Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

MASTER'S THESIS

New weird ethics: A study of values and nature in the language of the Southern Reach trilogy

Frida Bjørlo Øien

Master's Thesis in Children and Young Adult's Literature
Faculty of Education

Candidate number: 766
Supervisor: Zoltan Varga
Submission Date: September 15th, 2020

I confirm that the work is self-prepared and that references/source references to all sources used in the work are provided, cf. Regulation relating to academic studies and examinations at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), § 12-1.

Abstract

Many of today's youth and young adults are concerned with the environment and climate, expressing feelings of anger, frustration and discouragement in demonstrations for increased action in the fight against global warming. This thesis explores the confluence of values and ecology in the language of the Southern Reach trilogy in order to examine the alternative ways of thinking about nature crises that the trilogy offers. The main aim is to examine how nature is represented in value negotiations embedded in the language of the main characters in the Southern Reach trilogy.

The concept of value negotiations is taken from ordinary language philosophy. Using Stanley Cavell's method of grammatical investigations, I analyse the specific language that the main characters use in specific contexts, revealing their values through examining the judgments on which they make their word choices. This analysis is then discussed based on ecocritical concepts, structured around the Nature in Culture matrix developed by the Nature in Children's Literature and Culture research group at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences.

In the analysis I find that the language use of the characters in the Southern Reach trilogy reveals value negotiations that I have structured around three sets of themes: Science, curiosity and knowledge, truth, deception and control and safety, threat and protection. The value judgments within these themes deal with safety in familiarity, power in deception and value in knowledge, among others. In the discussion, I examine the way these value judgments represent nature and culture, finding that they capture a broad set of representations exhibiting a complexity in how these representations are presented to the reader.

Sammendrag

Mange av dagens barn og unge er bekymret for klima og miljø, og uttrykker frustrasjon, sinne og motløshet i demonstrasjoner for å få på plass en tydeligere klimapolitikk. Denne oppgaven utforsker konvergenser av verdier og økologi i språket funnet i The Southern Reach trilogien, med formål om å studere alternative tenkemåter som er funnet i trilogien. Hovedmålet i oppgaven er å undersøke hvordan natur er representert i verdiforhandlinger man finner i hovedkarakterenes språk i Southern Reach trilogien.

Konseptet om verdiforhandlinger er tatt fra dagligspråkfilosofien. Ved hjelp av Stanley Cavells metode for grammatiske undersøkelser analyserer jeg det spesifikke språket som hovedpersonene bruker i bestemte sammenhenger, og avslører verdiene deres ved å undersøke vurderingene som de gjør språkvalg med utgangspunkt i. Denne analysen blir deretter diskutert basert på økokritiske begreper, strukturert rundt Nature in Culture-matrisen utviklet av forskergruppen Nature in Children's Literature and Culture ved Høgskulen på Vestlandet.

I analysen finner jeg at språkbruken til karakterene i Southern Reach-trilogien avslører verdiforhandlinger som jeg har strukturert rundt tre sett med temaer: vitenskap, nysgjerrighet og kunnskap, sannhet, bedrag og kontroll og sikkerhet, trussel og beskyttelse. Verdivurderingene innenfor disse temaene handler blant annet om sikkerhet i det kjente, makt i hemmelighold og verdi i kunnskap. I diskusjonen undersøker jeg måten disse verdivurderingene representerer natur og kultur, og finner at de fagner et bredt spekter av representasjoner som viser en kompleksitet i hvordan disse representasjonene presenteres for leseren.

Acknowledgments

The work on this thesis has been both challenging, stressful, rewarding and fun. Being able to share most of the process with a supportive community in my fellow students and the teachers involved in the master's program has been particularly fruitful. An extra thank you is extended to Åse Kallestad and Lykke Guanio-Uluru for their advice and conversations in the beginning phases of working on this thesis. I would also like to acknowledge my amazing aunt and teacher, Berit Westergaard Bjørlo, for being a guide in literature my entire life. The discussions we have had on literature and literary theory, not least with regards to the helping hand she has extended for this thesis, has enriched my mind.

Special thanks go to my advisor, Zoltan Varga. His support, patience and invaluable feedback has been crucial in completing this work. It has been especially fun to have his guidance through five years of engaging with the English language and literature culminate in this work.

Lastly, I would like to thank my significant other, Kenneth Aas Stien, who opened my eyes to weird literature and has been a thoughtful and challenging discussion partner. He has been an excellent reader, critic and supporter, stepping up to the plate in a very stressful time.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

1.1. Background, purpose and research question

In the last decade stories and debates on climate change and humanity's relationship to nature has gradually started to dominate the media and other official and unofficial arenas for communication. With this thesis I intend to put a spotlight on what literature can contribute to start conversations and thought processes on nature in young adults. Some societal patterns have been seen as more detrimental to the environment than others. The patriarchal, capitalist society has gotten much negative attention from green thinkers for decades, but lately other factors, like the economic and educational growth of larger parts of the world's population, is getting more attention as possible problems in the growing environmental crisis. Growth and rising standards of living in human populations like we see today demands more land, more energy and leads to higher pressures on natural resources. This also coincides with a growing politization of for instance prosperity, commutes and ways of living, making the choice between biking or driving to work a global problem because of the connection between fuel-consumption and melting ice caps. The entwining of science and politics, facts and values and nature and culture lead to a "sense of the plurality, multiple agency and unpredictability, and compromised condition of the natural world" (Clark, 2014, p. 80). The shear intricacy in the vast web of connections making up the world makes it difficult to get a grip of the problems and solutions at a complex, global level. Realising that *we* are the driving force behind these problems might be even harder, not least because the placement of blame also comes with the burden of responsibility. In order to take responsibility for our destructive ways, we need to examine what makes us so destructive, reflect on how our decisions, our actions and our values at all levels impact the world and the environment (Clark, 2014, p. 86).

Our beliefs and habits are deeply rooted within the individual and thus changes in these demands a lot on a personal level. However, changes can be made. Arne Naess points out the dynamic between our values, society and economy (Naess & Rothenberg, 1989, p. 24), emphasizing how developments in one can affect the other. He goes on to challenge environmentalists to make change by continuously clarifying and disentangling values connected to ecology (Naess & Rothenberg, 1989, p. 45). Since Naess wrote about this in the 1970's and 1980's, there has been a shift towards a broader and better understanding of ecological issues. The transformation is evident both in how we talk about nature, hinting at a

change in values, and, gradually, in how societal and economic processes takes nature into account in decision making processes.

This development might also be manifested in how authors write about nature. Literary works can be seen as contributions to the larger discussion, adding a way to empathize, understand and wonder over different problems and situations through one's interactions with the written word. Furthermore, literature can give the reader an opportunity to explore different values that become apparent in the language in use. By reading, imagining and engaging in the story and the language, the reader accepts an invitation to negotiate these values (Kallestad, 2012). The author Jeff VanderMeer connects language, nature and the uncanny in the Southern Reach trilogy, creating an interesting piece of literature that challenges the ways in which nature and culture is represented. With this thesis I aim to study how a literary work can add to understandings of nature by looking at what values lies imbedded in the language of the Southern Reach trilogy and how these values align themselves with different views on and approaches to nature. The main aim for this thesis is to examine how nature is represented in value negotiations embedded in the language of the main characters in the Southern Reach trilogy.

There are two main aspects of this aim that I have broken into two research questions:

- What value judgments can be revealed in the language use of the main characters in the Southern Reach trilogy?
- (How) are representations of nature and culture expressed in the value judgments revealed in the Southern Reach trilogy?

One is concerned with the value judgments that can be found by examining the language of the two main characters. In order to answer this question, I am engaging with the source material through a grammatical investigation derived from Stanley Cavell's ordinary language philosophy. The other supplementary research question addresses the possible significance nature has in these values. This question will be discussed through an ecocritical analysis of the value judgments, utilising the Nature in Culture Matrix developed by the Nature in Children's Literature and Culture research group.

1.2. Relevance and previous research

The connection between horror literature or weird literature and ecocriticism has been pointed out by many scholars in recent years, both directly and indirectly. In her article "The Horror of the Anthropocene", Sarah Dillon (2018) notes how the concept of anthropocene lends itself well to horror writing due to the immensity and complexity of the idea that the world is rapidly changing in unidentifiable ways that borders the limits of our imaginations: "Horror, it seems, arrives when we are at the limit of our capacity to tell stories, be they literary or philosophical ones" (Dillon, 2018). As such, horror fiction can stretch the limits of the ways we think about the world as we understand it, giving us new perspectives. Dillon goes on in saying that contemporary horror "is moving from a literature of cosmic fear to a literature of planetary fear" (Dillon, 2018), which means that the shift in perspective that horror can offer its followers encompasses thought and representations of ecosystems and nature. This linking between the concept anthropocene and horror resonates with Gry Ulstein, using the term weird instead of horror, who writes that "The renewed interest in the weird can also be observed in contemporary cultural criticism and philosophy, picking up on the destabilisation of human significance and agency at the core of weird narrative" (Ulstein, 2019). "Weird times calls for weird tales", Ulstein (2019) concludes, and Jeff VanerMeer's Southern Reach trilogy is most definitely a weird tale.

I am not the first to study VanderMeer trilogy from an ecocritical point of view. Several scholars have deemed the trilogy to be of interest when examined with a focus on its representations of nature and culture. Brad Tabas (2015) has examined how VanderMeer, H. P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allen Poe explore the concept of place in their writing. Tabas argues that weird literature such as the Southern Reach trilogy examines the gap between the real and the natural which compels the writer and the reader to approach "the otherness of places and objects" (Tabas, 2018) in non-dogmatic ways. Andrew Strombeck (2019) looks at the way VanderMeer gives voice to the inhuman in the trilogy, discussing how the Southern Reach trilogy navigates between a pole in ecocriticism where aesthetic works *should* represent ecological issues, and another pole where aesthetic works are obliged to point out what cannot be represented. Gry Ulstein has written two articles on weird literature and the anthropocene, one published in 2019 that addresses anthropocene monsters in new weird narratives and one published in 2017 focusing on *Annihilation*, the first book in the Southern Reach trilogy. In the latter, Ulstein argues that the new weird literary movement, exemplified by *Annihilation*, "experiments with ways to move beyond cosmic fear", reimagining how fear at a cosmic scale can be transformed by accepting the monstrous.

Ulstein's analysis of *Annihilation* gives considerable attention to the language of the book, arguing that the language is transformative in its representation of anthropocentric concepts:

> The strange semantics of Area X articulates a new, weird reality, suggesting that words, language, and articulation can perform a similar shift in thinking about the real world. However, *The Southern Reach* also exposes and ridicules the futility of language, emphasizing that words are only words until their message becomes powerful enough to change minds, broaden scopes, and transform reality. (Ulstein, 2017, p. 93)

This study is inspired by Ulstein's ecocritical study of discourses on the anthropocene in the field of ecocriticism and the first novel in Vandermeer's series. Ulstein's study is a comparative one, focusing largely on the discourse in the overarching ecocritical landscape, whereas I have chosen to concentrate on the language of the books themselves and how it is suited to challenge the attentive reader's notion of nature and the environment.

1.3. The Southern Reach trilogy

The events of the first book of the Southern Reach trilogy, *Annihilation*, are narrated and focalised through an unnamed character called the biologist who is part of an expedition into Area X, a place off the Florida coast that officially was struck by a devastating natural disaster several decades ago. Unofficially, the area mysteriously underwent a transformation that vanquished all traces of human life with a border surrounding it allowing only one point of entry. The expedition is the twelfth in line, part of an effort by the Southern Reach agency, a research agency whose mission is to study Area X and find out what it is, how it came to be and if it could bring further destruction. It consists of the biologist, the surveyor, the anthropologist and their leader, the psychologist. The psychologist is revealed to be the director of the Southern Reach agency in the second book.

Inside Area X, the expedition encounters a 'topographical anomaly' on a hill that the biologist quickly takes to call a tower, despite the structure descending underground. Examining the tower, the biologist gets infected by the fungi on the tower's walls which triggers a change in her. The tower divides the expedition. The anthropologist meets her demise by a creature deep inside the tower that the biologist calls the Crawler and the psychologist is revealed to have given the other members hypnotic commands and suspected of having led the anthropologist to the Crawler. Then, the surveyor becomes afraid and deeply suspicious of her last ally, the biologist, leading to a stand-off between the two where the surveyor dies. After hunting down the psychologist for an explanation only to find her delirious and eventually dying from a fatal

fall, the biologist decides to go back to the tower and confront the Crawler. In doing so, the biologist is 'processed' by the Crawler before she resurfaces and continues her journey inside Area X, the changes instigated by tower wall fungi slowly consuming her. During the processing by the Crawler, a doppelgänger that takes to calling herself Ghost Bird is created and appears in an alley back in the world across the border, where she is found and brought back to the Southern Reach agency.

Authority, the second book in the series, is focalised and narrated through Control, a spy come fixer who is given the position of acting director through his influential mother. The reader follows Control's investigations into Area X and the Southern Reach agency that slowly reveals an intricate web of information and obfuscation of cosmic proportions. In the centre of this web is Ghost Bird, who is as perplexing to Control's methods of investigation as Area X. Control's confusion is increased by the hypnotic suggestions and deceit performed on him by the mysterious Voice who functions as Control's handler in his role as acting director. After Control tries to confront his superiors with their deceptions, he returns to the agency only to find that the border is rapidly advancing, and that Ghost Bird has escaped. In his terror, Control flees up the coast to a remote place that he knows Ghost Bird has a special connection to. He finds Ghost Bird there where she has expelled the "brightness" caused by the change instigated by the fungi in the tower, unexpectedly creating a portal into Area X in a tidal pool. The border advancing ever closer, Ghost Bird jumps through the portal and Control follows her.

In the third and last book of the series, *Acceptance*, the plotline is divided by four focalisers that operate in three different times. Two of the four focalisers, Ghost Bird and Control, are in the same plotline that picks up the story from where they jump through the portal into Area X. The other two focalisers are the previous director of the Southern Reach, Gloria, and the lighthouse keeper, Saul. Gloria's plotline first presents her perspective of her dying moments shared with the biologist before jumping back in time to the lead-up to the events of *Annihilation*. In Saul's plotline the reader is brought further into the past to the events that created Area X, the border and the Crawler. Control and Ghost Bird's plot line revolves around them exploring Area X together with the assistant director of the agency, Grace, who survived the border advancement and is reunited with the two protagonists inside Area X. Slowly, the trio gets more acquainted with this new ecology. Ghost Bird is quick to adapt to

her new situation, feeling that the changes brought on her by the Crawler has made her a part of Area X. Grace is more sceptical, but is willing to forego her scepticism and follow Ghost Bird through this new world. Control is unable to consolidate his new circumstances with the terror that Area X awakens in him, leading him to retrieve into the belly of the tower in search for another portal that can bring him back into human civilisation.

1.4. Structure of the master's thesis

This thesis generally follows a traditional structure. In chapter one I introduce the general idea of the thesis by presenting the background, purpose and the problem statement including two research questions, followed by an expansion of the thesis' relevance relating to previous research. In chapter two I present the two theories that this thesis builds on. The first theory that is discussed is ordinary language philosophy with an emphasis on how it deals with values in language and literature. Central to this thesis is the process of a grammatical investigation. In the second part of the theory I go into the field of ecocriticism, relating its emphasis on representations of nature and the interconnectedness between nature and culture before I go on to present the Nature in Culture matrix. Both fields are featured heavily in the analysis and discussion and they are the foundation through which I approach the Southern Reach trilogy critically.

Chapter three contains the analysis, which examines the language use of the two main characters in the Southern Reach trilogy by performing a grammatical investigation. Certain words and themes reoccur throughout the book, and a selection of them that I consider relevant to my thesis has been used as a basis for my analysis. In chapter 3.1 I expand upon the reasoning behind my selection and argue its relevance. Then I present instances and contexts where the characters use these words, analysis the value judgments that lie embedded in their language. Where the analysis in chapter three dwells in the field of language philosophy, chapter four contains a discussion about ecocritical perspectives based on what insight the analysis has brought. In this thesis I have sought to interrelate the fields. In chapter four you will find an ecocritical discussion based on the findings from the grammatical investigation performed and presented in chapter three. In chapter five I present a summary of my findings, give some closing remarks.

2. Theory

2.1. Ordinary language philosophy

This thesis aims to examine the value judgments in the Southern Reach trilogy in an ecocritical perspective, and so the first step is to discover which values the trilogy deals with and how they are presented. Literature has traditionally been tied to creativity, artfulness and emotions, while values and ethics have been the forte of the philosopher. I have chosen to use ordinary language philosophy to study the language in the Southern Reach trilogy for signs of the values that lie embedded in the material. This approach is grounded in philosopher Stanley Cavell, who sought to bridge the gap between literature and philosophy with this philosophical discipline. In this subchapter I will show how Cavell's take on ordinary language philosophy, in particular his use of the concept of criteria, can be used as a tool to uncover values in literary works, aided by the interpretations by contemporary literary scholars Toril Moi and Åse Kallestad. In doing so, I will first briefly discuss how the language we use reveals the way we see the world. Then, I will introduce the concept of *criteria* and how this concept is used in a Cavellian *grammatical investigation*. Lastly, I will explore ways in which grammatical investigations may be used as a method of literary analysis.

2.1.1. Values in language

In ordinary language philosophy, ethics and philosophy are combined with the idea that language and the way we use it is a tool to make sense of the world (Cavell, 2002, pp. 1-43). Cavell is focused on how people in their use of language are in a constant loop of understanding and dismantling of the words they use, and the meanings given to them. Language is used to address others, who in turn process the language, the way it is being used and the context it is used in, and responds. The response then contributes to the language users' understanding. As such, by using language we are creating common grounds of understanding while differentiating between the important and the unimportant (Kallestad, 2012, p. 234). In these language acts, we are continuously renewing or cementing our understandings of the words we use and revealing what worth we give the concepts and ideas that we connect to these words. Since our understanding of the language is so intrinsically tied to our understanding of the world, this means that the act of using a language reveals what we view as valuable or trivial in the world.

Cavell further developed Wittgenstein's notion of *criteria* to show the connection between language and what is meaningful. Criteria can be described as the reasons for finding something important, they are what compels us to mention something, what makes words important enough in the applicable world view to be used in that specific situation, or at all (Kallestad, 2012, p. 234). That means that when one elicits the criteria in a text, a paragraph, a sentence or a word, one asks oneself why this was important to say in that particular way at that particular time. Behind this question lies the issue of judgment, more specifically on what basis judgment is being made. Cavell defines criteria as "specifications a given person or group sets up on the basis of which (by means of, in terms of which) to judge (assess, settle) whether something has a particular status or value" (Cavell, 1999, p. 10). So, by asking *why this*, one is in a sense asking what the reason was for judging the word or phrase as important, as valuable enough, to state. In her book *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin and Cavell* Moi explains it as: "To use criteria is to exercise *judgment*, the judgment that *this* is the word to use, the sentence to utter in *these* specific circumstances" (Moi, 2017, p. 52, italics in original). It follows that to elicit criteria is to examine what makes a person exercise their judgment in a particular instance of language use, for instance in a phrase in a poem or a paragraph in a novel.

When examining the common ground on which language is understood, the concept of criteria is one of agreement. "To agree in judgment is to *share criteria* for how and when to apply concepts" (Moi, 2017, p. 224, italics in original). As noted earlier, when using language, a common ground of understanding is created while differentiating between the important and the unimportant (Kallestad, 2012, p. 234). This is a case of agreement in judgment. The reason for finding common ground is that the judgment can be agreed upon, that the language users agree in what is important and unimportant. However, it also lies in the act of differentiating, which is the act of using criteria. Within a group of people, big or small, that share the same language, agreement in judgment and thus shared use of criteria is widespread. This can also be said to be the case for writers and readers of literature. Without such a widespread agreement we would not be able to understand each other, yet we do not necessarily realize just how much we agree: "there is a background of pervasive and systematic agreements among us, which we had not realized, or had not known we realize" (Cavell, 1999, p. 30), and indeed that it is because the use of language is so "pervasively, almost unimaginably, *systematic*" (Cavell, 1999, p. 29, italics in original).

This is not to say that agreement always occurs, but to point out that agreement is the norm, and thus the disagreements become more notable. "Disagreement about our criteria, or the possibility of disagreement, is as fundamental a topic in Wittgenstein as the eliciting of criteria itself is" (Cavell, 1999, p. 18). A disagreement in criteria manifests in a failure to understand each other. When an utterance is made, the listener or reader judges whether the utterance can be accepted "as a sound one" (p. 19). If it can, then they are in agreement and the appeal to the listener of whether they could *see* what the speaker saw is accepted. If they cannot agree, they can either choose to put the misunderstanding aside, or they can inspect their criteria for what was said and what was understood and in doing so might uncover why the misunderstanding arose (Moi, 2017, p. 225).

The steps that are taken when inspecting criteria is part of what is called a grammatical investigation. When language users are out of atunement in their use of language, their *grammar*, it manifests as a sense of puzzlement or confusion, and it is exactly these instances that grammatical investigations investigate (Moi, 2017, p. 53). Cavell talks about grammar and grammatical investigations as a result of the communality of language and thus the systematicity of it. Language is shared and its use is something that we mostly agree on, so our systematic, shared use of language can be said to have a grammar (Cavell, 1999, p. 30). Cavell writes that "it is grammar which tells what kind of object anything is" (1999, p. 16), so what happens when language users no longer agree on the state of the object? When undertaking a grammatical investigation, three steps are gone through. In the first one "We find ourselves wanting to know something about a phenomenon, e.g., pain, expecting, knowledge, understanding, being of an opinion" (Cavell, 1999, p. 29). This is connected to the sense of puzzlement or confusion that comes from not being in atunement in judgment and criteria. A grammatical investigation does not start with a theory or a set of categories to study the text from, it begins with the relationship to the language itself: "We begin then, not with a method, but with our own sense of confusion" (Moi, 2017, p. 182).

When one has found a statement that puzzles, a phenomenon ones want to know something about, one goes on to step number two, where "We remind ourselves of the kinds of statement we make about it" (Cavell, 1999, p. 29). If the phenomenon of knowledge was what piqued one's interest, one would find the utterances in which knowledge was addressed and examine them. In doing so, one is reminded of the specific use of the word in particular cases. This

becomes important when moving on to the next step where one asks "what criteria we have for (what we go on in) saying what we say" (Cavell, 1999, p. 29). This means that one asks *why* the statements from step two where uttered in that specific way at that particular time. In other words, what made one differentiate these words, these statements as important enough to utter.

Such a grammatical investigation reveals to us what we deem as valuable by examining the interconnectedness between the phenomena of the world and the way we talk about those phenomena, our language. As Cavell formulates it: "It is an examination that exposes one's convictions, one's sense of what must and what cannot be the case; so it requires a breaking up of one's sense of necessity, to discover truer necessities" (Cavell, 1999, p. 21).

2.1.2. Values in literature

While it might seem like a leap to connect something called ordinary language to literature, Cavell's philosophical practices show that he did not see a divide between the two. Cavell did not see ordinary language as an opposition to the extraordinary or the literary, he saw ordinary language philosophy as an alternative view of language, or rather a cure against the metaperspectives on language and meaning that he found in the philosophical and literary directions of deconstruction and skepticism (Cavell, 1999, p. 37-48). Ordinary language philosophy is preoccupied with the language *in use*, and it is this preoccupation that makes it relevant in literary studies, and reversely makes literature relevant to philosophy. If one is to use language as a basis to understand values, one needs to examine the language in use, the point being that the language has to be used, uttered and received, in order to reveal the criteria behind the language.

The connection between literature and ethics, values and moral has been discussed for millennia. Ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle have had differing opinions on whether, and to what degree, literature can be ethical. In *Republic*, Plato (2000, part X) argues against literature by pointing to the imitative nature of act the writer engages in. Briefly explained, he contends that the writer cannot truly know (most of) the things he writes about, which leads to the writer's idea's being imitations of the real, in addition to his writings being imitations of his ideas. As such, literature in Plato's view is of little worth as it is an imitation of an imitation, and processing something at such a long distance from the truth, the *real*, is

meaningless.

Aristotle is of a different opinion. Although he acknowledges the imitative nature of literature, he argues that this imitation is an advantage (Aristotle, 1995, *Poetics*, part III). Humans, he says, revel in and learn by imitation: "Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity" (Aristotle, 1995, *Poetics*, part IV). The accessibility, then, of literature as 'descriptions' of things or situations which otherwise would be difficult to ascertain or understand, gives the reader the opportunity to contemplate the object through the literary work. As Aristotle suggests with his argument, one of the major assets of literature is its ability to portray a vast variety of circumstances and experiences. Through novels, poems and other forms of aesthetic writing, readers are given the opportunity to relate to and reflect upon scenarios and emotions that might otherwise not have been available to them. Such literary experiences can be especially meaningful in the formative years. Martha Nussbaum describes such preliminary ethical explorations of literature as basic and important preparations to moral interactions (2016, p. 31). She argues that exposure to literature can contribute in developing a capacity for critical thinking that is crucial for democracy. Her arguments bear similarities with Aristotle, ascertaining that the opportunity to read about different situations and *empathise* with different characters can give crucial experience in understanding each other and the world.

This might, however, be contingent on *how* the reader is exposed to the reading material and *what* material is being read. The discussion on literature and ethics also involves the question of whether literature benefits or corrupts a democratic upbringing. If the ethics of a piece of literature presents values based on what is perceived as right or wrong *in that work*, it follows that the reader, or indeed the society in which the work is being read, does not necessarily share the same set of value priorities. A proponent of this way of thinking, Greg Currie (2016), does not refute the idea that literature can affect the reader, but he problematizes an uncritically positive outlook on literature's possible effects. His argument builds on Plato's ideas of literature as imitation. Plato (2000, part X) postulates that the imitative nature of literature is especially prone to portray and agitate passion and temperament. He sees these emotions as unconducive, and even detrimental, to rational thought and reasoning. Although Currie's argument is more moderate, he points out that "literature can spread ignorance, prejudice and insensitivity as effectively as it provides knowledge and openness" (2016, p. 51).

Cavell's expansion and use of ordinary language philosophy adds to this discussion of literature and ethics, although he does not talk about it explicitly in the way that Nussbaum and Currie do. Moi, however, ventures to connect the two worlds of philosophy, of the ordinary language kind, and literature. She openly states that she finds most arguments and theories for the value of literature problematic, including Nussbaum's notions that literature fosters active, moral and emphatic citizens (Moi, 2017, p. 213). This does not mean that she aligns herself with the views of Plato or Currie. While she has issues with Nussbaum's theory, she still argues that "reading can change lives. It can help us to expand our senses of possibilities in life" (Moi, 2017, p. 213). The key word here seems to be *can*, and rests on an acknowledgment that literature and its readers comes in all different forms. The sheer variety means that one general defence of literature is too simplistic (p. 215). This does not, however, negate the value of literature, it only calls for different defences for different types of literature and different types of readers.

One thing that *some* literature can do for *some* readers is to draw them in to a "kind of spellbound reading" where you are given the opportunity to identify with, to muse over, to immerse yourself in the text (Moi, 2017, p. 214-215). It is hard to pinpoint just what is needed to make a reading *spellbound*, but it does require a certain attention from the reader. Without attention to what we read and how it affects us when we read it, we will never experience the sense of confusion that is fundamental in Cavell's grammatical investigation. Moi writes that an attentive reading starts with getting a hazy idea of the work's concerns and concepts (2011, p. 131). We try to grasp what the work is about and might find something that puzzles or confuses us in the process. This urges us to want to investigate further and we "zoom in on key concepts, study the examples, circle back to passages that illuminate them, look for arguments, the contradictions and the exceptions" (p. 131), which coincides with the next step in a grammatical investigation, where "we remind ourselves of the kinds of statement we make about it" (Cavell, 1999, p. 29). As Moi concludes, if a work truly fascinates, we may "try to get clear on why it strikes us as important" (2011, p. 131). This becomes the third step of a grammatical investigation, where the reader examines the criteria for the choice of words and the way they are uttered.

If a reader is willing to read literature with attention to what the work has to say they might find themselves in a process of expanding their understanding of the world. As we have seen, this is dependent on the reader, but it is also dependent on the writer:

> Writers spend their lives trying to find the right words. They can teach us differences. The best writers have an exceptional capacity to convey nuanced sense impressions, emotions, experiences, imaginative ruminations, reflections, thoughts. Their writing reveals and expresses the precision of their attention. (Moi, 2017, p. 227)

In this sense there is an intersection between ordinary language philosophy and the stance of Aristotle and Nussbaum, although the approach is different. Where Nussbaum promotes literature's ability to foster moral and critical thinking through empathy, ordinary language philosophy revolves around how language, including literature, can make us interact with and even evolve our values by inviting us to take part in conscious or unconscious grammatical investigations. Whether we choose to bring the attention to the reading necessary to engage in the criteria and value judgments present in the language is up to us as readers.

My grammatical investigation of the Southern Reach trilogy will expose some of the value negotiations that can be undertaken in an attentive reading of the series, value explorations that are also available to the young adult reader who endeavours to immerse themselves in the world and language of Jeff VanderMeer. "To speak is to appeal to others: 'Can you see what I see?'", Moi (2017, p. 225) writes, and the author of a work of literature like the Southern Reach, can be found to ask the same in their texts. For the Southern Reach trilogy this is an apt question. Its language, concepts and indeed the story itself is difficult to understand, and it demands an immense amount of attention to even be able to answer 'I can glimpse it through a veil' to the author's question. By inspecting the criteria behind the author's words, we can come closer to an understanding, or "we may discover that no further conversation is possible" (p. 226) and set the books aside, either not understanding the author's criteria, or being utterly out of tune with them.

2.2. Ecocriticism

In this thesis ecocriticism is used to examine the ecocritical impact that may lie embedded in the criteria and valuations found in the language of the Southern Reach trilogy. As Gry Ulstein (2017) argues, the trilogy offers an alternative to the traditional anthropocene represented in both ecocriticism and the traditional weird genre, and through my analysis and discussion I aim to uncover value judgements in the language that offer alternative ways of thinking on nature, culture and the anthropocene. Following a grammatical investigation of the trilogy, explained in the previous chapter, I will discuss the results of that investigation from an ecocritical standpoint. In order to do this, I will use this chapter to present the field of ecocriticism, focusing on representations of nature and the juxtaposition of nature and culture, as well as the concept of anthropocene. I will start by discussing the term ecocriticism, including a short outline of the fields historical background, before I give a more thorough presentation of nature, culture and anthropocene. Lastly, I will address the Nature in Culture Matrix (NatCul Matrix), a theoretical framework for analysis developed by the Nature in Children´s Literature and Culture (NaChiLitCul) group at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. The specific use of this framework will be presented in chapter 4.1.

The word ecocriticism consists of the two parts *eco* and *criticism.* The term *eco* establishes a focus on interdependencies, integrations and connections, which according to pioneer in the field, Cheryll Glotfelty, ensures a more holistic approach as opposed to *environmental studies,* which can come across as dualistic and centred around the human (Glotfelty, 2015, p. 123). The word *criticism* refers to the critical examination of literary texts. Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" and writes that it "takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty, 2015, p. 122). This broad definition highlights the expansive field of ecocritical literary study that encompasses many fields that can be linked through ecocriticism, including animal studies and ecofeminism. It also has ties to many other fields in both literature specifically and science more generally.

The most noteworthy interdisciplinary link for this thesis is the connection with philosophy. In his influential book *Ecocriticism,* Greg Garrard points out the inevitable involvement of for instance philosophy, sociology and ecology, because environmental problems are "the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection"

(Garrard, 2012a, p. 16), and therefore have to be analysed both as cultural phenomenon and scientific ones. Ecocriticism, then, can be applied narrowly, where it is an analysis of literature as a cultural phenomenon and how it approaches nature, environment and environmental problems, or broadly, where we look at how environmental ideas came to life and "discuss our experiences of various types of cultural representations of nature and whether these are useful when facing environmental crisis" (Øien, 2017, p. 7). Thus, a fundamental premise of ecocriticism is the influence culture has on nature and the influence nature has on culture. Arguably, it can be fruitful to combine an ecocritical and a philosophical approach on a work of literature in order to shed light on issues pertaining to the juxtaposition of nature and culture that demands a certain joint perspective to surface.

The development of the ecocritical field into this wide approach started at a considerably narrower point. Early works of ecocriticism concentrated mostly on romantic poetry, wilderness narrative and nature writing, with a focus on portrayals of nature (Garrard, 2012a, p. 5). Since then, the field has opened up to a broader definition of texts, such as film, art and other cultural artefacts, as well as approaching the texts from different ecocritical angles where the effect of nature on cultural artefacts is taken into consideration. This has for instance extended ecocritical analysis to a larger variety of genres, such as science fiction. The last few decades have seen ecocritical scholars like Bruno Latour, Timothy Clark and Donna Haraway connect the monster often present in science fiction writing to global warming and climate change, evoking interesting and fluid interactions of nature and culture, monstrous and human. Gendron, Ivanaj, Girard and Arpin (2017, p. 1555) argues that "radically different perspectives - such as those based in SF [science fiction] literature – may transform institutionalized policies and actions that are problematic in light of social and environmental issues". The transformational possibilities of environmental texts can be uncovered by critically examining the way cultural structures engage with nature and the environment (Glotfelty, 2015, pp. 122-124). This also establishes that by engaging with such texts we can expand our understanding of the natural, the cultural and the influence they have on each other, which is a view on literature and reading that corresponds with ordinary language philosophy.

2.2.1. Nature, Culture and the Anthropocene

Ecocriticism as a field is principally focused on how nature is represented in cultural texts,

including the interactions between nature and culture. The following discusses these concepts as well as the concept of the anthropocene. Nature is a complex word, describing and being used in several different contexts. Clark (2014, p. 75) divides the term's use into three different meanings. The first is what we mean when we speak of "the totality of the material universe" (p. 75). When we speak of nature in this way it is in the meaning that nature in all that is around us in the sense of the things that usually falls within the study of physics. The second way to understand nature is as opposite of culture, untouched by human agency, existing of and for itself (p. 75). Kate Soper (2015, p. 267) elaborates that this understanding of nature is as opposed to "everything which is defining of the order of humanity", bringing up the concept of nature as a fundamental *other* to humanity. Nature, then, is on one hand connected to the pure, the innocent and the pristine as opposed to something sullied by the human, but it also encapsulates the dangers and mysteries of the uncultured, beastlike and cruel. In Clark's third and last understanding of the meaning of the word nature, it is a word we use to describe something's (or someone's) innate trait, for example when we call something *natural* or say that a way of acting is in someone's *nature* (Clark, 2014, p. 75-76). As Soper points out, the most common and fundamental sense of *nature* is as an opposition to culture, and I will also focus mostly on this definition.

Garrard uses the word wilderness in much the same vein as the second meaning of nature presented by Clark, writing that "The idea of wilderness, signifying nature in a state uncontaminated by civilisation, is the most potent construction of nature available to New World environmentalism" (Garrard, 2012a, p. 66). He goes on to account for some historical depictions of wilderness, pointing out that some of the earliest documents of Western Eurasian civilisations portray the threat of wilderness, but that both older and newer historical and religious accounts also shows wilderness as a safe haven from the dangers of the civilised world (p. 68). This exemplifies the ambivalence of the relationship between nature and culture, wilderness and civilisation. The distinction between danger and safety, as well as distinctions between the usefulness and hindrance that nature can represent, is often apparent in the ways we write about nature. As Leo Mellor writes, "the history of looking for wilderness, or fearing it, is inevitably accompanied by attempts to write about it – if only to designate it and keep it at bay" (Mellor, 2014, p. 104). Mellor also writes that texts that dealt with wilderness where almost always fearful and negative until the eighteenth century, when philosophical currents started to explore senses of awe and terror in encounters with the natural world (p. 105). The expanded perspective on wilderness still encompasses feelings of

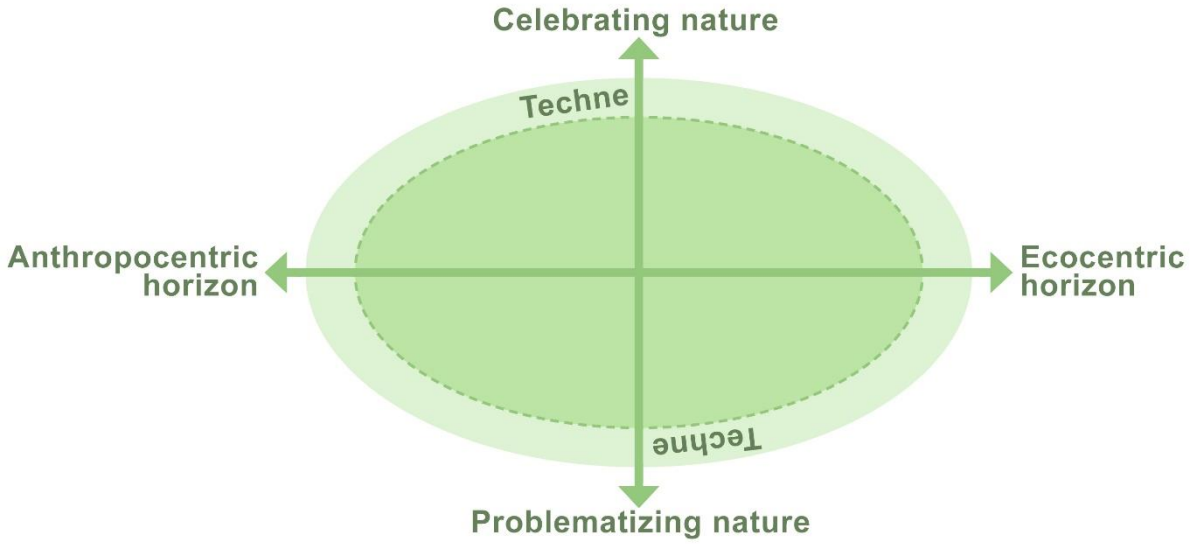
fear and despair, but Mellor argues that it simultaneously triggers "self-knowledge, a recalibration of self in the world – and indeed the universe" (p.105).

Some philosophers, ecologists, politicians and ecocritics fully embraces the recalibration of self as "the recuperation of some supposed natural part of a human identity seen as suppressed by the effects of abstraction, instrumentalist rationality, urban culture, and so forth" (Clark, 2014, p. 78). Thus, nature is not an opposite of the human, but of a human culture run amok, which signifies a need to retrieve a lost connection between a purer humanity and its environment, a need to go back to something perceived as original or 'real' as opposed to human-made. While the sentiment can seem naïve and romantic, the reality of human's destructive behaviours is beyond doubt. The impact humans currently have on earth's geology, climate and ecosystems has prompted the term anthropocene, which is defined by Clark (2014, p. 79) as "that era in the planet's natural history in which humanity becomes a decisive geological and climatological force". The many factors that make up the negative impact humans have on the world create a difficult situation to analyse and deal with. This often leads to fragmented and half-hearted discussions and attempts at solutions that skirt around the edges of a problem that continues to grow in its severity and complexity. A lack of a solution and the many trivialities and larger problems that contribute to the issue "become subject to the incalculable multiplier effect of growing population numbers and the uncertainty of unknown ecological tipping points" (p. 80).

The concept of the anthropocene crossed into the literary world, where it is associated with a human-centred view of earth, nature and the environment. Literary studies have traditionally focused on the human condition but bringing nature and the environment into literary readings could bring new perspectives to the literature (Garrard, 2012b, p. 5). By reading ecocritically we can start to move away from our inherent anthropocentrism and examine how we relate to nature, taking on the holistic approach to literature and the environment that Glotfelty asked for by expanding our consciousness to animals and non-living things. While neither authors nor readers are able to truly disconnect themselves from the way they experience the world, they can take a critical stand against their anthropocentrism and broaden their perception and approaches to nature by ecocritically considering the way they deal with the themes and issues in literature.

2.2.2. The nature in culture matrix

Figure 1. The Nature in Culture Matrix. From Ecocritical Perspectives on Children's Texts and Cultures: Nordic



Dialogues *(p. 12), by Goga et. al., 2018,* https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90497-9.

The field of ecocriticism is large, undertaking all kinds of literature and other cultural texts with a vast variety of different sub fields. I have therefore chosen to limit myself to using a specific framework, the Nature in Culture Matrix (NatCul Matrix) developed by the NaChiLit group at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. The Matrix is presented in *Ecocritical Perspectives on Children's Texts and Cultures: Nordic Dialogues* in 2018 and was developed as a tool to analyse representations of nature in children's and young adult's literature. The authors stress how the matrix encompasses key ecocritical concepts such as anthropocentrism, ecology and the dichotomy between nature and culture, and urges researchers in literature and other fields to make use of it in new and imaginative ways. It is the matrix's versatility and possibilities for adjustments that allows me to combine it with ordinary language philosophy and carry out an investigation not only of the ecocritical aspects of the books, but the ecocritical aspects of the values and ideologies that the books' language displays to the attentive reader.

In the discussion I will employ on the NatCul Matrix, which "facilitates the analysis, comparison and cross-disciplinary and international discussion of a variety of texts" (Goga, Guanio-Uluru, Hallås & Nyrnes, 2018, p. 12), and I will use it to discuss the ecological aspects of the results of the grammatical investigation of The Southern Reach trilogy. Divided by two axes, the horizontal and the vertical, with a third techne dimension, the NatCul Matrix

allows its user to analyse a text's view on nature by looking at "how humans position themselves in nature" (Goga et.al., 2018, p. 12). In this thesis this entails an ecocritical analysis of the Southern Reach based on how the humans in the text, namely the characters, relate to nature through their language, criteria and valuations. This also has implications on the reader's attitude to nature, both what they bring with them to the reading of the books and what they can gain when faced with the challenge to interact with the books' language and values.

Celebrating and problematising nature

The vertical axis of the NatCul Matrix addresses how, and whether, nature is being problematised or celebrated. Goga et.al. (2018, p. 12) explains that the "celebrating position implies an idea of the "pure child" or "child of nature" as a key figure in the cultural and pedagogical tradition, based primarily on Rousseau" while the problematising position "takes account of the escalating environmental challenges and the growing engagement of ecocritical children's literature, which demonstrate a critical and problematising awareness of nature" (p. 13). The two positions are presented as in opposition to each other, representing the poles of possible representations of nature, but one must also be aware of the nuances between the two and how a celebration and a problematising of nature can be interpreted differently.

The top of the vertical axis of the NatCul Matrix resonates with Clark's second understanding of the term nature, where nature is understood as something separate from culture. The thought of celebrating nature can bring with it a sense of a celebration *despite* culture's all-encompassing influence. If nature is seen as an opposite of culture, then a celebration of nature is a celebration of that which is not affected by human agency. This does not necessarily mean that a celebration of nature has to be devoid of the human. Literature is after all made by humans, for humans, and usually contains human or anthropomorphized characters. Culture will always seep through the nature celebration that takes place in the written word.

Although the dichotomy of nature versus culture seems to be strongest in the celebratory view on nature, the first meaning Clark ascribes to nature also becomes relevant here. Viewing nature as the "totality of the material universe" can be a way of looking at nature in an ecological sense. A celebratory view can for example encompass the idea of a circle of life,

nature as an amazing, intricate web of interconnected organisms, synopses and atoms that exists together within one universe. Such a view does not necessarily uphold a gap between nature and culture and can include the human as a part of the whole. If a text is evaluated as being on the outermost part of the celebratory axis it is imbued with positivity, whether the text leans towards a more culture/nature centred meaning or an "all-is-nature"-meaning. The further one moves towards the middle of the axis, the more ambiguous the representation of nature becomes.

On the other side of the vertical axis, Goga et. al.'s (2018, p. 18) presentation of problematising nature fully envelopes the human presence and agency. The focus here is on a critical awareness of the environment and the challenges that nature faces. Even more than the celebratory representation of nature, the problematising pole is coloured by an understanding of nature as an opposite to culture. The awareness that is asked for is aimed at the challenge humanity presents to nature. It builds on an understanding that humans, or culture, has created and escalated a situation where nature is threatened. Thus, culture is not only seen as the opposite of nature, it is seen as an antagonist, a problem that needs solving.

Although the creators of the matrix do not mention it, I would like to add another possible aspect of the problematising pole of the vertical axis: that of nature being a problem to culture. The opposition of nature and culture will not always be represented as one were humanity is the threat. We will find out that this is not a hard truth for the Southern Reach trilogy. Nature can pose severe threats to human characters in literature, either as actual or perceived danger. Thus, we can see a distinction between the two sides of the problematising pole of the vertical axis. This distinction is one that Clark (2014, p. 75) characterizes as one of "reverenced wilderness" versus bestiality and "cruel inhumanity" in the nature/culture meaning of the word nature.

Utilizing the vertical axis of the NatCul Matrix when studying literature ecocritically, we ask both whether the text celebrates nature or problematises it, and more importantly we ask in what ways it does so. Nature is a debated term in many fields of study and in our day to day language, bringing with it several paths of meaning in different uses. This is also the case in the Southern Reach trilogy. Therefore, I have connected some of the meanings given to the word nature to the two poles of the celebrating-problematising axis of the NatCul Matrix, discussing some ways in which they relate. Next, I will turn to the horizontal axis of the

matrix, while also discussing the poles' connection to the term nature.

Anthropocentric and ecocentric horizon

The anthropocentric and ecocentric axis of the NatCul Matrix facilitates an examination of what perspectives on nature a text takes on. The distinction is between the anthropocentric pole, which centres around human experiences and perspectives, and the ecocentric pole, which centres around a more holistic awareness of ecosystems and ecospheres (Goga, et. al., 2018, p. 13). The outermost poles represent the extremes in representation with room to exist and fluctuate between the two in the middle. Garrard (2012a, p. 22) writes that "It seems likely that any given concerned individual will probably have both eco- and anthropocentric attitudes at different times, under different conditions". Just as an individual will possess both eco- and anthropocentric attitudes, literary texts vary in their eco- and anthropocentrism, both between texts and within the individual texts. Texts are also read and interpreted differently, adding to the fluency that can be exhibited when attempting to place them on the horizontal axis of the NatCul Matrix.

Anthropocentrism is characterized by a focus on human superiority and an instrumental perspective on nature as valuable only in its usefulness in securing human needs (Quinn, Castéra & Clément, 2015, p. 894). This view entails a distinctive difference between nature and culture relevant to Clark's second understanding of nature as the other of culture (2014, p. 75). In an anthropocentric perspective, nature is an object in relation to human subjectivity, and thus cannot be in the same category as culture. Such a harsh differentiation between nature and culture necessitates an *othering* of nature to culture that breeds fascination and fear. The wilderness trope becomes visible, which can enhance the differences between what is viewed as natural phenomena and appearances and what is seen as cultural events and human traits, at the same time as it weakens the bonds of similarities between human and non-human. As Clark (2014, p. 76) puts it, "the defining problem becomes that of the antagonistic opposition of culture and nature".

At first glance, the anthropocentric view on nature seems to be counterintuitive to Clark's understanding of nature as "embracing everything" (Clark, 2014, p. 75) because it raises one species, the human, above the rest. However, any such hierarchical ideas or systems does not collide with the understanding that nature is the totality of the material universe. The human is

simply part of the totality. Quinn et.al. points out that there are many ways and forms in which anthropocentrism can be understood and analysed, which blurs the lines between the anthropocentric and the ecocentric. She exemplifies this with Val Plumwood's argument "for a form of 'liberationist' anthropocentrism in opposition to hegemonic human-centredness" (Quinn et.al., 2015, p. 895). Such an anthropocentrism "recognises the intrinsic value of nature and emphasises human knowledge about, connection to and absolute dependence on nature" (p. 895), which sets humanity's relation to nature within an understanding of nature as all-encompassing. Whether Plumwood's liberationist anthropocentrism is truly anthropocentric or an attempt to make ecocentrism more acceptable, it demonstrates the nuances that can be found between the poles of the anthropocentric and ecocentric horizon of the NatCul Matrix.

On the opposite side of anthropocentrism we find ecocentrism, characterised by granting intrinsic value to the non-human (Quinn et.al., 2015, p. 894). As noted, ecocentric thinking revolves around ecologies and ecospheres. This is central in Arne Naess' deep ecology movement, where the first of the eight key points in the deep ecology platform advocates that "[th]e well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purpose" (Naess as cited in Garrard, 2012a, p. 23). Ecocentrism can be interpreted in different ways. Garrard points out that ecocentrism can be misanthropic in nature, meaning that it advocates a certain scepticism and ill-will towards the human, but also emphasises that the more mainstream proponents of ecocentrism are softer in their understandings (p. 26). The stricter understanding of ecocentrism does not allow for any hierarchical structure where the human is given more intrinsic value than the non-human. This school of ecocentrism understands nature as one and all-encompassing and does not consider humanity as something different that can be allowed to set itself apart or above the rest. While it advocates an understanding where all entities and forms retain intrinsic value or some form of subjectivity as a life form, it also effectively denies the human any way to preserve itself when the interests of humanity does not align with that of another species, life form or ecosystem.

A softer understanding spearheaded by Naess allows for a preference of vital human needs over "the good of any other things" (p. 26), exemplifying how humans can retain some form of natural self-preservation when being attacked by a ferocious tiger or a deadly virus. This

understanding of nature can be aligned with both the all-encompassing and the nature versus culture meaning described by Clark (2014, p. 75-76). Humans are seen as part of the ecosphere, acting as one subject among the many that make up our world. We are given intrinsic value and agency to follow our instincts, and protect ourselves from immediate danger as long as we do not act in a way that causes disproportionate harm to other parts of the ecosphere. At the same time, human culture is the other to nature, simply because of our inherent human perspective. We set ourselves apart by giving ourselves the onus to decide what our 'vital' needs are and judging what is proportionate action when facing danger and what is not. Even further, we get to decide what constitutes danger, even though we can only analyse a potentially dangerous situation based on our own senses, experiences and thought processes.

The horizontal axis of the NatCul Matrix can include all these understandings of anthropocentrism, ecocentrism and nature, and more. It is up to the user of the matrix and the literary work that is being analysed which perspectives are most relevant and what insights the different perspectives can give on these concepts. Clark refers to Meyer, who says that: "[A]n ecological conception of nature, like any conception, has the potential to inspire a number of diverse and potentially contradictory positions" (Meyer as cited in Clark, 2014, p. 77). I have chosen to highlight these angles because they lend themselves well to the material I am working with in this thesis. The analysis will also show that the axis is more than its outerpoints, utilising the grey areas that exist between anthropocentric and ecocentric understandings and representations of nature, culture and the relationship between the two.

Techne

The NatCul Matrix also has a third dimension, that of techne, which refers to "the art of shaping and manufacturing" (Goga, et.al, 2018, p. 13). The techne dimension envelopes the other two dimensions of the matrix, which signals that the material that is analysed using the matrix is not nature itself, but mediations of nature. The representations of nature in literature are shaped, manufactured by human minds using human language and interpreted by the human reader and is therefore "subject to cultural influence and human manipulation" (p. 13). By introducing the techne concept into the NatCul Matrix, the authors establish a self-consciousness to both literature, reading and literary criticism that demands an awareness of how the cultural influences our perceptions and representations of nature. In this thesis, techne

is particularly relevant to the idea of a mutual relation between language, world views and values. Interacting with the notion that language evolves, is shaped, through our understanding of the world, the NatCul Matrix puts the focus on an understanding of the natural world mediated through language.

3. Analysis: Criteria and values in the Southern Reach trilogy

This chapter contains a Cavellian literary analysis of the three books, *Annihilation, Authority* and *Acceptance,* that make up the Southern Reach trilogy. In the following, I first give an account of the methodological approach to the analysis, where I present how I applied the steps in Cavell's grammatical investigation to the material. This account also relates how I chose to restrict the scope of the project from the three books to two concepts addressed in those books, and how that lead to the three themes mentioned above. Next, the analysis is divided into two based on those two concepts. In both parts, I start by describing the relevant concept before I present the analysis structured around the three themes. I have chosen to further concretise the material by only focusing on the two most prominent characters in the trilogy, the biologist and Control. This means that each theme consists of two parts, one for each character.

The analysis addresses the concepts *border, intent* and *purpose* and how they spark a sense of puzzlement that can be connected to judgments of value regarding the three sets of themes science, curiosity and knowledge, truth, deception and power, and safety, threat and protection. In the analysis, the two characters the biologist and Control is shown to approach these concepts differently, which shows the complexities in how background and experience can evolve and substantiate the way we understand the world, the words we use to talk about the world and how our words and our world view is interconnected. The biologist's background in science in general and biology specifically, as well as her guarded attitude to other people, affects how she values for instance knowledge, power and safety, which becomes apparent in the ways and contexts where she uses the words *border, intent* and *purpose*. The same can be said for Control, but his background is in counterterrorism and as a 'fixer' for government agencies, which facilitates a more human centred, suspicious attitude when he uses the same words.

3.1. Grammatical investigations

As discussed in the theory chapter, a Cavellian analysis entails examining the criteria behind the choice and use of significant words and utterances. In my readings of the Southern Reach trilogy I often found myself asking why VanderMeer had chosen a specific word or why he had chosen to phrase something a certain way. His use of language is unconventional, sometimes leading to puzzlement and confusion which might prompt further investigation into specific words and concepts. Several such instances occurred, but due to the practical restraints of a master's thesis, I had to make a choice. The words *border*, *purpose* and *intent* are mentioned several times throughout the series, suggesting a thematic problematization of these concepts and ensuring a material that is widespread and large enough to allow for a certain complexity and nuance that the trilogy deserves. The word border was most obvious, because of its central place in the story and the varied ways in which it is used and understood. I chose to include both intent and purpose as cognates in one chapter, because separately they were mentioned significantly fewer times than border, and because I thought that the similarity in dictionary meaning between the words could result in some interesting findings. These words are also very central to the story, as the question of intent and purpose is fundamental in a story that circles around encountering and understanding some unknown entity. As mentioned, there is also something in the way these words are used and the contexts they are used in that stimulates puzzlement and confusion – a condition for examining works of literature through the lens of ordinary language philosophy (Moi, 2017, p. 53).

Finding words or concepts that trigger such feelings is the first step in a grammatical investigation. When the reader has honed in on these, the next step is to find all the instances where the words and concepts are used, in order to "remind ourselves of the kinds of statement we make about it" (Cavell, 1999, p. 29), where "it" refers to statements or phenomena that puzzles us and makes us want to find out more. In order to systematically carry out this step, I used a digital version of the books and employed integrated search tools to locate each instance when the chosen words are mentioned in the texts. I then went through all the results and discarded the cases where the words were used in markedly different meanings, such as the term "border commander" or the statement "intent on my meal". This step also involved reading "around" the words and examining their context. While carrying out this step, I found that the context that the words appeared in often revealed extra layers of significance. This means that the following analysis does not solely discuss the words *border*, *intent* and *purpose*, yet it is entirely based on instances and contexts from the books where

these words are used.

In this analysis I will present the results of the third step of the grammatical investigation, where I examine what criteria lie behind the statements found in the previous step. This is where I ask why the characters chooses to word themselves in that specific way at that specific time, or "what criteria we have for (what we go on in) saying what we say (Cavell, 1999, p. 29). The aim is to uncover what judgments of criteria were made, consciously or unconsciously, when deciding to use a word or a phrase in the context it is used in. By exploring the words and their contexts the value judgments become visible, which can allow us to see the way the speaker views the phenomena of their world, and thus how they value them.

3.2. Presentation of the concept *border* in the Southern Reach trilogy

The word *border* itself figures prominently in all three books in the Southern Reach trilogy. It is used a total of 255 times in the 901 pages. It often refers to the actual "physical" border that surrounds Area X, but other concepts and utterances connected to the notion of borders are more associated with mental states and relationships. Relevant to this thesis, the border seems to function as a connector as well as a divider between the developed human world portrayed in the books and what is repeatedly described as a pristine wilderness inside the border in Area X.

There is a duality in how the different themes are addressed in connection with the border between the outside world and Area X. The border creates a distinct inside and outside, forcing the characters, and the reader, to evaluate whether the threat is within or without. On one hand, there is a strong military and academic presence around the border, monitoring for any signs that it will expand or that something will escape it, thus making Area X the danger that is held back by the border. On the other hand, the idea that the border is keeping the outside world from Area X is introduced early by the biologist: "One rule for an expedition into Area X was that we were to attempt no outside contact, for fear of some irrevocable contamination" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 7).

The juxtaposition between inside and outside and civilization and wilderness gets expressed in different ways by the biologist and Control. Their relation to the border, both physically and metaphorically, affects how they talk and think about the situations and phenomena they encounter while they try to make sense of the world and its mysteries. The characters' criteria pertaining to the three themes get revealed in their use of the word *border* and their reflections on the concept, as they grapple with and examine their own and each other's understandings, ideas and values.

3.2.1. Science, curiosity and knowledge

We enter the Southern Reach trilogy and get to know Area X through the perspectives of characters with different, mainly scientific, backgrounds. There is a difference in how the characters approach Area X based on their scientific field, curiosity and knowledge, and this can be traced in their use of the word *border* as well as what criteria they call upon. While the biologist is a trained biologist brought in to the Southern Reach agency and the expedition

into Area X because of her scientific research and background, Control is ostensibly given the position as acting director because his background as a spy has trained him to take unconventional routes of deduction to secure knowledge in order to act upon it. Both characters are concerned with science, curiosity and knowledge, but they value these very differently, and that affects their actions, attitudes and language as well as their position in the development of the story.

Biologist

The reader first gets acquainted with the unnamed biologist, focaliser and narrator of the first book, and her doppelgänger Ghost Bird, both of whom can be said to share the role of protagonist. The biologist becomes interested in science early on in her childhood, developing a curiosity and lust for knowledge through examining and monitoring the life in the overgrown pool in her parent's back yard. It is her meticulous curiosity that makes the biologist eligible for the expedition, but on her way from the border to the base camp the biologist wonders if her suitability stems more from being very self-contained (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 123). In the biologist's case these two qualities are connected. Her curiosity for science originated in a lonely childhood, turning inward to the boundaries of the nature in her backyard. This in turn led her to a narrow focus on biology in adulthood, having little interest in other people. Self-containment is thus connected to an interpersonal notion of border, creating a strict boundary between an inner sense of self and what is shown to others.

When the biologist realises that the psychologist might have chosen her for her restrained personality, she also notes that this quality is usually disapproved of from a psychological point of view. As such, the biologist presents two sets of criteria of being self-contained. According to one, the focus on humanity gives the word a negative undertone. The possible psychological impact that is hinted at is one of isolation from a community of other humans. Although the biologist is clearly aware of this outcome, she has chosen to keep her singular focus and remain on the fringes of society. Even in her relationship to her husband she puts up a border, not being able to share the depths of herself, resolving to nightly escapes to whatever vestige of nature is available in the city they live in. The biologist's reflection that self-containment is disapproved of "from a psychiatric point of view" (p. 123) reveals that she is familiar with how the word is usually understood in the greater world and takes this understanding into consideration when she develops her own criteria. Interpersonal borders, in

the sense of guardedness and self-containment, are not in line with this society's values. In the few, short flashbacks to her childhood and the time spent with her husband it becomes clear that she has struggled with her own guarded personality and society's negative valuation of such traits.

It seems, however, that the biologist has mostly put these struggles aside by the time she joins the expedition into Area X. She has kept living a life on the fringes, rarely having to interact with other humans except when she is forced by lack of funding to abandon a habitat she is studying and go back to her husband. Her recounting of her actions show that she has chosen a self-contained life despite the larger society's values of social and emotional connection. According to Moi, one has two options when one disagrees in the judgments of how a word is to be used and understood (Moi, 2017, p. 225). One is to simply let the misunderstanding continue and not focusing on it. The other option is to examine the words and utterances for criteria and uncover what lies behind the misunderstanding. By continuing to value her self-contained life the biologist shows that she has chosen to rely on the first option: to put the misunderstanding aside. However, when she remembers that the psychologist called her self-contained in one of the sessions preceding the expedition, she is "struck by" the word not being used as a "pejorative" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 123). Since she is coming from a society where such traits are not valued, she reacts with surprise to someone appreciating these traits. This means that she has shifted to the second option when a misunderstanding occurs. Through an examination of the words the psychologist used and the way in which she used them, the biologist finds criteria for the words that are not congruent with the criteria she is accustomed to encountering regarding her self-containment. Instead of connecting the word *self-contained* with negative values in the context of human interactions, the psychologist connects it to positive values in relation to science and knowledge. This seems to resonate with the biologist, sharing a reason, a criterion, for the importance of self-containment: it facilitates a keener focus on what she sees as important or interesting knowledge.

One aspect of her life in which the biologist does not fully contain herself is in her search for knowledge, especially knowledge pertaining to nature and biology. Her inherent curiosity is what drives her throughout the series, despite the fact that her knowledge and understanding of Area X changing several times. Quite early on in the first book she notes that the information being drilled into the expedition members by the Southern Reach agency works as a distraction to asking pertinent questions and discovering relevant details; "By the time we

were ready to cross the border, we knew everything … and we knew nothing" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 67). After the biologist and the surveyor have found the anthropologist dead in the tower and the surveyor is making a case for heading back to the border to be extracted, the biologist is reluctant to leave. Despite the traumatising experience, the biologist's curiosity overrides any fear she feels. She deploys delaying tactics on the surveyor, focusing on the new knowledge they can retrieve if they stay, gather information and analyse their findings (p. 70). Even later, when the psychologist lies dying in front of her, the biologist is more intent on unearthing what she can about Area X than she is with taking care of the dying woman or protecting herself from any threat that could surround her.

Only when she senses the vastness of the mystery surrounding Area X does she start to question the implications of knowledge. Triggered by the psychologist's contemplations that the border is advancing at accelerating speed, the biologist is struck by the impossible intricacy of Area X: "The thought of that silenced me for a long moment. When you are too close to the centre of a mystery there is no way to pull back and see the shape of it entire." (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 129). The psychologist confronts the biologist's entire view of life and the world, threatening to break down any hypnotic conditioning the psychologist's superiors had performed before the expedition to supposedly protect the expedition members from unnecessary trauma and make them easier to control should the need arise. This threat insinuates that the hypnotic conditioning altered the member's minds in other ways as well. The biologist stands seemingly firm against this possibly identity-shattering threat, saying "'I am sure of the here and now, this moment, and the next. I am sure of my past.'" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 129). However, her trust in her allegedly impermeable mental defences leaves is shaken, as she has interacted with the psychologist long enough to be affected by her last thoughts and ideas. The biologist starts to examine her own surety of the value of knowledge and science. A border has been crossed to be able to gain knowledge about Area X, both physically and scientifically. The biologist's reliance on knowledge and science is being subverted. She comes from a background where observing nature, making notes, finding connections and extracting knowledge is the base of her identity. Curiosity for her surroundings is second nature to her. In Area X, she learns that it is this curiosity that threatens to ruin the world.

When the biologist first hears the psychologist say that they should not have ventured into this pristine wilderness, she believes the reasoning is one of self-preservation and deflection of

responsibility, but in the same instance she also notes that she will change her perspective on this later (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 132). However, before she is able to fully adjust to the new criteria the psychologist exposes her to, the biologist goes through a change of both mental and physical nature. She contemplates on her surroundings on her way back to the Tower. With "no borders, no artificial light" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 169) her sight is clear: "I could see everything" (p. 169). Her physical changes coincide with the shift in her mentality towards science and curiosity. She is infected by Area X, and in becoming a part of this new ecology she is seeing it, literally, with new eyes. The insistence that there are no borders in this new view of the world and the immediate connection of border to the human creation of artificial lights suggests that the biologist relates borders to something human that no longer is valid. Without the artificial lights of the human world she can see that strange, new patterns of stars have replaced the familiar ones she had taken comfort in before her change. Now, she experiences a "grim sort of satisfaction in the thought" (p. 169) that she is far from the world back beyond the now non-existent border, likely too far to return.

The concept of a border is only necessary if there is an inside and an outside. Before she changes, the biologist uses the word *border* liberally and recognises that it is a distinction between wilderness and civilization, just as the related word *self-containment* serves as a distinction between isolation and connectedness. After returning from the depths of the Tower a second time, where she glimpses the true nature of Area X, she is more certain of the repercussions the human, scientific, gaze has had on the area. When thinking about the countless expeditions sent into this area she states: "Imagine that this communication sometimes lends a sense of the uncanny to the landscape because of the narcissism of our human gaze, but that it is just part of the natural world here" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 191). Just like the biologist's self-containment, Area X's border was a poor attempt at separating the untouched wilderness within from exhausting human interference. Despite the boundaries set up to ward against unwanted attention the Southern Reach agency broke through in efforts to divine what resulted in this "sense of uncanny" that arose in interactions with both the biologist and Area X. For Area X it is the unrelenting prodding and poking by the Southern Reach agency's science teams that provokes the uncanny, while the biologist's sense of self is tested by interactions with the psychologist and director. However, both the biologist and Area X shows a staunch resilience when faced with a human gaze lusting for knowledge and understanding. For the biologist this resilience is strengthened with the change brought on her by Area X, a change not just of a physical nature, but of a mental one: "before she died, the

psychologist said I had changed, and I think she meant I had *changed sides*" (p. 192). The biologist has become much less absolute in her valuation of science as a necessity to cross borders into unchartered territory and gain new knowledge. She is now aware of the hazards mere observation and testing can entail: "our instruments are useless, our methodology broken, our motivations selfish" (p. 192).

From this analysis of the biologist's relationship to values surrounding science, curiosity and knowledge based on the use and context of the word *border* in the Southern Reach trilogy I have found that the biologist is first represented as having a somewhat one dimensional relationship to science and knowledge. She has been driven by curiosity and knowledge her entire life, somewhat strengthened by her self-containment and distancing from society at large. Her interactions with the psychologist make her question whether knowledge and the scientific method should be valued absolutely. This happens first through a new and unexpected resonance in their criteria for the word self-contained, creating some grounds for further participation in a possible connection where it feels safe to question her criteria and values. This connection is eventually damaged, leaving the biologist insecure, her understandings and criteria for such deeply held beliefs on these integral parts of her identity in upheaval. The change Area X brings on her gives her a new sense of reality and belonging, which influences the way she views science and curiosity while removing the border from her world and thus the need to use the word from her vocabulary. We leave the biologist as a less rigid scientist, enlightened to the dangers that curiosity and a human gaze can bring to a pristine wilderness.

Control

Control, the protagonist and narrator of the second book in the series, *Authority*, has a very different background and different relationship to science than the biologist. Coming from a covert anti-terrorism background and being deployed as a fixer, his actions and reflections as acting director of the Southern Reach agency is coloured by a focus on evidence and blame rather than curiosity, experimentation and "pure" knowledge. He takes on a suspicious attitude to the scientific findings and theories raised about the border and Area X, questioning whether the mass of documentation he reads through to familiarize himself with the situation is "credible evidence" or a "mountain of bullshit" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 37). Reviewing the works of the previous director Control is wary of the patterns and routes that might have "colonized the director's mind" (p. 37). As Control grapples with understanding Area X and

the border, it is revealed that he does not see knowledge and science as absolutes, but rather as perpetuated by "bullshit artists" desperate for causality in a "universe driven by chance" (p. 37).

Provoked by watching a video of an early experiment where scientists let thousands of white rabbits loose close to the border to see how the border would react Control is shocked at the recklessness of the experiment, pointing out that the experiment seems like a "reflexive act of frustration" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 55). This attitude towards the scientists and their experiments shows that Control is less than impressed with the human tendencies he perceives is connected to curiosity and science. He does not reflect on any ingenuity behind the experiments, instead using more intuitive or primitive words like "reflexive" and "frustration" to describe the actions of the scientists. His portrayal of scientists becomes even more damaging, assigning them with a "frat-boy sensibility" that underpins the association with reckless qualities. These descriptions of the scientific community and process at the Southern Reach agency are contrasted by the more reverent attitude Control has towards the border. He reacts with anger and frustration at the carelessness with which the scientists have handled such inexplicable entities as the border and Area X. The weight of responsibility weighs heavy on him, even when the possible knowledge that can be gathered about these mysteries is enticing: "All of the things that wore you down, even as that was balanced by the electric feeling of being on the side of a border where you knew things no one else knew" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 72).

Control's valuation of the science and scientist at the Southern Reach agency is connected to his background as an anti-terrorism agent. His knowledge and attention are more tuned in to the human psyche than to the natural sciences. While his job is to try to understand Area X and the border better, he constantly falls back to fascination with the people of the agency. This fascination mostly falls to the biologist due to an inability to truly understand her motivations and ways of thinking. To him, this self-contained human offers as much of a mystery as Area X. When some of the problems in uncovering the nature of Area X are presented to Control he draws a link to the biologist: when something does not fit into familiar categories, they (the scientist/Control) "had to wrench their imaginations – and thus their analogies and metaphors – out of a grooved track that had been running through everyone's minds for hundreds and hundreds of years" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 114). In attempting to uncover the truth about Area X Control loses himself in trying to understand the

biologist, but he is not able to fully wrench his analogies and metaphors. Control and the biologist disagree so fully in their judgments of the value of science that Control is not able to acknowledge the misunderstanding and examine their language for criteria. This leaves them with the option of sidestepping the issue altogether, breaking down the path of communication (Moi, 2017, p. 225). By doing this, an interpersonal border is set up between Control and the biologist, just as the physical border separates the larger world from Area X.

On a trip to inspect the border Control is caught by just how dividing it is physically:

> Somehow Control had expected the equivalent of the disconnect when a two-page spread didn't quite line up in a coffee-table book. But instead it just looked like they were slogging through a huge terrarium or greenhouse with invisible glass revealing a sunny day on the ground beyond. They continued to the end amid a profusion of lush plant life and an alarmingly crowded landscape of birdlife and insects, with deer visible in the middle distance through the veil of rain. (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 134)

In this passage Control suggests that it is the human world that is on the inside of the terrarium, and thus that it is the human world that is being studied by whatever is on the other side. This is interesting both from an interpersonal perspective and from a scientific one. By this time, Control has started to think of Area X as the biologist's domain. While Control continuously fails to understand how the biologist sees the world on the "civilised" side of the border, more often being drawn into her questions and demands, he is shown here to harbour feelings that it is in truth she that is studying him. This means that not only does he not respect the natural sciences he oversees, but he is also starting to lose faith in his own human-centred approach, leaving him with an insecure relationship to the entire concept of knowledge.

Instead of taking a step back and re-evaluating his processes and knowledge base he doubles down on his methods, making his thought patterns and ideas increasingly erratic while he starts to mistrust every bit of information and knowledge he comes across. Where the biologist changes her values of science and curiosity when she is confronted with new sets of criteria and a new view of the world, we see Control's criteria shatter. He does not use this opportunity to form new values upon which to base his judgments over what is right and wrong in this new world. He simultaneously clings to a set of criteria that are no longer viable when the world he knew has changed so entirely while at the same time realising that this desperate adherence to the old will send him into madness. Even in this realisation, the gap between what he knew and valued on one side of the border, and what he must learn to know and live with on the other, becomes too large to bridge. Control is left with such diffuse and

indefinable criteria for knowledge and the world that he can no longer live with his own confusion:

> 'There is *no way back* across the border!' Shouting it at him. 'There is no *door* anymore.'
> Choking on seawater, buffeted by fish. A vision of drowning all over again.
> No door. Not anymore.
> Just whatever lay at the bottom of the sea.
> Maybe.
> Lost in the thought of that, while Grace continued to talk about grotesque and impossible things.
> (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 147)

3.2.2. Truth, deception and power

The difference between the two main character's use of the word border and the context around it also has an impact on their value judgments pertaining the concepts of truth, deception and power. Both characters are seen in situations where they are confronted with both power and powerlessness in relation to truth and deception. In the following sections I will show how they both at times perceive themselves as investigators into a higher and more correct truth. This perception affects their willingness to decide whether truth or deceit is appropriate in a lesser situation in order to reach this higher truth. However, their use of language around these situations shows nuanced differences in their valuations, revealing a more pronounced inclination for deceit and power in Control than in the biologist.

Biologist

With her scientific background, the biologist's focus on knowledge is one that aligns itself well with an emphasis on truth. Despite this, her relationship to truth is far more nuanced since the it exists on many levels that can interfere with each other. That can make deception and misuse of power seem necessary at one level in order to work towards truth on another level. In some of the instances where the biologist grapples with the word and concept of *border* it is revealed that she also struggles to find a balance between truth, deception and power that she is comfortable with and that makes sense to her in relation to the way she understands the world. The first time we find the biologist exploring her own truthfulness in a context relating to *border* is when she is trying to persuade her fellow expedition member to stay in Area X instead of going back to the border to be extracted. The reason she gives for wanting to stay is that she is not ready to go back yet. She uses a delaying tactic observed from the psychologist to get her way, avoiding to mention the complexities that crossing the border could entail: "I didn't say what I was thinking: That it might not be that simple"

(VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 70). The value judgment behind her deceit is twofold. On the one hand the biologist is intentionally holding back information to get to something she sees as a higher truth, to learn more about Area X. On the other hand she is holding back truth to spare her colleague a sense of being trapped behind the border: "But I didn't want her to feel as if she had no way out" (p. 70).

In order to uncover the truth about Area X, the biologist is calculating in the way she presents facts and options to her colleague. This underpins that her valuing of the concept truth is nuanced and dependent on how truth interacts with other values she holds. In this instance, her valuation of science and knowledge outweighs the opportunity to being truthful and avoiding dishonesty. While it seems that her choice to withhold information serves her search for a larger truth, it is striking that the biologist does not consider more thoroughly if sharing her information with her colleague could potentially bring about a greater insight into Area X. This points to a certain arrogance in who holds the 'correct' truth or the 'correct' path to the truth. In this arrogance she grants herself a certain power over her colleague, giving herself the right to decide what is the right or wrong thing to do in this situation, but also what is true and what is mere obfuscation of the truth. This position seems to fall naturally to the biologist and is likely part of the reason for her deep and growing distrust towards the Southern Reach agency and the information they have given her during training, a distrust mirrored in her colleagues reactions to her words and actions during and following the discussion over whether to go back to the border or not.

The biologist's distrust towards the Southern Reach agency surfaces many times throughout the series. It stems from the gradual revelation of just how much information have been held back, twisted and doctored (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 112). Her reactions to these smokescreens are frustration and anger at not being privy to possibly important information that could be crucial to her understanding of the border. While she has no problem holding back information from her colleague, as discussed earlier, she balks at information being withheld from herself. The difference between the two situations is the power dynamic. When the power to decide over the truth is held by herself, the biologist is more inclined to lie and hold back information. When the same power is shifted over to the Southern Reach agency, however, she is indignant over the loss of control and information. She deals with this frustration by focusing on her field of study:

> No matter how strange, a discarded exoskeleton, even if part of it resembled a human face, represented

> a kind of solvable mystery. One that, for the moment at least, pushed back the disturbing image of an expanding border and the countless lies told by the Southern Reach. (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 140)

In this utterance, the biologist links the lies of the Southern Reach agency to the expansion of the border. In doing so she suggests a direct correlation between the two: the secrecy maintained by the agency might somehow have facilitated a border expansion. Where the biologist was willing to set aside truth as a means to obtain some higher wisdom and scientific purpose, as previously discussed, she now sees the same choices from the agency as harmful interference into a mysterious, complicated system. This is because when *she* is behind the deception, she is also in tune with *why* she deceives, but when she is the one being deceived, the reasonings for the lack of truth are hidden. The expedition members are isolated from the world outside the border, including the agency. Because of that, the biologist does not have any means of understanding the judgments behind the agency's decisions of what information should be given, and how. This inability to examine the value judgments leads to a deep-rooted distrust of the Southern Reach agency's treatment of truth as well as negative feelings towards the power they exert when they take control over what narrative to base truth and deception on. Such a mistrust in turn breeds mistrust of all information coming from the agency: "I, too, knew that Area X ended abruptly not far past the lighthouse. How did I know this? Our superiors had told us during training. So, in fact, I knew nothing at all" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 163).

The other value judgment dealing with holding back the truth follows a different path. When the biologist persuades her the surveyor not to go back to the border, the colleague does not react purely with mistrust. Because the deceit also comes from a place of protection, shielding the colleague from unpleasant information, and not just from a need to have control over the truth-narrative, the dynamic between the two scientists is friendlier. The possibility for the surveyor to interact with the biologist is likely crucial in facilitating trust instead of mistrust when being deceived. Because the surveyor and the biologist are able to examine each other's language, the surveyor might have been able to discern the criteria the biologist employs in her use of the word *border*, and thus recognise the good intentions behind holding back the truth. The biologist does wonder if this might be the case with the Southern Reach agency as well. When she finds out that the agency has launched far more expeditions across the border than they had previously told her, the biologist asks herself: "Did 'twelve' expeditions refer only to the latest iteration of a longer effort, the omission of the rest necessary to quell the doubts of those approached to be volunteers?" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 112). While she is

suspicious of the omission, the words she uses when she thinks about the many more border crossings show that she does not condemn the deception entirely. She is open to other explanations, other value judgments behind the deceit that can set the agency's actions in a more forgiving light. This might be connected to the value judgments she applied herself in holding back information when she was convincing her colleague to not go back across the border. When she finds herself on the receiving end of deception, she initially reacts by transferring some of her own values onto the agency. As discussed earlier, however, the ongoing and deepening use of lies, omissions and disinformation she encounters, in tandem with a lack of opportunities to further examine the criteria and values behind the absence of truth, leads the biologist down a path of mistrust of the information and power of the agency, instead of the more trusting attitude that dishonesty can be deployed as a protective act.

Control

Unlike the biologist, Control is drawn to secrecy and power while still feeling the weight of responsibility that follows from being in a position to curate the truth. His complex position as a spy-come-fixer-come-manager leads to a complicated relationship to truth, deception and power. He is constantly stuck in a dilemma, syphoning information from his superiors and his subordinates, trying to find out what is the truth, what are lies and what is simply distracting information. In these processes he is continuously curating the information he obtains and deciding what needs to be withheld, what should be shared and who needs to be privy to the different evidence. "He had often felt heavy", he thinks, referring to "the weight of information, of history and context" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 72), but the heaviness is accompanied by "the electric feeling of being on the side of a border where you knew things no one else knew" (p. 72). Thus, Control has revealed two angles from which he views the power of truth and deceit: on the one hand he connects truth to responsibility and on the other he relates it to a sense of superiority in knowledge. Both essentially deal with facets of power.

The first facet of the connection between power and truth is the "electric feeling" (p. 72) it elicits in Control. He sets up two sides of this power: to know and not to know. Because he is in a position of power he is "on the side of a border where you knew things no one else knew" (p. 72). This means that a side of him values the pure superiority such power gives him. His superiority in position grants him the opportunity to decide what truths are meaningful in which settings, and followingly guards him from the moral repercussions of deceit. Control's wording of a *border* between truth and ignorance gives the impression that he understands the

power of truth to be something that should, or at least can, be guarded. This leads to the understanding that truth and deception are tools wielded by those with enough power, which is a position Control has strived for his entire life. Control's valuation of the power that truth holds also leads him to disregard the effect that deceit and lies can have on other people at a personal level. While he disregards it, he still acknowledges it. An example of this shown in his response to a former girlfriend who asked why he liked his secretive job:

> He'd given his standard response, in a portentous manner, to poke fun at himself. To disguise the seriousness. 'To know. To go beyond the veil.' Across the border. Even as Control said it, he had known that he was also telling her he didn't mind leaving her there, alone, on the other side. (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 195)

Again, he uses the word *border* to differentiate between having power over the truth and being left in the dark, and Control's disregard for the personal impacts of his subterfuge on his girlfriend solidifies his egotistical value judgment of truth and power. However, his apparent self-centredness is not absolute and the "electric feeling" (p. 72) Control gets from his power in truth and information is counterbalanced by duty and responsibility.

The heaviness Control feels at the weight of information and the truth comes from a sense of responsibility to find the *right* truth in order to act on it in the *right* ways. This is the second facet of power shown through Control's use of language in the *border* context. As a leader, he is responsible not only for the people who work for him, but for the outcome and repercussions of their work. Given the mystery surrounding the border and the negative consequences that has already taken place due to the actions of the Southern Reach agency, Control is understandably affected by his power. When reflecting on the actions of the former director of the agency, he sees the weight of power in her too. At one point, he goes through her decision process with regards to the border and withholding information, assessing its ethical validity. This reveals his own values concerning the director's choices:

> The thought had occurred while sorting through the scraps that if you ran an agency devoted to understanding and combating a force that constituted an insurgency, and you believed the border was, in some sense at least, advancing, then you might deviate from official protocols. (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 157)

Control seems to link the level of threat directly to the degree to which truth can be withheld or manipulated. There is no judgement in his words when he recounts the former director's decisions. Quite contrary, Control is putting himself in the director's shoes and displays an eagerness to understand and empathise with her. In doing so, he reveals that his valuation of truth and power aligns itself with the director's wilful deception. Through studying her notes, he is able to examine the criteria behind her words and consequently her actions, and his

reflections shows that he finds himself in agreement with the director's criteria. They have both experienced the weight that their position brings and are ostensibly coloured by a greater responsibility when they make decisions based on truth and deception.

Throughout the books, Control's focus on the two facets of values connected to power and truth gradually skews towards the responsibility to curate the truth in a responsible way that benefits some larger purpose. His understanding of the world rapidly changes as he is privy to larger chunks of the truth behind Area X, and with a shift in world view his judgments of criteria are also altered. The growing, mysterious threat beyond the border leads Control to become more weighed down with feelings of responsibility while he simultaneously realises how little power he has in this new world. He retracts into himself and the faded valuation of superiority in power when he is not able to join the two sentiments. This is kindled by the boundary that the biologist/Ghost Bird establishes between them, creating distance between Control and his guide into the unfamiliar Area X. He longs for a time when he was in a position of power: "To reimagine her in the interrogation room at the Southern Reach, and him watching her from behind the one-way glass" (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 76). With that, he shows that he is not able to go through the metamorphosis of values that are needed to have a future in Area X, a metamorphosis the biologist went through in when she became Ghost Bird.

3.2.3. Safety, threat and protection

In relation to safety, threat and protection, the border functions as a divider or protector between threat on one side and safety on the other. For the biologist the greatest threat is revealed to be on the human side of the border, where humans constitute a threat to nature through reckless pollution. For Control, the opposite is true, where the threat lies in Area X and the possible havoc it could wreak on the human world. However, both the biologist and Control show that they are balancing the border between the threat and safety of civilisation and wilderness, exposing strong, personal involvement that compels them to consider their value judgments based on threat, safety and protection.

Biologist

The biologist has a troubled relationship to safety, threat and protection. Already on the first page of the first book the biologist describes her meeting with Area X in the following way:

"Looking out over that untroubled landscape, I do not believe any of us could yet see the threat" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 3). The "untroubled landscape" in this paragraph is set up as an opposite to the human interference into Area X that can be glimpsed as decaying equipment and housing through the dense vegetation. Although the biologist is more or less unwaveringly on nature's side throughout the trilogy, it becomes clear already in this sentence that the threat behind Area X in her eyes is not in the immediate human interference or in the "untroubled landscape", but in something yet to come. On the initial hike from the border to base camp the biologist notes that the expedition experiences little of note. However, the group does have an encounter with a boar that acts and looks weird, and the biologist tries to find explanations and justifications for the boar's appearance. It is clear that she has become unnerved by this encounter and that it bothers her, but "[t]hen, after a time, the boar faded into the backdrop like all else that we had passed on our way from the border, and I was staring into the future again" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 17). The border is in the past and the biologist looks to the future. This unnerving encounter "faded into the backdrop like all else" and the further away she moves from the border, the more insignificant it becomes. The fluency and normalcy of the landscape, how it gradually reverts to a state of ordinary after an upsetting incident, speaks to the border being something arbitrary. At least to the biologist, the border's function is not clear yet and so she puts no specific stock into it apart from the sense of unease that the boar reawakened in her. Any threat that Area X has to offer has yet to reveal itself to the biologist, and since she is not yet preoccupied with danger, she presents no clear value judgments.

The biologist's familiarity and the ease with which she enters her new surroundings is related to the large amount of time she has spent in landscapes more or less untouched by human hands, specialising in what she calls transitional landscapes. This has also led to a great affinity for untouched landscapes, leading her to reflect over the marked difference between the two sides of the border with despair:

> The air was so clean, so fresh, while the world back beyond the border was what it had always been during the modern era: dirty, tired, imperfect, winding down, at war with itself. Back there, I had always felt as if my work amounted to a futile attempt to save us from who we are. (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 30)

She blames the degradation of the world back beyond the border on human mentality but sets a strong boundary between this mentality and herself. This passage makes it clear that whereas the biologist feels relatively safe inside the border of Area X, she perceives great threat on the other side. The threat on that side, however, is not of some unknown, mysterious

entity, but comes from the humans themselves. It is a threat all too well known to the biologist, leading her to feel like her work to counteract the human destruction was all for nothing. In the surrounding passages it also becomes clear how at home she feels in nature and wilderness, and thus in Area X, spending hours observing and losing herself in tiny, beautiful details and all-encompassing views. While Area X presents like a mystery to her, it is not threatening because it is a counterpoint to the threat of the human civilization that has defiled the nature on the other side of the border.

This is not a notion the biologist shares with her expedition members, however. As discussed earlier, the biologist and the surveyor have a discussion on whether they should go back to the border or keep exploring despite the death and disappearance of their other colleagues. The biologist and the surveyor do not have the same criteria regarding the safety of the border:

> 'I'm not ready to go back,' I told her. 'Not yet.' I wasn't near ready, despite what had happened. 'You prefer this place, you really do, don't you?' the surveyor said. It wasn't really a question; a kind of pity or disgust infused her voice. 'You think this is going to last much longer? Let me tell you, even on military maneuvers designed to simulate negative outcomes, I've seen better odds.' Fear was driving her, even if she was right. (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 71)

Whereas the surveyor sees the border as a way to safety, the biologist is reluctant to go back at all. She understands how the mention of the border connected to the idea of safety affects her colleague and acknowledges that her colleague's statements are right, at least from one perspective. Still, the biologist is not balking, resorting to psychological tricks to persuade the surveyor. This tells us that even though the biologist understands and accepts the points the surveyor makes, she does not agree in the judgments behind the points. Her values differ from those of the surveyor. Even though she has seen some of the horrors behind the mystery that is Area X she is not in agreement that the threat is greater than what she can find out if she stays. This is also presented alongside the comment that fear drives her colleague, which suggests that the notions of safety and protection at a personal level are not that important to the biologist. Her curious drive and wish to protect and coexist with the ecosystems she encounters overrides any values of threat at a personal level.

While the biologist is not overly concerned with her own or her colleagues' safety, she is concerned with the protection of and threat to nature. Her specialisation in transitional environments finds her continuously balancing borders between different ecologies as well as the border between wilderness and civilisation. Through the events of The Southern Reach trilogy, however, she gradually evolves her perception to be more concerned with the

"pristine wilderness" in Area X than the civilisation of humanity outside:

> The terrible thing, the thought I cannot dislodge after all I have seen, is that I can no longer say with conviction that this Is a bad thing. Not when looking at the pristine nature of Area X and then the world beyond, which we have altered so much. Before she died, the psychologist said I had changed, and I think she meant I had *changed sides.* It isn't true – I don't even know if there are sides, or what that might mean – but it *could* be true. I see now that I could be persuaded. (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 192)

She writes that it is not true that she has changed sides, but that she "could be persuaded", and in expressing this she shows that the process of change has already started. The biologist's value judgments err on the side of the protection of nature from the threat that is humanity rather than the threat that the unknown of Area X could present to the human world.

Control

While the biologist generally feels very much at ease in wild and untouched landscapes and values their safety and protection, the protagonist of the second book, Control, has a more strained relationship to nature. While on a run, Control describes his immediate surroundings between the town of Hedley and the wilderness leading into Area X in these words:

> It wasn't true wilderness, was comfortingly close to civilization, but existed just enough apart to create a boundary. This was what most people wanted: to be *close to* but not *part of.* They didn't want the fearful unknown 'pristine wilderness.' They didn't want a soulless artificial life, either. (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 81, italics in original)

Control is linking his views to those of most people, cementing his future reactions, thoughts and feelings as *normal* for the remainder of the books. Interestingly, Control finds comfort in existing on the border, the "boundary", between wilderness and civilization. The choice of words here is significant: the pristine wilderness is equated with being unknown and provoking fearfulness, but by connecting "a soulless artificial life" to civilization, the wilderness is also valued as being soulful and natural or real. Thus, Control's utterance contains a certain duality in its valuations. Nature or wilderness is full of life and soul, natural and pure. However, humans cannot "*be part of"* this wilderness, forced by fear to create boundaries or *borders* to keep the unknown away, while still being drawn close to it.

It is the unknown that provokes Control's value judgments regarding threat and safety when he uses the word border. The fear of the unknown becomes such a central and consuming concept to Control that it seeps through in almost each instance when the notion of border is brought up. He wonders at the stringent protective methods the military and the Southern Reach agency have applied to the area surrounding the border (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 28).

He also thinks about the many lives that have been lost in trying to find out just how much of a threat Area X constitutes to the world: "Yet that loss of life was trifling compared to the possibility of some break in containment across a border that the scientists were still studying and trying to understand" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 35). The use of the phrase "break in containment" suggests that Control imagines something uncontrollable getting lose, which does not go well with his valuation of control and power. It also delineates the border as something that is keeping a threat at bay. In that way, the border is a protective measure for Control, protecting him, and thus the rest of humanity, from the danger of the unknown.

Control is still more preoccupied with threat than with safety or protection. He seldom goes to any lengths to provide some sort of safeguard against whatever can be on the other side of the border. This is partially due to the uncertainty of the possible threat, yet it plays into his way of understanding the world, and thus, the values he has developed regarding threat, safety and protection. The thought that occupies his mind when the border is finally breached is not to get himself to safety, it is to think of the horror that now envelopes the research station and the people working there, which is evident in the following conversation with his mother who works higher up in the government:

> Grace, Whitby, who knew who else, caught up in a true nightmare now. 'It might stop there, for a very long time.' 'You're full of shit,' he said. 'You don't know what it will do.' 'Or it might speed up. You're right – we can't know.' 'That's right – we can't. I was there, right in the middle of it. I saw it coming.' Because *you put me there*. A howl inside of betrayal. (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 302, italics in original)

This fixation is coupled with a feeling of helplessness which is connected to the unknown nature of the threat in tandem with the lack of power he has over the situation. Control thought his position brought him power and knowledge, but realises now that the power and knowledge he has withers away in the face of the all-encompassing cosmic horror he sees in Area X. While his much-valued power is revealed as an illusion in all senses, both the manipulation by his superiors and the seemingly unrelenting force across the border, his obsession with threat grows even stronger.

When Control finds himself inside an expanded Area X, he is still forced to live with the uncertainty of his surroundings, but his perception of a great threat enveloping him prevents him from shifting his understanding of the world in the way the biologist is able to. While the biologist meets the natural world with curiosity and humility, Control comes from a place of suspicion and vigilance which presents itself in his fixation on the perceived threat. He is

unable to turn away from the idea that there is a door in the border that can bring him back to safety, away from the uncanny danger, even though all signs indicate that the border can no longer be crossed if it exists at all:

> 'Is that why you didn't go back across the border?' He asked. Because of the guilt? 'There is *no way back* across the border!' Shouting it at him. 'There is no *door* anymore.' Choking on seawater, buffeted by fish. A vision of drowning all over again. No door. Not anymore. Just whatever lay at the bottom of the sea. Maybe. Lost in the thought of that, while Grace continued to talk about grotesque and impossible things. (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 147, italics in original)

Again, Control shows that he is not able to consolidate his world view and values with the change in his situation and his inability to adapt his value judgements leads to a descent into himself which turns into madness instead of the acceptance the biologist is capable of.

3.3. Presentation of the concepts of *intent* and *purpose* in the Southern Reach trilogy

As with the word *border*, the usage of the words *purpose* and *intent* is frequent in the trilogy. Purpose is mentioned 66 times across the three books and intent is mentioned 28 times. Carrying roughly the same meaning, that means the characters consider their own, others' or Area x's motivation 94 times in total. Examining the words *purpose* and *intent* allows for an analysis of the value judgments that leads to the specific uses in the specific contexts. This is particularly relevant to this thesis as the characters are in a situation where they are forced to consider the intent and purpose of the non-human.

The value judgments behind the usage differs between the characters and can also change for a character. Their criteria are influenced by elements such as experience, familiarity, school of thought, social relationships, and duty. As the two main characters expresses themselves differently and in different contexts, we find that their value judgments evolve and interact with each other, creating a negotiation of values across characters and books.

3.3.1. Science, curiosity and knowledge

As the plot of The Southern reach centres around a scientific community that studies an unfamiliar territory, it intimately depicts the characters' relationship with science, curiosity and knowledge. Their perspective, however, differ as they approach this set of themes form different background and positions. Where their perspective comes in conflict with each other, it can be a source of misunderstandings that either needs to be resolved or overlooked. These misunderstandings and the way they are handled by the characters serves as a base for the value negotiations that happens in a broader sense throughout the trilogy. In this section I am exploring the biologist's and Control's use of language and how it reveals their values pertaining to science, curiosity and knowledge. They are shown to test their idea of what purpose and intent means as they examine Area X.

Biologist

The biologist's background equips her with a special outlook on both science and knowledge and the concepts of *purpose* and *intent.* Her use of these words and the context around them reveals that the criteria judgments she makes are affected by the focus she has on science and ecological connectivity. When first encountering the ominous tower in Area X the biologist starts asking questions of its origin and purpose. She is hypothesising: "I asked all of this and

more, not expecting an answer" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 21), showing that her first reaction to something new and unfamiliar is to examine it and ask the many questions that can bring her closer to new information and knowledge. While she is asking questions, she is not expecting answers, which shows that she can be patient and realises that not all questions have answers. This suggests that her valuation of science and knowledge is more concerned with going through the right processes to get sound answers than a need to have answers immediately.

Being trained in biology and ecology means that her initial assumptions and interests revolve around organisms and what role the tower's inhabitants serve at an ecological level. She does not prescribe any sentience to the objects she studies and is more focused on the what's and how's than the why's. However, this changes with more time spent in Area X:

> There were too many variables, not enough data, and I was making some base assumptions that might not be true. For one thing, in all of this I assumed that neither Crawler nor Tower was intelligent, in the sense of *possessing free will*. (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 92-93, italics in original)

Up until this point, the biologist has been more focused on *what* her research objects (the Crawler and the Tower) are and *how* they have come to be. In this passage she takes a step outside her ordinary sphere of science and starts to ask *why* they are there in a "conscious sense" (p. 92). The idea that the Crawler in the Tower has free will and intelligence also makes her project some of her own traits onto it. She postulates that the Crawler travelled in search of "*evidence"* that it could bring back and analyse (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 92, italics in original). In that sense, the biologist is shown to attempt to understand the Crawler and the words it writes on the walls of the Tower. She is examining the words, and in the process, she is testing out what purpose and intent the writer possesses. Her first instinct is to mirror herself in it, imposing her own values and behaviours regarding scientific methods on it, but this thought is so overwhelming to her that she feels the need to compartmentalise and wait to delve deeper into this possible connection.

When the biologist finally goes back to the Tower and the Crawler, she realises that the existence and purpose of these entities and Area X are beyond her understanding, beyond the scientific methods and equipment she knows how to use (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 178). She has examined the Crawler and its writing, only to come to a point where her understanding is too limited to comprehend it. It is at this point, however that the biologist decides to go further despite her lack of comprehension. She approaches the Crawler and *moves through* it, and in that action, it allows her access to jumbled, incoherent images and information about its

origin. Through this development the biologist herself is taken into the Crawler and gets processed in some strange way, leaving a rapidly changing biologist in Area X and creating a doppelgänger that calls herself Ghost Bird that appears in a parking lot in her home town on the other side of the border. Ghost Bird is in many ways the biologist, retaining her memories and her physique, but she was also created in Area X, influenced or altered by her creation through the absorption by the Crawler. This altered version of the biologist wonders whether the differences between the "old" biologist and herself makes her purpose more adaptable to the new world propagated by Area X: "She didn't think she was a failed double like this creature. She had purpose, free will. Perhaps a copy could also be superior to the original, create a new reality by avoiding old mistakes" (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 35). Here, Ghost Bird suggests that her purpose and the ability to follow through on this purpose has changed when she became Ghost Bird, and she views this change as superior. In changing, she now has the ability to fulfil the dream the biologist had of halting and reversing the damage done on ecosystems by human hands. She is able to "avoid old mistakes" by changing, becoming more at one with the new world.

This change in world view goes hand in hand with a change of the biologist's/Ghost Bird's use and understanding of the words purpose and intent with regards to science and knowledge. The biologist's focus in the research she is doing in Area X is to uncover the what's, how's and why's: "I was still holding on to the idea of causality, of *purpose* as that word might be recognizable to the Southern Reach. But what if you discovered that the price of purpose is to render invisible so many other things?" (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 157). She is seeing the idea of purpose as something she is holding on to, insinuating that the understanding she has of the word is outdated. At the same time, this understanding of purpose is connected to something recognisable to the Southern Reach agency, which suggests that she sees it as a scientific understanding of the word. This means that while the biologist recognises that she is "holding on to" an antiquated notion of purpose, that notion is cemented in the scientific community she comes from. Thus, even though she understands that there can be different criteria behind the word purpose, due to her strong identity as a scientist, she is not able to completely disentangle herself from the idea that purpose is a causality that can, and should, be investigated scientifically.

Ghost Bird, however, has been freed from such bonds in her creation, absent of the blinders that purpose presents to the biologist. She is not bound by the need to compartmentalise as the

biologist, which means that she can be more holistic in her approach and understanding of purpose and intent. An effect of this is that she is no longer concerned with purpose as something to be studied and known:

> She knew where it would all lead, what it always led to in human beings – a decision about what to do. What are we going to *do*? Where do we *go* from here? How do we *move forward*? What is our *mission* now? As if purpose could solve everything, could take the outlines of what was missing and by sheer will invoke it, make it appear, bring it back to life. […] You could know the what of something forever and never discover the why. (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 191)

The words she uses about the "human" understanding of purpose are negatively lading, showing that she does not share that understanding, valuing the singlemindedness of such scientific exploit negatively. In doing so, Ghost Bird renders the scientific notion of purpose as causality as useless in her outlook of the world, no longer judged as valuable enough to be a part of her language. She states that "You could know the what of something forever and never discover the why" (p. 191), indicating that knowing why is no longer a priority for her, which means that her valuation of knowledge and science has weakened in the transition from the biologist to becoming Ghost Bird.

Control

The way Control uses the words purpose and intent, as well as the contexts in which he uses them, reveals little valuation of actual knowledge. However, in the beginning he is concerned with the perception of knowledge. Watching an ant walking "with purpose toward the green strip of trees that lay between the parking lot and the highway" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 86), Control contemplates how he is unable to understand the ant's apparent sense of purpose. Despite his lack of understanding, he does impose a purpose on the ant, either as an instinct or a knowledge of its surroundings and needs. This observation leads him to pronounce that "So long as you don't tell people you don't know something, they'll probably think you know it" (p. 86). Knowing something and acting on that knowledge is clearly connected to the concept of purpose for Control; if you seem like you have a purpose, people are not inclined to question that purpose. Control's valuation of knowledge comes across as questionable, where he appears to be more concerned with perceived knowledge than actual knowledge. This is likely connected to a preference for acting over analysing. He is not opposed to the value of knowledge, but puts a greater emphasis on the usefulness of knowledge in following a purpose than merely obtaining knowledge for knowledge's sake.

Control's inconsistent relationship with knowledge also affects how he perceives the events

and possible entity behind Area X. Although his approach is not the same, similarly to Ghost Bird, Control sees the limitations of knowledge and science when facing something so inherently different:

> If something far beyond the experience of human beings had decided to embark upon a purpose that it did not intend to allow humans to recognize or understand, then terroir would simply be a kind of autopsy, a kind of admission of the limitations of human systems. (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 132)

He is recognising the limitations of human curiosity and knowledge when it is challenged with something "far beyond the experience of human beings". Knowledge, then, is interlinked with experience, the ability to process information through the webbing of previously internalised information. Control's understanding of knowledge as experience makes Area X into a completely unknowable mystery because he has no experience to base any theories or methods on. This leads to frustration, because his job is to distinguish and provide information and knowledge about Area X to the government in order to decide what actions can be made to mitigate any danger or reveal something that can be useful to the government or scientific progress. Since Control values knowledge based on its usefulness, the lack of a baseline to form any kind of understanding of Area X makes him annoyed at the requirement to study Area X at all. Because he sees no way to gain any useful knowledge that can be acted on, any knowledge about Area X loses its value.

When discussing the possible purpose of the mysterious return of the expedition members from the eleventh expedition with the assistant director, Control is forced to consider the possibility that Area X is somehow superior to humanity, and that no one before him has brought that idea up: "There was in his mother's fragmentation the admission that Central's was a soul-crushing failure. That they had been unable to conceive of a scenario in which Area X was smarter, more insidious, more resourceful" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 303). He is pointing out a *hubris* in the way Area X has been approached, where the people involved in the research and decision making around the examinations of the unexplained area have been so confident in their ability to eventually secure enough information and knowledge about Area X to have a suitable scientific understanding of it that they have not stopped to consider whether Area X is conscious or intentional in its purpose and if its purpose will allow them to obtain any kind of concrete knowledge about it. Control is not impressed with the *hubris* of the scientists at the Southern Reach agency, revealing once again that his valuation of science is low. The bitterness he expresses when he realises the possibility of a "smarter, more insidious, more resourceful" Area X implies that he has made the same presumptions, but that

he has changed after his experiences with Area X. As such, Control's valuation of science and knowledge might have been more pronounced at a previous time, but the events that led him to his position at the Southern Reach Agency and his experiences in that position have instigated a change in his world view and thus in his valuation of knowledge.

As the trilogy progresses, Control is becoming more disturbed by his and everyone else's difficulties in understanding Area X and not being able to act in response to it. His reaction to this powerlessness is not to seek out more knowledge, but to seek out other humans. As Control travels across the coast in search of Ghost Bird, who has escaped the Southern Reach facility, the lights originating from the expanding Area X are gaining on him (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 327). Wondering about their purpose, or lack thereof, he seeks comfort in the familiarity of human voices on the radio, only to hear unintelligible voices and static. This act shows that Control is more concerned with companionship with other people than with knowledge when he finds himself in threatening situations that he does not understand. Unlike the biologist, he is drawn to the human rather than being driven by curiosity for science.

Later, inside Area X with Ghost Bird and the assistant director, a discussion about what drives Area X turns the idea of purpose, free will and consciousness around, generating questions of what is worthy of attention and curiosity, and to whom. Until this point, most of the focus of the Southern Reach trilogy has been on humans attaining knowledge and protecting themselves from Area X. Area X is deemed as worthy of research by humans because of the impact it has had on humans. At this point in the story, though, Control is being introduced to the thought that an intelligent Area X could also be judging the worthiness of humanity (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 80). Because of the speculations that Area X functions at a completely different, likely superior level of consciousness than humans, this thought is sinister to Control. He is threatened by the idea that Area X sees humanity as something so primitive as to not be worthy of its attention, a tiny, almost insignificant annoyance: "*Is there something in the corner of your eye that you can't get out?*" (p. 80, italics in original). Area X is a curiosity to humans because of its impact on them, but as Control is realising humans have little to no impact on Area X, leaving them useless and certainly of no threat. And as has been established earlier, Control's valuation of knowledge is limited to whether it can be used or acted upon in some way. By applying his own valuations to Area X he realises that for Area X, there can be no real knowledge or use gained from his existence, rendering *himself* worthless.

> *This machine or creature or some combination of both that can manipulate molecules, that can store energy where it will, that can hide the bulk of its intent and its machinations from us. That lives with angels within it and with the vestige of its own terroir, the hints of its homeland, to which it can never return because it no longer exists.* […] And even in that hurting somehow Control knew that pain was incidental, not the Crawler's intent, but nothing about language, about communication, could bridge the divide between human beings and Area X. That anything approaching a similarity would be some subset of Area X functioning at its most primitive level. A blade of grass. A blue heron. A velvet ant. (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 310-311, italics in original)

3.3.2. Truth, deception and power

The value of truth is important to the characters in The Southern Reach, but Area X is shrouded in mystery. Searching for the truth in and about Area X is a reoccurring plot element, although the truth is ever fleeting due to the changing nature of the area. Moreover, the agency that the characters are working for functions as another layer of obfuscation. Because of this, reoccurring questions are what the truth is, to whom it belongs, and what power it may bring. The characters, however, have different loyalties. The hunt for truth and controlling the truth therefore becomes antagonistic in nature. In this section I explore the biologist's and Control's relationship to truth, deception and power and how it affects the criteria for their use of the words purpose and intent.

Biologist

The biologist's valuations of truth, deception and power are, as discussed in the chapter on border, more concerned with how they affect her ability to perform research and obtain knowledge while they also touch on the felt necessity to shield someone from uncomfortable truths. The valuation of deceit and power as tools to reach a 'higher' truth can also be traced in her use of the words purpose and intent and the context around that use, where her reaction to a possible change in the purpose of the expedition into Area X is central. The valuation of deceit as a way to soothe or protect does not come across in the language surrounding purpose and intent as it did with border.

After the biologist is infected by the spores in the walls of the tower and realises the level of hypnotic power that the psychologist exerts on the expedition members, she struggles with the choice to reveal that she has been infected and that the spores has made her immune to the psychologist's hypnotic suggestions (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 34). In her inner monologue the main focus of her anxiety is on confessing that she has become resistant to hypnosis, not on the infection itself. This reveals a lot about the biologist's value judgments that underscores the previous analysis of the concept of border. The biologist is not afraid of divulging that she

is infected because to her, the infection presents the expedition with an opportunity to examine a vital process in Area X up close. The need to deceive comes from making herself vulnerable to an examination of a personal, psychological nature. The use of the words "conspirator" and "confessing" in the context shows how she perceives herself and that she is very aware of how the others could perceive her if she told the truth. By revealing her knowledge about the "underlying conditioning hidden in our training" (p. 34), she would also be challenging the psychologist's position of power.

While there are few signs that the biologist sees power as valuable in and of itself, she does find it useful in allowing to decide the direction and purpose of the expedition. She feels resentful when thinking about how the psychologist has used her power over the expedition members' minds through hypnosis, but her focus is not on the feeling of being invaded, it is on the possible cover up of the expedition's true purpose:

> 'But why would the psychologist do that?' she asked me. 'We were going to all come down here in the morning anyway.' I felt as if I were observing the surveyor from a thousand miles away. 'I have no idea,' I said, 'but she has been hypnotizing all of us, and not just to give us peace of mind. Perhaps this expedition had a different purpose than what we were told.'. (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 63)

The biologist's suspicion towards the psychologist centres around this difference in purpose. As established earlier, the biologist is not unfamiliar with deceit and withholding truths if it is done to accommodate a truth that she considers to be more important. This necessitates an understanding that there *is* a higher truth to work towards, an understanding that has been made impossible to arrive at for the expedition members due to the psychologist's use of hypnosis. Where the biologist has been led to believe that they were working towards the same purpose – examine, analyse and gain knowledge about Area X – it is now revealed that that purpose might not be shared with the psychologist and, as an extension, the Southern Reach agency. This goes against the biologist's values as she respects deceit and misuse of power to obtain a higher truth, but the deceit she is uncovering now does the opposite; it obscures the truth and blocks the path to find it: "Always, as I looked back, I could see that there had been an almost willful intent to obscure, to misdirect, disguised as concern that we not be frightened or overwhelmed" (Vadnermeer, 2015a, p. 65)

Control

Control's valuation of truth, deceit and power are intermingled with his understanding and use of the words purpose and intent and is being affected both by his dealings with the Southern Reach agency and the government that controls it as well as the insecurity connected to the

unknown of Area X. His search for meaning and truth at the Southern Reach agency is halted by several layers of deception and distrust that permeates all of his interactions. His handler, known only as the Voice, is at the centre of this secrecy, hiding behind a voice-distorter on their phone calls. Although Control takes part in deception himself, he dislikes the complicated smokescreens set up by the Voice:

> He already imagined the Voice as a megalodon or other leviathan, situated in a think tank filled with salt water in some black-op basement so secret and labyrinthine that no one now remembered its purpose even as they continued to reenact its rituals. (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 53)

Control reimagines the Voice as an ancient monster so shrouded in secrecy that its purpose is forgotten. His association of monster to hidden purpose resonates in a valuation of power and truth as indications of superiority, to the degree where the rituals of submission to the monster is upheld because of a perceived authority and despite of a lack of purpose. This is also apparent in his relationship to the Voice, where Control is only given a bare minimum of information and expected to deliver all his findings and reflections in return. The information he gets is also questionable, which reinforces Control's weakness due to the Voice's power over the narrative.

The valuation Control displays of deception and control over the narrative as a means of power comes across throughout the trilogy, both in his use of the word border and the words purpose and intent. An example is when he is looking into the reasoning behind only allowing the expedition members to use their function, not their names, to address themselves and each other:

> It was to strip personality away for the starker purpose of instilling loyalty and to make conditioning and hypnosis more effective. Which, in turn, helped mitigate or stave off the effects of Area X – or, at least, that was the rationale Control had seen in the files. (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 113).

Denying someone their name as a part of their identity to instil loyalty and ensure the effect of hypnosis is a way to display power through controlling the narrative. The justifying factor, that it helped to 'stave off the effects of Area X', could signify a willingness or even keenness to protect the expedition members through this form of deception. However, the fact that Control adds on the last line makes it clear that he sees no good intention in the practice. While he does not necessarily condone the way in which the power is being used, he clearly sees the value of the power to control narrative this way, and how the control over narrative can reinforce power, even though the purpose stays hidden.

Control's valuation of power, truth and deceit is grounded in his own desire to hold such power. In the flashback mentioned in the border analysis, where a former girlfriend asks about

the purpose of his job, this is exemplified: "A girlfriend who had gleaned some sense of his job had once asked, 'Why do you do it?' – meaning why serve such a clandestine purpose, a purpose that could not be shared, could not be revealed" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 195). His interpretation of her question focuses on the nature of the purpose he serves. He uses the word 'clandestine' and notes that the purpose can't be shared or revealed. This gives the purpose, and the act of hiding it, value by making it special and important, and if Control's purpose is valuable, it gives Control power. Again, the link between deceit, control over the truth and power is made, reinforcing the interpretation that Control values power and being in command of the narrative.

The need to have power, know the truth and be in control of deceit makes Control vulnerable. This can be seen in the interactions with the Voice, like the one mentioned here, in his understanding of and reflections around Area X and in his dealings with characters that are not willing to submit themselves to him. One of those characters is Ghost Bird, who appears as an enigma to Control. He is not able to break her down and understand her and her purpose, despite an earnest desire and effort to communicate. Their separate approaches to each other and to Area X, combined with different value judgments and criteria behind their language use involving purpose makes it difficult for them to understand each other. As brought up earlier, Moi presents two options when faced with a misunderstanding in language and values. One is to examine the language to uncover what value judgments have been made that resulted in that choice of words and phrasing, while the other is to simply live with the misunderstanding (Moi, 2017, p. 225). Control has tried to examine Ghost Bird's language for criteria and failed, only to be left with the other choice Moi offers, to live with the disagreement in judgement. Due to the degree of this difficulty it permeates their relationship and affects all their decisions. Inside Area X Control finds himself in a place he does not understand with a person who's value judgments he is unable to understand or agree with, but who's judgments he is forced to follow because of her superiority in knowledge and thus power. "Lying there on his side, he could see the lighthouse in the distance. But as if she could tell his intent, Ghost Bird said, 'We're not going there. We're going to the island.' And just like that, he'd lost control" (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 76).

3.3.3. Safety, threat and protection

The uncertainty and danger associated with the mystery of Area X comes across in the

language of the two main characters. In this section I explore the biologist's and Control's relationship with regards to safety, threat and protection, and how it evolve/devolve throughout the books. Both characters are shown to consider how safety and threat is affected by familiarity and vagueness, and they find themselves in situations where their valuations are tested. Nevertheless, the difference between the value systems of Control and the biologist are again clear, adding to the overall negotiation of values in the series.

Biologist

In her use of the words purpose and intent, the biologist reveals some of her values regarding safety, threat and protection. It is revealed that she perceives the known as safe and the unknown as threatening and that a sense of camaraderie and purpose is reassuring when fear breaches the surface. When the expedition members enter Area X, their stress levels are greatly affected by their new surroundings and the insecurity surrounding their mission. Additionally, they have been stripped of their names and are dissuaded from talking about anything personal, which makes it difficult to acquaint themselves with each other. Their relief when they recognise the familiar structure of a lighthouse is therefore understandable:

> In fact, the surveyor and anthropologist had both expressed a kind of *relief* when they had seen the lighthouse. Its appearance on both the map and in reality reassured them, anchored them. Being familiar with its function further reassured them. With the tower, we know none of these things. We could not intuit its full outline. We had no sense of its purpose. And now that we had begun to descend into it, the tower *still* failed to reveal the measurements of the 'top' of the tower, but those numbers meant nothing, had no wider context. Without context, clinging to those numbers was a form of madness. (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 21, italics original)

We see here that the biologist links relief, reassurance, anchoring and familiarity in the context of the lighthouse. The known offers a sense of safety and protection that the other expedition members relish. On the other hand, the opposite can be said of the tower. It is vague, offers no sense of purpose and stands without context which makes it seem threatening in its obscurity.

The pronouns in this section reveal how the biologist positions herself with regard to the safety of the lighthouse and the threat of the tower. When she addresses the feelings of relief and familiarity brought forward by the lighthouse she focuses on the surveyor's and anthropologist's perceptions, using the pronouns 'them' and 'they'. The biologist does not include herself in those depictions which indicates that she does not share these feelings towards the structure. While the known and familiar has value as a point of safety and protection to her colleagues, the biologist does not share those value judgments. The wording

in the second part of the sections is different. Here, the biologist uses the pronoun 'we', aligning herself with her colleagues' valuation of the unknown as threatening. The sense of threat makes the biologist search for camaraderie in her colleagues, stating that

> Even though no threat had revealed itself, it seemed important to eliminate any possible moment of silence. As if somehow the blankness of the walls fed off of silence, and that something might appear in the spaces between our words if we were not careful. (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 21)

Filling the spaces between their words implies a method of ensuring a sense of safety and protection through closeness to other humans. By sharing language they might be able to offer each other reassurance in their shared perceptions of their experiences, finding strength in each other through familiarity. In a Cavellian sense, what is happening is the biologist's need to test the validity of her understanding of the world through language, hoping that her colleagues understand it the same way. If that is the case, her value judgments are shared which would affirm the threat of the unknown as well as provide emotional reassurance in community.

This community is broken apart when the biologist realises that the psychologist is using hypnotic commands on them, strengthening the perception of threat and lessening the companionship felt in being human together. By interfering with the biologist's idea of purpose in the expedition, the psychologist shifts the balance, leading to the biologist becoming "estranged from the expedition and its purpose" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 34). This reveals that however significant her valuation of safety in camaraderie she values her own purpose more. And as have been discussed earlier, the biologist finds purpose in her curiosity and search for knowledge. Again, it is revealed that knowledge takes precedence for the biologist, this time over the safety and protection that bonding with other humans can offer.

When the psychologist reveals the possibility of a different purpose for the expedition than what the biologist sees as important, it generates insecurity, anger and fear in the biologist. Without a mutual purpose, the path forward is less obvious as a team and the biologist is forced to consider which direction to take and whether to stay with the team despite a change in purpose or follow her own path despite the lack of protection and comfort in the other expedition members. Her own sense of purpose wins, but she is constantly having to make new evaluations of what ground her purpose stands on. After re-entering Area X as Ghost Bird she is able to let go of the need to have a meaningful purpose, finding comfort in patterns and a sense of inevitability:

> The prow of the boat had a blunt pragmatism to it that, set against all of that light, seemed serious to

> Ghost Bird, as if what they were doing had substance. Patterns could suffice as purpose, and the synchronicity of their rowing reassured her. They were *meant* to be rowing toward the island – to be here, in this place. (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 111, italics in original)

The anxieties she has had surrounding the why and how of Area X and her role in it is set aside, shifting the focus from a purpose of thought to a purpose of patterns and intuition.

Control

Like the expedition members, Control also finds reassurance and hope in the lighthouse. Reflecting on its purpose he draws up a line between safety and threat with the lighthouse as a centre point. "He returned to the lighthouse, based on what Grace had told him. What was the purpose of a lighthouse? To warn of danger, to guide coastal vessels, and to provide landfall for ships" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 284). The man-made structure is viewed as a place of safety and protection, guarding against any dangers and threat that can befall travellers on the coast. Control's attention to these qualities of a lighthouse shows that he judges safety and protection as important and that the lighthouse symbolises this to him. This is especially interesting in the context that the lighthouse is the *only* man-made structure left inside Area X. Where all other traces of human interference have rotted into the ground without a trace, the lighthouse is left as a beacon of safety, protection and hope to anyone who sees it and recognises its purpose.

The lighthouse is also a very concrete and specific thing, which in itself offers reassurance. As discussed in the previous part from the biologist's perspective, safety can be perceived in the known and familiar. Where the lighthouse is a tangible symbol of safety, the threat of Area X is vague, which adds to its perceived danger. Once it is rephrased into something more concrete, Control is able to let go of some of the hopelessness he has felt in dealing with a threat that cannot be discerned:

> 'We think in terms of machines, not animals. The enemy doesn't acknowledge machines.' He liked the word *enemy* – it crystallized and focused his attention more than 'Area X.' Area X was just a phenomenon visited upon humanity, like a weather event, but an *enemy* created intent and focus. (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 80, italics in original)

Control is pointing out how wording can affect ones understanding of a situation, creating a direction for his anger and fear by making the vague threat into a more tangible enemy that he ascribes intent and focus. This again builds up under the argument that Control values the unknown as threatening and scary, while the known is valued as safe and protective, even if it constitutes danger. Both are worth paying attention to for Control, but for different reasons.

Of course, this feeling of bolstered hope and security is soon taken away from him when it is pointed out that the likely superiority and intricacy of Area X might perceive humanity as insignificant, garnering the least possible attention.

Control's need for specificity in order to feel somewhat safe is present at several points in the trilogy, affirming that he is not able to change his valuations despite an upheaval in his surroundings.

> 'The critical question,' Grace said, 'is what is the *purpose* of this organism or organisms. And how do we survive.' 'We know it's purpose,' Control said, 'Which is to kill us, to transform us, to get rid of us. Isn't that what we try to avoid thinking about? What the director, you" – pointing at Grace – 'and Cheney and all the rest had to keep suppressing? The thought that it just wants to kill us all.'. (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 189)

The need to give Area X a specific purpose shines through, a need Control thinks he shares with the other people involved. He argues that "all the rest" had to suppress thoughts of Area X's purpose, which indicates that he is attempting to force an agreement in the judgment that Area X is a direct threat. In his understanding he is saying what everyone else is thinking, yet in the surrounding paragraph it is evident that he stands alone in this valuation. In an inner monologue Ghost Bird expresses that "Control wasn't prepared to receive this knowledge. It was eating him from the inside out. Maybe something specific would distract him" (VanderMeer, 2015c, p. 189). This shows that Control's evaluation of their situation with regards to threat and safety is not in line with Ghost Bird or the assistant director, Grace, which is grounded in his inability to fully comprehend the nuances of the unknown.

Control is drawn to the familiar when he is faced with a threat, either to get to a place of safety and protection or to make the threat less frightening and more manageable. The lighthouse constitutes safety because the purpose he gives it is a safe haven, which is grounded in a deep-rooted valuation of the man-made structure as a protector against the perils of the elements. Because of its familiarity in purpose and shape as well as its solidity it represents Control's value judgment that the known is safe and protective. On the other hand, Area X represents grave threat because of its impenetrable vagueness. Through his desperate attempts at forcing Area X into familiar boxes that he can relate to and understand it is revealed that Control is either not capable or unwilling to change or expand his already established understanding of purpose, threat, safety and protection. It is also revealed that he perceives these value judgments as shared with other humans, which might have been an accurate perception at one point or with different people than Grace and Ghost Bird, but that

is refuted by Ghost Birds contemplation that Control is still too fragile to take in the ambiguous obscurity of Area X and that he has yet to move beyond the need for specificity and familiarity.

4. Discussion: Ecocritical perspectives on criteria and values

The discussion will be used to examine the ecocritical stance of the trilogy, or rather, how the values unearthed in this analysis correspond to the axes in the NatCul Matrix. The main characters, the biologist and Control, and their value judgments have been shown to reveal value negotiations through their own evolvement and lack of evolvement but also in relation to each other. The juxtaposition between a knowledge-minded biologist who is self-contained and sceptical to other humans, but finds joy and closeness in nature and Control, who gravitates towards the human and is preoccupied with power and threat, makes for an interesting foundation to discuss the connection between nature and culture.

Area X is presented as a substitute for reclaimed nature that has reversed the damages done by human hands. At the same time Area X is shown as something alien, superior in its obscurity, perceived as a threat to the safety experienced in the familiarity of that which is made or understood by human civilisation. In this juxtaposition, the human relationship to nature is subverted, affecting the value negotiations and how they engage with different representations of nature.

I have chosen to present the discussion by first introducing how the NatCul Matrix is used as a method through which the material is ecocritically investigated. This short introduction is followed by the discussion which is organised by the axes in the matrix. The value judgments found in the analysis will first be examined by how they relate to the celebratory and problematising axis before I go on to look at it through the anthropocentric and ecocentric axis. I will not do a separate part on the techne dimension since that permeates the discussion as a whole.

4.1. The Nature in Culture matrix

In this chapter I use the NatCul matrix as a framework to discuss how representations of nature and culture are expressed in the value judgments revealed in the analysis. As discussed in the theory chapter, the NatCul matrix consists of two axes, the celebrating and problematising axis and the anthropocentric and ecocentric axis, enveloped by a techne dimension. In the following I am synthesising the arguments from the analysis and placing them within the matrix, discussing how the value judgments relate to celebratory and problematising representations of nature and culture, and anthropocentric and ecocentric representations of nature.

When placing the value judgments of the analysis into the matrix I also engage with the different understandings of nature extrapolated by Timothy Clark. I examine how nature is represented through the two characters Control and the biologist by looking at the understandings of nature that lies in the celebratory representations, the problematising representations and so on. This also entails a comparison of how the representations come across depending on the characters' valuations and differences in backgrounds, experiences and outlooks.

4.2. The celebratory and problematising axis

The Southern Reach trilogy's representation of nature and culture moves between the celebratory and problematising axis. This showcases how a literary work can embody a complexity in its portrayal of how humans can experience and value nature, as well as issues pertaining nature and nature crises.

In the biologist's language use, there is a stark sense of a celebratory relationship to nature. This comes across more in the depictions of her surroundings than directly in her value judgments. Nevertheless, it is indirectly evident that she has a close, celebratory relationship to nature, valuating it highly. The awe and curiosity with which she as a young girl follows the growth of an ecosystem in her parent's pool (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 43) sets the tone for how natural events are celebrated by the biologist, which continues in her repeated evaluations of the beauty of the nature around her whenever she is in a place that contains some sort of flora or fauna. The celebratory view on nature that the biologist represent through her language and value judgments can be understood through both of Clark's (2014) understandings of nature, that of nature as opposite to culture and that of nature as something all-encompassing. The biologist juxtaposes the value of nature with cultural interference at several points. This is shown directly through her language when she compares Area X with the 'human' side of the border:

> The air was so clean, so fresh, while the world back beyond the border was what it had always been during the modern era: dirty, tired, imperfect, winding down, at war with itself. Back there, I had always felt as if my work amounted to a futile attempt to save us from who we are. (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 30)

The biologist describes the untouched landscape in Area X as 'clean', and 'fresh', which is in line with the definition of the celebratory view on nature as pure. The pure nature is compared to the dirt and imperfections of civilisation, and so this passage also falls into the understanding of nature as opposite of culture. Thus, the celebratory view of nature as something pure is here represented as pure because it is unchanged by human hands. The juxtaposition of nature and culture in the celebratory view on nature is also indirectly present in the biologist's value judgments. When analysing how the biologist values safety, threat and protection, I found that her main concern was of the safety and protection of the untouched nature of Area X against the destructive forces of culture. This underpins how the celebratory view on nature represented in the series has aspects of a nature/culture dichotomy.

Another way of looking at the celebratory view on nature is through the understanding of nature as all-encompassing. This understanding is less present in the language use and value judgments of the biologist that I have focused on in this thesis, but it does make itself known in the changes that happen in valuations when Ghost Bird is created and examines her place with a changed body in both the human side of the border and in Area X. It is suggested that the changes that results in the transformation from the biologist to Ghost Bird is necessary for her to be able to assimilate into Area X. This does entail the physical changes, but since the assistant director, Grace, is also able to coexist with Area X together with Ghost Bird, the change in mentality might be more influential. As brought up in the border-analysis, when reflecting on her interaction with the psychologist where the psychologist claims that the biologist has "*changed sides*", Ghost Bird thinks that she "could be persuaded" (VanderMeer, 2015s, p. 192). Later, in the purpose-analysis pertaining science, curiosity and knowledge, Ghost Bird is shown to have shifted her values completely to be nature-centred and in doing so she is distancing herself from the idea that she, a human, is other than nature. As such, Ghost Bird is representing an understanding of nature where humans, namely those that have exhibited an ability to assimilate their mentality to Area X, can be part of an ecosystem where the all-encompassing nature is valued in its holistic purity.

While to a far lesser degree, Control also represents a celebratory view on nature, although the value judgments present in this material only briefly shows him representing a celebratory view on nature in line with the understanding that stresses the difference between nature and culture. The incident that depicts this most clearly is brought up when analysing the value judgments regarding safety, threat and protection revealed through the language use in the context of intent and purpose. Control is describing his surroundings when on a run close to the border:

> It wasn't true wilderness, was comfortingly close to civilization, but existed just enough apart to create a boundary. This was what most people wanted: to be *close to* but not *part of*. They didn't want the fearful unknown 'pristine wilderness.' They didn't want a soulless artificial life, either. (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 81, italics in original)

As emphasized in the analysis, the separation of pristine wilderness and the soulless artifice of civilisation implies a valuation of wilderness as something soulful and real. This is consistent with how a celebratory view on nature focuses on the pure from contamination, but also stresses the incompatibility of the pristine wilderness and "most people".

The lack of evidence that Control does not have a celebratory view on nature that is compatible with an understanding of nature as all-encompassing is interesting when it is compared to Ghost Bird's development. Because Ghost Bird is able to see humans as part of a larger ecology, Ghost Bird is able to adapt and find her place in the new world constituted by Area X. This is not the case for Control. His view on nature largely remains the same, based on the separation of the natural from the human, which results in him not being able to consolidate his position when Area X expands and takes over the world as he knows it.

On the other pole of the axis is a problematising view on nature. The biologist's strongly positive valuation of nature is pushed heavily in the way she problematises human interference into ecosystems and landscapes. She repeatedly uses words and phrases such as 'untouched landscape' in conjunction with celebratory descriptions of the nature around her, connoting that human interference lessens the beauty and fascination of flora and fauna. This problematisation of human interference manifests through subtexts and indirect language, but it is also stated outright in several instances, leaving no doubt as to the biologist's position in the ecocritical landscape. The biologist's criticism of the destructive behaviour of humans is presented right at the start of the first book, where she juxtaposes the "untroubled landscape" of Area X with the rusted remains of the equipment and housing of precious expeditions (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 3). This instance is brought up in the analysis on border and the themes safety, threat and protectionism which in the biologist's case focuses on how threat and safety is valued based on your relationship to nature and culture. The value negotiation taking place between the biologist and her colleague is based in their valuations of threat. I argue that where the colleague shows a strong valuations towards the human representing safety and the unknown of Area X and the nature there representing a threat, the biologist's valuation is opposite, where the threat lies in the human and how it can affect her sanctuary that is nature.

In this value negotiation, the premise that culture and nature are divided is central, but it is also questioned. The colleagues strong fear of the unknown nature represented by Area X undoubtedly sets the familiar of the human apart from nature. However, the biologist's view can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, the biologist's problematisation of the adverse effects humans can have on nature is consistent with the antagonistic qualities assigned to culture in the understanding of culture as opposite of nature. On the other hand, the biologist positions herself as an ally to nature. This makes the negotiation more nuanced,

opening up to an understanding that *some* culture, or *some* humans are destructive to nature, thus garnering a separation in the way of thinking about nature and culture, while others, like Ghost Bird, can adapt to ways of living in an ecosystem without separating themselves from the natural.

This nuance in the way of problematising nature is taking the problems of human interference and turning towards a more solution-focused mindset. As Ulstein (2017) argues, "the strange semantics of Area X articulates a new, weird reality, suggesting that words, language, and articulation can perform a similar shift in thinking about the world". In The Southern Reach trilogy, the biologist represents the power of such a shift, showing that an openness to engage with new phenomenon and ways of thinking and speaking about the world creates opportunities to adapt and perhaps even thrive in conditions beyond the limits of our imaginations. By going through this transformation, the biologist/Ghost Bird shifts the focus from problematising the relationship between culture and nature to a solution centred view consistent with an understanding of nature where everything, including humans, is part of one ecology where mindful and respectful humans coexist with nature.

Examining Control's use of language concerning *border*, *intent* and *purpose* and how it represents a problematising view on nature, a completely different understanding of nature comes to light. This is evident in Control's valuation of threat in the unknown and safety in the familiar, where nature is being presented as a threat to culture. Control's reaction and attitude towards the pristine wilderness of Area X is coloured by fear. To him, untroubled landscapes are characterised by the fact that they have not been, and perhaps can not be, controlled by humans, a perception that is strengthened when it is revealed that the border around Area X is expanding, intruding on human domain. Since Control has been shown to value power and superiority highly, a loss of power is particularly unsettling to him. Control experiences that the unchartered wilderness holds a power over him through the feelings of cosmic fear that results in difficulties in differentiating between real and imagined and further drives the separation between nature and culture by heightening the sense of threat nature triggers in him.

Thus, the way in which Control's valuations plays into representation of nature that problematise nature as a threat to culture functions as a counterpoint to both of the views on nature found in the biologist's value judgments. This facet of the ongoing value negotiation in

the trilogy adds an important perspective that ensures that the ethical considerations of the story is not one-sided. Control's value negotiations and the entrancing way in which his experiences of fear and madness stemming from the mysterious pristine wilderness is depicted makes the reader aware of the different backgrounds people have that can affect how they react to the immensity of the change that might be demanded when trying to understand and find solutions to problems and situations at the limit of their understanding.

Overall, the tone of the Southern Reach trilogy errs on the side of a problematisation of the negative impact that culture has on nature, with the value negotiations present in the language of the biologist and Control showing how a human-centred use of the words *border*, *purpose* and *intent* that conceals criteria focused on superiority in power and knowledge, threats in the unknown and protection in the human is incompatible to a way of living and understanding the world that does not put undue pressures on ecosystems or values humans over nature. However, the value negotiations also present another way of understanding nature, where culture and humanity are part of a harmonious ecology, mindful of their place in the ecosystem and impact on the nature they are a part of. This side of the value negotiations in the Southern Reach trilogy seems to confirm Ulstein's (2017) argument that "(New) weird narrative lays bare and challenges the limits of imagination, and explores how to expand, transform, and evolve beyond those limits".

4.3. The anthropocentric and ecocentric axis

On the anthropocentric pole of the axis, humans and human culture is seen as superior, where nature is valued through its function and usefulness with regards to humans (Quinn et.al., 2015, p. 894). In the Southern Reach trilogy, this understanding of the world is most clearly represented through Control's use of language and his value judgments. His valuation of science and knowledge as something that needs to be useful in order to have value resonates with an anthropocentric view on nature. The aimless research into Area X shocks and frustrates him because the responsibility he feels over the results and *usefulness* of the research makes him consider the possible adverse effects the research can have. So, in the valuation of knowledge and science as something useful there is also a possibility that the scientific probing can be detrimental in some way. Nevertheless, when considering the adverse effects of careless scientific conduct into Area X that are worth considering, Control's focus is on the threat that can be inadvertently triggered in Area X. This means that he puts human needs and safety first. Control never considers the impact that the research can have on the ecology of Area X. For example, while he is ostensibly getting acquainted with the scientific theories and findings, he is constantly drawn to the humans behind the science, attempting to unearth their thoughts and purposes instead of understanding their research.

Another aspect of Control's value judgments that affects the representation of nature in a way consistent with an anthropocentric approach is his valuation of power. The analysis on values pertaining truth, deception and power looking at both *border*, *purpose* and *intent* show a self-centredness in the way Control uses these words, witnessing of high valuation of power and how it grants him a sense of superiority. This is seen in the examples that are brought up in the analysis of his relations with a former girlfriend, with the Voice and with Ghost Bird. Linking this valuation of power as a form of superiority to the concept of anthropocene it becomes a metaphor for the ego-centric in human dealings with nature. An anthropocentric view is characterised by a sense of human superiority, which is evident in Control's complete lack of regard of the natural, exemplified here by his valuation of power. However, as stated in the analysis, Control does show tendencies to change his value judgments regarding power. As he gets better acquainted with Area X and his responsibilities in the Southern Reach Agency the weight of this responsibility starts to overshadow the feelings of superiority. Nevertheless, when he is pushed further into vulnerability by the level of obscurity in Area X taking away the power over his own mind he reverts back to his old valuations, regressing the

progress made in his internal value negotiations.

The value judgments read completely opposite when it comes to the biologist. Where Control gravitates towards the human, the biologist sets up strict boundaries against other humans while finding company in nature. Despite this, the biologist also presents some tendencies to the anthropocentric, although she displays an acute awareness of her own and other's anthropocentrism that reminds the reader to be aware of the way nature is represented and how that representation is influenced by the human mind. One such instance is when she catches herself making assumptions about the purpose and intent of the Crawler, an entity she knows next to nothing about:

> There were too many variables, not enough data, and I was making some base assumptions that might not be true. For one thing, in all of this I assumed that neither Crawler nor Tower was intelligent, in the sense of *possessing free will*. (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 92-93, italics in original)

As brought up in the analysis, this passage shows how the biologist has an instrumental approach to her research, including any non-human entities. Even so, she does remark on the anthropocentrism of this approach, showing awareness of her relationship to nature.

The biologist again draws the reader's attention to the anthropocentric after she has been 'processed' by the Crawler on her second descent into the tower. She wonders about the effect the countless expeditions sent into Area X has had not just on the physical landscape, but on the way the humans perceive that landscape: "Imagine that this communication sometimes lends a sense of the uncanny to the landscape because of the narcissism of our human gaze, but that it is just part of the natural world here" (VanderMeer, 2015a, p. 191). This reflection is brought up in the context around the use of the word border and shows how the biologist's valuations regarding science, knowledge and curiosity evolves with her own transformation. Although she has previously been revealed to have a very strong valuation of science and curiosity, to the point where it overshadows the valuations of her own safety as well as her integrity regarding truth and deception, in this passage she engages with her own and the Southern Reach agency's anthropocentric approaches to science. In doing so, she puts a critical light on the scientific practices' anthropocentric narcissism, demanding awareness of how the human gaze can affect nature and representations of nature.

On the opposite side of the axis, the ecocentric approach to nature focuses on the intrinsic value of all things, not placing the human in a hierarchy above animals, plants and other parts

of an ecology. In Control, this approach to nature is first and foremost represented through his almost fanatical interest in the theory of 'terroir' presented to him by Whitby, one of the more eccentric scientists at the Southern Reach agency. Terroir is explained to be "the sum of the effects of a localized environment" (VanderMeer, 2015b, p. 131), and Control first understands it as a revolutionary way to approach Area X: "So you mean you would study everything about the history – natural and human – of that stretch of coast, in addition to all other elements? And that you might – you just might – find an answer in that confluence?" (p. 131). This way of thinking about Area X takes into account the entire ecology of the place, but the way they speak about is neither particularly anthropocentric nor ecocentric. The ecocentric aspect of Control's dealing with terroir comes in the passage that is brought up in the analysis, where he considers the limits of human understanding, even in such a comprehensive theory as terroir. Here, he acknowledges that the ecology of Area X, functioning as a metaphor for nature, is too complex for humans to fully understand it, and therefore control it, which means that nature must have some sort of intrinsic value separated from human needs and understandings.

Referencing the same passage, in the analysis I also point out how the recognition of the limits of human knowledge and understanding triggers a deep frustration in Control which I argue stems from his valuation of knowledge based on its usefulness. In extension, this suggests that while this passage shows how Control acknowledges the existence of an ecocentric viewpoint, his values does not necessarily coincide with such a viewpoint. Since Control values knowledge only through its usefulness, it is not a stretch to surmise that he does not grant intrinsic value to natural phenomena, at least not when it is combined with the lack of attention Control has for nature and his abundance of attention towards the human. Turning to the context around his use of the words *purpose* and *intent*, the analysis reveals how the concept of purpose and the concept of power are interconnected in Control's valuation. Having a purpose is equated with having power, which to Control means that purpose is what gives something value. With regards to ecocentrism, the question then becomes what that means with respects to the idea of intrinsic value.

The soft understanding of ecocentrism fronted by Arne Naess allows humans a form of self-preservation when their vital needs are threatened by natural phenomena because this self-preservation is seen as a natural instinct much in the same way that Control sees an ant walking with purpose towards greenery as a possible act of instinct. However, because of

human's self-awareness there arises a need to judge the vital needs' value against the impact that the reaction can have on the ecology. As such, a valuation of purpose becomes problematic because it can skew the judgment towards what is perceived to have purpose. Due to the inherent anthropocentrism in human's perception of purpose and lack of ability to truly ascertain the purpose of other entities, this skews the judgment in favour of the human. Judging the proportionality of human impact on ecosystems based on purpose also distorts the idea of intrinsic value. If value is only given to that which has purpose, is that value truly inherent?

This is also connected to Control's reflection on what or who is worthy of curiosity, originating in a discussion of the purpose of Area X. In the analysis I point out how the human interest in Area X is due to the impact that Area X has had on human civilisation. This representation of value connected to humans is negotiated when Control is forced to consider if human civilisation is worthy of Area X's attention. turning the idea of intrinsic value around on the human, subverting anthropocentrism. Taking the notion of worth to a level at the limits of human understanding by questioning the intrinsic value of humans to an entity that operates on a completely different plane of consciousness compels the reader to consider the other and step out of their inherent anthropocentrism. This negotiation is completed when Ghost Bird decides to move through the Crawler and is taken up into the ecosystem of Area X, becoming part of it. This action shows how she is willing to take the last step into ecocentrism, detaching herself from the anthropocentric.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Analysis

In the analysis chapter of this thesis I work to answer the first research question that ask what value judgments can be revealed in the language use of the main characters in the Southern Reach trilogy. I find that the main characters' value judgments differ greatly within the same themes, but that they usually feature different aspects of similar issues. Where the biologist's value judgments regarding science, knowledge and curiosity are based in a strong sense of value in these three concepts, Control needs for them to be useful in order to see them as valuable. Both characters evolve in their valuations over the span of the trilogy. Transforming into Ghost Bird and realising the adverse effect that a singular focus on science can have, her valuation of knowledge dulls considerably. Control is challenged in his valuation of the usefulness of knowledge, but eventually falls back on his original value judgments without adapting to his new circumstances.

With truth, deception and power I find that neither the biologist nor Control are strangers to deception in order to uncover a truth more important than the one hidden in the deception. However, deception, truth and power are for the biologist only valued to the degree that it brings her closer to scientific knowledge, while Control finds value in power itself and the superiority that control over narrative grants him over other people and situations, intermingled with a heavy sense of responsibility.

The analysis of the themes safety, threat and protection finds the character's valuations negotiating whether the incomprehensibility of nature presents a threat to the human or the human is the greater threat to nature. Not surprisingly, the biologist shows a preference for nature. Control, on the other hand, finds great comfort in the familiarity of the human and is not able to process the vagueness and insecurities that Area X represents, making him experience it as a growing threat as it strips him of the power over his own mind.

5.2. Discussion

The discussion is devoted to answering the second research question, that asks how representations of nature and culture expressed in the value judgments revealed in the Southern Reach trilogy. I find that all sides of the Nature in Culture Matrix are represented

through the value judgments present in the language of the two main characters in the Southern Reach trilogy.

The trilogy celebrates nature by holding it up as a pure counterpoint tot the dirty, warring culture, reflecting an understanding of nature as the opposite of culture. However, another side of the celebratory pole is also represented, allowing a mindful humanity a place in a holistic ecology. On the problematising pole, we find a widespread problematisation of the negative impact humans can have on nature, primarily represented through the biologist's value judgments, but also finding solid ground in Control's valuations. Nevertheless, Control's valuation of threat in the unknown also brings up an understanding of nature that problematises how nature can be a problem to human safety. However, this view does not gain significant traction in the overall value negotiations of the trilogy, leaving the problematising focus on human culpability.

The discussion also places the trilogy's value negotiations into the anthropocentric and ecocentric axis of the matrix. The spectrum between human superiority on the anthropocentric pole and intrinsic value in all things on the ecocentric pole is discussed. I find that the value negotiations in the trilogy moves between representations on all stages of this spectrum, but that it culminates on the ecocentric side.

Overall, the discussion highlights the nuances in the representations of culture in the Southern Reach trilogy. The juxtaposition between the bureaucratic, human-centred Control and the science-minded nature champion biologist produces true negotiations of values that challenges the reader take on new perspectives and examine how their own values might hold up when their understanding of the world is brought to the limits of imagination.

5.3. Future Research

There are other ways to approach the Southern Reach trilogy and the language of new weird than I have done here. The grammatical investigation is highly subjective to the reader, so different readers can find different aspects of the value negotiations embedded in the language of the trilogy. One way to approach the material differently is seeing what other words or phrases triggers feelings of confusion or puzzlement. For example, you could go straight to the source and examine the use of the words *nature* and *human*, which from a rough read

through seems to have the potential to yield some interesting analyses that takes the techne dimension into greater account than the analysis in this thesis. Another possibility is to take a step further in the connection between the transformative language concerning wilderness and civilisation and the (new) weird genre by combining the discussion on how nature and culture is represented with genre theory. A point worth considering is the attention the Southern Reach trilogy has had in scholarly writing in the confluence between horror and ecocriticism. While there are always new and interesting angles to be considered and different scholars bring different lenses to their readings, it would be rewarding to see a broader collection of new weird-authors represented in this field.

Literature

Primary texts

VanderMeer, J. (2015a). *Annihilation*. London: Fourth Estate.

VanderMeer, J. (2015b). *Authority*. London: Fourth Estate.

VanderMeer, J. (2015c). *Acceptance*. London: Fourth Estate.

Secondary sources

Aristotle (1997). *Aristotle's Poetics: Translated and with a commentary by George Whalley*. (G. Whalley, & J. Baxter, Trans. and Ed.). Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Cavell, S. (1999). *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cavell, S. (2002). *Must We Mean What We Say? Updated edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge Philosophy Classics.

Clark, T. (2014). Nature, Post Nature. In L. Westling (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment* (pp. 75-89). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Currie, G. (2016). Does Fiction Make Us Less Empathic? *Teorema: Revista Internacional De Filosofía, 35*(3), 47-68. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/44077411.

Dillon, S. (2018). The Horror of the Anthropocene. *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings* 6(1), https://doi.org/10.16995/c21.38.

Garrard, G. (2012a). *Ecocriticism*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Garrard, G. (2012b). *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Glotfelty, C. (2015). Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis. In K. Hiltner (Ed.), *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader* (pp. 120-133). Abingdon: Routledge.

Goga, N., Guanio-Uluru, L. H., Hallås, O. & Nyrnes, A. (2018). *Ecocritical Perspectives on Children's Texts and Cultures: Nordic Dialogues*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90497-9.

Kallestad, Å. H. (2012). Verdimøter I Hilde Hagerups roman *Bølgebiter*. *Edda* 12(3), 231-242. Retrieved from https://www.idunn.no/edda/2012/03/verdimoeter_i_hilde_hagerups_roman_boelgebiter.

Mellor, L. (2014). The Lure of Wilderness. In L. Westling (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment* (pp. 104-117). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Moi, T. (2011). The Adventure of Reading: Literature and Philosophy, Cavell and Beauvoir. *Literature and Theology, 25*(2), 125-140.

Moi, T. (2017). *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies After Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Naess, A. & Rothenberg, D. (1989). *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. (2016). *Litteraturens etikk.* Oslo: Pax forlag.

Plato (2000). *The Republic.* (B. Jowett, Trans.). Retrieved from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm.

Quinn, F., Castéra, J., & Clément, P. (2015). Teachers' Conceptions of the Environment: Anthropocentrism, Nonanthropocentrism, Anthropomorphism and the Place of Nature. Environmental Education Research . https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2015.1076767.

Soper, K. (2015). The Discourses of Nature. In K. Hiltner (Ed.), *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader* (pp. 267-277). Abingdon: Routledge.

Strombeck A. (2020). Inhuman Writing in Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach Trilogy. *Textual Practice*, 34(8), 1365 1382. https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2019.1583684.

Tabas, B. (2015). Dark Places: Ecology, Place, and the Metaphysics of Horror Fiction. *Miranda*, 11, https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.7012.

Ulstein, G. (2017). Brave New Weird: Anthropocene Monsters in Jeff VanderMeer's "The Southern Reach". *Concentric – Literary and Cultural Studies*, 43(1), 71-96, https://www.researchgate.net/deref/http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.6240%2Fconcentric.lit.2017.43.1.05.

Ulstein, G. (2019). 'Age of Lovecraft'? —Anthropocene Monsters in (New) Weird Narrative. *Nordlit*, (42), 47–66. https://doi.org/10.7557/13.5004.

Øien, F. (2017). *Teaching environmental awareness through literature: an analysis of This Morning I Met a Whale* /[Bachelor's thesis/]. Western Norway University of Applied Sciences.