



Climate Fiction in Nordic Landscapes

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Abstract

This article analyses two climate fictions set in Nordic landscapes: Jostein Gaarder's *The World According to Anna* (2015) and *Memories of Water* (2014) by Emma Itäranta, both classed as young adult fiction. The article draws on ecocritical perspectives to examine how the developing conventions of cli-fi play out in a Nordic setting. It calls attention in particular to the importance of the cabin as a heterotopian space in Gaarder's novel, which is set in Norway, and to Itäranta's reliance on the green topos and the sanctuary topos to articulate her vision of climate change in a rural Finnish landscape.

Key words

Climate fiction, YA literature, Nordic landscape, the cabin as heterotopia, the green topos

This article analyses two climate fictions set in Nordic landscapes: Jostein Gaarder's *The World According to Anna* (2015)¹ and *Memories of Water* by Emma Itäranta (2014).² Both novels may be classed as young adult fictions. They were written by award-winning authors in a Nordic language and published in English translations, making them suitable texts around which to encourage a cross-regional dialogue on the genre of climate fiction, or cli-fi, as it is emerging for a young adult readership.

Placing the analysis of these two texts in relation to previous research on climate fiction, this article further draws on ecocritical perspectives to examine how the developing conventions of cli-fi play out in a Nordic

setting,³ emphasising Alice Curry's notion of «situated knowledges» (2013). The analysis shows that both novels seek to educate and engage their readers in climate change causes and effects through appeals to a sense of national identity by demonstrating how climate change alters local landscapes and, consequently, local cultural practices.

Climate fiction: a developing genre

In response to the scientific consensus that the global climate is becoming warmer due to human over-exploitation of natural resources, the emergent genre of cli-fi struggles to communicate the impact of these large-

scale changes in a way that is meaningful on a personal and cultural level. In an early⁴ book-length study, Adam Trexler points out that cli-fi requires the novel to «bring fact into dialogue with fiction» (2015, p. 29). He also notes that the Anthropocene⁵ challenges both the canonical novel and genre fiction: while it forces a reevaluation of the optimism of science fiction in relation to technology and the dependence of the suspense novels on fast cars and jets (2015, pp. 13–14), it also exposes the emphasis of canonical literature on self-reflexivity and formal innovation at the cost of reference to real-world issues (pp. 12–13). Criticism in the Anthropocene must consequently focus on literary qualities that have been underexamined in previous periods, Trexler holds, such as describing the disproportionate scale effects of climate change and the interpenetration between domestic and planetary scales (2015, p. 26). The novels analysed here both attempt such descriptions.

According to Trexler, in the representation of climate change, «the first hurdle faced by a novelist is to construct a fictional space where climate change presents itself as an immediate problem» (2015, p. 78). Lawrence Buell's formulation of the difference between «space», defined as a «geometrical and or topographical abstraction», and «place», defined as «space to which meaning has been ascribed» (2005, p. 63), is helpful here. Although they are abstractions, and thus «spaces», literary landscapes are also places, to which ascribed meaning frequently has congealed into cultural figures of thought: topoi. Identifying and examining literary topoi deployed in the two fictions under scrutiny, this article simultaneously acknowledges the point made by Curry that «A reading of nature as a discursive construct predicated on human value systems and language structures is in danger of obscuring the embodied and embedded reality of human-earth interaction and the materiality of the earth itself» (2013, p. 101). By being mindful of their local, Nordic context in the interpretation of these climate change

narratives, this article also focuses awareness on ways in which the construction and decoding of climate fiction depends on what Curry terms «situated knowledges»: that is, «an understanding of knowledge as emergent, subjective, and ecologically embedded» (2013, p. 101). Both these Nordic climate fictions, which take experiences of local landscapes as their point of departure, can be regarded as attempts to make use of both situated knowledges and common cultural topoi to depict predicted climate change effects for the young adult reader.

While young adult (YA) fiction is not a genre, the label is commonly used for books aimed at a young adult audience (Slettan, 2014, p. 9). The category is wide, with fuzzy boundaries, since many texts intended and marketed for young adult readers are crossover literature and thus read by young adults and adults alike. Rachel Falconer (2009) has noted that protagonists such as Lyra Belaqua in Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy and the protagonist of Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series share the features of having a physical age in the pre-teens while displaying a far more advanced mental age, thus catering to a crossover readership. Despite the difficulty in pinning down the category of YA literature, Svein Slettan argues that its main characteristic is that it represents «young adult experience» by taking on a «young adult perspective» (2014, p. 12, my translation). Both primary texts analysed here have young adult protagonists. Gaarder's novel employs third-person narration, while the narrative is mainly focalised through Anna, who turns sixteen in the course of the story. A didactic tendency⁶ further marks this text as intended for a younger readership. *Memory of Water* is narrated in first person by Noria, who is seventeen. Slettan argues that «the more immediate is the portrayal of youth experience, the closer adult fiction is to young adult fiction» (2014, p. 12, my translation). While Noria is close to adulthood, the first-person narration encourages immediacy, suggesting a categorisation as YA literature.

Discussion of YA climate fiction has so far been sporadically incorporated into a wider discussion of the dystopian and post-apocalyptic trends that have been prominent in YA fiction since the turn of the millennium (see for instance Hintz & Ostry, 2003; Bradford, Mallan, Stephens & McCallum, 2008; Basu, Broad & Hintz, 2013; Day, Green-Bar-teet & Montz, 2014). Alexa Weik Von Mossner (2013) has discussed Saci Lloyd's *The Carbon Diaries* along the axes of utopia / dystopia and in her examination of post-apocalyptic Anglo-American YA fiction in an ecofeminist perspective, Curry briefly discusses cli-fi, noting that in post-apocalyptic fiction, climate change is envisaged «as an immediate and devastating shattering of cultural norms» (2013, p. 18). This is not the case in the two Nordic climate fictions examined here, which develop more expanded temporal perspectives, making the changes depicted less abruptly dramatic.⁷

Since the novel as a literary form has evolved to represent human psychological processes, novelistic form is challenged when called upon to represent the more-than-human time scales of climate change effects. To date, a frequent solution to this challenge has been an emphasis on describing alterations of place. As Caren Irr notes: «setting is of crucial importance for cli-fi; endangered cities, islands and remote Arctic regions are common locations. Events of the genre often turn on a dramatic transformation in the setting, such as floods or the collapse of the food system» (2017, p. 2). A literary setting depends for its effects upon the reader's experience with real landscapes, since readers use cognitive schema, drawn from real-life experiences, to interpret literary scenes. Readers' use of schema allows authors to set a scene quickly without going into much detail, and to call «quiet attention» to departures from the norm (Gerrig & Egidio, 2003, pp. 40–1). This last form of reliance on reader schema is particularly prominent in cli-fi, which asks the reader to imagine landscapes altered by climate change,

often by relying on familiar schema to describe departures from the norm. In the novels examined here, Gaarder and Itäranta both draw on settings familiar to Nordic readers to demonstrate how climate change alters local landscapes. Thus, they adopt the strategy of much climate fiction: focusing on alterations of place to render visible the hyperobject⁸ of climate change.

Theorising fictional landscapes: ecocriticism and Northern European landscape topoi

The emphasis on place in climate fiction is not a novelty in the literary field. According to Jane Suzanne Carroll, a shift in literary perspective in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century «has refocused critical attention away from narrative structure or character and towards the geographical settings of texts» (Carroll, 2014, p. 1). The field of ecocriticism has been an influential force driving this shift and has discussed literary representations of natural landscapes at great length. In what might be described as three successive «waves», ecocritical emphasis has widened from an original focus on nature writing and Romantic poetry, via inclusion of urban landscapes and ecofeminism to an emphasis on local literatures (Slovic, 2010). Irr further links the third ecocritical wave to «an object-oriented ontology» (2017, p. 3), influenced by Morton (2013) and Donna Haraway (2016), who both argue for a shift in attention away from an anthropocentric perspective to a focus on the earth itself. While ecocriticism was «slow to engage with climate change», it is now «a central preoccupation» of this field of study (Trexler, 2015, p. 17).

Greg Garrard (2012) has traced the development of key ecocritical figures such as pollution, the pastoral, wilderness, apocalypse and dwelling. Taking a different approach, Carroll (2014) looks to cultural geography to illuminate her discussion of landscape in children's literature. She notes that «The interaction between geography and human cul-

ture transforms land into landscape» and that the «Human experience of territory – be it inhabited, viewed, remembered, or imagined – focalises and changes the nature of the site» (2014, p. 2). Discussing four literary topoi – the sanctuary topos, the green topos, the roadway topos and the lapsed topos – Carroll notes that global literatures have their own unique set of such topoi. She argues that while Virgil's classical texts are linked to Mediterranean landscapes, «medieval vernacular literature offers the first articulations of vernacular Northern European landscapes» (2014, p. 5). Consequently, she uses Anglo-Saxon and Northern European literature as a touchstone for her discussion of the representation of landscape in modern children's fantasy – thus drawing on the same source texts that inspired J. R. R. Tolkien in his creation of Middle-Earth (Shippey, 2003). This emphasis on Northern European and Nordic source texts makes Carroll's topoi relevant to this article, which will draw particularly on her descriptions of the green topos and the sanctuary topos in the analysis of *Memories of Water*. Attention to topoi remains useful when analysing landscape in contemporary cli-fi, since «The archive of climate fiction suggests that narrating climate change is highly dependent on existing cultural narratives» (Trexler, 2015, p. 118).

This article has a Nordic focus and the landscapes and cultural narratives explored in the recent anthology *Ecocritical Perspectives on Children's Texts and Cultures: Nordic Dialogues* (Goga, Guanio-Uluru, Hallås & Nyrnes, 2018) are thus highly relevant for the present discussion, although none of its contributions deals with climate fiction. This article thus breaks new ground in combining a discussion of two climate fictions aimed at young adult readers with an emphasis on Nordic landscapes. Importantly, a real-world setting is the basis for the imagined consequences of climate change in both the primary texts analysed in this article. While Trexler notes that «instead of focusing on wilderness or a pastoral landscape, the vast

majority of climate change novels are set in urban centres» (2015, p. 76), this does not hold true for the novels examined here (and the statement is slightly at odds with the importance Trexler elsewhere ascribes to polar tales (2015, p. 118)). *Anna* is set in rural Norway, with a remote mountain cabin as a significant locality. *Memories of Water* is set in a previously forested area in a future rural Finland, suggesting that urban centres are less significant in Nordic climate fictions than in the Anglo-American works analysed by Trexler (2015). In the following, the two novels are discussed individually, starting with *Anna*.

National romantic climate change

In *Anna*, Gaarder combines a realistic contemporary setting with narrative devices drawn from fantastic literature. The story's present is localised in the character of Anna, who lives in Norway in 2012. Anna has recurring dreams of experiencing life as her own granddaughter, Nova, much like Harry Potter has the capacity to experience the world through the mind of Voldemort in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (1997–2007). Nova holds Anna and her generation responsible for the accelerated species extinction of her own time.

Influenced by her dreams of Nova, Anna is moved to act to combat climate change and environmental degradation by establishing a local environmental group with her boyfriend, Jonas. Gaarder thus uses ties of family to expand the temporal scope of the story. The novel opens with the sentence: «On New Year's Eve, for as long as she could remember, the families in her village had gone up to the mountain pastures on a sleigh» (Gaarder, 2015, p. 1). In addition to the temporal scale it establishes, this introduction combines references to local custom (traveling by sleigh to mountain sheilings) with references to local climate (the snow on which the sleighs necessarily travel). In the same first

paragraph, the reader learns that «Sometimes a piste-basher was sent up in advance so that the horses wouldn't get stuck in loose snow» (ibid). This signals how, in Anna's Nordic location, masses of snow usually mark the event of New Year's Eve. Such pronounced seasonal changes, with snow covering the ground during winter, is a current feature of a Nordic climate. Several contributions to *Ecocritical Perspectives on Children's Texts and Cultures: Nordic Dialogues* (2018) mention or thematise snow and ice as features of the Nordic landscape. Analysing Frida Nilsson's Swedish fantasy novel *The Ice Sea Pirates* (2015), Nina Goga notes that «the ice-covered landscape that is portrayed may mean that the book is deeply rooted in a local Nordic, Arctic context» (2018, p. 68). Aslaug Nyrnes reads Maria Parr's *Astrid the Unstoppable* (2009) as a Nordic winter pastoral (2018, p. 82), where skiing and tobogganing foster the protagonist's relationship to the landscape. In her discussion of Finnish picturebooks, Kaisu Rättyä notes that «The northern landscape in the pictures is evoked by attributes that are particular and local, like mountain shapes and snowy hills in Lapland» (2018, p. 164), while Kirsti Pedersen Gurholt discusses the arctic adventures of the popular Norwegian TV series *The Wilderness Children*, many of which are traditional Nordic winter activities such as fishing on frozen lakes, skiing and dog-sledging (2018, p. 246). The opening sentence in *Anna* thus localises and anchors the narrative in a Norwegian rural tradition, establishing a cultural backdrop against which Anna's contemporary life and Nova's story from the future play themselves out. Climate change is signalled in the narrative by the fact that when Anna is ten, they must travel to the shieling by tractor, since there is no longer any snow on New Year's Eve.

In Norway, the shieling was a forerunner for the local tradition of spending leisure time at isolated cabins. Ellen Rees elaborates on the cultural register of cabins and shielings: «Probably every culture contains a

particularly significant type of built environment, a locus that takes on layers of meaning beyond its purely functional and aesthetic purposes. In Norway, that locus is the *hytte* or cabin» (Rees, 2014, p. 1). Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of «heterotopia,» Rees argues that in Norwegian culture, the cabin is one such Foucauldian type of social space «that functions on numerous registers simultaneously, and that has far more affective and social significance than it would appear to warrant on the surface» (2014, p. 2). The topos of the cabin, in the form of the shieling, is central to the value argument developed in relation to climate change in Gaarder's novel. Describing the historical roots of this figure in Norwegian literature, Rees notes:

Early on in the nineteenth century, a number of writers fixed on the shieling as a specifically national cultural manifestation. The lifestyle of the dairymaids who tended grazing animals and produced dairy products more or less in isolation at higher elevations during the summer months proved to be a rich source of nationalist iconography, combining as it did notions of independence and self-sufficiency with elements of the erotic and the supernatural (2014, pp. 3–4)

These early connotations of the cabin are activated in *Anna* as her family's shieling in the mountains is the locus for romantic meetings between Anna and Jonas, who ski from their separate valleys to meet up in the shieling, where they review articles about climate change⁹ and discuss how they can save 1001 plant and animal species from extinction.

The novel is quite specific when describing Anna's local landscape, detailing the species Anna encounters on her way. Among the plant species mentioned are dwarf birch, crowberry, alpine bearberry, alpine speedwell, cranberries, violet, heather, glacier buttercup and dwarf willow. Most of these are mountain species thriving in a cold cli-

mate, thus highlighting Anna's northern location. The rather detailed descriptions of the mountain flora reflect how Anna is grounded in her local environment, and also function to emphasise the novel's message about species extinction, since Nova later wanders the same paths, knowing that «much of the flora and fauna of the mountain are gone» (Gaarder, 2015, p. 117). While Jonas and Anna's meetings and their climate change deliberations make sense without situated knowledges of mountain skiing, of the local flora and fauna and of the cabin as a heterotopian space, Gaarder's choice of setting is particularly poignant to Norwegian readers, activating both local knowledge and central cultural figures.

The supernatural side of the cabin as a heterotopia is present in the fairy tale motif of *Arabian Nights*, signalled by the number 1001, the range of species Anna and Jonas seek to rescue. This motif is deployed to intertwine the level of the local and national romantic, symbolised by the shieling, with the global and international, thus demonstrating the reach of climate change. It is further developed when, in Anna's future, caravans of camels travel the mountain paths where Anna used to ski, and Nova befriends an (unnamed) Arabian boy who stays for convalescence in her grandmother Olla's house. The passing Arabs are climate refugees, fleeing from a Southern oil nation to a Northern one, and the boy pays for his stay with Aladdin's magical ring. Thus, Gaarder draws on literary and cultural icons to depict «the interpenetration between domestic and planetary scales» (Trexler 2015, p. 26) necessary to convey the effects of alterations in the global climate in a way that is culturally meaningful.

While the use of the *Arabian Nights* motif may open the text for an international readership, the cabin motif activates Norwegian situated knowledges and taps directly into the elegiac mood developed as Nova mourns species loss, net-surfing records of the past. According to Rees, «Nostalgia and a sense

of atavistic longing, a longing for an imagined past that never was, are key features of Norwegian conceptualizations of the cabin» (2014, pp. 4–5). Thus, through its emphasis on the cabin setting, Gaarder's novel caters to such a (situated, Norwegian) sense of romantic nostalgia.

Climate change under your skin

Environmental and cultural change is even more pronounced in Itäranta's *Memory of Water*, a dystopian narrative that raises questions of Nordic privilege and moral responsibility. It is set at an unspecified future date in rural Northern Finland, a setting identified through place names like Rovaniemi, Kuusamo and Kuoljärvi. Located near the Arctic Circle, the area is currently known for its long, cold and snowy winters and for extensive wilderness areas. Within the fiction, snow remains only as a memory recorded in books. The importance of having a sense of cultural memory is highlighted as the story's protagonist, Noria, habitually excavates the local rubbish heap with her friend Sanja in search of technical mementos from a bygone era. Their present culture appears to be under heavy influence from Chinese customs. Both the altered climate and this cultural shift are signalled by making Noria a tea master's apprentice, growing tea in her own garden.

The story's notion of privilege is developed through what Carroll (2014, p. 49) terms the green topos, which consists of gardens, farms and wilderness, all three of which are significant in Itäranta's novel. Tracing the green topos back to the «sheltered haven» of the locus amoenus of the classical tradition via the enclosed gardens and threatening forests of chivalric romance, Carroll argues that «its essential symbolic functions have remained stable from their earliest appearance» (p. 49). The symbolic function of the green topos is associated with «beauty [that] inspires the fear and knowledge of loss» (Wasserman, 1998, quoted in

Carroll, 2014, p. 50), a symbolism that is still active in the Western practice of graveyard burials in green spaces. The association of the garden with both innocence and a paradisiacal state, as well as with the loss of these, also owes its cultural force to the Biblical Eden.

The garden is delimited by boundaries, and «the fence defines the garden metaphysically as well, turning the garden into an exclusive zone of privilege and concealment, a private pleasance where the emphasis lies [...] on careful cultivation and choice» (Carroll, 2014, p. 52). In Itäranta's narrative, Noria's garden functions precisely as such a zone of privilege, a fertile green oasis set apart from the neighbourhood's «stooping gardens, brown like leather» (Itäranta, 2015, p. 192). The scorched environs around Noria's garden suggests a landscape transformed by rising temperatures and subsequent drought, in stark contrast to the present state of the local environment: Finland is known as «the land of a thousand lakes.»

In the story, the lush and contrastive fertility of Noria's garden is due to her access to a secret spring, hidden in a cave. The spring has been carefully guarded by a long line of ceremonial tea masters, of which Noria's father is one. Dying, he leaves Noria to negotiate this sacred privilege in a local community where people are perishing from hunger and thirst due to the rigorous control over available water resources exercised by the military establishment. Thus, Noria's position evokes the Nordic sense of privilege as countries that are relatively stable, peaceful and affluent in a global perspective. The question of whom to include in or exclude from such a privileged 'Eden' is one that has shaped the political debates in Europe in the wake of the contemporary refugee crisis. Arguably, the same question is at the heart of Donald Trump's desire to erect a wall along the Mexican border. If resources are limited, how far should hospitality extend? It is a question predicted to become increasingly pressing as the human population increases while agri-

culture is disrupted by altering weather patterns, creating waves of climate refugees. As the guardian of the secret spring, Noria faces this challenging dilemma. Left in charge of a spring that may run dry if over-taxed, she watches Sanja struggle to provide for her ailing family and ultimately lets her friend accompany her to the hidden water source. Shortly thereafter, the existence of the spring is common knowledge and Noria is singled out by the military and interned in her house, dying a few weeks later.

Enabling her to grow her own food, the garden and the spring are the pillars of Noria's subsistence, along with the money and favours she receives as the master of ritual tea ceremonies, conducted in an especially designated teahouse in a corner of her garden. Thus, another aspect of the green topos, that of the farm, is active in Itäranta's story. Discussing the representation of the farm, Carroll notes that in medieval representations «the farm is a place of constant struggle against vermin, weeds, weather, and disease» that is «threatened by the entire universe» (2014, p. 60). While Noria's own garden is more of an idyll, the atmosphere of the surrounding neighbourhood, pressing against her garden's borders, recalls these historical connotations of constant struggle – against insects, droughts, and illness resulting from malnutrition, with the fear of military reprimand constantly lurking. Nourished by her pleasant green garden, where her most arduous labour is that of raking, sowing and fruit picking, Noria is physically spared such hardships, although the moral force of their presence just outside her garden fence takes its toll on her psyche. This psychic «hardship» is the exercise of what Elisabeth Oxfeldt terms «Scandinavian guilt», denoting the flip side of privilege: «Time and again, we encounter narratives in which Scandinavians are confronted with an unhappy, less privileged global other» (2018, p. 1). Arguably, this figure is central to the moral dilemma Noria faces in *Memories of Water* and it is one that may increasingly be

activated in the pondering of responsibilities and responses in a world transformed by climate change.

Noria's function as the tea master invokes both the implicit influence of Chinese culture and foregrounds the sanctuary topos as central to the narrative. Discussing this topos, Carroll notes that the home as a sanctuary is a common figure in children's literature (2014, p. 17). While Noria's home is such a sheltered spot, the presence of the tea house adds the dimension of «sacred space» to this more general interpretation of the sanctuary topos, which is focused on «sacred spaces, on enclosures which are set apart from other aspects of the built environment and distinguished from the rest of the landscape by virtue of their sacred nature» (Carroll, 2014, p. 17). The focal point of the sacred space of the teahouse is the ritual of the tea ceremony, handed down from one tea master to the next. To Noria's father, the teahouse symbolises how natural resources outlast human ownership: «All does not belong to humans. The tea and the water do not belong to the tea masters, the tea masters belong to the tea and water» (Itäranta, 2014, p. 70). Noria's father thus denounces the anthropocentric position that all resources are subject to human need and control. As a result, the sanctuary topos becomes linked to the conservation of natural resources for their own sake and to the advocacy of a respectful manner characteristic of an eco-centric attitude. Consequently, Noria's initiation as tea master signals that she is taking on responsibility for the stewardship of these natural resources, which brings her into conflict with the short-term needs of her local, human, community.

While the garden and the sanctuary are delimited by borders, the water follows its own unpredictable course: «The tea masters believe there are times when water doesn't wish to be found because it knows it will be chained, which is against its nature» (Itäranta, 2014, p. 91). This untameable quality, attributed to water, pertains to the third

locus of the green topos, the wilderness, which is the opposite of the cultivated space of the farm and garden. Garrard observes that the word «wilderness», which derives from the Anglo-Saxon «wilddeoren», where «beasts existed beyond the boundaries of cultivation» (2012, p. 61), expresses a distinction based upon a mainly agricultural economy. Notably, the sacred spring, while nourishing Noria's farm and garden, exists beyond such boundaries, as do the Lost Lands, where Sanja and Noria propose to travel in order to find new water sources, and the Dead Forest, where Noria hides her heli-wagon, equipped to this end.

The Dead Forest further invokes climate change by signalling a dystopian forest die-back. While 73 % of Finland's land area is currently covered by forests (Natural Resources Institute Finland), in Noria's time the vibrant forests of the region are long dead and withered. The importance of extensive forests to Finnish culture and Finnish national identity is highlighted when Noria metaphorically describes her parents as trees (Itäranta, 2014, pp. 34, 74). During her father's funeral she also identifies with the dying forest: «I was a forest growing and disappearing» (p. 115). Thus, although homes tend to function as a sanctuary topos in children's literature to the point that they become «synonymous with personal identity» (Carroll, 2014, p. 23), and although there is a tendency in older Nordic literature, represented by the Icelandic sagas, for the protagonist to identify with their farmed land (Carroll, 2014, pp. 60–61), Noria notably self-identifies with the wilderness – the world outside the confined borders of the house, the farm and the garden that the tea ceremony implicitly serves and honours: the «lost» wilderness. This identification takes the form of a double elegy, a mourning not only of her dead father but also of the dead forest. Thus, it foreshadows Noria's own death, which occurs in the confines of her home and garden, habitually safe spaces that both fail to save her.

Drawing on the novelistic resources of symbolism and metaphor, Itäranta opts for a subtler «showing» of the consequences of climate change, in place of the more direct strategy adopted by Gaarder of having characters explicitly discuss climate change. This enables her to fuse novelistic form, traditionally centring on the development of a human protagonist, with a pattern of identification characteristic of an ecocentric attitude, while leaving the reader with more gaps to fill by inference. By inviting the reader into the mind of a character that is directly affected by climate change, Itäranta involves the reader in engaging with climate change effects as if they are already present.

Concluding remarks

Both the fictions analysed here employ the device of asking the reader to imagine how climate change will affect places and cultural practices of great national importance. While Gaarder focuses on the setting of the mountain cabin, a heterotopia to Norwegian readers, Itäranta invokes a future Finnish landscape devoid of its main present-day features: lakes and forests. Thus, the full impact of these novels depends on the situated knowledges of Nordic readers, highlighting the importance of analysing local literatures when discussing how cli-fi addresses climate change.

A recurring climate change marker in both novels is the absence of ice and snow – suggesting the cultural importance of ice and snow to a Nordic audience. Snow is a visible and well-known feature of Nordic landscapes, and becomes an apt metonym

for climate change effects, as an absence. Another commonality is the representation of the wilderness as an ideal space. In *Anna*, climate change measures are sought in a wilderness cabin. In *Memory of Water*, Noria inherits stewardship over the untameable and unbounded resource of water, while she identifies with the forest that, unlike her homely garden, lies «beyond the boundaries of cultivation» (Garrard, 2012, p. 61). Thus, the idea of the wilderness as a «true home» is common to these Nordic texts.

Both stories develop their representation of climate change with reference to a wintery Nordic climate, entwined with which are certain cultural practices that consequently feature as absences in the narratives. Thus, both adopt the elegiac mood, lamenting that which is lost. Itäranta is more elaborate than Gaarder in envisioning how an altered climate gives rise to new cultural practices and a new set of material realities.

It is further noteworthy that both novels have rural settings and female protagonists. An examination of a wider selection of texts will demonstrate whether this correlation between the elegy, the rural and the feminine is accidental or a gendered feature of YA cli-fi, regardless of the cultural setting. Potentially, the feminine gender is standing in for the earth, as ecofeminism suggests. According to Curry: «Acknowledgement of the earth as a material entity ties the earth to other ‘bodies’ and particularly the female body» (2014, p. 194). Thus, the trend in contemporary YA fiction of focusing on strong female protagonists potentially also signals ecocritical engagement.

Notes

- 1 The novel was originally published in Norwegian in 2013 with a title translatable as *Anna: A Fable about the Planet's Climate and Environment*. Quotes in this article are from the English translation of the text. This article uses *Anna* as an abbreviated title when referring to Gaarder's fable.
- 2 Itäranta's novel was published in Finnish in 2012, in English in 2014, and in Norwegian in 2015. The quotes in this article are from the English translation of the text.

- 3 This article is one of two analyses of Gaarder's and Itäranta's novels conducted by this author. While this article focuses on landscape, the other article is focused on the representation of plants in three Nordic climate fictions, where Gaarder's and Itäranta's novels are two of the texts analysed (see Guanio-Uluru 2019).
- 4 The number of monographs, anthologies and articles devoted to cli-fi has since grown rapidly, see for instance Mehnert (2016); Streeby (2018); Johns-Putra (2019).
- 5 Trexler accepts the term «Anthropocene» without discussion. The value argument embedded in the term has been questioned by Donna Haraway (2016) and Edward Wilson (2016).
- 6 This tendency manifests as the characters frequently relate scientific facts about climate change.
- 7 While this article acknowledges that the representation of place and time are intertwined in literary works – an observation influentially made by Mikhail Bakhtin with his notion of chronotopes (1988) – an in-depth discussion of the narrative representation of time in the two primary texts is beyond the scope of this article.
- 8 «Hyperobject» is a term coined by Timothy Morton (2013), who suggests that climate change is such an object. Ursula Heise (2014) has argued that Morton's concept is so all-encompassing as to be meaningless.
- 9 Rikke Frøyland (2019) points out that several of the articles that so impress Anna and Jonas are previously published opinion pieces by Gaarder.

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