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Title

Hundred-year floods. Depictions of floods in contemporary Swedish fiction

Abstract

The flood motif is one of the oldest in literary history, stretching back to the deluge myths in many cultures. It has influenced Western culture throughout the ages, perhaps most notably in the form of the biblical story about Noah's Ark, continuously taking on new forms and connotations. As awareness of the global climate crisis has grown in the last few decades, the flood motif has become increasingly common in climate fiction. The aim of this thesis is to examine the flood motif in contemporary Swedish prose, in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of how the relationship between humans and their environment is shaped and transformed. By focusing on six Swedish novels from the 2010s, an additional aim is to broaden the scope of international ecocritical research on water and disasters in contemporary literature. Ecocritical readings of *Fallvatten* (2012) by Mikael Niemi, *Vintern* (2016) by Conny Palmkvist, *Ödmården* (2017) by Nils Håkanson, and the trilogy *Ättlingarna* (2018–2020) by Mats Söderlund, start from the following questions: How are floods depicted in contemporary Swedish prose? In which ways do these depictions relate to specific genres or genre conventions? What ideas about time, place, catastrophe, and water characterize the flood motif in the novels in question? How can these ideas be understood and problematized within the context of contemporary ecocritical research?

The methodological approach consists of a combined analysis of motif, genre, imagery, and the role of place and place attachment in the novels. The theoretical framework underpinning the analyses is mainly based in contemporary ecocriticism and econarratology, in particular perspectives on the concepts of genre, spatiotemporality, place, water and catastrophe. With readings of the primary materials situated in a broader Swedish context as well as in relation to international examples and criticism, the study concludes that the flood motif in Swedish contemporary fiction in many ways aligns with general trends in terms of generic elements, textual strategies, and the use of the biblical deluge as a powerful intertextual framework. Nevertheless, there is a distinct tradition of tying flood narratives to the landscape, especially in the northern part of the country, which continues to influence Swedish flood depictions today. Further, references and connections in the examined flood novels create specific intertextual links to Swedish literary works, especially to poetry. The results also show that while there are diverse ideas about water, based on religious, mythological, or technological imagery represented in the novels, and while the agency of the water is often emphasized, there is, with a few exceptions, still a somewhat problematic distance between human and water upheld in the narratives. In the novels, the past, present and future are connected through water as a symbol of change and/or as a material change of the environment.

Keywords

Flood fiction, speculative fiction, climate fiction, disaster novels, ecocriticism, econarratology, blue humanities, deluge, Mikael Niemi, Conny Palmkvist, Nils Håkanson, Mats Söderlund

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