



Undringslitteratur: Understanding New Norwegian Speculative Fictions

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Abstract: A distinctive type of non-realist literature is emerging in Norway, one that necessitates the articulation of a new classificatory term. I propose the label *undringslitteratur*, situating this intervention within the broader debate in science fiction studies on the productivity and limitations of “fuzzy” labels as devices for designating hybrid forms of imaginative writing that traverse and unsettle the boundaries between realist and speculative modes. Contemporary Norwegian speculative fictions – here conceptualized together as *undringslitteratur* – may be delineated through the convergence of four interrelated elements. First, *undringslitteratur* is characterized by a poetics of scale, oscillating between the local and the global, and by an underlying “Anthropocene unconscious” as theorized by Mark Bould, as a structuring undercurrent of contemporary cultural production. Second, these fictions pursue the re-enchantment of the everyday by subverting conventional expectations regarding the relationship between the quotidian and the spectacular. Third, *undringslitteratur* is distinguished by a pronounced regional inflection, articulating “nordicity” both in imagery and in portrayals of “northernness” as a discursive system. Finally, these texts exhibit a vein of “stealthy” spiritual seeking. Crucially, however, what sets *undringslitteratur* apart is not the explicit representation of religious practices, spirituality, or belief, but rather the subtle, situated manner in which such themes are approached and articulated. I conclude by arguing that the synthesis of these elements is aptly encapsulated by the term *undring*. Connoting wonder, contemplation, and pausing before the inexplicable, *undring* designates not merely a thematic preoccupation but a structuring affect that animates contemporary Norwegian speculative fictions.

Keywords: speculative fiction, climate fiction, Norwegian speculative fiction, Undringslitteratur

1. Introduction

In Norway, more and more books are appearing in bookshops carrying blurbs that are written in such a way as to carefully and resolutely avoid the term “science fiction.” Instead, the blurbs describe these volumes as something along the lines of “a (personal/honest/*real*) story of love and loss/murder/mental health issues *with* imaginative interludes/a sprinkling of the fantastic/an eye to the stars/dreamlike sequences, *involving* technological playfulness/ an unfortunate incident in the lab/a liberal approach to time,” or something to that effect.

The number of these books, which are arguably somewhat science-fictional but not self-defined as such, is multiplying at such a rate that the phenomenon needs its own category, a working title of its own that can guide both researchers and fiction authors. But what should these texts be labeled?

One could insist on labelling them “science fiction” due to their frequent extrapolation from technoscientific elements (like space travel, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, climate engineering), exploration of the human and posthuman, and of temporal and spatial displacement, *et cetera*. Writers of what is often referred to as the “golden era” of Norwegian SF (1960–1980s) proudly labeled their work science fiction, and fans also adopted this categorization as a fringe, countercultural marker (Lindholm, *Fra Algernon*). Today, however, few contemporary Norwegian authors or publishers employ the term without qualification. For instance, Bjørn Vatne (b. 1976), arguably one of Norway’s foremost science fiction writers (even when utilizing the narrowest definition of the genre label), was reluctant to have his work to be labeled as such until recently (Vatne *Norse Tomorrow*). Publishers, editors, and other cultural practitioners involved in the production of contemporary Norwegian speculative fiction’s (NSF) “paratext” (Määttä 107–108) often demonstrate considerable creativity in circumnavigating the term, usually justifying their decision by arguing “science fiction” as a brand is not highly marketable. Arguably, in the contemporary Norwegian context, the term is conventionally associated with young adult and children’s literature, and with Hollywood. Yet this new literature is marketed towards and appeals to adult readers. As “science fiction” is not the preferred term by writers and other practitioners, its use in academic discussions of these texts should also be questioned.

Another ready option is the homegrown term *fabelprosa*. In 1967, the two nestors of Norwegian science fiction, Jon Bing (1944–2014) and Tor Åge Bringsværd (1939–2025) – B&B, as they are often referred to – wrote an essay on what they called *fabelprosa*, a term for fantastic literature emphasizing *fabulering* (fabulation or imaginative yarning)¹ or, in other words, the act of making things up.² As will be discussed below, I find *fabelprosa* misleading in

¹ All translations from Norwegian are mine.

² The project of this essay, written while B&B were students, was “to make an attempt to present the literary movement known as science fiction” to a Norwegian audience” and to “have science

its duality of meaning, and thus in need of being supplemented by a term more precisely signifying hybridity and genre-fluidity. Furthermore, the term has arguably become irreversibly tinted by a certain era, stylistic tendency, and spirit within NSF, as also will be elaborated upon.

A new term is therefore to be desired, one that resonates with the literary style of an innovative period in NSF for publishers, booksellers, marketers and creators, as well as opening up for hybridity. In other words, a new point of reference is necessary to help us orient ourselves. I have written an article in the Norwegian newspaper *Klassekampen*, proposing the term *undringslitteratur*, directly translated as the literature of wonderment (Tveit). The term has since been added to a page of the *Norsk tesaurus for sjanger og form* (Norwegian Thesaurus for Genre and Form), hosted by *Nasjonalbibliotekets vokabulartjeneste* (National Library's Vocabulary Service, "fantastisk litteratur"). This article elaborates on that work by exploring the contours of what I am calling *undringslitteratur*.

I begin by situating the term within the wider discussion in the field of SF studies on the use of "fuzzy" (Rieder *Colonial Gaze* 192) labels to designate forms of imaginative writing that hybridize realist and speculative styles. I then illustrate how these new Norwegian fictions nevertheless carry a distinctiveness in their amalgamation of four elements. First, they are marked by a play on scale, moving between the local and global. Related to this is the core "Anthropocene unconscious" (Bould 1) undercurrent in these fictions, as I will elaborate upon. Second, there is a discernible strive to re-enchant the everyday, the "mundane" (Ryman et al.), through subverting expectations regarding the relationship between the quotidian and the spectacular. These two first elements are made possible to feature in the stories through the frequent employment of the "absent paradigm" (Angenot 9), as will be discussed. Third, these texts are characterized by a strong local flavor, through the creation of *nordicity* (Furuseth et al.), evoking the topologies of the north but also "northernness" as a discursive system. Fourth, there is a streak of spiritual seeking running through these fictions. However, as I will argue, it is not the representation of practices of worship, spirituality, or belief that sets *undringslitteratur* apart, but the situated "stealthy" mode through which these themes are approached and come to expression. A prioritizing of (melancholic or dark) atmosphere over plot, and a foregrounding of introspection, are devices through which these latter two elements operate, as will be further discussed.

Through its combination of these four elements, contemporary NSF is distinctive enough to represent a clear break with the *fabelprosa* of the golden era. It is this difference I am attempting to mark with the proposal of the term *undringslitteratur*, as well as drawing attention to the hybrid and genre-bending aspect of these texts. Finally, I discuss the connotations of the word *undring* and how it captures the essence of this new wave within Norwegian literature, drawing connections to the etymological layers of meaning behind the word.

fiction recognized as a serious literary genre in Norway." (Bing and Bringsværd 83). They spend the remainder of the essay explaining the English term "science fiction" but do not further outline the contours of the Norwegian translation *fabelprosa*, or how it is to be wielded.

2. Fuzzy Labels

My proposed term *undringslitteratur* must thus be read as part of a long-standing conversation on genre in science fiction and speculative fiction studies. The term speculative fiction itself emerged in the mid-20th century, gaining traction as writers and critics sought a more inclusive category that could address the limitations of strict genre boundaries, particularly the divide between “serious” literature and so-called genre writing. Speculative fiction is conventionally understood to be an umbrella term that encompasses genres such as science fiction, slipstream, weird fiction, magical realism, and alternate history, united by their engagement with imagined worlds that depart in some way from empirical realities (Oziewicz). The term’s popularity has increased in recent decades because it provides a flexible critical framework for analyzing narratives that grapple with contemporary issues, yet are not obviously categorizable. Donna Haraway’s understanding of speculative fiction is similarly broad and inclusive, as a feminist mode of relational worldmaking: “science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, so far” (2).

However, in Norwegian the term “speculative” has slight negative connotations, more so than in English. This touches on the question of language: there is an argument for making the effort to find a Norwegian term for a Norwegian phenomenon. Furthermore, what I want to do with *undringslitteratur* is to create a period marker, referencing a certain ethos within Norwegian non-realist literature. I am striving for a distinctive break from, and worthy successor to, B&B’s *fabelprosa*, and so I want to contribute to a conversation that is more local; to create a useful localized category. As such, an international and broad label such as speculative fiction is ancillary in this process, of secondary relevance, though doubtless all the texts I have looked would fit comfortably within this Anglophone umbrella category as well.

Fabelprosa is arguably the closest Norwegian translation of speculative fiction. Conventionally, it is today either used as an umbrella term to mean all fantastic literature, for instance in the Norwegian dictionaries (“Fabelprosa”) or on the websites and bibliographies put together by the main library conglomerate Deichman (“Fargerik fabelprosa”). Less often, the term is used to demarcate the less definable genres adjacent to but outside of science fiction and fantasy.³

Fabelprosa may well be and will probably continue to be used as umbrella term for non-realist fiction. Yet it is in its second meaning, as a Norwegian term for hybrid realist/non-realist writing, where I instead suggest the term *undringslitteratur*. The first reason for this is that the dual meaning of *fabelprosa* as it is used today is imprecise, and may be misleading for readers, students and scholars. Like speculative fiction, *fabelprosa* creates difficulties with its duality of meaning – signifying both all fantastic literature *and* indefinable fantastic literature outside of the established categories of science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

³ For instance, on the website of the fantastic literature magazine *Nye Nova*, one of the founding members Jørn A. Jensen is introduced as working for both “the promotion of science fiction and *fabelprosa*” (Hansen).

Science fiction, fantasy, and horror have arguably become more clearly defined in Norwegian discourse, where their meanings are increasingly shaped by the English terms. They live their own lives and may well be referred to as *fabelprosa* or speculative fiction. *Undringslitteratur* can thus be used as a supplement, signifying in Norwegian that a certain text traverses genre boundaries, is more difficult to define. It can indicate that a text belongs to what might possibly in English be categorized into smaller subgenres like weird fiction, slipstream, mundane SF, or magical realism.

Second, writer Øyvind Myhre (b. 1945) expresses in an interview that he is “not too fond of the term *fabelprosa* as “it indicates that it's only about fables” (Ewo). I agree to some extent with Myhre in this argument, which brings the mind to a broader international debate a few years ago on the term “magic” in magical realism (see Foster and Scerbo). Third, *fabelprosa* as a term is too strongly entangled with a certain era, literary style and spirit in Norwegian non-realist literature. Though *fabelprosa* in its on-paper definition is broad, the term carries connotations to a *particular type* of non-realist writing in Norway, characterized by triumphalism and optimism, marked by the space age, social and political transformations at the “golden era” of NSF (1960s–1980s). Furthermore, the contemporary genre-bending texts are at a different point on the “realism-spectrum” (Chu 3) than the type of literature B&B were describing in 1967. There are less clearly-defined plotlines, the tone is darker, there are fewer answers or pure morals of the story, natural landscapes are foregrounded, gadgets and space are not what they once were. Something has significantly *shifted* in Norwegian fantastic literature, and it is this *change* I wish to draw attention to by proposing a new term.⁴

The proposal of the term *undringslitteratur* may thus more precisely be read as a continuation of long-running efforts to define hybrid imaginative writing in literary criticism. Over the past decades, a number of similar labels have been proposed to define a hybrid, realistic/fantastic style of imaginative writing. However, the urgency of defining such writing has varied. *Undringslitteratur*, as I conceptualize it, overlaps significantly with other similar contemporary labels, such as Juha Raipola’s “speculative climate fiction” (2019):

In speculative climate fiction ... the entire fictional world characteristically functions as a synecdoche for the changing climate. Speculative visions of flooding cities, melting glaciers, catastrophic storms, or drought-suffering environments demonstrate the potentially disastrous effects of climate change on the global environment, while the plot-level events of the narrative focus on the experience of living in a changed world. (8)

Raipola further distinguishes between two different approaches to climate change: mimetic (plausible) and speculative. *Undringslitteratur* overlaps with speculative climate fiction in its frequent emphasis on a changing climate and

⁴ There must be said to be a blurry transition between golden era NSF and *undringslitteratur* without any exact moment of change to pinpoint. Some works of the Norwegian golden era could also be classified as *undringslitteratur*: Axel Jensen’s *Oblidorian Trilogy* (Epp, 1965; Lul, 1992; and *Og resten står skrivd i stjernerne*, 1995). Like all genre labels, the borders between golden era and *undringslitteratur*, as both periodic and characteristic-based markers, are overlapping.

environments. Another close label is Caren Irr's concept of "realist hybrids." She lists works by Barbara Kingsolver, Amitav Ghosh, and T. C. Boyle as examples of novels that "are all interested in plagues, from locusts to flood and fire. They fuse realist prose style with an apocalyptic sensibility" (15). A third relevant term is "new Nordic magic" as introduced in the Danish magazine *Kosmorama* in 2021. The term is not explicitly defined, but the creators write "Forget about Nordic Noir! These days 'New Nordic Magic' is all the rage in Scandinavia, where trolls, vampires and deadly viruses spread in film and tv-series on the supernatural, the magic and in scifi" (*Kosmorama*). Further, magical realism, a literary mode in which fantastical or supernatural elements are presented as ordinary parts of everyday reality, is close to *undringslitteratur*. The editors of *Kosmorama* suggest further that the Scandinavian origin adds "a touch of everyday realism to the fantastic genres." Both magic realism and new Nordic magic overlap with *undringslitteratur* in that often the supernatural and the quotidian are blended together without a sense of explanation or surprise.

There are also broader sub-categories with which *undringslitteratur* finds affinity, like "slipstream" fiction, theorized extensively by Bruce Sterling (77), and "mundane SF" (Ryman et al.). Slipstream, which Rob Latham defines as "an emerging literary mode that engaged the contemporary world with the ideational boldness sf had allegedly abandoned" (1), ties together psychological and philosophical fiction and science fiction/fantasy. "The "Mundane Manifesto" was produced by a collection of "pissed off" science fiction enthusiasts at the Clarion West Workshop in 2004. The authors express frustration about the lack of plausibility of many SF tropes and plots. They wish, instead, to celebrate the mundane, the wonders that we Earth-dwellers already witness in our everyday lives or that are within reach. As such, "mundane SF" is concerned with "the awakening bedazzlement and wonder that awaits us as we contemplate the beauties of this Earth and its people and what will happen to them in time" (Ryman et al.). In *undringslitteratur* there is a similar focus on the Earth and the Earth-bound, on the explicit contemplation of "this Earth and its people" (Ryman et al.) – the mundane made strange. I will return to both Raipola and Irr's concepts, as well as "mundane SF" and "new Nordic magic".

The boundaries between these "hybrid" labels are arguably as "fuzzy" (Rieder, *Colonial Gaze* 192) as the labels themselves. John Rieder, iterating Paul Kincaid and inspired by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, sees science fiction as a "fuzzy set" (*Colonial Gaze* 192) with unclear borders, fluid and tenuous – a set of "family resemblances".⁵ Rick Altman argues similarly that all genre labels will always be retroactively applied, inescapably inadequate and in flux (Altman 78–79).⁶ It is impossible to find the perfect descriptor that fits neatly all texts of a certain kind forever. Yet it is fruitful to keep conversations

⁵ Kincaid writes that science fiction "is best understood as a group of objects that bear a family resemblance to one another rather than sharing some set of essential, defining characteristics" (416).

⁶ Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint elaborate on Altman's concept of genre: "Never, as frequently perceived, objects which already exist in the world and which are subsequently studied by genre critics, but fluid and tenuous constructions made by the interaction of various claims and practices by writers, producers, distributors, marketers, readers, fans, critics and other discursive agents" (Bould and Vint 49).

on genre labels alive and inclusive. These discussions allow scholarship to better understand and mark changes in literary style, themes and patterns of identification within and between genres over time.

3. Moving Across Scales

Although the boundaries between these hybrid genre labels are blurred and subtle, and there are significant overlaps, there are nonetheless distinctions. What distinguishes contemporary Norwegian speculative fictions here conceptualized as *undringslitteratur* is the amalgamation of the previously mentioned four key elements, which I will discuss and illustrate in what follows.

The first element is play on scale. By this I mean that these texts draw attention to the relationships and flows between scales (individual, local, glocal, global), often in relation to planetary crises. One example of this is Ingeborg Arvola's (b. 1974) short story "Vi tar imot alle" ("We welcome everyone"). This unsettling story, featured in the Norwegian science fiction anthology *En strek gjennom tyngdekraften* (*A line through gravity*, 2022), follows a day in the life of a young woman, Julia Reiser. Julia lives in an "arbeideri" (worker-y, 16) and the story is written from first-person perspective in a vernacular, bearing traces the post-migrant vernacular found in parts of eastern Norway today, with some made-up neologisms. Next to the reliance on the absent paradigm, world-building through only hinting at the off-screen world, the vernacular dialect can make it challenging to understand exactly what the frames and facts of Julia's life are. As such this text, like many contemporary NSF texts, makes use of what Marc Angenot calls *the absent paradigm*—worlds otherwise, only alluded to outside of the frame or the bounds of the page (Angenot 10). The plot in this text seems to play out in a near future (not made explicit), in a dystopian high-surveillance society where nearly every aspect of life (such as fertility, health indicators) is carefully monitored.

Julia is entangled in a love triangle with her roommate Annie and ex-lover Kevlar (17), and preoccupied with her continued unsuccessful efforts for promotion at work, where she is told the tests show her to be "too emotionally unstable" (19). For this promotion, Julia has to write a historical essay, and it is through excerpts from this essay that the reader understands the future history of the world in which Julia lives:

History tells us the story goes like this. 2018: 68 million people displaced. 2022: 80 million people displaced.[...] Not always with death-threats and stuff. Like it was more like ... get out of here, you poor idiot, you pång, we're taking this land for our solar power project, to have cement factory, grow soybeans, to dam dam. (21).

By drawing attention to the effects of the ongoing climate crisis, Arvola's text touches upon the consequences of the Anthropocene, using the absent paradigm (Angenot) as a device. The Anthropocene is a proposed geological epoch defined by the profound and often irreversible impact of human activity on Earth's ecosystems, climate, and geology. Like many contemporary texts, Arvola's story thus reflects what Mark Bould calls the "Anthropocene unconscious" (1). He defines this as the underlying, and sometimes repressed,

affects that ecological destruction and climate crisis engender (24).⁷ In Arvola's story the Anthropocene unconscious operates through climate change and climate migration looming in the background, as an issue of the past now solved, though the reader might wonder at what cost. The problem of massive climate-migration has, in the story, been outsourced to a private company, which has come up with "Levesteder" as the solution. All nation-states pay the company for the establishment and maintenance of enclosed and guarded parallel societies, adjacent to all the major cities that were previously attracting refugees; Julia lives in the "new Paris" (25). In the Levesteder, people are given a "life-loan" that they gradually pay back with hours of labor throughout their lives. They are fed, clothed, and housed, and are also able to pay off secondary or tertiary loans by cycling to produce energy in their free time. Julia writes: "The habitats extract people, they explained in the beginning. We make people out of people" (24).

While climate change and other planetary crises loom in the background, the personal is foregrounded in this story.⁸ The text also plays with perspective in order to point to scale, and how individual life-worlds and planetary challenges feed into one another in various ways. In the final scene, Julia sees protesters outside holding up signs that say "set them free." She wonders to herself if the protest is about a chicken farm nearby, and the horrible conditions under which the chickens live: "I can understand, because the way chickens live and don't live, without head, but with heart, plastic tubes as food and all that flows through – it makes you wonder, what kind of asshole came up with that?" (32). However, Julia's later reaction to locking eyes with a woman in the protest,

⁷ These affects, such as eco-grief, complicity, solastalgia, eco-anxiety and frustration are "trailed by swarms of 'other things which must not be said', by an eloquent jive of demurral, equivocation, circumvention, slippage, contradiction" (24). Bould, in general, advises reading texts with an eye for the "Anthropocene unconscious" (2). More broadly, one may speculate that the Anthropocene unconscious is in the process of replacing colonialism (Rieder, *Colonial Gaze* 6) as the new "white noise" of speculative fiction and science fiction in general – the ever-present presence, even in absence. If so, this would suggest an evolution within the genres themselves, through constant subversion, play, and re-negotiation of their limitations (Bould 8–9). Then again, neither science fiction nor speculative fiction have ever been static genres; they are always the "children of the time" in the sense of always conversing with dominant issues and developments at the time of production.

⁸ Julia's essay continues:

Removing refugees from the equation – a huge plus. The rest of the world's population is better off. More resources. No money thrown away. And new refugees – they don't exist. Back then people feared climate refugees, made calculations about growing wastelands and islands destined to be flooded, but now there are no refugees. (21).

Julia's great-grandmother was one of the last refugees, a "førstekommer" (firstcomer) – the first refugees to arrive at what became known as "Levesteder" (habitats). Remarkably, the story does not portray any type of resistance or revolt to the system of the Levesteder. Vice versa; Julia's unnervingly upbeat tone, her life choices (moving up in the system at the cost of having a child with Kevlar), her fervent hostility towards the "brain-dead, sidewalk-born refugees" (25) of the past, "gettifying [sic] developed countries and birthing baby-thingies" (22), and continual aggrandizement of labor and sacralization of the leadership is jarring in light of the realities of the Levesteder that we as readers come only to glimpse between the lines.

and the context of the historical essay, opens for the possibility that the protest is about the ex-refugees detained in the Levesteder camp:

A woman stands on a podium and speaks to the crowd. For a moment
our eyes lock, fänk [sic] in the heart, like a shock, so much life
in her eyes, she sees me so much, I feel flayed alive, breathless, whirl around,
walk in opposite direction (32).

The word choice “flayed alive” harkens back to the earlier mention of chickens and livestock in Julia’s essay, raising questions on the line between humans and animals, and about systems that reduce both to commodities. Such questions move between the individual and the systems and structures in which she exists, influencing both. The different viewpoints of Julia and the woman at the demonstration puts the focus on perspective, and how narratives and truths morph and change both vertically and horizontally across scale. The question of perspective comes through in the text in another way: through the constant negotiations between the individual and the powers that be. Another possible interpretation of the final scene is that Julia’s strong reaction signifying that she knows what the protest is about on some level, making her an unreliable narrator. It is tempting as a reader to question whether her glorification of the Levesteder system in the earlier historical essay was really heartfelt, or done in order to appease the authorities and get the promotion she wanted. Through these disparate attitudes, the text reminds us that the difference between incarceration “safety and stimuli” (22) is a matter of perspective.

The short story thus employs perspective to draw attention to scale itself, and the sometimes unstable connections between individual, local and global, on which objects and concepts flow and lives are lived. The facts of Julia’s life as it is portrayed would not be what they are without planetary crises. Reversely, her personal story becomes an image of human suffering under unbridled neoliberal capitalist expansion, the driving force behind the emergence of the Anthropocene. Yet, she also represents some of the psychological elements that allow that expansion to continue: her limited horizon, adaptivity, and preoccupation with the everyday. Thus, the text illustrates poignantly how the individual and local power is in constant flow with the planetary, each continually reproducing the other. By fitting both perspectives within the frame of the picture painted in the story, the text turns the attention towards scale itself, and to these flows and movements between.

Timothy Morton argues that the Anthropocene moment requires an expansion of thinking to what they call “earth magnitude”: “the thinking of beings on a number of different scales, none of which has priority over the other” (22). In contemporary NSF, both the type of play with scale I have discussed in Arvola’s story and the Anthropocene unconscious are ubiquitous. Some NSF texts have climate change as a manifest theme, and some, as Furuseth and Hennig argue, are also openly didactic; they give examples from the work of Maja Lunde and Jostein Gaarder (179–180). The didactic aspect especially comes to the fore in young adult fiction.⁹ In *undringslitteratur*,

⁹ In this article I mainly discuss texts for adult audiences. However, examples of young adult speculative fiction include *Anna: En fabel om klodens klima og miljø* (2013; translated as *The World According to Anna*) by Jostein Gaarder, *Bouvetøya 2052* (2015) by Lars Mæhle, *Gutten og de glødende treet* (2017; *The boy and the glowing tree*) by Agnar Lirhus, and *Embla:*

however, the Anthropocene unconscious is more nebulously present (like in Arvola's story), without any clear message, sometimes only discernible as a tone or atmosphere.¹⁰ Though the Anthropocene unconscious often falls into the background, it sets the stage for contemporary Norwegian speculations. The present discussion on *undringslitteratur* can thus also be read in relation to contemporary conversations on Norwegian ecocriticism. In *Økokritisk Håndbok, Sissel, Furuseth and Reinhard Hennig* show how, up until the 2010s, Norwegian academic ecocriticism had not deeply concerned itself with the steady rise of climate-focused speculative fiction.¹¹ Yet, "[s]everal scholars have pointed to the unique qualities of genre literature, particularly the emerging climate literature, in addressing the global challenges we face today" (Furuseth and Hennig 183). This article may also be read as a contribution to the contemporary efforts to fill this gap in Norwegian ecocriticism.

4. Re-enchanting the Everyday

In its core Anthropocene unconscious and interplay with scales, *undringslitteratur* overlaps with Raipola's aforementioned term "speculative climate fiction." Yet these new Norwegian speculative fictions that inform my conception of *undringslitteratur* do not necessarily portray "speculative visions of the disastrous effects of climate change" (Raipola 8). There could, of course, exist texts that can be considered both "speculative climate fiction" and *undringslitteratur*. However, overall, *undringslitteratur* is less spectacular in its visions; rather, its focus is on the everyday.

These texts resist expansive or overtly grandiose modes of worldbuilding. Instead, while speculative, magical, or fantastic elements emerge, the worlds they construct remain anchored in material reality. The Anthropocene is not rendered in its systemic totality, but mediated through subjective registers – through the affects, perceptions, and interiorities of individual characters – so that planetary crises are apprehended obliquely rather than explicitly. These texts are not concerned with "the end of the world"

Kampen for Fremtiden by Arild Midthun and climate scientist Bjørn H. Samsø (2022; Embla: The struggle for the future). In contemporary adult NSF, the Anthropocene unconscious is more nebulously present, without any clear message. Novels like Bjørn Vatne's (1976–) *Nullingen av Paul Abel* (2018; The nullification of Paul Abel) exemplify "climate literature that does not necessarily accept that the ecocritical perspective should dictate what is right and wrong." (Furuseth and Hennig 183).

¹⁰ Further illustrative examples of the nebulous presence of the Anthropocene unconscious, and interplay of scale, in *undringslitteratur* are Anders Elsrud Hultgreen's feature film *Morgenrøde* (2014), Berit Ellingsen's near-future novel *Not Dark Yet* (2021), the novel *Før de henter oss* by Peter Franziskus Strassegger (2015; Before they come and get us), and Franciska Eliassen's feature film *Den siste våren* (2022; Sister, What Grows Where Land is Sick?).

¹¹ They describe how "when three researchers at the Center for Development and Environment published an article on Norwegian climate fiction in 2017, they focused on notable titles like Brit Bildøen's *Sju dager i august* (2014), Mette Karlvik's *Den beste hausten er etter monsoon* (2014), Tomas Espedal's *Året* (2016), and Agnar Lirhus's *Liten kokebok* (2016), rather than books by Maja Lunde, Gert Nygårdshaug, or Jostein Gaarder. Equally symptomatic was Karlvik's protest against the label of climate fiction, as she asserted that she had never seen herself as a climate fiction writer" (Furuseth and Hennig 179–180).

in its totality but “little worlds.” Part of the project, it seems, is often to make the mundane spectacular and the spectacular mundane.

An example is the short story “Problemet med opp” (The trouble with up) by Bjørn Vatne, appearing in the same anthology, *En strek gjennom tyngdekraften* (A line through gravity, 2022), in which Arvola’s story can be found. The anthology was the first to be published in over 20 years, featuring “only new, imaginative Norwegian science fiction” (262). The collection has several stories that foreground not just everyday tasks and actions, but everyday feelings and thoughts in non-everyday situations or contexts, raising questions of agency.

In this story, a man floating in an apartment complex-like structure called “the cube” in space, is completely obsessed with an argument he has going with his partner Beate and neighbors on which way is up (now that there is no gravity). The reader is never informed why the man is in this apartment complex, or why the complex is floating in space, or what lead up to the situation. This is in itself a literary device, resting on the absent paradigm, yet also through the writer’s choice of emphasis, sidelining the spectacular (floating in outer space on a mysterious journey), and foregrounding the mundane.¹² Through this choice, the story highlights that the way the characters experience what is essentially a post-apocalyptic and extreme situation is not the same as what it looks like from the outside. From here, a connection can be drawn to readers’ own situations, for instance in being in the middle of spectacular ongoing global crises yet simultaneously being preoccupied by relatively everyday and banal things. It is not difficult to draw parallels between the floating apartment complex, a symbol of post-industrial urban expansion in the second half of the 20th century in Norwegian cities that gestures towards the massive consumption and expansion of the Anthropocene, and the planet Earth, in that none of the inhabitants have any final answer to why they are there, what lead up to things being as they are, or where they are headed. Instead, inhabitants turn their attentions towards internal, solvable, comprehensible matters, such as deciding what is up and what is down. As such, the text touches on the tension between what Morton calls “the big picture” and “little me” (Morton 4).¹³

At the same time, the characters, for all their faults, are not portrayed with disdain. The main character does in the end choose to lay aside the question of up, in order to reconcile with his partner and community. Through the main characters’ arch the reader is invited to rediscover the beauty, the enchantment, of the everyday. The story comments on the tragic limitations of the human mind, while simultaneously celebrating and lifting up the banalities of life. In the end, it is a warm story about community, love and

¹² For instance easy chairs and television remotes, conflict with neighbours about up, bickering with Beate about what television shows to watch and what beer brand they should buy.

¹³ Morton recognizes the difficulty of attempting to think in this multi-scalar way for the average person –to think of oneself as “little me” (4), the individual, and at the same time as a human that is a geophysical force. They give the example of turning a car key and driving a car, something which is statistically meaningless in one sense, yet at the same time, in the large scale of things, millions of people driving cars every day has a massive impact on the entire planet.

interdependency.¹⁴ The spectacular, and the bigger, unanswerable questions, fall into the background.

Both Vatne and Arola's stories in the anthology *En strek gjennom tyngdekraften* negotiate seamlessly between the scales of "earth magnitude" and "little me" (Morton) through placing everyday concerns in sharp relief against spectacular backgrounds. This mechanism, characterizing *undringslitteratur*, overlaps with "new Nordic magic" in its emphasis on "the everyday grind," (Joyce).¹⁵ Yet, in contemporary NSFs the emphasis is rather on drawing attention to the *processes of re-enchantment*, which centers agency. In Vatne and Arola's stories, for instance, everyday feelings and thoughts of the characters are centered, operating as anchors allowing for the seamless toggling between individual and planetary scales.

Furthermore, in its focus on re-enchanting the quotidian contemporary NSF also finds affinity with the aforementioned "mundane SF," also in that both can be understood as a reaction to the grandiose science fiction narratives served up by Hollywood, Bollywood, and other hubs of global pop-culture. The project of mundane SF and of contemporary NSF is not to dazzle but to re-enchant the material world, to make the mundane seem fantastic, and to hold up the processes by which people make them appear fantastic. As such, *undringslitteratur* often begins at a different point on the "realism spectrum" (Chu 3)¹⁶ than what B&B called *fabelprosa*. On the other hand, Ryman and

¹⁴ The uplifting of a community and interdependency (which in this story also carries a flavor of Nordic social-democratic ideology) becomes quite clear in the following quote, from which the anthology borrowed its title:

So where do I stand in the debate about up and down? I have always been among those who advocate for a unifying core. We call ourselves centrists, and we are unquestionably in the minority. Our goal is to provide the population with a single point that is 'up' for all people: the center of the cube. It is an immensely beautiful and democratic thought. It means that we renounce the age-old idea that every person has an infinite sky above them, and I believe this is what is difficult for Beate and Torgny: they refuse to realize that we are trapped here, together, and that's that. In many ways, they resemble the old earth-people. For them, it worked like this: if they could draw a line through the gravity affecting each person, billions of lines would point down towards the center of the planet and up towards unique points out there in the endless universe. If one moved far enough away from Earth, these lines would eventually be separated by light-years. Thus arose the idea that every person is capable of rising and ascending without bumping into anyone else, and the closer one gets to the divine, the more space one would have solely for oneself. This was a notion that created much trouble, from what I have understood.

For us centrists, it is quite the opposite. The closer one gets to the absolute core, or 'up,' the closer one will be to the people around one. Living an elevated life, therefore, involves not only closeness to others, but also limiting the amount of space you yourself occupy. (Vatne 231–232).

¹⁵ Yet, as a category "new Nordic magic" is not precise enough to be an apt descriptor for contemporary NSFs. The word magic implies the supernatural, bringing magic from a transcendental realm into the ordinary lives of humans. In contemporary NSF the enchantment takes place because the drama or spectacle of the backdrop (outer space in Vatne's story) provides a beautifying frame against which the quotidian is uplifted and placed front and center, allowing audiences an opportunity to re-value it, making the normal seem marvelous, enchanting, but not necessarily 'magical'.

¹⁶ Poet and scholar Seo-Young Chu sees no opposition between genre literature like science fiction on the one hand and realism on the other, to her there is only a "spectrum" of realism.

colleagues exclude stories featuring “larger-than-life” tropes of SF, such as interstellar travel, time travel, and contact with aliens, from their definition of mundane SF, deeming these scenarios too implausible. Larger-than life scenarios *do* occur in contemporary NSF.¹⁷

5. Creating “Nordicity”

Undringslitteratur could be thought of as inhabiting the middle ground between speculative climate fiction and mundane SF, closer to magical realism but with something other than magic. Classified within a “realism spectrum” (Chu 3), these fictions may well be called “realist hybrids,” fusing “a realist prose style with an apocalyptic sensibility” (Irr 15). Yet, *undringslitteratur* is not necessarily marked by an “apocalyptic sensibility” but rather occupies a liminal position right on the quivering line between tragedy and comedy.¹⁸

Furthermore, there is a situatedness in how the planetary is both approached and conveyed in these texts. In their exploration of climate change in Norwegian literature, television production, and film, Furuseth and colleagues identify four recurring elements: special relationships with nature, petroculture, “Norwegian gloom,” and “nordicity” (2020). Here I will focus on the significance of nordicity for defining *undringslitteratur*. Canadian linguist and geographer Louis-Edmond Hamlin coined the term *nordicité* to describe the circumpolar region characterized by “parameters such as latitude, annual cold, type of ice, natural vegetation, accessibility, resident population, and degree of economic activity” (Furuseth et al. 8–9). Daniel Chartier further explored this concept in literary and cultural studies, as also representing a discursive system, intertwining geographical landscapes with those of cultural imaginaries. In literature, nordicity implies that features of Nordic landscapes shine through as central elements of the story, including snow, ice, tides, or certain flora and fauna. However, as Furuseth and colleagues note, it is not just the representations of Nordic elements, but the modes in which these elements are portrayed, imagined, and re-imagined to which nordicity refers. Nordicity in art and literature sits at the intersection of the sociomaterial and the cultural, between place and national belonging, identity and more imaginative extrapolation.

Chu’s argument can perhaps be understood as a reversal of that made by Darko Suvin in 1972, which emphasizes what the latter called “cognitive estrangement.” To Chu, science fiction operates within the realm of mimesis, also by literalizing metaphors, and through doing so expands the concept of mimesis itself (Chu 3).

¹⁷ For instance, Sigbjørn Skåden’s novel *Fugl* (2019) is set on a distant planet where a human settlement exists. Another example can be found in Vatne’s short-story discussed above, or the novel *Oslo 2084* (2004) by B&B, private-investigator Robert Altermann is caught up in dramatic and violent hijinks in an Oslo that is partially underwater, where an underground alternative society is forming in the now disused subway tunnels. For this reason, rather than simply applying the concept of “mundane SF” to the Norwegian context, I propose the term *undringslitteratur* that accounts for the superimposition of re-enchanted mundane lives and larger-than life scenarios in NSF.

¹⁸ For instance, in their speculative fictions creators such as Cathrine Knutsen, Rannveig Leite Molven, Kristin Bergret, and Sigbjørn Skåden, seem to purposefully set out on the difficult task of writing neither a happy utopian nor a sad apocalyptic story.

The quality of nordicity is a point of convergence between wider Nordic eco-fiction and what I call *undringslitteratur*. I will illustrate using an example of a text that can simultaneously be read within an ecocritical framework with an emphasis on nordicity and place, and as *undringslitteratur*: Margrét Helgadóttir's (b. 1971) collection *The Stars Seem So Far Away* (2015, originally written in English).

Helgadóttir presents a series of interwoven short stories, following a small core cast of characters who move in and out of one another's lives, their paths gradually converging near the book's conclusion. The narrative unfolds in a post-apocalyptic warming world where the ice caps have melted, leading to a global catastrophe. Consequently, the surviving population, now starving refugees, flees north to scattered Arctic islands, seeking refuge in what remains of a cooler world.

The Stars Seem So Far Away vividly creates a sense of nordicity through its settings: outstretched seascapes, islands, and icy expanses. The vastness of the vistas underlines the smallness of the human in the large scheme of things. Myth and enchantment emerging through Nordic landscapes and fauna, notably (memories of) whales (48), (genetically engineered) polar bears (42), and a ghost fox (14), ornamenting the bleakness of sparse existences. Yet, the nordicity is also in the foregrounding of socio-psychological consequences of living in these cold, mostly barren terrains, and the type of cultures, value systems, and material relationalities they inspire.

An example of this can be found in reading the character Bjørg, first featured in the short story "A Rescue" (42), as an embodiment of certain ideals tied to nordicity. Bjørg lives by herself on an unnamed island, protecting a seed vault, with a group of genetically engineered pet polar bears, or "isbos." She embodies nordicity in her relationality to the material world, one that is strongly intertwined with identity. For instance, few but strong bonds, loyalties, and proximity are arguably hallmarks of Nordic social ideal and mark all Bjørg's connections. Her deep emotional connection to the polar bears, an iconic species of the northern hemisphere, and to the island, is a major part of her identity and informs her decision-making (Cade). She is arguably more at home with the animals and landscapes than other humans. For instance, she dreads having to go to the northern part of the island where there is a more built environment. She seems more or less comfortable about regularly murdering humans that arrive in boats and try to get at the vault, as she was taught to do in childhood by her now-deceased father, but worries about the isbos when she eventually does decide to leave: "She missed her isbos, especially Gard, their leader. She felt naked and vulnerable without the white animal close by" (151). The human connections Bjørg eventually does make are characterized by few strong bonds, especially to her partner Simik, and once the connection is made her devotion is absolute: "Whether I am a monster or not. Whether we stay or we leave. He is here. That is all that matters" (135).

Furthermore, Bjørg and her father's strong sense of duty and responsibility in protecting the vault reflects what is perhaps another tenet of Nordic values, a strong sense of (often abstract) collective responsibility

balanced with individual autonomy.¹⁹ Finally, Bjørg's uncomplaining "toughing-it-out" attitude under extreme circumstances, both the stormy and unpredictable climate and carrying out her duty of violently protecting the vault, reflects the ideal of resilience that echoes Hamlin's emphasis on cultural "ruggedness" in nordicity (Furuseth et al. 8–9). *The Stars Seem So Far Away* is thus a collection that both creates nordicity through portrayals of Nordic environments and culturally situated ways of becoming-with those environments.

6. Back Door to the House of Worship

There is a streak of spiritual seeking, a search for a connection with something beyond, running through *undringslitteratur*. Sometimes this streak is conspicuous, like in Bringsværd's novel *Slipp håndtaket når du vrir* (Let go of the handle when you twist) from 2015. The novel chronicles the journey of Jeremias, a character who frequently embodies various animals, along with his companions, Jensen, a black dog, and Hildur, a speech therapist. Through special bookshelves Jeremias and his friends jump between parallel universes, grappling to understand the rules and objectives of each new society, their own constant transformations, and of their mission. Despite its humorous and surreal tone, *Slipp håndtaket når du vrir* touches on sombre themes, such as racism, animal cruelty, intolerance, war, species extinction, and the search for meaning. The novel is also underpinned by Christianity in a number of ways. For instance, God sporadically appears in various forms including an eccentric old woman in a red poplin coat, and a burning bush, the latter directly referencing the Biblical story of Moses and the burning bush in Exodus. Throughout their adventure, Jeremias, Jensen, and Hildur find themselves constantly engaged in battle by a mysterious character called Fienden (the enemy), a manifestation of evil and darkness.²⁰

The streak of spirituality in *undringslitteratur* might be surprising, considering Norway is a highly secularized nation, as Turid Skorpe Lannem has shown. Yet, the spiritual elements rarely point to institutionalized religion, as they do in Bringsværd's novel, at least explicitly. The "something beyond" is often left intentionally ambiguous, like in Franciska Eliassen's (b. 1997) feature film *Den siste våren* (Sister, What Grows Where Land is Sick? 2022). The story follows two teenage sisters, Eira and Vera, growing up in a small town in northern Norway. Trying to understand her sister better, Eira reads Vera's diary, but is shocked by what she finds there. Like Alice in Wonderland, Eira falls into Vera's dark glittering universe, marked by oscillating hope and despair, as she grapples with the depth of depravity involved in the bleak

¹⁹ Bjørg remembers her father's words: "Look them in the eye and pull the trigger. It is your duty. Never forget that, girl ... We are helping the humans to survive in the future. So she would say it aloud to block out their cries. 'I am helping them.'" (43–44).

²⁰ In Norwegian, Fienden is a common-tongue name for Satan. It is revealed towards the end of the novel that the three protagonists are in fact a form of angels, and their mission, across the parallel universes, was in different ways to fight for the good, and to re-establish in various ways a form of cosmic order. Earth-dwellers being caught up in an eternal celestial struggle between heaven and hell, good and evil, is a frame that recurs in major world religions, art and literature.

human-driven machinations behind a changing climate. Eliassen's film depicts a number of mysterious rituals. One such ritual takes place in a dense forest amid pink and orange smoke; we hear drumming as a figure wearing a colorful dress and a deer skull as a mask leads a procession of people purposefully into the forest in slow motion. Wild dancing ensues and a variety of masks and twisted bodies flash across the screen. This particular scene evokes ideas of environment-based practices of worship in Norway, reaching back before the arrival of Christianity, reminiscent of paganism or animism. As such, the film brings up another kind of spirituality. Rather than transcendentalism, it represents a place-based earthy spirituality, emerging through everyday practices like moving through the forest. What distinguishes *undringslitteratur* from other hybrid genres is not the element of spiritual seeking itself, but the distinctive and historically specific way in which it comes to expression. Due to widespread social secularization in Norway,²¹ literary production is conceivably thought more normatively acceptable than outright practices of missionizing, spiritual proclamation, or collective worship. Furthermore, secularization opened more space for the sacralization of landscapes and environments, and some *undringslitteratur* can be read as part of these processes of sacralization and expressions of stealthy (or sometimes not so stealthy) reverence of and devotion to nature as the sacred.

The privileging of atmosphere over plot, alongside a marked orientation toward introspection, constitutes a set of aesthetic strategies through which both nordicity and spiritual seeking operate in *undringslitteratur*. The focus, like in Eliassen's film, is on the intimate: embodied experience, relationships, and psyche of the characters.²² Here, the inner lives of the characters generate the supernatural elements, not the other way around. Often plot is so far downplayed that it may be challenging for the reader to figure out what is actually going on.²³ The fictions instead center a "vibe," for instance through large visuals quivering with tension vibrato.²⁴ The atmospheres created are

²¹ Perhaps this characteristic of *undringslitteratur* (and the centrality of undring as a virtue in Norwegian society at large) may be understood as an attempt to fill in a vacuum left by the weakening of the centralized church's position (Statskirken) and the effects of secularization in Norway (Andreassen). Central institutions of ethics and morality, justice and politics have all severed official ties from organized Christianity. Yet, a Judeo-Christian ethos is often detectable in Norwegian society. In a book review of the anthology *Religion i dagens Norge: Mellom sekularisering og sakralisering* (2010, ed. Ulla Schmidt og Pål Ketil Botvar) Turid Skorpe Lannem summarizes thus: "Norway is among the most secularized countries in the world, but there is much to say about that." (372).

²² Other examples of the foregrounding of (dark) atmosphere over plot and an introspective focus can be found in in Von Trier's film *Thelma* (2017), or Berit Ellingsen's near-future novel *Not Dark Yet* (2021). Interestingly, the speculative element often emerges as an extension of pre-existing socio-psychological tensions, like in Bår Stenvik's *Informasjonen* (2018) where body-language expert Sven's disassociation with life leads him to leave his body entirely and live through an experimental avatar where he can have full control over his own appearance at all times. Another example is Mathias Faldbakken's famous and popular novel *Vi er Fem* (2020), where a malignant, electrified, sentient blob emerges as a result of tensions within a modern cookie-cutter family living a life of boredom and overconsumption in a rural village.

²³ In the film *Morgenrøde*, for instance, the cold wind and wide-open landscapes, combined with the mysterious religious rituals and grief of the characters create a mystical mood that entirely supersedes the plot (Elsrud Hultgreen 2014).

²⁴ There is also a growing amount of speculative poetry being published, and texts written in long-poem form, for instance Terje Dragseth's weird-poetry *Voodoo Science* (2022), or *Bella Blu* (2012), which the writer has imagined as a continuation of the voyage begun in Harry

often heavy, dark, or mellow, sometimes characterized by what has been called “Norwegian gloom” (Furuseth et al. 14), and, at times, borrowing elements from weird fiction or horror. Dark-toned portrayals of landscapes, close-ups of natural elements, changing environments, coupled with an introspective focus, is prolific. Vera’s universe in Eliassen’s film features wide Northern landscapes and animals, particularly horses. The eeriness of these nature scenes, created by the soundscapes, seems to suggest deeper spiritual essences or forces within these environments. These portrayals,²⁵ and the space they are given in the telling of these stories, convey the undertone of the “Anthropocene unconscious” (Bould 1) through turning the attention towards nature, what it is and what effect humanity has had on it. The idea, it seems, is not necessarily to frighten, nor to create a sense of the sublime for its own sake, but to enlist atmospheres and environmental imagery for reflexivity: asking how and why different environments move us, influencing our thoughts, feelings and actions, and how we move them, and how such assemblages change as our environments change. The spiritual streak may in this way be understood as part of the efforts to “give heart” or return agency to the “little me” (Morton), as an antidote to the overwhelm and petrification that planetary crises generate. This is especially relevant in the current moment when discussions both inside and outside academia revolve around trying, and mostly failing, to grasp “the scales of the Anthropocene” (Heise 275). By centering the processes through which we try to make meaning of what lies beyond human understanding, *undringslitteratur* also reflects how the ecological effects of the Anthropocene push the limits of existent dominant structures of meaning.

7. Three Ways to Wonder

In this final section, I show how the distinctive amalgamation of the four elements described above is aptly captured by the Norwegian term *undring*, especially through its emphasis on and (re)imagining of agency. *Undring*, from Norrønt (Old Norse) *undra*, is loosely translatable as “wonder.” It has positive connotations associated with childlike wonder. In my previous article, I write that *undringslitteratur* “suggests a positive and innocent attitude to the world. It sniffs and picks at the myriad unknowns of our time and hopes everything will turn out okay” (Tveit 2022).

Furthermore, *undring* can be described as having three overlapping connotations with accompanying associations: scientific inquiry, nonhuman relationality, and spirituality. *Undre* as a verb connoting scientific inquiry can mean to critically think about, to question, or to ruminate on something, with a

Martinson’s infamous *Aniara* long poem (1956), Øyvind Rimbereid’s *Solaris Korrigert* (2004) and two volumes by Maria Dorothea Schrattenholz (2015, 2021).

²⁵ This darkness may be read as part of a generalized contemporary fondness for creating dark-toned mystical, “trolsk” atmospheres often in connection with nonhuman environments. This privileging of atmosphere alludes once more to “new Norwegian magic,” where it is hard to tell where the “real” magic of landscapes end and the “novum” (Suvin 375) begin. Taking a wider view, the inward focus seems very much in line with other Norwegian and Nordic cultural products, such as Nordic noir, meditative jazz or the unending enthusiasm for semi-autobiographical realism.

positive spin. This signification underscores the positive aspects of curiosity, celebrating logic, exploration, and experimentation. *Undring*, or wonder, in this sense is the necessary catalyst for engaging with and formulating (research) questions. Here *undringslitteratur* connects to the more appealing aspects of the science fiction tradition; curiosity is, after all, the driving force behind innovation and inquiry. As Carl Freedman argues, science fiction functions as a literature of possibility, one that enables critical reflection on existing social structures by depicting them as contingent and therefore open to change (8). *Undring* as such becomes a celebration of curiosity, not just in childhood, but as a red thread through human life.

Secondly, *undring* is often evoked as a mode of relating to the nonhuman world. For instance, *undring.no*, the website of an organization working with “children and nature in various arenas,” states that “nature can be found everywhere. We lower the threshold and wonder [undrer oss] and seek knowledge together with the children” (“Undring og utforskning – på barnas premisser”). Finally, the word *under* can indicate a miracle, something that is to be marveled at and celebrated, brought about by unseen and/or incomprehensible forces – like the English term “a wonder.” The verb to wonder (*undre*) does not only designate scientific inquiry but can also be easily associated with religious or spiritual practices and texts. The term *undring* is ambiguous and roomy, and its ambiguity can be advantageous in this connection. With the rise of private or personal religiosity in a highly secularized society, a concept such as *undring* can be useful in underlining the co-existence of science and knowledge-production and spiritual pursuits beyond dualistic approaches.

Undring thus brings together scientific inquiry, spirituality, and the sociomaterial. The term thus reflects that the metaphysical and the transcendent – that which is beyond rational comprehension or scientific explanation – is not necessarily in contradiction to scientific curiosity and inquiry. It draws attention to the overlap between scientific and spiritual practices, and suggests that the two often exist in harmony within lived experience.

These three layers of meaning give the term *undring(slitteratur)* the depth and resonance needed to reflect the thematic and aesthetic concerns, scope, and purpose of contemporary NSF as delineated above. The movement across scale between the local and the global resonates with *undring's* etymological grounding in a moment of stopping, of holding the small against the vast. Likewise, the re-enchantment of the everyday, the transformation of the mundane into the site of strangeness, embodies the mood of *undring*: an attentiveness to what ordinarily passes unnoticed, a lingering gaze that renders the familiar uncanny. Both these traits echo the affective register of wonder, but they do so in a specifically Norwegian idiom, where *undring* is less about spectacle or astonishment and more about quiet reflection in the face of shifting realities.

Equally, nordicity and the stealthy mode of spiritual searching are well served by the semantic richness of *undring*. Evoking *undring* in the Norwegian context, arguably brings with it a whiff of the bonfire smoke, freshly caught cod, and damp fur. It moves in the realm of deep memory and “folkesjela” –

Norwegian collective identity.²⁶ Relatedly, Nordic landscapes like fjords, forests, and frozen expanses, in these texts, are not only backdrops but terrains that invite a contemplative stance, evoking awe without yielding easy answers. The spiritual dimension in contemporary NSF is not declarative but subdued, emerging obliquely as though through half-light. Here, too, *undring* provides an apt frame: it suggests an orientation toward mystery that resists closure, a mode of questioning rather than certainty.

Finally, the term *undringslitteratur* designates not merely a thematic preoccupation within contemporary NSF but a structuring affect that animates the texts, especially through an emphasis on agency. To be in a state of *undring* is to be full of questions and critically engaged with the material world. *Undring* emphasizes the agency of the wonderer as it connotes not just passively marveling at a piece of technology or an event, but to an active engagement and entanglement with the material world. It indicates a willingness to become, or perhaps to acknowledge, entanglement, interconnection, interdependence and the transformative power of encounters (Tsing 6). Grounded in everyday sociomaterial reality, *undringslitteratur* thus draws us back from the fantastic or spectacular to the “mundane” (Ryman et al.), which is re-enchanted through the agency of the wonderer.

8. Conclusion

In this article, I have proposed the term *undringslitteratur* to label the fictions of the current moment in Norwegian speculative fiction, to draw attention to how style and content have changed from that of “golden-era” NSF. Despite strong overlaps with other terms in circulation for hybrid, realist/speculative styles of imaginative writing, *undringslitteratur* is distinctive in its amalgamation of four elements.

First, *undringslitteratur* is characterized by a poetics of scale, oscillating between the local and the global in ways that resonate with the “Anthropocene unconscious,” where the impact of human activity on the nonhuman world is a constant, quiet presence. Through elastic motion between scales, between the individual and the planetary and those in-between, *undringslitteratur* explores contractions and expansions of objects and concepts and the pangs, flares, and

²⁶ Connection to specific natural environments is crucial to Norwegians sense of national identity and belonging. The struggle for sovereignty and nation building in the 1800s idealized traditional, rural life. The Norwegian national romantics, in their nation-building project, emphasized the drama and cultures of high mountain peaks and deep, glacier-carved fjords, creating a rugged and wild environment. This formed part of the rhetoric and narratives for Norwegian emancipation and sovereignty leading up to independence in 1814, also because it was something Denmark did not have, and Sweden less so (Bo 173). Furthermore, Furuseth and colleagues write about Norwegians’ “special” relationship with nature: “There is a widespread notion that Norwegians are closer to nature than the citizens of other nations” (11). Whether this is the case or not, the notion itself has become culturally significant, along with the idea of being defined as a resilient, rugged “nature people” (Furuseth et al. 8–9). *Undring’s* connection to the nonhuman world therefore not only highlights the deep ties between nature and wonder but also draws attention to these ties’ foundational role in shaping individual and national identity.

unforeseen pathways these movements generate.²⁷ Second, *undringslitteratur* pursues the re-enchantment of the everyday by subverting conventional presentations of the relationship between the quotidian and the spectacular. It is not just about lifting up the everyday and the intimate, what Morton discusses as “little me” perspectives, but also about drawing big questions, issues, and unknowns, as well as “big” (human) agency, into the quotidian. Third, *undringslitteratur* has a regional inflection, articulating nordicity both as a mode of topographical evocation and as a discursive system of “northernness.” Fourth, *undringslitteratur* exhibits a vein of stealthy spiritual seeking, that comes to expression through situated modes. A prioritizing of (melancholic or dark) atmosphere over plot, and an emphasis on the introspective are devices through which these latter two elements often operate.

Finally, I have discussed how the synthesis of these four elements is aptly encapsulated in the term *undring*. Connotating wonder, contemplation, and pausing before the inexplicable, *undring* designates not merely a thematic preoccupation but a structuring affect that animates contemporary NSF. The term encapsulates and celebrates two of the most important features of human life in harmonic synchrony: the broadness of embodied perception and the limits to understanding, the knowable and the unknowable. By threading together these four elements, *undring* embodies a uniquely Norwegian poetics of wonder, one that lingers in ambiguity while inviting the reader to dwell in its spaciousness. It points to wonderment as a driving force centering agency, which is crucial to both scientific and spiritual explorations of the material world.

Here I have shown how the label *undringslitteratur* is applicable in contemporary Norway. However, given that Norwegian fiction is not a closed circuit and flows with wider Nordic and global cultural tendencies and events, the term might also be useful in framing and further understanding other literatures. Another question to be explored is, where does the appeal of *undringslitteratur* lie for contemporary Norwegian audiences? How can we make sense of the current upsurge of this genre-crossing, strange and woeful type of writing? As the co-editor of the newest Norwegian SF-anthology Joanna Rzadzowska said in an interview: “When the crises come at us through all channels, science fiction can provide an alternative perspective on contemporary times” (Henanger and Mejdal). If we accept Csicsery-Ronay’s argument that “science fictionality” may be a useful mode of engagement with our modern world (2), then one may argue that when Norwegian audiences turn to SF they are no longer primarily looking to be dazzled with gadgets, scientist heroes, novel social and material technology, and space travel, which were the hallmarks of the golden era. They are arguably searching, instead, for tools with which to understand and process their own discombobulating, technologically accelerated, digitized presents marked by the climate crisis, connecting with characters who are equally confounded.

The appeal might also become evident when viewing *undringslitteratur* as a provider of temporary relief for widespread apprehension and disenchantment. Audiences are allowed to participate in the “art of noticing”

²⁷ Flows between the local and the global are also affecting production processes. Stephen Joyce writes about the recent shift to “glocalised” production using the Norwegian-produced series “Beforegners” (2019-2021, created by Anne Bjørnstad and Eilif Skodvin) as a case study.

(Tsing 37) through the re-enchantment of relatable life-worlds – to really see the depth in the eye of a reindeer, or the many shades of blue in a glacier. *Undringslitteratur* is a literature of complicity, atonement, and lamentation, one that stays with the trouble of the Anthropocene (Haraway). Yet, it is also a literature that glimmers with hope in its facets of wonderment, a soft invitation to Earthly (re)connection.

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