

Special Issue:
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Environmental Change in Nordic Fiction

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Abstract

The article presents an analysis of *Urd* by Ruth Lillegraven and *Heime mellom istidene* by Guri Sørungård Botheim. These two works of poetry are studied from an ecocritical perspective primarily inspired by Timothy Morton's concept of *dark ecology* and Timothy Clark's idea of the Anthropocene. The main focus of the analysis is how the poems depict feelings of familiarity between modern humans, their ancestors, and their surroundings. In the discussion, particular attention is paid to the gendered aspects of familial melancholy. In this way, the author seeks to demonstrate how poetic form can contribute to a way of reading in the Anthropocene.

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel analysiert *Urd* von Ruth Lillegraven und *Heime mellom istidene* von Guri Sørungård Botheim. Diese beiden Gedichtsammlungen werden aus einer ökokritischen Perspektive untersucht, die vor allem von Timothy Mortons Konzept der *dunklen Ökologie* und Timothy Clarks Idee des Anthropozäns inspiriert ist. Im Mittelpunkt der Analyse steht die Frage, wie die Gedichte Gefühle der Vertrautheit zwischen dem modernen Menschen, seinen Vorfahren und seiner Umgebung darstellen. In der Diskussion wird den geschlechtsspezifischen Aspekten der familiären Melancholie besondere Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Auf diese Weise versucht der Autor zu zeigen, wie die poetische Form zu einer Lesart im Anthropozän beitragen kann.

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Anthropocene Melancholy: Uncanny Familiarity in Contemporary Norwegian Long Poems

Introduction

The narrative long poems *Urd*¹ by Ruth Lillegraven and *Heime mellom istidene*² («Home Between the Ice Ages») by Guri Sørungård Botheim provoke important reflections on the relations between the human and the nonhuman, as well as the opportunities and limits of human agency. Another similarity is how both texts follow a speaker who is simultaneously the narrator, assembling a story out of lyrical texts. Here, human life is depicted as process, unrest, and travel. These books can be viewed as exemplary of a tendency in current Scandinavian poetry, of not only lending itself to ecocritical readings, but even alluding to important ecocritical questionings. In much contemporary Norwegian poetry, we find criticisms of anthropocentrism and ideas about the agency of matter.³ This tendency could be regarded in conjunction with what Louise Mønster calls a current of »Anthropocene poetry« in the Nordic countries. Mønster even suggests that poetry is »[...] especially apt at exploring the changes in the natural and environmental conditions of humans.«⁴ However, one might wonder whether one of the abilities of poetry might not be precisely to question the very assumption of something called »the human« that can have a relation to something called »nature«. As I will argue, the Anthropocene can be thought of as an epoch that refutes the idea of locality implied in the reified notion of nature.

I situate the reading of *Urd* and *Heime mellom istidene* within what Jamie Lorimer claims is one of several ways of engaging with the Anthropocene, namely that of developing new ontologies of the human and the nonhuman. Lorimer's account of ontologies aiming to explore how the geological subjects of the Anthropocene appear as »vulnerable, material and asymmetrically entangled within the nonhuman and inhuman forces of an unruly planet«⁵ well describes the *object-oriented ontology* (OOO) of Timothy Morton, an important stepping stone in the following study.

In the following, I describe a theoretical framework relating Morton's account of *dark ecology*⁶ to Timothy Clark's discussion of Anthropocene reading practices.⁷ In the analysis of the two works, I claim that the past functions as a reservoir of living and non-living entities that intrude into the present, underlining melancholic transtemporal and transspatial relations. Thus, the poems express a longing for connection and situatedness confronted with the impossibility of a full overview brought about by the Anthropocene.

¹ Cf. Lillegraven 2013. The title refers to a character in Norse mythology, but also to a magazine for women published in Norway between 1897 and 1958, cf. below.

² Cf. Botheim 2016.

³ Cf. Andersen 2018, p. 22.

⁴ »[...] særligt velegnet til at udforske ændringerne i menneskets natur- og omverdensforhold.« (Mønster 2017, p. 165)

⁵ Lorimer 2017, p. 128.

⁶ Cf. Morton 2007; 2010.

⁷ Cf. Clark 2015.

Objects, Agency, and Melancholy

OOO gives the lie to the idea that the world exists as a product of human perception, positing instead a fundamental, withdrawn reality where all objects – humans and nonhumans – exist in mutually determining relationships, independent of whatever humans might think or however we might conceptualize beings outside of ourselves. Morton describes how the existence of what he calls *hyperobjects* means that we only perceive reality as a mesh that defies ontological categorization into discrete entities: »The wet stuff falling on my head in Northern California in early 2011 could have been an effect of the tsunami churning up La Niña in the Pacific and dumping it on the land, La Niña being a manifestation of global warming in any case.«⁸ Inspired by Morton, Timothy Clark argues that in the Anthropocene, all objects must be considered hyperobjects »according to the postulate that all things are deeply connected to all others, are withdrawn from human comprehension to a degree, but are also uncanny in their (unmanageable) proximity and their participation in our own being«.⁹ Thus, to Clark, the Anthropocene forms a »threshold concept« that reminds us of the limits of human perception.¹⁰

To Morton, hyperobjects force us to realize the inadequacy of Kantian, correlationist thinking. They exist independently of our perception of them, and we can only perceive them obliquely, if at all. My claim is that in Lillegraven's and Botheim's poetry, this realization is expressed as a form of gendered melancholy. Here, I employ »melancholy« in the psychoanalytic sense of »[...] loss, separation, deprivation, futile longing«,¹¹ arguing that both poets attempt to relate an invisible past to a perceptible present. In addition, their poems foreground questions of form and textual materiality in original ways, calling for a questioning of how a poem can be a way of understanding humans and their relations to, and dependencies on, ecological space. Thus, they depict a particular kind of *temporal ecology*, indicating a vastness in which *seeing* what is present around us can never give a full view of the potentially melancholy interconnectedness of all things. However, in their works not only is the verbal language used figuratively; visual elements – what lyrical theory commonly terms »opsis«¹² – are also employed to suggest the appearance of what cannot be seen.

Furthermore, the concept of melancholy is inspired by Morton's use of it in his description of a *dark ecology*. Rather than deep ecological harmony, the sense of ecological interconnectedness, he argues, is more aptly described as a *mesh*. This metaphor connotes not only the sense of being trapped in a snare, but also the uncanny familiarity between all life forms: »Every single life form is literally familiar: we're genetically descended from them.«¹³ Therefore, »[...] ecology is about relating not to Nature but to aliens and ghosts. Intimacy presents us with the

⁸ Morton 2013, p. 47.

⁹ Clark 2015, p. 25.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 14f.

¹¹ »[...] tap, separasjon, berøvelse, forgjeves lengsel [...]« (Bale 1997, p. 14)

¹² Cf. Frye 1957.

¹³ Morton 2010, p. 29.

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problem of inner space. Our intimacy with other beings is full of ambiguity and darkness.«¹⁴ Arguing for reintroducing »the uncanny into the poetics of the home,«¹⁵ Morton effectively demonstrates how we come unfinished into the world and are shaped as »selves« by relational trauma.¹⁶

However, when it comes to talking about defining oneself, our languages are replete with static metaphors of borders and place. *Definition*, suggesting a limit between the object defined and the surrounding world, is not the only one. *Identity* conjures an image of a self-contained subject, an *id*. Likewise, we talk about finding one's *place* in the world, as if it were a question of staying put. Morton's more dynamic view of place as »a questioning, a ›what happened here?‹,«¹⁷ arguably comes to the fore in poetry. As Jonathan Culler remarks, narrative poems »have ways of indicating the significance of the incident narrated, so that the report of incident becomes subordinated to a meaning in the lyric present.«¹⁸ I take Culler to mean that narrative poetry combines the amplitude and causal exploration of narrative with the ability of poetry to make particular events stand out as existentially important in the present. Likewise, as Stefan Kjerkegaard observes: »If something actually *is* narrated in poetry, it is often its heuristic procedure, e.g. the potentiality of an identity [...].«¹⁹ The poems of Lillegraven and Botheim do depict such a procedure, exploring the potentiality inherent in man's – or rather: woman's – relations to the nonhuman. Poetry, I want to argue, can be a way of questioning the meaning of events, thus opening up the idea of place.

Weaving a Text

Lillegraven's *Urd* opens with the most quintessential literary trope, a journey across water:

the creeks

have gained

weight

slithering

like

fat

white

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁵ Morton 2007, p. 177.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁸ Culler 2017, p. 278.

¹⁹ Kjerkegaard 2014, p. 188.

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worms

down the

mountain sides

it is the tenth

day of vacation

the seventeenth year

after I moved

the floats are red

and round, have been lying

out since

early in the

spring

the drops of water like

shiny pearls of sweat

on the cold water

you row like

your mother, says

my father

[...] ²⁰

²⁰ »bekkane / har lagt / seg ut // buktar / seg / som / feite / kvite / ormar / nedover / fjellside // det er tiande / feriedagen // syttande året / etter eg flytta // blåsene er raude / og runde, har lege / ute sidan / tidleg på / våren // vassdropane som / blanke sveitteperler / på det kalde vatnet // du ror som / mor di, seier / far min [...]« (Lillegraven 2013, p. 9)

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Notice how the form suggests the inseparability of the event narrated and the space in which it occurs in the present tense. The varying length of the lines visually depicts a turning, like the bend of the fjord, or like the white creeks. The overall shape of the opening poem could also resemble a drop of water or even the shape of the oar. The poetic subject heads back to her home village in what could be imagined as a Western Norwegian fjord. Her father compares her rowing to that of her mother, perhaps indicating her lack of training, or rather his masculinist prejudice: women don't know how to row. Nevertheless, the speaker is pulled out from the lyric present and reminded of her relation to the female lineage of her family.

Interestingly, the slithering worms seem almost like an intertextual nod to Morton's claim that »[e]cological art is duty bound to hold the slimy in view,« because it represents »the taboo substance of life itself.«²¹ In effect, the creek-worms herald the presence of something uncanny. As such, the book opens with an ambiguous image of a turning back to a past: the ancient trope of water travel, rowing as a premodern way of transportation, the hints of life-long toil in the simile of »sweating« water, and the well-used floats marking the placement of the fishing nets. Of course, the nets in themselves stand out as a symbol for a troubled sense of interconnectedness.

The opening poem continues as the father of the poetic subject offers her the house of her late great-aunt Seselja, who passed away unmarried and childless. I choose these adjectives fully aware of their potential sexism, for the poems do initially define Seselja using a rhetoric of deprivation, according to what she did not do and did not have. She is introduced as the deceased inhabitant of the old house: excluded from the allodial right of running the farm as a woman, she lodged there at the mercy of her male nephew. The house, then, is the *place* to which she belonged, and the father's initial comment on women's apparent inability to row takes on added meaning as a synecdoche of how women have had less control of their lives and fewer occasions to travel than their male counterparts. In contrast, the speaker of these poems is cast as a modern woman, ostensibly in greater control of her destiny.

However, one crucial point in common between Seselja and her grandniece is the act of weaving, traditionally conceived of as feminine. Seselja worked as a seamstress, sewing garments for the entire village. At this point, one may riff on one of Martin Heidegger's many etymological meditations:

The Greek for »to bring forth or to produce« is *tikto*. The word *techne*, technique, belongs to the verb's root *tec*. To the Greeks *techne* means neither art nor handicraft but rather: to make something appear, within what is present, as this or that, in this way or that way. The Greeks conceive of *techne*, producing, in terms of letting appear.²²

Questioning the philosophical coherence of this approach, Greg Garrard refers to a similar passage in Heidegger as »an etymo-poetic process of conjuring from the murk of ancient meanings a spirit that reveals exactly what the magician would have it reveal.«²³ However, Heidegger's perhaps rather dubious way of excavating etymological

²¹ Morton 2007, p. 159.

²² Heidegger 2013, p. 157.

²³ Garrard 2010, p. 263.

meanings arguably offers what Morton calls – referring to Heidegger’s philosophy in general and not the etymo-poetic process as such – »a vivid sense of the uncanny strangeness of coexistence«. ²⁴ Somehow, various meanings coexist, underlining in a rather frustrating way how the full meaning is something that cannot be grasped. Poetic language in itself seems to turn into a hyperobject.

To see how this particular passage can be helpful, it is necessary to note how Heidegger leaves implied the way in which the act of bringing forth is sexed. For although he fails to mention it, the verb *tikto* strongly connotes the act of giving birth. ²⁵ Seselja’s weaving calls attention to another possible link in the etymological chain *tikto–technē*, namely *texere*, the Latin verb for *weaving* and basis for the word *text*. ²⁶ The poetic persona is a writer, and the book alludes to the etymological link between texts and textiles, as well as the metaphor of writing as weaving. As they plan how to furnish the house, the husband of the poetic persona tells her: »now you can / sit here, watch / over the yard / and the water // card your / thoughts, spin / your phrases / weave *your* / web«. ²⁷ Where Seselja’s life was one of corporeal toil, the poetic persona is a woman of words, and *Urd* is in many ways a depiction of her attempt to connect across the mesh. Here, writing and weaving are both ways of bringing people together, however unfulfillingly, across time and space.

The importance of weaving is signaled already in the title of the book. *Urd* is one of the three *nornes*, the goddesses of destiny in Norse mythology, the other two being *Verdandi* and *Skuld*. Their names derive from verbs meaning *to become* and *to be going to*, ²⁸ and could be construed as *what has been*, *what is in becoming*, and *what will be*. Imagined as present at the birth of every child, they weave individual threads of destiny for all humans. By evoking these goddesses, the poems connect the ideas of building, living, weaving, and familial feeling across time and space. In one poem, Seselja’s mother teaches her to spin yarn: »do not / let go too / fast, says / mother, or the / thread won’t go / through // but do not / hold it too / firmly either // or it will / tear«. ²⁹ This could be read as an exhortation to find a balance between staying and moving, between cultivating the connection – and letting go.

As Culler remarks, lyric form is a way of presenting happenings as significant. ³⁰ This implies that the form signals some sort of existential significance, and that more is at stake than in a conventional narrative such as a novel: »But it may be that the apparently trivial event is not so much rendered important in itself as marked as an occasion for

²⁴ Morton 2013, p. 22.

²⁵ While in Ancient Greek, *tikto* [τίκτω] was used of human parents of both sexes in the sense of begetting or bringing forth, it was limited to female animals in the sense of »to bear young, breed«. (Liddell & Scott 1970, p. 807)

²⁶ These words likely share a common Indo-European root, reconstructed as »*tek-s-« (de Vaan 2008, p. 619).

²⁷ »så kan du / sitje her, sjå / ut over tunet / og vatnet // karde dine / tankar, spinne / dine setningar / veve *din* / vev.« (Lillegraven 2013, p. 15)

²⁸ Cf. Steinsland 2005, pp. 249f.

²⁹ »ikkje / slepp for / fort, seier / mor, då går / ikkje tråden / gjennom // men ikkje / halde for / hardt heller // då slitnar / han.« (Lillegraven 2013, p. 26)

³⁰ Cf. Culler 2017, p. 259.

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poetic power.«³¹ That is, the event – such as Seselja’s life – might not have been significant then. But it can be in the present, a part of the present-day poetic subject’s life providing an existential epiphany, a melancholy feeling of familiarity. An awareness of the Anthropocene strengthens this, because it implies that the significance of even the smallest of events cannot be fully grasped and might even change in step with changes in spatial and temporal perspectives.

The title itself suggests that the trivial might become significant, as *Urd* is also the title of one of the earliest Norwegian weekly magazines aimed at a female readership. In this way, Lillegraven effectively weaves threads between female experiences in different eras of Norwegian history. These magazines provide Seselja with an imaginative way out of her self-chosen entrapment in the barn where she likes to hide, as she reads gaudy headlines and pins up pictures of celebrities with sumptuous, colorful dresses. The seeming triviality of glossy magazines is thus contrasted with their importance for the secluded life of a working-class woman in the twentieth century.

The Ambiguity of Water

In addition to weaving, another central trope in Lillegraven’s *Urd* is water in different states. Water is life-bringing and it connotes an expanded view for the poetic persona as she plans to write her poems overlooking the fjord. But water can also be fatal. In one poem, Seselja watches in horror as a neighbor, a young boy of fourteen, skates across the frozen water, unaware of a hole in the ice. She declares:

now
someone will
drown on
the water [...]»³²

She watches the boy heading across the lake with a saw. One might view this as another synecdoche, that of male efforts to control the nonhuman. In the Anthropocene, we are reminded that any act with which we manipulate the surroundings can have unpredictable repercussions. Moreover, the drowning strongly indicates our inability to *perceive* the dangers ahead of us. In this poem, then, Seselja the seamstress stands in for the *norme* who designs the unavoidable sequence of events. Her declaration that someone will drown turns into reality, much like how the text as a fabric creates the event as textual reality. The text intervenes in the present of the reader, showing us in a chilling way how our limited viewpoint blocks us from a full overview of impending disaster. For Seselja’s seclusion turns her into a Cassandra, a seer to whom no one listens. It is only by being turned into a poem that her declaration is made public and thus effectual. Her announcement of death cannot save the boy, but it can remind the reader of the inscrutability and unpredictability of events.

³¹ Ibid., p. 283.

³² »no kjem / nokon til / å drukne på / vatnet [...]« (Lillegraven 2013, p. 47)

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Familial intimacy, as Morton underlines, is filled with darkness, perhaps more often than light. Our relations to our environment – whether this be the humans of our past, the nonhumans of our present, or something on the border between the two, like objects left behind by those who lived before us – are fraught with a melancholy sense of loss. In *Urd*, the speaker feels her growing belly, carrying twins, pulling her towards the domestic and towards earth, which are two sides to the same story:

the belly pulls

me towards earth

the children grow ever

bigger and stronger

in there

they are still

just a little more than

half way

but we have to

head eastwards again

back to the

real

life

[...]

what is it

he says

nothing

I say

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but all the way
across the mountain I can
hear the foremothers

*why are
you not staying
they
whisper*

[...]

these
women
who never
gave up

not before
they slipped
on the ice in
the yard and
hurt themselves
half to
death³³

The length of the poem, ending with the word »death« at its bottom, underlines the slow gravitational pull of the pregnant belly towards an earth that is both life-giving and the abode of the deceased. But slipping on the ice,

³³ »magen dreg / meg mot jorda / barna blir stadig / større og sterkare / der inne // enno er dei / berre litt over / halvveges // men vi må / austover att / tilbake til det / eigentlege / livet [...] *kva er det* / seier han // *ingenting* / seier eg // men heile vegen / over fjellet kan eg / høyre formødrene // *kvifor blir / du ikkje her* / kviskrar / dei [...] desse / kvinnene / som aldri / gav seg // ikkje før / dei sklei / på isen i / tunet og / slo seg / halvt i / hel.« (Ibid., p. 83f.)

another instantiation of the ambiguous symbol of water, is merely part of the process of dying; the women were hurt *half* to death. Life as a process, ending in an event and in the earth as the final resting place, is contrasted with travel as process, harking back to the difference between the lives of past and present women from the opening poem. In the Norwegian imaginary, heading eastwards means leaving the rural West with its open, dramatic fjords for the urbanized lowlands around the capital. That is where »real life« goes on, which might mean the life of the present, as opposed to the nostalgic »weaving« in the West. The evasive answer the poetic speaker gives her husband is contrasted with the eloquence of the poem, which in itself reads as an answer to the whispers from the invisible deceased.

Hence, the melancholic attachment between the speaker and her foremothers is depicted as a dialogue with their ghosts, bringing Morton's *dark ecology* to mind: »We should find ways to stick around with the sticky mess that we're in and that we are, making thinking dirtier, identifying with ugliness, practicing ›hauntology‹ (Derrida's phrase) rather than ontology.«³⁴ What could be more hauntological than feeling stickily attached to a series of ghostly ancestors? Here, the body itself is a site of the uncanny and of non-identity.³⁵ This is not to evoke an essentialist claim, associated with reductive accounts of ecofeminism, that women necessarily enjoy a closer relation to a reified idea of nature. I mean this rather as a more moderate observation that female experiences like pregnancy, which have long been used to argue that women are more biologically than rationally governed, and thus inferior, can actually provide a nuanced view on the fraught relations between the human and the nonhuman. As Valerie Plumwood writes: »[...] an ecological feminist position could and should privilege some of the experiences and practices of women over those of men as a source of change without being committed to any form of naturalism.«³⁶ Moreover, the sensation of having someone inside oneself, pulling one towards the past, is also a strikingly apt metaphor for melancholy in the psychoanalytic sense. As Morton points out: »For Freud, melancholy is a refusal to digest the object, a sticking in the throat, an introjection.«³⁷ He goes on to state: »Dark ecology [...] is a perverse, melancholy ethics that refuses to digest the object into an ideal form.«³⁸ The melancholy familiarity in these poems is a result of *tikto* – giving birth, but also weaving, building, and writing. The poems thus create an impression of similarity in these actions through their effect of producing a haunting interconnectedness – a mesh.

Uncovering the Past in the Anthropocene

In Botheim's *Heime mellom istidene*, the inside leaf quotes a passage from the great classic of environmentalist thought, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1999), concerning »man's life in the primitive ages«: »He dwelt, as it

³⁴ Morton 2007, p. 188.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁶ Plumwood 1993, p. 35. And further: »We do not have to assume that nature is a sphere of harmony and peace, with which we as humans will never be in conflict.« (*Ibid.*, p. 37)

³⁷ Morton 2007, p. 186.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

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were, in a tent in this world, and was either threading the valleys, or crossing the plains, or climbing the mountain-tops. But lo! men have become the tools of their tools.«³⁹ Thoreau's words imply a condition of dependency on things, binding humans to specific places, a condition that is fundamentally at odds with the harmonious life.

Botheim seems to describe the problems of such a dependency while simultaneously problematizing the idea that harmony is attainable. For the book creates a pervasive sense of disunity already through its graphic layout. Its cover and inside leaves feature semi-abstract illustrations evoking ice, snow, and the blue sea, or possibly the great blue heavens, another concern of Thoreau's. As the reader turns the page, a two-page spread is divided into two plates: the left side is greenish, bordering on *petrol blue*, the right side is dark blue. The division potentially suggests a split between Norway's fossil-fueled economy and an idea of a life embedded in oceanic purity. The blue spread also provides the title of the first of the book's three sections: *Heime* (»[At] home«). The question of what »being at home« entails forms the premise of the entire book, where the division into two colors is underlined by the division into two voices: While some of the poems are written in Nynorsk, the written standard of modern Norwegian based on the common features of rural dialects,⁴⁰ others are written in a more phonemic representation of Botheim's own dialect from Lesja in the district of Gudbrandsdalen. The oscillation between these two ways of writing thus turns the book into a dialogue between the local and the national.

Similarly, some poems are printed in petrol blue font, others in deep blue, but the different font colors and the different writing norms do not overlap. Rather, deep blue is used for utterances by the poetic subject, a woman with an academic background in her late thirties, from Gudbrandsdalen and now living in Trondheim. Even more unambiguously than in *Urd*, then, the reader is encouraged to picture the speaker as an autofictional portrait of the author. While the utterances of the poetic »I« are rendered in deep blue, petrol blue font is used for any other person, or even things such as signs and newspaper clippings quoted. This graphic and typographic sorting of the text into several speakers suggests a duality between the subject and her surroundings but also a duality within herself, expressed through her oscillation between two different writing norms. At the same time, the layout of the book also creates affective bonds between these different elements. For example, the choice of writing in dialect could be read as an attempt to come closer to the family as opposed to using Nynorsk, which as a national writing norm is arguably more academic and less personal.

In the first and third part of the book, the poems are written in dialect, and are untitled. The middle part focuses on the speaker's life in Trondheim, the poems are in Nynorsk, and all have titles. This makes the middle, urban part come across as more fragmented, whereas the first and second part indicate a stronger connectedness between past and present since the texts are not always split up into distinguishable poems. The first poem, in petrol blue, opens:

after the ice age we wandered

³⁹ Thoreau 1999, p. 35.

⁴⁰ This is the same written standard Lillegraven uses in *Urd*.

here with tents
I am everyone who came here
they knew nothing
about how they lifted me together
upwards through the terrain
upwards through generations⁴¹

Who are »we«? One might initially view the poem as speaking on behalf of a larger collective, representing the original tribe of Gudbrandsdalen that settled in the area as the ice melted. Indeed, the reader gradually comes to realize that the color of the text represents someone other than the main speaker of the book. Most likely, we are to take the »we« as her ancestors, further implying that the »me« in this poem does not represent the main speaker. I interpret the poem as not representing one single thing or person, but rather the multitudinous mesh that climate change makes visible, what Clark terms »transpersonal agency«, operating at »the universal level of the human species as a whole«.⁴² For in *Heime mellom istidene* the Anthropocene also forms part of the background. A poem likewise printed in petrol blue, in the middle part titled »Trondheim,« consists of a message, perhaps sent from the main speaker's mother or a sibling:

the snow drifts are melting more than ever
now one can search for arrowheads
are you coming home?⁴³

We note how here, as in *Urd*, images of ice and its melting are associated with the act of perceiving something differently. But in Botheim's poems, these images have a different symbolic value as indications of changes generated by the Anthropocene. The drifts melt more today than even in the ice age, strengthening the troubled familial bond between the speaker and her ancestors. The arrowheads are not only nonhuman reminders of what is lost, but also »strangers who disturb us with their proximity«.⁴⁴ As in *Urd*, »[w]hat is significant or insignificant in the past can change, [...] even drastically«⁴⁵ in the Anthropocene. Indeed, the ancient human tools no longer covered in snow come across as a striking metaphor for the magnitude of the Anthropocene as a historical development. As the average global temperature increases, the snow melts to reveal traces of the first ancestors to be the tools of

⁴¹ »ette istie vandra oss / hit med telt / e e alle som kom hit / ingenting visste døm / um at døm lyfta me i lag / oppover i terrenget / oppover i generasjonene.« (Botheim 2016, p. 9)

⁴² Clark 2015, p. 14.

⁴³ »snøfennene smeltar meir enn nokon gong / nå kan ein leite etter pilspissar / kjem du heim?« (Botheim 2016, p. 44)

⁴⁴ Morton 2007, p. 81.

⁴⁵ Clark 2015, p. 52.

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their tools. Throwing away their arrowheads, they established themselves as sedentary rather than nomadic, becoming dependent as time went by on crops and domesticated animals. Thus, the tools are what we might, following Heidegger, call a technology of dwelling, returning to visibility by the snow that melts because of the global increase in temperature. The reappearance of these tools is thus a reminder of the long roots and vast repercussions of the Anthropocene. The arrowheads are historically significant not only regressively, pointing to the past, but also progressively, pointing to a future where the white face of winter is gone forever. In this way, the ancestral provenance of the poetic persona is depicted as a parallel hyperobject to the hyperobject of climate change. It is not visible in its entirety, but palpable in all that climate change uncovers – including the mesh of the family.

Crucially, the suggestion of vast, planetary change is contrasted with the apparent stability and locality in the word »home«. Perhaps the poem speaks to a dawning realization that not even the home is untouched by environmental change. As the title indicates, home can exist only in a slice of time *between* other epochs – it is a dynamic concept. This affects the life of the speaker in that she does not want a child: »the child does not want to live / away from the families / away from mountains // the child wishes for a home«. ⁴⁶ Where the speaker in *Urd* arrives at a melancholic nostalgia during her pregnancy, the main speaker in Botheim's poems seeks to avoid the exacerbated feeling of homelessness that a child would have brought about. Indeed, home seems to be more accurately described as a process that can never be limited to the local. The following two poems provide an example of this; they are printed in dark blue font and not separated by titles – thus they form the same book spread:

my body is gathered
by the terrain
ground through thousands of years

I have
sucked salt and minerals
from the ground
into my own feet

I have freckles
on my face

[...]

⁴⁶ »barnet har ikkje lyst til å bu / borte frå slektene / borte frå fjell // barnet ynskjer seg ein heim.« (Botheim 2016, p. 33)

I have lived here

for a long time

[...]

people organize and organize

transport

redistribute

spreading out

am I the last one

to hail from

only one place?⁴⁷

The final question is a striking depiction of nonlocality, and of identity as a *questioning* – no answer is provided. In this poem, humans are a geological force, necessary to the poetic speaker's sense of identity, but also a menace to ecological stability and paradoxically to her sense of self. One is reminded of Clark's assertion that in order to avoid ascribing human agency as »a central, sovereign determinant of events«, we need »to transform what seems the work of few interacting points or agents into the work of a far more multiplicitous and plural web, such as a whole ecological/geographical and biological context traced over larger spatial and temporal scales [...]«. ⁴⁸ Of course, such a scale can be suggested and acknowledged, but never fully perceived. Botheim, it would seem, does carry out such a scalar transformation. Here, as the speaker speaks for herself, history is depicted as individually significant in the Anthropocene. The individual human, a result of thousands of years of growth, of sucking minerals into her feet, finds herself transcending the limits of the individual. In other words, the poem is a fantastic imagining of the human as an ancient, unsurveyable entity. At the same time, the melancholy darkness of *Heime mellom istidene* prevents it from lapsing into a romantic reification of place, instead providing a dynamic account of how the past occasions a frustrated longing to go back.

⁴⁷ »kroppen min e samla upp / tå terrenget / slift gjennom tusenvis tå år // e ha / sogje salt og mineral / frå bakkjin / inn i egne føt // e har frokno / i fjeset [...] / e ha budd her / lengje [...] / folk ordna og ordna / frakta / umfordele / sprer se utover // e e den siste / som kjøm frå / berre en plass?« (Ibid., p. 64f.)

⁴⁸ Clark 2015, p. 127.

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Here, identity is a process marked by questioning. Does the speaker want to stay – or to travel? Is staying somewhere even possible, given the ever more visible changes in the world? While the book's opening quote from Thoreau suggests a lamentation of human estrangement from the supposed harmonious state of walking through the world, the speaker does not seem content with her life as a nomad between two homes:

generations melt

flow outwards

move to warmer parts

of the country

my ancestors

are those who stayed

[...]

I do not want to be

the one who leaves

and does not come back⁴⁹

In the Norwegian, the present tense of the verbs »flyt« (»to float«) and »fløt« (»to move house«) are placed parallelly in two lines of verse in the first stanza, underlining the metaphorical depiction of moving as floating. The human is a floating mass, like ice, which changes as the rest of the mesh changes too.

Concluding Remarks: Melancholy Ambiguity

Lyric poetry, Culler notes, has anticipated OOO by apostrophizing nonliving matter as if it had agency.⁵⁰ The aim of the above readings has been to show how issues of the agency of matter are connected to attachments to the past. Feeling a sense of connection to the past comes across as futile when the local, as such, no longer exists. Instead of a reification of place, these narrative poems rather provide a constant questioning of what happens at a place and thus of an individual's sense of self and belonging. This is often referred to, however improperly, as *identity*. The »mesh« of the human and the nonhuman also involves connections between humans, transcending slices of time.

⁴⁹ »generasjonene smelta / flyt utover / fløt åt varmare dele / tå landet // forfedran mine / e døm som vart [...] e vil ikkje vera / den som reise / og ikkje kjøm attende.« (Botheim 2016, p. 18)

⁵⁰ Cf. Culler 2017, p. 242.

There is no monolithic subjectivity that can be reconstructed through a Romantic place. Rather, there is a fundamental ambivalence, a melancholic split where (at least) two actions are desired at the same time: the act of dwelling and the act of changing. Here, the poetic form itself, I have argued, is crucial to the work of thinking about the human predicament. The narrative, lyrical long form in itself speaks to a need to construct coherence out of long processes that might nevertheless be only fragmentarily and indirectly appreciated, like the scattered symbolic of poetry.

In their problematization of the notion of place, I read a fundamental ambivalence into the works of Lillegraven and Botheim. Their poems do not idealize a sense of belonging to a locality that is somehow more harmonious, idyllic, or less estranging than whatever the alternative is. Hence, they might be said to illustrate what Morton identifies as the often dark and ambiguous relation to the ghosts of the past that we cannot perceive, but which nevertheless surround us. This melancholy ambiguity arguably avoids strong but naïve forms of ecomimesis, i.e., a rhetoric that attempts to create a sense of immediacy.⁵¹ Instead, the efficacy of narrative poetry in exploring the significance of the past for a later present⁵² provides a forceful depiction of an ambiguity that is and must remain unresolved. It is an ambiguity between local attachment and nonlocality, between past events and present effects, between what we perceive and what we make frustrated attempts to grasp conceptually. The longing for what one cannot have is melancholy by virtue of being futile, but this longing simultaneously indicates an indirect perception of past events *through* present effects. This amounts to a perception of the mesh, a hyperobject trapping us in a delightful melancholy.

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⁵¹ Cf. Morton 2007, p. 68.

⁵² Cf. Culler 2017, p. 278.

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