

NORDIC NARRATIVES OF NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

ECOCRITICAL APPROACHES TO
NORTHERN EUROPEAN LITERATURES AND CULTURES

Edited by **REINHARD HENNIG, ANNA-KARIN
JONASSON, and PETER DEGERMAN**

Nordic Narratives of Nature and the Environment

ECOCRITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Nordic Narratives of Nature and the Environment

**Ecocritical Approaches to Northern
European Literatures and Cultures**

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**Reinhard Hennig, Anna-Karin Jonasson, and
Peter Degerman**

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Introduction

Nordic Narratives of Nature and the Environment

Reinhard Hennig, Anna-Karin Jonasson,
and Peter Degerman

In the Nordic countries, people use bicycles instead of cars. They live in carbon-neutral cities, where all electricity is derived from renewable sources. They practice urban farming, growing and consuming their food locally and in sustainable ways. From an early age, they educate their children to become equally responsible eco-citizens. The political leaders in the region, however, are not content with governing the planet's most environmentally aware and eco-friendly population. They also altruistically offer to the rest of the world the Nordic model for building ecologically sustainable societies.

Northern Europe seems to be the *Ecotopia* from Ernest Callenbach's novel with that same title turned into a reality. This, at least, is the impression that the Nordic Council of Ministers (a state-financed body facilitating cooperation between the Nordic countries) conveys in a promotional film for its recently launched campaign *Nordic Solutions to Global Challenges* (Nordic Council of Ministers 2017a). However, the green image of the Nordic region depicted in this video is not an unmediated representation of socioecological facts. It is based on a narrative that probably says at least as much about how Nordic governments wish to present their countries to the world as about the actual lived realities in these countries. It tells one particular story, and in doing so, omits other narratives that might nuance or even contradict this story. As with all narratives, it is culturally constructed and derived from and embedded in broader cultural and historical contexts. However, that does not mean that it is irrelevant.

Narratives help us make sense of the world by structuring our perception of reality and sometimes even by guiding our actions. Many may look on *Nordic Solutions to Global Challenges* as an attempt at greenwashing politics and lifestyles whose ecological sustainability in many respects can be called into question. However, in constructing and telling an idealizing narrative of

Nordic greenness, those who present this narrative also put some pressure on themselves to at least to some extent achieve this ideal in reality. What sorts of narratives we tell about nature, the environment, and our relation toward them is therefore highly relevant. This makes these narratives themselves an important subject for environmental research, especially when considering the immense challenges that we are facing today in the form of, among other things, climate change, ecosystem degradation, and the global reduction of biological diversity.

The natural sciences deliver ever more detailed insights into the origins, characteristics, and possible consequences of these ongoing ecological and climatic transformations. However, since environmental change in most cases is directly or indirectly caused by human activity, it is also inextricably linked to social and cultural questions. Against this background, there is a growing insight that not only the natural sciences, but also the social sciences and the humanities can and should substantially contribute to environmental research. As a consequence, the so-called environmental humanities are currently emerging as a new field of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research that examines the complex ways in which social and cultural aspects form and influence human-environment interrelations (Emmett and Nye 2017).

Ecocriticism, by now a common designation for literary and cultural studies focusing on environmental questions, contributes to this research by studying human ideas, perceptions, and meaning-making processes in relation to the environment as expressed in various kinds of cultural production. Ecocriticism has grown rapidly in recent years and today constitutes a large and diverse field. This was much different only two decades ago. The focus of early ecocriticism as it evolved in the 1990s was mainly on nonfiction, especially the genre of nature writing and the textual representation of place. In addition, due to the field's origins in the United States, the selection of texts for ecocritical analysis was for quite some time mostly limited to Anglophone literature and especially North American works. Much of this changed rapidly from the end of the 1990s on. Fictional texts such as novels and short stories gained increasing attention, as did poetry's relation to nature and the environment. Gradually, ecocritical research began to encompass even other forms such as film, photography, and eventually all kinds of *ecomedia* (Rust, Monani, and Cubitt 2016). In addition, marked by the publication of Ursula Heise's seminal book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* in 2008, a more global perspective began to emerge, complementing the dominant focus on place and directing attention to the complex interconnections between local, national, and global levels with regard to environmental questions.

However, the inclusion of non-Anglophone literatures and cultures in ecocritical research proceeded slower, despite some early attempts, such

as the 1998 anthology *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook*, edited by Patrick Murphy. Yet perceptions and representations of nature and the environment in works of literature, film, and other forms of cultural expression are always embedded in specific cultural, social, and historical contexts. Although many contemporary environmental risks and the global environmental change occurring today are unprecedented in the history of human life on earth, the images and narratives by which humans relate to these phenomena nevertheless build on and make use of existing cultural tropes and narrative models. Cultural, social, and historical contexts as well as intertextual relations therefore strongly influence how images and narratives of nature and the environment are constructed. This means that there is a need for culture-related and language-related diversification and for comparative approaches within the environmental humanities in general and in ecocriticism in particular (Garrard 2012, 203). *Nordic Narratives of Nature and the Environment* is meant to contribute to this diversification process through, for the first time, assembling and making accessible ecocritical research from the field of Scandinavian studies in the form of an English language volume.

NORDIC ENVIRONMENTAL EXCEPTIONALISM

Scandinavian studies, as a field of research and teaching, focuses on the literatures, cultures, languages, histories, and societies of Scandinavia, or, in a wider sense, of the so-called Nordic countries. In Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish language, the Nordic region is called *Norden* (“The North”). Whereas the term Scandinavia in contemporary use normally refers to the modern states of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, *Norden* has a wider meaning. The Nordic Council of Ministers defines *Norden* as consisting of Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Åland Islands, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland.

Although all of these countries and autonomous regions are historically and culturally connected with each other in many ways, considerable differences exist within the Nordic region. Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the Swedish-speaking Åland Islands are closely related to each other through their North Germanic main languages, which are for the most part mutually comprehensible. Finnish, a Finno-Ugrian language, is very different from the North Germanic languages, although Finland shares a long common history with Sweden and is culturally very closely related to the other northern European countries. Finland also has a Swedish-speaking minority and Swedish is one of the country’s official languages. In northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland, the indigenous Sami population inhabits what is called Sápmi, a region that

does not conform to modern national borders and that even stretches into parts of Russia. The Sami languages are Finno-Ugrian and thus not related to the North Germanic languages either, but interaction between the different ethnic and linguistic groups of northern Europe has taken place for many thousands of years. The Arctic archipelago of Svalbard is a part of Norway's territory, while Denmark is historically and politically connected to the now autonomous former colonies of Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Iceland was settled by Scandinavians during the Viking Age and later became a part of the Danish kingdom before gaining full independence in 1944. Icelandic and Faroese share a common root with Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish, but are no longer readily understandable to speakers of the modern Scandinavian languages. Greenlandic is an Inuit language that is not related to any of the northern European languages.

Despite geographical, linguistic, and population differences, the Nordic countries share a reputation of economic prosperity, strong welfare states, high levels of education, as well as social and gender equality. International rankings of various kinds frequently rate Nordic countries at the top. For example, the World Happiness Report of 2017 ranked Norway, Iceland, and Denmark as the top three happiest countries in the world, Finland as fifth and Sweden as tenth (with the United States “only” ranking fourteenth; Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs 2017, 20). A recent study found that if the entire Nordic region were considered one country, it would rank in the top ten for twelve international indexes measuring equality, innovation, anti-corruption, freedom of the press, happiness and welfare, economic competitiveness, and environmental performance (Nordic Council of Ministers 2017b).

Protection of the environment is a key area in which the Nordic countries have acquired a reputation as being forerunners on national, regional, as well as international levels. The United Nations held their first conference on the environment in Stockholm in 1972, on the initiative of the host country Sweden. The term *sustainable development* was established in international political discourse through the World Commission on Development and the Environment, also called the Brundtland Commission as it was led by the Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. Since the Commission published its report *Our Common Future* in 1987, the Nordic countries have been among the worldwide most adamant proponents of sustainable development, understood as a form of “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 43). This international commitment goes hand in hand with comprehensive efforts at ecological modernization at home and relatively widespread environmental awareness among Nordic citizens (Tunkrova 2008, 27).

This Nordic “environmental exceptionalism” informs the campaign for *Nordic Solutions to Global Challenges*. However, it does not provide a complete and entirely accurate picture of the Nordic countries’ relationship to environmental issues. For example, a recent study measuring how far the Nordic countries have come in achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals found that there is considerable need for improvement in Nordic agricultural systems, energy efficiency, and ecosystem conservation. However, the greatest discrepancy between the Nordic environmental self-image and reality relates to consumption, as material consumption levels in the Nordic countries are considerably higher than what the goal of sustainability would permit (Nordic Council of Ministers 2017c). Therefore, the relationship between environmental awareness and environmental behavior in the Nordic countries is not as strong as it may seem at first glance. Against this background, studying Nordic narratives of nature and the environment as they appear in various forms of cultural production can contribute to a better understanding of the historical developments that contributed to the construction of the Nordic countries’ contemporary green image, and at the same time critically question the realities behind this image.

NORDIC NATURE IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Nature and the environment have always played important roles for Nordic societies, and they feature prominently in many areas of cultural expression. It is, of course, impossible to provide here an exhaustive account of the role of nature and the environment in Nordic literatures and cultures from their beginnings to present day. Some short and selective remarks will therefore have to suffice.

Human presence in northern Europe began after the last Ice Age, during which the region had been entirely covered by glaciers. After the inland ice started to melt some 12,000 years ago, plants, animals, and finally humans began to populate the now ice-free land area. The first humans arriving were hunters and gatherers whose interactions with the non-human environment can be traced not only through material remains, but also through rock carvings that have been discovered in many places in the Nordic countries, some as far north as Alta in Finnmark in northern Norway (69 degrees latitude). These carvings characteristically depict hunting and fishing scenes, with reindeer, elk, birds, and fish as recurring motifs. Rock carvings continued to be created even after the transition to agriculture in large parts of northern Europe, with one of the most well-known Bronze Age sites (used from roughly 180–500 BC) located at Tanum on the west coast of Sweden.

It was not before the second century AD and thus the Iron Age that runes as the first rudiments of a writing culture began to appear in northern Europe. Yet runic inscriptions (usually found on objects such as weapons, amulets, and stones) tended to be short and they do not provide much insight into human-environment interrelations. With the spread of Christianity in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Latin alphabet was introduced in the Nordic countries. From the twelfth century, longer texts, some in Latin, some written in the vernacular, are preserved, and these contain a broad variety of details about medieval Nordic societies and their relationship with the environment. The Old Norse *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (The Saga of Egil Skallagrímsson), for example, was written in the thirteenth century and describes in detail practices of resource use in Norway as well as the Viking Age exploration and colonization of the previously uninhabited Iceland. A remarkable text probably originally written in Norway around 1260, *Konungs skuggsjá* (The King's Mirror) conveys much geography- and nature-related medieval knowledge, including a discussion of different theories for explaining the phenomenon of the Northern Lights or *aurora borealis*.

During the early modern period, interest in the history and the nature of the Nordic region increased considerably. A notable expression of this interest is Olaus Magnus' *Carta Marina* from 1539, the first map depicting all of northern Europe and Iceland, including many details about natural resources and sometimes fanciful depictions of the people and animals inhabiting these lands and the surrounding seas. Another example is Peter Dass' long poem *Nordlands Trompet* (Trumpet of the North), completed around 1696 but first printed in 1739, which provides a detailed poetical description of nature and human-environment interactions in what are today the northern Norwegian counties of Nordland and Troms.

A less resource-centered and more aesthetic view of nature made its entrance in eighteenth century landscape poems such as "En Maji-Dag" ("A Day in May," 1758) by Danish-Norwegian poet Christian Braunmann Tullin. This was also the Age of Enlightenment, during which empirical studies of nature became more and more common. The most well-known Nordic representative is certainly Sweden's Carl von Linné (1707–1778), who created the binomial nomenclature for classifying species still used today. In addition, Linné produced travelogues that describe his journeys through several Swedish landscapes (starting with Lappland in 1732). These texts not only present interesting details about flora and fauna, but also have distinct literary qualities.

In the Nordic countries the nineteenth century, especially its second half, was characterized by the modernization of agriculture, industrialization, urbanization, and emigration to North America. Much of the literature and art of this time not only reflects these enormous social changes, but also delivers

counter-images through an idealization of traditional rural life. The national romanticism that flourished during that century tried to construct national identities connected to particular Nordic landscapes, a tendency that is clear, for example, in most of the Nordic countries' national anthems, which were composed during this time.

While in the romantic view, nature still appeared as orderly, as created and controlled by God, the processes of increasing industrialization and urbanization soon made it clear that human activity could alter the environment in detrimental ways. An early literary expression of this insight can be found in Henrik Ibsen's realistic drama *En Folkefiende* (*An Enemy of the People*, 1882). In this play a doctor named Tomas Stockmann discovers that the water in his town's spa is contaminated by industrial sewage and thus hazardous to the health of the spa visitors. However, Stockmann, believing that he will render society a great favor through revealing this pollution problem, experiences that the local power elites, who see their economic interests endangered, do not at all appreciate his role as a whistleblower and turn against him.

Anthropogenic environmental change accelerated during the twentieth century. One of those who were earliest in warning against the unsustainability of modern resource use practices and of contemporary human-environment interrelations was Swedish writer Elin Wägner. In works such as *Fred med jorden* (*Peace with Earth*, co-authored with Elisabeth Tamm, 1940) and *Väckarklocka* (*Alarm Clock*, 1941), Wägner developed a combined critique of patriarchy and of detrimental environmental behavior long before Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term *ecofeminism* in 1974.

From the second half of the twentieth century, and especially from around 1970, environmental issues began to appear more and more frequently in works of literature, both fiction and nonfiction. One influential Norwegian text from that time is Erik Dammann's *Fremtiden i våre hender* (*The Future in Our Hands*, 1972), which makes a case for less alienated lifestyles and for global environmental justice. This book served as the foundational text for a still existing environmental organization of the same name. Awareness that many environmental problems indeed have a global dimension began to become widespread in the 1970s, and often found its literary expression in dystopian texts. Norwegian writer Knut Faldbakken's two connected novels *Uår: Aftenlandet* and *Uår: Sweetwater* (1974 and 1976; translated into English as *Sweetwater*) present thus a scenario of overpopulation, environmental pollution, and increasing resource scarcity typical of that time. As some of the first literary texts worldwide to include anthropogenic climatic change in their plot, these novels also led the way toward the more recent trend of climate change fiction (or "cli-fi").

Recently, there has been a veritable boom in Nordic works of literature and art that in one way or another address environmental questions, often inspired by an awareness that significant detrimental change has already happened and that the planet through human activity even has entered a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. This consciousness is clearly expressed in the titles of some recent Nordic collections of poetry, such as the Swedish poet Jonas Gren's *Antropocen: Dikt för en ny epok* (Anthropocene: Poems for a New Epoch, 2016) and the Danish poet Andreas Vermehren Holm's *Antropocæn kreatur* (Anthropocene Creature, 2015). Much of this new environmental literature is political in more or less obvious ways. In 2013, Forfatternes klimaaksjon (The Norwegian Writers' Climate Campaign) was launched as probably the world's first organization of writers committed to fighting climate change. The explicitly formulated intention behind Forfatternes klimaaksjon is to use works of literature as a means to influence environmental politics, thus instrumentalizing literature as a form of climate action. Novels such as Maja Lunde's *Blå* (Blue, 2017) or Jan Kjærstad's *Slekters gang* (The Path of Kins, 2015) bear witness to this intention. Whether the new Nordic environmental *littérature engagée* indeed can live up to the expectations that it raises remains to be seen. The public debate that has emerged around it seems in any case to show that a renewed belief in the societal relevance of literature and art is developing in the light of the immense environmental challenges of our time.

SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES AND ECOCRITICISM

Ecocritical approaches made their entrance into Scandinavian studies relatively late. However, the recent growth in Nordic literature and art that in diverse ways relates to environmental and climatic questions is now also accompanied by an increase in ecocritical research within Scandinavian studies.

Murphy's internationally oriented anthology *Literature of Nature* from 1998 contained no section on northern Europe, although it did include a chapter on literary representations of the Arctic and a chapter on the use of landscapes in the construction of Finnish national identity. So far, only few edited volumes have been published that primarily address Nordic literatures and cultures from an ecocritical perspective. A useful collection is *Naturhistorier* (Histories of Nature, 1999), edited by Ivar Lærkesen, Harald Bache-Wiig, and Andreas Lombnæs. This volume traces historical changes in human perceptions and in the cultural construction of non-human nature from the perspective of literary history. While the focus is not on ecological questions in a narrow sense, many of the chapters would today probably be

considered examples of ecocritical readings of Nordic literary texts. The ecocritical perspective is more clearly expressed in a recent edited volume on Nordic eco-poetry that assembles different perspectives on the ecological trend in contemporary poetry (Larsen, Mønster, and Rustad 2017).

There are also some book-length ecocritical studies concerned with the work of individual Nordic writers, including ecofeminist Elin Wägner (Leppänen 2008), the Danish poet Inger Christensen (Fjørtoft 2011), and the Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun (Bär 2016). Other examples include a comparative study of Icelandic and Norwegian environmental literature covering the period from 1970 to 2013 (Hennig 2014), another one of contemporary Nordic film (Kääpä 2014), and a recent book providing an overview of twentieth century and contemporary literature from Denmark from the perspective of material ecocriticism (Gregersen and Skiveren 2016). In addition to these books, there is a huge number of individual articles and book chapters that bring together ecocriticism and Scandinavian studies, and that are dispersed in a variety of journals and edited volumes.

Clearly, after a relatively slow start, ecocriticism has developed into a fast-growing sub-field within Scandinavian studies. However, until very recently, there was no common forum for ecocritical research on Nordic literatures and cultures, a situation that resembles that of ecocriticism in North America before its institutionalization in the 1990s (cf. Glotfelty 1996, xvi–xvii). Ecocritical publications on Nordic literatures and cultures were hard to find, and researchers mainly worked by themselves, unaware of each other's work. With the establishment of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE, founded 1992) in the United States and the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and Environment (EASLCE, founded 2004), important networks for ecocritical scholars from a variety of backgrounds existed already, yet there was no meeting place for ecocritics with a particular interest in Scandinavian studies. To remedy this situation, in 2016 the Ecocritical Network for Scandinavian Studies (ENSCAN) was founded. ENSCAN does not compete with the aforementioned organizations, but rather complements them, providing a forum that facilitates and intensifies international collaboration between scholars in ecocriticism who are working on or are interested in environmental topics related specifically to the literatures and cultures of the Nordic countries.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THE VOLUME

Nordic Narratives of Nature and the Environment is one of the first outcomes of this new cooperation among ecocritical Scandinavian studies scholars. We have decided to use English as the working language for both ENSCAN and

this volume for two reasons: First, this ensures intra-Nordic comprehensibility, which otherwise (considering the existing language differences in the Nordic region) would not be given even for readers with a thorough background in Scandinavian studies. Second, writing in English makes ecocritical research on Nordic literatures and cultures accessible to readers from other disciplinary backgrounds, and thus opens for comparative perspectives that otherwise would be impossible due to language barriers. Most of the ecocritical publications from Scandinavian studies so far, including those listed above, are not written in English, but in one of the Nordic languages (and in some cases even in other languages such as German). In addition, many of the works discussed in our volume are not available in English translation and have therefore been inaccessible (and probably in most cases unknown) to readers without the respective language skills. Making ecocritical research from Scandinavian studies accessible in English language is thus not only a way to communicate this research to a wider audience, but also to facilitate future comparative studies that can reveal both commonalities and differences between Nordic and other literatures and cultures with regard to narratives of nature and the environment.

Since our volume has a rather broad perspective, no completeness is possible with regard to content. An ecocritical study covering the literatures and cultures of the entire Nordic region from their beginnings to present day would demand much more space and probably be a rather unrealistic project. Therefore, we do not attempt such a holistic approach, but rather want to provide insights into selected aspects of Nordic literatures and cultures in relation to nature and the environment. The diversity of content in the individual chapters in this volume is thus by purpose. When it comes to geographical scope, that of our volume is not as broad as to comprise entire *Norden*, as defined by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Rather, we have chosen to focus mainly (but not exclusively) on what are today the northern European countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, while paying less attention to the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland. These North Atlantic islands have, of course, highly interesting environmental histories, literatures, and cultures of their own. However, among other things due to an immensely increased political, economic, and environmental interest in the Arctic over the past two decades, at least Iceland and Greenland have already been dealt with from ecocritical perspectives in recent English-language publications to quite some extent (cf. Körber, McKenzie, and Westerstahl Stenport 2017). With respect to time, we have decided to put the main focus on the period from the nineteenth century to the present, thus leaving out the premodern era and the early modern period. Yet while the range of the volume thus with regard to content is limited in some ways, it is still by no means narrow, covering as it does northern European literatures and cultures over a period

of more than two centuries. As a whole, the volume therefore provides substantial insights into both old and new narratives of nature and the environment as well as into intertextual relations, the variety of cultural traditions, and current discourses connected to the Nordic “environmental imagination.” Great care has also been taken to contextualize broadly in the individual chapters, to ensure comprehensibility for not only students and scholars from Scandinavian studies but also for a general audience that is not specialized on Northern European literatures and cultures.

Structurally, the volume is organized around three major sub-themes: Nordic Anthropocene narratives; language, aesthetics, and the non-human in Nordic environments; and environmental justice and the postcolonial North.

The notion that through human activity our planet has entered a new geological epoch was first proposed by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer in 2000. Since then, this idea has found widespread acceptance. While there is some disagreement about the proposed naming of this new epoch as the Anthropocene, the basic issue is rather uncontroversial: namely, that through radically altering the earth’s ecosystems and climate, humans have ended the Holocene and thus the epoch during which agriculture and all human civilizations have developed. This newly acquired status of humanity as a geological force necessitates a reimagining of the relationship between nature and culture, between individual and collective action, and between “biological” or short time frames and so-called “deep time,” at the same time as the global environmental and climatic changes confront humans and other species with entirely new forms of risk. In the first part of our anthology, many of these aspects are examined in relation to Nordic literatures and cultures.

Lauren E. LaFauci focuses thus on two projects located in different parts of Norway: the Svalbard Global Seed Vault on the Svalbard archipelago, which stores genetic varieties of crop seeds from around the globe; and the Future Library in Oslo, which archives unpublished book manuscripts written in many different languages for one hundred years. These projects, with their inherent long-term perspectives, exemplify an almost utopian view of the Nordic countries, imagining them as safe and stable places for the preservation of biological and cultural resources, even and especially under the new conditions of risk that characterize the Anthropocene. As LaFauci argues, this narrative of northern safety can only partly be derived from “natural” characteristics and is foremost culturally constructed. It may thus convey a false sense of security, as recent problems at the Seed Vault due to the thawing of permafrost caused by climate change demonstrate. LaFauci concludes, however, that as projects eliciting thinking on long time scales, possibly even in relation to “deep time,” the Seed Vault and the Future

Library may nevertheless contribute to finding narratives that are more adequate to the interconnected environmental and societal transformations of the Anthropocene.

In a chapter based on contemporary film theory, Anna Sofia Rossholm discusses Hanna Ljungh's video installation *I Am Mountain: To Measure Impermanence* (2016) in relation to traditional documentary films depicting mountains, as well as to contemporary environmental narratives. For a long time, so called "mountain films" have primarily been viewed as portrayals of wilderness, assuming and reinforcing a division between humans and nature, and mediating a longing for an escape from modernity into a romantically inclined, eternal wilderness. Rossholm argues for an alternative way of understanding these narratives, looking at the way in which the medium of film as such uses the categories of time and space to problematize the division between humans and nature as well as discussing the relation between human perception and a nature beyond human scales. Her principal argument is that the traditional setting of human "action" against the backdrop of the immobile mountain is illusory and that both humans and nature move, but on different scales. In this respect, Ljung's video—a documentation of the scientific measurement of the declining snow level on the south peak of Sweden's highest mountain—relates to both the aesthetics of early films, which typically show only one movement, and to contemporary digital film technology, which enables extremely long shots.

Jørgen Bruhn takes as a point of departure the frequent notion of the difficulty of representing the Anthropocene and draws upon the example of an in many ways unusual Danish novel: Kaspar Colling Nielsen's *Mount København* (2010). This text describes how the construction of a 3,500-meter high mountain near the Danish capital affects not only environmental and climatic conditions, but over time also leads to changes in human nature. Bruhn reads *Mount København* as an aesthetic mediation of the Anthropocene: The absurd geoengineering project of the fictitious mountain simulates the possible consequences of the Anthropocene for both human and non-human life forms. Presenting a potpourri of stories that all are connected by Mount København, the novel makes imaginable the effects of physical change both over long time-scales (i.e., "deep time") and across assumed species' borders. Although typical Anthropocene phenomena such as global warming and mass species extinction do not appear in the novel, according to Bruhn the text can be read as an allegory on the new geological epoch that challenges and deconstructs established notions of both the human and the non-human.

Katie Ritson also provides an environmentally informed reading of a contemporary novel: Norwegian writer Kjersti Vik's *Mandø* (2009). Ritson points out that the term Nordic is deliberately vague about what exactly it includes and what it excludes: the linguistic, national and geographical borders of

Northern Europe overlap and diverge in different ways. Political, linguistic, and cultural aspects are usually seen as the constituting forces behind boundaries. However, ecocriticism is a form of literary analysis that is able to privilege ecologies and topographies over the conventional divisions of languages and cultures, and thus to gather and reconfigure Nordic experiences and perceptions of place. Ritson explores the ways in which a topographical feature can provide a new perspective on literary texts by examining a literary portrayal of the North Sea coast. Her analysis of the novel *Mandø*, which is set on a Danish tidal island, shows that this story can be seen not only as a depiction of the difficulties facing the protagonists, but also as a depiction of humanity's attempt to grasp "the new paradigms that the Anthropocene is forcing upon us." In *Mandø*, the main characters' difficulties communicating with each other due to cultural differences parallels the characters' difficulties crossing the protean causeway connecting Mandø (Man-Island) and the mainland, problems that reflect humanity's current situation and need for new ways of thinking. For Ritson, the novel is part of a broader canon of writing about the North Sea, one that, among others, includes texts written in Danish, English, German, and Dutch. In an age of global environmental concern, this Nordic narrative serves as a bridge between local, regional, and planetary spaces and moments in time.

Mandø certainly belongs to the sort of novels that writer Amitav Ghosh in his recent book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* calls "serious fiction," distinguishing it from the "genre fiction," which in his view is embodied by the recent trend of so-called climate change fiction or "cli-fi" (Ghosh 2016, 24 and 72). Yet this distinction is not always as clear as it may seem, and the increasing popularity of "cli-fi" indicates that this sort of literature may have a growing influence on individual and collective imaginations, and that it therefore should not be ignored. Toni Lahtinen provides thus an analysis of the Finnish writer Risto Isomäki's novel *The Sands of Sarasvati* (2013), which can be considered the beginning and the so far most prominent example of Finnish "cli-fi." As a text that mixes scientific and mythological approaches to environmental and climatic change, this work of literature has received considerable attention in Finland and has been translated into many other languages. Lahtinen reads the novel as an example of a transnational risk scenario that illustrates the vulnerability of contemporary societies to environmental and climate risks resulting from modern technology. In the depiction of a global catastrophe, Lahtinen sees a criticism directed both at national perceptions of Finland as a safe place and at a Western hubris based on economic, political, and technological superiority that is inadequate for the new conditions of the Anthropocene.

The second part of this volume is dedicated to the role of language and aesthetics in expressing and forming human relations with other species and ecosystems in Nordic contexts. Jenna Coughlin focuses thus on the confluence of language and nature, especially on how written language affects our perception of the material world. In nineteenth century Norway, the diversity of dialects was valued by authorities and in public life, and the country even adopted two different written standards. Another language implementation during this period concerns taxonomy and natural science. In ecocritical scholarship, Linnaean taxonomy has generally been understood as a tool by which nature was marked off as separated from culture and thus subject to human domination. In Norway, however, the implementation of Linnaean taxonomy can be seen as uneven because it was predated by a vernacular naturalist tradition. Through this tradition, local knowledge about nature as embodied in the vernacular naming of species maintained enough importance to challenge the hegemonic knowledge status of enlightenment natural science. Coughlin suggests that “places and societies where written language arrived late or unevenly could be locations where views of nature are contested and where critiques of the imposition of language standards across linguistically-diverse societies provide grounds for questioning the standardization of understandings of nature as well.” One central proponent of the vernacular tradition was the scholar Ivar Aasen (1813–1896). Coughlin argues that in his *Norske Plantenavne* (*Norwegian Plant Names*, 1860), Aasen created a Latin to Norwegian glossary that allowed vernacular views of plant life to stand alongside the universalizing scientific system. She then turns to a contemporary poet, Inger Elisabeth Hansen, who draws on the situated knowledge referenced by the names of endangered species to critique present-day environmental policy. Hansen’s poetry, which partly resembles Aasen’s work, suggests thus that this type of critique can be productive also in relation to the contemporary threat of species extinction.

In a chapter advocating a shift toward more formalist approaches in ecocriticism, Beatrice M. G. Reed suggests a concept of ecomorphism as an antonym to anthropomorphism. In contrast to anthropomorphism (i.e., the representation of non-human nature using human characteristics), ecomorphism, according to Reed’s definition, is the figural transfer of meaning from elements of nature or ecosystems to representations of human beings, encompassing a spectrum of elements of nature wider than the more conventionally used term zoomorphism. Non-human nature has always played an important role in Nordic literature, which may therefore constitute an especially rich reservoir of examples of ecomorphism. Using the Norwegian novel *Fuglane* (*The Birds*, 1957) by Tarjei Vesaas and the Swedish novel *Hitom himlen* (*This Side of Heaven*, 1946) by Stina Aronson as examples, Reed discusses how figural literary language through

both anthropomorphism and ecomorphism deconstructs and destabilizes established notions of the human and the non-human sphere as well as the relationships between subject and object.

With a similar focus, although drawing on an approach based on critical plant studies, genre studies, and dystopian studies as a theoretical framework, Hanna Samola analyses four Finnish novels that depict human life in relation to plant life and gardening. She examines among other things how the protagonists in the novels use gardening and the cultivation of flowers as a means of escape, only to find out that the botanic world influences human beings in unpredictable ways. Samola discusses the agency and intelligence of plants in relation to the genres of horror and sci-fi dystopia, addressing how, and if, plants are represented as agents in their own right. Although the four novels depict the relation between plants, humans, and animals in different ways, they all present the idea of a mutual dependence and interconnectedness between all living organisms in the global ecosystems. To avoid the usual allegorical or symbolic understanding of plants and plant life in literature, Samola discusses the possibilities of using plants as protagonists in narratives as well as looking at the way that the human-centered narration of traditional dystopias may eventually be destabilized in more recent works in the genre, works apt to put today's environmental concerns into focus.

In the last chapter in this section, Nina Goga explores *Ishavspirater* (*The Ice Sea Pirates*, 2015), a children's book by the Swedish writer Frida Nilsson, in an ecocritical reading grounded in environmental ethics and inspired by Bakhtinian conceptions of dialogism and encounters. The setting of this novel is a wintry archipelago in a distinctly Arctic environment through which the protagonist, Siri, travels in search for her kidnapped sister. Goga studies the many encounters between the girl and other living creatures, both human and non-human. Siri's interactions and communication (verbal and non-verbal) reveal that Siri develops a profound knowledge concerning the relationship between humans and other species, challenging an anthropocentric hierarchical understanding of these relations. She learns to read and reflect on various human attitudes toward different forms of life. Goga examines therefore "how the book constitutes an arena for developing an interspecies ethics" and argues that it can encourage young readers to increase their ecological awareness. However, she also questions these readers' ability "to cope with the ethical issues and contradictions in relation to the high rates of consumption and unsustainable lifestyles generally prevailing in the Nordic countries."

In the third and last part of our anthology, the focus is on the connection between environmental and social questions from the perspective of environmental justice ecocriticism and postcolonial ecocriticism. In a chapter on Karl August Tavaststjerna's Finland Swedish novel *Hårda tider* (*Hard Times*,

1891), Frederike Felcht deals with the social and environmental contextualization of hunger as it appears in this work of literary fiction. In earlier literary texts, the endurance of poverty and hunger resulting from the harshness of Nordic nature and climate had been idealized as an element of Nordic national identities, as something that simply had to be endured and that even strengthened social cohesion and the national character. However, according to Felcht, *Hårda tider* was the first work of literature in Finland to present a different framing: one in which scarcity and starvation were portrayed as socially detrimental phenomena that only in part resulted from environmental and climatic conditions, but were much more than that symptoms of a failure of traditional systems of poor relief, and that could (and should) be mitigated through the modernization of the economy.

Hårda tider can be read as a text touching upon issues of environmental justice, and thus on questions that have special relevance in connection to the colonial histories of the Nordic countries. The Sami in northern Europe have historically been subject to forced cultural assimilation by the modern states of Finland, Norway, and Sweden. In addition, their traditional land use rights in Sápmi have been infringed upon by agriculture encroachment, the closing of national borders, the construction of hydropower dams, and mining. As Kari Haarder Ekman shows in her chapter, literature played an ambivalent role in these processes of colonization. She studies two non-fiction books, both from the first decade of the twentieth century and based on a similar narrative describing a woman travelling with Sami nomads in the “wilderness”: the Danish artist Emilie Demant Hatt’s *Med Lapperne i Højjeldet* (With the Lapps in the High Mountains, 1913) and the Swedish journalist Ester Blenda Nordström’s *Kåtornas folk* (Tent People, 1916). Based on Rob Nixon’s concept of slow violence, Ekman uses these texts to discuss how wilderness and Sami culture were perceived in Sweden during this period. During the twentieth century, these books were widely read and influenced the popular image of the Sami and the non-human environment in Sápmi. Although both Demant Hatt and Nordström intended to defend and protect the Sami and their traditional rights, this aim included a wish, typical for that time, to “save” a certain lifestyle by keeping nomads “away from some aspects of modern life, like a good education.” Ekman discusses therefore also whether these texts themselves could “be seen as an example of ‘slow violence’ as they establish and maintain an idea of a strong connection between the Sami and the nomad lifestyle, including special schools, and an idea of this being the best for them.”

In the final chapter of this volume, Cheryl J. Fish underlines that conflicts over land use and the environment in Sápmi are by no means a thing of the past. Fish studies the work of two visual artists—Swedish Sami filmmaker Liselotte Wajstedt and Finnish Sami photographer Marja Helander—in

relation to questions of environmental justice. Introducing the concept of “elegiac ecojustice,” Fish focuses on how filmmakers and photographers create visual and verbal environmental narratives that examine industry’s and the state’s contributions to the encroachment of mining on Sami homelands. Through their art, Wajstedt and Helander engage with questions of indigenous rights, not only in Sápmi, but also on a global scale. Fish argues that these works can be seen as narratives of embodied, materialist stories that challenge and complicate the official discourses of economic development. They depict apocalyptic landscapes and destructive outcomes as results of “extractivism,” a term suggested by Naomi Klein to describe the structural and cultural violence connected to industrial devastation of nature in the age of the Anthropocene.

Taken together, the chapters in our volume provide varied and informative insights into the complexity of both older and newer Nordic narratives of nature and the environment. They also complement and nuance the narrative of northern Europe as an ecological utopia. It is our hope that they will contribute to the consolidation of ecocriticism as a field of research and teaching within Scandinavian studies and stimulate further ecocritical research on northern European literatures and cultures.

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