

Course: SKOK11
Semester: Spring 2026
Supervisor: Kristijan Petkoski
Examinator: Asta Cepaite

Returning to Our True Nature

**A multimodal semiotic study on folkloric nature
representations in destination branding**

NEOMI ALGANI & MAJA ÖRN

Lund University
Department of Communication
Bachelor's Thesis in Strategic Communication



Foreword

First of all, we would like to thank our supervisor Kristijan Petkoski for your help during this writing process and all the interest you showed in our topic. Your feedback, guidance and words of encouragement kept us on track until arriving at the finish line.

We would also like to thank Monica Porzionato for meeting with us early in the process to discuss all of our scattered ideas. Thank you for all of the inspiration and for encouraging us to pursue this topic.

Lastly, we would like to thank each other for being the best imaginable project partners to one another. Having complete trust in each other is what made this paper fun to write, all the way through. With that said, we conclude by stating that both authors contributed equally to this thesis.

Lund, May 21, 2026

Abstract

The ongoing environmental crisis is not only one of material proportions, but also symbolically manifested in a severe human-nature divide. Given communication's constitutive power in shaping understandings of nature, destination branding has been criticised for reproducing anthropocentric representations through commodifying nature. While previous research has demonstrated that folkloric tales may enable more ecocentric understandings of nature, how such elements participate in representing nature within destination branding has remained underexplored. The aim of this study was therefore to broaden the understanding of how nature is represented in destination branding when leveraging on folkloric tales, exploring whether more ecocentric understandings of the human-nature relationship could be made possible. To fulfil this aim, a multimodal semiotic analysis inspired by Barthes was conducted on Visit Sweden's campaign *Spellbound by Sweden*, consisting of an audiostory and complementary visual and textual promotional articles. The findings demonstrated that folkloric elements both reproduced and challenged dominant anthropocentric representations of nature through five major myths: (1) *Nature as Consumable Resource*, (2) *Nature as Sublime Beauty*, (3) *Nature as Alive Entity*, (4) *Nature as Danger* and (5) *Nature as Mother*. Further, an alternative form of ecocentrism was identified where nature appeared superior to humankind, thereby reversing the hierarchy of the human-nature divide. The study thus contributed to nuancing existing understandings of nature representation in destination branding by illustrating how leveraging on folkloric tales can enable alternative ways of imagining the human-nature relationship.

Keywords: representations of nature, folkloric tales, human-nature relationship, ecocentrism, multimodal semiotics, commodification of nature, destination branding

Number of characters including spaces: 97 897

Sammanfattning

Den pågående klimatkrisen är inte enbart av materiella proportioner, utan manifesteras också symboliskt genom en djup uppdelning mellan människa-natur. Givet kommunikationens konstituerande makt i att forma förståelser av natur har platsvarumärkning kritiserats för att reproducera antropocentriska representationer genom att kommodifiera naturen. Samtidigt som tidigare forskning har visat att folksagor kan möjliggöra mer ekocentriska förståelser av natur, har det inom platsvarumärkning varit underutforskat hur folksagor påverkar hur naturen representeras. Syftet med denna studie var därför att bredda förståelsen för hur natur representeras inom platsvarumärkning när folksagor används genom att undersöka huruvida mer ekocentriska förståelser av relationen mellan människa och natur kunde möjliggöras. För att uppfylla detta syfte genomfördes en multimodal semiotisk analys inspirerad av Barthes på Visit Swedens kampanj *Spellbound by Sweden*, bestående av en ljudberättelse samt kompletterande visuella och textuella artiklar. Resultaten visade att användandet av folksagor både reproducerade och utmanade dominerande antropocentriska representationer av natur genom fem huvudsakliga myter: (1) *Natur som Resurs för Konsumtion*, (2) *Natur som Sublim Skönhet*, (3) *Natur som Levande Entitet*, (4) *Natur som Fara* och (5) *Natur som Moder*. Vidare identifierades en alternativ form av ekocentrism där naturen framstod som överordnad människan, vilket kastade om hierarkin mellan människa-natur. Studien bidrog således till att nyansera existerande förståelser av representation av natur inom platsvarumärkning genom att illustrera hur användandet av folksagor kan möjliggöra alternativa sätt att förstå relationen mellan människa och natur.

Nyckelord: representation av naturen, folksagor, människa-natur relation, ekocentrism, multimodal semiotik, kommodifiering av natur, platsvarumärkning

Antal tecken inklusive blanksteg: 97 897

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Problematisation.....	2
1.2 Aim and Research Question.....	3
1.3 Introduction to Case.....	4
2. Literature Review.....	5
2.1 Dominant Representations of Nature.....	5
2.1.1 Alternative Representations of Nature.....	6
2.2 Leveraging on Folkloric Tales.....	8
3. Theoretical Framework.....	10
3.1 Study of Semiotics.....	10
3.2 Denotation and Connotation.....	10
3.3 Myths.....	12
4. Method.....	14
4.1 Scientific Approach.....	14
4.2 Case: Spellbound by Sweden.....	14
4.2.1 Data Selection and Sampling.....	15
4.3 Multimodal Semiotic Analysis.....	16
4.3.1 Operationalisation of Semiotics.....	17
4.4 Methodological Reflections.....	18
5. Analysis.....	20
5.1 Nature as Consumable Resource.....	20
5.2 Nature as Sublime Beauty.....	23
5.3 Nature as Alive Entity.....	26
5.4 Nature as Danger.....	29
5.5 Nature as Mother.....	33
6. Discussion.....	37
7. Conclusion.....	41
7.1 Suggestions for Future Research.....	41
Bibliography.....	43
Appendix.....	51
Appendix A: Guiding Analytical Questions.....	51
Appendix B: Semiotic Analysis on the Audiostory KILN.....	52
Appendix C: Semiotic Analysis on Promotional Articles.....	72

1. Introduction

We would like to initiate this paper with an imaginary story:

Deep within the forest, where the wind whispers through the trees and the river shimmers with a quiet glow, all are gathered around the fire. The elders speak, and the others – young and old, kin and visitor alike – listen in stillness. Tonight you are told the story of the leaf in the tree. Who it is, what it has felt, what it has lived through. Here, all belong to the same living system, significant to all, existing in symbiosis. You would not harm that small green being, trembling in the branches above you, carrying dreams, memories, and knowledge of the forest's quiet mysteries, far deeper than your own. You would not do that to your own tribe, to your people.

While this imaginary opener wishes to tell the story of a respectful and symbiotic relationship between human and nature, the ongoing environmental crisis reveals that modern Western society tells a very different one. Undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges of our time, the climate crisis' causes are multiple and complex. Still, there is little hesitation regarding its main trigger point: humans. Over time, humans have long sought control over nature through processes of domestication and modernisation, driving nature further away both physically and mentally (Cronon, 1996; Pattberg, 2007), reducing it to a resource available for human use and exploitation (Corbett, 2002; Milstein, 2016; Porter, 2013). Through these dominant societal processes, which Western society inevitably operates within, understanding nature as a living community humans are part of, or as part of one's Self, therefore seems almost impossible (Ashmore et al., 2004, as cited in Restall & Conrad, 2015; Schultz, 2010). Instead, a severe disconnect between humans and nature is formed where nature becomes understood as a separate and passive object, morally subordinate to humankind (Corbett, 2002; Milstein, 2016). With this hierarchy in place, exploiting nature becomes easier to justify, and consequently, fostering motivation to save it becomes increasingly difficult (Perkins, 2010).

In the midst of this ongoing environmental crisis, we live in a consumer society where practically everything can be commodified (Corbett, 2002), including places and, by extension, nature experiences. While harvesting forests for wood extraction might seem more harmful than promoting an all-inclusive skiing trip, both still operate within the same underlying logic: that nature exists for human use, enjoyment and, ultimately, profit. As nature

experiences remain an important component of tourism (e.g. Nadegger et al., 2025), destination branding campaigns frequently revolve around nature. From a social constructivist perspective, however, the representations of nature constructed through destination branding are not neutral. Rather, communication consists of signs and sign-systems which naturalise cultural conventions (Barthes, 1957/2009), therefore holding substantial power in constructing understandings of what nature is and where humans are positioned in relation to it.

Considering that the current human-nature relationship is not beneficial for fostering climate action (Perkins, 2010), while simultaneously being reinforced through dominant societal and communicative structures (Lakoff, 2010; Milstein, 2009), the situation initially does not appear particularly hopeful. Yet, since communication does not merely reflect reality but actively participates in shaping it, it holds the power not only to uphold harmful representations of nature, but also to challenge and reshape them. It therefore becomes relevant to explore how destination branding might contribute to a shift towards representing nature in ways that foster a more interconnected human-nature relationship.

1.1 Problematisation

The alarming environmental crisis is not solely a material issue of emissions, extraction and exploitation, but also a symbolic crisis concerning how humans understand their relationship to nature. Dominant Western understandings have increasingly positioned nature as separate to human life, constructing it as something to manage, consume and benefit from rather than exist within (Corbett, 2002; Milstein, 2016; Olausson & Ugglå, 2019; Takach, 2013). Such understandings are not created in isolation, but continuously reproduced through cultural discourse and communication practices that normalise the divided relationship between humans and nature (Lakoff, 2010; Milstein, 2009).

From a social constructivist perspective, communication does not merely describe reality but actively participates in constituting it through signs, myths and symbolic systems (Barthes, 1967). Repeated representations of nature as pleasurable scenery, available resources or enjoyable experience therefore contribute to naturalising anthropocentric, i.e., human-centered, assumptions regarding what nature is and how humans are expected to relate to it (e.g. Corbett, 2002; Takach, 2013). This becomes especially visible within destination branding, where natural landscapes are strategically constructed as attractive experiences whose value largely becomes tied to the emotional benefits they can provide humans. Considering that commercialism has been connected to upholding the human-nature divide

(Kesebir & Kesebir, 2017) this commodification becomes problematic as such representations of nature hinder efforts for fostering a more interconnected relationship between humans and nature and consequently, our willingness to care for the climate.

At the same time, previous research suggests that cultural elements and storytelling traditions may offer alternative ways of understanding nature, beyond dominant anthropocentric frameworks. Indigenous storytelling practices have been associated with relational, spiritual and ecocentric understandings of nature (e.g. Karmakar & De, 2025; Virtanen et al., 2021), and folkloric tales have been highlighted as a narrative branding resource with potential to foster more ecologically respectful behaviour (e.g. Hiimäe, 2025; Mitra & Sameer, 2022). Through presenting nature as alive, agentic and deeply interconnected with human existence, such narratives may challenge modern Western separations between humans and nature (Nicoletta & Yüksek, 2023). However, within destination branding, folkloric tales have mainly been approached as a strategic asset for enhancing destination attractiveness, differentiation and tourism value (e.g. Yen et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2023).

While previous studies have examined representations of nature in destination branding and the strategic use of folkloric tales separately, the minimal attention being paid to how these dimensions intersect points to a gap in the literature. Consequently, a tension emerges in the existing studies, where folklore is often associated with more relational and ecocentric understandings of nature, while simultaneously mobilised within branding logics that tend to reproduce anthropocentric constructions of nature. In the context of an escalating environmental crisis, these dynamics become significant to investigate. Since communication actively participates in shaping cultural understandings of nature, destination branding should not merely be understood as reflecting existing human-nature relationships, but also as contributing to their reproduction as well as their potential transformation. Aiming to address this gap, this study seeks to explore whether destination branding through leveraging on folkloric tales can enable more ecocentric understandings of nature and a more symbiotic human-nature relationship, built on care and consideration.

1.2 Aim and Research Question

The aim of this study is to broaden the understanding of how nature is represented within destination branding when leveraging on folkloric tales, and what understandings of the human-nature relationship these representations make possible. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to existing research by extending and nuancing predominantly anthropocentric

understandings of nature in strategic communication through considering how more ecocentric representations may emerge.

In order to fulfill our aim we will attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How are myths of nature constructed through folkloric tales in destination branding?

RQ2: How is the human-nature relationship constructed through these myths?

1.3 Introduction to Case

This phenomenon will be explored by analysing the campaign *Spellbound by Sweden*, developed by Visit Sweden, the official organisation responsible for promoting Sweden as a travel destination. The campaign takes form as an audio-based story in which Swedish nature is narrated through folkloric elements (Visit Sweden, n.d.), complemented by promotional visual and textual material of Swedish national parks. As a destination branding campaign drawing on folkloric tales centered on Swedish nature, the campaign provides a relevant case for analysing how folkloric elements influence how nature is constructed within destination branding.

2. Literature Review

To establish a foundation for this study we begin by examining existing research on representations of nature. This body of research is situated within destination branding more broadly, drawing on for example tourism studies, environmental communication, advertising studies, and place management research. Initially, this section establishes the dominant representations and explores their implications for the human-nature relationship. Following, it examines what alternative representations may look like and, lastly, investigates the potential of leveraging on folkloric tales for creating these types of alternative representations.

2.1 Dominant Representations of Nature

Nature has been studied in several different ways across multiple fields. While we are currently seeing an augmented research trend on representations of nature and the relationship between humans and nature (Olausson & Uggla, 2019), advertising and management studies mainly focus on sustainability issues (e.g. Hansen & Machin, 2013; Kilbourne, 1995; VanDyke & Tedesco, 2016) and are often characterised by corporate and rational perspectives (e.g. DiRusso & Myrick, 2021). While this tendency spans over various fields, several scholars have instead prioritised cultural perspectives in their analyses of nature representations (see Milstein 2016; Nadegger et al., 2025; Olausson & Uggla, 2019), an approach which Meppem and Bourke (1999) argue is missing in sustainability-oriented advertising research.

In cases where advertising studies do not focus on sustainability, nature is instead often narrated as an untouched source of beauty for humans to enjoy themselves in (Hansen, 2002). Nature is thus used as a backdrop to induce particular feelings or states of mind when marketing products, effectively commodifying natural landscapes into resources meant to be regarded as privatised and owned (Corbett, 2002; Porter, 2013; Takach, 2013). This commodification is often discussed in relation to the nature-culture divide, broadly theorised by Latour (1993) as positioning nature as inherently different from culture. Hereafter referred to as the human-nature divide, this separation positions nature as external to human life. Consequently, several scholars criticise how current representations of nature repeatedly reinforces this strict division (e.g. Milstein, 2016; Mörner & Olausson, 2017; Uggla &

Olausson, 2013). Such representations are frequently connected to anthropocentrism, a human-centered worldview in which the value of nature and other living beings is determined by their servitude to humans (Goralnik & Nelson, 2012). Others take this critique even further by arguing that the very act of framing is anthropocentric, since it imposes human-made limits on how nature can be understood (Ytterstad, 2015). These anthropocentric tendencies may negatively affect climate engagement and action by limiting understandings of the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world (Nadegger, 2023; Nadegger et al., 2025).

Research further shows that even when anthropocentric perspectives are less visible, nature is still framed as passive and sellable. For instance, through dramatic and awe-struck images where nature is presented as sublime, the natural world consequently becomes idealised and simplified (Oravec, 1996, as cited in Corbett, 2002). Similar romanticised representations have been found both in images taken by tourists themselves (Fälton, 2024) and in place branding practices where dramatic nature or weather conditions are transformed into tourist experiences (Nilsson, 2024). Corbett (2002) thoroughly criticises these representations, arguing for them to be yet another way of commodifying nature into a marketable source for humans' enjoyment, a logic which Brunner and Dawson (2017) argue further places humans in opposition to nature.

Another aspect of upholding the human-nature division is through identity constructions. In Uggle and Olausson's (2013) analysis of the city of Stockholm's tourist information they found that nature was repeatedly constructed as *the Other* through different frames. The authors argue that such discourse normalises the divide between humans and nature by failing to provide alternative understandings of the relationship. Similar tendencies have been identified by Milstein (2016), who demonstrated how tourism positions humans as spectators and animals as entertainment, consequently defining nature's value through its performance for human enjoyment. Likewise, Mörner and Olausson (2017) found anthropocentric frames to dominate social media discourse about hunting, upholding the notion of nature as separate from, and inferior to, humankind.

2.1.1 Alternative Representations of Nature

Despite the dominance of anthropocentric representations, scholars also point toward the possibility of defying such patterns. Milstein (2009) argues that discourse can both reinforce and challenge the current human-nature relationship. Building on critical discourse analysis,

Milstein conceptualises dominating Western discourse through three dialectical oppositions, which through Mörner and Olausson's (2017) application can be understood as tensions between hegemonic anthropocentric and counter-hegemonic ecocentric discourses. Milstein (2009) argues that societal progress such as industrialisation has positioned humans as controlling and dominating nature in opposition to living in harmony with it, forming the dialectic of *mastery* vs. *harmony*. Moreover, she claims that institutions such as science have contributed to positioning humans as separate from and greater than nature, undermining the opposing understanding that humans are indeed animals and therefore part of nature, conceptualised as *othering* vs. *connection*. Finally, where political and economic systems of production justify appropriating and commodifying nature for profit, idealism instead functions as a creative force able to emphasise human interdependence with nature, forming the dialectic of *exploitation* vs. *idealism*. Although Milstein argues that the hegemonic poles naturally dominate Western discourse, she underlines that the opposing poles are always indirectly present, creating tension and potential for challenging anthropocentric understandings of nature.

Building on Milstein (2009), Mörner and Olausson (2017) argue that while it may seem unlikely to find counter-hegemonic or ecocentric frames, paying attention to and encouraging them in public discourse could result in a more constructive and beneficial discourse for the human-nature relationship. The practical manifestation of such counter-hegemonic representations has been further explored by media scholars Nicoletta and Yüsek (2023). They identify several representations that they argue hold ecocentric value: representing nature as an active force rather than a passive one; emphasising interconnections between the human world and nature; and giving space to counter-hegemonic voices, such as Indigenous perspectives. They highlight the use of storytelling, including fiction and creative narratives, to imagine new ways of relating to nature, arguing that this provides visibility to ecocentric perspectives found in Indigenous approaches. With the integration of storytelling a fluidity and entanglement between human and non-human actors arises, thus contributing to “deconstructing hegemonic anthropocentrism and overcoming the dichotomies between humans and nature” (Nicoletta & Yüsek, 2023, p. 14). Similar to Milsten (2009), Nicoletta and Yüsek (2023) conclude by arguing that the mere proven existence of these alternative tactics demonstrates the potential to destabilise anthropocentric norms and open up space for more ecocentric understandings of the human-nature relationship.

2.2 Leveraging on Folkloric Tales

Having established that leveraging on cultural elements such as storytelling might represent nature in more ecocentric ways, possibly decreasing the human-nature divide (Nicoletta & Yüksek, 2023), it is of interest exploring these elements further. A practical expression of storytelling are folkloric tales, which can be seen as an enhanced form of storytelling (Mitra & Sameer, 2022).

Within destination branding folkloric tales have primarily been explored from managerial perspectives, thereby positioning it as a strategic asset. Britvin et al. (2020), for instance, conceptualise folklore as an intangible resource that contributes to shaping the image and perceived value of a place by building its symbolic capital. Similar insights are presented by Yin et al. (2023) who highlight the use of folkloric and mysterious elements as a differentiation strategy in destination image construction, as well as Yen et al. (2025) who demonstrate how myths and legends can be leveraged in marketing of smaller destinations. Similarly, Amalia et al. (2025) argue that folkloric tales constitute a valuable asset in destination marketing, emphasising cultural narratives as central for shaping meaning and, consequently, fostering tourists' emotional connection to a place. However, the authors also briefly point to potential risks associated with commodifying heritage, including issues of inauthenticity in the narration, as well as unsustainable tourism.

Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2015, p. 163) expand this critique of commodifying cultural heritage. They problematise “hijacking culture” through reducing cultural heritages to gentrified branding assets, and instead advocate for emphasising synergy and connectivity between culture, the place brand and the locals. This critical perspective is further advanced in the conceptual paper of Ironside and Massie (2020), who argue for a shift from the traditional *tourist-gaze* (Urry, 1990) towards a *folklore centric-gaze*, as a way to not instrumentalise folklore as a commodified cultural resource. At the same time, the authors acknowledge that the incorporation of cultural elements in place promotion can contribute to maintaining visibility and preserving cultural heritage. Rather than rejecting such practices altogether, they emphasise that when handled ethically in regards to the local cultural heritage, folkloric tales hold potential to foster meaningful connections between tourists, the local culture and the natural landscapes.

Although Ironside and Massie (2020) begin to touch upon this dimension, the field of destination branding still lacks a deeper understanding of how folkloric tales, when mobilised through communication, influences how nature is perceived, valued, and related to. This has

been more explored in research fields of psychology and language, often closely connected to Indigenous knowledge systems. For instance, Karmakar and De (2025) show how the Indigenous community Santali's folkloric tales position nature as a powerful entity, often greater and wiser than humans, thereby challenging the reduction of nature to a passive resource for human use. Similarly, Virtanen et al. (2021) demonstrate how oral storytelling in the Amazon rainforest portray the natural world as deeply intertwined with the human world, often understood in terms of symbiosis and interdependence. These studies suggest that folkloric narratives are not only often situated in natural environments but also function as a central means through which knowledge about nature is produced and transmitted, actively constructing ways of understanding it that often align with more ecocentric perspectives of the human-nature relationship.

Beyond Indigenous contexts, scholars have also highlighted the broader potential of folkloric tales in affecting the human-nature relationship in a way that impacts environmental attitudes and behaviours. Mitra and Sameer (2022) argue that folkloric storytelling can promote more sustainable behaviour through three key functions: an epistemic function where ecological knowledge is transmitted orally through generations, a motivational function of engaging emotions and reduce resistance to behavioural change, and an ethicising function where moral principles are internalised through engaging and emotional stories on how to act in relation to nature. Similarly, Hieemäe (2025) argues that folkloric tales centered around nature, especially when connected to spiritual or sacred energies, emphasise the connectedness between nature and humans, and that incorporating folkloric elements into environmental communication therefore can foster a stronger sense of responsibility and respect towards nature.

To summarise, while the first part of this literature review established that current representations of nature are dominated by commodification and anthropocentrism, the second part demonstrated that folkloric tales may hold the potential to challenge such understandings, enabling a more symbiotic human-nature relationship. However, within destination branding research folkloric elements have predominantly been approached from a managerial perspective. In other words, current destination branding research lacks an understanding of how leveraging on folkloric tales participates in constructing representations of nature and the human-nature relationship. Seeing as destination branding frequently promotes experiences in natural landscapes, the field holds considerable power in shaping human understandings of nature, making this gap particularly significant in the context of the ongoing environmental crisis.

3. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter presents the theoretical framework guiding the study. We draw on the field of semiology as it allows for investigations of how meanings surrounding nature are constructed through images and words. This section introduces Roland Barthes' understanding of semiotics, thereafter outlining his central semiotic concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth.

3.1 Study of Semiotics

This paper draws on the social constructivist perspective where communication is regarded as a sensemaking practice with meaning being derived through signs (Fiske, 2011). The primary tradition which regards communication as meditation through signs and symbols is the study of semiotics, where languages and social norms are regarded as constructed systems detached from the individual, thus solely connected through common understandings of symbolic meanings (Craig & Muller, 2007). The meaning of a sign is therefore never constant but always shaped by our lived experiences, our ways of seeing and the context in which the sign resides (Berger, 2016).

In this study we will mainly take off from the work of semiotician Roland Barthes, who interpreted and expanded Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas into a first-and second order semiotic system of *signification*. Saussure first theorised a sign as a physical object carrying meaning through its *signifier* – the mediator used to assume the sign – and *signified* – the concept or object represented by the sign (Barthes, 1957/2009). Saussure argued that the signifier and signified have an arbitrary relationship which is not static or instinctive, but rather constantly reconstructed by social and cultural conventions (Barthes, 1967). This process is described by Barthes as a first-order semiotic system where the two are bound together through works of cultural associations.

3.2 Denotation and Connotation

Barthes (1967) first-order semiological system is constituted of *denotation* and *connotation*, composing the basis of de-constructing cultural conventions which have turned into notions of reality through communication, and thus of importance for the purpose of this study.

The primary understanding of the sign, prior to designating it any interpretative meaning, is referred to by Barthes as denotation. While denotation concludes the commonly accepted meaning of a sign, it does not inherently mean that the signification is absolute, as Barthes underlines the ambiguous nature of signs as potential carriers of shifting meaning (Berger, 2016). To illuminate the value of semiotics for this study, we illustrate the signification process through an imaginary example of interpreting signs: beginning with denotations, the signs are understood to portray a human figure with darkly coloured eyes and plump lips, straight, dark hair going below their waist, wearing a pointy, black hat on their head with a long wooden stick with bristles held in their right hand. These descriptions are derived with the fewest premonitions possible and thus present an image clean from any culturally anchored understandings which impact how the signs' meaning is interpreted. Denotations are thus a vital first step for stripping oneself from previous conceptions of the world in order for the signs' cultural meanings to be exposed.

The second level of signification introduces the culturally anchored interpretations of the sign through connotation (Barthes, 1967). It is based on the denotative system's signified and signifier but expanded with the symbolic meaning derived from the lifeworld of the interpreter (Berger, 2016). Barthes (1967, p. 91) states that the signifiers of connotation are made up from denoted signs often grouped together, while the connotation's signified can be described as a "fragment of ideology" which is intrinsically connected to culture and history. Seeing as the connotation is subjective, it is very much dependent on common cultural agreements and highly arbitrary. At the connotative stage broader interpretations of what the signs signify emerge as a result of our cultural pre-understandings. Returning to the previously denoted imaginary example, the interpreter's lifeworld might connect the denotations of the pointy hat, broomstick and dark colours into a portrayal of a witch, a mythological creature who often takes the shape of a woman with evil, magical powers. These connotations are grounded in culturally inherited understandings and might thus be interpreted differently by someone outside of these specific cultural agreements.

The process of signification can be further exemplified through the photographic process, which was of high interest to Barthes. The mechanical reproduction of the object placed in front of the camera is equal to that of denotation, representing as such only that specific object without any cultural meaning assigned to it. Connotation is thereby manifested through the human part of the process, materialised through the photographer's choices of angles, lighting and effects, subjectively framing the object into a carrier of certain meanings (Fiske, 2011).

Together, this signification forms a sign which develops into the signifier of the second-order semiological system – the origin of *myths* (Barthes, 1957/2009).

3.3 Myths

As the aim for this study is investigating the representation of nature when folkloric elements are incorporated, it is of interest exploring the semiological concept of myths and how they influence our meaning-making processes. In his book *Mythologies*, Barthes (1957/2009) investigated how subjects in everyday life express symbolic meaning, hold ideological structures and are carriers of myths. He understood myths as a series of collective beliefs used by a society to conceptualise and gain an understanding of their reality, stating that materials such as language, photography and objects (i.e. “mythical speech”) are reduced to a “pure signifying function” when they are attached with a myth (Barthes, 1957/2009, p. 137). While myths are rooted within stories holding its original meaning, such as folktales or legends, Barthes distinguishes between the two as the myth becomes an entity of its own when established within the social discourse. Seeing that everything can be communicated, everything can consequently become a myth.

According to Barthes (1957/2009), all of society’s normative values and social systems are based on culturally established myths. When first encountering a myth its meaning is rarely apparent; myths are instead masked as naturalised truths which gain legitimacy through discourse and constantly evolve alongside society. The myth thus depicts itself as depoliticised speech used for “giving an historical intention a natural justification” (Barthes, 1957/2009, p. 168), granting myths the power of distorting reality through converting historical events into natural occurrences, consequently eliminating the awareness that they were once manmade. The core objective of semiotic analysis is therefore to expose these myths’ underlying cultural meanings, thus unraveling the ideological structures behind them (Fiske, 2011). Circling back to the example of the witch, the already established signifier through denotation and connotation allows for the previously disguised myths to present themselves. For instance, one broad myth could take the form of women being devious and manipulative, symbolised by the associations of witches as seductive, evil and possessive; another interpretation could instead naturalise the myth of women as powerful, otherworldly and independent. Depending on the residing context, the interpreter’s lifeworld and the cultural agreements, various myths present themselves, hinting towards different conventions all being culturally naturalised.

In sum, this study aims to unravel the relationship between signs, cultural conventions and naturalised myths through critical examinations of signs and symbols. Basing our thesis on semiotics, we continue the argument of nature not simply existing within strategic communication, but being loaded with meaning through multiple narrative resources. Therefore, it is of interest to explore how elements such as folkloric tales might impact our understanding of nature through introducing other cultural frames.

4. Method

This section outlines this study's chosen methodological framework, scientific approach and accounts for the chosen case. Following, we describe the analytical process in its entirety as well as reflect on the study's limitations and methodological choices.

4.1 Scientific Approach

As the aim of this study was exploring how nature is represented through folkloric tales, as well as the myths constructed on the human-nature relationship, the paper's methodology was constructed with a deeply qualitative core (Bryman, 2018). Seeing as we were interested in exploring myths around nature, a multimodal semiotic analysis was deemed well-suited as it allowed us to decode the cultural meanings within both visual and textual signs (Fiske, 2011).

Within semiology, the ontological stance is that signs are not simply representations of the world, but fundamental components of being that contribute to how the world is shaped (Fiske, 2011). Meaning is created both in the interactions between the signs themselves and the observer. As the epistemological approach within semiology is social constructivism (Craig & Muller, 2007), knowledge is regarded as mediated through the processes of interacting with signs, thus indicating that we do not have straight access to reality. Instead, the aim is to acquire these meaning-making processes through a social constructionist analysis, accepting that our knowledge about reality is inherently subjective (Marvasti, 2014). We adopted these ontological and epistemological perspectives and let them guide this study's methodological framework. Moreover, while many semioticians such as Saussure and Barthes take a structuralist approach (Craig & Muller, 2007), this study remained within the social constructivist realm as we had a greater focus on dynamic processes than objective structures (Flecha et al., 2001), allowing us to explore the communicative potential of folkloric tales in challenging anthropocentric understandings of nature.

4.2 Case: *Spellbound by Sweden*

The Nordic countries have been described as early pioneers within destination branding development (Cassinger et al., 2021). Among these countries, Sweden with its strong national brand has been found to be mostly associated with its natural landscapes and democratic values (Svenska Institutet, 2025). Visit Sweden, the nationally assigned company for

promoting Sweden as a travel destination, is driven by the promise of “[...] shaping the new era of purposeful travel”, described as creating lasting and meaningful experiences for the individual, the society and the planet (Visit Sweden, 2026). They base their values on corporate ecological and social responsibility, highlighting both positive and negative impact traveling can have on local cultures and nature. Since Visit Sweden holds significant influence over how the country’s nature is represented, its ambition to promote more responsible tourism made it an interesting case for examining whether such ambitions translated into less anthropocentric ways of constructing nature.

In September 2022, Visit Sweden launched their campaign *Spellbound by Sweden* with an audiostory based on Swedish folkloric tales, said to be narrated by Sweden itself. Written by the horror author John Ajvide Lindqvist and promoted as “[...] a chilling nature experience for all the senses” (Visit Sweden, n.d), the audio story was geo-restricted to certain Swedish national parks, encouraging potential tourists to travel to the Swedish forests in order to access the story. The campaign gained vast international attention, resulting in multiple marketing awards and an increase of visitors to Sweden (Forbes, 2022; Resumé, 2023). This provided a fascinating case where tourists were asked to adopt a participatory role in relation to nature, which together with the integration of folkloric tales showed how both nature and cultural elements can be bound together in strategic communication.

4.2.1 Data Selection and Sampling

Semiotic research does not primarily seek convertibility with expansive sampling, but rather encourages conducting detailed analyses on a concentrated amount of empiric data (Rose, 2023). In line with this reasoning, this study applied intensity sampling for choosing fewer information-rich materials (Patton, 1990), consisting of materials where representations of nature and folkloric elements were clearly manifested.

The first material selected for this study was the audio story *KILN*, constituting the core of the *Spellbound by Sweden* campaign. Seeing as folkloric tales are often orally transmitted, the audiostory provided an authentic form of folkloric storytelling within the promotional material. The audio story, released in 2022 the 11th of September, was publicly available as a podcast episode on Spotify in English, French and Dutch. The English version – 28 minutes and 4 seconds long – was selected and thereafter transcribed to enable a more detailed and iterative examination of the material, instead of just listening to it. As the audio file could not be directly downloaded from Spotify, it was played out loud from a laptop and then recorded

through a mobile phone. The recording was then transcribed using the AI-based service TurboScribe for effectiveness. To ensure accuracy the transcription was reviewed and manually completed by us while listening to the original audio, adding previously uncaptured music into the transcription document.

The audio story was complemented with digital textual and visual material from the official website for *Spellbound by Sweden*, taking form as a promotional article on national parks. With a total of nine promoted places accompanied by an introduction, all with an accompanying image and textual recommendations for activities and lodgings, it provided a broad and rich empirical material with potential to grant a better understanding of Visit Sweden's representations of nature. The articles were analysed directly through the website, allowing easier navigation.

While Visit Sweden also made a blog post with information about various mythological creatures in Swedish folkloric tales, it was purely informative and therefore did not offer any particularly interesting material to investigate the research question. Moreover, other affiliate organisations such as Visit Småland adopted the campaign and promoted other folkloric stories to listen to in their local national parks. While conducting a broader examination of Swedish destination branding could have provided a more nuanced understanding, we limited ourselves to the main campaign with this study's narrow timeframe in mind.

4.3 Multimodal Semiotic Analysis

This study was conducted with a multimodal semiotic analysis to explore how various myths about nature are created or reinforced through communication. The semiotic analysis aims to deconstruct various signs and signsystems in order to investigate how meaning is constructed (Rose, 2023), therefore suitable for conducting visual content analysis. As Barthes (1967) illustrates, communication is rarely confined to one single component but often dependent on various semiotic resources in order to create meaning, resulting in multimodality being regarded as rather intertwined with semiotics (Rose, 2023). Adopting a multimodal semiotic analysis allowed us to conduct a nuanced exploration of the representations of nature in the campaign through the various cultural and symbolic functions of both images and texts. While a multimodal critical discourse analysis could have provided a more critical lens into the ideological structures upholding anthropocentric narratives in communication, this study instead aimed to more exploratively examine how folkloric tales in destination branding might foster more ecocentric understandings, making a semiotic approach more suitable.

Aiming for a rich understanding of the myths, an inductive approach with open coding was employed, allowing codes to emerge straight from the material through a dynamic, iterative process (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). This agility was enhanced through coding the material separately before joining our individual findings (see Appendices B & C) and beginning the sorting and grouping process. When regarding the material, we were guided by analytical questions based on our research questions and aim (see Appendix A), allowing for a more nuanced and structured understanding of the empirics (Esiasson et al., 2017). In addition, folkloric tales were identified through looking for supernatural, magical and mythological elements, both in regards to characters, places and objects.

4.3.1 Operationalisation of Semiotics

Culloty et al. (2019) exemplify how Barthes' semiotics can be integrated into empirical studies to identify visual subjects and ideological meaning. They relate the denotation's descriptive level to a content analysis which "supports a comparative and longitudinal understanding" of the visual subjects, highlighting the importance of choosing whether to regard images in isolation or associated to other communicative elements (Culloty et al., 2019, p. 184). In this first analytical stage, we attempted to strip our minds of premonitions in order to denote the materials as clearly and neutrally as possible. When analysing the images, we regarded the various signs in their most obvious meanings, putting aside, for example, how stylistic choices impacted our interpretations. The textual material was approached similarly; we examined the literal meaning of words as described in the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d), regarding them first in isolation and second in the context of the paragraph.

With the denotation in place, connotation allowed us to further interpret the materials' cultural meanings, which according to Culloty et al. (2019) corresponds to frame analysis. Here, we drew on our own cultural understandings when analysing the material to examine how the communicative choices of textual phrasings and visual effects impacted our interpretations. We continuously switched between detailed and broader overviews of the materials for a better understanding of how the various elements related to each other in the given context. This also opened up for various interpretations, providing opportunities for unexpected findings to appear (Culloty et al., 2019). Moreover, rather than conducting a full visual analysis, selected aspects such as composition, salience and perspective were considered when relevant for understanding how representations of nature were constructed, thus drawing on insights from multimodal theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

Lastly, the myths corresponded to an interpretative analysis aiming to uncover which perspectives were being favoured and reinforced in the material (Culloty et al., 2019). By distinguishing between descriptive content and interpretative frames, we ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the material before moving toward investigating the communicated myths. However, as highlighted by Culloty et al. (2019), the interpretation of a myth is largely dependent on the lifeworld of the coder, and the research lens it is regarded through. Seeing as we aspired to find more ecocentric representations of nature, this might have impacted our meaning-making processes in exposing the material's underlying myths. Therefore, we attempted to critically examine the cultural values represented in the material in order to find various possible myths, even highlighting contradicting and missing ones.

With the denotations, connotations and myths in place, we had a deep familiarity with the empirical material which allowed us an overview of the collected analyses (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). While we initially analysed the promotional articles through individual bullet-points lists which were combined into a written document, the analysis of the audiostory was instead formatted into a table, proving more effective for overviewing the findings (see Appendices C & B). Following, we began the sorting process through marking the most prominent myths and disregarding ones irrelevant to the research question. Ending up with 22 myths, we wrote them on pieces of paper and shuffled them around in order to find emerging themes. After many rounds, three themes were formed with sub-groups of various myths. However, as we found this disposition constraining during the writing process, we decided to dissolve the three themes into five major myths.

4.4 Methodological Reflections

Seeing as this was a qualitative study based on semiotics, our own subjectivity inevitably influenced the interpreting of the signs (Bryman, 2018; Rose, 2023). While objectivity was not the aim, analytical credibility was instead pursued through a high degree of analytical reflexivity throughout the research process, acknowledging the interpretative nature of semiotic analysis (Heide & Simonsson, 2014).

This study aimed for dependability through a detailed and transparent account of methodological choices and the analytical process (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). Transferability was aspired through comprehensive descriptions of the empirical material and analytical steps (see Section 5 & Appendices B & C), followed by a discussion of the study's contextual boundaries (Given, 2008). This allowed for future studies to test our results by

applying them in other contexts and investigate their accuracy (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). As Visit Sweden openly states sustainable tourism as a core value, campaigns from other countries could possibly have provided a more nuanced image. Simultaneously, as there is not an abundance of destination branding campaigns using folkloric tales, Sweden would still provide interesting findings with possibly positive results for more nuanced representations of nature within strategic communication. Moreover, seeing as Visit Sweden is a publicly open domain and the people portrayed in the images were not the focus of the study, no consent was needed, thus reducing potential ethical concerns (Silverman, 2017).

Finally, Banks (2007) argues for visual methodologies' value lying precisely in their broad possibilities of multiple analyses. This shifts the method's potential limitations into a strength, providing a dynamic process where research is constantly pushed to broaden its boundaries. However, it is important to have comprehensive insights of culturally specific differences in order to make credible interpretations (Rose, 2023) and to regard the various possible interpretations in the semiotic analysis (Bignell, 2002). This was aimed for through placing the material in different contexts and repeatedly discussing our interpretations, strengthening the study's confirmability. Seeing as this study was conducted by two researchers, it was regarded as an opportunity to increase trustworthiness with intercoder reliability (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2019), coding the material separately before comparing the findings. However, as we were both familiar with previous research and are from Sweden, our similar pre-understanding possibly affected the variation of our findings. Moreover, although we critically examined all ideas until we landed on our findings, we are aware that they are not universal truths and might be interpreted differently by other researchers. This arbitrary notion, however, is the core of semiotics and we therefore encourage future research to expand on our findings and interpretations of the signs.

5. Analysis

In this section, we present our semiotic analysis. In the analysed material, we identified five major myths on nature and the human-nature relationship: (1) Nature as Consumable Resource, (2) Nature as Sublime Beauty, (3) Nature as Alive Entity, (4) Nature as Danger and (5) Nature as Mother. The myths are organised thematically according to this structure in the following subsections. All presented citations are retrieved from the empirical material and can be found in Appendices B and C, along with the full semiotic analyses. For analytical clarity, we refer to the human figure affected by the audiostory as “the protagonist”, despite possible alternative interpretations of the protagonist being nature or Sweden itself.

5.1 Nature as Consumable Resource

Across the material, nature is repeatedly constructed as available for human usage, enjoyment and exploration. Through representations of ownership, accessibility and organised experiences, nature becomes commodified and positioned as a resource rather than an independent subject with agency. This first becomes visible through signs of human exploitation of forests, animals and landscapes. Descriptions in the audiostory of men waiting in the forest until “wood mass had been distilled into charcoal” connotes humans using wood to mobilise small-scale industrialisations, and passing vehicles “loaded with timber” as destruction of forests into harvested wood – all representations of nature as a resource for economic profit. Another example is found in the reference to hunters laying out “death traps for wolves and elk”, where the elk, culturally understood in Sweden as the ‘King of the Forest’, becomes symbolically subordinated to human power through being hunted and killed. This exemplifies humans transforming even nature’s most revered animals into resources of food or clothing, constructing the myth of nature as gaining value through being materially useful and available for human capitalisation.

This understanding is further reinforced through signs of accessibility and structure. Although the campaign promotes protected national parks, the parks all visually or textually display human-made constructions such as trails, viewpoints and bridges, allowing visitors comfortable entrances into nature (see Image 1). Some images additionally depict visitors not wearing conventional outdoor attire, implying that nature can easily and safely be entered without much preparation. Consequently, these signs naturalise the idea of human interaction

with nature as easy, comfortable and accessible. Additionally, nature becomes not only physically accessible but also symbolically organised for the human visitor. Nature is represented as something already prepared for human consumption, where movement and behaviour have largely been pre-decided: hiking trails direct where visitors should walk, viewpoints determine how landscapes should be admired, hotels structure where visitors should sleep and guides mediate how nature should be understood. Rather than something humans simply exist within, nature becomes packaged into an organised tourism experience whose value and meaning is already predetermined. The many activities highlighted in the promotional articles further position nature as a setting for touristic adventures, a notion which is reinforced in the visual material. Even when appearing physically small in the images, humans are frequently centered in the compositions, participating in hikes or guided tours. Several images additionally portray visitors in groups interacting with each other rather than with the landscape itself. Through these representations, the material constructs the myth of nature existing to be experienced, explored and consumed by humans, functioning primarily as a spatial arena for social life and adventure.



Image 1: Getåravinen. Detailed analysis is provided in Appendix C.

This logic is further reinforced through the notion of “back to nature” repeatedly expressed both explicitly and implicitly across the material. While the phrase commonly signifies returning to a simpler and more rustic way of life distant from industrialised society, it receives a more romanticised connotation in the context of the campaign. Nature experiences are repeatedly connected to hotels and lodges with magnificent views, glamorous camping sites and restaurants, while you as the visitor are prompted to “treat yourself” to these experiences. Nature consequently becomes associated with luxury, reward and indulgence. Rather than suggesting a permanent reconnection with nature, going “back to nature” instead becomes tied to temporary, luxurious and organised tourism experiences. As a result, nature is represented as a commodity available to briefly visit before returning to urban modernity.

However, this tourism logic simultaneously depends on presenting nature as something more than merely organised human entertainment or luxury. In order to remain attractive, nature must also appear authentic. The campaign therefore relies on a semiotic paradox in which nature simultaneously appears untouched and accessible, wild and carefully mediated. Even “raw wilderness”, connoted as an untamed, untouched and unpredictable landscape, is socially constructed and taken advantage of in the promotional articles. Through repeated references to “untouched wilderness” and “roadless” forests, the material constructs nature’s authenticity through separations from civilisation, while simultaneously encouraging visitors to comfortably experience this untouched nature themselves. This contradiction becomes particularly visible in the audiostory, where the protagonist rushes into “the untouched primeval forest”, connotatively chasing an authentic and raw nature experience. However, once confronted with pure nature, the romanticised ideal collapses. The protagonist instead longs to “return to civilization” and “check off the fine nature experience”, explicitly separating the discomfort of wilderness from the safety and comfort of modern society. The constructed ideal form of wilderness is therefore not nature in its truly uncontrolled state, but rather wilderness as carefully mediated according to the expected tourist experience.

Another element leveraged on for symbolically managing nature are the folkloric tales. Through folkloric references the forest becomes enchanted, transforming nature into a mysterious wonder filled with otherworldly light and dark forces. These elements create excitement and suspense, turning nature into entertainment available for tourists. Folkloric tales are framed as bringing unique and unexpected dimensions to nature adventures, highlighted in the campaign as quests for gold hidden by trolls or fleeting encounters with fairy folk. Through transforming folkloric tales into tangible activities made for tourists, nature thereby becomes represented as a story waiting for human visitors to immerse

themselves in. Another exemplification is apparent in the description of meeting “real-life mythical characters at Tomteland park (Fairytale land)”, which initially suggests authentic encounters with folkloric beings while associations with a theme park instead connotes staged performances and commercial entertainment. Humans consequently become the assigned interpreters of folkloric characters, deciding their forms, perceptions and meanings. As a result folkloric tales, in similarity to nature, are transformed into a sellable spectacle for tourists’ enjoyment.

Taken together, the material constructs nature as something external to ordinary human life: a place to temporarily visit, consume and experience rather than exist within permanently. Through representations of extraction, accessibility, structure and enchantment, nature becomes transformed into consumable experiences adapted to different tourist desires.

5.2 Nature as Sublime Beauty

Following Barthes’ (1967) understanding of semiotics, nature cannot be simply represented as purely nature, but is always ascribed certain understandings through textual and visual elements. Among these meanings is beautifying nature, constructing it not merely as a rough object available for extraction but an elevated and dramatic scene to gaze at. This representation is embodied in the myth of *Nature as Sublime Beauty*.

Visually, sublimity is accomplished in the campaign through prioritising nature’s vastness in the images’ compositions, allowing the landscape to absorb the major part of the frame and further dramatising its features through stylistic choices such as camera angles and colour editing. Exemplified in Image 2, the layered mountain ranges, vast landscapes and small human figure ascribe nature attributes of being grand, powerful and visually overwhelming, placing humans as subordinate to the landscape surrounding them. Together with the material’s repeated descriptions of “uninterrupted wilderness” in which one can “walk for days”, human presence is reduced to insignificant figures and nature constructed as a much larger spatial entity. These cultural understandings suggest an attractiveness lying in the idea of the landscape overwhelming humans, both by scale and by beauty, and that humans have not yet fully touched or altered all of nature seemingly enhancing its value. Other textual descriptions of lakes as “crystal-clear” or waterfalls as “romantic” do not merely describe visibility, but aestheticise the landscape through culturally loaded associations of serenity, calmness and untouched perfection. In Barthes’ (1957/2009) terms, this representation transforms subjective interpretations of nature into a seemingly self-evident quality of nature

itself. The campaign accomplishes this through continuously imposing what could be regarded as the organic appearance of nature with signs of being “dramatic” and “epic”, consequently naturalising the idea of landscapes functioning as beautiful, awestruck, spectacles.



Image 2: Vålådalen. Detailed analysis is provided in Appendix C.

Furthermore, the myth *Nature as Sublime Beauty* is reinforced through folkloric enchantments which imbue the landscape with emotional and mysterious qualities. Old mythological stories and legends are repeatedly described as lingering in the forests and mountains, with trolls, giants and fairy folk positioned as fitting for living in these dramatic environments. This constructs nature as enchanted and mysterious – a source for fascination and awe. References to Swedish artist John Bauer additionally frame folklore as functioning for artistic inspiration and emotional meaning-making within the sublime landscape, and with Bauer’s work being closely associated with folkloric imagery, this further suggests that nature inspires and fascinates through its enchanted qualities.

Constructing nature as mysterious, awe-struck and intriguing is further highlighted in the representation of the folkloric creature Hulder. Described as “the most beautiful thing you have ever seen” with “a shimmering skin, her eyes borrowed from a deer, and her smile glowing like a flame in the night”, the Hulder’s embodiment of nature represents her as

irresistibly beautiful, emotionally overwhelming and otherworldly. Further portrayed through the statement “In her long existence, one hundred years is only a parenthesis”, the Hulder is connotatively positioned by nature’s side as existing outside ordinary human temporality. Through Barthes’ second-order signification (1957/2009), the Hulder thus functions as a symbolic embodiment of nature as patient, ancient and even eternal through her beauty and temporality, reinforcing nature’s fascinating qualities and, consequently, its sublimity.

However, beyond merely constructing nature as sublime, the campaign also establishes how humans are expected to experience and engage with nature’s beauty. In several of the images, people are depicted gazing at the landscape before them, often standing still or appearing calm and reflective. While watching one’s surroundings may denotatively suggest attentiveness, the connotation instead positions nature as valuable primarily through visual appreciation. The images thus model the expected way of interacting with nature, consequently hiding the myth of sublime nature as normalised truth (Barthes, 1957/2009). This becomes particularly visible in Image 3 which shows a gorge-like mountain formation in nature. At the center of the image, where the rocks are rust-orange coloured, water is visibly rushing downward, forming a waterfall; underneath, a small bridge-like structure appears where groups of people can be seen walking. The inwardly sloping terrain, together with the bridge, directs the viewer’s gaze toward the waterfall, reinforcing its role as the central attraction of the image. Although the people appear visually tiny in comparison to the surrounding landscape, they remain compositionally favoured through their placement and movement toward the viewpoint. The bridge itself structures how the sublime landscape should be experienced: rather than encouraging a longer immersion within nature, it directs visitors toward a brief moment of admiration before moving on. This results in a dramatisation and beautification of nature, emphasised for the enjoyment of the human gaze and providing a second-order signification where nature’s value to humans is understood through being an aesthetic and temporary object.

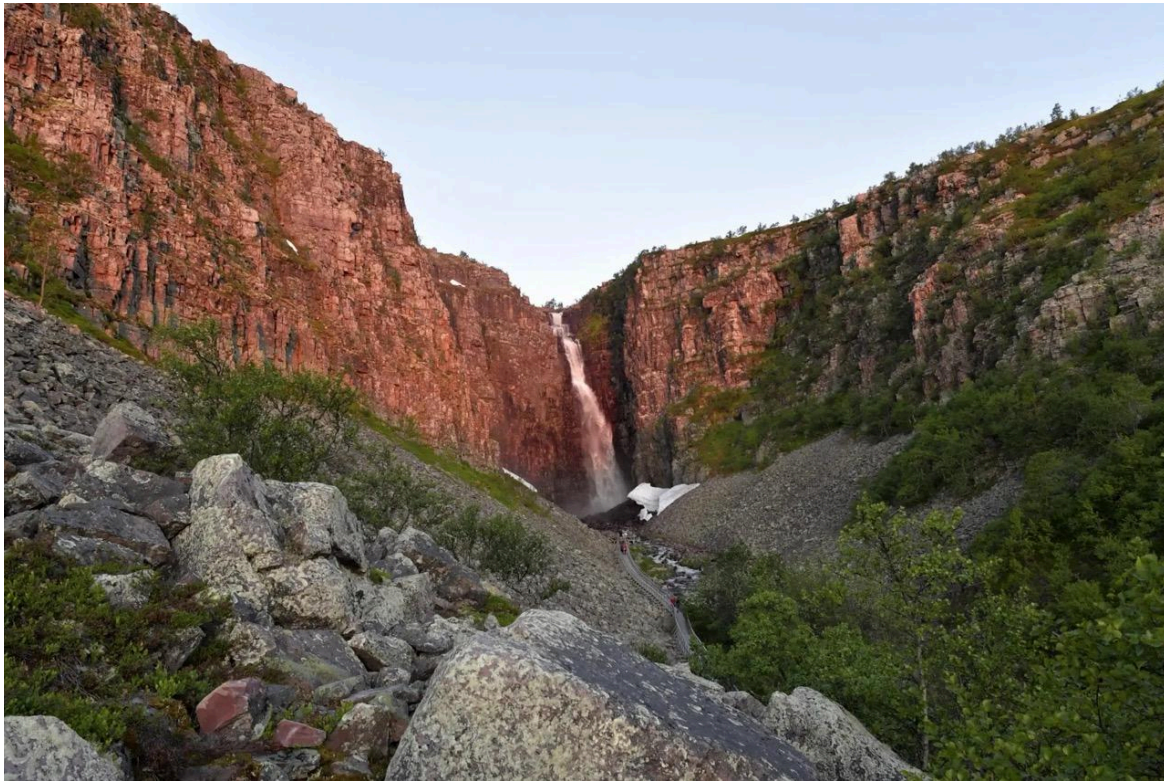


Image 3: Fulufjället. Detailed analysis is provided in Appendix C.

Overall, the material constructs nature as sublime through representations of vastness, permanence, beauty and enchantment. Nature is repeatedly framed as emotionally overwhelming, aesthetically grand and culturally meaningful, while humans are positioned as temporary spectators confronted with landscapes exceeding ordinary human scale and temporality. At the same time, this sublimity remains carefully mediated through viewpoints and visual and textual framings of nature as something to admire and visually enjoy, allowing the landscapes to become aesthetically consumable. Nature is thus represented as superior to humans in its beauty and grandness while simultaneously functioning as a mediated source for admiration, fascination and enjoyment by humans.

5.3 Nature as Alive Entity

Within the examined material, particularly prominent in the textual representations, nature is not only constructed as a passive scenery for human enjoyment, but as an active subject possessing agency and even a parallel cultural world of its own which exists beside human society. The denotative representations of forests and moss become loaded with connotations of consciousness, emotions and communicative abilities, ultimately constructing the myth of *Nature as Alive Entity*.

One of the clearest examples of nature coming alive appears in the audiostory where Sweden itself is said to be the narrator. Sweden is consistently referenced through the first-person narrative, attributing the physical landscape individuality and agency in its capability to communicate the story. This communicative ability is highlighted when nature recurrently interacts with humans, such as the moss “answering with an ethereal sigh” where a natural sound of released air is transformed into intimate communication, and nature calling out “come to me” suggesting not only speech, but also intentionality. Nature being a deliberate entity is further reinforced through denotative descriptions of a non-random vegetation pattern in the forest, looking “as if it had been planted there”. The phrasing connotes nature as having a hidden agenda or thought process behind the placement, making nature appear as acting purposely. A similar attribution can be identified in the description of trees as “mute”. While the term could simply connote an inability to communicate, “mute” in the context of nature consistently speaking strongly suggests an active choice of silence. The trees are thereby constructed as towering, observant presences imbued with silent thoughts or judgement – alive and intentional.

Beyond being granted communicative abilities and intentionality, nature is also repeatedly represented as possessing its own life and death processes. Nature is said to have scents of both mouldering leaves and spruce sap, and where a dead tree has fallen, moss actively grows over it. This constructs nature as ever-changing and regenerating, emphasising cycles of both life and death. While a fallen tree connotes death, its snake-like winding branches still carry a sense of aliveness, creating a representation of nature as self-sustaining independently of, and perhaps unexplainable to, humans. The material further positions nature as imbued with emotional and spiritual liveliness. Through referencing the forest as Sweden’s “soul”, the country and its nature are granted an immaterial consciousness, at a connotative level a spiritual identity equal to that of human or animal. Similar meanings are constructed in the promotional articles through descriptions of “romantic” waterfalls, attaching emotional qualities to natural landscapes, consequently positioning nature not as passive scenery, but as capable of feeling and sensitively interacting with humans. These emotional qualities are even more apparent in the audiostory with the folkloric figures being repeatedly assigned human-like qualities. For instance, the Hulder, described as being “a shy animal that bolts from human touch”, represents folkloric creatures as being intertwined with elements of nature in their very being. With this recognition of the Hulder as one with nature, her intimate interactions with the protagonist consequently associates nature itself with emotional agency, desire and sexuality. This is accentuated when the moss communicatively responds to their

intimate embrace, further suggesting that nature cannot only be touched, but also touch back. Through these connotations, nature is represented as possessing needs and desires similar to those culturally associated with humans and an ability to act on them, contributing to the second-order myth of *Nature as Alive Entity*.

Developing on the construction of nature as a subject capable of emotion and agency, the folkloric elements also invoke an emergence of a parallel social world. Rather than appearing as isolated inhabitants of the forest, the mythological beings are embedded within their own social contexts. Conflicts, hierarchies and relationships among mythological creatures are thus framed as existing independently of humans, illustrated by the human becoming dragged into an already existing social order ruled by dominant actors: “You have been with the Hulder. And then, Odin’s hunt is upon you.” The promotional articles further reference folkloric creatures as possessing organised social and spiritual structures. Mentioning a vantage point named “the trolls’ church” implies that folkloric creatures have religious rituals, and descriptions of “the stone troll” and “Lyktgubben” as seemingly protecting their own land implies them having defined territories. However, while these examples are reminiscent of human society, nature is still constructed as carrying meanings beyond human comprehension. For instance, after the intimate connection with the Hulder, the protagonist suddenly understands previously incomprehensible stone carvings, suggesting that only after becoming one with nature humans can gain a full understanding of nature’s inconceivable communication systems. In semiotic terms, nature itself appears to possess its own sign-system, loaded with hidden meanings that remain inaccessible through rational human interpretation alone.

This idea of nature containing its systems of meaning is further reinforced throughout the promotional articles. References to historical traces of Vikings and Sámi presence, as well as ancient geological formations, introduce a more rationalised understanding of nature as something that can be historically and scientifically explained through human knowledge systems. A similar logic appears when mentioning witch trials and placing the word ““witches”” within citation marks, marking these folkloric creatures as historically bound to the past and ultimately debunked. However, following Barthes’ (1967) emphasis on myths and signs as dependent on context, these elements do not carry fixed meanings. When combined with the audiostory’s emphasis on enchantment where mythological beings are constructed as actively existing, these rationalised understandings instead expose the limitations of human understanding. Nature cannot be entirely understood through history or

science, reinforcing the myth of nature having its own parallel sign-system, beyond human rational knowledge.

In conclusion, the material constructs nature as a living subject through representations of communicative abilities, emotional agency and intentionality. Furthermore, folkloric beings functioning as embodiments of nature with civilisation-like structures, social hierarchies and languages and sign-systems, consequently grants nature a culture of its own. Nature is therefore not represented as an empty landscape waiting to come alive through human visitors, but as a living entity with cultural systems. While existing parallel to human society, this world is represented as only partially accessible to humans until they fully immerse themselves in nature.

5.4 Nature as Danger

Across the material, nature is not only constructed as a passive and romanticised object of enjoyment, nor merely a subject with agency; rather, this agency can also take the form of active danger directed towards humans. Given that the campaign is promoted as a “chilling nature experience for all the senses” and Barthes’ (1967) understanding of signs as context-dependent, it is no wonder that nature’s agency becomes transformed into dangerous when positioned in relation to vulnerable human visitors.

The dangerous qualities of nature first emerge in the material’s repeated representations of the forest as physically threatening. The narrator cautioning the audiostory’s protagonist not to trip over roots or sink into damp moss might on a denotative level simply describe challenging terrain, while connotatively suggest humans’ lack of control in navigating the landscapes. Given that nature is ascribed agency, this instability becomes imbued with intentionality, as if nature is actively laying out obstacles for the human visitor. This could be understood as nature protecting itself, supported by the folkloric creatures being repeatedly positioned as guardians of the landscape. Humans must adapt their behaviour to an unfamiliar environment that actively responds to intrusion with hostility, implying that nature is a dangerous place for humans.

Nature’s hostility is further amplified through positioning nature as predatory to humans. For instance, tree branches described as “sharp nails of a witch” imbue vegetation with threatening intent through the cultural signification of the witch as an evil mythological figure. Similar meanings are constructed through comparisons of exposed root systems and “knotted troll arms that break free from the ground and shoot out”, suggesting unpredictability

through sudden movements associated with danger. Spiderwebs described as sticking to the human's face position the human as a vulnerable prey, further reinforced through horror-induced illustrations of the "hungry touch of ghosts", suggesting that nature possesses a predatory intent through creatures actively wanting to hunt, kill and eat humans. These signs are culturally understood as signifying nightmarish and chilling experiences, accentuated through sensory and symbolic signs of danger. In the audiostory, the Hulder's association with a stench described as resembling death introduces a grotesque and threatening nature experience. Similarly, the Northern Lights' green colour associated with the word "poison" attributes an otherwise natural phenomenon with contamination and lethality. Through such connotations, horror narratives become embedded into the landscape, naturalising the myth of nature as a place where humans risk becoming hunted, consumed or killed.

Nature being positioned as a lethal place culminates in representations of nature ultimately consuming human individuals entirely. In the audiostory, the listener is told: "It may be years before anyone finds you in the form of a skeleton, licked clean by the animals of the forest. Impossible to identify." Where this at a denotative level describes decomposition and scavenging processes, it connotatively attributes nature the capability of completely erasing the human self. Without burial rituals or any form of retained identity, the human body simply becomes part of nature's natural food chain, absorbed into nature's own cycles. The horror therefore lies not merely in death itself, but also in the complete loss of human individuality and being reduced to anonymous biological matter.

The myth of *Nature as Danger* is further intensified through the material's use of certain aesthetics. Many of the referenced creatures, such as spiders and ghosts, are culturally understood as being creatures of the night, and the audiostory's most dramatic moments occur during nighttime. Darkness carries cultural associations with uncertainty and fear, likely due to the human dependency on sight for rationally understanding and navigating the world. Nature at night is therefore represented as especially threatening in the material. Although these horror aesthetics are most explicit in the audiostory, similar meanings are found within the promotional articles. In Image 4, a mysterious and soft lighting emerges from above within an otherwise dark forest landscape, complemented with haphazardly winding branches from a dead tree. Together with textual references to the folkloric creature Lyktgubben, described as haunting the area and leading human visitors astray, the landscape becomes mystified and nature constructed as disorienting and hostile. This is further reinforced through the audiostory's occasional integration of eerie ambient music. Heavily dependent on bass, tones in the minor scale and string instruments, the music strengthens the atmosphere of

suspense and fear, undermining the human ability to rationally interpret the event and evoking strong emotional responses instead.



Image 4: Tyresta. Detailed analysis is provided in Appendix C.

With horror stories seemingly coming alive within nature itself, nature does not only become constructed as a physical threat, but also a psychological hazard for the rational human mind. Throughout the material, nature is associated with mysterious powers, energies and forces beyond rational explanation which in the audiostory are connected to human confusion, memory loss and dream-like experiences. These instances suggest that supernatural encounters occur in ways that the human mind can barely process rationally, leaving uncertainty regarding what was real and what was imagined. Statements such as “I can't help you. I am only the voice you hear inside your head”, construct Sweden and its forests as capable of invading the human mind, while simultaneously refusing responsibility for human fate, positioning nature as psychologically overpowering to humans and impossible to defend oneself against. This is further evident in the line “Your consciousness whispers helplessly, flee, flee. But your body simply continues to walk towards her [the Hulder]”, where human rationality and instinctive survival mechanisms are overridden. Nature thus becomes

constructed as capable of overpowering what is culturally understood as humanity's greatest strength: rationality itself.

The material builds on this aspect of nature being beyond human understanding by suggesting that safe navigation requires specialised knowledge, preparation or guidance. As previously discussed in *Nature as Consumable Resource*, the audiostory's warning that "You were in a hurry to delve into the untouched primeval forest", implies that entering nature without preparation leads to negative consequences, supported by visual depictions of tourists in specific outdoor wear and mentions of guided tours. These representations construct nature as unpredictable and potentially dangerous unless mediated through human systems of knowledge and control, such as expert guidance, appropriate equipment, or correct preparation. However, this seems to be primarily ascribed to certain groups of modern society. Through repeated emphasis on Sámi culture as closely intertwined with nature, a deeper understanding and respect towards nature's forces is associated with Indigenous people, further reinforcing the notion that nature cannot be fully understood by temporary visitors. While this could position human knowledge as the primary means of assigning nature meaning, this also implies that when such knowledge and tools are absent, nature's autonomy becomes reasserted through its immediate capacity to unsettle, disorient, and threaten the human visitor.

At the same time, the myth of *Nature as Danger* is slightly ambiguous. On one hand, nature is represented as hostile, frightening and lethal. On the other hand, in the audiostory's statement: "If you survive this, then you have experienced something that few Swedes and even fewer visitors have", this same danger becomes transformed into an exclusive adventure. Nature possibly being lethal offers an exclusive high stakes experience where survival is transformed into an elitist award for the bravest visitor. This logic is further reinforced through the material's construction of nature as a site of luring attraction, where hidden treasures and voices calling from the forest construct nature as actively drawing humans into dangerous situations. In line with this, the idea of nature as most beautiful when untouched further transforms danger into value, where risk and unpredictability become part of an idealised authentic experience. Through this, the material simultaneously constructs the myth of dangerous nature as something to fear and through that, something to seek out.

However, the material also in a way undermines this romanticised narrative of the ultimate adventure. After the protagonist's terrifying experiences in the forest, the narrator states that: "As soon as you return to your hotel, you intend to change your ticket, so that you can return home immediately, put this behind you, and try to forget", connoting the human's trauma and

psychological distress as a consequence of the visit to nature and the longing to reject the experience and return to the safety that the comfort that civilisation and their home provides. Nature ultimately becomes too real, too frightening and too uncontrollable to remain fully enjoyable, reinforcing the myth of nature as fundamentally threatening and beyond complete human control.

To conclude, nature is across the material represented as an active force capable of misleading, overpowering and ultimately consuming humans, positioning the human visitor as highly vulnerable and threatened. These same attributes can however be transformed into markers of exclusivity and adventure through commodifying the dangerous nature experience, while still suggesting that nature may ultimately be too frightening for humans to fully enjoy. The campaign therefore constructs nature as both consumable danger, and a force of danger that still undermines humans.

5.5 Nature as Mother

In the previous sections we have established nature as represented through a variety of myths. These were all found to culminate in one ultimate myth which ties these previous ones together: the myth of *Nature as Mother*. In this myth, nature is simultaneously represented as beautiful and overpowering, embodying a mighty agency which is both nurturing and possessive while ultimately still becoming consumable through the selling of reconnection with nature.

To begin with, nature is repeatedly attributed characteristics culturally associated with motherhood, which becomes further understood through the established cultural reference to nature as *Mother Nature*. Highlighted through all three versions of the audiostory *KILN* being narrated by speakers understood to be women, nature is consequently attached with feminine qualities easily translated into maternal attributes. This is for example visible in the description of nature wanting to “take you in its lap”, attributing the landscape with comforting intentions associated with a mother. The normative relationship between a mother and her child is one of care and unconditional devotion; no matter how far the child distances itself, the mother remains waiting for reunion. This becomes visible in the audiostory’s description of the Hulder whose long existence grants her “time to wait”, connoting nature’s endless patience and anticipation in awaiting human’s return to their natural state – to nature. Similarly, nature repeatedly “calling” humans toward it connotes nature’s desire to seek closeness with humans, echoing the image of a mother calling her children home. Another

connotation is nature as possessive, actively commanding people to return to nature, meaning that these maternal qualities are not represented as entirely gentle. The threatening aspects of nature discussed in the myth *Nature as Danger* can therefore also be understood within this myth. Nature's dangers become expressions of anger, desperation or attempts to reclaim what has separated itself from her, constructing humanity's separation from nature as a broken mother-child relationship.

Notably, this desire for reconnection is not represented as one-sided. The previously discussed phrase "back-to-nature", which in its promotional context commodified nature into a purchasable experience, simultaneously carries another meaning: a human longing to reconnect with nature. The audiostory's second-person narration speaks to every human that wants to listen, while the enchantment of the Helder is explicitly described as affecting anyone: "Doesn't matter if you are man or woman, old or young." Nature's attraction thereby becomes universal, suggesting that all humans share a desire to return to nature. It can further be argued that nature tourism itself relies on the existence of such a longing. Consequently, even nature's wild and sublime qualities become transformed into attractive and consumable experiences, ranging from "varied climate" to "pristine waters". What is ultimately being sold is therefore not nature itself, but the promise of returning to something authentic – to humanity's natural origins.

This human longing for reconnection with nature is reinforced through continuous representations of nature as healing, another quality which can be attributed to a caring mother. Through framing nature experiences as "a treat" for oneself, nature is positioned as an escape from ordinary life and a source of rejuvenation. Across the promotional articles depicted visitors are repeatedly connoted to health, emotional wellbeing and social connectedness, often appearing joyful and physically active. Other examples, such as Image 5, instead portray individuals in a meditative state, referencing a sense of relaxation where the forest is positioned as offering moments of stillness in an otherwise busy modern world.



Image 5: Cover image. Detailed analysis is provided in Appendix C.

Nature's healing attributes are further strengthened in the audiostory, especially prominent in the aftermath of the protagonist's grim night. At dawn, the enchanting representation of the forest as glittering and resounding with bird song is described as "expanding the space above your head", positioning the forest as an emotionally liberating and peaceful space. Through this, the human's return to normal state seems to be in synchronisation with the rising sun, further visible in the quote: "A new day trickles out into the cracks left by the terrors of the night", which ties emotional restoration to the rhythms of nature itself, thus reinforcing nature's nurturing maternal qualities. This notion is further accentuated through the illustration of the protagonist waking up in the moss "naked and curled up like a child", connoting vulnerability, dependence and rebirth. Stripped of clothes and material objects associated with civilisation, the human symbolically returns to an original and natural state, metaphorically resembling a return to Nature's womb. This culminates through the narration "You stop and open your arms, allowing nature to pour into you with all of its beauty, until your chest aches with a longing to become one with all of this", where nature becomes represented as a space humans were once part of but through processes of modernity no longer have a fundamental bond to. However, reconnecting is not impossible; through fully devoting oneself to nature – a process taking form in the story as mediated by folkloric

creatures – humans can at last return to a full immersion with nature and again become one. This encompasses a grander understanding of nature's being: "You no longer think that it is strange that you understand her, since you exist outside time and space." Casting aside the rationality of modern society is thus positioned as finally allowing humans to fully join with nature and exist in symbiosis – at last returning to their Mother.

However, the material simultaneously acknowledges the difficulty of such reconnections within modern society. As previously exemplified in *Nature as Consumable Resource*, the recurring integrations of the comforts of civilisation into nature experiences effectively distance humans from full immersion of nature, reinforcing the notion of civilisation as the 'real reality' for humans – not nature. Contrastingly, the material also introduces an alternative possibility through its representations of the Indigenous Sámi people. Not to be misunderstood as exemplifying a separation from modern civilisation, the Sámi people instead illustrate a more symbiotic and considerate human-nature relationship. Landscapes are framed as central to their "rich storytelling tradition", suggesting that they, through living in closer unity with nature, understand nature in a deeper way. This is further accentuated through mentioning their reindeer herds, culturally understood as central to Sámi life and as being approached with empathy and respect. While this still portrays a not entirely uncomplicated matter of owning wildlife, the material's positioning of reindeers and Sámi people as co-inhabitants of the region alludes to both being part of nature, co-existing within a more equal hierarchy. The Sámi being implicitly positioned as living in closer unity with nature and being more aligned to nature's own culture, thereby show that it is possible as humans to live interconnectedly with nature and not turn their backs on their Mother.

To conclude, the complexity of the human-nature relationship is addressed from the perspectives of both actors in the myth of *Nature as Mother*. Becoming naturalised through attributing nature with different maternal qualities, both comforting and sometimes demanding, the human-nature relationship is consequently positioned as a fractured mother-child bond, shaped by a strong longing for reconnection but not presented as uncomplicated. This longing can however be commodified, further perplexing the possibilities for true reconnection. At last, what clearly emerges is an understanding that only when nature is allowed to become an integrated part of human culture and rituals will it shift from existing as a parallel world by the side of humans and instead invite humans back to the symbiotic relationship of their origin – back to their Mother's embrace.

6. Discussion

In this section we discuss our findings from the analysis based on the perspectives of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, putting our findings in relation to previous research and thereby presenting our attribution to the field.

In accordance with the basis of semiotic theory, multiple contradicting meanings about the human-nature relationship appear in the campaign. Through simultaneously moving between anthropocentric and ecocentric understandings of nature, nature is consequently framed both as an object of commodification and an active, living force, with folkloric elements as found to enhance the latter.

To begin with, the findings show that nature's value is repeatedly constructed as lying in its servitude to humans, clearly exemplifying anthropocentric representations (Goralnik & Nelson, 2012). This mainly takes form in the campaign as nature signifying a space for human activity and experience. Across the myths *Nature as Consumable Resource*, *Nature as Sublime Beauty* and even *Nature as Danger*, nature's diverse attributes are packaged into structured and consumable experiences. In accordance with Nilsson's (2024) findings, even wild, unpredictable or dangerous nature can be transformed into authentic and thrilling tourist adventures, ultimately made profitable. Similarly, the folkloric tales are to some extent positioned as a strategic branding asset for differentiation, where the enchantment functions as a value-enhancing resource for the tourist destination Sweden, thereby risking undermining the country's authentic cultural heritage (Kavaratzi & Ashworth, 2015). Moreover, the findings demonstrate nature as subordinate to human control, positioning humans as separate from and different to nature. This successfully reinforces established dominant anthropocentric representations of nature (Brunner & Dawson, 2017; Mörner & Olausson, 2017; Takach, 2013), and demonstrates the persistence of Milstein's (2009) hegemonic discourses of mastery, othering and exploitation, through which humans are positioned as dominant over, separate from, and entitled to nature. In this sense, even communication aimed at promoting sustainable tourism risks reproducing the anthropocentric logics that previous research has argued contribute to the human-nature divide, carrying negative implications for human care for the environment.

While anthropocentric representations are present in the material, our findings also show clear manifestations of ecocentrism, understood through Milstein's (2009) counter-hegemonic

poles and Nicoletta and Yüksek's (2023) forms of ecocentric representations. To begin with, ecocentric understandings of nature were found in multiple myths through nature repeatedly being represented as an active force (Nicoletta & Yüksek, 2023), exemplified in *Nature as Mother*; where nature expresses an intentional will for her human children to return. Together with representations of a human longing to become one with nature, this reciprocated desire further resonates with Nicoletta and Yüksek's (2023) emphasis on interconnections between the human and non-human world, while also echoing Milstein's (2009) counter-hegemonic pole of connection. Similarly, the inclusion of Indigenous Sámi perspectives, and their positioning in closer unity with nature, can be understood as an ecocentric representation through giving counter-hegemonic voices more space (Nicoletta & Yüksek, 2023) and illustrating possibilities of harmony in the human-nature relationship (Milstein, 2009).

A valuable perspective of the ecocentric findings might be alluded to the campaign being based on an audiostory, building on Nicoletta and Yüksek's (2023) argument that storytelling can facilitate new ways of understanding nature. Folkloric tales, as an enhanced form of storytelling (Mitra & Sameer, 2022), thus become a key mechanism for imagining alternative human-nature relations. Moreover, folkloric elements in the context of storytelling rather than promotion, seem more capable of fostering the meaningful connections between tourists and nature that Ironside and Massie (2020) advocate. In particular, the entanglement of human and non-human beings found in the myth *Nature as Mother* illustrates an acceptance of nature's transcendence which reflects findings of communities practising storytelling around nature tending to hold broader understandings of nature as a spiritual being (Karmakar & De, 2025; Virtanen et al., 2021). Returning to Milstein (2009), these findings suggest that her counter-hegemonic pole of idealism is activated through the folkloric elements in the campaign. These ecocentric tendencies therefore nuance previous research which largely criticise destination branding communication for reproducing anthropocentric understandings of nature (e.g. Mörner & Olausson, 2017; Ugglå & Olausson, 2013) suggesting that alternative ways of conceptualising the human-nature relationship is possible. While acknowledging the persistence of anthropocentric representations and the complexity of overcoming these, we align ourselves with Nicoletta and Yüksek's (2023) visionary statement that the mere existence of alternative representations demonstrates that dominant discourses can be challenged and reimagined.

However, the most significant finding of this study goes beyond both anthropocentrism and symbiotic ecocentrism. In several instances, humans are no longer the central point of reference, but neither are they integrated into a harmonious or symbiotic relationship with

nature – instead, nature is being positioned as superior, overpowering and controlling human perception and behaviour. While Milstein's (2009) dialectics of mastery, othering and exploitation conceptualise human practices oppressing nature, our findings suggest that folkloric elements can radically reverse these dynamics through constructing nature as an autonomous other with a culture filled with meanings seemingly hidden from human civilisation. Therefore, while Milstein's dialectical poles are effective for mapping out human discourse around nature, they do not fully take into account nature's own agency. This consequently places Milstein's (2009) framework as holding an inherently human-centered position, aligning with Ytterstad's (2015) critique of framing practices as placing the understanding of nature always in the hands of humans. Folkloric tales thereby possibly introduce a new dimension of understanding nature which is rarely highlighted in neither communication practices nor theories.

While nature's superiority over humans may undermine anthropocentrism, human-nature separation is still reproduced, thus introducing an alternative form of ecocentrism which does not land in symbiosis and connectedness, but instead in nature upholding the human-nature divide through intentional mastering and othering. Nature's hegemonic qualities thus nuance the harmonious interconnectedness advocated by Milstein (2009) and Nicoletta and Yükses (2023), forming a tensed relationship between nature and humans. However, this division is not absolute. The findings demonstrate harmonious human-nature connections made possible first when humans accept nature's superiority, give up rationality and cast aside the logics of civilisation; only then can humans return to their original state of being one with nature. Already being hinted at in the ecocentric practices of Indigenous communities (Karmakar & De, 2025; Virtanen et al., 2021), modern Western culture with its ideas of nature as a resource is concluded as breaking folkloric enchantment and making reconnection with nature impossible.

Finally, incorporating folkloric tales in destination branding might thus enable alternative representations of nature with hinted possibilities of symbiosis. However, in line with Ashworth and Kavaratzis' (2015) caution, the use of cultural heritage within the campaign does not entirely avoid heritage commodification, particularly when positioning Swedish folkloric heritage as entertainment for the tourist experience. Leveraging on intangible cultural heritages thus points to a complexity which requires respectful handling. Nevertheless, our analysis on Visit Sweden's integration of folkloric tales does at large point to a considerate handling of Sweden's cultural heritage, which in accordance with Ironside and Massie (2020) might strengthen the country's cultural visibility and preservation. Lastly,

given that folkloric storytelling can promote more sustainable behaviour (Mitra & Sameer, 2022), and that our findings point to folkloric elements opening up for alternative ecocentric understandings, leveraging on folkloric tales in destination branding might cultivate relationships with more significance between culture, people and landscape.

7. Conclusion

This section marks the finish of this paper where we present our conclusions along with suggestions for future research.

The aim of this study was to broaden the understanding of how nature is represented within destination branding when leveraging on folkloric tales, and what understandings of the human-nature relationship such representations make possible. Through a multimodal semiotic analysis of Visit Sweden's campaign *Spellbound by Sweden*, the study demonstrated that folkloric tales construct contradictory representations of nature, consequently enabling different forms of the human-nature relationship. On the one hand, nature was represented as consumable and aesthetic, thereby reproducing dominant anthropocentric understandings, which arguably aligns with the commodifying logic that inevitably shapes destination branding. On the other hand, nature was represented as alive and spiritually significant, thereby opening up for alternative, ecocentric understandings of nature. Moreover, the study's most significant finding lied in showing that these ecocentric representations do not solely align with previous conceptualisations of ecocentrism as a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Through representing nature as superior to humankind, folkloric elements challenged anthropocentric understandings not by bridging the human-nature divide, but by reversing its hierarchy. The study therefore contributed to existing destination branding research by nuancing predominantly anthropocentric understandings of nature, showing that ecocentric representations are in fact possible to identify. This creates hopeful prospects for strategic communication not only to reproduce dominant cultural values surrounding nature, but also to reimagine them.

7.1 Suggestions for Future Research

Seeing that we wound up with an extensive amount of analysed material, the narrow time frame of this project could have limited the abundance of possible findings and understandings of nature. Future research might therefore have better conditions for expanding on this research phenomenon, resulting in a wider understanding. Additionally, as our study was limited to a Swedish context, future research is encouraged to continue to look for ecocentric representations in destination branding outside of this context, further exploring

folkloric tales and alternative cultural elements such as other storytelling practices and rituals from Indigenous communities. Providing valuable insight into how consumers' understandings of nature are affected by folkloric representations of nature, it could prove beneficial for future research to explore the recipient perspective, and particularly whether these representations might foster actual environmental engagement. Lastly, the established complexity of leveraging on cultural elements should be further examined, particularly the paradox of nature becoming less commodified when introducing folkloric elements while possibly compromising the authenticity of cultural heritage.

Bibliography

Amalia, R., Lubis, D. F., & Bowo, T. A. (2025). Literary Tourism Studies in Folklore at Tourist Attractions in Bangka Island. *Lire Journal (Journal of Linguistics and Literature)*, 9(3), 641–653. <https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v9i3.540>

Ashmore, R. D., Deaux, K., & McLaughlin-Volpe, T. (2004). An Organizing Framework for Collective Identity. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130(1), 80–114. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.130.1.80>

Banks, M. (2007). *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Barthes, R. (1967). *Elements of semiology*. Cape.

Barthes, R. (2009). *Mythologies*. (J. Cape, Trans. ed.). The Noonday Press. (Originally published 1957).

Berger, A. A. (2016). *Media and communication research methods: an introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Bignell, J. (2002). *Media semiotics: an introduction* (2nd ed.). Manchester University Press.

Blain, C., Levy, S. E., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2005). Destination Branding. *Journal of Travel Research*, 43(4), 328–338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287505274646>

Boyle, M. P., & Schmierbach, M. (2019). *Applied communication research methods: getting started as a researcher* (2nd ed). New York, NY: Routledge.

Britvin, A., Britvina, I., Starostova, L., & Compte-Pujol, M. (2020). Symbolic capital as a resource of promotion of provincial cities: an analysis of place branding strategies of Ural urban destinations. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 79, 183–202. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2020.79.ural>

Brunner, A., & Dawson, V. R. (2017). Marketing the recreational sublime: Jumbo Wild and the rhetorics of humans in nature. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34(4), 386–399. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2017.1322706>

Bryman, A. (2018). *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder*. (3rd ed.). Stockholm: Liber.

Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). *Search English*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

Cassinger, C., Gyimóthy, S., & Lucarelli, A. (2021). 20 years of Nordic place branding research: a review and future research agenda. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 21(1), 70–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2020.1830434>

Conservation International. (2014). *Nature is speaking*. <https://www.conservation.org/nature-is-speaking>

Corbett, J.B. (2002). A faint green sell: advertising and the natural world. *Environmental Rhetoric and Popular Culture*, 141–160. <https://juliacorbett.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/a-faint-green-sell-enviropop1.pdf>

Corbett, B. J. (2013). Communication challenges for sustainability. In J. K. Gilbert & S. Stocklmayer. (Eds.). *Communication and engagement with science and technology* (pp. 247–260). Routledge.

Craig, R. T., & Muller, H. L. (Eds.). (2007). *Theorizing communication: readings across traditions*. Johannesburg: MTM.

Cronon, W. (1996). The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature. *Environmental History*, 1(1), 7–28. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3985059>

Culloty, E., Suiter, J., Murphy, P., Brereton, P., Smeaton, A., & Zhang, D. Researching Visual Representations of Climate Change. *Environmental Communication*, 13(2), 179–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2018.1533877>

DiRusso, C., & Myrick, J. G. (2021). Sustainability in CSR Messages on Social Media: How Emotional Framing and Efficacy Affect Emotional Response, Memory and Persuasion. *Environmental Communication*, 1(16). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2021.1933120>

Eksell, J., & Thelander, Å. (2014), Kvalitativ analys inom strategisk kommunikation. I J, Eksell & Å, Thelander (Red.), *Kvalitativa metoder i strategisk kommunikation* (pp. 197-213). Studentlitteratur.

Esaiasson, P., Gilljam, M., Oscarsson, H., Towns, A. E., & Wängnerud, L. (2017). *Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad* (Fifth Edition). Wolters Kluwer.

Fiske, J. (2011). *Introduction to Communication Studies* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Flecha, R., Gómez, J., & Puigvert, L. (2001). Chapter 5: Constructivist structuralism; *Habitus. Counterpoints*, 250, 36–39. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42977868>

Forbes. (2022, September 29). *Visit Sweden's New Campaign Is Spellbinding-And You Have To Be There To Hear It*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/micheleherrmann/2022/09/29/visit-swedens-new-campaign-is-spellbinding-and-you-have-to-be-there-to-hear-it/>

Fälton, E. (2024). The romantic tourist gaze on Swedish national parks: tracing ways of seeing the non-human world through representations in tourists' Instagram posts. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 49(2), 235–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2021.1984692>

Given, L. M. (2008). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909>

Goralnik, L., Nelson, M. P. (2012). Anthropocentrism. In Chadwick, R., & Chadwick, R. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics* (2nd ed., pp. 145–155). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-373932-2.00349-5>

Hansen, A. (2002). Discourses of nature in advertising. *Communications*, 27(4), 499–511.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/comm.2002.005>

Hansen, A., & Machin, D. (2013). Researching Visual Environmental Communication. *Environmental Communication*, 7(2), 151–168.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2013.785441>

Heide, M., & Simonsson, C. (2014). Kvalitet och kunskap i fallstudier. In Eksell, J., & Thelander, Å. (Eds.). (2014). *Kvalitativa metoder i strategisk kommunikation* (pp. 211–228). Studentlitteratur.

Hiimäe, R. (2025). Environmental folklore as a vernacular code of sustainability: the case of Estonian lakes. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 15(3), 636–647.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-024-00974-6>

Ironside, R., & Massie, S. (2020). The Folklore-Centric Gaze: A Relational Approach to Landscape, Folklore and Tourism. *Time and Mind (The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture)*, 13(3), 227–244.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1751696X.2020.1809862>

Karmakar, S., & De, S. (2025). Indigenous Perspectives on Environment and Its Relation With Humans. *International Perspectives in Psychology*, 14(2), 79–87.
<https://doi.org/10.1027/2157-3891/a000122>

Kavaratzis, M., & Ashworth, G. (2015). Hijacking culture: the disconnection between place culture and place brands. *The Town Planning Review*, 86(2), 155–177.
<https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.2015.10>

Kesebir, S., & Kesebir, P. (2017). A growing disconnection from nature is evident in cultural products. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(2), 258–269.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691616662473>

Kilbourne, W. E. (1995). Green advertising: salvation or oxymoron?. *Journal of Advertising*, 24(2), 7–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1995.10673472>

Kress, G. R., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2021). *Reading images* (7th ed). Routledge.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). The metaphorical structure of the human conceptual system. *Cognitive Science*, 4(2), 195–208. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog0402_4

Latour, B. (1993). *We have never been modern*. Harvard Univ. Press.

Lichrou, M., O'Malley, L., & Patterson, M. (2008). Place-product or place narrative(s)? Perspectives in the Marketing of Tourism Destinations. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 16(1), 27–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09652540701794429>

Maheshwari, V., Vandewalle, I., & Bamber, D. (2011). Place branding's role in sustainable development. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 4(2), 198–213. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538331111153188>

Marvasti, A. B. (2014). *Analysing Observations*. In Flick, U (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* ("ed pp. 354–366). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243.n24>

Meppem, T., & Bourke, S. (1999). Different ways of knowing: a communicative turn toward sustainability. *Ecological economics*, 30(3), 389–404. [https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/S0921-8009\(99\)00053-1](https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/S0921-8009(99)00053-1)

Milstein, T. (2009). “Somethin’ Tells Me It’s All Happening at the Zoo”: Discourse, Power, and Conservationism. *Environmental Communication*, 3(1), 25–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524030802674174>

Milstein, T. (2016). The Performer Metaphor: “Mother Nature Never Gives Us the Same Show Twice.” *Environmental Communication*, 10(2), 227–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2015.1018295>

Mitra, S., & Sameer, A. (2022). Storytelling for behavior change: Use of folktales for promoting sustainable behaviors. *Problemy Ekorozwoju*, 17(2), 243–247. <https://doi.org/10.35784/pe.2022.2.26>

Mörner, C., & Olausson, U. (2017). Hunting the Beast on YouTube: The framing of nature in social media. *Nordicom Review*, 38(1), 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2016-0038>

Nadegger, M. (2023). Reassembling more-than-human sustainability: Relations with snow. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 101, 103613. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2023.103613>

Nadegger, M., Rantala, O., & Varley, P. (2025). Skiing-with snow – exploring proximate ethnographies. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–22.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2025.2539289>

Nicoletta, G., & Yükses, D. (2023). Strategies and Tactics to Communicate ‘Nature’. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01968599231215749>

Nilsson, H. B. (2024). The commodification of (bad) weather: Destination branding of the Faroe Islands. *Language & Communication*, 97, 55–69.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2024.05.001>.

Olausson, U., & Ugglå, Y. (2019). Celebrities celebrifying nature: the discursive construction of the human-nature relationship in the ‘Nature Is Speaking’ campaign. *Celebrity Studies*, 12(3), 353–370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2019.1626749>

Pattberg, P., (2007) “Conquest, Domination and Control: Europe’s Mastery of Nature in Historic Perspective”, *Journal of Political Ecology* 14(1), 1–9.
<https://doi.org/10.2458/v14i1.21681>

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (pp. 169–186). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Perkins, H. E. (2010). Measuring love and care for nature. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30(4), 455–463. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2010.05.004>.

- Porter, N. (2013). "Single-minded, compelling, and unique": Visual Communications, Landscape, and the Calculated Aesthetic of Place Branding. *Environmental Communication*, 7(2), 231–254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2013.779291>
- Rennstam, J., & Wästerfors, D. (2015). *Från stoff till studie: om analysarbete i kvalitativ forskning* (1st ed). Studentlitteratur.
- Restall, B., & Conrad, E. (2015). A literature review of connectedness to nature and its potential for environmental management. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 159, 264–278. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2015.05.022>
- Resume. (2023, April 19). *Framgångsrik kampanj satte Sverige på kartan som besöksmål*. <https://www.resume.se/marknadsforing/kampanj/framgangsrik-kampanj-satte-sverige-pa-kartan-som-besoksmal/>
- Rose, G. (2023). *Visual Methodologies. An introduction to researching with visual materials* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications
- Schultz, P. W. (2001). THE STRUCTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 21(4), 327–339. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jevps.2001.0227>
- Silverman. (2017). *Doing Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Svenska Institutet. (2025). *Omvärldens bild av Sverige* (01029/2023). <https://si.se/app/uploads/2025/10/nbi-2025-tillganglighetsanpassad.pdf>
- Takach, G. (2013). Selling Nature In a Resource-based Economy: Romantic/Extractive Gazes and Alberta's Bituminous Sands. *Environmental Communication*, 7(2), 211–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2013.778208>
- Uggla, Y., & Olausson, U. (2013). The Enrollment of Nature in Tourist Information: Framing Urban Nature as "the Other". *Environmental Communication*, 7(1), 97–112. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2012.745009>

- Urry, J. (1990). *The tourist gaze: leisure and travel in contemporary societies*. Sage.
- VanDyke, M. S., & Tedesco, J. C. (2016). Understanding Green Content Strategies: An Analysis of Environmental Advertising Frames From 1990 to 2010. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 10(1), 36–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2015.1066379>
- Virtanen, P. K., Apurinã, F., & Facundes, S. (2021). Amazonian worlds of other-than-human beings and the Apurinã through the materiality of oral stories. *Multilingua*, 40(4), 565–582. <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2020-0078>
- Visit Sweden. (n.d.). *Spellbound by Sweden – a chilling nature experience for all the senses*. <https://visitsweden.com/spellbound-by-sweden/>
- Visit Sweden. (2026, March 18). *Varumärkeslöftet*. <https://corporate.visitsweden.com/kunskap/budskap/vad-ska-vi-beratta/varumarket-sverige/>
- Yen, D., Jang, J., Wei, L., Morgan, N., & Pritchard, A. (2025). Leveraging folklore and fantasy to promote small destinations: the case of Visit Wales. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 17(3), 736–750. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2023.2263860>
- Yin, J., Qu, X., & Ni, Y. (2023) The power of culture: how it shapes tourists' online engagement with destinations. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 40(3), 242–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2023.2239854>
- Ytterstad, A. (2015). Framing global warming. *Environmental Communication*, 9(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2014.919332>

Appendix

Appendix A: Guiding Analytical Questions

The following questions were used as guidance for our semiotic analysis of the empirical material.

1. How is nature represented in the material?
2. What meanings and associations are attached to nature through language, visual elements and sound?
3. What broader, taken-for-granted understandings (myths) of nature are constructed?
4. How are folkloric elements incorporated in the representation of nature and what meanings do they contribute?
5. To what extent is nature attributed agency, voice or subjectivity?
6. How is the relationship between humans and nature constructed?

Appendix B: Semiotic Analysis on the Audiostory *KILN*

The following analysis is based on the transcription of the audiostory KILN from the campaign Spellbound by Sweden. The table is divided into the extracted passage and its denotations, connotations and myths.

Text	Denotation	Connotation	Potential Myth
I am Sweden...And this place is my soul. The forest.	A geographical territory and its dense collection of trees is equated with immaterial consciousness.	The forest has spiritual identity, human- or animal-like, consciousness, feelings.	The nature as a living subject, equal to human and animal. Nature is the root, core, of a nation's identity.
If you could cross me in ten steps, seven of them would go through a forest.	Statistically, seventy percent of the land area is made up of a dense collection of trees.	The majority of the land is made up of forest. Nature dominates the country, way more nature than cities/human-constructed entities. Whatever the forest holds, Sweden has a lot of.	Nature as superior, bigger than human.
the scent of spruce sap and mouldering leaves.	one can smell the liquid a specific kind of tree produces and decomposing leaves	The forest holds both living and dying vegetation, likely producing varying kinds of smells	Nature as a living subject with both life and death, producing smells.
the mute fir trees	coniferous trees that do not make sound	muteness as being secretive, silence as a choice, maybe as a quiet witness. towers quietly over humans, just watching	Nature as a silent witness, possessing some kind of judgement
Don't trip on a root. Or sink into the damp moss.	physical obstacles in the terrain that can cause loss of balance or stop one's step	the vulnerability of the human body, being inferior to the challenging natural landscape, or inferior to the traps nature lays	Humans physically struggle to be in nature Nature actively lays out threats for humans

In the haphazard vegetation, there is an almost perfect raised circle of ferns and blueberry bushes....The remains of kilns.	Circular work in the earth through vegetation, formed by historical industrial activity	Circle can signify something ritual, there is a hidden history here only visible if you know about it Human work will get overtaken by nature, even if hints of it may remain	Human industrial labour can be “mystified” Nature as superior to human labour
As if it had been planted here. In the middle of the forest. You approach it with caution.	A physical arrangement of vegetation in a non-random pattern. Human movement characterized by low speed.	Intentionality or hidden agency, mystery, potential danger. The forest is “wild” and dangerous, but also has some kind of hidden agency, thought process behind it.	Nature as having powers greater than humans can see Nature as a subject with agency
Its symmetry elicits respect.	Geometric balance which produces a certain feeling.	Humans give emotional responses to order, to something symmetrical. Symmetry communicates authority and should be admired or treated with politeness, or caution. Symmetry exists naturally, but is maybe more connected to the rational human brain or rational forces in human society.	Nature as worthy of worship or respect OR → Only human-looking/familiar shapes in nature are worthy of human respect
There are thousands and thousands of similar places in Sweden.	A high quantity of these specific sites within the national borders of the country Sweden.	Big scale, shared heritage in all of the country, national identity. The human being insignificant in relation to the rich history of Swedish nature, but maybe rather human marks such as these kilns having affected nature in thousands of places. Humans have marked,	Nature as a resource

		utilised, nature not only for a long time, but also on a big geographical scale.	
Men sat for many days and nights...Until the wood mass had been distilled into charcoal. That could fuel the smithy hearths.	Male humans remained stationary for a long duration. Until organic matter had transformed into carbon to be used as an energy source for metalworking.	An early form of small scale industrialisation. Humans transform nature, using it as a resource. Nature's value defined by its ability to power human industry.	Nature as a resource
you sink down into the moss. It answers with an ethereal sigh.	A human body descends and places pressure to a soft green plant which compresses the material, releases air and creates sound	The moss communicates, ethereal sigh gives intimate and spiritual connotations	Nature as a living subject with agency that can react and communicate
Branches scratch your cheeks. Sharp witches' nails reach for you	Tree branches come into physical contact with human skin	This process hurts. Intentional harm from the nature, feminine coded folklore connected to danger	Nature as an active predator/danger to humans.
upturned roots ... break free and shoot out like knotted troll arms	Exposed root systems of a fallen tree	Unpredictability in movement, danger, physical threat, connected to folkloric stories of trolls	Nature as an active danger Mythological traits as threats to humans
Maybe you can even find the ruins of a charcoal hut. And the stone from what was once a stove. Now covered in moss.	Old human-made structures for human enjoyment/survival have been largely overtaken by vegetation	The passage of time, nature winning over or reclaiming its land, overtaking human culture	Nature as eternal, human and culture as temporary
Through the low rays of light, you can discern carvings in the rock. Images of prey.	Dull sunlight at late hours of day, human-made cuts in stone depicting hunted animals	Mystical lightning, not fully illuminating the scene, traces of human presence in nature being proud and showing off their domination over animals for food or pleasure	Humans as a threat to nature and animals Humans as leaving permanent marks in nature, having been dependent on nature in all times

Death traps for wolves and elk.	Holes in the ground used for catching and hunting animals	Human-made holes. Cruelty to animals. Also the danger of moving in the landscape, created by humans, now dangerous to humans visiting	Humans as a threat to nature and animals, but also to themselves Nature as dangerous
Now it is only the tops of the spruce trees that glow like green fire.	Sunlight reflecting off the upper parts of trees during sunset	Natural light as a mystical phenomenon, magical sheen, an energy, supernatural aspect of a green fire. Fire signaling danger	Enchanted/magical forest Nature as dangerous
the untouched primeval forest	A large collection of trees that has been there a long time and not been altered by modern industry	Lack of human interference, pure forest. Authentic and ancient nature	Nature as eternal, untouched by humans
Where veils of the evening mist are beginning to rise	Water condensing near the ground due to temperature changes in the night	Veils as a human garment, nature taking on human form. Mist worsens vision, gives mystery. Mystery in transitions. Fairies, elves	Enchanted/magical forest
You are forced to round a gigantic boulder dropped here by the inland ice that covered this country some 10,000 years ago.	Due to a large block of ice being moved by historical geological forces humans have to adapt their path in nature	Immense time scales, geological power, human insignificance in having to adapt to it. Nature has been here far longer than humans and operates in their own powerful way	Nature as eternal and powerful, human as temporary and inferior
Glossy, poison-green veils drift across the sky. The northern lights.	Sun colliding with gases in the atmosphere and creating green lights in the sky	Poison signaling death. Glossy could give beauty. Danger/death, but fascination. Cosmic power. The exotic north, one of Sweden's most well known nature phenomena.	The beautiful and enchanted but dangerous/lethal nature.
Damp leaves and fur needles glitter in blue.	Moisture on vegetation reflecting light.	Glitter as jewel-like, luxurious or as magical, fairytale. Coldness from	Enchanting nature Unpleasant to be in (cold

		damp leaves and blue colour	and damp) but magical to look at
Everything glitters, and up in the treetops the small birds sing, expanding the space above your head.	Moisture on vegetation reflects light on several areas. The birds sit high in the trees and make sound, making you aware of the altitude above you	Magical, fairytale-like illusions from the sun reflecting on vegetation, looking like glitter. The birds' sound described as songs is pleasant and beautiful. The forest now feels less claustrophobic and scary, it is open and other peaceful creatures exist there in happiness. Could also connote opening up space to breathe or think/spiritual expansion.	Enchanting forest The nature as a healing space for humans
The Swedish forest is present everywhere. It encircles you, and wants to take you in its lap.	The forest surrounds you and is given maternal attributes.	Encircles could be threatening, entrapment. Can also provide comfort and motherly care. Has a huge presence.	Nature as Mother, a protective and comforting yet possessive entity
It's beautiful, isn't it?	A rhetorical question regarding the forest's visual aesthetics	Social pressure from Sweden itself, which consists of nature, to admire nature	Nature asking for aesthetic validation ?? Nature has value in being beautiful for humans
You want to return to civilisation. To your comfortable hotel room, your bathrobe and your slippers. Check off the fine nature experience.	A longing to get away from the forest and to human-made structures and consumer products for comfort and hygiene.	Nature as a task or a product to be consumed as a "need" for the "real" tourist experience. Nature should be as luxurious as human-made products, when it gives discomfort humans want to leave it.	Humans seeing nature as a commodity, a luxury experience Nature as uncomfortable. When nature as a commodity is challenged by nature by providing an uncomfortable experience, humans get uncomfortable. (at the same time "selling" the uncomfortable nature experience with this podcast, selling a chilling adventure → commodifying uncomfortable nature experiences)

You should have picked out some signs. You should have checked the battery of your phone. You should have followed a marked trail. But you didn't.	A wish to have used navigational tools and technological devices to the forest.	Reliance on technology and navigation tools to understand and navigate in nature. Loss of control.	Nature is something humans can't understand or master just from being in it, humans need tools and help to not lose control in nature.
I can't help you. I am only the voice you hear inside your head.	Internal thought process from an external voice. The narrator not being a physical being able to help, just a voice.	Psychological breakdown, isolation, being in need of help, lack of external aid. Sweden/the forest invading the human mind. Humans can't defend themselves from nature. Nature communicating power, superiority. But also communicating inability to do things.	Nature takes no responsibility for your fate Every living creature needs to tend for itself
Voices, music, or cars on a highway. Something to give you direction and prove that civilization still exists. But nothing can be heard. There is only you and the forest.	Sound signals produced by human activity and machinery. Silence. Only seeing or hearing the forest.	Looking for sounds that signal that other humans and the safety they and the human made processes of civilisation provide, to get help or comfort. Civilisation being the "real" reality for humans, which grounds them. Safety in infrastructure.	Reality or safety for humans only exist within the reach of human-made sound. Culture as reality. Nature as separate from human life and culture.
You feel a pang of hunger in your belly. ... Your body screams for rest.	Physiological sensation of needing nutrients and sleep.	Vulnerability in biological limits, the body as an animal. Nature strips away social status needs, leaving only basic survival needs such as hunger and fatigue. Nature is not a place to find food. Food is available in human-constructed	Nature as different from culture. Disconnection from nature as a source for food.

		society.	
Your clothes are slowly drying on your body as the day wells forth and nature awakens. ...A new day trickles out into the cracks left by the terrors of the night.	When the sun rises the warmth from the sun makes moisture evaporate from fabric. The sunrise marks the start of a new day and the transformation from night to day.	Recovery to “normal” in connection to the sun. The sun as a saving force, providing human comfort. Synchronisation with nature: human recovery is tied to the rhythm of the rising sun. The night, with its darkness, is terrifying. But the day, with its light, is new beginnings, calmness, safety.	Connectedness between human cycles and nature cycles.
a lorry loaded with timber drives by, you put out your thumb. The vehicle...stops with a loud squealing of brakes. You have made your way into the cab and borrowed a towel to wrap around you...staring vacantly at the pine trees whizzing past the side windows.	Industrial vehicle transporting harvested wood, mechanical friction to the ground. You enter the vehicle and get a piece of fabric. Looking at the trees outside the vehicle's partly transparent walls.	Putting out the thumb signals hitchhiking, a sign the lorry driver seems to understand. Human social body language constructs. Back in “reality” where you understand how interaction and processes work. The towel has drying powers, gives comfort (uncomfortable to be wet). Being tired from the nature experienced, having an empty look. Clear difference from being in nature to being in an industry produced car (nature as a resource for timber), watching nature from a distance.	Disconnection between nature and culture, and nature and human industrialisation processes. Human processes put nature at a distance. Nature as a resource for humans.
As soon as you return to your hotel, you intend to change your ticket, so that you can return home immediately, put this	Taking administrative action to alter travel plans and aim to perform psychological repression	Trauma from the nature and travel experience, a want to return back to the safe reality that the comfort and familiarity of a home provides. A want to reject the wild of nature. Experiencing failure of the romantic	Nature as traumatic/failed romanticism: the nature experience was too real/not enough romanticised (commodified?)/dangerous to be enjoyed

behind you, and try to forget.		ideal you had of the trip	
you will charge your phone, so that you can read your messages and email, check Facebook and Instagram. You will order food from room service, and stream some series that you like. Return to the realm of the rational, to technology and civilization.	Utilizing digital communication platforms, service labor	Longing for reconnection with the human social world through digital platforms and social media. Feeling in control, doing comfortable everyday-activities from the comfortability of the hotel room where other people do all the hard work for you. Human-centered systems are rational, nature framed as the irrational.	Nature as something different from culture. Nature as irrational, uncomfortable. Through human civilisation/human-made products humans can ignore nature. Technology and civilization is the only safe and comfortable for humans.
The embers and warmth from the kiln that drew her to them... her thousand-year old seclusion in the deep woods that would be eased by a collier's embrace.	The warm energy from fire attracts a character. Her long period of isolation is ended by physical contact.	A mythological creature feeling cold, lonely, seeking human warmth. Eroticism. The hulder could be considered to be part of nature, and nature therefore seeking emotional connection with humans. Or divides mythological creatures from nature, since the hulder feels isolated in the place that is nature.	Mythological characters actively seek contact with humans. Either to human constructs for warmth or to humans themselves for emotional or sexual connection. Mythological creatures have human needs and desires. / Nature has human like needs and desires.
Fairy folk and walkers aside, you also know that there are large animals in the Swedish forest. Bears, wolves, and elk. You also know that	Swedish forests has presence of large wild mammals. Statistically improbability of aggression, but statistics not giving a sense of security,	A difference between "imagined" danger such as fairy folk, and "real" danger as wild animals. But still produces the same kind of fear. Rationality of statistics does not help the feeling of fear.	Nature as unpredictable and "immune" to rationality. Rationality or scientific facts are powerless against nature's wilderness.

attacks are incredibly rare. But that is hardly a comfort.			
It may be years before anyone finds you in the form of a skeleton, licked clean by the animals of the forest. Impossible to identify	A long period of time passes before human remains after biological decomposition and animal scavenger activity, leading to loss of forensic identity.	Nature hides things, such as dead bodies. It's not visited enough to find bodies in time for being able to identify identities. A total erasure of self and death without any cultural rituals usually connected to it. Simply becoming part of the food chain.	Human as inferior to nature and its animals. Nature eventually consumes human individuals entirely. Separation from culture.
If you survive this, then you have experienced something that few Swedes and even fewer visitors have.	Continuing to live is a low-frequency event involving a small part of the population of the country and even smaller of people being in the country temporarily.	Many people, especially visitors with likely too little knowledge about how to act in the nature, have died in nature. Connotes exclusivity, but with high stakes. A “real” nature experience is a secret, elitist award for the brave, with the human’s life at stake. Gives fear, but a sense of excitement.	Nature is extra hostile towards tourists Nature is lethal, but offers the excitement of award or status when survived. The ultimate adventure.
Your consciousness whispers helplessly, flee, flee. But your body simply continues to walk towards her.	A conflict within the human brain between cognitive processes of logic and motor functions of movement.	A loss of free will, almost hypnosis, instinct wins over reason, and even over “fight or flight” instinct.. The mythological creature possesses something so enchanting, attractive to human’s basic needs or body, that it overrides human rationality. And the human rationality is what have made us top of the food chain. Here this is challenged, humans are inferior.	Nature taking form as mythological creatures overrules human rationality. Nature as superior to humans

In a sweeping motion, she lets her dress fall and stands naked before you. You will never remember exactly how it happened, but soon you yourself are naked. You embrace her and you sink down into the moss. You are hers and she is yours.	In a wide, rapid or graceful movement her clothing is removed. Loss of memory or moment of confusion. Physical contact, positioned on vegetation. Mutual possession over one another.	A sexual union with the hulder and with the landscape. Physical and mental. A total loss of boundaries and identity, they become the same. Happens so quickly or in such a confusing or magical way that the brain can hardly understand it and no memories will be left of how it practically happened.	True, full, human-nature connection through sexual activity when nature takes form as a mythological being. Nature as hard to understand for the human brain
You no longer think that it is strange that you understand her, since you exist outside time and space	An acceptance of non-rational communication processes due to displacement from temporal and physical dimensions	Some kind of supernatural telepathy has emerged due to the sexual immersion with the Hulder. Loss of human logic, with acceptance. There is nothing else present. When connected with nature in this way, time and space are non-existent. Perhaps only being human inventions.	When you work against human rationality and simply follow instinct, you can fully immerse yourself in nature and only then you can truly understand it. True connection with nature removes human connection with rational things like time and space. There exists a non-linear, “magical”/alternative reality.
You have been with the Hulder. And then, Odin's hunt is upon you.	In the past you interacted with the Hulder. Afterwards, the Nordic god Odin chases you.	An inescapable fate. being with the Hulder gave consequences you cannot escape from. Negative connotations to hunt, implies being hurt or killed. Old Swedish tale about the god Odin chasing the Hulder over skies and through forests during nighttime. Since you have become one with Hulder, he is now also after you.	The Nordic Gods watch over the Swedish forest and everyone there In nature, every action has consequences/you can't escape from your fate There are hierarchies even among mythological creatures.

A stench penetrates your nose as you draw closer...as if from an open grave with decomposing parts from a corpse of rotten wood.	A strong, unpleasant smell moves into your nose as you near the source. It resembles the smell from decomposed and rotten wood coming from a grave	Death, eerie premonitions, warnings that something isn't right Human corpse equated with attributes of nature (rotten wood). Grave = human corpse, but here used to bury a tree In death we're all the same	All living creatures return to nature/earth in death Nature as grotesque, harrowing, uneasy, disgusting Culture and nature unites (burial cultural but for nature)
You wake...naked and curled up like a child	When you regain consciousness you are not wearing anything and lay on the ground in fetal position	Very vulnerable, curled up = scared, alone, back to origin/the womb Return to null state Becoming one with human's most raw state, one with nature	In nature everyone return to their natural state Nature as undressing from all imaginary titles of modern society, strip back to origins Nature as Mother Earth (womb)
Something of yours fell into her possession...You gave your name, and thereby you gave the Hulder power over you, and she and I are one and the same.	The Hulder received the ability to control you because you told her your name. The speaker (Sweden) is the same as the Hulder.	By telling her your name part of your soul became hers to own, meaning she can control you forever Sweden = Hulder = both possess you	Nature as possessive, enchanted, mysterious and luring Nature as culture (folkloric tales are one with nature and the same as countries) All roads lead back to the forest (to Mother Nature)
What happened in the forest is something you will regard as a dream. A magical dream, about Sweden, and nothing that happened in reality.	The unfolded events in the forest of Sweden will be thought of as fantasy, imaginary and not real.	When in civilization there's no room for folklore, magic or other-than-human beings. Rationality takes over – must be a dream, can't possibly be real.	Nature as possessive, enchanted, mysterious and luring Nature is distinct from civilization (but part of culture?) Humans are rational beings with a lack of connection to magic, mythologies and nature's forces

When she calls you by your name, you will return to Sweden, to the forest. To me.	Someone will address you by your name which will make you go to Sweden and the forest again	She has him in her possession and whenever she calls, he'll be possessed to listen and return to the forest and the spirit of Sweden	Nature as possessive, enchanted, mysterious and luring Nature as other-worldly Sweden as possessive, mysterious, one with nature Folkloric creatures lure visitors to the forest; everyone will return to forest
She is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen. Doesn't matter if you are man or woman, old or young.	She has an extremely fair appearance which surpasses all other beauty you have seen. This applies for people of all sexes and ages.	Everyone, no matter their age or sex, no matter normative rules of who attracts who, will get enchanted by the Hulder's and nature's beauty	Nature as sublime beauty Nature as enchanting and attracting anyone
Text	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
<i>In the haphazard vegetation, there is an almost perfect raised circle of ferns and blueberry bushes.</i>	In an area where plants are existing in no particular order there is a nearly completely correct lifted circle composed of the green plant fern and the dark blue fruit blueberry growing on a plant with many small branches.	It's surprising and unexpected to find a perfect circle in the otherwise wild and unruly nature.	Circles = älvringar Fantastical chance which holds mysteries and magic Nature as enchanted
<i>In her long existence, one hundred years is only a parenthesis. A blink. And she has time to wait.</i>	She exists for a long period of time. One hundred years is an added remark, quick. She is in no hurry and can allow time to go by.	She doesn't age like ordinary humans and will outlive you. She has magic. Even 100 years is nothing so she will wait until she gets what she wants, because time isn't an issue.	Magical and mythological creatures live in another space. Humans are only a speck of dust for them. They hold power over humans. The creatures of the forest are as old as nature itself, will outlive humans always. Nature as eternal, humans temporary

<i>When you think you glimpse a mushroom pale hand waving as if for help.</i>	You believe you partly saw a hand with light grey-brown color which is less than usual. The hand is raised and moved side to side, maybe signaling the need for support.	You're unsure if what you saw was true, but it might have been a person in the water who waved for help as it was drowning, therefore already pale.	The forest is dangerous; many people die and their spirits haunt it forever. Forest = dark, eerie, haunted, unwelcoming for humans, mysterious What is real and what is not? The tales become reality.
<i>A drowned person who begs to be recovered and buried in holy ground.</i>	A human who has died in water and urgently requests to get back and be put into a religious or pure surface (soil).	A ghost/spirit/soul haunts the water where it died and desperately asks for their dead body to be found and buried in spiritual (christian?) soil for them to find rest.	Religion/spirituality/christianity is the way for redemption & the good, bright side Sweden has Christian heritage which is enliven in its spirit and culture Myths and folklore are based in Christianity/religion
<i>But was she simply a fantasy woven from moonbeams? Originating in the gloom and the solitude?</i>	A question if the woman was nothing more than an imaginary magical story formed by the light from the moon. She might have been made from loss of hope and being alone.	Was she real or made up? Was it the reflection of the moonlight which played tricks on the coalers tired eyes? (Moon = magical and spiritual power) Did she appear because of their loneliness and unhappiness? Like they were asking her to appear?	Nature has many inexplicable mysteries which might call to you from its darkest corners Loneliness and despair can make one call for fantastical creatures of the night Women are magical, seductive and mysterious, coming to you when you need them
<i>...every mosscovered rock you spy is an animal's back.</i>	All the stones covered with moss you secretly see is the backside of an animal	Mosscovered stones = overgrown/overtaken by nature; signifies long time You're on watch, frightened, spying around you and thinking that you see big scary animals everywhere	Nature comes alive in the dark Nature is eternal and all-encompassing Nature takes many shapes and can shape-shift (?)

<i>Its fur standing on end.</i>	The animal is frightened	Frightened and on edge, preparing to attack and protect itself	Be aware of preying animals in the forest Animals are equally scared of humans as humans of them
<i>When every snapping twig is the sound of heavy paws approaching.</i>	The sounds of breaking branches resemble/remind of animals with paws which come closer	A person on edge/frightened hears every breaking twig as an approaching threat in the form of a big dangerous animal	Nature is dangerous and home to many creatures which might harm you You should be attentive in nature and not lose focus, be aware of different sounds' meaning Animals are dangerous, wild and untamed, threat to humans
<i>Aware that the tendrils could suddenly break free and shoot out like knotted troll arms.</i>	Something knows that the stem-like part of climbing plants can come loose from the thing it's climbing on and quickly move, appearing similar to the arms of trolls containing knots	Plants which are otherwise still can come alive and become mythological creatures like trolls to attack you, scary	Nature comes alive / shapeshifts / is mysterious & unexpected Culture is part of nature Folkloric creatures are part of the forest/nature and can shift their form to be integrated into the vegetation (chameleon)
<i>The elastic threads of a spider web stick to your face</i>	Stretched out sticky silk threads of a spider's structure are glued to your face	Spider webs are used to catch animals for them to eat; you're their next victim Spiders = animals of the night, often regarded as scary and haunting Halloween, horror stories	Horror stories come alive in the forest You have no control in the forest and are the victim; nature has control/power
<i>and it is the hungry touch of ghosts that you feel.</i>	You physically or mentally feel the spirits of dead beings come in contact with you. They are hungry to eat	Ghosts are hungry for your flesh; will kill you/harm you/eat you	There are dark spirits in the forest which are hungry for human flesh Nature is spiritual and mysterious, dangerous to

			intruders
<i>Sharp witches' nails reach for you in the dark.</i>	A woman who is believed to have magical powers used to harm or help stretches out her arm and thinly pointed nails towards you in the darkness	The witch is usually gruesome and cruel, threatening, a creature of the night. Sharp nails are a common attribute. Could be an association to sharp twigs, imagining a witch tries to capture and hurt you	Nature is dark and filled with mysterious (and evil) powers/Nature is spiritual and mysterious, dangerous to intruders Nature wants to enchant you and keep you at its grasp Nature can turn from welcoming into hurtful when darkness falls There are many creatures in the forest who want to hurt you Everything comes alive in the darkness of the forest (twigs become sharp nails)
<i>Sobbing, you stumble on with all the creatures of the night at your heels.</i>	You are crying and step awkwardly, almost falling, with every living creature awake in the night running behind you	You're fleeing, frightened, can't keep up a straight line and continuously trip over. All of the darkest creatures – animals and mythological – chase after you and try to catch you (and hurt/kill)	Nature is turned into a nightmare when darkness falls, awakening its darkest and most dangerous creatures Nature is not for the faint-hearted Nature will protect itself from intruders Nature is dark and filled with mysterious (and evil) powers/Nature is spiritual and mysterious, dangerous to intruders/Nature is home to many creatures
<i>In the distance, you can hear a howl and you shiver as you think about werewolves, humans in the form of a wolf who hunt when the moon is</i>	You hear the sound of a wolf's cry far away which makes you think about the mythological creature werewolf and slightly shake	The howl and full moon gives associations to werewolves which are dangerous to humans, making you very frightened	Nature is turned into a nightmare when darkness falls, awakening its darkest and most dangerous creatures

<i>full.</i>			Folkloric tales come alive in the forest/nature Nature is dark and filled with mysterious (and evil) powers/Nature is spiritual and mysterious, dangerous to intruders/Nature is home to many creatures
<i>You embrace her and you sink down into the moss. It answers with an ethereal sigh. You are hers and she is yours. And the moon slowly rolls across the sky.</i>	You hold her tightly with both arms and go below the surface of the moss. The moss lightly lets out air. The two of you belong to each other. And the moon continues its path up in the sky.	You are intertwined with her in body and spirit, together becoming one with the Earth, the soft moss. Time slowly passes, only indicated by the slow rolling of the moon while you are joined to one. Moonlight also magical and spiritual Indicates sexual intercourse	Love and longing is the most natural thing/strongest force and part of nature Nature/the Earth welcomes you back to its womb, becoming one again Folkloric creatures have seductive powers which are strengthened by the power of the moon (?) Sexual intercourse is a powerful act which can reconnect you with nature and her powers
<i>In the green light of the sky, the inside of the cavity glints as spongy and soft as rotten wood.</i>	The sky shines a green light reflects from the hole and creates the impression of it being able to absorb liquid and being soft, similar to decayed trees	The Haldre is decaying and part of nature, reflecting the green of the Northern lights (making her look sick, eerie, haunting)	Culture and Nature are joined together The creatures of the forest are all part of nature, no matter their form Everything returns to its natural state of the Earth and becomes one with nature Folkloric creatures mirror all sides of nature, both beauty and decay
<i>Maybe you can even find the ruins of a charcoal hut.</i>	Encounter broken parts of the remnants of the man-made building for charcoal	Humans have been in the forest and left behind construction which nature has taken over	Nature is eternal and will always conquer (agency) Nature is bigger than

<i>Now covered in moss.</i>	What was before stone is now filled with the plant moss	Humans will die, nature is forever	humans Nature will always prosper and find a way to grow, continue living Humans are a parenthesis in time
<i>And became a beautiful woman from exotic locales.</i>	She turned into a very attractive woman, appearing as coming from far away and therefore exciting and attractive	She was extremely attractive and seductive, enhanced by her different and maybe unusual appearance	Swedes/Nordic people are exotic to tourists Folkloric creatures are exotic as they don't seemingly fit into the natural landscape
<i>You want to return to civilisation.</i>	You want to come back to human society and culture	You are somewhere wild and unruly and seek the comfort of structured society where humans live and work	Nature is opposite to human civilization and doesn't fit humans/everyone Nature is wild and untamed; humans are structured and proper
<i>Check off the fine nature experience.</i>	Putting a tick on being out in nature to indicate that it's finished/completed	Having an imaginary list of things to do as tourist and completing the experience of being in finer nature	Nature is something to shortly experience as a tourist and then go back to life Nature is momentarily and not central to human life Nature is something to gaze at, experience and enjoy and then leave behind for everyday life
<i>You were in a hurry to delve into the untouched primeval forest.</i>	You wanted to quickly reach into the unspoiled and ancient forest	You stressed to get deep into the forest as its ancient and untouched nature attracted you (or drew you in) Lack of planning because simply going into the forest, now comes the consequences	Nature requires planning, knowledge and guidance to be experienced correctly/to not stray off the path/to be safe Nature's attractive when untouched by humans = raw, wild, ancient
<i>Lost souls attracted by</i>	Immaterial parts of	Ghosts and spirits of	Nature as dark, filled with

<i>human warmth.</i>	human beings who don't know their way are drawn to the warmth of human bodies	dead humans are straying around in the forest, seeking living humans	spirits Horror in the forest, humans being victims/in danger
<i>As if fuelled by the moonlight, you gain renewed strength.</i>	You are weak but seem to become stronger and have new energy maybe by the light reflected from the moon	Moon has spiritual powers which give energy Moon = werewolves = supernatural	Nature has many mysteries and sources of energy, is supernatural
<i>The tips of your fingers find letters that you follow. Fourteen in total. Four words in a language you do not understand. If there is a message, it is not directed to you.</i>	There are carved words on a stone which feel like fourteen letters but you don't know the language and can't decipher it so it's meant for someone else.	Other people have been there before and left a message (maybe a warning) Connotes ancient times, stonecarving, history Premonition of what will come	Humans have left remnants in nature which will stay forever, but humans will eventually die History tells stories from the past Nature holds signs for you to decipher
<i>You cup your hands, catch the full moon in the raised surface of the water and drink until you quench your thirst.</i>	Drinking water from natural lakes out of your hands. The moon is reflected in the water	Full moon, spiritual, magical Gain some of the moon's strength through drinking the water	Nature has many resources you can survive/live on Nature gives strength and energy Nature as mysterious/dark/spiritual
<i>You sink down into the blueberry bushes and find that it makes for surprisingly soft bedding.</i> <i>You tear off a few fern leaves and shape them into a rudimentary pillow</i>	Leaves, bushes and parts of nature are soft and welcoming, which is unexpected. You can sleep in nature	Even nature can become a bed, pillow and comfort You can create comfort from nature's resources Nature invites you to lie down and rest	Nature is home Humans need associations to civilization to make sense of nature Nature offers relaxation and rest
<i>In a language that is spoken by all and by no one, come to me.</i>	Everyone understands but nobody understands. Imperative form to come to someone	Although nobody speaks the language, the calling is understood by all. Spiritual connection and communication, other-worldly.	Folkloric creatures communicate with spirit in mysterious ways Languages are made-up and imaginary, in the forest they are abundant

		Possession and enchantment, lure in to a trap	Nature calls to you, wants to keep you, possess you (danger)
<i>The veils of mist embrace the trees, billowing and turning, puffing up and taking firmer form. Assembling into the texture of the thinnest silk fabric that sweeps up the dried fern needles on the ground. Long blonde hair brushes over jagged twigs, and a milky white hand glimmers as it is struck by the moonlight before it returns to the shadows. Come.</i>	Transformation of mist which is around the trees into a long silk fabric which touches the plants on the ground Long brightly colored hair touches branches A bright hand shines up by the moonlight and then goes back to the shadows and isn't visible Imperative to come somewhere	Metamorphosis of nature into an otherworldly creature (Hulder) with female features She calls you to her as she's in the shadows	Nature as mysterious/dark/spiritual Folkloric creatures being seductive and want to lure humans to them Nature calls to you, wants to keep you, possess you (danger) Nature's home to many spiritual mysteries/creatures
<i>You can see her now as she dances, light as a feather in bare feet, with a delicate dress swirling around her like living water.</i>	She appears in a clearer form and dances barefoot. She wears a dress which is flowy and follows her movements	She seems otherworldly and part of nature Dances = free spirit, clothes which flow with her, free like water Barefeet in forest unusual for humans, indicates childlike associations and more primal/wild attributes	Nature's creatures are free and wild Nature is seductive Nature's home to many spiritual mysteries/creatures In nature you return to your inner child
<i>A shimmering skin, her eyes borrowed from a deer, and her smile glowing like a flame in the night.</i>	The woman has bright and sparkling skin, dark and big eyes similar to the animal deer, a warm smile	She looks otherworldly and like the creatures living in the forest, has attributes which makes you think about nature Great beauty	Folkloric creatures are one with nature Everything is connected and in the same system Women are beautiful otherworldly and seductive beings
<i>At first she is a shy animal that bolts from human touch.</i>	She is first shy and stays far away like an animal scared of humans	folkloric creatures become associated/one with their environment (nature)	Folkloric creatures are one with nature Animals and mythological

		She is scared of humans just like animals are She has attributes which makes you think about nature	creatures see humans as a threat Humans are different from animals and other-than-humans, not inherently same system?
<i>Wait, you say, in a language that is yours and you know she understands.</i>	Communication with a language both understand although from different places Imperative form to stay in her place until someone comes	Although she doesn't speak the language, she understands. Spiritual connection and communication, other-worldly. Longing for her by the caller	Folkloric creatures communicate with spirit in mysterious ways Languages are made-up and imaginary, in the forest they are abundant Longing and love has no human-made boundaries
<i>You see that her feet are half sunken in a large tuft of the softest moss.</i>	She stands barefoot in a large place with growing moss which looks soft and is not holding up her over its surface	She becomes one with nature Nature	Nature as inviting, warm, welcoming, deep Nature as womb, sink deeper into
<i>You stop and open your arms, allowing nature to pour into you with all of its beauty, until your chest aches with a longing to become one with all of this.</i>			Human longing to connect with nature, become in symbiosis Return to original, natural state Nature as sublime beauty

Appendix C: Semiotic Analysis on Promotional Articles

Following analyses are based on the promotional articles of Swedish national parks from the campaign Spellbound by Sweden. Each item is divided into denotations, connotations and myths. The semiotic analysis was conducted on every article's image, image text and text body.

Retrieved March 9, 2026 from

<https://visitsweden.com/what-to-do/nature-outdoors/nature/national-parks/national-parks-where-myths-and-legends-come-to-life/>

Item 1: Cover image and introductory text

Denotation:

The image depicts a lake surrounded by trees and is taken from above the lake. In the foreground, left to the image's centre a woman is sitting on the grass with her back against a tree. She is sitting with her side visible to the viewer, looking straight ahead. She is wearing a red jacket, blue jeans and headphones, and while she doesn't take up much space she's clearly visible. She is holding an object which might be a phone in her hand. The woman is placed in the left lower third of the image. The trees around her are tall and have narrow trunks. The sky is bright grey. The image's color scheme is to the colder side with green undertones and an overall emphasis on green, turquoise and slight purple.

- + It looks like the green consists of pine needles or moss.
- + On the ground in the foreground, we can see trees that are not densely packed. The trees are sparse, with some distance between them. They appear tall, and the treetops closest to the foreground disappear out of the frame. It looks like the same type of tree throughout, sparse coniferous trees.

The headline *National parks in Sweden – where myths and legends come to life* begins with stating that the location is the country of Sweden, situated in the Northern part of Europe. National parks are “an area of a country that is protected by the government because of its natural beauty or because it has a special history”. It is followed by a “—”

indicating that the following words are related to the national parks. Myths could indicate ancient stories about historical events/people or a commonly believed story which is falsely rooted. Legends can be ancient stories about famous events or persons which are not always true, or be ascribed to a person who excels in their area of interest and admired by others. For something to “come to life” might mean that something imaginary starts existing the ‘real world’; something becomes alive and functioning; something becomes more exciting or real-life like.

For something to be ‘deep’ might indicate having a longer distance between its horizontal and vertical borders, or strong feelings/experiences which last with you a long time. ‘Possess’ can mean ownership of certain qualities or things, or taking control over one’s mind. ‘Tranquility’ denotes a peaceful and calm state without any noise, violence or worry. ‘Drama’ indicates sometimes unexpected events filled with action, worry and excitement, or a directed theatrical, often serious, play performed by actors; ‘mystique’ describes qualities of being special in a mysterious and attractive sense.

‘Come here’ is an imperative form used to give an order. The text is written in second person perspective using the pronoun ‘you’ to directly address the reader. ‘Spellbound’ implies being held completely focused on something and unable to think about other things. ‘Fairy tales’ are traditional stories for children about imaginary creatures and magic. ‘Culture’ can be commonly shared beliefs, customs and attitudes (a way of life), or a noun for types of art; ‘nature’ “all the animals, plants, rocks, etc. in the world and all the features, forces, and processes that happen or exist independently of people, such as the weather, the sea, mountains, the production of young animals or plants, and growth”, or a characteristic feature. For these three to ‘meet across Sweden’ means that they come together either intentionally or unintentionally and are joined together; that they fulfill and satisfy something; or describe an experience.

Connotation:

The composition of the image, with the image’s darker vignette is centered around the brightness of the lake, the eye is drawn to the centre, where the woman is also sitting, brightly visible. She seems rather relaxed and entranced by her own world, listening to something while gazing into the forest. With the stillness of the lake scenery spread out behind her, it, and the matte green and turquoise color schemes, it creates a tranquil sense of no movement,

like a stop in time. Her solitude is apparent, further enhancing the sense of her littleness in this great and dark forest. However, although she is small, the eye is immediately drawn to her both as the colors of her seemingly modern clothes contrast to the otherwise dark green ambiance, and she is placed in the lower third corner of the image. The woman thus becomes the focus of the photograph.

The picture's dark light and matte colors create the impression of something mystical and gloomy. The clear reflection of the trees in the lake add to this mysterious feeling as the absence of ripples seem almost too perfect. Together with the color scheme and apparent solitude of the lonely woman, it can be connoted as bearing folkloric elements where the viewer's imagination of who might arrive in the forest and what might happen to her has mysterious and supernatural forms. However, it also connotes a sense of relaxation and tranquility, where the forest offers a **moment of stillness** in the otherwise busy modern world. As we can't see any other animalistic creature except for the woman, nature is presented as untouched solitude, where the physical contact with nature such as sitting against the trunk of a tree gives you a **moment of stillness**. The woman is not doing anything except for listening to something and gazing out to the forest, and while it's not sunny the image is still bright, which is rarely associated to mysticism or elements of horror stories.

These two connotations are also highlighted by the joint image text, where the Swedish forests are described as possessing "both beauty and tranquillity, but also drama and mystique." Nature is represented as not only sunny, warm and welcoming, but also cold, dark and mysterious, especially with regards to the image's colors and composition which highlight "drama and mystique". The image also represents nature as still and untouched. (The perception of the image in general is that of a stop in time; no hints of any wind, just utter stillness and an eerie premonition of what will happen when that moment will pass.)

As the hill follows the round shape of the lake, an effect similar to that of fish-eye is created, further giving the sense of the viewer being sucked into the image and the lake. The lake seems to fit into the picture, creating an impression of it being rather small. The trees being abundantly more and taller than the woman are given some sort of agency, which might however be slightly reduced in the woman's usage of one as support for her back, thus possibly treating it slightly as an object. As the image text uses words of the forest as

“possessing” certain attributes, the forest is treated as a subject with its own wisdom apart from humans.

The imperative form of “come here” can be connoted as an enchanting spell, like the forces of the forest which will draw you in and hold you at its grasp. It can also be connoted as encouraging visitors to be amazed at nature’s beauty and mystique as a form of entertainment, thus commodifying its attributes for human enjoyment. However, with the highlight of nature’s mysticism it describes something intangible for humans, outside of our grasp, which can be connoted as separating nature from humans and placing it above humans, consequently increasing its agency. The forest is presented as something to *experience*, to be *spellbound and possessed by*. While humans are small in comparison to the *deep forest* there’s still something for humans to experience, and together with the focus of the woman in the image, humans still hold certain agency in comparison to nature. Sweden’s forests holds *fairy tales*, which are thought to be made by humans; *culture*, which is also, something primarily thought to be made by humans. *Nature* thus holds something for itself but also for the enjoyment and thrill of humans.

In Sweden the forests are not only filled with animals, plants and beautiful landscapes, but also otherworldly beings stemming from folklore and mythology. They are filled to the brim with ancient (and well-known) stories, offering an experience worth traveling to Sweden to → something other than the ordinary nature experience while still with “outdoor activities” promoted and comfortable lodgings.

So you discover this other side of the national parks – which is implied more mystical, thrilling, dramatic and unexpected – while still being offered the safety and accessibility of classic tourist activities, thus lowering the gap for coming out to nature.

You don’t walk in the forest – you wander. No direction → you’ll find unexpected places with unexpected things (or creatures), you don’t experience the Swedish forests by following the trails, but going off-trail into the unknown

Listening to the story gets you into the right vibe for experiencing the forest and its other (darker?) side

Myths:

Nature as a space separated from everyday life and offers a distinct place for humans to rest, reflect and return to the stillness of nature.

The ideal human-nature relationship is being alone, silent and in a meditative/reflective state

Nature is representative of wisdom and age; humans as temporarily existing in the never-ending cycle of nature's life

- Connoted from the contrast of the stillness of the trees (they'll never move, only grow until they die), the moss growing on the trees (indicating that they've been there for a long time) and the young women's modern clothes and obvious movement around the world.

Nature possesses deep mysteries and untouched beauty which humans are drawn to. While possibly dangerous/mysterious, it's still accessible for humans to explore, be in and enjoy

- More elements of danger as the person in the image is a woman, who culturally is regarded as more exposed and weak. Her solitude in nature, together with not having all her senses aware (listening to something in headphones) presents a more eerie view of nature.

Nature as something to be enjoyed but not necessarily completely by itself – you're always tied to the civilization through something (headphones)

Nature as subject with agency and attributes, but also as an object for human enjoyment

Item 2: Åsnen National Park – Småland

Denotation:

The image depicts a calm wetland landscape dominated by purple and pink tones. A jetty stretches diagonally from the lower right corner towards the middle of the image, where a person, presumably a woman, stands at the edge looking out over the lake. She is dressed in a bright beige jacket, blue jeans and sneakers, and wears a dark cap. The jetty appears clean and

constructed from light grey or beige wooden planks. Reflections and dark shadows are cast onto the water beneath it.

The lake itself has ripples. Grassy vegetation, some rocks, and leaves from water lilies is showing from the surface. In the background, the borders of the lake are marked by tree-covered hills, some touched by orange light that could either indicate sunset or autumn foliage. Branches with leaves are partly visible from above, framing the image from the top. The cloudy sky is coloured in pink and purple hues.

At the same time, the human figure is visually central. The woman is positioned as the focal point of the composition, reinforced by the diagonal lines of the jetty leading towards her. Although she appears small in relation to the landscape, the constructed jetty establishes a clear human presence in nature and suggests that humans create designated places for themselves within the natural environment.

The accompanying text describes the area as “unspoiled wetlands” and forests “steeped in mythological tales.” Wetlands are associated with mud, darkness and strange creatures such as trolls or frogs, making the environment feel less inviting. Words such as “explore,” “enter,” and “legend has it” frame the landscape as something mysterious to discover. References to trolls, hidden gold and silver chambers, “water-lily filled waterways,” sleeping “under the stars,” and John Bauer connect the landscape to Swedish folklore and mythology. The phrase “back-to-nature” implies a return to a simpler and more natural way of living.

Connotation:

Nature is represented as vast and available, yet not very welcoming to enter. Instead, it seems meant to be gazed at from a distance. The woman’s passive stance mirrors the role of the spectator, while the lake itself does not appear inviting for swimming or interaction. The visible grass and vegetation make it feel untouched. Wetlands are also commonly associated with muddy, dark environments and animals such as frogs or eels, creating a more raw and less romanticised representation of nature.

The jetty takes up a large part of the image and visually directs attention towards the woman, reinforcing her as the centre of the composition. Its clean appearance suggests maintenance and human control within the landscape. At the same time, the branches hanging above the

woman create a feeling that something may be watching her. Since the photographer could have framed the image differently, their inclusion feels intentional. The branches seem to hover above her almost protectively, or as a warning, adding to the mysterious atmosphere. The woman's appearance blends into the colours of the scenery and as she stands alone in the stillness of the wetland, she appears almost spellbound by the landscape. The lake itself feels both shallow and dangerous at the same time, as if it could lure someone in. The purple colours and low hanging clouds strengthen the magical and mysterious feeling, making the landscape appear almost divine or supernatural. This is further reinforced by the accompanying texts, where the folkloric elements of trolls and hidden chambers add a mystical feeling to the image. The strong stillness of the image and purple lighting makes the viewer feel that the forests are truly "steeped in mythological tales", containing secrets waiting to be discovered. The fact that it is "yet to be found" gives the impression that the trolls may not want humans to discover it. The trolls therefore appear slightly hostile or deceptive, as if they want to lure humans deeper into dangerous landscapes.

The phrase "legend has it" introduces storytelling and mystery, while the hidden chamber "yet to be found" suggests that visitors might discover treasure themselves. Nature is therefore represented as something for humans to gain from, where the encouragement of exploring the forest has a distinct goal. It is also rather contradictory in its presentation of nature as "unspoiled", being a positive association of authentic nature experiences, while simultaneously encouraging tourists to explore and be there. The mention of John Bauer adds cultural and artistic associations to the landscape, connecting nature to Swedish folklore and heritage. The phrase "back-to-nature" further suggests that humans once belonged more closely to nature and can temporarily return to it, although more as part of tourism rather than everyday life. Nature consequently becomes something people can briefly visit before returning to urban modernity: if humans can "go back" to nature, they can also leave it behind again.

Myths:

Nature is represented as a source of cultural and artistic inspiration. The landscape is not only natural but cultural, carrying stories, traditions and myths within it.

→ John Bauer

To feel tranquility and take a break in. It's unspoiled until now, but will it remain like that?

Nature is constructed as mysterious, enchanted and spiritually charged, with magical landscapes inhabited by folkloric creatures, hidden treasures and ancient stories waiting to be discovered. Nature becomes a place of mystery, stillness and wonder, associated with darkness, unpredictability and enchantment.

Nature appears as something untouched and distant, yet simultaneously accessible through tourism and carefully designed entry points such as the jetty.

Nature is romanticised as a temporary escape from modern life: a peaceful and mystical place where humans can reconnect with authenticity before returning to ordinary urban existence. Nature is something to gaze at (tourist-gaze) and exists to be experienced, admired and consumed by humans. Nature has unspoiled landscapes waiting for humans to explore.

Item 3: Getåravinen Nature Reserve – Östergötland

Denotation:

The image depicts a pine-tree forest photographed from a lower angle downhill. A river with a low water-level streams from the image's centre down towards the foreground, with rocks and branches peaking out of the water. On the right side there is a steep hill with tree trunks spread apart from one another, while ferns and plants cover the lower parts of the forest, especially on the left side. The tops of the trees are not visible. Three middle-aged women are walking in a row on a path carved out along the hillside. They wear backpacks and short clothes, suggesting warm weather. The women are looking in different directions, either at the path or the surrounding forest, and although they are centered in the image they blend into the shadows and scenery rather than standing out strongly. The right side of the image is darker and covered in shadows, while sunlight filters through the trees on the left side. The color scheme is dominated by saturated greens and browns, making the forest appear vibrant and blooming.

The accompanying text describes the landscape as “jungle-like” and located in a “ravine.” Jungle creates associations to deep forests, unknown creatures and getting lost, while ravine

suggests remoteness and danger. References to trolls, winding streams, old spruce forests and creatures spying on visitors connect the landscape to folklore and mystery. The text also highlights activities such as hiking, sleeping “like a king” between the treetops and exploring old marble quarries, connecting nature both to mythology and tourism.

Connotation:

Although the forest is dense and vast, it does not feel uncanny or threatening, but rather welcoming and fairy-like. The women appear calm and carefree, quietly taking in the scenery while walking in silence. Their casual hiking clothes suggest an easy and accessible activity rather than adventure. The warm sunlight, vibrant greenery and summer atmosphere create associations to Swedish summer, wellness and peaceful outdoor life. However, the accompanying text adds a feeling of eeriness where trolls spying on visitors implies that the forest is not fully owned by humans, but rather belongs to the troll and its creatures. This resembles classic folkloric stories where supernatural beings watch over nature and punish disrespectful behaviour. This can also be connoted to someone always having ownership over nature, whether it's a human or a mythological creature. Although the stonetroll is part of nature it's still described as owning it as it is its home to protect. While descriptions of the troll sleeping on a bed further creates associations with human life separated from nature, it can also be argued as an extension of nature. Nature is thus given agency through its guardians which protect it from humans and induces respect grounded in fear.

The image overall gives the impression of a pleasant outdoor activity or hike. At the same time, the river's low water-level can also be associated with drought and environmental destruction connected to climate change, especially next to the human-made path. Nature is therefore not represented as fully untouched. At the same time, nature is also represented as a source for outdoor activities, where the comparison to a “jungle” strengthens the promotional aspect by associating Swedish nature with something exotic, raw and adventurous.

Myths:

Nature is both wild and accessible; something greater than humans, but still carefully organised into activities and attractions for visitors.

Nature receives agency through folkloric elements and stories where the mythological creatures act as its guardians

- However, further separating humans from nature? Or maybe it's an effect of human exploitation, that nature's creatures need to be on watch for harming human behaviour, thus creating a stricter border between humans and nature/folklore

Nature is a source of adventure, explorations and social enjoyments

Nature is represented as dramatic through associations with other climates/eco systems such as the *jungle* → makes nature more appealing, seem more raw and dramatic

Nature is home to many creatures who are there to guard it from intruders, meaning that visitors need to be watchful and respectful (always on edge)

The Swedish forest is green, warm and welcoming, offering a comfortable and adventurous experience for all ages.

Nature is never independent, but always owned or protected by something, whether it's humans or creatures.

Being in nature is a social activity which gives you wellness, happiness and content. It's multifaceted and broad: there's something for everyone.

Item 4: Tiveden National Park – Närke and Västergötland

Denotation:

The image depicts a rocky forest landscape photographed from a frog perspective. Large moss-covered boulders dominate the composition, with vegetation and ferns growing between the rocks. On the upper right side, a large angular rock rests on top of smaller stones, creating a shadowy area beneath it. In the foreground on the left side, a blurry green branch is visible. Behind the rocks, narrow tree trunks and green leaves can be seen against a bright white-grey sky. The image is dominated by green and grey tones.

In the upper middle of the image, three people stand on the rocks: a middle-aged man stands in front of two middle-aged women. The man has a dark beard and stands with his hands raised and outwards, wearing a green flat cap, checked shirt, green trousers, boots and a small

backpack. The women both have blonde ponytails and wear jeans and short-sleeved shirts in lighter colours. They are watching the man and listening to him. The women's feet are hidden behind the rocks, and although the people are centered in the image, they appear small compared to the large boulders surrounding them.

The accompanying text describes Tiveden as “vast,” “dramatic” and “enchanted,” situated between Sweden's two greatest lakes. The park “boasts” rock crevices, caves, lakes and hiking trails that “delight mythological creatures and outdoor enthusiasts alike.” Visitors are encouraged to hike to “The Troll's Church” for a “stunning view” and to enjoy glamping, dining experiences, fishing, biking and bungalow stays. The text therefore connects nature to both mythology and organised tourist experiences.

Connotation:

The frog perspective and large boulders make the landscape appear dramatic, with the vegetation growing over the rocks giving the impression that the forest has its own life beyond human control. This is accentuated by the sharpness of the rocks which almost feel unnatural and . While the humans are rather small in comparison to the giant rocks around them, their centered position still makes them the focus of the image.

The man is connoted as being dressed for nature experiences, which is mainly drawn from the fact that his clothes are in nature colours, something “outdoor” wear often is. He seems to have durable shoes, a cap that can protect from the sun, durable clothes, a backpack to keep extra clothes, food, water or emergency items. His body language suggests that he is telling something to the women, perhaps performing a guided tour or that he is simply knowledgeable here and knows a lot about the place or nature itself. The women are not particularly adapted in their clothing for a trip in the forest. They have no bag, a short-sleeved shirt means you could get scratched by branches, tight jeans that do not look very comfortable to walk in if you are going on a long hike in the forest, especially in this very rugged landscape where it looks like there could be a lot of climbing to get around the rocks. This creates the impression that nature is accessible even to inexperienced visitors, but also that knowledge is needed in order to fully understand and move through it. The women's impression of nature is decided by what the man decides to highlight in the national park, making them passive, listening and observing rather than actively engaging with the landscape.

The image itself contains no direct folkloric creatures, but the dramatic rocks, moss and hidden crevices create associations to troll landscapes and fairytale forests. The text, on the other side, strengthens the folkloric element through references to mythological creatures and “The Troll’s Church.” The idea that trolls have their own church gives them a human-like society and positions the forest as inhabited by hidden beings living parallel to humans. The crevices and caves create the feeling that something may be hiding within the rocks, beyond what humans can see or fully understand. Usages of words such as “enchancing”, which denotes very pleasant and spellbinding, might connote nature as luring the visitor into bewitchment. Nature therefore becomes enchanting not only in the sense of beauty, but also spellbinding and mysterious. Moreover, the text references “mythological creatures and outdoor enthusiasts alike”, placing them together as enthusiasts of nature’s various attractions and can be understood as regarding humans equal to any other living creature. Nature is for everyone to take part of.

At the same time, nature is effectively commodified through the many promoted experiences and activities. Glamping, dining experiences, hiking, fishing and bungalow stays package nature into comfortable and accessible tourist experiences. Nature becomes something to enjoy, explore and consume under structured forms rather than something humans simply exist within. Even the language of “stunning views” and “enjoy” frames nature through human pleasure and experience. The mythological elements are also placed alongside tourists and outdoor enthusiasts, making folklore itself part of the marketed experience. The placement of rock crevices, smaller lakes and hiking trails in the same sentence equates them with each other, creating the impression that just as the man-made hiking trails, the crevices and lakes are also there for human use.

Myths:

Nature is never presented as “just nature” but always tied to experiences, activities or meanings for humans

The forest contains hidden dimensions humans cannot fully access or control. Nature is enchanting, spellbinding and mysterious.

Nature has an intriguing force which is bigger than humans and difficult for us to fully grasp.

Nature is a living and active force inhabited by other-than-human beings, presenting a parallel world which exists side by side with humans. Humans are part of this world but have effectively separated themselves from it. Nature has not only inspired folklore but is the actual place where the mythical stories live.

Nature is both wild and demanding (therefore requires knowledge or a guide to move within) while at the same time also being accessible to the inexperienced. Nature is “democratized” but at the same time requires expertise.

Nature's meaning is not self-evident: it needs to be interpreted, explained, mediated through human knowledge. Nature is not fully accessible in itself, humans give it meaning and create the understanding.

- (maybe a bit as a contrast to the material where nature seems to be a place for individual restoration, in that material nature is more the source of understanding itself?)

Nature should be experienced under structured and planned forms where humans have control over the experience. You should not stray off the created path as you might encounter something unexpected and dangerous (the mysteries of the forest) (but also something uncomfortable which might give you a negative tourist experience which goes against the ideal experience of nature)

Item 5: Tresticklan National Park – West Sweden

Denotation:

The image depicts a lake surrounded by dense forest during what appears to be summer. The colors are saturated, bright and warm, dominated by green tones. The water stretches from the foreground and covers most of the image. Lily pads float on the still surface, with only a few ripples visible, while reeds and grass rise from the lower part of the image. On the right side, a rocky surface covered in grass extends slightly into the water.

Three young people stand on the rocky slab. Two women and one man are dressed in hiking clothes with backpacks, hiking shoes and outdoor trousers. The woman in the middle faces the viewer while smiling and looking towards the woman beside her, while the others look at her. Their reflections are clearly reflected in the water beneath them.

The forest in the background appears dense and green, with both leafy and coniferous trees visible. Behind the trees, an orange-yellow light from either the rising or setting sun shines through, creating reflections in the water and giving the image a glowing appearance. The people are centered in the image, but large parts of the composition are still occupied by the lake and surrounding forest.

The accompanying text describes the national park as “steeped in Viking mythology”, meaning that it is filled to the brim with Viking history and cultural stories. The usage of the word “boasting” when describing the park’s roadless and uninhabited pine forests presents it as a source of pride, accentuated by it being the largest in Southern Sweden. Visitors are invited to “walk for days through uninterrupted wilderness”, implying that for a long period of time they will only be surrounded by nature. Various landscapes are highlighted with adjectives such as “epic” and “dramatic”, denoting them as appearing extremely beautiful, noticeable and extreme. A giant, which is an imaginary creature similar to a man but extremely tall, strong and cruel, is said to have lived in the caves of the park, adding an element of folklore to the material. The text also promotes getting “back to nature”, similarly to previous examples where a simpler way of life is marketed, this time with the addition of sustainability which highlights it as an accommodation that causes little or no damage to the environment. Various outdoor activities are mentioned for explorations of nature, also highlighting Viking mythology with a “legendary” mountain included in Sweden’s first UNESCO Global Geopark.

Connotation:

The image creates a warm and welcoming feeling strongly associated with Swedish summer, presenting the “perfect postcard” of Swedish nature. The bright sunlight, green forests and still water make the landscape appear calm, beautiful and flourishing, giving an overall impression of nature as being welcoming. The three young people appear happy and experienced, being properly equipped with hiking clothes, backpacks and outdoor shoes looking intentional in their nature activity. The people are not standing silently gazing at the

landscape in reflection, but are instead interacting with each other, smiling and laughing. Nature thus becomes associated with social bonding, adventure and movement rather than solitude or contemplation. The image therefore presents Swedish nature as something people actively do things in together.

In both the image and accompanying text, nature is presented as dramatic and ethereal with an “epic scenery”, granting nature some agency over humans. However, the people in the image are still the focal point of the photograph and the continuous marketing of human experiences in nature turn this into commodification through sublimity.

The use of “no surprise” after describing the dramatic landscape implies that such environments naturally belong to giants and mythological beings. At the same time, the giant Bore is described in the past tense, suggesting that these mythological beings no longer actively inhabit the landscape. Folklore thus becomes something historical and cultural rather than an active force in the present. Moreover, as the landscape is described as “steeped in Viking mythology”, old stories and legends linger in the forests and mountains but mostly as atmosphere and heritage. The mountain being connected to UNESCO Global Geopark status further strengthens the sense of cultural and historical significance, while also legitimizing the landscape as something valuable and worth preserving.

The agency of nature is largely undermined in the accompanying texts. It is presented as something tangible for humans to experience, whereas the image’s composition of the humans being centered turns the forest into something to experience within the frame of outdoor activities. There, nature is represented as vast, untouched and separated from human civilization through descriptions such as “roadless,” “uninhabited” and “uninterrupted wilderness.” This again represents Swedish nature as raw and authentic where its attractiveness partly lies in the idea that humans have not yet fully touched or altered it. The marketing of the park as a place where tourists can “walk for days” without encountering modern society or other people becomes somewhat contradictory, since the material is also actively inviting visitors to travel there and experience this untouched wilderness themselves. This creates an image of nature as something left for the visitor to explore and discover, forming associations with colonialism. Moreover, the usage of “passing” to describe the landscapes on the hikes form a sense of nature’s sceneries as something to gaze at shortly and

then walk past. Simultaneously, it could also be connoted as part of the nature experience and bear more positive associations.

The phrase “get back to nature” creates the impression that humans once lived closer to nature but have since become separated from it. However, this reconnection takes place through organised tourism and planned activities such as hiking packages, cycling trails and sustainable cottages. Nature is therefore commodified into accessible and enjoyable experiences. Even sustainability becomes part of the marketed experience, where visitors can reconnect with nature in a responsible and comfortable way.

Myth:

Through being described as uninhabited, roadless, “uninterrupted wilderness” and as something in which one can “walk for days”, nature is represented as an endless untouched wilderness that exists outside human civil society, and that is older than humans have walked on this earth. It is most beautiful when it is untouched.

“Epic scenery” and being “dramatically high” together with its crystal clear waters and the fairytale-like water lilies creates the myth of nature as an aesthetic object, but also as a spectacle or drama. It is visually impressive and captivates humans by its beauty: nature as enchanting. Nature is most attractive when presented as raw and epic.

Humans being centered in the image and actively visited and explored by humans through moving and socialising, and connections to activities such as hiking and cycling create the myth of nature as existing to be experienced and explored through human activities and human social constructs. It acts as an arena for human social life and adventure.

The description of being steeped in viking mythology and connection to the folkloric character of giant Bore with its legendary mountain gives the myth of nature as mystical and magical and the home of many non-human/animal creatures. Nature is constructed as deeply historical with mythological heritage, a place where the past lives on. But the myth of Bore is solely placed in the past, with no active presence. The cultural heritage is leveraged in text but described as nothing that can really be experienced or explored today, it has no agency in the present.

The phenomenon of “getting back to nature” leverages on the myth of humans having left their connection to nature but wanting, needing or being able to actively seek a way back to it. Places nature as something humans have lost but where there is longing for reconnection.

The sunlight has a great effect on how humans perceive nature and warm, bright colours make nature seem more inviting. Also gives the myth that nature can be manipulated by humans in their presentation of it.

Item 6: Tyresta National Park – Sörmland

Denotations:

The image is taken from a slightly elevated angle, looking down towards the ground. The ground is covered with vegetation and white patches that look like moss. The most eye-catching element is a large tree trunk lying on the ground, which is also partially covered in moss and vegetation. The trunk is textured with tears and cracks. Several thick, sprawling branches extend from it: some rest on the ground, while one large branch points upward and out of the frame. Where the trunk has begun to be overgrown, more branches point straight up from the ground in various directions. In the background of the image different kinds of trees, appearing to be spruce, are visible. Furthest back, the image becomes blurry with a light brown and yellow glow. The ground is uneven, and the various elements: branches, moss, and smaller trees, are mixed in a sprawling, disorganised way.

The text describes Tyresta National Park in Södermanland, noting that it is "a world away" despite being only 45 minutes by bus from central Stockholm. It is southern Sweden's largest old-growth forest and is described as "fit for a fairytale," complete with thick, knotty pines and moss-covered landscapes. The text mentions "legend has it" that a flame-bearing character called “Lyktgubben” haunts the darkest enclaves, attempting to lead visitors astray. It also highlights the Stockholm archipelago and various activities like renting a cabin (near a former Viking stronghold), renting a kayak, or exploring Viking history and mythology at the Swedish History Museum. The nature is described as "accessible."

Connotations:

The "old-growth" forest suggests wisdom. Highlighting its vastness gives the sense of being an exciting place for tourists to explore.

The phrase "fit for a fairytale" is connotated as a folklore reference with positive connotation, since a fairytale is a story you usually tell children. Folklore, especially in Sweden, often revolves around the Swedish' forest with moss and old trees where trolls and other creatures live. That they describe the place as fit for a fairytale makes the reader connote the natural landscape as more loaded with mystical or mythological meaning. Reinforcing what kind of nature that can hold mythological connotations. Stockholm's archipelago is also brought into being fit for a fairytale, something which usually had not been an as clear connection. The archipelago of Sweden's capital is highly inhabited and touristic, but incorporating the fairytale image into the reader's head could spark new thoughts of how even more inhabited natural places may hold mysteries beyond what the naked human eye can see.

The fallen trunk is connotated as a dead tree that has been lying there for a long time, evidenced by the moss growing over it and the weathered cracks, seemingly untouched by humans. While the tree is dead, the unpredictable, winding branches feel almost alive, like winding snakes.

The light in the image adds a sense of mystique, sneaking in between trees rather than surrounding us.

Although no humans are visible in the image, tourism is encouraged through mentions of rentals and museums in the text, as well as suggesting that you may meet Lyktgubben when visiting this forest. Nature is described as "accessible", in this tourism context implying accessible for humans. It could be that nature in itself is accessible, or that humans have made it accessible.

Folkloristic elements are highlighted in the text by referring to the character "Lyktgubben". Referring to it as a character makes it unclear what form it takes. "Gubbe" in Swedish can be connotated to an old man, but also a figure. He carries fire, signaling danger or a warning, and

his goal is to mislead people. This creates an interplay with the winding branches and dead wood, death here takes on a scary or negative connotation. Lyktgubben lurks in the shadows, suggesting this is his land and that humans are intruders. He is a part of nature, or alternatively takes on the form of nature's protector. This makes the forest a place humans should perhaps not exploit, yet it also makes it an exciting adventure for those who thrive on the feeling of being a little bit afraid, like the tingling feeling of watching a horror movie but from the safety of your own home.

The mention of "darkest enclaves", as a dark territory differing from others, and "a world away" connotes a secluded territory, guarded by this hostile figure of Lyktgubben, far from human civilization. Yet only 45 minutes away from the tourist friendly Swedish capital Stockholm. The proximity to Stockholm, compared to the "world away" description connotes a transition to another dimension or realm, yet one that is easily reached.

Myths:

The dead tree with the overgrown moss that looks untouched by humans creates the myth of nature having its own life and death, processes that exist and change over time, independent of humans.

The tree's snake-like winding branches making the tree almost feel alive, though at the same time being clearly connotated to be dead, and the moss spreading and growing creates the myth of nature as active, something that moves, acts and can wind in its own way.

The light that sneaks in, the blurry background, the mysterious lightning and the unpredictable pattern of the ground and tree creates the myth of nature as something difficult to overview, something hidden and unpredictable and perhaps not fully accessible to human understanding.

Lyktgubben who wants to mislead humans, the mention of the "darkest enclaves", mysterious light, flames, "haunts", "lead visitors astray" and this secluded place being "a world away" creates the myth of nature as something that can actively oppose humans. Nature, through folkloric elements, is hostile towards human intrusion. Nature is a place where humans are outsiders and not welcome.

Lyktgubben as someone/something that “lives in nature” creates the myth of nature as not empty, as inhabited by beings humans cannot fully understand. Nature is not just an empty place for human enjoyment, but a social world on its own beyond human involvement. The legend of Lyktgubben together with the mention of this place as “fit for a fairytale” constructs the myth of nature when connected to cultural elements as both negatively and positively charged for humans, it both scares and enchants in an innocent way.

The prompting to rent a cabin or kayak and the proximity to civilization, being accessible from Stockholm, positions nature as something that is easy to get to, and possible and accessible to experience and enjoy. *Made accessible by humans for humans? or in nature's nature to be accessible?*

Item 7: Kittelfältet Nature Reserve – Värmland

Denotations:

The image revolves around a lake surrounded by forest. In the foreground, the ground is covered in dense vegetation, such as bushes and shrubs. A number of tall coniferous trees with bare trunks stand sparsely, their treetops extending beyond the frame of the image. The scene is bright with clear colors, and shadows are cast around the tree trunks. In the background, more trees can be glimpsed behind the lake, appearing dense from a distance. The lake reflects these background trees and the sky, which is otherwise not very visible in the image. The sky appears clear blue with some white clouds. In the lower midpoint, precisely centered between the sparse trees, stands a person with their back to the viewer, facing the lake. The person wears a short-sleeved dark shirt and dark pants, with blonde hair tied up in a ponytail.

The text describes smaller tarns formed by the ice sheet in the forests of Värmland, featuring vertical edges and flat bottoms. It describes this as unique topography, originating from the Ice Age, specifically as water-filled potholes from receding glaciers. One can walk a one-kilometer loop around Sundstjärn, the largest of these glacial relics. The text highlights old-growth pine trees, the "magical sheen" of turquoise waters, and notes that the area is part

of the EU's Natura 2000 protected areas. It mentions hiking trails for all experience levels and encourages readers to "treat yourself" to a country house weekend or lodge with magnificent views, including visits to a historic mining reserve and a well-preserved 19th-century mining village.

Connotations:

The descriptions of vertical edges, flat bottoms, and receding glaciers build an image of this being much more than just a lake, it is a water-filled pothole from the Ice Age. This makes it more interesting than a "regular lake," emphasizing that it is something beyond the ordinary.

The light in the image and the shadows appearing, together with the human wearing a short-sleeved shirt suggest it is a sunny and warm day, creating a light, happy feeling in the image. The bright and alive colors, crystal-clear lake and beautiful and serene landscape gives an inviting and welcoming sense.

The trees tower over the human, who, based on body shape and hair, is connoted as a woman. She becomes small in relation to the large water and the tall, old-growth trees that do not even fit within the frame of the image. She carries no equipment or backpack and is the only person visible, yet she is centered so the focus lands on her. It is as if we see nature through her, watching her admire the view. She also looks to be slightly in motion, as if she is doing the hike mentioned in the text.

Through emphasizing the heritage from the Ice Age, historic mining and mining village the focus falls on historical elements of nature, emphasizing both human history where nature has been used for its mining resources and the time before humans when nature held its own sole power.

The text and the placement of the human in the image focus on experience. The use of "Treat yourself" implies that nature and nature experiences are kinds of luxurious goods, treats for human well-being. It insinuates that visiting nature is something one does not necessarily always have time or money for. It is inaccessible, but desirable, and therefore considered a treat.

The mention of Natura 2000 connotes that nature is something sacred that humans should not interfere with or destroy.

Myths:

The mention of the Ice Age, glaciers, old growth and unique topography constructs the myth of nature as something formed by forces beyond human control and existence, having its own history: older, larger and independent of humans.

The mention of Natura 2000 and the image showing no visible human impact, except for the human actually being in the image, could construct the myth of nature untouched by humans. At the same time, a woman is clearly visible in the image, and nature experiences such as hiking are strongly encouraged by both image and text. This creates some kind of contradiction between wanting something to be preserved, protected and untouched, while still wanting people to visit it and use it for exercise. Being part of Natura 2000 is also used while promoting visiting the place.

The highlighted hiking trails, being for “all experience levels” in relation to the woman in the image seeming to do a hike but without wearing special hiking gear, creates the myth of nature as something everyone can take part in.

It also creates the myth of nature having been made organised and accessible by humans. It is not “just there”, but has also designed for experience (hiking trails having been mapped out). While at the same time being genuine and authentic, with its roots in the Ice Age where humans had no interference.

That the woman is alone in nature, doing a hike, her gaze out over the lake and appearing small compared to the large trees and landscape creates the myth of nature as a place for exercise and reflection, as well as something to experience alone. Her watching the landscape also constructs the myth of nature to be gazed at.

The beautiful and inviting sense of the image reinforces this gazing, constructing the myth of nature as something meant to be enjoyed aesthetically, as something picture-perfect.

The prompt to “treat yourself”, in connection to mentioning nature in relation to hotels, lodges and magnificent views creates the myth of nature as a treat for humans, something to indulge in and a source for well-being and sense of luxury. Nature gains value through human enjoyment and humans feeling “rich” for affording the luxurious feeling it gives. Nature is a form of personal reward and something you experience on a getaway. Not an everyday thing.

The turquoise waters and magical sheen, both seen in image and described in text, clear reflection on the waters in the image and the warm and inviting light construct the myth of nature as visually “perfect”, unreal in its beauty. This kind of picture-perfect, or serenity, of nature gives an aesthetic that almost feels magical.

The focus on geology, history and historical experiences creates the myth of nature as something rather scientific and historical, rather than mythologically alive. It puts nature in a more scientific or rational understanding and we understand it through the geological history of which it has been given its form.

Item 8: Fulufjället National Park – Dalarna

Denotations:

The image shows a mountain-dominated gorge-like formation in nature. The lower half of the image is covered in grey stone, consisting of both large boulders and smaller rocks, forming a gravel-like surface that slopes inward from both the left and right sides toward the center, creating a V-shape. The stone varies in shades of grey and white and is mixed with bright green vegetation. A tree or large bush rises from the lower edge of the image, while low-growing plants spread across the rocky ground. In the upper half of the image, the grey stone transitions abruptly into steep, rust-orange rock formations that also slope down toward the central V. These formations frame the scene like walls. Some vegetation is visible here as well, particularly on the right side, where the rock appears to level out slightly at the top, allowing sparse trees to grow. At the center of the image, within the red rock, water is visibly rushing downward, forming a waterfall. Beneath it, large white areas are visible, likely also stone.

In the middle of the grey area, at the base of the V-shape, a small bridge-like structure appears. It is very small in relation to the surrounding landscape. On the bridge, two pairs of people can be seen walking. One pair appears to be moving toward the waterfall, while in the pair behind them, one person seems to have stopped and is turned toward the trees on the right. Two of the individuals are wearing bright red tops. At the very top of the image, the sky is visible, light grey with a slight purple tone. The overall colours are clear and distinct.

The text describes Fulufjället National Park, a national park covering 385 km² and one of the largest in Sweden. It highlights the waterfall Njupesjär, which is 93 metres high, with water falling freely for 70 metres, making it one of Sweden's tallest waterfalls. The park is also associated with the world's oldest tree, located in Älvdalen, and references the historical Älvdalen witch trials, where women accused of being "witches" were executed. The word witches is put within quotation marks. The text further promotes activities such as visiting Tomteland to "meet real-life mythical characters," glamping experiences, romantic waterfall visits, witch trial-themed hikes, and guided excursions focused on mythical creatures said to inhabit areas like Styggforsen.

Connotations:

The waterfall functions as the focal point of both the landscape and the image composition. The way the terrain slopes inward and the presence of the bridge guide both the image viewer's gaze and the movement of the people within the image toward the waterfall, reinforcing its role as the central attraction. The people themselves appear to be engaged in a hike toward the waterfall.

The colour of the rust-red rock formations contribute to a sense of something visually striking and somewhat unusual compared to typical associations with Swedish nature.

The bright red clothing worn by some of the individuals makes them stand out against the otherwise natural colour palette, drawing attention to their presence. They are very small in relation to the vast landscape, but still centered in the picture. Though the landscape is very grand, humans are still made a central component of nature.

Despite the inclusion of the human-made element of the bridge, it appears minimal and almost insignificant within the larger composition. The infrastructure feels carefully placed, suggesting respect for the environment, constructed to enable access without heavily disturbing the natural surroundings. It also contributes to making nature accessible, humans have built bridges in this otherwise described “virtually untouched” landscape, just to get a better look at the waterfall.

The steep rock walls and the V-shaped formation create a sense of a powerful, almost overwhelming landscape. The scene appears nearly unnatural in its structure, yet it is simultaneously described as untouched, reinforcing a sense of grandeur.

The reference to the witch trials introduces a folkloric dimension, although it is framed critically. The use of “vicious” associates the witch hunt with violence and injustice, also since it is connected to “execution”, a very negatively and violent loaded word connected to death. The use of quotation marks around “witches” suggests that witches are a fabricated phenomenon, which is also connected to the general beliefs today. The witch hunts have even been mobilised within the feminist movement as an example of misogyny, described as a way of justifying executing women who deviated from the norm in some way, thereby debunking witches as a phenomenon. It is in the material more shifted towards a historical reflection than an active folkloric myth.

Another folkloric dimension is the promotion of “meet real life mythical characters at fairytale land”. It remains unclear what this means. Real life mythical characters can be connotated to be living, real creatures. However, fairytale land connotes to some kind of theme park, implying that the characters are made alive by human actors. In that case, humans interpret folkloric characters, deciding how they are perceived and what form they take.

The mention of glamping and guided tours frames the experience of nature as comfortable, organised, and accessible. Nature is something to be visited in a structured way rather than something entirely wild or unpredictable. This also connects to the bridge in the image as having been built in the landscape for humans to be able to enjoy nature easily. At the same time, the landscape is described as “virtually untouched,” suggesting a tension between the idea of pristine nature and the reality of human presence and infrastructure.

The lighting contributes to a warm and somewhat romantic atmosphere, particularly around the waterfall. The terms “magical” and “romantic” reinforce this, positioning nature as emotionally charged and aesthetically pleasing. The composition, with the waterfall centrally placed, enhances the sense of spectacle.

Myths:

The enormous mountains, the centrally placed waterfall, and the small scale of the people and the bridge together build the myth that nature is larger and holds more power than humans.

The presence of a small, discreet, and seemingly non-invasive bridge builds the myth that it is possible to approach and experience nature without destroying it, that humans can both preserve and use nature at the same time.

At the same time, nature is to be gazed at. We even interfere and build infrastructure to gaze at it. Even if you feel and look smaller than nature, human enjoyment is still the main focus. The bridge guiding both people and the viewer’s gaze toward the waterfall, the emphasis on it being “one of Sweden’s highest waterfalls,” and the promotion of guided tours and glamping together build the myth of nature as an attraction: something to travel to, see, and experience. Nature experiences are framed as something that can also be comfortable, exclusive, and enjoyable.

The descriptions of a “magical” and “romantic” waterfall, combined with the warm light and dramatic landscape, build the myth that nature possesses emotional or even supernatural qualities. It becomes something enchanting, not just a physical environment.

The references to the witch trials and to mythical characters together build the myth of nature as a place where stories, both historical and mythical, reside. At the same time, the framing of “witches” as a questioned or debunked concept suggests that not all myths are presented as active or believable in the present.

The myth that nature is grand, dramatic and most real when it’s untouched and raw, gives the most authentic experience.

Item 9: Vålådalen Nature Reserve – Jämtland

Denotations:

The image shows, in the foreground where the focus is sharp, a yellow-green ground that almost looks hilly, or bubbly. Large grey stones are scattered across the surface, and between or on some of these small hills there are sharp white patches. As the sharpness fades into the background, more of this bubbling green landscape continues, with a texture that makes it look like bushes or small trees covering the terrain. Where the foreground transitions into the background, there is a larger area of this textured, possibly vegetated surface. A stretch of more yellow-toned ground is also visible, appearing to contain smaller vegetation. In the far background, a faintly orange-coloured sky appears with thin clouds stretching across it. Several layers of mountains are visible, forming mountain ranges with white patches on them. The mountains in the distance are coloured in a darker, colder turquoise tone, while the rest of the image is dominated by a soft, warmer yellow light.

In the lower part of the foreground, slightly to the left, a single human figure is visible. The person stands with their back facing the viewer, wearing dark pants and carrying a large green backpack with straps hanging down. They appear to be wearing a beanie or helmet. Their legs are straight, suggesting they are standing still, and their face is turned toward the landscape in front of them.

The text describes Vålådalen Nature Reserve as a protected natural area located in northern Sweden. It presents the reserve as offering a varied landscape with lush forests, beautiful lakes, and “fantasy-worthy” pyramid hills. The landscape is said to include mountainous old-growth forests, pristine waters, and geological formations from the last Ice Age. Both wildlife and humans are described as having inhabited the region, and the presence of two Sámi villages is highlighted, including the possibility of encountering reindeer, with the instruction to observe them from a distance. The reserve is also associated with outdoor activities, relaxation at Åre’s oldest hotel described as an exclusive manor, and lodges offering views of the Northern Lights. Visitors are encouraged to discover the region’s heritage through museums.

Connotations:

There are no clear folkloric elements visible in the image, and only subtle hints of something “mystical” in the text. The colours and lighting suggest it being sunny, with clear shadows around the rounded hills of the landscape indicating strong sunlight. The light orange sky can be associated with either sunrise or sunset, reinforcing the warm tone of the scene.

The landscape is somewhat difficult to interpret. The hills, both big and small, give a playful feeling to the image. It almost looks like a ravine where the foreground breaks into the background, but it could just as well be dense vegetation. This ambiguity creates a sense of fascination, as it is not entirely clear how the landscape is formed or what it consists of.

The human figure gives a calm and still impression. The large backpack with hanging straps signals hiking, suggesting that the person is engaged in a nature experience. However, there is no clearly defined path, which makes it seem as if they are moving through the natural landscape rather than along a constructed route.

The white patches in the landscape are interpreted as snow or glaciers, which, together with the textual reference to Jämtland in northern Sweden and the visible mountain ranges, reinforces the idea of a northern, high-altitude environment. A slightly more yellow-toned stretch of ground resembles a path, possibly worn into the terrain, but the overall wild appearance of the landscape makes it equally plausible that it is naturally formed. At the same time, the text’s encouragement to explore outdoor activities suggests that people do move through this environment, even if it is not entirely visible in the image.

The human figure appears very small in comparison to the vast landscape. The person gazes out over the environment, suggesting contemplation or reflection. Nature is also connected to relaxation and exclusivity through references to hotels and lodges, framing the experience as comfortable and even luxurious.

The descriptions of “magical scenery” and “varied climate” imply more of an authentic, unpredictable natural experience. The “fantasy-worthy” landscape may even evoke associations with fictional worlds, such as those found in fantasy narratives. Magical scenery,

varied climate: prepare for everything, not only sunshine, here nature is real and gives an authentic experience.

Words such as “lush” and “beautiful lakes” carry positive connotations, while “fantasy-worthy” and “magical scenery” introduce a sense of something unreal or extraordinary, almost staged, despite being natural. The “pyramid hills”, though the name of the shape, also evokes associations with pyramids as mysterious and historically difficult-to-explain structures, which, combined with their origin in the Ice Age, reinforces a sense of something ancient and incomprehensible.

The Sámi people’s presence in this area is highlighted, and encountering their reindeer is framed as something special. The instruction to observe them from a distance implies respect and non-interference, suggesting that this is their space. At the same time, the reindeer are described as belonging to the Sámi, which introduces ideas of ownership, although this could also relate to a more complex, possibly symbiotic relationship knowing the cultural heritage of the Sámi people, where their relationship with the reindeer holds great importance for their culture.

Humans and wildlife are both described as inhabitants of the region, which in some way places them on a similar level of worth, though they are still clearly distinguished.

The Northern Lights are highlighted as an attraction, arguably adding a layer of mysticism. Their green, shimmering appearance contributes to the sense that northern Sweden inherently carries a kind of natural mysticism, even without explicit folklore references.

Myths:

The small human figure, the climate described as varied, the vast landscape, mountains in several layers, and the strong soft, dreamy, light together build the myth of nature as grand and powerful, where the human is small or subordinate. Nature appears fascinating, and the human is positioned as humble in relation to it. References to the last Ice Age, pyramid hills, and the hard-to-interpret landscape in the image together build the myth that nature exists before and beyond human knowledge and control, shaped by forces older and greater than humans themselves.

Nature is both dreamy (the soft light, soft hills) and raw (varied climate, dramatic landscape). Both wild, raw, unexpected and dramatic, and dreamy and soft.

The presence of a sole individual with a hiking backpack, standing still and looking out over the landscape, builds the myth of nature as something experienced individually, either as reflection (taking in the landscape) or as personal adventure.

Sweden offers varied nature activities for everyone and with numerous varied activities. Nature in Sweden is to be experienced.

The emphasis on outdoor activities, relaxation, luxury, and hotels builds the myth that nature exists for human well-being. It becomes a space for experience and luxury, where nature gains value through what it provides for humans, e.g. Northern Lights as something to “enjoy” from the comfortability of a hotel.

The instruction to watch reindeer from a distance builds the myth that animals have their own value and require respect. However, this relationship is also regulated, potentially framing it as respect not for animals but rather for the Sámi people. The simultaneous positioning of wildlife and humans as inhabitants of the region builds a slightly ambiguous myth where they are both part of nature, yet still separated, suggesting both equality and hierarchy at the same time.

The use of terms like “fantasy-worthy,” “magical scenery,” the Northern Lights, pyramid hills, and the light in the image together build the myth of nature as a kind of fantasy world, too extraordinary to belong to everyday reality. A fantasy story or game often also holds challenges, or enemies and together with the description of a “varied climate” it also builds the myth of nature as something unpredictable and potentially dangerous.

Item 10: Muddus National Park – Swedish Lapland

Denotations:

The image shows a bright blue stream winding in a zigzag pattern through the landscape. The colours are light and clear. The sky is very light blue and mostly covered with distinguishable white-grey clouds. At the horizon, a mountain range is visible – not very high, but clearly

defined. The landscape appears as a large green field of grass. Around the river there are mainly grassy areas, and around these, a fairly dense amount of trees that look like coniferous trees. They form something like a forest, which then opens up again deeper into the image and seems to be dominated by grass again, possibly where the river continues. Further back toward the horizon, dense forest appears again. Along the water's edge in the foreground stands a row of smaller trees, quite spaced out. The water is clear blue with shifts on the surface.

The text describes Muddus National Park in Swedish Lapland, part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Laponia, and also refers to its Sámi name, Muttos. It is described as the largest forest national park in Sweden (around 500 km²). The landscape includes deep ravines, boggy marshlands, primeval forests, and an “all-encompassing silence.” These elements are said to evoke a “fairytale world,” and the text states that the nature has inspired the Sámi people's rich storytelling tradition. The text also includes invitations to visit the area through guided tours, visit Jokkmokk market, explore Sápmi and Sámi culture, and stay at a “peace and quiet hotel” offering off-grid luxury.

Connotations:

There are no visible humans in the image. The grass looks flat but still natural, not cut or maintained by humans. It almost looks unusually groomed for “wild nature,” but the framing as a national park and the emphasis on silence gives it an untouched sense. That in itself creates fascination – that nature can look like this without human involvement.

The winding river stands out as the most “mysterious” element, why it moves in that pattern is not immediately clear. Otherwise, the image does not strongly signal mysticism through light, colour or editing. The “fairytale world” described in the text is not fully obvious visually, but some elements hint at it – especially the background with dense forest and mountains, which feels distant, large, and unknown.

The reference to primeval forest and “all-encompassing silence” reinforces a sense of something ancient and untouched. The connection to Sámi storytelling suggests that there are elements in the landscape that are not directly visible or understandable. The Sámi, as an Indigenous people, are implicitly positioned as having lived closer to nature and therefore possibly understanding it in a deeper way. It creates a feeling that nature contains something

beyond what we, as tourists, can see. At the same time, the Sámi culture is presented as something that can be visited and experienced through tourism.

There is also a strong sense of remoteness and separation from everyday life through the use of “off grid,” emphasis on silence, and Lapland as we know is a large and sparsely populated area in Sweden. We connotate it as this natural place being very distant from modern society. Nature here offers an authentic experience where human littleness is highlighted, no human sound is close. It is purely the “natural” nature, and gives a raw experience for nature-lovers.

At the same time, the text repeatedly encourages access through highlighting tours, hotels and cultural experiences which frames nature as something that can be entered, experienced, and consumed.

Myths:

The absence of humans in the image, the untouched yet still harmonious landscape, the framing of it as a national park (something to be protected from human interference), the emphasis on silence, and the idea of an ancient forest together build the myth of nature as something original, pristine and untouched, existing independently of humans and human intervention. An untouched wilderness but with a sense of calm. These ideas also build the myth of nature as a space separate from modern society, associated with silence and remoteness, implying a disconnection from everyday life.

With the trees described as ancient, and highlighting Sámi people as Indigenous, nature is represented as timeless and enduring and Sámi presence framed as rooted, as “natural” in this place. Implies a difference to the tourists' presence in nature, as more temporary and as visitors.

The idea of a “fairytale world,” the slight mysticism in the landscape with the winding river, the mountains, the dense forest in the background, the explicit mention of storytelling, and the connotated overall feeling that we cannot see everything with the naked eye together build the myth that nature holds hidden meanings beyond human perception and understanding. Something that those who have lived closer to nature for a long time (Sámi) understand it better and build storytelling around it. Nature is more than what is visible, not fully controllable.

Sámi storytelling inspired by nature and the implication that “they know more than we do” together suggest Indigenous people as having a deeper or more authentic understanding of nature because they have lived there for a long time. Thus constructing the myth that nature cannot be completely understood as a visitor. Implies that it is complicated in some kind of way and needs thousands of years of experience to be able to fully “understand”.

That itself can also be considered to be a myth, that nature is something to be understood.