

ASTRID GREVE KRISTENSEN

VATTENSKRÄCK

John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Människohamn*
and the Terror of the Ocean



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A level plain of a vast extent on land, is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean; but can it ever fill the mind with any thing so great as the ocean itself? This is owing to several causes, but it is owing to none more than this, that the ocean is an object of no small terror.

Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*¹

Introduction: Water Writing

In recent years, an increased interest in Blue Humanities has spawned several publications that take on water and the ocean as a topos in literature.² The ocean has been an intrinsic object of human rumination from time immemorial, and in literature we find examples of great deluges, fantastic seafaring journeys, and magnificent poetic contemplation. The onset of climate change has whetted human interest in plumbing these depths, engaging questions of humanity's relationship with the sea both within and without the literary scope. In the 2022 publication *A Poetic History of the Oceans. Literature and Maritime Modernity*, Søren Frank sketches out four different modes with which humans historically have written about the ocean. According to Frank, the rough outline of water writing modes encompass a theocentric, anthropocentric, technocentric and finally a geocentric mode of engagement between man and sea.³ Frank places the final stage, the geocentric, as the most modern and contemporary paradigm, where the dual conception of nostalgia (for times when the

ocean was pristine and seafaring beautiful) or dystopia (envisioning the climatic consequences of human mismanagement) reign.⁴ While he stresses that his periodization is transhistorical in scope, readers will surely recognize especially the geocentric mode as the framework for much of contemporary water writing.

[In] the geocentric epoch the dominant component in the gods- humans-technology-nature constellation is Nature and the Blue Planet. This results [...in] the conception of the ocean as a coherent ecosystem that is crucially important for the entire planet. This is the era of diesel and inorganic chemicals in which the sea is literally transformed into a plastic ocean or, in some works, is re- enchanted. The former belief in human control over nature is now replaced by a realization of our impotence, and as miscalculation sets in, a suspicion toward calculation develops.⁵

As writer and anthropologist Amitav Ghosh has claimed, to grapple with the Anthropocene, the author must embrace the improbable in writing.⁶ The tenets of realism and probability that undergird the modern "serious" novel simply cannot meet the needs of the modern age, due to the incontrovertible fact that climate change renders the world weirded and strange: literature must meet this challenge head-on and allow for the strange to emerge in narratives that should not be relegated to less-than genre fiction.⁷ The term "speculative fiction" is perhaps the most useful in this regard: "The field of speculative fiction groups together extremely diverse forms of non-mimetic fiction operating across different media for the purpose of reflecting on their cultural role, especially as opposed to the work performed by mimetic, or realist narratives", writes Marek Oziewicz, underlining exactly the non-mimetic aspects of the wide genre tapestry, that can be seen to include fantasy, vampire and post-apocalyptic fiction, gothic and science fiction narratives to name but a few.⁸

Speculative fiction thus takes on a new role by opening up our experiences to the unruly forces of nature. In this article, the speculative takes centre stage, suggesting a localized water lore that disrupts the imagery of the Stockholm coastal landscape. In *Människohamn* (2008), John Ajvide Lindqvist imagines an alternative cosmology where water – and the ocean specifically – is a force of destruction.

While most scholarship on Lindqvist's work has focused on his contributions to contemporary Scandinavian horror fiction, a suite of articles also grapples specifically with the ecological aspects of his work⁹ within a category that literary scholar Sofia Wijkmark deems the "ecogothic". Wijkmark operationalises philosopher Timothy Morton's notion of "dark ecology" and its related concept *the mesh* – a radical interconnectivity of the natural world and all living things – as intrinsic to understanding the ecological underpinnings of Lindqvist's writings.¹⁰

Of particular note in this study, we may also mention an article in *Coastal Studies and Society* by Jimmy Packham, which takes the more recent Lindqvist novel *Vänligheten* (2020) as an example of the author's engagement with the aquatic. In this novel, a shipping container filled with the bodies of dead refugees lands on the coast of Norrtälje, inciting violence and racist outbursts among the local inhabitants. Packham thus inscribes Lindqvist into a "globalgothic" turn where petroculture and human indifference contribute to the moral collapse of society.¹¹

Människohamn is, however, not merely an addition to the suite of contemporary climate fiction that grapples with the aquatic consequences of human activity.¹² Instead, I argue that Lindqvist, whose main genre of writing remains horror, offers a decentring of the human in a tale populated with aquatic ghosts and ancient curses where the human relationship to water is renegotiated through the prism of cosmic indifference.

Välkommen till Domarö.

Det är en plats du inte kan hitta på skjöckorten, såvida du inte tittar riktigt noga. [...]

Du måste plocka bort lite öar, skapa tomma ytor av vatten emellan dem för att få syn på Domarö. Då ser du också fyren på Gåvasten och alla de andra landmärken som dyker upp i denna berättelse.

Dyker upp, ja. Det var det rätta ordet. Vi kommer att röra oss på en plats som är ny för människan. I tiotusentals år har den legat under vattnen. Men sedan kommer öarna upp och till öarna kommer människorna, och med människorna berättelserna.

Då börjar vi.¹³

Indeed, let us begin. *Människohamn* follows the story of Anders, a man in his late 30s and the inhabitants of the fictional island Domarö.¹⁴ Anders returns to Domarö to live two years after the disappearance of his daughter. The family of three were skiing across the ice from Domarö to a smaller island when six-year-old Maja inexplicably vanishes. Two years later, Anders' life is in tatters – he has lost touch with Maja's mother, does not hold a job, and spends his days in a depressed, drunken stupor. Upon returning to Domarö where his grandparents Anna-Greta and Simon still live, Anders starts receiving messages from the beyond. It seems that Maja is trying to contact him through symbolic gestures such as drawing, writing, and pegboard beads. Other mysterious incidents occur on Domarö and through the life-stories of Anna-Greta and Simon, the reader is inundated with the water lore of the cursed islanders. Simon, who has spent his life as a magician, has his own secret covenant with the aquatic: he is the keeper of a water Spiritus, a small snail-like creature with magical properties. The Spiritus allows Simon to command water, to sense and commune with the substance.

As stranger and more grotesque occurrences accelerate on Domarö, the family members are forced to share their secrets with each other; Simon his pact with the Spiritus, Anders' possession by Maja, and Anna-Greta, an original islander, the secrets of the ocean's curse put upon the residents.¹⁵ Anders is not the only one possessed by the ocean, and otherwise docile individuals start acting strangely.¹⁶ Meanwhile Anders discovers how Maja through possessing his body is directing him towards finding her, getting him closer to the truth of her inexplicable disappearance.

This article will widen the scope of blue humanities studies by engaging with a text that, although strictly speaking belonging to the era of geocentric water writing, uses estrangement not for dystopian climatic means. Instead, this study shows how *Människohamn* belongs in contemporary Swedish (and Nordic) water writing through an entanglement of theocentric and geocentric modes. The novel espouses an entire aquatic cosmology that sidesteps the rational and instead imbues natural forces with terrible, targeted powers that reframe our cultural understanding of the Swedish *skärgård*.

“Badjävlar go home”

As shown by Wijkmark, Lindqvist frequently stages confrontations between the fantastical and the mundane (such as the Stockholm suburbs in *Låt den rätta komma in*) or with social ideals such as the Swedish *folkhem* (as seen in *Hantering av odöda*), “[combining supernatural horror] and social realism”.¹⁷ In *Människohamn* however, the author infuses the social realism of a coming-of-age story with notions of the idyllic. In the novel, Lindqvist deliberately twists the embedded cultural idyll of the Swedish *skärgård* – the distinctive archipelago landscape off the coasts of Scandinavia. “[I] nordisk sammenheng kan vi nok si at havet er en av våre mest karakteristiske og innflytelsesrike kronotoper i kulturen, som markant grense mellom landene, men også som viktig forbindelsesgrunnlag, som livgivende kraft og resurs og som ukontrollerbart naturfenomen” writes poetry scholar Emma Helene Heggdal.¹⁸ The *skärgård* is intrinsic to this cultural imaginary of the human-water relationship in the Nordic countries and functions as a significant part of the chronotope of the ocean. Lindqvist violently confronts the imagery of happy family summers and picturesque, stoic fishermen and through the thrust of bitter local resentments showcases an uglier side of humanity’s pact with nature. Yet, there is redemption to be found. The novel also hones in on love – between the elderly couple Anna-Greta and Simon, and Anders’ love of his daughter – a force that spurs confrontations with the wild and violent sea. Still, Lindqvist is by no means a sentimentalist, and *Människohamn* is a consummate horror experience. By centring the primordial powers of water as both a life-threatening and life-giving undeniable force, the author takes on both a cultural history of the *skärgård* and the human dependence and inherent connection to the aquatic.

The novel stages a critique of a kitsch sentimental version of the Swedish *skärgård*, the mouthpiece of which is the old islander Holger:

Hans tes var i grunden mycket enkel: roten till allt ont var nollåttan. Sedan fanns det då vissa nollåttor som var mer skyldiga än andra. De två främsta skurkarna het Evert Taube och Astrid Lindgren.

Holger tröttnade aldrig på att förklara hur det låg till för den som

ville höra på: skärgården hade varit en levande bygd med hårt arbetande befolkning tills Evert Taube kom och romantiserade alltihop. [...] Det hemska var att Taubes romantisering ledde till att nollåttan fick upp ögonen för skärgården. Här var det blommor i håret, dragspelsmusik och pittoreskt småsupande. De som hade råd skaffade sig sommarnöje. Tomterna köptes upp och skärgården avfolkades.

Lagom till att den värsta hetsen hadde lagit sig och skärgårdsborna trodde att de kunde andas ut, kom så dråpslaget med *Vi på Saltkråkan*. [...]

Skärgården hade gullats till döds. Så ansåg Holger.¹⁹

While humorous, Holger's deep disdain for Evert Taube and Astrid Lindgren gestures towards one of the main sentiments of the novel, which is a reimagination of Swedish coastal idyll into an ominous and threatening mirror image. As pointed out by Wijkmark, one of Lindqvist's methods is exactly this inversion of the familiar: "Familiar and supposedly safe places that become unfamiliar and frightening also have an important function in his work."²⁰ This upsets a culturally significant notion of the Nordic human and the water as intrinsically and benevolently linked. Lindqvist, along with Holger, balks at the harmless depiction of the archipelagic landscape off the Stockholm coast and *Människohamn* thus enters into a mode of water writing that distorts and contorts instead of lapping lazily at the edges of small islands.

A Blind and Deaf God: Myths of the Ocean

According to Lindqvist, the ocean is the main antagonist in *Människohamn*. He attributes this need to explore the ocean as sinister on the basis that, ten years prior to his publication of the novel, his own father drowned off the *skärgård*.²¹ In the novel, the author creates a rich mythos of the sea which continuously returns to the notion of its incomprehensibility. As Wijkmark notes:

Det handlar om vår oförmåga, eller ovilja, att uppfatta vår omgivning i all sin komplexitet och om otillräckligheten i de rigida system vi har försökt använda för att mäta upp den. Havet ter sig som en skrämmande,

gränslös enhet, eftersom vi inte förmår mäta det med våra sinnen, till skillnad från omgivningen på land som lätt kan delas in i ”enskildheter”. Men stannar vi upp och ser oss omkring noga räcker inte heller våra mått till på land – vi förnimmer det komplexa myller som utgör *the mesh*.²²

The novel is filled with contemplations on the nature of the ocean and the local history of the *skärgård* and its inhabitants. These short, interspersed texts are narratively separated from the perspectives of the two focalized characters, Anders and Simon, and instead function as an omniscient, extradiegetic voice. These textual fragments operate on the level of a holy text, where mythological and historical knowledge is shared with the reader. Thus, the water lore of Domarö and the sea is not only voiced intradiegetically through the characters. Accordingly, Lindqvist is able to imbue the text with a depersonalized source for the cosmology of the novel that lifts the discourse on water from the level of local gossip and folkloric mythmaking and onto a plane of ontological embeddedness. The following citation, from very early in the novel, provides such an oceanic credenda and signals how the ocean is construed in this storyworld.

Om Havet

Vi kan tänka på dem som motsatser eller komplement. Men det finns en skillnad i hur vi tänker på hav och hur vi tänker på land.

Går vi omkring i en skog, på en äng eller i en stad, då ser vi vår omgivning som uppbyggd av enskildheter. [...]

Men havet. Havet är något helt annat. Havet är ett. [...]

Om vi färdas i en liten båt så långt ut att land inte finns i sikte åt något håll kan vi få syn på havet. Det är ingen behaglig upplevelse. Havet är en blind och döv gud som omsluter oss och har all tänkbar makt över oss utan att känna till att vi existerar.

Vi betyder mindre än sandkornet på elefantens rygg och om havet får lust till oss kommer det att ta oss. Bara så. Havet känner inga gränser eller hänsyn. Det har givit oss allt och det kan ta allt ifrån oss.

*Till andra gudar riktar vi vår bön: Bevara oss för havet.*²³

Människohamn cannot be deemed typical climate fiction despite its deep engagement with nature. The speculative elements of the text

have more in common with the genre of cosmic horror than it does dystopian cli-fi. Despite this, the novel is not bereft of allusions to human greed and mismanagement of the earth's resources; the violence of the ocean is intrinsically linked to its sharing of its bounty. The legend of Domarö, regaled by Anna-Greta to Simon after decades of secrecy, tells the story of the islanders' pact with nature. This is a pact not built on shared responsibility and respect, but rather on offerings and harvest, akin to rituals of premodern indigenous cultures. Long ago, humans started fishing off the island. Herring, a quintessential Swedish (and Nordic) fish was plentiful in the sea. One fateful day, a man was left at Gåvasten and taken by the sea.²⁴ The bounty multiplied, leaving the fishermen to draw their own conclusions: sacrificing a human to the ocean led to better fishing. Thus began the yearly ritual sacrifice of islanders in order to secure their harvest.

For hundreds of years, the population of Domarö enjoyed the spoils of their labour, but the price was stark. The sacrificial body was chosen by popular vote, leading to a culture of distrust and malevolent gossip.²⁵ By 1675 an investigation from the mainland put a stop to the process. It was decided that the devil was at play in Domarö: men were hung and decapitated, women sent to spinneries, and children to orphanages. But the ocean, ever powerful, took revenge and decimated the island village with a storm of such proportions that all buildings were destroyed. This flooding of the island can be seen in relation to other literary deluges. As shown by literary scholar Malin Löf Nyqvist, a suite of contemporary Swedish novels that contain the motif of flooding introduce a new variation on this recurring theme. In her 2023 doctoral dissertation *Hundraårsflöden: Översvämnings-skildringar i svensk samtidsprosa*, Nyqvist relates this return of the flood to blue humanities and ecocritical discourse, while simultaneously harkening back to both the mythical and religious underpinnings of this phenomenon.²⁶ In her study, as in this, the aquatic is seen as constituting a life force that exerts violence on the humans: "När vattnet griper in i karaktärernas liv är det ofta i form av ett våld, en uppdämd kraft som fått nog av att vara uppdämd [...]".²⁷ After the storm waves decimated the infrastructure at Domarö in 1675, the ocean kept on taking its sacrifices, and drownings remain a recurrent and proportionally outsized problem on the island.

This story is relayed to Simon in a meeting among what can be construed as a council of elders. Simon, who himself has lived on the island for the better part of fifty years has been kept in the dark about the history of the pact. Still considered a "mainlander", the locals kept this knowledge to themselves for two reasons: their inherent distrust of "outsiders" and the fact that, once gifted this knowledge, you too are implicated in the pact with the ocean.²⁸ Simon, however, has grown weary of the locals' avoidance, and directly confronts them during their council meeting.²⁹ Resigned, the council agrees to inculcate Simon in the myth, thus sealing his fate.

The religious implications of this origin myth of Domarö prompt unpacking. The investigators from the mainland were certain of the devil's role in the moral corruption of the islanders. The final storm that destroys the island was seen as God's wrath at the insolence of the humans: "Det gick inte att tolka på annat sätt än att Gud hade plågats vid anblicken av Domarö. Som en nagel i hans öga hade den ön varit och nu hade han låtit havet dra sin raka över den för att befria skärgården från denna styggelse".³⁰ The contemporary inhabitants insist that the powers of the ocean have nothing to do with Christian beliefs: "Djävulen finns, det kan du vara säker på. Men med det här har han inget att göra".³¹

While the novel makes reference to Christian beliefs and figures – Simon the magician is a Biblical figure for instance – the spiritual undercurrent of *Människohamn* conjures more primordial powers.³² The ocean is not controlled by the Christian God, nor the devil. Instead it operates as a heathen deity, spurred by sacrifice and fear. It has agency, but unlike more benevolent literary descriptions of natural forces which, at the very least are seen as neutral or in upheaval due to mismanagement (the notion that nature "fights back" is not an uncommon trope in climate fiction), Lindqvist's ocean is vengeful and autonomous. When the omniscient narratorial instance states "*Havet är en blind och döv gud som omsluter oss och har all tänkbar makt över oss utan att känna till att vi existerar*", the reader should treat this as feasible testament of the ontological realities of this fictional universe. The implications of the oceanic God thus decenters a Christian-religious and moreover, a human logic reasoning in this storyworld.

The Little Humans With their Little Lights

Both Anders and Simon share moments of acute sublime character during the novel when they face the sudden realization of the ocean deep. Both of them are filled with a sense of dread as they take in its inexplicable volume. This sensation can be linked to the terror experienced when faced with the sublime. The Burkean concept of sublimity understands the sublime as the partner of the beautiful – the rush of emotion experienced as the human subject momentarily is overwhelmed by grandeur, especially through experiencing nature and natural phenomena.³³ The notion of the sublime became especially important to romantic writers – Samuel T. Coleridge’s evocative poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1797–1798) comes to mind – and the ocean is both an obvious and clichéd sublime natural force. I argue that Lindqvist takes sublime imagery further than its romantic and gothic origins imply. This argument is based on horror scholarship, and in particular on the study of H.P. Lovecraft’s oeuvre by English literary- and horror scholar Vivian Ralickas. Lovecraft is increasingly being read through the lens of the Anthropocene, cultural geography and narrative space theory, notions which relate directly to this study.³⁴ This expansion of thoughts surrounding the human emotional connection to the ocean enhances our understanding both of genre literature and the oceanic horrific as operationalized by Lindqvist.

In her study, Ralickas argues that while Lovecraft and his horror stories have often been read along the lines of the sublime, the genre of cosmic horror displaces the sublime through its displacing of human subjectivity. Both the Burkean and Kantian sublime rely on the emotional impact upon the human subject that experiences the sublime and how it reaffirms the subject.³⁵ The sublime, like the beautiful, repositions the human by having it self-reflexively ponder the vastness of which it is part. Accordingly, the religious undertones underpin a human-centric worldview that establishes man as part of the universe because of their ability to reason and to reflect upon the incomprehensible vastness of (God’s) creation. While frequently describing (in intentionally archaic style one might add) ferocious and wild nature, inexplicably large and domineering ruins or mountains

of epic proportions, Lovecraft eschews this classic sublime notion.

Lovecraft's explorations of the sublime decenters the human because of "[the] subject's inability to feel an ennobling awe in the face of [sublime imagery]".³⁶ The overwhelming experience of insight in the case of his protagonists invariably lead to death, insanity, or loss of memory.³⁷ This is because the turning point in practically every Lovecraft story involves the realization not only of the incomprehensible volume of existence, but what can be described as a "cosmic indifferentist foundation".³⁸ Thus, the human is unable to recentre himself in the universe but is instead crushed, his subjectivity pulverized, and meaning-making is lost.

In its ironic subversion of sublimity, cosmic horror not only denies the subject a safe vantage point from which to witness the spectacle in question, but also converts the sublime turn into a dynamics of descent. Unlike sublimity, which reconstitutes the integrity of subjects displaced in its expansive movement prior to the turn, cosmic horror irreparably erodes protagonists' individual bodies and the body politic, barring humanity from fostering the common sense upon which sublimity depends. [...] In a universe devoid of Godhead, nothing guarantees the significance and continuity of human existence; furthermore morality and the duality between good and evil it implies do not exist, given that they are necessarily products of human subjectivity.³⁹

The scenes in *Människohamn* that most closely resemble the sublime experience have to do with the reflection upon the sheer dizzying volume the ocean comprises. Lacking a clear moral universe, however, where good and evil are comprehensible and tangible categories, Lindqvist's novel too teeters closer to the hopeless dread of cosmic horror than the gothic sublime. As with the antagonists of the Lovecraft mythos, the ocean in *Människohamn* is irrational and immeasurable. While these characterizations align with the romantic sublime, the decentring of humanity in the face of the sea underscores an approach to the terrible that leaves the human doubting the divine forces that ought to keep the universe morally sound.

These observations are significant in our case, not because of what they may incur with regards to horror scholarship- and aesthetics,

but rather, because of how this impacts the symbolic function(s) of the ocean in *Människohamn*. I will include two (somewhat lengthy) examples that mirror each other, from the perspective of Simon and Anders, respectively:

Djupet.

Den kolossala rymd det rörde sig om, den ofantliga mängden vatten bara mellan Domarö och Nåten, som låg där och bidade i sitt mörker medan det endast visade upp sin blanka, harmlösa yta.

Simon så för sig finlandsfärjan de skulle åka med så småningom. [...]

Han tittade ner mot havet som skummade längs bogen och tänkte: Den skulle kunna sjunka här och vara borta. Det skulle inte märkas ett skvatt. Den skulle ligga där nere.

En rysning kröp längs hans ryggrad [...].⁴⁰

Djupet.

Djupet. Hur djupt...

Han stod på ingenting. Djupet var allt.

Det sägs att endast tio procent av ett isberg sticker upp ovanför ytan. Det var något liknande Anders i ett kallt, brinnande ögonblick kände tvärs igenom hela sin kropp, bara mer, bara större: det som stack upp, det som han stod på var inte ens en procent. Det var nästan ingenting. En sytråd över en avgrund. [...]

Vi är så små. Vi stackars människor med våra blinkande ljus.

Han hade i sin enfald trott att fyren hade något med saken att göra. Dess spöklikt blinkande öga över havet om nätterna hade förlött honom. Men vad är en fyr? Ett mänskligt påfund av trä och sten. En byggnad med en lampa i, inget mer. Lampan kan släckas och byggnaden vittra, men djupet...

Djupet består.⁴¹

The dizzying acknowledgement of the deep in both of these examples occurs when the ocean is still; harmless. The sudden horror in the face of the still ocean echoes Ralickas' observations of Lovecraft's eternal return to the crushing of the little human's belief in his own centrality in the scope of the universe and the pulverization of his subjective significance. The notion that even the water mass between Nåten

and Domarö could swallow whole the technologically sophisticated human creation of a cruise ship – and that it would carry no meaning, it could go unnoticed – underscores the tenets of cosmic horror in *Människohamn*.

The second citation, which comes from Anders' perspective, further emphasizes this. The lighthouse, which in a sublime turn would stand for the presence of humanity within the non-human, a symbol of enlightenment and communication (and a beacon of safety against the thresholds between sea and land) is construed as insignificant. This is a repetition of an earlier observation made by Anders: "*Havet. Och vi stackars små jävla människor med våra blinkande små ljus*".⁴² That the final scene of the novel sees the Gåvasten lighthouse smashed to smithereens by a wrathful ocean wave⁴³ only underscores the symbolic (in)significance of the humanmade bulwarks against cosmic indifference.

In a story from Anna-Greta's youth, a lighthouse keeper (not on Gåvasten) slowly loses his mind because of his contact with the ocean. Anna-Greta, who during the Second World War became a trader, delivers items of diversion and comfort to the soldiers. In addition she delivers puzzles, "[f]öreträdesvis med havsmotiv", to the man in the lighthouse.⁴⁴ The lighthouse keeper is seen by the locals as a strange, lonesome man. The two things he does to entertain himself is assembling puzzles and reading the Bible. It becomes known that he has overindulged in Bible reading and in the end he is lost at sea – most likely by having been drawn in by the siren song of the water. The name of the lighthouse is "Stora korset" – again a significant detail that suggests the human clinging to religion to ward off the evil of the ocean, but failing. This also leads back to the notion of the ocean as a deaf and blind god, and the continuous reference to (Christian) religious beliefs as either maddening or inconsequential to the ontological fabric of the storyworld. The motif of the puzzles furthers this hopelessness: by breaking the ocean down into small fragments and trying to reassemble them into a comprehensible image, his mind withers. To make comprehensible the incomprehensible sea is a task for no human, and the endeavour, along with the Biblical obsession has driven him from sanity.

The ocean in *Människohamn* is not a symbolic entity that mirrors

human consciousness. It is not a psychoanalytical mirror where a three-dimensional understanding of the apparent surface leads to an appreciation of the subconscious. To go in the water, to be submerged, means certain death, and the water carries a stark materialism rather than symbolic suggestion. Attempting to control it, through religion or through material objects such as lighthouses or ships, or through bite-size fragmented puzzle pieces only underwrites humanity's fate.

Anna-Greta tells Simon that the inaugurated but doomed inhabitants of Domarö cannot escape water. Even if they go inland to avoid it, they end up drowning: in a bucket, in the bathtub, in the smallest stream. Anders too comes to understand this:

Anders nickade frånvarande medan sammanhangens musik fortsatte att dåna i hans huvud. Det eviga havet, alltid ett och samma, som kunde tränga in i alla sprickor, spridas och sträka ut sig men alltid återvände till sig självt. En enda stor kropp med miljarder lemmar, från rytande vågor till spindelbensstunna rännilar som letade sig in, letade sig fram. Havet. Och de som där fanns. [...]

Ingen har så långa fingrar. [...]

Ingen har så långa fingrar. Ingen har så långa fingrar.⁴⁵

Here the ocean is presented as an enormous, monstrous body, akin to a primordial beast, with millions of limbs and ways to reach its victims, regardless of landmass. This vengefulness may not seem to signify indifference: why would the ocean be wrathful, if it is also indifferent? The cosmic indifference as explicated by Ralickas in relation to Lovecraft's work, showcases this indifference not as intention-less. Rather it consists of an all-encompassing evil, often embodied by alien or monstrous lifeforms, but also through natural elements, that is indifferent to human life, and has an autonomous, willed intention to harm, but without personal vendettas. Rather, the little humans with their little lights are powerless in the face of these forces, rendered insignificant or as pawns in much grander cosmic conflicts, beyond our comprehension.

The fact that the human body largely consists of water too places the human in significant danger, and functions as a reminder of the

Kristevaeen notion of the abject permeability of the body. By drinking the tainted sea water that runs through the well in Anders cabin, he invites the presence of Maja into his own body. Similarly, people on Domarö appear to lose their minds if they drink from tainted wells. A child attacks her friends on the pier and a local man enters a violent rage with a chain saw during a fire rescue, to name two examples.

Thus, while the generic markers of *Människohamn* could be further explored in a different text, these elements exemplify how the ocean, the antagonist of the novel, is emplaced as an element of cosmic horror. While descriptions of the ocean may appear at first glance to borrow from the romantic sublime tradition, and thus a significant suite of water writing, the real significance of these scenes where humans confront their own consciousness in the face of the ocean, showcases a crushing of thresholds and boundaries, leading to the ocean understood as an abject reminder. The little humans with their blinking lights, their attempt at reason and enlightenment, stand no chance against the force of the ocean, which is construed not only as a magnificent natural force, but something far more sinister and far reaching.

Katabasis

The climax of *Människohamn* centers on a quest Anders sets out on – the final push to find Maja and rescue her from what he has come to understand as a watery grave. Throughout the novel, Anders has received messages from his daughter from some obscure beyond, including drawings in old comic books that resemble a temple or staircase. After disentangling the symbols Maja has left him, he resigns himself to his possible death in the hope of bringing her back.

Ascending on the cliffs of the lighthouse island of Gåvasten he does indeed discover a staircase; underwater and beneath the ice. It descends into the recesses of the ocean, enveloped in darkness. Anders starts his descent, covered in an air bubble formed by the help of the Spiritus, given to him by Simon. Soon, however, Anders finds the staircase turning back upwards again: an Escherian staircase that goes both up and down at once. This impossible architecture further emphasises the novel's nods to cosmic horror: in Lovecraft's novella

At the Mountains of Madness (1936), an Antarctic research expedition faces a structure based in what is deemed "non-Euclidean" logic, and in the short story "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926), the terrible deity Cthulhu too lives at the end of a staircase in the ocean, shrouded in mystery and illogic.

[...Berghällerna] på den östra sidan stupade ner i havet i en bruten trappstegsformation.

Men det var ju ingen trappstegsformation. Det var en *trappa*. [...] *Vem går där?*

[...Det] var ingen trappa byggd för människor, knappast heller av människor. Vilka människor i forntiden skulle ha kunnat utföra stenarbeten *under vatten?*⁴⁶

To enter the underworld, a ritual is often enacted to weaken the border between the human and the otherworldly realm.⁴⁷ In the case of Anders this takes on a proto-Kristevaeen tenor. The Spiritus, which is described like a slug-like creature, must be enlivened each day by its keeper's saliva. For years, Simon has ritually let out a revolting string of spit onto the insect, reaffirming their connection through water. He has taught Anders the same, enshrining the covenant with the thing. In order to descend underwater without drowning, Anders decides to swallow the Spiritus, as much as the thought repulses him. The inversion of inside and outside, the revulsion at the mere thought of gobbling down the thing, echoes the insights of Julia Kristeva in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection* (1980), where borders are violated, especially through the open orifices of the body.⁴⁸

Upon ascending, Anders reemerges on the cliffs of Gåvasten, but to his surprise, the autumnal October chill has been replaced by a pleasant summer temperature. The boat he used for his journey appears new; it seems he has emerged in a different time and place. Domarö too, has changed; people are dressed in old-fashioned clothing, the houses look newer or more pristine, yet not a soul acknowledges his presence. He steers towards his family cabin, which miraculously is no longer bent out of shape. He enters to find Maja sitting on the floor of her bedroom, humming to herself and playing. At first, the little girl is oblivious to her father's presence, but Anders breaks

through her veil of ghostly resistance. Anders grabs his daughter and races to the pier to get back to Gåvasten and the onset of something resembling an earthquake signals the coming ire of the ocean. He carries her down the stairs underwater, reemerging in the present timeframe of the novel. However, the oceanic rage has not waned; quickly he races them back to Domarö once again and reaches high ground just as two enormous waves consecutively hit the island.

This sequence, which ends the novel with an action-packed but also emotionally laden tone, utilises the imagery of the *katabasis* – the descent to the underworld. In classical literature, the quest to save a loved one from the grasp of the realm of death is a recurrent motif.⁴⁹ Lindqvist's take on this employs some key changes; there is no tangible "god of death" to contend or barter with. The realm he visits appears Edenic, but he does not belong there. And yet, the people who reside there do not seem to be completely dead. As evidenced by the fact that Maja seems completely unchanged, this implies the realm is in a form of purgatorial standstill, a holding place the ocean operates to keep the sacrificial bodies of the islanders.

Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (1321) becomes significant here. The name Dante already resounds in *Människohamn*: Simon is first introduced to a Spiritus by another magician named Dante, and consequently named all his cats after his mentor. In the 1990s, when Simon himself finds a Spiritus on the shore of Domarö, his cat plays with the abject insect before falling over dead. The connection between the underworld, the Spiritus, and Dante himself is thus already embedded in the text when Anders undertakes his *katabasis*.

The realm Anders finds on the other side of the staircase appears as a compressed version of the three levels of the underworld in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. As already stated, the indifference and blindness of the inhabitants of the realm echo the aimless ghosts of Purgatorio. At the same time, the realm is a perfected version of one of the happiest memories of Anders childhood, a form of heaven. But Anders sees this as a temptation, a bid to stay, rather than an actual paradise. Thus, the alluring aspect of the underworld echoes a Satanic quest for submission of the human, a hell built on illusions of happiness. In the end, the water realm is a realm of death to which he has been granted access by fragmenting his self through the Spiritus ritual and

through his cursed water-connection to Maja. This is what Lindqvist's ocean holds: a primordial realm that feeds on humans and illusionary spectacle. Unlike Dante's religious construction, however, *Människohamn*'s horizon sees religion as insignificant illusions made up by humanity as bulwarks against the encompassing madness of the ocean.

Attempting to make any logical sense of the ocean is tantamount to sacrilege – a notion that also echoes older Christian traditions.

According to church fathers such as Saint Basil the Great, Saint Ambrose, and Saint Augustine, trying to understand the mysteries of the sea borders on sacrilege, and is comparable to wanting to penetrate God's impenetrable nature. Substantially, the sea is regarded as a residue of the primordial soup of chaos. Symbolically, it is a sign of the incompleteness of Creation. The sea is the extension of an original, formless chaos into a postdiluvian age and represents an ante- civilizational disorder.⁵⁰

Människohamn offers no final resolution with regards to the driving forces behind the sea. The lighthouse keeper who assembles the puzzles with oceanic motifs while being driven insane by the Bible therefore builds on the assertion by the church fathers mentioned by Frank. By avoiding the temptation to try to describe or understand the sea, Lindqvist asserts a theocentric literary treatment of the sea. Despite Frank's claim that "[the] notion of a primordial sea is common to most cultures, but it is in the Christian tradition that the idea of the sea as something terrifying, demonic, and chaotic is most evident", *Människohamn* stages an even further removal between the human subject and the irrational.⁵¹

Conclusion: A Different Ocean View

What does *Människohamn* teach us about the human relationship with the sea? The novel builds on age-old conceptions of the aquatic depths as a threatening force in the universe. The generic choices made by Lindqvist places the novel within a network of both old historical and modern conceptions of the horrors of the sea: it is a playful text that borrows imagery and motifs from a long line of

sources, from Greek and classical works, the Bible, Dante Alighieri through more modern examples of horror such as H.P. Lovecraft and Joseph W. Campbell.⁵² These endow the storyworld with a rich, intertextually embedded positionality that seeks to enliven aquatic angst in the reader. At the same time, the ecological aspects of the text should not be sidelined as incidental, as mere vehicles for the horrific to take form. While less entangled in discourses directly related to climate change and the potential of post-apocalyptic imagery this may confer, Lindqvist engages with a deeply embedded relationship between the human and the aquatic. Similarly, Frank writes in the introduction of *A Poetic History of the Oceans* of the evolution of the relationship between man and sea:

After having been perceived as a theater of divine forces to be feared and avoided in ancient times, a glimmering surface promising new lands and riches during the age of sail, and a place of fascinating depths partly familiarized by scientific discoveries and controlled by humans through technological inventions from the mid- nineteenth century, the sea gradually transformed itself from a powerful presence in human history to a place of personal recreation and impersonal containerization.⁵³

Lindqvist's novel reverts this notion by returning to the sea as a "theatre of divine forces" – in place of the personal recreation of the idyllic *skärgård*, Lindqvist estranges the quintessential Swedish landscape.

In *Människohamn* two times the ocean exerts its wrath against humanity with a great deluge. Although Biblical in scope (and certainly, the humans in 1675 who observed the first sacking of Domarö attributed the storm to the Christian God), the author refrains from a Christian teleological, linear understanding of humankind and of the sea itself. Instead, the two great floods that bookend the history of Domarö function as cyclical eschatology.

The second deluge takes place as Anders finally has raced back to Domarö after rescuing Maja from the aquatic underworld. A small handful of islanders take refuge on top of "flyttblocket" along with Maja and Anders. This remnant from the ice age, the highest point on the island, becomes a safe spot from which they can observe the

fierce display. Once again, Lindqvist toys with romantic sublime imagery: reminiscent of the famous Caspar David Friedrich painting “Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer” [Wanderer Above the Sea in Fog] (1818), the humans perch on top of stone and gaze upon the fearsome nature. Unlike the romantic masterpiece however, it is not impressive yet harmless fog that meets their eye, but consummate watery destruction. Maja whispers to Anders ”’Det var folk där...’ [...] ‘Det var folk där ute. På ön. Massor av folk. Dom är borta nu’”.⁵⁴

The novel thus ends on an ambiguous note. Anders manages to save his daughter, his dedication and love prevailing, but the sea has been further enraged. Anders has been incorporated into the island curse and his fate remains unstable. While a horizon of hope shimmers as the sea retreats, the final tableau may still fill the reader with cosmic dread: the rock onto which the few survivors have climbed is the earliest remnant of the island from before the rest of the archipelago emerged from the sea. Like the omniscient authorial voice explains, the *skärgård* that appeared a few thousand years ago, rising above the surface of the ocean, may just as easily sink again.⁵⁵ We find an echo of this in returning to one of Lovecraft’s most infamous stories, “The Call of Cthulhu”: “What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men”.⁵⁶

Noter

- 1 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Adam Phillips ed. (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1757]), 53–54.
- 2 See, for instance: Sidney I. Dobrin, *Blue Ecocriticism and the Oceanic Imperative* (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429456466>; Camille Roulière & Claudia Egerer, *Water Lore. Practice, Place and Poetics* (London: Routledge, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003218272>; Steve Mentz, *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003166665>.
- 3 ”The first paradigm, which dominated until the mid- fifteenth century, is *theocentric*. After this period of religious orientation and supremacy, an *anthropocentric* perspective in which humans challenged for and occupied the center prevailed until the middle of the nineteenth century, when a *technocentric* perspective characterized by the dominance of a technological mode of being replaced it. Technocentrism has only intensified since the nineteenth century, but a new planetarianism whose perspective is *geocentric* emerges in the second half of the

- twentieth century. [...] In this geocentric epoch, planet Earth takes center stage” Søren Frank, *A Poetic History of the Oceans. Literature and Maritime Modernity* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2022), 49, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004426702>.
- 4 “Theocentrism, anthropocentrism, and technocentrism are “world pictures” related not only to the period prior to 1450, to 1450–1850, and to the period after 1850, but also transhistorical perspectives that are found in different periods. The same is true of geocentrism. It is a perspective we can characterize as epochal for our contemporaneity and is also found in earlier periods”, Frank, *A Poetic History of the Oceans*, 142–143.
 - 5 Frank, *A Poetic History of the Oceans*, 145.
 - 6 The human-dominated geological age succeeding the Holocene. For more, see Steve Mentz, *Break Up the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.5749/9781452963518>.
 - 7 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement. Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 7–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474016688913>.
 - 8 “The term ‘speculative fiction’ has three historically located meanings: a subgenre of science fiction that deals with human rather than technological problems, a genre distinct from and opposite to science fiction in its exclusive focus on possible futures, and a super category for all genres that deliberately depart from imitating “consensus reality” of everyday experience. [...] While ‘speculative fiction’ was initially proposed as a name of a subgenre of science fiction, the term has recently been used in reference to a meta-generic fuzzy set supercategory – one defined not by clear boundaries but by resemblance to prototypical examples – and a field of cultural production. [...] The field of speculative fiction groups together extremely diverse forms of non-mimetic fiction operating across different media for the purpose of reflecting on their cultural role, especially as opposed to the work performed by mimetic, or realist narratives.” Marek Oziewicz, “Speculative Fiction” (Oxford: Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Literature, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.78>.
 - 9 See Jimmy Packham, “Down to the Sea in Crypts: Container Shipping, Haunted Shores, and the Ends of the World in Contemporary Writing”, *Coastal Studies and Society* vol. 5 (2026:1); Sofia Wijkmark, “Naturen och det kusliga. Nedslag i samtida svensk skönlitteratur”, *Tidskrift för litteraturvetenskap* vol. 42 (2012:1), 5–16, <https://doi.org/10.54797/tfl.v42i1.11713>; Sofia Wijkmark, “Ecology, Telepathy and Melancholia in John Ajvide Lindqvist’s *Handling the Undead*”, *Edda. Nordisk tidskrift för litteraturforskning* vol. 104 (2017:2), 145–160, <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1500-1989-2017-02-05>; Sofia Wijkmark, “Swedish Gothic and the demise of the welfare state”, in *Nordic Gothic*, Maria Holgren Troy, Johan Höglund, Yvonne Leffler and Sofia Wijkmark ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 47–64; Sofia Wijkmark, “Nordic Troll Gothic” in *Nordic Gothic*. Maria Holgren Troy, Johan Höglund, Yvonne Leffler and Sofia Wijkmark red. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 103–124, <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526126443>. On the “ecogothic”, see Wijkmark, “Nordic Troll Gothic” 2020, 103.
 - 10 Wijkmark, “Nordic Troll Gothic”, 104.
 - 11 “Composed of long-dead organisms, oil lubricates the machinery of global trade, [...] it is a powerful factor in the causes of modern war and population displacements, and its uncontrolled spilling heralds the toxification and annihilation of

- ecosystems [...]”. Packham, “Down to the Sea”, 121.
- 12 Maja Lunde’s *Blå* (2017) is a good example of this trend in a Nordic context.
 - 13 John Ajvide Lindqvist, *Människohamn* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2015 [2008]), “Prolog”, unpaginated.
 - 14 “Den skärgård jag beskriver är fiktiv och det finns, vad jag känner till, ingen ö som heter Domarö, men den är baserad på den skärgård där jag till en del växte upp. Namnen är ändrade, men känslan samma”. Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, “Efterord”, unpaginated.
 - 15 Even before Anders is made aware of the myths of the ocean, he is attuned to the sensed threat around him: “*Det vill åt mig. / Vad ’det’ var för något visste han inte. Bara att det var stort, starkt och att det vill åt honom. Att hans befästningar var klena*” Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 67.
 - 16 It becomes increasingly apparent that something is amiss: the island is tormented by the violent acts of two teenage ghosts who supposedly drowned in the 1990s; the body of a woman thought to have drowned a year prior washes up on shore, barely touched by the elements; a child waiting for the ferry violently attacks her friends, attempting to throw them in the sea.
 - 17 Wijkmark, “Swedish Gothic and the demise of the welfare state”, 47.
 - 18 Emma Helene Heggdal, Morten Langeland and Martina Moliis-Mellberg, “’Havfølelsen’ i to nordiske langdiktseksperimenter”, in Lotta Westerlund and Claus K. Madsen eds., *Modernism i nordisk lyrikk: Finlandssvensk strålning i Nordens poesi* (Helsingfors: Helsingfors universitet, 2025), 97. <https://doi.org/10.31885/9789528413929>
 - 19 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 77.
 - 20 Wijkmark, “Swedish Gothic and the demise of the welfare state”, 49.
 - 21 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, “Efterord”. The novel is also dedicated to his father.
 - 22 Wijkmark, “Naturen och det kusliga”, 11.
 - 23 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 163–164.
 - 24 Gåvasten – the gift stone – becomes the site of sacrifice and thus explains the rather peculiar name of the small isle.
 - 25 Those sacrificed were usually disliked by the population, which led to a conviction that the ocean primarily feeds on “bad” people.
 - 26 Malin Löf Nyqvist, *Hundraårsflöden. Översvämningsskildringar i svensk samtidsprosa* (Umeå: Institutionen för kultur- och medievetenskaper, 2023): “Översvämningssmotivet och det akvatiska bildspråket synliggör och problematiserar visserligen relationen mellan människa, vatten och plats i Sverige i samtiden samt betonar vattnets agens i den mer-än-mänskliga naturen. Det rör sig emellertid i huvudsak om ett tänkande om vatten, snarare än med vatten. I romanerna gestaltas vattnet överlag som något separat från människan, som visserligen ges en ”röst”, genom bland annat antropomorfisering, men som alltid fokaliseras genom ett mänskligt perspektiv och som först och främst uppmärksammas för hur det ställer den mänskliga tillvaron på ända eller skapar mellanmänskliga konflikter. När vattnet griper in i karaktärernas liv är det ofta i form av ett våld, en uppdämd kraft som fått nog av att vara uppdämd [...]”, 189. For more on the mythological underpinnings of the flood motif, see pages 61–69.
 - 27 Nyqvist, *Hundraårsflöden*, 189.
 - 28 Anna-Greta, who has shared her life with Simon since his arrival decades prior offers this as her explanation; the cloak-and-dagger silence was retained in order to protect him: “Om jag berättar det här för dig så kommer inte du hell-

er kunna flytta härifrån.” Anna-Greta kastade en blick ut på det mörka havet.
 ”Fast det har förmodlingen redan hänt. Att du inte får åka härifrån”” Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 229.

- 29 For instance, Simon resents the local Elov after the disappearance of Maja. Elov makes a convoluted statement that the family should not be going to the light-house at Gåvasten and asks Simon to tell them to leave in the middle of the fateful afternoon when Maja vanishes. Despite Simon’s insistent queries as to why, Elov offers no explanation. This incident sours their formerly friendly neighborhood.
- 30 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 186.
- 31 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 187.
- 32 Turid Karlsen Seim, “Simon Magus”, i *Store Norske Leksikon*. 2024. Accessed 15.02.2026. https://snl.no/Simon_Magus
- 33 Philosopher and writer Edmund Burke: “And to things of great dimensions, if we annex an adventitious idea of terror, they become without comparison greater. A level plain of a vast extent on land, is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean; but can it ever fill the mind with any thing so great as the ocean itself? This is owing to several causes, but it is owing to none more than this, that the ocean is an object of no small terror. Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime”. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Adam Phillips ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1757]), 53–54.
- 34 It is pertinent to note that Lovecraft was a famously paranoid racist whose mythos relied not only on the destruction of the reason and logic of man, but specifically of a male white Anglo Saxon Protestant supremacy. The paranoid cynicism of Lovecraft permeates his work through the continuous sublimation of man to primitive, fearsome, and therefore ‘other’ cultures. Although often exemplified through ancient alien cultures, the imagery is starkly coded through the white man’s fear of cultures different from his own. I am not making the claim that Lindqvist operates on this level of racialized or supremacist paranoia, but rather that the (a)moral and illogical ontology of his storyworld mimics that of the cosmic horror forefather. For recent studies of note pertaining to Lovecraft’s work, see for instance: James Kneale, “From beyond: H.P. Lovecraft and the place of horror”, *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 13 (2006), 106–126 and Antonio Alcala Gonzalez & Carl H. Sederholm eds., *Lovecraft in the 21st Century. Dead, But Still Dreaming*. (New York: Routledge, 2021).
- 35 Vivian Ralickas, “Cosmic Horror and the Question of the Sublime in Lovecraft”, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 18 (2007:3), 365–398.
- 36 Ralickas, “Cosmic Horror”, 380.
- 37 Ralickas, “Cosmic Horror”, 365.
- 38 Ralickas, “Cosmic Horror”, 387. This realization often comes about through the insight that humanity is but an inconsequential blight in the enduring and indifferent universe, exemplified sometimes by the fact that humanity is just a failed alien experiment and that forces far greater and out of reach of human comprehension malign, if even that.
- 39 Ralickas, “Cosmic Horror” 387.
- 40 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 306.
- 41 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 325.

- 42 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 64.
- 43 "Gåvastens fyr torn syntes inte längre. Det lilla skäret låg fortfarande där ute, men fyren var försvunnen, bortsväpt i vågen" Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 448.
- 44 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 340.
- 45 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 378.
- 46 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 423–424. "Who Goes There?" (1938) is a short story by the science fiction writer Joseph W. Campbell, published at the height of pulpy horror fiction. The short story was later adapted into the classic horror film *The Thing* (1982) by John Carpenter. In "Who Goes There?" a shapeshifting alien wreaks havoc on an Antarctic research station, trapping the researchers on a sea of ice. The fact that Anders makes this observation from Gåvasten, where Maja disappeared on the large sheet of ice covering the ocean may be an intentional reference to this example of horror fiction as well. The notion of older and unknown civilizations, ones that for instance may have built underwater staircases also belong within the cosmic horror tradition.
- 47 Aeneas must both prepare a sacrifice and bury his friend, as well as locate the golden bough in order to be admitted into the underworld in the *Aeneid*.
- 48 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, translation by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 [1980]), 1–31.
- 49 Heroes such as Herakles, Odysseus, Theseus and Orpheus all undertake journeys to the underworld. Rebecca Georgiades, "To Hell and Back: The Function of the Ancient Greek Hero's Katabasis", *Classicum* vol. 43 (2017:2), 2–8. Aeneas in the *Aeneid* is another canonical example.
- 50 Frank, *A Poetic History of the Oceans*, 51.
- 51 Frank, *A Poetic History of the Oceans*, 50.
- 52 Not to mention popular music, especially through the drowned two teenage ghosts obsessed with The Smiths. These central antagonists, that function as an elongation of the terror of the sea, but lacking for space had to be foregone in this particular study.
- 53 Frank *A Poetic History of the Oceans*, 14.
- 54 Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 448–449.
- 55 "För tretusen år sedan var Domarö bara en stor flat sten som stack upp ut vattnet, krönt av ett flyttblock som isen hadde lämnat efter sig [...] I övrigt ingenting. Det skulle dröja ytterligare tusen år innan kringliggande holmar och öar vågade sticka upp sina hjässor och påbörja bildandet av den arkipelag som numera går under namnet Domarö skärgård". Lindqvist, *Människohamn*, 11.
- 56 H.P Lovecraft, "The Call of Chtulhu", in *Necronomicon. The Best Weird Tales of H. P. Lovecraft. Commemorative Edition*, Stephen Jones ed., (London: Gollancz, 2008), 225.

