

## Climate Fiction and the Ethics of Existentialism: An Econarratological Analysis of Lyra Koli's *Allting Växer*

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is twofold: Existentialism as a philosophical discipline and ethical reference point seems to be a rare guest in ecocriticism. Based on an analysis of Lyra Koli's climate fiction *Allting Växer* (2018) this article argues that existentialism has something to offer to the ecocritical field. I make use of an econarratological approach, drawing on James Phelan's narrative ethics. Thus, I emphasize the article's second purpose, as narrative ethics is about reconstructing narratives own ethical standards rather than the reader bringing a prefabricated ethical system to the narrative. This reading practice can help to question the idea that some ethical and philosophical standards are better than others within ecocriticism—by encouraging scholars in ecocriticism to relate to what existentialism has to do with climate change in this specific case. In continuation of my analysis, I argue that *Allting Växer* is pointing at a positive side of existentialist concepts such as anxiety or anguish, that is, that there is a reflecting and changing potential in these moods or experiences. This existentialist framework contrasts with the interpretation of “Anthropocene disorder” (Timothy Clark) as the only outcome when confronting the complexity of the Anthropocene.

*Keywords:* *Allting Växer*, climate fiction, econarratology, existentialism, ecocriticism.

### Resumen

Este artículo tiene dos propósitos: el existencialismo como disciplina filosófica y punto de referencia ético parece ser un invitado raro en la ecocrítica. Basado en un análisis de la ficción climática de Lyra Koli *Allting Växer* (2018), este artículo pretende mostrar que el existencialismo tiene algo que ofrecer en el campo ecocrítico. Se aplica un enfoque econarratológico recurriendo a la ética narrativa de James Phelan como punto de partida. Por lo tanto, se enfatiza el segundo propósito del artículo, ya que la ética narrativa aborda la reconstrucción de los propios estándares éticos de las narrativas en lugar de que el lector traiga un sistema ético prefabricado a la narrativa. Esta práctica de lectura puede ayudar a cuestionar la idea de que algunos estándares éticos y filosóficos son mejores que otros dentro de la ecocrítica, para alentar a los investigadores de la ecocrítica a relacionarse con lo que el existencialismo tiene que ver con el cambio climático en este caso específico. Para continuar este análisis, se sostiene que *Allting Växer* apunta a un lado positivo de conceptos existencialistas como la ansiedad o la angustia, es decir, que existe un potencial reflectante y cambiante en estos estados de ánimo o experiencias. Este marco de referencia existencialista contrasta con la interpretación del «Anthropocene disorder» (trastorno del Antropoceno), de Timothy Clark, como el único resultado al enfrentarse a la complejidad del Antropoceno.

*Palabras clave:* *Allting Växer*, ficción climática, econarratología, existencialismo, ecocrítica.

### Introduction

In *Cli-Fi: A Companion*, Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra point out that climate fiction plays a part in “helping us meet the challenges with” climate change

because they “participate in the organization of our social reality as ‘regulatory fictions’”. Climate fictions, or cli-fi, are “forms of collective sense-making with the capacity to motivate and mobilize readers” (7).

This article is about how climate fictions can motivate and mobilize their readers. It does this by pairing econarratology with narrative ethics. Central to narrative ethics are two propositions: A narrative is a mobilizing and engaging act that influences the reader's emotions and ethical standards. Moreover, narrative ethics seek to explain how a narrative is capable of doing just that (Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction* 3–4). Thus, the article exercises a methodical approach to climate fiction also used by Markku Lehtimäki (2019 and 2020), Greg Garrard (2020), and Eric Morel (2020). However, I connect this narratological viewpoint with ethics of existentialism in my analysis of the Swedish climate fiction *Allting Växer* (*Everything Grows*, 2018) by Lyra Koli.

This approach is relevant for various reasons: Firstly, grappling with global climate change is not a struggle that simply depends on new technology or the idea of a new scientific breakthrough. Similarly, as Lawrence Buell points out, the success of environmentalist efforts also hinges on “a state of mind”: on attitudes, feelings, images, narratives (1). Again, how does *Allting Växer* affect its reader's state of mind?

Secondly, *Allting Växer* unites both existentialist and environmental perspectives. Ecocriticism rarely draws on an existentialist mindset; at first glance, the two positions seem incompatible. This is because existentialism is closely associated with anthropocentrism, an ideology that seems to be the source of anti-ecological beliefs. It is precisely because of this situation that I am analyzing this climate fiction, to examine how ecocriticism can benefit from existentialism. Some contemporary Nordic climate fictions link climate change with ecofeminist insights. Celebrating a distinct female culture is seen as a source of nurture and care and thus a starting point for a renewed feminine contract between gender, race, and the environment. This theme is the case, according to Reinhard Hennig, in Norwegian Maja Lunde's *Bienes historie* (*The History of Bees*, 2015).<sup>1</sup> According to Sissel Furuseth et al., Brit Bildøen's climate fiction *Adam Hiorths veg* (*Adam Hiorth's Journey*, 2011) is a satirical portrait of a famous environmentalist of the old school. Published only two years after “Arne Næss passed away, Bildøen's novel can be interpreted as a playful tribute to activists of Næss' kind” (11). Other contemporary Nordic climate fictions take place in the future and use apocalyptic and dystopian discourses. The ethical framing in these narratives is about emphasizing how the reader's present life and the future are interconnected. Future worlds where everyday milieus are marked by radical climate change are present in Nordic climate novels such as Charlotte Weitze's *Den Afskyelige* (*The Abominable*, 2016), Nina Bolt's *Oversvømmelsen* (*The flood*, 2015), Jesper Weithz's *Det som inte växer är döende* (*What does not grow is dying*, 2012), Maja Lunde's *Blå* (*The End of the Ocean*, 2017), Dennis Gade Kofod's *Nancy* (*Nancy*, 2015), and Aksel Selmer's *Ekspeditøren* (*The Saleswoman*, 2015) (Flinker 55–58). *Allting Växer* also makes use of a dystopian discourse, but the novel links this future scenario with

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<sup>1</sup> By Nordic I refer to Danish, Norwegian and Swedish climate fictions. Except for the titles *The Story of the Bees* and *The End of the Ocean*, I have translated all the titles in the introduction.

existentialist ethics that are not present in the climate fictions mentioned above. I am particularly interested in how *Allting Växer* is concerned with existentialist concepts such as meaninglessness, anguish, or anxiety and how these moods can be fruitful to the ecological thought. Finally, in the last section, I argue that existentialism offers a resilient existential perspective on the encounter with the complexity of the Anthropocene. This in opposition to, for example, Timothy Clark who connects the Anthropocene with a loss of proportion and apathy.

### Econarratology and narrative ethics

Erin James is, with *The Storyworld Accord* among the first to bind together the fields of ecocriticism and narratology into a new mode of reading she calls “econarratology”:<sup>2</sup>

Econarratology embraces the key concerns of each of its parent discourses—it maintains an interest in studying the relationship between literature and the physical environment, but does so with sensitivity to the literary structures and devices that we use to communicate representations of the physical environment to each other via narratives. (23)

According to Erin James’s and Eric Morel’s *Environment and Narrative* econarratology is examining the “mechanics of how narratives can convey environmental understanding via building blocks such as the organization of time and space, characterization, focalization, description, and narration”. The premise of econarratology is that the modern environmental crisis is partly a crisis of narrative which means “that changing humans’ interactions with the environment requires not only new stories but also a better understanding of the ones that have long been in circulation” (1–2).

Econarratology is a relatively new direction in ecocriticism. Attention to narrative in ecocriticism as such has not been non-existent, but inadequate. This because, as James and Morel state it in “Ecocriticism and Narrative Theory”, consideration of narrative structures has tended to stay “separate from and in a subservient role relative to ethical discourse in much ecocritical scholarship”. This circumstance means that many ecocritics, according to James and Morel, assess creative works—with reference to Ursula Heise—in terms of “whether they portray the realities of social oppression and environmental devastation accurately, and what ideological perspectives they imply” (357). As stated by Greg Garrard, the absence of narratology also finds its explanation in the tendency of ecocriticism to prioritize nature as a space for ethical consideration (110).

Classical narratology or structuralist narratology is for the most part descriptive-analytical, this is to say that it equips the researcher with a set of analytical terms—fabula and sjužet, Free Indirect Discourse—that in themselves tell the researcher nothing about ethical considerations. Post-classical narratology shares this descriptive-analytical interest as well but also has a rhetorical approach to narratives that conceive texts as purposeful communicative acts in which narrative tellers influence the emotions and values of their readers. In this view, the narrative is not just a representation of events but is also itself an event (Phelan, “Rhetoric/ethics” 203–9; Hawthorn and Lothe 2; James

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<sup>2</sup> See also this interpretation in James and Morel, *Environment and Narrative* 5.

and Morel, *Environment and Narrative* 8).

A central principle in rhetorical communication is what Phelan calls the “rhetorical triangle” of the author, text, and reader (“flesh-and-blood readers”) and how these affect each other. The premise is based on the author designing the work for a hypothetical audience and thus outlining ethical directions that allow the readers to position themselves in relation with these concepts. In other words, literature places the readers in a position that affects intellect, feelings, psyche and values—relationships that cannot be thought of independently (Phelan, *Living to Tell About It* 18–19; “Rhetoric/ethics” 209).

Methodologically, in relation to examining the recursive relationship among author, text, and reader, my task of interpretation pays attention to both the ethics of the told and the ethics of the telling. The ethics of the told concern narrative characters and events. Thus, my analysis focuses on the ethical dimensions of the characters’ actions in *Allting Växer*, especially the conflicts they encounter and the choices they make in relation to these. Furthermore, the focus is on how the plot in *Allting Växer* signals an attitude to the ethical issues faced by its characters. The ethics of the telling concern the relationship between the implied authors, narrators, and readers. My analysis thus focuses on the ethical dimensions that arise with the novel’s narrative technique. More specifically, it regards how the technique of the narrator implies and conveys ethical values employed by the implied author to express the novels underlying value system of existentialist ethics (Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction* 10-11, “Rhetoric/ethics” 211, “Narrative Ethics” n. pag.). I describe this existentialist value system in more detail in the next section.

### ***Allting Växer*: Setting, Narrative Progression and Existentialism**

*Allting Växer* takes place in a future society experiencing dramatic climate change. People live in a high-tech climate-controlled zone, a climate bubble where everyone speaks English. Outside the bubble, “outsiders” live in disaster areas: for example, in flooded cities or radioactive zones. Night, day, colors and seasons are regulated on large screens inside the bubble. People live in large building complexes, and the only ‘nature’ is found in the surroundings of the roof gardens, which are a mixture of artificial flowers and artificial sounds. In this dystopian future, women become pregnant by having a perfect embryo inserted into their uterus. Everyone is equipped with a medical implant that regulates their bodies’ health processors, and depression is considered as a symptom of chemical imbalances. The community cultivates health, control and perfection and therefore seeks help from technologies and the language of diagnostics. The novel’s very detailed descriptions of the setting (from geographical space to the objects within it) give the reader an understanding of the ideological orientation in the climate bubble: The great fear is that the climate collapse recurs and that the society degenerates into its own downfall once again. The novel’s two central characters, Jossi and the narrator Monica, occupy typical roles in this dystopia as representatives of a forgotten humanism. They insist that human beings cannot be fully understood in terms of technology, medical science, and rationality. Instead, they induce the reader’s notion of how irrational moods, ambiguities, and individual creativity are of great existential significance.

In relation to the novel's narrative progression, it is relevant to investigate the link between the logic of the text's movement from beginning to middle through ending (textual dynamics) and the reader's temporal experience (readerly dynamics) of that movement, to paraphrase Phelan (*Experiencing Fiction* 15–17). A basic sense of alienation or meaninglessness characterizes Jossi and Monica at the beginning. An all-consuming collectivist identity swallows both of them as the understanding of life in the bubble has become hardened into an ideology. In other words, Jossi's and Monica's life exists for the sake of the ideology instead of the reverse. Thus, the composition of the novel is tied to an existentialist line of development: They are both *unawakened*, they have not *encountered* themselves or their *freedom*, and they submit to a moral code they have not *chosen*. Therefore, they identify themselves with '*the they*' (a Heideggerian term for impersonal existence), that is, they think what 'they' think in the climate bubble, judge as 'they' judge, and so on. Eventually—little by little—they *come into existence* through various agencies: For Jossi, it is about a particular mood as she, in the beginning, is trapped in a mood of heaviness and meaninglessness (Jean-Paul Sartre speaks of nausea and Søren Kierkegaard of dread or anxiety, variant translations of *Angst*). For Monica, the very encounter with Jossi is crucial to her existential change. In other words, to come into existence is about an awakened self-determined life.<sup>3</sup> Or formulated differently, Jossi and Monica come into existence because they choose what they are not, instead of remaining what they are, objects for the ideology of the climate bubble. Jossi's and Monica's encounter with dark moods such as meaninglessness, anguish, or anxiety are double-edged as these moods confront them with a conviction of nullity but also a sense of possibility. In existentialism, dark moods are states of attunement through which we discover ourselves in a situation which has meaning. These moods can turn the familiar into the uncanny: Heidegger's word for the uncanny is "unheimlich", so to feel unheimlich is to feel unhoused. At such times we feel a sense of deep unease; we are threatened and oppressed by everything in general and nothing in particular. For what has oppressed us is the primary intuition that we are not sustained by infinite power. On the contrary, we perceive dimly in the experience of the uncanny that the world rests on nothing. It has no basis or ground. In an existentialist context, this feeling is a starting point for reflection; it holds the possibility of rethinking the world (Gray 116; Gravil 27–28; Stidsen 22–24; Kierkegaard 135–53).<sup>4</sup> To feel unhoused seems to be an essential feature of climate fiction, especially when one considers that the word ecology is rooted in the Greek word 'oikos', which refers to the family or the home as a household (Flinker 48; Andersen 132).

*Allting Växer* is filled with anachrony in its discourse (sjuzet) in relation to the story (fabula) or the chronology the reader pieces together in the reading. In practice, this means that the climatic, social and psychological conditions that underlie the novel's world are exposed little by little. For example, in the beginning chapters, the narrator talks

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<sup>3</sup> Despite considerable disagreements among Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, these terms are a sum of common features in existentialist thinking. See for example Gravil 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> This consequence, however, is a possibility and not a natural law, since a mood may obscure as much as clarify, disorientate rather than orientate. The existentialists who are primarily concerned with this psychological theme are Kierkegaard and Heidegger. See Gravil.



about “them” without the readers knowing of to whom “them” refers. *Allting Växer* thus articulates a riddle, several hints, which means that the temporal experience of the reader consists of shifting understandings and judgments. This kind of plot structure (which by no means only applies to the climate novel) contains a thematic and existentialist point in itself: life—as in the plot—is enigmatic.

## Art, Radical Empathy and Cognitive Estrangement

Both Jossi's parents died fifteen years earlier in an epidemic while trying to help outsiders. Jossi is raised by her Grandma Helena, who is from Scandinavia—therefore Jossi's name: Josefina Rebecca Engstrom. Following the climate collapse, Scandinavia has become a banned area, a radioactive zone, as nuclear power plants in Europe have failed because of the massive climate change. Jossi is married to Mads and belongs to the upper class in the climate bubble. Monica is a doctor and sister of Mads' mother—which is why she knows Jossi. Jossie is educated as an artist, but no longer believes in art. That is, she does not have the freedom to express her inner feeling because the system considers these to be mysterious and private:

She didn't realize she could have been so stupid. To be a unique individual, to be human, to be in touch with their history, it meant nothing; it was just platitudes from a campaign. The only thing the New Humanists wanted from her was family advertising for Otto and what she could get from them, which Katerina had so discreetly suggested, was a care job with a slightly higher ranking. There was nothing but a word choice that separated them from the old Humanist Party, nothing they really wanted to change, and above all, there was nothing, absolutely nothing that you could call the soul. (102–103)<sup>5</sup>

Jossi is offered a job as an artist for a party called the “New Humanists”; a job that her father-in-law Otto, a well-known politician, has arranged. Jossi declines the job offer because she is filled with disgust for how both politics and cultural life are permeated with slogans and clichés. As can be seen, art for Jossi is not an imitation of certain expectations but a sublimation of its stubborn elements.

Jossi and Monica are attracted by an organization that operates underground and calls itself the Organization for Radical Empathy. However, if one believes that Radical Empathy represents a set of thoughts that holds a liberating counter-narrative to totalitarian society, one is mistaken. It turns out that the organization is just as radical in their interpretation of the perfect society as those in the climate bubble are. They believe in the force of nature and work to restore nature. They will thus disprove the myth of nature's passivity. They do this by implementing genetically modified organic growths in

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<sup>5</sup> I have translated all of the quotes from the novel from Swedish into English. Hon förstod inte hon hade kunnat vara så dum. Att vara en unik individ, att vara medmänsklig, att stå i kontakt med sin historia, det betydde ingenting, det var bara plattityder ur en kampanj. Det enda Nya Humanisterna ville ha från henne var familjereklame för Otto och hon kunde få av dem, som Katerina så diskret hade antytt, var et vårdjobb med lite högre ranking. Det fanns ingenting annat än ordval som skilde dem från det gamla Humanistpartiet, ingenting som de verkligen ville förändra och framför allt fanns det ingenting, absolut ingenting, som man kunde kalla för själen. (102–103)

people's bodies, for example. When the natural growths are cultivated, they will be released into the climate bubble so that they can grow on humans, without their knowledge, in order to degrade the 'civilization' in the climate bubble into nature. Jossi offers her body for the experiment, making her, as the artist she is, a performative work of art. She opens herself to nature. In doing so, she emphasizes that she has the freedom to do whatever she wants with her body, despite the irrationality inherent in the experiment—in opposition to the ideals in the climate bubble. At the same time, she is slowly dying in the process, which underlines Radical Empathy's lack of ethics. She becomes a hybrid between the two opposing positions, driven by a need to induce reflection among those who witness her performative act.

*Allting Växer* uses "cognitive estrangement" as a literary strategy. That is, it presents the reader with a future world that is different from our empirical reality, yet at the same time resembles our reality. The universe of *Allting Växer* balances between a totalitarian and technologically-saturated society challenged by radical climate change and recognizable features with which the reader can identify. The concept of "cognitive estrangement" is taken from science fiction expert Darko Suvin, as the concept is based on the idea that in the changed future worlds of fiction we learn to see our own world in a new perspective (4–8).<sup>6</sup> Cognition and estrangement interact dialectically, allowing the reader not only to recognize the world of *Allting Växer* but also to see it as strange, prompting critical and ethical reflection about the difference between the text's world and our own. In other words, the novel positions the reader into ethical considerations of how present-day climate change have political, social and environmental consequences in the future. According to Eric C. Otto we cannot stop at the idea that future storyworlds are valuable only because they imagine future consequences. They are also valuable because they confront us with descriptions of the present. Even if these future scenarios are only imaginatively rendered, such fiction describes diminutive social and ecological developments that are already underway (11). Also, Gerry Canavan characterizes cognitive estrangement as a tool to project the conditions of a possible future—whether good or bad, ecotopian or apocalyptic—in hopes of transforming politics and environmental imaginations in the present (17). Thus, *Allting Växer* not only criticizes the culture of the climate bubble but also draws attention to how modern society is dominated by a desperate intent to use every means to delay the dying hour. As in the storyworld, we seem to have agreed to postpone death by any means, just as we strive to avoid any crisis, doubt, or other existential challenges.

### **The Narrator: an Impossible Construction**

The story develops from two distinct paths: one created by the tensions in Monica's narration and the other created by the instabilities in Jossi's life in the bubble. The tensions focus the reader's interest in Monica and her understanding of what she is telling,

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<sup>6</sup> Others also associate cli-fi with cognitive estrangement. See for example Loock, "Cli-fi and the Dystopian Tradition" 7; Whiteley et al. "Climate Change Imaginaries?"

whereas, the instabilities focus the reader's interest on Jossi's ideological and ethical conflicts with the norms of the climate bubble. Up to the point where Jossi dies, Monica is a witness to Jossi's life after that she becomes the protagonist.

Slowly, Monica realizes that she is an accomplice to Jossi's death by supporting the work of Radical Empathy. However, Jossi's death means that Monica is beginning to see life in the climate bubble more clearly. She portrays Jossi as Jesus, with Jossi opening up to "something bigger and surrenders herself to this" (278).<sup>7</sup> The name symbolism between Jossi and Jesus is not to be mistaken, and Jossi, like Jesus, is the one who guides and helps humankind. It is already evident on the first page where Monica thinks back to the late Jossi: "A faint upward, round nose and electric white-blonde hair like a scattered circle around the head" (9).<sup>8</sup> Jossi has a glory just like Jesus. Just as Jesus' speech was full of riddles, the novel tells us that life is more enigmatic than assumed in the climate bubble.

This enigma is also reflected in the novel's construction of the narrator. It strikes the reader from the very beginning as an impossible construction. We are dealing with a homodiegetic narrator who narrates in the same manner as a heterodiegetic narrator with inner or zero focalization does. The narrator describes feelings, thoughts and relationships in relation to Jossi and Mads, for example, of which the narrator could not possibly know. The reader slowly finds out that, the narrator is Monica and that she writes from a prison cell where she is awaiting her death sentence. Toward the end, Monica says: "Okay, the story of Jossi's life is more or less well-founded fantasies, but everything about the Organization is true" (274–75).<sup>9</sup> In the first part of the novel, Monica is an unreliable narrator, whereas, in the last part she is reliable in the sense that she shares the existentialist norms of the implied author. As Monica at the beginning of the novel finds Jossi's actions strange, the reader gets a thorough insight into the bizarre ideology of the climate bubble. In addition, if Monica is to be affected by Jossi, then one way to show this existentialist influence is to show how Monica moves from unreliability to reliability. Furthermore, Monica has not described the truths about Jossi, but rather her own subjective interpretation of the events. This situation underlines that for humankind no such thing as a universal narrator position exists and that there for humankind cannot, through technology (or other radical inventions), turn itself into a divine authority—erasing all obstacles and psychological problems, for example.

### **Monica and Environmental Perspectives Concerning *Allting Växer***

Monica is imprisoned because of her membership to Radical Empathy. Despite this, and for the first time in her life, she puts herself at risk. She knows that prison

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<sup>7</sup> "[...] något större og släppt taget om sig selv" (278).

<sup>8</sup> "En svagt uppåtpekende, rund näsa och det elektriska vitblonda håret som en spretig cikel kring huvudet" (9).

<sup>9</sup> "Okej, berättelsen om Jossis liv är mer eller mindre välgrundade fantasier, men allt som står om Organisationen är sant. [...]. Det borde finnas en universell berättarposition. Bortom namnen och replikerna, bortom karaktärerna och handlingen. Skrivandet har fått mig att känna att man borde kunna kliva ur sitt liv och skildra det utifrån. Men så för man läser igenom sin egen text slungas man tillbaka in i sin kropp, bliver påmind om sina gränser, sitt låga och platta tonläge" (274–75).



psychologists read her narration, which is why she signs her own death sentence by writing down Jossi's story, in which Monica distances herself from the ideals of the climate bubble. Letting go of oneself becomes Monica's basic rule. In her narration of Jossi's life, Monica realizes that she is a "living dead" trying to control her mind and body "with no idea why" (282).<sup>10</sup> For Monica, there is a changing and liberating potential in not trying to control and avoid adversity, doubt, anxiety and death itself. Monica pursues an impulse, to do what she finds right—finding her own voice. It is an archetypal situation of existentialism: Freedom in a prison cell. The possibility of finding one's own creative language contrasts with the rational language of diagnostic in the climate bubble. In their eagerness to do good, "they" keep humankind trapped in a system of one-dimensional thinking. Such a belief in technology and science not only means that "they" suppress something in humankind, but also that nature is suppressed in an anthropocentric way:

Without a doubt, we have broken down mountains and ice, manipulated animal and plant DNA spread poisons and destroyed billions of ancient ecosystems. At the same time, we have decorated our districts and homes with artificial beautifying versions of what we have destroyed, and entertained ourselves with VR versions of extinct environments. Nature has only existed for human needs. (139)<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion: What can Ecocriticism Learn from Existentialism?

In my analysis, I identified attention to the ethics of the told and ethics of the telling for the sake of understanding of how a climate fiction as *Allting Växer* works as a communicative act. Thus, I am not simply interested in the meaning of novel but also the experience of it. The readerly interests and ethical judgments are important to highlight in order to argue for how *Allting Växer* can play an important role in the moral and ecological development of readers by modelling their emotions and perspective of life in a climate-change future. This kind of criticism is based on the premises that narratives establish their own ethical standards—in this case, an existentialist ethic—and therefore, it seeks to make narrative judgments from the inside out rather than on some ethical system that the interpreter brings to the narrative (Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction* 10; "Rhetoric/ethics" 212). As an interpreter, I brought some ecocritical values and frames to the novel, but they were challenged, which was why I found *Allting Växer* exciting in the first place. About this novel as climate fiction, the question, then, is what can ecocriticism learn from existentialism?

*Allting Växer* shows its readers that there is a positive side to dark moods i.e., that there is a reflecting and changing potential in confronting one's basic anxiety or anguish. In the experience of such uncanny moods, we are confronted with the hidden truth that there is no ultimate consolation—that we cannot avoid death or alone put our trust in technology as the solution to environmental problems, for example. Especially the

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<sup>10</sup> "[...] levenade döda [...], utan att någon aning om varför". (282)

<sup>11</sup> Utan att tveka har vi brutit upp berg och isar, manipulerat djurs och växters DNA, spridit ut gifter och förstört miljardgamla ekosystem. Samtidigt har vi haft mage att dekorera våra distrikt och hem med artificiella förskönande versioner av det vi har förstört, och underhållit oss med VR-versioner av utdöda miljöer. Naturen har bara fått finnas till för människornas behov. (139)

Anthropocene emphasizes that we live in a situation of radical environmental changes that cannot be totally grasped or controlled. Only when entering open-eyed into these experiences, resolved to know them by their painful acquaintance, can we perceive the catastrophic consequences of climate change, obtain a new relation to nature, and so forth. In other words, exposure is an important existential and epistemological condition, something that must be sought and endured (Gray 117). This existential state of mind stands in opposition to theorists who speak of apathy as a psychological state in confrontation with the Anthropocene. Richard Kerridge writes about the age of climate change, that we have come to a time when the amount of alarming knowledge and awareness about climate change does not inspire robust environmentalist action but doomsday fatigue and apathy (363). Timothy Clark calls such a psychological condition “Anthropocene disorder”. That is, the feeling that a disaster is on the move on the horizon without having materialized yet and at the same time a feeling of insufficiency, that one does not have the means to deal with this disaster. In this situation, we tend to commute between anger and resignation on an everyday level. Such a condition leads to apathy, according to Clark (140, 160). Instead of drawing back from all the innumerable future scenarios of climate change into Anthropocene disorder (or into its dark companion: climate denial), *Allting Växer* shows us that we must embrace its vastness, uncertainties and dilemmas. This climate fiction offers an invitation to the reader to reflect on the following paradox: we have to realize that we cannot control the complex problem of climate change in order to engage the problem in a new and adequate manner.

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