

**Special Issue:**  
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**Environmental Change in Nordic Fiction**

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## **Introduction to the Special Issue:** ..... **Environmental Change in Nordic Fiction**

The five research articles published in this special issue of *NORDEUROPAforum* were originally presented as papers at the third workshop of the *Ecocritical Network for Scandinavian Studies* (ENSCAN), which had the overarching theme of »Environmental Change in Nordic Fiction«. Held in Tampere, Finland, in November 2019, the workshop provided a platform for scholars to discuss how environmental issues are represented in Nordic fiction across media, and how the physical impact of ecological transformation has affected our environmental imagination.

ENSCAN was conceived as a network for international collaboration between scholars in ecocriticism and environmental humanities, who are working on or are interested in environmental topics related specifically to the literatures and cultures of the Nordic countries. Their research is typically concerned both with the exceptionalism of the Nordic area and the historical and cultural differences between individual Nordic countries. Members of the network share a common interest in ecocriticism and closely related fields such as geocriticism, posthumanism, postcolonial ecocriticism, Arctic studies, island studies, utopian studies, maritime studies, human-animal studies, and urban studies, all in relation to the study of Northern European literatures and cultures.

In today's cultural atmosphere, the topicality of environmental change is heightened by a swift transformation in our current visions and representations of the Nordic environment. Traditionally, imagery of the Nordic and Arctic areas has been heavily influenced by the national Romantic ideas of purity and pristine wilderness, which still inform our common notions about Northern nature. In recent years, however, the Northern environment has become a political hotspot, where the effects of global climate change are readily visible. The Arctic is warming faster than any other region on Earth, and visions of the future in the Nordic region are adopting increasingly concerning qualities. Our workshop sought to address this topic in fiction from a rather broad perspective: we did not intend to limit our perspective on today's ecological challenges, but rather wished to emphasize a historical perspective on how physical changes in the environment are connected to new kinds of cultural representations and new ways of seeing and thinking about the world around us.

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In an earlier ENSCAN-related anthology, *Nordic Narratives of Nature and Environment* (2018), Reinhard Hennig, Anna-Karin Jonasson, and Peter Degerman shed light on the unique quality of the Nordic region in relation to environmental questions. Nordic countries are generally known for their economic prosperity, strong welfare states, social and gender equality, and high levels of education. They have also acquired a reputation for being forerunners in environmental protection, on the regional as well as the international level. This positive image, however, does not seem to be entirely accurate. Considering the United Nations' Sustainable Development goals, there is still a significant need for improvement in the areas of Nordic agricultural systems, energy efficiency, and ecosystem conservation. Significant problems are also generally represented by Nordic levels of material consumption, which are considerably higher than what the goal of sustainability would permit.

This special issue aims to address various environmentally oriented questions relating to this historical and cultural specificity of the Nordic area. In the broadest temporal sense, the articles move from traditional, indigenous environmental knowledge to the birth of modernity and then to the overwhelming contemporary presence of the Anthropocene, the proposed geological epoch of human impact upon Earth's geology and ecosystems.

In the first article, DANIEL CHARTIER focuses on a modern fairytale, *Sila* (2009) by Lana Hansen, an environmental activist and multidisciplinary artist, whose work borrows elements from the Inuit mythology of Greenland. Chartier's analysis of Hansen's work juxtaposes the environmental orientation of the indigenous Inuit culture with wider Western and Nordic notions of ecology. The article proposes that Hansen uses mythological imagery as a political strategy to convince Greenlanders of the urgency of addressing climate change.

HENNING HOWLID WÆRP's article offers an ecocritical viewpoint on the modernist poetics of Knut Hamsun's *Segelfoss* series (1913, 1915, 1933). With his examination of the roots of modern consumerism, Wærp shows how Nordic practices of markets and consumption have already been culturally addressed in the early stages of modernity.

MARKKU LEHTIMÄKI's article combines ecocriticism with a narratological perspective, contributing to the recent discussion about econarratology. Lehtimäki investigates Finnish-Swedish author Ulla Lundberg's novel *Is* (2012) as a complex cognitive experiment that integrates portrayals of fictional minds with representations of the Northern environment and non-human nature.

In his analysis of the narrative long poems *Urd* (2013) by Ruth Lillegraven and *Heime mellom istidene* (2016) by Guri Sørungård Botheim, PER ESBEN MYREN SVELSTAD suggests that contemporary Nordic poetry participates in an ongoing dialogue with ecocritical theory. By examining the poems in relation to Timothy Morton's *dark ecology*, Myren Svelstad argues that the Anthropocene can be thought of as an epoch that refutes the idea of locality implied in the reified notion of nature.

Nordic climate fiction often depicts humans in denial about climate change, but Erlend Nødtvedt's carnivalesque novel *Vestlandet* (2017) offers an alternative narrative. THORUNN GULLAKSEN ENDRESON's Bakhtinian analysis of the novel seeks new ways of making sense of climate change that might ease our current crisis fatigue

## Introduction to the Special Issue: Environmental Change in Nordic Fiction

created by the popularity of recent stories of ecological catastrophe. Can environmental humor offer us new visions of the future or the potential to understand and perceive ourselves from a fresh perspective?

With a range of analyses on changing historical responses and the abilities of different narrative genres to tackle the question of changing environments, this special issue of *NORDEUROPAforum* showcases the variability and ambiguity of the Nordic cultural relationship with ecological questions.

The ENSCAN workshop was arranged in collaboration with the research project *Darkening Visions: Dystopian Fiction in Contemporary Finnish Literature* at Tampere University (Kone Foundation, 2015–2019) and Toni Lahtinen's research project *Environmental Risks, Dystopias and Myths in Contemporary Literature* (Academy of Finland, 2017–2020).



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