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1. Introduction

Pia Ahlbäck, Jouni Teittinen and Maria Lassén-Seger

This volume suggests a historical trajectory of utopian and dystopian ideas in a Nordic literary context. The collection of articles pays attention both to the historical discourse of the "Nordic" in relation to literature, and to developments of the utopian/dystopian genres in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[1]

In her classic work on utopian theory, *The Concept of Utopia* (1990), Ruth Levitas emphasises that utopias come in many shapes and can be defined accordingly: in terms of function, form, function and form, contents, or left altogether undefined. Levitas, however, emphasises one thing in particular: that all utopias express "desire."[2] Acknowledging the importance of desire for the utopian imagination, it is crucial to align desire with hope, which is – in the well-known terms of Ernst Bloch – perhaps the most fundamental idea informing any kind of utopia, including its dystopic

[1] Unlike the themed issue of the *Utopian Studies Journal* on Nordic utopias and dystopias (2019), which was particularly concerned with utopias and dystopias of the present across a number of disciplines, this volume adopts a long-term perspective, informed by a more thorough understanding of the conceptual utopian/dystopian framework over time. It has also an explicit focus on literature, either directly or through related discourses.

[2] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 181.

double. Levitas's idea of desire is central throughout the volume and will be understood as the, more or less, passionate longing for, or goal-directed activity towards, something different, other, or better. In the multifarious projections of utopia and dystopia, criss-crossing over the border of art and politics, we find some of the primary cultural expressions of the principle of contrast. Utopia and dystopia, or in their modified forms *utopian* and *dystopian*, can be – among other things – social and political modes or tendencies, distinct literary forms, speculative shapes conferred to the physical world, to nature or art. The idea of an "other," virtually non-existent "good place," prototypically presented in Thomas More's playful work *Utopia* (1516), can be adapted to various contexts such as an *intentional community* built upon certain political ideals; the formation of a nation; the quintessential North understood as the Arctic or imaginary *Ultima Thule*; or even the reinforcing of one's own national self-image by means of an identification with a foreign nation. The uses of dystopia are historically no less varied. In this volume, we find a wide spectrum of utopia and dystopia geographically located in northern Europe, in the states called the Nordic countries, or "Norden."

The Nordic, "Norden," the North

In the recently published *Introduction to Nordic Cultures* (2020),[3] historian Mary Hilson notes that the perceived unity of the Nordic states, or "Norden," tends to be an outsider's perception rather than the view held by people living in the Nordic countries.[4] Although this is a typical characteristic of any outside/inside perspective, there are a number of long-standing similarities between the Nordic nations, not least in terms of jurisdiction and social welfare systems. Hilson finds that images of "Norden" – which is a Swedish-language concept for the Nordic countries that became increasingly internationally significant in the twenty-first century – have been positive or utopian ever since the 1920s, although not exclusively so.[5] Since the 1980s, and in the new millennium in particular, Hilson claims that it has become increasingly common to refer to the "Nordic model" outside of "Norden."[6] A continuing emphasis on the Nordic national welfare systems, historically founded in and informed by democratic Socialist ideas of societal justice, has established the Nordic region as exceptional.[7]

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[3] Annika Lindskog and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, eds., *Introduction to Nordic Cultures* (London: UCL Press, 2020), 1, https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787353992.

[4] Mary Hilson, "The Nordic Welfare Model," in *Introduction to Nordic Cultures*, ed. Annika Lindskog and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen (London: UCL Press, 2020), 70, https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787353992.

[5] Hilson, "The Nordic Welfare," 70.

[6] Hilson, "The Nordic Welfare," 70.

[7] With reference to Talbot Imlay's study *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism* (2018), Alan Granadino, Stefan Nygård and Peter Stadius point out that the "conventional narrative" of social democracy is indeed founded on the British and German Socialist parties. Alan Granadino, Stefan Nygård and Peter Stadius, eds., *Rethinking European Social Democracy and Socialism: The History of the Centre-Left in Northern and Southern*

The idea of state welfare as exceptionally characteristic of the Nordic countries, including phenomena such as gender equality and strong environmental protection, is ironically and entertainingly commented on in Luc Lefebvre's timely study of the Swedish intellectual circle and magazine *KRIS*, which was active in the 1960s and 70s.[8] Among its leading members were some of the most influential intellectuals in Sweden today, such as Horace Engdahl and Anders Olsson, who are prominent writers and scholars of literature. They are also members of the Swedish Academy and have both held the prestigious position of the Academy's permanent secretary.[9] Lefebvre's study of the intellectual history of *KRIS* extends from Marxist ideas in the 1960s and 70s to postmodernist individualism in the 80s when the circle dissolved. The article reveals ideas and emotions that both shake and inform the cultural debate in Sweden at the very top until this day. Returning to Levitas's definition of utopia as *desire*, the *KRIS* circle's initial embrace and successive renouncement of a Marxist utopia is perhaps best characterised by outright desire, rather than hope.

The Nordic countries or "Norden" comprise the sovereign states of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, including the autonomous areas of the Faeroes (Foeroya), Greenland (Kalaallit Nunaat) and the Åland

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Europe in the Late 20th Century (London: Routledge, 2022), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003181439.

[8] "Kris," meaning crisis, referred to an intellectual crisis in Sweden.

[9]" Ständige sekreterare" in Swedish. The permanent secretary is the most prominent of the eighteen Academy members. Each year, the permanent secretary announces who will receive the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Islands. The vast interstate region of Sápmi, which cuts through northern Finland, Sweden and Norway, is also part of "Norden."[10] The more narrowly defined region of Scandinavia, however, consists of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Nevertheless, as Annika Lindskog and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen point out, the terms Scandinavia and the Nordic are often used interchangeably.[11] The Nordic has, however, slowly become the preferred term for the region within multidisciplinary scholarship.[12]

Utopia can indeed take the shape of an almost blinding projection, and utopian hope and desire can be entangled in a discourse of national politics and identification. Laila Berg's ethnographic study of what she recognises to be a Scottish Nordic utopia shows proof to that effect. Berg has studied the responses of literature students in a reading club at the Open University of Strathclyde, taking courses in Nordic crime fiction or so-called Nordic Noir. She found that although the works that the students read picture the Nordic welfare states critically, they held on to their positive views of the Nordic societies. Instead of acknowledging that these novels provide effective social criticism, and react to actual problems in the Nordic nations,[13] the students understood them as purely literary constructions.

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[10] Sápmi also includes parts of northern Russia.
[11] Lindskog and Stougaard-Nielsen, *Introduction*, 1.
[12] Lindskog and Stougaard-Nielsen, *Introduction*, 2.
[13] Anne Grydehøj, "Nordic Noir," in *Introduction to Nordic Cultures*, ed. Annika Lindskog and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen (London: UCL Press, 2020), 117-28, https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787353992. See also Andrew Nestingen and Paula Arvas, eds., *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), in

Nicole Pohl pays attention to the conceptual intricacies of the Nordic in her article. Acknowledging the internal geographic, linguistic, and cultural diversities of the region, Pohl undertakes a thorough analysis of literary and political utopian and dystopian imagery over time, stretching back to the seventeenth century and the works of Swedish scholar and writer Olof Rudbeck and Danish-Norwegian writer Ludvig Holberg. Despite differences, Pohl succeeds in identifying nothing less than a link between Nordic mythology and present-day Nordic utopianism and anthropocene literary forms, like climate fiction, many varieties of Nordic Noir and Finnish Weird.[14]

Pohl's recognition of a Nordic iconography rooted in a mythological context – the Arctic north, the forests and the subterranean world – resonates with Björn Sundmark's article, which high-lights the importance of snow, ice and cold weather when representing the history of the Swedish nation. Sundmark examines a series of Swedish picturebooks for children on the history of Sweden, from the prehistoric era to the twentieth century. Throughout the series, Sundmark uncovers how harsh conditions – mainly represented in the shape of cold and snowy weather – are featured as a vital part of the nation of Sweden. Noting occasional discrepancies between the

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particular part one, "Revisions of the Socially Critical Genre Tradition." See further Barry Forshaw, *A Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (London: PalgraveMacmillan, 2012).

[14] One peculiar example that Pohl relates is Olof Rudbeck's idea that Sweden and Finland were the cradle of civilisation, and that both Latin and Hebrew had roots in the Swedish language. His son, Olof Rudbeck the Younger, argued, on his part, that Finnish, Estonian and Sámi people belonged to the ten lost tribes of Israel and that the Sámi and Hebrew languages were related.

visual and verbal narration, Sundmark shows that the twentieth-century Swedish urban society of the final picturebook in the series is depicted as dystopian.

Johannes Riquet's article engages in a discussion of the Arctic and, in particular, Greenland. Riquet introduces the idea of an anthropocene "hypervisibility" of the Arctic in contemporary literature, film and news media. There is a seeming paradox, he notes, in that the melting Arctic is often represented through traditional images and notions of persistent cold weather and icebergs. But narrating visions of human and animal extinction by means of eternal low temperatures is, in fact, logical, according to Riquet. Looking at the discourse of the Arctic climate in British author Sarah Moss's realistic climate novel *Cold Earth* (2009), which is set in Greenland, and the Greenlandic artist collective Allatta's literary anthology *Allatta! 2040* (2015), Riquet ends up drawing quite uplifting conclusions. He finds that these texts do not dwell on apocalyptic visions of extinction, but promote a discourse of resilience, survival and hope despite their occasional use of dystopian modes.

Shifts in dystopian imagination

In 1991, Peter Stillman reviewed Levitas's *Concept of Utopia* and addressed the core problems of defining utopias and dystopias.[15] "No definition, sets of definitions or general characterizations of utopia have proved to be lucid, free from striking problems about inclusion (or exclusion), and capable of winning relative consensus," Stillman claims.[16] These problems still remain, and their relevance has been reinforced by the vast amount of literary dystopias and scholarly works on dystopias published during the past decades.[17] The recent flood of dystopian literature, often repetitive and formulaic, also threatens to promote a certain myopia regarding the imaginative potential of dystopias. More importantly, it diverts attention from dystopia's historical and textual reliance on utopia, including a sense of hope, which even the grimmest dystopias are hard-pressed to wholly extinguish.[18] Such valuable insights must not be lost. An age immersed in

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[15] Peter Stillman, "Ruth Levitas: The Concept of Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 2 (1991), 220.
[16] Stillman, "Ruth Levitas," 220.
[17] In Finland alone, three international volumes related to utopias and dystopias were edited within a year: Pia Ahlbäck and Toni Lahtinen, eds., *Utopian Studies Journal: Special issue: Nordic Utopias and Dystopias* 30, no. 2 (2019), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/utopianstudies.30.2.0143; Kaisa Kaukiainen et al., *Narratives of Fear and Safety* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2020), http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-359-014-4; Saija Isomaa, Jyrki Korpua and Jouni Teittinen, eds., *New Perspectives on Dystopian Fiction in Literature and Other Media* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020). In addition, Kristina Malmio's and Kaisa Kurikka's (eds.) *Contemporary Nordic Literature and Spatiality* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) can be mentioned in this context.
[18] In addition to Ernst Bloch's fundamental writings on hope, utopia and dystopia, see e.g. Hans Ulrich Seeber, "Zur Geschichte des Utopiebegriffs," in *Literarische Utopien von Morus bis zur Gegenwart*, eds. Klaus L. Berghahn and Hans Ulrich Seeber (Königstein: Athenäum, 1983), 7-23; Pia Maria Ahlbäck, *Energy, Heterotopia, Dystopia: George Orwell, Michel Foucault and the Twentieth Century Environmental Imagination* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2001); Judith Meurer-Bongardt, "'Dagern låg som en skimrande yta av djupblått glas över gator och husfasader: 'intermedialitet, heterotopi och utopi i

dystopian imagination leaves little room for much needed utopian and hopeful thinking.

In this connection, we must pay heed to how essential utopian and dystopian horizons are to our cultural, political and even existential self-understanding: the nature of our present forms of life can scarcely be thought about apart from what preceded them but also from what might follow, how things might have been and might yet become. As Mark Currie appositely notes, ”reflection alters what is reflected upon, so that part of the lived temporality of an epoch is the way that it adopts a position of reflective distance from itself.”[19] The meaning of the present is inextricable from what it leads to, from what it in retrospect *will have been*, and it is this speculative, anticipatory and often defamiliarising perspective on the present which begets much of the power of literature's utopian and dystopian futures. When hope becomes little more than a side-product of increasingly darkening dystopias, the present risks losing touch with the future and so also with itself, the prospects and projects we define ourselves by.[20]

Hagar Olssons roman *På Kanaanexpressen* (1929),” *Joutsen/Svanen* (2015): 12-33, http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2015121825014.

[19] Mark Currie, *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 63.

[20] See Jouni Teittinen, “Post-apocalyptic Fiction and the Future Anterior,” in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, ed. Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (London: Routledge, 2020).

Regarding cultural self-conception, it is enlightening to see how the recent history of world-ending (secular) disasters has revolved around various fears. Before WW1 the threat was most often natural (although, and this is the case also later, many narratives afford allegorical readings) and increasingly man-made only after the war; the threat of nuclear holocaust peaked in the 1950s and 1980s, accompanied with the increased threat of ecodisaster from 1960s onward. In the new millennium literary dystopias have again become increasingly popular, the threats diversified. The terrorist strikes of 9/11, the economic collapse of 2008, waves of far-right populism (all the way into the White House) have all made their mark in dystopic fiction, and the unprecedented pandemic of Covid-19 of 2020 is already showing as well.[21] Technological developments from AI to gene splicing, cyber-warfare, geoengineering, technologies of enhanced reality and global surveillance, just to name some of the prominent trajectories, lay good ground for less-than-sunny speculation. In Brian Massumi's words, the beginning of the century is characterised not by a stable set of threats but rather its "capacity to produce new threats at any and every moment": in a word, our age is "threat-o-genic".[22]

Granting the multiplicity of threats, arguably the most notable contemporary source of futural dread is the complex aggregate of

[21] With the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in the February of 2022, temporarily subdued fears of nuclear war have again risen and will no doubt show in cultural production.
[22] Brian Massumi, "Potential Politics and the Primacy of Preemption," *Theory & Event* 10, no. 2 (2007), para. 13.

environmental and climate crises permeating the media, and many of the recent dystopias (and utopias!) explicitly voice that discourse. Here we should not forget the insight that scholars of utopias and dystopias have had for a long time: that dystopias, in one way or another, have long been concerned with threats to historical nature.[23] In 1990, Alexei Zverev concluded that,

> [t]he environment, the reasonable relations between man and the surrounding universe, and human nature are all under attack. The anti-utopian novel, and this is its real vocation, shows us the world in the instant just before the last hour of nature has come.[24]

Zverev discusses the classic dystopias of the twentieth century as "anti-utopias" and their apocalyptic moments of *eschaton*, which is the end of time or the moment immediately preceding the apocalypse.[25] From a

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[23] Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell's 1*984* (1949) express a desire for the liberating outward space of nature. This space is pictured, respectively, in the shape of a green wall of glass, behind which wild nature reigns; as an island far away where humans and nature exist freely; and a natural landscape in Oceania, falsely perceived to be untouched. These spaces cannot, however, really be accessed.

[24] Aleksei Zverev, "Anti-Utopia: The Twentieth Century," *Social Sciences* 21 (1990), 148. See also Brian Stableford, "Ecology and Dystopia," in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521886659.011.

[25] From Greek *éskaton*, "last, furthest". The notion of the end of the world is central to Christian theology, as well as to most religions and mythologies. In a Nordic context, the

political and environmental historical perspective, we may seem closer than ever to the end (of the end) today. Yet, twenty-first century dystopian literature often depicts, as Petter Skult suggests, post-apocalyptic societies after the onset of global environmental disaster.[26] In other words, we have witnessed a historical shift in dystopian imagination, from that of twentieth-century classic dystopian depictions of nature and the environment, as an unreachable object of passionate longing, to a twenty-first-century acute awareness of an impending global threat reinforced by the climate discourse. At this particular moment in time, it is therefore of great importance to keep a clear head and acknowledge the various opportunities for critical thought, which literary and social utopias and dystopias offer, as well as the long history of scholarly commentary on utopias and dystopias.

The complexity of today's ecological threats comes forth vividly in Riitta Jytilä's and Juha Raipola's contributions. Emmi Itäranta's novel *Memory of Water*, analysed by Riitta Jytilä, is a post-apocalyptic dystopia set in the totalitarian "Scandinavian Union." Reading the novel in terms of "ecological trauma fiction" – that is, "an assemblage that brings individual, collective and ecological layers of trauma together"[27] – Jytilä demonstrates literature's ability to concretise the restless temporalities of ecodisaster. As

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Old Norse myth of *Ragnarök* predicts an apocalypse immediately preceded by the *eschaton* of the exceptionally long and hard *Fimbul Winter*. Hence, the myth closely associates extreme weather conditions with the collapse of society and civilisation.

[26] Petter Skult, *The End of the World as We Know It: Theoretical Perspectives on Apocalyptic Science Fiction* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2019), http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-765-922-2.

[27] See Jytilä in this volume, 214-15.

often in utopias and dystopias, books and material objects become pivotal mediators between the world as we know it and the radically altered future reality: the protagonist Noria comes to long for winters, even though in her climate-changed world she has never experienced snow. But besides intra-narrative questions of remembering and forgetting, we also encounter the potentially "pre-traumatic" (to borrow E. Ann Kaplan's term which the article elaborates on) effect of global ecodisaster on both individuals and today's cultural imagination.

Ecological disasters, paradigmatically radical climate change, often do not only take place in the present or in the future but condition the experience of the present (and the past) by way of potential or nigh-certain future trajectories. The disaster is already underway and has in a sense already happened, with its feedback loops, slow-burning processes and unrealised but unavoidable tipping points, yet its precise shape remains unknown. This may also have consequences for how we conceptualise the genres of utopian and dystopian fiction: as the present becomes radically inseparable from its future, it becomes increasingly sensible to think of dystopia not in terms of temporal setting (relative to the time of writing) but of sensibility or *mood*. This is precisely the angle taken in Juha Raipola's article, which usefully defines "eco-dystopian realism" as referring to

fiction in which "the *mood* of the realistic narrative is significantly affected by an undesired ecological change."[28]

Raipola makes the important observation that, while the bulk of literature dealing with the topic of ecodisaster is genre fiction, Finnish realist literary fiction – perhaps due to its exceptionally strong position in the national canon – has been relatively quick in picking up the often unwieldy gauntlet of ecological issues. The article comments on the important claims (most visibly made by Amitav Ghosh) on the problems presented to the narrative conventions of the character-driven, realist novel by agentially complex and temporally diffuse topics like climate change. With Iida Rauma's novel *Seksistä ja matematiikasta* (2015, [*On Sex and Mathematics*]) as his example, Raipola demonstrates the specific affordances of realist fiction in evoking the mood of ecodisaster. While the bourgeois tradition of realist fiction arguably has weak points in its focus on the individual, the local and the ordinary, it may compensate by steering clear of the moral unambiguousness and stereotypical story patterns of ecodisaster-themed genre fiction. In the end, the trouble in representing complex environmental problems may lie with the demands of linear narrative form.

In his recent book *The Last Men: Character and Dystopia* (2020), Aaron S. Rosenfeld relates various implications of dystopia. What does

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[28] See Raipola in this volume, 97.

dystopia ultimately amount to, he asks.[29] In words resonating with Orwellian imagination, he queries "is [dystopia] just pure, escapist sensation, a vicarious truncheon smack, numbing us to our discontents?"[30] No, Rosenfield claims. Dystopia is many things at various times: a warning, an impulse, escapism, and so much else. But rarely, he reminds us, is dystopia studied "explicitly as literature."[31]

In this volume, dystopia *is* studied and discussed as literature, with due attention to its literary means and nuances, without disregarding its occasional functions of the warning or escapist kind. Whatever the case, the context is often one of acute environmental and social problems and the various ways of relating to them. Daniel Ogden reads the Swedish Nobel Laureate Harry Martinson's dystopian epic poem *Aniara* (1956) as a Menippean satire for our age, showing that Martinson's work belongs with the other classic, canonised dystopias of the twentieth century. Martinson's dystopia is a remarkable warning and Ogden's timely study shows the continuously striking environmental relevance of classic, twentieth-century dystopia. As Maria Laakso, Toni Lahtinen and Hanna Samola have noted, hope in twenty-first century eco-dystopias often takes the form of young people's agency. According to them, these narratives emphasise the space of agency *inside* the depicted dystopian society to a larger extent than what

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[29] Aaron S. Rosenfeld, *Character and Dystopia: The Last Men* (London: Routledge, 2020), 1.

[30] Rosenfeld, *Character and Dystopia*, 1.

[31] Rosenfeld, *Character and Dystopia*, 1.

tends to be the case in classic literary dystopias.[32] In twentieth-century dystopias – of which Martinson's *Aniara* is an obvious example – hope is often situated among the audience, when readers become the historical agents for opposition and change. Whether the same effect is achieved in young adult (YA) dystopias is debatable, but the analyses included in this volume suggest that there is ample room for probing ethically and existentially weighty subjects within YA fiction.

In the twenty-first century, YA dystopias have become a stock feature of the literary market, both globally and in the Nordic countries.[33] As Øygunn Skodvin Prestegård's article on two recent Scandinavian YA dystopian series (by Sofia Nordin and Sigbjørn Mostue) demonstrates, the genre typically brings together common YA themes – such as young people grappling with bodily changes and exploring their sexuality and their identities in relation to peer groups, adult authority and society at large – with larger existential issues of societal collapse, loss of cultural memory and possible extinction. Such narratives, Prestegård notes, are most often interpreted as either allegorical coming-of-age-stories (as per YA generic expectations) or as warnings of a future without a structured society. The two major interlinked expectations pertaining to the genre of dystopia – that

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[32] Maria Laakso, Toni Lahtinen and Hanna Samola, "Young Saviors and Agents of Change: Power, Environment, and Girlhood in Contemporary Finnish Young Adult Dystopias," *Utopian Studies* 30, no. 2 (2019), 194, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/utopianstudies.30.2.0193.

[33] Laakso, Lahtinen and Samola, "Young Saviors," 194.

they “comment on the societies in which they were written” and “present the reader with a (pedagogic) message”[34] – may, in fact, be strengthened when the texts are written for a young audience. As Prestegård shows, Nordin’s and Mostue’s dystopian YA series challenge both adult normativity and authority, as well as pre-chewed ethical and societal structures.

We find a similar challenge to convention in the Danish author Benni Bødker’s illustrated horror series *Zombie City,* which is analysed in this volume by Peter Kostenniemi. As Kostenniemi observes, the futural aspect of hope or desire characteristic of both utopia and, in a different form, classic dystopia, is often lacking in the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction – specifically its popular zombie variant. However, in *Zombie City,* a plague turns adults into zombies but spares the children and leaves many of them better off than before: the massive material inequality preceding the zombie apocalypse is at least momentarily overturned, as street children begin to loot the formerly guarded rich districts. Kostenniemi argues that the *Zombie City* novels, while steering clear of the classic blueprint-model of utopian literature (in the vein of More), do present a form of critical utopianism, a desire to open up the future – even a zombified one – to forms of societal organisation that make do without the ideal of the Nordic welfare state. There is, perhaps, life after *folkhemmet.*

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[34] See Prestegård in this volume, 207.

In his article, Teemu Jokilaakso examines two connected works by the prominent Finland-Swedish author Monika Fagerholm. As with Rauma's novel analysed by Raipola, *The American Girl* (2009) and its successor *The Glitter Scene* (2010) are not literary dystopias *sensu stricto,* but rather seminal postmodern works intermixing a variety of genres, including motifs of literary dystopia. Casting Fagerholm's prose as a representation of the Finland-Swedish community, Jokilaakso follows the very dark undercurrent in the novel's pastoral notion of childhood and extracts a nuanced criticism of the welfare state gone wrong.

Like the works analysed by Prestegård, Kostenniemi and Jytilä, Fagerholm's two novels focus on the tribulations of adolescent characters, and the connections made by Jokilaakso between conceptions of childhood and of national state are indeed broadly relevant. In utopias and dystopias, whether explicitly literary or generally characteristic of our cultural imagination, the intertwining of "our children's future" and the future of the nation, society and civilisation is ubiquitous. This is particularly pronounced in YA dystopias, where children are not only a genre-conventional symbol of a still-open future, but often (as in the texts engaged by Prestegård and Kostenniemi) represent a future markedly different from anything envisaged by their parents' generation. From the perspective of a dystopian future, the present age may gain hues of a lost utopia, but the promise of a blank slate simultaneously offers a release. As always, in life as in fiction, hope and fear do not come easily apart.

Again, the importance of hope and the intimate connection between utopia and dystopia become tangible in Judith Meurer-Bongardt's contribution "Space for Love." Meurer-Bongardt's article, which is lucidly informed both by new materialist and classical humanist ideas, discusses three novels from a comparative Nordic and historical perspective. Her analysis of the novels by famous 1940s Swedish modernist Karin Boye, Swedish contemporary writer Johanna Nilsson, and Finnish contemporary author Johanna Sinisalo, displays the power of affects and the other way around, the affects of power. Whereas Boye is a classic dystopian *par excellence*, Nilsson, in her novel three generations apart, attempts an update of Boye's dark vision in a feminist, presumingly more hopeful direction. Meurer-Bongardt, however, finds that considering our civilization's acute need of a "space for love", where both the natural world with its animals and every human being should be included, Nilsson fails as a utopian writer. Instead, Johanna Sinisalo in her more complex novel characterised by what has become known as "Finnish weird," comes closer to achieving this task.

The structure of the book

The volume has been divided into three major sections: "Nordic Welfare State Utopianism," "Nature in Transformation," and "Confronting Dystopian Futures." The first section includes Pohl's, Lefebvre's,

Kostenniemi's, and Berg's contributions, all of them representing either intellectual historical or critical ironical approaches to the subject of the welfare state. Occasionally both perspectives can be found simultaneously. The following section comprises Raipola's, Sundmark's, Riquet's, and Jokilaakso's articles, presenting imaginative changes and literary and historical meanings of the natural environment. Finally, the third section contains contributions by Ogden, Prestegård, Jytilä, and Meurer-Bongardt. These writers concern themselves explicitly with dystopias; the emphasis, however, lies on confrontation instead of submission to the circumstances. The last word of the volume is consequently that of *love*, which becomes in a positive sense a utopian Nordic memento for our world, which is once again haunted by so much military and political aggression.

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