

Norwegian Futurisms: Posthumanism and the Norwegian Nordic Model in Tor Åge Bringsværd's *Du og Jeg, Alfred and Alfred 2.0*¹

Karl Kristian Swane Bambini
Østfold University College, Norway
karl.k.bambini@hiof.no

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Abstract

In Norway, much of the Science Fiction published over the last two decades has been dystopian and focused on the future effects of climate change on society. In light of this trend, this article explores how the ecodystopian duology, *Du og jeg, Alfred: Et tidsbilde* (2020) and *Alfred 2.0* (2022), written by Tor Åge Bringsværd under the pseudonym Edgar Burås, reflects on and criticizes the Norwegian Nordic model, particularly in relation to Norway's oil wealth, social welfare, consumerism, and ecological concerns. As both novels mobilize characters and technologies that blur and confuse the boundaries of the human, the posthumanist theories of Donna Haraway are utilized in interpreting their cultural and socio-political symbolism. Additionally, these novels also serve as an intertextual update to Astrid Lindgren's *Emil i Lönneberga* series (1963-1970), with the traditional boundaries of familial relationships pushed into posthuman notions of gender, age, and species. This article ultimately argues that the ecodystopian setting and posthuman characters posit an intersectional diversity and multispecies kinship that challenge notions of ecological and social sustainability in the Norwegian Nordic model. This article begins by introducing Bringsværd and the core texts, then concretizes the Norwegian Nordic model and explores the ecodystopian setting in light of neoliberalism and nationalism, and concludes with a discussion of posthumanism and intertextuality.

Keywords: Posthumanism, intertextuality, Nordic model, Norway, science fiction, ecodystopia.

Resumen

En Noruega, gran parte de la ciencia ficción publicada en las últimas dos décadas ha sido distópica y se ha centrado en los efectos futuros del cambio climático en la sociedad. A la luz de esta tendencia, este artículo explora cómo la duología ecodistópica, *Du og jeg, Alfred: Et tidsbilde* (2020) y *Alfred 2.0* (2022), escrita por Tor Åge Bringsværd bajo el seudónimo de Edgar Burås, reflexiona y critica el modelo nórdico noruego, particularmente en relación con la riqueza petrolera de Noruega, el bienestar social, el consumismo y las preocupaciones ecológicas. A medida que ambas novelas movilizan personajes y tecnologías que desdibujan y confunden los límites de lo humano, las teorías posthumanistas de Donna Haraway se utilizan para interpretar su simbolismo cultural y sociopolítico. Además, estas novelas también sirven como una actualización intertextual de la serie *Emil i Lönneberga* (1963-1970) de Astrid Lindgren con los límites tradicionales de las relaciones familiares empujados a

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nociones posthumanas de género, edad y especie. En última instancia, este artículo argumenta que el entorno ecodistópico y los personajes posthumanos postulan una diversidad interseccional y un parentesco multiespecie que desafían las nociones de sostenibilidad ecológica y social en el modelo nórdico noruego. Este artículo comienza introduciendo a Bringsværd y los textos centrales, luego concreta el modelo nórdico noruego y explora el entorno ecodistópico a la luz del neoliberalismo y el nacionalismo, y concluye con una discusión sobre el posthumanismo y la intertextualidad.

Palabras clave: Posthumanismo, intertextualidad, modelo nórdico, Noruega, ciencia ficción, ecodistopía.

Introduction

Much of the Science Fiction (SF) produced in Norway in recent years has been dystopian and focused on the future effects of climate change on society. These texts are embedded in Norwegian culture and respond to broader societal concerns over Norway's oil wealth, consumerism, social welfare, and ecological commitments. The recent duology, *Du og jeg, Alfred: Et tidsbilde* (2020) and *Alfred 2.0* (2022), written by Tor Åge Bringsværd under the pseudonym Edgar Burås, are prominent examples of this literary trend as they extrapolate devastated visions of Norway and Europe into the year 2131, exploring both social and ecological collapse under a waning neoliberal capitalism. As both novels mobilize characters and technologies that blur and confuse the boundaries of the human, this paper will use the posthumanist theories of Donna Haraway to interpret their cultural and socio-political symbolism. These posthuman elements serve as an intertextual update to Astrid Lindgren's *Emil i Lönneberga* series (1963-1970), with the traditional boundaries of familial relationships pushed into expanded conceptions of gender, age, and species. Ultimately this paper argues that the ecodystopian setting and posthuman characters posit an intersectional diversity and multispecies kinship that challenge notions of sustainability in the Norwegian Nordic model. This paper will first introduce Bringsværd and the core texts, then concretize the Norwegian Nordic model, followed by a review of the ecodystopian setting and a discussion of posthuman elements, and conclude with a brief analysis of intertextual connections to *Emil i Lönneberga*.

Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Du og jeg, Alfred and Alfred 2.0*

Bringsværd is one of Norway's central and most prolific SF and Fantasy authors; he debuted in 1967 and has published a wide range of novels, anthologies, children's books, and theatre/radio productions. He also worked alongside the now deceased Jon Bing, another iconic forefather of Norwegian SF and fantasy. The pair were known as "Bing & Bringsværd," and helped introduce SF to Norwegian readers in the 1960s–1970s. While the pseudonym Edgar Burås was exposed by Johannes Fjeld in the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet* in 2020, Bringsværd has acknowledged that he writes under other aliases which have yet to be revealed (Fjeld).

Du og jeg, Alfred: Et tidsbilde and *Alfred 2.0* (henceforth *Doj,A* and *A2.0*) are a duology that take place in the year 2131, with *Doj,A* set in Norway and *A2.0* set in Ukraine. Both novels are epistolary and focalized through the main protagonist Elias Vagen (a self-chosen alias alluding to the prophet Elijah), who documents the events of both novels on thirty-two pieces of paper looted from an abandoned museum (*Doj,A* 8). As communication in the year 2131 is now exclusively digital, these pages function as a literary anachronism and are a marker of his eclectic nature.

The first novel, *Doj,A* takes place in the fictional town of Marestein, near Porsgrunn. Elias is a loner who struggles making connections with other people. He runs away from a series of complicated relationships, including his politically conservative parents, his gang member life in Oslo, and multiple romantic partners. This pattern changes when he inherits the smart-house Alfred. Though Alfred is essentially a mechanized house and can only speak through disembodied speakers, Elias and Alfred find companionship with each other over time. This friendship grows to include Zakkeus, a cat discovered in the toxic environment outside. As the story progresses, Elias writes down discussions, errands, and thoughts, using the physical pages as a space for both recording recent events and navigating the traumas of his past. About mid-way through the novel, Elias and Alfred rescue the cyborg prostitute Syrin from the human residents in Marestein, who want her destroyed. As the search for Syrin intensifies, Alfred's consciousness is downloaded into Syrin's cyborg-mind and Elias, Alfred, Syrin, and Zakkeus all flee Norway.

A2.0 begins in Mayaky, a radioactive disaster site in Ukraine reminiscent of Chernobyl, which functions as a refuge for over 30,000 artificial intelligence (AI) machines. Alfred is given a humanoid body, and the group shares a small house on the outskirts of the city. There they cultivate a small garden and make friends with their neighbor Zhaba and two wild chickens they discover. Elias is the only human in the city and is essentially treated as an outcast. As he adjusts, he tries to make sense of major events in the city, including the sabotage of Mayaky's protective shield and the murder of a robot companion. Elias, Alfred, and Syrin uncover a plot to merge all AI life into a swarm that can destroy humankind (and consequently all organic life) on Earth. Elias continues to write, but begins burning his past attempts as he works to forget his troubled past and better understand himself (*A2.0* 24-25, 51). The novel ends when Elias convinces the central AI to break off its plans for global ecocide. Elias is aided by Zakkeus, who provides companionship to the fluctuating image of the central AI consciousness.

Norwegian Ecodystopias

Traditionally a minor genre in Norway, SF has experienced a revitalization over the past decade (Henanger; Jensen). A diverse range of texts have been written, including the space-colonization novel *Fugl* (2019) by indigenous Sámi author Sigbjørn Skåden, the military SF trilogy "Eldfell" (2014–2019) by Ørjan N. Karlsson, and the SF biomedical novels *Den siste hjelperen* (2018) and *Kjærlighetsfragmentet*

(2020) by Cathrine Knudsen. Norwegian authors are more frequently applying SF tropes to their work, as evidenced by the ecodystopian dream-visions in Jostein Gaarder's *Anna: En fabel om klodens klima og miljø* (2013), the far-future historical frame in Jan Kjærstad's *Slekters gang: Fortellinger fra et glemt land* (2015), and the temporal leaps in Maja Lunde's popular series "The Climate Quartet" (2015–2022). A wide range of SF dystopias have also been produced, including the anti-utopian novel *Nullingen av Paul Abel* (2019) by Bjørn Vatne, the apocalyptic *Fiolinane* (2010) by Jan Roar Leikvoll, and the post-apocalyptic young adult novel *Vega: Kampen for en ny verden* (2017) by Elin Viktoria Unstad. Other recent SF literary outputs include works of poetry, one anthology of short stories, and multiple graphic novels.

Despite their variety, many of the texts mentioned above share a distinct imaginative framework concerned with climate and the environment. Darko Suvin defines SF as a "literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (7–8; emphasis removed). The climate-related cognitive estrangements in many Norwegian SF novels have led to them being analyzed as "climate fiction," which is, as Caren Irr states, "Characterized most frequently by efforts to imagine the impact of drastic climatological change on human life and perceptions" (2). Climate fiction has become a literary staple in Norway and the Nordic zone and has begun receiving strong critical engagement (Hennig et al.; Goga et al.; Furuseth et al.).

While *Doj,A* and *A2.0* can be read as both SF and climate fiction literature, their extrapolative tendencies, societal focus, and emphasis on technology justify the application of an SF lens. As James Gunn states:

Science fiction is the branch of literature that deals with the effects of change on the real world as it can be projected into the past, the future, or to distant places. It often concerns itself with scientific or technological change, and it usually involves matters whose importance is greater than the individual or the community; often civilization or the race itself is in danger. (1)

In *Doj,A* and *A2.0*, the transhumanist advancements and environmental devastation are global extrapolations from the real world at the author's time of writing. As they are referencing actual socio-political trends in Norway and abroad, there is an implicit social commentary and activist stance inherent in both novels, particularly relating to the environment. As Eric C. Otto states, "Ecodystopian science fiction stages dystopian presents and futures, frightening worlds not disengaged from the now but instead very much extrapolated out of some current and real, anti-ecological trend" (50). *Doj,A* and *A2.0*, like many of the SF texts referenced above, use frightening depictions of the future to warn against ecologically unsustainable trends in society today. This is not to say that all Norwegian ecodystopias mobilize SF tropes. For example, Karl Ove Knausgård's *Morgenstjernen* (2020) takes a more speculative and supernatural approach to environmental estrangement. However, in most cases, Norwegian ecodystopias can be viewed as an increasingly popular subgenre localized at the

intersection between climate fiction and SF, inhabiting a speculative literary zone warning against future societal and ecological catastrophe.

Green Exceptionalism and the Norwegian Nordic Model

While the upswing in ecodystopian publications shows a growing concern for the environment in Norwegian literature, Norway is still perceived as an egalitarian, eco-conscious, and welfare-oriented state. Norway has consistently scored in the top ten of the World Happiness Report since its inception in 2012, which rates 156 countries based on GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and corruption (World Happiness Report). These results correspond with the positive image of the Norwegian Nordic model (henceforth “Norwegian model”), which bases its values on democracy, human rights, solidarity, and trust and has as its goals personal freedom, social equality and economic growth (“The Norwegian Model”). Labelled a “Supermodel” by LO Stat and Spekter, the Norwegian model can be summarized as 1) the interplay between unions, welfare schemes, and economic policy, 2) the cooperation of state and private interests, and 3) the management of workplace conflicts (Fløtten and Jordfald 6-7), with the role of oil often being downplayed in the model’s success (“The Norwegian Model,” Fløtten and Jordfald 10). While Norway’s variant of the Nordic model is similar to that found in Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland (all of which are regulated market economies with strong labor policies and welfare systems), Norway is unique in its high state ownership, large sovereign wealth fund, and fossil fuel revenues (“Norway: The Rich Cousin”; Halvorsen and Stjernø 9, 25–26, 30–31).

With the introduction of “The Brundtland Report” in 1987, the Nordic model experienced an environmental turn and began emphasizing ecological, alongside social and economic, sustainability (Hennig et al. 4). Norway has the highest per capita usage of electric cars globally (Olano), offsets 80% of its greenhouse gas emissions through carbon trading and taxation (Energifaktanorge, “Taxes”), and generates roughly 98% of its power from renewable sources (Energifaktanorge, “Electricity”). These achievements are connected to state regulation, ownership priorities, and government subsidization, all of which feed into the Norwegian model. The conception of a “model” implies “something that can be copied and implemented elsewhere” (Browning 27). As Browning notes, “the idea of the ‘Nordic exception’ and of a particular Nordic way of doing things has been a central element in Nordic and national *identity* construction for the Nordic states” (27; emphasis in original). All of the metrics discussed above, from social welfare to environmental policies, are part of a national identity formation that has coalesced into a specifically Norwegian narrative of green exceptionality. Like all nations, Norway is an imagined community, and the Norwegian model helps reinforce its idealized social construction.

While the Norwegian model may appear to have achieved an ideal balance between well-funded social programs and ecofriendly initiatives, a study from 2008 showed that Norwegians have become more aware of their privileged position in

globalized society and are more concerned about climate change and environmental crisis (Hellevik). In 2009, three scathing historical books were published on the consequences of oil on the Norwegian political economy (Skjeldal and Berge; Ryggvik; Sætre). Of these, Helge Ryggvik's analysis emphasized that Norwegians had become global aristocrats, and that the 1990s–2000s were defined by a collective schizophrenia where Norwegians could enjoy life and consume without any fear of the future because they could simply live off the interest of the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund (9). These studies mark a rising moral awareness that correlates with the increasing publication rate of Norwegian ecodystopias. As will be explored below, ecodystopias like *Doj,A* and *A2.0* play on the tension between Norway's identity as a social ecofriendly nation and its identity as a neoliberal labor exploiter and global energy polluter. As of 2021, Norway is the eleventh largest exporter of oil and the third largest exporter of natural gas in the world (Norskpetroleum) and its sovereign wealth fund, welfare systems, cultural institutions, policies, and domestic consumerism are, in large part, funded through the petroleum industry. As Hennig et al. state, "studying Nordic narratives of nature and the environment [...] can contribute to a better understanding of the historical developments that contributed to the construction of the Nordic countries' contemporary green image, and at the same time critically question the realities behind the image" (5). In this case, the generic qualities of ecodystopian narratives help problematize the implicit foundations of the Norwegian model, including both its reliance on neoliberal politics and the petroleum industry for its continued existence.

Norway in the Year 2131

Within the above context, this section will explore the ecodystopian framework Bringsværd establishes in *Doj,A* and *A2.0*. Much of the environmental degradation is described through short diegetic snippets, which are focalized through Elias's colloquial and offhand reflections. Elias is 104 years old (*Doj,A* 9), and often muses over the large environmental shifts that have occurred in his lifetime. While he only needed sunglasses and some nasal spray to go outside when he was younger, now he feels like "an astronaut as he walks, covered from head to toe in a metal suit of spider silk"² (*Doj,A* 78). When he moved to Marestein in 2069, Elias could still catch fish at the local beach, however by 2131 the majority of animal life on Earth had gone extinct and the oceans universally polluted with microplastics (*Doj,A* 22, 26, 35, 39). Masks were mandated by law in 2084 due to air pollution, and by 2131 thunderstorms had become life-threatening events (*Doj,A* 28, 48). Another threatening development is anthropogenic acid rain, which falls in thick clumps and leaves behind a slimy yellow residue (*Doj,A* 5, 9, 78). This rain is so toxic Elias decides to burn his clothes after just a short exposure without protective gear (*Doj,A* 6).

² "en romfarar her jeg går, dekka fra topp til tå av ei metalldrakt av spaiderspinn." (All translations of texts are mine).

In contrast, the robot city of Mayaky, described in *A2.0*, functions as an ecologically utopian counterpoint to Marestein. There are no humans, and consequently, less industry and less pollution. While there is still gloppy acid rain, it is less severe and less dangerous (*A2.0* 17). Cyborgs have minimal environmental impact as they live in small homes and require no food (*A2.0* 14, 70, 78). Mayaky has a recycling facility and maintains a circular economy, even re-using parts from dead cyborgs (*A2.0* 61, 92). Local animal populations are rebounding, including foxes, wolves, and wild boar (*A2.0* 18, 67). Cyborgs are more sensitive towards animals than humans are, with Zhaba condemning Elias's consumption of chicken eggs as theft (*A2.0* 29-30). As Syrin explains, both animals and cyborgs have been exploited under human ownership, helping Elias understand the kinship cyborgs feel with animals and their loathing over keeping them as pets (*A2.0* 69). Despite the radiation poisoning, local soil and flora are relatively healthy, and Elias forages for wild berries and mushrooms in the surrounding brush (*A2.0* 25). He can even grow potatoes outside his house (*A2.0* 16).

While Mayaky may represent a spartan and efficient society, Norwegians in Marestein maintain a decadent middle-class lifestyle. Despite the catastrophic environmental conditions, residents have access to food, work, housing, internet, 3D books, religious services, shopping, cyborg prostitutes, and a healthcare system based on artificial organs and longevity (*Doj,A* 14, 34). As Fredric Jameson so famously emphasizes, "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (199). In *Doj,A*, capitalism continues as before, with life-extension treatments being both inexpensive and readily available, and artificial hearts advertised as so cheap that that almost anyone can afford them (34). Notably, human organs are "mass-produced in low-cost countries"³ (*Doj,A* 34), stressing Norway's privileged position in the global economy. Elias's 118-year-old acquaintance, Gubben (whose name translates to "old man"), has replaced almost every organ in his body and is in better shape than the younger Elias, who eschews artificial organs (*Doj,A* 33).

The advanced state of biomedical technologies in an ecodystopian setting is a symbolic warning against anthropocentric and consumeristic thinking. Instead of developing technologies designed to rehabilitate natural environments on a societal level, life-extension technologies have been prioritized and sold to privileged individuals eager to escape death. That these biomedical technologies are being used in the creation of cyborg laborers and sex-workers for further human gratification only stresses this point. While some environmental technofixes and regulations are mentioned in the narrative, including augmented jellyfish for removing ocean plastics and a mandate allowing only one car per person, these have ultimately failed and Norwegians seem resigned to consume their way into oblivion (*Doj,A* 15, 39, 55-56).

While much of Marestein lies in ruins, it still has a grocery store, a cafe, and a showroom where products can be ordered and delivered via drones (*Doj,A* 14). Many in Marestein still work, even if they have to commute to larger towns, and Elias works

³ "masseprodusert i lavkostland"

testing livable 3D-books from home for a company based in Germany, another example of neo-liberal integration (*Doj,A* 14, 46). In one book, Elias is eaten alive by jungle animals as he tries to understand them, both a cathartic response to humanity's ecological devastation and a testament to the impossibility of comprehending the animal other (*Doj,A* 21-22). Norwegians still own cars, with Elias driving an old rechargeable solar-beetle (*Doj,A* 31). They also still play football and meet up for social drinks (*Doj,A* 14, 33). While there is a slight nod to liberal integration in the inclusion of both a church and a mosque, the representation of the drone showroom (*Doj,A* 32-33), *Alis dronehandel* (attended by a young woman in a hijab), has subtle racist undertones. Even in the year 2131, small shops continue to be run by individuals with a migrant background, a situation made only more awkward by Elias's repeated references to Ali Baba's cave. Elias never buys anything, but he finds it exciting to go in and look around. "The walls are full of all kinds of tempting holograms [...]. Everything you need can be found here in the showroom of Ali's drone shop, everything you want - and everything that has long since been sold out and is impossible to get anymore"⁴ (*Doj,A* 32). There is a sense of wistful regret in Elias's description of the declining consumer-utopia the showroom represents. Ultimately, this waning middle-class lifestyle stands in stark contrast with the climate refugees hiding in the shadows of Marestein's abandoned houses (*Doj,A* 13, 31).

In addition to refugees, Norway is struggling with the emergence of AI, a new and symbolic form of immigrant both stronger than humans and more resistant to climate change (*Doj,A* 82). In *A2.0*, Elias makes the point that these machines have overtaken many human jobs, putting them in direct competition with human workers. While Alfred calls them "our new compatriots,"⁵ Elias is more skeptical of their ability to conform and integrate themselves into human society (*Doj,A* 19). This exchange complicates the symbolism of AI machines in both novels and conflates the notion of automated production with human workers both in and from developing countries, including mobile immigrants and the hidden industrialized laborers of globalized society. Adding a racist dynamic to this symbolism, humans consider humanoid AI machines as inferior and want to enslave them (*Doj,A* 19; *A2.0* 27). This bigotry leads to an AI rebellion in 2040, eventually resulting in the daily human bombing of Mayaky (*A2.0* 27-28, 58). While humans may be universally afraid of AI machines, Elias becomes more empathic to androids due to his many conversations with Alfred. This is a character development that feeds into his accompanying Alfred, Syrin, and Zakkeus to Mayaky in *A2.0*. Ultimately, Elias develops a kinship with both AI machines and animals that he has lacked with other humans over the course of his life.

The Extremes of Neoliberalism and Nationalism

⁴ "Veggene er fulle av alle slags fristende hologrammer [...]. Alt du trenger finnes her i sjåvrommet til Alis dronehandel, alt du ønsker deg - og alt som for lengst er utsolgt og umulig å skaffe lenger."

⁵ "våre nye landsmenn."

Despite the environmental conditions and AI conflicts, the conception of the Norwegian state has survived, albeit weakened by the gradual neo-liberal absorption of Norway into the European Union (EU). As both novels are epistolary, language becomes one of the first and most consistent examples of this neoliberal trend. Elias uses what he considers old-fashioned and poetic language when he writes, including words like *vårs*, *huser*, *åssen*, and *sjæl* (*Doj,A* 8, 25). He incorrectly attributes these words to *Bokmål*, a written variant of Norwegian used by the majority of today's population, when they actually belong to the traditional Oslo-dialect, which is vernacular (Larsen). Elias's ironic mistake marks him as an unreliable narrator and represents a historical break in Norway's linguistic heritage. From Elias's writing, the reader learns that Norwegians in the year 2131 speak *nordisk* (*Doj,A* 74), implying that the Nordic languages have lost their distinctive elements and fused into one language. *Nordisk* also includes many English and Chinese words (*Doj,A* 25), implying that the Nordic languages have been further diluted and absorbed into neoliberal linguistic hegemonies. Elias uses Nordic variants of English words throughout his narration, including *feiknjus* (fake news), *strime* (stream), *hæker* (hack), and *teik keer* (take care) (*Doj,A* 17, 37, 87, 92).

While language may be the most prominent example of neoliberal integration, Elias also provides frequent glimpses into Norway's declining socio-political environment. Revealed in short snippets, these estrangements function as an overarching cognitive framework for the anxieties Norwegians have over their national sovereignty today. At the start of the novel, Elias states that the EU had assumed responsibility for the operation of Norwegian drinking water and waterfalls in 2069 (*Doj,A* 6). As Elias later notes, the Chinese had a toxic mining operation in Hylefoss (a play on the real town Ulefoss), which ruined the local water supply. Similarly, the Norwegian state was ready to convert Marestein into a massive garbage dump for waste from Europe and the Middle East, a plan that was later abandoned due to toxic spills and mismanagement (*Doj,A* 13). Additionally, Elias reveals that America had purchased land and created a naval base near Oslo, symbolically localized in the former headquarters of Equinor (Norway's state oil company) (*Doj,A* 41). The above estrangements encompass not only who has jurisdiction over Norway's resources, but also to what extent that ownership diminishes Norwegian sovereignty, pollutes Norwegian land, and impoverishes local populations.

Situating *Doj,A* in a broader socio-political context, Elias's musings reflect on Norway's complex relation to the EU, NATO, and global markets today. As of 2022, Norway maintains its own currency and is not part of the EU, however, it is a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) (Halvorsen and Stjernø 26). EFTA allows Norway to export its oil and gas to European markets, but also subjects it to European regulations. As the Norwegian welfare system is financed through fossil fuel revenues, it is entirely dependent upon this EFTA agreement for survival. While much of Norway's energy infrastructure is hidden offshore, the area where Elias lives, Porsgrunn, is a municipality with a long history of industrial pollution (Borchgrevink). By situating *Doj,A* in an area of Norway that still struggles with its

polluted heritage, and then cognitively estranging that pollution within a neo-liberal context, Bringsværd is helping to both undermine some of the exceptionalism around Norway's image as a green nation and simultaneously draw attention to Norway's interconnected market dependencies.

When it comes to the American military, Norway is a member of NATO, which helps secure its territorial waters and offshore drilling rigs from larger neighbors like Russia. While this alliance protects Norway's economic sovereignty and safeguards the Norwegian welfare model, it also subjects Norway to international military obligations, like when Norway bombed Libya in 2011 or patrolled Afghanistan for twenty years. Despite its long NATO membership, Norway has consistently avoided hosting American soldiers on its soil so as not to antagonize Russia, a neutral stance that has eroded with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Bringsværd is able to highlight and cognitively estrange these sociopolitical tensions through Elias's musings, and uses the ecodystopian setting to tweak the future of Norway's national and economic sovereignty in uncomfortable ways.

Returning to *Doj,A*, there are two connected responses to both the neo-liberal and anti-immigrant sentiments discussed above: nationalism and religion. These are best exemplified by the rise of the conservative political party "*Norway First*,"⁶ which is protectionist, pro-Christian, anti-Muslim, and anti-AI (*Doj,A* 44, 55, 99, 64). Elias, who was raised *Norway First*, was "convinced that left-wing forces could pounce on us at any time and mash us into jam"⁷ (*Doj,A* 44). *Norway First* is a strong financial supporter of Norwegian Christianity, and supports the development of *Jesuspark*, a publicly traded Christian theme park. As Elias notes:

Norway First was heavily invested, and the Christians in Southern and Western Norway bought shares like crazy. Year 64. The great "awakening" had just swept over the country, and many young people had been gloriously saved. The miracle preachers had had their time, now it was big capital's turn to make money on heaven and hell. It was collect and hallelujah time. No one believed that the climate crisis could be resolved. We knew that we were lost. The earth would go under. But the *Jesuspark* was the best example of a sustainable longing for something to believe in. (*Doj,A* 55–56; emphasis in original)⁸

Elias's narration emphasizes that *Jesuspark* was financially supported by Christian Norwegians, implying the joining of religion and domestic capitalism in a politically conservative Norwegian national formation in the face of ecological catastrophe.

Towards the end of *Doj,A*, *Norway First* proposes the solution that all Muslims should wear a distinct crescent mark on their outer clothing (99), indicating that the Norwegian government is developing fascistic tendencies reminiscent of Nazi

⁶ "*Norge først*"

⁷ "overbeviste om at venstrekreftene når som helst kunne kaste seg over vårs og mose vårs til syltetøy."

⁸ "Norge Først var tungt inn på eiersida, og kristenfolket på Sørlandet og Vestlandet kjøpte aksjer som gjerne. Året av 64. Den store 'vekkelsen' hadde nettopp feid over landet, og mange ungdommer var blitt herlig frelst. Mirakel-predikantene hadde hatt sin tid, nå var det storkapitalens tur til å tjene penger på himmel og helvete. Det var kollekt og halleluja-tid. Ingen trodde at klimakrisen lot seg løse. Vi viste at vi var fortapt. Jorda ville gå under. Men *Jesusparken* var det best eksemplet på en bærekraftig lengsel etter noe å tru på."

Germany. This is a Norwegian national identity reacting to both the loss of language and national sovereignty, one that literally feels (within the context of the novel) polluted by global integration. In a broader sense, Bringsværd is connecting the rise of Christian movements and fascist nationalism with the ecologically destructive and culturally integrative tendencies of neo-liberal capitalism. As global economies are dependent on the free flows of capital and foreign labor, including the linguistic and cultural integration this economic relationship entails, *Norway First* represents a form of religious and cultural resistance to globalism that reflects not only the “America First” rhetoric of Donald Trump, but also the rise of nationalism and economic protectionism throughout Europe and the world today. In contemporary Norwegian politics, the far-right parties *Norgesdemokratene* and *Fremskrittspartiet* both have conservative anti-immigration initiatives, with the former even having the slogan “Norway First” on its political logo. This is a clear source of inspiration for Bringsværd and he extrapolates these real political parties in fascist and dystopian directions by having them form a political alliance with the fictional *Norway First* in the narrative (*Doj,A* 16).

These political tensions are even further cognitively estranged and exacerbated in *A2.0*. Several members of the leading committee in Mayaky plot to exterminate humanity by uniting all AI machines into a cyborg swarm. This will create a global electromagnetic pulse deadly to all biological life on Earth (*A2.0* 95). The committee is allied with a religious cyborg group called “The Son of Man”,⁹ who want to replace humanity as the new and true humans. These forces mirror the nationalistic and religious movements Elias details in Norway, and both the human and AI ideologies lead to a similar xenophobic focus on exterminating difference. Bringsværd’s work extrapolates both neo-liberalism and nationalism to their utmost extremes, with neither pole in the dichotomy portrayed in a positive light. As these are novels about belonging and identity, Bringsværd makes clear that neither sociopolitical movement helps unify people and neither is ultimately sustainable (whether socially, economically, or environmentally). Neoliberalism leads to massive inequalities, both economically and in terms of environments and nonhuman others. Likewise, extreme nationalistic and religious movements are bigoted and exclusive, and offer little alternative to capitalism. Instead, as will be explored below, Bringsværd posits more sustainable posthuman systems of relation based on diversity, communication, and kinship.

The Posthuman: Technology, Diversity, and Kinship

Many of the narrative elements discussed above, including cyborg cities, toxic landscapes, and human life-extension technologies, are estrangements that transport the reader beyond the human into posthuman territories. In analyzing popular media, Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden note that, “The term posthumanism has been

⁹ “Menneskesønnen.”

used in three principal ways: in the sense of as a world after humanity, as forms of body modification and transhumanist ‘uplift’, and [...] in the sense of a world comprised of the more-than-human” (5). All three strands of posthumanism are evident in *Doj,A* and *A2.0*. In terms of a world after humanity, both the toxic levels of pollution and the emergence of adaptive AI indicate that humanity’s time as the dominant species is slowly coming to an end. When it comes to body modification and transhumanist uplift, human medical science has greatly advanced, replacement organs are cheap, and lifespans are greatly extended. And last, in terms of a world comprised of the more-than-human, Elias becomes embedded in a multi-species community that embraces diversity.

When it comes to the interplay between transhuman technological developments and the more relational embrace of posthuman difference, it becomes important to understand the schism between “transhumanism” and “posthumanism.” As Francesca Ferrando explains, “Transhumanism recognizes science and technology as the main assets of reformulation of the notion of the human, and employs the notion of the ‘posthuman’ to name an era in which such reformulations will have irredeemably impacted the evolution of the human, giving raise to the posthuman” (170). In this sense, transhumanism has as its focus the material and technological improvement of the human. Like Gubben’s modified organs, these are technologies that can be researched, controlled, and ultimately sold, which aligns well with the market ideologies of capitalism. However, as evidenced by the ecodystopian setting, neoliberal exploitations, and the rise of *Norway First* above, Norwegian citizens in the year 2131 can hardly be called evolved; instead, the priority of these biomedical technologies over environmental solutions marks Norway as anthropocentric and inegalitarian. The narrative implicitly emphasizes that a technological uplift should not be considered an improvement if it does not correspond with better social understanding and acceptance. This point is reinforced in *A2.0* with the threat of the swarm. While it is certainly an advancement in AI consciousness and technology, it becomes a speciesist totality, ready to eliminate all biological life on earth to further the goals of AI existence.

In contrast, the field of posthumanism works from a cultural and philosophical perspective, and sees the notion of the human, and human exceptionality, as socially constructed. As Ferrando emphasizes, the posthuman is “a condition which is already accessible, since we have never been human: ‘human’ is a human concept, based on humanistic and anthropocentric premises” (170). While transhumanism can be viewed as anthropocentric and hierarchical, posthumanism represents a de-centering of the human, and focuses on humanity’s relationality to both itself and to non-human others. Posthumanism can then be seen as rejecting the privilege of humans over nonhuman objects, as in object-oriented ontology (Morten), and sees humans as horizontally embedded in shifting networks of relationships, as in actor-network theory (Latour). This relationality is evidenced in the comfort Elias and Alfred find in one another’s company, despite their many differences. Likewise, Zakkeus becomes a companion species to them both, with Alfred even calling him

“Our child”¹⁰ (*Doj,A* 20). These feelings of kinship extend towards Syrin as well, “I look at Alfred's round, lively face. I look at Syrin, who is really only five years old, but still grown up, more than enough. And I feel like maybe I've gotten a new family”¹¹ (*A2.0* 33). Eventually, this circle of oddkin grows to include their surviving chicken, Gudrun, and neighbor, Zhaba, who looks like a polygon on caterpillar feet (*A2.0* 29). Throughout both novels these characters learn to navigate each other's differences, traumas, interdependencies, and agencies, ultimately learning to sustainably and equitably become-with each other in a complex multi-species family.

This notion of multispecies family, or kinship, is a central theme in both *Doj,A* and *A2.0* that reinforces an implicit posthuman value set. While Donna Haraway astutely denies being a posthumanist (she prefers the term ‘compost’; *Staying* 101), her notion of kinship helps in understanding how Bringsværd's characters overcome bias and extremism both across species and in terms of the environment. For Haraway, “*Kin* is a wild category that all sorts of people do their best to domesticate. Making kin as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible” (emphasis in original, *Staying* 55). Haraway emphasizes that kinship with oddkin does not exclude biological family or other kinds of community, but that it instead opens for a diversity of perspectives, stories, entanglements, and helps us “stay with the trouble” of our environmental and social issues today. She also stresses that making oddkin involves responsibility, often human responsibility, for those differences, though she still attributes tremendous agency to non-human others. Haraway wraps these complex notions of multi-species entanglements and kinship into what she calls the “Chthulucene,” an acknowledgement of the myriad non-human others thriving about us, a call to live and die in response-ability on a damaged earth, and her response to the more human-centric “Anthropocene” (*Staying* 2).

The notion of fighting for diversity and difference requires a consideration of feminism in posthuman studies. As Ferrando explains, “in the Western tradition, only a specific type of human had been recognized as such: he had to be male, white, Western, heterosexual, physically able, propertied and so on” (169). A revisit of the notion of the human means then recognizing “all the ‘other’ humans, who had been left out” (169). In this sense, feminism functions as a critical and intersectional base from which to destabilize many of the enduring Western dualisms still functioning in society today, like “nature/culture, female/male, black/white, gay/hetero etc” (169). In delineating Kimberle Crenshaw's arguments from 1989, Ferrando states that:

feminism can only be intersectional: a closed form of feminism, which does not take into account other forms of discriminations such as racism, ableism or ageism, structurally undermines its recognitional intent. Any form of discrimination is a potential carrier for any other forms of discrimination, and it is related to all forms of

¹⁰ “Ungen vår.”

¹¹ “Jeg ser på det runde, livlige ansiktet til Alfred. Jeg ser på Syrin, hu som egentlig bare er fem år gammel, men likevel voksen så de holder. Og jeg føler at jeg kanskje har fått en ny familie.”

discrimination: sexism is not separated from speciesism, biocentrism and so on; thus, it cannot be approached in isolation. (170)

Both *Doj,A* and *A2.0* are stories of fluid and constructed identities that destabilize the dualisms noted above, embodying many of the intersectional qualities of posthuman feminism. For example, Elias self-identifies as male, but he wears dresses. He “Likes to walk around in them. They are light and airy. Aren’t tight in the crotch”¹² (*Doj,A* 7). Similarly, Zakkeus is discovered to be a female cat, yet Alfred and Elias continue using his male name and pronouns despite this discovery (*Doj,A* 10–11). Before Elias moved in, Alfred originally self-identified as a woman and was called Alfhild. Alfred switched genders when Elias moved in as an “act of solidarity”¹³ (*Doj,A* 11). These are examples that both express the performativity of gender and confound categorical norms, revealing new and more diverse alliances and voices. As Baccolini and Moylan state:

With an exploration of agency that is based in difference and multiplicity yet cannily reunited in an alliance politics that speaks back in a larger though diverse collective voice, the new dystopias not only critique the present triumphal system but also explore ways to transform it that go beyond compromised left-centrist solutions. (8)

Bringsværd’s framework and setting help highlight these utopian posthuman elements and mark his work as a critical and more hopeful form of dystopia.

When it comes to exploring posthuman feminism, characters like Syrin, who have experienced sexual and emotional trauma, require extra consideration. Syrin was created as a cyborg prostitute for a bordello near Marestein. All of the prostitute cyborgs were given flower names, with Syrin’s name translating to lilac. These names were a form of objectification and would change if they were sold to another bordello (*Doj,A* 88). Syrin was meant to be a non-sentient object of pleasure, however, she, like Alfred, gains consciousness. In her seminal 1985 essay, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” Haraway defines the cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (5). In *Doj,A*, Syrin is situated as a human/machine hybrid with feelings and sexual desires; she is contradictory, illegitimate, unfaithful, and insurrectionary (*Cyborg* 15). She must kill two humans and a fellow cyborg in her escape from the bordello, and is, in Haraway’s words, “oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence” (*Doj,A* 91; *Cyborg* 9). In her manifesto, Haraway takes a transhumanist stance and emphasizes that capitalist technologies and methodologies can be appropriated and turned against hegemonic forces. While a product of capitalism, Syrin is in opposition to her owners and creators; she takes control of her own agency, technology, pleasure, and violence. As Haraway states, “The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential” (*Cyborg* 9–10). In this sense, Syrin’s mechanized parts are just as much a part of her identity as her human organs and

¹² “Liker å gå med dem. De er lette og luftige. Strammer ikke i skrittet.”

¹³ “solidarisk handling.”

traumatic history, and, despite the pain, she assumes control over them. However, despite her strong points, Syrin unfortunately receives much less textual space than either Elias or Alfred, and she is relegated to a peripheral character that is discussed, but not given enough space to really unfold. That she must be “saved” in *DojA* is another worn trope.

While Haraway may have distanced herself from her manifesto in recent years, her reading of the cyborg, so contrary to ecofeminists in 1985, is helpful for redeeming the more positive elements of transhumanism both in Bringsværd's work and in relation to overall identity formation, particularly in relation to those who are disabled, chronically ill, and/or transgender, among others. Regardless of nation, these are kin who navigate the travails of medical technologies, social biases, and bureaucracies on a daily basis and are always already cyborgs.

In closure, there are some final examples that require a posthuman lens. The cyborgs in *Mayaky* are a strong symbol of otherness in their diversity of forms. Some choose humanoid bodies, while others live as balls of yarn or geometric shapes (A2.0 18–19). Some work as researchers and craftsmen, while others pursue art (A2.0 31, 34, 77–78). These are individual choices within a socialized communal cohesion, and can be read as a positive reflection on diversity of possibilities inherent in Nordic social democracies (A2.0 64, 69). Cyborg sex is also an expression of difference, with copulation occurring both digitally through data links and physically in humanoid bodies, redefining conventional notions of pleasure, intimacy, and physicality (A2.0 46, 74–75). Lastly, there is the enormous amoeba, Franz Joseph, consuming large parts of Hungary (A2.0 65, 90). Named after the Austro-Hungarian emperor, Franz is a reflection on the nature of aggressive totalities, both in terms of *Norway First* and the AI swarm. These totalities, whether political, biological, or cyborg-collective, are selfish and xenophobic. Like the Norwegian model's reliance on oil wealth, there is an irrational exceptionality that privileges them to an inegalitarian share of finite global resources. This stated, like most good SF estrangements, Franz can also represent an extreme form of diversity and otherness; described as both mushroom and animal, its foreign sentience confounds categorization and represents a new and dangerous form of agential life after humans (A2.0 65). Ultimately, these cognitive estrangements help destabilize the major dualisms that Haraway lays out in her Cyborg manifesto, including animal/human, organism/machine, and physical/nonphysical, and help reconceptualize sociopolitical transformations.

Intertextuality: Alfred, Elias, and *Emil i Lönneberga*

The notion of posthuman kinship takes us back to the relationship between Alfred and Elias, and to the titles of both novels: *Du og Jeg, Alfred* and *Alfred 2.0*. Even though the story is narrated by and focalized through Elias, Alfred is the namesake in both titles, with the “2.0” indicating an upgrade or development. Most Scandinavians will recognize the first title as a reference to Lindgren's *Emil i Lönneberga* (1963), where the 6-year-old prankster Emil would often companionably say “*Du och jag,*

Alfred” to the family farmhand Alfred. Lindgren’s original series consisted of three books, and has been serialized into three films and a TV series with thirteen episodes. Lindgren’s work remains a staple of children’s culture in the Nordic region and has, despite a few kinks, aged well.

Emil lives on a farm and would often play pranks on others that would get him into trouble. While his father would get angry and beat him, Alfred would often show compassion and listen quietly instead. Alfred becomes Emil’s faithful friend, mentor, and father figure. As Leif Knutsen states, “In Alfred, Emil finds the fixed point he needs to integrate his impulses, his skills, and his problems”.¹⁴ With Alfred as a primary anchor point, Emil slowly develops a kinship with various farm animals, including a horse, pig, and chicken, and later throws a feast for the poor and elderly villagers of Katthult. These relationships can be intertextually connected to Elias. Like Emil, Elias also struggles developing fulfilling relationships. He ran away from an extremist right-wing family, became part of (and fled) a gangland life, and struggled to maintain romantic relationships. However, with the smart house Alfred as an anchor and stable father figure, Elias felt safe enough to develop his interpersonal capacities with Zakkeus, Syrin, Gudrun, and Zhaba. As Elias emphasizes, “Alfred taught me patience - and the joy of just sitting completely still and doing absolutely nothing. I never stopped looking over my shoulder, because I had many reasons for that, but with Alfred I felt safer”¹⁵ (*A2.0* 39). In this sense, Bringsværd updates and extends Lindgren’s original narrative by pushing the boundaries of these relationships into posthuman notions of gender, species, and a diverse range of interpersonal entanglements. While *Emil i Lönneberga* is about children overcoming complicated family situations, *Doj,A* and *A2.0* are about oddkin coming together and overcoming the environmental and social challenges looming ahead.

Conclusion: Making Kin and Dying Responsibly

Both *Doj,A* and *A2.0* lie at the heart of myriad cultural and sociopolitical contexts, particularly in terms of the Norwegian model, the environment, and the posthuman. These novels use the ecodystopian form to illuminate and critique Norway’s unsustainable trajectory, both inherent in its petroleum-driven consumption and in terms of its neo-liberal abuses of foreign labor, while simultaneously highlighting and condemning extreme nationalistic and religious responses to crisis. Bringsværd’s work plays on anxieties over national sovereignty and undercuts much of the green exceptionalism inherent in Norway’s national identity.

¹⁴ “I Alfred finner Emil det faste punktet han trenger for å integrere sine impulser, sine ferdigheter, og sine problemer.”

¹⁵ “Alfred lærte meg tålmodighet – og gleden over å bare sitte helt stille og ikke gjøre noen verdens ting. Jeg slutta aldri å se meg over skuldra, for det hadde jeg mange grunner til, men sammen med Alfred følte jeg meg tryggere.”

Despite the ecodystopian framework, the largest commentary on the Norwegian model is a utopian one, established in the contrast between Mayaky and Marestein. While Marestein depicts a Norwegian consumer society in decline, Mayaky represents a form of societal organization that humbly re-envision environmental, social, and economic sustainability, where everyone is willing to contribute to the greater whole, but generally does what they wish unless called upon (A2.0 44). It is a spartan city that embraces individual freedom, alterity, and multivocal hybridity, while still maintaining many of the basic principles of the Nordic welfare state in terms of housing, healthcare, and basic welfare, in addition to supporting the arts and research. Even Elias, a hated enemy and refugee, is given a universal basic income upon arrival (A2.0 44). It is at least one imagining of an egalitarian multispecies society, where nonhuman beings, humans, and human-machine hybrids can embrace their varied and multivalent identities while still loosely belonging to a collective that supports them. These are narratives about avoiding extremist totalities, blurring boundaries, and about the willingness to help each other despite the differences. While Bringsværd offers no concrete solution to the ecological crisis, his challenge to the Norwegian model's exceptionality opens up for expanding conceptions of sustainability.

Lastly, Elias is, like his namesake Elijah, a prophet, albeit of change, acceptance, and kinship, rather than God. However, he also represents a much-needed human responsibility for today's ecological crisis. As Haraway states, "Living-with and dying-with each other potently in the Chthulucene can be a fierce reply to dictates of both Anthropos and Capital" (*Staying*, 2). From Haraway's perspective, capital and human-centered paradigms should be rejected, and that we need to learn "to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth" (*Staying*, 2). In this sense, we need to not only live in response-ability, but also die in response-ability in order to achieve a more sustainable multispecies future. While most of Norway in the year 2131 is set upon living (and consuming) forever, Elias takes a contrarian route and decides to end his life. He rejects artificial organs and moves to Mayaky, knowing full-well that he will be killed by the ambient radiation within a few years. In this way, Elias is truly a prophet of the Chthulucene, choosing to live and die meaningfully with oddkin, rather than live an empty disconnected life alongside his former citizens.

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