

Forskergruppe Litteratur og narrativitet: Veien videre

Forslag for nytt prosjekt:

JOHANNA:

I like both the Life Narrative and Dystopia ideas. I offer the following brainstormed themes:

“Freeing the Mind: Disturbing Narrative and Cultural Constraints.”

“Of Desolation and Ruin: Dystopian Narratives of Hope and Despair”

“Fighting the Powers that Bind: Dissolving Restrictions (Limitations? Boundaries?).”

MELANIE:

Writing Lives, Inscribing Earth: Life Narratives in the Anthropocene

While life-writing is generally understood to be related to the stories of individuals, it is hard to distinguish selves from environments. We are becoming more and more aware of the ways in which our notions of autonomy and agency are fictions, as our bodies and minds are porous: permeated with pathogens and plastic, shaped by local biomes, products of darkness and sun and wind, and intertwined with the animals and plant lives around us.

The term “Anthropocene” draws attention to the ways in which humans have shaped the present and future of the earth, how climate change, the extraction economy, and mass extinctions mark the geological era in which we live. What does it mean to “write lives” in this context?

Two recent anthologies have opened ground related to this topic, but there is still much work to be done. (*Life Writing in the Anthropocene*, Routledge 2021, *Life Writing in the Posthuman Anthropocene*, Palgrave 2021). (One way to distinguish a new collection from these would be perhaps to focus on a global perspective, eg. *Life Narratives in the Global Anthropocene?*).

We could consider essays that engage with these questions in relation (but not restricted) to:

- ecobiography
- biographies of ecological activists and writers
- life-writing by ecological activists and writers
- ways in which more traditional biographies and life narratives intersect with the environment
- medical humanities, life writing and the Anthropocene
- life writing, literature and the Anthropocene
- graphic novel life stories and the Anthropocene
- life stories or biographies related to the environment written for children
- ecological life-writing as practiced by poets, artists and musicians

- digital life-writing and the Anthropocene
- writing the lives of animals or plants
- ethnobiography and the Anthropocene
- Alternative forms of 'life writing' including nature writing and travel writing

JANE:

'Literature speaks the language of the imagination, and the study of literature is supposed to train and improve the imagination.'

Northrop Frye

My suggested topic: life and literature

From my author bio:

Imagination in life and literature

We need imagination to understand the past and predict the future. What better medium is there than fiction, and more especially, Cli-Fi, to demonstrate this important truth? As the American climate writer Bill McKibben tells us in *An Idea Can Go Extinct* (2003), the concept of 'normal' keeps changing as temperatures rise, species go extinct and coastlines are eroded. In just one century, we have overpowered the natural self-regulating processes that have gradually evolved over millions of years. So, what *is* normal? How far can we, or are we prepared to look back? And if we can't see what we've lost, how can we predict what we will face in the future?

We need plenty of imagination if we are to look into the future, and especially if we're to answer the question, 'What else will we lose if we continue to exploit the Earth?' Are we part of nature or are we separate? The sky, the clouds, the rugged mountains, beautiful lakes, the animals that inhabit the Earth: are they separate from us or part of us?

As Bill McKibben argues, the greenhouse effect 'is a more apt name than those who coined it imagined. The carbon dioxide and trace green gases act like the panes of glass on a greenhouse . . . We have built a greenhouse, a human creation, where once there bloomed a sweet and wild garden' (p. 70. Author's emphasis).

The front cover of the first novel in my trilogy shows my protagonist, Katja, looking over a lush green valley. The background, however, clearly demonstrates that something's seriously wrong. Will the fire consume the valley? Katja is distanced from the events but she is nonetheless part of them. Will she stand by and watch her world being consumed, or will she try to change it?

Can she imagine what will happen to the trees and valleys she loves so much if the fire wins? Does she understand why there is a fire in the first place? How did the valley look one hundred years ago, five hundred years ago, millions of years ago? Perhaps Katja, as she faces

the situation, is imagining what will happen if she doesn't do anything, if she doesn't care. She does not feel separate but she knows that she understands only a small part of what is going on. She also knows that it is her task to find out why this is happening, what the world looked like many centuries ago, what can be restored, what will be lost forever – and most important of all, what can be saved for future generations.

Throughout my trilogy, Katja and her friends undergo a learning process as they study both the environment and literary representations of it. Under the careful tutelage of her mentor, Professor Blackler, and along with her five friends, Katja gradually learns what has been lost, what is being lost, and what can be done to reverse the process that began over one hundred years ago. For Katja, 'climate change' becomes 'global warming'. What's the difference? Climate change suggests a natural process over a long period of time; 'global warming', on the other hand, is more recent and triggered, indeed fuelled by human activity.

'Katja's World Game' joins the material and perceptual worlds. Imagination allows us to see, think and dream about knowledge. As we follow Katja's internal struggles, we imagine ourselves in the same situation. Would we be braver than she is? Or less brave?

Global warming is all about the future. To save it, we must first imagine it, by looking backwards and then by looking forwards. Katja on the front cover of the first novel is looking forwards, facing the truth. The more she does so, the stronger she is, and thus the more able she is to face the future.

At the same time, she also wants to create the future – a future firmly based on an understanding of how nature works. She and her friends explore this issue as they create a video game in book two ('Katja's World Game: The Understory'), and initiate the building of sustainable villages that represent a new, Earth-friendly form of living. The villages, created in book three, 'Katja's World Game: The Overstory', take advantage of the latest developments in Artificial Intelligence and regenerative agriculture.

If imagination is our ability to see what is not actually present or does not exist, it must be a necessary condition for fictional experience. Katja understands this so well: she tells her story with passion and belief, knowing, at the same time, that she cannot see the whole story yet. This is because she must create it, just as readers, by interacting with the text, must also to some extent create the story. As citizens of the Earth, we must create the future so that we do not need to live in a greenhouse for the rest of our lives.

One possible route for developing this theme is to examine how my trilogy can be used in the university classroom. The primary target group is university students as well as high-school pupils

<https://katjasworldgame.com>