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## **Self-representing Parables:**

### **The Autobiographical Element in Per Olov Enquist's Works**

Tesi di dottorato di CATIA DE MARCO

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*Je n'ai jamais parlé d'autre chose que de moi.*

Alain Robbe-Grillet

*Peut-on – ou du moins pouvait-on autrefois – commencer  
à écrire sans se prendre pour un autre?*

Roland Barthes

## Introduction

One of the first things that strike the affectionate Enquist reader is certainly the recurrence of a set of key motives (images, memories, dreams) in several of his works, also many years apart from each other<sup>1</sup>: the heavenly harp, for instance, which appears a first time in *Sekonden* (1971) and then again and again up to *Ett annat liv* (2008); or the obscure and fascinating image of a man in his ice-grave, his face covered by a film of ice, which makes its first appearance in 1966 with *Hess* and reappears constantly until 2008 with *Ett annat liv* – and I could mention many others. These motives intersect and overlap the main plot(s), thus giving Enquist's books the appearance of a puzzle – itself a recurring image in his production (cf. 2.1.2) – or of a palimpsest<sup>2</sup> where one can still glimpse traces of previous texts. At the same time, these motives charge themselves with symbolical meaning at every new recurrence, until they assume an almost mythological dimension, a sort of reference frame in which the writer's whole production is inscribed. Although quotations and inspirations from other authors are also frequently inserted in the texts as mosaic tiles<sup>3</sup>, in this work I will focus on the intertextual recurrences that can be traced back to an autobiographical origin.

In fact, even when attributed to fictional characters, in the eyes of the contemporary Swedish reader some of these images and memories were from the beginning recognisable as, or at least suspectable of, being of autobiographical derivation: Enquist was too much of a public figure for his readers not to notice the traces of his Västerbotten origins or his personal and professional life scattered here and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., for instance, Lindberg, according to whom Enquist's writing «kännetecknas av ett livligt återbruk av teman, motiv, miljöer, händelser, personer och språkliga formuleringar från tidigare historier: upprepningens rörelse» (Lindberg 1999: 5; «is characterised by a keen reuse of themes, motives, settings, events, people and wordings from earlier stories: the movement of repetition»). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> More in the spirit of De Quincey's (1998) use of the word than of Genette's (1997b).

<sup>3</sup> Cf., for instance, the quotations from St. Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 13:11 («När jag var barn, talade som ett barn, och hade barnsliga tankar», Enquist 2014 [2004]: 32, 43, 45, 158; «When I was a child, spoke like a child and had childish thoughts», Enquist 2006: 32, 41, 42, 146) and from T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, ll. 15-16 («Marie! Marie! Och så bar det av», Enquist 2014 [2004]: 73, 78, 88; «Marie! Marie! And then it started», Enquist 2006: 76, 82, 99) refraining through *Boken om Blanche och Marie*.

there in his novels. However, it was only after the publication of the avowedly autobiographical *Ett annat liv* in 2008 that the full extent of this kind of inspiration became visible.

These elements are precisely what kindled the first idea for this study. As a translator of a few of Enquist's books, I was obliged to get to the bottom of each enigmatic image appearing in apparently incongruous contexts. By tracing them back to their origins, I began to sense a red thread that runs throughout his more than fifty-year-long career, a red thread which seems to originate from an autobiographical origin. I therefore have analysed most of Enquist's works<sup>4</sup> following the traces left by recurring images and themes, always with a great attention to the texts themselves: it is there, in the specific words used and reused by Enquist, that the loose end of the thread is hidden.

Of course Enquist is far from being the first writer to find a constant source of inspiration for his or her writing in his or her own life. However, I do believe he belongs to the most persevering in doing so, to the same degree as one of his most famous and celebrated predecessors, August Strindberg, a master in blending fiction and autobiography<sup>5</sup>, who declared in a letter to his first wife: «En författare är endast en referent af hvad han lefvat»<sup>6</sup> (Strindberg 1948: 190). Strindberg's example – and Michael Robinson's study of it – is in fact quite useful in identifying the questions to address in this study, and the route to follow in order to try to answer them. As in Enquist's works, also in Strindberg's «[h]is past is written and rewritten, lived and relived, across a succession of texts that comment upon each other as well as upon the life they record» (Robinson 1996: 16). The idea, then, is to find the elements of this past, used «som bitarne i en bygglåda»<sup>7</sup> (Strindberg 1994: 49), and analyse *how* they have been written and rewritten through the years, in search of a possible pattern – or

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<sup>4</sup> For an explication and explanation of my choice of texts, see 2.2.

<sup>5</sup> On this regard, cf. the illuminating *Strindberg and Autobiography* by Michael Robinson (1986).

<sup>6</sup> «A writer is only a reported of what he has lived» (transl. Robinson 1986: 1).

<sup>7</sup> «Like a child's building blocks» (transl. Robinson 1986: 39).

maybe patterns, since after using his biographical materials as building blocks in several novels Enquist also wrote what, despite diverging opinions about it, I tend to consider an autobiography. Despite being written in the third person, in fact, *Ett annat liv* definitely is «a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence», to quote Philippe Lejeune's renowned definition (Lejeune 1989a: 4).

The purpose of this study is therefore to look back at Enquist's literary production in an autobiographical light, an angle so far not fully exploited by critics. In fact, although there are several studies dedicated to *Ett annat liv*, or that highlight the autobiographical relevance of single works, there is not, to my knowledge, a study that examines his whole oeuvre from this standpoint. Given the nature of my analysis, I could also use the term proposed by Leigh Gilmore to describe discourses of identity in texts that are not considered as autobiography, that is "autobiographics". In her definition, the concept of autobiographics is introduced

to describe those elements of self-representation which are not bound by a philosophical definition of the self derived from Augustine, [...] those element that instead mark a location in a text where self-invention, self-discovery, and self-representation emerge within the technologies of autobiography – namely those legalistic, literary, social, and ecclesiastical discourses of truth and identity through which the subject of autobiography is produced. Autobiographics, as a reading practice, is concerned with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation. (Gilmore 1994: 42)

Gilmore was not the first critic or author to introduce a tailor-made term to describe his or her own particular vision of autobiography. In recent years we have witnessed, for instance, the appearance of Doubrovsky's autofiction, Abbot's autography, or Audre Lorde's biomythography<sup>8</sup>, just to name a few. However, in this study I prefer to remain faithful to the traditional term, although with my own reading of it. Inspired by what in Chapter 1 I designate as the «philosophical» current of criticism, I see autobiography as a means to confer meaning to the world and the self, to create an inner unity. This will allow me to discern an autobiographical dimension even in texts that cannot be regarded as autobiographies, such as all of Enquist's works prior to *Ett annat liv*. The other "quasi-synonym" of autobiography I will use in this study is self-representation. I

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<sup>8</sup> Cf., respectively, Doubrovsky 1977, Abbot 1988 and Lorde 1982.

herewith indicate the phenomenon *per se*, irrespective of purpose or scope: whenever an image of the author is included in a text, be it a memoir or a novel, there is self-representation. It can be episodic and serve a variety of purposes, from an enhanced reality effect obtained through the vividness of personal experience, to a stylistic game of *mise en abyme*. Only when self-representation is performed with the aim of defining and creating the self, as mentioned above, it really assumes an autobiographical dimension.

In this study I will highlight the constant presence of self-representation in Enquist's books, which with time assumes a stronger and stronger autobiographical dimension, or degree of autobiographicality. While in earlier books the representation of the self remains episodic, in later works the search for a personal unity becomes predominant, although the strategies followed to obtain it are not those of the classical autobiography. On the contrary, I will suggest that in Enquist's writing the most successful mode of representing – and constructing – a coherent self is through the associative and thematic instrument of metaphor, instead of the analytic and chronological device of classical autobiography.

Hence also the title of this study, *Self-representing Parables*. In addition to being a form of homage to Enquist's latest work, *Liknelseboken*, it refers to Enquist's choice of the metaphorical mode for his self-representation, which is the working hypothesis of this study. The biblical parable was, in the eyes of the child represented in *Ett annat liv*, the only example of permitted invention (cf. Enquist 2008: 51). According to my hypothesis, it is also the only way for Enquist to make things «hänga ihop»: in other words, to represent – or create, in an Olneyan sense (cf. 1.1.1) – a solid self.

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This study is articulated into five chapters, two for the critical and methodological framework respectively, and one for each of the three groups in which I will divide Enquist's works, roughly following a chronological order.



In the chapter dedicated to the state of the art, I will have no choice but to make a very personal selection among the virtually boundless bibliography about autobiography. I will therefore concentrate on critics who highlight similarities and overlappings between autobiography and fiction over those who focus on differences and incompatibilities, since this serves best the purpose of analysing the relationship between Per Olov Enquist's novels and his autobiography. I will divide these studies into five thematic areas: critics who see autobiography as a means to order and create a self, such as Gusdorf or Olney; studies on the relationship between a writer's autobiography and the rest of his or her oeuvre; studies on the border territories between autobiography and fiction, such as autofiction and self-representation; feminist criticism and critics who analyse autobiography as a performative strategy; and, finally, studies on autobiographies in the third person. A second section of the same chapter will be dedicated to a more complete presentation of the studies on Enquist's production from the seventies to the present day.

The second chapter will identify some elements in Enquist's work that can be used as a magnifying lens through which to look at his whole production in an autobiographical light. In particular, I will focus on the two metaphors of assembling puzzles and drawing maps, which both represent his deeply-felt need for ordering and finding a meaning in the world and himself. Also his obsessive use of repetition and the presence of sensitive subjects – or *smärtpunkterna*, as the author calls them – are relevant in this regard.

Chapter 3, 4 and 5 will instead be dedicated to the analysis of most of Enquist's narrative works (*Kristallögat*, *Färdvägen*, *Hess* and *Legionärerna* in Chapter 3, *Sekonden*, *Musikanternas uttåg*, *Nedstörtad ängel* and *I lodjurets timma* in Chapter 4, and *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, *Kartritarna*, *Ett annat liv*, and *Liknelseboken* in Chapter 5) with regard to the self-representing strategies they display and their different degree in autobiographicality.

In the conclusion I will finally propose a reading that tries to account for this lifelong interest for and devotion to self-representation.

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## Chapter 1: The state of the art

This study intends to analyse a wider corpus of Per Olov Enquist's works of in the light of the presence of autobiographical elements and impulses, in other words, of their "degree of autobiographicality". The critical framework on which it is based will therefore include both a choice from the monumental corpus of studies on autobiography, mainly focused on the relationship between autobiographical and fictional writing, and a selection of critical studies on Enquist's work.

### 1.1 Studies on autobiography

Although autobiography existed and produced masterpieces since much earlier, critical literature about autobiography only reached its full apogee around 1980. Academic interest began indeed some decades earlier (cf., for instance, Gusdorf's and Pascal's works cited below, from 1956 and 1960 respectively), but until then autobiography was generally considered to be something less (from a stylistic and formal point of view) or something more (from a historical and sociological one) than literature. Its ambiguous position between literature and factual writing, between art and life, conferred to it an almost evanescent quality that some critics tried to dispel by recurring to reassuring truisms – «Autobiography is a solidly established literary genre, its history traceable in a series of masterpieces», reads for instance the opening sentence of Gusdorf's seminal work (Gusdorf 1980: 28).

With *Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie*, published in 1956, Georges Gusdorf is commonly considered as the founder of theoretical literature about autobiography – «In the beginning, then, was Georges Gusdorf», tellingly comments James Olney in his *Autobiography and the Cultural Moment* (Olney 1980: 8). Gusdorf can also be regarded as the beginner (although his reasoning is inspired by Diltheyan principles) of the "philosophical" current of autobiographical criticism, as opposed to a "taxonomic" current aimed at defining and delimiting autobiography's specific domain.

In his essay he focuses on the process of construction and re-construction of the self implied by the autobiographical enterprise: according to him, «the specific intention of autobiography and its anthropological prerogative as a literary genre is clear: it is one of the means to self knowledge thanks to the fact that it recomposes and interprets a life in its totality» (Gusdorf 1980: 38). The question of genre is thus taken for granted, while all attention is on the meaning-giving function of autobiography, an orientation that will be followed, with different nuances, by critics such as Roy Pascal, James Olney, Paul John Eakin and many others.

The “taxonomic” approach, started and stimulated by another seminal study in the field of autobiography appeared in 1975, *Le Pacte autobiographique* by Philippe Lejeune, focuses on the other hand on the problem of definition. Others had already done it before him, but with his explicit statement of meaning, italicised and set in a free-standing block, Lejeune certainly gave a new dimension to the defining effort: «DEFINITION: *retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality*» (Lejeune 1989a: 4, italics in the original). The rigidity of this definition, later criticised by Lejeune himself in *Le Pacte autobiographique (bis)*<sup>9</sup>, risked to stiffen the critical discussion in formalistic analysis or sterile distinctions between bordering genres. However formulaic, though, this current of criticism had the positive effect of inscribing autobiography once and for all in the field of literature.

A third relevant trend in autobiographical studies could be defined as “deconstructionist”. If the subject no longer exists, how can we have a history of a subject written by him- or herself? Building on this ground, in the eighties a number of critics, from de Man to Derrida to Barthes, try to demonstrate the impossibility of the autobiographical project, which becomes «det centrala exemplet på autenticitetens, det sanna jaguttryckets, grundläggande omöjlighet»<sup>10</sup> (Larsson 2001: 103).

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<sup>9</sup> «Isolated from its context, cited as an “authority”, it could appear sectarian and dogmatic, a derisory Procrustean bed, a falsely magical formula that blocks reflection instead of stimulating it» (Lejeune 1989b: 121).

<sup>10</sup> «The central example of the fundamental impossibility of authenticity, of the true expression of the self.»

In this study I have focused on the critical directions which in my opinion best serve my aims. First, since the purpose of this study is to demonstrate a peculiar use of the autobiographical memory in Enquist's works<sup>11</sup>, I have concentrated on scholars who see autobiography as «a discovery, a creation, and an imitation of the self» (Olney 1980: 19). Secondly, since Enquist is the author both of an autobiography and of several novels, I have focused on the peculiar status claimed by autobiographies within their authors' complete oeuvres. Thirdly, I have turned to the field *par excellence* where fiction and autobiography overlap each other, autofiction. Finally, after analysing feminist criticism and critics who interpret autobiography as a performative strategy, I have also considered the relatively few studies that deal with autobiography in the third person.

### 1.1.1 «From lived farrago into a thought whole»

A human life can be brought to display a meaning only on condition of being turned into a story; once subject to the public order of narrative, it acquires both the gravity of a settled and venerable literary form, and the orientation of hindsight which alone raises the past from an aimless sum of reminiscence into a personal history. If we crave significance for ourselves as historical beings, we can have it only by an intelligent and sequential ordering of what we retain or can recover of our past – in which the autobiographer is a model for us all. A life storied is a life made meaningful, and any life, however vapid, is at least storable. I begin therefore from the assumption that whoever narrates his or her life is willing its transformation from a lived farrago into a thought whole. (Sturrock 1993: 20)

In this study I will try to demonstrate that one of the reasons for the obsessive recurrence of autobiographical images and episodes in Per Olov Enquist's works is the search for a meaning. Here I will therefore try to focus on the critical debate that highlights the role of autobiography as a means to confer meaning, as so well expressed by Sturrock.

The first to open this “philosophical” current, as already mentioned, was Georges Gusdorf. According to Olney, Gusdorf's main merit – and one that helped in bringing

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<sup>11</sup> «Enquist rekonstruerar, “bygger”, och i den processen sker också något slags arkeologi som är kopplad till barndomshuset» (Sarrimo 2012: 114; «Enquist reconstructs, “builds”, and in the process it also occurs a sort of archeology connected to his childhood house»).

about the wave of interest for autobiography of the early eighties – was to shift attention from the *bíos*-element to the *autós*. Prior to then, autobiography was simply a biography about oneself, without «agonizing questions of identity, self-definition, self-existence or self-deception» (Olney 1980: 20). With Gusdorf the attention turned to the “I” that half discovers, half creates him- or herself. For him, in fact, what the author of an autobiography sets out to do «is to reassemble the scattered elements of his individual life and to regroup them in a comprehensive sketch» (Gusdorf 1980: 35). In doing so, though, he cannot but distort it, since the person who remembers and writes his or her past is no longer the child, the adolescent or the person who lived that past. The «original sin» of autobiography, then, is «one of logical coherence and rationalization» (Gusdorf 1980: 41). The enterprise of autobiographical writing seems to be a desperate one from the start: while they aim at (re)creating their past and their self, authors are doomed to disfigure it; a contradiction that reflects the inherent ambivalence of autobiography, document and work of art at the same time (Gusdorf 1980: 43). According to Gusdorf, the artistic function is more important than the “historic” one, yet it appears secondary in comparison with what he calls its «anthropological significance»:

Every work of art is a projection from the interior realm into exterior space where in becoming incarnated it achieves consciousness of itself. Consequently there is need of a second critique that instead of verifying the literal accuracy of the narrative or demonstrating its artistic value would attempt to draw out its innermost, private significance by viewing it as the symbol, as it were, or the parable of a consciousness in quest of its own truth. (Gusdorf 1980: 44)

Many of the concepts outlined by Gusdorf are also echoed in Roy Pascal’s *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, despite the considerable space he dedicates, in the first chapters of his book, to discriminating it from neighbouring forms such as diary, memoirs and autobiographical novels. The core of his reasoning, however, highlights the «metaphysical urge» that pervades autobiography (Pascal 1960: 182). For him, autobiography is not merely an account of things done or known, an exposition of a personality, but it becomes «a search for the true self», and a means to come to terms with it (Pascal 1960: 39). Like Gusdorf before him, Pascal too believes that the autobiographer “constructs” a framework of meaningful events, thus offering an image

of his or her real self, based on the interplay of past and present. However, in its urge for a symbolic meaning, autobiography loses its battle with the novel: where the former has to be continually referred outwards and onwards (the act of writing being just an element of the life being written), the latter can afford to be self-sufficient and completed (Pascal 1960: 163). In novels, authors who feel the actuality of their own life as a «wrong truth», can decide to follow the «sense of life» instead of the historical fact, overcoming what in their characters and circumstances could be considered fortuitous, and turning their experiences into something symbolic to a degree that autobiography can rarely allow itself (Pascal 1960: 170-171).

Another representative of the “philosophical” current of autobiographical criticism is James Olney. However, by his own avowal, what became his first study on autobiography, *Metaphors of Self*, was in fact started as «a study of the way experience is transformed into literature (which I suppose could be another way of describing autobiography) – as a study of the creative process» (Olney 1980: 10). Thus he makes immediately clear that for him autobiography is strictly connected to creation, to art, «the vital impulse to order that has always caused man to create» (Olney 1972: 3):

Art, both autobiographic and poetic, mediates between the transient world of sensation and feeling, of event and emotion, and a constant, stable realm of pattern and significance. The poet, in his passion for perceiving and holding formal patterns, transforms a myriad passing sensations into the single, apprehensible and meaningful artifact; and like the poet, the autobiographer who draws out of the flux of events a coherent pattern, or who creates a sufficient metaphor for experience, discovers in the particular, and reveals to us, the universal. (Olney 1972: 45)

The idea of the creating power of autobiography is confirmed and developed in later essays. For Olney neither the life, the *bíos* – the author’s story – nor the I, the *autós* – the author’s self – is a given entity:

Here is where the act of writing – the third element of autobiography – assumes its true importance: it is through that act that the self and the life, complexly intertwined and entangled, take on a certain form, assume a particular shape and image, and endlessly reflect that image back and forth between themselves as between two mirrors. [...] The self, then, is fiction and so is the life, and behind the text of an autobiography lies the text of an “autobiography”: all that is left are characters on a page, and they too can be “deconstructed” to demonstrate the shadowiness of even their existence. (Olney 1980: 22)



The elusive distinction between autobiography and fiction is also at the centre of the short but disruptive essay that Paul de Man dedicated to the subject. After rejecting all recent attempts to define autobiography as a genre by critics such as Lejeune or Bruss, he immediately calls into question its assumed referentiality to actual and verifiable events:

But are we so certain that autobiography depends on reference, as a photograph depends on its subject or a (realistic) picture on its model? We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life [...]? (de Man 1979: 69)

The illusion of reference assumes in his view «a degree of referential productivity», from which it derives that «the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity but that it is undecidable» (de Man 1979: 70). The way out of this revolving door, then, is in the reading: de Man shifts responsibility from the writer to the reader, or better, to the «alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflective substitution» (de Man 1979: 70). The interesting point with respect to this study, is the idea that there are no clear boundaries between autobiographies and other literary texts – «any book with a readable title page is, to some extent, autobiographical» (de Man 1979: 70)<sup>12</sup> – a view that will prove convenient when analysing Enquist's works.

The “circularity” of autobiography is also pointed out by Louis Renza in *The Veto of the Imagination*, which he opens by posing a number of questions:

Is it [autobiography] an indeterminate mixture of truth and fiction? Is it based essentially in fact rather than self-invention? Or is it a full-fledged “literary” event whose primary being resides in and through the writing itself – in the “life” of the signifier as opposed to the life being signified?

[...]

Must we then settle for that compromising, commonplace conception that depicts autobiography as a formal mutation, a hybrid genre, a vague, unresolved mixture of “truth” about the autobiographer's life dyed into the colours of an ersatz, imaginative “design?” Or can we formulate autobiography as a unique phenomenon, definable neither as fiction nor nonfiction – not even a mixture of the two? (Renza 1980: 268, 273)

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<sup>12</sup> Lejeune, though, points out a difference in use between the noun “autobiography” and the adjective “autobiographical”, the first remaining close to the strict meaning of the term, the latter assuming a wider definition (Lejeune 1985: 18-19).

He somehow seems to echo Pascal's view when he underlines that a fictional author has an advantage compared with the autobiographer, in that the first can «cast a bridge» over past and present, between the time of living and that of writing, while the latter is caught in the duality implied by each personal act of memory. But Renza believes that there are ways to mitigate this split: the autobiographical writer can suppress the consciousness of the past (for instance with memoirs, where the autobiographical "I" is concentrated on his present self), avow it openly to himself (this is the case of "confessions", where the autobiographer is well aware – and usually proud – of not being any longer the person about whom he is writing), or emphasise the narcissism implicit in the autobiographical act (the example chosen by Renza is Rousseau, who excludes others from «the self-privacy elicited by his act» and reaches «a wholly private, autoeroticized consciousness of self» [Renza 1980: 290]). However, despite the intentional strategies applied by the author, autobiography remains trapped into its vicious circle:

The autobiographer cannot refer to his life as a dream without losing the autobiographical consciousness of his "life"; he cannot efface himself through a dream-narrative except, again, by a wilful act that denotes itself as he writes; nor he can fully commit himself to writing about writing's inability to signify his life as he tries, nevertheless, to do so, for this would entail conceding his discursive act to the consciousness of "others". Each of these tacks would essentially abort the autobiographical project itself. (Renza 1980: 294-295)

The answer to the opening questions, then, cannot but be partial and "in progress":

We might say, then, that autobiography is neither fictive nor nonfictive, not even a mixture of the two. We might view it instead as a unique, self-defining mode of self-referential expression, one that allows, then inhibits, its ostensible project of self-representation, of converting oneself into the present promised by language. (Renza 1980: 295)

With Paul John Eakin we go back to the idea of the autobiographical act as "construction" already pointed out by Gusdrof, Pascal and Olney, as highlighted in the opening page of his *Fictions in Autobiography*:

I shall argue that autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, and, further, that the self that is the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure. (Eakin 1985: 3)

Eakin goes so far in his conception of autobiography as a «mode of self-invention» (Eakin 1985: 9) as to claim that it could also remain unwritten: the autobiographical act is first private and only later, if ever, public. But the natural structure and operation of human consciousness should prepare us to accept that the «evolving content» of autobiography is generated both by memory *and* imagination, also bearing in mind that the autobiographer's access to the past is necessarily mediated through his present consciousness. Thus, «truth and identity in autobiography are plural» (Eakin 1985: 36). It is by choosing among the different possible versions on the past – in doing which the autobiographer is subject to the double impulse to reveal and to conceal – that the author produces a «more sophisticated formulation of experienced reality» (Eakin 1985: 115). As already underlined by Olney, the instrument through which the author invents, creates, or re-creates him- or herself is language. Eakin effectively analyses the polarised positions of «self-before-language» and «language-before-self» (Eakin 1985: 191), ending up suggesting «a more comprehensive conception of the autobiographical act as both a re-enactment and an extension of earlier phases of identity formation» (Eakin 1985: 226). For him the self is created through successive steps: first the acquisition of language<sup>13</sup>, then the recognition of an identity, for which he uses the term “I-am-me” experience<sup>14</sup>, and finally the autobiographical act (either private or public), the «culminating moment in the history of self-definition» ((Eakin 1985: 219).

### 1.1.2 Writers and autobiography: «A fatal attraction»

As James Olney noted in his essay *Autobiography and the Cultural Moment*, autobiography seems to exercise something very like a «fatal attraction», an «overwhelming appeal» (1980: 4) for nearly all men and women who consider

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<sup>13</sup> To describe this phase, Eakin refers to the well-known episode of the well-house and the insight of the relationship between sign and meaning in Helen Keller's *The story of my life* (Eakin 1985: 209-214).

<sup>14</sup> A term he borrows from Hebert Spiegelberg, who in turn had derived it from an autobiographical fragment by Jean Paul Richter (*ich bin ein Ich*) (Eakin 1985: 217-219).

themselves as writers. We must not forget that the most recent trends in autobiography and life writing studies are no longer circumscribed to literature but have steered towards an interdisciplinary approach that includes literary and cultural studies, history and sociology, anthropology and ethnology, philosophy and psychology, film and media studies, so that autobiographies written by professional writers almost risk to be considered a particular case.

Gusdorf touches upon the subject of writers' autobiographies towards the end of his essay. For the literary artist, he says, autobiography cannot be separated from his other works. In other words, his life *is* his writing: «The great events of my life are my works», stated Balzac, quoted by Gusdorf (1980: 47). The relationship between life and writing is a two-way one, cause and effect at the same time. The style of autobiography, then, should be understood not as a principle of writing but as a line of life, a “life style”.

The truth of the life is not different in kind from the truth of the work: the great artist, the great writer lives, in a sense, for his autobiography. [...] The life, the work, the autobiography appear thus like three aspects of a single affirmation, united by a system of constant intercourse. (Gusdorf 1980: 47-48)<sup>15</sup>

Apparently, Roy Pascal devoted more attention to the subject, since he entitled one of his chapters *The Autobiography of the Poet* (intended here as “imaginative writer”). However, his conclusions are the opposite of Gusdorf's; for him, the poet's style is a potential danger for the autobiographical project: «Imagination, love of words, and literary dexterity on the other hand may be a pitfall for the autobiographer, and lead to over-writing or irrelevance» (Pascal 1960: 133). For him, good writing and evocative power do not make good autobiography, but this statement must be read in the context of Pascal's prescriptive views about autobiography: despite its “artificiality”, autobiography remains quite distinct from (and in some regards inferior to, as hinted some pages above) the autobiographical novel, which instead can and must afford to indulge in “stylistic” devices.

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<sup>15</sup> A concept very similar to the one expressed by Jean Starobinski in his *Le Style de l'autobiographie*: «Here, even more than elsewhere, style is the act of an individual. [...] The self-referential value of style thus refers back to the moment of writing, to the contemporary “me”» (1980: 73-74).

Already in his first work dedicated to autobiography, James Olney established a relationship between autobiography and writing by noting that «a man's autobiography is thus like a magnifying lens, focusing and intensifying the same peculiar creative vitality that informs the volume of his collective works» (Olney 1972: 3-4). In later essays, he returned to the subject and expanded the concept, noting that autobiography is at the same time the least "literary" kind of writing and one practised by countless writers who transform it into «the most rarified and self-conscious of literary performances» (Olney 1980: 4). When the author of an autobiography is a writer,

the tendency is to produce autobiography in various guises and disguises in every work and then – this being the other side of the coin – to seek a unique form in a work properly called "an autobiography" (or any other name pointing to the same thing) that may reflect and express the life and the vision of this individual writer alone. (Olney 1980: 236)

However, these statements are not followed by an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon; Olney almost seems to have used them as a sort of disclaimer, since in his examination of the influence of memory on the ontological nature of autobiography he concentrated on works by several men of letters, and he is not sure if «the case would be different if the autobiographies had been written by physicians, or educators, or statesmen» (Olney 1980: 236).

Analysing, as he does, the language and style of autobiography, John Sturrock had no choice but to deal with autobiographies written by writers (nine out of the twenty-three examples exhaustively analysed in his study are by professional writers). Quite surprisingly, however, his introductory chapter about the contradictory nature of autobiography reminds of Pascal's position: «They [autobiographers] gather us around them to hear their story confidentially out, yet tell it by a means so strikingly formal as to produce in us a critical reserve complicating if not downright destructive of the intimacy they are inviting» (Sturrock 1993: 1). In other words, the literary medium (the "style") seems to interpose itself as a fatal barrier between writer and reader, inevitably frustrating the autobiographer's invitation to intimacy. Only when he comes to talking about contemporary autobiographers such as Nabokov and Stein does he change tune, suggesting style «to be, not a detachable nor merely auxiliary quality of writing but

“organic”, a truly inherent and distinctive quality, and as such the textual index of a writer’s uniqueness» (Sturrock 1993: 224). For Stein and Nabokov, in fact,

style is not some shameful bourgeois net-curtain, to be hung over the autobiographer’s window in mitigation of its transparency, but the most prestigious and valuable of a writer’s possessions, to suppress which in writing an autobiography would be a kind of mendacity. Stein in the event does partially suppress her style, as a concession to market forces; Nabokov does not, he flaunts it. But both recognize a writer’s style to be an autobiographical statement par excellence and accord it priority in writing. They are the heir of Rousseau in heeding as they do the rhetorical potentialities of style, but where he saw style as a variable quality, determined by the nature of the subject-matter, they see it as a constant and as itself determinant, the attractive signature of an autobiographer’s authority over his or her past. (Sturrock 1993: 224)

What distinguishes writer-autobiographers from others, Sturrock argues, is not the presence of style – even Darwin’s proclaimed indifference to style *is* a style, Darwin’s style (Sturrock 1993: 224) – but the awareness and the conscious use (or abuse, or attenuation) of style, really capable of transforming it into «the attractive signature of an autobiographer’s authority over his or her past».

### 1.1.3 From autofiction to self-representation

In recent decades we have witnessed a new upsurge of research about autobiography, especially in France and in the Nordic countries. In both cases critics concentrate on two concepts on the border between autobiography and fiction: autofiction in France, and self-representation in the Nordic countries.

The term “autofiction” first appeared in 1977 on the back-cover of George Doubrovsky’s *Fils* (cf. Gasparini 2008: 8-9):

Autobiographie? Non. C’est un privilège réservé aux importants de ce monde, au soir de leur vie et dans un beau style. Fiction d’événements et de fait strictement réel; si l’on veut *autofiction*, d’avoir confié le langage d’une aventure à l’aventure du langage, hors sagesse et hors syntaxe du roman, traditionnel ou nouveau. Rencontres, *fils* des mots, allitération, assonances, dissonances, écriture d’avant ou d’après littérature, *concrète*, comme on dit musique. Ou encore, autofriction, patiemment onaniste, qui espère faire maintenant partager son plaisir. (Doubrovsky, 1977: back cover, italics in the original)

Autobiography? No, that's a privilege reserved for the important people of this world, at the end of their lives, in a refined style. Fiction of strictly real events and facts; *autofiction*, if you wish, to have entrusted the language of an adventure to the adventure of language, beside wisdom and the syntax of the novel, be it traditional or new. Encounters, threads of words, alliterations, assonances, dissonances, a writing that precedes or follows literature, *concrete*, as we say of music. Or even autofiction, patiently onanistic, hoping to share its pleasure.

Since then the expression has been adopted by critics and writers, often with quite different meanings from the one in which Doubrovsky originally used it. A valuable instrument to find our bearings in this sometimes confused development is offered by Philippe Gasparini's *Autofiction* (2008), which offers a painstaking reconstruction of the debate that developed in France between the nineties and the first decade of the new century<sup>16</sup>.

From its very first appearance, the term autofiction appears extremely elusive, and its creator wrote several articles and essays in the effort to define it better (cf., for instance, "L'initiative aux maux: écrire sa psychanalyse" in Doubrovsky 1980: 165-201, and "Autobiographie/verité/psychanalyse" in Doubrovsky 1988: 61-79). To differentiate it from autobiography, Doubrovsky underlines its relationship with psychoanalysis and its creative use of language; to distinguish it from the novel, he insists that it relies on a referential pact. However, the new genre remains hovering in an ambiguous space:

Ni autobiographie ni roman, donc, au sens strict, il fonctionne dans l'entre-deux, en un renvoi incessant, en un lieu impossible et insaisissable ailleurs que dans l'opération du texte. (Doubrovsky 1988: 70)

Neither autobiography nor novel, therefore, strictly speaking; it operates in between them, in an unceasing cross-reference, in a place which is elusive and impossible to reach elsewhere than in the text.

Philippe Lejeune is one of the first to acknowledge the new term, not least because Doubrovsky himself claims it to fill one of the well-known «blackened squares» in

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<sup>16</sup> I am also indebted to Eva Ahlstedt's article about the French autofiction debate (Ahlstedt 2011).

Lejeune's chart<sup>17</sup>: a novel whose protagonist has the same name as its author. In *Le Pacte autobiographique (bis)*, Lejeune opens his renowned pact to the possibility of ambiguity, admitting that in recent years

from "to lie truly" [mentir vrai] to "autofiction", the literary autobiographical novel has come closer to autobiography, to the point of casting more doubt than ever before on the boundary between the two areas. (Lejeune 1989b: 135)

After these first skirmishes, autofiction rapidly attracts interest from critics and researchers, who however show the most varied opinions on and interpretations of the term. Gerard Genette and Vincent Colonna for instance use the term in the sense of "imaginary autobiography" (Gasparini 2008: 109-122), while others merely consider it a synonym for autobiographical novel (Gasparini 2008: 156). Also Doubrovsky's conception of autofiction evolves: far from disowning autobiography as he did in 1977, in 1992 he considers autofiction as the present-day form of autobiography, «une écriture reflétant la perception "post-moderne" du sujet», marked by the «disparition de l'ego classique, unifié, linéaire et intelligible»<sup>18</sup> (Gasparini 2008: 163). According to Gasparini, this ambiguity in interpretation is integral to the double meaning of one of its two constituents, "fiction", which designs both the account of imaginary facts and a text of literary pretension (2008: 296). Some of the critics, such as Colonna or Genette, concentrated on the first meaning, while others, among whom Doubrovsky himself, on the second.

In conclusion, the main contribution of the term autofiction and of the critical debate it aroused, is to have highlighted the continuity and the interconnection between works and genres previously held apart, attributing them to what as early as in 1975 Lejeune had defined as "autobiographical space" (1989a: 26-28): a space marked by an

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<sup>17</sup> In *Le Pacte autobiographique* Lejeune designed a chart that classified all possible combinations between the pact concluded with reader and the author's name/protagonist's name relationship. The chart had two "blackened squares", one of which inspired him the following reflection: «Can the hero of a novel declared as such have the same name of the author? Nothing would prevent such a thing from existing, and it is perhaps an internal contradiction from which some interesting effects could be drawn. But, in practice, no example of such a study comes to mind» (Lejeune 1989a: 18). In *Moi aussi* he announced that Doubrovsky «s'est employé à remplir l'une des deux cases vides, en combinant le pacte romanesque et l'emploi de son propre nom» (Lejeune 1986: 24; «endeavored to fill one of the two blackened squares by combining the fictional pact with the use of his own name»).

<sup>18</sup> «A writing that reflects the "postmodern" perception of the subject», «disappearance of the classical ego, unified, linear and intelligible.»



ambiguous pact that autofiction, thanks to the semantic duplicity intrinsic to its own meaning, represents to the highest degree.

Another term that inscribes itself into the wider field of autobiographical space is “self-representation”, a concept that in recent years has been at the centre of several studies about autobiographical writing, especially in the Scandinavian countries. *Selvskreven: Om litterær selvframstilling*, edited by Kjerkegaard, Nielsen and Øriasæter (2006), Melberg’s *Självskrivet: Om självframställning i litteraturen* (2008) and Sarrimo’s *Jagets scen: Självframställning i olika medier* (2012) are just a few examples of this tendency, probably related to the publication of a multitude of autobiographical experiments that present themselves as fictional and factual at the same time<sup>19</sup>. As explained by Kjerkegaard, Nielsen and Øriasæter in the introduction to their volume (2006: 7-18), the term “self-representation” points towards an overcoming of the distinction between fiction and autobiography, thus freeing literary theories from the «olycklig benägenhet att falla in i ett *antigen-eller*»<sup>20</sup>, to quote Melberg (2008: 10, italics in the original). Self-representation is defined as

litterære teksters fremstilling af et selv, som konstrueres i en reversibel proces mellem selvbiografiske og fiktive referencer. Selvfremstillingsformerne spænder fra den nøgternt selviattagende skildring til selvudstillingens, ja selvudleveringens form og er ofte led i overordnede strategiske eller poetologiske overvejelser over forholdet imellem forfatter, selvet i værket og værket selv. (Kjerkegaard, Nielsen and Øriasæter 2006: 8)

Literary texts’ representation of a self, which is constructed in a reversible process between autobiographical and fictional references. Forms of self-representation range from the objective self-observing description to forms of self-exhibition and even self-exposure, and are often part of superior strategic or poetological considerations about the relation between the author, the self in the text and the text itself.

Such a definition, underlying as it does the intimate relationship between referential and fictional words, is certainly useful for the purpose of this study, as is the nuanced vision of «de utallige måder, hvorpå helt forskellige forfattere i Danmark såvel som i udlandet skriver sig ind i værker, der ellers ikke fremstår som selvbiografiske, eller ud over

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Melberg 2008: 199, who also gives a partial (and personal) list, including among others Carina Rydberg, Jan Myrdal, Stig Larsson and Maja Lundgren.

<sup>20</sup> «The unlucky predisposition to fall into an *either-or* opposition.»

selvbiografiens begrænsinger»<sup>21</sup> (Kjerkegaard, Nielsen and Øriasæter 2006: 7), that emerges from this collection.

An inclusive approach is also at the basis of Ingrid Elams *Jag: En fiktion*, where she analyses texts that have traditionally been labelled both as novels and as autobiographies, in the conviction that «ett jag samtidigt kan vara en roll, en fiktion och ett personligt, biografiskt jag»<sup>22</sup> (Elam 2012: 55). Her choice of different “I’s” ranges from Sappho to Karl Ove Knausgård, via recognised autobiographers such as Augustine and Rousseau, novelists such as Flaubert and Camus, poets such as Dickinson and Södergran. For Elam the interesting point is neither the genre nor the pact, but the various declensions of personal identity, which she groups into general categories – classical, emotional, grandiose, kaleidoscopic, offended or regained “I’s”<sup>23</sup> – but all of them the individual’s «enda vapen i en kamp mot till synes övermäktiga samhällsnormer, konventioner och olika former av förtryck, till försvar för den egna friheten, känslan, sanningen»<sup>24</sup> (Elam 2012: 12).

The idea of crossing and transgressing borders between genres is also at the basis of Melberg’s 2008 monograph, which by analysing the work of over thirty authors intends to describe «ett mångfaldigande av de strategiska möjligheter varmed författaren kunde ägna sig att minnas, rekonstruera och konstruera sig själv och sitt själv»<sup>25</sup> (Melberg 2008: 9). He chooses the term “self-representation” because it is the best suited to escape the traps of black-or-white definitions and try a more open, «*både-och*» theory (Melberg 2008: 10, italics in the original) which allows for *both* a literary *and* an objective approach to reality. Although these strategies tend to vary from author to author and to get more entangled and complicated with time, Melberg basically retraces

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<sup>21</sup> «The countless ways in which completely different authors, in Denmark as well as abroad, include themselves in books that do not otherwise appear as autobiographical or that go beyond the borders of autobiography.»

<sup>22</sup> «An “I” can at the same time be a role, fiction, and a personal, biographical “I”.»

<sup>23</sup> For the complete original list, see the book’s content page (Elam 2012: [5]).

<sup>24</sup> «Only weapon in a fight against apparently overwhelming social rules and conventions and other forms of oppression, in defence of one’s own liberty, feeling, truth.»

<sup>25</sup> «A multiplication of the strategic possibilities with which authors can remember, reconstruct and construct themselves and their selves.»

them to three fundamental categories: «*visa, söka och dölja*, [som] kan ses som varianter – eller kanske som moment i – självets *konstruktion*»<sup>26</sup> (Melberg 2008: 22, italics in the original). This dramatic conception of self-representation is avowedly inspired by Nietzsche's idea of the self, according to which «jeget ikke kan tænkes uden sin præsentationsform [...] og at billedet af jeget egentligen er iscensat»<sup>27</sup> (Melberg 2006: 197):

Does one not write books precisely to conceal what lies within us? [...] Every philosophy also *conceals* a philosophy; every opinion is also a hiding place, every word also a mask. (Nietzsche 1990: 216, italics in the original)

The most interesting of the authors examined by Melberg, at least for the purpose of the present work, is certainly W.G. Sebald, who, according to Melberg, «utvecklar tekniker för att visa sig själv genom att dölja sig själv»<sup>28</sup> (Melberg 2008: 105). This strategy of showing oneself by way of hiding (or even of hiding oneself by pretending to show) is also clearly at work in many of Enquist's books, especially those of the first group of texts analysed in Chapter 3. In fact, the following statement, written with Sebald in mind, could easily apply to Enquist as well:

Sebald fremstiller sig selv som “skjult” i sin egen tekst, som “skjult” i mængden, eller som en genganger i sin egen historie og blandt sine egne mere eller mindre fiktive figurer (Melberg 2006: 208)

Sebald portrays himself as “hidden” in his own text, as “hidden” in the crowd, or as a ghost in his own story and among his own more or less fictive characters.

However, despite these strategies the self is neither fully identified nor stabilised by writing: if identity is a construction, it can be constructed again and again, and the self that in autobiography is doubled by definition (into a writing and reflecting instance on the one side and the self that lives and has lived on the other) becomes a plurality of selves. Autobiographical writers often seem unable to obtain a satisfactory image of themselves and continue to produce ever new forms of literary self-representation, ever

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<sup>26</sup> «*Show, search and hide*, that can be seen as variants – or maybe moments – of the *construction* of the self.»

<sup>27</sup> «The self cannot be thought of without its presentation form [...] and the image of the self is actually a staging.»

<sup>28</sup> «Develops techniques to show himself through hiding himself.»

new specimen of their «ofärdiga självet»<sup>29</sup> (Melberg 2008: 19), again with a statement that could be written with Enquist in mind:

Kanske dessa stora konstnärer gestaltar den radikala osäkerhet som utmärker det moderna livet och som innebär att identitet är något som ständigt måste skapas på nytt; att Jaget är en uppgift mer än ett faktum. (Melberg 2008: 55)

Maybe these great artists represent the radical uncertainty that characterises modern life and implies that identity is something that must be continuously re-created; that the Self is an objective rather than a fact.

#### 1.1.4 Feminist criticism

At the end of the seventies, feminist criticism began to focus on autobiography, denouncing the almost total absence of female examples in the corpus analysed by autobiographical studies. After putting women's autobiographies on the map, thanks to works such as Estelle Jelinek's critical anthology (Jelinek 1980), feminist critics concentrated on the peculiarities of women's autobiographies with respect to men's, highlighting that they tend to be more fragmentary and discontinuous and to focus more on personal and relational elements than on professional and social ones (cf. Smith and Watson 1998: 9). A somewhat simplistic explanation offered by Jelinek is that women's autobiographies merely reflect their everyday reality, thus resulting «analogous to the fragmentary, interrupted, and formless nature of their lives» (Jelinek 1980: 19). The observation of the apparent differences between men's and women's autobiographies also stimulated a deeper reflection on the question of the subject and its relation to writing, drawing on psychological studies that investigate the processes through which the subject – female and male – develops. According to American psychologist Nancy Chodorow, for instance, the different response to the oedipal stage, based on separation in boys and identification in girls, leads to «more permeable ego boundaries» in the latter (Chodorow 1980: 93). Others, drawing on Lacan's theories of self-constitution, focus on the idea of the split subject, «always in the process of constituting itself» (Smith and Watson 2001: 251). At any rate, the concepts of fluidity and

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<sup>29</sup> «Unfinished self.»

relationality on one side and of fragmentation and discontinuity on the other remain central to much feminist autobiographical criticism.

Leigh Gilmore, for instance, insists on the complexity and multiplicity of the human subject, which «ideologies of personhood reduce [...] for political ends» (Gilmore 1994: 32). In her opinion, the self represented by autobiography is moulded by cultural categories, and autobiography studies are not able to account for narrations aimed at representing «an irreducible, fully embodied “identity”» (Gilmore 1994: 32), such as those produced by women. This is why she feels the need to introduce a new term, “autobiographics”, to enlarge the field of self-representational writing: «a potential site of experimentation rather than a contractual sign of identity» (Gilmore 1994: 185), more apt than classical autobiography to represent the «multiple solicitation, multiple markings of “identity”, multiple figurations of agency» (Gilmore 1994: 186) of the self-representing self.

Otherness is another key term related to feminist autobiographical criticism. Julia Watson, for instance, highlights that autobiography studies have focused on a universal subject that is male and western. Emerged in the Renaissance, refined during Enlightenment and Romanticism, this universal human subject coagulated in the nineteenth century in a «singular, unified and atomic core» with «well defined, stable, impermeable boundaries» (Smith 1993: 5). Even when the twentieth century brought to the «dissolution of the old metaphysical selfhood» (Smith 1993: 57), thanks to the ideas of Marx, Freud, Saussure, Einstein and many others, the subjectivity of women remained firmly an “Other”, left outside discourses of self. According to the male subject, woman is essentially body, identified by her sexuality: «If the topography of the universal subject locates man’s selfhood somewhere between the ears, it locates woman’s selfhood between her thighs» (Smith 1993: 12). The body is at the centre of a blatant paradox: although with the clear-boundedness offered by its skin it could be seen as «the nearest home to the autobiographical subject» (Smith 1993: 128), it is refused by the male ideal of the universal self for its singularity, bringing to a distinction «between the disembodied “man” and the corporeally determined “woman”» (Butler 1986: 43). Trying to link the question of «the materiality of the body to the performativity of

gender» (Butler 1993:1), autobiography can become a means of reappropriation: «writing her experiential history of the body, the autobiographical subject engages in a process of critical self-consciousness through which she comes to an awareness of the relationship of her specific body to the cultural “body” and to the body politic» (Smith 1993: 131).

A similar positive view of otherness also appears at the conclusion of Lisbeth Larsson's *Sanning och konsekvens*, a study of the compound (auto)biographical narratives of Marika Stiernstedt and Ludvig Nordström. According to Larsson, otherness is not only a feminine, but a universal attribute: «Annanheten är alltid den andres, vare sig det är en man eller kvinna»<sup>30</sup> (Larsson 2001: 426). Drawing on Lévinas philosophy of face-to-face encounter with the Other (cf. Lévinas 1971), after analysing the intertwining of autobiographies, diaries and biographies that builds the portrait of these two Swedish authors, Larsson concludes that «[d]et är i mötet med den Andre, som Lévinas genomgående stavar med stort A, och i erkännandet av sin egen och andras annanhet som människan blir till»<sup>31</sup> (Larsson 2001: 428). (Auto)biography is, therefore, a writing practice that not only allows a reappropriation of the writer's identity, but also of the others: «Biografering är det svar vi ger den andre och oss själva på frågan om vad en människa är»<sup>32</sup> (Larsson 2001: 428).

### 1.1.5 Autobiography as a performative strategy

The conception of autobiography as a performative act, a dominant trend in the nineties and the early two-thousands (cf., for instance, Smith and Watson 2001: 206), was anticipated by almost twenty years by Elisabeth Bruss, who already in 1976 declared: «Autobiography is a personal performance, an action that exemplifies the character of the agent responsible for that action and how it is performed» (Bruss 1980: 300). Later,

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<sup>30</sup> «Otherness always belongs to the other, be it a man or a woman.»

<sup>31</sup> «It is in the meeting with the Other, that Lévinas always writes with a capital A, and in the acknowledgement of one's own and the others' otherness that the human being is born.»

<sup>32</sup> «Writing biographies is the answer we give the other and ourselves to the question “what is man”».

critics of autobiography drew on Judith Butler's studies on gender performativity, especially in the idea that autobiography, like gender, is the result of performativity, which must be understood «not as a singular or deliberate "act", but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names» (Butler 1993: 20). Applied to autobiography, this means that:

Autobiographical telling is performative; it enacts the "self" that it claims has given rise to the "I". Furthermore, an "I" is neither unified nor stable; rather, it is split, fragmented, provisional, a sign with multiple referents. [...] the tensions and contradictions in representing an "I" to various audiences, for various occasions, by various means, produce gaps, fissures, and boundary trouble within the narrative. (Smith and Watson 2005: 357)

Although the ideas that the self is not a given but a constructed entity, nor a fixed but an evolving one are not new (cf., for instance, Gusdorf discussed in 1.1.1 and Melberg in 1.1.3 respectively), here the accent starts to shift towards the audience, opening the ground to the study of autobiography as a mediatic performance.

Jon Helt Haarder speaks of «biografisk remediering»<sup>33</sup> (Haarder 2007: 84), referring to David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's concept of remediation, meaning the constant process of refashioning of media by newer, more advanced ones. According to Haarder, performative (auto)biography is an enhanced, hypermediated version of autobiography: «I den performativa biografismen håller författaren medvetet ut sig själv i den blåsande världen, experimenterar med tillfället»<sup>34</sup> (Haarder 2007: 87). With the advent and diffusion of blogs and social media, people (autobiographical authors included) are constantly in the middle region<sup>35</sup> between public and private. The distinction between the author's narrating voice and the voices of the public becomes blurred, with the interesting conclusion that «[p]erformative biografism utforskar

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<sup>33</sup> «Biographical remediation.»

<sup>34</sup> «In performative biographism the author voluntarily exposes himself in the wind-beaten world and experiments with chance.»

<sup>35</sup> Haarder (2004: 29-30) alludes to Meyrowitz's definition, referring to the grey zone between back-stage and on-stage.

föihållandet mellan narrativitet och begreppen lögn, sanning och fiktion»<sup>36</sup> (Haarder 2007: 89).

The concepts of remediation and mediatisation are also central for Cristine Sarrimo, who in *Jagets scen* aims at «studera föreställningar om och offentliga konstruktioner av nutida självbilder»<sup>37</sup> (Sarrimo 2008: 11). For doing so, she analyses a varied corpus of self-representing texts, from diary (Lars Norén) to diaristic novel (Maja Lungren), from autobiography (Per Olov Enquist) to autobiographical novel (Bodil Malmsten, Ann Haberlein) to blogs (kissiess.se and blondinbella.se), in the light of sociologic and media studies. Each of the eight analysed authors responds differently to the complex forces at work in our hyper-mediatic society, such as the intimisation and emotionalisation of the public sphere and a growing craving from the public's side for "reality" (both as in "real" as opposed to "fictional" and as in "reality-show"). However, the unifying factor in all case studies is the dialogical dimension of the autobiographical act, between the self-representing identities and the public scene on which they appear: «självbilder skapas och omskapas i en pågående dialog och förhandling, men även i en kamp, i ett vidare medialiserat sammanhang än det som ryms inom en boks pärmar»<sup>38</sup> (Sarrimo 2008: 20).

### 1.1.6 I or he?

Texts written in the third person are only a drop in the vast ocean of autobiography<sup>39</sup>, and the same disproportion also affects the critical debate. One of the few critics who dedicate something more than passing attention to this almost exceptional case is

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<sup>36</sup> «Performative biographism explores the relationship between narrativity and the notions of falsehood, truth and fiction.»

<sup>37</sup> «Study the conceptions and the public constructions of contemporary self-images.»

<sup>38</sup> «Self-images are created and recreated in an ongoing dialogue and negotiation, but also in a struggle, in a more medialised context than the one that exists between a book's covers.»

<sup>39</sup> For some reason that should deserve deeper attention in a separate study, this statement seems less true for Scandinavian autobiographies, from August Strindberg, to Pär Lagerkvist, to Harry Martinsson, only to mention a few.



Philippe Lejeune, who devoted to it an entire essay, “Autobiography in the Third Person” (Lejeune 1977). Although he can think of a small number of autobiographies entirely written in the third person (along with *The Education of Henry Adams*, he only names *The Armies of the Night* by Norman Mailer, which – incidentally – is quite an unusual example of autobiography, covering as it does a single episode of the author’s life), together with another few where the third person alternates with the first (Leiris’ *La Règle du jeu* and *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*), he nonetheless chooses to study these «revealing kind of borderline cases [that] allow us to bring out what is usually implicit in the use of “persons”» (Lejeune 1977: 28). By writing of him- or herself as if he or she were another, the author of a third-person autobiography realises, «in the form of a *doubling* [*dédoublement*], what the first person realises in the form of a *confusion*: the ineluctable duality of the grammatical “person”» (Lejeune 1977: 29).

This duality is evident on two different planes: at the level of the enunciation, by leaving the identity of the receiver undecided, the autobiographical “I” implies the presence of some “other”, be it the reader or “him/herself”; but it is the second level of duality that is more relevant for the present study, the one between the subject of enunciation and that of the statement – that is, between the author-narrator and the author-character. In autobiography, the inherent duality of the narrative voice, highlighted by gaps in perspective and focalisation between narrator and hero, is hidden behind the autobiographical “I”, which refers back to the lexical unity signified by the author’s name. In other words,

the first person, then, always conceals a hidden third person, and in this sense every autobiography is by definition indirect. But in the third-person autobiographies I am going to present, this indirectness is admitted, and boldly proclaimed. [...] It is as if, in autobiography, no combination of the personal pronouns could “fully express” the person in a satisfactory manner. Or rather, to put it less naively, all imaginable combinations reveal, with differing degrees of clarity, the nature of the person – the tension between impossible union and intolerable division and the fundamental schism which turns the speaker into a fugitive. (Lejeune 1977: 32)

The main intent of writing an autobiography in the third person should therefore be to create, or better to highlight the existing distance between narrator and hero, something that, as we shall see in more detail in the section dedicated to *Ett annat liv*

(cf. 5.4), seems to pertain also to the subject of the present study<sup>40</sup>. This distance in its turn can have a variety of intentions and effects, as Lejeune already pointed out in *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Lejeune 1989a: 6): it can envelop the hero in an aura of majesty, as in statesmen's memoirs, or under a mantle of humility, as in some religious "confessions"; it can voice the anguished impossibility of expressing identity propounded by modern theories about personality, or create an ironic perspective on the hero (something that Enquist does very often, as we shall see later on). However, this distance remains nonetheless partial, since

One cannot write an autobiography without constructing and communicating a point of view towards oneself. This point of view, whether complex or ambiguous, can open gaps between the narrator's perspective and that of the character, or enable the author to piece together and thus retrieve or modify the image he thinks others have of him. But no matter how complex or convoluted the procedure of recuperation may be, the point of view will ultimately carry the mark of the author. [...] The articulation of two truly differing points of view concerning a single individual cannot be accomplished in autobiography. The novelist, however, can create a double perspective but only by sacrificing reality (omniscience and "nonfocalization" are impossible outside fiction. (Lejeune 1977: 41)

The only way out, according to Lejeune, is the creation of a "fictive fiction", that is, an autobiography that "pretends" to be fiction: «the autobiographer tries to imagine what would happen if someone else were telling his story or drawing his portrait» (Lejeune 1977: 42). This is exactly what Gertrude Stein did by writing a fictive autobiography of her friend Alice Toklas, which was in fact a first-person biography of Alice and at the same time – and above all – a third-person autobiography. According to John Sturrock, what made Stein choose such an unusual form was the desire to «describe the inside as seen from the outside», as she herself reveals in *The Autobiography of Alice Toklas* (quoted in Sturrock 1993: 230). Her impersonation of Alice allows her to «sit audaciously to herself as to a portraitist, accepting to be an object among objects» (Sturrock 1993: 230). In other words, it allows her to «boldly proclaim» her otherness to herself.

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<sup>40</sup> «P O Enquist skapar distans genom att berätta i tredje person», says for example Eva Ström in her review of *Ett annal liv* on *Expressen* (Ström 2008; «P O Enquist creates distance by narrating in the third person»).

Another scholar who dedicated a certain attention to the theme is Jean Starobinski. According to him, autobiography holds a middle position between two extremes, narrative in the third person and pure monologue, representing thus «a mixed entity, which we can call discourse-history» (Starobinski 1980: 76). Although he defines the third-person autobiography «seemingly a modest form», this artifice achieves a solidification of the personality through objectivity. On the other hand, the pure monologue paradoxically obtains the opposite result, that is to weaken the “I” to the advantage of an apparently vanished “he” (Starobinski 1980: 77). Another, maybe secondary effect of the choice of the third person is the erasing from the text of the implicit “you” addressed by the explicit “I”, an addressee that often gives motivation to the discourse (as highlighted by the cases where the addressee is made explicit, be it God, a friend, or an unnamed reader). However, the main effect of the third-person pronoun is to highlight the “alterity” between narrator and hero. In “normal”, first-person autobiographies, the discontinuity between the living I of the past and the writing I of the present is expressed only at the level of time and of verb tenses (the use of the aorist), a process that nonetheless transforms the first person into a «quasi-third person», revealing the intrinsic ambiguity of the constancy of the personal pronoun (Starobinski 1980: 79).

Another critic who dealt, however passingly, with third-person autobiographies is Louis Renza in his already mentioned *The Veto of the Imagination*. Like Lejeune, he also focused on the gap between the author as a writer and as a character, a gap only apparently bridged by the pronoun “I”. To persist in the autobiographical project, he claims,

the autobiographer must come to terms with a unique pronominal crux: how can he keep using the first-person pronoun, his sense of self-reference, without its becoming in the course of writing something other than strictly his own self-referential sign – a de facto third-person pronoun? (Renza 1977: 278)

Paradoxically, then, the third-person pronoun should therefore be the “natural” choice of autobiography, obeying to what Renza calls «writing’s law of gravity»: namely that writing about one’s own existence entails a denial of this existence as one’s own. A statement that somehow recalls, symmetrically reflected, Genette’s comment

about Proust's transition from the third person of the quasi-autobiographical *Jean Santeuil* to the "I" of the more fictional *Recherche*: «as if Proust first had had to conquer a certain adhesion to himself, had to detach himself from himself, in order to win the right to say "I"» (Genette 1980: 249). In autobiography, on the other hand, the author *can* claim the right to say "he" in order to obtain a closer adhesion to himself.

## 1.2 Studies on Per Olov Enquist

Since Per Olov Enquist is «a dominant figure in the Swedish literary and cultural life» (Shideler 2004: 2), criticism about his work is rich and significant. Here I will take into consideration only the most comprehensive studies, or those that are most relevant for the sake of this research.

One of the earliest monographs dedicated to Enquist is Erik Henningsen's *Per Olov Enquist. En undersøgelse af en venstreintellektuel forfatters forsøg på at omfunktionere den litterære institution*, published in 1975. As the title itself reveals, this study focuses on the political aspects of Enquist's writing, describing it as a progress from the pre-documentary, "existentialist" themes of *Magnetisörens femte vinter*, to the engaged, "revolutionary" documentarism of *Legionärerna* and *Sekonden*. Henningsen's political angle, so typical of the times, tends to overlook the fact that, even in the most "political" of his books, Enquist has always tried to combine social analysis with a deep psychological dimension, a dimension that with time will become the predominant aspect of his writing.

Jan Stenkvis's *Om övervintringens villkor* (1978) analyses *Sekonden* in clear dispute with Henningsen's reading. Although he does not deny the importance of the political engagement that permeates *Sekonden* as much as *Legionärerna*, in his view the essential is to see «hur samhälleligt och privat, politiskt och existentiellt griper in i, betingar och modererar varandra»<sup>41</sup> (Stenkvis 1978: 96). Great attention is therefore

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<sup>41</sup> «How the social and the private, the political and the existential interact with each other, influence and moderate each other.»

paid to the personal element, highlighting the presence of autobiographical elements that Enquist uses – exactly as he does with documents (for instance interviews and parliamentary minutes in *Legionärerna*, sport magazines in *Sekonden*) – «som nödvändiga element i komplexa romanstrukturer»<sup>42</sup> (1978: 119). Stenkvist defends the composite structure of the novel against the criticism it attracted from several reviewers, recognising its poetic function and symbolic meaning: «den allt dominerande metaforen för den undersökning och den minnesteckning är pusslet»<sup>43</sup> (Stenkvist 1978: 123). Finally, he draws attention to many other symbolic images typical of Enquist's writing, such as the mountain in the sea, the ice-wall, the celestial harp, all more or less related to the theme of solitude and the desire for participation, highlighting their ambiguous role as «något som både döljer och avslöjar, både ropar efter en uttydning och bjuder motstånd»<sup>44</sup> (1978: 156) – a role surprisingly similar to the strategies that Arne Melberg identified as typical of autobiography (cf. 1.1.3).

Ross Shideler's *Per Olov Enquist: A Critical Study* (1984) is a chronological presentation of Enquist's complete works up to that time, preceded by an introduction in which he briefly enumerates his «Major Themes» (Shideler 1984: 15): art, history, language, politics and economics, self-acceptance, plus a number of images and symbols such as birds, the embryo, the journey, etc. Although deep and comprehensive, Shideler's study is somehow affected by its target reader («a general American audience» [Shideler 1984: vii] is the author's definition, though an American academic public is a more likely guess), who did not know Enquist nor his books. Shideler's analyses therefore tend, if not to simplify Enquist's texts, at least to make them more concluded than they are (they tend to solve Enquist's unsolved puzzles, so to say).

Henrik Jansson's *Per Olov Enquist och det inställda upproret: Ett författarskap i relation till svensk debatt 1961-1986* (1987) concentrates on the double focus of Enquist's writing, the private and the social dimensions. Jansson carefully analyses the Swedish cultural and social scene of the sixties and seventies, concentrating on the

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<sup>42</sup> «As necessary elements in complex fictional structures.»

<sup>43</sup> «The all-dominating metaphor for the inquiry and the memoir-writing is the puzzle.»

<sup>44</sup> «Something that both hides and reveals, both demands an interpretation and offers resistance.»

aesthetics of the “open work of art” on the one side and on the so called “trolöshetsdebatt”<sup>45</sup> on the other, and then examines how Enquist’s works relate to the general environment. According to him, Enquist’s distinguishing mark is the will to unite these two separate dimensions, to reduce the gap between feelings (private) and intellect (political).

Thomas Bredsdorff’s *De sorte huller. Om tillblivelsen af et sprog i P.O. Enquists forfatterskab* (1991) focuses on Enquist’s language, meant «i en betydelse som är både smalare och bredare än den som används i vanligt tal»<sup>46</sup> (Bredsdorff 1991: 7): not only words and expressions, but the meaning they bear and the world they create. Starting from the analysis of the short story *Mannen i båten*, originally written in 1969 for an anthology for young readers and later incorporated into *Sekonden* (cf. 4.1), he identifies what he deems to be the main characteristic of Enquist’s language: the untold, what must be read between the lines – the “black holes”, as he calls them, a term that gives the title to the entire book. The short story (as well as the following books that Bredsdorff takes into account) is strewn with «berättarens fel, hans minnesfel, hans minnesluckor, hans feltolkningar»<sup>47</sup> (Bredsdorff 1991: 14), so that the text becomes «ett vittnesbörd om glömska och om de intressantare och mer svårbestämbara fenomen däremellan [dvs. mellan erinring och glömska]: minnesförskjutning och rekonstruktion»<sup>48</sup> (Bredsdorff 1991: 14). And it is exactly this displacement and this reconstruction that engender two other typical traits of Enquist’s writing: fragmentation and repetition, or «återbruk», “reuse”, in Bredsdorff’s interesting choice of words (1991: 240). But to delay and to fragment is not enough: in order to speak about those “black holes”, Enquist must also disguise (a fundamental word in Enquist’s works, which will be analysed more in depth in 3.2) with the help of symbols, many of which are carefully analysed in Bredsdorff’s study.

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<sup>45</sup> The term is generally translated into English as “disenchantment debate”, although a more faithful translation of *trolöshet* could be “absence of belief/faith” (cf. Branty 2007: 325).

<sup>46</sup> «In a meaning that is both narrower and wider than in everyday speech.» For quotations from this text I use the Swedish translation published in the same year as the Danish original (Bredsdorff 1991).

<sup>47</sup> «The narrator’s mistakes, his lapses of memory, his gaps in memory, his errors of interpretation.»

<sup>48</sup> «A testimony about forgetfulness and two phenomena in between [i.e. between recollection and forgetfulness] that are more interesting and more difficult to determine: displacement and reconstruction.»

Also Eva Ekselius's *Andas fram mitt ansikte* (1996) focuses on symbols. Her purpose is to «frilägga [de underliggande skiktets] bildvärldar, visa hur de ordnar sig i bestämda mönster och hur man kan urskilja rörelse, utveckling, förändring»<sup>49</sup> (1996: 11) with the help of psychological, anthropological and religious studies' theories. The study offers a precious inventory of the images, symbols and *topoi* used by Enquist, all carefully and thoroughly dissected and analysed in dedicated chapters: «Isen», «Munnen och maskarna», «Himlaharpan», «Ängel i underjorden»<sup>50</sup>. The danger is that the interpretation sometimes becomes slightly strained, probably in the effort to obtain a univocal and unequivocal reading of «det kombination av pussel och palimpsest som kan sägas vara Per Olov Enquists metod»<sup>51</sup> (1996: 20).

Gunnar Syrén's *Mellan sanningen och lögnen* (2000), albeit dedicated to Enquist's dramatic production, gives stimulating insight in some of the themes that are central to this study. One of the most recurrent terms in Syrén's book is «spänning». According to him, Enquist's poetics is based upon tensions: between the will to unveil the truth and to hide it (Syrén 2000: 135), between the need for love and the certainty that it does not exist (2000: 135), between the consciousness of the world's meaninglessness and the search for a meaning (2000: 163). One of the most interesting points he raises is the connection between this striving for an explanation and autobiography:

Den här drömmen om att allt skall kunna bli möjligt att förstå och överskåda hyste Per Olov Enquist uppenbarligen redan som barn; där detta tema framträder tydligast, går det självbiografiska ofta i dagen. (Syrén 2000: 164)

It is evident that Per Olov Enquist cherished this dream that everything could be understood and surveyed since his childhood; where that theme becomes more distinct, the autobiographical element often comes to light.

The book Syrén is referring to here is *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, where the adult narrator evokes memories of the past in order to understand his life (and the writer Enquist in his turn draws on his own experiences, cf. 5.1). However, the answer that emerges is that

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<sup>49</sup> «To expose the iconography [of the underlying layers], to show how they dispose themselves in definite patterns and how we can detect movement, development, change.»

<sup>50</sup> Respectively «The ice», «The mouth and the worms», «The celestial harp», «Angel in the underworld».

<sup>51</sup> «The combination of puzzle and palimpsest that can be said to be Per Olov Enquist's method.»

there is no absolute truth to be found; the closest he comes to a meaning is when «[b]erättelsen [...] blir labyrintisk och berättaren kan aldrig uppnå full överblick, lika litet som läsaren eller publiken»<sup>52</sup> (Syrén 2000: 168). Enquist lets one of the characters in *Tribadernas natt* say that «sanningen tittar fram i springorna»<sup>53</sup> (Enquist 2017a: 79): it is in the cracks of the text, in the unsaid between the lines, in Bredsdorff's "black holes", that the only possible truth – however partial – can be found.

Among the many shorter studies dedicated to Enquist, here I take into account only a few of the most recent ones, all focused on his autobiography: a chapter from Cristine Sarrimo's *Jagets scen* (2012), one from Anders Johansson's *Självskrivna män* (2015) and an article by Massimiliano Bampi included in *Forms of Autobiographical Narration in Scandinavian Literature* (2015).

Starting from the mixed reception of *Ett annat liv*, Sarrimo's essay concentrates on the relationship between public and private. Autobiographers tread the boards of the public scene, subjecting themselves to a comparison between their inner self and their social, "historical" self as it is perceived by others. According to Sarrimo, there arose a conflict between Enquist's conception of and realisation of an autobiography, on the one hand, and his (our) time's, on the other: quoting Lisbeth Larsson, she maintains that «P.O. Enquists självbiografi framstår då som ett slags monument över det som Larsson identifierar som ett traditionellt modernistiskt affektfritt textideal»<sup>54</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 103) in a post-postmodernistic society. It was this asynchrony that caused the negative response from part of the critics: in the intersection between private and public life that constitutes the model for today's self-representation, the parabolic course of Enquist's life – from the «brightly lit place» (Enquist 2015: 101) of authorship to the darkness of alcoholism, back to «another life» (Enquist 2015: 389) as a writer again – offers too little «liv och blod»<sup>55</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 89) to fully satisfy the public. However, Enquist's

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<sup>52</sup> «The narration [...] becomes labyrinthine and the narrator never manages to get a full view, as little as the reader or the spectator do.»

<sup>53</sup> «The truth escapes from the cracks» (Enquist 2004: 58).

<sup>54</sup> «P.O. Enquist's autobiography appears then as a sort of monument of what Larsson identifies as a traditional modernistic unemotional epitome.»

<sup>55</sup> «Life and blood.»



distanced position is functional to satisfying what is probably his main motive for writing an autobiography, «begäret efter objektiv överblick»<sup>56</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 105) on himself and his life. This search for objectivity explains the strong social and historical connotation of Enquist's narration, which swings «mellan Hem och Historia»<sup>57</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 109), between private and public.

Johansson's interesting and original book alternates chapters dedicated to theoretical and critical reflections about «manligt autofiktivt skrivande»<sup>58</sup> (Johansson 2015: 7) with others focused on specific authors. In the nine examples he chooses<sup>59</sup>, he identifies both a tendency to affirm the independent subject behind the writing and simultaneously a problematisation of this same subject, torn between the extremes of «de två idealtyperna *Den starka, fria, aktiva individen* och *Den upplösta, passiva, underordnade, omänskliga funktionen*»<sup>60</sup> (Johansson 2015: 215, italics in the original). Curiously enough, Enquist is *maybe* («kanske», Johansson 2015: 215) included among the former, highlighting a problematic positioning towards what Johansson defines as «subjektiverings dialektik»<sup>61</sup> (Johansson 2015: 7). This problematic attitude is highlighted by the function performed by autobiography in Enquist. According to Johansson,

handlar *Ett annat liv* inte primärt om att förstå sitt färdiga jag, utan om att skydda eller rent av skapa subjektet med hjälp av berättandet. Avsaknad av ordning eller riktning är outhärdlig, men jaget föreställer sig ha makten att berätta sin egen berättelse. (Johansson 2015: 91)

*Ett annat liv* is not primarily about understanding his finished self, but about protecting or even creating the subject with the help of the narration. The lack of order or direction is unbearable, but the "I" believes to have the power to tell his own tale.

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<sup>56</sup> «The need for an objective view.»

<sup>57</sup> «Between Home and History.»

<sup>58</sup> «Male autofictional writing.»

<sup>59</sup> Per Wästberg, Martin Kellerman, Karl Ove Knausgård, Per Olov Enquist, Zlatan Ibrahimovic/David Lagercrantz, Lars Norén, Johan Jönson, Yahya Hassan and Eric Ericson.

<sup>60</sup> «The two ideal models *The strong, free, active individual* and *The dissolved, passive, subordinate, inhuman function.*»

<sup>61</sup> «Dialectics of subjectification.»

However, this creation of ordering and direction also has negative implications: the artificial stabilisation of the subject implies a stiffening, a reification, a relapse into the passive, the subordinate, the inhuman – in other words, the opposite of what was intended.

Bampi's article, «*Visserligen sant men knappast sanning*»: *The Construction of Autobiographical Discourse in P.O. Enquist's Ett Annat Liv*, focuses on the question of genre, highlighting the ontological ambiguity that characterises *Ett annat liv* both at a textual and a paratextual level. This ambiguity, he concludes, is a distinguishing mark of the author, who «[as] in most of his previous works, [...] appeals to his readers' willingness to believe and at the same time invites them to be sceptical» (Bampi 2015: 273), and must therefore be accepted by the reader, without trying to force the text either in a fictional or an autobiographical pact (cf. 5.4).

Now, after gleaning the wealth of critical sources both on autobiography and on Enquist's works, it is time to look directly into Enquist's production.

## Chapter 2: The methodological approach

In this chapter I will first select a few «utgångspunkter»<sup>62</sup> – to use a term that frequently appears in many of Enquist’s books, from *Legionärerna* to *Ett annat liv* – from which to approach the analysis of the actual texts. Hidden in the folds of Enquist’s writings there are namely some elements that help bringing out the autobiographical value of the texts themselves, enhancing it as a sort of polarisation filter. In particular, I will focus on the practice of repetition, which, as we will see, can serve the cause of autobiography, and on two images used as metaphors for the search of a meaning, that of the puzzle to be assembled and that of map drawing. Finally, I will also concentrate on the term «smärtpunkt»<sup>63</sup>, a key concept in Enquist’s poetics of experience.

In this chapter I will also explain my choice of corpus, with a section dedicated to *Ett annat liv*’s particular status of primary text and at the same time source of information about other texts.

### 2.1 «Utgångspunkter»

«Utgångspunkter» is certainly one of the many terms that frequently recur throughout Enquist’s whole production, often used – as so many other words in his books – in an unconventional sense. In *Legionärerna*, the expression is still used in a quite traditional way: «Till varje undersökning finns en utgångspunkt»<sup>64</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 31, 40). For most of the book it is used to sum up the investigator’s («undersökare») and the environment’s set of opinions and values and is often modified by adjectives such as «politiska» (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 185, 240, 242, 351) or «ideologiska» (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 351). However, Enquist already starts deviating from the customary usage when

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<sup>62</sup> Various rendered by Enquist’s English translators as «starting points» or «points of departure».

<sup>63</sup> Various translated in the British editions as «point of pain», «sore point» or «raw spot».

<sup>64</sup> «Every investigation has a basis/a motive» (Enquist 1974: 29, 39).

he defines «utgångspunkt» as «en punkt som är en känsla, eller en känslas vridpunkt»<sup>65</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 40).

From then on, the meaning of internal motivation, of feeling that lies behind a story or a book, prevails. In *Sekonden*, the term appears in the title of four out of seventeen chapters: «Blockering: utgångspunkter», «Omstart: utgångspunkter», «J. C. Lindner: utgångspunkter», «Överbryggan: utgångspunkter»<sup>66</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 59, 102, 139, 265). However, the texts that follow can hardly be defined as a “set of opinions and values”: they rather present a series of facts, images or episodes that seem only loosely connected, by way of a free association technique, to the main topic announced in the title.

In *Musikanternas uttåg*, ironically enough, the “points of departure” close the book: six short fragments apparently unrelated to each other, some from the novel, some from a planned, but never completed, wider novel about the same characters, some from the fairy tale that gives the novel its title, *The Musicians of Bremen*. Here again, their nature as points of departure is private and not shared with the reader. The same logic is at work in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, where «(Utgångspunkter)» (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 243, brackets in the original), is the epilogue’s subtitle. Here the connection between the fragments is, if possible, even looser: their only common trait is that they all belong to Enquist’s set (or constellation, as we will define it in the following section) of recurrent images.

Finally, in *Ett annat liv* the “points of departure” are more suitably positioned at the opening of the book: shreds of recollections mostly from 1989 and 1998, in occasion of two visits to his childhood village, but also from two of the treatment facilities he visited in 1989. Again, it is not easy for the reader to understand why just those images or episodes are so important, but the period to which they refer is certainly a central one both in Enquist’s biography and oeuvre, so that their choice as starting points for an autobiography is understandable.

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<sup>65</sup> «A point which is a feeling, or a feeling’s turning point» (Enquist 1974: 39-40).

<sup>66</sup> Respectively: «Obstruction: points of departure», «Restart: points of departure», «J. C. Lindner: points of departure», «The bridge: points of departure».

While approaching Enquist's works in search of the autobiographical red thread that runs through them, I have often been struck by images, metaphors or concepts which seem to resonate and amplify their autobiographical value. I therefore use these impressions and the way they are handled by the author as a "point of departure" for my analysis.

### **2.1.1 The poetics of repetition**

The very nature of Enquist's narrative, based on a palimpsestic use of recurring episodes and images, encourages to focus on the use of repetition, since the reiteration of certain episodes, with which we will deal in detail in the sections dedicated to the different books, is far too frequent to be accidental. The author himself is well aware of this characteristic, as he declares in an unpublished interview to Henrik Jansson partially quoted in the latter's monograph:

Det är uppenbart att jag har hållit mig till vissa temata och problemställningar, som i bok efter bok återkommer och varieras. Det uppstår nya rum ibland, men inte helt nya byggen utan utvecklingar av samma typer av temata. (Jansson 1987: 99)

It is evident that I cling to certain themes and issues, which recur and are varied in book after book. New rooms appear from time to time, but they are rather a development of the same kind of issue than a totally new construction.

Although repetition is by no means always related to autobiographical issues, by focusing on recurring images and episodes that often originate in Enquist's personal experiences, I will in this work argue that, at least in his case, there does exist a connection between repetition and autobiography.

«A moment's reflection will bring to mind two fundamental features of repetition: it is ubiquitous, but its effects are highly ambiguous» (Fischer 1994: 9), read the opening lines of a volume dedicated to repetition in all of its declensions, from

linguistics to rhetoric, to literature<sup>67</sup>. Even when it is restricted to literature, it can refer to the most disparate levels, from phonetics to lexicon, from form to content, from the intertextual to the intratextual. Also the effects that can be obtained through repetition are the most varied, from emphasis and emotional intensity to irony, from musicality to mimicry (Fischer 1994: 10-13). Here, of course, we will focus on those that best apply to Enquist's use of repetition.

An interesting analysis of «the constructive powers of repetition» (Kawin 1972: 6)<sup>68</sup> can be found in *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film*, by Bruce F. Kawin. While in psychology repetition is usually seen as negative, either as a neurotic symptom that «locks a work or a life into an unfulfillable compulsive cycle» (Kawin 1972: 12), or as «a neutralizer, habituator, and falsifier» that protects us from the new, the unexpected, the painful (Kawin 1972: 27), in literature iteration can have a “constructive” effect, in that it emphasises certain facts or ideas by making them «intense and solid through persistence» (Kawin 1972: 49). Emphasis by repetition aims at giving «the sense of having experienced the truth» (Kawin 1972: 50). The final effect of «the artful manipulation of repetition» is therefore «the generation of a mystical symbol» (Kawin 1972: 59) that binds past and present and transcends both. This is exactly what happens to some of the recurring images in Enquist's books, such as the celestial harp (cf. 4.1) or the “cycle ride to the Lord's Table” (cf. 3.2): originated in his childhood, they accumulate through repetition a deep symbolic meaning, as Ekselius already pointed out in her study (cf. 1.2).

The use of iteration by specific authors is at the centre of several studies<sup>69</sup>. Some interesting insight for an analysis of repetition in Enquist's works can be found in a volume dedicated to Tolstoy (Sankovitch 1998). According to the author, «Tolstoy uses

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Fischer 1994: 15: «When parrots do it, it's parroting. / When advertisers do it, it's reinforcement. / When children do it, it's imitation. / When brain-damaged people do it, it's perseveration or echolalia. / When dis-fluent people do it, it's stuttering, or stammering. / When orators do it, it's epizeuxis, plice, anadiplosis, polyptoton or antimetabole. / When novelists do it, it's cohesion. / When poets do it, it's alliteration, chiming, rhyme, or parallelism. / When priests do it, it's ritual. / When sounds do it, it's gemination. / When morphemes do it, it's reduplication.»

<sup>68</sup> A view that recalls Deleuze's statement that repetitions «do not add a second and a third time to the first, but carry the first time to the “nth” power» (Deleuze 1994: 1).

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, Brown 1952, on Zola's novels; Epperly 1989, on repetition in Trollope; Miller 1982, on seven English novels by Brontë, Thackeray, Hardy, Conrad and Woolf.

the device of repetition in his fiction to represent, call attention to, and provoke the processes by which human beings structure and give meaning to their experience» (Sankovitch 1998: 7). With its ability to emphasise, to remind and to create connections, repetition helps both characters and readers to structure and understand experiences, bringing order into something which at first sight might appear as disordered – a process that reminds of the «the vital impulse to order» that Olney connects to autobiography (cf. 1.1.1). Tolstoy's characters often direct their mental processes «with the aid of the repeated element, which becomes a sign» (Sankovitch 1998: 81). Indeed, repetition itself becomes a sort of sign, a bearer of meaning: it expresses a need for control, the same need that Freud would see at the basis of what he called «compulsion to repeat» (Freud 2001: 19). When Anna Karenina obsessively repeats the same words in her mind, for instance, she is trying to make things as she wishes them to be, ascribing to repetition «the rhetorical logic behind incantation» (Sankovitch 1998: 101).

Repetitions in Tolstoy appear both at an intratextual and an intertextual level. While the former serve the characters' search for a meaning and order, the latter «offer the careful, persistent reader a hypothetical text of his oeuvre: they suggest his persistent concern with particular kinds of experiences – experiences that involve conscious attempts at sense-making and self-shaping» (Sankovitch 1988: 181). Iteration is therefore useful also to understand the author, seen through his whole production as a unity:

Each word, phrase, or idea that has an intertextual antecedent elsewhere in Tolstoy serves a particular function in its particular context, but it also signals that constellation of images, associations, and meaning that go beyond the immediate context. (Sankovitch 1998: 181)

This approach can be extremely useful in analysing Enquist's production, where a wealth of intertextual cross-references and associations constitute a veritable «constellation» of *topoi* and symbols.

Other interesting insights about the function of repetition come from a study which focuses on an author definitely closer to Enquist, both from a geographical and a

thematic point of view: August Strindberg<sup>70</sup>. Michael Robinson dedicates a whole chapter of his *Strindberg and Autobiography* to repetition. According to him, repetition in Strindberg is «a major organizing principle for transforming an otherwise unbridled reality into a significant pattern, and pure contiguity into interpreted, meaningful sequence» (Robinson 1986: 31-32). Although he does not at all undervalue the unconscious, sometimes pathogenic forces behind repetition, highlighting as he does that Strindberg's attempt to write out the past assumes «the signs of a fixation» (1986: 31), Robinson also stresses its intellectual origins, from Kierkegaard to Swedenborg (1986: 32). Repetition thus becomes a conscious strategy to see unity and meaning in his experience: «Proceeding by associative leaps and metaphorical couplings rather than by patient deduction and the methodical accumulation of data, he delves into his memory to organize the world» (Robinson 1986: 40). Both the fixation and the associative and metaphorical method are certainly well attested also in Enquist. For the first, one could for instance consider the comments on his own writing he expresses in *Ett annat liv* and *Liknelseboken*, his second declaredly retrospective book, where he openly underlines «maniska upprepningar»<sup>71</sup> (Enquist 2013: 37) and «[o]ändliga och tröttande upprepningar, nästan rituella, som en mäsas»<sup>72</sup> (Enquist 2008: 441); as for the second, most of his books are clearly constructed following a non-chronological associative structure where metaphor plays a fundamental role, as I will point out in the sections dedicated to *Nedstörtad ängel* and *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* (cf. 4.3 and 5.1 respectively).

A reading of repetition in Enquist can be found in Ulf Lindberg's analysis of the short story *Mannen i båten*, originally written in 1969 for an anthology for young readers and later incorporated into *Sekonden*. According to Lindberg, repetition can also have a defensive function, strictly connected to another strategy often used by Enquist,

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<sup>70</sup> In addition to being the protagonist of two of Enquist's works, the drama *Tribadernas natt* (Enquist 2014a [1991]) and the script *Strindberg. Ett liv* (Enquist 2014 [1984]), Strindberg is the author of an autobiographical work in the third person which could be considered the yardstick for Scandinavian autobiographical writing (cf. Melberg 2008: 152).

<sup>71</sup> «Manic reiterations» (Enquist 2016: 36).

<sup>72</sup> «Endless, exhausting repetition, almost ritual, like a mass» (Enquist 2015: 326).



ellipsis (Lindberg 1999: 6)<sup>73</sup>. In Lindberg's reading, *Mannen i båten*, with all its ellipses and interruptions, reveals the function of fiction in Enquist's writing: fiction is a way to "displace" painful experiences<sup>74</sup> (Lindberg 1999: 11). However, these experiences do not disappear, they remain intact and force the narrator (and the writer) to take them up again and again: «den vuxne berättarens praktik skvallrar om att han fortfarande brottas med samma smärtpunkt. "Lösningen" blir att ständigt dikta vidare»<sup>75</sup> (Lindberg 1999: 12). This displacing and reiterating, already present at the very beginning of Enquist's career, becomes the distinguishing mark of his writing, his «berättarens praktik», recognisable in all of his books. According to Lindberg, this practice is nothing but a way in which the author understands himself and the world: «Att dikta och förskjuta har [...] blivit *legitimt*: oskiljaktigt från att söka förstå»<sup>76</sup> (1999: 14, italics in the original) – an interpretative effort that he pursues throughout his writing career.

It might be interesting to note that a similar double reading of repetition as displacing and reiterating at the same time is offered by Robinson in his already mentioned study on Strindberg, where he notes that «the tendency of the same material to reappear across many years reveals not merely the tenacity but the impermeability to writing of certain pathogenic recollections» (Robinson 1986: 33). Paradoxically, the recurring images are at the same time the most elusive: the feeling that an untold truth is hiding behind the image forces its obsessive return.

To go one step further, and to see repetition as a strategy not only to understand oneself, but also to represent oneself, we must turn to Paul John Eakin, who offers a useful cue of the connection between repetition and autobiography in his study of William Maxwell's *So Long, See You Tomorrow*, a novel based on autobiographical events (Eakin 1992: 40-53). According to Eakin, Maxwell turns to fiction to redeem the

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<sup>73</sup> It is not by chance that one of the most interesting monographs dedicated to Enquist's works is centred on and titled after «textens svarta hål», the black holes in his texts. I am obviously referring to Thomas Bredsdorff's *De sorte huller* (Bredsdorff 1991).

<sup>74</sup> The term "displacement" is used by Lindberg in its psychoanalytic sense: «the transferring of emotional feelings from their original object to one that disguises their real nature» (*Collins Online Dictionary*, <<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/displacement>>, last accessed 14 June 2017).

<sup>75</sup> «The practice of the adult narrator reveals that he is still struggling with the same sore points. The "solution" is to continue inventing.»

<sup>76</sup> «To invent and to displace [...] have become *legitimate*: indistinguishable from trying to understand.»

«incomplete and unacceptable» givens of experience (Eakin 1992: 40). Maxwell's strategy in dealing with an incident from his distant past (a brutal murder) combines reality and fiction, resulting in a threefold repetition of the events: recognising the inadequacy of his own memories, he first recurs to documentary evidence, but when that also proves unsatisfying, he finally «invent[s] a fiction in which he reconstructs the sequence of events that led to the murder, creating the missing referents of an incident that haunted his memory for most of a lifetime» (Eakin 1992: 41). But in Maxwell's shifting posture between fact (the documentary evidence) and fiction (his own re-writing of the events), and in the resulting repetition of the episode, Eakin sees

a clue to the motive for all autobiographical making, a tension between acceptance of the constraints of contingency and surrender to the irrepressible claims of desire. Every autobiography is, of course, a repetition of the past, but a repetition *with a difference*. (Eakin 1992: 45, italics in the original)

The interesting point resides here in the «difference»<sup>77</sup>, since it would be mere tautology to define autobiography as a «repetition of the past». This difference is «something more than merely the gap between the experience of subjectivity and an account of it in words», something that resembles «the element of resistance to the past that lurks in any desire to repeat it» (Eakin 1992: 46). Far from that,

[r]epetition of the past is necessarily a supplement and never merely a mirror of it. Whenever it is performed, the act of repetition tacitly confirms that reality not yet made into the referential fiction of autobiography – life as it is or as it was – is never entirely acceptable to the autobiographer. It is the made form of a life that brings acceptance, or at least understanding. (Eakin 1992: 46)

Thanks to this «supplement» of meaning, repetition can therefore be seen as a means to transform experience into discourse – life into autobiography – a transformation that implies a search for a meaning, an «acceptance, or at least understanding». In this study, we will try to demonstrate that this understanding is precisely what Enquist is striving to obtain – a goal symbolically represented by the reassembling of a puzzle.

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<sup>77</sup> See also Robinson (1986: 44): «For in the narrative discourse produced in autobiography, the repetition of the life once lived is imbued with difference: it is fashioned anew. [...] Thus the volumes of Strindberg's autobiography (and still less his novels and plays) are not the mere repetition of prior events, repositories in which the past is embalmed or interred, but the means by which he turns it to account and fashion himself anew in a text wherein the past he retraces also returns of itself to create an artistic web of analogies in which his life is no longer a succession of discrete events but a meaningful work of art whereby [...] he mediates his relationship with the worlds about him.»

### 2.1.2 The art of assembling puzzles

In his analysis of Maxwell's *So Long, See You Tomorrow*, Eakin identifies an image from the novel as a metaphor to represent the autobiographical act: the figure of the acrobat walking on a high wire «in that strange blue light. With his arm outstretched [...] And with no net to catch him if he falls» (Eakin 1992: 45). In his view, the acrobat becomes the symbol of the slippery balancing between fact and fiction which is at the basis of each autobiographical act.

In a similar way, I intend to use the image of the puzzle as a metaphor for the constructing and re-constructing action of Enquist's autobiographical act. This metaphor applies both to the formal level – one of the most noticeable and persistent characteristics of Enquist's works is fragmentation, with novels often divided into fragments that are not chronologically ordered and need the reader's intervention to restore a logical sequence – and to the content, since the image of the puzzle returns in many of his books.

As regards the form, Ekselius (1996: 14) points out that several critics<sup>78</sup>, as well as the author himself, have identified the puzzle as the constructive principle in Enquist's narrative<sup>79</sup>. To further complicate things, the image to be reassembled is often not a single one, but there are several at the same time (Ekselius 1996: 14). This is at its most evident in *Hess*, where the text is divided into eighty-seven numbered fragments of uneven length dedicated to different characters, such as Rudolf Hess, his aide Pintsch, Daniel Defoe, his character Robinson Crusoe, air ace Manfred von Richthofen alias the Red Baron, French author Joris-Karl Huysmans and several others (cf. 3.2). However, also later works show the same fragmentary structure: in *Legionärerna* the historical reconstruction of the extradition of the Balts sways between past and present;

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<sup>78</sup> She specifically mentions Shideler 1984, Jansson 1987 and Agrell 1993.

<sup>79</sup> Another comparison, quite in the spirit of the times, is with the mobile. In *Ett annat liv* Enquist himself defines *Bröderna Casey* as «en Caldersk språkmobil» (Enquist 2008: 179), a Calder-like language-mobile.

in *Sekonden* the history of the cheating hammer thrower intersects with his son's; *Nedstörtad ängel* consists of four different stories, divided into fragments and mixed up, and the list could continue till *Liknelseboken*, where the nine “parables” swing obsessively between the author's childhood and old age. However, «[b]åde den gemensamma bilden och de skilda skikten har en sanning att avslöja. Är det för att finna den, eller för att dölja den, som pojken oupphörligt rör med handen bland skärvorna i sitt ispussel?»<sup>80</sup>, as Ekselius (1996: 14) again points out, bringing into the picture the content level of the metaphor, the boy with the ice-puzzle about whom we will dwell in more detail later in this section.

The “puzzle technique” adopted by Enquist has also been analysed by Ross Shideler, who dedicated a whole article at *Putting Together the Puzzle in Per Olov Enquist's Sekonden* (Shideler 1977). According to him,

the puzzle concept serves as the technical and theoretical structure of the novel, [which] is narrated in subjective and objective bits or sequences that often seem to have only a distant relation to the immediate context. [...] Although the overall picture is given in the opening pages, like the picture on a puzzle box, one does not see the final portrait until the final pages. (Shideler 1977: 312)

Then, «using the normal method to assemble a puzzle, that is, separating the pieces and trying to find out the perimeter» (1977: 314), the narrator outlines and develops the main themes of the novel (which, in the case of *Sekonden*, are the personal history of the narrator in the present, that of his father in the past and the relationship between politics and sport). However, *Sekonden* is not the only one among Enquist's novels that is written with a puzzle technique. Shideler highlights that the same structure also informs *Musikanternas uttåg* (Shideler 1984: 120, 136), *Tribadernas natt* (1984: 150) and *Från regnormarnas liv* (1984: 154). In the conclusion of his monograph dedicated to Enquist's (then) complete works, he goes so far as to say that «his narrative use of a puzzle, of trying to find how pieces fit together, has remained constant, for his preoccupation with the relationship between the individual and society has obsessively shaped all of his writing» (Shideler 1984: 162). However, like Ekselius, also Shideler

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<sup>80</sup> «Both the combined image and the separate layers have a truth to reveal. Is it in order to find it, or to conceal it, that the boy endlessly runs his hand in his ice-puzzle?»

believes that repetition, together with other meta-literary techniques, is a means to «challenge literature's ability to find and portray the truth» (Shideler 1984: 162).

Thomas Bredsdorff, on the other hand, only touches upon the formal side of the metaphor and concentrates immediately on its content and source:

Metaforen skildrar den imagistiska montage-tekniken, som här [i *Sekonden*] når sin höjdpunkt hittills i författarskapet. Men den refererar inte bara till en teknik, utan också till en litterär källa som antyds redan på första sidan [...]. Pojken som lägger pussel i isslottet är den lille Kay i H.C. Andersens *Snödrotsningen*. Den sagan, som förblir en av författarskapets stående referenspunkter, dyker upp flera gånger. (Bredsdorff 1991: 126)

This metaphor describes the imagistic montage-technique, that here reaches its height so far in his writing. However, it does not refer only to a technique, but also to a literary source that is mentioned already on the first page. [...] The boy that assembles the puzzle in the ice castle is little Kay in H.C. Andersen's *The Snow Queen*. That fairy tale, which remains a constant reference point in his writing, turns up several times.

The fairy tale in question is the well-known story about a boy and a girl, Kay and Gerda, in the Snow Queen's palace. Kay has some glass fragments – shards of a magical mirror broken by an evil spirit – stuck in his eye and heart, which make him cold and unfeeling, until Gerda finds him and saves him with her tears and compassion. The most interesting detail for this discussion is that, while kept prisoner in the Snow Queen's palace, Kay tries to assemble an ice puzzle: if he manages to form the word “eternity”<sup>81</sup>, he will be free.

Bredsdorff's mentioning of Andersen's fairy tale is in fact just another quotation from Enquist himself. «Jag skulle ha sagt, nu vill jag berätta sagan om snödrotsningen»<sup>82</sup>, he lets Hans Christian Andersen say in *Från regnormarnas liv* (Enquist 2017a: 136). In this play about the celebrated Danish author, Enquist makes explicit a reference to the Snow Queen that made its first appearance almost thirty years earlier, in his first book, *Kristallögat*. Here the young protagonist breaks a vase and then tries to put the splinters together, hoping to find the key fragment that could reunite all

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<sup>81</sup> It is probably not by chance that eternity is also a recurring concept in Enquist's books, where it is defined by the image of «ett berg i havet, en mil långt och brett och högt, och fågeln som kom en gång vart tusende år för att vässa sin näbb tills berget var borta» (Enquist 2008: 401; «a mountain rising out of the sea, a mile long and wide and high, and the bird that came every thousand years to sharpen its beak until the mountain had been worn away», Enquist 2015: 301).

<sup>82</sup> «I should have said, I shall now tell you the story of the Snow Queen» (Enquist 2004: 116).

the pieces into a whole (Enquist 1961: 21). From then on, Andersen's fairy tale really becomes the «stående referenspunkt» mentioned by Bredsdorff.

The first explicit allusions to a puzzle to be solved appear in *Hess* (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 236) and in *Legionärerna* (2014 [1968]: 376, 377, 403, 415), but it is in *Sekonden* that the image becomes central. It appears already on the second page of the novel, in a dream related by the narrator, and recurs twelve times throughout the whole book<sup>83</sup>, sometimes as a memory of a childhood reading, sometimes as a comparison, sometimes as an apparently unrelated fragment. And the recurrence continues in *Berättelser från de inställda upprorens tid* (2014 [1974]: 212, 220), *Musikanternas uttåg* (2014 [1978]: 59, 310) and *Ett annat liv* (2008: 402, 403).

Such persistence, over such a long time span (from 1961 to 2008), clearly indicates that the image of the puzzle and the reference to Andersen's fairy tale have a deep significance in Enquist's writing. I lean on agreeing with Ekselius's reading, when she says that the metaphor of the puzzle highlights an ambiguity between the opposite goals of finding (or revealing) the truth and concealing it (1996: 14) – a reading that clearly recalls Melberg's threefold strategy of «visa, söka och dölja» already mentioned above in the chapter dedicated to autobiographical studies (cf. 1.1.3).

### 2.1.3 Drawing maps

As from a certain stage of Enquist's production, another image appears alongside that of the puzzle to symbolise the search for order and unity: map drawing. The importance of this activity is evidenced by the title of a collection of partially autobiographical essays published in 1992, *Kartritarna*, which can be translated as “the cartographers” or “the map-drawers” (cf. 5.2). The last essay, which gives the title to the whole collection, is a sort of preparatory study for the autobiography that will follow fifteen years later: the occasion for looking back is the author's mother moving to a nursing home, leaving her son with the task to empty her flat. In this short writing, divided in ten fragments, we

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<sup>83</sup> Enquist 2014 [1971]: 8, 21, 92, 93, 106, 122, 174, 236, 264, 304, 341, 348.

find many elements that also appear in *Ett annat liv* (e.g. Enquist's paternal grandmother's activity as the village chronicler, his grandfather's prize-winning fox, his crazy great-grandmother's scribbling on the walls, etc.) and some that do not. Most interesting, we find the image of a small child lying on the kitchen floor, busy at drawing maps:

Innan jag kunde skriva ritade jag kartor.  
Först var det Sverigekartan. Det var på smörpapper, och jag ritade på köksgolvet i det gröna huset. [...]  
Men det var roligt att rita, och jag var noga med att rita in byn, som hette Hjoggböle, på rätt plats så man kunde känna sig trygg. [...]  
Det var början. Jag ritade något hundratal Sverigekartor, till slut mycket exakt. Jag var nu helt säker på Sverige, det var inritat och under total kontroll, men med mittpunkten, som var byn, alltid utsatt. (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 296)

Before I learned to write, I drew maps.  
First it was the map of Sweden. I drew it on greaseproof paper, on the kitchen floor in the green house. [...]  
But it was fun to draw, and I was always careful about putting the village, that was called Hjoggböle, in the correct place, so that I could feel secure. [...]  
That was the beginning. I drew several hundred maps of Sweden, in the end with great accuracy. I was now completely sure about Sweden, it was drawn and under total control, but with its centre, which was the village, always well visible.

The passage, with almost exactly the same wording (albeit switched from the first- to the third-person narrative), also returns in *Ett annat liv*:

Först är det Sverigekartan. Han ritar på smörpapper, som kan läggas på den skolkarta han har; det är genomskinligt och det blir rent dokumentärt.  
Han ritar på köksgolvet i det gröna huset. Mycket snart behärskar han Sverige och kan släppa kartunderlaget. Det är ett stort steg när han behärskar Sverige, och han känner ett slags frihet. [...]  
Det är roligt att rita, och han är varje gång noga med att rita in byn, som heter Hjoggböle, på rätt plats för att veta var centrum finns, och så att han kan känna sig trygg. [...]  
Det är i början. Han ritar några hundra Sverigekartor, *på ett inre sätt* rättvisare än skolkartan. (Enquist 2008: 49-51, italics in the original)

First, the map of Sweden. He draws on greaseproof paper that he can place over the school map he has; it is transparent and so he can be completely accurate.  
He draws on the kitchen floor in the green house. Very soon he has mastered Sweden and can do without the map underneath. It is a huge step to have mastered Sweden and he feels a kind of liberation. [...]  
It is fun to draw, and each time he is very careful about putting the village, Hjoggböle, in the correct place to be sure where the centrum is and so that he can feel secure. [...]  
That is the beginning. He draws several hundred maps of Sweden, *inwardly* much more faithful than the school map. (Enquist 2015: 42)

Apart from the practical details (the kitchen floor, the green house, the greaseproof paper), also the emotional effects of drawing are the same: drawing is «roligt», it makes him feel «trygg» and «säker», it gives him a sense of «frihet» and «total kontroll». This sense of reassurance connected to drawing maps echoes the concept of cognitive mapping that Fredric Jameson borrowed from the urban studies of Kevin Lynch, defining it as a process that «involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory» (Jameson 1991: 51). Thanks to cognitive mapping, individuals can acquire, codify and memorise information about their own spatial surrounding, thus obtaining control, and therefore power, on their environment. This is exactly what the young map-drawer in Enquist's books does by placing the peripheral Hjoggböle in the centre of Sweden, «så att han kan känna sig trygg». The idea of mapping as an activity aimed at stabilising the individual's inner world is also confirmed by Dennis Cosgrove when he says that «mappings have served to project, order and arrange as well as to represent physical, social and imaginative worlds» (Cosgrove 1999: 16). However, mapping a space is more than simply describing it:

Another form of mapping is the creative probing, the tactical reworking, the *imaginative* projection of a surface. Here, mapping becomes the two-dimensional “staging” of actuality or desire [...], and generates a spatial order which *reorganizes and improves* upon existing models. (Cosgrove 1999: 15-16, italics mine)

After taking possession of the surrounding space by mapping it, the individual is ready to alter it to his/her best advantage. And this is exactly what the narrator of *Kartritarna* did as a child:

Jag visste att det var synd att dikta, eftersom det var synd att ljuga, om inte diktandet skedde i andligt syfte, som förkunnelse eller dödsruna, eller i den bibliska liknelsens form, men ingen granskade ju vad jag nedtecknade i kartform. Ingen såg över min axel, för att bestraffa lättfärdigheten, tecknen var ju abstrakta, kartorna likartade, jag utövade barnsliga sysselsättningar och kunde därför, i hemlighet, karteckna en värld som inte fanns. Jag måste ha låtit det ske, första gången, omedvetet. Jag började nedteckna påhittade landskap. (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 296)

I knew it was a sin to make things up, because it was a sin to lie, unless this making up was for a spiritual purpose, such as preaching or obituaries, or in the form of biblical parables, but no one checked what I jotted down in map form. No one



looked over my shoulder to punish my carelessness, the symbols were abstract, the maps similar to the others, I performed childish activities and therefore was able, in secret, to map a world that didn't exist.

The first time I guess I let it happen unawares. I started to draw invented landscapes.

Once again, the same passage is repeated in a very similar form in *Ett annat liv*:

Byn kan han ju. Det är bara att dokumentera. Västra delen av byn, den ogudaktiga, är svårast men han får gissa ibland. Fram till Konsum går det bra. Därefter öppnar sig osäkerheten, han vill till exempel ogärna rita kartor över Långviken som han en gång passerat med buss, men det var ju mera ett passerande. Eftersom det är synd att ljuga eller tilldika känner han sig villrådig. Att tilldika är ju tillåtet endast om det sker i andligt syfte, för att förklara Jesu gärningar och underverk; Kristi tilldiktningar i form av liknelsens är tillåtna.

Men att rita kartor är ju något annat. Ingen granskar heller vad han gör. Ingen *ser över hans axel* för att bestraffa lättfärdighet, tecknen är abstrakta, kartorna skenbart likartade. Han finner möjligheten att bedriva denna hemliga omritning lockande. Han börjar därför nedteckna påhittade landskap. (Enquist 2008: 51, italics in the original)

He knows the village after all. It is just a question of documenting it. The western section, the godless part, is the hardest, but sometimes he has to guess. Up to the co-op there is no problem. After that uncertainty creeps in. For example, he is unwilling to draw a map of Långviken; he went by it once on the bus, but that was just passing. It is a sin to lie or make things up and he is in two minds. Fabrication is permitted only for a spiritual purpose, in order to explain Christ's deeds and miracles; making things up about Jesus in the form of parables is allowed.

But making maps is something else. No-one is inspecting what he does either. No-one is looking over his shoulder to criticise his carelessness; the symbols are abstract and the maps apparently similar. He finds it tempting to indulge in this clandestine redesigning. He therefore begins to record invented landscapes. (Enquist 2015: 43)

The passage from mapping as a form of knowledge to drawing as a creation, as «diktning», is completed. Although the English translators of the preceding passages chose to translate it as «making up» or «fabrication», the verb «dikta»<sup>84</sup> has the double meaning of «writing poetry» and «inventing, fabricating, making up»<sup>85</sup>. Map drawing is therefore seen as a sort of premonition of another form of «diktning» in which the boy will indulge once grown up, that is writing. For Enquist this creation is typically connected to guilt («Jag visste att det var synd att dikta»), due to the strictly religious

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<sup>84</sup> It is worth noting that it was also a favourite verb of Strindberg's, who used it exactly in the same ambiguous way as Enquist (cf. Robinson 1986: 39).

<sup>85</sup> *Nordstedts Engelska Ordbok* (<<https://ne.ord.se/ordbok/svenska/en-pro/sök/dikta>>, last accessed 14 June 2017).

environment in which he grew up, where every form of entertainment (dance, cinema, reading non-edifying books) was prohibited.

However, infancy is not the only period in which he dedicates to drawing maps and organising space, nor are *Kartritarna* and *Ett annat liv* the only books to document it. In *I lodjurets timma*, a play first performed in 1988 and later included in *Dramatik* in 1991, the protagonist is a boy locked in a psychiatric institution for having killed two people and set fire to his dead grandfather's house. According to the female priest who is called to talk to him after a suicide attempt, the boy «verkade på ett egendomligt sätt besatt av huset»<sup>86</sup> (Enquist 2017a: 152). In his delirious conversations with his red cat, the boy obsessively describes the house and its surroundings:

Farstubron låg på gaveln mot bönhuset, som låg en bit bort. Med där var ingången, och en balkong över, och på sommarn var det snören upp till balkongen, som det växte humle på, alldeles tät. [...] Ja, alltså, sovrummet låg på andra våningen. Och morfar hade smitt en järnstege upp till sovrumsfönstret, om det skulle börja brinna. Det var alltså i samma gavel som telefontrådarna gick in. Och framför gaveln hade han planterad ett lyckoträd, det var en rönn. Det var så här, att stod man uppe i sovrumsfönstret så var det först gaveln med brandstegen, och sen telefontrådarna, och sen nyponhäcken. Sen backen ner mot kallkällan med grodorna. Sen var det en lägda, och sen landsvägen. Sist var det skogen på andra sidan. (Enquist 2017a: 187-188)

The porchsteps faced the prayer meeting house which lay some distance away. But there was its front door with a balcony over it, and in the summertime, twine was stung up to the balcony so the thickly growing hops could climb up. [...] Yes, well, you see, the bedroom was on the second floor. Granddad had built an iron stairway up to the bedroom window, in case of a fire. It was on the same side as the telephone lines. In front of the gable he had planted a good-luck tree, a mountain ash. It was like this, if you stood in the bedroom window, first there was the fire escape, then the telephone wires, then the rosehip hedge. Then the hill leading down to the storage cellar with the frogs. Finally there was the forest on the other side. (Enquist 1990: 40-41)

Although there is no actual map-drawing involved, the space around the house is described in detail (the fire-escape ladder, the rowan tree, the wild-rose hedge, the cold spring are all elements that will come back in other texts) and carefully ordered («först... sen... sen... sist»). The purpose of these obsessive descriptions is clearly stated in the text, as it was for the «barnsliga sysselsättningar» of *Kartritarna*: to make

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<sup>86</sup> «He seemed so peculiarly obsessed with the house» (Enquist 1990: 4).

things «hänga ihop», another of Enquist's recurring expressions<sup>87</sup>. The boy in his cell feels that the only thing that can give him a solid centre is his grandfather's house; without that centre, everything loses its connection, and «då blir man ju vansinnig»<sup>88</sup> (Enquist 2017a: 191).

Such a view of the space of the house evokes Gaston Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'espace*, where he underlines the importance of the images of the house for the construction of identity. According to the French philosopher, «the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being» (Bachelard 1969: xxxi), constituting «a body of images that gives mankind proofs or illusions of stability» (1969: 17). In *Kartritarna* the little boy draws maps of his house surroundings precisely to obtain stability, but later on this turns out to be illusory. However, it is again the image of the house that he turns to in his darkest moments. In *Ett annat liv* Enquist relates that in the mid-eighties, in Paris, he is on the point of sinking, well launched towards «den oemotståndliga undergången»<sup>89</sup> (Enquist 2008: 418). Lost in an alcoholic mist, he cannot write any longer, until one morning he assigns himself a task: he must answer a question and write at least a couple of lines, then he can surrender to the mist for the day. And the first question he answers is: «Vilket var ditt första telefonnummer?»<sup>90</sup> (Enquist 2008: 421). From that first answer («Mitt första telefonnummer var Sjön 3, Hjoggböle»<sup>91</sup>, 2008: 421), an almost uncontrolled regression to the world of his childhood begins:

Det kändes som någonting att ty sig till, nu när alla välgörare, som Jesus eller pappa, inte hade tid nu i denna tid av största betryck. Telefonnummer var anrop "Sjön 3", på den tiden anropade man, det var på något sätt personligt, kontaktrap som ångestvrål i ensamhet mellan byarna, tänker han sig ibland. Eller lockrop genom isen. [...]

Han börjar nu allt intensivare upprepa sig, finge han det icke blev han tokig. Det är ett livräddande beslut att besvara frågan. (Enquist 2008: 428-429)

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<sup>87</sup> The whole of *Liknelseboken*, for instance, is permeated by the «envetna frågan *Hur hänger det ihop*» (Enquist 2013: 39, italics in the original; «the un-remitting question: *How does it all connect?*» Enquist 2016: 38).

<sup>88</sup> «It drives you crazy» (Enquist 1990: 44).

<sup>89</sup> «Inescapable destruction» (Enquist 2015: 314).

<sup>90</sup> «What was your first telephone number?» (Enquist 2015: 316).

<sup>91</sup> «My first telephone number was Sjön 3, Hjoggböle» (Enquist 2015: 316).

He felt it was something he could cling to in these dire straits, when both his benefactors, Jesus and Pappa, now did not have time. The telephone number to call was “Sjön 3”; in those days making a call was something personal, he sometimes thinks, it was reaching out like a cry of anguish in the emptiness between the villages. Or a siren call through the ice. [...]  
Now he tries even harder to remember, otherwise he will go mad. Answering the question is a life-saving decision. (Enquist 2015: 317)

He sits in his Paris apartment with his red cat, August, and keeps on thinking and writing about his childhood home, because he has nothing left to do. The repetitions become more and more obsessive, but they give him a kind of trust: «Han bestämmer sig för att *upprepa sig* för att inte bli tokut, alltså gnuggar han om det han är säker på, alltså huset»<sup>92</sup> (Enquist 2008: 424, italics in the original). It almost seems that Gaston Bachelard had Enquist in mind when, fifty years earlier, he wrote:

we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. (Bachelard 1969: 5-6)

The green house of his childhood becomes for Enquist the protective fixation that will help him out of «denna tid av största betryck». It is central both in *I lodjurets timma* and in the subsequent *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, where it is named no less than 62 times in 250 pages, always with the same positive connotation. The green house is the family home of one of the two boys who were swapped at birth and later returned to their legitimate families, and for the narrator, who is forced to leave it when the mistake is corrected, it is the image of a heavenly, pre-fall reality:

Jag ägde rätten att bo i det gröna huset på grund av ett misstag gjort på sjukhuset i Bureå i september 1934, den dag Johannes och jag föddes.  
Sedan rättades misstaget till. Då blev jag utlämnad genom ett korrekt rättsligt förfarande, och rätten att bo i det gröna huset framtogs mig. (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 37)

The right to live in the green house came to belong to me, because of a mistake made at the hospital in Bureå in September 1934, the day Johannes and I were born.  
Later the mistake was corrected. Then I was exchanged, according to proper legal procedure, and the right to live in the green house taken away from me. (Enquist 1992: 33)

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<sup>92</sup> «He decides to *go over* everything, to stop himself going mad. So he concentrates on the thing he is sure about, the house» (Enquist 2015: 318).

After the second exchange, the loss of the house (of the inner centre) is what harrows the narrator most: «Nu orkar jag inte tala om Johannes hus längre. Det gör så ont»<sup>93</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 46). But he cannot refrain from thinking about it and goes on describing it, exactly with the same characteristics as in *I lodjurets timma*: «Alltså, om man räknade från den kortsida där brandstegen hängde, så var det först rönnen, sedan nyponhäcken, sedan backen ner till kallkällan»<sup>94</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 50).

In *Ett annat liv* all the process of regression to the «land of Motionless Childhood» is documented, from its beginning («Han bestämmer sig för att *upprepa sig* för att inte bli tokut, alltså gnuggar han om det han är säker på, alltså huset»<sup>95</sup>, Enquist 2008: 430, italics in the original), to its temporary, apparent success («Framför huset fanns lägdorna med kallkällan och grodorna. Dessa fakta upprepar han tills han lugnat sig. Då är han barn igen och *ingen kommer åt*»<sup>96</sup>, 2008: 431, italics in the original), to its inevitable failure («Det fanns inget Sjön 3 i Paris. / Att han retarderade till Gröna Hus och Blodligar hjälpte honom foga. Han kunde inte dölja sig i ett grönt hus»<sup>97</sup>, 2008: 453). The strategy of map-drawing therefore proved ineffective as a means to find unity and meaning and was abandoned after *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, with the exception of the retrospective account Enquist gives of it in *Ett annat liv*.

#### 2.1.4 «Smärtpunkterna»

Another interesting starting point from which to analyse Enquist's production is the recurring term «smärtpunkt», variously rendered by his translators as «point of pain»,

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<sup>93</sup> «I cannot bear talking about Johannes's house any more now. It hurts so» (Enquist 1992: 42).

<sup>94</sup> «That is, counting from the gable-end where the fire-escape ladder was, there was first the rowan tree, then the wild-rose hedge, then the slope down the cold spring» (Enquist 1992: 46-47).

<sup>95</sup> «He decides to go over everything, to stop himself going mad. So he concentrates on the thing he is sure about, the house» (Enquist 2015: 318).

<sup>96</sup> «In front of the house were the fields with the cold-water spring and the frogs. He repeats these facts until he has calmed down. Then he is a child once more and *no-one can touch him*» (Enquist 2015: 319).

<sup>97</sup> «Sjön 3 does not exist in Paris. / That he regressed to the green house and the leeches did little to help. He could not hide in a green house.» (Enquist 2015: 335).

«sore point» or «raw spot». The expression makes his first appearance in *Sekonden*:

Jag har för övrigt i min låda i skrivbordet en bild som uttrycker ett slags sanning om mina motiv. Bilden är tagen inom en fotbollsplans straffområde, en forward har, hårt tacklad, råkat ur balans och landat med vristen i sned vinkel mot markytan varvid benpipan råkat gå av. Bilden är tagen i exakt det ögonblick när benet når marken och bryts: man ser, på ett ohyggligt klart sätt, benpipan gå rakt genom den skyddande strumpan.

För mig har detta blivit bilden av smärtpunkten. Den lilla, envetna, icke dödliga, vardagliga och obönhörliga smärtpunkten. Jag vet andra smärtpunkter: en finns i en situation när pappa och jag går hand i hand efter Sturegatan sommaren 1947, och jag håller hårt, hårt i hans hand. Men det är så mycket innan dess. Det finns så mycket i vägen. Smörbyttan, rälsen, ballongerna, islandssillen – å herregud det är så lång väg att gå.

Och så flotten och träkikaren. (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 19)

By the way, in my desk drawer I keep a photograph that expresses a sort of truth about my motives. The photo was taken in the penalty area of a football field; a forward, tackled hard, had lost his balance and fallen to the ground with his ankle at an odd angle, so that he broke a bone. The photo is taken exactly when the bone hits the ground and breaks: you can see the broken bone going through the protecting sock.

For me that has become the image of a point of pain. The little, obstinate, not lethal, ordinary and inexorable point of pain. I know other aching points: one lies in the occasion when dad and I walk hand in hand along Sturegatan in the summer of 1947, and I hold his hand tight, tight. But there are so many before that. There is so much in the way. The butter cask, the rail, the balloons, the Icelandic herring – oh God, there is such a long way to go.

And then the raft and the wooden telescope.

This «little, obstinate, not lethal, ordinary and inexorable» pain is defined with the help of an odd list, an anticipation of some of the disturbing experiences that are described later in the book: the moment when the narrator's father's cheating is discovered (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 394-395), the butter cask that becomes the symbol for his grandfather's defeat after a back impairment (48), the blocking rail that the same grandfather lifted from the railways in 1917, thus temporarily breaking a strike (53-54), the balloons the narrator's father released in vain protest over Stockholm Stadium in 1934 (168-173), the herring he ate during an inspection at Långmora detention camp in 1942, when he worked as a police driver (361-364), the drowning of the narrator's brother as a child (7-29; cf. 4.1). All these experiences, in different ways and degrees, have to do with betrayal and guilt, as highlighted also by Lindberg: «På det tematiska planet knyts smärtpunkterna till likgiltighet, svek, förräderi eller ännu grövre brott, som

lämnar efter sig en övermäktig känsla av skuld»<sup>98</sup> (Lindberg 1999: 5). However, here as elsewhere in Enquist's production, guilt is a pervasive yet elusive feeling: «Skulden och skuggan av ett brott»<sup>99</sup>, is the title of a section of Ekselius's work (1996: 219). In fact one never really knows whether the looming sense of fault really originates in a suppressed misdeed, or «skuld [finns] först och söker ett brott av tillräcklig dignitet»<sup>100</sup> (Ekselius 1996: 221).

After these first occurrences, the term «smärtpunkt» becomes a key word in Enquist's production, to the point that the Augustpriset jury used it in its motivation for awarding him the prize in 2008: «han borrar sig ned mot en smärtpunkt i jaget»<sup>101</sup>. In fact, the term appears in virtually all of his works following *Sekonden*, developing a real “smärtpunktspoetik”<sup>102</sup> (cf. Lindberg 1999: 5). It recurs in almost all of his works, from *Från regnormarnas liv*<sup>103</sup> to *Musikanternas uttåg*<sup>104</sup>, from *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*<sup>105</sup> to

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<sup>98</sup> «On the thematic plane aching points are related to indifference, deceit, treachery or even more serious crimes, which leave behind an overwhelming sense of guilt.»

<sup>99</sup> «Guilt and the shadow of a crime.»

<sup>100</sup> «Guilt comes first and then looks for a crime of sufficient dignity.»

<sup>101</sup> «He digs himself down towards a sore point in his I» (<<http://www.augustpriset.se/bidrag/ett-annat-liv>>, last accessed 14 June 2017).

<sup>102</sup> «Poetics of the aching point.»

<sup>103</sup> «Vet ni vad smärtpunkterna är, herr Andersen? Det är de där envist levande smärtpunkterna som gör ont, ont, ont, och som påminner oss att vi lever. Utan smärtpunkterna är vi ingenting, bara döda. Kapslas dem in, börjar vi dö» (Enquist: 289-290; «Do you know your sore spots, Mr Andersen? Those stubborn, living sore spots that hurt so much, so much, and that remind us of being alive. Without these sore spots we are nothing, simply dead. If they are encapsulated we begin to die», Enquist 2004: 115).

<sup>104</sup> «Fast någonstans inom honom gnagde som en gåtfullt irriterande smärtpunkt frågan *vad ville egentligen denne Elmblad?* Vad betydde han?» (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 51, italics in the original; «Yet somewhere inside the question gnawed at him like a mysterious irritating stab of pain – *what did this Elmblad really want?* What did he mean?», Enquist 1993: 39).

<sup>105</sup> «När jag tänkte på Johannes och Eeva-Lisa och mig var det länge som en skarp, brinnande smärtpunkt, sandkornet i ett öga, och det tog nästan ett helt liv innan jag förstod att det var den lilla smärtan som talade att jag levde» (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 15; «When I thought of Johannes and Eeva-Lisa and me, for a long time it was like a sharp, burning point of pain, a grain of sand in the eye, and it took me almost a whole lifetime to realize that it was that small pain that reassured me that I was alive», Enquist 1992: 11).

*Kartritarna*<sup>106</sup>, as well as in *Livläkarens besök*<sup>107</sup>, *Lewis resa*<sup>108</sup>, *Boken om Blanche och Marie*<sup>109</sup> and *Ett annat liv*.

Both Lindberg and Ekselius dwell on this key concept, giving similar definitions for it: «Smärtpunkterna är väl inkapslade, traumatiska upplevelser, som pockar på att bearbetas, kläs i ord, narrativiseras»<sup>110</sup> (Lindberg 1999: 5), writes Lindberg, while Ekselius defines them as «det bortträngda minnet av något övermäktigt smärtsamt som i ögonblick av bristande kontroll bryter sig igenom sitt skyddande hölje av glömska»<sup>111</sup> (Ekselius 1996: 63). Both critics underline the traumatic, painful nature of the experience and the need for repressing or encapsulating it. In their turn, these two characteristics inevitably lead to other typical features of Enquist's writing. The difficulty in facing these "sore points", the need to encapsulate them deep inside, ends up in a recourse to ellipsis, to the "black holes" highlighted by Bredsdorff; at the same time, their preservation in subconscious form leads to a recidivistic surfacing of the same issues, and therefore to repetition. A confirmation of this reading is given by Enquist himself:

denna gåtfulla kittel som kokade av ett långt livs erfarenheter, och där med jämna mellanrum bubblor steg upp till ytan innehållande hemligheter och ord och smärtpunkter; ja just ordet *smärtpunkter* var något som de börjat ty sig till, det kunde förklara något. (Enquist 2008: 413, italics in the original)

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<sup>106</sup> «Det var ju den fruktansvärda insikten att han bar ansvaret för de andras lidanden, och att han visat sig vara en fattig, syndig människa och inte ett monument. Och det var väl kanske också ett slags lidande. / Inte bara ett slags. Det kanske var en smärtpunkt svårare att uthärda än ett fysiskt lidande» (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 64; «It was the terrifying realisation that he was responsible for the others' suffering, and that he had appeared as a poor, sinful human being and not as a monument. And maybe that was also a kind of suffering. / Non only a kind of. Maybe it was a point of pain more difficult to endure than a physical pain»).

<sup>107</sup> «Han fann det orättvist. Och han visste att hon rört vid en smärtpunkt» (Enquist 1999: 279; «He found this unjust. And he knew that she was touching on a sore spot», Enquist 2001: 222).

<sup>108</sup> «Och senare när han skrev om det, i något olika versioner, han rörde försiktigt vid händelsen, som vid en smärtpunkt, och ibland nästan med uppriktighet» (Enquist 2014 [2001]: 224; «And later he wrote about it, in several different versions; he touched on the event cautiously, as if it were a painful topic, and occasionally almost with candor», Enquist 2005: 179).

<sup>109</sup> «Kärleken övervinner allt, som arbetshypotes, eller innersta smärtpunkt» (Enquist 2014 [2004]: 9; «Love conquers all, as a working hypothesis, or the innermost core of pain», Enquist 2006: 13).

<sup>110</sup> «Aching points are well encapsulated traumatic experiences, which cry out to be processed, set in words, narrativised.»

<sup>111</sup> «The repressed memory of something overwhelmingly painful, which in moments of lacking control breaks though its protective layer of forgetfulness.»



this enigmatic cauldron boiling with the exploits of a long life, and periodically bubbles would rise to the surface containing secrets and words and sore points; that phrase, *sore points*, was something to bear in mind, it might explain something. (Enquist 2015: 310)

In the «enigmatic cauldron» of a man's life, therefore, it is thanks to the sore points that both author and readers can obtain something intelligible, something written «nästan med uppriktighet», although «i något olika versioner»<sup>112</sup> (Enquist 2014 [2001]: 224): a most suitable definition for Enquist autobiographical production.

## 2.2 The choice of texts

The presence of autobiographical elements is so pervasive in Enquist's oeuvre, that virtually each of his thirteen novels, one autobiography, four collections of essays and/or short stories, nine dramas and four scripts<sup>113</sup> could legitimately be taken into account for this study. However, for reasons of space and cohesion I left out of this survey all dramas and scripts, except *I lodjurets timma*, which has too many contact points with one of the analysed texts, *Nedstörtad ängel*, to be overlooked. As for the narrative works, I have chosen to concentrate on those texts where the autobiographical element is most evident and expressed through a certain set or «constellation» (cf. 2.1.1) of episodes and images. Given the working hypothesis that there is a development in the presence and relevance of these autobiographical elements, albeit with pauses and even temporary steps back, I will analyse the chosen texts following a chronological order and grouping them according to their different stage in autobiographicality.

In the first group I will start by examining briefly Enquist's two "apprenticeship" novels, *Kristallögat* (1961) and *Färdvägen* (1963), where the focus on the theme of identity foreshadows a coming interest for self-representation and autobiography. On

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<sup>112</sup> «Almost with candor», «in several different versions» (Enquist 2005: 179).

<sup>113</sup> Cf. <<http://poenquist.se>>, last accessed 14 June 2017. Although not explicitly defined as an official homepage, a link to this site appears on Enquist's publisher's homepage, Norstedts (<<http://www.norstedts.se/forfattare/115769-per-olov-enquist>>, last accessed 14 June 2017.). I excluded from this count works written together with other authors.

the other hand I will leave out of my survey his third work, *Magnetisörens femte vinter* (1964), because, although its theme is deeply rooted in the author's childhood<sup>114</sup>, its attention is on different threads of his subsequent production, such as the use of documents and the construction of an historical framework, rather than on specific autobiographical issues. I will then take into consideration *Hess* (1966) and *Legionärerna* (1968): as for the former, it is Enquist himself who reveals a connection with his own experience (cf. 3.2), while in the latter we have a narrator who has several characteristics and experiences in common with its author (cf. 3.3).

The second group opens with *Sekonden* (1971/1972)<sup>115</sup>, where the autobiographical elements, albeit attributed to another character, start to increase in number and relevance (cf. 4.1). I will instead leave out the short story collection *Berättelser från de inställda upprorens tid* (1974), since, although clearly inspired by the author's personal experiences, the episodes take place in California, geographically and thematically distant from the knot of «sore points» that recur in most of his other works. This group then includes the novels *Musikanternas uttåg* (1978), set in Enquist's birthplace in the north of Sweden, and *Nedstörtad ängel* (1985), based on the same experiences as the drama *I lodjurets timma* (1988)<sup>116</sup>, also analysed here.

The third and final group takes into account *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* (1991), together with the essay collection *Kartritarna* (1992). I will then treat very marginally and jointly the subsequent novels *Livläkarens besök* (1999), *Lewis resa* (2001) and *Boken om Blanche och Marie* (2004), where the autobiographical element, albeit not completely absent, is overshadowed by a more historical perspective. Finally, the outright autobiographical *Ett annat liv* (2008) and more ambiguous *Liknelseboken* (2013) represent the ideal conclusion of this excursus.

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<sup>114</sup> «Jag vet var någonstans *Magnetisören* föddes: långt tillbaka i den miljö där jag växte upp, mellan bönhus och andaktsstunder, bland människor som klängde sig intill tron som om de varit blomrankor», declares the author in *Tryckpunkter* (Enquist 1967: 59; «I know where *The Magnetist* was born from: way back in the environment where I grew up, among chapels and hours of devotion, surrounded by people who clung themselves to faith as if they were creepers»).

<sup>115</sup> The 1972 edition, used for all later reissues, merges into the text a formerly independent short story, originally written in 1969 for the school anthology *Hej, vi skriver till dig. Sagor för alla som vill läsa och lyssna* and later republished in Enquist 1978.

<sup>116</sup> The play has later been included in Enquist 2014a [1991] and Enquist 2017a.

For the sake of convenience, I will refer to the new editions of Enquist's complete works that have been recently published by Norstedts, with the exception of *Kristallögat* and *Färdvägen*, which are not included in that edition. For quotations from *I lodjurets timma* I have used the recently published *Dramatik I. Kammarspelen*, which together with *Dramatik II. De politiska* collects all the plays written by Enquist.

### **2.3 *Ett annat liv*: Fish or fowl?**

Some consideration must be given here to *Ett annat liv*, which appears in this study in the somewhat equivocal double capacity of primary text and source of information about other texts.

The question whether an autobiography can be used as a source of historical information about its author is intrinsic to the nature of the genre itself, suspended between fiction and fact. Paradoxically enough, this dilemma would not have been perceived as such by readers of the past, for whom memoirs and autobiography were tantamount to private history, as summarised by Paul John Eakin in the opening lines of his *Fictions in Autobiography*: «Most readers naturally assume that alla autobiographies are based on the veritable facts of a life history» (Eakin 1985: 3). It is with modern criticism that autobiography comes to be perceived as an aesthetic form and a literary genre, and consequently loses part of its documentary value: «autobiography is more universal than it is local, more timeless than historic, and more poetic in its significance than merely personal», states for instance James Olney (1972: viii). A second blow to autobiography's value as a source of information came from the deconstructivists, with their efforts to deny its referential value: «Do I not know that, in the field of the subject, there is no referent?», asks for instance Barthes (1977: 56). However, for the majority of readers, but also for many critics, «the presumption of truth-value is experientially essential; it is what makes autobiography matter to autobiographers and their readers» (Eakin 1992: 30). According to such a reading – echoing the ideas expressed in Wilhelm Dilthey's pioneering essay *Das Erleben und die Selbstbiographie*, which

maintain that autobiography is at the basis of historical understanding: «The autobiography can, ultimately, widen out into a historical portrait; this is limited, but also made meaningful by being based on experience, through which the self and its relation to the world are comprehended» (Dilthey 1976: 218) – using an autobiography as a source of information should therefore not be judged as absurd or inappropriate.

Besides, in Enquist's case we must keep in mind what Olney states about men of letters who write an autobiography (cf. 1.1.2). Olney considers autobiography «like a magnifying lens, focusing and intensifying the same peculiar creative vitality that informs the volume of his collective works» (Olney 1972: 3-4), a precious instrument to evaluate his or her writing thanks to the

the tendency [...] to produce autobiography in various guises and disguises in every work and then – this being the other side of the coin – to seek a unique form in a work properly called “an autobiography” (or any other name pointing to the same thing) that may reflect and express the life and the vision of this individual writer alone. (Olney 1980: 236)

The working hypothesis of this study is precisely that Enquist should have produced «autobiography in various guises and disguises in every work», later followed by *Ett annat liv*, which in fact contains interesting information about the composition of many earlier works<sup>117</sup>.

It is true, though, that the general question of the referentiality of autobiography is particularly complex in the special case of *Ett annat liv*, since there is no unanimous consensus about it being a proper autobiography or an autobiographical novel, with the differences in trustworthiness this implies. The presentation by the publisher and the reception in the press created a blurred picture that the author himself did not help to dispel, as I will analyse more in depth in 5.4. Nevertheless, such an ambiguity can be seen partly as a marketing strategy. According to Lenemark, for instance, the ambiguous reception of Stig Larsson's *Natta de mina* as «*både fakta och fiktion, både konstruktion och verklighet*»<sup>118</sup> (Lenemark 2009: 167, italics in the original) made the book «mer

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<sup>117</sup> *Kristallögat* (Enquist 2008: 161-163); *Magnetisörens femte vinter* (178); *Hess* (178); *Legionärerna* (201-241); *Sekonden* (243-280); *Musikanternas uttåg* (200-201, 355-365); *Nedstörtad ängel* (388, 445); *I lodjurets timma* (417-420); *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* (6, 489, 525-530).

<sup>118</sup> «Both fact and fiction, both construction and reality.»

konstnärligt och estetiskt intressant»<sup>119</sup> (Lenemark 2009: 167). However, the differences in the way the autobiographical materials are used and organised in, say, *Sekonden* or *I lodjurets timma* – where the images and episodes are hidden in the text, used as a mosaic tile to represent a different story – and in *Ett annat liv*, where they are brought back to the logical and chronological place they belong to, allow us to consider the latter as belonging to the wide and various family of autobiographical writings.

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<sup>119</sup> «More interesting from an artistic and aesthetic point of view.»

## Chapter 3: Exercises in self-representation

The comprehensive concept of self-representation, opposing the antithetic views that draw tight barriers between fiction and autobiography and open to exploring borderline territories (cf. 1.1.3), is certainly the most suitable instrument to analyse texts that, albeit not intentionally autobiographical, include nonetheless a more or less partial, more or less disguised representation of their author.

It is therefore with the concept of self-representation in mind that we will analyse the first novels written by Per Olov Enquist in the early sixties – two novels of formation (*Kristallögat* and *Färdvägen*), a modernistic historical novel (*Hess*) and a documentary novel (*Legionärerna*). Although they make no claims to autobiographicality, at a closer look we can nevertheless recognise a deep interest for identity and its formation as well as some first attempts at self-representation, albeit in a partial and/or disguised form.

### 3.1 *Kristallögat* and *Färdvägen*: In search of an identity

The question of personal identity is central in Enquist's first two novels, *Kristallögat* (1961) and *Färdvägen* (1963). Both are a sort of *Bildungsroman* with protagonists who try to find themselves by leaving their isolation and reaching self-acceptance and involvement with the world<sup>120</sup>. However, at this stage of his production the question remains mostly on an abstract and universal level, with little attempt at a downright self-representation.

In *Kristallögat* the character in search of an identity is a young girl called Jenni. At a student party, she meets Jens and tells him about her feelings of living her life in a dark cave, separated by other human beings. The two become lovers, but after a while they part and Jenni goes skiing in the mountains, where she remembers her conversations with Jens. The book closes with another party in the ski lodge's ballroom,

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<sup>120</sup> For this assumption, see Shideler 1984: 17-24, Bredsdorff 1991: 45-64, and Ekselius 1996: 182-184.

where Jenny finds out she is now ready to interact with other people. In short, by recounting Jens episodes from her childhood, among which some regarding a mysterious guilt, Jenni manages to feel better. This is a clear metaphor of the individual reflecting upon itself, as confirmed by the fact that the narrator and the listener have similar names: Jenni/Jens (cf. Bredsdorff 1991: 47). According to Bredsdorff, the process described in the novel (reliving one's own history in order to change one's present) resembles psychoanalysis, but with the difference that here «*det förflutna är en produkt av nuet snarare än tvärtom*»<sup>121</sup> (Bredsdorff 1991: 50, italics in the original). Or better still, to say it with Enquist's own words, past and present create and modify each other: «Du berättar din historia, och den förändras och du förändras med den. Sanningen är oviktig; det enda som är viktigt är du själv»<sup>122</sup> (Enquist 1961: 46).

The process of reconstructing one's past and personality is also epitomised by another image, right at the beginning of the book: while retreating from the noise of the party to a quieter room, Jenni breaks a vase with some dancing women on it, a symbol for «liv utan eftertanke»<sup>123</sup> (Enquist 1961: 8). After breaking it, the girl picks up the fragments, trying to find «nyckelbiten som kunde förena skärvorna till en helhet igen»<sup>124</sup> (1961: 21). As we have mentioned earlier in this work (cf. 2.1.2), the image of the shattered fragments, of the puzzle to be recomposed, will become central in several of Enquist's later work, always with the idea a unity (one's unity?) to be recovered. Here, with the naive optimism of the beginner, Enquist lets his young protagonist find a sort of personal unity, a «new face in her mirror» (Shideler 1991: 19), while in more mature works the task of finding one's identity will turn out to be much more complex.

In fact, the most interesting contribution of this debut work is what it anticipates about its author's later production. Although immature and not completely satisfying – «en ganska söt och välskriven men i grunden ointressant roman»<sup>125</sup> (Enquist 2008: 172)

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<sup>121</sup> «*The past is a product of the present instead of the other way round.*»

<sup>122</sup> «You tell your story, and it changes and you change with it. The truth is unimportant; the only important thing is yourself.»

<sup>123</sup> «Life without reflection.»

<sup>124</sup> «The key fragment that could reunite all the pieces into a whole.»

<sup>125</sup> «A quite sweet, well written, but fundamentally uninteresting novel» (Enquist 2015: 132).

is the definition Enquist himself gives of it in *Ett annat liv* – it offers a first example of themes and issues that will characterise many of Enquist's later works, among which, and maybe the most significant, the idea of reaching the truth by lying, as the author himself declares in his *Sidokommentar* on his writing:

en slag desperat idé om att man kunde förändra sitt liv genom att beskriva det lögnaktigt, att ett minne inte var ett historiskt faktum utan att man hade rätt att ljuga om det: att ha rätt att skapa sig en ny historia, göra en ny beskrivning av det som hänt. (Enquist 1967: 57)

a sort of desperate idea that one could change one's life by describing it untruthfully, that a memory was not a historic fact but that one had the right to lie about it: the right to create a new history for oneself, to describe what has happened in a new way.

We find here some hint of the “construction” and fictionalisation that are at the basis of the autobiographer's task, according to the critics who insist on the “creative” nature of autobiography. Although at this stage he had not yet begun to tell his own story, Enquist was already pondering over the ontological dimension of memory and its narration, dreaming about the right to «create a new history for oneself» by the very process of telling it.

Also Enquist's second novel, *Färdvägen*, has a protagonist in search of a self, a young Swede who undertakes a one-year trip through Europe in order to break free from his apathy and isolation and find a way to relate to reality and his fellow human being. Along the way he meets first a Danish cook – a man of action and not of reflection, who will become a sort of Sancho Panza to the Quixotic protagonist – and later a nurse called Ilene, a Beatrice-like figure who will help the protagonist on the route to self-discovery. After leading for some time a life of petty crime in the retinue of the cook, the young man follows Ilene to her house in the country, where he realises that he can leave behind his obsession for the past and start living in the present. However, when the three set forth again on another journey, the car crashes killing Ilene and the cook, thus leaving the narrator alone.

This ending leaves the reader at a loss, since throughout the novel the narrator keeps on remembering or retelling a car accident in his past, although with significant variations. In the first version, he is sitting at the back of the car and is therefore



guiltless of the death of the girl sitting beside his driving friend, while later he confesses that he was himself at the wheel and let his friend take the blame because he had no driving license. At the end, however, the reader understands that the narrator wrote the book *after* the accident with Ilene and the cook, thus mixing up past and present in a circular structure that again reminds of *Kristallögat*: while the first book opened and closed with a party, here the recurring episode is the car accident.

Also the idea that by telling his story the narrator could manage to modify his present is a common feature to the two books. While in *Kristallögat* it is Jenny's conversations with Jens that bring about the change, in *Färdvägen* the protagonist dreams of becoming a writer and keeps a notebook where he tries to catalogue and define everything. After the car accident that redetermines the novel's temporal structure, the protagonist's notebook ends up overlapping with the novel itself, which becomes a meta-novel about a novelist writing a novel and at the same time about a «narrator-novelist seeking meaning and order» (Shideler 1984: 21). This interweaving of (fictional) reality and writing is confirmed by the final scene, where the narrator compares himself to Don Quixote<sup>126</sup>, famous exactly for mixing up reality and illusion.

As with *Kristallögat*, one of the most interesting aspects of *Färdvägen*, in the light of this research, is the anticipation of themes and models that will characterise many of Enquist's later works: not only the «confrontation between the truth of fiction and the truth of reality» (Shideler 1991: 24), but of the creative influence of fiction onto reality. According to Enquist, the original idea with the novel was to write a sort of picaresque novel, «en roman om en människa som söker sin identitet»<sup>127</sup> (Enquist 1967: 57). But while he was writing it, he changed his mind, and the book became «en diskussion av möjliga livsalternativ [...]. Det skulle bli en roman om hans [berättarens] gamla jag, och hans möjliga jag»<sup>128</sup> (Enquist 1967: 57), a «ständiga självavslöjande som blir till en allt

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<sup>126</sup> «Irene, riddarens jungfru. Kocken, hans vapendragare och lärare. Och till sist resenären, riddaren» (Enquist 1963: 178-179; «Irene, the knight's maid. The cook, his squire and teacher. And finally the traveller, the knight»).

<sup>127</sup> «A novel about a person who is in search for his identity.»

<sup>128</sup> «A discussion of possible life alternatives [...]. It would become a novel about his [the narrator's] old selves, and his possible selves.»

större självpotentiering i allt större abstraktion»<sup>129</sup>, to use Bredsdorff's appropriate definition (Bredsdorff 1991: 52). In other words, the protagonist must tell his story and see himself reflected in the others' eyes (break out of the cave) in order to be able to create his own self through language, as Enquist explicitly says through Ilene's mouth: «Du måste se dig själv genom en annan. Du måste bli en annan, och sedan berätta historien om igen. Du måste bli en spegelbild av den du vill vara. Du måste hitta någon som är du»<sup>130</sup> (Enquist 1963: 132). And «to tell the story again» (and again) is exactly what Enquist will do in his life-long production, as this study aims at demonstrating.

### 3.2 *Hess*: A shadow of himself

While in the first two novels the theme of personal identity was approached almost exclusively from a fictional point of view, through the young protagonists' efforts to find themselves, with *Hess* (1966) and *Legionärerna* (1968) Enquist started to experiment with some partial form of self-representation.

Although partly blurred by the book's extremely complex structure, the question of self-representation in *Hess* is posed by Enquist himself, who, in a series of conversations with Ross Shideler in October 1979, called the novel a «realistic description of the consciousness of a European intellectual» (Shideler 1984: 41-42). The same concept was already stated in a 1966 interview with Jan Stolpe:

berättelserna skulle bli alltmer som drömmar, hallucinationer, med delar av min egen verklighet alltmer inblandade i drömmen: en serie drömmar om Hess som alltmer förvandlades att bli *en serie drömmar om min egen situation*. Inte en roman om Hess, men en roman om min tid. (Stolpe 1966: 760, italics mine)

the stories should become more and more like dreams, hallucinations, with parts of my own reality mixed more and more in the dream: a series of dreams about Hess that will be gradually transformed into *a series of dreams about my own situation*. Not a novel about Hess, but a novel about my own time.

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<sup>129</sup> «Continuous self-exposure that turns into a stronger and stronger self-potentialization in more and more abstract terms.»

<sup>130</sup> «You must see yourself through someone else. You must be someone else and then tell the story again. You must be a reflection of the one you want to be. You must find someone who is you.»

This quotation also gives a hint of the novel's construction, which is particularly convoluted, even for Enquist's standards, to the point that some critics defined it «a literary mobile» (Shideler 1984: 43; Ingvarsson 1997: 81; Agrell 1997: 46, 66). Later, when looking back at his early production in *Ett annat liv*, Enquist himself will define *Hess* «en monstruös roman, han<sup>131</sup> tycks befinna sig på en rangerbangård med otaliga spår»<sup>132</sup> (Enquist 2008: 179).

The text really does not belie these definitions; it is divided into a series of numbered fragments of very uneven length, with three main narrators or focal characters<sup>133</sup>: the title person Rudolf Hess, his aide Pintsch and a “researcher” (in the original *forskare*), who is writing a PhD thesis on Hess and his (fictive) manuscripts. However, other voices and standpoints are also included, adding to the fragmentation of the narrative, such as Daniel Defoe, his character Robinson Crusoe, air ace Manfred von Richthofen alias the Red Baron, French author Joris-Karl Huysmans and several others.

Since in the same years in which he wrote *Hess* Enquist was also working at his postgraduate thesis, it could be tempting to assume that, among the different voices in the novel, the most similar to his own would be the researcher's. However, in this novel one never knows for sure who is speaking; for instance, the researcher can talk in first person about experiences as a fighter pilot in the First World War or as Hitler's deputy in the Second, while Hess's memories can refer back to a childhood in a rural community in Västerbotten, as, for instance, in the episode where he attends the chapel service sitting on a wood-bench<sup>134</sup>, a scene that returns also in *Musikanternas uttåg*<sup>135</sup>.

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<sup>131</sup> “Han” is one of the indirect ways in which the autobiographical protagonist of *Ett annat liv* is called (cf. 5.4).

<sup>132</sup> «A monstrous novel; he seems to be in a railway siding with countless tracks» (Enquist 2015: 137).

<sup>133</sup> I introduce the distinction between narrator and focal characters because the fragments oscillate between the first person narrative and a third-person narrative with internal focalisation (cf. Genette 1980: 189).

<sup>134</sup> «Hur jag alltid satt längst bak i salen, uppklättrad på vedbänken och lutad mot spiselmuren, hur mötena inleddes och hur de avslutades» (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 81; «How I always sat at the back of the room, perched on the wood-bench and leaning on the chimney wall, how the prayer meetings started and how they ended»).

<sup>135</sup> «Han skulle så snabbt som möjligt ockupera vedbänken längst bak i bönhuset, den som stod bredvid kaminen, ta Eva-Liisa med sig och trycka upp henne i hörnet» (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 87; «He was to occupy the wood-bench at the back of the prayer-house as quickly as possible, the bench by the stove, taking Eva-Liisa with him and pressing her up into the corner», Enquist 1993: 67).

To analyse the attempt at self-representation in *Hess*, therefore, one should not restrict the examination to the researcher's words. On the contrary, the most autobiographical fragments are usually hidden in the pages ascribed to other characters, while the researcher, despite his parodically academic language, seems to serve a more programmatic purpose, defining the relationship between the author and his writing:

Den för mig viktiga och självfallna grundprincipen är, och måste vara, att forskaren, uttolkaren, texttydaren, i detta fall alltså jag själv, att denne kompilator är en faktor av utomordentlig vikt, att hans position måste bestämmas med stor noggrannhet: ej kan man här vara nog utförlig och detaljerad. Självfallet tjänar detta i längden endast ett syfte: att göra de behandlade dokumenten den största möjliga rättvisa, genom att bestämma deras läge i förhållande till så många fasta punkter i omgivningen som möjligt. [...] Forskarens bakgrund, uppväxt, sociala förhållanden, glimtar av hans vardag, diskussioner av hans värderingar – allt måste föras till bilden, för att få denna slutligt avrundad och klar: som en pärla, frestas jag säga. (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 7)

For me the important and self-evident basic principle is, and must be, that the researcher, interpreter, explicator, in this case myself, that this compiler is a factor of extraordinary importance, that his position must be defined with extreme caution: one cannot be too careful and detailed here. Obviously, in the long run this serves only one purpose: to do the researched documents the greatest possible justice by defining their position in relation to as many solid points in the environment as possible. [...] The researcher's background, childhood, social status, glimpses of his everyday life, discussion of his values – everything must be included in the portrait in order to make it fully rounded and clear: like a pearl, I am tempted to say. (Transl. Shideler 1984: 46)

The quoted passage alludes to some specific characteristics of the Swedish documentary novel that Enquist himself was to adopt in his following works, that is the inclusion of “real” documents in the text, together with the idea that «factual events are related by a narrator who appears himself in the work and comments on its coming into being and its relationship to reality in this capacity» (Yrliid 1997: 35). However, the allusion to «behandlade dokumenten» and «fasta punkter i omgivningen» might seem ironical in a novel where everything is continually moving from one temporal and spatial plan to another. This irony could imply a distancing from documentarism even before he fully embraces it with *Legionärerna*, as another fragment seems to confirm: «Självfallet är vi här tvingade att acceptera en låg verifikationspunkt eftersom biblioteket i Augsburg, och med det en omfattande dokumentsamling, förstördes vid fredsutbrottet»<sup>136</sup> (Enquist

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<sup>136</sup> «Here of course we are forced to accept a low verification threshold, since Augsburg library was destroyed at the outbreak of the peace, and with it an extensive documentation.»

2010 [1966]: 14). Enquist's writing method, here as well as in his later masterpieces, would rather consist in taking inspiration from documents to create (*dikta* is the word he will use in his autobiography to describe it, cf. 2.1.3) possible lives:

I den stora roman som Hess fullbordade under sin fängelsetid, undersökningen av von R. och hans liv, gräver han i en serie rekonstruktioner fram det liv som kunde vara von R.s, – ett liv som självfallet ej levats, men som i ansatser, med ständiga återvändsgränder och katastrofala misslyckanden, ändå leder fram till ett möjligt liv, ett liv som Hess i sin roman betecknar som von R.s liv. (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 109-110)

In the great novel that Hess completed during his imprisonment, the study of von R. and his life, he brings to light in a series of reconstructions the life that could have been von R.'s – a life that of course has not been lived, but that in rushes, with continuous dead ends and catastrophic failures, leads anyway to a possible life, a life that Hess in his novel designates as von R.'s life.

It is exactly what Enquist will do with Friedrich Struensee in *Livläkarens besök*, August Strindberg in *Tribadernas natt* and Marie Curie in *Boken om Blanche och Marie*, a concept of literature and writing that he will stick to throughout his career.

Among the various reconstructions of somebody else's life, however, fragments of Enquist himself and his experience also appear: as Hess, when writing his fictitious novels, cannot but include «den beskrivning av sig själv han ändå tvingades göra: sig själv som delar av andra, delar av berättelser»<sup>137</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 283), so Enquist leaves a trace of himself also in his most intricate novel. Looking back at it in *Ett annat liv*, he says that «I ett gigantiskt språkspel tycks skuggan av honom själv för första gången urskiljbar. / Han känner sig då generad, som om han råkat försäga sig»<sup>138</sup> (Enquist 2008: 179). This view is corroborated by the already reported statement from Enquist's interview to Stolpe, where he claimed that *Hess* was «a series of dreams about my own situation» (Stolpe 1966: 760). There are, for instance, hints to the snowy winters of northern Sweden, long descriptions of the religious communities typical of Västerbotten (although ascribed to Hess's childhood), and a series of specific episodes that later were recognised as taken from his own experience.

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<sup>137</sup> «The description of himself he, after all, was forced to give: himself as parts of others, parts of narrations.»

<sup>138</sup> «In a gigantic language game his own shadow is discernible for the first time. / He feels embarrassed, as if he has given himself away» (Enquist 2015: 137).

In *Hess* we also find the first appearance of a typical recurring episode, «cykelfärden till Herrens Bord» (Enquist 2008: 264), that will be included in *Sekonden* (2010: 128-134) and will find its definitive description and explanation in *Ett annat liv* (2008: 126-128). In *Hess* the episode appears twice, the first time as a whole dedicated fragment of unclear attribution:

Cykelfärden på skärtorsdagen, i regn. Lukten: av genomvåta kläder, torr katedralluft, kall förtvivlan. Ljusen: tända där framme, dämpade, krucifixets matta sken. Musiken: o Jesu Krist som till oss såg. Skammen, som till sist ej går inkläda. (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 101)

The cycle ride on Maundy Thursday, under the rain. The smell: of wet clothes, dry cathedral air, cold desperation. The candles: lighted there in the front, dull, the weak glitter of the crucifix. The music: Oh Jesus Christ who looked at us. The shame, that in the end cannot be disguised.

The episode is only sketched, almost impressionistically, by listing the protagonist's feelings: the author seems afraid of revealing too much, of «giving himself away». However, the effect on the reader is very strong: it is immediately obvious that this cycle ride has a significance that goes beyond its literal meaning. Two key words emerge, shame and disguise (cf. also 4.2), for the time being only two unexpected and indecipherable foreign bodies that will find an explanation later on.

The second time the episode is dealt with in more detail and seems to be ascribed to Hess, or at least it is included in a fragment where the researcher discusses Hess's uneasiness about ideas of metaphysical character:

Hur väl minns han dock inte denna kväll, denna långa cykeltur till Herrens bord, medan regnet föll (detta ständiga regn som ständigt återkommer i alla hans beskrivningar) och hur han cyklade med huvudet häftigt böjt framåt, piskande cykeln uppför berget som om han varit utsänd på en expedition och varit den siste överlevande och nu till övriga vedervärdigheter även tvingats uthärda regnet. Vattnet letade sig innanför kragen på hans gabardinrock som han i sin enfald trott skulle vara tillräcklig en kväll som denna: så var det, och hur han grät och visste att där framme, vid Herrens bord och inför hans ögon, också andra ögon skulle betrakta honom, att ett leende skulle spridas som nästa dag eller nästa vecka skulle explodera i ett skratt och ytterligare en cirkel skulle sluta sig. (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 288-289)

How well doesn't he remember that night, that long cycle ride to the Lord's Table, under the falling rain (that unceasing rain that unceasingly returns in all his descriptions) and how he tramped on with his head down, whipping the bike up the hill as if he were sent on an expedition and were the last survivor and now, on top of all other horrors, he also had to endure the rain. The water found its way down the collar of the gabardine coat that he had candidly thought would suffice in a

night like that: that's how it was, and he cried and knew that once there, at the Lord's Table and before His eyes, also other eyes would stare at him, and a smile would spread that the day after, or week after, would explode in a laugh, thus closing yet another circle.

We find again the rain, the idea of suffering or desperation («vedervärdigheter», «uthärda», «han grät»), the feeling of shame («andra ögon skulle betrakta honom»), but we do not learn much more about the reason why this scene is worth telling (and re-telling).

The episode withholds most of its mystique also in *Sekonden*. Here the cycle ride is not a solo feat, since the protagonist performs it together with his father, and on the latter's suggestion. The rain is still there, thicker than ever («ett grått, drivande töcken»<sup>139</sup>, Enquist 2014 [1971]: 128) but the overall impression is completely different. Other details are added; the religious element, in *Hess* only evoked by the reference to Maundy Thursday, the candles, the crucifix and the Lord's Table, here is clearly defined by a statement from the protagonist, abruptly inserted into a passage about cycling:

Tron var då för mig aldrig något som jag fann lust eller glädje i; de talade ofta från predikstolarna om glädjen i Gud, men jag hade snarare upplevt tron som en plåga, en envig plåga där bara graden av smärta, förnedring och skam varierade på grund av situationen. (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 129)

Faith has never been something in which I found pleasure or joy; from the pulpit they often talked about the joy in God, but I had rather experienced faith as a torment, an obstinate torment where only the degree of pain, humiliation and shame varied depending on the circumstances.

The inexplicable shame of the *Hess* fragments finds here a first explanation: it is the shame nourished by religion, or at least by a certain kind of rigid and stern attitude towards religion.

However, to counterbalance religion's effect on the protagonist there is sport:

Samtidigt hade jag ju sett på pappa hur han upplevt idrotten; hur han upplevt släggkastning och idrott så oerhört lustfyllt, fyllt av sensuella möjligheter och oväntade lustmoment. Det var rörelsens sensualism han funnit, befriad från skuld och ångest. (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 129)

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<sup>139</sup> «A grey, drifting mist.»

At the same time I had seen how dad experienced sport; the incredible pleasure with which he experienced hammer throw and sport, full of sensual possibilities and unexpected moments of pleasure. He had discovered the sensuality of movement, freed from guilt and anguish.

So strong is the power of sport that, when the protagonist goes into the church after having improved his personal record on the distance to the church, he does not feel the usual feelings of «pain, humiliation and shame»:

Obehaget molade sakta inom mig, men det var inte så farligt som jag trott. Jag tänkte på pappa som stått där ute som en svart liten bjässe i regnet och sett efter mig. Han fanns där och han kanske tänkte på mig: det var fint. (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 132)

An uneasiness chafed faintly inside me, but it wasn't so bad as I had expected. I thought of dad standing like a small black bear in the rain, looking at me. He was there and maybe was thinking about me: it was nice.

As already anticipated, the final effect of the episode is therefore completely different from the *Hess* versions, thanks to sport and the presence of the father, the big missing in the inner world of Enquist, who lost his real father when he was only six months old.

But to gauge the full significance of the cycle ride episode we have to wait for *Ett annat liv*, where it appears for the third time, in an extended version. Here the protagonist is alone again; here there are the rain, the church, the record; but here we have a personal explanation for the shame felt by the protagonist: it is the first time he has refused to accompany his pious mother to church – on Maundy Thursday, what is worse – making her cry in desperation. So after a while he changes his mind and follows her on his bike. But for a boy of his age,

[v]arje cykelfärd [är] en Tour de France. Också på väg till nattvarden. Ett tempolopp till oblat och vin.  
Också denna gång klockar han tempot.  
Han finner det naturligt att tänka på sin handling som en idrottsprestation. Vad är alternativet? Jesu lidande på korset, som för övrigt inte har börjat ännu eftersom det just nu drar ihop sig till den sista nattvarden. Först i morgon Jesu pina. (Enquist 2008: 127)

[e]ach bike ride [is] a Tour de France. Even on the way to communion. A time trial to the sacramental wafer and wine.  
He checks his pace this time as well.  
It is natural for him to think of his action as a sporting performance. What is the alternative? The suffering of Jesus on the cross, which anyway has not started yet



because right now it is time for the Last Supper. The torment of Christ will not start until tomorrow. (Enquist 2015: 98)

The contrast between sport and religion is still there, undoubtedly, but with a further dimension, more private, connected to his relationship with his mother – something that could better explain the sense of shame that permeated the previous versions of the episode:

Så blir det ofta dessa år. Han kan aldrig känna värmen i trons gemenskap; när han söker sig in i idrottens nästan förbjudna värld är det att komma in från kylan. Nu har han ändå gett efter, och företagit cykelfärden till Herrens bord, något som för henne skall framstå som en bekännelseakt. Det är ett steg tillbaka. Han vet inte varför han företagit cykelfärden. Kanske är det för hennes oerhörda ensamhets skull, för att hitta ett slags gemenskap i hennes ensamhet. Kanske vill han ge henne inte Kristi kärlek, utan bara sin egen mycket lilla men för henne inte helt oviktiga barmhärtighet. Hur länge till?

Kanske vet de båda att allt i grunden är förlorat, och att detta är sista gången. (Enquist 2008: 128)

During this period of his life it is often like this. He can never feel warmth in the community of faith; when he enters the almost forbidden world of sport, it is like coming in from the cold. And yet he has given in now and ridden his bike to the Lord's Table, and for her this will appear to be an acknowledgement. It is a step backwards. He does not know why he made the cycle ride. It might be for the sake of her tremendous loneliness, a feeling of solidarity in her isolation. Perhaps he does not want to give her the love of Christ, but only his own compassion; it may be small, but for her not totally insignificant. How much longer?

Maybe they both know that everything is essentially lost, that this is the last time. (Enquist 2015: 99)

Possibly it is just this private dimension that induced Enquist to define this episode in *Ett annat liv* as «giving himself away» (regarding *Hess*) and as something he said «almost against his will» (regarding *Sekonden*).

This example perfectly illustrates the accumulation of meaning obtained through intertextual repetition. Every time the cycle ride comes back, it acquires new emotional emphasis, stratifying in a complex symbol. The recurrence itself makes the episode into a “sign”, a private code that the author shares with his faithful readers, even if the meaning of this sign is modulated differently in the various books, from an unexplainable shame in *Hess*, to a hope of sharing in *Sekonden*, to a sense of loss in *Ett annat liv*.

But the cycle ride is not the only private element inserted in *Hess*. There is another childhood episode that recurs both here and in *Ett annat liv*. During school

years, one of Hess's older schoolmates begins to dig with a stick behind an outhouse, and after a while he finds something:

Efter ett tag får den grävande ett intensivare uttryck i ansiktet och petar med käppens spets försiktigt upp en med jord bemängd preventivmedelstrasa ur jorden. Man har funnit den, och pojken står med käppen i vädret medan Hess försiktigt kommer att fråga vad detta är. Man svarar honom då: Ett preventivmedel! («Elektrolyt.») Käppen med det jordiga gummit står höjd, som en flaggstång, Hess ser i smyg på sina kamrater, men ingen av dem tar av sin mössa. Efter en stund kommer ceremonien att upplösas. Preventivmedlet grävs ned, gruppen upplöses, alla går tysta och eftertänksamma tillbaka till skolan. Händelsen kommer att bli en [av] dessa säreget markanta vändpunkter i livet som Hess upplever. Som ett fälttecken kommer synen att fladdra in i hans liv. Han inser att han på något sätt måste skaffa sig inträde till de vuxnas liv, och förstår att det endast kan ske på ett sätt: genom att finna fler kondomer («preventivmedel»). (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 25-26)

After a while the digger gets a more intense expression on his face and with the tip of the stick lifts up an earth-ingrained shredded prophylactic from the ground. They have found it, and the boy stands with the stick in the air while Hess cautiously asks what it is. The answer is: A prophylactic! («Electrolyte.») The stick with the muddy piece of rubber is still lifted as a flagpole, Hess gives a furtive glance to his companions, but no one takes off his cap. After a while the ceremony breaks up. The prophylactic is buried, the group dissolves, everyone goes back to school, silent and thoughtful. The episode will become one of those striking turning points in life experienced by Hess. That vision will continue to flap in his life like a banner. He realises that he must somehow gain access to adults' life and understands that it can happen only in one way: by finding more condoms («prophylactics»).

The importance of the episode is highlighted both indirectly, with the solemnity of the child's vision («höjd som en flaggstång», «ceremonien», «tysta och eftertänksamma»), albeit veined with the unmistakable irony of the adult narrator, and directly, with the definition «en [av] dessa säreget markanta vändpunkter i livet». The digging up of the condom obviously symbolises the discovery of sex, and therefore the access to adult life, to the point that a few lines later, when the protagonist fails in finding more prophylactics, however obstinately he digs, he becomes taciturn and introverted: « Han kommer under denna tid att vandra mellan tvenne världar: barn är han icke, och eftersom hans grävande ej ger resultat förstår han, att han ej heller är vuxen»<sup>140</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 26).

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<sup>140</sup> «During that period he is drifting between two worlds: he is not a child, and since his digging gives no results he understands that he is not an adult either.»

When the childhood memory is used again many years later, in *Ett annat liv*, the passage is definitely shorter and all traces of solemnity have disappeared, leaving only the irony behind:

Den första kondom han själv sett förevisades för honom strax efter krigsslutet, alltså det andra världskriget, av Hasse Svensson, möjligen Maurits Renström. Gummit var nedgrävt bakom ett vedskjul vid skolhuset. Alla stod i ring och fasade, men känslan inför den jordiga gummislamsan var att kondomer på något sätt växte upp ur marken, kanske spettplanterade som tallplantor. (Enquist 2008: 143-144)

The first condom he himself saw was demonstrated to him immediately after the end of the war, that is the Second World War, by Hasse Svensson, or possibly it was Maurits Renström. The rubber had been buried behind a woodshed next to the schoolhouse. They all stood in a circle and shuddered, but the impression given by this muddy bit of rubber was that condoms somehow grew out of the earth, maybe planted with skewers like pine seedlings. (Enquist 2015: 112)

That «jordiga gummislamsan» has nothing to offer, least of all «inträde till de vuxnas liv». The episode is reduced to a funny detail, inserted in an even funnier university anecdote of a theologian who became a wholesaler in condoms (Enquist 2015: 111).

Compared with the previous one, this second episode is clearly less charged with symbolic meaning, as confirmed also by the single repetition. However, it is typical of Enquist's "reuse" technique already highlighted by Bredsdorff (1991: 240) and Lindberg (1999: 5).

There is yet another fragment that recurs almost literally both in *Hess* and in *Ett annat liv*, and later also in *Liknelseboken*: the lapidary message left by the dead father to his son: «Bliv en kristen»<sup>141</sup>. In *Hess* the message is addressed to the title character, who finds it between the pages of one of his favourite childhood books, *Robinson Crusoe*:

Lappar föll ut: «Be någon meddela H.» stod det, och det slog mig som en stöt att min far ändå fanns alldeles intill mig och sökte efter samma ting och människor som jag själv. «Bliv en kristen», stod det, och efter ett kommatecken stod mitt namn. Men orden var överstrukna, med en annan penna, och jag fick aldrig veta vems penna som var hans: den fläckande kulspetspennan eller blyertspennan som dragit sitt svaga streck snett över meningen. Men mitt namn var textat, eftertryckligt och hårt, som om han med större kraft velat nå mig med mitt namn än med de ord som stod framför. (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 235-236)

Some notes fell out: «Ask somebody to tell H.», there was written, and it was like a stab to think that my father was so near me and was looking for the same things and people as I did. «Become a Christian», there was written, and after a comma

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<sup>141</sup> «Become a Christian.»

came my name. But the words were crossed out, with a different pen, and I could never know which pen was his: the leaking ball pen or the pencil that drew its weak stroke aslant over the sentence. But my name was written in block letters, emphatically and powerfully, as if he had wanted more strongly to reach me with my name than with the words that preceded it.

The message could not be clearer, but the narrator needs to relativise it immediately: the words were crossed out, and no one will ever know which was the true message, whether the pious words or the rebellious penstroke. The theme of faith versus skepticism, absolutely crucial in *Magnetisörens femte vinter*<sup>142</sup>, remains central throughout all of Enquist's production, and the recurrence of this fragment throughout the years is there to testify it.

In *Ett annat liv* the same message is repeated four times (2008: 72, 99, 105 and 437), identical to the one in *Hess*, except for the son's name, which as there only evoked («mitt namn var textat») while here it is explicit: «PerOla, bliv en kristen»:

Sonen är i efterhand nästan kritisk mot henne [modern] för detta. Icke lämnade hon maken i fred för frälsningsivern ens på dödsbädden! Skulle ha honom att frälsa barnet *också där!* Fadern hade *säkert på hennes uppmaning!* sänt två skrivna meddelanden till pojken, som nu endast var ett halvt år. (Enquist 2008: 72, italics in the original)

Later the son almost reproaches her [his mother] for this. Driven by her zeal for salvation, she did not leave her husband in peace, even on his deathbed! She wanted to have him save the child *there too! Undoubtedly at her request*, the father had sent two written messages to the boy, who was only six months old at the time. (Enquist 2015: 58)

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Han läser dem på moderns uppmaning många gånger, och ett välbekant obehag finner sig varje gång. Det första är kristallklart. "*PerOla, bliv en kristen.*" Hur skakar man av sig ett arv? Och vilket är då arvet, skogshuggarens, stuvarens, eller den hemlige Tempelriddarens? Varför obehag? Varför värjer han sig också mot modern? Denna begynnande motspänstighet! Han betraktar sig själv genom henne, och börjar ifrågasätta. (Enquist 2008: 99, italics in the original)

At his mother's request he reads them over and over again and a familiar uneasiness sweeps over him. The first line is crystal clear. "*Per-Ola, become a Christian.*" How do you shake off a legacy? And is it the legacy of the lumberjack, the stevedore, or the secret Knight Templar? Why the uneasiness? Why is he against his mother? The first signs of recalcitrance! He sees himself through her and begins to wonder. (Enquist 2015: 78-79)

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<sup>142</sup> See for instance Shideler 1984: 25-40.

Varför behövde den snart blivande änkan, just dessa sista timmar, lägga sig i barnets karriärplanering? Han var ju trots allt bara sex månader, som han senare brukar meddela omgivningen, *alltför ofta*. Budskapet från den darrande handen var nog från modern. Hon satt säkert där vid dödsbädden på Bureå sjukstuga och var utom sig och visste ingen levandes råd, eftersom nu endast det stora mörkret runt det gröna huset i skogsbrynet återstod, och tårarna rann, men så bemannar hon sig, stoppar pennan i Elofs hand och för den, praktiskt taget med våld, i rätt pedagogisk riktning. Så måste det ha skett. (Enquist 2008: 105, italics in the original)

Why did the prospective widow now, in these final hours, need to meddle in her child's career plans? He was after all only six months old, as he later tells everyone, *all too often*. The message given by the trembling hand was clearly from his mother. She was obviously sitting there at the deathbed in Bureå cottage hospital, beside herself and at her wits' end, the great darkness surrounding the green house in the forest being all that remained, and her tears were falling; but then she controls herself, puts the pencil in Elof's hand and directs it, practically with force, in the right pedagogical direction. That must be what happened. (Enquist 2015: 83)

This time, the ambiguity is not represented by a stroke of pen, but by the supposed suggestion from the mother's side, and the distancing of the son is even sharper, in a crescendo of desperation and reproach, both towards the mother and the message itself.

Here the purpose of repetition is more straightforward: the episode is evidently a momentous one from a personal point of view, being the written message one of the few "direct" contacts between the author and his father. Unlike the episode of the cycle ride, obscure enough to be turned into a symbol to be reused whenever the need arose, the experience of the message was too personal, and after being attributed to a fictional character in a book it had to be kept private until it took its proper place in an autobiography.

These few examples show how the recurrence of an autobiographical fragment can serve different purposes and even have opposite effects: amplification in the cycle ride and the pious message episodes, reduction in the condom incident. The degree of insistence can also tell us something about the role of the fragment: a single repetition can indicate that the fragment is used only for the sake of a reality effect (cf. Barthes 1989: 142), while a more frequent reiteration, moreover at several years of distance, seems to point to a conferment of symbolic meaning (cf. 2.1.1).

It is also interesting to note that, although not an isolated phenomenon, in *Hess* self-representation remains fragmentary and almost involuntary («som om han råkat

försäga sig», Enquist 2008: 179). All the fragments are attributed to different voices (Hess, Pintsch, the researcher, the Red Baron) in the effort to disguise their autobiographical origin. What Enquist writes about *Sekonden* in *Ett annat liv* – «Väl maskerat, men ändå för första gången» (Enquist 2008: 264) – certainly applies also to *Hess*, where the idea of *maskera* is very much present with its almost synonym *inkläda*, translatable as “to veil, wrap in, cover”<sup>143</sup>. The verb appears ten times in the text<sup>144</sup>, always in connection to the idea of writing, of telling some truth. As Steve Sem-Sandberg highlights in his contribution to an article published on the occasion of Enquist’s eightieth birthday (Sem-Sandberg 2014), the term *inkläda* is extremely ambivalent: it can mean to enrich the truth in order to make it more comprehensible and trustworthy, but also, and maybe even more so, to protect the speaker and his/her inner world. A few examples taken from *Hess* illustrate this duplicity: in the first occurrence – «relatera H.s familjeförhållanden, förhållande till fadern, till den religiösa miljö som omgav honom samt, till slut, summera vad detta betydde. *Inkläd!*»<sup>145</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 29, italics mine) – the verb is used in its first, positive meaning, while in two later occasions – «hur den enskilda människan genom att skapa sig en rad av skyddande *inklädningar* och skal åt sig själv tillverkade en rustning som gjorde henne väl ägnad att möta den s.k. verkligheten»<sup>146</sup> (2010 [1966]: 121, italics mine); «kunde frilägga små håligheter där han själv syntes stå, halvt befriad och halvt fången, delvis naken och delvis *inklädd*»<sup>147</sup> (2010 [1966]: 151, italics mine) – the meaning is closer to “hide”. The term also attracted Eva Ekselius’s attention, who dedicated a subchapter of her

<sup>143</sup> The term is not listed in *Norstedts Engelska Plus* dictionary; *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok* (<[http://www.saob.se/artikel/?seek=inkläda&pz=1#U\\_I451\\_127015](http://www.saob.se/artikel/?seek=inkläda&pz=1#U_I451_127015)>, last accessed 14 June 2017) defines it as «kläda ngn i ngt, iföra ngn ngt» («dress up sb in sth, array sb in sth»); «förse med (skyddande) betäckning l. beklädnad» («supply a [protective] covering or clothing»); «giva (ngt, ss. en tanke l. känsla) en viss omklädnad l. dräkt l. yttre form l. gestalt» («give [sth, esp. an idea or feeling] a certain covering or clothing or external form or shape»).

<sup>144</sup> Enquist 2010 [1966]: 29, 34, 36 (twice), 56, 61, 101 (twice), 121, 151.

<sup>145</sup> «Relate H.’s family relationship, his relationship to his father, to the religious environment that surrounded him, and, in the end, summarise its significance. *Wrap up!*»

<sup>146</sup> «How the single human being, by creating a series of *wrappings* and shells, provided itself with an armour that made it fit to meet the so called reality.»

<sup>147</sup> «Could uncover small openings where he himself appeared to stand, half freed and half imprisoned, partly naked and partly *covered*.»

study to «Begreppet inklädnad»<sup>148</sup> (Ekselius 1996: 196-198). According to Ekselius, the term is a key conception in Enquist's writing, which returns in later works such as *Nedstörtad ängel* (Enquist 2014 [1985]) and *Tupilak* (Enquist 2017a), where the protagonists wrap their heads in rags or sheets<sup>149</sup>, but finds its most complete articulation in *Hess*. Ekselius also highlights the «ironisk dubbeltydlighet»<sup>150</sup> of the term:

Uppmaningen att «inkläda bättre», det vill säga pressa in en kaotisk ansamling emotionellt laddade fakta, minnesbilder, dagboksfragment etc. i en hårt strukturerad teoretisk begreppsapparat eller i en roman, blir en metakommentar till författarens pågående arbete: det gäller att bättre dölja det som kan avslöjas av sprickorna och de okontrollerade fragmenten i texten. (Ekselius 1996: 197)

The exhortation to «wrap up better», that is to say to compress a chaotic collection of emotionally laden facts, memories, diary fragments etc. into a compactly structured theoretical conceptual apparatus or into a novel, becomes a meta-comment on the author's ongoing work: it is a question of concealing better what can be revealed by the cracks and the uncontrolled fragments of the text.

We are therefore back to Melberg's strategies of «visa, söka och dölja» (cf. 1.1.3): in Enquist there is a constant conflict between *visa* and *dölja*, between *avslöja* and *inkläda*, between the self-revealing impulse and the urge to conceal. In *Hess* the latter seems to prevail upon the former, since the autobiographical fragments are hidden behind the various characters' masks and the message to be conveyed is made obscure by the intricate structure of the novel. However, the impulse to understand and to reveal is certainly present as well, and will become more and more pressing in later works.

### 3.3 *Legionärerna*: A self-portrait in the corner

While in *Hess* self-representation is one of the many sources upon which Enquist draws to create his composite “mobile” of a novel, with *Legionärerna* it assumes a different and wider role. The main similarity between the two books is the figure of the

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<sup>148</sup> «The conception of covering/masking.»

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Enquist 2014 [1985]: 30, 53, 62, 63, 71, 73, and Enquist 2017a: 242, 265.

<sup>150</sup> «Ironic ambiguity.»

“investigator” (*undersökare*) – in *Hess* we had a “researcher” (*forskare*) – who carries out an inquiry. Apart from that, the two novels seem to have very little in common, at least from a structural and stylistic point of view. While *Hess* had the complex and subjective structure of the French *nouveau roman* (Agrell 2004: 434), *Legionärerna* has been defined as «the epitome of the modern “documentary” novel» (Shideler 1984: 55), the reality-based and politically-involved genre that prevailed in Scandinavia in the sixties and seventies<sup>151</sup>. In this book the author collects an impressive amount of documentation (newspaper articles, Parliament minutes, personal interviews, etc.) in order to «ge en helt objektiv och exakt bild av denna i svensk samtidshistoria helt unika politiska affär» (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 5)<sup>152</sup>. The “unika affär” he refers to is the extradition of 146 Baltic refugees to the Soviet Union in 1945. The refugees were Baltic citizens who had served under various circumstances (from volunteers to forcibly conscripted) in the German army and had come to Sweden after the German capitulation in May. According to an agreement among the Allied forces, all former German soldiers should be sent back to the country where they were at the moment of the armistice, that is, in this specific case, the Soviet Union. The Swedish coalition government in charge in June 1945 decided accordingly, but when the resolution should have been carried out, in November of the same year, a storm of opinion broke out in the country, asking the government not to hand over the prisoners to «säkra döden»<sup>153</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 206). However, the government stood its ground and relinquished the Balts to the Soviet Union in January 1946. The actual episode closed there, but in the Swedish social consciousness it survived as a boil, an abscess, fuelled by the cold war (Bredsdorff 1991: 100).

The term “boil” (in Swedish *böld*) is used by Enquist himself in explaining his interest for this secondary episode in the history of his country:

Ingrid kom ut från köket med tallrikar på en bricka, hon såg fortfarande mycket svensk ut på ett slags hjälplöst sätt som han [undersökaren] inte visste vad han

<sup>151</sup> See, for instance, Yrlid 1997: 24-25, Bredsdorff 1993: 11-16.

<sup>152</sup> «To give an objective and exact picture of this political affair, unique in recent history» (Enquist 1974: vii).

<sup>153</sup> «Certain death» (Enquist 1974: 231).



skulle göra av: herregud, tänkte han, jag måste se likadan ut, lika hjälplös, fast med en tunn hinna av lite större duktighet och tydligare moralism. Men var skulle han skära? I vilka bölder? Han hade ju skurit i sina egna privata bölder så länge att smärtan försvunnit och njutningen kommit. Och nu? (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 47-48)

Ingrid came out from the kitchen with plates on a tray; she still looked very Swedish in a sort of helpless way that he [the investigator] didn't know what to make of. Good Lord, he thought, I must look the same, just as helpless, though with a thin film of slightly greater capability and more obvious moralism. But what boils was he to lance? He had been lancing his own private boils for so long that pain had given way to enjoyment. And now? (Enquist 1974: 49)

The passage comes at the end of a long chapter, the third of the book, in which the investigator appears as a character to explain the origin of the book: «Varje undersökning har en startpunkt; det här är en av dem. Ett slags början för en undersökning av baltutlämningen» (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 48)<sup>154</sup>. During a visit to the United States, in the middle of Vietnam contestation and Civil Rights demonstrations, a fellow guest at a dinner in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, addresses the investigator with these words:

«Världens samvete. Jag vet, jag har bott i Sverige. Svenskarna har världens enda transportabla samveten, de åker runt som professionella moralister. De talar aldrig om de situationer när de själva ställts inför moraliska konflikter. Transiteringarna. Baltutlämningen. Vad vet du egentligen om baltutlämningen?» (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 32)

«The world's conscience. I know, I've lived in Sweden. The Swedes have the world's only transportable consciences; they go around like professional moralists. They never speak of the situations when they themselves have been faced with moral conflicts. The troops transit. The extradition of the Balts. What do *you* know about the extradition of the Balts?» (Enquist 1974: 31, italics in the English translation)

The American's words bite in him and he starts to wonder about his own political and social engagement. Ten days later he is back in Sweden and starts the investigation about the Balt affair: he has found his boils to lance.

However, Chapter 3 does much more than simply giving the starting point of the book: it also draws a portrait of the investigator, a portrait that has several features in common with the author of the book. To begin with, the trip to the United States described in the novel was undertaken by Enquist himself in the spring of 1966, with

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<sup>154</sup> «Every investigation has a starting point, and this is one of them. A beginning for an investigation of the extradition of the Balts» (Enquist 1974: 50).

stops in New York for the PEN congress, in the southern states to follow James Meredith's March against fear and in Oak Ridge to visit an old school friend who lived there, as related in Chapter 7 of *Ett annat liv*, "En expedition" (Enquist 2008: 203-241).

Scattered throughout the text there are other references to elements of Enquist's biography, such as hints to books he has written («han hade en gång skrivit en roman om en magnetisör, och trott att han med detta var befriad från det irrationella»<sup>155</sup>, Enquist 2014 [1968]: 432) and the medical problems he suffered from («Efter två timmar spårar samtalet ur. De kommer in på olika former av magsårsoperationer»<sup>156</sup>, 2014 [1968]: 393), or the vivid and detailed memory of having read about the Balts affair as a child, in Västerbotten:

Den 1 december 1945 var undersökaren elva år och tre månader gammal. Posten kom på eftermiddagarna från Skellefteå, och han brukade stå där nere vid mjölkbryggan i Sjön, Hjoggböle. [...]

Det var bara ett par hundra meter att gå, över fältet, förbi bönhuset, genom grinden, hem. När han kom hem läste han först *Karl Alfred* och sedan *Fantomen Dragos* och sen sportsidan och sen resten: liggande på golvet i köket, med tidningen utbredd framför sig och den svarta vedspisen bakom sig. [...]

Tidningen hette *Norra Västerbotten*.

Han läste noga igenom referatet. Det föreföll egendomligt och överkligt att något sådant kunde inträffa i Sverige, men eftersom tyskar var inblandade kunde han acceptera att det verkligen skett. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 264-266)

On December 1, 1945, the investigator was eleven years and three months old. The post came in the afternoons from Skellefteå, and he and the others used to stand down by the platform for the milk churns at Sjön, Hjoggböle. [...]

It was only a few hundred yards to go, across the field, past the meetinghouse, through the gate, home. When he got home he read first the comic strips, then the sports page, then the rest: lying on the floor in the kitchen, with the newspaper spread out in front of him and the black woodstove behind him. [...]

The name of the newspaper was *Norra Västerbotten*.

He read the report carefully. It appeared strange and unreal that anything like that could happen in Sweden, but as the Germans were mixed up in it he could accept that it really *had* happened. (Enquist 1974: 301-302, italics in the English translation)

Here we find a geographical correspondence with the author's place of origin, together with a more personal hint to the environment he will describe later in *Ett annat liv*: the

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<sup>155</sup> «He had once written a novel about a hypnotizer, thinking that in so doing he was freed from everything irrational» (Enquist 1974: 499).

<sup>156</sup> «After two hours they stray from the subject and get onto different forms of stomach-ulcer operations» (Enquist 1974: 452).

chapel, the platform for the milk churns near the bus stop, the woodstove, the habit of reading lying on the kitchen floor, etc.

However, the most striking element that the investigator has in common with the author is his political orientation:

Här satt han, en före detta liberal, sedan fyra år frälst socialist, och kunde inte ens för sig själv förklara den egendomliga känsla av avstånd och trötthet han kände. Han kände sig vidöppen för angrepp, det enda han hade att skydda sig med var ett abstrakt "engagemang" som kunde saboteras med så enkla angrepp. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 33)

Here he sat, an ex-liberal, for the last four years a socialist convert, and he couldn't explain even to himself the peculiar feeling of remoteness and fatigue. He felt vulnerable. All he had to shield himself with was an abstract "involvement" that could be sabotaged with simple attacks. (Enquist 1974: 31)

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[...] han försökte formulera sin egen politiska utveckling, som varit en oavbruten rörelse åt vänster. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 33)

[...] he tried to formulate his own political development, which had been an unbroken movement to the Left. (Enquist 1974: 32)

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Här går jag, tänkte han, en tredje klassens f. d. ungliberal som är en tredje klassens socialist på väg att bli en tredje klassens kommunist, med en första klassens likgiltighet för allting som sker, och söker efter en medvetenhet som inte är sentimental eller bara en gest som lättar mitt dåliga samvete. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 36)

Here I am, he thought, a young third-class ex-liberal, now a third-class socialist on the way to becoming a third-class communist, with a first-class indifference to everything that happens, looking for an awareness that isn't sentimental or merely a gesture that eases my guilty conscience. (Enquist 1974: 35)

If somebody should still harbour doubts about the identification, here is a brief, ironical self-description born out of a question about his age from one of the former refugees he interviewed in Lettland:

Hur gammal? Trettio två. Nationalitet? Svensk. Sysselsättning? Författare. Sysselsättning? Moralist. Nationalitet och karaktär? Svensk moralist, nosare, hund, gift, ett barn. Politisk färg? Vänster. Politisk färg? Vänstersocialist. Har undersökningen förändrat din politiska ståndpunkt? Har du lärt dig något? Ja, allt. Vad då? Allt. Hur gammal är du? Trettio två år. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 414)

Age? Thirty-two. Nationality? Swedish. Occupation? Writer. Occupation? Moralist. Nationality and character? Swedish moralist, Nosy Parker, dog, married, one child.

Political views? Left. Political views? Left-wing socialist. Has the investigation changed your political outlook? Have you learned anything? Yes, everything. What? Everything. How old are you? Thirty-two. (Enquist 1974: 477)

Later in the book, another chapter, number 16, is completely dedicated to the investigator making «an experiment». In order to better evaluate the conditions of the Baltic war prisoners, who at the end of November 1945 started a hunger strike in the hope of avoiding extradition, he stops eating for a week:

Torsdagen den 13 april 1967 inledde undersökaren själv en hungerstrejk, under fysiskt sett samma villkor som de haft. Han tillät sig dricka vattenledningsvatten, ingenting annat. Fastan inleddes klockan 7 på torsdagens morgon, han följde de baltiska legionärernas Ränneslättvecka, dag för dag.

Vikt denna morgon: 79,2 kilo. Längd 192 centimeter.

Han kunde betecknas som lång, och ganska smal<sup>157</sup>. Hans fysiska kondition var otillfredsställande efter många år av skrivarbete, tobak och total brist på motion. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 249)

On Thursday, April 13, 1967, he himself began a hunger strike, under the same physical conditions. He allowed himself to drink tap water, nothing else. The fast was started at seven o'clock on Thursday morning, and he followed the Baltic legionnaires' Ränneslätt week, day by day.

Weight that morning: 174 pounds. Height 6 feet 2 inches.

He could be described as tall and rather slim. His physical condition was unsatisfactory after many years of desk work, tobacco, and a complete lack of exercise. (Enquist 1974: 282-283)

The experiment results in a relativisation of documents' value. In 1945 newspapers described the fasting Balts' condition as «alarmerande»<sup>158</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 247, 248): they were confined to bed, with weak pulse and dizziness. After a fast of the same length, by contrast, the investigator has no symptom at all, apart from a slight tiredness: although he has lost 6.3 kilos, he is perfectly able to walk, work and do all the things he usually does. His conclusion is therefore that «de svenska läkarnas rapporter inte grundade sig på medicinska fakta, utan på politiska»<sup>159</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 254), a conclusion that contributes to the personal crisis that will be dealt with in the following paragraphs.

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<sup>157</sup> This physical description will recur almost as a mantra forty-five years later in *Liknelseboken* (Enquist 2013: 7, 74, 103, 107, 158, 176, 190, 196, 197, 217, 235, 237).

<sup>158</sup> «Alarming» (Enquist 1974: 280, 281).

<sup>159</sup> «The Swedish doctors' reports were based not on medical facts, but on political ones» (Enquist 1974: 288).

It is immediately clear that the kind of self-representation that emerges from *Legionärerna* is completely different from the occasional snapshots included in *Hess*: instead of baffling snapshots inserted here and there in the text, what we have here is a cameo of the artist while producing his work, a bit like Velásquez's self-portrait in *Las Meninas*, albeit maybe slightly more in a corner of the canvas. The figure of the investigator, although it remains a «literary ploy not to be entirely identified with the author» (Shideler 1993: 13), is clearly modelled after Enquist himself: «*Undersökaren – det var beteckningen på berättaren i boken, den som utan tvekan också kunde ha kallats Per Olov Enquist*»<sup>160</sup>, he writes in *Ett annat liv* (2008: 211, italics in the original).

But what was Enquist's goal in inserting an effigy of himself in the novel? One of the possible answers is that he wanted to relativise the objectiveness of the “documentary” facts by introducing the subjectivity (i.e. the author's conscience) that filtered them. Enquist in fact was very well aware of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of objectivity, as is made clear by the very first lines that open *Legionärerna*:

Detta är en roman om baltutlämningen, men om beteckningen “roman” förefaller någon stötande, kan den ersättas med “reportage” eller “bok”. Jag har försökt att ända in i små och betydelselösa detaljer hålla mig exakt till verkligheten: har jag misslyckats beror det mer på oförmåga än på intention. [...] Min avsikt var att ge en helt objektiv och exakt bild av denna i svensk samtidshistoria helt unika politiska affär. Jag har, som kommer att framgå, misslyckats med att ge en objektiv bild. *Jag tror inte denna objektiva bild är möjlig att ge.* (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 5; italics mine)

This is a novel about the extradition of the Balts, but if the word *novel* gives offense, *documentary report* or *book* can be used instead. I have tried to stick to reality, down to the small and trifling details; if I have failed, my ability is at fault, not my intention. [...] My aim was to give an objective and exact picture of this political affair, unique in recent history. As will be seen, I have failed to give an objective picture. *I don't think it can be given.* (Enquist 1974: vii; only the last italics is mine)

Although the dominant aesthetics of the times required literature to be rooted in facts and to «enlighten» readers, rather than to create art (Yrliid 1997: 25), Enquist never underrates the importance of the subjective perception and evaluation of “objective” facts, and explicitly warns his readers not to forget it:

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<sup>160</sup> «*The Investigator* – that was the term for the book's narrator, who could easily have been called Per Olov Enquist» (Enquist 2015: 158).

Godta inte en presentation, tänk själv, var misstänksam. Det finns ingen helgonlik objektivitet, ingen yttersta sanning befriad från sina politiska utgångspunkter. Prova, var misstänksam. Ifrågasätt. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 242)

Don't accept a presentation; think for yourself; be suspicious. There is no saintly objectivity, no supreme truth, free from political bias. Try out. Be suspicious. Call into question. (Enquist 1974: 274)

On the other hand, by making visible and explicit the subjective consciousness that is collecting, connecting and re-telling the facts, Enquist is only apparently undermining their objective value, while actually enhancing it, as confirmed by Blackwell in her study on *Legionärerna*:

to be self-conscious is not only to be conscious of just one more object, called "oneself", it is also to be aware of having consciousness [...], to be aware of being a perceiving subject. Thus the self-consciousness of Enquist's presence in the novel has a tendency towards both the objective and the subjective. (Blackwell 1983: 132)

The figure of the investigator, therefore, is also one of the many entities of which the book is trying to give a documentary view.

Another important function performed by the investigator is to highlight the similarities between the political and social situation in 1945 and in 1966. Throughout the book Enquist draws explicit parallels:

den aspekten på baltutlämningen hade så aktuella anknytningar: det var de åren i mitten på 60-talet när de svenska demonstranterna mot USA borde hålla sig tysta för att inte skada handeln med amerikanarna (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 202)

that aspect of the Balt extradition was so topical: it was the years in the middle of the 1960s when the Swedish demonstrators against the United States should keep quiet so as not to spoil the trade with the Americans. (Enquist 1974: 228)

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Detta var 1967, protesternas år, deserteringarnas år, demonstrationstågens år, äggkastningens år, de krossade ambassadrutornas år, den civila ohörsamhetens år. Här, på Ränneslätt, hade militärer och vaktare offentligt protesterat mot något som de uppfattade som inhumant, mot den regering som de tjänade: det var 1945, också ett protestens år. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 267-268)

This was 1967, the year of the protests, the year of the desertions, the year of the demonstration marches, the year of egg throwing, the year of smashed embassy windows, the year of civil disobedience. Here at Ränneslätt, soldiers and guards had publicly protested against something they regarded as inhuman, against the government they served: it was 1945, also a year of protest. (Enquist 1974: 304-305)

However, the connection is established not only on a historical plan, but also on a more personal level. The investigator feels that he is mixing up the levels, that he «beskriver en viss politisk situation mitt uppe i en annan politisk situation – och de båda situationerna skymmer varandra, och färgar av sig på varandra»<sup>161</sup> (2014 [1968]: 351), another confirmation of the impossibility of objectivity. His view of the Balt affair is coloured by his own difficulty in recognising and acknowledging his personal judgements and values:

Han hade de senaste åren med våldsam kraft upplevt sitt liv och sina värderingar som styrda, dirigerade. [...] Hur prioriterar man föremålen för sin humanitära medkänsla? Det hade för honom, liksom för nästan alla andra svenskar, varit självfallet att hellre koncentrera sin upprördhet till den handfull som dödades vid Berlinmuren än till den halva miljön kommunister som ett år arkebuserades i Indonesien. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 268)

Of recent years it had stuck him forcibly that his life and his judgements were being controlled and directed. [...] How do you give priority to the objects of your human principle and compassion? For him, as for almost every Swede, it had been a matter of course to concentrate his indignation on the handful killed at the Berlin wall rather than on the half-million communists who in one year faced the firing squads in Indonesia. (Enquist 1974: 305)

If he cannot take a correct moral stance about his time's dilemmas, how could he judge the decisions taken more than thirty years earlier, this is the question he starts to ask himself.

One therefore begins to wonder whether the real aim of the book is to shed light on an almost forgotten «Swedish dilemma», or if we should rather agree with Oscar Krokstedt<sup>162</sup> when he writes:

Man kan om honom [Enquist] säga vad Pontoppidan sade om sig själv att diktaren skriver om sin tid men först och främst om sig själv. När han [Enquist] nu skrivit en dokumentärroman är dokumenten därför kanske för honom inte det väsentliga. (Krokstedt 1975: 22)

We could say about him [Enquist] what Pontoppidan said of himself, that a poet writes about his time, but above all about himself. If he [Enquist] has now written a documentary novel, the documents are therefore maybe not the essential for him.

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<sup>161</sup> «[He] is describing a certain political situation in the middle of another political situation – and the two situations color one another, the dye from one comes off on the other» (Enquist 1974: 403).

<sup>162</sup> Vice-admiral Oscar Krokstedt is the author of a critic of the documentariness of *Legionärerna* based on his own experiences in the Swedish Naval Forces' staff. However, his analysis is not devoid of a certain literary insight and sensibility, as shown by the reference to Pontoppidan.

Reading between the lines of *Legionärerna*, the «essential» for the author seems to be the contrasting desire to understand and to participate (see also Shideler 1984: 56-57) that permeates the investigator both when he analyses the Swedish events from 1945 and when he witnesses the American and Swedish demonstrations in 1966; the desire «att samtidigt kunna vila i fostervattnet och se mekaniken, tänkte han. Att vara delaktig och uppmärksam på fakta. Att reducera inte sin känsla, men sin okunnighet»<sup>163</sup> (2014 [1968]: 46).

But this desire remains unachieved; towards the end of his enquiry, during an interview with one of the key figures among the Baltic prisoners, the investigator realises with a sudden *déjà vu* that «han egentligen varit mera intresserad av sitt eget engagemang än av det som demonstrationen gällde»<sup>164</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 431). The dream of participation, so strong and palpable during the Civil Right demonstrations in the United States, falls through in an almost solipsistic attitude:

Livet gled förbi där ute, man bombade Hanoi och demonstrerade, Svetlana kom till New York och pratade sitt charmerande strunt, ett fartyg förliste och några svenskar blev dubbelmästare i bordtennis, men runt omkring sig drog undersökaren allt högre murar av observans, egocentricitet och självmedvetenhet. Och dag för dag blev detta allt uppenbarare: den närmast hysteriska upptagenhet av sig själv som till sist kom att dominera allt. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 251)

Life slipped past out there: Hanoi was bombed; there were protest marches; Svetlana came to New York and talked her charming nonsense; a ship was wrecked; some Swedes became doubles champions in table tennis. But round about him the investigator built higher and higher walls of observance, egocentricity, and self-assurance. And day by day this became more and more apparent: the almost hysterical occupation with himself which at last came to dominate everything. (Enquist 1974: 285)

In the light of this shift in focus from the political to the personal, our judgement of the self-representation performed by Enquist in *Legionärerna* must also be modified. From an instrument in the service of the documentary nature of the novel, aimed at incorporating the objective facts with the subjective conscience that perceives them, the

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<sup>163</sup> «To be able to rest in the amniotic fluid and see the mechanism at the same time, he thought. To take part and yet to pay attention to facts. To keep one's feelings but reduce one's ignorance» (Enquist 1974: 47).

<sup>164</sup> «He had been more interested in his own involvement than in what the demonstration was about» (Enquist 1974: 498).



figure of the investigator becomes a self-portrait in every respect, albeit not positioned at the centre of the picture. The image is only partial, barely sketched in some of its aspects (the political and social aspirations, the working method, etc.), but the process we will see at work in many of the following books is set: many of his characters to come will in some way overlap with his own portrait, as he farsightedly writes on the closing page of *Legionärerna*:

Sedan skulle alla ansikten och röster övermanna honom, deras öden bli alltför påträngande, överblicken oklar, traumat komplicerat och diffust, hans eget liv alltför nära deras. (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 439)

Then all the faces and voices would overpower him, their destiny become too obtrusive, the general picture unclear, the trauma complicated and diffuse, his own life far too close to theirs. (Enquist 1974: 507-508)

This tendency to confuse himself with his objects of study (i.e the characters in his documentary or historical novels) to the point of overlapping also attracted Enquist some criticism: Peter Luthersson for instance finds that Enquist's documentary novels do not deal at all with what they apparently deal with: «Han hittar historiska gestalter, situationer och händelser som tillåter honom att så att säga förklätt diskutera en personlig problematik»<sup>165</sup> (Luthersson 2002: 17). However, whether we consider this personal angle an enrichment or a distortion, it is certainly yet another confirmation of the centrality of the autobiographical element in Enquist's writing.

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<sup>165</sup> «He finds historical figures, situations and events that allow him to discuss so to say disguisedly some personal problem.»

## Chapter 4: Self-revealing masks

In the first phase of Enquist's production we have found the first signs of what would become a persisting trend throughout his subsequent works: the tendency to insert the author in the text, either disguised under masks, as in *Hess*, or displaced to a side of the canvas, as in *Legionärerna*. Both these self-representing strategies come back several times in the following books, before the author undertakes a more direct attempt to autobiography.

In the first, experimental attempts at self-representation discussed in the previous pages, in addition to the iterative approach analysed in 2.1.1, we can clearly perceive the three strategies identified by Melberg in his studies: «visa, söka och dölja» (2008: 22). All three can in different measure apply also to Enquist's texts. He *shows* by recalling extremely visual and vivid images of his memories: the first fragment about the «cycle ride to the Lord's table» in *Hess* is a piling up of visual, tactile and olfactory impressions that creates a sort of multi-sensorial photograph; equally immediate and detailed is the description of the bus stop and the kitchen in the newspaper episode of *Legionärerna* discussed above. As for *searching*, the presence itself of the researcher/investigator is based on a continual search, either for a historical/political truth or for a personal identity, as confirmed by the constant self-questioning of the investigator in *Legionärerna*. When we come to *hiding*, it definitely is the prevailing strategy in *Hess*, but the tension between revealing and concealing will remain a fundamental constant throughout Enquist's production.

In this chapter I will examine a second group of books where the personal element in Enquist's writing becomes more evident and substantial: *Sekonden* (1971), *Musikanternas uttåg* (1978) and *Nedstörtad ängel* (1985).

The first to point out this gradual increase in autobiographicality is Enquist himself in *Ett annat liv*. About *Sekonden* he says:

Plötsligt skriver han – för första gången i sitt författarliv – nästan mot sin vilja något om sig själv. Cykelfärden till Herrens Bord, Himlaharpan, Greifswald. Om en mor, och en far som inte fanns. Väl maskerat, men ändå för första gången. (Enquist 2008: 269)

All of a sudden he is writing – for the first time in his life as an author and almost against his will – about himself. The cycle ride to the Lord's Table, the Celestial Harp, Greifswald. About a mother, and an absent father. It is well disguised, but for the first time it is there. (Enquist 2015: 199)

This seems somehow to contradict a previous statement about *Hess* («I ett gigantiskt språkspel tycks skuggan av honom själv för första gången urskiljbar. Han känner sig då generad, som om han råkat försäga sig»<sup>166</sup>, Enquist 2008: 179), even though there he just talks of «his own shadow» while here the avowal is more open, detailed with specific examples, including something so intimate and personal as «en mor, och en far som inte fanns». A comment in the same style is also given on *Musikanternas uttåg*, where the personal element becomes still more visible:

Det är hans landskap, hans by, hans familj. Han behöver inte vara så förlamande skräckslagen för att skriva om det som bara är hans privata. [...] Han ger hänsynslöst familjen en annan biografi, eller lägger ihop två; det är dikt men nästan sant ändå. (Enquist 2008: 364-5)

It is his landscape, his village, his family. He does not need to be paralysed by fear at the thought of writing about what is personal to him. [...] Inconsiderate and ruthless, he gives his family another biography, or he joins two together; it is fiction, but almost true all the same. (Enquist 2015: 273)

The interesting here is the idea that there is no need to be afraid to expose oneself, which once again recalls the conflict between «visa» and «dölja», this time apparently more in the favour of showing. Another notable feature is the overlapping of «dikt» and «sant», of fiction and truth, which echoes the idea of reaching the truth by lying already at work in previous books (cf. 3.1).

However, this upward trend in autobiographicality is far from constant or uniform. While the personal element is clearly visible in the first two books treated in this

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<sup>166</sup> «In a gigantic language game his own shadow is discernible for the first time. He feels embarrassed, as if he has given himself away» (Enquist 2015: 137).

chapter, it becomes more subdued in *Nedstörtad ängel*<sup>167</sup>, although it persists in a less tangible and more symbolic way.

#### 4.1 *Sekonden*: «Something about himself»

Published three years after *Legionärerna*, *Sekonden* shows great continuity with it: as the previous novel, it combines a growing urge for self-representation with the need to analyse and understand society through the lens of a specific episode, in this case the story of a hammer thrower and his cheating. The historical person who inspired *Sekonden* is Erik Johansson-Umedalen-Myrskog, a boxer and sprinter active in the thirties and forties, who began hammer-throwing at the age of 34 and set the Swedish record at 40. Three years later he was disqualified for having lightened his hammer by half a kilo; the most curious detail in the whole story – and what, according to Jan Stenkvist, also attracted Enquist’s attention – is that Umedalen also lent his lighted hammer to a fellow thrower, «för resultatens skull»<sup>168</sup> (Stenkvist 1978: 117). In his book, Enquist tells the sportsman’s story – changing his name to Mattias Jonsson-Eggestam-Lindner<sup>169</sup> – through his son Christian’s words, interweaving it with the son’s own story and an analysis of the relationship between politics and sport.

As he did in *Legionärerna*, Enquist blends facts based on documentary testimony – newspaper articles, interviews, books on the history of sport, etc. – with personal experiences, here ascribed to Lindner’s son. In *Sekonden*, however, the documents on which he bases the novels are not included in the text as mosaic pieces, as in

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<sup>167</sup> This is how Enquist describes the book in *Ett annat liv*: «Den enda roman han skriver [i Köpenhamn] är en mycket kort text på 140 sidor, en kärleksroman, om ett monster med dubbelhuvud, Pasqual Pinon och hans Maria. [...] Den är en tunn bok eftersom det var ett mirakel att den överhuvud blev skriven, då vid 80-talets mitt. Det gick att skriva under en morgontimme, sedan icke» (Enquist 2008: 395; «The only novel he writes [in Copenhagen] is a very short text of 140 pages, a love story, about a two-headed monster, Pasqual Pinon and his Maria. [...] It is a thin book and it is a miracle it was written at all, at that time in the mid ’80s. he could write for an hour or two in the mornings, when he was sober, and then nothing at all», 2015: 292).

<sup>168</sup> «For the sake of the performance.»

<sup>169</sup> The origin of the triple name is faithful to the original: the middle name (Umedalen) was probably chosen as a reaction to the ordinariness of the original family name (Johansson), while the third (Myrskog) was an attempt to fall into oblivion after the scandal (cf. Stenkvist 1978: 115-116).

*Legionärerna*, but are freely synthesised and condensed – «pressa[d] samman», in Jansson's wording (1987: 147). His aim, as he declares in an article where he describes his working method, is «tydliggöra verklighet, inte spegla den»<sup>170</sup> (Enquist 1981: 121):

Jag gräver, försöker finna fram till det jag tycker är sant, försöker ställa problemet så klart som möjligt. Sedan skiver jag. [...] Jag försöker, i några livsöden och under några år, sammanfatta en existensiell problematik. Jag är alltså ingen krönikör, utan arbetar med gestaltningar, sammanfattningar. (Enquist 1981: 120)

I dig, I try to bring out what I believe to be true, I try to pose the problem as clearly as possible. Then I write. [...] I try to condense, in a few destinies and for a few years, an existential issue. So I am not a chronicler, I work with creations, condensations.

Apart from the freer attitude towards documents, another difference with *Legionärerna* (and also with *Ett annat liv*, cf. 5.4) is the use of the first-person pronoun. Now that the narrator is not a nameless “investigator” with the same political position and the same physical appearance as the writer himself (cf. 3.3) but a fictitious character named Johan Christian Lindner<sup>171</sup>, Enquist shifts from third- to first-person narration. It would be tempting to draw a parallel between Enquist's choice of person and Proust's passage from the third person of *Jean Santeuil* to the first of the *Recherche* as analysed by Genette:

Most obviously significant in this turnaround is the late, and deliberate, assumption of the *form* of direct autobiography, which we must immediately connect to the apparently contradictory fact that the narrative content of the *Recherche* is less directly autobiographical than the narrative content of *Santeuil* – as if Proust first had had to conquer a certain adhesion to himself, had to detach himself from himself, in order to win the right to say «I», or more precisely the right to have this hero who is neither completely himself nor completely someone else say «I». So the conquest of the *I* here is not a return to and attendance on himself, not a settling into the comfort of «subjectivity», but perhaps exactly the opposite: the difficult experience of relating to oneself with (slight) distance and off-centering – a relationship wonderfully symbolized by that barely suggested, seemingly accidental semihomonymy of the narrator-hero and the signatory. (Genette 1980: 249, italics in the original)

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<sup>170</sup> «To make reality clearer, not to mirror it.»

<sup>171</sup> Curiously enough, throughout the book the narrator insists almost obsessively in stating his name: «mitt fulla namn: Johan Christian Lindner» (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 8; «my full name: Johan Christian Lindner»), «Christian Lindner kallar jag mig» (31; «I am called Christian Lindner»), «Och så mitt [namn]: Christian Lindner» (56; «And then mine: Christian Lindner»), «Johan Christian Lindner heter jag» (217; «My name is Johan Christian Lindner»). It could be a corroboration of the need for distance on the part of the author discussed here.

If Proust «win[s] the right to say “I”» by decreasing the degree of autobiographicality of the *Recherche*, it seems that Enquist wins the same right, while continuing to reveal «något om sig själv», by hiding behind somebody else’s mask, in this case Johan Christian Lindner’s. In both cases however there is a need for detaching from the self, either in terms of content (Proust) or of form (Enquist), as if both writers did not dare to reveal too much of themselves.

However, despite Enquist’s choice of pronoun, Christian Lindner and his author have plenty in common: both can boast a past as high jumpers and a present as intellectuals. Their similarities emerge in particular in a short passage in the third person, defined as a «kort bildningsroman»<sup>172</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 238), where the narrator describes himself as a sportsman, «god mångkampare och lovande hoppare»<sup>173</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 240), and relates his sporting experiences abroad, among which the same university athletics meeting in Greifswald also attended by Enquist<sup>174</sup> (cf. Enquist 2008: 147-152). Both take also part in the World University Games in Turin in 1959: «han mindes plötsligt med grämlse tävlingarna i Turin där allting hade lekt till och med 1.96»<sup>175</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 253), says Christian Lindner in *Sekonden*, while in *Ett annat liv* «vid den Akademiska världsmästerskapen i Turin 1959 blir han femman på 196 trots usla och allt för lösa banor, som han gärna formulerar det själv»<sup>176</sup> (Enquist 2008: 152, italics in the original). But Lindner is not only a sportsman, he is also «en västeuropeisk intellektuell»<sup>177</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 259), a definition that needs no proof of its appropriateness to Enquist.

However, apart from the ostensible similarities between *Sekonden*’s narrator and his author, it is the latter himself who lists some of his personal experiences included in

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<sup>172</sup> «A short *Bildungsroman*.»

<sup>173</sup> «Good athlete and promising jumper.»

<sup>174</sup> Curiously enough, in *Sekonden* Lindner visits Greifswald in the autumn of 1956 (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 240), while in *Ett annat liv* Enquist’s stay in the GDR is dated one year later.

<sup>175</sup> «He suddenly remembered with regret the championships in Turin, where everything had gone well until 1.96.»

<sup>176</sup> «At the World University Championships in Turin in 1959 he is fifth in the 1.96, despite lousy tracks that were far too loose, as he puts it to himself» (Enquist 2015: 116).

<sup>177</sup> «A west European intellectual.»

the book: «Cykelfärden till Herrens Bord, Himlaharpan, Greifswald» (Enquist 2008: 269). We could add the invasion of Prague, the trips to Berlin and other less visible, but not less significant details, which will be analysed later on. But let us start from the elements to which Enquist himself draws our attention. The cycle ride to the Lord's Table has already been widely dealt with in the previous chapter, but in *Sekonden* another of Enquist's key images<sup>178</sup> makes its first appearance, that of the «himlaharpa», the celestial harp. Curiously enough, in *Sekonden* the acoustic phenomenon he refers to is just described, without the poetical definition that will denote it in the following books:

Månsken, snö och ytterligt sträng kyla, jag satt vid sängens fotända inlindad i mina filter och såg ut över dalen. Det sjöng i hela huset. Det sjöng från telefontrådarna, dovt och klart, hårt och ihållande. [...]

Men det var sången från telefontrådarna, med det gamla trähuset som en gigantisk klangbotten, som jag aldrig skulle kunna glömma. Jag fick för mig att det var rymden som sjöng, att jag befann mig innerst inne i universums gigantiska snäcka, den som uppfångade de allra yttersta ljuden och gav dem till mig. Det var den sången jag hörde. Jag satt inlindad i mina filter, gömd i snäckans innersta vindling, och snäckan öppnade sig i ett allt oerhördare gap, tog in den blåsvarta rymden och mörkret bortanför den. (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 90-91)

Moonlight, snow and exceptionally bitter cold, I was sitting on the foot-end of my bed all wrapped up in my blankets and looked out on the valley. The whole house was singing. The song came from the telephone wires, muted and clear, piercing and persistent. [...]

But it was the song from the telephone wires, with the old wooden house as a huge sounding box, that I would never forget. I imagined that it was the outer space that sang, that I was sitting deep inside the universe's giant shell, the one that collected the remotest sounds and gave them to me. It was that song that I heard. I sat all wrapped up in my blankets, hidden inside the shell's deepest coil, while the shell opened towards an immense gap, taking in the blue-black space and the darkness beyond it.

The description of the phenomenon and of its effects on the narrator goes on for nearly five pages, always reinforcing the same feeling of immensity outside («Allting var oerhört. Rymden var oerhörd, svärtan oerhörd. Ljuset från månen, den isblåvita snöns återsken, kölden som ofta sjönk ner mot 40 grader, allting var oerhört»<sup>179</sup>, Enquist 2014 [1971]: 90) and of protective solitude inside («Jag satt där ensam i snäckans innersta

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Ekselius, who titles a chapter of her book «Himlaharpan» (Ekselius 1996: 157-228).

<sup>179</sup> «Everything was immense. The space was immense, the darkness immense. The moonlight, the icy blue-white reflection of the snow, the cold that often reached minus 40, everything was immense.»

vindling, min ensamhet var skenbar och man erbjöd mig flykt»<sup>180</sup>, 92). The song from outer space however is not menacing, just fascinating. It offers «flykt», the promise of a possible contact: «Gemenskap fanns, långt borta från världen. Kontakt var möjlig. Rösterna sjöng, och jag lyssnade»<sup>181</sup> (92).

Later on in the book the image returns twice. The first time it is a reminiscence triggered by the cold light of the moon falling in through a window in a waiting hall at Minsk station:

Genom de höga fönstren föll ljus in, kanske var det månljus. Jag vet: jag kopplar alltid samman vissa bilder. Månljus, snö, pappa stående i grå flanellkalsonger intill fotändan av min säng, med det kantiga egendomliga sorgset slutna ansiktet oförstående vänligt lyssnande till sången från telefonrådarna. Snäckans innersta vindling, att vila i fostervattnet, att se mekaniken: att inte utesluta någonting och inte ställa upp falska motsättningar. (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 233)

The light fell in from the high windows, maybe it was moonlight. I know: I always tie together certain images. Moonlight, snow, dad standing in his grey flannel drawers at the foot of my bed, with his strange, angular, sorrowfully fixed face, listening amiably but without understanding the song from the telephone wires. The shell's deepest coil, to rest in the amniotic fluid, to see the mechanism: never exclude anything, nor put forward false oppositions.

Here the narrator is short-circuited with his author: it is Enquist who had written about «fostervattnet» and «mekaniken» in *Legionärerna* (cf. 3.3), here blended with «sången från telefonrådarna» and «snäckans innersta vindling». More interesting, the narrator/author admits his conscious use of repetition as a means to connect different experiences, thus creating a cohesive pattern, maybe even a meaning.

The last recurrence of the heavenly song in *Sekonden* is in the final chapter, where the narrator takes leave of his father; during his last visit, he suddenly remembers the nights of his childhood, when they used to listen to the song of the telephone wires together:

Så mindes jag ju honom: hur han kommit vaggande i mörkret och stått där vid min sängs fotända, en av dessa krigsvintrar på 40-talet då kölden var mycket sträng, dalen täckt av vit snö, när jag suttit hopkrupen under filtarna och hållits fången av sången från telefonrådarna, av signalerna som kom från den yttersta av rymder. Då

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<sup>180</sup> « I sat there alone inside the shell's deepest coil, my loneliness was apparent and I was offered a getaway.»

<sup>181</sup> «A communion did exist, far away from the world. A contact was possible. The voices sang and I listened.»



hade han i natten kommit till mig, i sina grå flanelkalsonger och med nävarna hjälplöst men ändå tryggt hängande rakt ner. Nu var han gammal, han hade de sista åren torkat samman och krympt på ett besynnerligt sätt, men ännu vaknade han på natten och hölls vaken av sin oro. Eller var det mötet med mig han ville förlänga? (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 401)

It was so that I remembered him: how he had come swaying in the dark and sat down at the foot-end of my bed, one of those war winters in the forties when the cold was bitter and the valley covered in snow, and I sat all wrapped up in my blankets, captured by the song from the telephone wires, by the signals that came from the remotest of spaces. Then he had come to me at night, in his grey flannel drawers and with his hands helplessly but at the same time comfortably hanging by his side. Now he was old, in recent years he had dried up and shrunk in a funny way, but at night he still woke up and was kept awake by his anxiety. Or was it our meeting that he wanted to prolong?

As already pointed out for the cycle ride to the Lord's table in the previous chapter, in *Sekonden* the presence of the father transfigures what in reality must have been a solitary experience (as we can gather from our knowledge of Enquist's family situation, since in most other occurrences it is not described as such), here presented as a shared emotion, something so precious as to be prolonged many years later at the price of a sleepless night. An absence («en far som inte fanns») is thus turned into a «hjälplost men ändå tryggt» presence: a perfect exemplification of the reassuring effects of repetition, which can turn «a passive predicament into an active situation» (Robinson 1986: 44, in his turn referring to Freud 2001).

However, the image's potential is far from exploited and the frequency with which it appears in following works<sup>182</sup> is in itself an evidence of its importance, as Ekselius points out (cf. 1996: 158). It is in *Musikanternas uttåg* that the expression «himlaharpan» is used for the first time to describe the resonance of telephone wires:

Det var som hemma. Trådarnas ena ända var fäst i ett trähus i en by i Västerbotten, den andra fanns ute i rymden, trådarna hängde i döda stjärnor, det ven och råmade, sången kom från rymden och var ordlös och handlade om de ordlösa.  
Det var himlaharpan. (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 59-60)

It was like at home. One end of the wire was attached to a wooden house in a village in Västerbotten, the other out in space, the wires suspended from dead stars, whining and roaring, the song from space which was wordless and about the wordless.

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<sup>182</sup> In *Sekonden* (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 91, 92, 93, 94, 233, 305, 401); in *Musikanternas uttåg* (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 55, 60, 61, 62, 70, 76, 90, 131, 137, 275, 276, 310); in *Nedstörtad ängel* (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 47, 48, 80); in *I lodjurets timma* (Enquist 2017a: 184, 185, 186, 187, 189, 192, 193); in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 21, 80, 93, 98, 172, 248); in *Ett annat liv* (Enquist 2008: 44, 77, 269, 280, 518).

It was the celestial harp. (Enquist 1993: 45)

Here the space is not simply «gigantisk» and «oerhörd», as in *Sekonden*: it is «död» and «ordlös»; it does not sing «dovt och klart», it whines and roars. The reassuring has turned to frightening, maybe due to the absence of the father. And in the following passage the transformation is even more evident:

Strängarna var spända mot huset, huset var en resonanslåda och han befann sig mitt i lådan, strängarnas bortre ända fanns borta i stjärnehavet och himlaharpan dånade och dånade. I drömmen var sången från himlaharpan öronbedövande och skrämmande, inte mjuk, dov och högtidlig som han egentligen mindes den från vinternätterna i Hjoggböle, utan skärande, tunnare och mer hotfullt skarp. Så blev sången så skarp och genomträngande att den gjorde ont, den gick rakt genom hans huvud och det fanns ingen som kunde hjälpa honom. Längst in i mörkret var smärtan en mjuk glödande punkt som växte och svällde, sången från himlaharpan vek åt sidan och till sist var bara smärtan där, skarp, klar och mycket saklig. (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 275-276)

The wires were stretched to the house. The house was a sounding-box and he was in the middle of the box. The other end of the wire was far away in the stars and the celestial harp was thundering on and on. In his dream, the song of the celestial harp was deafening and frightening, not soft, muted and dignified as he remembered from the winter nights in Hjoggböle, but piercing, thinner and more menacing. The song grew so sharp and penetrating that it hurt, going right through his head, and there was no one who could help him. Far inside the darkness, the pain was a soft glowing point that grew and swelled, the song of the celestial harp veering away, and finally nothing was left but the pain, sharp, clear and very real. (Enquist 1993: 215-216)

The passage comes at the end of the incident in which the young protagonist, Nicanor, gets his tongue accidentally cut off in a fight, which explains the insistence on pain, but the harp itself is menacing and frightening, as in the first quotation. The absence of the father reflects the darkness and the wordlessness of the far-away stars, making the contact with the transcendent a frightening and menacing experience.

In *Nedstörtad ängel* the image assumes yet a slightly different nuancing:

I drömmen visste jag genast vad det var. De lyssnade till himlaharpan. Och sången från den, den kände jag ju så väl, från när jag själv var barn. Det fanns alldeles vita januarinätter när månen var vit och snön lyste och det var kallt kallt kallt; telefontrådarna var fästa i husets vägg, huset var av trä och pappa hade byggt det själv, det var som en jättelik resonanslåda, och trådarna sjöng.

Det var en oerhörd sång hämtad från stjärnorna, den kom natt efter natt när det var kallt. Det sjöng på himlaharpan som om någon där ute i vinternatten dragit med en jättestråke över strängarna, det sjöng, tusen år av sorg och förlåtelse, ordlöst och sorgset, natten lång, trådarnas ena ända var fästa i ett trähus i Västerbotten men den andra ändan hängde fast långt ute i rymden, hängde i svarta döda stjärnor. Sången

kom från rymden och var ordlös och handlade om de ordlösa. Glöm oss inte, sjöng den, vi är som du, glöm oss inte.

Trådarnas ena ända hängde i de svarta döda stjärnorna, sången hade färdats i tusen år och till sist nått fram till de två som satt där i natten i ett trähus i Västerbotten. Sången handlade om dem. Vi är inte stumma, vi finns. De höll varandra i handen och lyssnade till himlaharpan, och pojken lutade sitt huvud mot Pinons arm, och blundade.

Och man kunde se att han var nästan lycklig. (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 47-48)

In the dream I knew exactly what it was. They listened to the heavenly harp. And its song, which I had known so well since I myself had been a child. There were quite white January nights when the moon was white and it was cold cold cold; the telephone wires were fastened to the wall of the house, the house was made of wood and Daddy had built it himself, it was like a gigantic resonating box, and the wires sang.

It was an enormous song brought from the stars, it came night after night when it was cold. It sang in the heavenly harp as if someone out there in the winter's night had drawn a giant's bow over the strings, it sang, a thousand years of sadness and forgiving, wordlessly and sadly, all night long, one end of the wires stuck to a wooden house in Västerbotten County, but the other end hung on far out in space, hung on to the dead black stars. The song came from space and was wordless and was about the wordless. Do not forget us, it sang, we are like you, do not forget us.

The one end of the wires hung among the black dead stars, the song had travelled for a thousand years and at last reached those two sitting there at night in a wooden house in Västerbotten. The song was about them. We are not dumb, we exist. They held each other's hands and listened to the heavenly harp, and the boy leaned his head against Pinon's arm, and his eyes were closed.

And one could see that he was almost happy. (Enquist 1986: 56)

The person who dreams of the heavenly harp is the narrator of this short but complex novel that entwines three different narratives. In the narrator's dream, the protagonists of two different stories, the two-headed monster Pinon and a nameless killer boy, sit together listening to the «song from the stars». We are back to the atmosphere of *Sekonden*: the experience is shared, and the message, although wordless and coming from the dead stars, is soothing and inclusive. The two «monstrous» protagonists feel accepted, almost happy: according to Ekselius, *Nedstörtad ängel* is «en roman om försoning»<sup>183</sup> (Ekselius 1996: 212), and this reading is confirmed by the fact that the following paragraph opens with the word «agape», which the author later defines as not having to earn forgiveness.

In *I lodjurets timma* the transcendent dimension of the heavenly harp is made explicit:

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<sup>183</sup> «A novel about atonement.»

Och så kom han [morfar] upp, och stod bakom mig i långkalsongerna. Och så la han handen över håret på mig. Och strök så där, lite lätt. Och så sa han: hör du vad det är? Nä, sa jag. Det är Himlaharpan, sa han. Vem är det som sjunger? sa jag. Jag tror det är Gud, sa han. Han brukar sjunga så där ibland. (Enquist 2017a: 185-186)

And he came up and stood beside me in his longjohns. He put his hand on my head, and brushed my hair, like this, very softly. And he said: «Do you hear what it is?» «Hmmm», I said. «That's the heavenly harp,» he said. «Who's that singing?» I asked. «I think it's God,» he said. «He sings like that sometimes.» (Enquist 1990: 38-39)

It is the first time God is mentioned in this context, and this is not surprising, since the play, written in the same period as *Nedstörtad ängel*, is very much a book about mercy and forgiveness, about agape in its higher sense.

Still transcendent, albeit in a more profane meaning, is the experience described in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*:

Johannes hade, innan han blev förrädare, sagt att det var himlaharpan. Musiken kunde höras vinternätter när det var kallt, då sjöng det i den hemlighetsfulla värld som han och jag hade skapat åt oss: fylld av stjärnor och trådar och musik och hemliga signaler. (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 21)

Johannes, before he became a traitor, had said that this was the heavenly harp. On cold winter nights you could hear the music, when the secret world he and I had created would be singing: nights full of stars and wires and music and secret signals. (Enquist 1992: 17)

Again, when the experience is shared, the heavenly harp is mysterious, but fundamentally reassuring: it bears «signaler», a message, be it from God or from Flash Gordon, that other inhabitant of the skies, as it is playfully hinted at in *Ett annat liv*: «Där ovan styrde Blixt Gordon mot nya uppdrag, och här nere låg han själv och väntade på ett budskap från stjärnorna och från himlaharpan»<sup>184</sup> (Enquist 2008: 514). For the rest of *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, that is after Johannes's "betrayal", the harp is only seen as something missing, something that the narrator has been deprived of, like the green house discussed in 2.1.3.

To close this long roundup, necessary to show the great relevance of the heavenly harp in Enquist's iconography, we have five, brief references in *Ett annat liv*. One of them in particular seems a sort of anticlimax:

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<sup>184</sup> «Up above, Flash Gordon was heading for new adventures, and down where he was lying, waiting for a message from the stars and the celestial harp» (Enquist 2015: 381).

Det händer särskilt vintertid när telefontrådarna sjunger mot de gröna husets resonanslåda som vore det en *himlaharpa*, ordet han fått beröm för. (Enquist 2008: 77, italics in the original)

It happens especially in the winter, when the hum of the telephone wires resonates against the roof of the green house, like a *celestial harp*, the phrase he was commended for. (Enquist 2015: 62)

The description is plain, matter-of-fact, without a trace of the poetry and the mysteriousness of the previous occurrences. However, it gives a piece of fundamental information: by telling us that he was commended (by his mother, as it can be inferred from the text) for the phrase «celestial harp», Enquist is dating back to his childhood the conceiving of this image, and therefore offering a possible explanation for its persistence. Another, more convincing (or at least most intriguing) explanation can be deduced from the sentences that immediately precede the mentioning of the celestial harp. The author describes the moments of fear and loneliness of his early childhood, when he thinks intensely of his dead father, whom he imagines as a guardian angel in a black serge suit, as if to summon him. The angel-father always appears to answer his son's call, especially in the winter, when the celestial harp is singing. It is now much clearer why the image of the celestial harp is often described as a shared experience and connected to a sense of reassurance, in spite of the menacing dark space outside. This observation also supports the view that repetition in Enquist often arises from an autobiographical impulse, however hidden it might appear at first sight.

The third element of *Sekonden* which Enquist explicitly labels as autobiographical is Greifswald. Greifswald is a city in north-eastern Germany, then in GDR, which in 1956 celebrated its university quinquennial with a student athletics tournament. And it is there that both Christian Lindner (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 240-241) and the young protagonist of *Ett annat liv* (Enquist 2008: 147) take part in the high jump competition. But neither contents himself with competing:

En studentgrupp framför en nattlig kabaré, stjärnan är en ung studentska som han träffar efter föreställningen, hon heter Gisela. Som en tromb går hon in i den blyge eller kanske inte längre så tafatte svensken, de inleder ett förhållande som ska bli smärtsamt, och som han inte klarar av. Det drar ut, de skriver senare brev, hon vill fly till Sverige, han vågar inte ta ansvar för henne, han vågar inte ta steget. Hennes brev allt mer förtvivlade.

Han börjar, återkommen till Uppsala, skriva en kärleksroman som börjar i Greifswald, det är trasch, undanflykter. Han är rädd. Detta stämmer inte med hans

självbild som säger snäll, inte feg. Det skakar om honom, många år senare skriver han en roman om idrott och politik, men egentligen trodde han sig skriva en roman om Greifswald. (Enquist 2008: 151)

A group of students watch a night-time cabaret, the star of which is a young female student he meets after the show, called Gisela. With the force of a tornado she sweeps the shy Swede, who is perhaps not quite so awkward now, off his feet. They enter into a relationship that will be painful and that he will not be able to deal with. It carries on; they write to each other. She wants to fly to Sweden, but he cannot face taking responsibility for her, does not dare to take the step. Her letters became increasingly desperate.

On his return to Uppsala he starts to write a love story set in Greifswald; it is trash, a cop-out. He is afraid. This does not conform to his image of himself as good-hearted rather than cowardly; it shakes him. Many years later he writes a novel about sport and politics, but actually he believes he is writing a novel about Greifswald. (Enquist 2015: 115)

This is the whole story in *Ett annat liv*: eleven lines. In *Sekonden* the love affair with Gisela is the core of one of the three interweaving threads of the novel, Christian Lindner's story, and is told at some length. However, about the most delicate part of the story, the girl's intention to fly to Sweden, also *Sekonden* is quite evasive, almost defensive:

Hon hade tänkt sig att stanna. Hon sa det aldrig öppet. [...] Hon såg prövande på mig och jag visste att jag inte skulle bestå prövningen eftersom jag ville misslyckas. Hon såg mycket ensam ut. Vi hade ännu inte gått till polisen. Hon sa:  
– Du är rädd. (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 341-343)

She had intended to stay. She never said that openly. [...] She looked at me searchingly and I knew that I wouldn't pass the test because I wanted to fail. She looked very lonesome. We hadn't gone to the police yet. She said:  
– You're afraid.

Again, as with the heavenly harp, the form of the novel allows the episode to bloom freely, while in the autobiographical text the discretion, verging on reticence, with which Enquist treats his dears and nears<sup>185</sup> restricts the narration to the bare, unemotional facts.

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<sup>185</sup>A discretion for which he has been both praised and harshly criticised. Cf., for instance, the following quotes from two reviews of *Ett annat liv*: «Egentligen är jag kanske mest imponerad av det faktum att Enquist varken hämnas på gamla fiender eller lämnar ut sina närmaste» (Coelho Ahndoril 2008; «Actually what probably strikes me most is the fact that Enquist neither takes revenge on old enemies nor gives away his nears and dears»); «Inte ens fiktiva medel kan dölja att den blygsammaste författaren i Sverige tycks ha ett själv rättfärdigt ego trist som ett bönehus på landet. Och de som borde vara riktigt nära benämner han aldrig. Det är kusligt» (Eklund 2008; «Not even fictive expedients can hide the fact that the most modest writer in Sweden has a self-righteous ego as gloomy as a meeting house in the countryside. And those who should be really near him, he never names. It is creepy»).

The last elements listed in *Ett annat liv* («en mor, och en far som inte fanns», Enquist 2008: 269) are those that have been transformed – «maskerat» – the most in the fictionalising process. Christian's nameless mother is treated much more harshly than the respected and loved Maja in *Ett annat liv*:

Jag försökte tänka på mamma, men såg bara hennes fromma små tårar och hörde hennes böner, och de gav ingen värme, och man kunde inte ta på dem eller använda dem. (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 24)

I tried to think of mum, but I only saw her pious little tears and heard her prayers, and they did not warm, one could not touch them nor use them.

\*

Mamma, som en sorgsen liten fågel, som äntligen insett att hennes ensamhet var ohjälplig. (136)

Mum, like a sad little bird, who had finally realised that her loneliness was hopeless.

\*

Mamma dog på sitt lite knyckiga, småsnyftande sätt. (307)

Mum died in her slightly jerky, sobbing way.

These are only a few examples of the style in which she is constantly presented throughout the book: a fearful, devoted little woman, utterly unable to communicate with her son. In his camouflaging action, Enquist is careful to insert crucial differences, first of all the early death of the woman, when her son is still in his teens.

The opposite treatment is reserved to the protagonist's father, a projection of the father that Enquist never had. According to his son, Mattias Jonsson-Egnestam-Lindner «såg stark och behändig ut»<sup>186</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 20) and «jobbade först i skogen, sedan som stuvare»<sup>187</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 90); he was passionately devoted to sport and, despite his cheating, he remained a «fundamentalt god, hederlig och lojal»<sup>188</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 281) person throughout his life. Several of these characteristics are similar to those ascribed by the boy in *Ett annat liv* to his prematurely dead father,

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<sup>186</sup> «Looked strong and nifty.»

<sup>187</sup> «Worked first in the woods, then as a stevedore.»

<sup>188</sup> «Fundamentally good, honest and loyal.»

imagined as a guardian angel («Vingarna är vita, och han ser behändig ut när han flaxar»<sup>189</sup>, Enquist 2008: 76) or reconstructed through his wife's and brothers' memories: «han är stuveriarbetare på sommaren och skogshuggare på vintern»<sup>190</sup> (Enquist 2008: 13), «farbröderna berättade ju mest om hur rolig han hade varit, berättat historier, populärast i stuvarlaget, snygg och trevlig också mot kvinnorna *fast på ett ödmjukt sätt* som glädde alla»<sup>191</sup> (Enquist 2008: 72, italics in the original). As an author, then, Enquist does nothing different from what he had done in his childhood: he (re)constructs and invents a father, starting from the few documentary scraps he has at hand – a bit as he does in his documentary novels.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, those listed in *Ett annat liv* are not the only elements of *Sekonden* which are taken from Enquist's own experience. Between 1970 and 1971 he spent two six-month periods in Berlin, and many of the things he witnessed there, such as several events of the city's animated sport scene, are also included in *Sekonden*. Since these are a certainly less sensitive issue than the relationship with his parents, less camouflaging is needed, and the description is almost identical in the novel and the autobiography. Here are two short examples regarding respectively track cycling and football:

Banan var av trä med smala lamellartade träribbor klistrade tätt intill varandra, med de olika markeringsgränserna i rött och vitt. Cyklisterna kom och steg mot mig, steg och sjönk, som rytmiska vågor, pulsvågor, slet sina tre-fyra varv, hämtade in avlösaren, sträckte handen snett framåt, körde förbi och slet den andre med sig i växlingen. (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 77)

The wooden track was made of thin, engineered wood laths glued to each other, with the various delimiting lines marked in red and white. The cyclists rode up towards me, up and down the track, like rhythmic waves, pulse waves, they pushed their three or four laps, then grabbed the relief with their hand stretched in front of them and slung him into the race.

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<sup>189</sup> «The wings are white and he looks very nifty as he flaps them» (Enquist 2015: 62).

<sup>190</sup> «He was a stevedore in summer and a lumberjack in winter» (Enquist 2015: 15).

<sup>191</sup> «His brothers spoke mostly about how funny he had been: he told stories, was the most popular in the team of stevedores, good-looking and nice to women, but *in a respectful way* that everyone liked» (Enquist 2015: 59).



Banan är av trä och han beundrar det gedigna lamellarbetet, han sitter mitt på vid E-sektionens främre gräns, cyklisterna stiger och sjunker mot honom, som rytmiska vågor, sliter sina tre fyra varv, hämtar in avlösaren. (Enquist 2008: 255)

The track is made of engineered wood and he is full of admiration for the workmanship in the surface. He is sitting at the front of the E section; the cyclists bank up and down past him in rhythmic waves, taking in in turns to push for three or four laps and drop back. (Enquist 2015: 190)

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Men Hertha BSC:s hemmapublik, en icke oväsentlig del av Berlins arbetarklass, tycktes under köldens, fuktens och drivsnöns tryck förvandlas från det jovialiska, öldrickande, humorfyllda och känslotarka djur som tryckte sig efter Stadions väggar vackra sommarkvällar till något annat, brutalare och samtidigt mer gripande, aggressivare och samtidigt mer öppet sårbart. [...] Snön drev hårt, och de skrek. De skrek åt spelet och åt motståndarna och åt fouls och åt kylan och åt allting i denna egendomliga stad. *Schweinehund!* skrek de, hårt och upprört och stående upp från de lager av filtar och sammanvikta tidningar som skulle hindra bänkarnas fukt och kyla att tränga upp, *Schweinehund! Schweinehund!* (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 351-352)

But Herta B.S.C.'s home crowd, a not inconsiderable proportion of Berlin's working class, seemed to be transformed under the force of the cold, the damp and the driving snow from the jovial, beer-drinking, humorous and passionate beings that crowded the Stadion in fine summer evenings, into something different: more ruthless and at the same time more touching, more aggressive but also more visibly vulnerable. [...] They were lashed by the snow and they yelled. They yelled at the game and at the opposing team and at fouls and at the cold and at everything in that strange city. *Schweinehund!*, they yelled, loud and indignantly, standing up from the layer of blankets and newspapers which should prevent the cold and damp of the terraces to penetrate, *Schweinehund! Schweinehund!*

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Hertha BSC:s hemmapublik, en icke oväsentlig del av Västberlins arbetarklass, tycktes under köldens, fuktens och drivsnöns tryck förvandlas från det jovialiska, öldrickande, humorfyllda och känslotarka djur som tryckte sig efter Olympiastadions väggar vackra sommarkvällar till något annat: brutalare och samtidigt mer gripande, och samtidigt sårbarare. Snön drev hårt, och de skrek. De skrek åt spelet och åt motståndarna, och kanske också åt sig själva, *Schweinehund!* skrek de, hårt och förorättat och stående upp från de lager av filtar och tidningar som skulle hindra bänkarnas fukt och kyla att tränga upp, *Schweinehund! Schweinehund!* (Enquist 2008: 258)

Herta B.S.C.'s home crowd, a not inconsiderable proportion of them from West Berlin's working class, seemed to be transformed under the force of the cold, the damp and the driving snow from the jovial, beer-swigging, humorous and sentimental spectators of summer evenings into something else: more callous and also more thrilling. They were lashed by the snow and they yelled. They yelled at the game and at the opposition and perhaps also at themselves. [*Schweinehund!*, they yelled, loud and in an injured tone, standing up from the layer of blankets and

newspapers which should prevent the cold and damp of the terraces to penetrate,]<sup>192</sup> *Schweinehund! Schweinehund!* (Enquist 2015: 192)

Such episodes have nothing dangerous and can be revealed as they happened, without any need to be concealed nor disguised, as handy bricks with which to build a convincing fictional world, similar in their function to the documents condensed to distil a clearer reality. And as bricks, they can also be dismantled from a previous work and recycled almost word for word more than thirty years later, as the two examples above clearly show.

At the opposite end of the scale for both sensitiveness and camouflaging, we find the last element of this long section dedicated to *Sekonden*, the episode of the drowning boy. As Ulf Lindberg points out, this little tale «utgör något av en urfabel i P.O. Enquists fiktionprosa»<sup>193</sup> (Lindberg 1999: 3), appearing first in the short story *Mannen i båten*, then in *Sekonden* and finally in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*<sup>194</sup>. The story, very similar in the first two versions, is simple: two boys around ten years old build and equip a raft, but during its maiden voyage on a little lake, one of the two falls and drowns. However, «[d]et sista ordet står ingenstans i texten. Han “drunknar” inte. Han försvinner, ut ur historien och in i berättaren»<sup>195</sup> (Bredsdorff 1991: 13). The surviving boy goes adrift for some time, and when he is rescued by his grandfather, he maintains that a foreigner in a boat (the “man in the boat” who gives the title to the short story) came and took the other away. Nothing substantiates an autobiographical origin of the episode, apart from a hasty mention in *Ett annat liv*, where it is listed together with other important but often disturbing experiences from his childhood. However, the original short story had a subtitle, «Historien, som jag berättade den för Mats»<sup>196</sup>, which introduces a reference to Enquist’s then eight-year-old son. Of course the allusion is just part of the narrative frame in which a man tells his son a story from his childhood, but it nonetheless creates

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<sup>192</sup> The text in square brackets is missing in the English translation.

<sup>193</sup> «Represents something of an ur-fable in P.O. Enquist’s fictional prose.»

<sup>194</sup> Thomas Bredsdorff must share Lindberg’s opinion, since he titles the introducing chapter of his *De svarta hålen* “Mannen i boken”, paraphrasing the title of the short story.

<sup>195</sup> «The last word does not appear in the text. He does not “drown”. He disappears, out of the story and into the narrator.»

<sup>196</sup> «The story, the way I told it to Mats.»

a bridge – real or fictional – between the narrator and the author of the story. The other interesting detail is the hint that this is only one version of the story, the one the narrator chose to tell his son Mats, thus opening the possibility of different interpretations, further corroborated by the elliptical and fragmented structure of the short story. This is in fact characterised by «ett iögonfallande bruk av [...] det för mycket sagda (upprepningar och motsägelser), det för lite sagda (ellipser) eller det annorlunda sagda (stilväxlingar)»<sup>197</sup> (Lindberg 1999: 6). The never mentioned death of the boy is transformed first into a happy-ending accident, with the other boy stretching out a hand and saving him, then into a mysterious disappearance at the hands of an even more mysterious stranger, more or less openly identified with the Flying Dutchman: in both cases, when truth is too hard to be faced, it undergoes a process of *maskering*, of disguising, as so often in Enquist's writing (cf. 3.2).

In *Sekonden* the accident, transformed into an episode of Christian Lindner's childhood, is related in almost identical terms as in *Mannen i båten*:

Horisonten, vågorna, den lutande masten. Och jag minns lika tydligt Peters ansikte i vattnet (rädd för att han inte kunde simma så bra, generad för att han varit så klumpig). Sjön gick ganska hög. Jag räckte ut handen mot honom. Det var precis i skymningen: svårt att se, mycket kallt vatten, en ljus röd rand där solen just hade gått ner. Hans ansikte där nere i vattnet, han log generat som om han tänkte: Fan vad jag har klumpat mig. Och jag räckte så ut handen mot honom. [...]  
Det finns en lucka i det jag minns, en liten behändig lucka på sådär ett par timmar. Det nästa jag minns måste nämligen ha varit en bra stund senare. Jag satt längst bak i aktern. Peter satt längst fram, med ryggen mot mig, han kurade ihop sig som om han frös. (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 15-16)

The horizon, the waves, the leaning mast. And I remember as clearly Peter's face in the water (scared because he could not swim that well, embarrassed for having been so clumsy). The waves were quite high. I reached out my hand towards him. It was exactly at twilight: difficult to see, very cold water, a light red stripe where the sun had just gone down. His face down there in the water, he smiled an embarrassed smile as if he thought: gosh, how clumsy I have been. And then I reached out my hand towards him. [...]  
There is a hole in what I remember, a handy little hole of about a couple of hours. The next thing I remember must have been a good while later. I was sitting right at the back of the raft. Peter was sitting at the front, with his back towards me, huddling himself back as if he was freezing.

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<sup>197</sup> «A conspicuous use of [...] saying too much (repetitions and contradictions), saying too little (ellipsis) or saying something in a different way (stylistic variations).»

However, after the «black hole» (Lindberg 1999: 8) that interrupts the narration, before going ahead with the first reconstruction (the happy-ending accident), *Sekonden* inserts a paragraph about agape: «För mig har det kommit att betyda: att inte behöva göra sig förtjänt av nåden. Start på nytt, bordet rensopat, inget försprång för de duktiga som jobbat ihop till en förlåtelse»<sup>198</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 15-16). This need for grace is of course connected with the idea of guilt, a guilt which is made clearer by the second reconstruction of the accident, the intervention of the unknown man, later identified as the Flying Dutchman, who «en gång begått ett fruktansvärt brott: han hade inte räckt ut sin hand mot drunknande sjömän»<sup>199</sup> (Enquist, 1978: 41). What is silenced by the black hole is therefore the fear of being responsible for the death of the friend, of having «räck[t] ut handen, *men inte tillräckligt långt*»<sup>200</sup> (Bredsdorff 1991: 17, italics in the original), or simply the inescapable sense of guilt of any survivor, as Lindberg prefers to see it (Lindberg 1999: 10). The aching “sore point” is passed over in silence, as usual, but – just because of its being unexpressed – it is forced to come back over and over again, not only inside the same story (the stretched hand comes back five times in *Mannen i båten*), but also from one book to the other.

The episode of the drowning boy is also included in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, where it intertwines with the main threads of the novel. One of the two twin-like protagonists of the novel, Johannes, disappears after a raft accident described in terms similar to the previous versions:

Och så minns jag tydligt hans ansikte i vattnet, jag såg hur han både var rädd och skämdes för att han varit så klumpig, det var som han velat be om ursäkt. Sjön gick ganska hög. Jag såg hans ansikte i vattnet, just innan han försvann under flotten, och jag minns tydligt hur jag räckte ut handen mot min bästa vän Johannes, som för att rädda honom ur den yttersta nöd, just i det ögonblick han rycktes ned i vattenvirveln, lika stor som den när syndafloden sög ner de nästan avklädda kvinnorna i det jättelika vattuhålet.

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<sup>198</sup> «For me it has come to mean: not having to deserve grace. To begin afresh, *tabula rasa*, without any advantage for the hard-working ones who earned themselves forgiveness.»

<sup>199</sup> «Had once committed a terrible crime: he had not reached out his hand to drowning seamen.» The sentence, present in the first version of the story, in *Sekonden* has been changed into «han som svikit och inte visat kärlek» (Enquist 2014 [1971]: 21; «he who had betrayed and not shown love»), maybe because originally too explicit.

<sup>200</sup> «Reached out his hand, *but not enough*.»

Det nästa jag minns måste ha varit flera timmar senare. Jag satt längst bak på flotten. (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 211)

And I clearly remember his face in the water then, I saw how he was both scared and ashamed of having been so clumsy, it was as if he wanted to apologize. The waves were quite high. I saw his face in the water, just before he vanished under the raft, and I clearly remember how I reached out my hand to Johannes my best friend, as if to save him in the greatest danger, but at that very moment he was dragged down in the whirling waters, just as big as the Flood when it sucked the almost unclad women into the vast watterhole [*sic*].

The next thing I remember must have been hours later. I was sitting right at the back of the raft. (Enquist 1992: 211)

The difference here is that the fallen boy heaves himself up onto the raft by himself, without the help of the narrator, who however does not feel any guilt: after all, Johannes had “betrayed” him by taking possession of his house and family after the second swapping. Also when he disappears, Johannes does not need any intervention of a mysterious stranger: he just goes ashore on a little island in the middle of the lake, and from there finds the way to the *Nautilus*, where the narrator will find him forty-five years later. In *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, however, the focus of the whole passage is not on the drowned boy himself, but on a sort of doubling: the surviving narrator finds his foster sister’s «döpojke»<sup>201</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 187, 198, 201, 205, 206, 207, 216, 217) and drops it in the lake in a sort of burial. But another «döpojke» is present both in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* and in *Ett annat liv*: the narrator’s stillborn older brother with his same name. According to Lindberg, then, «[u]rscenariot består i att ett barn har dött i moderlivet – i fostervattnet – medan ersättaren/berättaren fått leva vidare»<sup>202</sup> (Lindberg 1999: 17). Here is another possible autobiographical connection to the recurring image of the drowning boy, a sort of original sin – an “ur-guilt”, to use a term that Lindberg could have employed – from which it is impossible to escape, and which therefore returns again and again.

The episode of the drowning boy is in fact also touched upon, albeit with very different strategies and treatment, in much later works such as *Ett annat liv* and *Liknelseboken*. Unlike the previous versions, here the episode is just named hastily,

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<sup>201</sup> «Deadboy», according to *Kapten Nemos* English translator (Enquist 1992: 186, 199, 201, 206, 207, 208, 216, 217).

<sup>202</sup> «The primeval scenario consists in a boy who died in his mother’s womb – in the amniotic fluid – while the substitute/narrator could live on.»

without any details. In *Ett annat liv*, together with other unsettling experiences from his childhood (including «lilldöingen», another version of «döpojken»), as a part of the “answer” the protagonist so eagerly looks for:

Han infogar på detta sätt Blixt Gordon som en del av svaret på frågan, tillsammans med fadern, och lilldöingen, och på sätt och vis också Eeva-Lisa, och pojken som drunknade i träsket, och till vars död han på intet sätt är skyldig eller möjlig att lagföra tack vare sin ringa ålder, och den avklingande men inte längre ensamma sången från telefontrådarna. (Enquist 2008: 44-45)

And so he includes Flash Gordon as part of the answer to the question, along with his father, and the ghost boy, and to a certain extent Eeva-Lisa, and the boy who drowned in the marsh, for whose death he is in no way responsible or could possibly be prosecuted because of his age, and the receding but no longer solitary humming from the telephone wires. (Enquist 2015: 38)

Here we find again the hint at responsibility (the insistence on his *not* being responsible, of course, could be read as the tentative disclaimer of a dirty conscience), even in front of the law, which also returns in the three occurrences in *Liknelseboken*:

Talet vid Församlingsgården måste innehålla minnen. Kunde inledas med något han fördolt, men ofarligt. Som detta komiska lilla brott som måste ha inträffat krigssommaren 1940, i juli, då han satte katten på en hopsnickrad flotte och lät den segla iväg till en säkert fruktansvärd död.  
Eller kamraten Håkans död och återuppståndelse på Bursjön! (Enquist 2013: 11)

The speech in the parish hall must contain memories. It could begin with something he had concealed, something harmless. Like that silly, petty crime, which must have taken place in the war summer of 1940, in July, when he put the cat on a raft he had cobbled together and let it sail off towards a certain, frightful death.  
Or his friend Håkan’s death and resurrection on Lake Bursjön! (Enquist 2016: 12-13)

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Det uttalades Bussjön, sjön där Mannen i båten en augustinatt hade visat sig och hämtat Håkan med sig, som vore denna främmande man som kommit roende i skymningen Den Flygande Holländaren. Han som kommit för att hämta Håkan; och det hade medfört att han själv aldrig medgivit att Håkan dödde. Att *Håkan helt enkelt had dödde däri vattudjupet*.  
Som morbror Aron, nog om detta.  
Och själv hade han blivit sjuk den sommaren av oro, eller kanske ångest, då alla felaktigt och helt utan grund trodde att det var hans fel att Håkan drunknat.  
I alla fall: oskuld i luften på gräsmattan framför Larssonsgården.  
Det kan ha varit skuld. (Enquist 2013: 91, italics in the original)

It was the lake where the Man in the Boat had appeared one August night and taken Håkan with him – as if this unknown man who came rowing in the twilight were the Flying Dutchman. He had come for Håkan; and as a result he himself had never

admitted that Håkan was dead. That *Håkan had quite simply died out there in the watery depths*.

Like Uncle Aron; enough of that.

That summer he had been sick with worry, or perhaps dread, when everyone wrongly, and completely without foundation, believed it was his fault that Håkan had drowned.

Anyway: innocence in the air on the lawn in front of Larssonsgården.

It might have been guilt. (Enquist 2016: 89)

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Varför kände han ännu en gång skuld, eller snarare oro, nu när denna andra familj på Larssonsgården var borta, och hans egen *övertagit*. Absolut inget konstigt i detta, verkligen! men alla minnen!!! fast ingen talade om det som hänt den natten på timmerflotten med Håkan, och detta med Den Flygande Holländaren. (Enquist 2013: 97-98, italics in the original)

Why did he once again feel guilt, or rather unease, now that the other family at Larssonsgården had gone and his own had taken over? Nothing strange about that, really! But all the memories!!! Though no-one spoke of what had happened that night on the log raft with Håkan, or about the Flying Dutchman. (Enquist 2016: 92)

The first of these passages, in particular, offers an explicit description of Enquist's strategy in dealing with disturbing memories: first conceal them, then replace them with something «ofarlig», as happened in the first appearances of the drowning boy in *Sekonden* and *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*. Here the (real? imagined?) episodes that are mixed up are the death of a cat left to drift on a raft, for which the narrator is said to be responsible, and the «död och återuppståndelse» of a drowned friend, for which in *Ett annat liv* and *Liknelseboken* he denies whatever responsibility. However, sooner or later the repressed or camouflaged memories surface again, even more than forty years after the first attempt at processing them in writing.

At this point it is clear that, albeit certainly being a novel and not an autobiographical text, *Sekonden* incorporates quite a lot «om sig själv», as Enquist puts it retrospectively. The different autobiographical elements and themes are treated with diverse purposes and strategies, from the “documentary” effect of the more descriptive passages about Berlin and Greifswald, to the fictionalised memories elevated to symbolic meaning such as the cycle ride or the heavenly harp, to the almost unmentionable secrets that constitute his deepest «smärtpunkterna», a recurring term in his production that appears here for the first time (cf. 2.1.4). The tension between «visa» and «dölja» already evidenced in the previous books is more active than ever (as

confirmed by the fact that the author's revelations about himself are done «nästan mot sin vilja»), with the predominance of showing or hiding depending on the role played by each particular memory in the complex structure of the novel.

#### 4.2 *Musikanternas uttåg*: A family history

With *Musikanternas uttåg* Enquist's production seems to take a more marked autobiographical turn, concentrating on the family background that opens so many autobiographies: the action is completely set in the region where he grew up, Västerbotten, and many characters are based on relatives and family acquaintances who he heard about during his childhood. In particular, one of the main characters, Josefina Markström, is modelled on Enquist's maternal grandmother Johanna Lindgren («det är en förfärlig historia om mormor Johanna Lindgren»<sup>203</sup>, Enquist 2008: 364)<sup>204</sup>, while the protagonist Nicanor is a compound of several real people (Sjölund 2014)<sup>205</sup>.

In *Ett annat liv* Enquist describes at some length the genesis of the novel (Enquist 2008: 290, 361-371). The original plan was to write a book about Swedish emigration to South America after the great strike in 1909, an idea he had played with since the early seventies but always set aside for other projects. In 1976 he realises that the enterprise is destined to failure, and writes instead a sort of prologue to it: the story of a family in the Västerbotten coastland in the years between 1903 and 1909, and at the same time the story of the difficult birth of the labour movement in the poor and religious environment

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<sup>203</sup> «An appalling story about Grandmother Johanna Lindgren» (Enquist 2015: 273).

<sup>204</sup> Cf. also *Lewis resa*: «När jag var barn, och i beråd och icke visste mig någon levande råd, gick jag till min mormor, som hette Johanna, men som jag kallat Josefina i *Musikanternas uttåg*, och bad om hjälp» (Enquist 2014 [2001]: 153; «While I was a child and found myself in a quandary and at complete loss, I would go to my grandmother, whose name was Johanna but whom I called Josefina in my novel *The Musicians' Procession*, to ask for help», Enquist 2005: 124).

<sup>205</sup> Cf. *Ett annat liv*: «Han själv hade en tidig morgon stått där på kyrkogården, Gudsåkern, som den kallades, och återfunnit den platta liggande gravsten som utmärkte vilorummet för Efraim Markström. / En gång född i Bureå, i själva verket med det bibliska dopnamnet Nicanor» (Enquist 2008: 122; «Early one morning he had stood in the churchyard, God's Fields, and found the flat gravestone marking the resting place of Efraim Markström. / Born in Bureå, baptised Nicanor», Enquist 2015: 95). Also in *Lewis resa*: «Jag frågade om Nicanor, som inte hette så, och om Aron» (Enquist 2001: 416, «I asked about Nicanor, though that was not his name, and about my mother's brother, Aron», Enquist 2005: 325).



of northern Sweden. In short, the exterior plot of the novel can be described as follows: a socialist agitator from southern Sweden, Elmblad, tries a first, disastrous proselytising trip to Västerbotten in 1903. Seven years later, after the sawmill workers have organised themselves in smaller independent associations, he comes back at the invitation of Nicanor Markström, a boy he met during the first trip. However, also the second attempt at unionising the local workers ends up in failure, both at a political and a personal level: Nicanor is accidentally maimed in a fight with the workers and his mother Josefina is forced to emigrate to South America after the suicide of her brother.

The description of the development of the Argentinian project also tells us something about Enquist's attitude towards his family's and his own story:

Han återvänder från Broadway till det han *inte klarar av*. Han har inte klarat av det sedan våren 1971, nu fortsätter han att inte klara av.

Det är romanen om den svenska utvandringen till Argentina 1910. Exil och sönderfall.

Kanske finns det i begreppet *exil* något som oroar honom. Eller också är det ordet *rastlöshet* som skrämmer. Han vill själv ständigt och otåligt förflytta sig, men just i förflyttningen, i själva språnget, retarderar han och dagdrömmer. Ibland om en liten holme i ett träsk och den tungrodda båten och kartor på smörpapper eller om moderns kök. [...]

Samtidigt är han skräckslagen inför tanken att skriva om just detta, alltså det privata. Hellre baltiska legionärerna, eller väl cacherade släggkastare.

Cachera är ett ord han lärt från teaterns värld. Det betydde dölja. (Enquist 2008: 361, italics in the original)

He returns from Broadway to something he *cannot handle*. He has not been able to handle it since the spring of 1971, and now he carries on not being able to handle it.

It is the novel about Swedish emigration to Argentina in 1910. Exile and collapse.

Perhaps there is something in the concept of *exile* that troubles him. Or the word *restlessness* scares him. He constantly and impatiently wants to be on the move, but in the act of moving, in taking the leap, he slows down and starts daydreaming. Sometimes about a little island in a marsh and the unwieldy boat and maps on greaseproof paper, or about his mother's kitchen. [...]

At the same time he is terrified at the thought of writing about this, writing about the personal. Prefers Baltic legionnaires, or well-disguised hammer throwers.

*Cacher* is a word for disguise he has learned in the theatre world. It means hide. (Enquist 2015: 266)

Once again, Enquist's writing seems to stem from an eternally revolving conflict, of which he is perfectly aware: the impulse to study a phenomenon (Swedish emigration) is thwarted by a personal connection to the subject (the idea of restlessness and exile, always present in Enquist, who spent many years abroad); he therefore seeks an escape

in daydreams, but these in their turn bring him back to even more personal memories, such as his childhood habit of drawing maps (cf. 2.1.3), and in reaction he ends up hiding behind somebody else's story, as he has done with *Legionärerna* and *Sekonden*. However, in *Musikanternas uttåg*, according to what he declares in *Ett annat liv*, Enquist manages not to be «paralysed by fear» about writing his family's story, perhaps thanks to the liberties he takes in doing so («he gives his family another biography, or he joins two together», cf. above).

The use of documentary materials – articles, letters and memoirs about the «Great Strike» of 1909<sup>206</sup> and the events that led to it (Bredsdorff 1991: 184) – albeit rearranged in the spirit of the method professed in the article *Tydliggöra eller spegla verklighet* (Enquist 1981), proves the continuity with *Legionärerna* and *Sekonden*. Another similarity with *Legionärerna* is the occasional appearance of a flesh and blood narrator behind the characters and events related in the book. After a fifty-odd-page prologue that describes Elmblad's first trip to Västerbotten, a «jag» suddenly appears in Nicanor Markström's description:

Pojken hette Frans Nicanor Markström, och kallades Nicanor. Det var ett vanligt namn. Man fann honom död en marsdag 1973, han var då nära sjuttioåttå år gammal.

Jag kände honom väl. Den här boken handlar inte bara om honom, men också om honom. [...]

Jag bodde i Los Angeles den våren. Man skrev och berättade. Nicanor död.

Det var slut med alla samtal. Resten fick jag fylla i själv. (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 57-58)

The boy's name was Frans Nicanor Markström, and he was called Nicanor. It was an ordinary name. He was found dead one March day in 1973, when he was almost seventy-eight.

I knew him well. This book is not only about him, but it is also about him. [...]

I was living in Los Angeles that spring. They wrote and told me. Nicanor dead.

That was the end of all our conversations. I would have to fill in the rest myself. (Enquist 1993: 43-44)

Unlike in *Legionärerna*, however, there is no attempt to describe this narrator or transform him into a character with some resemblance to his author, as happened with the «undersökare». The narrator's «I» is simply the nameless and faceless listener who

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<sup>206</sup> The general strike known as “Storstrejken” was a general work stoppage by over 300,000 individuals all over Sweden, from August 4th to September 4th 1909. It was the first major conflict between the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (Landsorganisationen, LO) and the Swedish Employers Association (Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen, SAF).

collects Nicanor's memories, and who then «fill[s] in the rest» to tell his story. Only in two occasions he intrudes more directly into the narration. The first one is to relate «en bisarr anekdot» «i familjemytologin»<sup>207</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 254), that is Elmlblad's<sup>208</sup> one-night stay at his grandfather's house during the second trip to Västerbotten:

Han hette Per Valfrid Enquist och levde också på rävjakt och tjärbränning, han var en dyster, tidigt skallig man som ofta berättade historier. Det var min farfar, fast det hör egentligen inte dit. [...]

Farfar var en vänlig själ och var vid så unga år ännu inte hemfallen åt religionen i samma våldsamma utsträckning som resten av min släkt. Han blev dock frälst i mycket god tid före sotsängen och lyckades därmed förvandla gravölet till en ljus och stilla, nästan upprymd tillställning. Jag var själv med och gladdes åt att han blivit hemtagen till övre stället. (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 253-254)

His name was Per Valfrid Enquist, and he also lived off fox-hunting and tar-boiling. He was a gloomy, prematurely bald man, who often told stories. He was my paternal grandfather, though that's not really anything to do with it. [...]

Grandfather was a friendly soul and at such a young age was not so addicted to religion to the same extent as the rest of the family. However, his soul was saved in plenty of time before his deathbed, so he succeeded in turning the funeral rites into a bright, almost elated performance. I was there, too, and was pleased he had been gathered to higher things. (Enquist 1993: 197)

The second, more interesting intrusion of the narrator is a comparison between the times he is describing, the first decade of the twentieth century, and those of his own childhood, the forties:

Det landskap där hon [Josefina] växt upp finns ju kvar; alltid något. [...] Jag har ju växt upp i samma landskap, jag höll på att säga samma by: men det är inte riktigt sant kanske. En by är inte densamma ett halvt sekel senare. Och en by kan ha många ansikten.

Fyrtio år avlägset, kunde vara fyrtio ljusår. Då blir himlaharpans sång som det svaga ekot från en sedan länge förintad stjärna. Eller som ett vagt och otydligt lockrop genom isen. Så är det med historien. Vi får fylla ut. I själva verket är det ju detta som är historien. (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 281)

The countryside where she [Josefina] grew up is still there: always something. [...] I had grown up in the same landscape; I was about to say the same village, but perhaps that's not really true. A village is not the same half a century later, and a village can have many faces.

Forty years might be forty light-years. Then the song of the celestial harp becomes the faint echo from a long since extinguished star, or a vague and indistinct lure-call through the ice. That's what history is like. We have to fill it out. Actually, that's what history is. (Enquist 1993: 219)

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<sup>207</sup> «A most bizarre incident» «in our family mythology» (Enquist 1993: 197).

<sup>208</sup> Elmlblad's character is based on socialist propagandist Frans Elmgren (cf. Jansson 1987: 152-158); it is therefore likely that the latter was the agitator put up by Enquist's grandfather.

In addition to the overt comparison, reinforced by the use of an image already present in *Sekonden*, «himlaharpan», the most interesting here is maybe the claim to our right to «fill out» history, yet another statement of his working method (cf. Enquist 1981). Curiously enough, the reflection about time that passes and transforms the landscape stimulates a more personal reminiscence, maybe one of the daydreams mentioned in *Ett annat liv* (Enquist 2008: 361). Josefina lives in the «worldly» part of the village, which in the forties, when Enquist grew up, «religionssociologiskt sett var [...] klart intressant, tydligt uppdelad i en världslig halva, och en andlig»<sup>209</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 281). That part of the village «blev på 40-talet lokalt världsberömd i stora delar av Övre Norrland på grund av sitt fotbollslag»<sup>210</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 282), the Komet, to which the narrator dedicates a two-page detailed digression, later taken up again and expanded in *Ett annat liv* (Enquist 2008: 40-43).

Then, as he already did in *Legionärena* and *Sekonden*, Enquist also includes some details from his own childhood into a fictional setting, probably in order to enhance the reality effect. Here we have a quick example:

Det var n'Anselm, morfar i gården. Med honom var det så, att han hade något slags sårskorpor eller eksem i håret och alltid kliade sig där. [...] När han åt var det något påfrestande att sitta vid samma bord. Först åt han då gröt en stund. Sedan lade han tankfullt ner skeden, tittade upp i taket, och började dystert att skrapa hårbotten med höger långfingernagel. När han fått ihop nog tog han ner handen och åt upp det. (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 124)

[It was] Anselm, the maternal grandfather in the family. He happened to have some sort of sores or eczema in his hair and was always scratching himself there. [...] It was trying to sit at the same table when he was eating. First he would eat some porridge for a while, then he would put his spoon down, thoughtfully look up at the ceiling and gloomily start scratching his scalp with his right middle fingernail. When he had collected up enough, he took down his hand and ate the proceeds up. (Enquist 1993: 97-98)

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<sup>209</sup> «From a socio-religious point of view, the village was very interesting in the forties, clearly divided into a worldly part and a spiritual part» (Enquist 1993: 220). Cf. *Ett annat liv*: «Byn är indelad i en ogudaktig och en andlig halva» (Enquist 2008: 40; «The village is divided into two halves, godless and god-fearing», Enquist 2015: 34).

<sup>210</sup> «The part of Hjoggböle famed in the forties all over northern Norrland for its football team» (Enquist 1993: 220).

Drängen är gammgoss och har eksem i håret och kliar sig med nageln när han äter rågmjölsgroten, *och så stopp han eksemen deri månnom*. Ingen tycker om det men han vill icke bättra sig. (Enquist 2008: 87, italics in the original)

He [the farmhand] is an old bachelor who scratches the eczema on his scalp while he eats his porridge, *which means he puts the eczema into his mouth*. No-one likes it, but he will not mend his ways. (Enquist 2015: 70)

However, the most interesting autobiographical episode is strikingly absent in the autobiography, the perfect epitome of a repressed «smärtpunkt» that can surface only in disguise. One of the main characters of *Musikanternas uttåg* is Eva-Liisa, a foster child of Carelian origin that moves to live with the Markströms. A freer spirit than the pious family that puts her up, she ends up being raped and made pregnant by Uncle Aron, and after his death by suicide she emigrates to South America with her foster mother Josefina. As in the case of Nicanor, also Eva-Liisa is declared to be a combination of at least two models<sup>211</sup>:

Han vet att en ung kvinna skall bli centralgestalt i hans roman, det är henne han tänker på som Eeva-Lisa<sup>212</sup>. Det är hon som bär morbror Arons barn när hon flyr. För henne fanns det en förebild, dock inte den verkliga Eeva-Lisa, om vilken han ej får tala.

Kunde man använda verklighet på detta sätt, sammankoppla två liv? Han vet inte. Han vet hur det gick med verklighetens unga flicka som emigrerade och var med barn. Hon fick Parkinson och återfanns död i en by utanför Obera. (Enquist 2008: 359-360)

He knows that a young woman will be the central character in his novel, the one he thinks of as Eeva-Lisa. She was the one carrying Uncle Aron's child when she fled. There is a precedent for her, though it is not the real Eeva-Lisa, about whom he is not at liberty to speak.

Could reality be used in this way, could two lives be joined? He does not know. He knows how things were for the real young girl who was pregnant and emigrated. She got Parkinson's disease and was found dead in a village on the other side of Obera. (Enquist 2015: 269-270)

Apart from the repeated statement of Enquist's method of condensing episodes and people to serve his narration, here we find the refrain that accompanies most of Eeva-

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<sup>211</sup> The compound nature of the foster sister figure is confirmed by Enquist himself when he declares: «När jag i boken, i ett kapitel som heter "Att icke syndens smitta" beskriver Josefina's egendomliga lilla förbön för Eva Liisa så utspelas den 1906: men det är fel, i verkligheten utspelades den under ett av 40-talets första år, jag var själv med. Är det jag då berättar sant eller inte?» (Enquist 1981:121; «When in the book, in a chapter called "So that the sin shall not spread", I describe Josefina's curious little prayer for Eva-Liisa, the scene is laid in 1906: but this is wrong, in reality it happened in the early forties, I was also there. So, is what I tell true or not?»).

<sup>212</sup> In *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* and *Ett annat liv* the name is spelt Eeva-Lisa instead of Eva-Liisa.

Lisa's appearances in *Ett annat liv*, the idea that he cannot speak about her, also repeated in three further occasions<sup>213</sup>. Why he must keep silent about her is not clear, but the peremptory tone of the prohibition suggests that it could come from his mother, maybe connected to a conflict between her and the foster daughter:

Han älskar både henne och sin mor, innerligt, men plågas av deras allt våldsammare konflikter. Han tycker att hans mor, som i princip är urbilden av godhet, inte är snäll mot Eeva-Lisa. (Enquist 2008: 30)

He loves both her and his mother dearly, but is distressed by their ever more violent disagreements. He thinks that his mother, who is in principle the very essence of goodness, is not nice to Eeva-Lisa. (Enquist 2015: 27)

As usual, however, when something is passed under silence it remains alive as a sore point that sooner or later will have to be let out; and this is exactly what happens with Eeva-Lisa, who is also a central figure in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, a novel that – not by chance – is defined in *Ett annat liv* as «[e]n bok om hans mor och Eeva-Lisa och han själv»<sup>214</sup> (Enquist 2008: 489). Also in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* the foster sister is doomed to a sad fate: she gets pregnant and dies giving birth to a dead boy, helped only by the nameless protagonist, who later throws the little corpse into the lake. Here her real guilt finally comes out: not stealing twenty-five öre<sup>215</sup>, as in *Musikanternas uttåg*, and as Johannes, the protagonist's double, writes in his untruthful notes, but pregnancy, and not caused by rape but by an illegitimate relationship. The protagonist, like the little

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<sup>213</sup> «Det har att göra med hans fostersyster Eeva-Lisa. Det är om henne han inte får berätta» (Enquist 2008: 30; «It has to do with his foster sister, Eeva-Lisa. He is not supposed to speak about her», Enquist 2015: 27); «Det är den enda vän han har under sin ungdom, förutom Eeva-Lisa, och skogen, om man tänker så. Men om Eeva-Lisa måste han tiga» (Enquist 2008: 36; «[He] is his only friend during childhood, apart from Eeva-Lisa, and the forest, if you can count that. But about Eeva-Lisa he must maintain his silence», Enquist 2015: 32); «Eller var det kanske Eeva-Lisa, om vilken han ej fick tala?» (Enquist 2008: 267; «Or might it be Eeva-Lisa, about whom he must not speak?», Enquist 2015: 202).

<sup>214</sup> «A book about his mother and Eeva-Lisa and himself» (Enquist 2015: 364). The same concept is repeated twice more: «romanen om Eeva-Lisa och hans mor och honom själv och bortbytet och döpojken» (Enquist 2015: 525; «the novel about Eeva-Lisa and his mother and himself and the changeling and the ghost boy», Enquist 2015: 389); «Boken om Eeva-Lisa och honom själv och hans mor och döpojken och Vålgöraren och Sjön och alltihop» (Enquist 2015: 530; «The book about Eeva-Lisa and himself and his mother and the ghost boy and the Benefactor and Sjön and everything», Enquist 2015: 392). These are also among the book's last words.

<sup>215</sup> The idea to confess a petty guilt in order to avoid speaking about a serious one is explicitly mentioned in *Liknelseboken*: «Det fanns småsynderna som var bra att ha till hands om han blev nervös» (Enquist 2013: 11; «There were, he thought, some trivial offences it would be good to have up his sleeve in case he became nervous», Enquist 2016: 13).

boy in *Sekonden* with his drowned brother, cannot accept Eeva-Lisa's death and tries to find the stillborn boy's body in order to get into contact with her. After hiding for some days in the forest, he finally finds Eeva-Lisa, resurrected in the shape of a cat. Of all this story, quite readable in its everyday tragedy behind the thin disguise of the fable-like novel, only two short, partly contradictory allusions survive in *Ett annat liv*:

Bensberget ännu kvar, skogen också, och grottan, själva skådeplatsen där han *iscensatte* Eeva-Lisas återuppståndelse i *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*. (Enquist 2008: 304, italics in the original)

Bensberget was still there, the forest too, and the grotto, the setting<sup>216</sup> for Eeva-Lisa's resurrection in *Captain Nemo's library*. (Enquist 2015: 229)

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Strax innan toppen fanns De döda kattornas grotta, som han kom att utforska och kartlägga redan i tidiga år, och där han en gång räddat fostersystern Eeva-Lisa från förfrysningsdöden. (Enquist 2008: 425)

Just below the summit was the Dead Cats' Grotto, which he explored and mapped at a young age and where long ago he saved his foster sister Eeva-Lisa from freezing to death. (Enquist 2015: 319)

In *Ett annat liv* Eeva-Lisa takes up a much smaller space than in *Musikanternas uttåg* or in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*: her name appears only 24 times compared with 77 and 167 respectively. The protagonist keeps on repeating that he cannot speak about her, it is true, but maybe he has already told all that he felt he had to tell, thus emptying of its repressed meaning the encapsulated sore point (cf. 2.1.4) of the foster sister.

However, in *Musikanternas uttåg* that cathartic effect is still to come, and Eva-Liisa is one of the many characters who make themselves guilty of some sin, and like the others is punished for it: Nicanor betrays Elmblad during the latter's first trip, and is punished by having his tongue accidentally cut off; Elmblad lies to his superiors about his trips' results, and is punished with failure; uncle Aron rapes his foster niece, and punishes himself with suicide – one of the most terrible suicide scenes in the history of literature, I am tempted to add, going on for seven, endless pages. Eva-Liisa's guilt consists simply in being «en egendomlig främmande fågel»<sup>217</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1978]:

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<sup>216</sup> The English translation cuts the overt reference to *iscensättning*, the staging of a play.

<sup>217</sup> «A strange alien bird» (Enquist 1993: 60).

79), a stranger and the daughter of a pianist, who does not fit in the sternly religious environment she finds herself transplanted into. In such a dismal atmosphere, the words from *The Musicians of Bremen*, the fairy tale that gives the title to the novel, «Det gives alltid något bättre än döden»<sup>218</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1978]: 56, 57, 277, 323, 324, 327, 329), sound almost mocking, despite the slightly lighter conclusion, with Josefina and Eva-Liisa emigrating to a possibly better future in South America.

The theme of guilt is certainly central in *Musikanternas uttåg*, and *Ett annat liv* offers a possible personal explanation for it. While he was writing *Musikanternas uttåg*, in 1976, Enquist was involved in a property scandal for having bought a flat irregularly. After witnessing against the estate agent, he felt he had obeyed the law but betrayed his conscience, because it had been him who contacted the agent. As a result, «kommer det att ta år innan han blir kvitt detta gnagande i sitt inre, som han bara kan kalla *skam*»<sup>219</sup> (Enquist 2008: 200, italics in the original). It is precisely in those months that he writes the pages in *Musikanternas uttåg* where the theme of guilt and shame is at its most evident:

De första månaderna låser han bara in sig, vill inte se någon.  
Det han kan göra är skriva, kanske om skam. Han skriver under en lång natt slutkapitlet i "Musikanternas uttåg", beskrivningen av morbror Arons självmord, hur denne efter att ha våldfört sig på Eeva-Lisa med oerhörd beslutsamhet vandrar ut över Burefjärdens is en stormig natt, hackar sig igenom isen med sitt spett, tappar spettet, återvänder, hämtar nytt spett, vidgar hålet i isen, fastnar med ryggsäcken full av den tyngande potatis som skall dra honom ner, men lyckas till sist, efter många timmar i nattlig snöstorm på isen, framgångsrikt sjunka ner i det svarta svindlande hål som är havsens djupaste mörker.  
Nästan en bragd.  
Skammen var drivkraften för morbror Aron. Men det var ändå en bragd, nästan en idrottsprestation att med denna oerhörda beslutsamhet verkställa detta fysiskt sett mödosamma självmord, nästan beundransvärt, ja helt säkert beundransvärt.  
(Enquist 2008: 200-201)

For the first few months he locks himself away, does not want to see anyone.  
All he can do is write, perhaps about shame. One long night he completes the final chapter of *The March of the Musicians*, the description of Uncle Aron's suicide: how, after raping Eeva-Lisa, he walks resolutely out over the ice on Burefjärden one stormy night, breaks a hole in the ice with a metal spike, loses the spike, returns home to fetch another, makes the hole wider, gets caught by the rucksack full of heavy potatoes meant to pull him down, and finally, after many hours in the

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<sup>218</sup> «There is always something better than death» (Enquist 1993: 42, 217, 253, 254, 255, 256).

<sup>219</sup> «It will take years before he is rid of this gnawing pain inside him that he can only call *shame*» (Enquist 2015: 152).



snowstorm on the ice, succeeds in sinking down into the dark abyss, the deepest blackness of the ocean.

Almost an act of bravery.

Shame was the driving force for Uncle Aron. But it was nevertheless a feat, a sporting achievement, to commit suicide with such tremendous determination and physical difficulty; it was admirable, indeed, truly admirable. (Enquist 2015: 152-153)

Once again we find that the driving force behind Enquist's writing is a personal «smärtpunkt». Torn between the need to unburden himself and the attempt to escape a distressing reality, he resorts to disguises, transfiguring a painful experience into a recurring symbol.

#### **4.3 *Nedstörtad ängel* and *I lodjurets timma*: A metaphor of the self**

With *Nedstörtad ängel* (1985) the autobiographical impulse seems to take a temporary setback, at least at first glance. Actually, it simply gets hidden behind the exuberant narrative material of the short novel, which blends together three stories united by a nameless narrator: one about Pasqual Pinon, a «monster» with a second, female head on his forehead; a second one about a psychiatrist who develops an inexplicable affection for the killer of his young daughter; and a third, more thinly sketched, which relates the love story between Bertolt Brecht and Ruth Berlau. The red thread that connects these stories is the narrator's incapacity to understand love in the disparate forms it can assume, of which the three narratives offer a small but quite extreme catalogue. The complex structure of the novel reminds of Hess's. *Nedstörtad ängel* is divided into four songs, preceded by a prelude and followed by a coda; each of these parts is in its turn divided into several fragments without a chronological order. As in Hess, autobiographical materials are used in the same way as any other document: abstracted from its context and ruthlessly rearranged in order to condensate a truer reality (cf. Enquist 1981). Just to give a hint of how irreverent – and ironic – his treatment of documentary data can be in this book, he ascribes to the historic figure of Pasqual Pinon – a Mexican freak-circus entertainer who very likely “transformed” a benign tumour on

his head into a second, female head – a fictional biography written by a John Shideler, curiously semi-homonymous to the author of a renown study about Enquist himself!

However, despite this freer treatment, some autobiographical elements remain well recognisable, such as the early death of the narrator's father:

[1]<sup>220</sup> Jag minns ingenting av min far, eftersom han dog när jag var sex månader gammal. Det var i mars; efteråt släppte man av mamma nere vid spånhyveln och hon pulsade genom snön upp till skogsbrynet där huset låg och det var sen kväll och huset var mörkt och en granne som bodde en kilometer därifrån hade tagit hand om mig mens han dog. [2] Någon i byn varslade månaden innan att tre män skulle dö, och tre män dog: han hade drömt att tre tallar föll, och vaknat, och förstått. Det var tecknet. [...] <sup>221</sup>  
[3] Chauffören, det var Marklin, hade stannat vid spånhyveln och frågat bakåt i bussen om det inte var någon som kunde följa henne upp, men hon hade inte velat. (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 23-25)

I cannot remember anything of my father, since he died when I was six months old. It happened in March: afterwards, they took my mother as far as the wood-planing site, and she plunged her way through the snow up to the edge of the forest where the house was and it was late in the evening and the house was dark and a neighbour who lived a kilometre away had taken care of me while he died. Somebody in the village foretold the previous month the death of three men, and three men died: he had dreamt that three pines fell, and had woken up and understood. That was the sign. [...]  
The driver, that was Marklin, had stopped at the wood-planing site and asked towards the back of the bus if someone would go up with her, but she had not wanted anyone. (Enquist 1986: 26-27)

The same material, in very similar wording, reappears, divided in several fragments, in *Ett annat liv*:

[1] - [3] När maken dog i mars tog hon bussen hem från sjukstugan och chauffören, det var Marklin, frågade bakåt bussen om det inte var någon som kunde *förbarm sig över kweinna*. Hon hade flännat hela färden, men tog sig dock samman och pulsade ensam upp i mörkret mot huset. (Enquist 2008: 46, italics in the original)

After her husband died in March, she travelled home from the cottage hospital on the bus, and the driver, Marklin, shouted back to the passengers, asking if there was not someone who would take pity on the woman. She had wept all the way, but she composed herself and trudged up to the house on her own in the dark. (Enquist 2015: 39)

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[2] Någon i byn berättar för barnet, nästan viskande, om den dröm Hugo Hedman haft vintern 1935. I drömmen föll tre stora träd. Det var tall, men icke under

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<sup>220</sup> I numbered the various passages to help highlighting the similarities with the following books.

<sup>221</sup> The omitted passage recurs almost literally in *Boken om Blanche och Marie*, yet another confirmation of the use of repetition and self-quotation in Enquist's works.

avverkningen. Det var en förebådelse. Samma vinter dog tre män i byn. Drömmen var ett tecken. En av dem som dog och förutspåddes av tallfällning ansågs vara nÉlof. Barnet förstår senare att denne inte är en «tall», utan «fadern», men allt är oklart. (Enquist 2008: 11)

Someone in the village tells the child, almost in a whisper, about the dream that Hugo Hedman had in the winter of 1935. In the dream three tall trees fell down. They were pine trees, but they had not been cut down deliberately. It was an omen. The same winter three men in the village died. The dream had been a sign. One of the dead men was apparently called Elof. Later the child understands that this man is not a «pine tree», but «his father»; however, it is very confusing. (Enquist 2015: 13)

The autobiographical elements are not exhausted yet. There are, for instance, «krokodilmannen»<sup>222</sup> in Brattby asylum (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 53), which returns in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 117), *Ett annat liv* (Enquist 2008: 423) and *Liknelseboken* (Enquist 2013: 206), and the benjamin ficus that sheds its leaves (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 20, 74, 85; Enquist 2008: 390, 407, 494; Enquist 2013: 166). More interesting is the insistent recurrence of an image that already appeared in *Hess*, but finds here its fullest development: it is the image of the man in the ice-grave, to which Ekselius dedicates a section of her study (Ekselius 1996: 51-58). In *Hess* the description appears towards the end of the book, apparently detached from other fragments:

Hess låg med ögonen öppna, stelt fixerande den grå rymden. Över hans ansikte hade smältvattnet runnit och sedan frusit fast igen, så att hela ansiktet var övertäckt av en tunn klar ishinna. Genom den kunde han se delar av diffusa isblock, delar av grå moln, delar av skuggor som kunde vara albatrosser, delar av föremål och rörelser som han tyckte sig delvis känna igen: men isbarken var ett dåligt glas och han kunde inte vara säker. [...] När snön kom blev han helt ogenomskinlig och detaljerna försvann: då var han till sist fri och ute ur beskrivningen. Albatrossen var det sista han såg. Han trodde den var en spindel som långsamt kröp över hans ansikte. (Enquist 2010 [1966]: 325-326)

Hess was lying with his eyes open, staring fixedly at the grey sky. The ice had thawed and water had run over his face and then frozen again, so that the whole face was covered by a thin, transparent film of ice. Through it, he could see parts of blurred blocks of ice, parts of grey clouds, parts of shadows that could be albatrosses, parts of objects and movements he felt he recognised: but the icy crust was a bad window glass and he could not be sure. [...] When the snow came everything was opaque and the details disappeared: then at last he was free. The albatross was the last thing he saw. He thought it was a spider which crawled slowly over his face.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> «The crocodile man» (Enquist 1986: 64).

<sup>223</sup> Where the texts correspond, I followed the published translation of *Nedstörtad ängel*.

As for many of the innumerable materials accumulated in *Hess*, the image remains obscure and mysterious; according to Ekselius, it is used as a metaphor for depression and melancholy (Ekselius 1996: 52). In *Nedstörtad ängel* it gradually assumes a much clearer outline and significance. The first appearance of the man in the ice-grave, as one of the narrator's recurring dreams, is a word for word quotation from *Hess*, apart from the first sentence, which changes the subject of the dream («Mannen i isgraven, som jag inte visste vem han var, låg med ögonen öppna...»<sup>224</sup>, Enquist 2014 [1985]: 9), and a slight rearrangement of the objects seen by the lying man. No new element is therefore added, apart from the confirmation of the importance of the image offered by its repetition.

The second occurrence, instead, offers both an explanation for the origin of the image and a possible interpretation:

Antecknar i dagboken: isgrav.

Måste vara: den döde Finn Malmgren i hans isgrav. De var på marsch söderut, för att skaffa undsättning. Hans två italienska kamrater hade huggit ut en isgrav och befriat honom från en del kläder och lämnat honom åt sitt öde, ännu levande. Som barn var just den bilden den som starkast etsade sig in i mitt medvetande: jag föreställde mig hur jag återfann Finn Malmgren i hans isgrav, död, och hur en tunn ishinna hade bildats runt hans kropp och täckt hans huvud och ansikte, och hur han legat där med öppna ögon och stirrat rakt upp genom ishinnan, och hur han dött, och hur han högt där uppe sett kanske en albatross, en jättelik vit fågel, som kretsade runt runt, som en svag vit skugga bakom ishinnan.

En så maniskt återkommande bild. En så lustfylld skräck att leva och dö bakom en ishinna. Mer lust än skräck, kanske. (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 31)

Note in the diary: ice-grave.

This must be: the dead Finn Malmgren in his ice-grave. They were marching southward, to get help. His two Italian companions had cut a grave in the ice and relieved him of some of his clothes and left him to his fate, still alive. As a child it was just that image which became most sharply etched into my mind: I imagined how I would find Finn Malmgren in his grave in the ice, dead, and how a thin film of ice would have formed round his body and covered his head and face, and how he would have been lying there, his eyes open and staring, straight through the film of ice, and how he died, and how he would have seen, high up there, maybe an albatross, a gigantic white bird, which circled again and again, like a faint white shadow beyond the film of ice.

Such a maniacally recurring image. Such a pleasurable fear at living and dying behind a film of ice. More pleasure than fear, perhaps. (Enquist 1986: 34)

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<sup>224</sup> «The man in the ice-grave, I did not know who he was, was lying with his eyes open...» (Enquist 1986: 7).

Contradicting what is stated in the previous occurrence («I did not know who he was»), here the man in the ice-grave is clearly identified as Finn Malmgren, the Swedish meteorologist who took part in Umberto Nobile's expedition with the airship *Italia*. In May 1928, when the airship crashed and several members of the expedition were stranded on floating ice, Malmgren and two Italian officers decided to try to walk back to King's Bay, in the Svalbard archipelago, in search for help. However, after some days' walk he collapsed in consequence of a wound suffered in the crash, and was left to die on the pack, his body never to be found. The origin of the image, taken from a book read in his childhood, is confirmed by *Ett annat liv*:

Den finaste död han visste var ju den som Finn Malmgren fick, uppe i isgraven i Arktis. Han orkade inte fortsätta, och då de italienska kamraterna tagit av honom de värmande kläderna och huggit en isgrav och lagt honom levande i den. Och så dödde han, lugnt och stilla, efter det som framgick i volymen «Från Pol till Pol». Som kunde lånas på skolbibliotek, vilket han gjorde förvisso. Och isvattnet hade runnit över hans ansikte och skapat en ishinna. (Enquist 2008: 515)

The finest death he knew of was that of Finn Malmgren, in his grave in the ice in the Arctic. He couldn't carry on, so his Italian colleagues took off his warm clothes and dug a grave out of the ice and laid him in it. And then he died, calmly and quietly, according to what was written in the book *From Pole to Pole*. Which could be borrowed from the school library, and of course he did. And the cold water had run over his face and formed a film of ice. (Enquist 2015: 381-382)

It is not difficult to imagine how strong an impression such an episode could make on a child living himself surrounded by ice. It is not surprising that it etches itself in his imagination, ready to be charged with symbolic meaning at a later age. The final sentence of the second quotation from *Nedstörtad ängel* («En så maniskt återkommande bild. En så lustfylld skräck att leva och dö bakom en ishinna»), in fact, offers a useful interpretation of Enquist's interest for this «maniacally recurring image»: while «hinna» represents isolation, encapsulation and shielding (not only from dangers, but also from other forms of contact) – a symbol tightly connected with other ones, such as window panes, walls and thick, armour-like skin (cf. Ekselius 1996: 58-63) – ice stands for death, both at the emotional and physical level, and is linked for instance with the recurring reference to Andersen's *Snow Queen* (cf. 2.1.2). The man in the ice-grave – shielded and secure, but cold and dead – is therefore a perfect metaphor for a highly ambivalent wish for life and death at the same time. It is not by chance that one of the

main characters of the book ends up committing suicide with the help of the «hinna» of a plastic bag (cf. below about «Vargen i Säter»).

In the last occurrence in *Nedstörtad ängel*, in another dream that assembles all the characters from the different narrative threads, the personal relevance of the symbolic image is made even clearer:

Drömde i natt åter om Pinon.

Vi befann oss på en väldig isslätt; det måste ha varit i polarregionen. Vårt fartyg hade skruvats sönder av isen, och vi befann oss på marsch: men det var inte polen som var vårt mål.

Det var en mycket liten expedition: det var Pasqual Pinon och hans Maria, jag själv, K, hans hustru, pojken, och Ruth B. [...].

Så, med ens, var vi framme. Vi var framme vid isgraven. Det var Pinon som fann den. [...]

Jag såg genast vem det var. Han låg utsträckt på rygg i isgraven. Det var pappa, precis som på kortet. Italienarna hade lämnat honom här. De hade tagit av honom nästan alla kläder, tagit hans mat, huggit ut en kista i den vita, blåskimrande, nästan genomskinliga isen, och lagt honom där medan han ännu levde. Smältvattnet hade frusit till en tunn ishinna, men den var genomskinlig, man kunde se att han låg med öppna ögon och såg rakt upp, såg rakt upp genom isens matta hinna.

Och Pinon sa: Nu är du framme. Nu är det din tur.

Han gav mig vingfjädern. Den var vit, jag kände igen den. Jag böjde mig fram, och såg: och så stilla hade fågeln svävat högt där uppe att dess linjer etsat sig in i ishinnan, tecknat sin kontur på isen. Jag böjde mig fram, andades mot ishinnan, strök samtidigt med fjädern mot den. Isfågeln försvann långsamt, ansiktet kom fram, och det var jag. (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 87-89)

Dreamt tonight again about Pinon.

We were on an enormous ice plain; it must have been near the Pole. Our ship had been ground to pieces by the ice, and we were marching; but the Pole was not our goal.

It was a very small expedition: it consisted of Pinon and his Maria, myself, K, his wife, the boy, and Ruth B. [...]

Then all of a sudden we arrived. We arrived at the grave in the ice. It was Pinon who found it. [...]

I saw at once who it was. He was lying stretched out on his back in the ice-grave. It was Daddy, just as in the corpse-picture. The Italians had left him here. They had taken off almost all his clothes, taken his food, cut off a coffin in the white, blue-shimmering, almost transparent ice, and laid him there while he was still alive. The melting water had frozen to a thin film of ice, but it was transparent, one could see that he was lying with open eyes, looking straight up, looking straight up through the opaque film of ice.

And Pinon said; now you have arrived. Now it is your turn.

He gave me the bird's wing feather. It was white, I recognized it. I bent over and looked: and so still had the bird been, hovering high up there, that its lines had etched themselves into the film of ice, drawn their outline on the ice. I leaned forward, breathed on the film of ice, stroked it with the feather at the same time. The ice bird disappeared slowly, the face emerged, and it was I. (Enquist 1986: 107-109)

When the ice film melts and the dead man's face appears, it is no longer Finn Malmgren's, nor the narrator's father's (cf. below about the mourning portrait), but the narrator himself's. This revelation is prepared by the obscure message from the interned boy that opens the book: «Bevarar ännu en av pojkens små egendomliga lappar. På denna står endast fyra ord: "Andas fram mitt ansikte." / En bön?»<sup>225</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 7). The boy's prayer, which returns not only in *Nedstörtad ängel* but also in several other books<sup>226</sup> will be fulfilled in the very last line of the book, which closes with the scene quoted above: it is the narrator's breath that allows the face to become visible. The statement that «[d]en viktigaste ståndpunkt i *Nedstörtad ängel* kan sägas vara försvaret för människan som bär på en stark dödslängtan»<sup>227</sup> (Englund 2006: 77) therefore seems justified: the closing lines of *Nedstörtad ängel* seem somehow to fulfil symbolically a death wish, which will be repudiated many years later, when Enquist faces a death ironically similar to Finn Malmgren's on the Icelandic plains, after fleeing from a treatment facility: «har man nu anmält sig till denna terrängtävling och startat får man fullfölja, och uppnå sitt mål, som icke är att bryta loppet och kvarligga här i snön och låta sig översnöas»<sup>228</sup> (Enquist 2008: 516).

Besides the above mentioned autobiographical elements, there is yet another one that is passed under almost complete silence in *Ett annat liv*, as already happened with *Musikanternas uttåg*'s Eva-Liisa. One of the three independent threads of *Nedstörtad ängel* is centred on a boy interned in a psychiatric hospital for having killed a little girl, who goes under the nickname of «Vargen i Säter»<sup>229</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 30). After killing a second girl during a permission, he develops a sort of father-son relationship

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<sup>225</sup> «Still kept one of the boy's odd little notes. On this one there are only a few words: "Express my face in breaths". / A prayer?» (Enquist 1986: 5).

<sup>226</sup> In *Nedstörtad ängel* (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 85), in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 15) and in *Liknelseboken* (Enquist 2013: 162). This phrase was even chosen by Ekselius as the title of her monograph to symbolise Enquist deep-lying, coded message.

<sup>227</sup> «The most important standpoint in *Nedstörtad ängel* can be assumed to be the justification of the individual who harbours a strong death wish.»

<sup>228</sup> «Once you've signed up for the cross-country competition and started, it has to be completed, and you have to reach your goal; and that is not to drop out of the race and lie there in the snow and let it bury you» (Enquist 2015: 382).

<sup>229</sup> «The Säter wolf» (Enquist 1986: 32). The town of Säter houses a known Swedish psychiatric hospital.

with the father of his second victim, K., a known psychiatrist and a close friend of the narrator's. The narrator himself plays a role in this narrative thread, since he sends the boy a couple of his books, among which a collection of short stories that includes the story of Josef Bachmann, the man who shot German activist Rudi Dutschke – a clear reference to Enquist's *Berättelser från de inställda upprorens tid*. From this book the boy will take inspiration to commit suicide in the same way as Bachmann, by pulling a plastic bag over his own head.

A similar nameless interned boy is also at the centre of Enquist's following work, the play *I lodjurets timma*. Here the crime that led the narrator to psychiatric treatment is his having set fire to his grandfather's house, thus killing the couple who had bought it after the man's death. In the course of an "experiment", the boy is entrusted with a red cat, who is later killed by a jealous co-internee. Left alone, the boy commits suicide in the same way as the Säter wolf and Josef Bachmann, with the help of a plastic bag. However, if the internment and the suicide connect him with the boy in *Nedstörtad ängel*, the protagonist of the play also has many characteristics in common with his author: for instance, he used to live in a green wooden house in Hjoggböle and has developed a true fixation for it (cf. 2.1.3):

Pjäsen om den röda katten är det enda han skriver i Paris. Vistelsen varar tre år. Han går upp tidigt, skriver i bästa fall någon timma innan han blir full. En teaterpjäs är ju inte så lång. Pjäsen handlar om en ung pojke, en fånge, dubbelmördare, inspärrad, som tycks sjukligt fixerad vid det gröna hus i Hjoggböle där han är född, och som tilldelats vården av en katt i uppfostrande syfte. (Enquist 2008: 420)

The play about the ginger cat is the only thing he writes in Paris. They live there for three years. He rises early in the morning, and at best writes for an hour or two before he gets drunk. A play for the theatre is not very long after all. The play is about a young boy, a convict, double-murderer, imprisoned, who seems morbidly obsessed with the green house in Hjoggböle where he was born, and who is assigned the care of a cat for rehabilitative purposes. (Enquist 2015: 315)

This is the only appearance of the boy in *Ett annat liv*: he is simply a character in a play, a mirror of the author, of the obsession for his childhood house that he himself develops in Paris (cf. 2.1.3). In the following book, *Liknelseboken*, he plays instead a fundamental role. He suddenly acquires a name, Siklund, («Han hette ju Siklund»<sup>230</sup>,

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<sup>230</sup> «He was indeed called Siklund» (Enquist 2016: 204).



Enquist 2013: 217), which is repeated 40 times in 254 pages, and a reality of flesh and blood:

Pojken var ju ett särskilt kapitel. Han hade blivit tokut, på något sätt, och själv hade han ägnat honom många besök under Uppsalatiden, innan han rymde till Köpenhamn och ett nytt äktenskap, så nog var Pojken bekant för honom. Det var obehagligt. Besöken hade misslyckats! inklusive det mer vetenskapliga experimentet med Pojken och katten.

Gud sig förbarme, hade han ej i en bok också lånat pojkstackarns förnamn! Nicanor! Vad hade han inte lånat! och aldrig skulle han glömma att Pojken hade sagt att jag har krupit in i dig och böckerna!, men sen ville han krypa ut. Och när det inte gick så fick han dela morbror Arons öde, alltså icke så att han nedspettat sig genom isen på Burefjärden, men döden genom kvävning var det i alla fall oomkullrunkeligt. Ej i vatten, men med plastpåse. (Enquist 2013: 21)

The Boy was a separate chapter. He had gone mad, somehow, and he himself had paid many visits during his time in Uppsala, before he moved to Copenhagen and a new marriage, so the Boy was well known to him. It was distressing. The visits had failed! Including the more scientific experiment with the Boy and the cat.

God have mercy on him! Had he not, in one of his books, even borrowed the poor Boy's forename? Nicanor! What had he not borrowed? And he would never forget that the Boy had said, «I've crept into you and the books!» But then he wanted to creep back out. And when that did not work, he had shared Uncle Aron's fate – not stabbing his way through the ice on Burefjärden, but death by asphyxiation was nevertheless incontrovertible. Not in water, but with a plastic bag. (Enquist 2016: 22)

The book maintains that the source for the crazy boy in both *Nedstörtad ängel* and *I lodjurets timma* is a distant cousin of Enquist's («en fyrmänning»<sup>231</sup>, Enquist 2013: 20), who also «crept into» his earlier book by lending his first name to Nicanor from *Musikanternas uttåg*. Unlike Eeva-Lisa, who almost disappeared after the ample treatment in *Musikanternas uttåg* and *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, the crazy boy, albeit neglected in *Ett annat liv*, occupies a significant part of *Liknelseboken*, as if Enquist thought he had not said enough about him. The insistence with which the boy's character appears and re-appears over several decades certainly demonstrates that he is one of the many «smärtpunkter» that drive all of Enquist's writing. From *Liknelseboken* we can gather two interesting pieces of information about this particular sore point: when Enquist, during his desperate Paris years, writes the story of the boy and his red

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<sup>231</sup> «A third cousin» (Enquist 2016: 21).

cat, first killed and then resurrected, he is shouting his own «bönerop om sin egen frälsning från spritandet, fast nyttolöst! och skamset!»<sup>232</sup> (Enquist 2013: 131):

Katten som dog, och återuppstod igen, och så dog och upptogs han, och *undret var möjligt*. Han hade när han skrev faktiskt enträget trott att undret var möjligt! Också för honom! Stupfull och darrhant hade han tiggat om undret. Och velat i detta teaterstycke bekänna sig till denna tro!  
Och hävdade att återuppståndelsen också var möjlig för fyllo i Paris. (Enquist 2013: 135, italics in the original)

The cat that died, and was resurrected, and then he died and was taken up, and that *the miracle was possible*. When he was writing he had in fact seriously believed that the miracle was possible! For him as well! Blind drunk and with shaking hands he had pleaded for this miracle. Had wanted in the play to profess this faith!  
And affirmed that resurrection was also possible for the drunkard in Paris. (Enquist 2016: 127)

As in *Nedstörtad ängel*, the wishes for death and life – or resurrection – are inextricably linked. In the end the instinct to survive prevails, as reported in *Ett annat liv*. However, this does not dispense with the sense of guilt that according to Ekselius is at the centre of Enquist's writing: «Känslan av skuld följer som en skugga genom Per Olov Enquists texter, en skugga av en brott vars konturer bara låter sig anas»<sup>233</sup> (Ekselius 1996: 219). *Liknelseboken* offers a possible explanation of this sort of “ur-guilt”, connecting it to writing:

I Arbetsboken återkommer noteringar om *skulden för det skrivna men mest för det oskrivna som ej kunde nedtecknas*. Dit hörde ju liknelsen om nödfrälsningen av Siklund genom kattens död och återuppståndelse. (Enquist 2013: 131, italics in the original)

Repetitively, the Workbook speaks of *the guilt for that which has been written, but mostly for that which has not and could not be put in writing*. To this belonged the parable of Siklund's deliverance from hardship through the death of the cat and his resurrection. (Enquist 2016: 122)

The sense of guilt is connected to what he has written, among which «[d]en icke rättade versionen om Siklund, den som påstod sig säga sanningen [som han skrev] ihop som en *ravelbit för teater* en vinter i Paris vid 80-talets mitt»<sup>234</sup> (Enquist 2013: 155, italics on

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<sup>232</sup> «Supplication for his own salvation from drink, though to no avail, and full of shame!» (Enquist 2016: 123).

<sup>233</sup> «The feeling of guilt follows like a shadow throughout Per Olov Enquist's texts, the shadow of a crime whose profile can only be conjectured.»

<sup>234</sup> «The uncorrected version of Siklund, the one that claimed to tell the truth, [that] he put together as a piece of nonsense for the theatre one winter in Paris in the middle of the '80s» (Enquist 2016: 146).

the original). The feeling is that of having betrayed, almost slandered, an innocent victim: «Som han ju själv en gång hade skildrat i ett teaterstycke, som somliga i familjen ställde sig tveksamma till. Smutskastning av pojckastarna!»<sup>235</sup> (Enquist 2013: 21). However, guilt also permeates «det oskrivna som ej kunde nedtecknas». This second guilt is likely to be the driving force that spurs Enquist to write again and again about his hidden sore points. In the end, however, he seems to accept that «[t]alet på Församlingsgården skulle aldrig fullbordas, det var lika bra, han fick väl skriva ett brev i stället. Färdigrättat skulle det aldrig bli»<sup>236</sup> (Enquist 2013: 254). He has «berättat allt så som det var. Fatta får ni göra själva»<sup>237</sup> (Enquist 2013: 219).

Going back to *Nedstörtad ängel*, an interesting reading, quite in tune with the thesis of the present study, is offered by Axel Englund in his *Det kodade meddelandet*. Englund agrees with Bredsdorff and Ekselius in reading the novel as «en prosadikt»<sup>238</sup> (Bredsdorff 1991: 198,), written following poetry's composing devices of metaphor and thematic relationship (Englund 2006: 65)<sup>239</sup>. However, he goes one step further by maintaining that the three independent stories are simply metaphors intended to explain the primary subject (the narrator) through different secondary subjects<sup>240</sup>: «Det är hans [berättarjagets] historia som utgör centrum i berättelsen och de andra historierna tycks främst vara där för att spegla och belysa den»<sup>241</sup> (Englund 2006: 74). The same idea of clarifying, of making intelligible something through something else is also expressed by Thurah, according to whom *Nedstörtad ängel* is

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<sup>235</sup> «He himself had once portrayed him in a play for the theatre, to which the attitude of some members of the family had been dubious. Blackening the poor boy's name!» (Enquist 2016: 22).

<sup>236</sup> «The speech at the parish hall would never be completed. It was just as well; he could write a letter instead. It would never be corrected» (Enquist 2016: 237).

<sup>237</sup> «Told it as it was. You'll have to understand it by yourselves» (Enquist 2016: 206).

<sup>238</sup> «A prose poem.»

<sup>239</sup> Englund refers to Jakobson's theory as expressed in his *The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles* (Jakobson 1956).

<sup>240</sup> Englund uses Max Black's terminology and theory of metaphor (cf. Black 1962).

<sup>241</sup> «It is his [the narrating I's] story that constitutes the centre of the narration, and the other stories seem to be there mainly to reflect and illustrate it.»

en objektivering. Objektivering er «resonanskassen», den fortælling eller de fortællinger, der skaber klangbund for fortællerens egen historie. Objektivering er et ekko eller en projektion. Den forvandler det indre til noget ydre, følelse til noget sanseligt. (Thurah 2002: 28)

an objectification. Objectification is the «resonance box», the narrative or narratives that generate resonance for the narrator's own story. Objectification is an echo or a projection. It transforms the inner into something external, feeling into something tangible.

The narrator is in search of an insight, an answer about the world and himself – an insight that sometimes seems beguilingly near, but is never reached. The fact that the longed for answer concerns the narrator himself is confirmed by two episodes in which he experiences the dizzy feeling of seeing himself. The first describes the narrator's reactions the first time he saw his father's mourning portrait<sup>242</sup>:

Jag ska alltid minnas det. Det var som att få ett slag på käften. Jag stirrade på kortet, som förslagen, eftersom jag först inte förstod vem det var. Jag höll kortet i min hand, och trodde att det var mig själv jag såg. Det var ju jag som låg där, ingen tvekan, det var så likt, misstag uteslutet. Varje drag var jag. Det måste vara jag. Det var bara en sak jag inte förstod: varför jag låg i en likkista.

Sen förstod jag att det var min far.

Jag ska alltid minnas de där sekunderna. Det var första gången jag såg mig själv. Jag var sexton år, och det skulle dröja trettio år innan jag såg mig för andra gången. (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 25)

I shall always remember it. It was like getting socked on the jaw. I stared at the picture, as if paralysed, since at first I did not understand who it was. I held the photo in my hand and thought I saw myself. It was I, surely, who was lying there, not a doubt, there was such a likeness, a mistake was impossible. Every feature was mine. It must be I. There was only one thing I could not understand: why I was lying in a coffin.

Then I understood that it was my father.

I shall always remember those seconds. It was the first time I saw myself. I was sixteen, and it would take thirty years before I saw myself for the second time. (Enquist 1986: 28)

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<sup>242</sup> A comparison with the same experience as described in *Ett annat liv* gives an example of the free use Enquist does not only of documentary facts, but also of his own experiences: «Av oklara, kanske rent dokumentära skäl, tas i byn alltid likkort: kameran fångar liket i kistan. Dokumentet placeras dock icke på spiselkransen. Det förvaras mer särskilt. Pojken får förmånen att – särskilt vid storhelgerna – studera faderns likkort. Han blir då som allsmäktig. När togs det, frågar han skälvan, var det mens han levde? Icket, svarar modern, man måste först dö innan kortet tas, du ser väl kistan! Men när är han upptagen till Frälsaren? När han är död, men innan kortet tas?» (Enquist 2008: 74; «For obscure, possibly purely documentary, reasons, in this village a photograph of the corpse is always taken: the camera captures the image of the body in the coffin. The record is not kept on the mantelpiece. Special care is taken of it. The boy is allowed the privilege – particularly at holiday times – of studying his father's photograph. It makes him seem omnipotent. When was it taken, he asks in a tremulous voice, was it while he was alive? You have to die first before the photograph can be taken, his mother replies, can you see – there's the coffin! But when does he go up to heaven? After he is dead, but before the photograph is taken?», Enquist 2015: 60). The discovery of the mourning portrait in the autobiography does trigger strong feelings and doubts in the little boy, but they are of completely different nature than those expressed in *Nedstörtad ängel*.

The second episode describes a gastroscopy the narrator underwent in Uppsala:

Just nu, i detta ögonblick, såg jag mig själv. Fast inte som vanligt, inte det jag vant mig vid och som kanske var sant, men bara kanske eftersom jag vant mig, nej inte som vanligt. Jag såg. Det här var inte bara en människa, anatomi, utan det var jag själv.

Det här var jag. Så här såg jag ut. Det som rörde sig, pulserade, svällde, sjönk, talade med ljudlösa läpprörelser, det var jag själv. Jag hade varit naiv, tagit allting för givet. För första gången såg jag nu mig själv, en bit av mig själv visserligen, men på samma sätt som jag borde ha sett det andra också, det andra som var jag [...]

Under några minuter hade jag blivit iakttagen av mig själv. Nästan sett mig själv, på det sätt som andra hela tiden såg mig, men utan att berätta. Det var det skrämmande. Det jag sett var det fysiska, men ändå inte bara. Jag ville upp ur min förlamning, men kunde inte röra mig. Jag låg ensam i rummet och tänkte att detta var alltså också jag. En bit av det innersta, men bara det fysiska, ändå inte den nedersta botten. Om detta var jag fanns det säkert också något annat, kanske kontinenter av något annat: ytterligare en mun som skulle öppna sig och låta ett öga glida igenom, och ytterligare en, och ytterligare. (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 21-22)

Just now, at this moment, I saw myself, though not in the usual way, not the way I had got used to and which might have been the true way, but perhaps only because of habit, no not the usual way. I saw. This was not just a human being, anatomy, instead it was me.

This was I, This was how I looked. That which moved, pulsated, bulged, sank, spoke, with silent moving lips, that was me. I had been naive, taken everything for granted. For the first time I now saw myself, only a bit of me, that is true, but just as I would have seen the rest too, the remainder that was me. [...]

For some minutes I had been observed by myself. Almost seen myself, in the way others saw me all the time, without telling. This was frightening. What I had seen was physical, but not only. I wanted to get out of my paralysis, but could not move. I lay alone in the room and thought: so this is me. Something of the innermost, only physical, not yet the deepest level. If that was I, then there was surely also something else, maybe continents of something else: yet another mouth would open and let the eye slide through, and yet another and another. (Enquist 1986: 23-25)

Seeing himself is described as an almost ecstatic experience, a revelation of a deeper truth – the truth the narrator/author is constantly looking for. The role of metaphor played by the other characters in the novel is made explicit by a reference to the gastroscopy experience: «[Pinon] är en liten kamerakula som sänks ner i mig, betraktar mig och mina gamla drömmar inifrån, vänligt och kritiskt»<sup>243</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 15), says the narrator commenting on Pinon's recurring presence in his dreams. The above-quoted passage also bears a reference («ljudlösa läpprörelser») to another of the

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<sup>243</sup> «He is a little spherical camera, which has been lowered into me, observes me and my old dreams from inside, kindly and critically» (Enquist 1986: 16).

book's characters, Pinon's "wife" Maria, whose dumb lips move incessantly as if trying to communicate a message, exactly as the narrator's membranes pulsate like «silent moving lips». Englund's essay seems to suggest that the main purpose in *Nedstörtad ängel* is to find a definition – an image? a unity? – for the narrator, an aim that remains eternally unattained. The revelation that closes the book («the face emerged, and it was I») is just a dream, the same dream that opens the book: «Vaknade 3.45, drömmen fortfarande alldeles levande. Strök ofrivilligt med fingret mot ansiktet, mot kindens hud. / Hade varit mycket nära svaret»<sup>244</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1985]: 7). The answer was «very close», but not reached.

I am tempted to take Englund's reasoning one step further and conjecture that all – or at least most – of Enquist's production is a huge "metaphor" to define the writing subject. The idea of using *Nedstörtad ängel* as a sort of lens to better understand earlier and later works is shared by Thurah, according to whom «[r]omanen er grundfortælling, en matrice – eller maske – for mange av Enquists romanfortællinger»<sup>245</sup> (Thurah 2002: 20). The constant recourse to metaphor as a means of self-representation reminds of the idea of autobiography as a metaphor of the self expressed by Olney (cf. 1.1.1). According to Olney, «[m]etaphor is essentially a way of knowing» and the psychological basis on which it rests is «to grasp the unknown through the known» (Olney 1972: 31). Indeed, as *Nedstörtad ängel* seems to suggest and later works such as *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* will confirm (cf. 5.1), Enquist recurs to metaphors as a way to indirect self-knowledge: «in this in-between state of fall and aspiration in which we find ourselves, where wholeness is more a notion than a condition, we can conceive of wholeness, or realize it, only synthetically and symbolically», as Olney points out in the conclusion of his book (Olney 1972: 318).

However, as shown by *Nedstörtad ängel*'s circular structure, this striving for wholeness is destined to failure, and therefore to ever new attempts. Metaphor, though, is not only a positive instrument at the service of personal unity; it can also be used as a

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<sup>244</sup> «Woke 3.45, the dream was then quite vivid. Without thinking, stroke my face with a finger, against the skin of the cheek. / Had been very close to the answer» (Enquist 1986: 5).

<sup>245</sup> «The novel is the fundamental narration, a matrix – or mask – for many of Enquist's novels.»

shield to screen off frightening or dangerous truths: «Hvis objektivering er formen, så er formen på én gang en hinde eller *en skal om* och en måde *at få sagt*»<sup>246</sup> (Thurah 2002: 82, italics in the original). And Enquist is certainly a master in exploiting both these possibilities offered by metaphors, making them into masks behind which one can hide, but that at the same reveal a challenging truth: «Every profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is continually growing», he seems to suggest, borrowing Nietzsche's words (Nietzsche 1990: 69-70).

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<sup>246</sup> «If objectification is form, so form is at the same time both a film or a shell, and a way to have things said.»

## Chapter 5: The whole story?

In the previous chapter I have analysed a second group of Enquist's writings, where we can witness a growing level of autobiographicality with respect to the first one. However, while in the first two works taken into account there, *Sekonden* and *Musikanternas uttåg*, this increased presence of the autobiographical element is expressed mostly through the insertion and reiteration of specific episodes (such as the heavenly harp or the athletics meeting in Greifswald), with *Nedstörtad ängel* and *I lodjurets timma* the metaphoric function of these recurring images starts to become more evident.

This final chapter groups books that at first glance seem to have little in common. The most striking contrast is that they all belong to different genres: the main focus is on a novel, a collection of texts that range between the essay and the short story, an autobiography and a hybrid book almost impossible to define, with a shorter section dedicated to a group of three historical novels. However, at a deeper level they can all be seen as different embodiments of a new stage of the same striving for a coherent meaning that, in varying degrees, permeates the whole of Enquist's production.

*Kapten Nemos bibliotek* (1991), defined by its own author as «romanen om Eeva-Lisa och hans mor och honom själv och bortbytet och döpojken»<sup>247</sup> (Enquist 2008: 525), could be described as the highest point of Enquist's self-describing metaphor, where he «nu tar också [...] steget fullt ut. Han träder – fortfarande förvisso dolt för läsaren, men likväl fullt tydlig – direkt in i sitt eget skrivna och diktade stoff»<sup>248</sup>, as maintains Crister Enander in his penetrating analysis of the book (Enander 1995: 89).

After bringing the metaphor to its height, the course to follow had forcibly to change, and maybe it is for this reason that after publishing *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* Enquist declared that he would not write another novel<sup>249</sup>. His following book,

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<sup>247</sup> «The novel about Eeva-Lisa and his mother and himself and the changeling and the ghost boy» (Enquist 2015: 389).

<sup>248</sup> «Now [he] takes the final step. He enters – still hidden to the reader, it is true, but nonetheless fully recognisable – directly into his own written and imagined material.»

<sup>249</sup> Cf. for instance Enander 1991: 18, 1995: 81, and Öhman 1993: 37.



*Kartritarna* (1992), steers indeed towards non-fiction, being a collection of mixed writings which contains the first embryo of a different autobiographical narrative, less disguised and more traditional in style and scope.

After a few years in which he mainly dedicated himself to writing for theatre, however, Enquist went back to the novel, with some of his best accomplishments in the genre, three historical novels, *Livläkarens besök* (1999), *Lewis resa* (2001) and *Boken om Blanche och Marie* (2004), which I will here treat only marginally, since their relevance to my reasoning is limited.

The following book examined in this chapter is instead the closest thing to a traditional autobiography in Enquist's production. In *Ett annat liv* (2008) we find many of the images and episodes already used in several of the previous books, but related in a relatively regular chronological order and with a less symbolical charge, with the consequences that are analysed in detail in 5.4.

Finally, with *Liknelseboken* (2013) we go back to a more hybrid book, which maintains a strong autobiographical element, but combined with the freer approach of the earlier novels.

### **5.1 *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*: From metaphor to spell**

To any reader who has even a slight acquaintanceship with Enquist's oeuvre, it appears immediately evident that *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* is a sort of summa of his writing, «en fortætning, en tilspidsning af det foregående»<sup>250</sup> (Thurah 2002: 100). Also Bredsdorff defines it as «en lång upprepning», Enquist's «mest självrefererande verk»<sup>251</sup> (Bredsdorff 1991: 239) that bears trace of all previous works.

On his part, in *Ett annat liv* Enquist declares explicitly that *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* is a book about himself:

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<sup>250</sup> «A compression, a sharpening of what comes before.»

<sup>251</sup> «A long repetition», «most self-referring work.»

Då fick han förvisningen, i sanning, att han skulle kunna skriva denna bok färdigt. Den skulle handla om återuppståndelsen. Och hava namnet *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*. Boken om Eeva-Lisa och honom själv och hans mor och döpojken och Vålgöraren och Sjön och alltihop. Den skulle knyta ihop det sista i hans gamla liv och det första i det andra liv han nu fått som gåva. (Enquist 2008: 528)

And then he was convinced, in truth, that he would finish the book. It would be about resurrection. And have the title *Captain Nemo's Library*. The book about Eeva-Lisa and himself and his mother and the ghost boy and the Benefactor and Sjön and everything. It would tie together the last of his old life and the first of the different life he had received as a gift. (Enquist 2015: 392)

It could be worth noting that this book «about resurrection» is said to be a sort of threshold between an «old life» and a new and different life he had «received as a gift», not unlike Augustine's *Confessions*, which looks back on the author's sinful life from the safe haven of his bestowed grace. However, *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* is very far from a traditional autobiography or even an autobiographical novel. In an interview to Crister Enander given shortly after the book's publication, Enquist explains better his approach in writing it:

jag tyckte inte det lönade sig att ljuga längre [...]. Men i boken berättar jag inte precis som det var. Vad jag gör är att jag tar två berättelser och lägger ihop dem och får en tredje. Denna tredje berättelse blir på det sättet *den absoluta sanningen*. (Enander 1991: 22, italics mine)

I thought it was no use to lie further [...]. But in the book I do not tell exactly how it was. What I do is to take two stories and put them together to get a third one. This way this third story becomes *the absolute truth*.

We are back to the paradoxical idea of reaching truth by lying that was already present in Enquist's first works (cf. in particular *Kristallögat*, discussed in 3.1), or rather to create a truer reality by welding together different elements, also a long-standing method of the author (cf. "Tydliggöra eller spegla verklighet", quoted in 4.1). The first of the two stories Enquist refers to in the interview is an episode from his family history, when two newborn children were swapped at Bureå hospital in the early forties, while the second refers to the pregnancy of a young, unmarried girl he describes as his foster sister. The former is a well-documented event, to which *Aftonbladet* dedicated a long article in its Sunday supplement in November 1980 (cf. Enander 1991), and out of which journalist Agneta Bernárdzons more recently made a documentary film, *Kapten Nemos barn*. In 1942 two women gave birth to a son at Bureå hospital with a few hours'

delay. After some years one of the two couples started to wonder about their son's brown eyes (both parents were blue-eyed) and decided to bring the matter to court. After three years of proceedings, the Supreme Court stated that the two children – then seven years old – really had been swapped at birth and should therefore be returned to their biological parents. However, one of the two families did not accept the court decision and, albeit forced to renounce the son they had grown, refused to take the other in exchange, so that from then on the two children grew up as brothers. Enquist – eight years old at the time of the children's birth, fifteen at the conclusion of the controversy – was cousin to one of the swapped children, and had therefore a first-hand knowledge of that traumatic experience.

Of the second story he combines to obtain a third, “enhanced” one, we have instead no factual evidence. As already pointed out when discussing *Musikanternas uttåg* (cf. 4.2), Enquist is particularly reticent about his (real? fictive?) foster sister. The only explicit comment about her, included in the already mentioned interview to Crister Enander, paradoxically – and probably intentionally so – strengthens her ambiguous status:

De [böckerna] blir som ett rum i barndomen, ett rum som inte går att skilja från det som faktiskt hände. Kapten Nemo är en dokumenterad sanning, på samma sätt som att jag verkligen hade en fostersyster är en dokumenterad sanning. (Enander 1991: 23)

They [the books] become like a room in one's childhood, a room that cannot be distinguished from what really happened. Captain Nemo is a documented reality, in the same way as it is a documented reality that I had a foster sister.

While apparently confirming Eeva-Lisa's «documented» existence, he is in fact comparing her to a fictional character like Nemo, something that «cannot be distinguished from what really happened».

However, the point here is not what is true and what is not in Enquist's narration, but the use he makes of both real and fictional elements in constructing his metaphor, his «third story» which should «become *the absolute truth*». *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* is constructed around a frame narration, where an adult nameless narrator is going through Captain Nemo's library, trying to reconstruct his own and his friend Johannes's childhood story. The narrator and Johannes had been swapped at birth and then forced

to go back to their “real” families. With the second exchange, the friendship between the two boys is replaced by hostility and envy from the narrator’s side, who is bereaved of his mother Josefine, of his beloved green house and of his foster-sister Eeva-Lisa. Only when the latter dies after giving birth to a stillborn baby do the two boys temporarily reunite, for an expedition in search of the little corpse which resembles the fateful raft cruise already described in *Sekonden* and discussed in 4.1. Here, however, the episode does not close with one of the boys’ death, but with Johannes’s disappearance and the narrator’s “detaining”. After many years the two meet again in Captain Nemo’s *Nautilus*, just before Johannes’s death. However, throughout the book the two boys often overlap and blend in with each other, to the point that it is easy to suppose that Johannes is just an imaginary friend, a projection of the nameless narrator. The real episode of the swapped cousin should therefore have offered Enquist a perfect literary device to split up his features into two different characters.

According to Öhman, the frame narration represents the remembering process of the narrator, who tries to «tolka de ledtråder och metaforer som funnits och vuxit i honom under hela denna långa tid», metaphors that are often produced «i syfte att dölja det som varit smärtsamt»<sup>252</sup> (Öhman 1993: 34). The nameless narrator in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* could therefore be interpreted as a symbol of the author trying to come to grips with his own past, after giving so many different versions (“metaphors”) of it in his previous work. This seems to be confirmed by the text, which in the very first page reports one of Enquist’s favourite images for interpreting and giving a meaning, the verb «lägga ihop»:

Förr hade jag hemliga drömmar att det vore möjligt att lägga ihop allting, så att allting blev färdig, avslutat. Att till sist kunna säga: så var det, det var så det gick till, detta är hela historien.

Med det vore ju mot bättre vetande. Mot bättre vetande är dock ett bra sätt att inte ge upp. Visste vi bättre, gav vi upp. (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 7)

I used to have secret dreams about making it all add up, so that everything would be accounted for, brought to a close. At last to be able to say: it was like this, it happened this way, this is the whole story.

But that would be contrary to better knowledge. Contrary to better knowledge is a good way to keep going. If we knew better, we would give up. (Enquist 1992: 3)

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<sup>252</sup> «Interpret the clues and metaphors that have been present and grown within him during that long time», «in order to hide what was painful.»

While at the opening of the book the project to make things «add up» seems just wishful thinking, a hopeless dream, the closing lines of the book take up again the same sentence, apparently in an affirmative mode: «Så var det, det var så det gick till, detta är hela historien»<sup>253</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 250). During the unwinding of the narration, therefore, the process of bringing things to a close seems to succeed. Johannes is an obsessive writer, and the library on the *Nautilus* contains «hundratals, kanske tusentals böcker»<sup>254</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 26), all written by Johannes himself, together with all the «bärgningslistorna» where he «så noggrant hade [...] antecknat allt att det nu kunde återfinnas i detta hans sista museet»<sup>255</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 24), and the «små slarviga lappar» through which he «skickar signaler»<sup>256</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 15) to the narrator. The fact that Johannes's stories are often untrue is not a drawback but an advantage:

Det är klart att Johannes ljög hela tiden. Han var väl rädd han också. Men jag lärde mig mer av hans lögnar än av hans sanningar. Sanningarna var alltid ointressanta. Men när man ljög rörde han sig mycket tätt intill. [...]

Den sista text Johannes skrev, innan han dog på kökssoffan i *Nautilus* med finkan ouppäten och hela köket ostädat och luddorna kvarglömda i farstun, det var ett försök till rekonstruktion av hur Eeva-Lisa blev bortskickad. Han har det i flera varianter. Inte mycket till rekonstruktion, besvärjelse snarare. (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 9-10)

Obviously, Johannes lied the whole time. Of course he was afraid as well. But I learnt more from his lies than from his truths. The truths were always uninteresting. But when he lied he moved in very close. [...]

The last text written by Johannes, before he died on the kitchen sofa in *Nautilus* with his finka uneaten and the whole kitchen in a mess and the fleecyboots forgotten in the lobby, was an attempt to reconstruct how Eeva-Lisa came to be sent away. He made up several versions. Not so much reconstructions. Spells, rather. (Enquist 1992: 5-6)

To lie – or «dikta», to use another favourite verb of Enquist's – is therefore just a constructive, deeper way to describe reality, or maybe to transform it. It is not by chance that he uses here the term «besvärjelse», spell, another typical Enquistian word. Already

<sup>253</sup> «It was like this, it happened this way, this is the whole story» (Enquist 1992: 250).

<sup>254</sup> «Hundreds, maybe thousands of books» (Enquist 1992: 22).

<sup>255</sup> «Salvage lists», «had [...] noted everything down that now it could all be found in this place, his last museum» (Enquist 1992: 20).

<sup>256</sup> «Untidy little notes», «sends signals» (Enquist 1992: 12).

in *Hess* he spoke of «konsten som en besvärjelse»<sup>257</sup> (2010 [1966]: 62), and the term comes back in *Sekonden*<sup>258</sup>, in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* and in *Kartritarna*<sup>259</sup>, always in connection to something (art, sports, science) that allows to get into contact with one's own life, as «a sort of working hypothesis that allowed to continue to live».

An interesting reading of the term «besvärjelse», which brings us back to the constructive conception of writing and self-writing proposed by Eakin and Olney (cf. 1.1.1), is offered by Helene Blomqvist in her analysis of *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*:

En rekonstruktion verkar bakåt i tiden, men en besvärjelse framåt. En rekonstruktion är till att ta reda på exakt hur någonting gick till men en besvärjelse är till för att *åstadkomma något* i nuet. (Blomqvist 1996: 433, italics in the original)

A reconstruction operates backwards in time, a spell forwards. A reconstruction is aimed at finding out exactly how something happened, while a spell is aimed at *obtaining something* in the present.

And what if not «spells» are the constant repetitions of images and phrases throughout Enquist's whole production, of which *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* offers a full catalogue: from the green house (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 15, 35, 59, 86, 151), to the mourning portrait (16, 96), the heavenly harp (21, 98), the maps of Sweden (95, 121, 141, 197, 199), the stillborn baby (187, 198, 201, 205, 206, 207, 216, 217), and so on. This

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<sup>257</sup> «Art as a spell.»

<sup>258</sup> «Det fanns något både i religionen och idrotten som var besvärjelse, ceremoni och rit: båda tycktes kunna placera ett slags glasvägg mellan ceremonin och verkligheten, men det kunde inte hjälpas att idrottens glasvägg var tunnare och ändå gav känslan av att det egentliga livet inte var placerat bakom framtidens molnbank eller dödens mörker, utan fanns strax intill, alldeles strax intill» (2014 [1971]: 130; «There was something both in religion and in sport that was a spell, a ceremony and a ritual: both seemed able to place a sort of glass wall between the ceremony and reality, but it was inevitable that the glass wall of sport was thinner, and nonetheless it gave a feeling that real life was not placed behind the future's bank of clouds or death's darkness, that it was just close, quite close to you»); «Betrakta de små detaljerna, ritualen, besvärjelsen. Betrakta den lilla ceremonins plats och användning i den stora ceremonin. Betrakta pusselbitens plats i den större bilden» (2014 [1971]: 264; «Observe the little details, the ritual, the spell. Observe the place of the little ceremony, and its use in the big ceremony. Observe the place of the puzzle pieces in the wider image»).

<sup>259</sup> «De som byggde en alltför stor katedral för att försäkra sig om något, som en besvärjelse, ett slags arbetshypotes som gjorde att man kunde leva vidare» (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 15; «Those who built a too big cathedral just to make sure of something, like a spell, a sort of working hypothesis that allowed to continue to live»); «Kvantfysiken är full av metaforer.[...] Metaforerna innehåller en besvärjelse» (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 212; «Quantum physics is full of metaphors. [...] The metaphors contain a spell»).

obsessive repeating and cataloguing of images and “sore points”, recognised by Enquist himself <sup>260</sup>, has in fact a constructive function:

Men jag var länge helt säker på hur det skulle sluta: med att jag skulle föras in i det slutgiltiga biblioteket, där myterna skulle utsättas av klarhet, ångesten av förklaring, och där allting till sist skulle bringas att hänga samman. (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 23)

But for a long time I was quite sure how it would end: I would be guided to the ultimate library, where the myths would be replaced by clarity, anguish by explanations, and where everything at last would be made to fit together. (Enquist 1992: 19)

The striven-for unity of the «whole story», the assembled puzzle, is therefore to be found in the «ultimate library» where all sore points are collected, as confirmed also by Bredsdorff: «Hela romanen är ett långt försök att förvandla det som ger smärta till det som ger mening»<sup>261</sup> (Bredsdorff 1991: 252). The key to this transformation of pain, to the clarifying of «myths», or metaphors, can be found in Helene Blomqvist’s study, where she underlines the difference between «förstå»<sup>262</sup> and «fatta»<sup>263</sup> that emerges from Enquist’s text: «Hemligheter har ju alla, det gäller att säga dem så att de andra inte förstår, för att få dem att fatta. Det är stor skillnad på att förstå och fatta»<sup>264</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 99). According to Blomqvist, «fatta» means

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<sup>260</sup> «Han hade ofta skrivit om smärtpunkterna, i sina meddelanden till mig. [...] De innersta smärtpunkterna hade han katalogiserat här i sitt bibliotek; här, i sitt snart i vulkanens inre nedsänkta bibliotek» (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 33; «He had often written about stages of pain. [...] The internal stages of pain he had catalogued here in his library; here, in this library soon to be immersed in the interior of the volcano», Enquist 1992: 29). Here the English translator chose a different interpretation from her colleagues for translating «smärtpunkt», less ideal for my reasoning (cf. “point of pain”, “sore point”, “raw spot” in 2.1.4).

<sup>261</sup> «The whole novel is but a prolonged attempt to transform the painful into the meaningful.»

<sup>262</sup> «Understand; comprehend, grasp; get; make out; realize; see; know» (*Norstedts Svenska-Engelska Ordbok*, <<http://www.ord.se/oversattning/engelska-plus/?s=förstå&l=SSVSEN>>, last accessed 14 June 2017).

<sup>263</sup> «Understand, grasp, conceive, comprehend» (*Norstedts Svenska-Engelska Ordbok*, <<http://www.ord.se/oversattning/engelska-plus/?s=fatta&l=SSVSEN>>, last accessed 14 June 2017). Although the two verbs can almost appear as synonyms, *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok* helps us to understand the slight difference in meaning, when it defines «fatta» as «förstå den verkliga innebörden av l. det inre sammanhanget hos (ngt)» (<<http://www.saob.se/artikel/?seek=fatta&pz=1>>, last accessed 14 June 2017), «understand the real meaning or the intrinsic context of something».

<sup>264</sup> «Of course, everyone has secrets, it is a matter of telling so that the rest do not comprehend, in order to get them to grasp it. There is a big difference between comprehending and grasping» (Enquist 1992: 97-98).

inte ta reda på fakta – vad som verkligen har hänt av det som berättas – utan att få fatt på *meningen* för min konkreta nu-situation. Berättelsens befriande förmåga har inte med *fakticiteten* utan med *relevansen* att göra. (Blomqvist 1996: 431, italics in the original)

not to find out facts – what really happened of what is being told – but to get hold of the *meaning* for my practical now-situation. The liberating power of narration has not to do with *factuality* but with *relevance*.

In order to «fatta», it is necessary to follow another logic,

inte ett temporalt och syntagmatiskt, så att man ordnar upp alla fragmenten i rätt ordning, korrekt tolkade, avkodade, och med de felaktiga varianterna bortrensade (vilket alltså är fullständigt omöjligt), utan ett paradigmiskt, så att man lägger de olika fragmenten, berättelserna och varianterna intill varandra i knippen – alltså den metod som Lévi-Strauss förespråkade vid tolkning av myter – och kanske också på varandra, så att en ny bild med nya linjer uppstår. (Blomqvist 2006: 57)

not a temporal or syntagmatic one, so that you arrange all fragments in the right order, correctly interpreted, decoded, and with the wrong variants eliminated (which is completely impossible), but a paradigmatic one, so that you put all fragments, stories and variants next to each other in bundles – that is to say the method recommended by Lévi-Strauss for the interpretation of myths – and maybe even one upon the other, so that a new image with new lines appears.

It is the same logic based on thematic relationship already mentioned by Englund in his analysis of *Nedstörtad ängel* (cf. 4.3), where he highlights the interactive power of the metaphor, able to redefine its subject (Englund 2006: 67). To understand the «meaning», therefore, one has to renounce any pretence to a historical reconstruction, concentrating on the thematic unity obtained through metaphor. In *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*'s epilogue (which is tellingly subtitled «Utgångspunkter», starting points), the nameless narrator describes the effort to make things «add up»: in the four years he is detained and observed, he thinks about things. After he is freed, he goes through the library and Johannes's deceitful messages, until he accepts that they are «besvärjelser»: «När man ser att de är besvärjelser blir de lättare att bära»<sup>265</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 247). Once he does, «[a]llting är ju egentligen enkel. Fast det tog långt tid att få det enkelt»<sup>266</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 248). However, he does not manage to make others understand: «Det försökte jag förklara för de som förvarade mig. Men intet förstod dom»<sup>267</sup> (Enquist

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<sup>265</sup> «When they are seen as spells, they become easier to bear» (Enquist 1992: 247).

<sup>266</sup> «Everything is really so simple. But it took a lot of time to simplify it» (Enquist 1992: 248).

<sup>267</sup> «I tried to explain this to the people who detained me. But they understood nothing» (Enquist 1992: 248).



2014b [1991]: 248). The secret is that one does not have to «förstå», only to «fatta». Once we accept the incongruities, the repetitions, the apparently incomprehensible, can we really say that «[s]å var det, det var så det gick till, detta är hela historien» (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 250). «Besvärjelsen är fullbordad»<sup>268</sup>, writes Crister Enander soon after the publication of the book (Enander 1992: 23). However, if he had managed to do that, to make things connect, Enquist would probably not have written the following books.

## 5.2 *Kartritarna*: A personal essay

As anticipated in the introduction to this chapter, the next book to be analysed is completely different from *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*. On Norstedts' homepage *Kartritarna* is described as «en personlig essä i tio kapitel, eller tio avsnitt ur en oavslutad livsroman»<sup>269</sup>. Although this collection includes texts written at different times, with different characteristics and on the most diverse subjects (one is on sport, another on Olof Palme's assassination, another on a planned but never written play about Bohr and Heisenberg, for instance), it is true that some of its chapters (for this is how Enquist calls them) offer interesting reflections about life-writing. In this light *Kartritarna* could even be read as a sort of preparatory study for the autobiographical works to come, both from a thematic and a methodological point of view.

The final chapter, also called “*Kartritarna*”, is one of the most interesting from this point of view. After a first brief section dedicated to Karen Blixen and her true reasons for writing – apparently unrelated to the rest, although at a certain point the reader understands that it is there to reinforce by resonance one of the bearing concepts of the text, the idea that one can express oneself also through silence – this chapter describes the narrator's visit to his childhood village on the occasion of a class reunion forty years after high school diploma. In the days preceding the gathering, he empties his mother's

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<sup>268</sup> «The spell is completed.»

<sup>269</sup> «A personal essay in ten chapters, or ten episodes from an uncompleted life narrative» (<<http://www.norstedts.se/bocker/112193-kartritarna>>, last accessed 14 June 2017).

flat after her moving to a nursing home. Both tasks imply a powerful activation of memory: at the reunion the former classmates must deliver a five-minute speech about their lives, and cleaning up an eighty-eight-year-old's home can reveal a lot of unexpected findings, from the wax Infant Jesus halved by the neighbours' son so many years before, to a faded herbarium, to a collection of newspaper cuttings bearing the narrator's grandmother's signature. The discovery of this unexpected ability of his grandmother's – she was the village correspondent for the local newspaper, *Norra Västerbotten*, writing short notices about parish meetings and festivities, but above all obituaries, sometimes even in verse – is an important revelation for the author/narrator. After a life of writing, often associated to an unfathomable sense of guilt (cf. 2.1.3), he suddenly finds out a precedent, a companion in a «hemligt brödraskap»<sup>270</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 279). He even attributes his grandmother his own motivations for writing, echoing one of his recurring verbs, «hänga ihop»:

Varför hade hon skrivit, och hur hade hon känt det då. Man kunde tänka sig att hon känt en häftig glädje, som om hon inte längre var ensam. Att det fanns en förklaring. Versarna i *Norran* hade då fått något att hänga ihop. (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 278)

Why had she written, and how had she felt about it. One could imagine that she had felt a deep joy, as if she no longer were alone. That there was an explanation. The verses on the *Norran* then managed to have things connect.

Writing has a similar reassuring effect on the narrator, analogous to drawing maps (cf. 2.1.3): «När jag skrev reducerades ensamheten, och jag blev nästan människa. Det andra, förfärliga, sjönk undan och blev obetydligt»<sup>271</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 286). Even more reassuring is the idea of belonging to a brotherhood, to be in direct connection with one's closer ancestors. Going through his mother's possessions, the narrator is in fact digging into his own past, as any autobiographer does before starting to put his or her life into writing. With this short story, Enquist begins by inscribing himself into a clear lineage: his grandmother was a writer, like him, and the same could be said, in a metaphorical sense, also of his grandfather. Although he never wrote a line, he

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<sup>270</sup> «A secret brotherhood.»

<sup>271</sup> «When I wrote solitude relented, and I almost became a human being. The other things, the horrible things, receded and became unimportant.»

nonetheless managed to «rita ner sitt tecken»<sup>272</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 289) by breeding a wonderful cross fox and taking it all the way to Stockholm for a fur exhibition. The episode is taken up again in length and with similar wording in *Ett annat liv* (and then again in *Liknelseboken*), where its meaning is made clearer: «Man kan skapa konst på många sätt, som rävfarmaren PW eller mr Pullen»<sup>273</sup> (Enquist 2008: 136-137), thinks the young protagonist after reading a poem by his colleague and fellow tenant Lars Gustafsson. Despite his illiteracy, his grandfather had nonetheless something to say: «Man kunde ju vara förkunnare ändå, eller vilja rita ner en berättelse, eller göra något som fastnade och blev kvar när man dog»<sup>274</sup> (Enquist 2008: 66).

The visit to his childhood village and the immersion in his mother's life relics thus serve a double purpose: on one hand they provide material for a (possible? already planned?) autobiography, memories and episodes that are in fact plentifully used in *Ett annat liv*, from his grandfather's and grandmother's stories to his own map drawing (already dealt with in detail in 2.1.3) or the first pioneer class to take the high school diploma. On the other hand, they also offer a reflection on writing, on its purpose and its consequences:

Man fick ofta frågan om varför «egentligen» man skrivit det man gjort, då fick man hitta på något som lät bra. [...] Huvudsaken var att man kunde känna sig trygg. Ordet «egentligen» hade efter några år fått en nästan hotfull underton, som om ordet påstod att det i texten fanns något dolt, egentligt, aldrig redovisat. (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 276)

I was often asked why I had written what I had, «really», and then I had to make up something that sounded good. [...] The main point was that one had to feel easy about it.

After some years the word «really» had got an almost menacing undertone, as if it meant that in the text there was something hidden, real, never reported.

Despite the positive feelings of community and freedom described above, writing also has a dangerous side, the risk to reveal something that should be kept hidden. The same reflection also emerges in another text from the same collection, “Målet mot Fröken Julie”, dedicated to Strindberg and his *Fröken Julie*:

<sup>272</sup> «Sketch down his sign.»

<sup>273</sup> «You can create art in many ways, like the fox farmer P.W. or Mr Pullen» (Enquist 2015: 107).

<sup>274</sup> «You can still be a bearer of tidings, or want to sketch out a story, or make something lasting that would be there after your death» (Enquist 2015: 53-54).

Med goda teatertexter förhåller det sig alltid så, att de innehåller en hemlighet. På detta sätt liknar denna goda text oss människor; vi innehåller också nästan alltid en hemlighet. En god regel, dock inte inom psykoanalysen, är att människan ska tillåtas behålla denna hemlighet. Annars försvinner hon, eller blir omänsklig tydlig. (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 59)

The thing with good theatre plays is that they always contain a secret. This way these good plays resemble us human beings; we almost always contain a secret, too. A good rule, although not in psychoanalysis, is that people should be allowed to keep that secret. Otherwise they disappear, or become inhumanly evident.

A possible solution to avoid disappearing as a human being is to “*inkläda*” (cf. 3.2), to speak in metaphors, in signs:

Därför skriver jag om djur, [...] jag behandlar dem som tecken för något annat, inte som varelser. [...] Men om de också är tecken, som måste iakttas med yttersta noggrannhet, måste frågan bli: tecken för vad? Den textyta i livet där vi skriver de hemliga meddelanden vi vill förbehålla oss själva, och hemlighålla för oss själva? [...] I det ögonblick man betraktar tecknen på nytt börjar ansatserna till flykt. Det är det normala: inte bevara, utan överge (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 52-54)

This is why I write about animals, [...] I treat them as symbols of something else, not as creatures. [...] But if they also are symbols, to be observed with extreme attention, the question must be: symbols of what? The text surface in our life where we write the secret messages that we want to keep to ourselves, and keep secret from ourselves? [...] In the moment when you observe the symbols again, the escape attempts begin. That is the standard: not to preserve, but to discard.

Writing is therefore a way to convey a coded message, to «show» and «hide» at the same time, to quote yet again Arne Melberg (2008: 22, discussed in 1.1.3). As we have already seen, *inkläda* is a well-known concept in Enquist’s production. What is new here is the frankness with which he analyses the mechanism behind his writing, probably due to the partly essayistic form of the text.

The same sharp-sighted and frank analysis also examines another of his methods: stratification and repetition. In the opening chapter, “Gravtillhörighet”, Enquist is once again sitting in his mother’s house, although at an earlier date than in the chapter “Kartritarna”. It is August 1986, and he is going through the articles he wrote and the notes he took during the Football World Cup in Mexico a couple of months earlier, in

order to put together a planned book on sport, *Två reportage om idrott* (Enquist 1986).

What he is doing is compared to the Icelandic sagas, where

[d]et fanns en verklig händelse, och sedan berättade någon om den, sedan någon annan, och någon nedtecknade sagan om berättelsen. Man kunde säga att de försökte färga in sig i historien. (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 7-8)

there was a real event, and then somebody told a story about it, and then somebody else, and somebody wrote down the saga about that story. You could say that they tried to leave their own colour onto the story.

In each repetition something of every narrator – be they different ones, as in the sagas, or always the same, as with Enquist’s case – passes on to the story, like a tinge. In the case of different narrators it is probably a way to affirm their own existence («De försökte väl påstå att de fanns på något sätt»<sup>275</sup>, Enquist 2010 [1992]: 8), but when a writer goes back to what he or she has already written it is different:

Att omskriva sina egna sagor måste vara något annat, och svårare att försvara, men det kanske var så att man hade misslyckats den första gången, eller inte sett det som var det egentliga, eller fördolt det. Man hade fördolt sig den första gången: ja, det var en möjlighet. (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 8)

To rewrite your own stories must be something different, and more difficult to defend, but maybe the case is that the first time you had failed, or had not seen what it really was, or you had hidden it. You had hidden yourself, the first time: yes, it was a possibility.

Once again, repetition is the other side of the “black holes” coin: as Lindberg points out in his analysis of *Mannen i båten* (cf. 2.1.1 and 4.1), when something is passed over in silence it must inevitably come up again in what he defines «upprepningsens rörelse»<sup>276</sup> (Lindberg 1999: 5). Ellipsis, suppression and repetition are the inextricably linked instruments of Enquist’s writing, aimed at «få tillhörighet i sig själv»<sup>277</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 12), at finding a mid-point in one’s life.

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<sup>275</sup> «They were probably trying to affirm that they existed, in some way.»

<sup>276</sup> «Repetition’s movement.»

<sup>277</sup> «Sense of belonging to oneself.»

### 5.3 Interlude: The historical novels

As I have already mentioned, after *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* Enquist declared that he did not intend to write another novel<sup>278</sup>. However, in 1999, after almost a decennium in which he dedicated mostly to drama, he published one of his most celebrated novels, *Livläkarens besök*, about the insane Danish king Christian VII, his wife Caroline Mathilde and the German physician Struensee. Although the style and structure are typically Enquistian, with frequent digressions and overlapping perspectives, from an autobiographical point of view something seems to have changed in comparison with the previous works. The recurring images and “sore points” are gone, as well as the autobiographical element, with the exception of the young king’s obsession for guilt and punishment (cf. Enquist 2014 [1999]: 49, 51, etc.) and his search for a «välgörare»<sup>279</sup>, the role attributed to Kapten Nemo in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, and to the protagonist’s father in *Ett annat liv* (cf., for instance, Enquist 2014 [1999]: 47, 50, etc., and Enquist 2008: 77, 80, etc.). The omniscient narrator plays no open role in the action and only occasionally betrays his presence by the use of deictics (for instance, «Det finns i dag inga monument över Struensee i Danmark»<sup>280</sup>, Enquist 2014 [1999]: 14, italics mine).

With the following historical novel, *Lewis resa*, about the founder and leader of the Swedish pentecostal movement, Lewi Pethrus, things are slightly different. A thirty-two-page-long prologue revolves around a nameless narrator who is invited to take part in the funeral of Efraim Markström, an old acquaintance of his, which takes place in Christiansfeld, seat of an important centre of the Moravian Church. Here he finds Efraim’s *Lebenslauf*: a sort of diary or autobiography that the Moravian Church adepts have to compile and deposit in the church archives. This *Lebenslauf* – be it real or fictional – is at the ground of the main body of the book: the historical reconstruction of the relationship between the two main figures of the Swedish Pentecostal movement, Lewi Pethrus and Sven Lidman, based on the first-hand narration of Efraim, who is said

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<sup>278</sup> Cf., for instance, Enander 1995: 81 and Öhman 1993: 37.

<sup>279</sup> «Benefactor.»

<sup>280</sup> «Today there is not a single monument to Struensee in Denmark» (Enquist 2001: 5).

to have known both. The situation is to a certain degree similar to *Legionärerna*<sup>281</sup>, with a narrator who works on documents (some certainly real, such as newspapers and the books written by the two protagonists, other probably fictional, as Efraim's testimony) and is directly present in the narration through his meetings with Efraim or his own research. After the prologue, however, his appearances gradually thin out, as do the references to Efraim's *Lebenslauf*, at the beginning very frequent. The presence of a narrator recognisable as Enquist himself – he lives in Denmark at the time of Efraim's funeral (Enquist 2014 [2001]: 8) and there are several references to characters and episodes of his previous books, such as uncle Aron or Josefina Markström (2014 [2001]: 416 and 153 respectively) – has therefore a structural framing function in the novel, which remains fundamentally focused on its historical reconstruction.

Something similar also happens in *Boken om Blanche och Marie*, about Polish chemist Marie Curie and Jean-Martin Charcot's most known patient Blanche Wittman. Here we find a narrator often saying «I», but the pronoun – when not spoken by one of the novel's characters – is followed almost every time by verbs such as *tänka* (Enquist 2014 [2004]: 26, 44, 47, 61, 94, 150, 151), *tycka* (40, 44, 48, 160), *anta* (45, 240), *känna igen* (48, 156, 158, 164), *känna* (58, 94), *redovisa* (70), *glömma* (73), *skriva* (88), *undra* (93), *mena* (93), *uppfatta* (156), *hoppas* (189), *bestämma*<sup>282</sup> (258). The narrator is therefore present only as the external conscience that filters Blanche and Marie's stories, or through references to Enquist's previous books, such as the image of the indivisible couple Pasqual Pinon/Maria to represent Marie Curie and her husband's love, or Blanche Wittman and Charcot's. There are only two notable exceptions to this pattern: two pages are dedicated to the death of Enquist's father, and two others describe a curious episode with a hypnotiser dating from his teens.

The first passage is introduced by a sentence apparently referred to Marie's loss of her beloved husband Pierre: «Jag har alltid undrat hur det är, för den som överlever, när

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<sup>281</sup> A passing hint to *Legionärerna*, almost a wink to the readers, is the definition of Lewi Pethrus as «Guds Per Albin» (Enquist 2014 [2001]: 43, 60), referring to Per Albin Hansson, Prime Minister of Sweden at the time of the Balts affair.

<sup>282</sup> Respectively: “to believe”, “to think”, “to assume”, “to recognise”, “to feel”, “to relate”, “to forget”, “to write”, “to wonder”, “to mean”, “to understand”, “to hope”, “to decide”.

en kärlek tar slut nästan innan den börjat»<sup>283</sup> (Enquist 2014 [2004]: 93). Immediately afterwards a connection with his own experience is drawn: «Undrar man måste man leta, och ta om. Inget fel i det»<sup>284</sup> (Enquist 2014 [2004]: 93), followed by the scene of the mother pulsing through the snow after her husband's death already included in *Nedstörtad ängel* and later in *Ett annat liv* (cf. 4.3).

The second passage is more interesting because it describes an episode of which there are no other traces in Enquist's texts. At sixteen years of age, the narrator attended a hypnotiser's show in Skellefteå, and ended up acting as a subject for the suggestion experiment on the stage. Also here the personal memory is introduced by an assonance with a character's experience, in this case Blanche Wittman's exposure as a human guinea-pig at Salpêtrière hospital: «Jag känner igen det»<sup>285</sup>, is the narrator's comment (Enquist 2014 [2004]: 158). The emotional proximity to Blanche is underlined also by the closing of the autobiographical digression: «Det var min korta vistelse på Salpêtrière, ett sjukhus beläget på scenen i Skellefteå Läroverks aula, där jag betalat tre kronor i inträde och blivit delaktig»<sup>286</sup> (Enquist 2014 [2004]: 160).

In these three historical novels, the instances of self-representation that had been a constant presence in Enquist's writing seems to have thinned out. The image of the author, virtually absent from *Livläkarens besök*, comes back in *Lewis resa* and *Boken om Blanche och Marie*, but limited in space and scope: his presence seems confined to a role as a source of information, as with his conversations with Efraim, or as a resonance box for a character's emotions, as with the two episodes quoted from *Boken om Blanche och Marie*. However, just a few years after the last of these historical books, he publishes *Ett annat liv*, a straightforward autobiography, despite its third-person narration. Far from being exhausted, therefore, Enquist's autobiographical drive simply seems to have steered towards different forms of expression.

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<sup>283</sup> «I've always wondered what it's like for the one who survives when a love comes to an end almost before it has begun» (Enquist 2006: 80).

<sup>284</sup> «If you wonder you have to find out, and reconstruct it. Nothing wrong with that» (Enquist 2006: 80).

<sup>285</sup> «I recognize this» (Enquist 2006: 136).

<sup>286</sup> «That was my brief sojourn in Salpêtrière, a hospital located on the stage of the auditorium in Skellefteå High School, where I paid three kronor entrance fee and became an accomplice» (Enquist 2006: 137).



#### 5.4 *Ett annat liv*: The official version

After having referred to *Ett annat liv* throughout this study as a source of information about and comparison with earlier books, in this section I will look at it in its unity, trying to demonstrate that here Enquist's self-representing project has taken a different form compared with earlier works.

The text is organised in three sections, preceded by a short introduction in the form of «Utgångspunkter» (cf. 2.1). The first section, «Oskuld»<sup>287</sup>, dedicated to childhood and adolescence in the barren Västerbotten environment, is not dissimilar in style from earlier works: brief imagistic fragments that gradually reveal a wider perspective. Enquist is setting the stage, describing the village of Hjöggböle and presenting the protagonists: the widowed mother, the stillborn first son, the kind and delicate second-born son, the absent father fluttering as a Benefactor in the high skies. This section closes with the young protagonist ending school and symbolically distancing himself from the religious mother with the episode of the cycle ride to Maundy Thursday communion, dealt with in depth in 3.2. With the second part, «En starkt upplyst plats»<sup>288</sup>, the protagonist opens to the world: first the military service, then university in the very intellectual world of Uppsala. From there he will fly off for a life-long journey that will bring him to Berlin, Los Angeles, Broadway, Paris, Copenhagen. It is the section dedicated to the writing years, the one which is most similar to a classic memoir: matter-of-fact, ironical, intellectual. Things change again with «In i mörkret»<sup>289</sup>, the final section dedicated to the dependence years. Alcohol abuse appears all of a sudden, almost without warning: we left the young protagonist as a member of the abstainers' association Band of Hope (cf. Enquist 2008: 47, 55, 492, etc.), and we find him again in Copenhagen, unable to write because he starts drinking earlier and earlier in the day (cf. Enquist 2008: 389). The fall is as deep as the flight had been high,

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<sup>287</sup> «Innocence.»

<sup>288</sup> «A brightly lit place.»

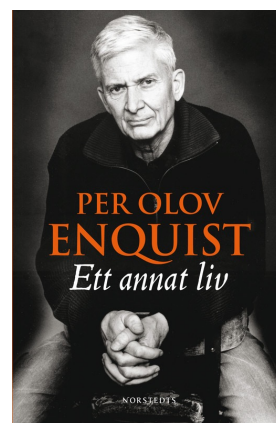
<sup>289</sup> «Into the darkness.»

and only after having reached the bottom, when he almost dies on an Icelandic plain, he is able to rise again to the “other life” which gives the title to the book.

When *Ett annat liv* was published in 2008, reviewers and critics were perplexed about the categorisation of the book. Was it an autobiography, a memoir, an autobiographical novel or a novel tout court? Also booksellers, chart compilers and literary juries seemed a little bewildered about the book’s nature: one week after its release in September 2008, *Ett annat liv* topped the non-fiction best-sellers chart (Willems 2009: 50), but in November it won the prestigious Augustpriset in the fiction category<sup>290</sup>.

With Enquist, in fact, this kind of reflection is more relevant than ever. Having highlighted the importance of the autobiographical element in his whole production, one is actually tempted to ask oneself, together with Cristine Sarrimo: «Vad “är” då en självbiografi till skillnad från exempelvis *I lodjurets timma*?»<sup>291</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 112). Instead of *I lodjurets timma*, she could have named *Musikanternas uttåg* or *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, which all «sägs ha fångat en central erfarenhet som författaren Enquist gjorde»<sup>292</sup> and where «[d]et självbiografiska och det till synes fiktiva [...] flyter samman»<sup>293</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 112).

To try to answer this question, I will start from how the book was presented and received. The presentation by the publisher seems to suggest an autobiography: on the front cover of the original Swedish edition, a pensive Per Olov Enquist stares at us from a full-page photograph (cf. image on the side), while on the back cover the book is described as «en memoarbok som med humor, värme och nyfikenhet beskriver ett livsöde som format ett av vår tids stora



<sup>290</sup> Cf. <<http://www.augustpriset.se/bidrag/ett-annat-liv>>, last accessed 14 June 2017.

<sup>291</sup> «What “is” then an autobiography compared for instance with *I lodjurets timma*?»

<sup>292</sup> «Are said to have captured a central experience done by Enquist the author.»

<sup>293</sup> «The autobiographical and the apparently fictitious [...] become blurred.»

författarskap»<sup>294</sup>. Also the content seems to speak for an autobiographical pact: although the volume is written in the third person, with a protagonist mostly referred to as «han», “he”, the related events follow Enquist’s well-known course of life, from his childhood in Västerbotten to his successful literary career, to the deep personal crisis from which he finally emerged in 1990.

Despite this, while some reviewers accept the publisher’s (and author’s?) view and define it as a «självbiografi, skriven i tredje person» (Åberg 2008), «rika självbiografiska berättelse» (Bergdahl 2008), «memoarbok» (Nilsson 2008)<sup>295</sup>, others are of a different opinion. Lars Lönnroth writes for instance on *Svenska Dagbladet*:

Egentligen är det väl tveksamt om P O Enquists nya bok, *Ett annat liv*, kan betecknas som «sakprosa». Ett slags självbiografi är den onekligen men ofullständig, tvetydig och full av luckor. Mest liknar den en utvecklingsroman i tre akter, diktad med Enquists sedvanliga berättartekniska briljans och sinne för dramatik. (Lönnroth 2008)

It is actually quite dubious whether P.O. Enquist’s new book, *Ett annat liv*, can be described as «non-fiction». It is undeniably a sort of autobiography, but incomplete, ambiguous and full of gaps. Most of all, it looks like a *Bildungsroman* in three acts, written with Enquist’s usual brilliant narrative technique and sense for drama.

Lönnroth’s criticism, however, could apply to no matter which autobiography recognised as such: incompleteness and a certain degree of ambiguity are implicit in the act itself of remembering and putting into writing past events, as stated, for instance, by Roy Pascal: «[t]he autobiographer must rigorously select from his life» (Pascal 1960: 15). More revealing is another harsh criticism directed at *Ett annat liv*, this time by Jan Eklund:

Men vad är det för en självbiografi vi egentligen läser? Den är berättad som en roman, skriven i tredje person. Jag har blivit «han» och mellan dem ligger en ocean av fiktiva möjligheter och distanseringseffekter som bara en romanförfattare kan älska. Det kan skapa driv och nya vinklar men också förkonstling; en fiktiv hinna. Enquists självbiografi saknar liv och spontanitet. Den är en hårt regisserad berättelse, lika överspänd som frostig. Det enda som tycks betyda något är det inre dramat. De verkliga människor som förekommer i boken används som matriser att flytta runt i en kulissvärld, som vagt påminner om verkligheten. Det är möjligen en

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<sup>294</sup> «A memoir that with humour, warmth and curiosity describes a destiny that has moulded one of the great authors of our time.»

<sup>295</sup> Respectively, «an autobiography written in third person», «a rich autobiographical narration», «memoirs».

triumf för fiktionen. Knappast för trovärdigheten och uppriktigheten. (Eklund 2008)

But what kind of autobiography are we actually reading? It is told as a novel, written in the third person. «I» has become «he», and between the two there lies an ocean of fictive possibilities and distancing effects that only a novelist can love. This can create motivation and new perspective, but also artificiality; a fictive film. Enquist's autobiography lacks in life and spontaneity. It is a strictly directed narration, as strained as it is cold. The only thing that seems to matter is the inner drama. The real people who appear in the book are used as matrixes to be moved around on a stage that vaguely reminds of reality. It may be a triumph for fiction, but hardly for credibility and sincerity.

Eklund's dissatisfaction with the autobiographical in *Ett annat liv* therefore lies in its lack of life and spontaneity, its detachment and coldness. But are these really the characteristics which distinguish fiction from non-fiction, a novel from an autobiography? According to Sarrimo, what Enquist's text does not satisfy are not the requirements for an autobiography, but «vår tids autenticitetsideal»<sup>296</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 91) and «dagens norm för det självskrivande subjektet»<sup>297</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 104), which she identifies in a reality show-like confession, possibly with a background of suffering and (psychic, emotional) illness (cf. Sarrimo 2012: 30-31). Conceding there is «ett inre jag och ett yttre sådan och alltid en möjlig diskrepans eller konflikt dem emellan»<sup>298</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 106),

[i] *Ett annat liv* ser vi hur Enquist även inordnar gestaltningen av «Enquist» i ett socialt och historiskt sammanhang. Det är med andra ord främst ett socialt och historiskt jag som skildras och i mindre utsträckning ett privatlivsförankrat sådant. (Sarrimo 2012: 106)

in *Ett annat liv* we see how Enquist even arranges the shaping of «Enquist» in a social and historical context. In other words, it is principally a social and historical I which is depicted, and only to a less extent one rooted in private life.

The social and historical dimension of *Ett annat liv* is highlighted also by other critics and reviewers, such as Leif Zern, who writes that:

*Ett annat liv* är inte så mycket en självbiografi som en dokumentärroman om författaren Per Olov Enquist. [...] Den är full av lysande formuleringar och går att läsa som ett underhållande facit till svensk nutidshistoria, från Wigforss till Palme.

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<sup>296</sup> «The authenticity ideal of our times.»

<sup>297</sup> «Today's standard for the self-writing subject.»

<sup>298</sup> «An inner "I" and an exterior one, and always a possible discrepancy or contrast between them.»

Men det är just dess karaktär av facit som hindrar det totala uppgåendet i den.  
(Zern 2008)

*Ett annat liv* is not so much an autobiography, as a documentary novel about the writer Per Olov Enquist. [...] It is full of brilliant formulations and can be read as an entertaining guide about contemporary Swedish history, from Wigforss to Palme. But it is exactly its nature as a guide that prevents one from being totally absorbed by it.

However, according to Sarrimo, *Ett annat liv* seems to express also an apparently contrasting message: «På någon punkt är och förblir du outgrundlig inför dig själv och de krafter som driver dig framåt eller ner i mörkret»<sup>299</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 115). *Ett annat liv* is the search for that impenetrable «liten liten kärna inne i honom»<sup>300</sup> (Enquist 2008: 481). However, with Enquist even this reconquest of a self «mynnar ut i en återuppstånden publik persona och inte i en privat sådan»<sup>301</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 120), a sort of “official version” of his life and works, something so distant from today’s prevailing self-exposing models of self-representation as to explain why so much of *Ett annat liv*’s reception focused on the question of genre.

Leaving the reviewers’ doubts apart, let us concentrate on the pact undersigned by Enquist in *Ett annat liv*. At first sight this seems to be an autobiographical one: the already mentioned paratexts (the photo on the front cover and the text on the back one) assert that the protagonist of the book, albeit referred to in the third person and mostly nameless<sup>302</sup>, is to be identified with its author. Even the two deflections from the norm – third-person narration and nameless protagonist – are provided for by Lejeune already in his seminal essay from 1975. As for the former, he explicitly maintains that

by bringing up the problem of the *author*, autobiography brings to light phenomena that fiction leaves in doubt: in particular, the fact that there can be identity of the narrator and the principal character in the case of narration “in the third person”.

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<sup>299</sup> «From a certain angle you are and remain impenetrable to yourself and to the forces that drive you forward or down into the obscurity.»

<sup>300</sup> «Tiny little kernel deep inside him» (Enquist 2015: 358).

<sup>301</sup> «Results into a resurrected public persona and not into a private one.»

<sup>302</sup> The name «Enquist» occurs 40 times in 530 pages: twice referred to the swapped boys’ case (Enquist 2008: 15, 23), once to the whole family (40), twice to the family illness defined as «Enquistmagan» («the Enquist belly»; 63, 160), once to P.O. Enquist’s father Elof (96), once to his grandfather P.W. (68), four times to his mother Maja (48, 196, 336, 527), and 29 times to himself (24, 137, 143, etc.), almost always in his capacity as a writer or, in the final part, as an alcoholic. As already mentioned, for the rest of the book the protagonist is usually referred to as «he».

This identity, no longer being established within the text by the use of “I”, is established indirectly, but without any ambiguity, by the double equation: author = narrator, and author = character, from which it is deduced that narrator = character even if the narrator remains implicit. (Lejeune 1989a: 6, italics in the original)

This procedure, according to Lejeune, can be used for different purposes and with different effects, from conceit, to humility, to an «ironic distancing» – something similar to the “fault” ascribed by Eklund to *Ett annat liv*.

As for the second deviation from the norm, when the protagonist’s name is not given – although as we have seen in Enquist’s case this absence is only partial – the choice of genre rests fully on the kind of pact explicitly or implicitly undesignated by the author (cf. Lejeune 1989a: 16). In any case, in Lejeune’s classification, an autobiography of a nameless character is perfectly possible.

Some critics agree with this tentative attribution of *Ett annat liv* to the field of autobiography. According to Torbjörn Forslid,

Enquist skriver i den stora bekännelsestraditionen med rötter hos Augustinus och Rousseau. Därför har han egentligen ganska lite gemensamt med Maja Lundgrens och Lars Noréns omsusade texter. (Forslid 2008)

Enquist writes in the great confession tradition with its root in Augustine and Rousseau. Therefore he has actually quite little in common with Maja Lundgren’s and Lars Norén’s much debated texts.

Also according to Sarrimo, *Ett annat liv* is «en livsberättelse som har en traditionell och välbeprövad struktur kopplad till den kristna frälsningens dito: uppgång, fall och återlösning»<sup>303</sup> (Sarrimo 2012: 105). This tripartite structure is evident in *Ett annat liv*, even if its three parts do not coincide with the three phases of the Christian model: the rise spans both over the childhood and teenage years described in “Oskuld” and the literary success of “En starkt upplyst plats”, while “In i mörkret”, includes both the fall and the redemption of the very final pages.

However, things are not so clear yet. Soon after the release of the book, Enquist himself seemed to be wanting to muddy the waters. If in a television interview for SVT

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<sup>303</sup> «A life narrative which has a traditional and well-tried structure connected to the one typical of Christian salvation: rise, fall and redemption.»

cultural programme *Babel* he declared that he had «talat hundra procent sanning»<sup>304</sup>, in another interview for the women magazine *Vi* he stated:

Det är inte mina memoarer. Jag har alltid tyckt att memoarer är pretentiösa och har sagt mig att några sådana ska jag då aldrig skriva. Och så hatar jag när någon till exempel träder ut ur garderoben med en sådan här historia i kvällspressen. (Quoted in Kvist 2012: 18)

These are not my memoirs. I have always thought that memoirs are pretentious, and I have said to myself that I will never write any. Furthermore I hate when somebody, for example, comes out with such a story in the evening press.

Of course such statements are (or can be) part of a promoting strategy to boost interest from readers (cf., for instance, the discussion about Carina Rydberg's *Den högsta kasten* [*The Highest Caste*] in Lenemark 2009: 21-30). However, the ambiguity is real, and carefully constructed within the text, as Massimiliano Bampi points out:

On the one hand, by writing an autobiographical account of his life he seals a pact with the reader by establishing, in a seemingly uncontroversial manner, the identity of author, protagonist and narrator. This is done both at the level of the text and at that of the paratext. On the other hand, though, both paratext and text are marked by the presence of signals of different kinds which are meant to warn the (attentive) reader against a simplistic interpretation of the story. Once sealed, however, the pact with the reader is not conclusively binding. Whenever he is warned against the trustworthiness of the story, the pact is dissolved and the reader is at a loss when trying to determine the relationship between narration and factual reality. (Bampi 2015: 273)

Bampi's reasoning echoes Poul Behrendt's idea that the contract between writer and reader is not a fixed one, but can be of a different kind at different times. According to Behrendt, starting from the second half of the last century there has been a growing confusion – usually intentional on the part of the author – between the fictional and the reality pact (Behrendt 2006: 19). It is interesting to note that, among the first examples of this blurred pact he mentions Enquist, who, according to Behrendt's reading, should have added to the reality pact underlying *Legionärena* – «*Det er sandt*»<sup>305</sup> – the clause: «*Det er falsk, hvis det kan forbedre historien*»<sup>306</sup> (Behrendt 2006: 20, italics in the original).

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<sup>304</sup> «Said the hundred percent truth.» Quoted in Zanton-Ericsson 2008.

<sup>305</sup> «*It is true.*»

<sup>306</sup> «*It is false, if it can make the story better.*»

However, in the case of *Ett annat liv* there are no postponed revelations that can alter the way a reader perceives his text, as in Peter Høeg's *De måske egnede* [*Borderliners*] or Thorkild Hansen's *Et atelier i Paris* [*An atelier in Paris*] (cf. Behrendt 2006: 9-18 and 19-23 respectively). The source of uncertainty is simply connected to Enquist's doubts about the possibility of describing reality and telling the truth: «Visserligen sant, men knappast sanning»<sup>307</sup> (Enquist 2008: 132) is the comment about his own description of the harshness of his military duty. It is basically the same mistrustful attitude towards alleged truths, included his own, already expressed forty years earlier in *Legionärerna*: «Det finns ingen helgonlik objektivitet, ingen yttersta sanning befriad från sina politiska utgångspunkter. Pröva, var misstänksam. Ifrågasätt»<sup>308</sup> (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 242, cf. 3.3). In *Ett annat liv* Enquist explains that approach as a lesson he learnt from history professor Hans Villius during his university years: «Misstänksamhet är en dygd, sanning alltid ett tvivelaktigt begrepp»<sup>309</sup> (Enquist 2008: 146).

The idea of truth as a dubious concept follows Enquist throughout his career: «Sanningen är oviktig; det enda som är viktigt är du själv»<sup>310</sup> (Enquist 1961: 46) says Jens in *Kristallögat*, echoed thirty years later by *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*'s protagonist: «Sanningarna var alltid ointressanta. Men när man ljög rörde han sig mycket tätt intill»<sup>311</sup> (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 9). In *Ett annat liv* the noun «sanning» recurs 16 times, the adjective/adverb «sann/sant» 28. Some of these occurrences are revealing of Enquist's attitude towards truth, starting from the above quoted contraposition between «sant» and «sanningen», which brings us back to a statement from Enquist's article from 1981: «Något behöver ju inte vara "sant", bara för att det har "hänt"»<sup>312</sup> (Enquist 1981: 121, cf. 4.1). The first interesting occurrence of the term in *Ett annat liv* regards

<sup>307</sup> «Certainly true, but hardly the whole truth» (Enquist 2015: 104).

<sup>308</sup> « There is no saintly objectivity, no supreme truth, free from political bias. Try out. Be suspicious. Call into question.»

<sup>309</sup> «Suspicion is a virtue, truth always a dubious concept» (Enquist 2015: 114)

<sup>310</sup> «The truth is unimportant; the only important thing is yourself.»

<sup>311</sup> «The truths were always uninteresting. But when he lied he moved in very close» (Enquist 1992: 5).

<sup>312</sup> «Something does not have to be "true", only because it has "happened".»



an alleged rumour (more likely a projection of an inner obsession) connected to the swapped children's episode, according to which «i själva verket var han som var bortbytt på Bureå sjukstuga»<sup>313</sup> (Enquist 2008: 24). Here the author, while talking about his swapped cousin, anticipates a much later obsession of not being really himself. However, by writing *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, he will «genom att ge den objektiva sanningen om förväxlingen klarlägga, så att det inte längre skulle diktas»<sup>314</sup> (Enquist 2008: 24). The interesting here is the contraposition of «the objective truth» of the novel against the «making up» (although, as we have seen in 2.1.3, the verb «dikta» is richer and deeper in meaning, referring also to poetic invention)<sup>315</sup>. The «truth» expressed in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* is therefore the reassuring way to answer a deep existential uncertainty: «Han började grubbla om det kunde vara sant, först lite på skämt, sen blev det olustigt»<sup>316</sup> (Enquist 2008: 24).

Another interesting mention of the relativity of truth, introduced by the valuable lesson by professor Villius quoted above, is connected to the writing of *Legionärerna*: since «de etablerade historiska sanningarna» are the fruit of «de segrare som producerar historiens lögn»<sup>317</sup> (Enquist 2008: 146), the established version of the Balts' extradition is «intensivt närvarande och alldeles sann, oavsett vad som hade hänt i verkligheten»<sup>318</sup> (Enquist 2008: 215). Truth and reality are therefore two separate concepts: truth always has a subjective component, be it the fruit of a deliberate effort («sammanförda sanna fragment på ett lögnaktigt sätt»<sup>319</sup>, Enquist 2008: 223-224) or the

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<sup>313</sup> «In actual fact, it was he who had been switched at Bureå cottage hospital» (Enquist 2015: 23).

<sup>314</sup> «Make everything clear by presenting the objective truth about the swap, so that people would stop making things up» (Enquist 2015: 23).

<sup>315</sup> The same contraposition is also expressed in another passage already quoted in this work, about *Musikanternas uttåg*: «det är dikt men nästan sant ändå» (Enquist 2008: 365; «it is fiction, but almost true all the same», Enquist 2015: 273).

<sup>316</sup> «He began to agonise over whether it could be true, first as a joke, but soon it was not funny» (Enquist 2015: 23).

<sup>317</sup> «Established historical truths», «the conquerors who produce history's lies» (Enquist 2015: 104).

<sup>318</sup> «Intensely present and completely true, regardless of what had happened in reality» (Enquist 2015: 162-163).

<sup>319</sup> «Fragments of truth brought together in a mendacious way» (Enquist 2015: 169).

inevitable distortion of a perceiving conscience. In any case, «[s]anningen var ju långt mer komplicerad»<sup>320</sup> (Enquist 2008: 235).

A still different insight in the apparently infinite declinations of truth is offered by the overlapping episodes of Enquist's neighbour in Copenhagen, Mr Clausen, and of the memoirs of Danish actress Johanne Luise Heiberg, the protagonist of the play *Från regnormarnas liv* together with Hans Christian Andersen. Mr Clausen is a seventy-year-old man who likes to talk to his Swedish neighbour: he explains his new country to him, also with the aid of several of Andersen's fairy tales, and confides to him his troubles and secrets, among which an incestuous relationship with his own sister. However, Mr Clausen's account of the events is understandably blurred and full of gaps, and Enquist «grubblar över herr Clausens minnen, deras förbindelse med fru Heibergs utstrukna liv. Allt oklarare vad som är sant, och vad som är livets barmhärtiga töcken»<sup>321</sup> (Enquist 2008: 400). What had happened with Johanne Luise Heiberg's diaries was that

[h]ennes vänner, samtliga professorer och ej födda på bordell, de som granskat hennes omfattande memoarer «Et liv», hade ur hennes anteckningar utstrukit allt som var livets smuts. Dock blev detta femtio år senare publicerat, i en särskild volym.

Det utstrukna uttryckte en oerhörd sanning. (Enquist 2008: 415)

Her friends, all professors and not one of them born in a brothel, had examined her exhaustive memoirs, *A life*, and had erased from her writings all evidence of life's impurities. Those were collected together and published in a separate volume fifty years later.

The deletions conveyed overwhelming truth. (Enquist 2015: 311)

Both in Mr Clausen's and Johanne Heiberg's case, then, the truth is to be found in the «deleted parts» – in the «black holes» of the untold, we could say in Enquist's case. In order to say the truth about oneself, therefore, one has to collect all «korta eller långa fragment med det förbjudna»<sup>322</sup> (Enquist 2008: 400), and put them together, like pieces in a puzzle. With his obsessive return to his hidden «sore points», Enquist proves to

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<sup>320</sup> «The truth was far more complicated» (Enquist 2015: 178).

<sup>321</sup> «Ponders over Mr Clausen's reminiscences, their connection to the deleted parts of Mrs Heiberg's life. It is harder and harder to discern what is true, and what is a veil of compassion» (Enquist 2015: 300).

<sup>322</sup> «Long and short extracts containing the forbidden» (Enquist 2015: 300).

have learnt Johanne Heiberg's lesson: «Man kan ju inte förstå sitt eget liv, hon försökte ändå»<sup>323</sup> (Enquist 2008: 416).

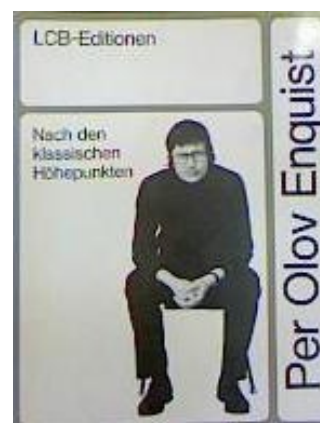
The last example of Enquist's use of the term «truth» in *Ett annat liv* is also a perfect example of his extraordinary self-irony. When he is the guest of Berlin Literarisches Colloquium's Künstlerprogramm, like his predecessors Enquist sits for the cover photo of the pamphlet that BLC dedicated to its resident writers, a photo on a simple chair that «antas uttrycka en inre sanning»<sup>324</sup> (Enquist 2008: 242):

Enquist sitter på detta själsdokumentära bokomslag stel och iskallt lugn, bär svarta, närmast fascistoida glasögon, stirrande rakt fram. Kroppshållningen är *mot hans avsikt* kärnsvensk, närmast vältränad, men där ovan ett ansikte med ögon som han hoppas verkar uråldriga och utsäger "*jag har genomkorsat kontinenter*". Ansiktet är dock inringat av tidsenliga ganska långa polisonger. (Enquist 2008: 242, italics in the original)

Enquist is on one cover, bearing his soul, icily calm, steely, wearing dark glasses, looking almost fascist-like, and staring straight ahead. His posture is thoroughly and *wilfully* Swedish and he looks in good shape; in his countenance his eyes, he hopes, convey age-old wisdom and say clearly "*I have traversed continents*." His face is, however, framed by quite long sideburns, the fashion of the time. (Enquist 2015: 183)

The funny thing is that in that «själsdokumentära» photo from 1969 (see image below), he sits in exactly the same position (sideburns aside) as in the cover of *Ett annat liv*: leaning slightly forward, with his hands joined – maybe the posture that best expresses an «inner truth»?

Another interesting and often recurring word in *Ett annat liv* (77 occurrences) is «egentligen/egentlig»<sup>325</sup>, a term which in one of the above listed quotations is closely linked to «sann». When investigating the Balts affair, the «naive unge författare» wants to find out and write «det



<sup>323</sup> «It is not possible to understand one own's life, but she had tried all the same» (Enquist 2015: 312).

<sup>324</sup> «Presents the embodiment of inner truth» (Enquist 2015: 183).

<sup>325</sup> «Really, in reality, actually; strictly (properly) speaking; after all; by rights; exactly» (*Norstedts Svenska-Engelska Ordbok*, <<https://ne.ord.se/ordbok/svensk-engelsk-pro/sök/egentligen>>, last accessed 14 June 2017); «real, actual, virtual, true; proper» (*Norstedts Svenska-Engelska Ordbok*, <<https://ne.ord.se/ordbok/svensk-engelsk-pro/sök/egentlig>>, last accessed 14 June 2017).

*som egentligen hände*»<sup>326</sup> (Enquist 2008: 215, italics in the original). But that «actually» turns out to be a minefield, as treacherous as the conquerors' adjusted version of truth.

The term «egentligen» also plays an important role in *Kartritarna*, where it is said to assume «an almost menacing undertone» (cf. Enquist 2010 [1992]: 276). In *Kartritarna* the term «egentligen» is often included in the question why a writer (Enquist himself, Strindberg, Geijerstam, Karen Blixen, Enquist's grandmother) «egentligen» writes, as if there must be a double reason for doing it, an overt, public one, and a secret, more obscure motive. The chapter “Målet mot *Fröken Julie*”, for instance, touches the question «om man kan söka efter ett slags “egentlig” sanning i *Fröken Julie*»<sup>327</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 88). The idea here is that Strindberg, in *Fröken Julie* as in many other cases, is saying something different from what he appears to say, something about «något annat, egentligen, utan att själv veta det»<sup>328</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 88). This reminds of what Enquist said about his early novels, where he revealed something «almost against his will» (cf. 3.2), as if his texts had «sin tvetydiga undertext»<sup>329</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 97).

The opening chapter of *Kartritarna*, “Gravtillhörighet”, offers a possible indication of what these writers' “real” motive could be. One of the narrator's longer-standing friend is going to die soon, and before that moment he has to «bestämma vad som var det egentliga»<sup>330</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 9), what has been important in his life. In the same days Enquist is reworking some earlier texts and he finds an uncanny similarity between their activities: «att tänka igenom det tillfälliga en andra gång, och revidera det»<sup>331</sup>, an activity he feels like «ett bedrägeri»<sup>332</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 7).

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<sup>326</sup> «Naive young writer», «*what actually happened*» (Enquist 2015: 162-163).

<sup>327</sup> «If one can look for a sort of “real” truth in *Fröken Julie*.»

<sup>328</sup> «Something different, really, without knowing it himself.»

<sup>329</sup> «Their ambiguous subtext.»

<sup>330</sup> «To decide what was the real thing.»

<sup>331</sup> «To think about the occasional a second time, and revise it.»

<sup>332</sup> «A fraud.»

However, in front of death «att slutföra och bestämma»<sup>333</sup> becomes an essential necessity: «Det måste ju finnas något, annars var allting meningslöst»<sup>334</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 9). The implied message seems to be that what associates writers with dying men is the search for a meaning. And probably it is not by chance that at seventy-five – certainly not in front of death, but at an age when our days ahead start to look less numberless than they used to – Enquist looked back onto his life and tried to understand «what was the real thing.»

As we have seen, this search for an elusive meaning, symbolised by the image of the puzzle to compose (cf. 2.1.2), is one of the bearing principles of the whole of Enquist's production. In *Ett annat liv* he uses a slightly different metaphor, the game where you have to connect all numbered dots until an image appears:

Han kom ihåg hur Eeva-Lisa en gång lärt honom leken med punkterna och elefanten: man hade ett papper och så fanns det siffror på det och varje siffra hade ett ord som betydde något, nej, hur var det?

Till slut hade man fört pennan från punkt till punkt och det blev en figur som förklarade allt. Och då fick man det att hänga samman. Och han hade fått hjälp av Eeva-Lisa som höll handen över hans, som för att hjälpa honom. Allting i livet gick ut på att få det att hänga samman. Och till slut förstod man och kunde ropa *En elefant!* Till exempel. (Enquist 2008: 408, italics in the original)

He recalled the game Eeva-Lisa taught him with the dots and the elephant: you had a piece of paper with numbers on and each number had a word that meant something. No, how did it go?

In the end you traced your pencil from dot to dot and a shape emerged to give you the answer. You made it all join up. And he had been helped by Eeva-Lisa, who held her hand over his, as if guiding him. Life depends upon everything being joined up. And finally you can shout, *An elephant!* For example. (Enquist 2015: 306)

Here the fragments are not casually scattered, like in a puzzle, but numbered – chronologically ordered, as in an autobiography? – and you have to join them one after the other, in sequence. The parallel is made unusually clear by a second passage:

Han [Mr Clausen] menade kanske att han varit mycket nära att förstå vad kärlek var, men blivit förhindrad. Alltså att i sista stund se vad deras liv varit, det ögonblick när han skulle ha kunnat lägga samman och förstå, och punkterna ha bildat en figur; och han då skulle kunnat slå ut händerna och ropa *Ett annat liv!* Det fattades bara några punkter. (Enquist 2008: 414-415, italics in the original)

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<sup>333</sup> «To come to a conclusion and a decision.»

<sup>334</sup> «There has to be something, otherwise everything has been meaningless.»

Perhaps he [Mr Clausen] meant that he had been very close to understanding what love was, but had been prevented. From seeing at the last minute what their life had been, the instant when he could have joined it all together and understood, and the dots would have formed a picture; and he could have thrown his hands up and cried, «A different life!»<sup>335</sup> There were only a few dots missing. (Enquist 2015: 311)

The figure that should appear by joining all dots in the right order is therefore the image of one's life. However, a few dots are still missing, and the image remains incomplete.

With *Ett annat liv* the failed reconstruction is best highlighted by the fact that the question that watermarks the whole book, «Hur kunde det gå så illa när det började så bra?»<sup>336</sup> (Enquist 2008: 47, 93, 302, 490), remains unanswered. This question implies an element of judgement (well vs badly) and causal-temporal connection (begin vs turn out) which is central in the making of an autobiography. It is the act of writing one's life, as Johansson reminds us, that «tillhandahåller den helhet livet saknar»<sup>337</sup>:

om boken syftar till att förstå nuet genom det förflutna (ett hermeneutiskt projekt), så är den alltså i lika hög grad ut på att skapa en livsberättelse, eller mer precis, skapa ordning (ett poetiskt projekt). (Johansson 2015: 91)

if the book is aimed at understanding the present by means of the past (a hermeneutic project), it is also meant to create a life narrative, or more precisely, to create order (a poetic project).

However, while Johansson seems to contrast understanding with narrating/ordering, for other critics one of the characteristics of autobiography is precisely the coincidence of the hermeneutic and the poetic project: the transformation of a chaos of incidents into an ordered, and therefore understandable, series of events – in Sturrock's words, turning «a lived farrago into a thought whole» (Sturrock 1993: 20, cf. 1.1.1). Life, lived life, is just a series of contingencies. Only by re-thinking and re-shaping it – in other words, by narrating it, by making in into an autobiography – we have got a chance to see its unity, its possible meaning, if there is one. However, this systematisation has a price to be

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<sup>335</sup> In English the parallel is made less clear by the different title chosen for the published translation of *Ett annat liv*, *The wandering pine*.

<sup>336</sup> «When everything was going so well, how could it turn out so badly?» (Enquist 2015: 40, 74, 227, 365).

<sup>337</sup> «Supplies the unity that life does not have.»

paid: by sorting and selecting among people, events and emotions, something goes inevitably lost. As Johansson points out,

Det finns en tendens i *Ett annat liv* att kronologi och blivande görs synonyma. [...] Den [berättelsen] gör sitt bästa för att inlemma blivandet i kronologins trygga riktning, men lyckas det? (Johansson 2015: 94)

In *Ett annat liv* there is a propensity to make synonyms of chronology and becoming [...]. It [the narrative] does its best to incorporate becoming into chronology's safe direction, but are we sure that it succeeds?

What Johansson seems to suggest is that the unity, the meaning – the elephant that appears after having joined all the dots – is just a plot, a literary artifice. Real life, real stories do not offer only order, but also «kaotiska blivanden i fel riktningar»<sup>338</sup>, «stickspåren som hotar berättandet och därmed subjektets självidentitet»<sup>339</sup> (Johansson 2015: 94-95). Johansson highlights the presence of such sidetracks in *Ett annat liv*, in the form of abrupt interruptions of the chronological order, often dismissed as abruptly by a «Nog om detta»<sup>340</sup> (cf. Enquist 2008: 7, 38). It is by means of these sidetracks that

[b]ortom självförståelse och självordnandet vittnar *Ett annat liv* [...] om den outplånliga lockelsen i att inte ordnas/subjektiveras/reifieras, utan (för)bli *annan*. Men kontrollen upprätthålls. Isen håller<sup>341</sup>. Det kommer inte längre än till den ton av förundran som ljuder genom hela boken, som ett vittnesmål om möjligheten av något annat. (Johansson 2015: 95, italics in the original)

beyond self-understanding and self-organising, *Ett annat liv* testifies [...] to the imperishable temptation of not letting oneself be organised/subjectified/reified, but to remain *something else*. But self-control is kept up. The ice does not break. It does not go further than the wondering tone that echoes throughout the whole book, as a testimony to the possibility of something different.

This «something different» beyond self-understanding and self-organising, firmly kept under control in *Ett annat liv*, is at the centre of Enquist's following attempt at self-representation, *Liknelseboken*. After attempting to «förstå» his life with a syntagmatic logic in *Ett annat liv*, with *Liknelseboken* Enquist returns to the paradigmatic one with which he had tried to «fatta» (cf. 5.1) it in most of his previous works.

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<sup>338</sup> «Chaotic becoming in wrong directions.»

<sup>339</sup> «Sidetracks that threaten the narration and therefore also the identity of the subject.»

<sup>340</sup> «Enough of that» (Enquist 2015: 9).

<sup>341</sup> The metaphor of «walking on thin ice» to describe the delicate balance that separates him from chaos is taken from Enquist (cf., for instance, Enquist 2008: 240, 384, 390).

## 5.5 *Liknelseboken*: The obsession of the untold

A few years after *Ett annat liv*, in 2013, a new book by Enquist was released, *Liknelseboken*. Reviewers were as perplexed about the book's categorisation as they had been with *Ett annat liv*. Some defined it as autobiographical – «Självbiografiska *Liknelseboken*»<sup>342</sup> (Thunberg 2013); «en självbiografisk skildring»<sup>343</sup> (Rabe 2013) – while others were more cautious in their judgement, although highlighting the continuity with *Ett annat liv*: «ett slags korrektur till *Ett annat liv*. Eller ett lågmält post skriptum»<sup>344</sup> (Landström 2013); «en sorts korrigeringsbok»<sup>345</sup> (Beckman 2013). This prudence was justified by the author's statements that preceded the book's release. For instance, to the straight question whether *Liknelseboken* was thought as «en fristående del av *Ett annat liv*»<sup>346</sup>, asked by Yukiko Duke of the magazine *Vi*, he answered:

Nej, inte alls. *Ett annat liv* ser jag som en självbiografi, medan *Liknelseboken* är en roman. Jag har tillåtit mig att ta vissa konstnärliga friheter i den, medan självbiografien är berättad rakt av – utan något hittepå. (Duke 2013)

No, not at all. I see *Ett annat liv* as an autobiography, while *Liknelseboken* is a novel. In it I have allowed myself to take certain artistic licenses, while the autobiography is told straight as it is – without any invention.

The question of the pact underlying *Liknelseboken* should therefore appear less complicated than with *Ett annat liv*. The book bears the subtitle «En kärleksroman»<sup>347</sup> and on the back cover it is defined as «PO Enquists nya roman»<sup>348</sup>. The fact itself that

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<sup>342</sup> «The autobiographical *Liknelseboken*.»

<sup>343</sup> «An autobiographical account.»

<sup>344</sup> «A kind of proof sheet of *Ett annat liv*. Or a subdued post scriptum.»

<sup>345</sup> «A sort of correction book.»

<sup>346</sup> «A free-standing part of *Ett annat liv*.»

<sup>347</sup> «A love novel.» The English published translation chose to render it as «A love story» (cf. Enquist 2016).

<sup>348</sup> «P.O. Enquist's new novel» (<<http://www.norstedts.se/bocker/113999-liknelseboken>>, last accessed 14 June 2017).



here Enquist, in addition to well-known episodes already exploited both in some of his novels and in his autobiography, relates some new incidents supposedly from his life, so far unknown to the public, weakens even an indirect argument in support of an autobiographical pact.

However, despite Enquist's declarations to the press, *Liknelseboken* has undoubtedly several characteristics in common with *Ett annat liv*. It is narrated in the third person, with a "protagonist" who is referred to mostly as «han», «pojken» (ten times), «(denne) Enquist»<sup>349</sup> (three times) or «E.» (twenty times). As many reviewers and the back cover itself point out, also from a content point of view the book «kan sägas ta vid där memoarromanen *Ett annat liv* slutade»<sup>350</sup>. The narrator, too, is «på alla sätt lik den Per-Olov vi mötte i memoarboken *Ett annat liv*»<sup>351</sup> (Larsmo 2013): he is an aged man, author of a «bokahopen»<sup>352</sup> (Enquist 2013: 6, 46, 151), son of Maja and grandson of Per Walfrid, he has lived in Uppsala, Copenhagen and Paris, and so on. Yet, while with *Ett annat liv* Enquist's disclaimers («Det är inte mina memoarer», cf. 5.4) appeared almost as a form of coquettish shyness or part of a more prosaic promoting strategy, in *Liknelseboken* they seem to point to a deliberate choice of what Lejeune would have defined an undetermined pact («Pact=0», Lejeune 1989a: 16). This indetermination allows the author to take a freer stance towards his subject: unencumbered by the constraints of a temporal, syntagmatic logic, he can go back to his favourite figure of the metaphor, as highlighted by the title itself (*liknelse* means both "parable" and "simile, metaphor"<sup>353</sup>), to describe an enhanced reality.

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<sup>349</sup> Respectively «he», «the boy», «(this/that) Enquist».

<sup>350</sup> «Can be said to start where the memoir book *Ett annat liv* closed» (<<http://www.norstedts.se/bocker/113999-liknelseboken>>, last accessed 14 June 2017).

<sup>351</sup> «In all respects like the Per-Olov we met in the memoir book *Ett annat liv*.»

<sup>352</sup> «Pile of books» (Enquist 2013: 8, 142), «heap of books» (45).

<sup>353</sup> Cf. *Norstedts Svenska-Engelska Ordbok* (<<https://ne.ord.se/ordbok/svensk-engelsk/sök/liknelse>>, last accessed 14 June 2017).

The book appears in fact as a series of almost independent “parables” with baffling titles<sup>354</sup>, each dedicated to a so far undisclosed episode of Enquist’s life, from the unexpected reappearance of his father’s notebook, which he believed to have been destroyed, to the true story of the distant relative who inspired the figure of the crazy boy in *Nedstörtad ängel* and *I lodjurets timma*, to the narrator’s first sexual experience in his teens with a much older woman. The red threads that loosely connect the nine parables are the three tasks the third-person narrator undertakes in the first pages: the revision of the speech he held at his mother’s funeral in 1992 and the double request from a «flock av snart döende vänner»<sup>355</sup> (Enquist 2013: 229): to finally write the love story he has never been able to write and to answer their question, «helt enkelt *hur det hängde ihop*. / Så att intet blev hängande»<sup>356</sup> (Enquist 2013: 16, italics in the original).

Both the dying friends and the question bring us back to earlier books: in *Kartritarna* it was a dying friend who induced the narrator to think about «vad som var det egentliga»<sup>357</sup> (Enquist 2010 [1992]: 9) in life. Now, twenty years later, the number of friends approaching death has increased, but the question is still the same «envetna frågan *Hur hänger det ihop?*»<sup>358</sup> (Enquist 2013: 39, italics in the original). Apparently, a five-hundred-and-odd-page autobiography was not enough to answer that.

To approach the question, Enquist recurs once again to the full catalogue of images and episodes of his prior production, a characteristic that has been noticed by several reviewers who defined *Liknelseboken* as a «summeringbok»<sup>359</sup> (Beckman 2013),

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<sup>354</sup> «Liknelsen om det återfunna notesblocket» («The parable of the Recovered Notebook»), «Liknelsen om den förkrossade tremänning» («The parable of the Broken-hearted Second Cousin»), «Liknelsen om fastern som voge» («The parable of the Aunt who Dared»), «Liknelsen om kvinnan på det kvistfria furugolvet» («The parable of the Woman on the Knot-free Pine Floor»), «Liknelsen om det innersta rummet» («The parable of the Innermost Room»), «Liknelsen om det förslösade pundet» («The parable of the Squandered Talent»), «Liknelsen om de fem tulpanerna» («The parable of the Five Tulips»), «Liknelsen om postfröken» («The parable of the Postwoman»), «Liknelsen om Jesu andra återkomst» («The parable of Jesus’ Second Coming»).

<sup>355</sup> «Flock of soon-to-be dying friends» (Enquist 2016: 214).

<sup>356</sup> «Quite simply, about how it was all connected. / So that nothing was left hanging in the air» (Enquist 2016: 17).

<sup>357</sup> «What was the real thing.»

<sup>358</sup> «The un-relenting question: *How does it all connect?*» (Enquist 2016: 38).

<sup>359</sup> «Summing-up book.»

an «inventering»<sup>360</sup> (Larsmo 2013) or «en allvarsam lek, där Enquist botaniserar bland sina egna verk och i sin egen biografi»<sup>361</sup> (Sandström 2013). We have the green house, the cross fox, the dead father and the pious mother, and so on. However, this time Enquist is obsessed with the idea that he must avoid *undvika* or *gå bredvid* and instead *tala mer direkt*<sup>362</sup> (cf. Enquist 2013: 5). He therefore intends to

uppsöka de svarta hålen vid revision av gravtalet. Eller det som låg mellan det sagda, det fanns kanske ännu tid. Tränga sig in i *historiens spricka*. Som om detta vore enklare! Det var ju det utelämnade som gjorde mest ont. Hålen och sprickorna var inte självklara, blev mest som meddelanden med raderna skrivna på varandra, så att de ursprungliga orden, återuppsökta, långsamt övertäcktes och blev grå och sen svarta och till sist helt obegripliga. (Enquist 2013: 6-7, italics in the original)

When revising the funeral oration one could also look for the black holes in it. Or, for what lay between the spoken words: there might still be time. Force one's way in through *a chink in history*. As if that were simpler! It was what was left out that hurt most. The holes and the chinks were not obvious; they were mostly like notes where the lines had been written on top of other lines, so that the original words were gradually overlaid, growing grey, and then black, and in the end wholly indecipherable. (Enquist 2016: 8)

And indeed he tries to look into the black holes, to tell the untold that hurts most. For instance, we meet again the crazy boy from both *Nedstörtad ängel* and *I lodjurets timma*, but this time the author's own relationship to him (he was a distant cousin, «en fyrmänning»<sup>363</sup>, Enquist 2013: 20) and responsibilities towards him are revealed. He had, in fact, first «i en bok också lånat pojstackarns förnamn! Nicanor!»<sup>364</sup> and later «skildrat [hans öde] i ett teaterstycke, som somliga i familjen ställde sig tveksamma till. Smutskastning av pojstackarn!»<sup>365</sup> (Enquist 2013: 21).

Once again, the interesting here is not to find out some yet unknown details and episodes from Enquist's life, such as the first sexual experience that attracted so much curiosity from readers and reviewers alike (cf., for instance, Eriksson 2013 and Rabe

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<sup>360</sup> «Inventory.»

<sup>361</sup> «A serious game, in which Enquist browses among his own works and his own biography.»

<sup>362</sup> Respectively «to dodge», «to skirt round» and «be more direct» (Enquist 2016: 7).

<sup>363</sup> «A third cousin» (Enquist 2016: 21).

<sup>364</sup> «In one of his books, even borrowed the poor Boy's forename? Nicanor!» (Enquist 2016: 22).

<sup>365</sup> «Portrayed him in a play for the theatre, to which the attitude of some members of the family had been dubious. Blackening the poor boy's name!» (Enquist 2016: 22).

2013), but to analyse the new attitude towards self-representation. The whole book is permeated by the idea of “tearing down scaffoldings”:

Han har en återkommande föreställning om byggnadsställningar som måste rivas. Och när de alla är rivna ska det finnas någonting kvar där inne, mycket litet, men sant. Han river. Det är nödvändigt. Man kan inte överleva annars. Och någonting måste väl finnas där inne. Vad var det annars för mening. (Enquist 2013: 230)

The recurring image of a scaffolding that must be torn down. And when it has been destroyed there will be something left inside, very small, but true. He tugs. It is imperative. Otherwise one cannot survive. There is bound to be something inside. How else could there be any meaning, ever? (Enquist 2016: 215)

The scaffolding are the stories behind which he has hidden for all his life, and is still trying to hide with two aborted novels about Christian IV of Denmark and the boy Siklund («historiska romaner var ju de bästa att ta till om han blev nervös och ville övertäcka»<sup>366</sup>, Enquist 2013: 12), while the «something left inside, very small, but true» reminds of the inner kernel he does not want to surrender during treatment in the closing part of *Ett annat liv*:

en liten liten kärna inne i honom som bestod av en integritet han samlat på sig under femtiofem år, ett slags *jag* som inte ville låta sig krossas, och som nu desperat kämpade mot dem som sade sig vilja hjälpa honom, och styra om hans liv, och förändra honom. (Enquist 2008: 481, italics in the original)

a tiny little kernel deep inside him that holds the integrity he has gathered for fifty-five years, a kind of *self* that will not be crushed and is now desperately fighting against those who say they want to help him, and redirect his life, and change him. (Enquist 2015: 358)

With this new book, then, Enquist declares his intention to stop hiding behind historical masks and to show his own face, or «taga steget helt ut»<sup>367</sup> (Enquist 2013: 19), as he repeatedly says in the text itself. He finally seems to lean more towards “showing” after so much “hiding”. However, he still feels uneasy or scared about it: «Det kändes ärligt talat tryggt att icke taga steget fullt ut, särskilt vid mer personliga frågor. Där fick man

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<sup>366</sup> «Historical novels were obviously the best recourse when he felt nervous and wanted to cover things up» (Enquist 2016: 13).

<sup>367</sup> «Taking the plunge» (Enquist 2016: 20).

bemanna sig»<sup>368</sup> (Enquist 2013: 19). Even if the narrator really would like to «take the plunge» and tell the «whole story» – «hela historien», as it reads in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*'s closing lines, (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 250) – he gets scared and backs away, or turns into other directions. The narration is continuously interrupted by sidetracks and digressions, by «liknelser som omvägar, sätt att slippa gå rakt in i berättelsen»<sup>369</sup> (Eriksson 2013). The book therefore assumes a circular movement, as Henrik Jansson also noticed: «Det är som om han gick i cirklar kring något som bränner, trevande och eftertänksamt»<sup>370</sup> (Jansson 2013). But on the other hand «är det just det fortgående reflekterandet, kretsandet kring och kring, som bär upp berättelsen»<sup>371</sup> (Jansson 2013). As Johansson remarks about *Ett annat liv* (cf. 5.4), it is precisely the digressions, the «kaotiska blivanden i fel riktningar»<sup>372</sup> (Johansson 2015: 94) that best represents the contingency and irrationality of life.

With *Liknelseboken* a new image appears to represent the narrator's quest for the ultimate truth to reveal, that of the dog that scents his own smell. Its first appearance follows a visit to Enquist's native village in 2007; after realising that going back «var icke att nedstiga i Pilens Flod, som han läst i Kiplings *Kim* som barn. Insikt fick han skaffa sig själv och på annat håll, om det inte redan var för sent»<sup>373</sup> (Enquist 2013: 9-10), he flees, «som en hund som stöter på sin egen vittring, och blir skräm»<sup>374</sup> (Enquist 2013: 10). Once more, he had believed that the answer could be hiding in «the land of Motionless Childhood» (Bachelard 1969: 5, cf. 2.1.3), but on the one hand that land does not exist any longer, and on the other the attempt itself is enough to trigger a

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<sup>368</sup> «To be honest, it felt safe not taking the plunge, especially with regard to more personal questions. That way one could keep control» (Enquist 2016: 20-21).

<sup>369</sup> «Parables like detours, ways to avoid going right into the story.»

<sup>370</sup> «It looks like he is walking in circles around something that is burning, fumblingly and thoughtfully.»

<sup>371</sup> «Actually it is precisely the ongoing reflection, the circling round and round, which bears the narration.»

<sup>372</sup> «Chaotic coming into being in wrong directions.»

<sup>373</sup> «Was not like stepping into the River of the Arrow, as he had read, when he was a child, in Kipling's *Kim*. He had to find enlightenment for himself, and elsewhere – if it was not already too late» (Enquist 2016: 11).

<sup>374</sup> «Like a dog frightened when accosted by its own smell» (Enquist 2016: 11).

flight instinct. The well known impulse to hide is still active, and still hinders the decision to reveal.

The second time the dog appears, it follows again a passage where the narrator talks about his mother:

Aning av vittring för den förvirrade hunden.  
Hunden nosar sig bakåt. Överallt vittring av förnuftigt liv, ibland dock vittring av honom själv. Då stelnar hunden till! som i skräck, och byter kurs. Så förnuft igen. Hunden vet då att han är räddad, men rädd. (Enquist 2013: 71)

The faintest scent for the confused dog.  
The dog is sniffing its way backwards. Everywhere the scent of a reasonable life, sometimes the scent of itself. It suddenly freezes! As in fear, and change direction. Common sense again. The dog knows it is safe, but is afraid. (Enquist 2016: 68)

The dog «sniffs its way backwards»: once again, the answer is sought in the past, but the fear is enough to stop the pursuit.

The next mention of the dog is on the occasion of a serious illness that hit the narrator in 1995:

Han ligger i ambulansen och stirrar stelt i taket. Är det nu det är över? Vad var det som aldrig blev av? Som han flydde ifrån? Som en hund undviker han fortfarande sin egen vittring, han känner doften och viker skyggt undan, skräckslagen inför den vittring som ännu icke tunnats ut. [...]  
Varför var han så lugn? I februari 1990 hade han erhållit ett annat liv som en gåva, han kände sig lätt, befriad, varje år en gåva, ofattbar var livets lätthet. Och nu, bara fem år senare, brydde han sig inte längre. [...]  
Att inte bry sig om livet var en dödssynd. Där hade han det. Hunden uppfångade nu sin egen vittring.  
Spring då! Spring. (Enquist 2013: 147-148)

He is lying in the ambulance, staring fixedly at the ceiling. Is it over now? What was it that he never got round to? That he was fleeing from? Like a dog, he still avoids his own smell; he recognises it and furtively turns aside, terrified of an odour that has not yet abated. [...]  
Why was he so calm? In February 1990 he was offered another life, as a present: he felt light, liberated, every year a gift, the lightness of living so unimaginable. And now, a mere five years later, he no longer cared. [...]  
Not to care about living was a mortal sin. There he had it. The dog had caught its own scent now.  
Run then! Run! (Enquist 2016: 138-139)

A first answer to what the dog was at the same time looking for and fleeing from is given: a guilt, the ur-guilt of not caring about life, the «ambivalent wish for life and death» that was at the centre of *Nedstörtad ängel* (cf. 4.3). As we have seen earlier, a pervasive yet elusive feeling of guilt is one of the prime movers of Enquist's writing (cf.

2.1.4), and here we find a possible explanation for it. The link with that particular book and its “twin-play” *I lodjurets timma* is confirmed by the following appearance of the dog:

Kanske har till sist hunden fått upp vittringen på pojken Siklund. Egentligen var han rädd för honom. Pojken var 24 år den hösten 1977. Självt var han 43. Han bevittnade då återuppståndelsen, företecknad. Den verkliga skulle komma på Island många år senare.

Hunden uppfångar först då vittringen av sig själv. (Enquist 2013: 149)

Perhaps the dog has finally caught the scent of the Boy, Siklund. Actually, it was afraid of him. The Boy was twenty-four in the autumn of 1977. He himself was forty-three. On that occasion he witnessed the foretold resurrection. The real one would happen in Iceland, many years later.

Only then does the dog catch its own scent. (Enquist 2016: 140)

We find here a confirmation of what we wrote about *Nedstörtad ängel* in 4.3: as so many characters in Enquist’s production, the suicidal Boy of the two works from the mid-eighties was a “metaphor” of the narrator/author, and the miracle of his cat’s resurrection was the hope, almost a prophecy, of the miracle of the second life which will be given to the author some years later.

In the last recurrence there seems to be no more room to flee:

Livet var fullt av tecken, men de avsatte inga märken för den som var rädd. Handlade de om honom själv fick han väl öppna ögonen.

Han river byggnadsställningarna, det är väl det som är det sista, det som man måste riva. Bakom finns – förhoppningsvis? – åtminstone en liten barnslig kärna? Som när det började?

Inte ingenting.

Detta svaga jämrande gnyende, som från hunden som hittat fram till sin vittring och inte kunde fly?

Ska det aldrig ta slut? Jo, en gång. Inte nu. (Enquist 2013: 226-227)

Life was full of signs, but it left no traces for one who was fearful. If the signs related to him, he had to open his eyes.

He tears at the scaffolding; it is the last thing that has to be pulled down. Behind it is there – is it to be hoped? – at least a tiny core of childhood? From when it all began?

Not nothing.

That faint whimpering whine, as from a dog that has found afresh its own scent and cannot escape?

Will it never end? Yes, at some point. Not now. (Enquist 2016: 212)

We find again the torn down scaffolding, the tiny bit inside. At this point the dog seems not to be able to escape again. Apparently the narrator has no choice left: it is time to face the untold, after having «skirted round» (Enquist 2016: 7) for most of his life,

writing his books: «Det var väl det som var meningen med att skriva; då slapp man säga»<sup>375</sup> (Enquist 2013: 247). But the untold wants to remain unspeakable:

Det sägbara skulle vara bitar av det liv han levat. Det osägbara var bilder på projektionsskärmar som svängde och skymde varandra, obarmhärtigt, som felexponerade bilder. (Enquist 2013: 230)

The speakable would be pieces of the life he had lived. What could not be spoken about was made up of swaying images on projection screens that mercilessly obscured one another, like badly exposed photographs. (Enquist 2016: 215)

That is, in a nutshell, the difference between *Ett annat liv* and Enquist's other books: one is the «speakable», the official version, fragments of a lived life. The rest, what lies at the bottom of a black hole, can be expressed only as a «badly exposed photograph», as a metaphor, or a spell.

The revised speech on his mother's memory «skulle aldrig fullbordas»<sup>376</sup> (Enquist 2013: 254), says the narrator on the last page of *Liknelseboken*. The final message of the book seems to skip over *Ett annat liv*'s reassuring closing<sup>377</sup> to connect directly with older works. «Nu har jag berättat allt, fatta får ni göra själva»<sup>378</sup> (Enquist 2013: 219), says the narrator after having told one of his parables, echoing «the Boy Siklund» in *I lodjurets timma*: «Jag har berättat allting precis som det var. Precis allting, det var så där det gick till. Det finns ingenting mer att säga. Förstå får du väl göra själv»<sup>379</sup> (2017a: 196). There is no saintly – to echo *Legionärerna*<sup>380</sup> – «whole story», as the narrator in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* already feared<sup>381</sup>, only «unrelenting questions». «Men vilka vore vi om vi icke försökte»<sup>382</sup> (Enquist 2013: 145).

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<sup>375</sup> «That was surely the point of writing: to avoid having to say anything» (Enquist 2016: 231).

<sup>376</sup> «Would never be completed» (Enquist 2016: 237).

<sup>377</sup> «Och han visste att han var räddad» (Enquist 2008: 530; «And he knew he had been saved», Enquist 2015: 392).

<sup>378</sup> «I have told it as it was. You'll have to understand by yourselves» (Enquist 2016: 206).

<sup>379</sup> «I have told you how everything happened. Everything, just exactly how it was. There's nothing more to say. Understanding you have to get for yourself» (Enquist 1990: 48-49).

<sup>380</sup> «Det finns ingen helgonlik objektivitet» (Enquist 2014 [1968]: 242; «There is no saintly objectivity», Enquist 1974: 274).

<sup>381</sup> Cf. Enquist 2014b [1991]: 7, 250.

<sup>382</sup> «But who would we be if we did not try?» (Enquist 2016: 137).



## Conclusions

According to Thomas Thurah, the whole of Enquist's production is watermarked by the question «*hvad er et menneske?*»<sup>383</sup> (Thurah 2002: 22, italics in the original). In his opinion, a first, tentative answer is offered by *Nedstörtad ängel*, the novel which he sees as the middle point of Enquist's oeuvre, both temporally and thematically (cf. Thurah 2002: 20): the human being is the monster, but «ikke den fysisk deformede, ikke vanskabningen, men den forstødte, dvs. den, der er adskilt fra»<sup>384</sup> (Thurah 2002: 25). The driving force behind Enquist's writing should therefore be a desire for unity, a wish to fill an absence, a black hole.

Again according to Thurah, a second, more advanced answer is to be found in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, through Captain Nemo's words to Johannes:

Han sade då att det endast funnes tre slags människor: bödlarna, offren och förrädarna. [...] Dock, sade han då med sitt sorgsna och sällsamt eljest leende, är du inte endast förrädare, utan därjämte bödel och offer. [...] Ja, svarade han då, som alla andra människor är du allting. (Enquist 2014b [1991]: 161)

He then said there are only three kinds of people: executioners, victims and traitors. [...] Still, he went on, with his sad and wonderfully otherwise smile, you are not only a traitor, but an executioner too, and a victim. [...] Yes, was his answer, like every human being you are everything. (Enquist 1992: 159)

In the few years that separate the two texts, the possibility of a unity, a completeness of some kind seems to have emerged. Though, it is no easy game to accept it: to obtain unity, one has to acknowledge his or her own most negative sides, the idea of being not only a victim, but also a traitor and an executioner at the same time, with the burden of guilt this entails.

If we turn it from the general to the personal – since in Enquist «[t]il sidst siver det helt ned, ned i fortællerens underjordiske, eller med tanke på *Kaptajn Nemos*

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<sup>383</sup> «*What is a human being?*»

<sup>384</sup> «Not the physically deformed, not disfigurement, but the outcast, i.e. the one who is separated from.»

*bibliotek undersöka; til förtällerens egen historie»*<sup>385</sup> (Thurah 2002: 83-84) – the same question becomes «who/what am I?». In this study I have examined most of Per Olov Enquist's narrative production exactly with that question in mind, following the autobiographical red thread that runs through it. By combing through his narrative texts in search of autobiographical elements and by analysing the use he makes of them, I perceived a growing presence and weight of the self-representing impulse, from a partial, pretendedly casual appearance of the author in the first phase of his production (the childhood memories ascribed to Hess, the cameo of himself in *Legionärerna*), through the self-portrait in disguise of *Sekonden* or the family history of *Musikanternas uttåg*, to an almost overwhelming presence in *Ett annat liv* and *Liknelseboken*, where the narrator/author occupies so to say the whole narrative space. Ordered on a hypothetical scale of autobiographicity, then, Enquist's works would roughly follow a chronological sequence, as if over the years this impulse had grown stronger.

Throughout this progression, though, the impulse to reveal himself has always been inextricably linked to an equally strong urge to conceal, the two essential poles of autobiographical writing identified by Arne Melberg (Melberg 2008: 22). The interplay of these two impulses obtains different effects in different works, although it is possible to recognise a periodisation, albeit partial. In the first phase of Enquist's career, for instance – here analysed in Chapter 3 through the scrutiny of *Kristallögat*, *Färdvägen*, *Hess* and *Legionärerna* – the prevailing strategy was to hide behind other characters' masks, as in *Hess*, or in a fold of the main narration, as in *Legionärerna*. The personal element was only one of the many pieces of an unsolved puzzle, the image of a complex reality impossible to grasp. In a second stage – here represented by *Sekonden*, *Musikanternas uttåg*, *Nedstörtad ängel* and *I lodjurets timma*, all discussed in Chapter 4 – we witnessed an increasing presence of autobiographical elements, especially in the first two of the above mentioned works, although still disguised and inserted in a fictional frame. The image is still that of the puzzle to compose, but the mutual relevance of the self and the world is becoming more evident, also thanks to the use of

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<sup>385</sup> «In the end it all seeps down, down to the narrator's subterranean, or thinking of *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* sublacustral reality; to the narrator's own story.»

the metaphor as a form of self-representation that Enquist begins to exploit with the last two of these four works. His use of the metaphor reminds both of Olney's theory – according to which metaphor is what «allows us to connect the known of ourselves to the unknown of the world, and [...] it simultaneously organizes the self into a new and richer entity» (Olney 1972: 32) – and of Strindberg's practice, who organised the world by «proceeding by associative leaps and metaphorical couplings» (Robinson 1986: 40). However, metaphor too incorporates the two opposite poles of hiding and showing: on one hand it allows to penetrate deeper truths, often too difficult to be mentioned openly, but at the same time it also offers a convenient shield of obscurity and ambiguity behind which one can hide.

The work where Enquist's self-describing metaphor reaches its highest points is undoubtedly *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, a book that can be defined as an autobiography in the form of a metaphor – the form that Enquist masters the best and that allows him to reveal the most. The more straightforward layout and outspoken tone of *Ett annat liv*, instead, seems to restrain his self-representation, which is probably why «*Kapten Nemos bibliotek* läst i ljuset av *Ett annat liv* kan framstå som mer självbiografisk än *Ett annat Liv*»<sup>386</sup>, as Sarrimo pointed out (2012: 120). This paradox – an autobiography less autobiographical than a novel partly set on Captain Nemo's *Nautilus* – is probably due just to the temporary putting aside of the metaphorical method. The attempt to reduce the «kaotiska blivanden»<sup>387</sup> of life (Johansson 2015: 94) into a chronologically ordered narration, albeit exactly what is expected from an autobiography (cf. Sturrock 1993: 20, discussed in 1.1.1), can nonetheless result in something less true, according to one of the principles that guided Enquist's writing from the beginning, the idea that «[n]ågot behöver ju inte vara "sant", bara för att det har "hänt"»<sup>388</sup> (Enquist 1981: 121).

Enquist's persistent turning to self-representation in his writing is certainly connected to the need to find a meaning, a unity, both in himself and in the world (cf., for instance, the «search for the true self» of Pascal 1960: 39 discussed in 1.1.1).

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<sup>386</sup> «*Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, read in the light of *Ett annat liv*, can appear as more autobiographical than *Ett annat liv*.»

<sup>387</sup> «Chaotic becoming.»

<sup>388</sup> «Something does not have to be "true", only because it has "happened".»

However, what I have tried to demonstrate in this study is that the form of the autobiography proper was not the best one for him to answer the question that resounds throughout his work, «Hur hänger det ihop?»<sup>389</sup>. As I have suggested in the section dedicated to *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, the chronologic and syntagmatic logic of the autobiography only allows to “förstå”: in other words, to find an apparent explanation. The order and cohesion of autobiography is artificial, a construction of the author, as if he was numbering dots in order to obtain a certain image. In order to “fatta”, to understand the truer, underlying meaning, it is necessary to rely on the associative and paradigmatic logic of the metaphor. The puzzle that Enquist has been so obsessed with solving, from *Sekonden* to *Ett annat liv*, cannot be assembled. One must accept that life is made up of sidetracks and «kaotiska blivanden i fel riktningar»<sup>390</sup>, to quote again Johansson (2015: 94-95), in order to get a true image of it, even though this image is nothing but a series of «felexponerade bilder»<sup>391</sup> (Enquist 2013: 230).

Enquist’s path to autobiography moves through metaphors, or parables, as he suggests in *Liknelseboken*. «Dags för en liknelse»<sup>392</sup>, says the narrator in the closing lines of this book (Enquist 2013: 253). Yet another one.

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<sup>389</sup> «How does it all connect?»

<sup>390</sup> «Chaotic becoming in wrong directions.»

<sup>391</sup> «Badly exposed photographs.»

<sup>392</sup> «Time for a parable» (Enquist 2016: 237).

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## Abstract (English)

This dissertation aims at analysing Per Olov Enquist's work in the light of an autobiographical perspective. After giving to print a number of acclaimed novels and dramas, often strewn with autobiographical elements and details, in 2008 he also published an autobiography, which reinforced the impression that his personal experience had been a fundamental inspiration for his fictional works.

The keys that allow to read Enquist's writings in an autobiographical light are taken from his own works: in particular, I have identified two metaphors that represent the need for ordering and finding a meaning in the world and himself, i.e. assembling puzzles and drawing maps, as well as an obsessive use of repetition, seen as the other side of the coin of the silence under which sensitive subjects (or *smärtpunkterna*, as the author calls them) are passed. In Enquist's works in fact the opposing forces of negation and revelation are always at work at the same time: although disturbing experiences are often disguised or passed under silence, their intrinsic force makes sure that they are mentioned again and again, from one book to another.

Enquist's works have then been grouped into three sets with different self-representing strategies: from inserting isolated personal elements in the plot, often attributed to fictional characters, as in the first group (*Kristallögat*, *Färdvägen*, *Hess* and *Legionärerna*), to a more marked presence of the autobiographical elements, albeit still in a fictionalised frame, in the second group (*Sekonden*, *Musikanternas uttåg*, *Nedstörtad ängel* and *I lodjurets timma*), to a clear self-representative purpose in the third group, although with deeply different methods: oneiric and symbolical in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, essaistic in *Kartritarna*, straightforwardly autobiographical in *Ett annat liv*, pensively memoiristic in *Liknelseboken*.

The conclusions I have drawn from this survey of Per Olov Enquist's production is that the persistent recurrence of autobiographical elements in his writing is connected to the need to find a meaning and a unity, both in himself and in the world. However, straightforward autobiography is not necessarily the most adequate way to satisfy that need: in Enquist's case, metaphor seems to offer a more effective solution.

Keywords: Swedish literature; Per Olov Enquist; autobiography; self-representation; identity; repetition.

## Abstract (Italian)

Questa tesi si propone di analizzare l'opera di Per Olov Enquist alla luce di una prospettiva autobiografica. Dopo aver pubblicato numeri romanzi e opere teatrali di grande successo, in cui spesso compaiono elementi e dettagli autobiografici, nel 2008 l'autore svedese ha dato alle stampe un'autobiografia, la cui lettura rafforza l'impressione che le sue esperienze personali abbiano costituito una fondamentale fonte di ispirazione per le opere di finzione.

Per inquadrare gli scritti di Enquist in un'ottica autobiografica vengono utilizzate alcune chiavi di lettura offerte dagli stessi testi presi in analisi. Si tratta in primo luogo di due metafore che rappresentano il bisogno di ordinare e di trovare un significato all'esperienza del mondo e della propria identità, attività che parte della critica identifica come motore stesso della scrittura autobiografica: l'assemblare puzzle e il disegnare mappe. In secondo luogo, anche l'uso quasi ossessivo della ripetizione di episodi, immagini ed espressioni viene interpretato come portatore di una valenza autobiografica. A ricorrere sono una serie di «punti dolenti» (*smärtpunkterna* in originale) che da un lato non vengono mai raccontati fino in fondo, dall'altro si ripresentano da un libro all'altro proprio in virtù della loro carica emotiva inespressa. Questo porta a identificare le due forze contrarie all'opera contemporaneamente nella scrittura di Enquist: da un lato l'impulso a nascondere, a negare, dall'altro quello a mostrare, a rivelare.

Alla luce di queste chiavi di lettura, vengono prese in esame gran parte delle opere di Enquist, dagli esordi nel 1961 al libro più recente del 2013. Questa analisi evidenzia un'evoluzione nelle strategie di auto-rappresentazione utilizzate. In una prima fase (*Kristallögat*, *Färdvägen*, *Hess*, *Legionärerna*), gli elementi autobiografici sono isolati e spesso attribuiti a personaggi di finzione. In un secondo gruppo di opere (*Sekonden*, *Musikanternas uttåg*, *Nedstörtad ängel*, *I lodjurets timma*), assistiamo a un aumento del livello di autobiograficità, pur mantenendo un contesto finzionale. Infine, nell'ultima fase la dimensione autobiografica diventa centrale, sebbene con modalità diverse nei vari testi presi in considerazione: declinata sotto forma di saggio in *Kartritarna*, l'auto-rappresentazione assume forma metaforica in *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, dichiaratamente autobiografica in *Ett annat liv*, per poi tornare a una forma ibrida ma a forte componente memorialistica in *Liknelseboken*.

Da questa analisi delle opere di Per Olov Enquist emerge la conclusione che la costante presenza di elementi autobiografici nella sua scrittura è indice di un'esigenza di creare un ordine e trovare un senso al sé e al mondo. Tuttavia, la forma tipicamente autobiografica (cronologica, analitica) non sembra essere la più adatta a soddisfare questa esigenza, a cui risponde meglio una rappresentazione basata sulla metafora.

Parole chiave: Letteratura svedese; Per Olov Enquist; autobiografia; auto-rappresentazione; identità; ripetizione.

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