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Fictional Minds in Natural Environments:

Changing Ecologies, Human Experiences, and Textual Designs in Ulla-Lena Lundberg's *Ice*

Abstract

The essay studies Ulla-Lena Lundberg's novel *Ice*, the story of which depicts the changing seasons and the formation of sea ice in the Åland archipelago. In the narrative, ice takes both mental and physical dimensions, and the analysis focuses on the workings of fictional minds in their specific natural and social environments. It is argued that nature both inspires and informs human experience and meaning making, even as it resists and challenges, human aims and hopes. In the novel, the characters have differing views on the natural environment and conflicting interpretations of what nature and its phenomena, including ice, could mean.

Zusammenfassung

Der Aufsatz befasst sich mit Ulla-Lena Lundbergs Roman *Eis*, der den Wechsel der Jahreszeiten und die Entstehung des Meereises auf den Åland-Inseln behandelt. In der Erzählung nimmt das Eis sowohl mentale als auch physische Dimensionen an, und die Analyse konzentriert sich auf die Funktionsweise der fiktiven Denkfiguren in ihren spezifischen natürlichen und sozialen Umgebungen. Es wird argumentiert, dass die Natur die menschliche Erfahrung und Bedeutungssuche sowohl inspiriert als auch informiert, auch wenn sie sich den menschlichen Zielen und Hoffnungen widersetzt und diese herausfordert. In dem Roman haben die Figuren abweichende Ansichten über die natürliche Umwelt und widersprechen sich hinsichtlich ihrer Interpretationen von der Bedeutung der Natur und ihrer Phänomene, einschließlich des Eises.

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The narrative of *Ice* (2012), a novel by the Finland-Swedish author Ulla-Lena Lundberg, is situated in the changing seasons of the Åland archipelago, with its nature descriptions emphasizing winter, coldness, and darkness.[1] The reader of the novel may almost physically feel the presence of nature in the narrative, especially the changes in the weather and the sea surrounding the islands. While the story takes place in the late 1940s just after the war, and while the novel is a representative of historical fiction in that sense, the contemporary reader's knowledge of the changing environment of the North may also inform her or his approach to ice formation and changes in the climate depicted in the narrative. The novel also dramatizes how human characters are embodied consciousnesses and suggests how our mental images are firmly bound together with our bodily experience of the world and with our physical perception of things. In effect, as I argue, human minds are always embedded in a particular environmental context. In my reading, the presence or absence of ice determines the lives of the people living in the islands, even as it has shaped the landscape, having a powerful agency of its own.

In what follows, I will focus on the ways in which the novel's textual designs try to capture the sense of changing ecologies. I will tentatively ask how a focus on the novelist's exploration of ecological issues can be complemented with a closer look at the narrative designs by means of which Lundberg engages with those issues. As James Phelan argues in his book *Experiencing Fiction* (2007), »texts are designed by authors in order to affect readers in particular ways«.[2] More specifically, I argue that coming to terms with portrayals of fictional minds in natural environments in the novel requires integrating ecocritical perspectives on nonhuman nature with narratological research on consciousness presentation. In my reading, the seemingly uneventful surface level of the story gains rich emotional undertones as the narrative unfolds.

Ice and Its Meanings

The kind of slow and uneventful narrative style represented by Lundberg's *Ice* may present challenges of its own for the reader. It is as if the narrative formation resembled ice formation, taking its time to develop and crystallize. Indeed, an international review of the novel suggests that *Ice* is »a bit boring, especially the first half, which is a litany of cosy preparations of food and drink, page after page after page«.[3] The narrative of *Ice* is as if necessarily »boring«, focusing as it does on inglorious everyday practices and detailing aspects of daily life. In my view, these kinds of narratives, in which descriptions of natural environments and everyday things are given a great deal of space, should be interesting cases from the viewpoint of ecocriticism as well as from the viewpoint of narrative studies.

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1 The novel was originally published as *Is* in Swedish and *Jää* in the Finnish translation, and was awarded the Finlandia Prize, which is Finland's most prestigious literary award. In my essay, I use Thomas Teal's English translation.

2 Phelan 2007, p. 4.

3 Johnson 2016.

The novel is set in a supposedly fictional place, which nevertheless has strong references to Lundberg's autobiographical background in Kökar, where she was born in 1947.[4] *Ice* is a rich and complex novel in its depiction of the social community of the fictional Örland Islands, somewhere in the margins of the Baltic Sea. Those islands cannot be found in a churchman's »atlas«, because they are »too far out to sea from the perspective both of the mainland and of Åland«.[5] The story begins in 1946, in a bleak mental and physical landscape just after the ending of the war, with »greyness and brownness drawn across all of existence«.[6] The Örlands are depicted as »wild and salty and windswept«: »Never green reflections on the water, only dark grey-blue and silver and ash-grey, or a bright blue glassy surface like today.«[7] As I aim to suggest, the physical landscape also develops into a mental landscape in the narrative.

Here, in this context, it is also possible to consider *Ice* as another version of the metaphor of »the narrow room« developed by Merete Mazzarella.[8] Analyzing spatial forms and recurring topics in Finland-Swedish prose by several male authors, Mazzarella suggests that these narratives are detached from the rest of the society and situated in their own isolated realities. The vision of life presented in these works is conceptualized as a narrow room – that is, as a small, somewhat claustrophobic space.[9] As has been suggested in subsequent criticisms of Mazzarella's influential imagery, however, more recent Finland-Swedish fiction, including fiction written by women, is »breaking through the walls of these narrow rooms by finding new forms of expression and narrative structures«.[10] In the case of Lundberg's *Ice*, closed and sterile city spaces of middle-class masculinity are opened toward the natural environment, which, for its part, also widens the perspectives and horizons of narrow and isolated minds.

In my analysis of the novel, I will especially focus on its main character, a Lutheran priest named Petter Kummel, a member of a family whose saga has been told in Lundberg's previous novels. His last name appears to refer to a sea mark called *kummel*; through his name he is as if originally connected to the sea water, which, finally and tragically, takes back its own. His fate is already anticipated in the very first glimpse the reader gets of him: »*He's made a good first impression. But when he's about to step ashore, the boat glides out a bit as if the sea wanted to take him back, and a cold breeze draws across the bay.*«[11] Petter's Christian name is aptly Christian in the sense that it connotes Peter, the »rock«, also meaning the solid basis of the congregation. *Ice* describes life in an outer archipelago, where this young priest arrives with his small family, his wife Mona and their daughter Sanna. They become part of the community of small islands with their harsh living conditions.

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4 On Lundberg's autobiographically oriented fiction in relation to Kökar, see Gustafsson 2007, pp. 168–178.

5 Lundberg 2016, p. 426.

6 Ibid., p. 76.

7 Ibid., p. 100.

8 Cf. Mazzarella 1989.

9 Cf. ibid., pp. 7, 263.

10 Kurikka et al. 2019, p. 86 (emphasis in original).

11 Lundberg 2016, p. 11.

Occasionally the ice that shuts the island off from the outside world melts, providing the island people with possibilities of moving and living, only to freeze again into a cold that limits those possibilities. In my reading, ice therefore takes both mental and physical dimensions in the narrative. Accordingly, the title of the novel refers to »ice« both as a physical aspect of the natural environment and as a mental aspect of people's attitude toward each other in a small community, with characteristic human traits such as »egoism, personal advantage [and] cold calculation«.[12] Petter's initial meeting with the islanders, as the new priest of the Örlands congregation, is not altogether successful. Thus, when preparing to deliver his first sermon in the eyes of a demanding audience, he pictures the church people as knowing he is »on thin ice«.[13] On the other hand, after the main character's death, his wife Mona continues living with »a heart that is closed, frozen to the core«.[14]

As suggested, ice in Lundberg's novel is not only a natural formation but it also functions on a symbolic and thematic level. Traditionally, ice has been linked to negative imagery; for example, in Dante's *Inferno* (1321), the ninth circle of Hell is icy throughout, because ice forms physically in the absence of the sun (or, in Dante's imagery, in the absence of God's radiant love). In his book *Ice: Nature and Culture* (2018), Klaus Dodds traces the meanings of ice both as a natural and cultural phenomenon, also suggesting how ice inspires and informs human imagination: »For the polar explorer, the shamanist and the fantasy novelist alike, ice and snow are literary and oral alchemy – turning ordinary stories into epics.«[15] In Lundberg's *Ice*, the frozen element represents not only death, isolation, and a difficult, unexplored territory, as in many Arctic stories, but also a possibility for new connections in life. Therefore, as Dodds would put it, Lundberg's ordinary story of human activities in everyday life turns into an epic with mythical, religious, and philosophical dimensions.

While Lundberg's narrative is situated in the Åland islands in the Baltic Sea, it is possible to interpret its ice imagery with the help of a brief foray into the field of Arctic studies. In the conventional imagery, the Arctic wasteland represents death and sterility, a place without life and fertility. In this context, ice functions as a metaphor of death and a symbol of nature's power and hostility toward human life. Ice, of course, is also a physical element of nature, and Lundberg's novel powerfully emphasizes this in addition to ice's symbolic and thematic meanings. In his classic environmentalist text *Arctic Dreams* (1986), Barry Lopez notes that sea ice behaves in less predictable ways than freshwater ice and that its physics – »the distribution of forces within it, the range of its elasticity and plasticity, the structural quality of its crystal lattices« – is very complex.[16] In her essay on the Soviet Arctic, Susi Frank reads »freezing« on a symbolic level, seeing ice as a medium that hinders development – that is, modernization.[17]

12 Ibid., p. 341.

13 Ibid., p. 47.

14 Ibid., p. 417.

15 Dodds 2018, p. 21.

16 Lopez 1999, p. 210.

17 Cf. Frank 2017, p. 21.

In a slightly different context, Lundberg's narrative also depicts ice as a physical formation, which prevents traveling by boat from the mainland (especially from Turku[18] to the island, as transportation and travel only become possible when the ice melts. The frozen environment therefore also helps the isolated islands to construct a solid community of their own, in which ice makes it possible to travel more quickly from one island to another by foot or by sledge. The people on the Örlands somehow resemble the surrounding landscape, which, for its part, has »hardened« them: »The Örlanders are as social as herring and combine in different, shifting communities, most eagerly in their families and villages.«[19] Occasionally, the frozen sea opens up new possibilities: »Mostly they talk about the ice, how much easier everything is now that it's finally freezing hard.«[20] Ice, therefore, not only separates but also connects people.

In order to survive in these harsh conditions, Lundberg's characters need the skill of *reading* ice and nature as a whole. In this way, the interpretation of natural signs is shown to be one of the basic survival mechanisms of humankind. Various characters, however, have their differing ways of seeing nature, from a spiritual interpretation of things to a materialist understanding of the world. Whereas Petter's reliance on biblical texts makes him see the environment in terms of a pastoral or a flood, depending on the weather, his wife Mona, who takes care of everyday practicalities in their home and among farm animals, is »rational and realistic« and does not believe in »a sentimental attachment or romantic nonsense«.[21] While *Ice* tells a profoundly human drama of hopes and fears, nature is also an active agent with a will of its own, even though human practices also have their influence on the environment.[22]

Nature and Narrative

Whatever its emphasis on nature descriptions, Lundberg's novel is not a narrative of physical ice formation during long periods of time, but a story of human experiences and perceptions of the natural environment. Therefore, my reading of *Ice* could be characterized as a mode of humanist ecocriticism, or, to be more precise, as an ecologically oriented non-anthropocentric new humanism, with its links to literary theory and moral philosophy.[23] As Kate Rigby notes, »an acknowledgement of the centrality of the human actant, however contingent, contextualized, and decentered she might be in herself, is also a necessary condition for there to be such a thing as literature, as commonly

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18 The Swedish names for Finnish cities have been retained in the English translation (Åbo instead of Turku and Helsingfors instead of Helsinki).

19 Lundberg 2016, p. 342.

20 Ibid., p. 349.

21 Ibid., p. 28.

22 See Bruno Latour, who speaks of a river as having agency in »geostory«. Note, however, that Latour aims to problematize conventional distinctions between nature and culture as well as subjectivity and objectivity. Criticizing the rhetoric concerning »global warming«, he argues that »through a surprising inversion of background and foreground, it is *human* history that has become frozen and *natural* history that is taking on a frenetic pace« (Latour 2014, pp. 13, 16).

23 See Iovino 2010, pp. 32f.

understood, along with almost all other kinds of artistic endeavor«.[24] In literature and art, the messy and thorny realm of nature is given a certain design, a polished form; and while there are forms and designs in nature, only human arts aim at ethical and aesthetic representations.[25]

Obviously, the human component is overemphasized in classical and cognitive narratologies, and for that reason it is important to try to find a theoretical middle ground between mind and matter. Representing an anthropomorphic reading of literature, Monika Fludernik's project of »natural« narratology argues that purely scientific accounts cannot give us a sense of experiencing things, since they do not evoke human experientiality in the way that narratives do.[26] Interestingly, for Fludernik, descriptions of nature in narrative fiction are *non-natural*, as they de-naturalize the natural frames of storytelling, which rely on human experientiality.[27] In her book *Why We Read Fiction* (2006), Lisa Zunshine similarly argues that we like reading fiction because it provides an access to imagined mental states, to the thoughts, intentions, and feelings of other people. She goes on to suggest that pure descriptions of nature are difficult for us to come to terms with, since they do not explicitly ascribe human thoughts and feelings to natural events and objects.[28] As Nancy Easterlin also points out, the concept of mind has been troublesome for ecocriticism, which is suspicious of literary works that only reflect mental processes. She suggests accordingly that »because human minds stand behind all human activity, including literary activity, knowledge of the mind is relevant to any literary account of the environment« and argues that human beings are »in and of nature« and that »nonhuman nature, the environment, or whatever we wish to call it, can never be known in an other-than-human sense«.[29]

Recent posthumanist approaches have been engaged to problematize the humanist assumptions of literary theory and narrative studies, however, including the generally held notion that narratives are necessarily anthropomorphic and that they evoke human experientiality. In my view, what is needed is a kind of bridging of these two poles, one focusing on fictional minds and the other emphasizing the natural environment. In his book *Narratology beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life* (2018), David Herman is interested in the interplay between nonhuman agents and their surrounding environments. He also argues that narratives characteristically have »human-centric bias« in which »the otherness of nonhuman agents is not taken sufficiently into account«.[30] He suggests instead that human as well as nonhuman minds are embedded in those natural and social environments in which they act and interact. As Herman argues elsewhere, both classical and postclassical theories of fictional minds are based on

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24 Rigby 2004, p. 427. Rigby partly bases her approach on Dominic Head's model of the ecological text and ecocritical operation, which recentres the human subject. See Head 1998, p. 37.

25 See Gilcrest 2002, p. 133; Boyd 2009, p. 4.

26 Fludernik 1996, p. 13.

27 Cf. ibid., pp. 31–34.

28 Cf. Zunshine 2006, p. 27.

29 Easterlin 2010, pp. 257–259.

30 Herman 2018, p. 65.

dualistic (Cartesian) models in their claim that »the representation of characters' inner lives is [...] the touchstone that sets fiction apart from reality«, as is suggested in Dorrit Cohn's influential book *Transparent Minds* (1978).[31]

Indeed, some of the well-known concepts related to the consciousness-reading techniques (*stream of consciousness* or *transparent minds*) interestingly evoke watery metaphors, even though in classical narratology the focus is solely on fictional minds and not on natural worlds. Therefore, narrative and cognitive studies have been active in theorizing fictional minds, from Dorrit Cohn's formalist analysis of the structures of imaginary consciousness and »isolated« minds to Alan Palmer's more recent studies on social, collective, and »intermental« minds.[32] What I especially emphasize in my own reading of Lundberg's *Ice* is the ways in which fictional minds work in natural, including nonhuman, environments. Accordingly, as Thomas Polger argues in his *Natural Minds* (2004), »the problem is not *whether* minds are part of the natural world, but *how* they are«.[33]

As suggested above, humanist or anthropomorphic understandings of narrative have been recently challenged and questioned in posthumanism and material ecocriticism, which see certain narrative techniques and literary conventions as hermetically sealed textuality. Accordingly, Stacy Alaimo suggests that »the psychological interiority stressed by the stream of consciousness form isolates the characters, not only from each other, dramatizing a familiar modernist sense of alienation, but also from the wider material world«.[34] I believe, however, that by providing new tools for analyzing textual designs, narrative theory can enrich the methods of ecocritical analysis; in other words, a focus on narrative forms may reveal new modes of interconnection between textual practices and natural ecologies. Conversely, ecocritics can provide narrative theorists with new questions to address when it comes to the study of narrative forms: for example, how might an author's concern with a particular kind of ecology motivate the use of specific forms?[35] In the case of Lundberg's *Ice*, the shapes and designs one can find in the changing natural environment both inspire and inform narrative practices and novelistic structures. As Serpil Oppermann notes, we should pay attention to an ecological conception of textuality in literature and see how, in given works, »textual diversity and biodiversity [...] shake hands«.[36]

The recent project of *econarratology*, coined and developed by Erin James, is as much informed by ecocriticism's referential and political interests as by narratology's textual and structural emphasis. In her study, ecocriticism's interest in the relationship between literature and the physical environment is combined with narratology's focus on literary structures and devices. She suggests, quite rightly to my mind, that »[f]ocusing on structures – narrative

31 Cohn 1978, p. 7 (as quoted in Herman 2011, p. 7).

32 Cf. Palmer 2004; 2010.

33 Polger 2004, p. 2.

34 Alaimo 2012, p. 478.

35 See also Lehtimäki 2013, p. 137.

36 Oppermann 2006, p. 109.

structures in particular – opens up ecocritical discourse to a set of texts that had previously been illegible to ecocritics«.[37] James especially emphasizes the reader's experiential immersion in fictional worlds, which are understood in relation to our experience of the natural world outside that fiction. In the next section of my essay, I aim to analyze the ways in which human minds work in the natural environment represented in Lundberg's novel and how people employ language and storytelling in order to come to terms with an often difficult and resistant nature.

Signs and Stories

Lundberg's novel makes the relationship between human language and the natural environment one of its main questions. Indeed, while the human mind attempts to make sense of the environment with signs and stories, human language and imagination are strongly inspired, as well as fundamentally *informed*, by the natural environment. As Scott Knickerbocker suggests when speaking of nature poetry, »at the origin of our relationship with nature lies metaphor; at the origin of our use of metaphor lies nature«.[38] Brian Boyd also argues that art is »a specifically human adaptation, biologically part of our species«.[39] As Boyd explains throughout his book *On the Origin of Stories* (2009), fiction and narrative are particularly human adaptations and developments with a natural and biological origin.[40] Obviously, however, modes of language and imagination are both culture-specific and nature-specific. In the wintry, windy, watery, and icy surroundings of the Örland islands, language appears sparse and stark, connected to daily practices and survival skills. Yet the churchgoing people are eager to sing hymns with connections to nature imagery – such as »Like Shining Sunrise in the Spring«, »Shall We Gather at the River«, »Starlight on Sea and Sand«, and »Winter's Rage is Over« – and they also develop warm attitudes toward Petter because of his good singing voice.

In his *Song of the Earth* (2000), Jonathan Bate argues that »symbolic expression is one of the peculiar systems that our species has evolved for coping with the world; it is one of our survival-mechanisms«.[41] In *Ice*, the reading of nature is shown to be one of the basic survival skills of human and nonhuman animals, but we may also see how the narrative's main character Petter Kummel is often incapable of reading the physical surface of the environment. Instead, he tries to read the landscape and natural events through his subjective vision, and even more so through a conventional cultural vision. Biblical language and nature description are sometimes also combined in the external narrator's presentation, in phrases like »every grain of sand on the ice«.[42] Petter especially employs familiar cognitive schemas, scripts, and frames, in this case deriving from the Bible, which, naturally, is the central touchstone of his way of seeing things:

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37 James 2015, p. 14.

38 Knickerbocker 2012, p. 4.

39 Boyd 2009, p. 1.

40 Cf. ibid., pp. 384–391.

41 Bate 2000, p. 251.

42 Lundberg 2016, p. 405.

> A terrible storm on Christmas Eve. [...] It's not a problem of thin ice, because the ice hasn't set yet, only made small attempts in the bays, where snow and ice trim the beaches while the open sea rolls free. [...] the whole world is drowned by the merciless waves. »For those in peril on the sea«, the pastor prays.[43]

Here water is seen in its various manifestations, both liquid and solid, as in open water, snow, and ice. The priest is ready, however, to read symbolic and allegorical meanings into the phenomena of indifferent nature. While his vision in the above excerpt is almost apocalyptic, alluding to the biblical floods, in the next excerpt he envisions a pastoral idyll, a phrase he himself employs, being himself a pastor in a pastoral landscape:

> The scene was utterly peaceful as he approached on his bike. For some reason, the phrase »pastoral idyll« crossed his mind – peacefully grazing cows, no visible activity anywhere, woolly clouds in the sky, a benevolent sun shining down on all of it. Like life on earth before the Fall, [...].[44]

For historical and geographical reasons, ice does not figure visibly in the Bible. One of the few times it is mentioned is in the Book of Job, when referring to the power of God – »By the breath of God ice is given«[45] – and when untrue friends are compared to streams »which are black by reason of the ice«[46]. For the main character of Lundberg's *Ice*, who is a new priest in the remote Örland islands, the Bible does not provide images of the natural environment in the midst of which he needs to do his work. The narrative constructs almost ironic connections to and juxtapositions with the »warm, dry climate«[47] in the ancient environment of the Sea of Galilee, which, of course, provides sources for Petter's sermons. But in the icy, cold climate of the Baltic Sea the human mind also works differently. The implied question is: what would Jesus have done in these harsh conditions of icy waters and dark nights? How can the religion of the Near East – with its fishermen on sunny lakes – be adapted to the cold conditions of the northern environment? This is something that Petter needs to realize in his sermons: »Yes, but people are full of stories, the fishing is what life is about. It's where they find their identity and their self-image and the pictures that describe their lives.«[48]

In what follows, Petter utilizes cognitive frames to make the sometimes strange and difficult biblical texts more concrete and graspable for his churchgoing listeners, imaginatively transferring Jesus Himself from the biblical deserts to the watery landscapes more familiar to the people of the islands:

> The text and the length provide the framework, and as his own experience of life on the Örlands has grown, he is able to find more and more natural associations between the biblical texts and the life of his congregation. The points of contact are no longer limited to the Sea of Galilee and the desert as a metaphor for the sea, [...].

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43 Ibid., p. 273.

44 Ibid., p. 317.

45 Job 37:10, Bible Study Tools, https://www.biblestudytools.com/job/37-10.html (11.02.2022).

46 Job 16:6, Bible Study Tools, https://www.biblestudytools.com/job/6-16.html (11.02.2022).

47 Lundberg 2016, p. 129.

48 Ibid., p. 128.

> The Örlands have become a biblical landscape that he makes use of in his sermons. When Jesus went up to Storböte and saw the glory of the archipelago, the devil appeared and said all these things will I give thee.[49]

As mentioned, Petter's constant recourse to biblical texts and other cultural frames makes him often incapable of acting in the natural environment and among the people of the island community – which, of course, also makes his practice of Christianity quite abstract and »textual«. He has a formal attitude to the things in the world, exemplified by his notion that »the liturgy is the product of difficult schisms and agonizing committee meetings« but it has been »polished« and »formulated« for the priest so that by following the established convention he does not have to face his own imperfections.[50] Petter's reliance on texts, conventions, and forms therefore prevents him from seeing that nature does not follow the same constraints as human designs but may be chaotic and unpredictable. His undeveloped survival skills in nature, as well as his inability to read signs in the environment, eventually result in his tragic drowning in icy waters.

Surface and Depth

The question of interpretation of human and nonhuman nature is as if written inside the narrative of *Ice*. The narrative is very much about seeing the landscape and surviving in nature. The very beginning of the narrative supposedly posits a hypothetical observer, through whose vision the landscape or seascape is seen. Soon enough, however, the text indicates that there is an individual experiencer present:

> *No one who's seen the way a landscape changes when a boat appears can ever agree that any individual human life lacks meaning. The land and the bay are at peace. People gaze out across the water, rest their eyes, then look away. Things are what they are.* [...] *But when he [the priest] is about to step ashore, the boat glides out a bit as if the sea wanted to take him back, and a cold breeze draws across the bay. What that might mean I don't know.*[51]

The beginning of the narrative also constructs a hermeneutic basis of the text. Thus, the sentence »what that might mean« is only not a riddle for the character, who also functions as a first-person narrator in the sections printed in italics, but a way of asking the reader to participate in the interpretation of the text as a whole. As it happens, this character, Anton, who works as a postman delivering mail and messages between islands, is a hermeneutic device par excellence, resembling Homer's semi-god Hermes in his role, as well as connecting chapters and events of the narrative through his poetic reflections. His position in the narrative structure is also motivated, as his first-person narration guides the reader to see the meanings and connections in the text.[52] As a mythical figure, functioning

49 Ibid., p. 329.

50 Ibid., p. 53.

51 Ibid., pp. 9, 11 (emphasis in original).

52 In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth speaks of »the disguised rhetoric of modern fiction«, as in the works of authors (such as Henry James) who seem to think that the reader needs a »friend« in a form of a character to help her or him to grasp a novel in its complexity (Booth 1983, p. 99).

somewhere in the margins of the society, Anton is an intentionally artificial character, which Lundberg needs for her aesthetic and thematic purposes.

It is also thematically motivated in Lundberg's larger design that Anton (also called Post-Anton) represents pre-Christian understandings in the story, believing as he does in an animistic view of the world.[53] His vision of the spiritual essence of natural objects and forms therefore differs from Petter's reliance on religious texts or from the scientific and atheist approach represented by one of the other characters, Doctor Gyllen. At the very beginning of the narrative, Anton reflects on those »*ancient and invisible*« powers which are »*no longer human*« and which »*exist beyond our range of vision*«.[54] He also tells Petter that it is crucial to learn to interpret the signs of nature, because »*the whole world was full of signs*« and »*you had to interpret them and understand them*«.[55] This advice concerns not only the storyworld of characters and events but also the textual level of the novel and its reading.

The very ending of the narrative, spoken by this same character, refers to the images of surface and depth as well as to the ways things are in the world, constantly flowing and changing, like water. In a self-reflexive sense, the opening and the ending of the narrative provide the reader with keys for the text, which, under its simple and clear surface, has depths and undercurrents to be interpreted:

> *Human beings are made to live on the surface, and for long periods at a time they can forget what lies underneath. Some things sink to the bottom and other things rise up instead. What has happened in the past moves steadily away from the real world, precisely the way the priest grows more and more unlike the man he was when he walked among us, and more of a stranger. This is as it should be, for everything flows and shifts and changes.*[56]

Indeed, it is likely that Lundberg's novel asks its readers to contemplate its textual surface as well as its interpretive depths. For example, visual descriptions of physical phenomena are likely to prompt readers to entertain a surface reading, while readers' assumptions that there are interpretative depths under the surface direct them toward a symptomatic reading.[57] Here the first mode of reading focuses on the visible and direct level of natural settings, physical action, character behavior, and dialogue, while the second mode of reading searches for invisible and indirect levels of motivation, such as hidden motifs and underlying themes. Combining these two ways of reading, I argue, we could analyze both the physical and mental dimensions of ice.

Beyond the surface level of visual and objective »telling« there is the level of the »told« – the storyworld with its senses, experiences, and human-like characters – in Lundberg's fiction. The novel's descriptions of nature, landscape, and weather – in which the characters and events are situated – are full of images of ice, snow, whiteness,

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[53] See also Haapala 2017, pp. 177–180.

[54] Lundberg 2016, p. 9 (emphasis in original).

[55] Ibid., p. 97.

[56] Ibid., p. 443 (emphasis in original).

[57] See Best & Marcus 2009.

and darkness; images, that is, which can be interpreted as constituting the ethical dimension and the thematic level of the narrative as well.[58] Modernist ideals of reading – especially those that emphasize surface, directness, and thingness – are particularly important to ecocriticism, which typically sees anthropomorphic and symbolic interpretations as problematic. As Benjamin Morgan suggests, cultural historians and literary scholars tend to ignore those textual aspects which are merely descriptive.[59] In his reading of nineteenth-century descriptions of the Arctic weather and nature, Morgan writes that »[t]o the literary scholar, a whale is never just a whale, and the space opened up by the slippage between signifier and signified is the domain of interpretation«.[60] He refers to Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's above-mentioned concept of surface reading, which focuses on »what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden or hiding«.[61] However, this kind of reading, whatever its strengths, may also be a sign of a neutral, seemingly objective, and »cold« reading. It is a reading practice, typical in New Criticism and classical narratology, which prefers imagery and structure to affective experiences and ideological interpretations. In my view, ecocriticism should read for the surface as well as for the depth; in other words, it should try to see that which is evident as well as that which is hidden. According to the reading model practiced in this essay, the physical as well as the mental, and the concrete as well as the symbolic, dimensions of ice should be taken into account.

Whether or not the change in the climate in the storyworld of Lundberg's *Ice*, situated in the late 1940s, has to do with any global warming, it nevertheless reminds the reader that the characters are living in harsh conditions in which changes in the environment may be crucial. Here, in the scene of Petter Kummel's sudden drowning, we may also see how the mind works in the natural environment in which it tries to survive, until it ceases functioning:

> Everything is going black, he slides down and gets a mouth full of water, which wakes him up and he coughs and shouts. Have mercy upon us. Deliver us from evil. It occurs to him that he is dying. [...] His eyes can see – different degrees of darkness, the coal-black depths of water, the greyer black of the ice, the murmuring, expanding blackness of the sky, with neither moon nor stars. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of the death, he thinks. Darkness shall be as light. Have mercy upon us. [...] No body now, just pain, no longer shaped in his image. But a mind that is still attentive and notes that the pain suddenly slides away and that his body returns in familiar form, warm in the sunshine on the granite by the parsonage, full of pleasure in its health, youth, and vigour. With his intellect, he understands that this is what you feel when death steps in, but even if that is so, he embraces the feeling and thinks that he will live.[62]

58 One is tempted to recall Ernest Hemingway's famous iceberg technique, explicitly defined in his nonfiction book *Death in the Afternoon* (1932). As Hemingway suggested, just as only the tip of an iceberg is exposed above the surface of water, writing should not reveal anything; instead, emotions and meanings remain hidden under the surface of the text.

59 Cf. Morgan 2016, p. 10.

60 Ibid., p. 19.

61 Best & Marcus 2009, p. 9; as quoted in Morgan 2016, p. 20.

62 Lundberg 2016, pp. 355–359.

The unexpected drowning of the main character of the narrative is a powerful scene, slow and painful, and as it is happening, he realizes that his life-long reliance on texts, theories, and unearthly visions cannot help him now. Earlier in the narrative Petter is seen through the eyes of his more practical wife Mona: »His face a picture of masculine helplessness.«[63] What would have helped him is the practical knowledge of the surrounding environment – that is, the ability to »read nature« and act in the midst of it – a knowledge that is as if naturally part of the being-in-the-world of the island's inhabitants, who always remember to carry an ice pike and a knife when crossing the ice.[64] Petter, for his part, is carrying with him a briefcase »full of tracts, a Bible, a hymnal and a copy of The Songs of Zion«.[65] As suggested above, Petter's fate has been anticipated in Post-Anton's reflections from the very beginning of the narrative; as Anton also has it:

> *When the ice sets, you need to keep your ears open and your eyes on stalks. How the ice freezes, where are the dangerous currents.* [...] *In addition, there is another way of seeing and hearing that can't be explained. It's like seeing and hearing alongside others who have been out there from time immemorial and know everything about the weather and the ice,* [...].[66]

Through these ruminations, the narrative as a whole suggests that there is more to nonhuman nature than a human mind can grasp and that it takes time, experience, and perception to know and understand the ice.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have read Ulla-Lena Lundberg's novel *Ice* with a view to its narrative design as well as its strategies for engaging with the natural world. As I have suggested, the formation of ice operates at multiple levels of narrative structure and thematic meaning in the novel, being a symbol of social relationships as well as a natural phenomenon. In other words, the »how« and the »what« aspects of the narrative text – its rhetorical designs and thematic emphases – should be recognized as equally important dimensions of its structure. I have also analyzed the ways in which Lundberg's novel suggests how the human capabilities of using our imagination and making stories are grounded in our physical experience of natural environments. In the novel, different characters have their own ways of seeing nature, ranging from spiritual visions to scientific theories, yet the harsh northern environment of the Åland archipelago requires that each character is able to »read« the ice in order to survive. Combining narratology and ecocriticism in my model, I argue that Lundberg's *Ice* is a complex and interesting cognitive experiment with the ways in which fictional minds function in natural environments.

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63 Ibid., p. 87.

64 See also Haapala 2017, pp. 181–186.

65 Lundberg 2016, p. 352.

66 Ibid., p. 167 (emphasis in original).

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