P.C. Jersild's *Ypsilon* (2012): Postmodernism, Metafiction, and Social Purpose

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Abstract
This article explores P.C. Jersild's metafictive maneuvers in his 2012 novel, *Ypsilon.* The fates of nine characters from nine of Jersild's novels are intertwined in this story which serves as a prequel to his novel, *En levande själ.* In addition, Jersild provides reflections on the rules of fiction and his feelings about being an author. Playful fabulation is, however, contrasted with clinically realistic descriptions of suffering and death. The text is playful, but the purpose is serious. The ethics of euthanasia are explored, and Jersild continues to interest himself in the essence of identity, self, and humanity, as well as the toll upon individuals who find themselves in the power of impersonal bureaucracy. Jersild writes postmodern prose with a social purpose.

Keywords
P.C. Jersild; postmodernism; metafiction; ethics in literature; euthanasia; identity; Ypsilon; En levande själ

DOI
10.54432/scand/PUDB6605

Introduction

P.C. Jersild is a highly respected Swedish novelist, who also happens to be a medical doctor, associated with the fields of psychiatry and social medicine. When he published *Ypsilon* in 2012, it was his thirty-third novel and the author himself was 77. The novel possesses many of the traits typical of Jersild's writing: 1) an interest in the dehumanization of individuals in the face of impersonal bureaucracy (Shideler 1984), 2) reflections over the essence of identity, self, and humanity (Shideler 1988, Shideler 2002, Webb 2003, Fechner-Smarsly 2004, Hermann 2004), and 3) a consideration of ethics in our scientific, secular world (Nordwall-Ehrlow 1983, Nordwall-Ehrlow 1987, Larsson 1987, Shideler 1988, Anselm 1990). *Ypsilon* is also a prequel to Jersild's 1980 novel, *En levande själ* (*A Living Soul* 1988), written 32 years after the fact and possessing as its title the "name" of the narrator: a human brain floating in a laboratory aquarium. *En levande själ* was skillfully translated in 1988 by Rika Lesser and has thus been the focus of much of the Jersild scholarship on identity written in English. The two novels were published in one volume in 2012. In addition to the above-mentioned themes, *Ypsilon* presents meditations on end-of-life scenarios, as well as a review of Jersild's own literary career. All of this takes place in what this article calls a metafictive hall of mirrors.[i]

Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as "a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality." (1984: 2) Metafiction itself is not new, since elements can be found as far back as *The Canterbury Tales* (1392) and *Don Quixote* (1605). Postmodernism has been particularly fond of this device as a tool for undermining dominant narratives. There are, of course, lengthy arguments about the superficiality versus social engagement of postmodernism (Jameson 1991 vs Hutcheon 1988, for example). Andrew Dean's more recent look at metafiction's ups and downs, characterizes these conflicts in essentially the same light (2021: 8). Metafiction is self-consciously aware of its status as a construction, rather than a piece of reality. Thus, metafiction is a tool for undermining authority, leaving it to the reader to determine what they think is true/real and what is not. Postmodern metafiction does not have to be socially engaged, but it can be.

Per Christian Jersild

The narrator of *Ypsilon* is an author by the name of P.C. Jersild, who seems to have much in common with the real P.C. Jersild, including being the author of the same books. Oddly enough, this P.C. Jersild seems to run into characters from his novels, nine of them, as he goes about his business. On the very first page there is a note from P.C. Jersild answering the question: "Varför två romaner i en volym?" (2012: 1, Why two novels in one volume?) Jersild writes that he became curious about the fate of some of the characters from his novels, and that *Ypsilon* is the story of their subsequent adventures. The two novels are being published together, because *En levande själ* takes up where *Ypsilon* ends. The note ends with the statement: "Inom romankonsten är allt möjligt" (2012: 1, In the art of the novel, anything is possible).[ii]

Perhaps one of the most jarring features of the novel is that despite its impossible premise (P.C. Jersild encounters fictional characters from his novels), the novel is written in a highly realistic mode. The locations of the novel, mostly around Stockholm, are recognizable and verifiable. Fellow authors are mentioned by name (Sven Delblanc, Jan Guillou, Lars Gyllensten….). The details of the end-of-life experiences are written with the sometimes excruciating detail that only a medical doctor could manage. Jersild, the physician, served for many years on Sweden's Medical Ethics Council (SMER, Statens medicinsk-etiska rådet), and helped to pen a report on Holland's euthanasia policies, a fact referred to in the novel (2012: 31). As recently as 2017, Jersild wrote an editorial for a medical journal (*Läkartidningen*) arguing in favor of euthanasia, but the meditations on end-of-life scenarios in this novel are much more ambiguous (Jersild 2017). Jersild, the author, seems to be leaving room for readers to draw their own ethical conclusions. Moreover, there are some fuzzy patches in this realistic presentation of P.C. Jersild's life as an author. Jersild's actual family, his wife, children, and grandchildren, are alluded to, but are merely shadows. The fictional characters from his novels have much more substance to them. That is where the reader's attention is focused. This is likely due to the fact that the novel is about Jersild's life as an author, not about his actual life.

Complicating this description is the fact that P[er] C[hristian] Jersild's father, Christian Jersild, is one of the nine characters Jersild treats in this novel. The treatment he receives is, however, not quite the same. Whereas the fictional characters all seem to be figures of flesh and blood, Christian Jersild only appears as a memory of Jersild's.

Late in the novel, when the characters he has met are gathered together, Christian Jersild is absent. In the second paragraph of the novel, Jersild is slumbering in a chair with a book on his knee. This is directly before the first fictional character, Reine Larsson, rings the doorbell. In part, this is something of a "through the looking glass" moment; is the entire novel only a dream? This dozing moment is mentioned again at the very end of *Ypsilon*, rather reinforcing that sense. (2012: 339) In Chapter 10, Jersild identifies the book he was reading at the moment: *Jag minns min ungdom* (1971; I Remember my Youth). One of the thirteen contributors to this anthology is Christian Jersild. His son, P.C. Jersild, had picked up the book again because "jag fått kritik för det porträtt av min far jag gav i den självbiografiska romanen *Fem hjärtan i en tändsticksask* (1989)" (2012: 68, I had received criticism for the portrait of my father that I gave in the autobiographical novel *Five Hearts in a Matchbox* [1989]). Jersild recalls the differences he had with his father, the foremost of which was that his father was deeply religious and Jersild is not. He reports his ailing father expressed his greatest sorrow: "Att du och jag inte får träffas i nästa liv." (2012: 69, That you and I may not meet in the next life.) Jersild notes that his father "drog en vinstlott" (2012: 70, won the lottery), when it came to the way he died. After delivering a thank-you speech to a Bible study group, Christian Jersild had a heart attack and died instantly. Although Christian Jersild does not resurrect from the dead in this novel where "anything can happen," it is clear that the struggles between father and son have left a strong imprint on P.C. Jersild's approach to ethics and his interest in what happens at death and afterward. Even so, Jersild is not a Christian, in more than one sense. In this anteroom to our literary hall of mirrors, we learn about the impact that both his father and mother (who was apparently an avid reader of literature) had on this author and his writings, but all in the context of texts and intertexts. Perhaps because Christian Jersild is not purely a product of P.C. Jersild's imagination, that is why this character is treated differently. Autobiographical fiction apparently places demands on veracity that other fiction does not.

Reine Larsson

The first of Jersild's fictional characters to ring his doorbell (or is it the second or third, if you count P.C. Jersild and the reference to Christian Jersild contained in the as-yet unnamed book on his lap?) is Reine Larsson from *Barnens ö* (1976; *Children's Island,* 1986). Later in the novel, it is pointed out to Jersild that he cannot expect most

readers to have read everything he has written (2012: 218). Anticipating this, Jersild supplies plot summaries of most of the relevant books. Once he recognizes who is at the door, he writes:

> Reine Larsson är huvudperson i min roman *Barnens ö* (1976). Han är son till en ensamstående mor, sjukvårdsbiträdet Harriet Larsson, och de två bor i en trea i Sollentuna. Sommaren 1975 är det tänkt att Reine skall till en barnkoloni, eftersom hans mor vill sommarjobba på lasarettet i Uddevalla. Reine, som är en utpräglat individualist, hoppar dock av på vägen till Barnens ö för att försöka klara sig på egen hand i storstaden. Sommarlovet tänker han ägna åt att lösa de stora frågorna om kärleken, livet och döden. (2012: 12)
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> (Reine Larsson is the main character in my novel *Children's Island* (1976). He is the son of a single mother, nursing assistant Harriet Larsson, and the two of them live in a three-room apartment in Sollentuna. During the summer of 1975, Reine is supposed to go to a summer camp, because his mother wants to work during the summer at a hospital in Uddevalla. Reine, who is a strong individualist, runs away on the way to Children's Island in order to manage by himself in the big city. He intends to dedicate his summer vacation to solving the big questions about love, life and death.)

Part of the difficulty Jersild has in recognizing Reine is that he is ten-years-old in the novel and the Reine who knocks on his door is a graduate student of philosophy. The current year is apparently 1989–90.

Reine and Jersild discuss a number of things, but one of them is literary theory and the nature of postmodernism. The political implications of postmodernism are placed front and center in this novel. The title of Reine's dissertation is: "Är reduktionismen en dekonstruktion?" (16, Is Reductionism a Deconstruction?) When Jersild says that sounds a little postmodern to him, Reine adamantly objects

to being called a postmodernist. Heidegger, Foucault, Nietzsche, and Hegel's names are bandied about and Heidegger's association with Nazism is invoked. These discussions mirror the actual discussions going on in academia during the 1980s, during which postmodernism became theorized, competing with and sometimes being confused with deconstruction. A perceived lack of political engagement is in large part what kept the concept of postmodernism from being fully embraced in Swedish academic circles (Brantly 2017, 9–10). Jersild of the 1980s and 1990s shared this reluctance, although he did not object to being characterized as having written historiographic metafiction in the form of *Geniernas återkomst* (1987; Return of the Geniuses) back in 1989. (Brantly 2017, 75n1) Before Reine's visit, Jersild tells us that he has just been at UCLA for a month as a writer in residence. UCLA happens to be where one of Jersild's most attentive scholars, Ross Shideler, is a Professor of Comparative Literature and Scandinavian, and where the single American dissertation on Jersild has been written under Shideler's supervision. Jersild apparently allows Reine to voice some of the ideas about his writing that had confronted Jersild at this time. A footnote to a 2002 essay by Shideler on, in part, *En levande själ* is instructive:

> Let me admit at the beginning that my modest attempt in this essay to put Jersild within a poststructuralist context might surprise him. In *Darwins ofullbordade* he is skeptical of Foucault and postmodernism's tendency to doubt everything (103). He fears that this kind of relativism, in the sciences for instance, runs the risk of undermining the differences between the trivial and serious (104). […] Additionally, in spite of Jersild's doubts, I think a Foucauldian perspective has much to offer in terms of Jersild's writing. (Shideler 2002: 143)

Moreover, in the words of Gregory Webb's 2003 dissertation, which also deals with, in part, *En levande själ*: "Central to the analysis will be the overriding thesis of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975), which investigates the history of the self in relation to social institutions of power." (Webb 2003: 15) In *Ypsilon*, Jersild seems to engage in reflections, not only about his own corpus of work, but also about what the scholars have said about it and the theories they have

employed. There is a tension between the seriousness of the scientific perspective and the inventive fabulation of the literary imagination, which is never clearly resolved. Nonetheless, this tension provides multiple opportunities for considering different perspectives on the recurring themes of both Jersild's works and this novel in particular.

Jersild does not see Reine again until almost a year later, and by then, Reine has been diagnosed as having diabetes. Before he goes to see Reine in the hospital cafeteria, he has been studying up and has read Fredric Jameson and even Jean-François Lyotard. Jersild expresses his understanding of postmodernism as follows:

> [P]ostmodernismen närmast står för en inriktning i konsten, och arkitekturen, som beteckningen på en stil. Medan postmoderniteten, som i sig omfattar postmodernismen, är en filosofi som antigen kunde ses som modernitetens motsats eller som en förnyelse av moderniteten. (2012: 24)
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> (Postmodernism basically represents a direction in art, and architecture, as the designation of a style. Whereas, postmodernity, of which postmodernism is a part, is a philosophy that either can be seen as modernity's opposite or as a renewal of modernity.)

Ironically, this clarifying sentiment is never actually expressed to Reine, who has other things on his mind because of his diagnosis. Diabetes will eventually be the end of young Reine, who travels to Romania with his girlfriend and is either given a bad bottle of insulin or the insulin is administered improperly. Reine's death occurs in 1992, (2012: 52) a sad end for a character that Jersild repeatedly marks as one of his favorite characters. Jersild speculates whether or not subconscious choices made by Reine contributed to his own death. It is possible that Reine's reluctance to submit to a life ruled by his disease resulted in choices that brought about his own death, a type of suicide.

Jersild's first interview with Reine is interrupted by an arranged phone call regarding a radio program about the phenomenon of novels written as a series, which seems to be all the rage in Sweden at the moment (the early 1990s). Jersild is to represent novelists who write

single novels about varied subjects. It is worth noting that the reader has now begun a novel which is the first in a series of two, even though the second novel was written 32 years before the first. Jersild comes upon what he calls a spectacular spontaneous idea:

> Om man ser en räcka solitära böcker som en kortlek, som en patiens, kan man strunta i kronologin, i vilken ordning böckerna utkommit. Man blandar och ger. Hur man än vänder på författarskap finns inte fler än ett par tre återkommande grundteman. Också ett bygge kan därför vecklas ut til en svit. Man kan pröva sig fram och placera om böckerna oberoende av utgivningsår fram och tillbaka tills man får fram en kedja och patiensen så att säga går ut. En bok som skrivits för tjugo år sedan kan då hamna sist, medan det nyaste verket kanske kan stå som första kort. (2012: 18-9)
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> (If one sees a string of individual books as a deck of cards, as a game of solitaire, one can forget about chronology, what order the books came out. One shuffles and deals. No matter how one looks at an author's works, there are not more than three repeating basic themes. Even a stand-alone work can therefore be developed into a series. One can experiment and rearrange the books regardless of their year of publication, back and forth, until one creates a chain and the game of solitaire, so to speak, works out. A book that was written twenty years ago can therefore come last, while the most recent work can be the first card.)

That seems to be just what Jersild is engaged in with *Ypsilon*, though the radio producer is not as impressed with the idea as Jersild seems to be. This is a self-conscious reflection over what Jersild is attempting in this present novel: to focus on themes, such as end-of-life decisions, issues of identity and self, and the plight of the individual in the face of inhuman bureaucracy. These are all issues that return again and again in Jersild's work. Moreover, chronology is

thrown out the window when it comes to the order in which we meet the characters from Jersild's novels. It simply does not matter.

Lennart Siljeberg

Time does make a jump before we meet the next character. The year is 2005 and Jersild has turned seventy. He and his wife decide to downsize and start looking for an apartment with assisted living possibilities. At one such place, he recognizes Lennart Siljeberg from *Grisjakten* (1968; The Pig Hunt). *Grisjakten* was made into a film in 1970, and Jersild notes that Lennart resembles the actor who played him (2012: 82). This is an odd reflective moment between literary fiction and film: Once the film has been made, of course the literary character will look like the actor who played him in the public imagination. Lennart is a bureaucrat who is appointed as bureau chief for the State Livestock Inspection Office (Statens boskapsinspektion or SBI). As such, Lennart is given orders to exterminate all the pigs on Gotland, without an explanation as to why. Jersild's own summary says:

> I varje fall kände Siljeberg inte till det bakomliggande motivet, bara målet. Utan att veta varför, samlar den nitiske byråchefen ett antal medarbetare omkring sig, lägger upp planer för utrotningen och beger sig därefter ut på fältet. […] Han för sin kamp på två fronter, mot regeringskansliet som snålar och schabblar med resurserna, och bönderna som vägrar följa direktiven. Han inrättar en central slaktanläggning för gasning av svin i Roma och låter särskilda patruller spåra upp de djur som gotlänningarna gömmer i markerna. […] Till slut återstår en enda skadad griskulting. […] I ett tillstånd av förvirring byter han plötsligt sida och gömmer sig med den lilla grisen i en kyrka. Vad som händer sedan framgår inte av berättelsen. (2012: 75-6)
>
> (In any case, Siljeberg did not know the underlying motive, only the goal. Without knowing why, the eager bureau chief gathers a

> number of co-workers around him, sets out the plans for the extermination and after that goes into the field. […] He wages his battle on two fronts, against the government offices who are miserly and waffle about the resources, and the farmers who refuse to follow the directive. He establishes a central slaughterhouse for the gassing of the pigs in Roma and has special patrols track down the animals that the Gotlanders are hiding in the country. […] At last, there is only one injured piglet. […] In a state of confusion, he suddenly changes sides and hides himself and the piglet in a church. What happens next is not part of the story.)

Jersild deliberately avoids making contact with Lennart once he recognizes him. Lennart is suffering from macular degeneration and it is easy for Jersild to sneak out without Lennart recognizing him. Jersild seems to have a bad conscience about this character.

Lennart Siljeberg and Jersild meet again in 2009, when Jersild is presenting his new novel, *Edens bakgård* (2009; Eden's Backyard) at a library. Jersild claims to have had Lennart as a patient, suffering from a nervous breakdown, in the late 1960s when Jersild worked for the State Personnel Office. Jersild did not feel like a particularly effective counselor, and eventually Lennart dropped out of government oversight by resigning his job in government. Subsequently, Lennart became a minister, specifically a hospital chaplain, who brought comfort to the ill and dying. Part of Jersild's bad conscience towards Lennart stems from the fact that he had "använt honom" (81, used him). Jersild had been inspired by Rudolph Hess' memoires of Auschwitz and placed the dutiful Lennart in a situation that went against his normally kind disposition and resulted in the breakdown. Jersild goes to visit Lennart a second time of his own volition. This time, Lennart has been diagnosed with cancer, multiple myeloma. Lennart has refused any aggressive treatments and requested only palliative care. Jersild wonders how that fits in with Lennart's religious beliefs. Lennart responds that life is a gift from God, but we are not obligated to have that gift sullied or made into a ruin. More than a gift, life is a loan we are entrusted to manage: "När vi inte klarar av det längre tycker jag att vi bör avsäga oss förvaltningen." (117, When we no longer can do it, then I think we ought to give up the management.) Through this character, Jersild is able to interrogate Christian views

about the end of life in a way that would not have been possible in discussions with his own father. Lennart briefly touches upon the complexities of the mind/body conundrum. What is the state of a person who is brain dead and hooked up to a respirator? Scientists see brain death as death, and even the law in this case allows the respirator to be turned off. But for Christians who believe in a soul and life after death, how can this be reconciled? Lennart does not have an easy answer, because as a hospital chaplain he has seen cases where it has seemed inhumane to maintain life at all costs. (2012: 116) The mind/body problem is, of course, highly relevant to Jersild's narrator in *En levande själ,* who is in some way, a mind without a body (though with a cerebral cortex). Jersild's discussions with Lennart give him the opportunity to explore religious views about the end of life, but he also metafictively worries about his responsibility towards characters for whom he has imagined a bleak outcome.

Ypsilon

Interwoven between Jersild's conversations with Lennart is a summary of *En levande själ,* which, after explaining that it is not really possible to choose a favorite book, Jersild then chooses as his favorite. The summary runs as follows:

> *En levande själ* är berättelsen om en uttagen ännu levande människohjärna som förvaras i kroppsvarm vätska i en glaslåda placerad i ett av den medicinsk-tekniska innovationsbranschens forskningslaboratorier. Det är hjärnan som själv berättar vad som sker framför det enda öga som, förutom själva hjärnan, finns kvar av det som en gång varit en hel människa. Hjärnan har inget minne av sitt tidigare liv. Minnet togs bort i flytten mellan det gamla vanliga livet och det nya, i glasburken. Hjärnan har därför till en början stora svårigheter att orientera sig i sin nya tillvaro, men begriper så småningom at han-hon-den-det befinner sig i företagets laboratorium i ett särskilt syfte, att få sin intelligens uppodlad. (2012: 63)

> (*A Living Soul* is the story of a still-living extracted human brain which is kept in body-temperature fluid in a glass tank placed in one of the medical-technical departments of innovation research laboratories. It is the brain itself that tells what happens before the only eye which, with the exception of the brain itself, is what is left of that which once upon a time was a whole person. The brain has no memory of its earlier life. The memory was taken away during the transition from the old normal life to the new one in the glass jar. Therefore, the brain in the beginning has great difficulties orienting itself in its new existence but understands eventually that he-she-they-it finds itself in the company's laboratory for a specific purpose, to have its intelligence enhanced.)

This summary is more interesting for its omissions than its information value. The type of laboratory that the brain ends up in is glossed over. That the lab is a private, for-profit enterprise is of central interest, in terms of what the research laboratory is allowed to do with human subjects. It is of further interest that this summary makes a great point of being non-gender specific, providing a string of pronouns to designate the brain. The novel itself (En levande själ) is fairly clear that the brain is male, or at least Ypsilon seems to be clear about it as he develops a strong crush on Emma, the lab assistant. Athough the novel certainly examines the nature of the self and how to answer the question, "Who am I?," it does not go far enough in examining the relationship of gender and race to a sense of identity. When confronted with a fellow brain in an aquarium, Ypsilon speculates that it is a "he" because of the shape of its ears (Jersild 1980, 161). Later Ypsilon wonders if the other brain might be from India or Mongolia because of its brown eye (Jersild 1980, 202). The omissions in this summary of Ypsilon are a deliberate authorial choice, as well as a slight obfuscation, in order to keep possibilities open in this "prequel.' After providing the summary, Jersild remarks that the most common question he gets about the novel is: How did the brain get into the aquarium and who was it before? "Den berättelsen återstår att skriva. Och den uppgiften kan i och för sig vem som helst ge sig in på, också jag" (2012: 63, That tale has yet to be written. And for all

that, anyone can take on the task, even me). The reader is in the midst of that tale, but some suspense remains in terms of the outcome.

Roland Rajamäki

The next character to cross Jersild's path is Roland Rajamäki from *Edens bakgård,* the novel that Jersild was presenting when he ran into Lennart Siljeberg. The summary of *Edens bakgård* is somewhat longer than the previous summaries, perhaps because it was part of the library presentation. Some of the highlights include:

> *Edens bakgård* utspelas i en nära framtid och handlar om en man i medelåldern, som hamnat utanför samhället. Han har varken arbete eller bostad. Till och med sitt personnummer har had råkat bli av med genom en förväxling av myndigheterna, vilket gjort honom till en icke-existens. Han har en brokig karriär bakom sig, bland annat har han försökt försörja sig som magiker, trollkarl, men inte klarat av tricken på grund av alkoholmisbruk. När boken börjar har han precis fått sin enda verkliga vän här i världen, schäfern Busen, stulen. (2012: 71–2)
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> (*Eden's Backyard* takes place in a near future and deals with a middle-aged man, who has landed outside of society. He has neither a job nor a place to live. He has even lost his social security number through a mix-up by the authorities, which has made him into a non-entity. He has a varied career behind him, among other things, he has tried to support himself as a magician, an illusionist, but not managed to do the trick because of his alcohol abuse. When the book begins, the only true friend he has in the world, the German shepherd Busen, has just been stolen.)

Roland is hired as a watchman by a company named Holodrom that provides virtual reality experiences. Business does not go all that well and they need to develop new software:

> För att bygga upp programmen behöver man en försökskanin, som kan skickas in i de ännu inte färdigställda datorimiterade världarna. Och det blir Roland Rajamäki som mer eller mindre tvingas ta på sig rollen som försöksperson. Han får testa så väl halsbrytande äventyr som avancerad pornografi och pedofili. (2012: 72)
>
> (In order to develop the programs, they need an experimental animal, that can be sent into the not-quite-complete computerized worlds. And it is Roland Rajamäki who more or less is forced to take on the role of experimental subject. He must test both strenuous adventures as well as advanced pornography and pedophilia.)

After a period when the company even enters the arena of religion, Roland is able to get away and takes the firm's guard dog, Balthazar, with him. He lives in a camping ground in a trailer and supports himself by performing as a magician at children's parties. Of course, the virtual reality described is yet another of *Ypsilon's* metafictive mirrors. What is real and what is not? At the same time, it is clear that Jersild is revisiting his interest in the ethics of exploiting living beings for profit, and Roland's role of experimental animal is not so very different from that of Ypsilon. Jersild himself is highlighting the recurring themes in his work.

In this case, Jersild seeks out Roland and goes to some effort to make contact. Once again, it seems that Jersild has a bad conscience towards one of his characters, and he comes to offer Roland 4,000 crowns, claiming that he earned it for work already completed. Roland is justifiably skeptical, but then uses Jersild to get himself released from police custody because Balthazar has been accused of aggressive behavior. On the way to the station, Jersild claims (to the reader? to himself? to the pages of the novel?) that he knows of a crime that Roland committed for which he has never been held accountable. According to Jersild, Roland and a drug dealer named Micke got drunk together and ended up throwing a Finnish man into the water where

he drowned, so murder or, at least, manslaughter. Roland was never brought up on charges because there were no witnesses except the equally culpable Micke. Jersild says that he suppressed the information about this crime, because Roland was the main character in his novel and should be more sympathetic. Speaking about the rules of fiction: "En huvudperson måste på något vis alltid sona sitt brott, antigen genom att bli avslöjad eller straffas genom ingrepp av ödet." (2012: 104, A main character must always in some way pay for their crimes, either through being exposed or punished by the intervention of fate.) Not long after, Jersild is notified that Roland has been found drowned and he is asked to come and identify the body. Jersild arrives during the autopsy, which is an example of the gritty realism of which this novel is capable. Although Jersild does identify Roland, it begs the question of whether the pile of organs, flesh, and slime actually is Roland, raising the familiar topic of identity. Jersild is able to piece together some details leading up to Roland's drowning. His dog, Balthazar, mysteriously disappeared and this made Roland turn to drink again. Roland is an alcoholic and his choice to drink in his fit of despair, causes his death. From various perspectives, Roland's death is an accident, suicide, or even poetic justice (with reference to the undiscovered murder). In any case, Balthazar returns and Jersild adopts him, and he lives for three more years, until the dog becomes too frail and must be put down. Ending the suffering of animals is a kindness, but with humans it is different, according to Swedish law.

Evy Beck

Aptly, with the fate of the dog Balthazar fresh in our minds, the next character in line is Evy Beck from *Djurdoktorn*. (1973; *The Animal Doctor*, 1988). Jersild says this about her:

> Hon är en drygt femtioårig kvinnlig veterinär som blivit arbetslös, men som får en ny chans att med lön från ett särskilt konto ta hand om försöksdjuren på en medicinsk högskola, i romanen kallad Alfred Nobels mediko-kirurgiska institut. Detta samtidigt som hon är ensam ansvarig för sin åttioårige svårt sjuke far, en elak gubbe och obotlig stalinist som ständigt klagar på henne, vilket ytterligare sänker hennes redan svaga självförtroende.

> Jag gjorde henne till huvudperson i min roman Djurdoktorn (1973) inte minst för att kunna diskutera förhållandet mellan människa och djur. (2012: 127–8)
>
> (She is a female veterinarian about fifty years old who has become unemployed, but who gets a new chance to, with funds from a specific account, take care of the experimental animals in a medical school, in the novel called Alfred Nobel's Medical-Surgical Institute. At the same time, she is the sole person responsible for her eighty-year-old severely ill father, a nasty old man and an incurable Stalinist who constantly complains about her, which further lowers her already weak self-esteem.
>
> I made her into the protagonist in my novel *The Animal Doctor* (1973), not least so I could discuss the relationship between humans and animals.)

The ethical treatment of animals in the research labs of industry is a theme which also is relevant to *En levande själ.* Evy tries to do her best for the animals, but is ultimately overwhelmed by a bureaucracy that puts profits before all else. After the events in *Djurdoktorn*, we learn that Evy found happiness in a same-sex relationship with a woman named Marga Roos. Evy's illegitimate son Erik has become a successful economist, and eventually, an economic minister for the Moderates, a somewhat right-leaning Swedish political party. Sadly, Evy develops Alzheimers and must be put into a care home, where she dies from a domestic accident brought on by her condition. Evy, in essence, becomes the reverse of Ypsilon, a body without a mind, something Jersild underscores at her funeral when he wonders about the grief of her partner: "Hur ser sorgen ut efter den som likt Evy dör två gånger, först som person, sedan som kropp?" (2012: 176, What does grief look like for someone who like Evy dies twice, first as a person, then as a body?)

Some of the most patently metafictive moments happen during conversations with Evy's son Erik. The fictional Erik is a reader who does not seem to be able to keep reality and fiction separated. During their first conversation, Erik challenges Jersild with regard to the picture of the future he painted in *Djurdoktorn*. The book came out in

1973, but events are supposed to be taking place in 1988-9. Did he get it right? This causes Jersild to reflect "Inget åldras så snabbt som framtidsskildringar." (135, Nothing ages as fast as depictions of the future.) Erik identifies the Nobel Institute with the Karolinska Institute, which Jersild denies, claiming it is a creation of his fantasy. Erik wants to take the fiction as reality, criticizing Jersild for getting the geography wrong. He also points out that Jersild did not foresee the fall of the Soviet Union or the development of computer technology. Jersild himself regrets not having predicted the Aids epidemic. Erik proves not to be a terribly sympathetic critic. Many of his criticisms might also be said to apply to *En levande själ*, which also takes place in a near future. In the case of that particular novel, one could argue that Jersild failed to predict the development of stem cells (though he comes close). This conversation is an acknowledgement that Jersild's attempts to predict the future are inevitably flawed.

Once Erik Beck becomes a government minister, he asks Jersild to leave his mother alone. He does not want Jersild to write about her and accuses him of using his mother as an experimental animal: "I romanen *Djurdoktorn* är hon veterinär. Och vad har du gjort henne till nu: ett djur!" (2012: 158, In the novel, *The Animal Doctor*, she is a veterinarian. And what have you made her into now: an animal!). Jersild is shocked by the accusation. It turns out that Erik has read quite a few of Jersild's novels: *Barnens ö, Babels hus* (1978; *The House of Babel*, 1987)*, En levande själ, Efter floden* (1982; *After the Flood*, 1982)*,* and *Geniernas återkomst*. Erik then hurls out the accusation:

> – Där sitter du bakom din dator och tittar på medans det går åt helvete för dina figurer. Kall som en fisk. Bryr du dig verkligen om oss människor? Först lurar du läsaren att identifiera sig med romanens, vad heter det på svenska, protagonist?
>
> – Huvudperson.
>
> – Och sedan går det jävligt illa för den som man som läsare vill att det skall gå bra för. Man känner sig snopen, eller, vad skall jag säga, lurad, sårad? Du har hela tiden suttit med alla korten på hand. Men du döljer dem i det längsta. Håller korten tätt intill kroppen för att kunna ta ut

> effekten. Man kan undra om du inte i själva verket är en jävla sadist! (2012: 158–9)
>
> (– There you sit behind your computer and watch while everything goes to hell for your characters. Cold as a fish. Do you really care about us people? First, you trick the reader into identifying with the novel's – what is it called in Swedish- protagonist?"
>
> – Main character.
>
> – And then it goes damned terribly for the person that the reader wants it to go well for. One feels surprised, or, what should I say, deceived, hurt? The whole time you have sat with your cards close to your chest in order to create the effect. One can ask if you are not actually a damned sadist!)

Jersild excuses himself by saying that it is the author's privilege to know more than the reader, but this response side-steps his responsibility for what happens to his characters. It does not make Erik like him any better. Erik then worries that his own finance department might end up in a book, but Jersild responds laconically: "Jag har redan skrivit två byråkratsatirer. Och tappat lusten för fler. Dikten kan i alla fall aldrig slå verkligheten." (2012: 159, I have already written two bureaucracy satires. And I have lost the desire for more. Fiction can, in any case, never beat reality.)

Despite Jersild taking shelter behind the rules of fiction, the accusation seems to strike home nonetheless. During Evy's funeral, Jersild begins thinking of his curiosity about the fate of his own characters as something like a scientific study. Then comes the thought: "Om jag trott på Gud kunde jag braverat med att jag satt mig i Guds ställe. För var det inte precis det han-om han nu fanns- höll på med: att dela ut livvsförlopp, och livsslut." (2012: 174, If I believed in God, I could boast that I had put myself in God's place. Because was not that exactly what he-if he exists-is engaged in: dealing out the course of a life, and the end of life.) Jersild then speculates about what role we each play in our ultimate end: What are the life choices we make that precipitate it? Then Jersild reverts to chance and the metaphor of a lottery: "Det finns inget mer uttjatat men samtidigt

relevantare påstående än att livet är ett lotteri." (2012: 174, There is nothing more worn out, but at the same time more relevant, than that life is a lottery.) We recall that Jersild claimed his own father had won the lottery when he died suddenly of a heart attack. Eventually comes the admission: "Men till skillnad från i verkligheten är det ingen slump vem som dör av vad i en roman. Det är resultatet av ett medvetet val. […] Att skriva är att välja." (2012: 175, But unlike in reality it is not chance that determines what one dies of in a novel. It is the result of a conscious choice. […] To write is to choose.) There could well be a reason why Jersild's characters might be annoyed with him. The guilty conscience that Jersild occasionally feels towards his characters is warranted by the fact that everything that happens in his novels is the choice of the author, who in the realm of fiction, plays God.

Rolf Nylander

Before Evy's funeral, Jersild is spontaneously contacted by Rolf Nylander from *Vi ses i Song My* (1970; We'll Meet in My Lai). Of that novel, Jersild writes:

> Rolf Nylander är jagberättaren i min kortroman *Vi ses i Song My* (1970). När berättelsen börjar är han stabspsykolog i Försvarsstaben och har just samlat kring sig ett specialistteam bestående av en psykiater, en informationsman, en officer, en sjuksköterska och en ombudsman från LO. Dessa personer bildar Personaladministrativa försökssektionen (PAFS) med uppgift att införa gräsrotsdemokrati i den svenska krigsmakten. PAFS första uppgift blir att med demokratiska metoder kväsa ett myteri inom ett ingenjörsförband i övre Norrland. Genom skickligt manipulerande löser gruppen sin uppgift trots motstånd från de konservativa militärarna, som är vana vid handfastare tag och inte inser de nya metodernas effektivitet. Efter fullgjort uppdrag försvann Rolf Nylander ur mitt synfält. (2012: 160)
>
> (Rolf Nylander is the first-person narrator in my short novel, *We'll Meet in My Lai* (1970). When the

> tale begins, he is a staff psychologist in the Department of Defense and has just gathered around himself a specialist team consisting of psychiatrists, an information man, an officer, a nurse, and an ombud from LO. These people make up the Personnel Administration Experimental Section (PAES) with the mission of introducing grassroots democracy to the Swedish military. PAES' first assignment is, with democratic methods, to quell a mutiny within a band of engineers in Upper Norrland. Through clever manipulations, the group completes its task despite resistance from the conservative military, which is used to more direct methods and does not see the effectiveness of the new methods. After completing his mission, Rolf Nylander disappeared from my view.)

Rolf Nylander and Jersild meet for lunch. Rolf claims that he used to be a government spy and about forty years in the past, kept Jersild out of trouble when he was writing critical things about the defense minister. Jersild is somewhat surprised by this, and perhaps not convinced. Rolf's real purpose is to get medical advice from Jersild. He has been diagnosed with prostate cancer and wants Jersild to advise him about what course of treatment he should follow. Jersild refuses to do so, since he is not a specialist and, seemingly, does not want the responsibility of giving Rolf medical advice. Rolf wants to meet with Jersild again, but Jersild is reluctant. Jersild considers the differences and similarities between the two of them, particularly when it comes to social class. Rolf comes from a privileged background and is confident and extroverted, whereas Jersild did not grow up with the same advantages and feels shy and introverted. Yet, they still have some things in common. Jersild reflects: "Han var en del av mig som varje romanfigur är en uppsvälld bit av sin glasblåsare till författare." (2012: 179, He was a part of me just as every novel character is a puffed up piece of their glass blower of an author.) When Rolf later calls to tell him that he has chosen a "wait and see" course of action, Jersild does not object. This turns out to have been the wrong choice, the prostrate cancer turns deadly, and Rolf blames Jersild for giving him bad advice. Towards his other characters, Jersild occasionally feels guilty, but in this case he feels unjustly accused. The personal

antipathy Jersild feels towards Rolf has affected his willingness to get involved in his medical treatment. The medical judgement of physicians can be affected by likes and dislikes. Nevertheless, Jersild the author has made a choice.

Agneta Sjödin-Åhslund

At a reception for Craig Venter, a celebrity geneticist, Jersild runs into Joakim Sjödin, who questions Jersild about applying for research money from a fund with which Jersild is involved. Joakim turns out to be the son of Agneta Sjödin-Åhslund from *En gammal kärlek* (1995; An Old Love) and Jersild learns that she is suffering from multiple sclerosis. In the novel, she is a fifty-five-year-old physician in private practice. When she was younger, she left her first love, Andres Härmund, in order to marry someone she met in medical school. Nine years and two children later, Agneta is herself abandoned. She remarries and her second husband dies five years later in a traffic accident. Andres Härmund appears in her waiting room thirty-five years after their split. The relationship is rekindled and he is accepted by her two children, who are now adults. Andres discovers that he is very sick and Agnete worries if that is why he sought her out. Quite the opposite, Andres does not want her involved in his health consultations. When he learns that he has an inoperable tumor, he asks Agnete to help him die if his suffering is too great. She is thrown into a great struggle with her conscience. She consults her children:

> Marika, själv läkare som sin mor, är starkt emot, medan den yngre Joakim, filosofistudenten, är för. Han anser att varje människa har rätt att påverka och välja sitt eget döende. (2012: 184)
>
> (Marika, herself a doctor like her mother, is strongly against, whereas the younger Joakim, the philosophy student, is in favor. He thinks that every person has the right to affect and choose their own death.)

Agnete has difficulty deciding and Andres gets worse and worse.

> Så slutligen, när hon inte längre orkar se honom lida, beslutar hon sig. Hon skaffar hem de preparat som behövs och förbereder sig – men tvekar igen.
>
> Under tiden försvinner Andres Härmand. Hans bil står inte på sin vanliga ruta i p-garaget. Agneta är helt säker på att han åkt iväg någonstans för att ta sitt liv. Man söker honom på alla tänkbara ställen. Först efter fyra dygn hittas han död i sin bil; han hade inte kört långt, bara till en annan del av det stora garaget. Den rättsmedicinska undersökningen visar att han dött av en hjärtinfarkt. Därmed är hon dock inte löst från sitt etiska dilemma-trots att slumpen kom emellan hade hon ju faktiskt varit beredd att ge honom dödshjälp. (2012: 184–5)
>
> (So finally, when she no longer can bear to see him suffer, she decides. She takes home the medications that are needed and prepares herself – but hesitates again.
>
> In the meantime, Andres Härmand disappears. His car is not in its usual space in the parking garage. Agnete is certain that he has gone somewhere to take his own life. They search everywhere for him. After four days he is finally found dead in his car; he had not driven far, only to another part of the big garage. The forensic medical examination shows that he died of a heart attack. With that, however, she is not freed from her ethical dilemma—even though chance intervened, she had actually been prepared to assist with his death.)

This novel shows that Jersild has been interested in the ethics of euthanasia for quite some time, in his fiction as well as his life as a physician. When Jersild goes to visit Agnete, he is able to discuss her condition in detail with this fellow doctor. It is a disease that progresses slowly and will sooner or later kill you. After his cordial visit

with Agnete, Jersild reminisces about some rather unpleasant cases of multiple sclerosis he has known. Jersild clearly has respect for Agnete and is more keen to maintain contact than she is. This is an interesting reversal of the attitudes he demonstrated towards Rolf.

Jersild seems eager to see her again, but is put off for a half a year by Agnete. When he learns that she is at a health spa on Gran Canaria, he flies there unannounced. Agnete resents his sudden appearance and takes the offensive, asking him about his health: How goes the urination? Are you too old to write? She says that she had a writer as a patient:

> Han påstod att problemet var att han allt mer tvingades konkurrera inte med sina generationskamrater som han gjort i decennier utan med sig själv. Varje dag när han gick igenom det han fått ner på papper insåg han att han var bättre för tjugo år sedan. Om han då kunnat skriva i fyrfärg, som han uttryckte det, blev allt han numera skrev bara svartvitt. (2012: 211)
>
> (He maintained that the problem was that he was forced, more and more, to compete, not with his contemporaries as he had done for decades, but with himself. Every day when he went through what he had gotten down on paper he realized that he was better twenty years ago. If he had been able to write in multicolor then, as he expressed it, now, all he wrote was merely black and white.)

This is a significant anxiety to project upon the aging author. Jersild wants to hear more about Andres, but Agnete claims to have forgotten. Jersild's interest comes across as almost ghoulish, and he decides not to press the issue, since he would risk not being able to contact her again. Jersild clearly wants to go over Agnete's reasons for agreeing to assist in her lover's suicide, but she is not interested, since the experience was traumatic, even though she was spared by fate (or more accurately, authorial choices) from committing the actual deed.

Agnete's condition continues to worsen, and the next time Jersild is able to see her, she is in a private nursing home. He tries to entertain

her by speaking of his "project": Seeking out "people" that he was once close to, but then had not thought about or even tried to forget. (2012: 217) It is interesting that the project is described as dealing with people, not characters from his novels, in this formulation. Originally, he had wanted a representative group, as though this were some sort of scientific study. He gives up on that idea:

> Mina romaner bygger inte på att vara representativa. De flesta har en manlig huvudperson av det enkla skälet att jag är man. […] Urvalet är därför som man säger behäftat med en rejäl "bias". Vilket jag borde tänkt på i början av författarbanan; nu är det för sent. (2012: 217)
>
> (My novels are not built upon being representative. Most of them have a male protagonist for the simple reason that I am a man. […] The selection is therefore, as one says, marked by a real "bias." Which I should have thought of at the beginning of my authorial career; now it is too late.)

Agnete, as a scientific colleague and a potential subject of the study does not like it: "Hon var inte så förtjust i själva grundidén, att en författare intervjuar sina egna roman-gestalter, något som hon upplevde som en sorts mental inavel." (2012: 218, She was not so keen on the basic idea itself, that an author interviews his own novel characters, something she felt was some kind of mental incest.) She asks him why he thinks that people would be interested in reading about horrible deaths. Jersild responds:

> Ständigt predikas det att litteraturens två främsta motiv är kärleken och döden. Kärleken attraherar, döden repellerar. Kärleken besjungs i alla tänkbara tonarter. För att besjunga döden måste den uppenbarligen först förfalskas. Hur många ocensurerade och oförblommerade

> dödsskildringar finnns det egentligen i romanliteraturen? Inte många. (2012: 218)
>
> (It is always being preached that the two main themes in literature are love and death. Love attracts, death repels. Love is sung about in all possible keys. In order to sing about death, it must apparently be falsified. How many uncensured and unvarnished death scenes are there actually in novels? Not many.)

Agnete asks him bluntly what sort of end he has in mind for her. He puts the question back to her and she explains that she wants to be a positive example for her grandchildren. She does not want to take the easy way out, so she will not ask him to assist her to die. Jersild has indicated that he might be willing to do so. She hopes to remain alive, even if it is difficult, for as long as she can, so that she can be there for her family. Later we learn that Agnete had prepared an advanced directive, stating she does not want treatment for heart failure or infections. She develops pneumonia and passes away peacefully after two days. Her choices accord her a dignified death, even though euthanasia has been rejected. It seems that Jersild the author, although he claims he did not know about the advanced directive, accorded Agnete the best version of the death she requested. Agnete's example almost argues against euthanasia as a choice.

Bernt Svensson

The last of the characters that Jersild adds to his "study" is Bernt Svensson, the son of the main character in *Babels hus* (1978; *House of Babel,* 1987), Primus Svensson. The summary of *Babels hus* reads as follows:

> *Babels hus* (1978) är berättelsen om den 76-årige pensionären Primus Svenssons två vårdtillfällen på ett nybyggt storsjukhus i södra Stockholm, kallat Enskede sjukhus. Första gången läggs han in akut för hjärtinfarkt, tillfrisknar så småningom och skrivs ut – bara för att en kort tid senare

> återintas för gulsot. Läkarna finner att Primus lider av en cancertumör i bukspottkörteln som inte går att operera, och efter en tid avlider han i sin sjukdom. Förutom av vara en polyfon berättelse om det stora sjukhuset och alla dem som arbetar där, handlar romanen inte minst om den spända relationen mellan den sjuke Primus och hans ende son, läkemedelskonsulenten Bernt Svensson. (2012: 201)
>
> (*House of Babel* (1978) is the story of the 76-year-old retiree Primus Svensson's two stays at a newly built large hospital in south Stockholm, called Enskede Hospital. The first time, he is admitted to emergency for a heart attack, eventually gets better and is released-only to be readmitted a short time later for jaundice. The doctors discover that Primus is suffering from a cancerous tumor in his pancreas that is inoperable, and after a while he dies of his illness. In addition to being a polyphonic tale of the large hospital and all those who work there, the novel deals not the least with the tense relationship between the sick Primus and his only son, the pharmaceutical consultant, Bernt Svensson.)

Jersild feels he has already told the story of Primus Svensson's death, so does not want to resurrect him and go over it all again. Instead, he chooses to find out what happened to the son. Bernt was a traveling salesman for a pharmaceutical company, Luna Läkemedel, but eventually the job, with its enormous expense account, led to debilitating alcoholism for Bernt and he had to retire. Bernt wants to get back at his employers and tries to cut into their profits by collecting unused medications and redistributing them. This scheme does not work out for a number of reasons, including the involvement of drug dealers.

In between visits to Agnete, Jersild spots a familiar face on the television, and it turns out to be Bernt, almost unrecognizable due to a ponytail and beard. Bernt has become a health guru, of sorts, running a health retreat in an old manor house in Närke in south central

Sweden. The foundation of the health retreat is water and meditation, not any form of medicine. Jersild speculates that this is yet another way of trying to get revenge upon the pharmaceutical industry. Jersild visits the retreat, and it appears to be successful, though Jersild is clearly skeptical about the health benefits promised. A year and a half later, Jersild wants to write an article about alternative medicine and discovers that Bernt has sold the property to a Bible school for 38 million crowns. Jersild finds him in a nice apartment in Stockholm, but he is a changed man. He has been diagnosed with mesothelioma, which apparently was caused by a job in his youth, during which he came into contact with asbestos. At first, Bernt asks Jersild to help him establish a fund to support research. Then, he wants to sue the company that dealt in asbestos, but it no longer exists. Bernt's prognosis is not good and he becomes more and more ill. Eventually, he asks Jersild to assist with his suicide. Although Jersild favors, in principle, the idea of assisted suicide, he is annoyed to have the request put to him, since it is illegal in Sweden and entails risks for him personally and professionally. In the abstract, Jersild favors euthanasia, but is not willing, initially, to risk his own freedom for a person he does not find particularly appealing. Personal likes and dislikes play a role. Bernt tries to end his own life, but is unsuccessful. Jersild fantasizes a scenario whereby he follows all the rules, tries to support Bernt to the end, but then can bear it no longer and escapes on a charter trip to Florida. When placed in a situation where he might actually perform euthanasia, Jersild is terrified. Eventually, Jersild decides to act upon his principles. Jersild volunteers to move into Bernt's apartment and monitor his sedation, so that he can die at home. Jersild helps Bernt with his will, then moves out. He returns as Bernt's two caregivers are leaving. Jersild sedates Bernt, removes his oxygen lines, and places a plastic bag over his head. Bernt dies quickly and without discomfort. Jersild replaces the oxygen lines, takes the plastic bag, and leaves. That is the end of Part I of *Ypsilon*.

Study or Trial?

At the beginning of Part II (which is considerably shorter than Part I), Jersild embarks upon one of the ferries to Finland, in order to participate in "Book Day at Sea." He is reluctant to be part of a panel with younger writers, who are at ease performing in public. He fortifies himself with a mini bottle of wine and is led to a conference room. At first, he thinks he has been taken to the wrong place, and then he recognizes that it is a gathering of his characters as they appeared in

the novels he wrote. That means Reine Larsson is once more ten years old, for example. Eight faces stare at him: Reine Larsson, Lennart Siljeberg, Roland Rajamäki, Evy Beck, Rolf Nylander, Agneta Sjödin-Åhslund, Bernt Svensson, and one more. Only his father, Christian Jersild is not present. The eighth character is Primus Svensson, father to Bernt. Jersild is not sure why they are all there. Rolf Nylander reluctantly agrees to take minutes. The characters introduce themselves to each other, but when they get to Jersild they ask him to leave the room for a while.

Jersild returns to his cabin and falls asleep, but is awakened by a knock on the door. This time he is led to the ship's smörgåsbord restaurant, where all the characters are gathered once more, except for Primus Svensson and Christian Jersild. This time they are closer to the age at which they died. Jersild wonders if he is in some Swedenborgian life after death, or perhaps in the Author's Heaven as he imagined it in his novel, *Holgerssons* (1991):

> I Författarnas Himmel samlas alla döda skriftställare var afton till middag. De mest kända, de som räknas upp i kanon – Tolstoj, Balzac, Joyce, Proust, Woolf, Mann – sitter i den övre avdelningen. De mindre berömda, varav flertalet svenskar, får hålla till godo med ölstugan. (2012: 288)
>
> (In the Author's Heaven, all the dead authors gather for dinner every evening. The most famous, those who are counted part of the canon – Tolstoy, Balzac, Joyce, Proust, Woolf, Mann – sit in the upper story. Those less famous, among which are most Swedes, have to make do with the beer cellar.)

Despite the odd location, the meeting is once more called to order, and Rolf continues taking minutes. The characters take turns describing how it felt to die. This meeting becomes a strange inversion of a thought experiment by American political philosopher, John Rawls, which was described earlier in the novel (2012: 67). The original thought experiment is described in Rawls' book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), according to Jersild. In that thought experiment, a group of

not-yet-born people meet to discuss the sort of world they would like to be born into. In the case of Jersild's "follow-up study" (2012: 174), seven dead people describe their experience of leaving the world. Several of the subjects claim that they do not quite remember…they were dying. Rolf Nylander goes on at length about the miseries of his death, clearly resenting Jersild for it. Bernt Svensson smiles and thanks Jersild for his assistance, which evidently prevented him from undue suffering. The group migrates to the whiskey bar, where the assembled characters use a lottery program to determine what Jersild's cause of death will be. Of course, they do not tell him what it will be, and he is grateful. The tables are turned. Jersild has chosen the end for each of these characters, and now they take a hand in choosing his. This gathering has more the feeling of a trial than a study.

Guilty as Charged

In the next chapter, Jersild is arrested and charged with the murder of Bernt Svensson. Jersild does not resist and confesses. We are now solidly on fictional ground: P.C. Jersild, the author and physician, has never been arrested or spent time in jail. This Jersild is held for six months in an old and rather dire prison, but once he is formally found guilty, he is transferred to a minimum security prison that seems as comfortable as such a place can be. Jersild begins to notice the first symptoms of the disease that will take him, ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease (2012: 323). He keeps the information to himself for as long as possible. Jersild befriends a young inmate named Gunnar, who wonders how the police got wise to him. Jersild asks him to guess:

> Jag försäkrade att det inte handlade om någon helt ny i berättelsen tidigare icke nämnd person. Det tillåter inte dramaturgin. Mördaren, eller den som avslöjar gärningsmannen måste ha skymtat tidigt i berättelsen. Allt annat är fusk. (2012: 332)
>
> (I assured him that it was not a matter of some completely new person not yet mentioned in the story. The dramaturgy does not allow it. The murderer, or the one who reveals the criminal, has to have been glimpsed early in the story. Anything else is cheating.)

The classic rules of the mystery novel seem to prevail. Jersild was pointed out as the murderer by none other than Bernt Svensson himself, who left a note on his computer claiming to fear that Jersild might murder him. A final act of revenge by a petty soul. Further, this hardly seems like a ringing endorsement for euthanasia, especially as long as it remains illegal. Bernt's suffering was ended, but the price paid by Jersild is enormous.

Jersild's symptoms progress. As a sort of close parentheses, Jersild notes: "Jag somnade lätt med boken i knäet precis som jag gjort i början på denna berättlese strax innan Reine ringde på min dörr." (2012: 339, I fell lightly asleep with the book on my knee just I had done in the beginning of this story just before Reine rang my doorbell.) If the first nap brought us into a metafictive realm where reality and fiction are intertwined, the second nap lands us solidly in a fictive world. In order to stay awake in the evening, Jersild surfs the net. He runs across a company called Biochine: "Det verkade bekant på något vis—hade jag inte stött på det tidigare?" (2012: 340; It seemed familiar somehow—had I not come across it before?) This professed ignorance is an "Aha!" moment for anyone familiar with *En levande själ.* Biochine is the company that controls Ypsilon, the brain in the aquarium. The name of the company was strategically vague in the description of *En levande själ* earlier in the novel (2012: 62). In a chronologically impossible somersault, we now know who Ypsilon was before he awoke in the lab: P.C. Jersild (2012: 63). With an illegible signature, Jersild signs the consent form familiar to the readers of *En levande själ,* in which he gives Biochine custody of "min storhjärna, lillhjärna och förlängda märg med vidhängande hjärnnerver" (2012: 344; "my cerebrum, cerebellum, brain stem and all cerebral nerves appended thereto," Jersild 1988, 15) Chapter 11 describes an out-of-body experience, during which Jersild is apparently observing the surgery to remove his brain. The last three chapters of *Ypsilon* exactly replicate the beginning of *En levande själ.* It is a truism of narrative study that one should never confuse the author with the narrator: Scarcely ever has this been more true and more confusing. Jersild's fate as Ypsilon is more terrible than any he imagined for his other characters. What little that remains of his humanity will be stripped away for the sake of profit. When he is no longer profitable, he is terminated. He is not suffering, so this is not euthanasia. He is simply discarded.

Conclusion

Although P.C. Jersild may be a reluctant postmodernist, metafiction is clearly his stock in trade. The "metafictive hall of mirrors" reflects nine of Jersilds's novels in a dizzying spectacle that playfully results in the author himself becoming the character he created in *En levande själ.* At the same time, Jersild provides further reflections on the rules of fiction and his feelings about being an author. Playful fabulation is, however, contrasted with clinically realistic descriptions of suffering and death. The text may be playful, but the purpose is serious. The ethics of euthanasia are explored, but readers must reach their own conclusions. Jersild continues to interest himself in the essence of identity, self, and humanity, as well as the toll upon individuals who find themselves in the power of impersonal bureaucracy. Jersild writes postmodern prose with a social purpose.

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i Ola Larsmo in “Nedför spiralen: Om P. C. Jersilds berättarteknik.” (1986; Down the Spiral: On P. C. Jersild’s Narrative Technique) compares Jersild’s narrative technique in a few of the books referenced in *Ypsilon* to a spiral. In the case of *Ypsilon*, one might say that there are several intertwining spirals, so much so, that perhaps a model of a tornado might express it. For my purposes, I prefer the metaphor of a hall of mirrors, in order to mine the many nuances of the terms “reflection” and “self-reflection.”

ii All translations from Swedish are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Since *Ypsilon* has not yet been translated to English, I find it necessary to cite and translate a number of passages, so that the English-speaking reader might be able to follow the argument.