

CHAPTER 6: A TALE TOLD BY A ~~MODERNIST~~ POSTMODERNIST: JAN KJÆRSTAD'S  
*HOMO FALSUS*

How could a Javanese Buddhist temple, Greta Garbo, and a salad fetish be integral to understanding a novel set in contemporary Oslo? Is it *more* likely that three men are missing because they were murdered or because they vanished into thin air during sexual intercourse? Jan Kjærstad explains that while “Den klassiske fysiker ville si: Hvis to beskrivelser utelukker hverandre gjensidig, så må minst én av dem være feil. Bohr sa: Begge er nødvendige for en full forståelse” [The classical physicist would say, “If two descriptions are mutually exclusive, then at least one of them must be wrong.” Bohr said, “Both are necessary for a full understanding”] (226). While Bohr was referring to the fact that light displays properties of both a wave and particles, Kjærstad is talking about the growing trend of novels in which there are dual narratives that are mutually exclusive and none the less both necessary to understand the text. Jan Kjærstad’s *Homo falsus eller det perfekte mord* [*Homo falsus or the Perfect Murder*](1984) is just such a text. Although seemingly mutually exclusive, the three men are both murdered and vanish into thin air during sex. Both readings are necessary for a full understanding of the text.

This chapter contains four sections. In the first, I provide an overview of the extant scholarship on *Homo falsus*. In the second, I demonstrate that *Homo falsus* is indeed a postmodernist text and discuss why some people have trouble recognizing this fact. In the third and fourth sections I contribute two original complementary readings of the text, showing in the first that the text’s two narrators, male and female, can be read as a single postmodern individual and in the second that the text’s two narrators can be read as aspects of a single individual telling two versions, one modernist and one postmodernist, of one story.

#### BACKGROUND, EXTANT SCHOLARSHIP

In Norway, Kjærstad has consistently received widely varying critical attention for his work, ranging from excessive praise to disparagement for being too difficult, elitist, or cerebral, for including too much low culture and sex in his books, and for selling out by allowing his books to be sold as book club selections. This has been balanced by Kjærstad’s extremely positive critical reception especially in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Germany. In fact, when the Norwegian committee failed to nominate Kjærstad’s *Oppdageren* for the Nordisk Råd’s literature prize in 2000 a scandal erupted as Danish critics threatened to nominate the text themselves.

Kjærstad won the prize the following year. In addition, he has received the Henrik Steffens prize (1998), the Aschehoug prize (1993), and the Norsk Litteraturkritikerlag’s prize (1984). In fact, Øystein Rottem ranks Kjærstad in first place, tied with Jon Fosse, as the most important Norwegian author of the

1980s. Regardless of the acclaim or disparagement, Kjærstad's books continue to sell well, be widely discussed in Norwegian media of all types, and appear on a variety of university reading lists, and in an ever growing list of dissertations and scholarly treatises. A film version of *Homo Falsus* came out in 1992.

To date, three dissertations focus explicitly *Homo falsus*. Magnus Persson includes a chapter on the formal and thematic integration of computer technology in the text and Jon Arvid Haugen covers Kjærstad's use of lies. Eli Flatekval touches on a large number of topics, holding that the way to understand *Homo falsus*'s compositional riddle is to submerge herself into its details. Her dissertation provides a number of insights, focusing primarily on the character of Greta and the tension between the desire for a single, overall understanding and the fear of the totality of such an understanding. I agree with many of Flatekval's points, but will also refute a number of her claims.

As for more extensive, published secondary resources, there are two: Ingeborg Kongslien's "Mennesket i tekst og teori" and Per Thomas Andersen's "Repetisjonens funksjon i Jan Kjærstads *Homo falsus*." Kongslien situates the text in a discussion of metafiction and postmodernism; her thesis is that Kjærstad expresses what lies at the intersection between fragmentation and construction, between deconstruction and reconstruction (107). Kongslien postulates that Kjærstad comments on and criticizes contemporary society by presenting a "storkonstruksjon" [grand construction] and that the book's metafictional aspects allow the reader to reconstruct a system of meaning. She does not know whether the reader understands that there is any ultimate meaning in the "storkonstruksjon" and leaves unanswered the question of the narrator and whether the conclusion can be anything besides nihilism (115, 113).

Andersen's article covers particularly useful new ground, discussing the function and details of repetition in the text. His use of Vladimir Propp's inventory of functions to map Kjærstad's use of repeated elements throughout the text is so useful that Aschehoug would be wise to publish it as an afterword to the text itself. Andersen pronounces the text a late modernist or postmodernist novel about the meaning and terms of identity and creativity in our postindustrial society (312). He concedes that he does not know who the "winning" narrator is—the male narrator who "is clearly the lord and master of the narrative" or Greta (324, 327). In addition, he touches briefly on subject and object actants in the text, pointing out that the men are subjects seeking to use Greta, as an object, for sexual gratification and that Greta is a subject, seeking to "vampire" the men, as objects, to death (318). Andersen presents parallels between Kjærstad's use of repetition in *Homo falsus* and Hamsun's in *Sult* [*Hunger*]. Finally, Andersen shows how Kjærstad deconstructs by constructing—by seeing how things are constructed, the reader sees the patterns in the text before the characters (321).

I will return to both Kongslien and Andersen's work as I proceed. Both touch briefly on topics I will cover in more depth. In particular Kongslien mentions only in passing Kjærstad's use of "characteristically" postmodern narrative techniques including an obtrusive narrator, a Chinese box structure, self-reflectivity, and intertextuality (105). I will show in much greater depth how Kjærstad uses

narrative techniques in creating a model of postmodern identity. While Andersen charts Kjørstad's use of repetition in Greta, Paul, Alf, and Jacob, he does not look at the male narrator. I will add the male narrator to his function mapping, as well as elaborating on his paragraph on subject and object actants in the text. In addition, both Kongslie and Andersen flirt with the idea of Kjørstad's "big" story being threatened by "smaller" or "little" stories, but do not draw this out. I will bring in Lyotard's more familiar wording, "grand récits," as I show how Kjørstad uses both grand and minor stories in *Homo falsus* to present one story in two very different ways, in short, a modernist and a postmodernist presentation of the same tale.

In addition, Arild Linneberg and Geir Mork devote two pages to *Homo falsus* in their article on postmodernism and Norwegian fiction of the 1980s, which appears in *Postmodern Fiction in Europe and the Americas* (49–50). They call *Homo falsus* "probably the most complexly creative Norwegian novel since *Sug* (1979)" and describe it as "a postmodern dialogue between literature, film, and computer technology" (49). In *Postmodernism och metafiktio i Norden* Bo Jansson discusses Kjørstad's *Rand* [Brink] at length, but also touches on *Homo falsus*. He astutely summarizes that through the text's two narrators, Kjørstad implies that fiction and reality are relative concepts (58). Although Jansson says relatively little about *Homo falsus* in his book, many of his critical observations on other postmodern Nordic novels such as Lars Gustafsson's *Bernard Foys tredje rockad* [Bernard Foy's Third Castling], which came out two years after *Homo falsus* and which Jansson considers the first truly postmodern Swedish novel, also apply to *Homo falsus*.

As an author, Kjørstad himself has also been unusually forthcoming with secondary information, participating in online chat sessions, interviews, lectures, newspaper debates, and publishing two collections of essays. Feeling that life bombards him with information that he never has the opportunity to filter or process, Kjørstad says he intentionally inserted into *Homo falsus* "en fjerdedel ren løgn blant en mengde annen sann informasjon" [25% pure lies amidst a multitude of other true information] (*Torpedo* 143). He suggests that readers will find it difficult to discern the lies, pointing out that they even include false epigraphs from Freud and Marx (*Torpedo* 143). While I will not address Kjørstad's intentions in writing *Homo falsus*, I will not exclude his comments when I feel they contribute to the discussion.

Kjørstad's novel occupies an ironic position in Norwegian literary history. Much of the scholarship devoted specifically to *Homo falsus* skirts the question of the text's postmodernity. At the same time, postmodern theorists pinpoint Kjørstad's novel as one of Norway's first and greatest example of postmodernism. I will begin by bridging these two approaches to the text, looking both at the text in detail and specifically addressing its postmodern aspects. Then I will provide the reader with a complementary pair of readings in response to the central question surrounding the text: who really narrates the book? I will read the two narrators as separate individuals, one modernist and one postmodernist, and also as aspects of a single individual and I will show that these two mutually exclusive readings are both true.

POSTMODERNISM AND *HOMO FALSUS**THE TWO CAMPS*

The small handful of literary critics and scholars who have written at length on Kjærstad's *Homo falsus* have largely skirted the issue of whether the text is postmodern or not. Per Thomas Andersen calls the novel "en senmodernistisk eller postmodernistisk roman" [a late modernist or postmodernist novel], but does not attempt to resolve the matter (312). Ingeborg Kongslien raises the same question: "Spørsmålet om *Homo falsus* skal kallast ein modernistisk eller postmodernistisk roman kan førebels stå ope" [The question of whether *Homo falsus* should be called a modernist or postmodernist novel may initially come up] (106), but neglects to answer it. Her answer to the question is a nonanswer; she answers the question of whether the text is modernist or postmodernist by summarizing that it is metafictional.

In confusing metafiction with postmodernism, Kongslien is in good company. Kjærstad himself has made the same mistake. He writes that he has never considered himself a postmodernist, that "postmodernismen er like gammel som Cervantes" [postmodernism is as old as Cervants] (personal correspondence). Clearly postmodernism as a literary movement did not begin in the early 1600s. The simplistic equation of postmodernism with metafiction is common, but wrong.

Such misunderstandings of postmodernism have particularly characterized the Norwegian literary milieu in recent decades. Despite Kjærstad's own efforts as editor of the literary magazine *Vinduet* to introduce the theoretical discussions surrounding postmodernism to a Norwegian audience during the 1980s, many Norwegian scholars remained relatively ignorant on the topic for decades. This resulted in the lack of early scholarship on *Homo falsus*, which actually addressed the text's postmodern elements.

Kongslien alludes to another common misperception among Norwegian literary scholars when she asks "Er utgangen anna enn nihilism?" [Is the result anything other than nihilism?] (113). The confusion of postmodernism and nihilism was widespread among Norwegian academics at the end of the twentieth century. As with the question of the text's postmodernity, Kongslien also largely avoids answering her own question of the text's nihilism. In the end, she concludes that she is uncertain whether readers will find any greater meaning in the text, but that "forsøket mitt på å koma fram til dette, tidvis har gjeve meg store lesaropplevingar og tidvis sterkt har utfordra både tålmod, fantasi og tanke, det er eg sikker på" [my attempt to find this [meaning], has at times given me great reading experiences and at times significantly challenged my patience, imagination, and thinking. That I'm sure of] (115). Ultimately, Kongslien makes a number of insightful observations about *Homo falsus*, but falls into a trap common among Scandinavian literary academics. She flirts with the idea of taking a critical stance on the text, mentioning fashionable critical terms such as postmodernism and metafiction, but ultimately winds up writing a glorified reader response paper whose ultimate message is essentially, "this book was hard to read, but I liked it."

She is certainly in good company. One of the most intriguing aspects of Kjærstad's authorship in general and *Homo falsus* in particular that Norwegian scholars have not discussed is Kjærstad's postmodernism. While Kjærstad himself, especially since his days in the 1980s as editor of the journal *Vinduet*, has stayed particularly current with discussions of literary theory and authorship worldwide, most Norwegian literary critics have not kept up with him. Reviews of Kjærstad's work in the Norwegian media reflect this provincialism and rarely discuss his work in an international context or in the light of literary critical discussions on topics such as postmodernism that have received widespread academic attention in most of the world outside of Norway.

Kjærstad himself identifies with and considers his primary artistic influences to include: Saul Bellow, Inger Christensen, Don DeLillo, Marguerite Duras, Haruki Murakami, Iris Murdoch, Kenzaburo Oe, Michael Ondaatje, Amos Oz, Orhan Pamuk, Salman Rushdie, and Graham Swift (*Dagbladet* 10 May 1999). Among other things the list includes a striking number of globally renowned postmodernists. By ignoring Kjærstad's similarities with works by these authors, Norwegian critics and academics have missed one of the most basic aspects of Kjærstad's authorship—his postmodernism.

Ironically, scholars who hardly mention *Homo falsus* have little trouble determining that it is postmodern. Røssaak acknowledges that “med romaner som *Homo falsus eller det perfekte mord* (1984) ble Jan Kjærstad betegnet som en tidlig, kanskje den første postmoderne forfatter i Norge” [with novels like *Homo falsus or the Perfect Murder* (1984) Jan Kjærstad was designated as an early, and perhaps the first, postmodern author in Norway] (40). Similarly, Swedish scholar Bo Jansson also recognizes Kjærstad's postmodernism, writing that,

Fløgstad uppfattas ofta vid 1980-talets början, och före Jan Kjærstads egentliga genombrott med *Homo falsus eller: Det perfekte mord*, som den postmoderna skandinaviska romanens främste företrädare. (154)

[Fløgstad was often interpreted in the beginning of the 1980s, and prior to Jan Kjærstad's real breakthrough with *Homo falsus eller: Det perfekte mord*, as the foremost representative of the postmodern Scandinavian novel.]

In other words, scholars such as Røssaak and Jansson who work with postmodern theory easily pinpoint *Homo falsus* as one of Scandinavia's first and finest postmodernist novels.

What the scholarship on Kjærstad is lacking is someone who combines the two camps: someone who writes in detail on Kjærstad's text, supporting her claims with citations from *Homo falsus*, and who at the same time acknowledges the text's postmodernism. That is what I will do here. Before I come to the question of the text's narrators, I will outline some of the strategies that Kjærstad employs which easily situate the text on the postmodernist side of the question that Andersen and Kongslie both raise but do not answer: is the book modernist or postmodernist? Kjærstad utilizes a full repertoire of postmodern techniques in *Homo falsus*, including fluid combinations of fact and fiction and of popular and high culture, references to technoculture and multimedia citations, metaleptic breaks in the text's narrative frame, and

the creation of a postmodern spatial zone by superimposing the Buddhist temple at Borobudur on modern-day Oslo.

*MULTIMEDIA REFERENCES: FACTOIDS AND SOUND BITES*

Kjærstad cites such a plethora of repeated factoids, cultural and historical references, sound bites, and miscellaneous details that Kongslien explains, “ved første gongs lesing kan *Homo falsus* kjennast som encyklopedisk vald mot lesaren [upon first reading, *Homo falsus* can feel like encyclopedic violence against the reader]” (105). In an online question and answer session, Kjærstad explains that, “Å velge omhyggelig ut faktaene til en roman, av den overfloden det er å ta av, er et ledd i forfatterens mimesis-bestrebelse, forsøket på å speile samtiden” [Painstakingly selecting the facts for a novel, from the abundance there is to pick from, is a step in the author’s endeavor at mimesis, the attempt to reflect our contemporary time.] (faktafiksjon, 1999). In doing so, Kjærstad writes a text that Jameson might aptly describe as a narrative “about the process of reproduction and include[s] movie cameras, video, tape recorders, the whole technology of production and reproduction of the simulacrum” (37). In reflecting reality this way, Kjærstad’s radically eclectic referentiality is akin to other postmodernist authors such as Pynchon, Coover, and Leyner in the United States; Fløgstad in Norway; and Eskellinen, Kontio, and Nevanlinna in Finland.

Kjærstad’s characters reenact entire scenes from Greta Garbo movies, recall the “soft-core porn covers” of Carly Simon and Linda Ronstadt’s records, and wonder if Henry the Eighth sooner resembled the painting in the history books or Richard Burton in “Anne Of The Thousand Days.” Greta consistently thinks of her surrounding world in multimedia similes, for example, staring at Alf as if “han var the creature from the Black Lagoon [he were the creature from the Black Lagoon]” (157). Indeed, practically every page in the book contains multiple, often random-seeming allusions to a wide array of high and low cultural references and secondary media. Kjærstad engages in the radical eclecticism that Jencks foresaw for architectural postmodernism, pulling together “different kinds of meaning... so that they interrelate and modify each other” (132).

Kjærstad’s references are not only eclectic, they are often multivalent, evoking more than one aspect of a citation at a time or involving more than one sense. Kjærstad describes the renaissance of classical music through film, for example how Mozart’s music gained popularity through its use in the film *Elvira Madigan*, an example of how film can become a means of conveyance for music. Kjærstad’s discussion of the use of Mozart in *Elvira Madigan* is both a reference to the composer and to the film in general, as well as to the use of the composer’s music in the film specifically and the impact of this on popular attitudes to the music. The reference is multivalent.

Similarly, Kjærstad writes that Van Gogh’s paintings came alive for a new generation through Kirk Douglas in *Lust For Life* (106). Greta ties important moments in her life to films—her grandfather’s death with *Quai Des Brumes* on TV and the first time she had sex with *Easy Rider* (107–8). In cases like

these, Kjørstad uses references that are one level removed, referring not just to a Van Gogh, but to a popular culture citation of Van Gogh. Thus Kjørstad doubly distances the text from the cultural allusion, double-layering its significance in the text.

For readers who are familiar with the cultural references Kjørstad evokes, these contribute a layer of meaning to the text. For example, the male narrator describes Alf's game of guessing which book an attractive woman will go to in a bookstore, "neglelakkfingerer på Norman Mailer, mascarabaldakiner over Henry Miller" [nail polished fingers on Norman Mailer, baldachins of mascara over Henry Miller] (137). Here a familiarity with the works of Mailer and Miller provides a new layer to the erotic nature of Alf's game.

In another example, to belittle her husband's paintings Greta explains that she is the artist, not him. She describes how he had completely miscalculated what meaningful art was:

Ta bare Art Museum i Philadelphia. Det var ikke lenger kjent for maleriene sine, men for at filmstjernen Sylvester Stallone hadde jogga oppover trappene der i verdenssuksessen Rocky. (61)

[Just take the Art Museum in Philadelphia. It wasn't known for its paintings any more, but because the movie star Sylvester Stallone had jogged up the stairs there in the worldwide success Rocky.]

Not only is this a classic example of combining high culture and popular culture, this is a double denigration of Greta's husband's artistic creation. In this understated insult of Greta's husband's art, the contents of the museum are forgotten, while the steps in front of the building are recognized worldwide because they had a cameo appearance in the Sylvester Stallone movie. McHale explains this trait as typical of postmodernism: in some texts "certain narratological functions that would normally be carried out directly by the verbal text have been entrusted to some secondary medium (movie, television, computer) represented in the verbal text" (*Constructing* 182). Hence, Greta does not need to belittle her husband's art, Stallone has already done it for her.

Kjørstad not only entrusts the conveyance of meaning to the secondary media that he cites, but adds another level of meaning through his groupings of references. Like building blocks, Kjørstad not only sprinkles *Homo falsus* with individual references, but conglomerations of references that take on a meaning greater than the sum of their parts. An example of this is Alf's death scene where we read:

Venner, applauder, komedien er over, skulle Beethoven ha sagt idet han døde.  
Et tu Brute, sa Cæsar.  
Mer lys! Mer lys! sa Goethe.  
Det var et flott slag golf, gutter, sa Bing Crosby.  
Jeg gjør det igjen, sa Hernán Cortés.  
Alf Skjønfeldt sa ingenting.

[Applause, friends, the comedy is over, Beethoven is to have said as he died.  
Et tu, Brute, said Ceasar.  
More light! More light! said Goethe.  
That was a great game of golf, fellas, said Bing Crosby.  
I'll do it again, said Hernán Cortés.]

Alf Skjønfeldt said nothing] (173).

Here, each building block is a quote from a famous person, the famous last words of various figures. Note that the list combines high culture with popular culture: Bing Crosby meets Goethe. Kjørstad both elevates Alf by comparing him with such famous company, and denigrates him by leaving him speechless while the others all uttered phrases that went down in history.

While some critics liken Kjørstad's work to a "faktahelvete" [hell of facts], Kjørstad himself prefers to call it a paradise of language (*Dagbladet* 10 May 1999). And the references contribute far more than confusion and chaos to the text. Kjørstad frequently uses this type of grouping of citations to convey an unspoken message on a metalevel, a message that can be read only by correctly deducing the pattern in the group of citations. In the case above, the citations of famous figures' last words tell the reader that Alf is about to die.

In addition to repeated references and citations, Kjørstad uses what he calls building blocks in other ways. The male narrator's salads are one example of recurrent, interchangeable building blocks. His salads always include four minor elements and one major element. One day it's cauliflower, hard boiled egg, pickle slices, and caraway with cubed smoked salmon, another day iceberg lettuce, mushrooms, tomato wedges, and halved chestnuts with Bayonne ham and still another, honey dew melon, carrot, radish and cucumber with crayfish tails.

The reader makes a mental note of the different ingredients, attempting to piece together a greater overall understanding of the text. This quest for an underlying explanatory pattern sometimes results in a nagging suspicion that Kjørstad is mocking the reader. I feel this particularly when I find myself doing something like diagramming salad ingredients to no avail. If there is a greater meaning to the salad ingredients, none of the text's commentators has succeeded in finding it.

Not all of the repeated elements, however, are as evidently frivolous as salad contents. An affair between a married man and a woman named Siri, for example, appears in different contexts in different characters' lives. Paul, Alf, Jacob and Greta's father all had extramarital affairs with Siri. Ironically, while seeming to comprise a more vital motif than the salads, the Siri factor adds no more to an overall understanding of the text than the salads. Both contribute by shepherding the reader to a conscious realization of the text's repetitive structure.

Kjørstad repeats phrases and motives excessively and creates absurdly explicit parallels within the text. The most obvious example of Kjørstad's repetition technique is Greta's sequential seduction of Paul, Alf, and Jacob. The men are repetitions of each other, each with slightly different characteristics, but essentially going through the same seduction and murder process with Greta. Whether it is a serious event, such as murder, or a silly one, such as a four-ingredient salad, that is repeated, the repetition takes on another level of meaning in *Homo falsus*. To illustrate this, a smaller example works just as well as a grand one, like murder.



Throughout the text there are repeated references to a “rød perm” [red binder]. The male narrator describes Greta collecting newspaper articles in this red binder (205) and as “et individ som *handlet* ut fra kunnskapene hun har samlet i en rød perm...” [an individual who *acted* based on the skills she has collected in a red binder] (239). Later, however, Greta denies having any red binder (291). She remembers that “hun var den som *skrev*, ikke den som ble skrevet. (Men hun kunne la ham beholde illusjonen om at hun... drepte ut fra kriterier samlet i en rød perm)” [she was the one who was *writing*, not the one who was being written. (But she could let him keep his illusion that she... was killing based on criteria gathered in a red binder)] (293). The repetition of elements and phrases such as the red binder forces the reader “to make a mental note of the descriptive echoes, thereby rendering him or her complicit with the construction of a textual network of association...” (Baker 39).

The reader’s awareness of this network of association is the first step towards grasping any overarching pattern. Salman Rushdie describes this as part of the postmodern condition, as “the elevation of the quest for the Grail over the Grail itself... the point from which fiction begins” (422). By forcing the reader to look for a metalevel meaning in the text’s various compilations of facts, references, and citations, Kjærstad does precisely this. He elevates the quest for answers, for links and meanings between the facts, over the answers themselves. In terms of the red binder, Kjærstad writes,

Geniene i dag var de som hadde evnen til å kombinere. ...hun kunne finne på å si både det ene og det andre, til og med gi dem den røde samlepermen som bare besto av blanke ark.

[The geniuses today were those who had the ability to combine. ...she could manage to say both the one thing and the other, even give them the red binder which consisted of blank pages] (312).

Kjærstad has elevated the quest for meaning over the meaning itself. Just as the pages in Greta’s binder are blank, ultimately the text’s facts and repeated elements are unimportant. They are merely variables that can contain any value whatsoever. The ultimate meaning in *Homo falsus* comes from the search for meaning itself.

#### *EXTENDING ANDERSEN’S TABLES: METAMEANING AND CHARACTER SALAD*

In some cases, however, larger patterns that convey meaning on a metalevel do emerge in the text. Kjærstad’s novel, like the male narrator’s salads, is composed of four minor elements and one major one. In his article, “The Function of Repetition in Jan Kjærstad’s *Homo falsus*,” Andersen outlines and assigns an order to many of the text’s repetitions. For example, he clearly demonstrates the repetitive pattern of the three men’s dealings with Greta: Paul, Alf and Jacob receive letters, Greta hides her intentions, they have stagnant sex lives, they arrange to meet Greta, they want to meet Greta, they check into a hotel, they go to the nightclub, they hit on the wrong woman, are slipped a note, go to the apartment, role-play scenes from Garbo movies with Greta, reach orgasm, vanish, and their clothes are sent home (314). As Andersen points out, after three complete cycles of this pattern with Paul, Alf and Jacob, the pattern begins again with the narrator as victim, but is interrupted.

Andersen provides the following table showing the mold into which Paul, Alf and Jacob all fit, each with a slightly different set of variables (319). He does not include the narrator in his analysis of the victims. I have added the fourth column for the narrator to demonstrate how his character is an incomplete progression of the pattern:

Table 5. Andersen's Template for Paul, Alf and Jacob and My Own Fourth Column for the Narrator (cf. Andersen 319)

	1. PAUL	2. ALF	3. JACOB	4. Narrator
A Education	Lawyer	Theologian	Military	
B Profession	Bank	KUD	Insurance	Author and Psychiatric Patient
C Dream Job	Pastor	Military	Mystic	Magician
D Artistic Dream	Musician	Author	Painter	Author
E Creative Work	Twelve-tone composition	Novella	Cubist Painting	Homo Recens
F Ideal	Schönberg	Joyce	Picasso	
G Hobby	Model Railroad	Architectural Model	Model Drawing	Photography Model
H Hero	Spencer Tracy	Charlton Heston	Henry Fonda	Torgeir Brandtzæg
I Marriage	Fernanda	Mathilde	Nora	Eli
J Affair	Siri	Siri	Siri	
K Family Background	Father: officer	Father: lawyer	Father: pastor	
L Academic Research	Article: law	Article: theology	Article: military	Article: computers

The diagram makes it clear that the narrator conforms almost, but not quite, completely to the mold of what a male character in *Homo falsus* is expected to be.

The male narrator confirms the similarities between himself and the three other men, explaining that he made

...de tre ofrene så like meg selv... og Greta tilsvarende den dommeren som bor et sted i meg. Jeg skapte rett og slett andre personer av de puslespillbrikkene som er *meg*

[...the three victims so like myself... and Greta equivalent to the judge that lives somewhere inside me. I created, when we get right down to it, other people from the puzzle pieces that are *me*] (298).

Kjærstad has created a salad of his own, using the same formula that the male narrator uses to prepare his salads: four minor elements and one major element. The four men, Paul, Alf, Jacob and the salad-eating narrator are the minor elements and Greta, their predatory seducer, is the major element. And Kjærstad takes this salad metaphor to still another level. When asked which of his characters he resembled most, Kjærstad responded "Den personen som ligner mest på meg selv er Greta, hovedpersonen i *Homo falsus*. Det er på mange måter min egen livshistorie" [The character that most resembles myself is Greta, the main character in *Homo falsus*. In many ways, it's my own life's story] (*Dagbladet* 10 May 1999).

*METALEPSES, MISES-EN-ABYME, AND OTHER TACTICS*

When Jacob is thinking about the military as a network of lies within lies he comes up with a metaphor that describes the mise-en-abyme structure that is so prevalent in *Homo falsus*: “Trojanske hester inni de trojanske hestene” [Trojan horses within the Trojan horses] (264). The variables that recur in different characters lives are in many ways mises-en-abymes pregnant with other mises-en-abymes. Many events in the text, such as the pornography shop raid, are seen at different levels of the text at different times. In this case, Jacob witnesses a feminist group raid a pornography shop and Greta takes part in a raid, but at different times.

The theme of missionaries in China, for example, recurs throughout the novel. Alf was a missionary in China, as was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who is quoted in one of the epigraphs, and Jacob likes the movie *The China Lesson* where Fonda plays the Jesuit monk Matteo Ricci on a mission in China. Sexual encounters make up another recurrent theme. While Jacob likes to read the letters people write to Playboy about sexual escapades, for example in the halls under the university (245), Greta’s father had such an affair under the university (272). Paul convinces his wife to go listen to an organ concert in church so that he can have an affair with a woman at a rock concert, and Greta’s father did the exact same thing.

One of the most interesting cases of mise-en-abyme in the text is the models of reality the men build. Paul’s hobby is a model railroad version of Oslo’s network of tracks. Alf builds an architectural model of the city of Oslo. Jacob works on a version of Oslo made of drawings he has done. The models are all perfect copies with one exception, where the model-maker had to change some aspect to get the model to function properly (Andersen 318).

After we have read about the slight change each man has had to make in the layout of Oslo in their model, a catastrophe such as a derailed streetcar or an earthquake occurs in that part of the real city. Like the other three model-makers, the male narrator is working on a photographic model of Oslo. The catastrophe that happens in his model may be the disappearance of three men, murdered or caused to vanish during orgasm by Greta. The male narrator is the most significant example of metalepsis in the text. By falling into the pattern of one of his male characters, one level removed from the narrative level he inhabits as their author, he violates the narrative levels in the text. The models they have created of reality, their fictional versions of reality, end up altering reality. Their fictions become real; reality becomes their fiction.

This problematic relationship between reality and fiction is one of the focal aspects of the novel. Things that Greta or the male narrator think or write frequently become real within the world of the story. And yet, the created reality frequently exclaims its own fictionality. Kjørstad writes, “det vi kaller virkeligheten er bare en fiksjon [what we call reality is only a fiction]” (230). In his article, Andersen discusses doubt over the discrepancy between “the original” and “the copy” in the text (324). In *Homo falsus*, Kjørstad creates a world full of simulacra, copies without originals, that are sometimes fictional, sometimes real, and sometimes, yes, both.

Andersen discusses “the modern repetition” of elements as a popular technique where all the interrelated elements are found on the same level (323). Kjærstad’s *Homo falsus* is far more complex. Its interrelated elements transcend all the different narratological levels. The novel is composed of hypertext-like links between fiction and reality, which frequently build up illusions of reality only to then reveal them as fictions (Kongslie 106). It combines narratives by a male and female narrator, overlaying them in such a way that they cannot be separated, but rather form one postmodern narrating individual who uses metafiction to show that reality and fiction are two aspects of one thing. By overlaying different genders, narrators, and frames of reference, Kjærstad creates a model of postmodern identity. Greta says that she is an example of life imitating art (153) and actually she is an endless series of simulacra, a system of mises-en-abyme without an original object of referral, a compilation of elements drawn from an entropic, centerless system; she is both life imitating art and art imitating life, both fictional and real.

#### POSTMODERN SPATIAL ZONE

McHale explains that while realist or modernist writing typically organizes space around a perceiving subject, postmodernist writing often constructs and deconstructs a spatial zone (*Postmodernist* 45). This is precisely what Kjærstad does in *Homo falsus*. The novel appears to be set in Oslo, but this Oslo does not quite correspond to the real city. In an interview, Kjærstad describes his amusement that the Dutch translation of *Homo falsus* included a map of Oslo, showing the locations of the various buildings mentioned in the text:

I “Homo Falsus” er det en dross av løgner (jfr. tittelen), deriblant navn på fictive bygninger. Flere av disse ikke-eksisterende bygningene er allikevel plassert på dette kartet. Jeg liker tanken på en turist fra Nederland som går rundt i Oslo med dette kartet for å finne bygninger som ikke finnes.

[There are a lot of lies in *Homo falsus* (cf. the title), including the names of fictional buildings. Several of these nonexistent buildings were nonetheless included on this map. I like the idea of a tourist from the Netherlands walking around Oslo with this map to find buildings that don’t exist] (*Dagbladet* 23 February 2000).

Just as the male characters create models of reality—Paul a model railroad; Alf an architectural model; Jacob a model drawing; the male narrator a photographic model—that are slightly off, so too does Kjærstad, creating a textual model of Oslo that does not exactly coincide with reality. In one of the text’s many mises-en-abyme, Kjærstad’s slightly erroneous fictional model of Oslo evokes the other men’s models.

The letters Greta sends with her victims’ clothes home to their wives go to the addresses Holtegata 16, Skovveien 13, and Oscars gate 29 (300). In reality there is a music business at Holtegata 16, a restaurant and Norges Kunst og Antikvitetshandleres Forening [The Norwegian Association of Art and Antique Dealers] at Skovveien 13, and Oscars gate 29 houses the Dutch embassy. Certainly insurance salesman Jacob and his wife Nora do not live in the Dutch embassy. Kjærstad’s constant mélange of references to real locations in Oslo and misattributed buildings that cannot be what the text says they are is

precisely the type of spatial construction and deconstruction that McHale mentions. These addresses also serve as a wonderfully clear example of the fluid way Kjørstad combines fact and fiction in the text. These addresses are simultaneously both real and fictional.

Another postmodernist spatial technique Kjørstad employs is superimposition. He superimposes the ancient Buddhist temple of Borobudur on contemporary Oslo. In so doing, he creates a unique fictional zone, one that is neither Oslo nor Borobudur, but what McHale might call a photographic double-exposure, a postmodernist zone combining the two (46). The letters, which Greta sends along with the victims' clothes, tie locations in Oslo to stūpas<sup>2</sup> in Borobudur. They "oppga stūpaer i Borobudur, som transformert over på Oslo var punkter på en sirkels periferi..." [assigned stūpas in Borobudur, which transformed over onto Oslo were points on a circle's periphery...] (299–300). In this way, Kjørstad physically superimposes the structure of the Buddhist temple onto a map of Oslo. At the same time, he superimposes the structure of Buddhist memorial stūpas for the dead onto a series of Norwegian deaths.

The act of overlaying the floor plan of Borobudur on the map of Oslo is a classic example of the postmodern superimposition of two very different frames of reference. Borobudur gives the reader a new way in which to consider the map of Oslo, just as the map of Oslo gives the reader a new way to consider the temple of Borobudur. As Greta bicycles through Vigeland's Park, she envisions Borobudur in great detail:

når hun så obeliskene i sentrum, gikk tankene til hovedstūpaen i Borobudur, det kolossale buddhistiske byggverket på Java; de fire galleriavsatsene oppå hverandre, med relieffer fra Buddha og andre hellige menns liv (gallerier som pilegrimene vandret langs for å bli Opplyst), de tre sirklene innenfor hverandre på toppen, de 72 små stūpaene og hovedstūpaen midt i... Greta tenkte heller på dette der hun rullet forbi Monolitten... (290)

[when she saw the obelisk in the middle, her thoughts went to the main stūpa in Borobudur, the colossal Buddhist structure on Java; the four gallery terraces on top of each other, with reliefs of Buddha's and other holy men's lives (galleries the pilgrims wandered along to become Enlightened), the three circles inside each other on the top, the 72 small stūpas and the main stūpa in the middle... Greta thought of this instead as she rolled past the Monolith...]

Here Kjørstad provides a textbook introduction to the structure of the temple.

The form of the temple proves to be a rich metaphor for the form problems in *Homo falsus*. Borobudur is one large stūpa, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, comprised of smaller stūpas. Edward Conze, a Buddhism scholar, describes Borobudur as "a mandala in stone [that] symbolizes the cosmos as well as the way to salvation..." (83). Pilgrims use it to perform the classic ritual of *pradaksina*, walking clockwise, gradually upwards around the stūpa until they reached the smallest round. Refer to the aerial diagram of Borobudur in *Homo falsus* (201) for an overview of the temple's form. Pilgrims would progress through three levels: Kamadhatu, the world of desire, which is the now mostly hidden first gallery;

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<sup>2</sup> A *stūpa* is a sacred monument containing human remains or relics or a memorial built to memorialize a location, either empty or containing only a text (Krom 8-9).

Rupadhātu, the world of forms, which comprises the 2nd-4th galleries; and Arupadhātu, the world of formlessness, which comprises the last three, uppermost, circular terraces (Kusuma). Just as Borobudur does, *Homo falsus* also combines the worlds of desire, form, and formlessness.

Borobudur's form is doubly coded. It is comprised of a square and a circle, laid one atop the other. Similarly, *Homo falsus* is the narrative of a male narrator and a female narrator, laid one atop the other. In many respects, its narrative contains two novels; one about a man writing a text about Oslo, mysticism, girls, and seduction, and the other about a woman's tantric voyage to selfhood. The male narrator is a part of Greta's text, becoming one of her victims. Greta is a part of the male narrator's text, the creation of her character ultimately driving him mad.

This same duality of form is prevalent in Borobudur and many interpretations of the temple have focused on the problem of its two prevalent forms. According to Paul Mus,

Ce que nous tenons pour certains, c'est que l'architecte qui nous a laissé le Barabudur *dans sa forme actuelle* l'a conçu divisé en deux ensembles théoriques, ajustés l'un dans l'autre. Il y aurait, répétons-le, deux Barabudur, celui qu'on voit du dehors et celui qui se révèle quand on pénètre dans l'agencement des terrasses. (87)

[What we know for certain is that the architect who left us Borobudur *in its current form* conceived of it divided in two theoretical portions, positioned one within the other. There are, let us repeat, two Borobudurs, the one that is visible from the outside and the one that reveals itself when one penetrates into the structure of the terraces.]

The temple at Borobudur shows how two different primary architectural forms can be superimposed. From the air, it is a mandala in stone. From the side, it is an enormous stūpa. From inside, it is a Buddhist text in stone relief. Mus emphasized the impossibility of presenting the temple as a uniform, homogeneous structure and urges acceptance of the formal duality of its external and internal structures; by admitting two concentric Borobudurs, each hidden within the other, he explains that each can retain its own unique merits and we can move away from the irresolvable contentions that fill Borobudur's history (Mus 88-89).

Borobudur is a particularly apt metaphor for the formal arrangements in *Homo falsus* because of the integration of textuality into the temple. Conze aptly describes Borobudur as a Buddhist textbook carved in stone; as pilgrims walk around Borobudur's galleries, circling their way upwards towards the top, they pass by bas-reliefs that depict great Mahāyāna texts, the *Jātaka*, *Lalitavistara*, *Gandavyuha*, and *Karmavibhanga* (83). Throughout history, interpretations of Borobudur's structures have been antagonistic and occasionally violently oppositional (Mus 4). Philologists have looked "at the reliefs and their inscriptions first and foremost as a source of information on the text" and architects have looked at "the text only to the extent to which it could throw light on the meaning of the reliefs" (Fontein 12). Kjærstad's analysts can be summarized the same way: Andersen probes the text's structure and repetitions as a source of information on the story and Kongslien looks at metafictional and postmodern themes in the story to look for a clue to the structure. Not surprisingly, given Kjærstad's mixed career of fiction and nonfiction writing, *Homo falsus* is both literature about subject formation and critical commentary on the topic.

As the physical incarnation of a text, Borobudur is also a metaphor for Greta, the physical embodiment of the male narrator's text. Both Greta and Borobudur are visual representations of narrative. Mus describes the overall form of Borobudur thus, “à l'extérieur, un stūpa, au dedans un prasada'. Telle est la définition tantrique du corps humain et tel est aussi le Barabudur” [‘on the outside, a stūpa, on the inside, a prasada.’ Such is the tantric definition of the human body and such is also the temple of Borobudur] (105). Interestingly, a stūpa is bell-shaped and statues of humans are often carved so that the human form would fit perfectly into the outlines of the bell. In sculptures, the Buddha is often seated in a seated position such that the shape of a stūpa could circumscribe the outline of his body. Greta pictures herself as the unfinished Buddha that was found in Borobudur's main stūpa. A *prasada* is a structure formed from superimposed stories, also compared with the mystical structure of the interior of the human body. Borobudur, comprised of seven superimposed layers, is thus a prasada. Greta is also a prasada, tantrically subsuming the lives of Paul, Alf, and Jacob into her physical being.

The stūpa and the prasada are both architectural forms that can be inscribed on a human being and provide a unique insight into *Homo falsus*. Rigid forms can also be inscribed on Kjørstad's characters. The three men and the male narrator all fit into a general victim template. Each of the various incarnations of Greta fits into a general Greta template. The form of the male narrator's modernist tale and Greta's postmodernist tale can be inscribed over the same body of text, the same plot elements. Kjørstad creates a unique relationship between these two narrators, the male and the female. Their narratives are superimposed, both distinct, yet both contained within the same structure.

### CONCLUSION

Scholars of postmodernism, including Røssaak, Jansson, and myself, quickly recognize *Homo falsus* as one of Scandinavia's earliest postmodern novels. The majority of Norwegian academics who have written about the text, however, have not been willing to take a stand on whether or not it is. Kjørstad himself skirts the question, pointing out that he has never called himself a postmodernist, but also acknowledging that it is effectively impossible for any Norwegian author to be a postmodernist. Basically, anyone who relies on book sales in Norway for their living would be taking a sizable risk by admitting to postmodernist tendencies, likewise for scholars who write about literature to a Norwegian-language audience. This does not mean that Kjørstad's *Homo falsus* is not postmodern.

Kjørstad combines high culture and popular culture references in typically postmodernist fashion. He blends technoculture and multimedia references into *Homo falsus* in a way that draws attention to the notion of simulacra. By filling the novel with a network of contradictory associations, Kjørstad forces the reader to be aware of his or her own search for meaning and overarching pattern. By doing so, he elevates the *quest* for the Grail over the illusory Grail itself. *Homo falsus* is also replete with mises-en-abyme, which compel the reader to look for a metalevel meaning in the text's various compilations of facts, references,

repeated plot elements, and citations. In that the male narrator becomes a character and Greta becomes the author of the text, Kjørstad writes one of the penultimate examples of metalepsis. Finally, he creates a postmodern spatial zone by superimposing Borobudur on modern-day Oslo. While any one of these facts alone might not make the novel postmodern, the inclusion of all these elements in a single, highly metafictional novel does.

#### A SINGLE POSTMODERN ENTITY

##### *KJØRSTAD'S DEFINITION OF NEW (POSTMODERN) IDENTITY*

Kjørstad is in an absurd position; he is one of the most lucid Norwegian writers to discuss literary postmodernism and yet he rarely uses the word "postmodern." In fact, he goes to great lengths to distance himself from the term postmodernism, even while focusing the vast majority of his professional career on postmodernism. In *Menneskets matrise* [*The Matrix of Man*], he acknowledges that the multitude of characteristics covered by the terms metafiction and postmodernism "blir i Norge redusert til en klisjé, et stikkord" [are reduced in Norway to a cliché, a slogan] (85). He explains that because of provincialism, Norwegians use the term postmodernism as "et uhyre effektivt våpen" [an uncommonly effective weapon] (*Matrise* 85). From a global perspective, Kjørstad's position is remarkable and ironic: he is regaled in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and France as Norway's leading postmodernist, while in Norway the term is taboo.

In this section I will look at how the narrators in *Homo falsus* can be read as two aspects of a single postmodern individual. I will rely on much of Kjørstad's own writing on the subject. Of all the applied literary theorists in the world to discuss the nature of a postmodern identity, his observations are among the most insightful. However, I feel I must point out that I only have the privilege of using the word postmodern because I am writing from the U.S.; if I were in Norway, I, like Kjørstad, would have to leave that word unsaid.

That said, what is a postmodern identity? In *Menneskets felt*, Kjørstad traces the development of identity in novels, from authors who have historically probed the depths of the human unconscious, the magnifying glass approach, to a newer breed of authors who explore the width and scope of identity, the prism approach (*Felt* 268–272). He believes that contemporary man is not so much fragmented as organized in a different way than previously imagined, not cohesively around a center, but rather in a broad web or network of interconnected positions.

Kjørstad's advice is that instead of continuing to delve deeper and deeper into an individual's consciousness, searching for a center, authors ought instead to try to create a new, larger understanding of an individual's perimeters (269). He explains,



Om vi tyr til Ibsen og Peer Gynts selvrefleksjoner mens han plukker fra hverandre en løk, er problemet i dag ikke så mye det vertikale, at mennesket har en kjerne, men det horisontale, at mennesket består av *flere* løker. Menneskets identitet er større enn vi tror. Det holder ikke å sammenligne et individ med *én* løk, individet er et *nett* med løk.

[If we refer to Ibsen and Peer Gynt's self reflections while he pulls apart an onion, the problem today is not so much the vertical, that the individual has a core, but the horizontal, that the individual consists of *many* onions. The individual's identity is larger than we think. It no longer holds to compare an individual with *one* onion, the individual is a *network* of onions.] (*Felt* 268)

This "many onions" exploration of the individual is precisely what is going on in *Homo falsus*.

Kjærstad remarks that the state of innovation into the nature of identity has not progressed much since Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), a biography of one individual whose life encompasses not only several centuries, but also both genders, as an example of the individual (*Felt* 270). Kjærstad believes that the issues modernists like Woolf raise about identity are still awaiting further discussion (*Felt* 272). I will show that Kjærstad takes Woolf's multifaceted, prismatic approach to identity one step further in *Homo falsus*, where the text's two narrators can be read as two aspects of a single individual.

In other words, many modernists present characters whose identities change over the course of the text as the reader permeates through the different mental layers of a single individual, a single unifying narrative consciousness. In *Orlando*, the magnifying glass approach to the complex individual results in a sort of hierarchical archeological excavation of layer upon layer of the self, moving from one self to the next over time. Despite Orlando's uniquely multiple identity, the single onion theory of identity still applies; Orlando has only one identity at a time. In creating the double narrator of *Homo falsus*, Kjærstad simultaneously looks at the layers of two onions that make up one individual.

Whereas the character of *Orlando* is at times a man, at times a woman, the postmodern narrator of *Homo falsus* is simultaneously a man and a woman, subject and object, writer and written. This postmodern approach to the individual highlights the coexistence of seemingly mutually exclusive possibilities. Kjærstad is intrigued with the physics concept of complementarity<sup>3</sup> and by extension with the idea of a novel that includes multiple, mutually exclusive explanations to a phenomenon (*Torpedo* 153). He writes,

Jeg har lenge vært opptatt av muligheten for å skrive om menneskets identitet på en annerledes måte... det vil komme romaner i nær fremtid som eksperimenterer med alternative—kall det gjerne usannsynlige—måter å skildre mennesker på, kanskje romaner hvor hovedpersonen er flere mennesker på en gang, uten at han eller hun er unormal av den grunn... du ser ansatsene til noe slikt i Virginia Woolfs *Orlando*, men det er gjort forbausende få slike forsøk siden.

For a long time I have been captivated by the possibility of writing about human identity in a different way... in the near future there will be novels that experiment with alternative—go ahead and call them unlikely—ways of portraying people, perhaps novels where the main character is several people at one time, without him or her being abnormal because of it... you see the

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<sup>3</sup> Complementarity is the idea that two different models may be necessary to describe a subatomic system, e.g., electrons may be regarded as particles or waves in different circumstances (Encarta).

beginnings of this type of thing in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, but surprisingly few attempts have been made since. (*Torpedo* 170)

Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988) exhibits precisely this new type of narrative. Like *Homo falsus*, *Satanic Verses* contains a doubly coded narrative in which it is also impossible to conclusively decide whether the narrator is Shaitan (Satan) or God. *Satanic Verses* is a narrative demonstration of postmodern anti-foundationalism; the reader has to abandon the futile belief that any true, hidden, unsullied narrative can be revealed by interrogating the narrator's status and discovering the precise extent of his narrative manipulations (Baker 177-78). By constructing an aporia of two possible and contradictory identities of the source of narrative authority, Rushdie thwarts the reader's attempt to reach conclusions (Baker 177). Kjærstad does the same thing in *Homo falsus*. Rushdie's narrators are mutually exclusive opposites; while the reader cannot conclusively determine whether Satan or God narrates the text, one clearly cannot conflate the two. Kjærstad's narrators are a man and a woman, and although he does not conclusively indicate which of the two narrates he does inscribe in the text enough clues about gender as a performance or a role, that his two narrators can be read as two different roles played by a single person.

#### GENDER SATIRE: "DEN SEKSUELLE BYTTELEKEN" [THE SEXUAL PREY GAME] (21)

Kjærstad suggests that a new literary trend might combine a more postmodern approach to a novel's frame story, moving away from modernism's singular narrative focalization towards more postmodern narrative approaches, with a more postmodern approach towards identity. This would mean moving away from modernism's layers-of-the-onion approach towards a more postmodern, multiple onion conception of identity. He asks,

Hva ville skje med romanen om man lot dette utvidede selv være fortelleren i rammen? Går det an å tenke seg en roman der altså ikke hovedpersonen hadde flere identiteter, men beretteren bak—og kanskje til og med identiteter som alle var nødvendige for forståelsen, selv om de gjensidig utelukket hverandre?

[What would happen to the novel if one allowed this expanded self be the narrator in the frame? Is it possible to imagine a novel thus where it wasn't the protagonist who had multiple identities, but the narrator behind [the protagonist]—and perhaps even identities that were all necessary for understanding, even if they were mutually exclusive?] (*Felt* 272)

This is precisely what Kjærstad accomplished in *Homo falsus*. The expanded narrator is both the salad-eating man and the woman who thinks she is Greta Garbo. The narrator is both a man and a woman, mutually exclusive identities that are both necessary to understand the text. In the next section I will look at how the two narrators' tales differ. In this section, I will use evidence from the text to show that, in the postmodern world of the text, the two narrators can be read as mutually exclusive aspects of someone who, nonetheless, is a single individual.

The first hint in *Homo falsus* that there may be some kind of gender play going on is the cover. Kjærstad metafictionally writes, "Dagen kom. Romanen sto i bokhandelen. Pent omslag, silhuetten av Greta

Garbo” [The day arrived. The novel was in the bookstore. Nice cover, the silhouette of Greta Garbo] (321). But it is no ordinary image of Greta Garbo. In thick, white pancake makeup and dark glasses she could easily be a man in drag. This possibility is supported by the male narrator’s wondering if in writing Greta he was playing a woman’s role “som de mannlige skuespillerne i det gamle kabuki-teatret” [like the male actors in the old Kabuki theater] (197).

There are a striking number of references throughout the text to masks and performances and Kjærstad himself has said that lies are the true protagonist of the text. Many of these lies in *Homo falsus* involve gender as a performance. In fact, the title of the book, Latin for “false man,” draws gender into question. Similarly, Greta is credited as having “et antrekk for enhver anledning. Masker bak masker” [an outfit for every occasion. Masks behind masks] (91). Kjærstad includes numerous suggestions that both the male narrator and Greta are merely playing roles, performing parts. He refers to countless metamorphosis scenes in works by Shakespeare, Joyce, Apuleius, etc. and makes statements like “horen blir mann og du blir kvinne” [the whore becomes a man and you become a woman] (131). Examples like these draw attention to gender as performance.

As Greta seduces Paul, she reenacts scenes from the film *Queen Christina*, in which Greta Garbo dresses as a man to experience freedom from her position as queen of Sweden. Paul, expecting a woman, tries to understand what is going on: “en mann! En mann fra et annet århundre. En mann fra et kostymeball?... Stemmen. En kvinne. Men noe var galt. Han/hun lukket døra” [a man! A man from another century. A man from a costume ball?... The voice. A woman. But something was wrong. He/she closed the door] (48). By choosing *Queen Christina*, Kjærstad emphasizes the idea of gender play in his text.

As Greta seduces Jacob, Kjærstad writes that Greta found a new hero in Russian revolutionary Sergei Nechayev, describing at length how he “dro forkledt som kvinne, med falsk pass” [traveled disguised as a woman, with a false passport] (219). Ironically, Flatekval misses the cross-dressing theme with Nechayev, becoming bogged down instead in the hunt for the authenticity of Kjærstad’s references: “Sergej Netsjajevs navn har jeg ikke funnet i noen av de oppslagsverkene jeg har konsultert. Han har trolig aldri eksistert” [I have not found Sergei Nechayev’s name in any of the reference works I have consulted. Most likely he never existed] (59). As with so many of Kjærstad’s references, Nechayev’s importance does not reside in the fact that he was an authentic historical figure, as was the real queen Christina. Readers who dwell overly long on the accuracy of any one reference in *Homo falsus* become lost in the flow.

As with Kjærstad’s cluster of quotations of what famous people said on their deathbeds during Alf’s death scene (173), the true meaning behind the inclusion of extensive scenes from “Queen Christina” and the life of Sergei Nechayev are not contingent on the truth of the references. After all, Hernán Cortés is not known for saying “Jeg gjør det igjen” [I’ll do it again] (173) on his deathbed. What Flatekval missed in this instance is that the overall pattern in *Homo falsus* is more important than the sum of its parts. What is

important is that Kjærstad's emphasis on figures like Queen Christina and Sergei Nechayev serve to highlight the theme of gender as performance.

Having established an overarching theme of gender as a role in his text, Kjærstad takes great liberties in shifting back and forth between stereotypical gender depictions, highlighting once again, the performance aspect. For example, views of women's bodies alternate strikingly between prey-like victims of sexually predatory males to the female body as a tool to control men. The female body in *Homo falsus* is sometimes a *Playboy* centerfold and sometimes an anti-pornography feminist terrorist.

What is more, the text consistently vacillates almost chapter by chapter in its narrative depiction of women, cycling continuously between portraying women as prey and predator. For example, as Paul sits in the bar at the SAS hotel looking for the woman he will have sex with, Kjærstad compares the bar to a "jaktområde" [hunting grounds] (10). Paul plays the part of the hunter. In the spring he looks with "grådige øyne mot de nyutsprungne puppene under jumperne, Oslopikene som paraderte forbi" [greedy eyes towards the newly budded tits under the sweaters, the Oslo girls who paraded past] (15). He plays the part of predator. Oslo is his hunting ground and young women are his potential sexual prey.

In another example of overly satirized predatory sexuality, Paul looks through his notebook of sexual escapades, "(For eksempel: Gunn (18 år)/mot solveggen på setra nedenfor Glittertind/ to minutter (lavere kokepunkt)/ påske, ti kuldegrader, dråper frosset på låret hennes.)" [(For example: Gunn (18 years)/ against the sunny wall of the chalet below Glittertind/ two minutes (lower boiling point)/ Easter, minus ten degrees Centigrade, drops frozen on her thighs)] (15). Here women are reduced to the barest statistics in his record of sexual conquests—name, age, sex location, duration of sex act in minutes, comments.

At times, Kjærstad portrays the men as hunters, conquerors. For example, Paul is described as always able to handle a woman, "under alle omstendigheter. Alltid suksess. Født til å bestige seierspallen" [under all circumstances. Always success. Born to mount the victory platform] (17). Almost without exception, the view of men in roles of sexualized power is so overly exaggerated in the text as to be laughable. The idea that this stereotypical machismo is an act is reinforced not only by the frequency and humorous extent to which Kjærstad carries the theme, but also by its constant interruption by an equally caricatured version of feminism.

As Greta prepares to meet Paul, she glances at her naked body in the mirror, dresses, and puts on her makeup "rutinert, nesten automatisk" [routinely, almost automatically] (12). In sharp contrast to Paul's overly sexualized way of thinking about women's bodies focusing on individual body parts, such as their "nyutsprungne puppene" [newly budded tits] (15), the female body is now so unremarkable as to be mundane. Not only that, but the power system of the hunter and the prey is turned on its head. Greta is described as moving into the workroom "mens hun knuste en drue mellom jekslene" [while she crushed a grape between her jaws] (12). The woman suddenly assumes the role of the hunter, the predator. And just

as with the complementary male perspective, the female perspective is equally caricaturized through ridiculously over-the-top images like Greta crushing the grape.

Both sexes' perspectives are equally satirized in the text. We read of Paul that "han skulle elske henne som om han var domorganisten i Oslo, skulle vise denne uoppdragne mannshisseren" [he would make love to her as if he were the Oslo cathedral organist, would show this ill-mannered temptress] (67). But for every outrageous example of something a male character thinks, there is some outrageous female equivalent. Instead of an organist, Greta is compare to a vampire or a conductor, forcing nerve-wracked male victims to go to the bathroom, fear sexually transmitted diseases and poisons, and finally reducing them to begging.

For every reference to a woman's tits or thighs, there is a reference to a man's "skritt" [crotch] or " rumpeballene" [buttocks] (58) or, for example, "en speiderskjorte hang over stolryggen og en gutt lå i senga med sæd som størknet stearin på magen" [a boy scout's shirt hung over the back of the chair and a boy lay in the bed with semen like congealed wax on his stomach] (288). Once again, the extent of the masculinized/feminized slant of the perspective is taken to satirical lengths. However, what is truly remarkable is the way the text cycles back and forth between the two extremes. Both the satirization of gender perspectives and the incessant oscillation between male and female as predator and prey respectively serve to heighten the sense of gender as a role instead of a stable essence in *Homo falsus*. And if gender is something that can be performed, then one person of whichever sex could play the role of both the male narrator and the female narrator in *Homo falsus*.

#### *THE TWO NARRATORS ARE ONE*

Evidence abounds in the text to indicate that the male narrator and Greta both comprise a single individual. Kjørstad explains the tantric view of sexuality, which permeates the text, as "en forståelse av den andre som et *subjekt*... selvet var en kombinasjon av *to* faktorer, mann og kvinne" [an understanding of the other as a *subject*... the self was a combination of two factors, man and woman] (232). *Homo falsus*'s postmodern double narrator can be understood as just this type of self, one that contains both a man and a woman.

Just as Kjørstad superimposes the temple at Borobudur on modern day Oslo to create a new perspective, he superimposes a male narrator and a female narrator on each other to create a new perspective, one that shifts back and forth between male and female. According to the text, "Det hadde ikke noe med den misbrukte klisjéen schizofreni å gjøre. På ingen måte. Alle hadde to hjernehalvdeler" [It had nothing to do with the misused cliché, schizophrenia. Absolutely not. Everyone had two brain hemispheres] (91). The context for this is that Greta is a master of identity. Greta "visste hvem hun var, valgte hver dag helt bevisst hvem hun ville være. Ingen omstillingsproblemer" [knew who she was, chose completely consciously every day would she would be. No readjustment problems] (91).

Perhaps this is why Kjørstad writes that “den personen som ligner mest på meg selv, er Greta, hovedpersonen i *Homo falsus*. Det er på mange måter min egen livshistorie” [the character who most resembles me is Greta, the protagonist in *Homo falsus*. In many ways, that is the story of my own life] (*Dagbladet* 10 May 1999). Greta, like an author, has the ability to play any role she chooses. Her identity is fluid and multiple.

The text’s male narrator is less able to change roles. In the text he is exclusively either the author of the text or the ward of a mental institution. At the same time, he understands Greta to be a part of himself. He wonders “...hadde jeg som de mannlige skuespillerne i det gamle kabuki-teatret bare spilt en kvinnerolle? Nei. Hun var et biprodukt av meg selv” [...had I, like the male actors in the old Kabuki theater, only played a woman’s role? No. She was a byproduct of my self] (197). He realizes “som i et blaff, at Greta jo var meg selv” [as if in a flash, that I was Greta] (195). Hence, in the text both the male narrator and Greta realize that it is no problem for a single person to play both female and male roles. In addition to this, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the two never appear in the text at the same time. Greta is active by night and the male narrator by day.

#### *METAFICTION: THE TWO WRITE EACH OTHER, WRITE THEMSELVES*

There are two authorial figures that speak metafictionally throughout the text about their writing of *Homo falsus* itself. One is the man, whom I call the “male narrator,” who buys Niels Abel’s bed and makes himself a salad consisting every day of four minor elements and a major element. The other is a woman who thinks she is Greta Garbo. The male narrator writes *Homo falsus* while sitting at his computer, stopping to make salads, enjoy the fireplace and lie down on Abel’s bed and smoke with the ashtray on his stomach. Greta thinks all the events in the story, often while lying on her green sofa, but also keeps notebooks in her workroom where she writes out the story.

Andersen concludes that the question of which narrator actually narrates is irresolvable (328). As do the other theorists who have looked at the text—their unanimous conclusion is that both the salad-eating man and Greta narrate the text. Given the gender role-playing that goes on in the text and Kjørstad’s view of the multiple nature of identity, it is possible that the two narrators are aspects of one individual. The use of metafiction in the text provides other compelling evidence for this reading. Both narrators claim to have written *Homo falsus*. If they both wrote this one book, then it simplifies the situation greatly to consider the possibility that they are both one individual.

Firstly, let me summarize the overall narrative structure of the text. The text is divided into four major sections, one each devoted to Greta’s interactions with Paul, Alf, Jacob, and the male narrator respectively. Each major section is then divided into a number of chapters, which are not numbered but headed with configurations from the Japanese game of Kado. Each of these chapters is narrated predominantly in the present tense from the perspective of a given consciousness, including Paul, Alf,

Jacob, the male narrator, Greta, and inspector With. The male narrator's consciousness is presented in first-person narration, while all the other consciousnesses are presented in third-person narration (see table 6).

Table 6. *Homo falsus* Narrative Perspective by Chapter.

Chapter	Ch. 1–10	Ch. 11–20	Ch. 21–29	Ch. 30–34
1	Paul	Greta	Greta	Roald With
2	Greta	Greta	Greta	Greta
3	Paul	Male Narrator	Male Narrator	Male Narrator
4	Male Narrator	Alf/Greta	Greta	Greta
5	Paul	Alf	Jacob/Greta	Male Narrator
6	Paul/Greta	Alf/Greta	Jacob/Greta	
7	Paul/Greta	Alf/Greta	Jacob/Greta	
8	Paul/Greta	Alf/Greta	Greta	
9	Greta	Greta	Male Narrator	
10	Male Narrator	Male Narrator		

Secondly, let me briefly review the circumstantial evidence that makes it possible to read the two narrators as the same entity. As you can see from the table above, the two never appear simultaneously in the text. Greta sleeps during the day and is awake at night. The male narrator keeps more normal hours. So in terms of time, the role of Greta could well be one that the male narrator plays at night, in his off hours when he is not writing. The two also have remarkably similar behavioral patterns, frequently walking through the apartment hallways, looking into empty rooms, looking out the window, looking at the pictures they have on their walls, taking notes in their notebooks, lying on their backs and thinking about the book they are writing. And they both have videotape covers that are designed to make the videotapes look like books.

In addition to circumstantial evidence that the two narrators may be a single individual, there is compelling metafictional evidence in the text as well. Both Greta and the male narrator take credit for writing the text and each other. Kjærstad makes clear that the male narrator writes the text and creates the character of Greta. Similarly he also makes clear that Greta creates not only herself, but also the male narrator and his text.

Kjærstad makes it clear that the male narrator writes the text. He has a flowchart for when different parts of the story should be written and even receives a phone call from the publisher checking to see how the novel is coming (196). Periodically throughout the text, he rereads the chapters he has already written. For example, he self-consciously writes, “Jeg la de gjennomleste kapitlene fra meg... jeg [var] godt fornøyd med skildringen av kvinnen, Greta, hennes væremåte” [I put down the chapters I'd read through... I [was] satisfied with my depiction of the woman, Greta, her manner] (81). He takes credit for creating the character of Greta here. He also writes, “Jeg tenker ofte på Greta. Med Greta mener jeg den

piken jeg skildret i første del av romanen min” [I often think about Greta. By Greta I mean the girl that I portrayed in the first part of my novel] (331). So, the male narrator acknowledges not only that he is the author of Greta, but also the novel Greta appears in.

In fact, he even experiences the supreme metafictional moment when his book is finally released. The male narrator writes, “Dagen kom. Romanen sto i bokhandelen. Pent omslag, silhouetten av Greta Garbo” [The day came. The novel was in the bookstore. Nice cover, the silhouette of Greta Garbo] (321). And in fact, he describes the cover of Kjørstad’s *Homo falsus* (see figure 21). At the same time, Kjørstad robs the male narrator of some of his authorial prowess. For example, during one of the male narrator’s low points, he is forced to search back through what he has already written and

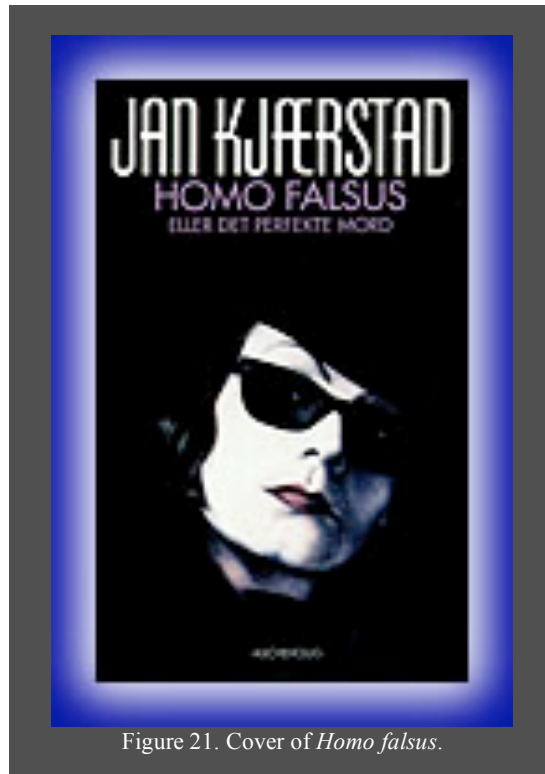


Figure 21. Cover of *Homo falsus*.

lete etter noen slags spor jeg kunne utvikle videre. På en måte var det fornedrende, sitte der lik en revisor som ikke får summen til å stemme og leter etter feil i et regnskap han først trodde var greit.

[search for some kind of trace I could develop further. In a way it was humiliating, [to] sit there like an accountant who couldn’t get the sum to agree and search for a mistake in the math he at first had thought was ok] (179).

Kjørstad makes it impossible for readers to believe that the male narrator is in control of writing *Homo falsus*. While he claims credit for writing the text, he also consistently runs into problems with his authorship. As with the fluctuations in the way the sexes are viewed alternatively as predator and prey, the problems with the male narrator’s narration is also taken to comic, exaggerated lengths. Not only does he have minor problems, he has serious authorial crises that cause him to rethink the entire book a few times.

At the same time, Kjørstad also makes it clear in the text that Greta writes the story of the male narrator. For example, we read that Greta uses her computer “til å skrive ut fortellingen om forfatteren [to write out the story of the author]” (293). Greta goes one step further when, towards the end of the book, she:

stopper foran mikrocomputeren. Slår den på. Fortellingen om forfatteren var ferdig. Siste del lå fullført, lagret på en diskett. Bare å trykke på p for å få den skrevet ut... Hun trykker på printknappen...



[stops in front of the microcomputer. Turns it on. The story about the author was done. The last part lay completed, stored on a disk. Just had to hit “P” to print it out... She hits the print key...] (326).

Not only does Greta write the book *Homo falsus* and the male narrator writing the book *Homo falsus*, but she also creates herself. As Greta bicycles past the monolith in Vigeland’s Park, she thinks about the temple at Borobudur and the unfinished Buddha sculpture that was found in its main stūpa, thinking that she “kunne plassere seg selv som den uferdige buddhaen i sentrum, tenke sirkler og kvadratiske gallerier rundt seg. Skape seg selv” [could place herself like the unfinished Buddha in the center, imagine circles and quadratic galleries around herself. Create herself] (290). Kjærstad is essentially saying here that Greta creates herself, that she has the ability to achieve subjecthood on her own.

At the same time, Kjærstad also inscribes Greta with a sense that she is the object of someone else’s creation, the feeling that the male narrator is responsible for her creation. As Greta lies on the bed in a strange apartment, the narrator describes her as having “opplevelsen av ikke å være opphavsmannen til sitt eget liv. Være skrevet av andre.” [the experience of not being the originator of one’s own life. To be written by others] (191). In other words, Kjærstad makes it clear that Greta both does and does not write herself, the male narrator and the text as a whole.

Eventually these discrepancies begin to melt down. After all, both the male narrator and Greta are clearly shown to be the authors of *Homo falsus*. Kjærstad explains that Greta

ville skrive historien om en forfatter som skriver en bok om en pikes nye strategi... Skrive seg selv. Skape en forfatter så lik og ulik henne selv at han klarte oppgaven... Tenke ut i detalj den romanen forfatteren skrev (uten å skrive den).

[wanted to write the story of an author who writes a book about a girl’s new strategy... Write herself. Create an author so like and unlike herself that he could handle the task... Devise in detail the novel the author wrote (without writing it)] (315).

This appears to indicate that Greta writes the male narrator writing Greta, with the reservation that the male narrator never actually writes anything. While Greta experiences the feeling that she knew what she wanted to write without its becoming real, the male narrator experiences just the opposite when he has “tanker om å være litteraturens kong Midas. Alt jeg skrev ble virkelighet” [thoughts of being literature’s king Midas. Everything I wrote became reality] (241). As with Midas before him, this proves a “nocitura munera” [baleful gift] (Ovid, book XI, line 104).

The complex narrative situation becomes confusing even for its two narrators. For example, we read that Greta “var sliten av å gruble på hva forfatteren tenkte hun skulle tenke. Som stormaktene tvers overfor hverandre ved forhandlingsbordet. Hva tror de at vi tror at de tror osv.” [was tired of meditating about what the author thought she should think. Like the superpowers across from each other at the negotiating table. What do they think that we think that they think, etc.] (290–1). As I have shown. The male narrator’s situation is compared with Midas’s unenviable one and Greta feels she is caught in a

“tankespiral som kunne skru deg ned i vanviddet” [thought spiral that could screw you down into insanity] (291). Both narrators share this problematic relationship with the Möbius strip of the text’s narration.

It is as if both narrators are struggling to accomplish the same thing. At one point Greta describes the writing project she is working on by saying that she “arbeider med å skape et speil som kan materialisere et ukjent ansikt” [is working to create a mirror which can materialize an unknown face] (191). A few pages later, the male narrator finally has the burst of clarity that Greta has been looking for. He realizes:

At Greta jo var meg selv. Fotsporet var mitt eget, for å knytte tilbake til Robinson Crusoe. Som Narkissos... var jeg i lang tid ikke klar over at det var mitt eget speilbilde jeg stirret inn i.

[that Greta of course was my self. The footprints were my own, to link this back to Robinson Crusoe. Like Narcissus... for a long time I had not understood that it was my own reflection I was staring at] (195).

In other words, not only are Greta and the male narrator one and the same postmodern person, but they are metafictionally aware of their commonality. This is certainly not the only logical conclusion that one can draw from *Homo falsus*’s narrative situation, but it does fit the evidence.

#### A TALE TOLD BY A ~~MODERNIST~~ POSTMODERNIST

As a complementary reading of the narrative situation, I will show that Kjærstad has also superimposed a modernist and a postmodernist narrative on each other in *Homo falsus*. I will show that the male narrator represents modernist traits while on each count Greta represents the postmodernist equivalent. Kjærstad himself hints at the possibility of this novelistic strategy in a 1996 article:

Til slutt vil jeg antyde enda en strategi for en mulig ny roman. Den kunne bestå i at man *kombinerte* de to problematikkene, rammen og identiteten... Hva ville skje med romanen om man lot dette utvidede selv være fortelleren i rammen? Går det an å tenke seg en roman der altså ikke hovedpersonen hadde flere identiteter, men beretteren bak—og kanskje til og med identiteter som alle var nødvendige for forståelsen, selv om de gjensidig utelukket hverandre?

[Finally, I would like to suggest yet another strategy for a possible new novel. It could consist of *combining* the two problems, frame and identity... What would happen to the novel if one let this expanded self be the narrator in the frame? Is it possible to imagine a novel where it was not the protagonist who had multiple identities, but the narrator behind [the protagonist]—and perhaps even identities that were all necessary for an understanding, even if they were mutually exclusive?] (*Felt* 272)

This is precisely what Kjærstad does in *Homo falsus*. I showed above that the male narrator and Greta can be read as one postmodern individual with multiple identities. Here I will show that *Homo falsus*’s narrator can also be read as a single individual with multiple identities—he is both a modernist and a postmodernist.

The narrative situation in *Homo falsus* is particularly complicated, a veritable sampler of various narrative modes, everything from first person to third person narration, from quoted interior monologue to narrated dialogue, from consonant to dissonant psycho-narration, etc. (see Cohn). Cataloging the often-

disjointed collage of narrative modes in *Homo falsus*, like the salad ingredients or the Kado figures that begin each chapter, does not appear to contribute any great insight into the text. When viewed in light of Kjørstad's award-winning Jonas Wergeland trilogy, however, it is easy to see how his experimentations with narrative form in *Homo falsus* contributed to narrative innovation on an even larger scale. The distinction that is important here is that Kjørstad presents the male narrator's consciousness in first person and the other characters, including Greta, in third person.

Above all, this is important because it supports the idea that ultimately a single narrator narrates the entire text. If Greta were also presented in the first person there could plausibly be two autonomous narrators at work, but because the male narrator is narrated in the first person and Greta in third person, it is consistent that a single, overarching narrator narrates them both. Nonetheless, even if the narrator behind the two is a single individual, I will show that he has multiple identities. He writes the male narrator's portions of the text as a modernist and Greta's portions of the text as a postmodernist. While seemingly mutually exclusive, it is necessary to understand both in order to understand the text as a whole.

#### EPISTEMOLOGY/ONTOLOGY

In comparing the characteristics of modernism and postmodernism, Jansson observes that:

Detektivromanen (modernismens mest typiska populärlitterära genre) är alltid starkt epistemologiskt inriktad... Ett brott—vanligtvis ett mord—begås og härefter blir det detektivens uppgift att rekonstruera mordet... och finna fram til mördaren... Science-fiction-berättelsen däremot (postmodernismens mest karakteristiska populärlitterära genre) är vanligtvis helt annorlunda konstruerad. Den berättar ofta *hypotetiskt* om sådant som i en högteknologiskt högtstående *framtid* skulle kunna *tänkas* ske men som inte nödvändigtvis verkligen kommer att inträffa. Dessutom konfronteras ofta i science fiction-romaner med varandra olika världar och härigenom erhåller denna typ av roman en—och i motsats till den epistemologiskt orienterade detektivberättelsen—påtaglig ontologisk inriktning.

[The detective novel (modernism's most typical popular literature genre) is always strongly epistemologically focused... A crime—usually a murder—is committed and then it becomes the detective's job to reconstruct the murder... and figure out who the murderer is... The science fiction story on the other hand (postmodernism's most characteristic popular literature genre) is usually constructed completely differently. It often tells *hypothetically* about something that might be *thought* to happen in a highly technologically advanced *future*, but that does not necessarily actually happen. In addition, one is often confronted in science fiction novels with different worlds and by doing this, this type of novel—and in contrast with the epistemologically oriented detective novel—obviously has an ontological focus] (75).

Jansson describes how both Kjørstad's *Rand* [Brink] (1990) and Høeg's *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* [Smilla's Sense of Snow] (1992) combine elements of both a detective novel and a science fiction novel (Jansson 115, 75). While Jansson does not mention *Homo falsus* in this context, it also clearly combines elements of a detective novel and a science fiction novel.

Jansson does not cite any secondary sources for his 1996 observation that the detective novel “(modernismens mest typiska populärlitterära genre) är alltid starkt epistemologiskt inriktad”

[(modernism's most typical popular literary genre) is always strongly epistemologically focused] and that the science fiction novel "(postmodernismens mest karakteristiska populärlitterära genre)" [postmodernism's most characteristic popular literary genre] has an ontological focus (75). While his point is well made and correct, it is unfortunately also plagiarized. In *Postmodernist Fiction* from 1987, Brian McHale writes, "Science fiction, we might say, is to postmodernism what detective fiction was to modernism: it is the ontological genre *par excellence* (as the detective story is the epistemological genre *par excellence*)..." (16). Jansson could plead ignorance were it not for the fact that he cites McHale's text in several other locations.

In the case of *Homo falsus*, the male narrator's tale is a detective story and Greta's tale is science fiction. The story told through the male narrator's first person perspective is a classic murder mystery. He describes the crimes that result in the deaths of Paul, Alf, and Jacob, and searches for Greta's possible motives. He recognizes the ultimate need for an investigator "som kjente det macabre mords utallige finesser og våpen, som hadde besøkt Scotland Yards Black Museum og var en mester i innfløkte alibier, i avlytting, forkledninger, avledningsmanøvrer..." [who was familiar with the macabre murder's countless finesses and weapons, who had visited Scotland Yard's Black Museum and was a master of complicated alibis, auditory surveillance, disguises, diversionary maneuvers...] (299). In other words, *Homo falsus*'s male narrator views the novel as a classic modernist detective story, the case of a serial murderer that needs to be solved.

Greta's tale, by contrast, is science fiction. In her sections of the text, the victims literally vanish into thin air. The men's sequential disappearances are otherworldly, equated to the culmination of highest yoga Tantra. Perhaps they have literally attained a Buddhist state of nirvana, the "extinguishing" of their lives as characters. Many of the elements that can be read in a Buddhist light—such as the Borobudur motif, mandalas, stūpas, and so forth—also contribute to making Greta's story science fiction. One potential area of academic study would be to look into aspects of Buddhism in *Homo falsus*. In the case of the men's disappearances and Greta's transformation from a character in a story into a real person, one narrative level above the story, Kjærstad has taken Tantra concepts and made them occur literally.

Greta goes through the classic pilgrims' ritual of *pradaksina*<sup>4</sup>. Over the course of the novel, as if she were making her way up and around through the galleries of Borobudur does, Greta travels through the worlds of desire, form, and formlessness until she reaches the stūpa at the top. The pinnacle of her spiritual journey arrives as she breaks through an ontological boundary at the end of her final narrative chapter. She prints out the novel *Homo falsus*, "romanen hun ikke skulle tenke, men leve... hun har fri i dag, vil ut... Ut.

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<sup>4</sup> "It is a classic Buddhist ritual for pilgrims to carry out the stages of a visit by turning clockwise and gradually upwards around a stūpa, until reaching the smallest round, which is that of the unity at the top. This method was already described in pre-Vedic texts prior to 2700 BC; in India, this is called—by Hindus as well as Jains and Buddhists—'pradaksina.' The idea is to walk around the divine in order to awaken the divine, meaning to bring a statue to life and thus exalt its power, while at the same time apprehending all aspects of its divinity..." (Berger Foundation).

Nå begynte det. Nullstilt. Ta fatt forfra. Gjør det umulige” [The novel she wouldn’t think, but live... today she’s free, wants to go out... Out. Now it was beginning. Reset. Make a fresh start. Do the impossible] (327). Greta’s tale can be read both as a parable of a Buddhist spiritual pilgrimage and as science fiction in that these spiritual events have been presented as literally true.

It is science fiction in that the three men vanish into thin air with only their clothing left behind. The men’s disappearances are obviously ontological in nature. Human beings can vanish in an instant in Greta’s world. Of course, Greta’s tale is science fiction in many other regards as well. She constantly repeats her mantra to “gjøre det umulige” [do the impossible] to herself and Kjærstad even gives her “røntgenblikk” [x-ray vision] (288). Greta is characterized by doing the impossible, by transcending the boundaries of reality. Kjærstad associates her with forming a strategy for the “fjerde dimensjon. Nye øyne. Alle vinkler samtidig” [fourth dimension. New eyes. All angles simultaneously] (73). Her tale of role-playing, fluid identity, x-ray vision, and men vanishing into thin air is the science fiction counterpart to the male narrator’s realistic, factual, murder investigating detective novel. Ultimately, *Homo falsus* contains both genres.

As Jansson points out, science fiction often juxtaposes two dissimilar worlds, thus foregrounding ontological questions about which world is real. In *Homo falsus*, Kjærstad juxtaposes the temple at Borobudur and Vigeland’s Park. He also juxtaposes Greta’s mystical tale and the male narrator’s gritty detective story.

That said, the focus on epistemology and ontology is clear in the text not only in the allusions to detective fiction and science fiction, but in the male narrator’s pervasive focus on epistemological issues and Greta’s pervasive focus on ontological issues. The male narrator’s existence is marked by epistemological issues. There is only one version of the male narrator. He is consistent throughout the book. His habits are consistent; he lies on Abel’s bed and makes himself salads that always follow the same pattern. He consistently focuses on epistemological questions. He dwells on questions of how to interpret his world: What do Greta’s actions mean?; What are the facts?; How reliable is the knowledge he has?; What is his place in the world? Is he crazy? And so on.

By contrast, Greta’s existence is marked by ontological issues. There are four major incarnations of her character in the book. The different versions of Greta have different idols—Mao, Elvis, and Bakunin—and different careers—scholar, rock musician, feminist, and author. Greta’s identity is multiple. Kjærstad portrays her as a person who can be literally anything. We read, “Men hvem var hun. Hvem vil du være. Hvem *kan* du være i dette samfunnet. Lastebilsjåfør. Skiltmaler. Grunnskolelærer...” [But who was she. Who do you want to be. Who *can* you be in this society. Truck driver. Sign painter. Elementary school teacher] (74). Greta is the ultimate ontological experiment; she can be anyone. She is part computer program, part vamp, part activist, part student, part author, and so on. Her world focuses on ontological questions. She dwells on questions of the nature of being and reality: What world is this?; How do these

various worlds differ?; Which of my selves is performing?; What happens when different kinds of worlds are juxtaposed or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world(s) it projects?; How is a projected world structured?; And so on.

Hence, Kjørstad creates a narrator with multiple identities. The male narrator's story is a classic modernist detective story. The male narrator's concerns are epistemological. The world that the male narrator lives in is stable and realistic, forming an ontologically unproblematic backdrop against which the events of the plot and the characters' thoughts may be displayed. Modernist fiction, in short. Greta's story is postmodernist and in many ways science fiction. Greta's concerns are ontological. There is no stable world behind Greta's consciousness; incompatible realities flicker into existence and out of existence again. Postmodernist fiction, in short (cf. McHale, *Postmodernist* 234). Kjørstad's *Homo falsus* juxtaposes a modernist version and a postmodernist version of the same story.

#### UNIVALENCE/MULTIVALENCE

The narrator's split personality in *Homo falsus* also emphasizes other prevalent changes in the way people think about literature. Once again, the male narrator's story is told in a modernist vein and Greta's story in a postmodernist vein. This can be seen both in the question of who speaks for whom as well as in the way non-Norwegian elements and ideas are presented. In the male narrator's novel, a male author writes the story of a female murderer. In Greta's novel, by contrast, the woman's story is told from her own perspective. Similarly, when the male narrator writes about Eastern religion it is threatening, dangerous, and presented as Other. When Greta writes about Eastern religion, it is as someone who practices the religion with familiarity and scholarly focus.

The male narrator's creation of Greta implies that the man is best qualified to tell the woman's story. He narrates Greta's speech, her thoughts, her deeds, and dictates her motives. In his version of the novel, she is the object of his creation, not a subject in her own right.

The male narrator consistently portrays women's sexuality in a negative light, often with a preliminary rush of excitement, particularly as the men each have a brief encounter with a woman named Siri, followed equally consistently by remarkably negative connotations of things like witches, bitterness, and taking out the trash. The male narrator describes his failed ten-year marriage with his ex-wife Eli, explaining that "hun avslørte seg som en heks og får ikke noe Taj Mahal av meg" [she revealed herself to be a witch and won't be getting any Taj Mahal from me] (119). The relationships Paul, Alf, and Jacob have with their wives are also portrayed negatively. Paul's wife Fernande, for example, starts out as "nesten uutholdelig sexy" [almost unbearably sexy], but their sex life quickly declines until sex "var ikke mer erotisk enn å tømme avfallet i søppelsjakten" [was no more erotic than dumping the trash down the garbage chute] (40).

The male narrator particularly villainizes Greta's sexuality and portrays it in an extremely negative, ominous light. She consistently uses flattery to lure men into meeting her, seduces them, murders them, and mails their clothing back to their families. Her use of Tantric ideas is suspect, sinister, and deadly. Her reenactments of scenes from Garbo movies are presented as threatening and unnerving.

In contrast to this, when the narrative is presented through Greta's consciousness, female sexuality is portrayed in a far more positive light. While Greta is seducing each of the men, the narrative focus jumps back and forth between the men's minds and Greta's mind. While the men are unsettled and powerless, Greta is portrayed as calm and meditative. Sex is portrayed as natural and comfortable. Greta finds eroticism in things like rock music and movies. In short, in Greta's story, female sexuality is presented as normal, and as a potential means to spiritual growth.

Greta has quite an advanced understanding of Buddhism and Tantric philosophy compared to your average Norwegian. In her various incarnations, she also has an academic background including feminism and the history of Maoism. In her narration, she speaks for herself as a woman, the subject of her own story, not the object of a man's. By allowing Greta's story to be narrated directly through her own consciousness, Kjærstad foregrounds the concepts of authenticity and agency that so many postmodern, feminist, and postcolonial scholars have emphasized. While the modernist male narrator presumes to speak for Greta, postmodernist Greta problematizes this situation by insisting on speaking for herself and for not always agreeing with what the male narrator would have her say.

In fact, postmodernists frequently revisit history, retelling events from a provocatively transformed viewpoint. Greta, Kjærstad's postmodernist narrator, does just this. She tells her own version of the male narrator's story. And from Greta's perspective, although the evidence is the same, the message is quite different. Instead of being dangerous and deadly, Tantric sexuality is empowering. Instead of an exotic or threatening Other, Buddhism is a well-understood philosophical teaching.

Just as the modernist portions of the narrative portray female sexuality as negative, Other, and threatening, they also present Eastern religion and Tantric philosophy as dangerous, even deadly. Postmodernism has brought with it an increased awareness of subjects modernists often treated as Other. The male narrator writes about "en mystisk østerlandsk seksualteknikk" [a mystical Eastern sexual technique] (112). Greta, on the other hand, in her own science fiction way, has a thorough understanding of how Tantra works, conceiving of it not as a "technique" for making men disappear, but as a school of spiritual thought, what Mitchell calls "powerful and practical esoteric methods for spiritual advancement on the journey to Buddhahood" (160).

She explains her training in detail to Sissel, describing how her lama, "Ka Pa Thu, lærte meg den første *sādhana*'en... [og] Den Høyeste Yoga" [Ka Pa Thu, taught me the first *sādhana*... [and] The Highest Yoga] (231–232). And indeed, unlike the male narrator's minimal understanding of Buddhism, Greta's understanding proves far more profound. She uses specific Tantric terms such as the Sanskrit word

*sādhana*, meaning “esoteric practices,” and the “highest yoga,” the most advanced of the four types of Tantric practice (Mitchell 148, 167–8). Unlike the male narrator, Greta is familiar with many advanced Buddhist concepts and has clearly devoted her time and attention to finding a teacher and studying various practices. Tantra is not an unknown Other to Greta. In essence, just as Greta gets a chance to speak for herself in the text instead of having the male narrator speak for her, Tantric philosophy also gets a chance to speak for itself in the text, expressed not as the object of a Norwegian man’s fears, but as a natural part of Greta’s life.

Greta explains that the highest yoga, “besto i foreningen av motsetninger; i samleie mellom kvinne og mann... I tantrismen var seksualiteten nemlig en forståelse av den andre som et *subject*” [consisted of the unification of opposites; in sex between a woman and a man... In Tantra, sexuality was namely an understanding of the other as a *subject*] (232). Again, this supports the idea that she is getting her information from something more advanced than a coffee table book on the subject. Her explanation closely matches Buddhist scholars’. Mitchell, for example, writes of “Tantric techniques that help one experience the union... of self and other. From this experiential union of opposites results a ‘seed’ of *bodhicitta*... the energy of *bodhicitta* is also related to the union of feminine and masculine energies within the body...” (162). Throughout the text, Greta is greatly preoccupied with Buddhist ideas and knows her subject matter. The male narrator, on the contrary, rarely mentions anything related to Buddhism, avoids using Sanskrit terms, and generally portrays it as a generalized, threatening Other.

### AESTHETIC

In terms of generalized trends, as I outlined in chapter three, modernists focus on cities and machines while postmodernists focus on computers. Modernists draw on classical references while postmodernists draw on popular culture references. Modernist characters are more likely to be independently wealthy, devoting their lives to the pursuit of art, while postmodernist characters more often hold jobs. In each of these ways, *Homo falsus*’s male narrator is typically modernist, while Greta is typically postmodernist.

As the former Cambridge professor Raymond Williams wisely summarized, “...the key cultural factor of the modernist shift is the character of the metropolis” (Williams 91). In other words, the city is a major, if not the major, thematic factor in modernist literature. This is evident in works such as Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” and Knut Hamsun’s *Sult* [*Hunger*]. This is also evident in the male narrator’s version of *Homo falsus*, where Oslo plays a central role, almost a character in its own rite. Kjærstad permeates the text with references to Oslo. There are numerous passages that read like an homage to the city, such as

...vinklene mellom bygningene, den geometriske utformingene av trikkeskinnene, systemet av enveiskjørt gater, nattsafenes jernekjefter, de elektromagnetiske bølgene fra Tryvann og Røverkollen, alle trådene begravd under jorda, avløpsrørene, dataterminalene på reisebyråene, telex’en på Oslo Børs, kontrollpanelene i Lysverket, trafikk-knutepunktene, Danskebåtene ved



Utstikker 2, Kiel-ferga ved Hjortnes-kaia, Sentralbanestasjonen, bussene på Grønland torg, beskjedene over høyttaleren på Fornebu, de forskjellige vokabularene; studentene på UB, slakteren på Torshov, kirurgene på Legevakta, taxi-sjåføren utenfor Viking, byen som *hjerne*; Universitetshøyblokkene oppe på Blindern, Slottsparken og nattklubbene nede i sentrum, kloakken under Akershus festning, tre lag på en akse gjennom byen—det var alt dette hun elsket, innviklede forbindelser som søkte sin form, byen, Oslo som var *i* henne, i hodet, i blodet, under fotbladene...

[...the angles between the buildings, the streetcar tracks' geometrical formations, the system of one way streets, the night safes' iron jaws, the electromagnetic waves from Tryvann and Røverkollen, all the wires buried underground, the drainage pipes, the travel agencies' computer terminals, the telex at the Oslo Stock Exchange, the control panels at Oslo Electric Company, the traffic junctions, the Denmark boats at Pier 2, the ferry to Kiel at the Hjortnes wharf, the Central Railway Station, the busses at Grønland Square, the messages over the loudspeaker at Fornebu Airport, the different vocabularies; the students at the University Library, the butcher at Torshov, the surgeons in the Emergency Clinics, the taxi driver outside Viking, the city as a *brain*; the University highrises up at Blindern, the park around the Palace, and the nightclubs downtown, the sewer under Akershus Fortress, three layers on an axis through the city—she loved all of this, complicated associations searching for their form, the city, Oslo which was *in* her, in her head, in her blood, under the soles of her feet...] (291–92).

Throughout the text, passages such as this express an intimate knowledge of the city and a fascination with its workings and landmarks. In this way, *Homo falsus* is very much preoccupied with modernism's fascination with the city. At the same time it completes the mise-en-abyme of models of Oslo in the text. Paul, Alf, Jacob, the male narrator, and Kjærstad have each created their own model version of Oslo.

At the same time, postmodern references to computers also saturate the text. Kjærstad believes påvirkningen fra EDB kommer via den indirekte og mangfoldige veien snarere enn gjennom bøker skrevet ved hjelp av programmer og interaktive spill-romaner. Den vil først vise seg i stilen. EDB vil skape en puls, som Byen skapte en puls for modernistene (*Matrise* 78)

[computers' effect will come via their indirect and multiple pathways sooner than through books written using programs and interactive gaming-novels. They will first show themselves in the style. Computers will create a pulse, the way the City created a pulse for the modernists.]

Kjærstad takes a modernist depiction of the intricacies of urban Oslo and superimposes on them a layer of computer references. Greta travels through Oslo's nighttime streets, past "Bislett og Frydenlunds bryggeri, byen som en kjempechip, hun som signal" [Bislett and Frydenlund's Brewery, the city as a giant chip, she as a signal] (292). Here Kjærstad describes Greta as an electrical signal pulsing through the signal pathways in the giant computer chip that is Oslo. Kjærstad consistently presents Greta through computer terms. For example, "Hun ville bruke hodet. For å komme seg ut. Escape. Control C. Hjernen var en slegge som kunne knuse murer." [She wanted to use her head. To get out. Escape. Control C. Her brain was a sledgehammer that could smash masonry walls] (315). So, just as the male narrator represents modernism's fascination with the city, Greta literally embodies postmodernism's fascination with the computer.

The two narrators also embody modernism and postmodernism's respective stances on classical versus popular culture references. In the male narrator's portions of the text, the references are

overwhelmingly classical in nature. The list of names includes Odysseus, Oedipus, Theseus, Daidalos, Poseidon, Medea, Pandora, Scheherazade, Shakespeare, Wagner, Titian, Zeuxis, and Parrhasios. In Greta's portions of the text, the references are just as overwhelmingly popular in nature. The list includes actors (Greta Garbo, Marlon Brando, Spencer Tracy, Elvis), movies (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, *Spartacus*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Last Tango in Paris*, *The Shining*, *Jaws*), consumer products (Coca Cola, Benson and Hedges cigarettes), and extensive references to popular music. Equally striking are the lack of classical references in Greta's sections and the lack of popular culture references in the male narrator's sections. Once again, he is typically modernist, while she is typically postmodernist.

The modernism/postmodernism split is also reflected in the two narrators' respective careers. Modernist characters tend to be independently wealthy, devoting their time to an artistic passion rather than a job needed for financial reasons. Novels by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, and numerous others exemplify this. The male narrator in *Homo falsus* fits this trend. He writes, "Å skrive en roman ble rett og slett den perfekte måten å slå i hjel tid på. Penger hadde jeg nok av (takket være en arv)..." [To put it plainly, writing a novel was the perfect way to kill time. I had plenty of money (thanks to an inheritance)] (28). Aside from the novel he is writing, the male narrator's only other hobby appears to be salad making.

By contrast, each of the various incarnations of Greta has a different career outside of her work as an author. She even works in a nightclub, saving up her tip money to buy a computer (293). Greta does not write out of boredom nor live off of an inheritance. Kjørstad details her academic backgrounds and the difficulties she encounters in her careers. In short, Greta is a self-made contemporary woman while the male narrator fits the mold of the modernist artist.

### *THE ROLE OF ART*

The text's two narrators respectively embody modernist and postmodernist perspectives on the role of art. The male narrator adheres to Ezra Pound's modernist maxim to "make it new," striving to create an autonomous art object. By contrast, Greta adheres to postmodernist ideals, striving to create an intertextual, relativistic artistic work, one that is more process than end product.

Modernists prefer rootlessly independent texts, unique, original works of art that do not rely on other texts. The male narrator typifies this modernist stance. He describes his quest for something new to write about, something that hadn't been written before. He explains, "skulle jeg dikte... måtte temaet været nytt" [If was going to write... the theme had to be new] (28). As he struggles to come up with a completely original idea, he experiences frustration, finding that all topics are "brukt, brukt, brukt. Alt var oppbrukt" [used, used, used. Everything was used up] (29). The male narrator writes that despite so many stories and themes having been used already, "ville jeg ikke akseptere at originalitet var umulig" [I would not accept that originality was impossible] (30). In fact, the male narrator expressly aligns himself with the modernist movement when he calls it tragic that,

så mange i dag skriver på same måte som 1800-tallets forfattere, same hvor *godt* det er skrevet. Jeg vet det er fristende... for min del har jeg alltid betraktet litteraturen som en stafett og vil heller krabbe en ny etappe enn å ta på meg forrige generasjons kortbukser og løpe første etappe om igen

[so many people write today the same way nineteenth century authors did, regardless of how *well* it's written. I know it's tempting... for my part I've always considered literature to be a relay race and I would rather stumble through a new leg than to put on the previous generation's shorts and run the first leg over again] (113).

Here, the male narrator very clearly expresses his desire to do something new with his art. He is expressing in his own words Ezra Pound's rallying cry to "make it new."

By contrast, Greta represents the postmodernist counterpart to this view. Instead of trying to create something completely new and autonomous, she is intentionally creating a relativistic, intertextual work. She targets four men with seductive letters, appealing to each of the men individually. She draws on scenes from Garbo's movies *Queen Christina*, *Camille*, and *Maria Walewska*, but each time she acts out scenes from Garbo movies she insists on changing the plot of the film so that she does not die in the end (151). She constantly revisits scenes from old films, lyrics from rock songs, allusions to historical figures, and other references, weaving an intertextual tale that is partially new and partially derivative.

While the male narrator is thoroughly wrapped up in trying to create a novel with a completely new theme, Greta is interested in recreating herself. Ultimately, her goal is to transform herself through Tantric practice, to move from one ontological plane to another, as opposed to the male narrator's epistemological concentration on expressing his unchanging ontology through art. The two narrators' opinions on the autonomy of art and value of intertextuality could not be more representative of a modernist and postmodernist view of art. They are stereotypical representatives of the two movements.

They are also stereotypical in their approach to art. The male narrator views art as an object, a finished, autonomous entity, while Greta views art as a process, a performance. The male narrator's goal is to present Homo Recens, the New Human. Once he depicts this specimen, as a textual object, his project will be complete. Greta's project is to create herself, but not as an artistic object. Instead Greta seeks to literally create herself, to go from an object of the male narrator's artistic production to the subject of her own life, to transcend to a higher ontological level. She does this through performances of scenes from Garbo movies, through sex with her victims, through recreating different versions of herself. Her art is consistently performative, unlike the male narrator who makes art from the safety of his own apartment, creating an object that is separate from himself and his world. Until the two collide of course.

In addition, the ways in which the male narrator and Greta use film and performance are textbook representations of a modernist and postmodernist use of cinema. McHale explains that,

for modernist fiction, the movies served primarily as a source for new techniques of representation... instead of serving as a repertoire of representational techniques, the movies and television appear in postmodernist writing as an ontological level: a world-within-the-world (*Postmodernist* 128)

This difference is clear in the way the male narrator and Greta relate to film and television. The male narrator turns on his television and “ligger på sengen og ser på alt som er, fra barne-TV til Kveldsnytt. Ofte med lyden av. Også denne tiden bruker jeg til å tenke mens jeg lar bildene svirre foran øynene” [lies on the bed and watches everything there is, from children’s television to the evening news. Often with the sound off. I use this time to think as well while I let the images swirl before my eyes] (83). For the male narrator, the television is in the background. He does not act out scenes from these programs. He does not even mention specific scenes, just rattles off names of programs.

When he mentions the names of specific programs, it is not because the plots of the programs are important to the story he is writing. He names the shows and movies that he watches to provide himself and the reader with a more thorough picture of his writing process. He explains that the story of Alf and Greta seems so remote when he thinks back on it, “men jeg ser jeg har notert ned noen av de programmene som gikk på TV i den perioden jeg skrev ferdig disse kapitlene” [but I see that I jotted down some of the programs that were on TV when I was finishing writing these chapters] (192). He goes on to list the programs—*Zoom!*, *Ta Den Ring* (Norwegian science fiction), *To Serve Them All My Days*, a Danish documentary on wire tapping, the 57<sup>th</sup> episode of *Dallas*—but does not tie the shows into his writing, does not dwell on the contents of any of the programs.

Greta’s life by contrast is seeped in film and television references, and they are practically all elaborated on. Pages 106–111, for example, go into great detail about how specific television shows and movies have specific associations and implications in her life. How she watched *Citizen Kane* when she was in third grade and didn’t understand any of it, but had to watch because the presenter had said it was not suitable for children and she couldn’t resist (107). Or detailing the scenes from the *Deer Hunter* she found particularly horrifying and how those images pop up when one least expects them, “når du står med kjæresten i Eiffeltårnet og ser utover Paris, oversikt og lykke; plutselig dukker Walkens ansikt opp, skjuler Madeleine-kirken i to sekunder før den forsvinner igjen” [when you’re standing with your lover in the Eiffel tower and looking out over Paris, the view and happiness; suddenly Walkens’s face appears, hides the Église de la Madeleine for two seconds before it disappears again] (108). When it concerns Greta, Kjærstad makes use of the content of the reference. When it concerns the male narrator, Kjærstad includes the references in name only.

For the male narrator, television and film references serve to provide inspiration in his writing. They suggest themes or techniques that he can use in his writing. His relationship with film and television fits McHale’s description of a modernist one. For Greta, television and film references are an integral part of who she is. Scenes from movies and TV shows appear in her sections of *Homo falsus* as a world within the world. The references to the *Deer Slayer* above are a prime example. The horror and alienation of the *Deer Slayer* has one layer of meaning in the text, accessible to anyone who has seen the film. The fact that those specific scenes haunt Greta provides a level of insight into her character. The fact that those scenes

pop into her head at inopportune, inappropriate moments provides yet another layer of meaning. The references appear in Greta's world have an added ontological level; they evoke the original, something in Greta's life, and a third thing as those two are juxtaposed. In short, they are postmodernist.

### MESSAGE

The message of the male narrator's portions of the text is thoroughly modernist. He conceives of the story as consistent, or needing consistency. He sees it as a murder mystery where everything should add up in the end. For him, there is one ultimately true version of the events. The message of Greta's portions of the text is thoroughly postmodernist. She conceives of the story as multiple, made up of a number of smaller stories. She is not troubled by inconsistencies between the different versions. There does not have to be a single, resolved version of events. For Greta, truth can be multiple. In short, her tale is postmodernist and his is modernist.

*Homo falsus* must ultimately, according to the male narrator, comprise one consistent story. When he senses that things are not adding up, he comes up with the idea of adding a detective to the story. The detective "visste at det gjaldt å tro på muligheten av forbindelser på tross av store distanser; en etterforsker som ergo bygde på det viktigste: at alt henger sammen" [knew that it was a matter of believing in the possibility of connections despite great distances; a detective who therefore depended on the most important thing: that everything is connected] (299). In other words, the male narrator believes that *Homo falsus* is a detective story, a genre that McHale calls "the epistemological genre *par excellence*" (9). The male narrator believes that there is an ontologically unproblematic world that is stable and reconstructable against which the movement of the characters' minds and their actions can be displayed. For example, the male victims do not vanish into thin air, because that is impossible. Greta must have murdered them with a knife and burned their bodies.

Greta's version is not so consistent. She is consistently describing as doing the impossible. She can zero herself out and reinitialize herself like a computer program. She has "ingen illusjoner. Ingen krav om å finne sin 'identitet.' Bare dette ene: å kunne få begynne på nytt... få lov til å være uferdig. Fra å være galt ferdig til å få være uferdig med nye muligheter" [no illusions. No requirement to find her 'identity.' Just the one thing: to be able to start from scratch... be allowed to be unfinished. From being finished wrong to being unfinished with new possibilities] (326). In Greta's story, she is variously interested in Mao, Elvis, Bakunin, Joyce, Schönberg, Picasso, and Garbo. She is inconsistent and her world is inconsistent. The male victims vanish into thin air, even though that is impossible.

The male narrator keeps a photo collection of Oslo. He needs for everything to add up into a larger whole. Greta keeps pictures of "USA, der de erklærte gale var normale. Sovjet, der de normale ble erklært gale. Kina, der et helt lands galskap ble retusjert bort" [the United States, where what was declared crazy was normal. The Soviet Union, where what was normal was declared crazy. China, where a whole

country's craziness was retouched away] (326). In many ways, the two's photographs are demonstrative of their stances on narrative. The male narrator believes in the supremacy of a single grand narrative. All of his photos add up to present a larger picture of Oslo. Greta believes in the supremacy of multiple, smaller narratives. Her photos do not add up to a larger whole, and on her apartment walls movie posters surround them making the collection all the more eclectic. He needs for Greta to have a motive, and for the crime to have a single solution. Greta keeps an open awareness of multiple possibilities, multiple ways of looking at things, multiple answers. His view is essentially modernist and hers postmodernist.

The ultimate evidence that the male narrator represents a modernist stance and Greta a postmodernist stance is their ultimate fates. Like so many modernist narrators before him, the male narrator slips into madness. He is institutionalized and rather enjoys his new life. He never had much of a life outside the novel he was writing anyway. Mostly he only had Niels Abel's bed and his salads. And he is even able to bring Abel's bed to the mental institution with him. His fictional world and his real world coalesce to become one world. He gets a "en klaustrofobisk følelse av å være kontrollert, en sinnssyk fornemmelse av bare å være en karakter i en fiksjon..." [claustrophobic feeling of being controlled, an insane sense of being just a character in a fiction] (199). He ends the book with fewer ontological levels than he began it.

Greta by contrast transcends fiction to become real. Greta's book ends with her realization that it was "romanen hun ikke skulle tenke, men leve" [the novel she wouldn't think, but live] (327). At the end of the book, she puts on her cape and we read, "hun har fri i dag, vil ut... Ut. Nå begynte det. Nullstilt. Ta fatt forfra. Gjør det umulige" [she's free today, wants to go out... Out. Now it was starting. Reset. Make a fresh start. Do the impossible] (327). She ends the book by moving into another ontological plane. She leaves the world of being a fictional character and goes out onto the streets of Oslo to live her own life, transcending the boundary between two different ontological levels. Her realities as a character and as a real person are incompatible, and yet they are both true. As the male narrator becomes a character, Greta becomes an autonomous subject. *Homo falsus* brings the process of postmodern subject creation to life; Kjærstad elevates the quest for subjectivity over the subject itself.

To conclude, Kjærstad's *Homo falsus* is a postmodernist text, however reluctant its author and Norwegian critics are to be pinned down on the subject. My two complementary readings both result in interpreting the male narrator and Greta as two different and seemingly mutually exclusive aspects of a single individual. In other words, the text's main character is two people at once. *Homo falsus* explores a new kind of individual, an alternative way of portraying people. To borrow Kjærstad's analogy, this postmodern individual's identity consists of a network of onions, not a single onion. Kjærstad also superimposes a modernist detective story and a postmodernist science fiction story. He superimposes a man's story about a female murderer and a woman's story of creating herself. The two stories are incompatible, and yet they are both true.