

Article

The Future Modernism of No-Oil Norway: Øyvind Rimbereid's "Solaris Corrected"

Per Thomas Andersen

Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, University of Oslo, 0317 Oslo, Norway;
p.t.andersen@iln.uio.no

Received: 5 March 2019; Accepted: 10 April 2019; Published: 17 April 2019



Abstract: The article is a literary analysis of the poem "Solaris Corrected" by the Norwegian poet Øyvind Rimbereid. The work is a poetical science fiction where the oil industry in the North Sea is seen from a retrospective point of view, conveyed in a future language. As a part of the modernist tradition in Scandinavian literature, Rimbereid's work can be read as a significant renewal of the poetic heritage from among others Rolf Jacobsen and Harry Martinson.

Keywords: modernism; science fiction; contemporary poetry; Norwegian literature

One of the most original literary works published in Norway since the year 2000 is Øyvind Rimbereid's *Solaris Corrected* (*Solaris korrigeret*) (Rimbereid 2000). This work can be regarded as a renewal of the modernist long poem in the tradition from William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, Ezra Pound and Michael Ondaatje, among others. At the same time, it is written in intertextual dialogue with Stanislav Lem's *Solaris* (1961) and Andreij Tarkovsky's film adaptation (1972). *Solaris Corrected* is a poetic science fiction about the situation in the Norwegian 'oil-capital' Stavanger in the year 2480—after the oil operations are over, the carbon era has ended and the surface of the earth has become uninhabitable. Thus, the poem can be read as a contribution to literary ecocritical criticism. The most sensational aspect of the work, though, is the poetic language in which it is written. The author has created a new and original language of his own, based on the dialect of his hometown Stavanger, combined with elements from all the national languages from countries involved in the oil industry in the North Sea. Thus, linguistically, the literary project can be regarded as a remarkable renewal in the tradition from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, but Rimbereid's literary text is easier to read.

Rimbereid was born in Stavanger in 1966. Both his hometown and the oil operations have put their marks on his works. Rimbereid debuted in 1993 with the collection of short stories *It Has Begun* (*Det har begynt*) (Rimbereid 1993). In the 1990s he published only prose works. However, in the 2000s he has switched to poetry collections.¹ There is something symphonic, vast, diverse and complex about Rimbereid's poem: The quotidian, concrete and personal are written into a temporality that has extensive historical dimensions, the mood of a here and now is contextualized, and the poem ambitiously draws on scientific and historic knowledge so that the present, the past and the future may illuminate each other. The title of Rimbereid's first poetry collection, *Late Topographies* (*Seine topografiar*) (Rimbereid 2000), can be interpreted literally as late-topographical poetry. He appears to re-map his city, Stavanger, and his region, Rogaland.

Solaris Corrected is Rimbereid's most famous work. He has subsequently followed up the depiction of the local home environment, among other things, in the dialogical long-poem *Jimmen* (Rimbereid 2011). However, he has also further developed his interest in global societal perspectives in, for example, the collection *Herbarium* (Rimbereid 2008). Inspired by, and describing, various flowers, among other

¹ Rimbereid's poetry collections are further discussed in (Andersen 2018).

things, *Herbarium* is a formidable long poem about the tulip and Dutch colonial history. Then came *Sea of the Organ* (*Orgelsjøen*) (Rimbereid 2013), which is built around the organ as a musical instrument and as a central metaphor. *The Laws* (*Lovene*) (Rimbereid 2015) is an extensive poem about the history of law. *Leni's Places* (*Lenis plassar*) (Rimbereid 2017) is Rimbereid's most recent publication, and this work too is a long poem.²

The poem "Solaris Corrected", from the collection with the same title, is a poetical science fiction where the oil industry in the North Sea is seen from a retrospective point of view, conveyed in a future language. "Solaris Corrected" was highly esteemed by the reviewers when the work was published in 2004. Paal-Helge Haugen, himself a celebrated poet, wrote, in the newspaper *Fædrelandsvennen* that "books like this are written only once in each generation". Rimbereid was awarded the Critics' Prize (Kritikerprisen) for the book. However, the work also has a significant reception history beyond reviews and prizes. The most spectacular event was the creation of a stage version at The Norwegian Theatre in October 2015 with the famous Norwegian actress Ane Dahl Torp as the main character. In addition, already in 2013, The Norwegian Opera had staged a full-scale opera version based on music by Norwegian composer Øyvind Mæland.

There are several research contributions about "Solaris Corrected". Janneke Kampevold Larsen wrote an article in the Norwegian journal *Vinduet* (2004) in which she discussed the intellectual connection to Stanislaw Lem's and Andrej Tarkovsky's *Solaris*. Audun Lindholm gave an outstanding presentation of the work in the journal *Vagant* (Lindholm 2008), and in 2010 Christian Refsum wrote an article in the journal *Edda* in which he discussed multilingualism in "Solaris Corrected" and Jonas Hassen Khemiri's novel *Montecore*. Thorstein Norheim published a presentation of Norwegian contemporary poetry in a book edited by Mads Bunch in 2013, *Millennium. Nye retninger i nordisk litteratur*. Claus K. Madsen has written a genre-focused article in *Edda* (2015) in which he compares "Solaris Corrected" and Claus Høeck's "Ulrike Marie Meinhof".

In this article, the poem will be read as a literary problematization and critical warning regarding the prospects for the oil-producing country Norway. As a part of a renewal of the poetic modernist

² Some scholars believe that the long-poem genre is based on traditions with roots dating back to ancient epic poetry such as Homer's *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Examples in modern literature are T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Berthold Brecht's *Die Erinnerung der Hirse*, Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Allen Ginsberg's *Fall of America*. In terms of newer long poem tradition, it seems to me that a Canadian tradition has taken the lead. It started in 1964 when author George Bowering began publishing the magazine *Imago*, which, in fact, considered its task to be to publish only long poems. Over a decade, the journal published 20 different issues. In 1978, the journal *Genre* published a special issue, "The Long Poem in the Twentieth Century". Then, in 1979, award-winning author Michael Ondaatje released an extensive anthology called *The Long Poem Anthology* (Ondaatje 1979). Here Ondaatje wrote that "the most interesting work being done by poets today can be found within the structure of the long poem". In the case of Rimbereid, it is tempting to suggest that this is the situation in Norway today. In 1992 Sharon Thesen published the *New Long Poem Anthology*, and in 2001 (Thesen 2001), a second edition of this anthology came out with contributions from nine new poets. In the field of research, Michael Bernstein's *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* from 1980 (Bernstein 1980) represents an interesting attempt to describe three of the most famous long poems, Pound's *The Cantos*, William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* and Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, as parts of the epic tradition. Bernstein, as the title says, emphasizes the work as the tribe's narrative. This is a term Pound himself used about his work, referring to Rudyard Kipling. In a monograph from 1983, M. L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall defined the genre as a part of the lyric tradition, but they did not use the 'long poem' term. Instead, they introduced the term 'poetic sequence'. Rosenthal and Gall focus primarily on writers belonging to high modernism. The scholars are surprised that the appearance of a whole new genre, they call it "Modern Sequence", could occur almost without notice. At the time when Rosenthal and Gall released their monograph (Rosenthal and Gall 1983), the genre had received so much attention that a conference, "Long-liners Conference on the Canadian Long Poem", was held in Toronto in 1985. The conference proceedings were published in the magazine *Open Letter* No. 2-3, 1985. Thus, even in the field of research Canada seems to be a key contributor on the subject of long poems. Thus, in 1991, Smaro Kamboureli released the monograph *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem* (Kamboureli 1991). Kamboureli here criticizes Bernstein for simplifying when incorporating modern long poems in the epic tradition. She criticizes Rosenthal and Gall for rejecting the long poem-term and simplifying the complexity of the genre when they see it as part of the lyric tradition. Kamboureli focuses on authors that are mostly younger than those in Rosenthal and Gall's monograph. In her presentation, Kamboureli emphasizes that long poem "is a genre in the present tense". She focuses on the long poem's relationships with place and location, and she writes about the subject-position in the long poem. There is obviously no consensus about the description of modern long poems as a genre. The only reasonable approach is to do as Bernstein does, namely to adopt Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance" (*Familienähnlichkeit*) as part of the genre definition. However, there is no room for an elaborate discussion of the long poem genre here.

tradition in Scandinavian literature, the work can clearly be read in continuation of among others Harry Martinson's *Aniara* (1956). Rimbereid's poem is a dystopian depiction of the future Norway where the industrial utopia about the oil country is turned upside down.

Ecological and Linguistic Change

Timothy Mitchell writes in his article "Hydrocarbon Utopia" from *Utopia/Dystopia. Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Mitchell 2010):

Fossil fuels have played an ambiguous role in our utopian imagination. In the twentieth century they helped to form the most prosperous, healthy, and democratic communities in human history. They enabled these communities to live according to the utopian principle that growth of wealth and well-being could continue without any foreseeable limit. Yet hydrocarbon energy also now appears as a curse. Oil is said to be a cause of violence and war. Societies that process it in abundance appear more liable to suffer from a special degree of tyranny. (p. 117)

Rimbereid's depiction is not about war, violence and tyranny, although he has made room for traditional science fiction elements such as increased monitoring and correction (korrex). However, as mentioned in the introduction to *Utopia/Dystopia*, "Utopias and dystopias are histories of the present" (p. 1), and Rimbereid's works can clearly be read as a warning against the utopian image drawn by oil-producing countries referred to in Mitchell's quote above. As I see it, since the 1990s Norway has obviously been captured by ideas of "growth of wealth and well-being [. . .] without any foreseeable limit". The threat, however, is not war and tyranny as in the present situation in the Middle East, but the global ecological crisis. This crisis is also described by Mitchell:

These ways of life are unsustainable, and they now face the twin crises that will end them: although calculating reserves of fossil fuels is a political process involving rival calculative techniques, there is substantial evidence that those reserves are running out, and in the process of using them up, we have taken carbon that was previously stored underground and placed it in the atmosphere, where it is causing increases in global temperatures that may lead to catastrophic climate change. (Mitchell 2010, p. 118)

Tony Burns writes in *Political Theory, Science Fiction and Utopian Literature* that in the history of future depictions, H. G. Wells' contribution is crucial: "Wells' science fiction is important for the history of utopian/dystopian political thought because, after nearly 500 years of utopianism, it marked a major transition from utopian to dystopian writing" (Burns 2008, p. 19). Both the term utopia and the term dystopia focus on places, *topoi*, and Rimbereid's poetry is clearly topographical. Still, dystopian science fiction narratives are just as much about *events* of the kind Slavoj Žižek describes in his book *Events: A Philosophical Journey through a Concept* (Žižek 2014). There are events with effects that exceed their causes, and that represent basic epochal changes of irreversible nature. The main point in dystopian representations is usually to focus on such events that lie between now and the projected future, events that have taken place in the fiction, but that should rather not happen in history. There are especially two important events that underlie the depiction in "Solaris Corrected", a relatively rapid one and a very slow one. The rapid event is the historical change of region and nation that took place as a consequence of the oil production in the North Sea. It started cautiously in the 1960s, but then gathered speed and changed the Norwegian country in terms of economy and welfare over one generation. In Rimbereid's depiction, this event has been prolonged into the future until the year 2480, and a new fictional event is extrapolated into the text, namely the end of the 'oil adventure'. The affluent society we know from our own time is definitely lost.

The slower event is purely fictional, and is about transformation of the language as a result of the influence from surrounding languages. The changes are depicted from a distance of 476 years. While the first of these events exerts a decisive influence on the theme and choice of motifs in the poem,

the other determines the linguistic expression in the poem. It is a poetic language created for this work alone. The language can symbolize the development that must have taken place in the macro region. Stavanger dialect is the root of the language, but in addition we find important elements from English, German and other languages. The language is characterized by rapid code switching between languages, as well as several abbreviations, omission of some vowels, as well as the elimination of the Scandinavian letters æ, ø and å.³ Audun Lindholm describes the Solaris language as follows in his article in the magazine *Vagant* from 2008:

Rimbereid has drawn a linguistic circle around Ekofisk, the first platform city in the middle of the North Sea, and created a hybrid synthesis of Stavanger dialect, Lowland Scottish, English, Dutch and Danish, mixed with Old Norse forms. (Lindholm 2008)

All literary fiction about the future puts the reader to a paradoxical task, namely to ‘reconstruct’ something that has not yet happened. The time of writing and time of reading constitute one (or two) starting point(s) from which the projection of a moment in the future must be interpreted; that is, it provides us with interpretative tools which are per definition insufficient. The projected point in the future shows discrepancies that are often not explained by historical development. The discrepancies do not progress gradually, as they do in history, but occur abruptly, without preparation. Therefore, they appear to be ‘estranged’ conditions, phenomena, or situations. The reader must try to ‘reconstruct’ what has happened between these points in time, despite the fact that they have not yet occurred in reality.

The basic idea is that this ‘reconstruction’ of possible events should trigger some specific types of reflection in the reader’s mind, often with scary or cautionary effects in relation to the reader’s present. In traditional science fiction these reflections will often be mixed with a futuristic fascination, usually of a technological nature. In Rimbereid’s case, there is little fascination to find, apart from the aesthetic fascination of a linguistic experiment. Thus, Rimbereid’s work is clearly of a dystopian nature. In addition, it is with Rimbereid as with most dystopies: the reader must ‘reconstruct’ *catastrophic* events. The future situation depicted is prognostic; it is based on phenomena of the present, and is likely to come true if it is extended into the future. The author prolongs and reinforces trends at the time of writing. In Rimbereid’s case, the prognostic aspect is clear and is supported by research at the time of writing. The prognostic perspective is that oil wells and gas wells will run out and be emptied. There are no more reserves of fossil fuels, a fact which is obviously supposed to change the future society.

The society Rimbereid depicts in “Solaris Corrected” is, however, so drastically different from our well-known world of today that there must be *several* events underlying the changes in addition to the isolated fact that the oil and gas business has ended. The reader will have to ‘reconstruct’ more unknown events between the present and the future in order to make sense of the narrative. This can be demanding because the text gives few concrete hints. However, perhaps it is first and foremost an overall point that matters if we take Michael D. Gordin’s point of view into account: “Utopias and dystopias are histories of the present” (Gordin et al. 2010, p. 1). The reflections that Rimbereid’s poem primarily produces resemble the key point made in Timothy Mitchell’s article on “Hydrocarbon Utopia”: There is a connection between petroleum and politics, between energy and society. Taking into account the societal changes caused by previous energy changes, it may not be unreasonable to think that something similar can happen when the era of fossil fuels is over. History teaches us that there is no guarantee that we can go on living as we are used to, just replacing our energy sources.

³ Since English words are integral parts of Rimbereid’s language, and since this language also includes German words and Rimbereid’s own word constructions, I have chosen not to give English translations of the following excerpts from “Solaris Corrected”. I will, however, render English translations of most of the poem’s key words that I discuss.

Energy and Society: From Sun to Coal and Oil

Until the nineteenth century, energy sources were renewable. Sun and rain made plants and trees grow and provided food for humans and animals. “Solar energy was converted into grain and other crops to provide fuel for humans, into grasslands to raise animals for labor and further human fuel, into woodlands to provide firewood, and into wind and water power to drive transportation and machinery”, writes Timothy Mitchell, referring to Rolf Peter Sieferle (Mitchell 2010, p. 119). Until the late 1950s, farms were driven on the basis of this kind of renewable energy on the small islands in Ryfylke outside Stavanger by which the Condeep platforms were towed a few years later. Mitchell also writes that “for most of the world, the capture of solar radiation in replenishable forms continued to be the main source of energy until perhaps the mid-twentieth century” (Mitchell 2010, p. 119). In other parts of Europe, however, a shift began gradually to take place from the beginning of the nineteenth century. We are talking about one of the most important events in the history of the globe:

From around 1800, these renewable sources were steadily replaced with highly-consented stores of buried solar energy, the deposits of carbon laid down 150 to 350 million years ago, when the decay of peat-bogs and marine organisms in particular oxygen-deficient environments converted biomass into relatively rare but extraordinarily potent deposits of coal and oil. (Mitchell 2010, p. 119)

The transition from renewable sources to coal and oil changed the world in almost every imaginable way, bringing about a utopian energy-consuming century. The scientific predictions show that we will empty these extremely potent energy sources in the period 1950 to 2050, more or less consistent with Øyvind Rimbereid’s (and my own) life. We are the carbon utopians.

The differences between the traditional societies’ solar energy and the modern carbon-based energy communities are great both in terms of consumption and distribution. Mitchell writes about the consumption:

A single liter of gasoline used today needed about twenty-five metric tons of ancient marine life as precursor material, and organic matter of equivalent of the earth’s entire production of plant and animal life for four hundred years was required to produce the fossile fuels we burn in a single year. (Mitchell 2010, p. 119)

Virtually as important as consumption is distribution. The sun wandered by itself over the sky and delivered its energy with relatively well-functioning distribution over most of the globe. Transport of energy was no problem. Traditional solar energy privileged smaller and scattered populations where people could live close to forests, fields and pastures. The sun wandered the same route over the sky every day and every year, and did not accelerate any change.

Coal was a much more powerful source of energy. However, it existed only in concentrated quantities in a few places, especially in the UK, Germany and the United States. Coal also made it possible to develop completely new means of transportation such as trains and steamers. A network of transportation routes for energy and new hubs for infrastructure was developed, all under the control of the coal-producing superpowers. The complex societal process associated with industrialization and colonialism is closely linked to the use of coal as an energy source. One could add urbanization, class struggle and new political organizations, even democratic processes and structures.

Political strikes and strong unions were gradually perceived as a significant problem by factory owners and growth-driven nations. Mitchell believes this was an important reason for the carbon era shifting from coal to oil:

After World War II, the coal miners of Europe again appeared as the core of a militant threat to corporatist democratic politics. As U.S. planners worked to engineer the postwar political order in Europe, they came up with a new mechanism to defeat the coal miners: to convert Europe’s energy system from one based on coal to one based predominantly on oil. Western

Europe had no oil fields, so the additional oil would come from the Middle East. (Mitchell 2010, pp. 122–23)

Because the Middle East was a much less democratized area than the coal-producing countries, it was far easier to discipline the labor force in these areas. According to Mitchell, after World War II a great deal of international policy has revolved around the United States' need for access to, and control of, oil resources. The new oil industry eliminated the power of European coal workers. Over time it turned out that petroleum is more closely related to tyranny and war than previous sources of energy. Dictatorships in the Middle East have produced energy that large consumers in the democratized world have greatly appreciated. An obvious example is the alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The willingness to wage war for access to oil was manifested with great clarity in the United States' and the Allies' Second Iraq War. It is convenient for the Western world that the brutal link between petroleum and tyranny is obscured: the problems arise in remote parts of the world. Oil-based energy changed the world as much as the transition to coal had done. Although coal was transported to places far from the deposits, the cost of shipping was relatively modest. Very little coal was transported across the big oceans. Oil is lighter than coal, and is therefore much easier to transport. The same goes for gas. The freight takes place partly in giant tankers that can cross all continents and partly in a large pipeline network. Oil and gas fit hand in glove with a globalized era, and has clearly contributed to producing it. For a long time, it was considered an advantage for the major energy consumers that the extraction mainly took place in remote areas, and was carried "home" as needed. However, as the political turmoil in the largest oil producing regions has increased, the problems and costs of maintaining adequate control have become extensive. This has led to countries such as the United States investing more extensively in oil production at home.

However, from the outset of the oil era the USA has been the most important driving force. Across the globe, US oil companies have played a decisive role in establishing oil industry. Norway is no exception. In addition, the great need for energy is due to the new lifestyle for the large and growing middle class that evolved in the United States especially from the 1940s and 1950s onwards. The idea that large populations in privileged nations should have unlimited access to energy in order to provide a non-sustainable lifestyle has spread across large parts of the world, first to Europe, then to Asia. This lifestyle is still in a proliferation phase globally, despite the knowledge that it is not sustainable. Given the extreme energy consumption of the late modern consumer communities and the strong dependency on petroleum as an energy source, it is hardly an exaggeration to assume that the transition to a time without oil will be dramatic. History shows that the link between energy source and social conditions is tight. If it is correct, as many forecasts show that we need to prepare for the oil to end by 2050, life and society are likely to become very different from the petroleum era. Yet consciousness of such a change seems to be insufficient—at least in oil producing Norway. The scope seems to limit itself to preparing to find other sources of income. If the oil wells really run dry globally, the conversions will probably be more basic than that. Perhaps the kind of scenario we encounter in Rimbereid's *Solaris Corrected* is more 'realistic' than the illusion that when the oil ends, we can make a living out of fish and entertainment instead, and otherwise continue as before.

Future Labor and Social Structure

History has shown that energy types are closely linked to technology, working life and transport. Energy sources also have consequences for demographics, organizational forms and class division of populations. There is a close connection between energy consumption and political conditions. Almost all of these conditions are presented as affected in Rimbereid's future vision. The overall change he depicts in "Solaris Corrected" is the transition from a utopian imagination to a dystopian future. The carbon era evolved into the dream vision that there was energy enough to produce eternal prosperity growth leading all the way into heaven. Rimbereid's dystopian answer is a post-catastrophic condition where people plan to emigrate from the surface of the earth because life is threatened. The destination for the migration in "Solaris Corrected" is not another planet, but an underwater society:

AIG ne veit wat aig mein um mrs. Chan ennimeir.
 HU haf naw vid 14.6 siner intern lovar
 Bestimmen at nearli heila 14.6 ska til
Seifa botten flytta.
 DEN ska "SOLARIS" kallast.
 "SOLARIS"? Ne meir 14.6? (p. 35)

The new technology associated with the future community is already mentioned in the initial italicized text, in which the narrator addresses a *you*, which, of course, includes, directly or indirectly, the reader. It is apparent that humans use tools that are in one way or another interpolated in the body. It seems that people's strength and ability to work has weakened:

wi arbeiden
 onli vid oren nanofingren,
 (...) AIG seer an
 meiner fingren, part af organic 14.6,
 men veike, dei er som seagrass (p. 9)

The weakening can possibly explain the extensive use of robots that we hear about several times. Technology in the future community is a mix of new and old. Nano-fingers (Nanofingre) and robots represent the new; but most sensational among the new tools is the Brain-machine (Breynmachin) BK2884, which is placed ten kilometers below sea level, in an empty oil well. The machine has important features:

BK2884 er den best master
 til ou biobalansera biosfæren,
 og den best master af oren
 ekonomical world, af taxes, trafficky, siddyplans
 og best master af oren plans for future.
 OREN organic-og siddy-
 konnection kan ne lefa vidout denna breyn, dei seis.
 STOPS BK2884 =
 BIG risk for oren praktical world. (p. 30)

The narrator is confronted with the fact that he will soon have to move down to the bottom of the sea to prepare a "NEW-DEPT-SEA-WORLD" under mud, sea grass and fish. The perspective is urgent:

EIN slik seifa
 world er kan henda
 oren sista chans, dei seis.
 OM wi skat enka intelligenten
 og seifa uss self, som human existensen,
 wi haf ou profa wat we profa kan. (p. 31)

Rimbereid emphasizes, however, that elements from old technology continue to exist. The narrator has "grease" on his hands, yellow black, glossy grease, and explains that these are elements of the past: "DEI is not a part of modern model/novice. DEI is also a part of old sea/of old pipes and old grease" (p. 25).

This leads us to the working life in the future community. The narrator is the supervisor for a team consisting of 123 robots. They work underwater to repair pipes and pipelines. The supervisor is himself representative of the reduced level of labour performed by human people. It is mentioned that they have a working day of only half an hour: "wi arbeiden/so litl, 30 min a day" (p. 9). The robots, however, work diligently. They are like ants, we are told (p. 25). They are called "grabbers" ("greipmaskinar"), they are rectangular, and their size is given in millimeters: 1200 × 400 × 350 mm. They are connected to

each other in a network so that the work they perform is totally coordinated. They have a “collective brain” (“collitive breyn”) (p. 10). If one of them breaks, it will be replaced immediately by a new one (p. 25). Yet they do not know about each other. They have a closed feedback system that allows them “to know only of themselves” (“DEI only knows about itself”) (p. 10). The narrator says he loves his robots, and he claims they are both free and happy—just that they are not able to be conscious of this fact themselves. They resemble slave workers as we know them from past historical epochs. They have no other function than to work for the benefit of the humans.

It is not entirely clear what the work under the sea is really about. The robots repair “hydropipes”. The supervisor’s expertise consists of “mechanical knowledge” and he will, as said, contribute to build a safe world under water. In this context, it appears that he is going to pump “geothermal energy” up from the sea ground. In interviews, Rimbereid has said that the work of “Solaris Corrected” consists in extracting heat energy from the continental shelf under the sea ground. Anyway, it is evident that the worklife of humans has changed significantly in the future community. Rimbereid uses a very concrete strategy to bring about the impression of change. He completely changes measures and numbers: As I have mentioned, the working day is 30 minutes long. He uses the same strategy when describing the new conditions in the transportation sector. We learn about very fast travel both to the region of London and the region of Moscow. The speed is high:

Ou fara avgarde
til regio London, i hoy hoy speed-
tunnel undr seaen
ovfr platfurmvrak
og olda, emti gassbrunnar
der unkring dark seagrass vexr (p. 28)

Speed and mode of transportation are also given in exact terms, and again the measures and numbers ensure the effect of ‘estrangement’:

OG plutsl kenna speed,
kenna startryck genom
rygg og neck. MEN so, ven to minutter fara i 1490 km/h
i el-magnet-tunnel, all er som normal ...
SPEEDLOVEN: OU fara av garde
i eigen gravitation-room, fara forbi vrak og brunnar
og ne kraft kenna fra det,
onli kraft fra point long long der fram (p. 29)

Settlement patterns and organizational forms of living have also greatly changed in Rimbereid’s future vision. We hear nothing about nations except in conjunction with names of regions such as the “region of Norwg-West”. As a community-organizing unit, the nation is gone. As mentioned, the Solaris language is built on the local Stavanger dialect, not on Norwegian official written language, and the influence that has brought about the language changes comes from the regions around the North Sea. We hear from the quotation above that known cities like London and Moscow are referred to as regions (“London region”). It seems that the region is an organizational structure that has gained importance. On the other hand, it is a rather decayed image we are confronted with in the depiction of “city Stavgrsand” (“siddy Stavgrsand”).⁴ The new and more important organizational forms are obviously smaller than the traditional cities. They are referred to as cells and organics:

⁴ The name of the city, “Stavgrsand”, is a compound word, combining two neighboring cities existing today: Stavanger and Sandnes.

SIDDY Stavgersand, siddy min,
 exist nearli ne at all, mang
 konklud naw. KAN henda den exist
 onli som ein olda namn,
 som symbol an ein siddy?
 JA, som om places i 2480 forts sku wiktig vera!
 STAVGERSAND, ein nearli
 emti place
 midt i flowen af so mang
 cells, organics, konnekts, pow og del-
 lovar. (p. 12)

As for the city, the picture is somewhat confusing. On the one hand, it is depicted as “nearly empty” (“nearli emti”). On the other hand, we learn about “the chaotic streets of the city, packed with people” (“siddyens kaotic streets, proppa af humans”) (p. 13). However, the most important organizational group of the society appear to be “organics”. The narrator lives in organic 14.6. It has 63,000 inhabitants. Here he lives with his girlfriend Shiri. They have a “little room, owned by organic 14.6” (“litl room, eigat af organic 14.6.”). There are many other organics as well, and they appear to be differentiated based on class. Organic 1.1 seems to be inhabited by a perfume-scenting elite (p. 27).

This takes us to the composition of the population. It is clearly classed. At the top of the system, we have neither a king nor a president, but (probably) a Chinese owner, Mrs. Chan. Even in the depiction of this character Rimbereid uses measure and number displacement to create a sense of estrangement; Mrs. Chan is 123 years old. However, the narrator is not sure Mrs. Chan is a person at all.

OG mrs. Chan er good organic-eigar.
 MRS. Chan er 123 age, dei seis.
 OG difor smart, vid big human novledg.
 SELF om aig iblant tenk hu ne exist.
 AIG tenk hun mang er, er ein sort firm.
 OR kan henda hu ne human er,
 men onli ein konstrukt breyn
 som ein human tenk? (p. 37)

At the upper level of the class society we find those who are called “shadows” (“skuggar”). They live in organic 3.4 and similar organics. They are called shadows because they are behind “all construction, production/all numbers, names/and ideas” (“all konstrukt, production/all nummer, namn/og ideo”) (p. 23). They live isolated, by themselves, socializing only with each other and “thinking only their own thoughts” (“tenkande onli i deirs eigne tank”) (p. 24). It is obvious that they constitute an elite: “They are the knowledge elite of society with stronger power than all the territory owners and those with material ownership” (“DEI er novledg-/humans, vid staerkar pow enn all areal-/og materie-eigare. DEIRS pow/er unbegrensat, dei seis.”) (p. 24). The future community has thus preserved the opposition between brain workers and those who have “grease” on their hands. However, the opposition comes very mildly: “THANK YOU!” (p. 24). The active class struggle with strikes as weapons, as we know it not least from the coal era, is obviously history.

The narrator belongs to a class that is simply called humans. Probably he and his class should be regarded as the middle class of the Solaris society. If so, it becomes clear that the middle class has experienced a considerable declassing process since the time of the oil era. As mentioned, the narrator lives with his girlfriend in a small apartment that belongs to the organic where they live. They do not have access to any kind of prosperity or luxury. We do not get an in-depth description of how the narrator or his class lives. However, we learn about a functioning health system. The narrator visits a clinic to get syringes. He suffers from an intestinal infection. At one point his brain is scanned,

and it is determined that he is suffering from a defect: “Conclusion: I have a small defect in my left pantomimic cortic, a somewhat too excessive production of own images” (“KONKLUTION: AIG haf ein litl/defect i venstr phantomic breyn-/bark, ein noko for staerk production/af eigne picts”) (p. 41). Thus, the “human” we become acquainted with as readers must be perceived as a kind of dissident with maybe too many independent ideas. That is probably why he tells us the story of “Solaris Corrected”.

In addition to providing the health information, some attempts are made to humanize the narrator and his life. We have already heard that he has a girlfriend, Shirin. He also tells us that he sometimes gets hurt by her “bad bad word” (p. 21). He remembers that his father carried him on his shoulders, and he visits his mother’s grave. However, we do not learn about any children, despite him being 38 years old.

Further down the ranks of the community we find those who are called drifters. They appear as a kind of nomads, without permanent employment and residence. It is the drifters that crowd the streets of the city, making it chaotic. They are exposed to the most active monitoring and schooling or “correction” (“correctx”) as well. There seems to be almost no contact between the narrator’s class and the drifters. The narrator says he hardly knows any drifters. However, he has heard of individual drifters who had romantic dreams and tried to move into the wilderness to live in harmony with nature. These romantic individuals have a brutal side as well. We learn that such a romantic drifter once lured people into the wilderness to kill them there.

At the bottom level of the class community we must assume that the robots are located. They perform work for humans and have high capacity. They are under complete control and are designed so that they perform coordinated work without knowing each other. The narrator believes they are both free and happy. However, of course, we do not hear anything from the robots themselves. It is unclear how robots who lack human prerequisites can be happy and free. Perhaps these qualities should be understood as a projection from the narrator and his class of humans.

A striking feature of the depiction of the future society is that no one eats. We are not told anything about nutrition, food chains or how people and animals get food. We learn that animals exist but that for example, elephants can no longer live a free life. How edible nutrition is cultivated is unclear. Brian Stableford writes in the article “Science Fiction and Ecology” that in ecological science fiction “the central thread of ecological analysis is the food chain, which extends from ‘primary producers’ which fix solar energy into various extended paths whose links are herbivores, predators, parasites, and saprophytes” (Stableford 2005, p. 127). From a strict genre perspective, one might think that this is an argument for not considering “Solaris Corrected” ecological science fiction. Nevertheless, I still think that the focus on energy is just as relevant an ecological subject as the food chain—which is of course linked to the energy issue.

Rimbereid has touched on several aspects of the future community, showing that there is not only one crucial event between the present and the future: the fact that the oil wells have become empty has led to several fundamental and irreversible results at several levels of society. The important point is that the relations between sources of energy and social structures are tight and that the consequences of the historical event in “Solaris Corrected” are comprehensive.

Universalizing Metaphors

As a science fiction story, “Solaris Corrected” shows several significant features that belong to the traditional genre, including the ‘estrangement’ of the future perspective, a disturbing or frightening apocalyptic or dystopian development of society and living conditions, and technological innovations or changes. Among the technological changes we find not only robots and machines, as I have already mentioned, but also the rhetorical use of measures and numbers that signal science, precision—and change.

Var for to dagr sidan til sista seifa-
check i sentrl 14.6. I lopet av 400 sporsmaal,
1123 picts og nearli 13,000 electric ljus-impuls

dei scannat min breyn,
 all parts af min breyn,
 og spesi nucleus caudatus,
 ver redsl og sorg kommen fra
 og den hypothalmisk INAH 3
 ver oren sex existen.
 KONCLUTION: AIG haf ein litl
 defect i venstr phantomic breyn-
 bark, ein noko for staerk production
 af eigne picts. (p. 41)

Although the terms here are actually genuine terms for parts of the brain, the numbers make little sense apart from rhetorically signaling scientific and factual accuracy. In “Solaris Corrected” such signals are more important than traditional lyrical elements such as literary tropes. Nevertheless, through the health check, we learn that the narrator has a deviation in the brain structure that results in an over-developed imagination. This corresponds to, and perhaps also explains why, the supervisor in an underwater industrial business writes poems. However, if we look specifically at the “own picts” he produces, we find that the text is only to a small extent affected by tropes. There are some local metaphors like “the bowels of the law” (p. 15), fingers referred to as sea grass and the robots as ants. A small section about a shoal of fish (pp. 31–32) is probably primarily meant to be read literally, but it has a metaphorical potential if related to the “collective brain” (“Kollektive Breyn”) (p. 10) mentioned elsewhere in the poem. In addition, we have already learned that some of the social classes have been described in terms that imply metaphorical meaning (shadows and drifters).

Except for these rather local metaphors, there are mainly two groups of metaphorical motifs in the poem. One is related to light and light reflection; the other focuses on gravity as a universal principle of existence. We meet the first of these metaphorical motifs in the depiction of satellite images of the globe at night. In such images, the geographical map appears quite vaguely, while the lights from the cities become clear. When seen from the satellite perspective, such night light from Kristiansand to Bergen resembles a sickle:

SOMTIIMS aig find og seer an min screen,
 seer an regio Norwg-West,
 picts takat fra ofven,
 seer all ljus om natt, spots eftr spots
 so tait og komplex, fra Krisand til Bergn.
 SPOTS af ljus i ein sigd,
 som om all saman hengr. EIN sigd
 klar til ou skera gennem all materie
 og all human life. (p. 11)

The image is expanded globally with China as an example (“Chin”), where the light sources that is, the cities, barely can be separated from each other. The sickles now become half-moons which are not as easy to imagine as the half-moon at the south western part of Norway:

... I Chin f. ex.,
 der ne sidde kan skillast out,
 der infinit mengd af sigd i ljus er.
 OG liksom uppo kverodder,
 i ein gigant pattern,
 vanskil ou vita wat all sigdar tilsamman blir ...
 OR seer out som half moons,
 detta? SOM big mengd half moons

up ner, vid jord undr seg
 vid oren jord som ein dark, infinit
 univers undr seg? (p. 11)

Following this extension of the metaphor, the narrator reflects allegorically on the possibility of a universal or metaphysical superior source of light:

JA, er det detta wi er?
 EIN vorld af half moons?
 MEN wat er da oren sol? (p. 11)

The solar-moon relationship is repeated in the depiction of the drifters, the nomadic class in society, those without security system ("seifa system") around them (p. 14). They are clearly a part of society, and they are punished for quite minor offenses (p. 15). It may be the loneliness of the drifters the narrator wants to portray when he characterizes them as isolated suns without any moon to shine at:

DEI er openbara,
 hengr umkring som solar.
 SOLAR vidout moons ou skinna mot? (p. 14)

The final part of this metaphorical motif is related to the human body. The narrator has once had a bowel infection, and he had to take x-rays of his "botten-torso". He has later on repeatedly looked at his x-ray pictures, and discovered that his hipbones resemble sickles or half-months. This similarity makes him wonder about a possible unexpected and confusing universal unity. Some parts of the narrator are only partly his own, partly something else, "AS IF they live their own lives in me?" (SOM om dei lefr/siner heilt eigne lifs i meg (p. 16)). He cannot control that parts inside him which is something else:

OG ven dei sjuk blir,
 kan henda til det doyande,
 min breyn kan ne helpa dei. (p. 16)

However, he has no answer to the question of what this other one is. Yet the metaphorical motifs throughout the poem imply a connection between global structures and bodily characteristics at the individual level.

The second group of metaphorical motifs, the gravity metaphors, conveys a similar sense of universal unity.

Wat ne forsvinna kan,
 er gravitationen. GRAVITATIONEN
 existen ovfr all distans fra mill
 sol-agen away
 og strick back til uss.
 LITL so litl, veik so veik,
 men ne zero. GRAVITATIONEN
 er det minsta wi kan stola an.
 DEN er den onli total
 kommunikationen i univers. (p. 21)

The principle is not restricted to the spherical systems of the universe. It also applies on the social level. The people gravitate towards each other. In that way, gravity is also the basic principle of the individual's feelings of love and hatred.

DEN arbeiden ogso i uss.
 ALL haf wi
 gravitation-
 kroppar, tick tock
 i oren celln og knokl.
 ALL wi arbeiden, all wi spiik: gravitationen.
 VEN wi love og hatr: gravitationen. (p. 21)

“Solaris Corrected”, therefore, is not just about a future, dystopian society and the oil industry in the North Sea. Along the way, by means of lyrical structures, the poem also points to basic universal forces that form connections and universal unity. It appears as if there is a universalizing feature in the poem—without being dominant.

“Solaris Corrected” shows Øyvind Rimbereid’s wide range as a poet. He is one of Norway’s most original language artists today, something which is manifested in his constructing a whole new language and being able to use it consistently both grammatically and lyrically. The poem also shows Rimbereid’s repertoire as a verse poet and a constructor of poetic metaphors. Simultaneously, “Solaris Corrected” demonstrates that Rimbereid is a highly engaged writer as well, deeply concerned with the challenges of contemporary society. Directing his focus towards historical events, he confronts his readers with fateful changes, changes with potentially irreversible consequences.

In the tradition of Scandinavian modernism, Rimbereid’s poem can be said to hark back to the first “green poet” in Norwegian literature, Rolf Jacobsen. In the 1930’s he was the first to introduce the world of industry and technology in Norwegian poetry—electrical turbines, airplanes and racing cars. In his later poems the challenges of modern times became an increasingly important topic in his writing. Even more obvious is Rimbereid’s connection to the Swedish poet Harry Martinson and his famous work *Aniara. A Review of Man in Time and Space (Aniara. En revy om människan i tid och rum)* (1956). Martinson’s work is a poem of science fiction, and might be regarded as a precursor to Rimbereid’s “Solaris Corrected”. However, it is obviously clear that the topic of an ecological crisis and dystopian perspectives have become increasingly relevant in modern poetry both in Scandinavia and Europe, as well as in literature worldwide.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Andersen, Per Thomas. 2018. *Rimbereids Lyrikk. Hendelser og Poetiske Øyeblikk*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Bernstein, Michael. 1980. *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic*. Princeton: Princeton Legacy Library.
- Burns, Tony. 2008. *Political Theory, Science Fiction, and Utopian Literature. Ursula K. Guin and the Dispossessed*. New York and Toronto: Lexington Books.
- Gordin, Michael D., Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash, eds. 2010. *Utopia/Dystopia. Conditions of Historical Possibility*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Kamboureli, Smaro. 1991. *On the Edge of Genre. The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lindholm, Audun. 2008. FOR Aig Veit Existen af Vorld. *Vagant*. July 1. Available online: <http://www.vagant.no/for-aig-veit-existen-af-vorld-om-solaris-korrigert/> (accessed on 16 April 2019).
- Mitchell, Timothy. 2010. Hydrocarbon Utopia. In *Utopia/Dystopia. Conditions of Historical Possibility*. Edited by Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Ondaatje, Michael. 1979. *The Long Poem Anthology*. Toronto: Coach House Press.
- Rimbereid, Øyvind. 1993. *Det Har Begynt*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Rimbereid, Øyvind. 2000. *Seine Topografier, Trådreiser, Solaris Korrigert*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Rimbereid, Øyvind. 2008. *Herbarium*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Rimbereid, Øyvind. 2011. *Jimmen*. Oslo: Gyldendal.

- Rimbereid, Øyvind. 2013. *Orgelsjøen*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Rimbereid, Øyvind. 2015. *Lovene*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Rimbereid, Øyvind. 2017. *Lenis Plassar*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Rosenthal, Macha Louis, and Sally M. Gall. 1983. *The Modern Poetic Sequence*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stableford, Brian. 2005. Science Fiction and Ecology. In *A Companion to Science Fiction*. Edited by David Seed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Thesen, Sharon. 2001. *The New Long Poem Anthology*. Vancouver: Talobooks.
- Zizek, Slavoj. 2014. *Event. A Philosophical Journey through a Concept*. Brooklyn and London: Melville House.



© 2019 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).