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THE PROCESS OF REWRITING IN KARL OVE KNAUSGÅRD'S *A TIME FOR EVERYTHING.* A FRACTAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT. ***The process of rewriting in Karl Ove Knausgård's* A time for everything.** ***A fractal approach.*** *A time for everything*, Knausgård's second novel, has been often referred to as a retelling of the Bible. Although the intertext with the biblical stories is not to be ignored, it is our opinion that Knausgård also rewrote some passages from the previous novel or included elements that he later used in the series *My struggle*. We consider *A time for everything* a fractal image of Knausgård's writings and attempt to analyse items related to death and despair, from a fractal approach. Our aim is to demonstrate that there is a stochastic narrative, self-similar, both at a micro- and a macro-level.

Keywords: *rewriting, fractal, creating, authenticity, fiction*

REZUMAT. ***Procesul de rescriere în romanul* Orice lucru îşi are vremea lui *de Karl Ove Knausgård. O abordare fractală.*** *Orice lucru îşi are vremea lui,* cel de-al doilea roman al lui Knausgård, a fost adesea denumit o rescriere a Bibliei. Deşi intertextul cu naraţiunea biblică nu trebuie ignorat, credem că procesul de rescriere cuprinde şi alte pasaje din textele publicate anterior sau din seria *Lupta mea*. În analiza noastră am pornit de la considerentul că *Orice lucru îşi are vremea lui* reprezintă o imagine fractală a scrierilor lui Knausgård şi am încercat să interpretăm unele elemente legate de moarte, disperare şi durere, pornind de la o abordare fractală. Scopul nostru a fost să demonstrăm că există o similaritate stochastică, atât la nivel micro, cât şi macro.

Cuvinte cheie: *rescriere, fractal, creare, autenticitate, ficţiune*

Introduction

"To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down,

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and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace." (Ecc, 3:1-8)

This is the reference most people point at when talking about Karl Ove Knausgård's second book, *En tid for alt,* translated from Norwegian by James Anderson and published under two titles *A Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven* (2008), and *A Time for Everything* (with two different editions, 2009 and 2015).

However obvious, the intertextuality with the biblical text is not, in our opinion, the most intriguing one, as Knausgård rewrites some passages from his previous book and perfectly integrate them in the latest, most debated series, *My struggle*. Wanting to address the issue of rewriting both as self-narration and reference to external texts, we will examine the author's narrative strategies from a fractal analysis perspective and do so by using Vøllo's words: "[…] an overarching theme in Knausgård's rewriting is concerned with roots and beginnings: the roots of place, the roots of tradition, the roots of memory" (Vøllo, 2019, 173). We will not start from the criteria Vøllo embodies in her thesis – autogeography, autobiography and subjective phenomenology –, but rather focus on the process of rewriting and its connection to the beginnings[2] seen as a fractal image, leaving out the autoreception and the autoreceptive narration Vøllo admirably traces in her paper on *A time for everything*[3].

Our understanding of the rewriting process will not necessarily aim to enumerate the occurrences of change and permutations in Knausgård's texts, but on the contrary prove that there is a red narrative thread, a recurrent frame, starting from the first novel, *Out of the world* and ending with the worldwide famous *My struggle.* The novels, as different and unique as they may seem, could be regarded as a trilogy[4], as the author himself mentioned it in several interviews.

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[2] The beginnings of his writing career and the memories regarding the beginnings of his life.

[3] As Ida Hummel Vøllo states in her thesis (*op. cit.*, pp. 12-13), in 2010, Stefan Iversen introduces the term "autoreception" that comprises both self-criticism and rewriting of one's texts. In this article we will focus on the second term. As Iversen suggests, this does not imply the rewriting of a specific text, but more the rewriting of several texts. (Iversen, 2010, 49-62).

That is exactly what happens in Knausgård's case. He is continuously rewriting his texts, creating stochastic fractal patterns. Some critics stated that a significant aim might have been to create a new text while lacking inspiration or the fact that the author was concerned with the reception of a text that he found improper or not rising to his standards.

[4] The critics name the books a trilogy as well. Haugen mentions that *Out of the world, A time for everything* and *My struggle* can be analyzed as a trilogy "a story within a story about Karl Ove himself" (Haugen, 2010, 12-18).

Jan Thomas Holmlund (2009) has been writing about this issue even before, when he stated that the books are a classical trilogy.

Our point of view, nevertheless, is that they represent a fractal image, characterized by stochastic similarity.

1. Is rewriting retelling, recreating or creating?

Named often by the critics a prodigy, a genius or an unscrupulous writer, Knausgård has certainly been interpreted and analysed with extreme and often contrary perspectives. While some praise him for being shameless others point out his shamefaced actions, depicting ethics and morality, or the lack of it, as two important pillars of his novels. If the series *My struggle* has gained a lot of attention in the latest years, not the same publicity has been given to *Out of the world* that won Critic's Prize and *A time for everything* that was nominated for The Nordic Council Literature Prize. These novels are often set aside and forgotten in the analysis of Knausgård's style and narrative techniques. The shadowing presence of these books in the nowadays reception was also described by Liesl Schillinger who stated in the article "Why Karl Ove Knausgaard Can't Stop Writing", the fact that for the Norwegian author *A time for everything,* his second novel is his favourite book. Why is that so? Why does Knausgård point out this book of all the books he has written? For some readers acquainted to the writer's autofictional and autobiographical style, this is "the most fictional book. […]" that centres upon angels, trying to find an answer to their disappearance: "It's about angels, like angels do exist, they really were around. The mystery in the book is where did they go? It's a retelling of the stories in the Bible." (Schillinger citing Knausgård, 2015, 7)

And yet, it is so much more than that. What Knausgård does best is to make us look the other way, forget about our first impulses, not stay too long on a page and casually progress towards the end. He is doing it by using stories within a story, scenes that are characterized by stochastic similarity. He is acting like a guide, highlighting some aspects and shadowing others in a novel, only to do the exact opposite in another. As true as it is that *A time for everything* is a book about the Bible, the interpretations one can add to this novel are so numerous, creating a fractal net rather than a mirror. Marc De Kesel also states that "[…] the title refers to the real topic of the novel: the non-linear and non-cyclic "constant flux", in which all things happen in the same 'indifferent' temporal space" (De Kesel, 17). Taking this under consideration, we do not believe Knausgård's *A time for everything* is a retelling of the Bible, especially of the First Testament, in the sense of a reconstruction of the original text, as the author implies. We believe we should think of the second part of the definition, where to retell is "to tell a story again, often in a different way" (Online Oxford Dictionary, "retell").

In the Bible, God appears as fearless, powerful, almighty, deciding upon the humans and creating them after His image:

> "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (Gen, 1:26)

But there might be a flip side of the coin, since in Knausgård's *En tid for alt* the presence of the angels makes us fundamentally question God or the nature of the human beings (Maeseneer, Meszanos, 2015, 450-464). Because the angels are the connecting element between the mortality and the immortality, between God and humans, their transformation from perfect beings to imperfect, dying creatures make us, humans, doubt if "spiritual and moral progress is possible (*Ibidem*)"[5]. Arguably, as Marc De Kesel underlines, "[…] after God's death, the angels fell, slowly, very slowly, until they definitely lost their immortality and died" (De Kesel, 1).

This is the reality Antinous Bellori witnesses:

> "Antinous now sees that its jaw, too, is shaking. But its expression is firm, its eyes cold and clear. The first one bites into the fish and pulls off a piece with a jerk. Then it takes the torch for the other, which grips the fish in both hands and bends its head slowly forward. It is as if the effort increases the shaking, and the first one places a supporting hand on its arm. And so, standing close together, the light flickering across their faces and the bottom of their cloaks trailing in the water, they stand eating the fish. Antinous stares at them, spellbound. The teeth that sink into the fish's flesh, the scales that cling to their chins, the eyeballs that now and then turn up and make them look white and blind. Then they look like statues standing there, for without the life of the eyes, the deadness of their faces is emphasized. Each time he sees it, Antinous recoils in fear. *They're dead*, he thinks. *They're dead*. But then the eyeballs correct themselves, the faces again fill with life, and what a moment before was loathsome in them is now beautiful again" (Knausgård, 2009a, 16-17).

Once we talk about this transformation, we talk about the angels' death. Once we talk about *kenosis*, we also talk about God's imperfection, powerless actions and confusion. The imperfection characterizes not only the angels and their appearance, but also everything else connected to God. Bellori's God is indeed the God of emptiness, and the perfect imperfect incarnation of this concept. He is the ruler of this *non praesentia*, He is inconsistent and incoherent (Maeseneer, Meszanos, 2015, 450-464). Both in the world, and out of this world,

[5] How was this transformation possible and even accepted by God? That is the question raised by Knausgård in this novel: "Why they chose the exact form that they did, and transformed themselves into human baby-like beings, isn't difficult to understand. Their fear was that their barbarity and appetite and terrible rage would show themselves, and so it was innocence they sought, and as man was created in their image, they selected man at his most innocent as their new model". (Knausgård, 2009a, 449).

if we are to paraphrase Knausgård's first novel, appears to be God's, the humans' and the angles' common point. Not belonging to a certain space or landscape. Not being a part of something, definitely, permanently. The absence of stability makes the connection to the title of this second novel. There is a time for everything, for every purpose under heaven, but that time does occur sporadically. The rest of our lives lie in the loveless, godless existence. There is a time for God's despair; there is a time for the human's meaningless life, for every action that we make. Analysing *A time for everything*, Bern Lage Breivoll arrives at the conclusion that the novel it's not about religion but about the importance of human values that overcome the divine ones (Breivoll, 2006, 1-10).

As for the line between fiction and authenticity, the present and the past, one must wonder if retelling really means rewriting. And is rewriting creating a new text or continuing the same one?

Let's focus on the last fifty pages that have aroused a lot of questions regarding the novel's theme and motives. The bestseller that takes place in Norway, in 2000, ends with Henrik Vankel's[6] perspective. We hence find out that he is the one to tell the story of Antinous Bellori, the fictional author of *On the Nature of Angels* (1584) and that the descriptions we had in the first 500 pages were just part of his point of view. If we are to trust the author, the seagulls first appear in Norway in 1732, being angels that transformed themselves, as the last line of Bellori's study suggests "*The angels have fallen. They are out there somewhere*". Can this however be authentic? Can Knausgård be trusted? And, moreover, should he be trusted? Or should the text be interpreted without reference to the author's biography? If so, what does the story of a teacher in North Norway falling for a pupil (*Out of the world*) has to do with the story of angels and their transformation into seagulls, with the story of Cain, Abel, Noah and Ezekiel (*A time for everything*) or with the story of the struggle a man named Karl Ove goes through (*My struggle*)? Several critics have mentioned that there is not an obvious link between the different novels, as there is no obvious link between the parts of *A time for everything.* Morten Abrahamsen goes further and states that the end of the book seems to be superficially added to the plot[7], while others criticize Knausgård's lack of fluidity in this novel. But for what is worth, *A time for everything* is a fractal of Knausgård's entire carrier as a writer, being different, yet similar at a micro- and macro-level. As Yves De Maeseneer and Julia Meszaros demonstrate, the mood that "connects Vankel, Bellori and the angels is one of deep despair" (Maeseneer, Meszanos, 2015, 450-464). Paraphrasing this sentence, what connects Knausgård's novels and creates his unique style is the same despair.

[6] Ida Hummel Vøllo mentions it, the first name given to the character was Henrik Moller –Stray. (Vøllo, 2019, 119).

[7] "Problemet er bare at denne avsluttende delen av boken virker svært påklistret." (Abrahamsen, 2004).

2. A time for rewriting one's story

In correlation to the beginning of a novel, most people refer to its first lines. However, the first line is not the starting point of a book, but the result of a struggle, the written metamorphosis of its inception. We often ask ourselves how the author managed to write his first lines, what thoughts were behind his actions. This struggle to write something great, something novel, has also crossed Knausgård's mind in relation to the novel *A time for everything*, as we find out from Ida Hummel Vøllo's PhD thesis. Already acknowledged as a writer, Knausgård wanted to continue the story from *Out of the world*, but he could not do it, because he lacked the inspiration. Instead, he used several narrative transgressions about angels and their transformation into seagulls that he has previously written. Knausgård allegedly got to see something intriguing in the wooden floor of his first office and noticed that "[…] the knots and grain, perhaps two meters from the chair where I was sitting, formed an image of Christ wearing a crown of thorns" (Vøllo citing Knausgård, 2019, 174).

While Claus Elholm Andersen insists on the probable anxiety of influence the Norwegian author had, which could explain his lack of inspiration, Vøllo questions Knausgård's words and anxiety and argues that

> "[b]y this I am not claiming that Knausgård actually and necessarily saw the face of Christ in the wooden floor of his office in Stockholm in 2004, but rather that the scene is placed here with strategic intention to connect the author-images past and present: to connect this autobiographical and autogeographical memory with his author-image in 2008 and with *Min kamp*" (*Idem*, 174).

As a direct consequence of this scene, Bernt Lage Breivoll insists on the fact that the present can change the past, that *A time for everything* is a text that ignores the time rules and has flashbacks as main narrative strategy (Breivoll, 2006, 79). Everything we think we know is hence based on supposition. We suppose that Knausgård artificially added the story of the wooden floor to connect the missing dots, we suppose the story of Antinous Bellori happens in Henrik Vankel's head, but we do not know that for sure. Seen from this perspective, there is no coherent connection between the angels, God, the humans and the main characters presented in the book, Cain, Abel, Lamec, Noah, Anna, Lot, Esekiel, Antinous Bellori and Henrik Vankel besides Knausgård's intent to make it seem like a novel[8]. Unless we read the book from a fractal perspective and

[8] In the article "Of Squawking Seagulls and the Mutable Divine: Karl Ove Knausgaard's A Time for Everything (With Reference to My Struggle)", P. J. Sabo writes "Henrik's purposeful isolation, for instance, is reminiscent of Knausgaard's biblical characters: Cain lives solitarily in a house in the forest, Noah lives away from society on a mountain meadow, and Ezekiel lives for years under self-imposed house arrest. The closest connection is to Cain, as Henrik's mutilation of his chest and face echoes the mark that God set on Cain". (Sabo, 2016, 112).

realize that chaos is the incipient reorganization of a system, in a different manner. Most of the literary discussions nowadays place the literary creations in two categories: fiction or authenticity. But if we implement a fractal reading paradigm, we do not have opposite literary classifications, but rather ramifications of a similar-like structure. What is chaotic for us could be regarded as structured for somebody else. It depends on the point of view one is embracing.

3. A fractal analysis approach

In the following part of the article, we base our analyse on the belief that Knausgård's texts have a fractal structure that can be extended to the examination of his narrative techniques, of the themes used in the books and of the relationship between God and humans.

The fractal theory experienced a boom in the 1980s, with Mandelbrot's approach on chaos theory and its relation to nature in *Fractals: Form, Chance, and Dimension*. Fractals are complex mathematical structures that have several properties such as self-similarity, non-linearity and strange attractors[9]. The usage of this concept in literature is showing a process of metaphorically transferring concepts and analysing methods from science to humanities.

In order to emphasise the fractal structure of a text, we have to take a motif and see if it is rescaled and reused in other works, to the size of the original document or at different levels. Since the number of items taken into consideration is just a matter of personal choice or subjective preferences, it is however difficult if not impossible to prove that two texts are self-similar in every aspect. Therefore a stochastic analysis is to be preferred.

One can argue that Knausgård's narrative is not complex at all, since it is inspired by personal stories and describes the everyday life. Nevertheless, the iterations of certain themes such as shame, death or despair, having the father-son relationship in the middle is the proof that Knausgård is using what Lawrence Beemer calls a "fractal narrative" (Beemer, 2011).

It can be argued, as Polvinen states, that the concept of "fractal analysis" must be seen as a metaphorical concept applied to literature (Polvinen, 2008, 71). Arguably, in the examination of *A time for everything* we are refraining from

[9] The literary fractals are closely linked to symbols or motifs, to places, to the characters that appear in the book or to the phrase structure the author is creating. In the online dictionary, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ fractals are being defined as "any of various extremely irregular curves or shapes for which any suitably chosen part is similar in shape to a given larger or smaller part when magnified or reduced to the same size", self-similarity has been defined as "the quality or state of having an appearance that is invariant upon being scaled larger or smaller", a strange attractor as "the state of a mathematically chaotic system toward which the system trends : the attractor of a mathematically chaotic system" and stochastic as "involving a random variable, involving change or probability:.

making comparisons between the texts and analyse all the non-linear items, and we are stressing the analysis towards the recurrent theme of death or despair. The destructive outbursts ignite the character's self-destruction and represent the self-similar element in the fractal image of this article.

Out of the world is a novel about a twenty-six year old teacher that leaves North Norway and establishes himself in Kristiansand, after his relationship with a pupil is discovered and condemned. Shame, "all-encompassing and devastating" (Lindholm, 2004), plays an important role.

Following the fractal pattern, the same symbols flow back and forth between the two books. We see Henrik Vankel from *Out of the world* in the novel *A time for everything* in despair and ashamed, dwelling on his haunted past and thinking about his epitaph: "Henrik Vankel. 1970-1998. He died in order to prove to himself that his feelings were genuine" (Knausgård, 2009a). According to Fredrik Wandrup: "Here he is split between an increasing experience of the beauty of nature and a compulsive neurotic urge to injure himself. Read in the light of the rest of the book: He is a fallen angel, most like a dead seagull - a bird species that according to his father «was once angels»" (Wandrup, 2004, our translation)[10].

A similar passage is found in the series *My struggle,* book three, where Knausgård writes:

> "Anne Lisbet emerged from the sea.
> She was wearing a bikini bottom and a white T-shirt. It was wet, and her round breasts were visible. Her wet black hair shone in the sun. She beamed her broadest smile. I watched her, I couldn't keep my eyes off her, but then I noticed something beside me, and turned my head, and there was Kolloen, he was watching her too.
> There was no difference in our gazes, I realised that at once, he saw what I saw and he was thinking what I was thinking.
> About *Anne Lisbet*.
> She was thirteen years old.
> The moment didn't even last for a second, he looked down as soon as I noticed him, but it was enough, and I'd had an insight into something which a moment before I didn't even know existed". (Knausgård, 2015a, 447-448)

In the fourth volume of *My struggle*, Knausgård presents himself as an alter-ego of Henrik, since his feelings towards the thirteen-year-old Andrea could been interpreted as such. The character named intentionally Karl Ove, is a sexually frustrated eighteen-year-old man that works as a school teacher in

[10] "Her er han utspent mellom en tiltakende opplevelse av naturens skjønnhet og en tvangsnevrotisk trang til å skade seg selv. Lest i lys av resten av boka: Han er en fallen engel, mest lik en død måke - en fuglesort som ifølge hans far «en gang var engler»".

order to save up money to travel and start his career as a writer. His feelings for Andrea and the sexual attraction he has towards his pupil end up in humiliation and despair. However, as Claus Elholm Andersen mentions, Karl Ove is not that obsessed with Andrea as Henrik was with Miriam in *Out of the world* (Andersen, 2015, 95-105), even if the story about Karl Ove's love for Andrea appears to be the main plot of the fourth volume of *My struggle*[11].

> "Was I in love with Andrea?
> Was I in love?
> No, no, no.
> But I was drawn to her in my thoughts. I was.
> When I was at the school during the night, when I stood by the dark, motionless water in the swimming pool, I imagined she was in the changing room, alone, and that soon I would go in. She covered herself, looked up, I knelt down in front of her, she looked at me, at first with apprehension, then tenderness and openness" (Knausgård, 2015b, 424).

In the real life, Knausgård himself was a teacher in North Norway, in 1987, when he went there to work for a year. In the sixth volume of *My struggle* he confesses that the feelings he had for a thirteen-year-old girl while being himself an eighteen year old teacher were dangerous and inappropriate, thus acknowledging that the story from *Out of the world* could be authentic.

Furthermore, the author's father was an English teacher and the episode of him having an affair appears in several volumes of the series. So it seems like the teacher sexually interested in an adolescent girl, could be a fractal element in Knausgård's writings.

Another self-similar aspect is the presence of death. Rather than accepting his condition, Vankel operates on despair and sadness, self-destructing and self-harming himself. He is thinking about death and physical pain. The resemblance between these passages and the opening lines in *My struggle,* book 1 is striking (Vøllo, 2019, 159).

In the famous series Knausgård writes:

> "For the heart, life is simple: it beats for as long as it can. Then it stops. Sooner or later, one day, this pounding action will cease of its own accord, and the blood will begin to run toward the body's lowest point, where it will collect in a small pool, visible from outside as a dark, soft patch on ever whitening skin, as the temperature sinks, the limbs stiffen and the intestines drain. These changes in the first hours occur so slowly and take place with such inexorability that there is something almost ritualistic about them, as though life capitulates according to specific

[11] Andrea appears from the beginning of the text on page 44 as the young teacher reads the catalog.

> rules, a kind of gentleman's agreement to which the representatives of death also adhere, inasmuch as they always wait until life has retreated before they launch their invasion of the new landscape. By which point, however, the invasion is irrevocable. The enormous hordes of bacteria that begin to infiltrate the body's innards cannot be halted. Had they but tried a few hours earlier, they would have met with immediate resistance; however everything around them is quiet now, as they delve deeper and deeper into the moist darkness" (Knausgård, 2009b, 3).

In *A time for everything,* Knausgård describes the moment of death but from a different angle. Abel is the one to take Jared's heart out of the body to examine it. While reading the Bible, Abel is presented as a shepherd and as a killer. The feeling that led to the murder is considered to be jealousy as Cain's sacrifices were not accepted by gods. But when reading Knausgård's *A time for everything,* one sees another Cain, merciful and upset because of Abel's gestures. This lack of empathy from Abel could be the reason he is going to be killed by his brother.

> "Then the heart stops beating, then the lungs stop breathing, then the thoughts stop revolving. Because they have a limit, and an exact point when that is reached, and it is that exact point Abel longs to witness. Not from the outside, as he would if he'd stuck the knife into the brain or the heart, but from the inside, as he will if only he can get hold of the heart with his hands. That has to be the way to 'help' him, he thinks. Grip the heart so hard that it stops. Feel the heart stop. *Feel* Jared's heart stop and the life cease between his fingers" (Knausgård, 2009a).

In addressing this issue, Ane Farsethås states that the reflections about death and the description of the heart in *A time for everything* and *My struggle* have some main differences, where the fame that the opening line has brought to *My struggle*, while remaining unnoticeable for the readers of *A time for everything,* remains essential (Farsethås, 2012, 284-285).

It is worth mentioning that in her PhD thesis, Ida Hummel Vøllo continues Farsethås demonstration and points out that the body the heart description is referring to is not the "anonymous, universal body, but instead […] Henrik Vankel's father" (Vøllo, 2019, 160), thus implying the fact that Henrik Vankel's father resemble Karl Ove's fictional father figure.

Another important element of the rewriting process in Knausgård's texts is the retelling of the Bible. Several stories are included, such as the story of Cain and Abel, the story of Noah and the great flood, of Ezekiel or Lot. Breaking the stereotypes from the Bible that normally places people into two categories, good or bad, Knausgård proves how the humans are much more complex and unique than we think. The difference between individualism and collectivism is used here to emphasise the relationship between the brothers.

We should pause now to interpret Cain and Abel's behavior. One is the good shepherd that even the God likes; the other one is the bad farmer that is set aside by God and by his family. And yet, the good brother ends up being a killer just like his sibling. Knausgård makes us question the biblical story and the reasons behind God's choices by rewriting the frame of the narrative and completing it with the missing passages. In the Bible, there is no explicit narrative explaining why Cain murdered Abel. We only suppose it was jealousy, or the fact that his sacrifices were not accepted. Then came Knausgård, venturing into the mysticism of the Bible and pointing out the fact that Abel was infatuated, selfish and mean, used to killing, because of his job, while Cain acts to defend the ones in need from Abel's impulse to harm others. The reason of the fratricide is in *A time for everything* Cain's despair, his way to cope with his brother's behaviour towards Jared. When finding Jared in the woods, hurt, with half of his face destroyed, Abel cuts his eye and cuts him open in an attempt to feel his heart dying. The scene is too much to bear for Cain who is willing to stop Jared's pain, by throwing a stone to his head. This thought and the thought of revenging Jared's death haunts him his entire life:

> "Then he tipped it back, opened his mouth, and screamed. Cain couldn't endure it. He wanted to help him, but he couldn't, and suddenly it filled him with rage: in one bound he was on his feet, he had to get out, he put on his shoes, snatched his jacket, and ran down the field to the river.
> It had been six months before, when he'd held the rock above his head on the mountain, ready to smash Jared's head, that the thought of killing Abel had come to Cain for the first time. The thought was a terrible one, and he justified it by saying to himself that he'd been blind with rage, and that the thought belonged to his wrath and not to him. But it wasn't true. Once the thought had been thought, it suddenly lay there as a possibility. He could distance himself from it, he could laugh at it, he could ignore it, but he couldn't eliminate it: after that occurrence on the mountain, fratricide would always be something he'd have to reckon with". (Knausgård, 2009a)

The fundamental idea behind the reiteration of death and despair is that they are self-similar elements that one could multiply and examine at micro-scales in *A time for everything*. Whereas the presence of Vankel at the end of the novel appears superficially added, one must not forget that what Henrik and Abel have in common is the despair they are going through. Prima facie, this despair connects the characters on a metaphorical level. But on the other hand, it also emphasises what has been coined as a fractal narrative. At the end of the novel, emotionally in pain, Henrik Vankel cuts his face and chest to feel physical pain. Abel, on the contrary, cuts Jared's face and chest, provoking him physical pain, in order to try to understand his emotions. That being said, pain and despair are interchangeable parts of a bigger fractal image.

Continuing the quotations from the Bible with his own words is another self-similar narrative technique Knausgård is using in the novel. In the King James' Bible, we have this paragraph explaining God's anger at Cain:

> "'The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand'. But Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, this day You have driven me from the face of the earth, and from Your face I will be hidden; I will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me'" (Gen, 4:10-13)

In Knausgård's book, the lines from the Bible are integrated in the text. The author presents us why God is showing himself to Cain and when that is happening. And everything takes the form of an unique narrative. No marks of quotation are to be found in the original text. However, in the English translations, the quotation marks make it easier for the reader to identify where the Bible stops and where Knausgård's text begins.

> "In his misery and boundless sorrow, he didn't notice that the light around him was getting weaker and weaker, and finally vanished altogether. On his knees at his brother's side he stroked his hair, kissed his cheeks, his brow, his lips. Lovely little Abel, he said, my lovely little brother, he said it over and over again, until he had no more tears, and rose trembling to his feet. Only then did he see that it was dark around him. And that a light now shone out over the field.
> There was something alluring about the light, all willpower seemed to disappear from him, without thinking he began to walk toward it. Out there Cain actually saw God and fell to his knees". (Knausgård, 2009a)

Ultimately, beyond the explicit rewritings of the biblical text there are many implicit rewritings as well, as for example, the landscapes or the presence of seagulls[12]. Knausgård places the biblical story in the Scandinavian landscape, because his geography is what Ruhl calls "autogeography". For the critic, the discrepancies between the detailed narrations and Knausgård's deny of any autobiographical element, suggests the fact that he is unconsciously reconstructing his autobiography by reconstructing its geography (Vøllo citing Ruhl, 2019, 137). This is the case for *A time for everything*, where the landscape presented is not the original Garden of Eden, but the forests of Norway.

[12] The symbol of seagulls appears often in *My Struggle.* "These shrunken angels, who have been condemned to screech and scavenge their way through life, are everywhere in My Struggle, as they are in our world, and yet because of this sort of omnipresence they blend unassumingly into the background". (Sabo, 2016, 113).

Conclusion

We have argued that Knausgård's novel, *A time for everything,* has a fractal narrative, iterating some symbols and elements, not only at a micro-level, but also as intertext with other novels. The constant interventions of the writer in the biblical story have not changed the theme of the book, but on the contrary helped us understand the despair, the death, the shame of the humans, their way of living in a world where God is "dead on the cross, and the angels [are] imprisoned here". Of course, more research is needed in order to investigate all the self-similar and non-linear aspects that appear in the book. But what remains certain, is that there is a time for everything, a time for humans, for their values, for their imperfect lives created after what seems to be an imperfect model. That time is now and Knausgård writes about it.

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