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Representations of Extreme Weather and Climate Change in Ingrid Tørresvold's *Hilsen Ruth*

This article is devoted to the representation of extreme weather as a result of global warming in Ingrid Tørresvold's *Hilsen Ruth* [Regards, Ruth]. Published in 2020, the novel imagines the effects of a severe heatwave over Norway, focusing on 39-year-old Ruth, who perceives the crisis as an opportunity to deal with personal problems. Considering the book as a realistic narrative of climate change, I examine the fictional representation of extreme weather as an impending risk and discuss the air conditioner as a symbol of anthropogenic global warming. I also discuss the affective dimension of the novel, drawing attention to the main character's experience of the crisis caused by the unusual heat. Finally, my analysis seeks to show how *Hilsen Ruth* addresses climate change as a phenomenon intertwined with individual and cultural perceptions.

Keywords: extreme weather, climate change narratives, Norwegian fiction, Ingrid Tørresvold

1. Introduction

Not only is nature back in contemporary Norwegian literature, but ecology and the climate crisis have also entered the literary realm, as Martha Norheim observes (2017: 22–23). The most outstanding example of this is the Norwegian Writer's Climate Campaign (Forfatternes Klimaaksjon), an online platform launched in 2013 which gathers and promotes literary texts and other art forms that engage with the topic of the environmental crisis. At the same time, the plethora of studies that cast light on the representation of climate change in Norwegian literature indicates that writers have been experimenting with a variety of literary forms and types of narratives. For instance, Norheim (2017) observes that while some novels portray climate change in dystopian storyworlds set in the future, such as Peter Franziskus Strassegger's *Før de henter oss* [Before They Take Us] (2015), Jan Roar Leikvoll's *Fiolinane* [The Violins] (2010) or Maja Lunde's *Bienes historie* (*The History of Bees*, 2015), other fictional texts, including Mette Karlvik's *Den beste hausten er etter monsun* [The Best Harvest is after Monsoon] (2014) or Christian Valeur's *Steffen tar sin del av ansvaret* [Steffen Takes His Share of the Responsibility]

(2009), are set in our present world. Discussing Amitav Ghosh's (2016) thesis that global warming lacks representation in the modern realist novel, Thorunn Gullaksen Endreson, Kristian Bjørkdahl and Karen Lykke Syse (2017) explore realistic narratives of climate change in Tomas Espedal's *Året* [The Year] (2016), Agnar Lirhus's *Liten kokebok* [Little Cookbook] (2016), Brit Bildøen's *Sju dager i august* [Seven Days in August] (2014) and Mette Karlsvik's aforementioned novel. Reinhard Hennig (2021) also published an article that looks upon more innovative and experimental literary forms, including Jan Kjærstad's postmodern novel *Slekters gang* [The Path of Kins] (2015).

In this paper, I discuss Ingrid Tørrsvold's debut novel, *Hilsen Ruth* [Regards, Ruth] (2020), and analyse its representation of climate change as extreme weather. The story is set in an unnamed Norwegian city resembling Oslo, as Rolv Nøtvik Jakobsen notes (2020: 363), gripped by a serious heatwave that leads to forest fires and lack of precipitations, generating a severe crisis that forces authorities to declare state of emergency. Published in 2020, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the novel was deemed particularly relevant due to its depiction of what it means to live in isolation during a state of emergency (Bentzrud 2020). However, readers can relate to the characters and the events taking place in *Hilsen Ruth* on a more concrete level, as the novel depicts an episode of extreme weather rather similar to the unusual phenomena occurring more and more often in our world. Looking only at the past year, a major heatwave over Europe, floods in Pakistan, snowfall in the Sahara Desert, and dangerous wildfires are only a few examples that made 2022 a year of extreme weather events, continuing a trend of climate change phenomena, which have become more common over the last decades.¹

Representations of climate change in literature is a topic that has drawn scholars' attention over the past years. Fiction that engages with climate change has largely been categorised as climate fiction or, shortly, cli-fi. However, it is difficult to define cli-fi as a proper genre, as Adeline Johns-Putra (2016) points out. Rather, as she argues, cli-fi is a category that encompasses texts belonging to diverse genres: "science fiction, dystopia, fantasy, thriller, romance, as well as fiction that is not easily identifiable with a given genre, for example, the social or psychological character studies" (Johns-Putra 2016: 267). In their recent *Økokritisk håndbok. Natur og miljø i litteratur* [Handbook of Ecocriticism: Nature and Environment in Literature], Sissel Furuseth and Reinhard Hennig also highlight the ambiguous usage of the term cli-fi in Norwegian literary criticism (Furuseth and Hennig 2023: 179–183). Generally, cli-fi is associated with stories about anthropogenic climate fiction, against the backdrop of a futuristic, often dystopian setting. Nonetheless, scholars have identified a tendency to portray climate change in recognisable storyworlds. Adam

¹ See, for instance, the report published by the Copernicus Climate Change Service: <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-2022-was-year-climate-extremes-record-high-temperatures-and-rising-concentrations>

Trexler (2015), for instance, discusses the emergence of “Anthropocene realism”. As he explains, “[t]he creation of Anthropocene realism marks a profound shift in the understanding of climate change itself, from something that ought not to exist to something that already does” (Trexler 2015: 233). At the same time, Trexler also acknowledges the problems and limitations of realistic Anthropocene fiction: “It cannot imagine novel technological, organizational, and political approaches to climate change. Its focus on a narrow locale and set of characters compresses distributed, global events. It struggles to understand the devastating potential of climatic disaster” (Trexler 2015: 233). Another problem with literary realism, as Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra underline, is that it “depends on highly conventional and canonical novelistic techniques grounded in identification and empathy with characters” (Goodbody and John-Putra 2019: 237). Anchored in such anthropocentric conventions, realistic narratives are in this way limited to representing human experiences and perceptions.

Juha Raipola states that neither realistic nor dystopian climate change narratives “can be described as representing the effects of climate change more accurately than the other” (Raipola 2019: 8). He points out that these two categories differ in their narrative orientation and in their thematic approach to climate change. As such, realistic narratives “are set in relatively familiar surroundings of the present day or a very-near-future world, where recognisable human characters ponder the effects of global warming”, and usually aim attention at “the various affective and cognitive responses – such as eco-anxiety, climate sorrow, or climate change denial – evoked by the global environmental situation” (Raipola 2019: 8). Thus, I would argue that, notwithstanding its dystopian impulse, the focus on the character’s experience of the storyworld makes *Hilsen Ruth* a realistic narrative. At the centre of the story is 39-year-old Ruth, who, against the backdrop of an unfolding crisis, decides to continue her part-time job at a small café, instead of joining her sister in northern Norway, where she can find refuge from the heatwave. The novel depicts her attempt to make friends with Sofie, the employer’s niece and her work colleague, as a way of surmounting social isolation and loneliness. While the heatwave leads to violent wildfires and access to water is restricted, Ruth perceives the crisis as an opportunity for her to deal with personal problems and gain a sense of responsibility.

In this article, my aim is to discuss how extreme weather is thematised in *Hilsen Ruth* as a way of depicting climate change realistically. My analysis of the novel comes in two parts. I first examine the depiction of extreme weather as an impending risk to humans and the environment, but also as a threat to symbols of national identity. I also discuss the air conditioner as a symbol of anthropogenic global warming. Then, I consider the affective dimension of the novel, focusing on the way the main character relates to the crisis caused by extreme temperatures. In my discussion of the novel, I finally try to show how, through its fictional representation of extreme weather, *Hilsen Ruth* addresses climate change as a phenomenon intertwined with individual and cultural perceptions.

2. Extreme heat and the climate unconscious

Drawing on Ulrich Beck's understanding of risk as "the anticipation of a catastrophe" (Beck 2009: 9), Alexa Weik von Mossner claims that "American cli-fi is, almost without exception, *risk fiction*". She explains that this term refers to fiction that "is centrally concerned with the potential future consequences of anthropogenic climate forcing" and "imagines those risks at a moment when there is still a great deal of uncertainty about their exact nature and degree" (Weik von Mossner 2017: 129). In Tørresvold's short novel, a ferocious heatwave grips southern Norway and the unforeseen consequences of this unusual phenomenon impel authorities to impose a state of emergency. Without providing any precise temporal indications, *Hilsen Ruth* depicts a recognisable storyworld, set in the present or in the near future, and imagines a scenario in which global warming materialises in the form of extreme weather. The novel thus depicts a state of uncertainty that characterises what Weik von Mossner calls risk fiction. This is how the situation is described in the first pages of the novel:

De snakker bare om været på nyhetene, hele døgnet nå. Hetebølgen ble varslet allerede i april, meteorologene snakket om den kommende varmen i mange uker, men jeg trodde de overdrev, som de alltid gjør, prognosene pleier aldri å være så presise. På nyhetene sier de at det kommer til å bli ny varmere rekord i dag, igjen, det er ingen tegn til at det skal bli kjøligere med det første. Skogbrannene sprer seg, det kan bli nødvendig å evakuere mennesker som bor i de mest utsatte områdene. Temperaturen er lavere i nord, det er derfor folk reiser. (Tørresvold 2020: 6)²

Narrated in the first person by Ruth, the novel focuses on the individual perception of such threats posed by extreme weather. In this paragraph, we can clearly see how the intensity of the heatwave takes the protagonist by surprise. Throughout the novel, the unpredictability and the sense of uncertainty is reinforced by the media:

En meteorolog forteller at den nordlige delen av landet ser ut til å være forskånet inntil videre [...] men ingen vet hva som vil skje utover sommeren og høsten. (Tørresvold 2020: 32)³

Vi ser på TV. På nyhetene snakker de om drikkevannet, om at tilstanden stadig blir mer kritisk i vannreservoarene, de ber folk om å forberede seg på å koke vannet. (Tørresvold 2020: 65)⁴

² "They only talk about the weather on the news, all day long. The heatwave was forecast in April, the meteorologists talked about the coming heat for many weeks, but I thought they were exaggerating, as they always do, the forecasts never used to be so precise. On the news they say it is going to be a new heat record today, again, there is no sign it would get cooler any time soon. The wildfires are spreading, it might become necessary to evacuate people that live in the exposed areas. The temperature is lower in the north, that is why people go there." (my translation)

³ "A meteorologist says that the northern part of the country seems to be spared for the time being [...] but no one knows what will happen over the summer and autumn." (my translation)

⁴ "We are watching TV. On the news, they are talking about drinking water, about the situation getting more and more critical in the water reserves, they are asking people to get ready to boil the water." (my translation)

Although Ruth is never directly in danger, she can see the effects of the heatwave. For instance, elderly persons, who are the most vulnerable to high temperatures, enter the café where Ruth works only to ask for a free glass of water, and she also witnesses a woman fainting outside a supermarket.

Besides the direct danger of extreme heat to the human body, wildfires are another consequence of the heatwave. As wildfires ravage forests and agricultural areas, farmers must sacrifice their animals and people travel towards the northern parts of the country, generating chaos in the airports and on roadways. Soon, in the absence of sufficient resources, officials shut off tap water. Ruth and her new friend Sofie thus have to buy bottled water at the supermarket, where the situation is also slowly getting out of control, as people are crowding to get water: “Alle prøver å få med seg flasker, en kvinnelig ansatt står midt i mengden og forsøker å holde et øyeblikk over situasjonen. Med jevne mellomrom roper hun ut hvor mye hver enkelt kan ta med seg, en dunk og to mindre flasker, ikke mer, de venter på en ny bestilling” (Tørresvold 2020: 82).⁵ Currently, Norway is rich in water resources and almost the entire population has access to drinking water.⁶ Norwegian natural landscape is dominated by lakes, rivers, fjords, and waterfalls. Water also largely contributed to the industrialisation and modernisation of the country, as waterfalls are used for the production of hydropower energy. Hence, water can even be considered a symbol of national identity, related both to the nation’s particular nature and to the high living standards associated with Norway (Nynäs 2010). Thus, importantly, in *Hilsen Ruth*, global warming also emerges as a threat to national values and symbols.

It is important to notice that the characters do not refer to the heatwave as a consequence of climate change. However, although there is no direct indication that the scenario imagined in *Hilsen Ruth* is a result of anthropogenic global warming, there is one prominent symbol of this change, namely the air conditioner. Julia Leyda associates air conditioning with what she calls “the climate unconscious”, defined as “a trace of meaning that points to climate change, which is not overtly signalled yet arguably informs significant structures of feeling in the early 21st century” (Leyda 2021: 101). She is mainly interested in the representation of post-air-conditioning futures in screen media: she shows that many American films and TV series which do not directly engage with the topic of global warming do however represent the banal Anthropocene by alluding to “extreme heat as an affective device” (Leyda 2021: 103). But the presence of “the climate unconscious” can certainly be traced in literary fictional texts as well.

⁵ “Everyone tries to get bottles, a female employee stands in the middle of the crowd and tries to keep an eye on the situation. Regularly, she shouts out how much every person can take, a can and two smaller bottles, no more, they are waiting for another order.” (my translation)

⁶ For more information on this subject, see the official statistics from Statistisk Sentralbyrå: <https://www.ssb.no/en/natur-og-miljo/vann-og-avlop/statistikk/kommunal-vannforsyning>

In *Hilsen Ruth*, for instance, the air conditioner is almost ubiquitous everywhere Ruth finds herself: on the bus, in the café, in cars, in Mari's house and even at her place, although she does not have an air conditioner, but an electric fan. The device is overtly associated with a certain comfort: "Klimaanlegget i bussen gjør godt, jakken kjennes ikke så klam lenger, jeg kan beholde den på likevel" (Tørresvold 2020: 6).⁷ Ruth even remembers her first encounter with an air conditioner, which happened during a holiday in Gran Canaria with her aunt: "Mitt første møte med klimaanlegg var på Gran Canaria. [...] Da vi gikk ut av flyet, ble jeg overveldet av varmen. [...] Klimaanlegget på hotellrommet ble en lettelse. Da tante ville gå på stranda neste morgen, ble jeg igjen på rommer, jeg nektet å gå ut i varme" (Tørresvold 2020: 43).⁸ Bearing traces of a certain affective attachment to the air conditioner, these passages thus describe what Leyda refers to as the climate unconscious. Importantly, the absence of this device is immediately noticed by the protagonist when she enters a car without air conditioning: "Det må være en gammel bil, han har ikke klimaanlegg" (Tørresvold 2020: 87).⁹ I would thus suggest that the presence of air conditioning in *Hilsen Ruth* is highly symbolic of the paradoxical use of technology against global warming. Stephen Buranyi explains how the large-scale use of air conditioning has a tremendous impact on the planet's climate due to the high amount of electricity it requires. He thus observes "the awful irony of this feedback loop: warmer temperatures lead to more air conditioning; more air conditioning leads to warmer temperatures" (Buranyi 2019).

I would further argue that the presence of air conditioning in the novel also alludes to the privilege of Norwegian people – and more generally of those living in developed countries – in the face of global warming. In an interview, Tørresvold states that, in her novel, it is the wealthy people who have the possibility to protect themselves from the consequences of climate change (Reinertsen 2020). Although Ruth herself is not among the wealthy people in society, as a Norwegian she has access to appliances dependent on electricity, such as the air conditioner. The novel subtly signals to its Norwegian readers that certain resources or goods that might be taken for granted are, in fact, a privilege that few people have access to on a global scale. Moreover, although climate change is represented in this novel as a local phenomenon, the underlying significance of the air conditioner as contributor to global warming hints at the larger implications of the global climate crisis, which affects people in different social positions unevenly.

⁷ "The air conditioner on the bus feels good, the jacket is no longer so sticky, I can keep it on anyway." (my translation)

⁸ "My first meeting with the air conditioner was in Gran Canaria. When we walked out of the plane, I was overwhelmed by the heat. [...] The air conditioner in the hotel room was a relief. When aunt wanted to go to the beach the next morning, I stayed in the room, I refused to walk outside in the heat." (my translation)

⁹ "It must be an old car, it doesn't have air conditioning." (my translation)

In the next section, I focus more closely on the protagonist's experience of the crisis, and I discuss how Ruth's perception of the unusual weather events is largely determined by her emotions and personal experiences. I also draw attention to how culturally shaped worldviews influence her attitude towards the unfolding crisis.

3. "A strong desire to do something good"

Before travelling to the north of the country, Mari tells her sister that "på noen måter kan kriser føre med seg gode ting også" (Tørresvold 2020: 19),¹⁰ because, during a crisis, people change their perspective and remember what truly matters in life. Ruth perceives the emergency situation as an opportunity for her to become more responsible and make a contribution in the world: "jeg får trent på å fungere i samfunnet" (Tørresvold 2020: 7).¹¹ The protagonist appears as a lonely and isolated person, struggling to make friends. Focusing on how the situation generated by the unusual weather can turn out to be a positive experience for her, Ruth repeatedly gives voice to her desire to be helpful. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, after taking away the dead rats outside her house, she states: "Det gir meg en følelse av å bidra, selv om handlingen ikke moner i det store bildet, men hva gjør egentlig det" (Tørresvold 2020: 5).¹² Unfortunately, in spite of her good intentions, all her attempts to help others are bound to fail.

Often, climate change fiction portrays parental care as a way of conveying responsibility for the next generations, which is a central message in the environmental movement. To quote Johns-Putra, "[t]he discourse of environmentalist crisis in the Anthropocene is peppered with such references to parental obligations to posterity, creating a sense of transcendence and timelessness on the one hand and conjuring up elemental feelings of care and love on the other" (Johns-Putra 2019: 5). In *Hilsen Ruth*, parental care appears most clearly in the case of Ruth's sister, who leaves the city and moves to the north to protect her two daughters from the hazards created by the heatwave. Becoming friends with her work colleague, Ruth finds out that Sofie is studying child welfare because, as she says, she wants to help children: "Jeg vil hjelpe barn" (Tørresvold 2020: 23).¹³ When she tells Ruth that she is pregnant and considers an abortion, in order to show her compassion, Ruth lies to her saying that she had a similar experience when she had an abortion as a teenager. Ruth also lies saying that she is a swimming instructor or when she tells Sofie that her parents are dead. The lies she comes up with might be an expression of her need to show empathy and thus gain Sofie's confidence in a way that

¹⁰ "in some ways, crises can lead to good things as well" (my translation)

¹¹ "I get trained to function in society." (my translation)

¹² "It gives me a feeling of contributing, even if the gesture doesn't make sense in the big picture, but what really does." (my translation)

¹³ "I want to help children." (my translation)

would make her feel safe to ask for Ruth's help or advice. Thinking that Sofie needs her makes Ruth feel good about herself: she feels that she can finally make friends with someone, help another person and thus find a sense of meaning in her own life: "Det virker som hun mener det, at hun virkelig vil at jeg skal bli" (Tørresvold 2020: 56).¹⁴ Ruth imagines that her friend sees her as a responsible person she can rely on: "Kanskje hun ser på meg som en som kan være der for henne" (Tørresvold 2020: 104),¹⁵ "Jeg er eldre enn henne, jeg må være den ansvarlige" (Tørresvold 2020: 50).¹⁶ Thus, Ruth does in a way express a parental concern, trying to take care of her friend and show her support.

"Jeg er full av følelser, men først og fremst av et sterkt ønske om å gjøre noe godt" (Tørresvold 2020: 106),¹⁷ Ruth thinks to herself one day. Unfortunately, she is often rejected when she wants to do something good. For instance, after she sees her eighty-year-old neighbour trying to hang a bird cage on a tree, Ruth buys her a ladder to use instead of a chair, but the woman tells her she does not need it, because she already has one. Another good deed Ruth tries to do is when she decides to not throw away the unsold bakery products at the café, and instead take them to the hospital, where she could offer them to people who might need to eat. But when she arrives there, the receptionist refuses to take them, telling Ruth she is not allowed to bring trash in there. When she does not succeed in convincing her that the products are not expired, she ends up throwing everything on the street. Ruth does not even succeed in looking after the plants and the aquarium fish Mari leaves in her care, and some of the plants dry out, while one of the fishes dies.

Concentrated upon how she can be helpful to others, Ruth does not seem to be truly concerned about the gravity of the heatwave, thinking that the problem is not as severe as it is presented in the media:

Meteorologen smiler altfor mye, jeg tror ikke på henne. Jeg tror hun lyver, men jeg skal takle det. Hvis varmen fortsetter, betyr det bare at jeg må fortsette å holde meg innendørs med viften på, at det vil være færre folk på kjøpesenteret og på bussen, generelt hvor jeg ferdes. Konsekvensene er ikke så ille. Det kunne vært flom, da måtte jeg ha oppsøkt hjelp, tilbrakt flere dager i en offentlig bygning, en gymsal, sammen med hundrevis av andre evakuerte. Når en krise først skal inntreffe, foretrekker jeg hetebølge. Å kjøle seg ned er lettere enn å varme seg opp. (Tørresvold 2020: 33)¹⁸

¹⁴ "It seems that she really means that, that she really wants me to stay." (my translation)

¹⁵ "Maybe she sees me as someone who can be there for her." (my translation)

¹⁶ "I am older than her, I have to be the responsible one." (my translation)

¹⁷ "I am full of emotions, but most of all of a strong desire to do something good." (my translation)

¹⁸ "The meteorologist is smiling way too much, I don't believe her. I think she's lying, but I will deal with it. If the heat continues, it only means that I have to keep staying inside, with the fan on, that there will be fewer people at the shopping centre and on the bus, generally where I go. The consequences are not that bad. It could have been a flood, then I would have had to seek help, spend several days in a public building, a sports hall, together with hundreds of others evacuees. When a crisis occurs, I prefer a heatwave. Cooling down is easier than warming up." (my translation)

I would argue that Ruth's scepticism with regard to the risks of the heatwave is a form of denial, suggestive of the kind of privilege she has. Mistrusting the meteorologist's concern about the seriousness of the unusual heat, Ruth thinks that she can protect herself from the consequences of extreme weather by simply staying inside with the fan on. In her study conducted in a Norwegian community and published under the title *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life* (2011), American sociologist Kari Marie Norgaard shows that, although Norwegians are informed about and acknowledge the existence of global warming, there is a tendency to downplay and, in a certain way, deny the implications of the climate crisis upon their daily life. Drawing on Stanley Cohen's distinction between literal, interpretative, and implicatory forms of denial, Norgaard indicates that, in the Norwegian community she studied, she observed a form of implicatory denial and not a denial of climate change per se. In this case, what is minimised is not actual information about climate change, but "the psychological, political or moral implications that conventionally follow" (Cohen 2001: 8, cited in Norgaard 2011: 11). In Tørresvold's novel, Ruth's disregard towards the unusual weather phenomenon can thus be symptomatic of a form of socially organised denial, which Norgaard understands as "the process by which individuals collectively distance themselves from information because of norms of emotion, conversation, and attention and by which they use an existing cultural repertoire of strategies in the process" (Norgaard 2011: 9). She further explains that:

Through a framework of socially organized denial, our view shifts from one in which *understanding* of climate change and *caring* about ecological conditions and our human neighbors are in short supply to one whereby these qualities are acutely present but actively muted in order to protect individual identity and sense of empowerment and to maintain culturally produced conceptions of reality. (Norgaard 2011: 207)

Counting upon unrestrained access to resources such as water and electricity, Ruth minimises the seriousness of the heatwave, perhaps placing confidence in the fact that the authorities will remediate the situation. When Sofie no longer wants to talk to her, after finding out that she was lying about her life, Ruth becomes lonely again, and has an apathetic response when tap water comes back: "Jeg vil ikke at alt skal bli normalt igjen" (Tørresvold 2020: 130).¹⁹ She acts carelessly and lets the water run in the shower, despite the notification from the authorities that water should be used sparingly. She then goes to the supermarket to buy bottled water, which she afterwards simply pours in the sink. As such, I would argue that Ruth's denial of the real risks of the heatwave derives not only from the inability to deal with her emotions, but also from her privileged social position. In this way, the novel suggests that perceptions of the climate crisis are strongly influenced by individual feelings and experiences, which are often embedded in culturally constructed worldviews.

¹⁹ "I don't want everything to come back to normal again." (my translation)

Throughout the novel, Ruth recalls childhood memories about the relationship with her sister, about her school friend Gro and about her aunt, who used to be the closest people to Ruth. But she lost both Gro's friendship and her aunt, who committed suicide. When Ruth is also rejected by Sofie, she is no longer confident that the crisis can turn out to be a positive experience. After seeing a commercial with a car driving into the sunset, Ruth decides to pack her bags, take her neighbour's car, and leave the city without any fixed destination. In the ending scene, she allegedly sees her aunt on the side of the road, but it is not clear whether she imagines it or whether she is hallucinating because of the high temperatures, as the last sentences of the novel might suggest: "Mange dør av kulde om vinteren, i parker og under broer, men hva med varmen. Den er drøyere, seigere, man kan ikke kjøre fra sola" (Tørresvold 2020: 152).²⁰ The impossibility of driving away from the sun alludes to the impossibility of escaping the impending consequences of global warming.

All in all, *Hilsen Ruth* might be read as a pessimistic response to climate change. Considering Johns-Putra's remark that parental care is central in many climate change narratives, Ruth stands out as a rather atypical character, because she never succeeds in her attempts to manifest care. Besides, she does not seem to have a close relationship with her family. Although her sister repeatedly asks Ruth to join her in the north, she refuses to do so. And when her mother calls to tell her they want to come and stay with her, Ruth refuses their visit, even though it is not clear why. However, in spite of the pessimistic outlook the novel conveys, Ruth is a character that many readers might sympathise and even identify with, and her story brings to light a different side of what it means to deal with such crises caused by climatic disruptions.

4. Conclusion

In my analysis of the novel *Hilsen Ruth*, I tried to show how imagining risk scenarios in which global warming materialises as extreme weather can become a literary strategy to bring into discussion the manifold implications of climate change for the environment, society, and personal life. As we have seen, the novel suggests that climate change emerges as a threat to elements of national identity and indicates that perceptions of climate risks are often a matter of privilege. As such, *Hilsen Ruth* is an example of how climate change narratives can offer valuable insight into how specific cultures relate to environmental issues. Through its focus on the affective dimension, the novel brings to light how perceptions of environmental threats are often influenced by individuals' emotions.

²⁰ "Many people die from the cold in the winter, in parks or under bridges, but what about the heat. It is slower, tougher, you can't drive from the sun." (my translation)

I have also attempted to show that depictions of extreme weather work as a way of realistically representing the climate crisis. However, although the story remains anchored in a recognisable storyworld and focuses on the main character's response to the crisis, the heatwave is an uncanny phenomenon that generates an exceptional situation and thus the scenario evoked by the novel borders on the dystopian mode. Therefore, the endeavour to draw a clear line between realistic and dystopian narratives within climate fiction might be difficult. These ambiguities reinforce the need to define more precisely the different categories of texts that might loosely be referred to as climate fiction. I suggest that this endeavour could be underpinned by a discussion of the particularities of these texts within specific cultural contexts. For instance, it would be interesting to further investigate whether – besides the depiction of risk scenarios in familiar settings and the focus on affective and cognitive responses to the climate crisis – realistic novels about climate change from Norway are largely characterised by a certain social criticism, or, more precisely, a criticism of privilege in the face of environmental threats, as my analysis of *Hilsen Ruth* suggests.

All in all, I would finally conclude that thematising anthropogenic global warming as extreme weather might be one of the most effective literary strategies to convey the impact of climate change in a way in which contemporary readers could gain insight into the manifold implications of the ongoing crisis upon their everyday life. This is due to the fact that narratives that depict extreme phenomena manage to evoke the unusual nature of uncanny events generated by global warming, while at the same time illustrating responses to risks scenarios that are rather likely to occur in our real world.

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