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Short Bio

Helen Mäntymäki, PhD, works as a senior lecturer at the Department of Language and Communication Studies, University of Jyväskylä. Her research interests include contemporary crime narratives, gender and ecocriticism. She has previously published for example on female murderers, detectives and embodiment, metaphors and memory in English and Nordic crime fiction. In addition, she is the editor of four volumes of articles on mobility, resistance and deviant women in popular representation.

Abstract

Environmental themes have invaded Nordic TV crime series over the past few years. In this paper, the epistemological starting points of a Swedish series, *Jordskott* (2015), are examined. The paper argues that the series criticizes the traditional humanist paradigm on which realistic crime narratives are based. It does so through the introduction of fantastic non-human beings with the help of which the boundaries of 'nature' and 'human being' are set mobile. In the series, subjectivities are rendered volatile and the humanist epistemological paradigm is questioned as a sustainable ground for defining what counts as a subject. Theoretically, the paper draws on posthumanist theory and ecocriticism. The paper argues that *Jordskott* promotes a new ecologically grounded understanding of the formation of subjectivities through hybridity not only on the level of the representation of individual characters, but also the crime genre.

Keywords: *Jordskott*, epistemology, hybrid subjectivities, posthumanism, ecocriticism, genre

Epistemologies of (Un)sustainability in Swedish Crime Series *Jordskott*

Introduction

During the past few years, a number of TV crime series focusing on environment-related themes have been produced in the Nordic countries. These dramas approach environmental issues from a variety of angles; however, they invariably portray ‘nature’ as the inferior and objectified other whose instrumentalisation is legitimized through its materiality, and human beings as hostile exploiters of natural resources, or as defenders of the essential ‘naturalness’ of the environment. This kind of initial setting is often elaborated and questioned through the moral implications of criminal activity, highlighting the consequences of the destruction of nature for the local community and (eventually) the criminals, but rendering nature itself voiceless. For example series such as *Pintaa syvemmäätä* (*Deeper than a Scratch* 2015, Finland) and Danish *Bedraeg* (*Follow the Money* 2016) juxtapose ethics and maximization of profit in the context of energy business. *Tellus* (2014, Finland), explores the fine line between environmental activism versus terrorism as an ideological choice, focusing on the workings of the human psyche. However, Swedish *Jordskott* (2015, hereafter *J* in references) turns away from the bleak realism of the Nordic Noir tradition: it is an ecofantastic crime thriller which involves a very contemporary investigation of vanished children and a series of suspicious deaths, combined with a nature-related mystery with fantasy features.

Featuring a naïve ‘nature strikes back’ narrative, the series, nevertheless, epitomizes important epistemological questions regarding nature, humanity and genre. The first is a critique of classical humanism by way of rendering volatile the dividing line between ‘nature’ and ‘human’ (here understood as culturally constructed); the second concerns the crime genre itself, and its ability to respond to social concerns and changes.

In regards to the first point, a critique of classical humanism is enacted through mostly violent encounters between various fantastic nature beings such as fairies, dryads, forest (non-)humans, and humans.¹ These encounters are essentially about power, about conflict of interest and the suppression of what, in classical humanism, is understood as non-human and nature. At the same

time, different subjectivities come into relation and form new, hybrid entities through these violent encounters.

In regards to the second point, concerning the genre of crime fiction, the ways in which subjectivity and agency are associated with nature is interesting from the perspective of generic change. The crime genre has, during the past few decades, evolved into a many-sided and flexible means of responding to social concerns and developments (see for example Bergman 2014). In *Jordskott*, the hybridity of the (non-)human characters it features is also present in the ways in which the series makes use of the traditional structure and tropes of popular crime narratives and blends them with fantasy, folklore and family saga. The requirement of realism of the Nordic socio-critical crime narrative (see Forshaw 2012, 2013) remains intact on the level of the concrete crime cases in the series: there are murders, and they are eventually solved. However, the series also questions social belief systems through metaphor and through the fantastic, thereby rendering volatile the realism of the narrative. *Jordskott*'s metaphorical, fantastical qualities shake the foundations of the crime genre and pulls it towards the subversiveness incorporated in the narrative limitlessness of fantasy. Rosemary Jackson (2000, 20) writes how the word 'fantasy' points towards 'essential ambiguity' in its *un*-realness. This means that it simultaneously works on levels inaccessible for crime narratives that draw on the tradition of realism, and creates room for alternative subjectivities, ethics, modes of embodiment and life. While it is true that realistic crime narratives also make use of fantastic elements, these deviations from 'what is real' tend to have a realistic explanation (see Todorov 1975). *Jordskott* does not return to the realistic mode, but remains within what Todorov would refer to as the 'uncanny', a narrative drawing on simultaneous and ambiguous familiarity and unfamiliarity, thereby challenging our knowledge of reality.

What Happens in *Jordskott*?

In *Jordskott*, Eva Thörnblad, police officer and reluctant heir to a forestry company, returns to her home town in an indeterminate place in Sweden for estate inventory after the death of her father. She is traumatized by the inexplicable disappearance of her young daughter seven years earlier, and now returns in the midst of a recent sequence of suspicious deaths and new cases of vanished children. In the background, her father's company is cutting down ancient forests and planning a major mining operation in Silverhöjd (Silver Hill), an area known in the local, silenced oral

tradition as a mysterious homestead of strange, humanlike cave dwellers, dryads and other humanlike creatures, hereafter referred to as (non-)humans.

The main plot revolves around the brutal violation of nature and how the local community becomes entangled in conflicts related to it. These conflicts form a densely woven net rooted in the violation of an 18th century agreement between an early representative of the Thörnbladh clan, and the (non-)human residents of the caves of Silverhöjd. The violator, Eva's late father, had destroyed the cave population with pesticide thirty years previously, save for one baby, who was found and adopted by the local wise woman, Ylva. The historic and current disappearance of local children now is the protest of the orphan baby Muns, now grown up and returned to the caves, against the plans of Thörnblad Cellulose to start mining for silver in the area. It is also alleged that the exploitation of forests continues to destroy the populations of various other non-human inhabitants in the area.

The main conflict in the series is constructed on a complicated skein of interrelations between past/present, culture/nature and human/nature, through which exploitation is historicized and universalized, despite the local setting. Economic and social gain or mere revenge are legitimized through the ideology of mastery and progress, and the 'baddies', in their hegemonic position, do not question their right to promote their own, highly individual aims at the cost of others. As portraits of exploiters, these characters are produced in terms of hyperseparation (Plumwood 1993) as immoral, unconcerned and hostile towards not only the (non-)human others who represent the natural world, but everyone who threatens to hamper their aspirations. However, as a moral conclusion, the series highlights the relationality of dualistic divisions: when the lower pole becomes unstable, the higher one inevitably turns precarious. In the end, a conventional closure is reached as the exploiters' unsustainable aspirations are crushed and they are punished with death or a total loss of power. The good people who work as mediators between the human society and nature are rewarded with new kind of knowledge and new abilities; the local community may continue their everyday existence; and nature's integrity remains intact (for the time being).

From Human to Posthuman and Sustainable Conceptions of Subjectivity

In this paper, my overall aim is to discuss how the category of *human being* is problematized in *Jordskott* through encounters between *human* and *nature*. I will approach the question through

analysis of Eva's encounter with the mysterious organism *jordskott* and DC Tom Aronsson's encounter with the orphaned dryad girl, Esmeralda. These meetings emerge in the series most centrally as a battlefield between epistemologies: traditional *humanism* and the anthropocentrism it incorporates, versus what could be referred to as a *posthumanist* view which promotes a more holistic way when it comes to the recognition of the status of different subjectivities, agency and otherness. In addition, since these meetings are essentially points of recognition of the difference of the other beyond humanist rationality, an affective dimension drawing on the wider understanding of subjectivity in the construction of the other as a 'strange stranger' through 'strange encounters' is introduced. Timothy Morton's concept of the 'strange stranger' is useful in understanding the representation of (non-)humans in *Jordskott* (2010, 15, 38, 53–54). The concept refers to the simultaneous connecteness and separatedness between alive and non-alive existence. The strange stranger is an uncanny entity in that it is both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time; therefore it can embody on the one hand fear and anxiety but at the same time recognition and belonging. The (non-)humans in *Jordskott* are both us and not us. This ambiguity is also present in Sara Ahmed's concept of the stranger since the stranger is based on recognition: 'We recognize somebody *as a stranger* (original italics), rather than simply failing to recognise them' (2000, 22). Encountering a stranger is, in other words, a process through which something already known is uncannily invested with the quality of strangeness. Most concretely this is seen in the series when Eva has to swallow the mysterious nature organism 'jordskott' (literally earth sprout) in order to survive her deadly gunshot wounds. The organism, having invaded her body, not only heals her but also sharpens her senses, thereby introducing her to hybridity and forcing her to negotiate her new self as a human being taken over by nature. Sharing her body with the organism *jordskott* introduces the sensation of the internalized stranger to her.

The overall theoretical approach of the paper is based on posthuman ecocriticism that takes as its starting point the textual and cultural mediatedness of all natural phenomena (see Legler 1997, 227; Oppermann 1999). As this paper focuses on the change of conceptualization of the human/non-human construction, the main argument is that in combining an analysis of different areas of naturecultures, which nature, the human and the (non-)human represent in different ways, the series opens up new trails in popular representation.

This change of conceptualization is an epistemological movement from traditional humanism towards posthumanism. Contemporary ecocriticism is based on the posthuman critique of the classical humanistic paradigm as a doctrine drawing on anthropocentrism and the elevation of human reason and its moral powers into the measuring stick of humanness (see Öhman 2010; Braidotti 2013, 13). The limited view promoted by anthropocentrism and the alleged abstractness of ‘reason’ and ‘human being’ which reside in the heart of classical humanism have led to the objectification and instrumentalisation of nature, and the legitimisation of destructive and unsustainable practices. In response to this reductive paradigmatic binary, Rosi Braidotti (2013, 66) proposes a number of approaches to the understanding of both subjectivity and the production of theory and knowledge. The most important one is the thought of subjectivity as not being the prerogative of the anthropos only (Braidotti 2013, 82), but instead a materially based ontological process of becoming, beyond hierarchy-bound categorization and involving live and non-alive forms of existence. This is what *Jordskott* examines through its representation of hybridity. Moreover, the series ties the production of new subjectivities together with questions social, cultural and ecological sustainability.

Sustainability, simply defined as ‘activity that can be continued indefinitely without causing harm’ emphasises the idea of sustainability as doing, thus creating room for the recognition of the agency and worth of alive and non-alive beings of all kinds (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang, and Chan 2012, 274). (Un-)sustainability, on the other hand, is a volatile term in that it embodies both the positive agency of sustainability in a pendulum-kind of movement depending on the agent, situation and epistemological vantage point. In *Jordskott*, the pendulum movement highlights both the sustainable practices and how acts that are not sustainable eventually cause a strike back in one form or another. The term links with the clash of epistemologies and the overall elaboration in which the series engages: namely, how the causes of violence are translated into sustainable solutions through the amalgamations of human and nature through the representations of Eva, Tom and Josefin. This way the series clearly connects questions of sustainability to the promotion of the idea that the production of dualistic polarities can only lead to unsustainable practices with devastating consequences (see Plumwood 1993).

Internalising Nature in *Jordskott*

Throughout the series, the forests and hill of Silverhöjd are repeatedly presented to viewers from a bird's eye view. This conveys an impression of the wilderness as empty and readily exploitable, ironically referencing the traditional social construction of nature and highlighting the starting points of the series' central epistemological clash. As crime narratives are essentially about clashes of different moral standards, the clash of epistemologies in *Jordskott* is also invested with an ethical dimension emphasizing and questioning the hierarchy between different life forms. This is evident in different ways: jordskott, for example, is referred to as a 'parasite' (*J* 7:14:11), which makes visible the boundary between the host and the unwanted, intruding other, while simultaneously emphasizing its role in the interconnectedness of all life. Moreover, the (non-)humans are described on the one hand through difference as evil strangers and on the other hand humans fully capable of moral decision-making and integration into human society. In *Jordskott*, subjectivity is presented not only as the property of an individual, but a collective rhizomatic process through which different individuals or entities are joined together in a comparable manner to Morton's notion of the 'mesh' (Morton 2010, 33–47).

A view of totality and an examination of the dividing lines between human technology, nature and conceptions of life is offered in the first episode of the series (*J* 1:57:06). Josefin is hospitalized because of her mysterious condition: she is conjoined with jordskott, and in the manner of a rooting plant, the entity is gradually pulling her towards the earth. The scene begins with an image of her empty hospital bed surrounded by life-supporting technology which looks like tree branches made of metal. Her room is dark, except for pale daylight from the window. When the camera pans to the window, we see Josefin standing with her face turned towards the light and her hand in a flower pot. Tree roots literally emerge from her hand when she touches the soil, and she too is like a plant reaching for light and nourishment in surroundings where life is technologized and connections with living and unruly nature severed.

Ahmed states that encounters are embedded in the intensification of boundaries (2000, 24). Eva—who is initially horrified by jordskott's transgression of species boundaries—begins to understand and accept the phenomenon only when her own life is saved by embracing jordskott's force. The organism jordskott thus serves as a materialized metaphor of a new kind of knowledge and approach to nature that not only addresses the rationality of the mind but integrates the body in its

affective capacity into the material wholeness of the world. In dealing with mind-body-world reciprocity, Rosemary White regards affect as the bridging force and emphasizes the processual and co-productive nature of the mind-body-world relation in affecting and being affected in a way that erases the dualistic divisions (2013, 139).

Eva is not the only member of the police who is affected by nature in the series: the scientific, scrutinizing gaze of DS Tom Aronsson is endowed with additional sensitivity through his encounter with the orphaned dryad girl Esmeralda. When Tom questions Esmeralda at the police station (*J* 6:35:02), her strangeness becomes evident through an affective reaction that surpasses human capacities. The scene begins with Tom and Esmeralda sitting at a table at the end of a corridor. When Tom accuses Esmeralda of murdering a young man at a party, the lights in the corridor begin to flicker in accordance with her mood. This affective reaction, rising from the body, is intertwined with her construction as silenced, powerless female; her rage emerges as a comment on the stigmatisation and objectification of those defined in terms of difference in relation to the social norm of human being. As the scene progresses, the camera's focus alternates between Esmeralda's face, distorted with rage and fear, and a blurred, high-angle close-up shot of Tom losing his concentration and authority. Totally powerless, he is imprisoned by Esmeralda's rage when she, screaming out loud, tells about her experiences of sexual harassment from her foster fathers, which 'nobody believes although you tell the truth' (*J* 6:36:35; all translations are mine). She associates Tom with those men, shouting 'You are exactly like all of them!'. Then the image turns black, and when it returns, the camera focus alternates between a blinking fluorescent lamp on the floor and an extreme close up of Tom's blinking eyes. A drop of blood dripping on the forensic report leads the camera to the source, a pen sticking out of Tom's neck.

The obvious conclusion is that Esmeralda's rage is the direct cause of this violence. However, the video recording of the questioning reveals later in the series that Tom, when overwhelmed by Esmeralda's rage, stabbed himself (*J* 9:46:10). Although she, on the one hand, can be seen as a manipulative source of revenge towards the men, both those who have abused her, and Tom who is 'like them', her reaction towards him is presented as outside human moral codification. She is depicted as a wild animal pursued by a hunter, and the human violence causes her to resort to her instinctive capacities as an automatic survival strategy. The encounter between Esmeralda and

Tom highlights without intensifying the boundary between the human and (non-)human. Ahmed notes how the stranger is produced through material, bodily encounters. She asserts that the stranger is not what we fail to recognise, but something we already do recognise as a ‘stranger’ (2000, 3–4). The encounter between Tom and Esmeralda, based in partial recognition only, is of both of recognition and unrecognition in a dialogue that exhibits the unfigurable, intrinsic strangeness of the other in the self and self in the other (see Morton 2010, 41).

Later, the series constructs a heroine of the partially recognised Esmeralda, thus highlighting the erasure of strict binary distinctions. Having provided Tom with a new communicative sensitivity as an initiation to (non-)humanity, an instinctive telepathic ability with the help of which he can contact his autistic daughter Ida (who can communicate with Josefin and Muns), Esmeralda is released and she turns into a mediator and, eventually, a crucial character in saving the vanished children. She is humanness at its best and nature as its most giving, in the same sensing material-rational body.

Both Eva’s and Tom’s subjectivities are challenged and reproduced through encounters with difference. Since nature is epistemologically and culturally constructed in terms of separation, encounters with nature are traditionally embedded in a relationship of distancing. Nature appears to us as something we ‘know’ but as something we recognize as strange. What Ahmed calls ‘stranger danger’ is part of our relationship with nature; the moment nature invades what we regard as our territory and threatens our bodies, it turns fearsome because by doing that, it simultaneously threatens the very existence and integrity of our *human* subjectivities (2000, 4). This is also the starting point in *Jordkott*. When discussing the workings of fear, Ahmed emphasizes the ways in which fear works precisely ‘by establishing others as fearsome insofar as they threaten to take the self in’ and how this fear works to legitimize violence against those who are analogously recognised as strangers (2014, 64). For both Eva and Tom, encountering the strangeness in the organism *Jordkott* and in Esmeralda are journeys of self-discovery in which the stranger functions as a threatening marker of the fragmentation of the self. However, as Ahmed points out, the recognition of the difference represented by the stranger can also turn into a process of establishing and defining the ‘I’ from new starting points (2000, 6). Towards the end of the first season, Eva, Tom, Esmeralda and Josefin, the characters who most clearly display change as incorporated in

hybridity in the series, reach a point of acceptance of new ways of being in the world: Eva willingly submits Josefin to the earth, thereby fulfilling her own wish; Tom learns to communicate with his autistic daughter through his inner voice; and Esmeralda's new role as mediator between the human and (non-)human bespeaks the capacities of the hybrid 'I'. Thus the series incorporates the move from the mimetic, realism-based narrative towards the marvellous of fantasy stories (see Jackson 2009, 20) and back again in accepting and normalising hybrid subjectivities. Life as displayed by these characters is not dualism-based but something previously unthinkable: a form of existence that can, in its most extreme form, question the boundaries of life and death.

Death as Integration into Life

Death is at the heart of the crime narrative (see Dunant 2000, 11). On the level of narrative, death does not represent the end, but is generative of new action and a new narrative through the double story structure (see Todorov 1977). However, the drama and moral conclusions are founded on the finality of death, and the disappearance from life of the murdered individual. From this perspective, death appears as the end of a life and ego. In *Jordskott*, death as an end is not only present through the representation of the murder victims, but also the mass-murdered (non-)humans. In fact, it is their previous destruction and near extinction that leads to and highlights the different ways of relating to death in the series. Ethics and subjectivity reside in the centre of this distinction, expressed through the ways in which the series juxtaposes two different views on death and consequently life and subjectivity. One, represented mainly by the antagonists in the series, draws on contemporary bio-politics which disregards trans-species solidarity, resorts to simplifying metaphorisations when referring to different life forms, and sees the (non-)human other in terms of commodification, exploitability, disposability, and enmity. The other can be understood with the help of Braidotti's posthuman theory of death, which not only calls for a new approach to 'how species are interacting and inter-killing' but also the social, political, ethical, material and epistemological questions related to all aspects of death (2013, 130–138).

Our view of death depends on our view of life. The view on life Braidotti promotes is inherently intertwined with her posthumanist philosophy, and is based on the idea of *Life/zoe* as Life, as cosmic energy, absolute vitality, radical alterity, impersonal, inhuman and beyond temporality. In expanding Life into the prerogative of all life forms, a *zoe*-political and therefore post-

anthropocentric dimension is opened for the understanding of life and death as intertwined and mutually inclusive. *Life/zoe* is both a threatening as well as a generative force, thus shifting the boundaries between and undoing clearcut distinctions between life and death (Braidotti 2013, 112).

Braidotti's conception of Life resonates with the way in which the organism *jordskott* is presented as both life and death. The organism is a concrete metaphor of a life force which makes no distinctions between the human and the non-human. It returns Eva to life after she has been shot, expands her conceptualization of the world, and guides her to understand and accept Josefin's urge to become one with the earth. When Eva, lying on a table in Ylva's cottage, wonders why she is not dead after the shooting incident, a colleague states: 'That is not an easy question to answer' (*J* 7:13:39). This gestures to the difficulty of understanding the integrated processes of life and death from the point of view of a traditional epistemology which lacks the understanding of the interconnectedness of all life and death. *Jordskott* serves here as a metaphor that embodies the idea of sustainable transformation and of shifting inter-relations between human and non-human forces.

Josefin is another example. She ceases to exist as a human being, but her subjectivity is merged with the earth, turning into 'a creative synthesis of flows, energies and perpetual becoming' or what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a rhizomatic process of becoming (Braidotti 2013, 131; Deleuze and Guattari 2005). Accordingly, Josefin's integration with the forest is portrayed as a comforting and desired process. Eva's sorrow for having to give up her child gains expression through Ida, whose autism is celebrated as an alternative sensitivity, opening up channels for communication beyond speech. Ida becomes a mediator between Josefin and Eva, translating Josefin's inner voice into verbal language. Josefin asks Eva to let her go: 'Don't cry mommy. I'm not afraid anymore. I want to be in the forest' (*J* 10:54:21). Later Eva wakes up next to Josefin who has now metamorphosed into a tree root, with small sprouts fondling her hand.

Through the organism, the series promotes the idea of nature as continuous life, supported by a cosmic life force. It represents death as not the end of material life but as 'another phase in a generative process' (Braidotti 2013, 121). Josefin's return to the forest and gradual integration into the ecosystem highlights the epistemological shift from subjectivity as understood in traditional humanism as singular and posthumanist approaches. *Life/zoe* is an inseparable intertwining of life

and death instead of the the ‘unrepresentable, the unthinkable, and unproductive black hole’ (Braidotti 2013, 131) that can only be expressed in cultural metaphors (Bronfen 1992). Braidotti suggests that in order to make sense of death, we need an unconventional approach that rests on a preliminary and fundamental distinction between personal and impersonal death, both the suppression of the individualized ego and even more radically, going beyond the ego (2013, 131–133). Josefin’s becoming earth rewrites both personal and impersonal death through her integration into nature which in the light of *Life/zoe* represents a death that goes beyond time in tying together all time in cyclic totality of beginnings and ends (see Braidotti 2013, 131–133). Understanding Life (including life and death) as perpetual becoming also introduces the idea of sustainability.

Previously, I have referred to sustainability as doing, which presupposes an active agent and suggests that sustainable solutions can be achieved through the acts of individuals. In addition to this, *Jordskott* introduces sustainability from other angles. Firstly, as an epistemological issue, a change in conceptualization that the new hybrid subjects represent. The organism *jordskott*, as pointed out above, serves as a material metaphor of epistemological change and simultaneously a marker of the processuality of knowledge systems. Secondly and closely related to the first point, sustainability refers to a novel conceptualisation of existence itself in which life and death are inseparably intertwined in *Life/zoe* into an eternal becoming (see Braidotti 2013, 121). Thirdly, the series also promotes a more traditional approach to sustainability through references to sustainable development, a way of fulfilling our present needs without endangering those of future generations, but with the crucial addition, indicated by the series, that the word ‘generations’ not only refers to human but also the future of other life forms.

Moral Implications in the Light of Crime Fiction

In *Jordskott*, key generic features of contemporary fantasy are integrated into the serial TV crime genre. This genre-hybridity brings a vital ecological dimension to the crime narrative; makes interrogation of pressing questions of subjectivity, agency and the human-nature distinction possible through fantastical means; and asserts that these are indeed social issues, worthy of discussion within crime fiction’s narrative framework of investigation, denouement, justice and renewal.

Following the conventions of the detection narrative, the immoral activities of the wrongdoers are revealed in *Jordskott* through the combined agencies of human and more-than-human investigators. Although the organism *jordskott* is not a moral entity itself, it becomes a lens through which to regard the acts of the human and (non-)human characters. On the one hand, as in the case of Josefin, the organism plays an ambiguous role as a vehicle of Muns's revenge on the Thörnbladh family. In its dual role, it represents imprisonment, however, at the same time it highlights a connection with nature as a harbinger of expanded conceptualization and Life. The organism both gives and takes; it can heal and kill; it is beyond rationality, and in that sense it also emphasizes the polymorphism of the potentials of nature.

However, the organism turns into a moral device in the hands of the evil. One of the villains in the series is Harry Storm, a traumatized, vengeful man whose one-dimensional hatred and fear of the (non-)humans stems from a violent confrontation years earlier in which he lost his family. He is now stooge to the board members of Thörnbladh Cellulose and responsible for the murders of the undercover (non-)humans in the town. Towards the end of the series, Storm is severely injured and in order to be able to carry out his plan of destroying Muns's cave, he takes an overdose of *jordskotts* with the aim of healing rapidly (10:23:59). This contradictory act of suddenly embracing nature is bound to lead to destruction because of its unethical starting point: instead of healing Storm's wounds, the overdose ironically turns him into the object of his own hatred, a fearful, shapeless monster and an emblem of otherness. Moreover, the fantastic conversion is only part of his punishment for violations of nature. In addition to being consumed by the *jordskotts*, his monstrous body is ripped into pieces and eaten by water creatures whom he has been hunting in his hatred of all (non-)humans (*J* 10:39:27). These violent ways of integration into nature bespeak retaliation for hateful denigration of (non-)human subjectivity. Despite the fantasy-like metamorphosis and death by water creatures, Storm's fate also fits the genre conventions of the detection narrative in locating responsibility in individual human agencies.

Moreover, *Jordskott* displays conventionality and faithfulness to the traditions of Nordic N Noir through the destiny and capacities of Esmeralda and Tom. After having been profiled as suspect, Esmeralda is elevated into an investigative intelligence. With the help of Esmeralda's telepathic sensitivity, Storm is found, and through powers retrieved from encounters with her, Tom is able

to rescue the still missing children from Muns's cave. Esmeralda's rise from marginalization to the centre of the narrative resonates with other stories featuring individuals who develop into moral agents despite unprivileged social situations in Nordic Noir. For example Lisbeth Salander in the Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy (2005–2007) and Lena Jaakkola in the Finnish crime TV-series *Bordertown* (2016) are characters whose personal performances of questioning social injustice from positions outside the Establishment are directly related to the socio-critical potential of the stories. However, in a break from conventions of the genre, in *Jordskott*, evil and responsibility for transgression does not lie with kidnapper Muns, but is intrinsic to the cultural discourses through which nature is rendered strange and other. The last images in the series show a fuzzy reflection of Muns waving at Ida in a mutual recognition of shared strangeness as a potential continuation of epistemological redefinition.

As an example of fantastic Nordic Noir, *Jordskott* is not alone in pointing out how the many-faceted processes of strangeness can render the position of the anthropos precarious. The theme also emerges in stories set in extreme conditions or locations far away from urban centres where the urban human is confronted with the strangeness of nature. For example, the British-produced series *Fortitude* (2015) draws on the bleakness of Nordic Noir, discussing the consequences of global warming for a fiction Arctic island community through a murder mystery. The series borrows from fantasy, horror and science fiction, dramatising the unpredictable threats of climate change, and showing how popular narratives may function as powerful forces of social and environmental criticism. In addition, Swedish-French *Midnattssol/Jour polaire* (2016; *Midnight Sun*) pursues the subject of humanism through the juxtaposition of the Sápmi, the indigenous population of Northern Scandinavia, and the Swedes. Like *Jordskott*, the series associates this 'other' population with nature, locality and mysterious, shamanistic knowledge beyond rationality, for example an ability to know future events. The theme of humanity vs. (non)humanity runs through both of these series rhizomatically, emerging in different forms and surfacing at various points of the narratives. Moreover, the most central theme of the crime genre, violence, is in this new fantastic Nordic Noir equally rhizomatic and is never restricted to the actual murder victims only. Instead, it comprises of a wide network of acts and subjects including human and (non-)human as well as alive and non-alive ones.

Concluding Thoughts

This article has discussed encounters with difference, or strangeness, as a key point in the criticism of the humanist epistemology. It has also argued for the potential of posthuman ecocriticism in highlighting the processuality of hybrid (non-)human/human subjects in *Jordskott*. Within the bleak realism of Nordic Noir, *Jordskott* represents an alternative way of being socio-critical by incorporating elements of the fantastic, traditionally associated with speculative fiction, in the noir narrative. Societal and social critique are, in fact, a common denominator between these genres: while crime fiction traditionally studies societal problems through realistic narratives, speculative fiction invests in imagining alternative worlds and futures in order to comment on contemporary phenomena. The generic hybridity of *Jordkott* is one of the ways in which contemporary popular culture participates in reflection on societal problems in ways that highlight the complicity of relations of power and difference from novel angles.

However, crime narratives have traditionally drawn on the dominant humanist epistemology. Rationality, logical deduction, clinical psychology and scientifically produced forensic evidence have dominated the processes of detection. *Jordskott* takes a very different direction, introducing detectives and human beings who step outside these parameters, and acknowledging and recognising emerging new ways of thinking in society. Simultaneously, the series also provides ample material for a study drawing on posthuman ecocriticism which, as Serpil Oppermann states, provides novel ways to understand and interact with nature by providing space for various theories to converge in the production of ‘new epistemological configurations’ (2016, 24). In combining the realism and socio-critical concerns to fantasy drawing on folklore, *Jordskott*, I argue, creates room for new imaginations and new epistemological configurations within the popular crime genre.

¹ By ‘(non-)humans’, I refer to the almost human populations who inhabit the forests and caves of Silverhöjd. With the term I emphasise the processuality in the way in which the series constructs these populations in terms of negotiation between the human and non-human. I also use ‘non-human’ when discussing theory and when no specific reference is made to the (non-)humans in the series.

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