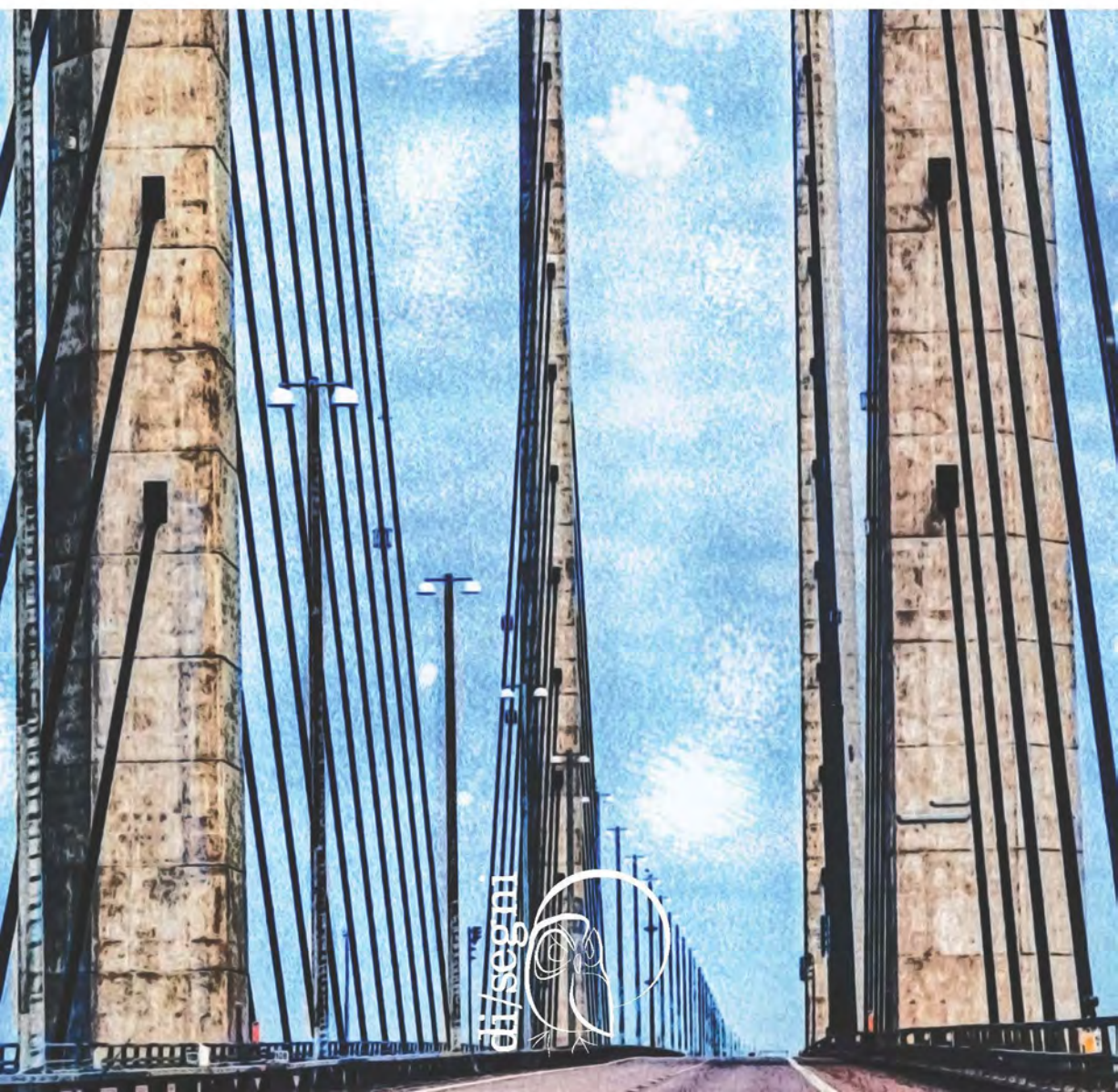


# BRIDGES TO SCANDINAVIA

Edited by Andrea Meregalli and Camilla Storskog











# BRIDGES TO SCANDINAVIA

Edited by *Andrea Meregalli and Camilla Storskog*

di/egni

Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere

Facoltà di Studi Umanistici

Università degli Studi di Milano

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e Camilla Storskog per l'insieme del volume  
ISBN 978-88-6705-412-1

ILLUSTRAZIONE DI COPERTINA:  
*The Øresund Bridge*  
Elaborazione grafica su fotografia di Flora Cusi

n° 15  
Collana sottoposta a double blind peer review  
ISSN: 2282-2097

**Grafica:**  
Raúl Díaz Rosales

**Composizione:**  
Ledizioni

**Disegno del logo:**  
Paola Turino

STAMPATO A MILANO  
NEL MESE DI GIUGNO 2016

www.ledizioni.it  
www.ledipublishing.com  
info@ledizioni.it  
Via Alamanni 11 – 20141 Milano

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NORDIC TOPOGRAPHIES IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN  
LITERATURE: KLAUS BÖDL'S *STUDIE IN KRISTALLBILDUNG*  
AND *SÜDLICH VON ABISKO*

Moira Paleari

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Klaus Bödl's 'topographical prose'<sup>1</sup> features the Nordic landscape as a remote and lonely place, while outlining and deconstructing stereotypes; at the same time, he describes natural and urban environments where the protagonists, German travellers, move about as displaced figures who question their position in a forlorn space and whose perception of the Nordic reality can merely produce fractal images of the immediate surroundings.

Readers approaching Bödl's landscape descriptions are confronted with a double perspective: on the one hand, the permanent depiction of 'true' Nordic places; on the other, the reduction of certain spaces to provisional and uncertain landscapes, which no longer correspond to the (ideal) image that the foreign traveller had of those areas.

The aim of my survey is to analyse the patterns of representation of spatial perception in the narrative construction of *Studie in Kristallbildung* (1997) and *Südlich von Abisko* (2000) in order to detect the functions of these typologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Klaus Bödl represents a new voice in contemporary German literature. When approaching his work, one has no choice but to notice his constant attention over the years to the Nordic landscape and the Scandinavian culture. Bödl has often travelled to Scandinavia in his job as a researcher in Scandinavian literature (he is now professor of literature and cultural history of the Scandinavian Middle Ages at the University of Kiel, Germany). These travels represent a crucial experience for all his fictional writings, too. His first novel was *Studie in Kristallbildung* (*Study in Crystal Formation*, 1997) followed by a poetic travel account, *Die fernen Inseln* (*The Distant Islands*, 2003), for which he obtained the Brüder Grimm prize and the Hermann Hesse prize, the tale *Südlich von Abisko* (*South of Abisko*, 2000) and the novel *Der nächtliche Lehrer* (*The Nocturnal Teacher*, 2010), for which he was awarded the 2013 Friedrich Hebbel prize. The Nordic countries and their landscapes provide the settings for all these texts.

I. *STUDIE IN KRISTALLBILDUNG*, AN ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE SLOWNESS AND DESOLATION

*Studie in Kristallbildung*, Bödl's debut novel, presents a picture of Greenland and Iceland from the peripheral point of view of a foreigner, Johannes Grahn, who perceives and describes the places and his daily life in these two host countries in two booklets (corresponding to the two parts of the novel). The plot is not especially significant and is therefore a very simple one: Grahn is a German who has been working for two years as a driver in a unidentifiable, nameless little town (Freund 2001, 171) in Greenland, in an attempt to leave the past behind. His monotonous life changes abruptly when another foreigner, the Austrian Markus Brack, comes to the village and begins asking questions about Grahn. The reader finds out that Grahn spent the night with Brack's partner, Agnes, shortly before she died in an accident. The story ends unexpectedly for the reader: Brack suddenly leaves Greenland without discovering anything about the accident, whereas Grahn moves to Germany and goes back to his old life.

The first-person narrator focuses above all on the landscape and the interaction of natural and human factors in the Nordic locales, offering fragments of reflections, memories and descriptions: these seem to represent steps in the search for the pieces of a lost life, which – falling short of the reader's expectations<sup>2</sup> – will never be reconstructed.

The very beginning of the text provides a perfect example of the descriptive strategy used to present the characteristics of a Nordic landscape, as the following lines suitably show:

Das erste, was in mein Blickfeld geriet, war Schnee, der in der Morgensonne glänzte, als sei er mit einer Glasschicht überzogen. Ein Wanderer, der sich dort ins Gebirge hinauf verirrt hätte, stellte ich mir vor, bliebe unweigerlich mit den Sohlen an diesem zuckrigen Schnee haften, er schlüpfte vielleicht aus den Schuhen, um dann auf allen vieren den Fels wiederzugewinnen, doch die Handflächen frören ihm sofort fest, seine Lage wäre die des Insekts auf dem Fliegenpapier. Freilich: Wanderer kommen in dieses Gebirge kaum. [...] Über Geröllhalden und Flächen, die wie dicht mit Asche bedeckt aussehen, glitt der Blick dann zum Wasser hinunter. Das Eis auf dem Fjörd: Über der Oberfläche ist es von einem hellen Grau, wie das Weiße in Menschengenügen, unter Wasser leuchtet es türkisfarben. Kein Schiff ist um diese Zeit auf dem Fjörd zu sehen, nur ein kleines Fischerboot konnte

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<sup>2</sup> The reactions of reviewers were diverse: some appreciated the subversion of the reader's expectations as a perfect example of the postmodernist deconstruction of the plot; others saw this as a mere play with postmodern theories and a lack of depth (for the reviews see Auer's final bibliography: Auer 2008, C; see also Auer 2008, 4).

ich zwischen den scheinbar reglosen Eismassen entdecken; aus der Ferne sah es so aus, als bewege es sich kaum (*Studie*, 7).<sup>3</sup>

The topography is made up of generalisations about the Nordic landscape, which is a typical way of presenting stereotypes (Rühling 2004, 288-91): the impression here is one of a cold and lonely place, of a hostile environment, and of extreme slowness and motionlessness.<sup>4</sup> The elements of the description are part of our collective imagination concerning the Nordic landscape, though at first it is impossible to identify one specific country (i.e., Greenland) and one can only linger on the repeated descriptive patterns, as if the place did not need a chronicle: “Einen Chronisten scheint dieses Land allerdings nicht zu benötigen” (*Studie*, 9).<sup>5</sup>

The landscape is modelled on two principal features: the connection between the different descriptive elements made through comparisons and analogies – as if the Nordic landscape could be interpreted only through its referential aspects<sup>6</sup> – and through Grahn, who imagines, from a distant and ironic viewpoint, what a hiker would experience in the mountains. In this way, space serves as a surface onto which Grahn can project his thoughts,<sup>7</sup> and it soon acquires an emblematic function: to identify the protagonist’s position, his new position in a foreign land.

There is no empathy in Grahn’s approach to the landscape: he is no longer the romantic hiker (“Wanderer”), who describes the environment while on the move and who feels at one with nature and is moved by it. He is no longer the *flâneur* à la Baudelaire, reading the city space as an active part of it, constantly changing direction and searching for unconventional routes off the beaten track. Instead, Grahn is frozen in apathy. He does not walk: he simply drives tourists from the airport to the hotel.

Many of his landscape descriptions are ‘fictional’; they are not provided

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<sup>3</sup> From now on *Studie in Kristallbildung* (Bödl [1997] 2004a) will be cited as *Studie*, followed by the page numbers. “The first thing that got into my visual field was snow. It shone in the morning sun as if a coat of ice covered it. A hiker, who got lost in those mountains – I imagined – would invariably have his soles stuck to this soft snow; perhaps he would get out of his shoes to reach the cliff on all fours, but his palms would freeze immediately; his condition would be that of an insect stuck on flypaper. Admittedly, not many hikers come to these mountains. [...] Then my gaze turned down towards the water after gliding across scree slopes and expanses, which seem to be covered with ash. The ice on the fjord: over the surface it is light grey, as the white of the eyes, under the water it shines turquoise. No ships can be seen at this time; I could catch a glimpse of only a little fishing boat among the apparently motionless mass of ice; from a distance it hardly seemed to move.” All translations are mine.

<sup>4</sup> In his novel Bödl often uses the words *Langsamkeit* (‘slowness’), *langsam* (‘slow’) and *Reglosigkeit* (‘immobility’) to convey the idea of silence and immobility. See for instance *Studie*, 8, 9, 12.

<sup>5</sup> “This country does not seem to need a chronicler.”

<sup>6</sup> See Hoffmann 1978, 267, who underlines the “Verweischarakter des Raums” (“referential character of space”).

<sup>7</sup> Kraft 2003; also quoted in Schütte 2005, 421.

by direct observations but by looking at old maps or etchings or, intertextually, by reporting historical anecdotes or extracts written by landscape scientists:

Der Kupferstich stellt eine Karte der arktischen Gegend dar. Auf Island ist der Eingang zur Hölle eingezeichnet, für den man den Vulkan Hekla hielt. Wurde in jenen Zeiten eine Schlacht ausgefochten, irgendwo auf der Welt, den in der Umgebung der Hekla wohnenden Isländern konnte es nicht entgehen, waren dann doch die Lüfte erfüllt von den Seelen derer, die zur Hölle fuhren (*Studie*, 16).<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, the relationship between the protagonist and the landscape persists, even though from afar. Grahn looks through field glasses or out of the window, which makes the readers recognise a boundary between the character and the landscape, but also a correspondence, as effectively epitomised in the following passage, where both the landscape and the protagonist's face are motionless and surprisingly familiar:

Morgens, beim Aufstehen, streift mein Blick die Gegenstände im Zimmer. Es hilft, sie fest in den Blick zu fassen, wenn man wie ich morgens zu Schwindel neigt. Sie sind deutlich zu erkennen, vor dem Fenster befinden sich keine Vorhänge. [...] Während ich mir das Gesicht trockne, blicke ich aus dem Fenster. Die Aussicht ist mir längst vertrauter als mein Gesicht. Ganz im Hintergrund die Bergkette, die 'Nunatakken' genannt wird, dann das Eis auf dem Fjörd, mit grünblauen Rändern, die mit Müll bedeckte Landzunge, die über den Hang verstreuten Häuser, in denen noch alles schläft, einige Mütter mit Säuglingen an der Brust ausgenommen, die Grasflecken zwischen den Häusern, der rotgestrichene Turm an der alten Holzkirche, die leuchtend orangenfarbenen Container unten im Hafen, von hier oben aus betrachtet wirken sie wie wahllos verstreute Bauklötze (*Studie*, 14-16).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "The copperplate represents a map of the Arctic region. The entrance to hell is marked as being in Iceland, and it was thought to be the volcano of Hekla. If at that time a battle was being waged anywhere in the world, the Icelanders living around Hekla would not have missed it: the air was filled with souls going to hell."

<sup>9</sup> "In the morning, when I get up, my gaze caresses the objects in my room. It is helpful to fix one's eyes on them, if one tends to feel dizzy as I do. One can see the objects very clearly, the window has no curtains. [...] While I am drying my face I look out of the window. The view is more familiar to me than my own face. Far away, in the background, one can see the so-called Nunatakken mountains, then the ice on the fjord, with bluish green edges, the promontory littered with rubbish, the houses scattered over the hillside, where everything is still sleeping except for a few mothers nursing their babies, the patches of grass between the houses, the red

The relationship perceived here is represented by the room and the landscape, by the inside and the outside, which correspond to the perception of a near and a distant place, respectively. However, there is no hierarchy between these two dimensions, which excludes any spatial dynamism. The lack of action, supported by a descriptive style, gives the space a sense of slowness; time and space seem to be captured in one single moment, in which fragments of reflections, remembrances and observations merge as in a process of ‘crystallisation’, as the title of the novel already foreshadows.<sup>10</sup>

In the above-quoted lines one can make out the fundamental tendencies of the process of description that Philippe Hamon revealed in his work *Introduction à l'analyse du descriptif (Introduction to the Analysis of Description, 1981)*, namely the “tendance ‘horizontale’ d’exhaustivité” (Hamon 1981, 61-62),<sup>11</sup> which aims at descriptive extensiveness, and the “tendance ‘verticale’, *décryptive*” (Hamon 1981, 63-64; emphasis in the original),<sup>12</sup> which searches for a meaning of the described beyond the represented. The reader, who is not involved in the narration of a plot, is placed in front of a list of objects, the accumulation and interaction of which both play a central role in the description: the fjord is set in opposition to the rubbish, the houses and the church to the containers. Thus Grahn, looking out of the window, invites the readers to reflect on the juxtaposition of nature and civilisation, idyll and destruction, past and present, while indirectly raising their awareness of the processes underlying this desolate situation, yet without drawing a precise picture of the natural and the urban landscape.

The representation of the inhabitants of the remote little town highlights this desolation, too: the Nordic landscape is as barren as the people themselves, who are mostly jobless or alcoholics or have no future prospects; the foreigner’s point of view sees them as shadows lost in an ice desert and unable to act. The same impression is created by the inhabitants of the town – for instance by the local parliamentarian, who is fully aware that there are no alternatives for young people, and who tells Grahn that suicide is a leading cause of many deaths among them (*Studie*, 54) – and by old Doctor Rask, who underlines that it is almost impossible to escape from such negativity (*Studie*, 74-75; see also Schütte 2005, 422).

Therefore, as Gremler (2012, 189) has rightly observed, the Nordic landscape is only apparently an “Erkenntnisort”,<sup>13</sup> a place of self-discovery; in fact, it is a place of refuge (Schütte 2005, 420) and an undefined dystopian

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tower by the old wooden church, the bright orange containers down by the port; viewed from above, they look like building blocks haphazardly strewn about.”

<sup>10</sup> About the motif of the ‘crystal’ and the crystallised structure of the novel see Auer 2008, 3. See also Schütte 2005, 422, who compares *Studie in Kristallbildung* with Adalbert Stifter’s tale *Bergkristall (Rock Crystal)*, from the collection *Bunte Steine (Colourful Stones, 1853)*.

<sup>11</sup> “A ‘horizontal’ tendency to exhaustiveness.”

<sup>12</sup> “A vertical *decrypting* tendency.”

<sup>13</sup> Schütte (2010) uses this term to define the protagonist of Bödl’s novel *Der nächtliche Lehrer* (2010).

place with some Nordic traits – that of a cold, remote and unmoving land.

Another important association for the immobility of the reconstructed space is the repeated parallel between the landscape and the process of writing: by creating his Nordic landscape or, better still, by crystallising its desolation, Grahn often makes a comparison between the topography of the country and his approach to writing. At the very beginning, one is told that during his two years in Greenland, Grahn lived his life without writing (“eine fast vollständig schriftlose Existenz”; *Studie*, 8)<sup>14</sup>, although he had always written before, as if his ability to write had frozen along with his memories, and any present events could not be captured:

Auch wenn man alles aufschreibt, ändert sich nichts: Die Tage vergehen, lösen aneinander ab, sie wiederholen sich und verlieren sich zugleich in einem Meer von Zeit. [...] Ich wünsche mir keine Biographie. Es genügt, daß sich kleine Geschichten ereignen, die nichts anderes bedeuten als sich selbst (*Studie*, 89).<sup>15</sup>

In his state of desolation, Grahn comes to the following conclusion, again associating the landscape with the writing process; as the weather grows colder, words become looser and lose their intimacy:

Jetzt wird es kühl im Gras, wo ich sitze. Nicht daß ein Wind aufgekommen wäre; die Kälte, die das Eis auf dem Fjord vor mir ausstrahlt, nimmt zu in dem Maß, wie der Abendschatten sich über dem Wasser ausbreitet. Die Hand, die den Stift hält, wird klamm. Dadurch verändert sich meine Handschrift, sie wird eckiger und unregelmäßig. Die Worte werden breiter, das Geschriebene verliert seine Vertrautheit. Als könnte in der Kälte nichts beim alten bleiben (*Studie*, 128).<sup>16</sup>

## 2. SÜDLICH VON ABISKO, CAPTURING SLOWNESS

The juxtaposition of nature and civilisation represents the semantic paradigm of *Südllich von Abisko*, too. In it Bödl compares Abisko, a village in

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<sup>14</sup> “A life without any writing activity.”

<sup>15</sup> “Even if one writes down everything, nothing changes: days go by, following one another and flowing into a sea of time. [...] I do not want a biography. I am happy with a few stories which mean nothing but themselves.”

<sup>16</sup> “Now it is getting cold on the grass where I am sitting. Not because the wind is getting up; the cold coming from the ice on the fjord increases as the shadow of the evening extends over the water. The hand holding the pen becomes numb with cold. That is why my handwriting changes: it gets edgy and irregular. The words become wider and wider, the written page loses its familiarity. As if nothing could remain unchanged in the cold.”

Lapland, “ein Jenseitsreich” that does not differ from any other Nordic village (*Abisko*, 125),<sup>17</sup> with any place south of Abisko, particularly with Stockholm.

This double contrast, north versus south and countryside versus urban space, is paralleled in the temporal sequence. Abisko is the image of the past, of the remembrances of Harald Behringer, the protagonist of the tale, a “Melancholiker mit misanthropischen Zügen” (Schütte 2005, 423),<sup>18</sup> who spent some time in the loneliness of Abisko to finish working on a translation. Stockholm defines the present time, the three days after Behringer’s return from Lapland, in which three main occurrences intersect: the protagonist tells about his difficulty in his affair with Malin; he relates his desolate daily routine; and he recounts the short visit to Stockholm paid by Emma, the daughter of Miss Holmquist, who is the owner of the hotel where Behringer stayed in Abisko. The ending of the story is as unexpected and frustrating as in *Studie in Kristallbildung*: Malin thinks that Emma is Behringer’s lover and breaks up with him; Behringer does not deem it necessary to tell her that her suspicion is unfounded.

The past is therefore to the present as the countryside is to the urban space: in Abisko everything moves slowly and nothing seems to happen; in Stockholm the daily occupations fill the vacuum in Behringer’s life. On the narrative level, this very contrast corresponds to two different narration forms: the past is evoked through recollections and generalised spatial descriptions, whereas the present is narrated and determines the configuration of the story.

Both space and time are connected according to Behringer’s perspective; he remembers, imagines and reports, conveying a sense of bewilderment and desolation. He admits that he does not feel well in the urban space and realises that his stay in Abisko has changed him. Still, he chooses not to leave civilisation, or rather, he takes no decision and continues living an aimless life, a sort of absence.

Unsurprisingly, Abisko offers no real possibility of change; it is not an “Erkenntnisort” (Gremler 2012, 189), but only a “positive(n) Utopie” (Auer 2008, 5),<sup>19</sup> an “Imaginationsraum” (Platen 2007, 79),<sup>20</sup> an uncertain space situated between dream and remembrance (*Abisko*, 31), a place which cannot be considered real (“Als sei es mit Hilfe eines solchen Schildes möglich, Abisko unter den Tatsachen einzureihen”; *Abisko*, 7),<sup>21</sup> because it is only an imaginary place in Behringer’s eyes, which seems to be tuned out of time, or better still, to belong to a timeless uncertainty.

<sup>17</sup> “A hereafter.” From now on *Südlich von Abisko* (Bödl [2000] 2004b) will be cited as *Abisko*, followed by the page numbers.

<sup>18</sup> “Melancholic person with misanthropic traits.”

<sup>19</sup> “Positive utopia.”

<sup>20</sup> “Imaginary space.”

<sup>21</sup> “As if such a signboard made it possible to number Abisko among facts.”

Although the reader is tempted to identify Abisko as an ideal place, his expectations are disappointed by arbitrary signs, which can take on any signification, as well as by the representation of undefined places onto which the (apparent) desires of the narrator are projected.

Indefiniteness belongs to the Nordic narrative space despite the use of place names, which seems to offer the opposite sensation, as the following lines exemplify:

War in Abisko die ganze Natur beklommen von der Erwartung des Winters, der freilich eine über ein halbes Jahr währende Erstarrung und Verfinsterung mit sich bringen würde, so war es in Stockholm noch beinahe sommerlich. Es herrschte auch dieses ganz besondere Licht, ein Licht, wie es nur an Sonntagen vorkommt und vielleicht nur in Schweden. Alles wirkte wie mit einem Firnis überzogen: die Büsche, die glänzten, als habe es gerade geregnet, das hohe Gras zwischen den weißen Stämmen der Birken und den hellblauen der Kiefern, die Steine und unten die zimtfarbenen Häuser, deren Konturen man hinter dem Geäst erahnen konnte, dort wo das Blattwerk sich doch schon etwas gelichtet hatte. [...] Im Südwesten zogen graublau Wolken mit gleißenden Rändern auf. Das Laub in den Bäumen darunter glühte in der Sonne fast unwirklich. Es hatte schon die Farbe, die in manchen Romanen als golden bezeichnet wird (*Abisko*, 10-11).<sup>22</sup>

Here one does not find a prose that longs for exactness;<sup>23</sup> on the contrary, if we took away the place names, we would hardly understand that the description refers to a Nordic landscape. In this way, Bödl's text shows a very careful and precise "selection of structures" (Iser's so-called "Selektionsstruktur"; 1976, 120); the combination of fictional locations with the names of real ones thus allows the construction of space as well as its deconstruction. The remote and forlorn Nordic world is no longer a reality but an image in our collective stereotypisation and in the perception of the protagonist, who represents the point of view of the contemporary displaced human being.

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<sup>22</sup> "In Abisko the whole nature was in a state of anxiety over the oncoming winter, which would bring more than six months of numbness and darkness, whereas in Stockholm the weather was still almost summery. There was a particular light, a light that appears only on Sunday and perhaps only in Sweden. Everything seemed to be varnished: the bushes, glistening as if it had just rained, the high grass among the white trunks of the birches and the light blue pines, the stones, and, at the bottom the cinnamon-coloured houses, whose outlines could be made out from behind the branches, just where the leaves had already thinned out. [...] Grey blue clouds passed with dazzling contours in the south-west. The leaves on the trees were aglow in the sun, looking almost unreal, and had already turned to what some novels describe as golden."

<sup>23</sup> On this subject I do not agree with Schütte's definition of Bödl's prose as a "genauigkeitsversessene Prosa" (2005, 422; "an excessively precise prose"). One should rather speak of an apparently precise prose.



This deconstruction is also evident in the artificiality of the representation – something that the narrating voice itself stresses in the last sentence of the above-quoted passage: “Es [das Laub in den Bäumen] hatte schon die Farbe, die in manchen Romanen als golden bezeichnet wird” (*Abisko*, 11). The following episode is artificial and frustrating, too: in keeping with the juxtaposition of distance and nearness, the protagonist, imitating a romantic idyll, presents an episode in which a personified magpie with long feathers and dark eyes catches the attention of Behringer by hopping at his feet (*Abisko*, 11).

Not only is the representation artificial; the description is also ‘old fashioned’, and the reader does not expect such a ‘conventional’ way of writing from a contemporary writer. Admittedly, there is a clear reference to the Biedermeier style, both in Behringer’s withdrawal to inactivity and in his poetic stylisation of reality. Yet, if Bödl, on the one hand, seems to take this epoch as a model to present the utopia of the remote land, on the other, he deconstructs this model by underlining that this positivity is only apparent, coming merely from the desolate perspective of the narrating voice.

Behringer’s hopeless attitude is clear even in his perception of the other characters, which goes hand in hand with his reading of the surrounding landscape. These characters are described through generalisations and contrasting descriptions aimed at emphasising the individual perspective of the protagonist, whose self is so insecure that he needs to be constantly compared to others.

In this connection, the narrator presents, for example, his partner Malin. Her very first introduction is already marked by negativity and is set in opposition to the space perception of the protagonist: he is sitting in front of a monument, the grave of an unknown person from the Iron Age, a sacred place for him, when she suddenly covers his face with her hands, thus preventing him from seeing *his* place (*Abisko*, 12-13) while making fun of his attitude (*Abisko*, 15). Malin invades Behringer’s space and their visions of the world soon prove incompatible: she is always active, while he seems to have replaced action with thoughts and contemplation. He perceives her dynamic presence as a displacement of his own perspective, as a kind of foreign experience: her nearness is threatening (*Abisko*, 12), her stature frightful (*Abisko*, 13) and her clothes awful (*Abisko*, 14).

Behringer’s and Malin’s spaces never overlap and their relationship seems to be founded on incommunicability, which is accentuated throughout the text by a connection between their frames of mind and spatial references, as the following passage, one of the many possible examples, effectively shows:

Der Zug erreichte das Ufer von Kristineberg und fuhr an dem menschenleeren Minigolfplatz vorüber, dessen Bahnen mit roten

Blättern übersät waren. Ich setzte Malin auseinander, dass ich mir das genaue Gegenteil von dem vorstellte, was sie sich vorstellte. Ich dachte mir selber das Ufer ohne Blocks. Und ich dachte es mir nicht nur so: Nachdem ich in Abisko gewesen war, hatte ich auch die Fähigkeit, es so zu sehen. Überhaupt die ganze Gegend zu sehen, wie sie im Grunde war, ohne den ganzen fragwürdigen Zierat, den die neuzeitliche Menschheit an ihr angebracht hat: ohne diesen lächerlichen Minigolfplatz (Leute, die Minigolf spielen!), ohne die Salkhalle, die Stadtautobahn, und das vollkommen überflüssige Hotel Kristineberg, ein rosa gestrichener barackenartiger Flachbau, der, wegen des Stacheldrahtzauns zum Bahndamm hin, mehr an ein Straflager erinnert als an ein Hotel (*Abisko*, 27).<sup>24</sup>

Behringer's observations unveil the same rhetoric strategy as in *Studie in Kristallbildung*. The description is based on contrasting elements, which do not only stress the incompatibility of both characters, but also "die Auflösung der ursprünglichen Gebundenheiten" (Simmel 1913, 637),<sup>25</sup> the protagonist's awareness that he has lost his previous (and better) living conditions, so that he can only think of his past space without living it. This void is filled through the language, which is why the text shows a great insistence on *enumeratio* ("die Salkhalle, die Stadtautobahn, und das vollkommen überflüssige Hotel Kristineberg") and hyperbole ("ohne den ganzen fragwürdigen Zierat" and "das vollkommen überflüssige Hotel Kristineberg"), which the narrator uses to produce – textually – his own landscape perception (his own *Vorstellung*). Through the repetition of his reflections, Behringer constantly (re)defines his own relation to nature, but he also creates a counterpart to the fullness of contemporary spaces, the so-called "non-lieux" of Marc Augé (1992), such as motorways, crossroads, etc.

In conclusion, considering the peculiarities of the landscape representation and space perception in *Studie in Kristallbildung* and *Südlich von Abisko*, the following aspects of Böldl's approach to the Nordic topography are noteworthy and can be summarised as follows.

First, the representation of the Nordic space is characterised by a conscious dichotomy between the (re)appropriation and deconstruction of ste-

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<sup>24</sup> "The train pulled in by the waterside at Kristineberg and passed near the empty miniature golf course, whose tracks were strewn with red leaves. I explained to Malin that my opinion was the exact opposite of hers. I imagined that waterfront without any buildings. And I was convinced of this: since I had been to Abisko, I had the capability to see it like that. I was able to imagine all the area as it had actually been, without all that showy decoration that modern people had brought: without this ridiculous miniature golf course (people who play mini-golf!), without the 'Salkhalle', the motorway, and the completely unnecessary Hotel Kristineberg, a shoddy block of flats painted in pink which, because of the barbed wire facing the railway embankment, reminds you of a prison more than a hotel."

<sup>25</sup> "The dissolution of original bonds."

reotypes belonging to our collective cultural tradition. On the one hand, through the use of traditional *topoi*, one can detect the need to build the textual space according to pre-existing semantic coordinates; on the other hand, the simultaneous undermining of these coordinates (through irony, juxtaposition of descriptive elements and rhetorical devices such as accumulation or repetition) shows the very awareness in Bödl's characters of the impossibility of this procedure. One cannot shape a forlorn space but only an uncertain and timeless fragmented idea of it.

Second, Bödl's way of writing tries to reduce the act of telling a story to its simplest terms; therefore the plot is not as important as the act of describing itself, through which the author wishes to create an alienation effect on the reader, who becomes frustrated, but who is also led to reflect on the immobility or the changes of the Nordic space.

Finally, the protagonists' perception of space is based on the traditional north-versus-south, countryside-versus-town contrasts; their attitude towards the urban space is negative and they show an apparent longing for a forlorn past, which can never eventuate. This position stresses the typically modernist attitude of individuals, whose uneasiness and apathy reduce them to a simulacrum of themselves.

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