatomy analogy

[...] som om livet kapitulere ifølge bestemte regler, en slags *gentlemen's agreement*, som også det dødes representanter retter seg etter, idet de alltid venter på livet har trukket seg ut før de starter invasjonen av dette nye landskapet feltherren deres har erobret. Da er de til gjengjeld nådeløse. Besatt av én eneste tanke, den på destruksjon, begynner utallige bakterier å myldre inn gjennom kroppens ganger og sjakter. Hadde det skjedd noen få timer tidligere, da hjertet fortsatt slo, ville de straks ha møtt motstand og blitt nedkjempet, men nå er alt dødt og stille rundt dem, og de begir seg stadig lengre innover i dette forlatte landskapet, uten øye for dets neste uvirkelige skjønnhet: alt skal tilintetgjøres. Det er ordren de har fått, det er ordren de følger. Selv kroppens mest uerstattelige minnesmerker går de løs på. De Lieberkünske krypter i Propria, Clarks søyle i Medulla Spinalis, Aquedukten i Cerebellum og den nærliggende Villi Arachnoidales, alt jevnes med jorden. Basalgangliene raser ut, hjernebroen styrter sammen, lymfestrømmen tørker inn, de Peyerske flekker i Illeum oppløses, spindellevshinnen brister, de Haverske kanaler tømmes og i øyehulene råtner øyeeplene opp. Labyrinten i det indre øret, med sin vakre forgård, praktfulle bueganger, og berømte utsikt, hvor man fra de to vinduene kan se langt utover Cochleas ville og forrevne landskap, med henholdsvis Scala Tympani og Scala Vestibuli i horisonten, legges i grus; det sjeldne Arbor Vitae, livets tre, som bare finnes i Cerebellum, ødelegges; de Langerhanske øyene i Pancras går under og kommunikasjonen i Wernickles [sic] område bryter sammen. Aktiviteten ved Teres Major opphører, suset fra elektronene som passerer Intercostalis Externus på vei til Spinalgangliene stilner, det særegne lyset på høydene over Iris slukner. Til og med de små, kunstferdig

utformede gjenstandene som ligger gjemt rundt omkring i søkk og fordypninger i dette fuktige landskapet, Bowmans kapsel i Renes, den sorte substans i Mesencephalon, den underlige børstebremmen i Sub-Mucosa og de enestående glasslegemene ute ved Orbitas kyster, kommer til å forsvinne. Heller ikke virvelsøylens ikoniske eleganse eller hjernevindingenes slangeaktige sammenfoldinger, som ved et underlig sammentreff minner om mønsteret i de forstende sanddynene på Mars, formasjoner som ellers ikke har sin like på jorden, noe han [Knausgårds far] umulig kunne kjenne til, siden bildene derfra først ble tatt helt mot slutten av 1990-tallet, kommer til å bli bevart. Falangene forsvinner, otolittene forsvinner, folikkene forsvinner, til og med Vagus, den vidvankende nerve forsvinner og vil aldri vende tilbake, for han har forlatt den kroppen som har tjent ham i alle disse årene, igjen er bare materien, selve liket [...].” (91-92, emphasis original)

Translation of Warfare and anatomy-analogy in “Verden driver seg selv: 1”, based on Don Bartlett’s translation of the corresponding passage in *Death in the Family. My Struggle 1*

“[...] as though life capitulates according to specific rules, a kind of gentleman’s agreement, to which the representatives of death also adhere, inasmuch as they always wait until life has retreated before they launch their invasion of the new landscape their commander has conquered. By which point, however, they are merciless. Obsessed by one single thought, its destruction, enormous hordes of bacteria begin to swarm through all the body’s corridors and shafts. Had this happened but a few hours earlier, when the heart was still beating, they would have met immediate resistance and been fought off; however, everything around them is dead and quiet now, as they delve deeper and deeper into the abandoned terrain, without considering its almost surreal beauty: everything must be destroyed. That is the order they have been given, that is the order they will follow. Not even the body’s most irreplaceable monuments are spared. The crypts of Lieberkühn in Propria, Clark’s column in the Medulla Spinalis, the Aqueduct in the Cerebellum and the adjacent Villi Arachnoides, everything is wiped out. The Basal Ganglia crumple, the Pons falls, the lymph flow dries up, the Peyerian patches of the Ileum are dissolved, the Arachnoid mater bursts, the Haversian canals are emptied and in the eye sockets the eyeballs rot. The labyrinth in the inner ear, with its beautiful forecourt, magnificent archways, and celebrated view, where you, from the two windows, can see far out over Cochlea’s wild and craggy landscape, with Scala Tympani and Scala Vestibuli in the horizon, is crushed; the rare Arbor Vitae, the tree of life, that only exists in the Cerebellum, is destroyed; the islets of Langerhans in the Pancreas go under and the communication with Wernicke’s area break down. The activity by Teres Major ceases, the murmur from the electrons that pass through Intercostales Externi on their way to the Spinal Ganglion becomes silent, the distinctive light on the heights over Iris is extinguished. Even the small, elaborately crafted objects that lie hidden away in the nooks and crannies in this moist landscape, Bowman’s capsule in the kidneys, the black substance in the Mesencephalon, the strange brim of Submucosa and the outstanding vitreous humours by the coast of Orbita, will vanish. Neither the vertebral column’s iconic elegance nor the snake-like convulsions of the Gyri, that by a curious coincidence resemble the patterns found in the fossilised Martian sand dunes, formations that have no other equivalent on Earth, something he [Knausgård’s father] could not possibly have been aware of, since the pictures were first taken towards the end of the 1990s, will be preserved. The Phalanges disappear, the Otoliths disappear, the follicles disappear, even Vagus, that long-wandering nerve disappears and will never return, as he has left the body that had served him all these years, all that is left is the matter, the corpse itself [...].”

Chapter 6 Rewriting Roots and Beginnings

VI Comparison between “Om framtiden” (2008) and *Min kamp I* (2009)

PAGE “Om framtiden”/ *Min kamp I*

103/7	“For hjertet er livet enkelt”*
104-105/220**	Extensive knowledge about the material world, from the universe to the atom
105/218-219	Feeling that the world is small, contrasted with knowledge that it is unfathomable: “samtiden [er] en åpen dør som står og slår i historiens vind”*** Categories for understanding ‘everything’
106/220	Iconodule time has transported the physical world to the imaginary world
108/220-221	Cannot combat fiction with fiction; urge to affirm the existing world, contradicted by romantic, essentialist search for meaning****
108-109/221-222	Recalling the inexplicable meaningfulness he experienced travelling from Stockholm to Gnesta
109/221-222	Feelings of meaningfulness in paintings by Rembrandt, Turner and Caravaggio
109/222-223	Angels as the figures that embody the duality between the divine and the human, the essential and the existing, physical world*****
110/223	Edvard Munch as paradigm changer in art: everything is filtered through human subjectivity
111-113/8-10	Paradox of repression of death and iconodulist culture
113/224	Death as real and unreal
113/435*****	Demystification of death

* “For the heart, life is simple” (MS I: 3)

** In *Min kamp I* the rewritten reflections are placed in the diegetic time 2004 (cf. I: 189-225)

*** “the present [was] an open door that stood flapping in the wind of history” (MS I: 242)

**** Note that this appears in the present tense in “Om framtiden” and in the past tense in *Min kamp I*

***** Note that this appears in “Om framtiden” as being a thought from the past, while in *Min kamp I* it is narrated as if the preceding thoughts led Karl Ove to think about angels

***** In *Min kamp I* this is placed in the diegetic time July 1998