

Peacock, Steven. 2014. *Swedish Crime Fiction: Novel, Film, Television*. Manchester: Manchester UP. vi + 218 pages. ISBN: 978-0-7190-9069.

Steven Peacock's study is the second of two books published in 2014 that concentrate on Swedish crime fiction (SWCF). The other is Kerstin Bergman's *Swedish Crime Fiction: The Making of Nordic Noir*. The main difference between the two is that while Bergman focuses exclusively on novels, Peacock shows more interest in their film and television adaptations. (I will use "film" from this point, to cover feature films and TV series.) Peacock divides his work into five chapters: "Nation, Genre, and Institution"; "Community and the Family"; "Space and Place"; "Bodies"; and "Interview Transcripts." In his introduction, Peacock says he intends to follow Mark Bould in his view that the term "noir" needs to be studied outside America, "in other national, linguistic, and international contexts," and Michael A. Boyce in his "understanding of noir as 'a particular sensibility or mood, one of alienation, pessimism, and uncertainty'" (3). Since SWCF novels have been studied by recent English-language critics, notably Barry Forshaw (2011) and Kerstin Bergman (2014), this review will concentrate on Peacock's approach to film adaptations, a decision strengthened by the fact that Peacock, by his own admission, reads the novels in English and follows the dialogues of Swedish films through English subtitles. I should add, by way of further introduction, that Peacock is both careful and generous in his selection of other critics' views.

While many SWCF enthusiasts would consider the first Swedish film version of Stieg Larsson's *Männ som hatar kvinnor* [Men Who Hate Women], directed by Niels Arden Oplev in 2009, to be their adaptation of choice, Peacock justifies his concentration on David Fincher's 2011 remake, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, with an expert and fascinating reading of Fincher's technique. His film "opens *outside* of time and space, with a bravura title sequence separated from the diegetic world of the narrative, and thus from Sweden" (114). Peacock then centres his attention on Mikael Blomkvist (Daniel Craig) and Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara). In Fincher's opening sequence proper, we are in Stockholm, and Blomkvist has lost his case against Wennerström:

...television screens in cafés and shops hang heavily over the journalist's head. Re-viewing the film a second time, these images can be seen as a foreshadowing of Blomkvist's ultimate fate: caught on camera (literally) strung-up in Martin's basement lair, ready for slaughter.
(130)

Peacock then quotes Casey Benyahia's view that Salander is seen by Larsson "as a product of society's fear of and attraction to the digital world" (129). For Salander, as for any individual, "the possibilities of ambiguity and deception

created by cyberspace can alter the nature of social exchange, introducing a precondition of uncertainty or anxiety into all virtual contacts” (129). Peacock now cleverly links Salander’s expertise in a “virtual” world with her journey from Stockholm to Hedeby Island:

The speed and dexterity of her movements through cyberspace find tangible “real-world” expression in the shots of her riding on her motorcycle—navigating the webs of roads and bridges on the streets of Stockholm and out on Hedeby Island. Cyberspace offers her a position of immunity, a site from which she can map her experiences in the geographical spaces of the real world.
(131)

Stieg Larsson was clearly attracted to outsiders and shared with other SWCF writers the fear that Sweden’s welfare state, especially in its perceived late 20th-century decline, can deprive its citizens of what was once the country’s badge of pride: individual freedom. In Leif G. W. Persson’s *Mellan sommarens längtan och vinterns köld* (2002) [Between Summer’s Longing and Winter’s Cold], Stieg Larsson’s *Millennium* trilogy (2005), and Henning Mankell’s *Den orolige mannen* (2009) [*The Troubled Man*], the state has become secretive and Orwellian, prepared to go beyond mere surveillance to murder in order to protect itself. Throughout his book, Peacock is aware of this larger tension and of its microcosmic reflection in institutions, business, and the media. His approach to Liza Marklund’s journalist heroine, Annika Bengtzon (Helena Bergström), in Colin Nutley’s 2001 film *Sprängaren* (1998) [*The Bomber*] provides a visual image of what Mankell has called “the Swedish Anxiety” (quoted in Peacock 16). The novel begins when someone—surely a terrorist?—has blown up the nearly-completed stadium for the Olympic Games. The attack is more terrifying, more un-Swedish if you like, when the police discover that the chair of Sweden’s Olympic committee, Christina Furhage, has been dismembered by the blast. In his chapter “Bodies,” Peacock shows how such a violent act “suggests the fragmentation of self and society” (134):

In *The Bomber*, Colin Nutley quickly establishes a pattern of editing shots of body parts into abstract collages. Footage of Olympic participants is presented in this way, and connected to the close-up shots of a mangled corpse in the opening scene. Both are violently cut, chopped up to be made pointedly anonymous.
(135)

In the microcosm of her office milieu, Bengtzon is presented by Marklund “as a noble loner, standing apart from the pack mentality of the press” (79):

The 2003 film of the novel develops these tensions between Bengtson as individual and member of the press in its compositions of characters in the workplace. It presents the news editorial boardroom in the much-favored modern style of a shaky-cam, suggesting the team's constant anxiety or unpreparedness for the next big news story. ... The free camera provides an intimate feel but keeps Bengtson at a distance. The film does the same with the killer, holding us with the news reporters, presenting nothing from the murderer's perspective. Our sense of the fictional world is filtered through a "press-eye" view, and Bengtson's separateness again aligns her with the killer's outsider status.

(80)

In a section called "Country houses, locked rooms, and snow-bound mysteries" (124–26), Peacock takes us to Åsa Larsson's arctic community of Kiruna and another outsider, Rebecka Martinsson (Izabella Scorupco in the first Åsa Larsson film). She feels "at home" in the place where she was born; at the same time, the community, with its secrecy and hostilities to Stockholmers—Rebecka works, at least in Larsson's first novel *Solstorm* (2003) [*Sun Storm*], as a lawyer in the capital—makes her feel claustrophobic. It is "a cold and insular place" (125). In Leif Lindblom's film version, "in the opening images the camera turns immediately to the skies, to the majesty of the northern lights." Then, "as the camera pans from left to right, it brings into view the sights of a modern church building, all metallic struts and plastic sheeting. This building, this church, forms the shell under which the clammed-up community gathers" (126). The audience will immediately sense something alien about the structure, and of course the first murder will take place here, spreading paranoia and more violence through the "idyllic" winter landscape. As vast and beautiful as Sweden's forests and mountains may be, there is no hiding place. With the economy that characterizes film at its best, Lindblom captures a major concern of SWCF as a whole: the question of "what happens in settings where the idea of a public good has been lost" (Nicole Rafter and Michelle Brown 2011, quoted in Peacock 99).

Peacock ends his book with five rewarding transcripts of interviews conducted between him and the following filmmakers and authors: Mikael Wallén and Erik Hultkvist of Yellow Bird Productions, who gave us the Swedish *Wallander* series and the *Millennium* films; Andy Harries of Left Bank Productions, the company that co-produced the BBC *Wallander* series starring Kenneth Branagh; the novelists Johan Theorin and Mari Jungstedt; and an interesting odd man out, John Ajvide Lindkvist, writer of the best-selling novel *Låt den rätta komma in* (2007) [*Let the Right One In*], that was filmed in Sweden (2008) by Thomas Alfredson and in America (2010) by Matt Reeves. Peacock is, I think, justified in claiming that his interview with Lindkvist provides us with insights into "thematic intersections between the horror and crime drama genres" (23).

While wishing that Steven Peacock had placed more trust in his own special field of film and not devoted as much space to SWCF in its novel form, I have

found this a rewarding and stimulating book. One can only hope that similarly specialized studies of Nordic Noir in Iceland, Norway, Denmark, and Finland will soon appear.

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