

Special Issue:

Changing Concepts of Nature in Contemporary Scandinavian Literature and Photography

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Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag arbeitet heraus, wie in der skandinavischen Klimawandel-Literatur des 21. Jahrhunderts Eis und Schnee als bedauernswerte Entitäten verkörpert werden und legt dar, dass zeitgenössische fiktionale Literatur ein geeignetes Mittel für ökologische Trauerarbeit ist. Im theoretischen Rückgriff auf Ashlee Cunsolos Arbeit zur Klimatrauer geht die Autorin der übergeordneten Frage nach, wie wissenschaftliche Warnungen zur globalen Erderwärmung und schrumpfenden Kryosphäre in der skandinavischen Literatur emotional und ästhetisch verhandelt werden. Die Achse des Aufsatzes bildet eine vergleichende Analyse zweier Cli-Fi-Romane: *Den afskyelige* (»Der Abscheuliche«, 2006) der dänischen Schriftstellerin Charlotte Weitze und *Steffen tar sin del av ansvaret* (»Steffen übernimmt seinen Teil der Verantwortung«, 2009) des norwegischen Autors Christian Valeur. In beiden Romanen realisieren die jungen Protagonist_innen, dass Schnee eine seltene Ressource geworden und fast am Verschwinden ist. Angesichts dieser Tatsache werden miteinander verwandte Gefühle wie Trauer, Schuld und Verwirrung ausgelöst, aber auch Galgenhumor, Dankbarkeit und Stolz hervorgerufen. Ausgehend von diesen Beobachtungen zeigt die Autorin, dass literarische Fiktion eine entscheidende Rolle spielen kann, um ein tieferes Verständnis für die komplexe emotionale Einheit von Klimaangst, Trauer und Widerständigkeit zu entwickeln.

Abstract

The article calls attention to how snow and ice are embodied as grievable entities in Nordic 21st century climate change fiction, arguing that contemporary fiction is a valuable apparatus for processing ecological mourning. The author draws theoretically on Ashlee Cunsolo's work on ecological grief, while the overarching research question is how scientific warnings about global warming and shrinking cryosphere are dealt with emotionally and aesthetically in Nordic literature. A comparative analysis of the Scandinavian cli-fi novels *Den afskyelige* (»The abominable«, 2016), written by Danish Charlotte Weitze, and *Steffen tar sin del av ansvaret* (»Steffen takes his share of the responsibility«, 2009), by Norwegian Christian Valeur forms the backbone of the article. In both novels, the young protagonists are realizing that snow is a scarce resource, close to disappearing. Facing this fact arouses interrelated emotions of grief, guilt and confusion, but also gallows humour, gratitude and pride. From these observations, the author argues that fiction may play a crucial role for a deeper understanding of the emotional complex of climate anxiety, grief and resilience.

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Introduction

In August 2019, when the Okjökull was the first glacier in Iceland to be formally declared dead ice, Andri Snær Magnason, internationally acclaimed writer and grandson of Icelandic glaciologists, was invited by Texan anthropologists to write the text for a plaque to commemorate the demise of the glacier. Addressed as a letter to the future, the plaque reads: »Ok is the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier. In the next 200 years all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This moment is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it.«¹

The memorial plaque for the dead Ok is appropriately forward-looking rather than retrospective, and the mourning ceremony calls for action on behalf of future generations.

Significantly, the introduction to the psychological journal *American Imago*'s special issue on *ecological grief*, spring 2020, refers to the farewell of the Ok glacier and the subsequent funeral ceremony for the Pizol glacier in Switzerland on 22 September 2019. Such a preface would seem to mark a shift in interest with regard to environmental loss and human affects, away from focusing on species extinction and towards an increasing awareness of our attachments to inorganic environments. To be sure, the issue sets out to explore »the myriad ways in which environmental change wreaks havoc on the human psyche«,² including an article by the Australian philosopher Glenn A. Albrecht who elaborates on his concept of *solastalgia* and other neologisms created for the purpose of describing human pain and distress caused by environmental loss. The Canadian scholar Ashlee Cunsolo and her team present their research on Inuit experiences of ecological grief over caribou population decline, whereas Timothy Clark explains how Anthropocene horror is related to ecological grief, and film scholar E. Ann Kaplan argues that climate-related pre-trauma is a legitimate psychological condition that deserves to be acknowledged more in future health care.³ Stef Craps notices in his introduction that many of the contributors approach the topic of *ecological grief* »via literary texts, films, or other artistic creations that are seen to provide form and structure for grief related to environmental loss«.⁴

From the point of view of literary scholarship, this is an encouraging observation, but as is often the case in scientific journals dealing with environmental issues, most examples in the *American Imago* are related to anglophone texts and cultural manifestations. In the following, therefore, I will draw attention to how Nordic contemporary fiction serves as a cultural laboratory for articulating and dealing with ecological grief, or more precisely, how novels may embody human affects in relation to the prospect of a future when snow and ice no longer exist. My overall research question is *How are scientific warnings about a shrinking cryosphere represented in contemporary Nordic fiction?*

¹ Magnason 2019. The Icelandic version »Bréf til framtíðarinnar« reads: »Ok er fyrsti nafnkunni jökullinn til að missa titil sinn. Á næstu 200 árum er talið að allir jöklar landsins fari sömu leið. Þetta minniserki er til vitnis um að við vitum hvað er að gerast og hvað þarf að gera. Aðeins þú veist hvort við gerðum eitthvað.«

² Craps 2020, p. 5.

³ Cf. Kaplan 2020, p. 99.

⁴ Craps 2020, p. 5.

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The article is structured around a comparative analysis of the Norwegian diary novel *Steffen tar sin del av ansvaret* (»Steffen takes his share of the responsibility«, 2009), written by novelist and television scriptwriter Christian Valeur (b. 1986), and the Danish cli-fi novel *Den afskyelige* (»The abominable«, 2016), written by folklorist and author Charlotte Weitze (b. 1974). Whereas Weitze's novel addresses the problem of melting glaciers in a partly fantastic future setting, Valeur portrays his young law-student protagonist's climate anxiety and conflicting emotions concerning sustainable everyday living in a naïvist-realistic mode. What these stylistically very different novels have in common is, first and foremost, an inventive imaginative engagement with a *snowman motif*. At the end of my analysis, I will elaborate on the implications of this motif on the climate grief discourse initiated by the above-mentioned Cunsolo and Kaplan.

Initially, it may be useful to present some basic concepts and illustrate their usefulness with some examples. To investigate snow and ice as *mournable entities*, as I will do in this article inspired by Ashlee Cunsolo's reflections on climate change as the work of mourning, presupposes an understanding of the conceptual triangle *climate grief*, *cryosphere*, and *snowhow*.

Conceptual framework

Health geographer Ashlee Cunsolo, a leading voice on climate change and mental health and the founding Dean of the School of Arctic and Subarctic Studies in the Labrador Institute of Memorial University, has investigated climate grief both empirically and theoretically. In »Climate change as the work of mourning«, one of her mainly theoretical essays, she takes Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) as her starting point, underlining that »mourning is about transformation«.⁵ For Butler, mourning has to do with »submitting to transformation«,⁶ and Cunsolo subscribes to Butler's argument that recognizing bodies as mournable subjects requires significant activism and re-codification. Where Butler is speaking of the AIDS-affected body, Cunsolo argues that »we can, and we should, extend this discussion of mourning to the non-human, and use this mourning as a resource for recognizing non-humans as *fellow* vulnerable entities and mournable subjects«.⁷ Inspired by Butler and Derrida, Cunsolo is focusing on the ethical and political potential for discursive transformation that emerges from mourning.

Indeed, while mourning exposes our connections to others – human, animal, vegetal, or mineral – and provides an opportunity to connect to ourselves and others through loss and shared vulnerability, it also provides ethical

⁵ Cunsolo 2012, p. 144.

⁶ Butler 2004, p. 21.

⁷ Cunsolo 2012, p. 147.

(through recognition of shared vulnerability) and political (through moving this recognition to action) opportunities to expand discursive spaces to include bodies that are not mourned in dominant discourse, and to encourage individual and collective action, recognition, and responsibility in environmental matters.⁸

Funerals for melting glaciers may be cases in point, but until recently, the discourse on ecological grief has been dominated by the mourning of dying animals and of landscapes destroyed for industrial purposes. Today, climate change is increasingly understood to impact mental health; together with Neville R. Ellis, a researcher on family farms in the drying Australian wheat belt, Cunsolo has synthesized existing ethnographic research on ecological grief. Cunsolo and Ellis highlight three climate-related contexts in which they find such grief reported: 1) grief associated with physical ecological losses, 2) grief associated with loss of environmental knowledge, and 3) grief associated with anticipated future losses of place, land, species, and culture.⁹ They mention briefly Maria Furberg's research on Sami reindeer herders in Northern Sweden as it confirms Cunsolo's own research in the Northern Canada Inuit communities; »migration routes have been blocked by large water reservoirs that either do not freeze over at all or the ice on them is too thin when it is time for autumn migration.«¹⁰ Although the indigenous peoples of the North may not fear climate change as such, they mourn that their valued way of life is likely to disappear in the future.

The arctic and subarctic peoples of Scandinavia and Canada have a lot in common, obviously, when it comes to climate anxiety and ecological grief. In 2013, the Swedish literary magazine *Iotal* devoted an entire issue to the topic *klimatsorg* (climate grief), and in a conversation with the editor Madeleine Grive and a couple of fellow writers, the poet Jonas Gren reveals that he is grieving the forests and rivers destroyed by Canadian petroleum industry in their pursuit of the last oil hidden in the sand. He adds that such a grief concerning non-human life is dependent on knowledge, but also that grief walks hand in hand with anger.¹¹ In the same interview, cli-fi novelist Jesper Weithz confesses that his grief often transforms into anxiety, whereas poet Aase Berg believes that literature may help people endure the pain of grieving.

It is worth noticing how these Swedish writers link ecological grief conceptually to other affects such as anger, anxiety and courage. None of them, however, speaks explicitly about melting glaciers and the absence of snow, which may be explained by the fact that until recently the public knowledge of these problems has been limited and difficult to conceptualize. After all, the idea of a shrinking cryosphere is unfamiliar to us and difficult to imagine, because ice and snow are still important components of the Nordic winter and significant in our cultural memory. Learning to survive and enjoy the long winters has become a virtue born of necessity.¹² As the Norwegian poet Guri

⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

⁹ Cunsolo & Ellis 2018, p. 276–277.

¹⁰ Furberg, Evengård & Nilsson 2011, p. 6.

¹¹ Cf. Grive 2013, p. 30.

¹² Cf. Furuseth 2020.

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Sörumgård Botheim put it in *Heime mellom istidene* («At home between the ice ages», 2016): »I was born in a winter / I live in a winter / the frost spreads/ through generations«. ¹³

Collective traumas from historical cold periods, known in Norse mythology as the »Fimbulwinter«, may explain the deep-rooted tendency of envisioning future catastrophes as endless winter. The Nordic literatures are still filled with stories about tackling the obstacles and threats of winter, and the dystopian vision in Jesper Weithz's novel *Det som inte växer är döende* («What does not grow is dying», 2012) includes a fatal snowstorm, which illustrates that even in the age of global warming the cryosphere is primarily associated with death. ¹⁴

The picture is about to change, however, as the black prospect of an overheated future dawns on us. In the non-fiction book *Frostens rike* (2017), known in German as *Im Reich des Frosts* (2019) and in English as *Kingdom of Frost* (2020), the Norwegian science journalist Bjørn Vassnes makes a case for the fascinating cryosphere, that is, all of Earth's frozen waters that are so vital to human survival. Vassnes, who was born and raised in Finnmark, the northernmost county of onshore Norway, exposes how people across the Nordic countries may have quite different experiences of snow. He remembers how, as a child, he went cross-country skiing on the peaceful and endless Finnmarksvidda close to his home and imagined himself as the explorer Fridtjof Nansen crossing Greenland. Given those positive winter experiences, he felt alienated when reading fairy tales and stories that described the cryosphere as terrifying and dangerous, as »a hotbed of evil, like those of Hans Christian Andersen and C. S. Lewis«. ¹⁵ The young Vassnes had trouble identifying with these scary literary versions of winter.

In Andersen, the wicked Snow Queen steals children and takes them with her up to her realm of frost in the north, where she travels around by reindeer, just like my neighbors the Sami reindeer herders. In the fairy tale, the boy, Kay, is kidnapped by the wicked queen and taken back to her cold palace in the north, and his friend Gerda goes after them to set him free. And in the Narnia books by Lewis, the White Witch casts a spell on Narnia, throwing it into an endless winter, in which Christmas never comes to light up a cold and dreary existence. These kinds of characters and motifs are familiar to children today through Disney films such as *Frozen*. It is clear that such stories are written in countries where people have rarely had the opportunity to experience the positive sides of winter and know only of its troublesome aspects: like snow-blocked roads and people breaking arms or legs after slipping on the ice. ¹⁶

The last sentence in this quote clearly marks Bjørn Vassnes as a northerner, estranged from the southern majority's view of winter as something frightening. Even as a child, he understood that the mythological North and the real North had little to do with each other, and the grown up science journalist benefits from this dual vision. In his

¹³ »e vart født i en vinter/ e bur i en vinter/ frosten brer se / gjennom slektsledd« (Botheim 2016, p. 9).

¹⁴ In *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*, Adam Trexler mentions the popular apocalyptic disaster film *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and several Anglo-American novels with polar and glacial settings, a tendency he criticizes for making »global warming more remote« (Trexler 2015, p. 82).

¹⁵ Vassnes 2020, p. 30.

¹⁶ Ibid.

professional life, Vassnes has realized that his marginalized position as a northerner might be an advantage when disseminating knowledge about the vital force of frost in the twenty-first century's grand narrative of global warming.

For thousands of years, winter and snow have been crucial for Nordic identity, and the frosty parts of nature seem to become even dearer to us when they are about to disappear. What Vassnes is hinting at is the »snowhow« built up through generations in Norway and across the Nordic countries. The question is to what extent this embodied knowledge of dealing with snow is still relevant in the twenty-first century. Will we need the skills for surviving the long winters in the future? It is hardly incidental that the public service television broadcasters in Norway, Sweden and Finland recently co-produced a documentary series together entitled *Snowhow*, released January 2020. At the same time, southern Scandinavia experienced a winter of record-breaking mildness with almost no snow at all.¹⁷ What a few years ago were presented as predictions and scientific models have now become observable realities.

That a certain nostalgia for winter-life grows on us when we cannot take ice and snow for granted any more is hardly surprising. Let us take a closer look at two examples of how Nordic 21st-century fiction may portray humans' emotional reactions to the loss of winter. In Scandinavian cli-fi novels as different as Charlotte Weitze's *Den afskyelige* and Christian Valeur's *Steffen tar sin del av ansvaret*, the young protagonists are well aware of the problem that snow is a scarce resource and about to disappear.

The endangered snowman

Hans Christian Andersen may have given winter a bad reputation, but his fellow Danish citizen Charlotte Weitze sees it otherwise. »As long as there is white ice, there is hope«, the father of the female protagonist in *Den afskyelige* says, as his daughter has just returned to Denmark following a trip to Nepal.¹⁸ The protagonist herself, Heidi, falls in love with the 2.3-metre tall Kenneth, a descendant of the Himalayan Yetis, a dying race of hairy snow-monsters who have sought refuge at Kluftafjeld, the world's last glacier, which in the novel is located in the mountains outside what could be Copenhagen or another Scandinavian city.¹⁹ In this clearly fantastic setting, about a generation forward in time, Weitze has taken inspiration from the myth about the abominable snowman, but has turned the monster into an endangered species in need of protection.

¹⁷ The Norwegian Meteorological Institute reported that the temperatures in southern Norway in January 2020 were the highest ever measured (cf. Holm 2020).

¹⁸ »Så længe der er hvid is, er der håb, siger far.« (Weitze 2016, p. 94).

¹⁹ As Jørgen Bruhn has suggested, Weitze's novel echoes Kaspar Colling Nielsen's *Mount Copenhagen* (2010), »which also works in the mixed register of science fiction and magical realism« (2018, p. 56). He claims, however, that the aesthetic mediation of the Anthropocene is more complex in Colling Nielsen's novel, since *Mount Copenhagen*'s ironic utopia of a future Denmark involves terraforming, reflecting the post-human condition. I will argue that post-human perspectives are reflected in Weitze's novel as well, although they are not quite as clear from the very beginning.

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The motif of the snowman as an endangered species is also central in *Steffen tar sin del av ansvaret*. Christian Valeur's novel describes the mental breakdown of the 23-year-old law student Steffen Schiøtz in December 2007, the very month Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize »for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change«. ²⁰ Steffen's father describes the Nobel decision as »silly«, ²¹ but Steffen himself has just met an environmentalist outdoor girl in his class, who convinces the privileged middle-class boy that change is needed. However, the conflicting pressures from parents, classmates, his girlfriend and his old peer group, who think all the talk about the environment is disturbing, overwhelm him. That is why, right before Christmas, having failed his exam on environmental law, he drives out to the family cabin outside town to sort his head and practise sustainable living.

Settled alone in the cabin, Steffen becomes bored and restless and decides to go outside to shovel snow, although it is not necessary, which makes him start reflecting on why there seems to be less snow this year: »Snow is endangered. Snow should be on the UNESCO's World Heritage List«, Steffen concludes. ²² He discovers that the snow is perfectly wet for making a snowman, so he clears his way from the cabin to the storehouse by rolling a snowball, enjoying the feeling of it growing. Eventually, the snowman is standing there in front of him and the two of them – Steffen and Snøffen (as he names his new fantasy friend) – embark on a conversation on the climate issue and all the problems global warming is going to cause the snowman's family: »Scary future prospects. Climate refugees bumping along towards Siberia, seeking sanctuary. Dying while on waiting list for treatment«, Snøffen says. ²³ Steffen tries to comfort the snowman, stroking his belly, saying: »*It is not supposed to be easy*«, which makes Snøffen even more grumpy:

You should not complain, Steffen, he says. You are the luckiest in the whole world. Grown up in the capital of the richest country in the world. You have no right to complain. You have no right to be in pain. There are only two things you are entitled to. Thank humbly, and feel a guilty conscience. ²⁴

Steffen continues his conversation with the angry snowman who is becoming more and more desperate. Steffen is uncomfortable and tries to calm Snøffen down, but the snowman goes on with his accusations: »*Look at me! I am screwed. You rich, white people have ruined my future. The future of a congener. I am white too! Do you see!*

²⁰ The Nobel Peace Prize 2007. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Mon. 28 Sep 2020. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2007/summary/> (28.11.2021).

²¹ »tulle« (Valeur 2009, p. 83).

²² »Snø er utrydningstruet. Snø bør stå på UNESCOs verdensarv-liste.« (Ibid., p. 50).

²³ »Skremmende framtidssikter. Klimaflyktninger som humper mot Sibir, søker om asyl. Dør i behandlingsskøen.« (Ibid., p. 51).

²⁴ »*Du kan ikke klage, Steffen, sier han. Du er den heldigste i hele verden. Vokst opp i hovedstaden i verdens rikeste land. Du har ingen rett til å klage. Du har ingen rett til å ha det vondt. Det er bare to ting du har rett til. Takke ydmykt, og ha dårlig samvittighet.*« (Ibid.).

*White! I understand that you do not care about blacks, but I am white, I am like you! Stop extracting oil and gas!*²⁵ Steffen finds these words disturbingly racist and tells the desperate snowman that he is not working in the oil industry; he hardly knows what oil looks like: »*Oil is an abstract phenomenon in my daily life*«, he assures the snowman, shouting at him that he also is desperate, which makes the snowman start crying: »*Be kind to me, Steffen! Don't you see I am melting!*« Steffen replies: »*So what? Haven't you melted every spring?*«, but Snøffen wields him the final blow: »*Yes, but if you don't do anything soon, there will come a winter when I will not wake up from my summer sleep.*«²⁶

The gravity of the situation dawns on Steffen, the conversation ends, and the atmosphere changes from tense to caring. Steffen finds some more snow to cover Snøffen's hips and belly and hopes it will keep the snowman alive a little longer.

However absurd this episode is, it is a rather straightforward answer to my initial question: how are scientific warnings about a shrinking cryosphere represented in contemporary Nordic fiction? Well, imagine a snowman arousing your empathy by talking to you about his future fate. In *Steffen tar sin del av ansvaret*, the snowman's lines are continuously mediated and analyzed by the first-person narrator Steffen. The reader follows his diary entries from 17 December to New Year's Eve, with embedded flashbacks from earlier episodes at school, family dinners and conversations with his girlfriend. At a formal level, personal diary reflections are mixed with elements of dramatic dialogue, handwritten notes, text messages, email correspondences and screen shots from internet search. Altogether, this gives the novel a youthful mashup look and a naïvist voice, not unlike the tone in Erlend Loe's 1996 novel *Naive.Super*, which also is narrated by a man in his mid-twenties who suddenly becomes confused by life and therefore quits university and instead engages in repetitive childish play. The young man's reaction to being confronted with the complex world is to withdraw from adult life in a kind of psychological regression.

In Steffen's case, his naïve and straightforward approach to the challenges of climate change could be read as a way of ridiculing Al Gore and his fellow activists, but the conversation between Steffen and the snowman goes beyond the childishly regressive. If we interpret Snøffen as Steffen's fantasy friend and alter ego, it seems clear that during their conversation they are reciprocally fuelling each other's despair. The tenderness emerging between them at the end may indicate an admission of guilt. Psychologically, the novel is ambivalent about the seriousness of Steffen's mental condition. Is he actually dissociating, hallucinating or is he self-aware and imagining, playing? In any case, the protagonist obviously has a bad conscience and lets his feeling of deficiency manifest itself as an accusing snowman with no arms.

²⁵ »*Se på meg! Jeg er screwed. Dere rike, hvite mennesker har ødelagt framtiden min. Framtiden til en artsfrende. Jeg er også hvit! Ser du det! Hvit! Jeg skjønner at dere ikke bryr dere om de svarte, men jeg er hvit, jeg er som deg! Slutt å hente opp olje og gass!*« (Ibid., p. 52).

²⁶ »*Vær snill med meg, Steffen. Ser du ikke at jeg smelter?* Jeg sier: *So what? Har du ikke alltid smeltet hver vår.* Han svarer: *Jo, men hvis dere ikke gjør noe snart, kommer det en vinter hvor jeg ikke våkner fra sommerdvalen.*« (Ibid.).

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Cold pleasures

Inspired by folklore, fairy tales, fantasy and surrealism, the snowman in Charlotte Weitze's *Den afskyelige* emerges as less innocent and much more eerie than the sad, handicapped toy Christian Valeur moulds in the realist contemporary setting of *Steffen tar sin del av ansvaret*. Weitze's seamless shifts between everyday realism and fantastic elements create a weird atmosphere. The novel opens with a scene where the first-person narrator, twenty-one year old Heidi, is sitting at her sister Angelica's bed at the hospital, where she has been lying for seven years after being injured by a snow-grooming machine at the ski resort Klaufafjeld, an accident described by newspapers as the last skiing accident in the country.²⁷

The country seems to be Denmark, with its dykes and ocean-exposed lowlands, but Klaufafjeld skiing resort, run by people with Swedish names and with a glacier at the top of the mountain, is only a short hour's drive away from Heidi's home, which indicates that the fictional setting is a shrunken, miniature Scandinavia rather than consisting of actual nations. Alternatively, the setting can be interpreted as an expanded Denmark with associated colonies. The following quote illustrates what the options were for the teenagers and their parents regarding winter excursions:

The main thing was that we loved downhill skiing and that it was difficult to imagine a winter without it. We tried to forget that some of our classmates were lucky enough or had such wealthy parents that they could travel all the way to Greenland or even down to Antarctica – other places with guaranteed snow.²⁸

The Alps are also mentioned, but Klaufafjeld is closer to home, and the big glacier at the top with its nuances of blue and green clearly is a magic force of attraction: »The ice cap blew cold in the back of the neck, the air was always fresh up here.«²⁹ Obviously, in *Den afskyelige*, ice and snow are associated with pleasure. Heidi looks back at the winter holidays of her adolescence »missing the hissing sound of quick slalom turns and whistling wind.«³⁰ When Heidi in her early twenties, after her sister has passed away, has sexual intercourse with men, they often complain about her being too cold inside. In Weitze's novel, this inner coldness is meant quite literally, referring to Heidi's low vaginal temperature.

Eventually, when she meets Kenneth who cannot get enough of the coldness because of his severe perspiration problems, she finds her match.

– I have never felt anything like this with any other human being, he said. – Deep inside and a little up! Why are you so cold? Have you always been like this?

²⁷ Cf. Weitze 2016, p. 8.

²⁸ »Hovedsagen var, at vi var glade for at stå på ski, og at det var svært at forestille sig en vinter uden. Vi måtte prøve at glemme, at nogle af vores klassekammerater var så heldige, eller havde så velhavende forældre, at de kunne rejse helt til Grønland eller sågar ned til Antarktis, hvor der også var snegaranti.« (Ibid., p. 13).

²⁹ »Iskalotten pustede koldt i nakken, luften var altid frisk heroppe.« (Ibid.).

³⁰ »Jeg savner den hvislende lyd af hurtige slalomsving og hvinende blæst.« (Ibid., p. 15).

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I shrug my shoulders. – Maybe I can do something about it, I mutter, putting my underpants on and my blouse.
– Goodbye.

Kenneth smiles. – No need to apologize, he says, holding me tight. – I have never experienced anything like this, I mean, anything so wonderful! It must not stop. Never ever.³¹

Heidi moves in with Kenneth, and he shrieks with joy every time he reaches her cold spot during sex. Heidi knows nothing about his snow-monster origin, but due to Kenneth's great difficulties with global warming, he becomes obsessed with sustainable living and Heidi tries as best as she can to join him in his efforts, until their relationship becomes unbearable.

In this respect, Charlotte Weitze's Kenneth shares some traits with Christian Valeur's Steffen. Both male characters are manic about their CO2 accounts, and their fanatical behaviour on behalf of the climate makes it hard for them to maintain sound relations with partners, friends and family. Kenneth becomes increasingly desperate and violent, and at the end of the novel, Heidi seeks comfort and company in her childhood friend Mette, who has just given birth to Ankerstjerne, a little boy who looks more like a sea lion than a human being. The mutation turns out to be an advantage, however, when the sea levels rise and people have to flee their homes, finding safety on the last glacier at Kluftafjeld.

Mourning through snow

Because Heidi loses her sister early in life, the grief motif is stronger and more explicitly present in Weitze's novel than in Valeur's. Furthermore, because Angelica's accident was connected to the skiing resort and she was such a dedicated writer of the family weather diary while she was alive, it is hard to tell which aspects of Heidi's mourning are related to environmental loss and which arise from the fact that she has lost her closest relative. Charlotte Weitze seems to be deliberately commingling mournable objects when she describes Heidi's mother making snow lanterns that look like little blinking girls outside their house.

My mother was standing there in the dressing gown; maybe she had had her nightwear on the whole day. She told a story she had read. It took place in Russia and was about a married couple that made a girl of snow, who suddenly came to life. In the end, the girl moved into their house and stayed with them.³²

³¹ » – Jeg har aldrig mærket noget lignende hos noget andet menneske, siger han. – Helt inde og lidt oppe! Hvorfor er du så kold? Har du altid været sådan?

Jeg trækker på skuldrene. – Måske kan man gøre noget ved det, mumler jeg, hiver trusserne på og tager blusen over hovedet. – Farvel. Kenneth griner. – Det skal du ikke undskylde, siger han og holder mig fast. – Jeg har aldrig oplevet noget lignende. Altså noget så vidunderligt! Det må ikke stoppe. Aldrig nogensinde.« (Ibid., p. 75).

³² »Min mor stod der i slåbrok, måske havde hun haft nattøj på hele dagen. Hun fortalte om en historie, som hun havde læst. Den foregik i Rusland og handlede om et ægtepar, der lavede en pige af sne, som pludselig blev levende. Det endte med at pigen kom ind og boede hos dem.« (Ibid., p. 192).

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The snow girl in the Russian fairy tale melted when she came into the house, but Heidi's grieving mother envisions how her snow girls are waving at her, a scene that in the novel expresses sadness and hope at the same time.

This confusion of mournable objects can probably be related to what E. Ann Kaplan writes in the *American Imago* about climate-related pre-traumatic stress syndrome. Reflecting on Paul Schrader's film *First Reformed* (2018), where a priest engages emotionally with a young climate activist who commits suicide because he believes the Earth is doomed, Kaplan observes that even the priest develops a pre-traumatic stress condition, most likely because he already suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome after having lost his son to the Iraq war. Kaplan refers to clinical psychological research and finds that Schrader's cli-fi movie »exemplifies the theory that post-traumatic stressors make people vulnerable to PreTSS«. ³³

In Christian Valeur's novel, Steffen's problems are trivial in comparison to those of Weitze's Heidi, her mother and the characters in *First Reformed*, but even in his case, it is difficult to tell whether climate anxiety is the cause of his heartsickness or if it is the other way around. His breakdown occurs right after a party where he has observed his classmate Kjersti, with whom he has secretly fallen in love, kissing his best friend. As we know from psychological research that emotional vulnerability in one area often leads to increased receptiveness in other areas, too, it is hard to distinguish his heartsickness from his climate grief. Like Heidi's mother, Steffen moulds a snow-figure he can seek comfort in, thus relating snow to both loss and creation.

Anticipatory grieving as activism

We need to frame climate change as the work of mourning, Ashlee Cunsolo argues, and she advises us to transcend the limiting anthropocentric notion of mourning. ³⁴ My examples in this essay, however, show that it is probably impossible to escape an anthropogenic focus because the very concept of mourning is embodied in human phenomenology. Human attachment to snow shaped as personalized snowmen is illustrating in that respect. To be sure, Yoko Tawada takes a different approach in her *Etüden im Schnee* (2014; *Memoirs of a Polar Bear*, 2017), a novel that is narrated from the perspectives of three bears in captivity. Especially in the last story, about Knut at Berlin Zoo, Tawada adds a twist to the polar bear cliché, letting the bear mourn his people rather than the other way around, but even Tawada cannot escape the fact that such a literary twist only works as long as human readers project their feelings into the bear perspective.

More important are the activist implications of Ashlee Cunsolo's reflections on anticipatory grieving. In her empirical research, she has observed how Inuit people are grieving losses in advance:

Many people also reported experiencing a sense of *anticipatory* grieving for losses expected to come, but not yet arrived. Based on the rapidity of the changes in the region and the realization that these changes will not

³³ Kaplan 2020, p. 88.

³⁴ Cf. Cunsolo 2012, p. 147.

only continue, but will most likely worsen in severity and impact, Inuit with whom I worked indicated they were already imagining future losses, already experiencing levels of pain over what may come. [...] This anticipatory memory of loss is a mourning that begins before the break event, but is based in an understanding of the experience of other losses.³⁵

This resonates with what Kaplan writes; the fear of loss is nourished by the memory of loss, which makes the grieving stronger. But as the funeral ceremony for the Okjökull and other glaciers may herald, collective grieving can also be politically powerful. Cunsolo argues that public mourning can be an important mechanism for political mobilization and mentions the COP 15 climate change negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009, where the Tuvalu delegation publicly shared their grief, sadness, and distress about the destruction of their coastlines and the rapid disappearance of part of their island due to rising water levels.³⁶ Cunsolo believes in grief as a source for activism.

In an essay on Scandinavian climate change fiction, Jens Kramshøj Flinker writes about Charlotte Weitze's protagonist that when Heidi no longer fears the climate crisis but realizes that she is right in the middle of it, then she is able to envision a different future. The novel's message, he claims, is that such a mental adjustment to climate change is the first step of hope.³⁷ If we believe in mourning as »submitting to transformation«, to use Butler's phrase,³⁸ even adjustment may be an appropriate form of activism, but should we leave it there?

»As long as there is white ice, there is hope«

»I love winter best now, but I try not to love it too much, for fear of the January, perhaps not too distant, when the snow will fall as warm rain«, the American environmentalist Bill McKibben wrote in *The End of Nature* (1990).³⁹ Today, the feared future without snow has become the present time. In January 2020, there were frequent reports in the Norwegian media about children no longer being able to meet for ski races, while newspaper columnists complained of being *værsyke* (moody from the weather) due to snow being washed away by the rain, depriving them of their mandatory Sunday skiing.⁴⁰ Author Maja Lunde joined in the choir of worried voices. When receiving the Bjørnson Prize in May 2020, she delivered a speech of thanks in the form of a diary covering four days of the first half-year of 2020. Casting her mind back to the situation before the Covid-19 lockdown, it had been the snowless winter that worried her the most. While running in the bare forests east of Oslo on January 22, she was scared because there were no signs of winter: »I am speeding up, as if the horror gets me moving. *Fight or flight* is the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 140.

³⁶ C.f. Cunsolo 2012, p. 151.

³⁷ Cf. Flinker 2018, p. 58.

³⁸ Butler 2004, p. 21.

³⁹ McKibben 1989, p. 195.

⁴⁰ Cf. Tiller 2020.

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human response to fear. Fight or flight.«⁴¹ Lunde emphasizes that the emotions of fear and sorrow are impulses to act: »We should defend despair and care about grief and fear. Emotions may give us power to do something, to fight. Our feelings may matter to other people.«⁴² Thus, her message is in line with Cunsolo's: environmental grief should be witnessed and shared.

Writing fiction is one way of sharing, and it is noteworthy that Christian Valeur and Charlotte Weitze approach the depressing issue of global warming with striking vigour, humour and creativity, reflecting resilience in ways that are often difficult to consider in ethnographic research on climate anxiety and ecological grief. Of course, these novels may not be the most representative and their reading public may be limited. Other examples of Nordic climate change fiction, seemingly more depressing as they tend to depict the future in terms of endless rain, certainly have quite a large audience. Antti Tuomainen's climate noir *Parantaja* (2010; *The Healer*, 2013) is set in a damp near-future Helsinki, where ghastly crimes are taking place while the Finnish elite has fled from the decaying capital to seek security up north on the Arctic coast. Endlessly rainy storms are also the dystopian setting of Bjørn Vatne's satirical cli-fi novel *Nullingen av Paul Abel* (»The Deletion of Paul Abel«, 2018), although extreme weather has always been the norm on the west coast of Norway. It is more disturbing when the inner regions of the country start acting like coastal zones, as in Maja Lunde's *Przewalskis hest* (2019; *The Last Wild Horses*, 2022) in which the future drama is related to how the rain is destroying food supplies for both humans and animals. In Emmi Itäranta's *Memory of Water* (2012), however, lack of fresh water has become a widespread problem, and winter is a distant memory known only from books. Obviously, Nordic readers find it creepy when seasonal changes disappear; as Hanna Samola has pointed out, »changes in seasons have been a common topic in Nordic dystopian fiction of the twenty-first century.«⁴³

What Itäranta envisions in her dystopian novel is a worst-case scenario predicted by today's glaciologists who have described the dramatic consequences of melting glaciers, in the Himalayas in particular; for as Andri Snær Magnason, Bjørn Vassnes and others have pointed out, the ice on the Roof of the World serves as a water tower for billions of people.

We do not know when – or whether – the Earth's systems will pass the tipping point that will set us on an unstoppable course for a process of warming. But what we do know is that without the cryosphere, life on Earth will become difficult for us humans. Hundreds of millions will be left without water, heat waves and forest fires

⁴¹ »Jeg setter opp farten, det er som om redselen gir meg fart. *Fight or flight* kalles menneskets respons på redsel. Kjemp eller flykt.« (Lunde 2020, p. 4).

⁴² »Vi bør hegne om fortvilelsen, ta vare på sorgen og redselen. Den kan gi oss krefter til å gjøre noe, til å kjempe. Og våre følelser kan ha betydning for andre mennesker.« (Ibid., p. 5).

⁴³ Samola 2018, p. 145.

will make vast areas uninhabitable, the weather will become steadily more extreme, and the ocean will rise to levels well above the places where most large cities and population centers stand today.⁴⁴

The science journalist places his hope in cryoactivists battling for the world's remaining glaciers. To conclude that the novels *Steffen tar sin del av ansvaret* and *Den afskyelige* are examples of cryoactivism may be an overstatement, but as the refrain in Charlotte Weitze's novel goes: »As long as there is white ice, there is hope.«⁴⁵ In other words, there are good reasons not only to mourn demising glaciers and the loss of snow, but also to appreciate and celebrate the vital cryosphere while it is still with us.

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⁴⁴ Cf. Vassnes 2020, p. 215. See also Um tímenn og vatnið (2019; On Time and Water, 2020), Andri Snær Magnason's follow-up to his »letter to the future«.

⁴⁵ »Så længe der er hvid is, er der håb, siger far.« (Weitze 2016, p. 94).

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