

# Scandinavian Crime Fiction: a review of recent scholarship

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ABSTRACT: The last two decades have witnessed an unprecedented outpouring of crime fiction from the Scandinavian countries: Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. The two books under review address Scandinavian crime fiction from different points of view. The collection of essays edited by Nestingen and Arvas is the more directly ideological and specialized work; whereas Forshaw's guide concentrates more on crime fiction as a genre, and its translation into English. The two publications, then, complement each other, and it will depend to a great extent on individual taste which one readers will prefer.

RÉSUMÉ: Les deux dernières décennies ont été témoins d'une vague sans précédent de fiction criminelle chez les pays scandinaves : en Islande, en Norvège, au Danemark, en Suède et en Finlande. Les deux livres à l'étude abordent la fiction criminelle scandinave en fonction de différents points de vue. Le recueil d'essais de Nestingen et d'Arvas est le travail le plus directement idéologique et spécialisé; tandis que le guide de Forshaw se concentre plus sur la fiction criminelle en tant que genre et sur sa traduction en anglais. Les deux publications, de ce fait, se complètent mutuellement et la préférence du lecteur dépendra dans une large mesure de ses goûts personnels.

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Forshaw, Barry. 2012. *Death in a Cold Climate: A Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 224 pages. ISBN: 978-0230361447.

Nestingen, Andrew, and Paula Arvas, eds. 2011. *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 194 pages. ISBN: 978-0708323304.

## *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*

The recent publication of two English-language studies devoted to Scandinavian crime fiction<sup>1</sup> is itself a tribute to a sub-genre that threatens to dominate the genre world-wide.<sup>2</sup> Andrew Nestingen and Paula Arvas begin the introduction to their collection of essays by pointing out that the prominence of Scandinavian crime fiction “stands in contrast to the diminutive size of the region. Roughly twenty-five million citizens inhabited the nation states of Scandinavia in 2009” (1). This contrasts with the population of Canada now estimated as thirty-five million. It is true that Canada has a number of fine crime fiction writers: Peter Robinson, Giles Blunt, and Louise Penny, for example. However, the sheer number and high quality of SCF<sup>3</sup> writers who have achieved international success during the last two decades, in proportion to the region’s population base, does make what is also known as Nordic noir, or *krimi*, a publishing phenomenon.

Nestingen and Arvas make it clear from the start that their focus is on “the cultural significance of Scandinavian crime fiction” (2). The book is organized into three units: the first “examines the history and transformation of Scandinavian crime fiction”; the second “interrogates the ‘Scandinavian’ in the book’s title, that is the particular places and spaces represented and contested in crime fiction from the region”; in the third, “the focus shifts to the cultural politics of literary representation, analyzing representation of gender, sexuality, and cultural status, as well as modes of representation themselves” (2). The editors conclude this outline with a claim that the combination of social criticism in Scandinavian crime novels with a predominantly “gloomy, pensive, and pessimistic” tone, means that these factors “form a unique constellation” (2). This claim is open to question. Ian Rankin’s Edinburgh, Stephen Booth’s Peak District, and Blunt’s Algonquin Bay—these places are examined with as critical and dark-adapted eye<sup>4</sup> as are Mankell’s Skåne, Åke Edwardson’s Gothenburg, and Jo Nesbø’s Oslo. One could argue that Val McDermid’s *The Retribution* (2012) equals any Scandinavian mystery in its relentlessly dark view of contemporary society. Social criticism and a certain degree of gothic gloom have also been aspects of the British detective novel from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, through Agatha Christie, to McDermid. Moreover, there is less homogeneity in SCF than the editors’ comment implies. Yes, Mankell’s Kurt Wallander and Arnaldur Indriðason’s

Erlendur Sveinsson share a dark view of life, but Karin Fossum's more centred detective Conrad Sejer, and Camilla Läckberg's husband and wife investigative team of Inspector Patrik Hedström and crime writer Erica Falck, maintain an optimism that contrasts with the grim murders they must solve. There may well be gloom in much *SCF*, but it is often illuminated by compassion and humour. It is also arguable that pessimism is, in the last analysis, foreign to crime fiction as a genre. For example: Ian Rankin's *Let it Bleed* (1996) and Henning Mankell's *The Fifth Woman* (2004)<sup>9</sup> are indeed extremely "gloomy" and "pensive," but both novels end with a sense that justice and right are still possible, however fragile they may seem. What is a widespread and possibly unique constellation in recent Nordic crime fiction is the sense of invasion—of a previously idyllic, even pastoral way of life being threatened by a violence that is "foreign," of an envied welfare state being undermined. In Mankell's *The Fifth Woman* (2004), the Ystad pathologist Sven Nyberg says of a crime that its brutality is "Something that doesn't belong here" in Sweden (58). Anne Holt's profiler Johanne Vik feels that murder "seems... very un-Norwegian" (2008 82). And what if the Scandinavian sense of security has itself been an illusion? A colleague of Mankell's Kurt Wallander remembers an older detective speaking of Sweden's prosperity as "a well-camouflaged quagmire. The decay was underneath it all" (2004 273). Perhaps the *locus classicus* of the feeling that the new Scandinavia is paradise lost comes in Anne Holt's *1222* where her popular heroine Hanne Wilhelmsen thinks to herself:

Even in Finse, the Norwegian mountain village where the train struggles up through valleys so Norwegian that that you imagine you can see nineteenth-century paintings flickering by outside the windows; even now, in a snowstorm, in ultra-Norwegian isolation in an old National Romantic wooden building, even here the outside world has made its presence felt. The presence of the terrorist was life's reminder that the world was no longer so alien or so far away; it was here with us, always, and we were a part of it whether we liked it or not. (2011 270)

This feeling is often encountered in *SCF*, though it is not necessarily placed at centre stage.

Part I of *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, "Revisions of the Socially Critical Genre Tradition," begins with Michael Tapper's "Dirty Harry in the Swedish Welfare State." This chapter is a reminder that the new wave of Swedish crime fiction is to some extent built on Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's Martin Beck novels written in the 1960s and 1970s. The authors subjected *Folkhemmet* [the welfare state] to an analysis "in which we try to relate crime to its political and ideological doctrines" (Tapper 22). Tapper is less concerned with Beck himself than with his more ruthless colleague Gunvald Larsson who, like Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry, is the man able "to strike fear and respect into the brutal criminal heart" (25). In

twenty-four films of the Beck novels made from 1997 to 2009, Larsson emerges as the loner cop whose “omnipotent vigilantism” (28) has become popular in the twenty-first century. Witness the violent “Best of Gunvald Larsson” videos on YouTube.com, which Tapper sees as a disturbing mirror of “the new, post-Folkhemmet Sweden” (32).

The fourth essay in this section on crime fiction and nationality is the most interesting: Karsten Wind Meyhoff’s “Digging into the Secrets of the Past: Rewriting History in the Modern Scandinavian Police Procedural.” *SCF* does not in general favour historical novels, in the sense of fiction set in a clearly historical past, such as Maureen Jennings’ Detective Murdoch mysteries which take place in late-Victorian Toronto, or Charles Todd’s Inspector Ian Rutledge mysteries set in England shortly after the First World War. History in Meyhoff’s sense of the word refers to the more recent past—World War II and the Cold War—and the way secrets of this era have a habit of resurfacing, dangerously, in the present. This is a temporal version of Hanne Wilhelmsen’s geopolitical fear that Norway is no longer immune to global terrorism. Meyhoff’s first example is a planned series of novels—two have already been written—by Christian Dorph and Simon Pasternak, which sets out to expose the dark underside of Denmark in a relatively recent, but nonetheless idealized past from 1975 through the late twentieth century. Meyhoff’s other two examples will be more familiar to English-speaking readers: Jo Nesbø’s *The Redbreast* (2006) and Stieg Larsson’s *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2008). In the first, the Oslo detective Harry Hole uncovers a neo-Nazi circle intent on rewriting history, through murder if necessary, in favour of Norwegians who fought and died on the Russian front for Hitler’s Germany. While Nesbø is far from supporting this circle’s ideology, he does in Meyhoff’s view “demonstrate how history is a plural and complex process, in which events and motives are often fuzzy and located in a morally grey area” (69). War changes received values, and heroism, the very quality that helps to make war “romantic” in many people’s minds, “is never far from betrayal” (69). Here, Nesbø shares a common ground, not only as Meyhoff points out, with Dorph and Pasternak (69), but with Christian Madsen’s 2009 film about the Danish resistance, *Flame and Citron*, where “everything is grey,”<sup>6</sup> and “acting under orders” to assassinate an enemy may lead to the murder of a friend. In his conclusion, Meyhoff argues that the novelists he has chosen challenge the “master narratives” of twentieth-century history in Scandinavia by presenting us with “new and fresh images of our recent past” (71).

Many readers would agree that Mankell’s cycle of ten Kurt Wallander novels, especially the first eight published in Sweden from 1991 to 1999, is the cornerstone of the new crime fiction in Scandinavia. The series establishes what we have almost come to expect from *SCF*: a complex, often deeply troubled investigator, a strong sense of place, in this instance Ystad and the province of Skåne, and a pervasive atmosphere of social decline, combined with a fear that the world

outside is invading Sweden with “unSwedish” problems of corruption, racial tension, and violent crime. In “The Place of Pessimism in Henning Mankell’s Kurt Wallander Series,” Shane McCorristine defines place “as a category that can be equally thought of in terms of location, locale and an individual’s own sense of place or emotional ties with the world” (77). McCorristine is notably perceptive in showing how Wallander’s father’s paintings of the same Scania landscape are not just an old man’s eccentricity, but mirror an “interlinking of landscape and psychology, personhood and place” (81) in Mankell’s delineation of his central character. While Wallander’s pessimism is often reflected in his sense of Skåne’s scenic desolation—*ödsligheten*—McCorristine argues that the detective “learns to love the place that has become a central component of his identity” (81). And in the process of learning to love desolation, Wallander also becomes a man “who will adapt to the evils of the world with a heightened existential awareness” (82). While a number of villains in the Wallander series can be said to “cash in,” in more ways than one, on a cynicism that has accompanied what Nestingen calls “neoliberal retrenchment” (172) in Sweden, McCorristine argues that Wallander “harbours the remnants of an old-fashioned humanism and sense of justice alongside his pessimistic outlook” (85). This essay is an empathetic and closely-argued study of a major contemporary writer.

Finland differs from the rest of Scandinavia in two distinct ways. The first is linguistic. Finnish, the country’s first and dominant language, belongs to the Finno-Ugric language group, not to Norse; it is also notoriously difficult for non-Finns to master. This may, in part at least, explain why comparatively few English translations of Finnish crime fiction are available. Certainly Finland appears to be unfairly marginalized in the translation and/or distribution of its crime fiction writers. The second is geopolitical. Finland not only shares a long border with Russia, but has had a long and often troubled relationship with its powerful eastern neighbour. In her essay, “Next to the Final Frontier: Russians in Contemporary Finnish and Scandinavian Crime Fiction,” Paula Arvas does discuss writers from other Scandinavian countries, Denmark’s Leif Davidsen, for example, but her main interest is in the way Russians are depicted in Finnish mysteries and thrillers. There are, Arvas argues, three main Russian figures in these novels: “the killer, the victim and the middle man” (115). These figures draw primarily “on narratives that have sprung from the rapid social transformation of post-Soviet north-Eastern Europe” (115).

The killers, or “agents of death,” are similar to John le Carré’s Russian villains or those that appear in the James Bond films (117). Arvas’s first example of this figure is Viacheslev Volkov, a killer-for-hire, who features in the thriller by Tero Somppi, *Luonnoton kosto* (2008) [Unnatural Revenge]. He is typical in being Red Army- and KGB-trained. He has carried out numerous assassinations, is without conscience, and the Finnish police “finds itself powerless when confronting such an enemy” (118). Like Somppi, Ilkka Remes, “the leading author of international

thrillers in Finland” (117), has a Russian killer, Artem Granov, who in *Ruttokellot* (2000) [The Bells of Plague] carries out a revenge assassination of Finland’s prime minister. The victim figure is “the prostituted, enslaved, Russian, or Eastern European woman” (120-21). She appears in the novels of Leena Lehtolainen, that expose the “Russian mafia’s control of the Eastern sex trade in Finland” (122). Where both killer and victim embody Finland’s fear of the Russian criminal world since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the middle man, such as Viktor Kärppä in the novels of Matti Rönkä, represents an attempt to create a less stereotyped, more humanized Russian figure. As his name suggests, Viktor Kärppä “straddles the border” between Russia and Finland (124). He may be involved in illegal business, but Rönkä uses him, at times humorously, to undermine Russian stereotypes (124). In her conclusion, Arvas says that though Russians are the villains of choice in Finnish crime fiction, a new type of novel is emerging that “highlights the positive characteristics in the Russian character, and explores the hybridity of Russian and Finnish culture” (125).

Liza Marklund and Camilla Läckberg are the most popular female crime fiction writers in Scandinavia. The front cover of Läckberg’s 2008 novel, *The Drowning*, proclaims at the top: 9 MILLION BOOKS SOLD, and an *Independent* reviewer quoted on the back tells us that the author is “The hottest female writer in Sweden at the moment.” Similarly, we read on the cover of Liza Marklund’s 1999 Annika Bengtzon thriller, *Exposed*, the American best-seller Karin Slaughter’s praise, “No one tells a story like Liza Marklund,” and from *The Globe and Mail*: “This is a series to savour.” I have introduced Sara Kärrholm’s chapter on “Swedish Queens of Crime” with these publisher’s blurbs because they point to what it is about: “Promotion and the Notion of Feminine Agency—Liza Marklund and Camilla Läckberg.” Kärrholm’s essay is on “the marketing and media reception” of these two writers (131). She begins by noting changes which “the crime-queen title has undergone in the last twenty years” (131). Maria Lang, perhaps Sweden’s first Agatha Christie-style crime fiction writer, was popular in the 1950s. However, as Läckberg points out, Lang left the promotion of her books to the publishing house, Norstedts. She was herself reluctant “to create herself as a trademark in her field” (132). The promotion of female crime writers was very different after the success of Marklund’s first Annika Bengtzon novel, *Sprängaren* [*The Bomber*] in 1998. Now the author’s face is on the front cover, her eyes focused confidently on the camera lens. Amusingly, Marklund surrendered to this marketing strategy: “Omslaget var så fullt att ingen människa någonsin skulle kunna tro att jag stod där för att vara tjugig” [The cover was so ugly that nobody would ever think I was standing there to look fabulous] (Marklund 2008, blog)<sup>7</sup>. Eventually, the cover portrait of Marklund became “a crucial part of a branding campaign in self-promotion,” and led to an association between the author and her heroine—both have backgrounds in tabloid journalism—which helped to present them as “stubborn, brave women in an environment dominated by men” (134).

While Läckberg's photograph does not appear on the front cover of her novels, her image inside the cover and on the internet is more glamorous than Marklund's. In the English paperback edition of *The Preacher* (2010), a close-up photograph of her face has an attractiveness reminiscent of the young Kate Nelligan. Kärrholm says of these portraits that they suggest the author is not unwilling to expose herself to an "erotic gaze" (140).

Kärrholm's chapter has something of the suspense which is the hallmark of crime fiction itself. Before her conclusion, this reviewer at least was uncertain whether or not she was taking a stern, feminist stance *against* the strategies of self-promotion she describes. When, for example, she singles out the discrepancy between Läckberg's blog which promotes the writer as *Deckarmamma* [Crime Mum], and a video clip which "features Läckberg in an Esther Williams bathing suit, with a noose around her neck" (140), a reader would be almost certain that Kärrholm is censoring the author for taking her self-promotion a shade too far. However, in her conclusion, she comes out strongly in favour of both authors' self-promotion: "For women struggling in areas defined by men or to make ends meet and to reconcile work and family life, both Läckberg's and Marklund's public personas might serve as positive symbols of empowerment" (143), in comparison with Maria Lang's "quite passive" (132) role in the promotion of her novels. This is a difficult chapter to evaluate. It is interesting and extremely well-researched, but seems oddly out of place in the collection. I would question the apparent implication that Lang's defence of her privacy is less to be admired than contemporary self-promotion. That issue is also put into perspective by the fact that the Swedish tabloids have exasperated Läckberg by their obsession with her recent divorce (Forshaw 37). It is also surprising that Kärrholm shows no interest in Läckberg and Marklund as novelists. I would have welcomed a comparison between, for example, Marklund's *Last Will* (2006) and Läckberg's *The Hidden Child* (2007). Both novels combine a sense of Swedish history with the mystery genre, and would provide a good basis for evaluating the standing of the two novelists as crime fiction writers. However, Kärrholm might just as well have chosen two fashion models or film stars for her chapter, as her focus is entirely on promotion and self-promotion, rather than the profession of creative writers.

I will discuss the last two chapters I have selected from *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* together, since they address similar questions, if from different points of view. Magnus Persson defends Peter Høeg's *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (2001) against critics who see it as a failed attempt to fuse the "highground" of the postmodernist novel with the mystery genre. Nestingen examines the thin line between realism and melodrama in recent SCF as a whole. The chapters also share an interest in the amateur outsider heroine-as-investigator: Høeg's Smilla Jaspersen and Larsson's Lisbeth Salander.

Persson begins by stating that the recent "Scandinavian crime novel has drawn nearer to the mainstream novel while well-established authors have taken

to writing crime fiction. This suggests a blurring between high culture and popular culture that characterizes postmodernity” (148). He goes on to demonstrate that Høeg does not, as some critics maintain, parody the crime fiction genre, or undermine it in a metafictional way (154). On the contrary:

Høeg had an open and genuinely curious view of the genre. Contrary to one of the premises of postmodern theory, he opened up the possibility that the detective story can have something positive and creative to contribute in its own right. (154)

Persson concludes that crime fiction has become an inclusive genre, which is perhaps what “disturbs its critics most” (157). Usefully comparing *Smilla’s Sense of Snow* to Karin Fossum’s *Broken* (2008), he claims that

No subject—or literary technique—is unthinkable for the detective story today. It is a long time since the crime novel could be dismissed as some kind of harmless puzzle. Now it is aggressively social and problem oriented. No human experience is precluded from it, however dark or painful it may turn out to be. (156-57)

One could add to Persson’s praise of the novel’s originality the way that Høeg is unusual in avoiding the familiar “invasion of Scandinavia” motif. Now it is Denmark that invades another country, post-Home-Rule Greenland, as some distinctly amoral scientists seek to plunder its mineral wealth, covering up the murder of a child in the process.

The final chapter in this collection is Nestingen’s “Unnecessary Officers: Realism, Melodrama and Scandinavian Crime Fiction in Transition.” In Nestingen’s view

The Scandinavian crime novel is becoming more melodramatic, because melodramatic narration well suits the project of contesting the morality of the welfare state’s transformation under neoliberalism. Many novels dramatize the protagonist’s participation in state institutions changed by neoliberal retrenchment. Yet melodrama used in this way tends to simplify conflicts by reducing them to subjective moral dramas. We also see morality migrating into other figures in these narratives, for example, private investigators, security workers, journalists and so forth. They are often portrayed as entrepreneurial figures, entangled in criminal activity, yet morally certain. These figures are arguably taking over the role of the police investigator and her or his team as protagonists in Scandinavian crime fiction. (172)

As examples of these amateur investigators, we could include Smilla, Marklund's Annika Bengtzon, Läckberg's Erica Falck, and Larsson's Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander; and Nestingen's essay ends by examining Larsson's characters as his prime embodiments of melodrama and its moral ambivalence. While Mankell's Kurt Wallander and Edwardson's Erik Winter are state-appointed officers, Blomkvist and Salander, in Nestingen's opinion, come disturbingly close to "vigilante individualism" (180) which, it would now seem, is the last way to defend "the neoliberal subversion of the welfare state" (18). Nestingen shares with Anna Westerståhl Stenport and Cecilia Ovesdotter Alm (2009) the opinion that "Salander and Blomkvist fight neoliberalism by using its tools more skillfully and more ruthlessly than the corporations; but in so doing, they replicate the values, ethics and practices they ostensibly oppose" (Stenport and Alm 180).

Nestingén's conclusion can be challenged in a number of ways. I would question, for example, his view that the amateur investigator is taking over from the state-appointed detective in *SCF*. This is not the case: there are still far more Scandinavian novels with professional detectives than with private sleuths. I would also point out that that Smilla is as much a vigilante individualist as Lisbeth Salander (I do not see Blomkvist as the vigilante type); however, because Smilla's causes—justice for a murdered child, and the defence of her native country—are so obviously and morally right, and her own personality is more attractive to the reader than Salander's, she slips through the vigilante-label net. Moreover, crime fiction and thrillers, from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, through Ian Fleming, to Stieg Larsson, are melodramas, some more sensational than others. Even Høeg's skilful use of first person/present tense narrative—a technique often used in postmodern novels outside the crime fiction genre—cannot disguise the fact that his story moves towards a climactic scene which is as exciting and implausible as comparable scenes in two recent Bond films, *Casino Royale* (2007) and *Quantum of Solace* (2009). Camille, the heroine of *Quantum of Solace*, is, like Smilla, defending her country, Bolivia, against villainous exploitation, as well as carrying out personal revenge in the style of Lisbeth Salander. Smilla, Salander, and Camille are variants of the heroine as avenger, but only Salander is "found guilty" by critics of fighting fire with fire, because she is a citizen of neoliberal Sweden. All these characters are as fictional as Sherlock Holmes and Miss Marple, while Alm, Nestingen, and Stenport forget that Larsson defied death threats in his remarkably courageous stand against Swedish neo-Nazism. It is a positive sign that critics are treating good crime fiction with the respect it deserves, but perhaps in this instance they are doing *SCF* a disservice by taking it too literally: as social tract rather than literary genre.

*Scandinavian Crime Fiction* is a well-chosen selection of essays that covers a wide range of authors and topics in its field. It is clearly a book for specialists, Scandinavian scholars, for example, and university instructors and graduate students researching *SCF*. While it may take the genre at times too academically

and ideologically, as in Nestingen's concluding chapter, it can be recommended as a valuable contribution to the study of Nordic noir.

### *Death in a Cold Climate*

*Death in a Cold Climate: A Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction* is part of the Crime Files Series, published by Palgrave Macmillan, and consisting of books about detective fiction. There are twenty titles in the series to date, an indication both of crime fiction's popularity and its acceptance as a major literary genre. Barry Forshaw's publications include two books on crime fiction and *The Man Who Left Too Soon: The Life and Works of Stieg Larsson* (2010).

In his Introduction, Forshaw asks the question: "why has the field of Scandinavian crime fiction in translation—for so long caviar to the general—become such a hot ticket in recent years?" His answers include both the high literary merit of SCF and "the insights into Scandinavian society provided by this fiction" (1).<sup>8</sup> Forshaw says that his book "attempts to place all the key authors and their work in the context of social changes in their respective countries and illustrates the radical revision (via the novels) of fondly held British and American images of Nordic society." He also wants his book to be "a celebration of the crucial role of translation" (2), something that is all too frequently ignored.

Returning to his initial question about the popularity of SCF in English translation, Forshaw argues that this sub-genre "is more prepared to toy with notions of improvisation and destabilization of the generic form" (3). The result is that SCF "has a capacity to elevate the genre above its most basic entertainment status" (4). Forshaw also makes two useful analogies: 1. that Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, the great literary ancestors of contemporary Scandinavian writing, were both expert at "the slow, painful uncovering of dark secrets," which "is the *lingua franca* of crime fiction"; and 2. that Sweden's greatest filmmaker Ingmar Bergman "moves in a universe in which the interaction between his characters, violent, extreme and confrontational, suggests parallels with the darker explorations of the human soul" we encounter in crime fiction, especially in its Nordic form (10).

Forshaw organizes his guide to SCF by country, beginning with Sweden. His first two chapters—"Crime and the Left" and "The Cracks Appear: Henning Mankell"—are not as detailed or rewarding as the corresponding chapters, on Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, and on Mankell, in the collection edited by Nestingen and Arvas. Forshaw begins his chapter on Mankell with the challenging and, I think, much needed point that the author "confounds all stereotyped expectations of Nordic gloom and produces books crammed with humanity and guarded optimism" (22), this in spite of the often macabre events of his plots. The chapter begins as a survey of Mankell's novels to date, including two that fall outside the

crime fiction genre: *Depths* (2006) and *Italian Shoes* (2009). Forshaw overrates *Depths*, a novel I find puzzling and disappointing, but his praise of *Italian Shoes* is deserved, and the book prompts from Forshaw a comment that fits Mankell's police procedurals as well as his novels outside the genre: that the work is "a trenchant examination of the boundless human capacity for making the wrong decisions" (25). There is also a brief but positive and useful reading of *The Troubled Man* (2012), the last, and most complex Kurt Wallander novel. However, the same chapter digresses not simply to Håkan Nesser, but to more than four pages quoting Laurie Thompson's approach to translating Nesser and other Swedish authors (29-33). What Thompson has to say is interesting, but with this lengthy digression, cracks appear in the chapter's focus, as well as in Kurt Wallander's Sweden.

In chapter 3, "Sweden: The Dream Darkens," Forshaw gets into his critical stride and produces an excellent introduction to Camilla Läckberg and other more recently translated Swedish authors. Läckberg acknowledges the influence of Ruth Rendell (36); and there is in both writers a balance between sympathetic investigators—Rendell's Inspector Wexford, and Läckberg's Erica Falck and Patrik Hedström—and the grim murders they are called on to solve. There is a difference in the authors' chosen locales. Rendell's fictional English town, Kingsmarkham, is relatively populous and middle-class. Läckberg's Fjällbacka—her own birthplace on the southwest coast of Sweden—is tiny, isolated, especially in winter, and, in her novels at least, home to fishermen, hunters, a crime fiction novelist, her detective husband, and not a few religious fanatics. The very isolation of Fjällbacka, felt most strongly in the dark and cold of winter, allows Läckberg to create a more gothic atmosphere than we find in Rendell's Wexford novels. Forshaw also compares Läckberg to Agatha Christie in "the machine-tooled precision" of her plots, but adds that "Läckberg is very much a contemporary writer, offering a picture of modern society that is as penetrating and allusive as her narrative is involving" (36).

Forshaw's survey of Läckberg's Fjällbacka novels is marked by the way it manages to offer a good deal of useful information and commentary in a few pages. As throughout the book, he provides brief plot summaries, akin to those found on bookcovers and inside pages of the novels, without of course giving away the endings. I find his comments on *The Stonecutter* (2010) especially insightful:

As in *The Ice Princess* and *The Preacher*, Läckberg's job is to conjure anxiety—and that is one of her ironclad skills. But this novel adds another level cannily designed to unsettle us—a measured examination of the elements of determinism in human nature, and the readiness (which we all possess to some degree?) to cut adrift moral restraint when passionately held desires are frustrated.

(37)

In *The Hidden Child* (2007), as Forshaw demonstrates, Läckberg ventures skillfully into the controversial field of neutral Sweden's WWII links with Hitler's Germany. The plot begins with a well-worn fictional device: Erica Falck discovers an old chest in a remote corner of her attic. However, she does not chance upon a treasure map or a diary, but a Nazi war medal carefully hidden among her late mother's belongings. Läckberg makes skilful use of the medal to trigger the events of *The Hidden Child*, in which allegiances from half a century ago threaten a new generation.

In this chapter, Forshaw's use of quotations from authors, translators, and publishers does not lead to a lack of focus. It is, incidentally, a relief to read in a comment on Läckberg from her British publisher, Julia Wisdom of HarperCollins, that there are SCF enthusiasts in Australia and Canada, as well as Britain and America (39), though this is the only mention in Forshaw's guide of an English-speaking readership that is not Anglo-American.

Chapter 3 introduces three other Swedish crime fiction writers whose works are becoming known in English translation: Camilla Ceder, Mons Tallentoft, and Kerstin Ekman. Ekman's novel *Blackwater* (1996) is recommended by Forshaw for its powerful evocation of "the strangely lit northern Swedish landscape" (48), a comment which suggests an unexplored link between Swedish mysteries and the late nineteenth–early twentieth-century symbolist tradition of Scandinavian landscape art, that influenced the Group of Seven, and was reintroduced to North America by two exhibitions and books based on them: Kirk Varnedoe's *Northern Light: Nordic Art at the Turn of the Century* (1988)—the exhibition was organized by the Brooklyn Museum in 1982—and Roald Nasgaard's memorable 1984 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, *The Mystic North*—the book was also published in 1984.

It was on my second reading of *Death in a Cold Climate* that I became fully alert to an imbalance of distribution: there are five chapters on Swedish crime fiction, with two chapters each on Norway, Iceland, and Denmark, and one on Finland. Though Sweden may well be the SCF superpower, I felt that this review needed to redress the balance, by covering the remaining three Swedish chapters more concisely, with: (1) a selection of writers who are both first rate and less familiar to English-speaking readers than, for example, Mankell and Stieg Larsson; (2) some thoughts on the unexpectedly broad political spectrum in recent writers' novels and comments; and (3) a focus on the equally varied locations and atmospheres in contemporary Swedish mysteries.

Forshaw rightly recommends Mari Jungstedt and Johan Theorin as truly promising younger writers. Both set their novels on Baltic islands, Jungstedt's Gotland, and Theorin's Öland which lies closer to the southeast coast of Sweden. Forshaw justly claims that Jungstedt's Inspector Knutas novels "are among the most rarified and satisfying pleasures afforded by the field," distinguished as they are by a "steady accumulation of unsettling atmosphere" (51). It is a pleasing

coincidence that the word “gothic” derives in part at least from Gotland, since Jungstedt’s “unsettling atmosphere” is subtly gothic. The slightly out of focus black and white photograph of a misty fjord landscape on the paperback front cover of *Unseen* (2008) skillfully mirrors the novel’s atmosphere. Jungstedt sees the island itself as

perfect for crime stories – it is a version of the “locked room” scenario, because of the coastal parameters. The environment is immensely evocative: the flat, wild and dramatic landscape, the special light, the limestone rocks, the long sandy beaches that lay [sic] empty most of the year, the historical town of Visby with the wall around...  
(51)

Readers familiar with Bergman’s *Through a Glass Darkly* (1960) and *The Passion of Anna* (1968) will be familiar with Jungstedt’s landscape, since both films were shot on the island of Färö, part of Gotland, and only a short ferry ride away from Gotland itself. Jungstedt’s most recent novel to be translated into English, *The Dead of Summer* (2011), takes place for the most part on Färö. There is too something of Bergman’s powerful minimalism in what Forshaw calls Jungstedt’s “stripped-down” prose (51). Theorin’s Öland, and his plots, are even more overtly gothic. *Echoes from the Dead* (2008) begins in a landscape that is “gray and blurred” by fog (Theorin 1), and the novel is permeated by a sense that the present is haunted by the past, a hallmark of the gothic genre. Like Jungstedt, Theorin sets out to make his island “as much of a character in the stories as the people there” (76). He sees himself as a non-political writer: “the finest fiction does not pursue a definite political agenda” (77). This claim is borne out by the way the haunting of the past by the present is not connected with WWII or the Cold War, as it is in Larsson’s trilogy or Mankell’s *The Troubled Man*. Theorin claims that he is “much more interested in trying to see criminals, the police and the victims of crimes as individuals in a certain society rather than some sort of abstract symbols of it” (77).

While Jungstedt and Theorin are reasonably well known through English translations, two contrastingly political and urban Swedish writers, the novelist, Leif Persson and the historian Jon Bondeson, are yet to reach a wider market outside Sweden. Both share an interest in the still unsolved murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986, an event that for many Swedes “marked the beginning of the end of a particular dream” (54). Forshaw describes Persson’s Palme novel, *Between Summer’s Longing and Winter’s End* (2011) as a book whose “immense rewards... will be purchased at a price” (55). I found this novel very hard to appreciate. Persson allows us no access to his predominantly unpleasant and two-dimensional characters’ inner worlds—with the exception of Superintendent Lars Martin Johansson—and his flat, ironic style makes for difficult reading.

Persson has obviously struck a chord in Sweden and Europe, but this book—the first in a Palme trilogy—is the first example of Nordic noir I have read that is close to being unreadable. Perhaps its subject matter is better suited to the non-fictional approach taken by Jon Bondeson, whose *Blood on the Snow: The Killing of Olof Palme* Forshaw describes as “provocative and confrontational,” if challenging for non-Nordic readers (94).

Åke Edwardson and Åsa Larsson, my final choice of Swedish authors discussed by Forshaw, are much better known outside Sweden than Persson and Bondeson. Edwardson’s Chief Inspector Erik Winter works in Gothenburg, Sweden’s second largest city which comes to vivid life in such novels as *Sun and Shadow* (2005) and *Sail of Stone* (2012). Edwardson evokes his urban landscape with as much detail and atmosphere as Jungstedt employs for the very different world of Gotland. Winter himself is one of the most interesting detectives in recent crime fiction. He is tough, troubled, but never cynical, and relates well to his colleagues, especially the equally well-realized Aneta Djanali who has to deal with racism at a personal level as well as crime. Forshaw makes two useful observations on Edwardson’s writing: that, despite the violent crimes Winter must deal with, it has “a quiet humanity”; and that the climaxes are “deliberately drained of drama.” We are given instead “a strong sense of lives in transition, of endings and beginnings” (80). These qualities are clearly present in what I feel is Edwardson’s finest novel, *Sail of Stone* (2012), too recent to be included in Forshaw. Here Edwardson shifts effortlessly between plots in a manner that obviously reflects the jazz technique of John Coltrane, Winter’s musical obsession. Winter’s investigation also moves from southern Sweden to northern Scotland, and the two landscapes begin to fit each other like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. This is one of the most technically brilliant crime novels I have read.

Åsa Larsson’s novels are set in a landscape and climate that most readers will think of as typically Swedish: in and north of Kiruna, Sweden’s northernmost city, we are in a world of ice, snow, wolves, extreme cold, and long months of winter darkness. There are some parallels with Läckberg’s Fjällbacka, but Larsson’s world is one of greater extremes, in terms of violence as well as climate. In this forbidding setting, the courage shown by Larsson’s central character, Rebecka Martinsson, a former Stockholm lawyer, and now a prosecutor in Kiruna, is usually tested to the limit. She is one of the most compelling characters in contemporary crime fiction. Forshaw compares Martinsson and her police colleague Anna-Maria Mella with Lynda La Plante’s Jane Tennison. All three women “are struggling in a world of unsympathetic men (and Larsson peoples her cast with some extremely nasty males)”; however, in Forshaw’s view, “the Swedish author’s writing is more ambitious than her British colleague, with a level of plotting that excels in both ambition and achievement” (93). Forshaw says of Larsson’s most recent Rebecka Martinsson novel, *Until thy Wrath be Past* (2011) that it “continues the author’s reinvention of the crime novel in a piece crammed with minatory atmosphere”

(94). In a remarkable fusion of the supernatural with police procedural, Larsson allows the ghost of a murder victim to hover above the action, narrating and commenting until its soul is freed. This beautifully written redemptive novel is in itself a refutation that gloom and pessimism dominate *SCF*. With their fascinating characters, excellent plots, and a powerfully realized northern landscape, Åsa Larsson's novels might well be a good place to start for someone unfamiliar with Swedish crime fiction.

I have already mentioned the debt owed by contemporary Scandinavian crime fiction writers to Ibsen's retrospective action: no one in his plays can escape the past. His evocation of landscape is also a strong influence in Norway. When Peer Gynt returns, morally and spiritually bankrupt, from sixty years of global wandering and financial chicanery, he notices two things as his ship moves up a western fjord: the snow-covered peaks of the inland mountains, and the isolated farms scattered along the shores. His remark to the Captain, "De bygger spredt her i landet" (Ibsen 1962 205) [They build far apart in this country], has become proverbial in Norway. In Forshaw's words, Norway's "population (such as it is outside Oslo) is spread far and wide throughout the intimidating vastnesses" (96). One writer who makes use of western Norway's impressive landscape is Gunnar Staalesen, though he admits that it is more of a "crucial background" to his plots than a "character" in its own right:

I think the presence of nature is particularly strong—and pervasive—in most Norwegian... novels... It's stronger and more pronounced than in the literature from many other regions of the world. Regarding this sense of place, it is important for me to draw a precise picture of my region, the West coast of Norway, the second largest city in Norway, Bergen, and the areas surrounding the city. I also need to register, of course, the ocean, the fjords, the mountains...

(123)

Staalesen's admission that the mountain landscape is a "crucial background" explains the initially surprising fact that Norwegian crime fiction rarely takes place *in* the wilderness. There are few inhabitants of the vast and forbidding Hardangervidda or the Jotunheimen mountains; it is, then, almost banal but necessary to say that there will also be few murders there. Swedish nature has the advantage for crime fiction writers that people do inhabit the northern forests and Baltic islands, and these can become more central to the narrative. Staalesen is not yet well known outside Norway, but Forshaw makes the author's Varg Veum novels, set in Bergen, sound impressive, with *The Consorts of Death* (2009) as the most powerful so far. Veum "started his career as a child protection officer in the Norwegian social services," and in *Consorts of Death*, he is called on "to tend a traumatized child at the scene of a murder," that of his stepfather; and all the

Veum novels centre on “the damaged lives resulting from family breakdown” (122).

Karin Fossum is one of Norway’s best known crime fiction writers. Her Inspector Conrad Sejer series—there are ten so far—are widely read in English translation, and have been filmed for Norwegian television. Unlike Staalesen’s characters, Fossum’s do inhabit the gentler hills and forests of south-eastern Norway. Sejer himself lives in a small, unnamed town, and investigates murders, in Oslo, as in *Eva’s Eye* (2013), and in small rural communities, as in *Black Seconds* (2007), or by a mountain lake, as in *Don’t Look Back* (2003). Unlike Jo Nesbø or Stieg Larsson, for example, Fossum’s style is remarkably concise and restrained. There are no international conspiracies, no powerful criminal underworld. The sense of menace and violence is perhaps more shocking, coming as it does out of a quiet, ordinary world. Fossum’s murderers are for the most part not intrinsically evil. They are ordinary people who suddenly find themselves committing extraordinary, yes evil, actions, “when the devil holds the candle,” to borrow one of her titles (2004). Forshaw introduces Fossum with an anecdote about a crime fiction convention in Bristol. Some of the assembled writers were chuckling over the way their spouses “came up with ever-more ingenious ways of dispatching victims” than they did (108); then Fossum gave a keynote speech which began with a “truly scarifying description of a real-life child murder,” that sobered her audience. As Forshaw comments: “People shifted uneasily in their seats, but it was a salutary reminder that crime—however pleasurable on the page—has grim consequences in the non-literary world” (109).

The anecdote reflects the effect that Fossum’s novels have on their readers. The violence is more disturbing than it is in more sensational or gothic-tinged crime fiction, because style, characters, and milieu combine to create a world that is unnervingly close to real-life. Forshaw is correct in observing that “Fossum is not in the business of offering readers a comfort zone” (110). Fossum’s tall, polite, centred, grey-eyed detective Sejer is well chosen for Fossum’s approach to the police procedural: “When I wrote about him for the first time, I fashioned him in the vein of the kind of hero that I grew up with in the 1950s and 1960s: the kind and serious type, like TV’s Dr Kildare. Decent and good” (111). The nearest equivalent to Sejer in English-language fiction is P.D. James’s Adam Dalgleish—especially as portrayed on television by Roy Marsden. Both detectives are quiet, good listeners, patient, and observant, in strong contrast to such less balanced maverick inspectors as Morse, Rebus, or Harry Hole.

Jo Nesbø’s Detective Inspector Harry Hole is the professional and social polar opposite to Conrad Sejer: “a lone wolf, a chronic alcoholic, separated from his wife and child” (Forshaw 106), and prone to demotion for conduct unbecoming a police officer. When I first encountered Nesbø, I found his novels page-turners, but rather close to a blending of James Bond with police procedural. They tend to be long. Compare *The Redbreast*’s 618 pages with *Black Seconds*’s 247 pages which

are in larger print. However, I have more recently come to appreciate his detailed and “atmospheric portrait” of Oslo, and what Forshaw calls Nesbø’s “sharp picture of a tense Nordic society in flux” (106). As we have seen in *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, Nesbø also has a deeply felt sense of modern Norwegian history, with its dark roots in WWII, that, as terrible recent events have shown, seem hard to eradicate so many generations on.

Forshaw goes on to quote Staalesen’s concise and useful summary of what he sees as the two characteristics of SCF: “first, a focus on social affairs and current societal issues woven into the plot or murder mystery, often with a critical angle revealing the less salubrious side of Scandinavia’s tenuously prosperous welfare societies; second, the frequent presence of nature as a key element in the narrative” (125). Nature is very much a key element in Anne Holt’s *1222* (2011)—the number refers to the height above sea-level of the hotel where the action takes place, which is located on the northern edge of the Hardangervidda. Passengers from a derailed train en route northwest from Oslo to Bergen are forced to huddle in a snowbound hotel where, amazingly, murders start to take place. Luckily, the now wheelchair bound and retired Inspector Hanne Wilhelmsen is there to see that justice is done. The novel is highly readable, but its element of pastiche—Agatha Christie and Stephen King are prime suspects—makes it, in my opinion, weaker than Holt’s *What Never Happens* (2008), and *Fear Not* (2011) two far more successful police procedurals involving the engaging Oslo husband and wife detective team of Adam Stubo and Johanne Vik. Perhaps Holt is more at home in Oslo than the snowbound wilderness.

The population of Iceland in 2011 was 317,000. This means that the entire country’s population is smaller than that of metropolitan Halifax, 403,188 in 2010. Nonetheless, in the last two decades this sparsely peopled island has produced a significant number of crime fiction authors. Forshaw notes that, statistically, “only one murder is committed per annum in Iceland” (131). As in the Oxford of Inspector Morse and Inspector Lewis, we have to take the fictional murder count with more than a pinch of salt. The first Icelandic detective novels that Forshaw discusses, are by a British author, Michael Ridpath: the Inspector Magnus Jonson series that reflects the extreme contrasts that this land of fire and ice provides: “Everyone in Iceland seems to be on Facebook, yet everyone’s granny has spoken to elves” (Forshaw 133). Icelandic buildings and architecture are mostly modern, but few countries are so conscious of their history, in Iceland’s case reaching back a thousand years to the first Viking settlers and the famous sagas. Ridpath uses these contrasts to the full in his novel with its suitably Tolkienesque title, *Where the Shadows Lie* (2010), in which the author “evokes the bleak beauty of this landscape as well as the contrast between the old and the new, as police in twenty-first-century Reykjavík unravel a mystery surrounding a lost saga, a ring and a volcano” (133).

The best known Icelandic novelist is Arnaldur Indriðason. Eight of his compulsively readable Detective Erlendur novels are available in English. Like so many Canadian crime novelists, Indriðason seems fascinated by bodies of water, especially lakes which feature in two of his best works. *The Draining Lake* (2007) begins after an earthquake causes a large lake to empty, revealing a skeleton weighted down by a Russian transmitting device dating from the cold war. As in analogous plots by Nesbø and Mankell, a sinister past surfaces in the present, and the naïve attraction of Icelandic students to East Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall has unforeseen and frightening repercussions in the twenty-first century. I disagree with Forshaw's verdict that the characters "are lightly sketched in" (140); on the contrary I feel that the author has captured the painful vulnerability of youthful idealism in a way that recalls Wordsworth's attempt to come to terms with his involvement in the French Revolution. *Hypothermia* (2009) centres on a more private tragedy. An apparent suicide by a woman in a cottage near Lake Thingvellir may not be as straightforward as it seems. As more facts about the case come to light, including the dead woman's relationship with a medium, Erlendur is forced to send a police diver to explore another lake for evidence. Like Kurt Wallander, Erlendur is a loner. He has a difficult relationship with an addicted daughter; and his only reading consists of true-life stories about missing persons in the Icelandic interior. He is unable to forget the moment as a child when he lost his little brother in a blizzard. The psychological depth given by Indriðason to his detective, not to mention Erlendur's colleague, Elínborg, who takes over the investigation in *Outrage* (2011), and a vivid, if bleak, evocation of Iceland, combine to make these novels among the finest in their genre. They are Nordic in many ways, but seem very different from their European Scandinavian counterparts.

Forshaw's third choice from Iceland is Yrsa Sigurðardóttir. He compares her to Kathy Reichs "in the blood-chilling stakes" (136), and it sounds as if *Last Rituals* (2008), her first crime novel, has more than its fair share of gruesome detail. She confesses to be resolutely apolitical: "I do not find Icelandic politics merit being part of my novels; frankly. I find such things really boring—and ridiculous" (137). Like Åsa Larsson, Sigurðardóttir has a lawyer as her investigator, Thóra Gudmundsdóttir, who lives in Reykjavík, but takes on cases in "the more remote areas" of Iceland, which the author cherishes (137). Sigurðardóttir makes what one could call field trips to the locations of her novels—as far West as Greenland for *The Day is Dark* (2011)—to give them authenticity. Judging from Forshaw's survey, Sigurðardóttir's "splendidly accomplished" (136) Thóra Gudmundsdóttir novel, *My Soul to Take* (2009), would be a good introduction to Iceland's Queen of Crime.

Finland's modern and contemporary music is deservedly world-famous: Jean Sibelius, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Aulis Sallinen, and Uuno Klami have all produced major symphonic and operatic works with unique soundworlds. It has too a rich

tradition of crime fiction which, as has been mentioned, is only just reaching an English-speaking readership. It is a striking proof that reading novels is as subjective an experience as listening to music, that where Paula Arvas's chapter on Finnish SCF gives the impression that it is obsessed with Russia and Russian characters, Barry Forshaw only mentions "the Russian legacy" once in his guide to Finnish authors (147). His emphasis is on Finnish crime and Finnish investigators. More than half this chapter is devoted to Matti Joensuu who has been writing crime fiction since 1976. Joensuu's dark view of crime and social problems is coloured by his own thirty-five year full-time police career in the Helsinki Arson and Explosives unit (147). He is best known for a novel series featuring Detective Sergeant Timo Harjunpää. The most recent Harjunpää novel is *The Priest of Evil* (2006). It is clear that Joensuu's police career has given him a more intimate and more detailed knowledge of his novels' milieu—Helsinki—than that of many other crime fiction writers. For example, when researching locations for a possible new story which became *The Priest of Evil*, he discovered that "beneath Helsinki there is over 300 km worth of tunnels and infrastructure, places that we don't know about, right beneath the city" (150). As Forshaw tells us, "it is within these tunnels that we discover the Priest of Evil, conversing with himself in what appears to be Latin, as he goes about his curious rituals, one of those characters whose 'inner worlds' is explored with great thoroughness" (150). Joensuu says that in his police work he "was constantly exposed to the grim effects of crime and violent death" (149), and this has helped lend "a kind of truthfulness" to his fictional world. As an interesting footnote to the rise of crime fiction as a significant genre, Joensuu points out that as recently as the 1970s crime fiction was ridiculed in Finland, but since he became the first crime writer to win the Finnish State Award for Literature in 1982, the genre has been shown increasing respect (153).

From the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, Danish literature boasts some of the world's, let alone Scandinavia's, finest novelists. Before the success of *Smilla's Sense of Snow*, however, this remarkable fictional output—with the exception of Karen Blixen who wrote in English as Isak Dinesen—was little known outside Denmark. The Danish writer Tom Kristensen said of his younger contemporary H.C. Branner's novel, *Rytteren* (1949) [*The Riding Master*] (1951) that had it been written in English, "Branner would have awakened the next day to world fame" (quoted in Mussari 1999 69). The classic Danish novels are also remarkably varied in style, ranging from political and psychological realism, through Karen Blixen's brand of magic realism, to the picaresque. Contemporary Danish fiction writers seem to have inherited this variety, since it is hard to pin down a specific Danish style or form in thrillers or police procedurals. Unfortunately, in his two chapters on Denmark, Forshaw fails to place its crime fiction in a national literary context, or to mention its rich stylistic variety. The first chapter, "Death in Denmark," is largely filled by lengthy

quotations from Donald Spoto and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, a Danish specialist on Scandinavian literature, which are extremely generalized, and virtually fail to mention any Danish crime fiction writers. Only after eleven pages of digressions, does Forshaw devote one page to two novels which do reflect greatly contrasting approaches to the mystery form. Mikkel Birkegaard's *Library of Shadows* (2008) is a remarkable first novel. It begins when a young man of Danish-Italian descent, Jon Campelli, inherits his father's bookshop which turns out to be a meeting place for booklovers who have themselves inherited a secret power handed down from the library of Alexandria: the power to affect thought and emotion through the act of reading. However, they have enemies resentful of this power. This is a unique example of crime fiction as magic realism. The second novel, Christian Jungersen's *The Exception* (2006), is as Forshaw rightly claims, "superlative" (169), a novel that rivals Mankell, Fossum, and Åsa Larsson at their best. An institution called the Danish Centre for Genocide studies has been set up in Copenhagen. Four women, Iben, Malene, Anne-Lise, and Camilla, work at the centre with an older man, Paul, as their boss. The women start to receive death threats on their computers, and the assumption is at first that these threats come from a Bosnian war criminal wanted by the Hague, and possibly on the run in Scandinavia. However, as the story unfolds, the women start to suspect each other, and to look for a scapegoat *inside* their place of work. What is remarkable about *The Exception* is that it works as a political thriller and as a penetrating study of work-related stress pushed over the edge into paranoia.

Discussion of these novels might well have fitted into the next chapter, "Danish Uncertainties." There is less extraneous material here, and Forshaw does introduce readers to some promising new Danish crime fiction writers. Jussi Adler-Olsen's *The Keeper of Lost Causes* (2011) centres on his likable maverick detective Carl Mørck who has been given a desk-job, in Department Q, looking over cold-case files after being wounded in a shoot-out. He teams up with a younger colleague to investigate the disappearance, possibly drowning, of a prominent politician, Merete Lyngaard, which occurred five years before the novel starts. *The Keeper of Lost Causes* may not be as original as *The Exception*, but it is thoroughly entertaining and suspenseful, with excellent characterization, and deserved its Glass Key Award, the top crime fiction award in Scandinavia. His most recent Department Q novel, *The Absent One* (2012), is a compelling cross between thriller and police procedural, that is a strong rival to Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy. Leif Davidsen's *Lime's Photograph* (2002) and *The Serbian Dane* (2007) are good, well-paced thrillers which will remind readers of Ken Follett and Frederick Forsyth. Where Davidsen may have the edge on his English counterparts is in an ability to introduce a sense of tragedy into the thriller genre, especially in *The Serbian Dane*. The chapter ends with an introduction to the Nina Borg series by Lene Kaaberbøl and Agnete Friis. There are two in the series so far, *The Boy in the Suitcase* (2011) and the intriguingly titled *A Quiet, Unfelt Killing* (2010). Nina

Borg is, uniquely to my knowledge, a Red-Cross-nurse-as-investigator who is “out to save the world” through legitimate—and slightly less legitimate—means (179). Forshaw’s book ends with a short but useful survey of SCF in film and television adaptations.

As its cover quotations indicate, Forshaw’s book has been highly praised by such top crime fiction writers as Val McDermid and Håkan Nesser. It is indeed a useful guide, but it is spoiled by the author’s fondness for digression, and a tendency to pad his chapters with lengthy and often generalized quotations from translators, publishers, critics, and authors. One would have thought that a series editor would have pounced on these. I am nonetheless grateful to Forshaw for introducing me to a number of clearly exciting new writers of SCF, such as Joensuu, Sigurðardóttir, and Staalesen, and for his many perceptive comments on individual writers. With some reservations, then, I can recommend it as an enthusiastic if roughly organized guide to SCF, while, as I have suggested before, *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* will appeal to a more specialized readership.

An interesting question that Forshaw raises is whether or not the current fascination with Nordic noir in English translation is “more than a passing literary fashion” (191). Kaaberbøl speaks of “the recent bubble of attention” (179) to SCF, and of course a bubble has a tendency to burst. Alison Hennessey, one of the British publishers of Indriðason and Nesbø, feels that “Scandinavian crime fiction has reached something of a tipping point” (131), in English translation at least. My preferred term would be “dipping point,” by which I mean that translated SCF has peaked and may dip and level off to become a first among equals, no longer, as it were, Everest. Whatever its future, Scandinavian crime fiction will remain one of the remarkable success stories in modern literary history.

#### NOTES

1. Although, in a geographical sense, Scandinavia refers to Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, I have for the most part followed Nestingen and Arvas in using Scandinavian in place of Nordic, one reason being that Nordic has, as these authors point out, no substantive form (15).
2. See also Andrew Nestingen’s *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia: Fiction, Film, and Social Change* (2008)
3. For the sake of economy, I will use SCF to stand for Scandinavian Crime Fiction.
4. See Ruth Rendell (writing as Barbara Vine), *A Dark-Adapted Eye* (1993).
5. There are discrepancies between the two books under review in references to SCF in English, and Forshaw does not include translators’ names in his guide. My own references to novels in English translation are to editions available now in North America. Other references are to Scandinavian editions, when no English translations are, to my knowledge, available.
6. *Flame and Citron*. 2008. Directed by Christian Madsen. The quotation is from a subtitle.

7. My translation.
8. Page numbers in this section refer to Forshaw (2012). Forshaw quotes and paraphrases from a number of sources, but does not supply references. I have tried to make clear the distinction between Forshaw and these sources.
9. [Motion picture].
10. [Motion picture].
11. [Motion picture].
12. [Motion picture].
13. [Motion picture].
14. 29 February. <http://web.archive.org/web/20080427153346/http://www.lizamarklund.net/bocker.php?go=omslag> (Accessed March 11, 2014). Original website no longer available.

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