NORLIT 2017: NORDIC UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS
Keynote lectures

Nicole Pohl (Professor of Early Modern Literature and Critical Theory, Oxford Brookes University)

From Niels Klim to Jordscott: Utopia in the Nordic Tradition
Thursday 12:15–13:15 (Large auditorium A120, ASA-building)

Nicole Pohl has published and edited books on women’s utopian writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, European salons and epistolarity. Some publications within the Utopian field are Gender and Utopia in the Eighteenth Century: Essays in English and French Utopian Writing (with ed. Brenda Tooley, 2007) and Women, Space and Utopia, 1600-1800 (2006). Pohl is also the General Editor of the interdisciplinary and peer-reviewed journal Utopian Studies. Pohl works on eighteenth-century English literature with a particular interest in women's letters and literature, European Enlightenment and European literary networks.

Pasi Sahlberg (Author, Education Advisor)

The Future Vision of the Nordic School Systems
Friday 13:15 – 14:15 (Large auditorium A120, ASA-building)

Pasi Sahlberg is a Finnish educator, author and scholar. He has worked as school-teacher, teacher educator, researcher and policy advisor in Finland and has examined education systems around the world. His expertise includes school improvement, international education issues, classroom teaching and learning, teacher education, and school leadership. He is the author of the best-selling book Finnish Lessons 2.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland (2015) and of numerous professional articles and book chapters. He is the former Director General of CIMO (Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation) at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and has been a visiting Professor of Practice at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education in Cambridge, MA, USA.
Susanna Alakoski (Writer)
Trygghet är radikalt (“Safety is radical”)
Friday 16:30 – 17:30 (Large auditorium A120, ASA-building)

Susanna Alakoski made her literary debut in 2006 with the novel “Svinalängorna” (“The Swine Rows”), which was rewarded the Swedish August Prize for Fiction in 2010. The novel was subsequently dramatised and it has also been filmatised. In 2010 she published the novel “Håpas du trifs bra i Fengelset” (“Hope you Like it in Jail”). In addition, she has published four books for children, been the editor of several anthologies, and published two diary-essays: “Oktober i Fattigsverige” and “April i Anhörigsverige”, in 2012 and 2015 respectively. The latter was performed as a play at Stockholm City Theatre in the spring of 2016. Her play “Laina och fåglarna” (“Laina and the Birds”) is currently being performed on stages around Sweden. Susanna Alakoski has a bachelor’s degree in social sciences and was awarded an honorary degree at the Faculty of Health and Society at Malmö University in 2015.

The presentation will be in Swedish.
Themed session 1: A Means to many Ends: the Politics of Nordic Models, Utopias and Dystopias (Chair: Louis Clerc)
Thursday 13:30 – 15:30 (Jöns Budde M218, Arken)

Made up of a mix of historians and political scientists, our panel will look at the political uses of “Nordic utopias” and “Nordic dystopias” in various contexts, inside and outside the Nordic countries. Whether broadly Nordic or centered on the image of a specific country, idealized representations of the Nordic Countries have been used for domestic and foreign political purposes at various points in time – and still are today. This phenomenon has been observed in the activities of Nordic governments themselves (offering a specific “model” for foreign consumption) or in the representations of non-Nordics; the model presented has been in turn good (the utopian Nordic model) or bad (for example the neo-authoritarian “socialism light” of 1960s Sweden). Motivations for the use of the Nordic model as a rhetorical device have been ideological, political but also economic: Finland’s recent efforts at nation branding, for instance, have been mostly geared towards enhancing the country’s image as a producer of goods and services.

The focus of our panel will thus be on specifically political uses of these representations, as part of political processes (justification, “pedagogical aid”, role-model, counter-model, etc), and will range from Nordic activities producing these representations to the reactions of non-Nordics. The panel will be organized as a round-table, with short presentations followed by a discussion moderated by the panel’s discussant. During the discussion, panel participants will be encouraged to consider the way their scientific insights can be reinvested into a broader discussion on current issues, especially the current efforts of Nordic authorities aiming at producing narratives and representations, the external uses and misuses of these representations, and the political implications of these cultural phenomena.

Laura Ipatti (University of Turku)
Finland’s image management in Japan during the mid-Cold War

From the “centre” (Helsinki) to the “field” (in this case Finland’s embassy in Tokyo and via it to Japan), my case will shed light on how the official line of “selling” a select set of characteristics and themes about one Nordic country has worked, as based on a study of diplomatic reporting and commentaries in Japanese media. The Japanese example is, I suggest, particularly interesting as it is one of the
very rare, if not even the only, instances in which Finland’s ‘nation branding’ has come to enjoy wide success. I could discuss the reasons of this success from an historical, actor-oriented institutional perspective, and trace some connections and explanations behind Finland’s image(s) in Japan as they are known in the 2000s. The goal will be to bridge the gap between an active period of Finnish image policy in Japan in the 1960-70s and the current “Nordic/Finland Boom” that’s been reported in Japanese and Finnish media.

**Yohann Aucante (EHESS in Paris)**

The largely positive representations of Nordic (socioeconomic) models

His presentation will deal with the largely positive representations of Nordic (socioeconomic) models, still extremely prevalent despite the strong forces of change that have affected the Nordic countries over the last 40 years. An extension of this question will be the “paradox” of models that initially appealed to a mostly left-wing audience and that have transformed so that they also seduced parts of the right in different countries (the left-right divide having arguably evolved in the meantime). From that, he will reflect on the apparent closing of the social democratic imagination that has been so important to nurture both the utopian and dystopian representations of the North, although Finland is certainly different in this respect.

**Vesa Vares (University of Turku)**

Nordic “liberal” universities seen from the totalitarian viewpoint. German academic evaluations of the possibilities to influence the Nordic universities in the 1930’s

The theme relates to interaction, integration and conflicts with and in the society, especially to totalitarian ideologies. I will look into the viewpoints and assumptions which the German academics who visited Scandinavian universities entertained about their hosts: what was the reputation of National Socialist Germany, how much harm had the politicization and “arianization” of science caused in Scandinavia, what sort of prejudices one had to fight, who were the potential friends and foes, what were the best means to reverse the setbacks. I will use the reports which the German professors and docents were obliged to send to their superiors at their own universities and ministries. Usually these reports were
very thorough and made also political conclusions.

I will not try to focus on what the Scandinavian academics in their own minds actually thought about Germany and National Socialist totalitarianism. To do this, one should, of course, use Scandinavian sources. The German viewpoint no doubt misinterpreted many things, and no one should be named pro- or anti-Nazi solely on the evidence of the German material. Not even the German reporters were usually active Nazis. However, even though many of the assumptions and interpretations might have been incorrect – wishful thinking or seen too much through ideological lenses – they were nevertheless more crucial to the Germans than what the “wie es eigentlich gewesen” was: it was what was believed to be true, and this was also transmitted to the German Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Education. This information influenced the German decisions more than what later researchers can construe to have been actually true. However, most reports, even though they were produced in a totalitarian system, were surprisingly open, free from ideology and even critical. They recommended almost unanimously that the academic contacts should be free from politics, because politics would only harm the actual goal to rehabilitate the German science in the world.

It was also typical that in the reports it was often stated that although there were very few sympathizers in the upper hierarchy – among the professors, docents and higher administration – there was plenty of interest among the students, who were fascinated by the idealist stands which had taken over the German students. It was also often stated that the junior officials or anyone who was closer to everyday practice of his or her field had more interest and understanding to the National Socialist practices than the theoretical professors who had adopted the ideas of Enlightenment and Scandinavian freedom. It was also reported that there were clear differences between the Scandinavians: Lund was sympathetic, Göteborg (högskola) the most critical, the Finnish academics generally more sympathetic than their Scandinavian counterparts (if you referred only to old traditions and to 1918 and did not scare them off with National Socialism).

Thus the theme reflects on the question of how totalitarianism tried to influence the Scandinavian universities by ordinary, everyday, practical and – on the surface – depoliticizing ways.

**Peter Stadius** (University of Helsinki)

A Nordic black legend? 20th century counter-images of progressive Scandinavia
Themed session 2: Blue Waters, Black Oil. Industrialization, Environmental-alism, and Minority Nationalism in the Case of the “Neste War” in Tvärminne 1970–1973 (Chair: Hanna Lindberg)

Thursday 13:30 – 15:30 (Kramer M220, Arken)

HANNA LINDBERG (Åbo Akademi University)

The Birth of Local Environmental Activism in Finland. The Case of Aktionsgruppen för Nylands skärgård

Environmental awareness was awakened in Finland due to several environmental crises and threats in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A galvanizing moment for local environmental activism in Western Nyland was an article in the local newspaper Västra Nyland in October of 1970. According to the article, that the state-owned oil company Neste had bought land in Southern Finland through a front, right next to Tvärminne zoological station, to establish Finland’s third oil refinery. An oil refinery as a next-door neighbour would not only endanger the southern archipelago but also ruin decades of research.

The article in Västra Nyland was a starting point for local environmental activism, as it mobilized thousands to protest environmental dangers caused by oil refineries and petrochemical industries. It also gave rise to formal environmental activism on the local level, “Aktionsgruppen för Nylands skärgård”, which worked to stop Neste’s plans. The aim of the paper is to investigate the formation of grass-root environmental activism in Western Nyland during the Neste scandal. How did the activists organize themselves and mobilize interest for environmental issues? Which images of the future did the activists employ in their quest to prevent Neste’s plans for a third oil refinery next to Tvärminne zoological station?

MATIAS KAIHOVIRTA (Åbo Akademi University)

Black Gold and Red Workers – Hopes and fears of industrialization in the Finland-Swedish labor organization

How did the Swedish-speaking minority in the Finnish Social Democratic Party react on the plans of building an oil refinery in Tvärminne? For the Social Democrats the building of an oil refinery would bring new jobs to a stagnating rural area, where especially the Swedish-speaking working class was exposed to un-
employment or forced to immigrate to Sweden. Yet, state-driven industrialization wasn’t necessarily a grand solution for the Social Democrats. Finnish migration to “traditional” Swedish-speaking industrial heartlands brought out fears of social problems in the municipalities and the spread of communism. This presentation highlights the intersection of class and ethnicity in the discourses used by the Swedish-speaking Social Democrats during the postwar era.

**Mats Wickström** (Åbo Akademi University)

**Capitalist Exploitation or Necessary Growth? The Finnish People’s Democratic League, industrialization and the challenge and opportunity of environmentalism**

In the 1967 party program of the communist controlled political umbrella organization the Finnish People’s Democratic League neither nature nor environment were mentioned. The “democratization” of Finnish society was predicated on continued industrialization and economic growth. The rise of environmentalism challenged the materialism of the Finnish People’s Democratic League, but the intrinsic critique of capitalism in the nascent environmental movement was also conceptualized as an opportunity. For the Finnish People’s Democratic League issue was further compounded by the split between the reformist majority and the “Stalinist” minority in the Communist Party of Finland. For the Swedish-speaking Communists and People’s Democrats the question of economic growth and environmental protection also carried an ethnic dimension due to the ambivalence of socialist and minority nationalist aims in regards to the Swedish-speaking minority.

“The fight for the environment is a class struggle question”

diamonds

**Session 3**
Thursday 16:00 – 17:30 (Jöns Budde M218, Arken)

**Kasimir Sandbacka** (University of Oulu)

**Utopianism, nostalgia, and melancholy as historical attitudes**

The terms nostalgia, melancholy, and utopia, but also terms such as longing, mourning, hope, et cetera, often cohabit theoretical texts. Nostalgia is some-
times considered to have utopian qualities, while both melancholy and nostal-
ggia seem to contain varying degrees of longing and wistfulness. They can be regarded as idealistic, totalitarian, naïve, progressive, or deluded depending on the theoretical background and political preferences of the writer in question. What is often lacking is an explication of the multifarious ways in which these terms relate to each other, the properties they share, the properties that differ between them, and a perhaps even a realization that they could be subsumed under a common rubric. In this paper I gather these terms under the rubric his-
torical attitude.

Using the works of Finnish author Rosa Liksom as an example, I demon-
strate through a systematic classification that nostalgia, melancholy, and uto-
pianism can all be seen as ethical and cognitive outlooks on history, but also that a nuanced theoretical approach that is capable of differentiating between sub-
types of nostalgia, melancholy, and utopianism is required to explore their polit-
ico-ethical implications. An important theoretical framework of this exploration is Fredric Jameson’s theory of the political unconscious and cognitive mapping.

Charlotte Coutu (Université du Québec)
The Heterogeneity of the North: Critical Discourse and Utopia in Rosa
Liksom’s *Dark Paradise*

In Rosa Liksom’s short-story collection, *Tyhjän tien Paratiisit*, translated into English as *Dark Paradise*, the influential Finnish writer unveils the dark lives of ordinary people. In each of the short stories, the protagonists express their as-
pirations for a brighter future or describe how they try to escape an often dis-
mal (disappointing) life. As Nordic countries are often praised for their appar-
ent idealistic social system, the vision is seriously challenged in Liksom’s work as the violence and poverty are ubiquitous. Her stories show the life of those who are left aside in the system, the failed ones of a so-called perfect society. My project is therefore to demonstrate how we can see those protagonists as dystopian figures of a society described by its utopian components. For my Mas-
ter’s thesis, I use visual and auditive elements to illustrate the tension between those two states. I then not only refer to the relationship between lightscapes and darkscapes but also between silence and noise in a Nordic environment. Following the work of Daniel Chartier on the idea of place, I understand the North as a discursively constructed place that is both created by imaginary and
realistic figures. I am also interested by violent female protagonists in Liksom’s short stories. I see this particular kind of violence, often directed towards men, as potentially utopian in a way that it foresees a world in which women are seen as equally violent as men. This implies that gender is constructed and can be deconstructed in a futuristic world. Furthermore, these women often think of violence as a way to make the world a better place for them which can also be seen as ultimately being utopic. Finally, I would like to demonstrate that not only are utopian and dystopian elements present in Rosa Liksom’s short-story collection *Dark paradise*, but that they are dependent on each other, creating them to become more apparent to the reader.

**Freja Rudels** (Åbo Akademi University)

*Utopian in-betweens: Relating Desire in Hannele Mikaela Taivassalo and Lyra Ekström Lindbäck*

We must dare to think utopia, says the seminal Finland-Swedish author Monika Fagerholm in an in-depth interview for the journal *Ny Tid* in June 2016. She stresses the need to think new thoughts, to move in the direction of the unknown, to imagine. When Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van der Akker sketch the outlines of literature after postmodernism utopia forms a core ingredient. In what they chose to call “metamodernism”, utopian thinking takes place alongside postmodernist playful irony (2010).

The aim of this paper is to explore how utopian thinking, the yearning for alternative visions, comes across in novels by two contemporary Nordic authors: the Swedish novelist Lyra Ekström Lindbäck and the Finland-Swedish writer Hannele Mikaela Taivassalo. Erotic desire is a key element in the writings of both authors. Desire forms more than just a recurring motif in their fiction, it permeates all of the narrating, pushing it towards sexual and textual in-betweens.

Along with the concept of metamodernism I will draw upon the neo materialist nomadism of Rosi Braidotti to uncover the workings of desire as motor and motif, and to analyse the possible utopian dimension of the transitions and relations explored by Ekström Lindbäck and Taivassalo. Can desire guide us into the unknown? How are concepts of self and other rethought and reformed, and what new dimensions of narrating are unveiled when Ekström Lindbäck and Taivassalo relate desire?
Hanna Samola (Stockholm University)

Bluebells and cotton grass. The importance of flowers and plants in dystopian fiction

In the dystopian tradition, wild nature on the other side of the city walls is a common topos. Wilderness outside or inside the urban milieu is often a place of rebellion and escape for the protagonists of dystopian novels. In my presentation, I will examine in detail the depictions of these secret meadows, fields, and swamps outside or inside the dystopian cities and societies.

I will discuss plant and flower motifs in dystopian novels *Kys’* (2003) by Tatyana Tolstaya, *Staden utan kvinnor* (2011) by Madeleine Hessérus, and *Auringon ydin* (2013, *The Core of the Sun* 2016) by Johanna Sinisalo. I will interpret plant motifs as allusions to fairy tales and other dystopias, but I will also examine the depictions of flora from a more botanical point of view. What does the reader get to know from the milieu by knowing the typical habitats of the vegetation depicted?

Tostaya’s *Kys’* depicts the city of Moscow after a nuclear catastrophe. Notwithstanding the monstrosity of the surroundings, there are places of beauty in the city and outside of it. Symbols of this beauty are flowers, for example bluebells that the protagonist of the novel brings to his bride. In *Staden utan kvinnor*, the nonconformist Jakob Hall lives in the archipelago near Stockholm. The archipelago is a contrast to the city of Stockholm, which is divided into separate areas by a wall. In Sinisalo’s *Auringon ydin*, the rebellious and nonconformist group called Gaians plant chilli in their secret garden in the woods. Chilli is prohibited by the totalitarian state of Finland because it may be used as a means of a mental escape from the authority. In this novel, swamp is a significant milieu. With its white cotton grasses and bog pools it is a place both of enchanting beauty and of death.
Maria Pujol-Valls (Universitat Internacional de Catalunya/Western Norway University of Applied Sciences)

Nordic utopia in children’s fiction. Or how illustrations can depict nature in a Norwegian novel and its Spanish translation

The Norwegian children’s bestseller Tonje Glimmerdal (2009) by Maria Parr has been translated into many languages. The original cover and inner illustrations have been changed in the Spanish version and, therefore, its meaning is based on a new combination of text and paratexts.

The novel has been considered a winter pastoral as young Tonje, the main character, lives in the mountains and finds her purpose in life in her homeland valley. The way in which the different versions of the book depict the image of Nordic nature can be analysed with the matrix designed by the Nature in Children’s Literature (NaChiLit) research group, from the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. This tool helps to systematise if a literary work offers an anthropocentric or biocentric approach to nature, and if this is problematized or celebrated. When applied to Tonje Glimmerdal and its Spanish translation, Tania Val de Lumbre, this matrix is used with an ecocritical theoretical framework in order to understand the concept of Nordic utopia that illustrations may reflect.

This paper examines if differences in paratexts influence the concept of nature that both versions convey. It focuses on the extent to which an idyllic setting shapes the concept of the Nordic as utopian in each book, and how this variation can affect the Spanish reader’s perception.

Hilja Roivainen (University of Turku)

The Continuum of Utopian Landscape Topos and Utopian-Dystopian Modes in Art: A Case of Recent Nordic Paintings

In my paper, I will analyse the utopian and dystopian modes in the 21st Century paintings of Anna Tuori (b.1976), Petri Ala-Maunus (b.1970, Finland), John Kørner (b.1964, Denmark), Eggert Pétursson (b.1956, Iceland), Andreas Eriksson (b.1975, Sweden) and Astrid Nondal (b.1958, Norway). In the above mentioned, the experience and concepts of place or a natural world in the Nordic countries are painted for example in Doric, Lydian, Hypolydian, Apollonian or Phrygian modes. The utopian iconography of 21st Century Nordic landscape paintings (landscape elements and colour modes) have not been studied in more depth from the perspective of psychological utopian thinking, as defined by Ernst
Bloch (1885–1977) in Das Prinzip Hoffnung (1953 & 1959). Bloch (1986:915) cites Freud’s dream theory when describing pastoral in the countryside nature experienced as motherly active leisure space, as an escape from busy reality or as utopia of nostalgia. In the manner of Burke’s definition of sublime (1756) Bloch (1986:917) claims that mountain, ocean or sky objects of the natural world cause sublime emotions. I interpret that these landscape objects belong to the iconography of utopian landscape paintings that also contain for example the green valley, meadow, forest, tree or island present in the paradise myths and utopian literature. This iconography is part of the concept of utopian/dystopian topos in pastoral, Arcadia, picturesque, or sublime landscape painting. Further, light and darkness as modal features are part of Bloch’s utopian landscape metaphor. For example, Bloch describes darkness as an internal utopian horizon in Rembrandt’s paintings, the transcendental blue as distant shimmering mountains in Paradiso or the promise of Not-Yet in dawn.

Session 5
Thursday 16:00 – 17:30 (Donner M225, Arken)

Lieven Ameel (University of Tampere)
Negotiating Possible Futures of Helsinki: Utopian and Dystopian Features in Fiction and Planning Texts

In international city planning, a new utopianism is arguably becoming in vogue, projecting the idea of the ideal city as a blueprint for an ideal society. In the Finnish context, the ambitious urban planning and strategic visions for Helsinki are symptomatic for a contemporary “renaissance of the city” of sorts, with a focus on comprehensive plans and a belief in remaking society through city design. Simultaneously, in a wide range of contemporary Finnish fiction, the idea of the future is informed by profoundly dystopian undercurrents, and in depictions of future Helsinki, the protagonist are typically struggling to come to terms with a society (and its environment) at breaking point. In my presentation, I will examine how fictional and planning texts frame possible choices and questions of agency in relation to alternative pathways towards a hoped-for or feared-for future. The material under discussion will consist of a selection of Helsinki’s strategic and urban planning texts from the twenty-first century, as well as recent Finnish novels
such as Antti Tuomainen’s Parantaja (“The Healer”; 2010), Elina Hirvonen’s Kun aika loppuu (“When Time Runs Out”; 2015), Esa Mäkinen’s Totuuskuvio (“Truth Cube”; 2015) and Annika Luther’s De hemlösas stad (“City of the Homeless; 2011).

My paper engages with current debates in literary ethics, spatiality, and environmental criticism. In its theoretical approaches, it draws on literary urban studies, ecocriticism, and possible worlds theory. The aim is to foreground the materiality of planning narratives (whose projected futures are intended to petrify in concrete and glass), while drawing attention to the literary and rhetoric antecedents of such narratives. Ultimately, I hope to gain a better understanding of what kinds of paths towards the future are postulated by these two different kinds of texts, and what role they envision for agency in our relationship with the present and future urban environment.

Ella Rockar (University of Manitoba/University of Copenhagen)
Housing, Welfare, and “Hygge”: Do the Danes Do it Better?

Housing, Welfare, and “Hygge” uncovers the current state of social – and more broadly affordable – housing in Denmark, as well as the effects that neoliberalism has had on housing over time. Through a critical lens, the presentation highlights the achievements and shortcomings of housing and community experiments, as well as the overall availability of affordable housing in Denmark. Housing is compared to the wider context of the Danish welfare state and the effects of welfare state retrenchment during the period of neoliberalism. As a Masters student based at the University of Manitoba (Canada) and an exchange student at the University of Copenhagen (Denmark), the presenter offers additional insights by comparing and contrasting the two nations in terms of the availability of social and affordable housing, quality of housing, welfare state models, overall levels of poverty and inequality, as well as the importance of the interactions among these factors.

Furthermore, the fascination among North American scholars, activists, and the public, with the idea of the “Scandinavian utopia”, as well as the problems that can arise from this fascination and the general belief in the dichotomy of utopic and dystopic societies, are discussed. Lastly, the presenter will probe her own experiences as a student searching for affordable housing in both areas. Thus, by synthesizing foundational works that have guided scholarly understandings of housing, such as Bourdieu’s The Social Structures of the Economy, recently popular literature that has sparked conversation on the subject, such as
Booth's *The Almost Nearly Perfect People*, and the author’s own experiences, the presentation seeks to explore the question: When it comes to housing, welfare, and the concept of “hygge”, do the Danes do it better?

**Damon Major** (4Cities)

**Contested Utopias: A Case Study of Christiania**

On August 31st, two police officers and one civilian were shot in the autonomous neighborhood of Christiania in Copenhagen. The shooting in itself represented a moment of trauma, where a city known for peace and safety was faced with a rupture from the norm. Yet, the shooting brought intense debate as to not only the safety of the autonomous neighborhood, but also the identity that Christiania holds. The 34-hectare military barracks that was reclaimed by residents in 1971 houses approximately 850 residents has learned to coexist with a widely known marijuana and hash selling “Pusher Street” which has garnered international attention in the form of both local entertainment as well as international tourism. Over the course of Christiania’s existence, this drug trade has been the cause of several instances of violence, which has caused reactions by the Christiania residents to remove the ionic pusher street, and the most iconic aspect of the touristic utopia. This confrontation between the gangs that control the drug trade, the drug users, the visitors and the residents poses the question of whose utopia Christiana is, and the power relations that the largely anarchic space resides within. As each individual’s utopia holds value, a meaning, and desire for a better place, is there a process of converging these utopias into one, and how does power manifest itself in both the utopia’s convergence and fragmentation?

**Session 6**  
Friday 8:30 – 10:00 (Jöns Budde M218, Arken)

**Miikka Laihinen** (University of Turku)

**The Text, the Forest, the Issues: Messy Material Relations in Mikael Brygger’s Poem ’METSÄ’**

Finnish poet Mikael Brygger’s experimental poem “METSÄ” (“A FOREST”, 2010) questions the traditional conceptions of forest as an untouched, utopian natural
space. On the page of a book Brygger’s poem forms an equilateral square standing on one of its corners, consisting of randomly recurring letters ‘p’ and ‘u’ (and hence forming several differing wordily assemblages of ‘puu’, the Finnish for ‘tree’). In the very center of the textual area, an equally equilateral white space – a hole – pierces the textual forest with its pure white emptiness.

On one level, Brygger’s poem actualizes on the page a characteristic Nordic space, a plot of land filled with trees of two different varieties. On the other hand, the equilateral material form of the poem and the empty space in the middle conjure up images of commercial forests, planted solely on the purpose of filling the needs of a timber trade capitalist.

Seemingly simple in its composition, Brygger’s poem addresses – or, rather, shows, actualizes and connects together – several burning issues of the 21st century Nordic lifestyle and society. The prevailing, if challenged, division between nature and culture, the fragile balance between a natural state, forestry and exploitation and also the messy material relation between letters, words and things are all on agenda in Brygger’s experimental poetic expression.

The question(s) to which I focus on in my presentation is: how is one supposed to read a text like that of Brygger’s? And, more importantly, does Brygger’s poem and the very event of reading it change something in the way I as a Nordic reader conceive my environment? In other words, how are the relations between a text, a reader and the world outside connected and laid out in this singular textual assemblage?

My reading of Brygger’s poem takes a new materialist, or even so-called posthumanist stance. I approach poetry not as a language-based media transmitting (interpreted) meanings, but as a means of immanent, material operation of language on the page of a book.

**Peter Degerman** (Mid Sweden University)

The Ore, the Forest and the Hydroelectric Power: Material Strategies in Contemporary Northern Swedish Poetry

The paper focuses on the ways in which contemporary poetry of northern Sweden may voice issues of materiality in a postcolonial context. The study aims to explore the unstable boundaries between human and nonhuman, between garbage and commodity, and between the local and the global. The poetry is read in the historical light of a specific literary tradition emanating from the northern part of Sweden, where the landscape is configured by the two pre-
dominant depictions of it in 20th century literature: the exotic wilderness and the early industrial exploitation of this wilderness; the former being conceived as a utopian image and the latter as a dystopian vision. The paper thus addresses questions concerning the possibilities of reading young contemporary poetry in the context of the traditional literature of northern Sweden in a postcolonial perspective.

Sofia Roberg (Stockholm University)

Topos, a-topos, utopia, dystopia. On the science fiction poetry of Øyvind Rimbereid and Johannes Heldén

In a time of escalating human-induced climate change, the relation between humans, technology and nature is a pressing issue that needs to be further explored in order to understand both the causes and implications of the situation we are finding ourselves in. The two contemporary Scandinavian poets Øyvind Rimbereid and Johannes Heldén have both explored this subject through the genre of science fiction – Rimbereid in his acclaimed poetry collection Solaris korrigiert (2004) and Heldén through the whole of his literary production, not least in his latest book Astroekologi (2016). While these two works of poetry conjure up two very different worlds, they are both set in the future and address the expansion of technology at the expense of nature. In Solaris korrigiert, the reader meets a future society localized in the southwest of Norway year 2480, the oil production having affected the development of the Stavanger region both at a societal and linguistic level. Place has given way for the non-places of globalization and robots, computers and clones are taking over a world supposedly afflicted by ecological disaster. The world of Astroekologi, on the other hand, is post-industrial, in a state of decay where technology melts into nature as the forests reclaim territory after an ecological crisis.

In these two works of poetry, the themes and motifs of science fiction are set to work in a poetic form where language becomes a part of the story. In this paper I will perform readings of these works of poetry, informed by ecocritical and ecopoetic perspectives. I will focus on the notion of place, the relation between the local and the global, and discuss how the works relate to the utopian and dystopian. The inquiry can thus be said to move between the terms topos, a-topos, dystopia and utopia.
Themed session 7: Too good to be true. Nordic societies as imagined in fiction and non-fiction in contemporary France
(Chair: Gro Bjørnerud Mo)
Friday 8:30 – 10:00 (Kramer M220, Arken)

In this panel, we explore Nordic societies as imagined in fiction and non-fiction in contemporary France.

The Nordic countries have traditionally played a marginal role in French culture and politics. The most persistent image of the North has been conveyed by travellers who have told stories about remote, beautiful, but cold places and primitive life. The Nordic model, based on compromise, homogeneity and equality between sexes, classes and generations, has not only met with admiration, but also with disbelief: Rather than being taken seriously as a realistic economic, political and social model, the Nordic countries have often been considered as an unachievable ideal, far from a sustainable political model. Even though the Nordic countries remain associated with beautiful nature, a rising number of utopian and dystopian representations of the Nordic welfare state and nordicity have begun to surface, both in literature and in the political debate. The contributions in this panel seek to illustrate this tendency.

Cecilie Bjerknes Aarre & Kjerstin Aukrust (University of Oslo)
If François Fillon was Swedish... The utopian image of the Nordic model in the French presidential campaign

This paper focuses on the image of the Nordic model as a reference in the French political debate. In general, it seems that the mention of Nordic countries and the Nordic model is surrounded by a cloud of clichés, prejudices and lack of knowledge. The age-old and somewhat caricatured idea of the Northern societies as being freedom-loving, isolated, Protestant, calm, stern and un-cultivated, is still alive and well in the French debate, even today. This paper argues that this idealized perception of the Nordic model could have political consequences.

Historically, the Nordic model’s reputation in France has been two-faced: on one hand, its apparent success and longevity has been viewed as fascinating, while the transferability to the domestic situation has generally been perceived as unlikely, even utopic. A common understanding of what separates
the Nordic model from the French, is that whereas French society tends to be perceived as polarized, the Nordic countries are viewed as more consensus based. These opposite perceptions can make it difficult for the French to see the relevance of the Nordic countries; the general view seems to be, as Jon Elster claims, that the Scandinavian model cannot be exported, especially not to France – its very nature does not allow it to function outside the borders of the small countries in the North. Thus, the Nordic countries are in many ways held hostage by the clichés and prejudices surrounding them. This paper’s claim is that important aspects of the Nordic model are lost in the French utopic translation of the concept: the idealization of the Nordic model is therefore standing in the way of it being used more proactively.

Gro Bjørnerud Mo (University of Oslo)

Dystopian and utopian images of the Nordic in the French contemporary literature


In different ways, these three writers express an increased interest in Norwegian exceptionalism, but they also include elements associated with the Nordic model, and convey observations on Nordic wealth, peace and equality. They continue to perpetuate 19th century myths and do not distinguish between the different Nordic countries when it comes to images of untouched nature, beautiful women or heroic Viking past. Some of the features they associate with the Nordic model are, however, explicitly negative. The naivety of the politicians and the population, the dangers of a tolerant and an open society are repeatedly emphasized. The privileges and benefits associated with the welfare state are described as unsustainable. The understanding of the Nordic model in these novels is built on a mix of utopian and dystopian elements. Dangers and threats are inflated. Privileges are amplified and magnified. Both before and after the terrorist attacks in 2011, the high levels of trust in the Nordic countries are seriously questioned. This paper analyses the choice of such hyperbolic representations from a political, historical and rhetorical point of view.
Geir Uvsløkk (University of Oslo)

Views on the Nordic model in French television documentaries: the end of the Nordic “miracle”?

In recent years, French television documentaries on the political and social situation in the Nordic countries have become increasingly skeptical towards the Nordic model, suggesting that the end may be near for the Nordic “miracle” (Kwak-Sialelli & Leconte, 2013). This paper focuses on four documentaries shown on the French-German television channel Arte from 2006 to 2013: Anne-Sophie Mercier & Matthias Beermann, “Faut-il copier les Scandinaves ?” (February 2006); Jean-Christophe Victor, “La méthode suédoise” (October 2009) and “Danemark à la présidence de l’union européenne” (April 2012), and Anna Kwak-Sialelli & Daniel Leconte, “Norvège, le pays des gens heureux ?” (August 2013).

In these documentaries, different aspects of the Nordic model were subjected to a thorough analysis and presented to the viewers. The main impression is at first largely positive: the Nordic countries are presented as a new Utopia, blessed with a range of natural resources, well-functioning social systems, political transparency, and so on and so forth. In each of the documentaries, however, there are, towards the end, more or less subtle indications that not everything is perfect in these seemingly idyllic societies. This paper analyzes and compares the dystopian echoes found in the four documentaries.

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Session 8
Friday 10:15 – 11:45 (Jöns Budde M218, Arken)

Harri Veivo (Université de Caen Normandie)

Geographies of Modernity in Finland’s Literature in the 1920s: Imagination, Desire, Utopia

In the 1920s, young Finnish- and Swedish-speaking modernists wanted to bring new impulses into Finland’s culture and literature by “opening the windows toward Europe”, as Elmer Diktonius famously wrote in the revue Ultra in 1922. The desire for renewal was articulated both in space and in time: Finland represented the past, while the modern was to be found in Europe. This basic scheme of a belated periphery and an advanced centre was however complicated by a set of perceptions, interpretations, projects and historical events that placed the
object of the desire for the “new” and the utopias of the modern not only in the great metropolises such as Paris and Berlin, but also elsewhere on the map of Europe and the world. Some writers and intellectuals cultivated relations with “the new Europe” of small countries that had become independent nation states after the fall of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, arguing that true modern vitality was to be found there, while others perceived modernisation as a project that should treat the whole surface area of Finland in an equal manner, levelling differences in a utopian egalitarian way with the help of technology and communication. The geography of modernity was a complex network of values and significations; it was shaped by imagination, desire and utopian thinking; it extended from the Arctic sea to Latin America. In my paper, I want to understand how this network was constructed by key actors of the 1920s generation that participated in the circles that were formed around the revues Ultra, Tulenkantajat and Quosego, analysing essays, novels and poems written both in Finnish and Swedish with the focal point set on the Nordic cultural and political context.

Iida Pöllänen (University of Oregon)
Nordic Literary Modernisms: The Countryside as Dystopia and Utopia

Many consider Nordic culture to be defined by its geographical location at the periphery of Europe, as paradoxically both European and at the same time Europe’s (derivative or belated) other. In this paper, I will analyze how this geographical location plays out in Swedish and Finnish modernist literary texts that attempt to understand the effects of modernization on Nordic communities. The texts that I study from the first half of the 20th century are particularly interested in representations of the rural, the countryside, and nature, and often follow and depict characters’ movements between cities and the countryside. This movement between urban ‘centers’ and rural ‘peripheries’ within Sweden, or within Finland, can simultaneously be seen as a commentary on the larger issue of the respected countries as being possible sites of utopian or dystopian periphery in comparison to the rest of Europe, and as ‘others’ to European modern metropolis.

In regards to this, especially two different interpretations emerge in my modernist readings: Firstly, the Nordic countryside as a negative other; that which has been left behind modernity (and its urbanization) and therefore causes huge struggles for its citizens. In this interpretation, the peripheral locations represented can function as dystopian metaphors to the entire country’s
backward state. Thus, associations are made between the urban, the modern, and the rest of the world on the one hand, and the rural, the backward, and - as in the case of Eyvind Johnsson’s *Stad i mörker* (1927) - the “Swedish,” on the other.

Secondly, in modernist texts representing Karelia as a specific rural cite, associations are made between the countryside location, utopia, and authentic community. Instead of seeing Karelia as an opposition to the present and the modern, these texts, such as Hagar Olsson’s *Träsnidaren och döden: berättelse från Karelen* (1940) entwine the peripheral location both with the past - as a dreamy, already-lost site of childhood happiness - and also with the future: as a possible alternative and harmonious way of living in the modern world.

Luc Lefebvre (University of Stockholm/Université Paris-Sorbonne)

Between Crisis and Critique: the Swedish Review *Kris* after the time of Utopias

The 1960s and 1970s were decades where the leftist utopian thought thrived among European intellectuals and artists. Many looked at Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution in China as a new example of possibly successful socialism, whether by lack of information or by blind enthusiasm, while the political and social uprisings in the wake of 1968 added fuel to dreams of changing or even overthrowing Western capitalist imperialism. In Sweden, as in many other countries, these intellectuals and artists were massively mobilised by this idea of radical change. Literature and literary theory in particular found a new purpose: the strengthening of the ideological struggle against imperialism at the side of the working class.

However, as those revolutionary ideals crumbled towards the end of the 1970s, some of these intellectual, cultural and academic circles felt the urge of rethinking utopias and the possibility of making them a reality. In my presentation, I would like to examine how this discussion took place in the literary and philosophical milieus around the review *Kris* and how it helped shaping this review’s literary and critical project. This group of young critiques, academics and writers (Horace Engdahl, Stig Larsson, Anders Olsson among others) wished indeed to challenge the traditional vision of art and literature of the political Left, advocating a new critical position as well as more avant-gardist forms of artistic expression. With the help of namely Karl Mannheim’s essay on Ideology and Utopia and Ricoeur’s lectures on the topic, I would like to describe and analyse
the Kris project between oppositional utopia, concrete utopia and even mobile utopia or, as I would like to call it, atopia.

Session 9
Friday 10:15 – 11:45 (Kramer M220, Arken)

Øygunn Skodvin Prestegård (NLA Høgskolen)
Nordic Young Adult Dystopias

Allegorical readings have strong traditions in utopian literature, a literature that might be conceived as having a didactical potential: Through a description of a society, better or worse than the reader’s, utopian fiction opens for critique of existing social or political conditions, thus becoming a catalyst for change in a society (which is a possible interpretation of Ernst Bloch’s view of utopian thought: all literature that portrays a different society, presents hope of something other than what is known and therefore has transformative power). Utopian and dystopian elements in literature for children and young adults add an extra didactical dimension to a literature that is already expected to be educational or to have an educational motive. Even though this expectation over the last few decades has been challenged by authors, literary scholars and critics alike, literature for young people is still often met with a «double gaze», according to Ingeborg Mjør: On the one hand, the literature is expected to meet with high artistic standards, but on the other hand it is to meet the target group’s specific demands – such as authors, critics and other practitioners define them.

The wave of dystopian literature for young adults that we have seen over the last years, has also been met with this double gaze. The literature can be praised for its ability to create a fictitious universe, or it can be criticised for presenting teenagers with bad role models. The allegorical is rarely addressed in these criticisms, and the literature is often read on another level than utopian/dystopian literature that is written for an adult group of readers. I wish to examine the potential for interpretation in a selection of Nordic y.a.-dystopian novels both on the literal and the allegorical level in an attempt to see the texts on a broader canvas than the level of (the reader’s possible) identification potential (see Maria Nikolajeva, 2010): Which interpretation potentials lie in different approaches to dystopian young adult fiction, and how do the selected books demonstrate a Nordic notion of dystopia?
At the end of the ’90s an editor of the Swedish literary magazine Mono lamented the disappearance of dystopian literature. Today his complaint would be utterly misplaced. The ’00s saw an upsurge in dystopian fiction in Sweden and the dystopian novel is by now a firmly established literary genre. Due to its critical, reflective and expressive possibilities many Swedish authors turn to the politically engaged genre at least once. It is often claimed that a significant structural feature of dystopian narrative is that it begins in medias res and that the reader is immediately transported to the fictional society. For instance Tom Moylan argues this opening to be a key feature. This view often also originates in contrasts with the classic utopia, whose traveler usually visited strange lands beyond the seas. In the context of the renewed interest in dystopian fiction, my paper examines one aspect of the Swedish dystopian novel of the ‘00s: how the beginning of the narrative relies upon the same travel conventions as the classic utopia. Examples will primarily be drawn from five Swedish dystopias: Cilla Naumanns Fly (2004), Ninni Holmquists Enhet (2006), Jerker Virdborgs Kall feber (2009), Martin Engbergs Stjärnpalatset (2010) and Karin Tidbecks Amatka (2012). I examine the broad implications that this structural alteration has for the world-building and depiction of society, character-development and reader-position. It is argued that the travel narrative is suitable to the necessity of dystopian narrative to both unobtrusively describe and “show” the alternative society and to create emotional engagement with the protagonist and the fictional society. The travel narrative is essentially a device in a poetics of spatial reader-immersion, with the dual purpose of promoting the reader’s empathic identification with the protagonist and positioning the reader in a less character-bound reflection on fictive and real societies. It is also argued that character-development in this dystopian narrative is not simply a question of intensified alienation from society. The progressions are more varied and unstable.

Aino-Kaisa Koistinen (University of Jyväskylä)
The Care Robot in Äkta Människor – A Monster or a Tool for the Future?
Quite recently, care robots have begun an invasion into our lives and have given rebirth to the hopes and concerns considering both utopian and dystopian technological futures. When introducing a new generation of service robots in our
daily lives, it is interesting and important to consider how they have already been imagined in science fiction, as these imaginations can be used to make visible the problems as well as promises inherent in close relationships between humans and machines. The technological imaginations created by science fiction narratives, indeed, influence our cultural imaginaries, often turning to science facts. This paper will discuss, how robotic creatures and technology are generally represented or (re)imagined as hopeful or monstrous figures in science fiction narratives and how they relate to contemporary technological developments. While doing so, I will focus on the representations of welfare technologies, namely the care robots, and use the Swedish television series Äkta Människor (2012–2014) as a case study.

The narrative of Äkta Människor includes care robots (that are, interestingly enough, called Hubots) that are human-like in their appearance, raising intriguing questions about the boundaries between humans and machines as well as the future of welfare technologies. Judging from the news there seems to be two strands in the development of care robots: creating robots that appear like humans or are, in some way, relatable as human-like figures, and the creation of robots that are designed to appear more like machines. Science fiction stories like Äkta Människor present us tales of what may happen if care robots are created in the image of us humans. In the paper, I will discuss, how the series frames its care robots and what kinds of societal questions – considering, for example, gendered care or the ethics of care – the series brings to the fore.

Session 10
Friday 14:30 – 16:00 (Jöns Budde M218, Arken)

Fanny Lindgren (Umeå University)
What’s Hiding in the Woods of the Swedish North?

This paper aims at discussing the use of nature and the supernatural in contemporary northern Swedish literature, in the light of the long historical exploitation of the area and the conflicts this caused. The novels that I will examine are Stallo by Stefan Spjut, Glupahungern by Andrea Lundgren and Ett föremåls berättelse om obesvar by Mikael Berglund. The paper is underpinned by theories of ecocriticism in order to explore the relations between humans and the environment. In
addition, theories of time-space relations and movement are used.

The analysis focus on movement in time-space, human-bear and trollbear relationships and transformations in the novels. The different paths that are chosen by the characters in the novels reveal varying ways in which humans relate to their surroundings, and as a result also relations to, and ideas about, the Swedish north. For example, the nomadic people in *Ett föremåls berättelse om obesvar* moves according to seasonal change, while the crown men from the south establish their settlements close to the natural resources they exploit and adjust nature to their own needs. These relationships are also made visible in relation to the non-human animals as well as non-human animal transformations in the novels: for example, the troll-bear transformations in *Stallo* elaborates the idea of northern Sweden as a wilderness, whilst *Glupahungern* rather use this idea of northern Sweden in order to criticise the anthropocentric norm.

In conclusion, all three novels relate in different ways to the history of, and ideas about, the Swedish north, which in turn are closely connected to stories about nature and the supernatural. The novels display a critical relationship towards historical events, as well as present day ideas and approaches to northern Sweden, nature and animals.

**Meri Alarcón** (University of Gothenburg)

*Water As the Cause of Democratic Decay: Finland-Swedish, Swedish-Finnish and Torniolaakso Dystopian Literature Through An Ecocritical Perspective*

In dystopian literature there are some given forms of storytelling, one of them is the way authors use natural disasters concerning water in the story. My interest lies in society’s decay as a consequence of the natural disaster. More specifically, I want to explore how the cultural context of the Finland-Swedish, Swedish-Finnish and Torniolaakso (dystopian) literature demonstrate these natural disasters and the ways in which society’s decay is expressed through the characters’ actions and by the changes in the descriptions of the landscapes. What interests me is the human vulnerability from a class perspective and how nature is reflected in the text in a dystopian context.

Cultural landscapes coupled with working class identity is clearly reflected in the Ostrobothnia and Tornedalen dystopian literature and are seldom discussed from a class and ecocritical perspective. The theme I will work with,
in addition to cultural landscapes and working class is water as the cause of the democratic atrophy.

**Teemu Jokilaakso** (University of Tampere)

**Singing Children in the District – Dark pastoral in Monika Fagerholm’s ”End of the Glitter Scene” novels**


The both novels tell a story about children growing up in a small Finnish provincial coastal area simply called District (Trakten). This kind of an environment could surely be taken as an ideal environment for children to grow. In Fagerholms novels, however, the Nordic “ideal society’s” institutional and conventional ways and means seem to be colliding with the child characters’ depicted experience. This happens both on a level of language used for mediating childrens experience and themes varying from family problems and child molesting to definitions of “normal” on behalf of social institutions.

In my presentation I interpret child and adolescent protagonists being more or less marginal or set apart from the normal, conventional and “adult” every day social life partly due to their young age. In these “coming-of-age stories” Fagerholms children are not either depicted as a inhabitants of a childhoods paradise, utopia or pure pastoral but as actors in a "glittering scene" where also the end of an era of childhood is visibly lingering on and bringing up the fearful insights and threats of enculturation.

To elucidate the world and enculturation processes the children and adolescents are depicted going through, I use the concept of *dark pastoral* which has first been used in its relation to poetics of childhood by literary scholar Roni Natov (2003, 120). The dark pastoral is in my interpretation taken as critical aspect to the romantic vision of harmonious and utopian childhood. In late-modern enculturation stories, such as Fagerholms novels, it can be seen associated with the creative energy and imagination of childhood, but at the same time resolving the tensions associated with civilization and culture, possibly demarcated as bestial and spiritual, male and female, or social and natural.
**Session 11**
Friday 14:30 – 16:00 (Kramer M220, Arken)

**Björn Sundmark** (Malmö University)

**Nature, North and Nation in Swedish Texts for Children**

The emergence of modern nation-states towards the end of the eighteenth century and the rise of children’s literature in the same period is not coincidental. Children’s literature makes and educates future citizens, and the idea of childhood pervades the rhetoric of nation and citizenship (Sundmark & Kelen; Lucas; Webb; Reimer). If the child is regularly “nationalized” in children’s literature, one can also argue that s/he is just as often “naturalized.” Indeed, ideas about nation, nature and childhood are more often than not conflated in children’s literature discourse (Sundmark; Andersson; Jaques). In this paper, it is the idea of north that is primarily employed to unpack this conceptual complex.

The north is understood as a signifier for both nation and nature (Davidson; Grace). All of the Scandinavian countries – or more aptly, the Nordic countries – of course relate culturally and historically to the idea of north. What is attempted here is to show how this “northern” discourse surfaces in a specific Swedish context. How is the north narrated in texts for children? How is it produced? To just point to a few possibilities: ever since Montesquieu the north has been associated with manliness, rugged nature, strength, individualism, and freedom – qualities which, presumably, are meant to stand in sharp contrast to the effeminate, overcivilized, and weak tyranny of “the south.” But the idea of north and its manifestations is of course much more varied and complex than that. It can represent life-defeating barrenness and cold. It can be evil as in H. C. Andersen’s Snow Queen. The north can also – from the perspective of the majority population – denote the Other: the Inuit and the Sami.

**Kristina Hermansson** (University of Gothenburg)

**Reaching for Utopia. Norm Critical Children’s books in Sweden**

In 2007, the first self-labeled so called norm critical publishing houses were established in Sweden, Olika förlag and Vilda förlag. One year later, Sagolikt förlag, started. Now there are a few more publishing houses with similar orientation, forming a new niche in children’s literature publishing. The titles published are
examined by experts in order not to contain stereotypical representations of
gender, class and ethnicity but rather, according to Olika förlag, “challenge out-
dated norms”. This paper critical studies the literary production, focusing pic-
ture books, by relating it to the Swedish gender educational equality discourse
(eds. Bromseth & Darj) and intersectional theory (Crenshaw, de los Reyes).

I intend to shed light on utopian aspects, relating the norm critical litera-
ary production to the Gender Equality Project in which utopian and pragmatic
views merge. Michel Foucault’s concept heterotopia will be utilized to exami-
ne this literary niche as a place where utopian visions are manifested. The paper
argues that the Gender equality project has gone through a political shift since
the 1960s and the early 1970s, when it was part of a broader equality project.
Today other liberal political ideas and hyper-individualism more clearly affect
the views on what gender equality means and how it could be reached. Also, the
dominating views on what a child is or should be has changed. The norm critical
picture book expresses these changes, but also offers – or at least intends to of-
fer – a resistance by presenting progressive, or even utopian dreams of equality
and justice. In my paper, I examine how and by what means norms and ideology
are being (re)presented in the actual books as in the paratexts, both verbally and
visually. From an intersectional point of view, I will point out some significant
paradoxes and inherent conflicts.

Olle Widhe (University of Gothenburg)
The Swedish Welfare State, Utopian Vision, and the Concept of Chil-
dren’s Rights in Leftist Children’s Literature around ‘68

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between left wing chil-
dren’s literature and the concept of children and children’s rights in Sweden
around ‘68. My main focus is two children’s books written and illustrated by the
radical, and in many areas influential, Swedish couple Gunnar Ohrlander (1939–
2010) and Helena Henschen (1940–2011). These books are examples of how
children were regarded as a marginalized group endowed with special signifi-
cance for the left-wing intellectuals in Sweden during the long 1970s.

In When the Children Took Power preschool children provokes a revolu-
tion on their Kindergarten and thus forces the adults to observe the rights of the
child and the poor. In both metaphorical and concrete way the narrative stands
out as a radical critique of the presumed capitalist values prevailing the welfare
state administrated by the Swedish Social Democratic Party. When the Kids Went
on Strike, on the other hand, is a story about a group of children and their involvement in a mining strike somewhere in the north of Sweden. It offers a participatory approach for children and evokes them as right-bearing persons who have the potential to reshape society. The theme of children's participation is expressed already in the preface, as the author proclaims that adults should listen to children, otherwise strange things might happen. He also underlines the importance of children participation when he announce that the book, to become “accurate”, is co-written together with Jesper, a nine year old boy in third grade.

The strike-motif articulates both the children’s and the worker’s human rights to be seen and heard in close connection to contemporary politics. It alludes to the Great Miner’s strike in the north of Sweden 1969–1970, often described as one of the most important events in the modern history of Sweden. One main undertaking for the new left was to combat the presumed bourgeois values of the state, and to create a new socialist utopia, including a new set of rights for children. This article will explore how this was done in Swedish children’s books around ’68.

Session 12
Friday 14:30 – 16:00 (Donner M225, Arken)

Marie Mossé (Université de Lorraine/Université du Québec à Montréal)
The temptation of utopia in 19th century travel accounts in Iceland: an origin of the contemporary Scandinavian model?

The 19th century saw the rediscovery of a geographical area – Scandinavia, and Iceland in particular – and of a literature as well, since Nordic and Celtic Antiquities were transmitted by Paul-Henri Mallet (1756) and Bishop Thomas Percy (1770), which opened the way to the translation of the many Icelandic sagas throughout the 19th century. A new terra incognita, simultaneously real and literary, were suddenly a substitute in the traveler’s mind for the countries of the “Grand Tour” and the Pacific Islands, which were now considered as well-known places through the exhaustive discourse and travel accounts of explorers of the previous centuries. That paradigm shift came together with an aesthetic revolution within the writing of travel accounts: the growing ease of international travels brought explorers, merchants, scientists to capitulate their position to journalists, would-be or established painters and writers, and also to the ances-
tors of “tourists”, honest and ordinary men, often literature-lovers, whose fascina-
tion for Icelandic mythology and sagas brought to Ultima Thule... The goal of travel writings was not impartial and dispassionate knowledge transfer any-
more: it suddenly became the expression of the Self through the transmission of intimate impressions and imaginative representations, and often the genesis of literary ambitions for the traveler. In such a context, Iceland became a challeng-
ing new place for any traveler to bring to life through his/her discourse.

The writing of Iceland shifted from the methodic description of the country and its inhabitants (see the physicians Henry Holland and George Stu-
art Mackenzie in 1810) to a more personal discourse, fluctuating between dream and reality, medieval sagas’ Iceland and miserable and disappointing Danish Ice-
land of the 19th century – and confining to an ideological discourse, of which travelers themselves were more or less conscious. Through this ideological dis-
course, imagination and ideas of utopia could come to expression.

My hypothesis is as follows: in a century affected by historical changes like the end of the Ancien Régime in France, the resurgence of European nations through revolutions and the construction of the American nation, European and American travelers come to Iceland to chase a dream, a utopia in both senses of the word: a land of nowhere, where strangeness and marvelousness join to pre-
serve the unknown, and a country of happiness, where innocence, purity, equality, love of nature and trust in future still exists. I would like to analyze the tracks of utopian discourse and imaginary, and their underlying causes as well, in the Euro-
pean and American travels accounts in 19th century Iceland. My analysis will particularly focus on the utopian stereotypes, motives and schemes, should they be borrowed from a century-old tradition of exploration accounts (myth of the noble savage; eulogy of natural life; perfect political and social system; traditional representation of the North) or should they come from the Romantic reinterpret-
ation of Icelandic sagas and mythology (Iceland as the country of rebels warriors and poets, as the cradle of democracy) – should they take into account the real and actual Iceland, or the past Iceland emerged from a fantasy Middle Age. Is it a coincidence that William Morris, passionate translator of Icelandic sagas, is also the author of the utopian novel “News from Nowhere” (1889)? Traditional utopian motives and schemes seem therefore to be reinvested in the 19th century travel accounts in Iceland in order to give birth to a new utopia, our today’s utopia: the Scandinavian model of equality, social bond, democracy and freedom.

I will also try to show that the border between those well-known uto-
pian stereotypes and dystopia can be very hazy, attesting to the reversibility
between, on one side, fascination and, on the other side, disappointment and aversion in the traveler’s eye – a constant shift accompanied with an other shift in the traveler’s self-representation: the latter struggle to find his own identity, between the political thinker, the moralist trying to uplift his/her contemporary, or the dreamy poet, at a time where the very possibility of classical utopia tends to be more and more questioned.

Beata Agrell (University of Gothenburg)

Utopia and Apocalypse – Socialist and Christian Intersections in Devout Narratives of the Early Swedish 1900s

The early Swedish 1900s were turbulent times, marked by multiple processes of modernization. Industrialization, urbanization, democratization, mass medialization, and secularization were in full swing, and so were popular movements of both manual workers and religious revivalists. Strikes and other protests against low wages and poor working conditions were frequent, as was criticism of hypocritical oppressive clergymen and the organizing of revivalist communities. The Church was called in question, but was still a powerful factor in society, closely allied with the ruling classes.

This complex situation was reflected and discussed in both working class literature and devout narratives of those days. Of significant interest even in devout narratives was the issue of what kind of life the lower classes were entitled to and what must be demanded by a social order that could make this possible. Socialists and Christians offered different solutions, and their confrontations were depicted in novels and short stories. But the two perspectives could also intersect into a common vision of a utopian future, sometimes with apocalyptic overtones. This paper investigates some examples of how such discussions are portrayed, how the tension between socialist and Christian outlooks is handled, what utopian tendencies that are actualized, and how they relate to the depicted reality.

Elsi Hyttinen (University of Turku)

Every Animal Is Worth A Song. The Anthropocenic Reverberations on the Finnish National Stage

It might still be debatable whether the Anthropocene is a proper geological term. However, in humanist studies the concept has already proven useful as it designates a space within which to see and seek interconnections between the
current ecological crisis, political and economic instabilities and certain aspects of the western cultural heritage (Eronen et al. 2016). Perceived this way, the effect the Anthropocene has on us is quite undeniable: we have already destroyed nature to the point of it turning unpredictable as a contract party. Left with no space of its own, nature has become a strange human-infiltered entity that refuses to submit to us as the nature we had under control used to.

Many posthumanist thinkers have recently declared that in the current crisis, we need art. In my paper, I will be reading Lea and Klaus Klemola’s National Theatre play *Maaseudun tulevaisuus* (2014) as an artwork that in a way answers that call, as it explicitly asks what the new pact between humans and nonhuman beings should be like. *Maaseudun tulevaisuus* is a mixture of dystopia and utopia set in near future where infrastructure has collapsed and every animal is worth a song. However, my reading of the play and its reception also suggest that art’s messianic potential is only relative, as an artwork carries no singular meaning. In *Maaseudun tulevaisuus*’s reception, the prevalent frameworks are the national – the play is read as an allegory of present-day Finland – or the absurd – the claim that the play has no message, and that the spectator should just sit back and give up looking for one. In the paper, I will concentrate primarily on what I think it says of our anthropocenic times that in the reception, the animal question is hardly seriously considered at all.

 Divider

**Session 13**
Saturday 10:00 – 11:30 (Jöns Budde M218, Arken)

**Riitta Jytilä** (University of Turku)
**Memory and the Future. Utopian impulses in Contemporary Finnish Trauma Fiction**

In recent years, cultural memory studies have devoted more and more attention to the imaginative and future-oriented aspects of memory. Many contemporary scholars, such as Michael Rothberg (2009) and Max Silverman (2013), have stressed the close relationship between memory and imagination and memory’s capacity to build new solidarities. In a related manner, feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2013) emphasizes memory as a productive and affirmative force instead of the backward-looking perspective. According to her, shaping memory
as imagination also entails reinventing the self through affective encounters. Instead of seeing utopian future-orientation as a question of genre conventions, utopia could be understood as social imagining and desire for better lives and thereby it could be understood more widely than exclusively as a literary genre with its own formal, pre-given features. In *Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch (1986) was the first one to call “utopian impulse” our capacity to imagine beyond real experiences and the possibility to reimagine and reorganize our lives.

In contemporary Finnish literature, the growth of memory culture and the experience of war and a traumatic past are widely discussed. In particular traumatic, intimate experiences and the ways of “othering” based on gender, race and class are emphasized. Remembering could reinforce nationalistic tendencies, but writers, such as Elina Hirvonen, Sofi Oksanen and Katja Kettu deal with the transnational sites of memory, such as 9/11, Gulag and Holocaust, thus emphasizing the fact that memory is not only at the service of a nation state and nationalism. In the presentation, I discuss these “real-world dystopias”, stressing imaginative potential of transnational memory and uses of memory across time and space. I also discuss memory as affective force. Affects, such as hope and despair, happiness and sorrow, dreams and anxieties are crucial in providing orientations towards the future.

**Sarianna Kankkunen** (University of Helsinki)

**Just passing-by the Utopia. Spatial exclusion in Maarit Verronen’s novel *Varjonainen***

The Estonia disaster brings the whole nation to a standstill. The newspapers are filled with reports; random strangers engage in conversation on the streets and at the bus stops. People are in shock, but among them is someone who will benefit from the general confusion. She is a survivor of the disaster, but also a paperless immigrant, a shadow among real people, a fugitive of the Soviet system now infiltrating the West. Day by day she approaches utopian Nordic society, mimicking the right way to walk, occupying the right places to stay.

Maarit Verronen’s novel *Varjonainen* (2013) is a story of an illegal immigrant who is prepared to do anything in order to get her share of the wealth of sheltered Finland. It is a fugitive story that turns into a crime story. But most importantly, it is a journey into the dark landscape of exclusion. Verronen’s character-narrator travels from summerhouses to the streets of suburbia, from dusty back offices to the Jugend buildings of downtown Helsinki. A hungry passer-by
gazing at the cozy bright-lit living rooms, she transforms into an estate owner.

In this paper, the thematics of exclusion and Nordic welfare society will be studied from the viewpoint of spatiality and spatial practices. The paper will focus on the experienced exclusion and confinement in urban and suburban environment and the ways in which these experiences are conveyed into narrative in Verronen’s novel. What are the spatial practices that produce inclusion/exclusion in the context of a Nordic welfare society? How do these Utopian sites react when intruded?

Anna Hollsten (University of Helsinki)

Folkhem and Fear in Peter Pohl’s Micke Sequel

Peter Pohl’s Micke sequel is a coming-of-age story including five novels. The sequel begins in the middle of the 1940’s, when Micke, the protagonist, is five years old, and it ends in the late 1960’s reflecting changes in the Swedish society during that time. Until the age of eleven, Micke’s life is dominated by rupture. Moreover, bullying and physical punishment are recurring motives. Hence, there is a strong critical force in the sequel and Pohl discloses how institutions like family and school are unable to protect children from violence.

In my paper, I will discuss Pohl’s social criticism by applying the concept of folkhem, which has played an important role in Swedish welfare policy. Especially Hammarbyhöjden, where Micke lives in the beginning of the sequel, is a setting that can be read as a comment to the ideals of the folkhem. Hammarbyhöjden, a modern suburb in southern Stockholm, was built in the 1930’s and the 1940’s in purpose to offer a healthy environment to those families that had lived in crowded apartments in the centre of Stockholm. However, as Pohl makes clear, the modern suburb cannot bring welfare to Micke’s life. On the contrary, the folkhem ideals fail and the suburb becomes a topos of fear.
Daniel Ogden (Mälardalen University)

Varieties of Swedish Social Satire and Their Importance in Understanding the World Around Us

This paper has a two-fold purpose: (1) to highlight the importance of satire as a form of social criticism today, and (2) to examine how a selection of different modern Swedish works have contributed to this genre. I’ll be focusing mainly on Lena Andersson’s *Duck City* (2006), P. C. Jersild’s *Edens bakgård* (2006), *Efter floden* (1982) and *En levande själv* (1980); and Harry Martinson’s *Aniara* (1956). Andersson’s *Duck City* and to a certain extent Jersild’s *Edens bakgård* correspond to what Northrop Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) calls the “first phase” of satire in which the Chaplinesque “little person” has to find his/her way in an unfeeling and impersonal world. The main weakness of this type of satire, although it succeeds in ridiculing a certain kind of human behavior, is that it tends to leave society intact. The individual has to adapt to an unfair society. *En levande själv*, *Efter floden* and *Aniara* are considerably darker satires. A strong sense of melancholy pervades these works. Indeed we find melancholy running throughout Jersild’s entire production. *Efter floden* and *Aniara* border on the tragic as Frye uses the term, and unlike “first phase” satires mentioned above, call out for us to change; not so much social institutions, as do utopian narratives; but our own destructive behavior, which has brought us to the brink of extinction. All three writers - like the satirists who preceded and prepared the ground for them, such as Swift and Voltaire - base their social criticism on human experience rather than philosophical systems. In our own polarized world filled with uncertainty, this more detached way of investigating the human condition is needed more than ever.

Maria Laakso (University of Tampere)

“This is the price you pay for living in a welfare state” Provocation as a Rhetorical Strategy in a Finnish Short Movie “Mercy All the Way”

Finnish short movie *Mercy all the way* (2014, orig. *Säälistäjä*) is an interesting reaction to the public debate which took place in Finland after the terror at-
tack by Andres Breivik in Norway. The debate started when journalist Markus Määttänen claimed in newspaper *Aamulehti* that it was actually the lack of female companionship that drove Breivik to blow up a government building and to open fire on a youth camp. Director Hannaleena Hauru and screenwriter Tanja Heinänen make this analysis as a starting point of their movie. They create an alternative reality in near future where women working at the employment office start to offer “pity sex” to young men who are under the threat to become marginalized from the society. In a movie these women are depicted as heroes trying to prevent any future mass murders, but whether the society is utopic or dystopic by nature stays up to the viewer to decide.

The film is very much a feminist text but still it exploits the gender stereotypes in order to be provocative. By stereotypical gender roles the movie expands its critique towards not only Määttänen’s single column but also to the modern Finnish antifeminist men’s right movement. For example author Timo Hännikäinen and the popular blogger Henry Laasanen have both discussed sexual relations in a western world from the antifeminist male perspective inventing a theory of heterosexual pairing and the erotic power women wield in a modern society. This is the wider societal frame the movie *Mercy all the way* discusses.

In my presentation I want to examine ideology and the rhetorical structure of a highly provocative satirical text (or in this case a film). The movie can be considered to be morally and rhetorically a complex texts. It chooses to pretend that the subtext of the film (Määttänens writing and other similar opinions) is to be taken seriously but at the same time it is an obvious provocation and an attempt to mock Määttänen’s claims. I will examine the rhetorical structure and the narrative ethos of this kind of narrative communication. At the same time I will discuss the Finnish and Nordic context of the film by analyzing it against Määttänen’s original text. By comparing these two texts I will show, how certain ideologies concerning sexual politics are constantly negotiated inside a contemporary Finnish society and a culture.

**Peter Kostenniemi** (University of Stockholm)

**The fall and rise of the welfare state in *Zombie City***

Contemporary zombie fiction is often interpreted as a dystopian end of civilization; in the aftermath of a zombie outburst, survivors turn against each other in an endless spiral of increasing violence. The zombie is often discussed as a sym-
bol of societal change, notably the fall of the welfare state; according to Henry A. Giroux, the walking dead signals collateral damage following neoliberal politics gone astray. However, the Danish children’s novel series Zombie City (2013–14), by author Benni Bødker, provides a counter narrative where the zombie plague proves much less of a disruption of order than a logical extension of disorder.

In Zombie City, a plague has transformed all adults into flesh eating zombies and left the surviving children to fend for themselves. The protagonist Chris has an advantage due to his previous life situation, before the outburst, as a street child. For him, the apocalypse proves less difficult to handle and far more auspicious compared to the children growing up amongst the ‘rich people’. In flashbacks, Zombie City reveals structures of a former society marked by socio-economic gaps and various levels of corruption whilst the zombie plague serves to even out the terms of survival.

Towards the end of the novel series, Chris encounters a group of survivors gathering in a place known as ‘the land of the living’. There, a new society is prospering where safety and supplies are granted those who in some way contribute to its existence. The zombie outburst, thus, functions as a step in order to escape the dystopian decline of society, and instead of disrupting the welfare state it serves to reinstate it and renegotiate its terms.

Session 15
Saturday 13:00–14:00 (Jøns Budde M218, Arken)

Marit Elise Lyngstad (Hedmark University of Applied Sciences)
The Arctic Utopia: Greenland as sanctuary in Julie Bertagna’s Exodus and Zenith

Julie Bertagna’s Exodus trilogy starts out as postapocalyptic fiction, which “with its focus on life ‘after the end’, brings to life the possibility of a new community: out of the ashes of the old, we create structure” (Curtis, 2013, p. 85). This “new community” can turn into a utopia – “a good place” which is “a non-place” (Vieira, 2010, p. 5) – or a dystopia: a society “in which the ideals for improvement have gone tragically amok” (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 3). In Bertagna’s novels, the main character Mara spends most of her time living in a post-apocalyptic dystopia caused by climate change, melting polar ice caps and rising sea levels, but she
preserves a utopian hope for the future despite her circumstances. This hope is represented by Greenland, which she sets her heart on reaching: “There’s land in the north of the world. I’m sure of it. [...] It’s called the land of the people. I’m going to get there – I’m going to take the slaves and the Treenesters and the boat people – as many as I can rescue” (Bertagna, 2002, p. 269). When she finally gets there towards the end of the trilogy’s second novel, Greenland appears to be the sanctuary she wished for, but there is also a tension present in the narrative – the utopia is not perfect after all (Bertagna, 2007).

This paper examines the concept of Greenland as a utopia in Julie Bertagna’s novels Exodus and Zenith. I argue that the Arctic territories here represent something unknown, wild, primal and inherently natural in contrast to other parts of the world – similar to how they were viewed by early Western explorers (Hill, 2008). Furthermore, Greenland is seen as the place where humans can co-exist with nature in a harmonious manner and build a new world after the old has been destroyed: the ultimate utopia in the wake of a climate catastrophe. However, Greenland is not without its imperfections; this is because “the process of wish-fulfillment includes a kind of reality principle” (Jameson, 2007, p. 83) – meaning that the utopia cannot be too flawless. Lastly, the two novels’ utopian and dystopian elements are discussed in relation to their target audience, as works written for younger readers tend to emphasize hope over despair and agency on the part of the protagonist (Basu, Broad, & Hintz, 2013; Reynolds, 2007).

Delilah Bermudez Brataas (Norwegian University of Science and Technology)

‘Peculiar Circles:’ The Fluid Utopia at the Northern Pole in Margaret Cavendish’s Blazing World

Margaret Cavendish would not have described The Blazing World as a utopia, let alone assigned a single genre or form to it. Nevertheless, it is her most surprising work and contains characteristics from multiple forms; depending on perspective, a reader can find elements of forms Cavendish worked on elsewhere, and simultaneously recognize the text as something wholly new and unfathomable. She carefully crafts an ideal fictional world that she could inhabit in tandem with its Empress as philosopher-scribe, setting it alight to blaze forth in contrast to a philosophical world that she offered as equally ideal, inhabitable and enlightening by pairing Observations upon Experimental Philosophy with the Blazing World.
in reprint (1668). The texts in tandem evoke knowledge as the means to the ideal, but her fictional space in particular blazes with this premise, and indeed the narrative returns repeatedly to themes of warmth and fire as a materialization of enlightenment and knowledge. Yet the heat of knowledge as an ideal space can only be reached through the clever device of an alternate world accessed through the frozen North Pole. Indeed, on arriving in *the Blazing World*, Cavendish’s heroine is rescued by anthropomorphic Polar Bears who speak and walk upright and treat her more humanely than the bestial men of our world. She is found surrounded by the frozen bodies of the men who kidnapped her; the men are killed by the extreme cold at the North Pole that she, alone, survives by “the light of her beauty” and “the heat of her youth.” Her virtue and goodness are sufficient to help her survive the cold of the “very end or point of the Pole of that world, but even to another Pole of another world, which joined close to it; so that the cold having a double strength at the conjunction of those two Poles, was insupportable” (126).

Cavendish strategically located the entry to her utopia in the arctic in a time when the tradition of literary ideal spaces looked towards the heavens in descriptions of celestial worlds that paralleled the discovery of the New World. Both were capitalizing on exciting arenas that offered blank spaces that utopists could use as a mirror for the social and cultural problems of the Old World. Their utopic potential fed the hope that a new world might offer a fertile space for rebirth, return, or redemption. A *tabula rasa* was always a fertile ground for utopic visions, whether it was located on a new moon, or in a new land, or in Cavendish’s case, a visionary world that materialized at the blurring of Earth’s poles. The cold and ice of the farthest north thus offered her not only an empty landscape, but the extreme, stark contrast of the binaries she wished to blur. In this paper, I will demonstrate that Cavendish’s *Blazing World* emerges as utopia that demands fluidity to achieve its ideality. One must move fluidly between limiting binaries to transcend spirit and matter, cold and warmth, and ultimately knowledge and ignorance as the only means to conceive, and thus achieve, a true utopia.
Judith Meurer-Bongardt (Universität Bonn)

Gender and utopia in contemporary Nordic novels for young people

In my paper, I shall compare four novels for young people from Norway, Sweden and Finland: Jostein Gaarder’s Anna. En fabel om klodens klima og miljø (2013), Per Nilsson’s Otopia (2014), Annika Luther’s De hemlösas stad (2011), and Emmi Itäranta’s Teemestarins kirja (2012). The focus lies on the female protagonists, who can be read as carrying a utopian potential even though most of the novels display a dystopian character.

Climate change and a latent criticism of capitalism are thematised in all of the novels. Even if the novels reflect current debates, it is possible to find many themes that are characteristic of utopian/dystopian literature: the relation between the individual and the community and between nature and culture, as well as the relation between men and women, and the importance of the young in representing a new kind of humanity (“den nya människan”), etc.

Taking Ernst Bloch’s and Michel Foucault’s concepts of utopia and heterotopia into consideration, I will study the utopian potential of the protagonists. My starting-point is that due to their youth and gender, the protagonists are typical representatives of the principle of hope (“Prinzip Hoffnung”). They carry a concrete utopian potential that may enable a better future although there are many indications of a negative development. In addition, this potential makes itself known within various spaces in the text, which mostly have a close relationship to the protagonists and can be classified as “other spaces” in relation to the dominant social systems of the novels.

The concept of post-humanism has gained momentum during the past decade or so. The issues that lie behind my comparative presentation are partly connected to the idea of the end of the humanist era. What significance is attached to the human beings of the studied utopian/dystopian novels? In what way does the category of the human make itself known? Is an idea such as Erich Fromm’s “humanism as a concrete utopia” introduced in the texts? And if so, which function does such an idea have in an epoch that is defined as “anthropocene”?

Session 16
Saturday 13:00 – 14:00 (Kramer M220, Arken)
The presentation focuses on the figure of the child in two post-apocalyptic novels, the Swedish author P.C. Jersild’s *Efter Floden* (1982, trans. *After the Flood*) and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006). While children in post-apocalyptic narratives often naturally straddle the tensioned thematics of nostalgia and futurity, the figure of the child also connects to the issue of authenticity: first, through the child’s “natural” freedom from the ways of civilization, which also makes the child an “authentic” witness who perceives the post-apocalyptic condition (as it were) on its own terms; secondly, in the more abstract sense of representing humanity’s “new childhood”, which carries with it the hope of a future humanity that is less vile because more in touch with (its) nature. Both aspects evoke the ideal of innocence, whether epistemic or ethical, and carry heavy expectations and assumptions concerning human nature.

These aspects and ideals receive strikingly different treatments in Jersild’s and McCarthy’s novels. Both have at their center “children” born soon after the apocalypse, framed against father figures (the boy’s father in *The Road*, Edvin’s mentor Petsamo in *After the Flood*) whose partly pre-apocalyptic bearings reflect the reader’s relation to the novels’ post-apocalyptic realities. In *The Road*, the boy retains an aura of fundamental otherness, as the narrative is largely focalised through the father, while *After the Flood* employs its childlike (actually adult) protagonist Edvin as the first person narrator. The reader’s relationship to the two “children” is thus construed on markedly different terms, which also affects how the thematics of innocence, authenticity and human nature become variously articulated. A comparative analysis, I suggest, may both illuminate the novels’ core problematics and extract some general insights concerning today’s post-apocalyptic imagination.