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## Narrating the Wetlands of Kristianstad: The Aesthetics of an Offbeat Bioregion

One of the main arguments of Ursula K. Heise's study *Sense of Place, and Sense of Planet* is that ecological awareness, initially a phenomenon grounded in local and regional interests, has become part of 'eco-cosmopolitanism': a global, ideological struggle for a thoroughly planned and well-structured environmental policy, resulting in a well-defined, worldwide view of the effects of the daily work of restoring and conserving places. This essay takes as its starting point the stories and descriptions of a very limited area, the biosphere reserve in and around the city of Kristianstad, in south-eastern Sweden. Since 2005, this area has been a node on an international network of biosphere reserves that today covers a significant part of the Western Hemisphere. In the central part of the essay, I interpret descriptions of nature and landscape in three novels by Swedish authors Birgitta Trotzig and Eva Ström as integral parts of fictitious stories, and as naturalistic depictions of a particular physical reality. These fictitious images of nature serve as symbolic and metaphorical elements of narratives dominated by theological and psychological motifs, but are at the same time realistic, verbal renderings of a landscape that is in fact full of wetness, dirt, mud, and featureless, invading vegetation. Various rhetorical manoeuvres are used to communicate diverse categories of sensations, though external nature, the identified material origin of the images and renderings, is the same as in the non-fictitious media informing us of the biosphere reserve.

Established by UNESCO in 1976, the global project to establish biosphere reserves has today achieved considerable international success, mainly in North America and Europe. The project's core goal is to identify a number of local, environmentally unique natural areas worthy of protection. In collaboration with regional and national political and administrative units, geographically distinct regions are created in which economic and industrial development should be characterized by sustainability, which are the subject of multidisciplinary research, and in which the interests of industry, farming, and nature conservation are reconciled via cooperative action. The idea guiding the setting-up and ongoing management of these areas is to create a sustainable relationship between various cultural, industrial, and environmental interests to allow coexistence on equal terms. For a region to be accepted as a biosphere reserve, a number of requirements must be met. Within

its limits, a biosphere reserve must include natural areas preserved to protect biodiversity, a protective 'buffer zone' shielding the more vulnerable parts of the area, and a surrounding 'transition area' that may include farming activities, settlements, and other cultural activities. The World Network of Biosphere Reserves coordinates the common interests and developmental possibilities of these quite diverse biosphere reserves; its main purpose is to monitor the ongoing management of and creation of new reserves around the planet.

The requirements for acceptance as a biosphere reserve have gradually been made more stringent, and places for which approval is sought must undergo rigorous and often time-consuming testing before being officially named biosphere reserves. For any single region, it is crucial to win UNESCO's approval. Such endorsement means the region will likely attract both national and international attention, fostering opportunities for developing, for example, tourism and permanent settlement, tourists and settlers choosing the area due to interest in nature and outdoor recreation. The combination of local attention to what could be called ecological exploration of the area, and the importance of creating a thriving economy, leads local political representatives and non-governmental organizations to use rhetoric and narratives that portray the area as an inviting pastoral environment. Its wilderness aspects are also highlighted in the various texts used by groups seeking biosphere reserve approval, and after approval such rhetoric becomes typical of various verbal and visual media connected with the reserve. Images tend to play an important role as transmitters of characteristic impressions and of the ambience of the reserve. Of particular interest are aerial photographs of the area, since they convey the impression of a well-ordered space, while the distance from the pictured objects makes them appear photogenic and even sublime in a way that seems crucial for this kind of mediation of nature.

The Kristianstad Vattenrike [i.e., wetland] Biosphere Reserve (henceforth referred to as 'Vattenrike') – a name with considerable connotative richness – is characterized by the merging of urban, rural, and more or less pristine natural environments, which look very attractive from a bird's-eye view. Illustrated publications describe the area as fascinating from a biological and geographical perspective, since it contains vast, untouched wetlands, rich flora and fauna, and great natural beauty of immense aesthetic value to residents and visitors. Descriptions of this wetland and biosphere reserve in nature writing and official publications from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries display only moderate variation. Writing of this genre describes the area as interesting and beautiful, and the visual impressions of the observer comprise the bulk of the text. Sound impressions are more seldom described, as are the smells and tactile experiences a visitor might encounter, perhaps because

this area is extremely hard to traverse in certain spots, and because the wetland's rotting organic material gives off an unpleasant odour. Central to most textual descriptions of this environment is an emphasis on the boundaries that distinguish it from surrounding areas. The biosphere reserve concept is based on the notion that an area can be cut off from its surroundings and that within this enclosed space a kind of ecological stability and harmony can exist: the space will be protected and handled with special care compared with surrounding areas. It would seem to be difficult to delimit the extent of a specific biosphere, as it is constantly affected by the environment surrounding it, making it virtually impossible to define its limits. As Bill McKibben has stated, it is now impossible to speak of untouched areas of the planet, since earth's ecology, climate, and general environmental status must be seen as a whole. For example, carbon dioxide not only affects the places where it is emitted, but adds to the general atmospheric burden, thus promoting planetary climate change. McKibben underlines how this relatively new understanding has altered attitudes towards environmental activism:

In such a situation the usual environmental ideas don't work, because the problem is outside our normal way of thinking. For some years one of the chief (and admirable) slogans of environmentalists has been 'Think globally, act locally'. It is true that one can work most effectively close to home instead of futilely addressing all the world's problems. But as the reality changes, so must the perception. Our local problem here in the Adirondacks – acid rain – has its cause in Ohio and Kentucky. And now, as the climate warms, our local problem – the death of trees – starts to have its causes everywhere. Everywhere. A factory in Japan is as deadly as a burning rain forest in Brazil, a Communist coal mine in Romania, a capitalist utility in West Virginia. Or as the blue 1981 Honda parked in the driveway twenty feet from where I sit, or as the wood stove warming my back.<sup>1</sup>

Though today this global awareness dominates the general outlook on the environment and sustainable development, biosphere reserves are still intimately connected to particular limited regions, and, notwithstanding the international network founded by UNESCO, these protected natural areas are described as isolated islands, surrounded by exploited land not in need of the same kind of human care. One reason for this view is the obvious fact that regionally delimited enclaves are more easily described in narratives, with the help of rhetorical strategies focusing on specific details. This way of telling the story of a potential reserve probably makes the area and concept more accessible to the local public, a necessary step towards generating the political will and positive action needed to establish the reserve.

It is entirely possible to hold several different attitudes towards attempts to create a more popular image of a wetland area. First, in the long run, these attempts should almost certainly increase the acceptance and understanding of a truly unique piece of nature, which is a necessary step towards protecting it from uncontrolled exploitation. A second reason to construct such an image is to attract visitors – at least 100,000 visitors a year in the case of Vattenrike. The primary decision that reduced exploitation of the Vattenrike biosphere reserve was to renounce ditching, and instead build discreet levees to protect roads and buildings from flooding. Another positive change was to let privately owned cattle graze the damp fields surrounding the wetlands proper, providing a natural way to control excess growth. The introductory text found on the official Vattenrike website is presented in such a way as to enhance the need for conscious collaboration between structured environmental planning and inhabitants with an amateur interest in nature and who desire immediate access to rare species:

Kristianstad Vattenrike is indeed a very rich area with its wetlands, streaming rivers, dry grasslands and forests. No less than 35 different species of fish have been caught in the River Helgeå and 225 species of birds have been observed in the area. More than 100 of these species, several of them in the national red list of endangered species, nest within or adjacent to the wetlands.<sup>2</sup>

The first thing to notice is the suffix *~rike*, which in this context gives a positive ring to the area described. The word is often used in an ameliorative way as designating a vast, almost immeasurable, attractive and alluring area. It connotes a large, albeit delimited, district governed by its own laws, rules, and regulations, organized in a way that distinguishes it from surrounding areas. The closest English equivalents are *kingdom* or *realm*, and the word *rike* has been used to designate a piece of land ruled by an appointed monarch or some other monolithic head of state. The name tells us we are in the realm of water, a landscape dominated by this fecund yet strange element, and, in some way or other, estranged from other, dryer parts of nature, parts more thoroughly dominated by human and humankind's cultural activities. As a prefix, *vatten~* has a certain connotative force, since it describes an element that is not man's conventional habitat, and that is impossible for him, in any convenient way at least, to exploit and dwell upon. Being in a *Vattenrike* means that we as humans have no inherent right to be present: we are strangers in this place, and nature here is strange to us. Furthermore, the area is 'very rich', which is itself a frequently used verbal formulation in texts dealing with nature and the environment. By using marketing techniques

to highlight the abundance of nature, splendid sights, and rare species, such rhetoric strives to awaken public attention. Underlying this specific rhetoric is the great positive value recently attached to the concept of 'biodiversity', a concept largely popularized by the immense success of Edward O. Wilson's book *The Diversity of Life*. The dominant role of biodiversity as a concept, and of course the material phenomenon it denotes, is central to current discussions of ecosystems. To mention red-listed plants and animals in any informational text is a sure way to underline the unique character of an area, and draw attention to its importance in the struggle to protect biotopes hosting these species. By implication, such a view argues for man's active protection of the locale, as this is necessary for the survival of the threatened species.

Like all such texts, the Vattenrike informational material tends to fluctuate between acting as an outspoken promoter of the unique richness of the area, describing its natural values as worthy of strong protection – a stance that may ward off environmentally conscious visitors – and explicitly addressing potential tourists, urging them to encounter the exquisite sceneries offered in the biosphere reserve. This double agenda is found in most descriptions of nature reserves, which are established to serve as refuge areas for threatened and unique flora and fauna. The verbal descriptions are often formed as more or less dramatic narratives telling us of the chosen and unique quality of the enclosed area. Parallel to this verbal propaganda is the actual aim of nature reserves, national parks, and biosphere reserves, which is to minimize human interference within them. Taken as a whole, descriptions of Vattenrike found in official publications are rather similar. Some, like those by Carl Fries and Patrik Olofsson, contain narrative parts, in the form of, for example, geological processes described in stories, and historical chronicles telling of the building of settlements and the development of cultivation in the region. The dominant genres on the reserve's website, though, are those of research reports and what may be called 'verbally enhanced information'. The latter takes the form of more or less metaphorically and rhetorically rich descriptions of places, plants, animals, and watercourses, which are never described in a neutral, objective way, but always heightened by figurative language, as in this short piece by nature writer Carl Fries:

How many Swedes realise that the last 30 km of the lower reaches of the River Helgeå, which include the lakes Araslövssjön, Hammarsjön, Egeside sjö and Yngsjön, evoke an openness, sanctuary and life in an area of countryside whose expressiveness cannot be found anywhere else in our country? There is a magnitude [sic!] in this Water Kingdom which brings peace to the soul. This is

southern Sweden, a flat valley bottom extending for miles and miles in a luxuriant verdure of pastures, marshy meadows, reeds and bushes.<sup>3</sup>

In radical contrast to these picturesque descriptions stand, as already mentioned, the more overtly construed verbal renderings of the landscape we find in fictitious narratives. There are quite a few examples of depictions of this area in narrative fiction, but those chosen for this essay are, in my view, the most *referentially* accurate ones. Besides, it is quite possible to regard them as ingenious examples of the ways an author can depict mental and cognitive processes, by exaggerating certain aspects of the protagonists' view of, and encounter with, specific parts of a regional landscape, which is an important symbolic component of the narratives. The narrative works chosen are two novels by Birgitta Trotzig, *De utsatta* [The exposed] and *Dykungens dotter* [The March King's daughter], and one by Eva Ström, *Mats Ulfson*. Both authors have roots in Kristianstad, and both write a stylistically similar prose, dealing with somewhat similar motifs and themes.<sup>4</sup> In the novels, nature is characterized by the negative traits associated with the wetland area, before it became a biosphere reserve in need of rhetorical elevation, traits that are sometimes rather analogous to the general themes of the stories. *De utsatta* is a historical novel. Its main protagonist, the priest Isak Graa, has been removed from service by the church. His faith is deeply rooted and emotionally intense, but he is constantly questioning his own righteousness in a self-doubt that puts him into what we would today describe as depressions, interrupted by brief moments of mania. At the beginning of the novel, Trotzig describes the city of Kristianstad, a town made possible by substantial ditching and canal construction, by which the water-logged area was drained and rendered suitable for settlement. The story of *De utsatta* takes place towards the end of the sixteenth century, when the city was quite new, and still a distant outpost in recently 'Swedenized' former Danish provinces. The isolation suffered by Isak Graa, due to his mental and spiritual condition, is reflected in the following descriptive landscape tableau:

Around the city of Christianstad there was water: vast, shallow lakes and marshes, and the wide space above echoed of bird sound, bird's lament. But in winter, when the migratory birds had gone away there was a great silence; and the sunsets flared, high and lonely in their loneliness – most notably so in wintertime when, through sunset, the city swam on top of its island in the overflowing marshes in the middle of a sea of fire, extending towards the horizon; fire was in the sky, fire was reflected in the vast spaces of water.<sup>5</sup>

Although the description symbolically simulates the exposed position of the protagonist, it is mimetically successful as it rather obviously refers to geographical and climatologically easily

discernable features of the landscape of which the city is part. The wetland is rich because so many birds – waders, geese, and ducks of various kinds – rest and nest in the large meadows surrounding Helgeå. The auditory markers of this richness are prominent in such a way that they refer to a possible, authentic experience of the biological events connected to the locality. The rendering of the visual sensations registered in the clear, cold autumn and winter air gives a certain impression of authenticity, though, as is obvious, Trotzig's figurative language is here Biblical, apocalyptic, stressing of the destructive and cleansing forces of fire. One interesting feature of the cited passage is the metaphorical isolation that adheres to the city, a rhetorical impression connected to the isolation of the protagonist, but that also reflects the exposed physical position of the city. The same kind of exposure is accentuated in this description of the landscape surrounding Kristianstad:

So the city lay, abandoned and shut inside itself – a crew of not quite a thousand men was stationed there – and out of their prison the burgers and the crew looked out on the vast and empty landscape. The sun rose above it and shivering fumes of heat stood above the marshes at noon, the yellow iris's smell and the lapwing's lament ... Out of the dark of night a breath of decay rose towards him from the petered-out bogs outside the embankments. The night was pregnant: a strange kind of living thing inhabited the centre of darkness; you didn't know whether it was a friend's or foe's life that was about to take form there.<sup>6</sup>

The 'abandoned-ness' of the city is overtly accentuated in this passage, and its surrounding environment is described as threatening, mystical. The specificity of the description is emphasized by Trotzig by focusing on three signal markers of the area – the marsh, the yellow lily (*Iris pseudacorus*), and the lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*). This particular plant and this particular bird are intimately connected to the plains and marshlands of southern Sweden, and the flower's scent and the bird's call distinguish the ambience of these geographical areas. Many commentators have noted Trotzig's unique way of describing the earth and soil, i.e., the earth of marsh and plain that characterizes the area, as a life-giving entity with female attributes. Some of her novels present a parallel progression between biological processes and the mystical/religious birth-giving process of a chosen and stigmatized human offspring. The ending of the passage cited above illustrates how the protagonist is affected by this creative process, uniting with the non-human nature surrounding him. It must be stated that the rhetorical and metaphorical features of this passage have naturalistic referents, and are convincing precisely because they signal authenticity, and simulate the sense experience of the material nature set aside to be protected inside what is now the biosphere reserve, the

Vattenrike. The same mixture of symbolism and naturalism is frequently found in the more explicitly descriptive parts of the novel. The next quotation tells us of how the main character strives to become an essential part of the nature around him:

In the springtime, the unrest of the long evenings was so real that it felt like pain in the skin: the long, grey evenings, the smell of earth, the finely, closely printed letters that he could no longer discern in the fading light – it had been a while since he had turned the page. Out there lay the flat, silent countryside, grey and dark of earth: earth-men lived there, in their dens of stone and mud; ate earth, chewed earth, fell asleep in the dark in their earthy folds.

How he longed for their darkness, their warm earthly darkness, so close to the breathing of the animals with their warm tongues and the smell of droppings in the dark and the sound of jaws ruminating and grinding and hooves moving around, kicking in the stalls: there, in the dark among the animals, man rested in his quiet warm residence – yes, he longed to go there.<sup>7</sup>

The passage appears as a kind of biocentric dream, in which the exposed protagonist wishes himself away from the cultural sphere where he resides, out into a landscape teeming with organic processes. When he sits indoors and tries to read, his isolation from the social order becomes more explicit articulated, and his initial departure from the realm of culture is accentuated by his declining ability to see. The ‘earth-men’ inhabiting the surrounding landscape are so intimately bound to the natural processes, and to the earth, that they become incorporated into a communion with the animals they keep; their position becomes, in the eyes of the protagonist, desirable as a corrective to the culture that suppresses him. In another passage describing the environment, similar types of textual markers are repeated by Trotzig, stylistic markers that enhance the impression of the humid and decomposed quality of the surrounding landscape:

In the cold spring twilight, the strange juvenile odour of wet earth lingered, and on the silent streets (for it was not the time for visits) there hovered a smell of water, swiftly running water from the river that grew shining and dark after the break-up of the ice, the muddy water from the marshes that lay deeply flooded.

Out there, deserted shrieks of birds cut through the clear evening, coming from afar, from over the lakes.<sup>8</sup>

Trotzig’s description of the Vattenrike landscape, integrated as it is in a narrative saturated with human sacrifice and suffering, comes out as a heightening of the protagonist’s state of mind, and amplifies the description of the city’s exposed position. The town, like the lonely birds, is isolated from the surrounding world by the wetlands; even still, to a contemporary

visitor, Kristianstad appears cut off from the surrounding farmlands by the river, lakes, and dense marshes. It is striking that Trotzig's fiction is so rich in naturalistic descriptions of landscapes, considering that it is utterly dominated by anthropocentric perspectives, through which landscape is associated with the mental and spiritual states of her novels' protagonists. The way Trotzig describes the landscape accurately simulates the impression the area would likely make on an observer who, for example, intended to move there. To appreciate such phenomena as biodiversity and the sustainable development of the wetlands, when it is one's immediate habitat, another kind of simulated observation is required, construed by mustering various affirmative, rhetorical manoeuvres. Even more accentuated is the view of awkward and offbeat nature in *Dykungens dotter*, a novel fellow writer Kerstin Ekman describes thus:

The story tells us that when we mate and give birth and die, a grand drama is being played out. Her language conveys smells of earth, mud, brackish water, wet weeds, horse manure, and cow dung, human waste, sour milk, pig's shit, salt, seaweed, fish intestines, tar, afterbirth and excrement. Nothing in the way these people of the novel pursue their lives is trivial. Such is the statement of this story, which sees life as something immensely serious; a story that without being embarrassed sets out to illustrate transcendence.<sup>9</sup>

The most notable aspect of Ekman's quotation is how she chooses to focus on the smells, which here, by means of verbal simulation, are communicated to the reader in a rhetorically efficient catalogue style. As we can observe, the various smells ooze from organic material and from the sedimentary stratum that is the material basis of the landscape. In *Dykungens dotter*, the main character's encounter with Kristianstad is handled in such a way that the quite harsh landscape of the city is explicitly described:

The town, which she now, in the month of August in the last years of the 1920s, was walking towards, was at first not visible at all. Green fields of reed appeared. The town was there somewhere, built on watershed islands made of mud in a slowly running river connecting two large marshy lakes, vast shallow lakes overgrown with reeds and surrounded by stretches of brushwood. Green, green everywhere.<sup>10</sup>

The main character in *Dykungens dotter* is Mojan (meaning 'mother' in the regional dialect, deviating from the more ordinary, colloquial Swedish variant 'morsan'), who was forced to leave her home and society in eastern Scania when it was discovered that she was carrying an unplanned baby – a socially unacceptable situation. The father is a travelling gypsy, and the child, Flickan (i.e., 'the girl'), who is the issue of the brief encounter, carries the marks of her

origin, as she is dark and strange and ‘of too much body’, as Trotzig puts it.<sup>11</sup> Mojan moves to Kristianstad where, with great effort, she tries to become part of the social network; her efforts are to no avail, however, due to the social stigma she bears and the resulting alienation.<sup>12</sup> The novel’s title is taken from H. C. Andersen’s short story ‘Dynd-Kongens Datter’ [‘The Marsh King’s Daughter’], one of his *Fairy Tales*, published in 1858. The connection to mud and detritus, as well as the character of the frog (the Marsh King proper in Andersen’s story), creates a relationship with an unfriendly, wetland environment, a relationship intended to produce an imaginative closeness to the specific locale where the story takes place. Many centuries have passed since the events in *De utsatta*, but Kristianstad appears strangely familiar. It is midsummer, when verdure dominates the area around the city, enhanced as it is by the shallow, running waters and the constant humidity of the wetlands, which prevents the meadows in and around the floodplains from drying out. The city is hard to spot at a distance, when approached from the west, and the most prominent feature to an incoming observer is the reeds surrounding the city limits, reeds that in reality denote, and metaphorically or symbolically connote, impenetrability, wateriness, and isolation. The only appealing trait of the landscape is the closeness to the sea and the refreshing salty wind coming in from the east towards the town and the wetlands:

It was all so strange. But now and then, across the fumes of mud and waste rising from the channels, came gusts of salt; it was the coastal plains and the sea that breathed a nightly sigh in the darkness across the lakes, over the vast still reeds, into the streets.<sup>13</sup>

The coast appearing as something positive and beckoning is a rhetorical commonplace in Swedish literature. By letting the winds bear life-giving saltiness and freshness, they stand in contrast to the muddiness and decay that are imagined as the principal aspects of the town, surrounded as it is by sweet water. In several passages, Trotzig conveys an impression of this landscape as exciting because, for the small girl in the story, it is an area of exploration and games. As can be noted in the following passage, the wetland environment turns into a kind of jungle, or mangrove biotope, in the summertime; the general unfriendliness of the surroundings at the same time becoming a feature that attracts the female protagonist Flickan, when she ventures into the wet areas around the city:

Behind the farthest house was an overgrown, deserted lot; it ended up in a drainage ditch and then turned into a muddy forest. There were the places of freedom and hiding: ditches, foggy meadows, shrubberies turning into woods that stretched to

the embankment and the lake. It was a zone of trees and sludge that encircled the city – the city that was almost surrounded by water, bugs, and lakes. Thickets of willows, sallow, and alder were entangled into a impenetrability of twigs and roots; a strange dusky darkness, which became even darker and deeper the more you ventured into it, more entangled the further in you looked into it: trees, roots, mud in a never-ending maze puddles of water in between, old dams and canals. Birds were jumping and twittering. But suddenly, through the meshed twigs, a lake appears, with its silver as vast and deep as the sky.<sup>14</sup>

Nature becomes a safe haven for the protagonist, who finds in it the possibility of escape from the social conventions and prejudice that she suffers from in the city, where she is seen as odd and strange. Trotzig's account of the area surrounding the city repeats the descriptions noted in other passages cited. The city is isolated from the outer world by a biotope that is extremely hard to traverse, but makes it possible for the girl to find a kind of closeness to the processes of nature, similar to the experiences made by the main character of *De utsatta*. The nature of the wetlands is associated with the biological instincts of the protagonists, firmly accentuating Trotzig's focus on the messy, unstructured, and uncontrollable growth, inside which human activities, such as building canals and dams, enhances the opacity of Vattenrike, instead of making it more anthropocentrically inviting. The lake stands out like an epiphany, suddenly appearing, deviating from the uncontrollable and messy mud-scape of the wetlands. With the lake, the pastoral gaze is reintroduced into the description, markedly changing the tone, when the description shifts from accentuating the appalling and impenetrable, to focusing on the light in the clearing and on the heavenly radiance. In the following quotation, we find yet another description of a biotope, handled in the same manner as the passage cited earlier, a repetition that is stressed by the introductory 'ju' ['as we all know']:

As we all know, the city was surrounded by a zone of mud: the mushy impediment between town and lake criss-crossed by canals and sludgy dams, while dark system of lakes stretched itself under the interwoven vaults of trees ... Deep inside the greenery a constant singing was heard; day and night during this season the nightingale sang his tune; in its deep clear heartbeats, the heart of the earth pulsated deeply and heavily as if everything were about to burst. The water lilies were trembling there. From the lake the light of the big lake-mirror was reflected with such force that it even lit up the depths of the shrubbery where she sat; it was gathered and silted through all the leaves and stems, until it reached a bottom and became a still, clear, bright, warm room. Humidity fumed, the mud smelled bitter and clean from the large leaves already covering the canal; further into the summer, the landscape would become impenetrable – darkness over the dams, dark, green, silent, worrying.<sup>15</sup>

In this quotation, the encounter with the reflecting lake is repeated, and the singing bird is identified as a nightingale (*Luscinia luscinia*), a species found in thick bushes near water and humidity in any form, which sings powerfully for a few weeks from the end of May until Midsummer. In the text, its singing is imagined using the simile of a heart, the earth's heart, which gives the reader an impression of nature being alive in much the same way as a human body is alive. This anthropomorphism is a common feature of Trotzig's writing and signifies a beckoning prospect of fertility and life; but at the same time, the landscape issues an implicit threat, encircling the limited area of civilization that is the city. The descriptive passages make use of tropes associated with depictions of wilderness, jungles, and marshes, which are tempting and fascinating as well as inhumanly disorganized and ensnaring. The biotope in itself is both attractive to the protagonist, and a threat indicating both decay and death by water. Trotzig's version of Vattenrike is even a place of pollution and biohazard, and as recently as the 1920s, malaria was found in this place full of still water:

From the surrounding marshlands fevers rose – in late summer and autumn fumes of mud, fumes of fever. Not even the three-day shiver that comes from the sting of that certain mosquito was fully exterminated. The water from the pipes was poisoned and forbidden to drink; drinking water had to be drawn from a shared water pump that stood in the street.<sup>16</sup>

The untouched, harsh watery landscape is depicted as an exciting jungle and at the same time as a centre of infection, poisoned by the city dwellers, affecting the townspeople by hosting illnesses. What makes the biosphere reserve a unique place – the fact that it includes both pristine land worthy of protection and culture in the form of buildings, industries, and farmlands – makes it a borderland between the human and the non-human, a condition stressed in the following quotation in which Mojan visits her new workplace, the co-operative butchery:

It was an unknown part of the city she now encountered. The territory of the co-operative butchery – with an abattoir, delicatessen, and bone-meal factory – was situated on an isolated spot north of the city limits. Vacant bog lands separated it from the town; the river ran close by, and a short distance away the north lake spread out, shallow and miles across, covered by reeds in summer. Of the buildings, the abattoir with the with iron gates, the butchery, the concrete oblong of the bone-meal factory, nothing could actually be seen in the summertime until coming close by – the way between the ditches, deep as a canal, led between walls of billowing reeds, the height of a man. You couldn't see anything, but the stench and the flies came at you in hot, blind gusts, long before you could spot their origin.<sup>17</sup>

The co-operative butcheries were collectively owned by meat-producing farmers, and the one in Kristianstad was built in 1911 in the city district of Långebro, by that time on the northern outskirts of the town, near Araslövssjön. The buildings were placed in an isolated location because butcheries produced foul odours; they were also quite noisy establishments where shrieks of animals merged with the din of cutting and grinding machinery. From the description quoted, it becomes clear that the factory is cut off from the rest of the city because of the disturbance it creates. The nature description in the passage focuses on the ugly anti-pastoral wasteland surrounding the perimeter of the embanked city, while the lake is described as ‘shallow and miles across’, in rhetorical counterpoint to the more conventional way of describing lakes as, for example, ‘clear and deep’. The lake itself appears to have resulted from the river being dammed, overflowing the meadows; the consequences of artistic, pastoral conventions are such that these vast areas of shallow water renounce invitation, and appear rather as hindering and appalling. The reeds growing in the decaying environment of these waters in summertime give off a foul smell. By this descriptive gambit, the marshy lands are associated with cultural artefacts, and the antithetical elements trigger repulsion in the reader. Modernity, and the industrial production of food represented by the butchery, is the antithesis of the pastoral, the ideals of which, when it comes to animal production, envision animals freely roaming the meadows; the farmer, with his own hands, slaughters and butchers his animals, preserves and grinds the meat, and makes it into savoury hams, sausages, and cottage pies. Set against this fictitious image of a past time, it is clear how the area, in Trotzig’s text, is described as a disagreeable wasteland. At the same time, this wasteland is a place of mystical experiences, by which nature and the protagonists unite in their shared state of exposure and stigmatized chosen-ness. In the next quotation from *Dykungens dotter*, the various previously noted aspects of landscape and nature description connect to form an anthropocentric perspective directed outwards, towards the surrounding, impenetrable and water-drenched territory. By simulating a kind of anthropomorphic life form, an amalgamation of the two perspectives is created, and further attention is drawn to nature as designer and life-giver:

The next day was a Sunday. Weather hot and beautiful. And she went out into the marsh forest. There she lay, inside a thicket, tucked between the roots of an elder stump; they spread around her like two, knotty dark legs, thigh-bones, disappearing into the leaf-spotted ground as though they belonged to a body descending into the earth, burying itself, no difference at all between her and the

leafy warm earth, the branches wanting to sink into the earth, the roots striving for the sky .... The sunbeams floating through the leaves – they met, traversed, were separated; in the light of the sunbeams and the sun-webs, all the creatures of the marsh air became visible, light-clouds of flies and gnats ... She lay in the lap of the radiant buzzing humid earth. Hours or just moments? She sank and sank through a well that grew darker and clearer – it did not end. Her skin opened up gently below the cold sweat dew – lips opening silently, her whole body opening up. Brushing aside the thoughts that continuously rattled an empty evil cage, the body opened up. Her body listened: a wind and a whining, a grunting and a hissing, chewing and gnawing, grinding and polishing, the mosquitoes dancing, the worms eating and moving, the tough fabric and the fine fabric of roots stretching and bursting, the total mass of earth utters a slowly grinding muttering murmuring life-sound of plant parts turning into earth, seeds turning into earth, earth turning into heart-shaped leaves, earth turning into trunks that grow towards the sun, earth becoming roots and bodies, bodies turning into other bodies, bodies turning into dust and earth, everywhere and into everything the whole earth breathes, breathes and changes the light living warm humming earth.<sup>18</sup>

The central motif of the novel is indeed the vulnerability of a social outcast, but parallel to this there are elements of social longing in the protagonists, a longing to be part of a conventional social order. Many interpreters see an overt religious theme in the novel (e. g. Bergil 1995), and Franzén emphasizes that the novel could be associated with the *kenosis* motive, *kenosis* being a theological term signifying the act of God renouncing his divinity, taking human form, and sacrificing Himself. Interpreted in this way, the novels' protagonists become victims of the social order and typical representatives of 'the other', i.e., signifying deviance and difference, and at the same time of spiritual chosen-ness. The lives of 'the others' become, in line with this view, the lives of the exposed, lives of radical negativity, suggesting the necessity of travelling a *via negativa* towards an existential rock bottom before it is possible to be released from destiny. It would be of some interest to connect this discussion of people, renouncing their value as humans by free and conscious act or impelled by social forces, to the landscape surrounding them. This particular landscape signifies, as do the protagonists, oddity, and is described as impenetrable, tangled, and rejecting. It clearly interacts with the anthropocentric thematics of the novel, and is furthermore aligned with the individual fates of the protagonists and their way of living. In Trotzig's novels we encounter an environment that is most definitely part of a fictitious construction, with existential and theological nodes, but in the same way as her novels contain anti-heroic narratives, acted out by outsiders, people struck with suffering and exposure or madness, the landscape described is a kind of naturalistic anti-landscape.

Scholars, among them Olsson,<sup>19</sup> have noted that Trotzig's descriptions of landscapes and environments in *De utsatta* have to be seen as *acronies*, a concept borrowed from Gerard Genette's narratological terminology, signifying a kind of verbal gap leading the reader in to what is the diegesis proper. Acronies are not themselves active parts of the story, and Pirholt attributes these narrative elements to acts of creation, out of which the told world rises, as he argues, *ex nihilo*: 'It is from this point, when the eye of the text starts to discern the various details of the flat land, that the text we read begins to form the world'.<sup>20</sup> Pirholt explains how Trotzig, by using verbal place markers, shifts her focus from an external view of a distant landscape, to a perspective where the focalization is situated *inside* the fictitious landscape previously observed at a certain distance. In my view, there is an unwanted abstraction in these narratological remarks, as though the landscape described could only be perceived as part of an imaginary universe. In this limited fashion, Pirholt describes how Trotzig executes her landscape simulations:

But the recurrent images of the sea, the flatlands, and the forest point towards this primary function of *mise-en-scene*. The static feature of the landscape, and its placement in the texts of Trotzig, points not only towards the creation of a fictitious place, but to a more fundamental narrative technique. The texts, which create and are created by a world filled with meaning, have their various elements (in a kind of double signification) situated in a meaningful, symbolic relationship with each other, and with birth, life, and death. In the words of Harold Bloom, one may speak of a mythopoeic world, which creates its own structures of myth and meaning.<sup>21</sup>

As previously stated, Trotzig's landscape descriptions are, in most cases, thoroughly integrated in the diegesis, and sometimes, to use Olsson's term, they may be seen as acronies resting outside the time and space of the narrative. I would like to oppose the view of what Olsson and Pirholt call 'basic landscapes', i.e., landscapes that are not described in a realistic manner, only filling a symbolic purpose, and propose that her landscapes to a large extent actually are perceived as naturalistic figurations of authentic places, which interact with the action of the novels. These landscape do not merely constitute 'the background against which the main characters carry out their actions',<sup>22</sup> but are indeed in themselves highly significant verbal renderings of what could be de facto impressions, experienced by an observer of the coastal plains of this very part of southern Sweden.

What actually takes place in the novels of Trotzig, when it comes to landscape description, is a rhetorical manoeuvre that is strongly affiliated with the anti-pastoral tradition. Anti-pastoral descriptions function as thematic counterparts to images of the traditionally

tender, green, and inviting pastoral landscapes and environments dominating literary depictions of rural nature. As Ursula Heise points out, the pastoral is probably the most important aesthetic preference guiding our idea of what actually constitutes natural beauty.<sup>23</sup> Even if Trotzig, in an utterly thorough manner, uses mimesis when describing the landscape the characters inhabit, the reader notices her landscape descriptions as a kind of deliberate rhetorical move, because the figurations are dominated by off-beat, counter-pastoral traits, such as humidity, disharmony, ugliness, and unpleasant smells. In the informational leaflets, websites, and nature writing describing the same Vattenrike landscape, emphatic focus is put on the pastoral traits, a manoeuvre creating interest on the part of avid naturalists, local politicians, and inhabitants to explore the landscape. However, to the observer who actually takes the opportunity to visit the real places, these descriptions appear even more deviant from what may be called the ‘objective sense impressions’ of the sceneries than do Trotzig’s descriptions of the very same environment. To a certain extent, this is because Trotzig’s descriptions are constituted by different kinds of simulated sense data, and notably not only visual ones. The most conventional textual renderings of encounters with nature and landscape concentrate on the visual, and concentrate verbalization on simulating the optical sensations. This transformation of sense impressions, or using certain literary conventions when describing a landscape, is part of a rhetorical operation reminding us of those of the anti-pastoral, taking as its point of departure the fact that ‘the natural world can no longer be constructed as “a land of dreams”, but is in fact a bleak battle for survival without divine purpose’.<sup>24</sup> Even the traditional anti-pastoral should be seen as a kind of georgic, describing the works and days of the farmer, but the genre also focuses on social inequalities and on modern farming methods such as monocultures and the British phenomenon of ‘enclosures’, i.e., the enclosed areas that replaced the commons; added to this element of modernization must be descriptions of clear-cut areas, dry-ditched fields, fences, and enclosed meadowlands creating what appeared to be a more monotonous and unfriendly landscape. Gifford makes us aware of the differences in landscape description between Irish poets Yeats and Kavanagh, the first of whom idealizes the landscape and writes of the ‘soil’ ploughed by harmonious farmers, while the other – like Trotzig – describes the ground as ‘clay’ or ‘mud’, having a sticky, dirty, slippery, and mushy quality.

There seems to most scholars to be a kind of divine purpose in the fates of the protagonists in Trotzig’s novels, they, like Christ, being stigmatized or otherwise marked, chosen to be sacrificed in an unfathomable and spiritual drama. Still, it must also be seen as symptomatic that the landscape described is so full of lack of pastoral features; it is no georgic

farmland, inhabited by rural workers harshly toiling, but an emblem of mental expulsion and abhorrent social processes. Nevertheless, it is in some way representative of the sensory experiences an observer has when visiting the area surrounding Kristianstad. As an almost repetitive, persistent description of this landscape, this passage from Eva Ström's novel *Mats Ulfson* can be seen as exemplary; here we encounter the eponymous, main character on a bicycle trip out of town:

Suddenly the town comes to an end. A wall of tenement houses stands out like a giant forehead over the dingy border zone, where the city is no longer a city, where the rural is not yet rural. In this area, everything is unplanned, tangled. Small, twisted sheds, housing run-down bicycle workshops, share the space with the barracks of the Streets Department, where snowploughs and graders used for muddy grounds are kept. Well-built but sadly shrunken brick fortresses tell the story of a place where once power plants and gas works stood; now the buildings are vacant, and the big windows stand out as gaping holes. Small bushes of ash, poplar, and birch grow randomly and unruly on the badly kept grounds. Several joggers signal a kind of connection to contemporary society's values when they gravely run through the bushes of the border zone, towards the tracks laid out outside the city limits.

Mats Ulfson rides his bike through the mild February morning, and the air cools his cheeks. He has reached the shallow, reedy lake and watches its great, grey eye, the lake that really is a slowly running creek, which has over-flown its boundaries. Along the beaches, thick zones of tangled vegetation, a black mess of indefinable species of trees, thrive in the wet mud. Above the lake, the skies were high like an arch, though the day is cloudy. It is beautiful, very beautiful, he decides. Yes, even this grey creek, with its slightly mottled surface, smells of fumes from the sea, and runs, majestically, to the mouth of the river, without any hurrying speed.<sup>25</sup>

Ström's description of the environment begins with the image of an area standing out as a kind of impediment, as if it were a border zone separating culture from nature. This area is unplanned, its vegetation unruly and 'tangled', and any traces of culture inscribed bear the same lack of structure. The sheds are shrunken and askew, as if they were twisted trees or plants hindered in their upward growth. What is typical of Ström's symbolism is that she finds her similes in a sphere usually associated with material categories; here, the similes are connected with buildings. The plants being named are described elsewhere as 'sly', a word connoting unwanted, smaller trees and bushes spreading without human control in untidy areas that are not properly kept. Ash, poplar, and birch typically represent species lacking any industrial value, easily rooted as they are on grounds left derelict. In the next section of the quotation, the protagonist has reached the countryside, and the reedy lake (probably Hammarsjön), a lake that, as Ström points out, is an extended and dammed-up stretch of the

Helgeå; it is not until the closeness to the sea is noticed by the protagonist that the landscape finally opens up, assuming a more pastoral appearance and offering him an visual experience in line with this sensation.

The final thesis articulated here is that, although the landscape descriptions of Vattenrike biosphere reserve may differ, they collectively create an idea of a particular bioregion. From the outset, bioregionalism has been part of the more politicized side of the environmental movement, and has had its major stronghold in western USA; two activists first using the term have stated that it refers ‘both to geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness’.<sup>26</sup> Taking this epitomizing concept as a point of departure, it is possible to state that a bioregion contains a specific kind of landscape with a particular topography, geography, fauna, and flora, climate, and ecology, and with a cultural mentality and local history making it stand out from surrounding regions. The cultural quality is said to originate in a group of people making an affirmative choice to inhabit this very area, and to protect its culture and environment. Furthermore, following Gary Snyder, it is not only an idea that primarily concerns the rural environment, but is ‘as much for the restoration of urban neighbourhood life and the greening of the cities’.<sup>27</sup> As Lawrence Buell would have it, ‘[there is] indeed ... special attention to city–hinterland relations, including the metropolitan emplacement within watershed districts’.<sup>28</sup> It must be noted that this idea is largely a unique, American phenomenon, grounded in the un-rooted mobility that dominates the American public and its relationship to localities, and could be said to motivate a certain political agenda propagating an environmentally conscious connectedness to a well-defined place. In a country such as Sweden, the citizens of which, at least until quite recently, identified themselves with regions, even places, the concept is not applicable in the same way. As Buell points out, it is no simple task to define what a bioregion really is or how its borders should be drawn. Vattenrike could, with the help of coordinates, be localized to a definitive boundaries but it would not be these coordinates in themselves that define the region’s extent, but more or less random geographical and topographical borders. One aspect of bioregional thinking that warrants attention is, as one of its proponents points out, the particular environmental significance of places:

Even urban areas sprang into existence, and most often continue to depend, on environmental circumstances that lie just below the level of our awareness. From the time humans located regularly-visited hunting camps and early river farming settlements, human places have been superimposed on environmental settings.<sup>29</sup>

In both the fictive and the factual texts describing the Kristianstad area, the city is imagined as thoroughly integrated with its natural environment, with the surrounding watersheds, marshes, and hinterland areas covered with unruly bushes. Literally in the centre of the Vattenrike, the city becomes so entangled with the wetlands that the merging of nature, landscape, and urban environment is almost complete. A good example of this entanglement is the academy at which I currently teach. Until quite recently, the campus was the location of a Panzer Regiment, but since 1993, it has hosted a small but successful university. The surrounding fields were for a long time practice fields and shooting ranges, but are now incorporated into the part of the Vattenrike that offers the most biodiversity, as it is rich in birds and wetland plants. In just a few minutes, a visitor to the university college can walk, without wetting his shoes, along a well-structured path, out into a wetland area that is almost impenetrable and that, in the summertime, has the cliché appearance of a jungle or of the imagined landscape of Trotzig's and Ström's novels. It is interesting to note how the environment and surroundings of this biosphere region make human interference possible, at the same time as they maintain its isolated character. In this fashion, the landscape, which at the outset seems utterly strange and off-beat, becomes part of our daily lives. Our deliberate actions to preserve it can be seen as small steps towards a local environmental understanding, which may be a necessary path towards the kind of planetary eco-cosmopolitanism that is crucial when it comes to keeping all the earth's fragile landscapes alive.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> McKibben (2003), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Kristianstad Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve, English webpage.

<sup>3</sup> Fries (1963) cited on Kristianstad Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve, English webpage.

<sup>4</sup> Ståhl (2004), p. 54f.

<sup>5</sup> Trotzig (1957), p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Trotzig (1957), p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Trotzig (1957), p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Trotzig (1957). p. 162.

<sup>9</sup> Ekman (1997), *00-tal*, 1997: 22.

<sup>10</sup> Trotzig (1985), p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Trotzig (1985), p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> Franzén (2007), p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> Trotzig (1985), p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Trotzig (1985), p. 71.

<sup>15</sup> Trotzig (1985), p. 103f.

<sup>16</sup> Trotzig (1985), p. 142f.

<sup>17</sup> Trotzig (1985), p. 191.

<sup>18</sup> Trotzig (1985), p. 206.

<sup>19</sup> Olsson (1988).

<sup>20</sup> Pirholt (2005), p. 111.

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- <sup>21</sup>Pirholt (2005), p.114.  
<sup>22</sup>Pirholt (2005), pp. 113–114.  
<sup>23</sup>Heise (2008), p. 30.  
<sup>24</sup>Gifford (1999), p. 120.  
<sup>25</sup>Ström (1991), p. 66f.  
<sup>26</sup>Buell (2005).  
<sup>27</sup>Snyder (1990), p. 40.  
<sup>28</sup>Buell (2005), p. 83f.  
<sup>29</sup>Buell (2005), p. 84.

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