International Workshop

The Sea in Scandinavian Literature

17-19 January 2024
Institut für Skandinavistik, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt

With

Anders Ehlers Dam

Søren Frank

Christine Hamm

Brandon Kaaz

Judith Meurer-Bongardt

Radka Stahr

Philipp Wagner

Thomas Fechner-Smarsly

Guðrun í Jákupsstovu

Annegret Heitmann

Laura Löslein

Karl Emil Rosenbæk

Jorge Centeno Vilca

Mia Österlund

Organisation: Katie Ritson & Frederike Felcht

Further information:

https://www.uni-

frankfurt.de/44354505/Aktuelles#TheSeaInScandinavianLiterature







Schedule

Wednesday 17 January

Room: Casino 1.802

18:00 Welcome and Introduction

Dr. Katie Ritson, Prof. Dr. Frederike Felcht

18:15 **Keynote Lecture and Discussion**

Prof. Dr. Søren Frank: Big Blue Nordic

19:30 Reception

Thursday 18 January

Room: IG Farbenhaus 1.418

10:00 Coffee

10:15 - 11:30 Panel I

Liminal Zones

Guðrun í Jákupsstovu: "The eastern coast of the North Sea": Instability and Reorientation in Dorthe Nors' *A Line in the World*

Prof. Dr. Anders Ehlers Dam: Coastal Writing: The Wadden Sea in the Works of St. St. Blicher, Peter Seeberg and Dorthe Nors

11:30 - 11:45 Break

11:45 - 13:00 Panel II

Temporal Seas

Jorge Centeno Vilca: Metabolic Totality and the Baltic Sea: A Marxist Ecocritical Reading of Tranströmer's *Östersjöar* (1974).

Prof. Dr. Annegret Heitmann: Maritime Time in Solvej Balle's novel *Om udregning af rumfang* (2020ff.)

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch

14:00 - 15:15 **Panel III**

The Sea and the Subject

Dr. Radka Stahr: The Intoxicating Ocean: Alcohol and the Sea in Scandinavian Literature (in Danish)

Prof. Dr. Christine Hamm: A Woman's Life and The Sea – Vigdis Stokkelien's trilogy on Gro (*Lille-Gibraltar*, 1972, *Båten under Solseilet*, 1982, and *Stjerneleden*, 1984)

15:15 - 15:30 Break

15:30 - 16:45 Panel IV

Storied Seas

Dr. Philipp Wagner: The Children and the Sea: On the Representation of the Sea in Annika Thors' Steffi and Nelli Series

Dr. Mia Österlund: How Do We Narrate Ourselves in Relation to the Sea? Perspectives on Contemporary Nordic Illustrated Children's Books (in Swedish)

17:00 - 18:30 Walk along the River Main

18:45 Dinner: Restaurant **Bar Shuka**, Niddastraße 56, 60329 Frankfurt am Main

Friday 19 January

Room: IG Farbenhaus NG 2.701

09:30 Coffee

09:45 - 11:00 Panel V

Post-Industrial Seas

Brandon Kaaz: Diving Deep: A Blue Ecocritical Reading of Øyvind Rimbereid's *Solaris korrigert* (2004)

PD Dr. Thomas Fechner-Smarsly: Offshore Oil Technologies, Waste, and the Perspective of Human Labour in Rimbereid's Poems

11:00 - 11:30 Break

11:30 - 12:45 **Panel VI**

Oceanic Utopias/Dystopias

Laura Löslein: Endangered and dangerous species: Deep sea ecology in Frank Schätzings *The Swarm* (2004)

Dr. Karl Emil Rosenbæk: Electriculture and Solarcommunism: Oceanic Visions in Ask Katzeff's Futurisms.

12:45 - 13:45 Lunch

13:45 - 15:00 Panel VII

Storytelling for Ocean Conservation?

Dr. Judith Meurer-Bongardt: With New Narratives Towards a More Sustainable Ocean Governance? Narrative Strategies and Agency in the Scientific Art-Project "Radical Ocean Futures" from Stockholm (in Swedish)

Closing Discussion

15:00 END

Hotel:

Hotel Nizza, Elbestraße 10, 60329 Frankfurt am Main

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Workshop 17-19 January - Abstracts and Participant List

KEYNOTE

Søren Frank "Big Blue Nordic"

In my talk, I will argue for a model of the Nordic region as a "Big Blue Nordic." I will discuss what implications this perspectival change from land to sea potentially has for our understanding of the relationship between humans, nature, and society and of concepts such as ecology, sustainability, geography, and history. More specifically and bearing in mind that we seemingly inhabit a transition period between the Holocene and the Anthropocene epochs, I will examine the possible benefits of scholars directing their attention towards a blue literary history.

Temporally, the human species is not only evolutionary linked to the ocean in the form of a myth of origin, the planet as such may also very well "end with it," as Captain Nemo suggests in Verne's undersea classic – the same idea is repeated by Elizabeth DeLoughrey when she speaks of the ocean as "our anticipated destiny." Ontologically, the transition into the Anthropocene reveals planetary mechanisms of greater instability and weather events characterized by increasing unpredictability and intensity, qualities that remind us of how the ocean behaves.

Reading blue literature, historical as well as contemporary, and learning about how writers from Homer and Jens Munk to Kim Stanley Robinson and Siri Jacobsen have portrayed and imagined human "experiments in living wet" may provide us with invaluable ÜberLebenswissen, Ottmar Ette's semantically plural concept that generally signifies "knowledge about life" and "knowledge about living," but more specifically it also means "knowledge about survival".

From the sagas and the logbooks of early modern navigators to nautical novels about sailors on board sailing ships and steamships and contemporary climate fiction, petrofiction, and speculative fiction, the literary history of the Nordic countries reveals a color bluer than the literary histories of most other regions. We only have to revisit our literary tradition and look for that blue shade.

Guðrun í Jákupsstovu

"The eastern coast of the North Sea": Instability and reorientation in Dorthe Nors' A Line in the World

This paper analyses Dorth Nors' creative nonfiction text, A Line in the World (2022), with a specific focus on its depiction of the Danish west coast as a transformative landscape reshaping perceptions of time and reorienting notions of national identity. Reflecting on the region's peripheral status within Danish society, Nors presents a subtle resistance to the Danish centres of power to the east by casting the Danish west coast as the "the eastern coast of the North Sea" (37). Emphasising the North Sea as the territory the region orients itself towards, Nors' text invites a perspective that looks beyond the national borders of Denmark and instead gazes outwards to Norway in the north, and the Wadden Sea islands shared by Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands in the south.

Through this focus, Nors navigates how local identities across national boundaries are formed along this coastline, and how they might be influenced by its ever-changing environment. But beyond this human history, the text also engages with the landscape history of this coastal area, tracing both its geological evolution as well as its "lively" present. This notion is particularly compelling in the text's juxtaposition of the flat Danish landscape and the many vertical architectures that are built along this coast – church spires, lighthouses, and the chimneys from the chemical factory, Cheminova. Exploring how these architectures interact with the North Sea environment – and gradually erode through exposure to its force – this paper explores what histories these architectures represent, and how their interaction with the North Sea environment situates questions of temporality and future to this coastal environment.

Jorge Ernesto Centeno Vilca Metabolic Totality and the Baltic Sea: A Marxist Ecocritical Reading of Tranströmer's Östersjöar (1974)

In his long poem Österjöar (1974) Tranströmer depicts a complex tapestry of (dis-)connections and (dis-)unities between social and natural temporalities, personal and collective memories, physical and metaphysical experiences within a specific space: the Baltic Sea. Its semantic multiplicity is stressed by using different generic discourses which are organised by an individual lyrical voice and by using metaphors which mediate between concrete and abstract experiences. By reading this poem as an attempt to depict the metabolic totality of the Baltic Sea, I seek to bring this long poem in relation with current ecocritical debates between Marxist and Latourian perspectives around the concept of hybridity. Following this, I argue that the political configuration of the poem turns communication into the central concern and the sea into a symbolic and concrete space where the former can be negotiated.

Annegret Heitmann

Maritime Time in Solvej Balle's novel *Om udregning af rumfang* (2020ff.)

Solvej Balle has just published the fifth of seven projected volumes of her novel Om udregning af rumfang/On the calculation of volume, whose protagonist and narrator Tara Stelter is caught in a time-loop of an eternally repeated 18th of November. This existential state of emergency brings about various attempts to come to terms with the situation and prompts reflections about the relationship of time and space, until towards the end of volume 3 the philosophical interest is increasingly overlaid by a critique of civilisation. Crucial for this move is the episode about Olga Periti and her walk along the North Sea coast, on which I will concentrate in my paper. The rhythm of the Wadden Sea coast calls for an alternative conception of time, which challenges linear progression or the stasis of November 18th.

Anders Dam

Coastal Writing: The Wadden Sea in the Works of St. St. Blicher, Peter Seeberg and Dorthe Nors

In my presentation, I analyze the writings of three Danish authors about the coastline stretching out along present-day Northern Germany to Northern Jutland peninsula, focusing on the representation of the constantly changing coastal landscape of the Wadden Sea region. St. St. Blicher was one of the first Danish authors who wrote about Jutland. In his Vestlig Profil af den Cimbriske Halvø fra Hamborg til Skagen (1838), he set himself the goal of describing the whole Danish west coast from south to north. In the 20th century, Peter Seeberg revisited Blicher's coast project with his Vestlig profil af den jyske halvø (published posthumously in 2000 in an edition with photographs by Katrine Ussing). Finally, Dorthe Nors published recently, in collaboration with photographer Henrik Saxgren, the book En linje i verden (2021), which follows as well the coastline in literary writing. I examine the type of writing engendered and inspired by the coastal landscape, as well as the intertextual connection between these texts, starting with Blicher text, which functions as a topographical hypotext. How are the Wadden Sea and its coast written and rewritten into the examined works? What is the function of the Wadden Sea in the understanding of the fluid, everchanging border between sea and land?

Radka Stahr

The intoxicating ocean: Alcohol and the sea in Scandinavian Literature

In my paper I will explore aspects of the relationship between the sea and alcohol in Nordic literature. There are two main scenarios; one in which there is a culture of drinking at sea, the other in which being at sea is likened to being drunk. The first type is often captured in sea shanties, but also in other literary motifs, such as drinking on passenger ferries, or drowning at sea as a result of drinking. One quite specific link between alcohol and the sea is in the question of guilt in postcolonial literature that is concerned with the transport of sugar cane

from the colonies in order to produce rum. The other kind of literature, which involves a more metaphorical connection between literature and the sea, primarily stems from the inability to walk straight without falling, exactly as on the deck of a ship in the high seas. The intoxicating feeling of riding the waves finds a particular echo in lyrical form, where poets use rhythmic components to represent the sensation of movement.

Following my overview of these general considerations of the relationship between alcohol and the sea I will focus on two literary texts: Jens Bjørneboes novel *Haiene* (1974) and Martin Svedmans poetry collection *Når jeg drikker* (2019), both of which reflect the link between alcohol and the sea. Bjørneboe's novel is a story of a sea voyage and a shipwreck, in which the characters' enthusiasm for alcohol on ship takes on allegorical qualities, whereas Svedman's poems are the painful testimony of a man trying to stay sober, but failing again and again, his state of delirium accompanied by strange images of the sea. Contradictory though these works may seem, they have in common their fascination with the intoxicating qualities of both alcohol and the sea—both of which are hard to resist.

(OBS: The talk will be in Danish.)

Christine Hamm

"A Woman's Life and The Sea – Vigdis Stokkelien's *Lille-Gibraltar*, *Båten under Solseilet* and *Stjerneleden*"

Vigdis Stokkelien's three books Lille-Gibraltar, 1972, Båten under Solseilet, 1982, and Stjerneleden, 1984, describe human beings who suffer of anxiety because they experience violence and hate, but also witness global oil and weapon trade, and environmental pollution.

All three books end in a personal disaster for the main protagonist Gro: In Lille-Gibraltar, she contributes as a thirteen-year-old girl to an explosion of the German fort on the island where she lives, and she is gang-raped by Norwegians celebrating the liberation of Norway in May 1945. In Båten under Solseilet, twenty-year-old Gro increasingly suffers from her knowledge of how people live in the former Eastern colonies. In the end, she has to leave the oil cargo ship where she works and must return home to recover from Malaria. In Stjerneleden, middle-aged Gro suffers from severe back-pain. Towards the end of the novel, she is sexually insulted by her nurse and takes her own life by drowning in the sea outside her house.

Contemporary critics connected the apocalyptic mode characterizing the novels to Stokkelien's fight for human rights in her journal articles, as well as her essays against the Vietnam war. I will show that Stokkelien's trilogy today forces us to recognize the impact on the oceans by the second world war, Norway's oil trading, and the country's membership of the Nato. While Gro herself tries to remind herself of poetic pictures of the sea, Stokkelien's plot calls first and foremost for more attention to the less beautiful aspects. Following Elizabeth DeLoughrey's claims in her article 'Toward a Critical Ocean Studies for the Anthropocene', I argue that in Stokkelien's texts the sea becomes visible in "less poetic

terms", not the least because of the militarization of the oceans (DeLoughrey 2019, p. 22). The violence performed on Gro's body as well as the sea throughout the trilogy is experienced by modern readers as predicting the disastrous effects of climate change and global capitalism.

Philipp Wagner

The children and the sea: On the representation of the sea in Annika Thors' Steffi and Nelli series

The title of the YA novels *En ö i havet* (1996), *Näckrosdammen* (1997), *Havets djup* (1998) und *Öppet hav* (1999) show that the sea has a significant role in Annika Thors four-volume Steffi and Nelli series, which deals with the lives of two Viennese refugee children on the Göteborg coast during World War II. Despite the series' international acclaim, TV serialisation, and career as a set text in Swedish schools, it has only rarely been the focus of literary scholarship. My paper focuses on the representation of the sea and the islands, and on their intertextual and intermedial dimensions across all four volumes. I will argue that the islands stand in metonymic relationship with the life of the protagonist Steffi. In contrast to the island, the sea is a multifaceted and ambivalent symbol that can be read against the background of new scholarship in Blue Humanities.

Mia Österlund

How Do We Narrate Ourselves in Relation to the Sea? Perspectives on Contemporary Nordic Illustrated Children's Books

Abstract to follow

(OBS: The talk will be in Swedish.)

Brandon Kaaz

Diving Deep. A Blue Ecocritical Reading of Øyvind Rimbereids Solaris korrigert (Solaris Corrected, 2004)

Published in 2004, Øyvind Rimbereid's volume of poems Solaris korrigert was integrated into a collection of canonical Norwegian literature, the Norsk litterær kanon, only four years later. The volume itself gets its name from one of the poems in it, the long poem Solaris korrigert. Written in a language invented by the author – apparently comprised of dialectal Norwegian, English, German, Old Norse and other languages spoken in and around the North Sea – the poem takes us to »Stavgersand« in the year 2480. The 37-page-long narrative poem is told from the perspective of an elusive »aig«, a worker in »organic 14.6«. It is through the lyrical narrator that we are given glimpses of the diegetic world. We learn, for example, that

the narrator works with robots and repairs pipes for 30 minutes a day, that society and the environment have undergone drastic changes, and that the oil wells in the North Sea appear to have run out of their liquid, black gold. Over the course of the poem, the narrator is sent to »SOLARIS«, a (presumably) virtual world run by »Breynmachine BK2884« at the bottom of an empty oil well.

In my presentation, I will examine the long poem from the perspective of the Blue Humanities. This I will do by focusing on three main points. First, I plan on discussing the poem's language and theme with Sigmund Freud's concept of »das Unheimliche« in order to find a way to speak about the effect the poem has on its readers. In the second part, I will focus my attention on the sea. The narrator's life is deeply interwoven with the sea not only due to their work on underwater pipes, but also the geographical reference to Western Norway and the location of »SOLARIS« in an underwater oil well. On this occasion, I will speak about the multiple allusions to seagrass that can be found throughout the text. Lastly, I will examine the place in which »SOLARIS« is located: The empty oil well is a strange place located in the sea that, at the same time, is cut off from it.

Thomas Fechner-Smarsly

"Syddr and Grease: Offshore-Oil-Technologies, waste and the perspective of human labor"

In Øyvind Rimbereid's "Solaris korrigert" (2004) and "Jimmen" (2011), oil technology is 'observed' from a point of view on land (Stavanger), on the one hand from the perspective of the last waste hauler as the first platforms are towed out to sea in the 1970s, and on the other from a distant future perspective of post-fossil energies - with their rotting pipelines and empty gas wells - by the foreman of a robot cleaning crew. The double temporal perspective is also juxtaposed with one of space (offhore/onshore/underworld) and one of superfluous matter from the spirit of waste - the protagonists 'embody' its ostracized part ("Der verfemte Teil", G. Bataille) with their work on the remnants of abundance and are themselves already marginal figures, even superfluous in their hybridity (coupling human-horse and human-machine/robot) and an impurity of language. — Outlook on the new waste: Oil storage in empty gas wells and relocation of the city of Stavanger to a similar one ("Solaris korrigert").

Laura Löslein

Endangered and dangerous species: Deep Sea ecology in Frank Schätzings *The Swarm* (2004)

With its Ballad *The Diver* (1797) the German writer Friedrich Schiller marks a starting point in a literary Deep Sea interest. For decades the Deep Sea was and still is represented as a realm of hardly accessible knowledge which makes it a space of phantasma but also one of invisible dangers. Because of its extremity regarding high water pressure, cold temperatures or darkness

its exploration is only possible with special technology. As we step in to the Age of the Anthropocene the interest on risks and dangers has shifted more and more to natural disasters like biodiversity loss, ocean acidification and climate change. Frank Schätzing addresses all these issues in his ecothriller The Swarm (2004). The novel starts with various ecological anomalies in the world's oceans on a global scale: for instance the sudden appearance of methane bacteria eating bristle worms on the continental slope near Trondheim. They were found by the oil company 'Statoil' who is planning to construct a new platform in 700 hundred meters depth. Their operation depends on the ecological status of these worms. While the marine biologist Sigur Johanson researches on the exact species, the worm population increases rapidly which later leads to an unstable ocean floor and at last to a catastrophic mega tsunami sweeping over North Europe. The centre of this catastrophic development is a highly intelligent species living in the Deep See that intends to destroy the human kind. The presentation wants to set a focus on the relationship between these marine worms as potentially endangered species and humans as it changes rapidly during the plot to the human kind as endangered species. In that sense the presentation explores moments of human and non-human agency through an ecocritical lens located in the northern sea and its representation in German literature.

Karl Emil Rosenbæk Scandinavian Solarpunk and Wet Communitarianism in Ask Katzeff's Futurisms

In a Scandinavian context, the literary genre of Solarpunk is almost completely absent. However, the Danish writer Ask Katzeff has published two small collections of 'futurisms' where ecological symbiosis and solarity are key ingredients. The 'techtopian' visions of the future that we have come to know in IPCC-negotiations, advertisements, and industry forecasts, are electro at the heart. As Bill Gates writes in his climate(savior)-book How to Avoid a Climate Disaster (2021): "I wasn't always aware of how much we rely on electricity, but over the years I've gradually come to see how essential it is. [...] In fact, it's fair to say that I'm in awe of all the physical infrastructure that makes electricity so cheap, available, and reliable." Yet, on its own, as Dominic Boyer succinctly writes in No More Fossils (2023), "electrical infrastructure cannot disrupt the world made by sucro, carbo, petro. Indeed, if history is any guide, it is more likely that electroculture will emerge deeply shaped by the grooves of petroculture." A radically new future, Katzeff therefore suggests in his work, needs to root out the techtopian electro-fantasy of business as usual and propose unthinkable alternatives. Thus, situated at Svendborg near the South Funen Archipelago, solarcommunitarian oceanic visions saturate Katzeff's writings. This paper asks, what we are to extract from such watery solarpunk writings in addition to the obvious rejection of status quo elongation?

Judith Meurer-Bongardt

Can new narratives save the oceans? Narrative strategies and their impact in the science-art project Radical Ocean Futures in Stockholm

The notion that literature and art can have an impact on human consciousness, and thereby influence their decision-making has been a cornerstone of Northern European thinking since at least the "Modern Breakthrough." The interdisciplinary Radical Ocean Futures (ROF) project, which launched in 2018 at the Stockholm Resilience Centre, exemplified this mindset. On opening the website of the project, the viewer is confronted by four futuristic images of the ocean along with a text that clearly articulates the intentions of the researchers behind it: "A Science Fiction Prototyping approach to imagining our future ocean. Why? Because our oceans matter and we need new narratives to #SaveOurOcean and guide efforts to transform towards more sustainable ocean governance."

In my paper I will explore to what extent the narratives developed in the ROF project conform to "Anthropocene narratives" (Dürbeck 2018; Frank 2019), and whether the four scenarios can indeed be described as "new narratives" (Braidotti 2014; Haraway 2016; Tsing 2017). I will argue that there is a discrepancy between the ocean in its ecological materiality and the discursive ocean as a complex nexus of human narrative, and discuss whether the ROF project is successful in combining these two in the service of ocean conservation.

(OBS: The talk will be in Swedish.)

Participants

- 1. Michelle Andor, Goethe University Frankfurt
- 2. Jorge Ernesto Centeno Vilca, Ludwig Maxmilian University Munich
- 3. Prof. Dr. Matthias Egeler, Goethe-University Frankfurt
- 4. Prof. Dr. Anders Ehlers Dam, Europa University Flensburg
- 5. PD Dr. Thomas Fechner-Smarsly, University of Bonn
- 6. Prof. Dr. Frederike Felcht, Goethe University Frankfurt
- 7. Prof. Dr. Søren Frank, University of Copenhagen
- 8. Caren Gäbel, Christian Albrecht University Kiel
- 9. Prof. Dr. Christine Hamm, University of Bergen
- 10. Marlene Hastenplug, Goethe University Frankfurt
- 11. Prof. Dr. Annegret Heitmann, Ludwig Maxmilian University Munich (emerita)
- 12. Guðrun í Jákupsstovu, University of Bern
- 13. Brandon Kaaz, Goethe University Frankfurt
- 14. Laura Löslein, Goethe University Frankfurt
- 15. Dr. Judith Meurer-Bongardt, University of Bonn
- 16. Dr. Katie Ritson, Ludwig Maxmilian University Munich
- 17. Dr. Karl Emil Rosenbæk, University of Southern Denmark
- 18. Dr. Radka Stahr, Charles University Prague
- 19. Dr. Philipp Wagner, University of Vienna
- 20. Dr. Mia Österlund, Åbo Akademi University

