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Locating Nordic Noir

From Beck to The Bridge

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Image from 'Trapped' by Lilja Jónsdóttir, RvK Studios.

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CHAPTER 12

Trapped and Original Noir from Iceland and Norway

In terms of volume, Swedish crime fiction and crime drama may represent the most powerful tradition within Nordic Noir in the Nordic region, supplemented by Danish television drama with a range of influential transformations of production methods; however, both Icelandic and Norwegian drama have succeeded in increasing production values and improving production methods to match their counterparts in Denmark and Sweden and have also come to play a very important role in the export of Nordic television drama. Even though both drama traditions reacted comparatively late to the international attention, they have been able to produce several titles that have travelled well in the wake of the Swedish and Danish prime movers. Audun Engelstad (2016) refers to 'pan-national co-productions and to bundle funding from various European financial sources' as a primary incentive behind high budgets and the promotion of 'high-end television' in two recent Norwegian dramas, *Frikjent/Acquitted* (2015–) and *Okkupert/Occupied* (2015–). Produced for Norwegian commercial public service broadcaster (PSB) TV 2, they denote strength in Nordic PSBs as sites 'for working through difficult cultural issues' (Engelstad 2016). Engelstad refers to these two dramas as having 'a pan-Scandinavian production identity', but in doing so, he leaves out the French flavour added to the financial side of *Occupied,* which is credited as a TV 2 Norway and Arte France co-production. According to Engelstad, high-end television is:

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> identified by its high budget, visible in the cinematic production values (budgets per produced hour are close to that of a medium-budget movie); a must-see allure that promotes of a kind of essential viewing experience; authorial input that promises creative innovation; a star-driven cast and production team; a narrative complexity based on systematic cutting between different sub-plots; and a genre-based story, which often showcases a radical mixing of genres. (Engelstad 2016)

Such identification marks in a pan-Scandinavian television drama production identity are the necessary hallmarks of a drama in order for it to be able to compete on the international television market, which is the case for both dramas.

Even if such a transnational identity profile and an international, mostly Anglophone, genre orientation are adequate explanations, both series still have a definitively Norwegian flavour that clearly supersedes the creative, financial and generic characteristics of the dramas. The 'Norwegianness' of the dramas derives from three primary features of the dramas: spoken language, Norwegian actors and actresses, and very importantly, the recognisable Norwegian urban and rural settings of the dramas, respectively. As we shall see in this chapter, the imagery stamp of the dramas does not only appear as references to real places that we would be able to visit ourselves; the visual portrayals of especially the rural landscapes of Norway and Iceland are also intertextually indebted to the logic of place in Nordic, mostly romanticist landscape painting from the nineteenth century. So even if the assumption of something allegedly 'Norwegian' or 'Icelandic' may appear outdated in a transnational media environment—even as a 'borealism', i.e. the imagination of a natural Nordic unity (Alsen and Landmann 2016, 24)—the references to distinctive landscapes and landmarks still evoke a sense of place tied very closely to the settings of the dramas. This will be evident in the overview below of Icelandic and Norwegian crime dramas, and in conclusion we will sum up this aspiration from the Nordic painting tradition in the spatiality of the dramas.

Trapped as White Noir

Similar to the new supernatural tendency in Swedish crime drama briefly touched upon in Chap. 11, we see Icelandic nature and landscapes employed in a similar manner in Sveinbjörn I. Baldvinsson's miniseries

Hamarinn/The Cliff (2009). This series was an early component in a significant qualitative turn in Icelandic television production during the late 2000s. The series is set primarily in rural Iceland, where the drama arises from mortal accidents around construction work being carried out at an alleged elven place called Hamarinn. According to local mythology in Hafnarfjörður, the cliff Hamarinn is supposedly the royal home of elves. Local tour guides service visitors with stories of halted construction work and, with great similarity to the Swedish dramas *Jordskott* (2015–) and *Ängelby* (2015), nature is treated as something absolute that cannot be restored once it has been damaged by modern infrastructure and technology. In a sense, the metaphysical understanding of nature in such dramas emphasises the immeasurable appeal of natural beauty that is replicated in much tourist material from such areas, including Hafnarfjörður. It may be slightly stereotypical, as suggested in *The Cliff*, but it serves as a noteworthy argument for saving the natural surroundings that in itself represent a treasure trove for Icelandic businesses (including the film industry). We find parallel arguments and similar supernatural indications in *Fortitude* (2015–), *Midnight Sun* (2016–) and *Jordskott*, and thus, these drama are also directly indebted to *Twin Peaks* (1990–) and *The X-Files* (1993–).

The Cliff was part of several tendencies in Icelandic film and television drama after the turn of the Millennium. Until the late 2000s, television drama played a minor role in fiction production in general and crime drama in particular, but just as the creative industry was transformed by different postmillennial influences—international attention towards television drama, the global success of *Forbrydelsen/The Killing* (2007–2012), and new viewing practices on online platforms—so did Icelandic television drama change significantly during this period. In cinemas, the success of films like Björn Br. Björnssons *Köld slóð/Cold Trail* (2006), Baltasar Kormákur's *Mýrin/Jar City* (2006), Óscar Jónasson's *Reykjavik-Rotterdam* (2008) and Kormákur's international remake of Jónasson's film *Contraband* (2012) indicates some international attention towards Icelandic crime films in this period, but the films also constitute the base from which new Icelandic television crime drama is developing. Björnsson moves on to direct Baldvinsson's script for the RÚV miniseries *Mannaveiðar/I Hunt Men* (2008) adapted from Viktor Arnar Ingólfsson's *Aftureldingl/Daybreak* (2005), while Baldvinsson subsequently continues his interest in crime drama in the original miniseries *The Cliff* and *Hraunið/The Lava Field* (2014), linked with similar

casts, including Björn Hlynur Haraldsson as the detective Helgi, but with different crime plots. *The Lava Field* has recently been made available on various Netflix regions, appearing in the Icelandic title screen as *Hamarinn*, which creates a direct association with *The Cliff*, but causes it to lose the original reference to a lava field embedded in the original Icelandic title. Baldvinsson has his roots in the Icelandic film industry in the 1980s, which was characterised by Birgir Thor Møller as an age of professionalisation and internationalisation just after the establishment of The Icelandic Film Fund in 1980 (Møller 2003, 276). Interestingly enough, according to Møller, a film which represented a significant step towards establishing the film fund was Reynir Oddson's *Mordsaga/Story of a Crime* (1977), because this was based on local Icelandic talent rather than foreigners working in Iceland, which means that figuratively speaking, the modernisation of Icelandic film was rooted in crime fiction. Besides his personal history in the modernisation of Icelandic film, Baldvinsson has also briefly worked in Danish television production as a scriptwriter on the DR drama *Taxa* (1997–1999), and he co-wrote the main part of the third season of Danish TV 2's court drama *Forsvar/Defence* (2003–2004), meaning that he has experienced some of the changes that led to the recent international interest in Danish drama. Pegasus Productions produced the two connected miniseries *The Cliff* and *The Lava Field*, creating a connection to the international interest in Icelandic dramas, which was based on the work of Pegasus as a co-producer of for instance the Sky Atlantic drama *Fortitude* and the HBO drama *Games of Thrones* (2011–).

Sigurjón Kjartansson is another very important figure in Icelandic television drama production. He built his reputation in Icelandic comedy, to which he still occasionally returns, but he has written and produced several crime dramas too. In this genre, he first wrote Sagafilm's Reykjavik police procedural *Svartir englar/Black Angels* (2008), which was based on Ævar Örn Jósepsson novels and directed by Óscar Jónasson, who at the same time directed the Arnaldur Indriðason adaptation *Reykjavik-Rotterdam* with Baltasar Kormákur as a leading actor. Four years later, Kormákur would direct the remake *Contraband*. These associations are clear indications of at least two trends: firstly, we see that the attention towards Icelandic crime film partly also springs from adaptations, mainly Indriðason's novels, and secondly, we also see a clear crossover between film and television production, which has become a common modus operandi in Scandinavian film and television

production. Kjartansson created *Black Angels* together with Margret Örnólfsdottir, and they continued their collaboration on Sagafilm's court case crime drama for Stöð 2, *Réttur/Court* (2009–2010). This was recently revived in the spin-off series *Case* (2015), in which the central character Logi Traustason appears in a police procedural which has a number of close narrative similarities with *The Killing*. Kjartansson is credited for 'the original story', and the series was directed by Baldwin Z, who would collaborate with Kjartansson as one of the directors on the international breakthrough for Icelandic television drama, the RÚV drama *Ofærð/Trapped*. *Trapped* was produced by RVK Studios, of which Baltasar Kormákur is the main owner and director, while Kjartansson is head of development, producer and main showrunner of television drama. RVK also runs production services for visiting productions, assisting with tasks such as finding suitable locations for film and television productions.

Summing up, in only a decade, the development of Icelandic drama has gone through a development very similar to that of the other Nordic countries. However, this has happened at a much greater speed and has been spurred on by great admiration of and inspiration from especially the so-called Danish model (Kjartansson 2016). Basically, the very recent success of Icelandic television drama boils down to a few far-sighted production companies (Pegasus, Sagafilm and RVK) in close collaboration with the two main television channels (RÚV and Stöð 2) and a handful of ambitious filmmakers (Baldvinsson, Kjartansson and Kormákur). In the development and professionalisation of Icelandic film and television production, foreign productions in Iceland have also played a very important role in both the local training of film producers and the motivation for increased international collaboration. In our interview with Guðrún Birna Jörgensen (manager at Promote Iceland) and Einar Hansen Tómasson (film commissioner at Film in Iceland), this became very obvious (Jörgensen and Tómasson 2016). The website of Film in Iceland refers to numerous film and television shows which are partly produced in Iceland, most of them US productions including the blockbusters *Interstellar* (2015), *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015) and *Furious 8* (2017). This list goes back to the 1980s, but most titles are from the 2000s and onwards. The long history of Icelandic film and television drama is, of course, much more complex than portrayed here, but for these companies and the personnel a general deep-felt interest has been expressed in exploiting the natural surroundings and landscape

in Iceland for the purpose of drama, which emerges with great impact in especially *Trapped*, which, according to both Kjartansson (2016) and Kormákur, was made explicitly to attract international attention to Icelandic drama. 'We had been going through ideas, me, Sirgurjon [Kjartansson] and Magnús [Viðar Sigurðsson], regarding an Icelandic police drama that could possibly be sold outside Iceland', says Kormákur as his very first remark in The Making of Trapped (available on Arrow Films' DVD release). At the same time, he insists that it 'will be totally clear that this is an Icelandic show', which serves to emphasise that in this sense the local can be very global, just as we have seen in many other Nordic Noir dramas. In our interview with Kjartansson, he referred to local areas in Iceland as being at once both unique and translocal, because such localities can be found anywhere in the world:

> Going out of the city also gives us the specialty of Iceland. How Iceland is unique, how the landscape is unique. We set the first series in a small town in Iceland, but small towns tend to be like each other, it's an international thing, the thing of the small town. But still we are in Iceland, we have the crazy sea, we have the crazy mountains and we have the crazy snow and everything. So what we brought to the world was something visually unique. (Kjartansson 2016)

Kjartansson stresses how very Icelandic the drama is, but he also told us about a very conscious strategy in associating international scriptwriters in the writing process of the drama. Screenwriter Clive Bradley explains the process himself:

> It's a slightly long story. Creator Baltazar Kormákur's company RVK had developed it and they had sort of hit a bit of a brick wall with it. They wanted it to be an international show; they didn't just want it to be just for Iceland. They also wanted international funding and that kind of thing. They had started a relationship with a company called Dynamic Television, which is a transatlantic company, and one of its executive producers – a German based in Paris – I'd been working with on a couple of projects. We worked very well together and he got me involved, and so it developed from there. In the first instance, I wrote my own version of the pilot, which helped to get ZDF in Germany onboard, and then we used a system where I would write the whole thing in English, which was then translated into Icelandic by Sigurjón Kjartansson. (Hirons 2016)

In this quote, Bradley refers to the executive producer and screenwriter Klaus Zimmerman (from the transnational production and distribution company Dynamic Television), who co-wrote the complete series and, in addition to the collaboration between Kjartansson, Zimmerman and Bradley, he brought in the French screenwriter Sonia Moyersoen with connections to the broadcaster France 2, which ended up airing the drama (Kjartansson 2016). Thus, as a production, *Trapped* is both financially and creatively a transnational co-production between the Icelandic production company RVK Studios and RÚV, ZDF, France Télévisions, DR, SVT, NRK, Swedish Yle and the BBC, personified by writers from Iceland, England, Germany and France.

In *Trapped*, genre and spatial orientation are clearly indicated in the symbolic title sequence, which consists of twelve shots intercutting between a dirty, wrinkled and decaying human body and miscellaneous topographical images from around Iceland: top angle shots of an icy glacier, mountains, a lava field, a large coastal rock and seaside cliffs. While attracting attention to different typically Icelandic landscape phenomena, the sequence also metaphorically and formalistically suggests a likeness between a dead human body and the natural surroundings: the body can be read topographically, and the landscape can be dissected forensically. The sequence provides a symbolic reference to the deadly beauty of Icelandic surroundings in which danger lurks for the uninitiated who is unable to read the land. In other words, the sequence introduces the drama genre through the dead body and uses the topographical imagery as an abstract locative instrument. Showing the variety of Icelandic nature in the title sequence indicates the topographical attention towards different climates in Iceland: from the cool, snowless images of Reykjavik to the rough, snow-filled Seyðisfjörður, where the action supposedly takes place. According to *The Making of Trapped,* three production sites were used: the series is set in Seyðisfjörður, but most of the production took place in Siglufjörður, which is much closer to Reykjavik than the actual setting of the drama (closer means cheaper). The plot follows the investigation of the murder of a man found dismembered in the ocean when a large passenger liner arrives from Denmark. Thus, the drama comments on low crime rates in Iceland, where criminal activity seems to arrive from abroad, in this case from Denmark and Lithuania. In itself, this may be a postcolonial comment as well, which is emphasised throughout the drama, in that the Danish sea captain insists on speaking Danish to the local investigator Andri. Just as the murder inquiry

commences, a heavy blizzard arrives, which makes the road unpassable (the Icelandic title *Ofærð* means 'unpassable'). As a result, the murderer is 'trapped', first on the boat, then in the small rural village; but at the same time, help from the Reykjavik police headquarters is unable to reach the place in order to assist the investigation, which causes *Trapped* to rework 'the locked room mystery' to fit a cold and isolated Icelandic setting that in a sense becomes a character in itself: the movement and hostile actions of the blizzard become just as dangerous as having a murderer on the loose among the local citizens.

Snow as a topos is, of course, the most important climatic feature in *Trapped* since it plays such a large role in the dramatic development of the series. Geographically, Iceland is located on the southern edge of the Arctic Circle, and setting the series in Seyóisfjoður literally situates the drama as close to the polar circle as possible. Whether or not Iceland is Arctic or sub-Arctic has been up for debate and depends on the definition used (Steinberg et al. 2015, 12–13), but the series *Trapped* is very much in line with classic tropes in what Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport dub 'Arctic cinema':

> Frozen, inhospitable, static and sterile: techniques and tropes of mass audience visual representation from the nineteenth century onward cemented the view of the Arctic as an exemplar of a sublime space overwhelmed by nature and as a point of desolation. This cultural understanding of the Arctic has been well articulated and critiqued in scholarly works representing a wide range of disciplines and points of view. (MacKenzie and Stenport 2014, 3)

In criticising the stereotype, scholars stress the lack of political awareness of different regions, identities and nations as well as the variety of landscapes in considerations of the 'Arctic spectacle' (Potter 2007) or the 'Arctic discourse' (Ryall et al. 2010). However, as the plot of *Trapped* unfolds throughout the ten episodes, the murderer is disclosed as an insider with very local and political incentives rooted in Iceland's geographical and political transatlantic position. So in a sense, the drama attempts to negotiate the issues usually raised in such postcolonial censure of what Jessica M. Shadian refers to as the 'Nordic Arctic': a spatial construction of identity in which, through historical arguments, Nordic societies raise geopolitical claims to Arctic areas (Shadian 2013). This does not mean that *Trapped* escapes stereotypical depictions of

the cold; after all, snow may be cold and dangerous, and consequently the trope of isolation is common in genre fiction, for instance in Yrsa Sigurðardottir's novel *Auðnin/The Day is Dark* (2008), which shares obvious similarities with John Carpenter's film *The Thing* (1982). In fact, *Trapped* is an interesting parallel to Ragnar Jónasson's Icelandic novel *Snjóblinda/Snowblind* (2010), a crime story that takes place in Siglufjöður, where most of *Trapped* was filmed, and includes a plot featuring a local policeman on his own after the mountain pass closes in a blizzard (just like *Trapped*). For Luis Rocha Antunes, isolation in particular is a prevalent part of what he calls 'aesthetics of cold' (Antunes 2016, 132), and hence, *Trapped* and similar narratives may be considered *white noir*.

In other words, as a television drama, *Trapped* may renew Nordic crime dramas by way of basing much of its plot development on a heavy blizzard, although 'snowed-in' is a common trope in written crime fiction and fiction in general. On the website Goodreads.com is a long list of so-called 'trapped-in-a-blizzard-together-romances', which indicates the prevalence of this trope. Heidi Hansson refers to adventure tales as a popular genre, which 'has most often made use of an Arctic setting' and 'where the—usually male—character is confronted with difficult conditions and physical challenges which he overcomes, proving his strength and resourcefulness' (Hansson 2010, 224); and in many ways Andri, the main character of *Trapped*, fits this description very well. However, the common reference to blizzards in popular culture also indicates a widespread banal, perhaps unconscious, influence from romanticist depictions of nature in an attempt to reach for sublimity in the evocative landscapes of the dramas and the stories. In line with our expanded use in Chap. 2 of the concept *local colour* as a reflection of a global trend of transforming places into commodities and cultures into marketable destinations, which is deeply embedded in romanticist portrayals of landscapes and nature, *Trapped* may stand out as an exception and serve as a very basic depiction of an extreme sense of north Icelandic local colour related to awe-inspiring evocations of the sublime. On the one hand, Iceland may appear like a very hostile environment much more associated with the extreme trope of Arctic isolation, which may perhaps even contradict commodification or tourist appeal. On the other, by way of popular cultural tropes, human encounter (Andri's) with the powerful forces of nature is accentuated: extensive images of snowy mountains and windswept shorelines strike a resonance with Nordic and European

landscape paintings by for instance Johan Christian Dahl and his friend Caspar David Friedrich and, in this case, what Magne Malmanger refers to as 'the Nordic sublime' in for instance Friedrich's 'Der Mönch am Meer'. According to Malmanger, Friedrich 'placed his lonesome monk on the beach by the sea, undoubtedly looking north, and it is said that the painter himself dreamt of visiting Iceland' (Malmanger 2006, 45). Even though Malmanger is critical towards the assumption that a specific *Nordic* sublime exists, he acknowledges a specific overwhelming aesthetic in several of Dahl's paintings, such as *Stetind i tåke/The Mountain Stetind in Fog*, a painting of the giddy heights of Stetind, referred to as the national mountain of Norway.

In our interview with Jörgensen from Promote Iceland and Tómasson from Film in Iceland, a very similar notion of breathtaking Icelandic nature was confirmed (Jörgensen and Tómasson 2016), and in fact the website for Promote Iceland and Film in Iceland both present images that in many ways are commercialised variations of the romanticist images by Dahl, Friedrich and the Icelandic pioneering landscape painter Þórarinn K. Þorlákssson, although Þorlákssson prioritised the Icelandic summer landscape. As regards Kjartansson's remark above about the 'craziness' of Icelandic nature as well as the topographic elements of the title sequence, Katharina Alsen and Annika Landmann, referring to the first Icelandic romanticist poet Bjarni Thorarensen, describe the early landscape paintings in a very similar manner:

> Both the beauty and the raw, potentially destructive attributes of the environment, which would extract a close bond from people precisely because of this contradiction, were aestheticized: 'A wondrous mixture of frost and fire, mountains and plains, and lava fields and sea; you are beautiful and terrible […]'! is how the poet Bjarni Thorarensen (1741–1841) once addressed the landscape as the sublime counterpart of a collective 'we'. (Alsen and Landmann 2016, 33–35)

They describe Þorlákssson's 'paintings as "translations" of natural poetic themes and expressive forms into the visual arts, in that Iceland's wild dramatic nature is here idealized, and thus formerly domesticized' (Alsen and Landmann 2016, 33–35). Although very internationalised creatively and financially, this domestication of the raw Icelandic nature is still very active in Kjartansson's framing of the sublimity of nature in *Trapped* as a particular Icelandic 'craziness'. In sum, this means that just like much

more contemporary television landscape imagery, the landscape imagery so extensively utilised in *Trapped*, has a very obvious genealogy that runs from nineteenth century paintings into a present-day visual mind frame in film and television drama which is closely associated with the commercial place-branding of an island like Iceland.

Acquitted and Sublimity Light

As seen in Chap. 7, Norwegian television has produced crime drama for decades; the public service channels have been engaged in cross-Scandinavian co-productions since the 1990s, but both local and transnational financial and creative collaboration has been on the rise for the past two decades. As we shall see, Norwegian crime drama is deeply indebted to internationally successful Norwegian crime writers, but compared to Sweden, producers of television crime dramas in Norway have had a much stronger tradition for producing original content. Whereas Denmark has had almost no tradition for adapting crime literature to film and television, with a few exceptions such as the recent Jussi Adler-Olsen adaptations, crime drama in Norway holds a middle position with both a minor share of adapted crime dramas and a significant number of original series, which seem to have taken over from adapted crime fiction during the present decade.

In the 1990s, crime literature by well-known Norwegian authors was to some extent adapted for cinemas—in fact, a range of authors attracted attention. In 1997, two novels by Anne Holt, *Blind gudinde/Blind Goddess* (1993) and *Salige er de som tørster/Blessed Are Those Who Thirst* (1994), were adapted for the film screen in Norway. The two popular Norwegian crime novels by Karin Fossum, *Evas øye/In the darkness* (1995) and *Den som frykter ulven/He who fears the wolf* (1997), were adapted for cinemas in 1999 and 2004, respectively. In her focus on strong women in Norwegian crime film, Anna Gjelsvik points towards both the adaptations of *In the darkness* and *Blessed Are Those Who Thirst* as notable examples of a shift towards a focus on everyday life in Scandinavian crime fiction, and as her third example she included *Cellofan—med døden til følge* [Cellophane – resulting in death] (1998), a film written directly for the screen. In combination, these productions point towards interesting developments in Nordic crime drama production: *Cellofan* was produced by Filmlance, which has later produced quite a number of popular crime dramas, and the film was directed by

Eva Isaksen, who would later direct four television miniseries with the common title *Sejer* (2000–2006) based on four Karin Fossum novels. The adaptation of *He who fears the wolf* is interesting as well, since it shows quite a number of similarities in style with what later came to attract attention as Nordic Noir: Norwegian rural landscapes, darkened woods, a dark-blue range of colours, deep shades and flashlight illumination; in addition, the Danish actor Lars Bom played the main part as investigator Konrad Sejer. During previous years, Bom had become a well-known face in Scandinavia from his role as the sensitive truck driver Johnny in *Rejseholdet/Unit One* (2000–2004). The films and the creative personnel indicate an increasing crossover interaction between film and television industries in Norway as well, while it also shows the slow increase in recognisable stylistic elements from Nordic Noir.

Unni Lindell, another Norwegian bestselling author, and her novels about the investigator Cato Isaksen have played an important role in the development of television crime dramas in Norway. Six novels have been adapted for six three-episode miniseries produced by the Danish pan-Scandinavian production company Nordisk Film and aired on NRK. At the moment these are available on the Scandinavian cable and streaming service Viaplay as a series in twelve one-and-a-half-hour episodes. The six series were co-written by the Swedish scriptwriters Jonas Cornell and Lars Bill Lundholm, both heavyweight scriptwriters in Sweden, and both with a number of crime films and series on their resumés. Lundholm has acquired most of his experience from television drama, while Cornell has intersected between film and television. Both have adapted popular Jan Guillou novels, while Cornell wrote three of the six films in the Swedish series of films *History of a Crime* (1993) and hence played a notable part in Ole Søndberg's and Søren Stærmose's industrial transition towards more standardised packages of crime fiction during the 1990s (see Chap. 6). Cornell and Lundholm's adaptations of the Lindell novels take place in the Norwegian capital of Oslo, but the crime committed and the investigative processes are deeply embedded in everyday dwellingscapes, to such an extent that Oslo appears portrayed perhaps more provincial than in other Oslo-dramas such as the recent *Occupied*. According to Tone C. Rønning, NRK's project manager of outhouse productions, the series of Lindell adaptations did convincingly well on Norwegian television (Sæby 2010), but the series has not been able to attract a noticeable international audience, and after the broadcast of the latest episode, *Honningfellen/The Honey Trap* (2009), Rønning clearly indicated that

NRK was going in a different direction: 'We have no plans to order additional Lindell-series as for now. We must seek innovation and development so we do not disappoint the audience. But I can promise that there is much more splendid drama for adults in the time to come' (Sæby 2010). In the meantime, Miso Film and Norwegian TV 2 had attracted a cinema audience and later a viewership for the adaptations of a number of bestselling novels by Gunnar Staalesen, perhaps the most well-known crime fiction writer in Norway with a selection of novels ranging back to the early 1970s. The series of films *Varg Veum* (2007–2012), eight of which were released in Norwegian cinemas, were produced by Miso Film and SF Film Norway in a co-production with German ARD, TV 2 Norway and Swedish TV 4 and in collaboration with French Canal+, TV 2 Denmark, Finnish Yle and Icelandic RÚV. *Varg Veum* broke heavily with both previous original dramas and adaptations on Norwegian television with a style to some extent influenced by film noir. These were rooted in Staalesen's roman noire style, and conveyed a sense of the dark televisual environments that would grow into Nordic Noir, and with significant spatial attention paid towards Bergen, the second largest city in Norway, and the recognisable panoramic views of its cityscape. In other words, *Varg Veum* points towards an international influence on style and spatial portrayals as well as the transnational Nordic and European collaboration which is characteristic of Norwegian television drama in general today and is also found in the development of crime dramas for both NRK and TV 2. Against this background, Rønning's remarks after the final episode of the Lindell adaptations seem to point towards this changing television landscape in Norway, which would attract international attention only a few years later with the crime-comedy *Lilyhammer* (2011–2014), co-produced with Netflix. Historically, this was the first Scandinavian series to do so, and as a result, it became a controversial stepping stone for Norwegian television drama towards international collaboration (Sundet 2016).

Even though crime novels by Staalesen, Lindell and Fossum have played an important part in the development of Norwegian television crime drama, with an intermediate blurring of the boundaries between film and television (only a few years later than the very similar development in the Swedish distribution practice), Norwegian television has had a stronger tradition for writing for the television screen compared to Sweden. The history of Norwegian crime drama includes: two seasons of the police drama *Fox Grønland* (2001–2003); the hostage drama

Deadline Torp (2005), a miniseries co-written by crime author Jo Nesbø; an interesting international production and plot profile of the two seasons of the police drama *Kodenavn Hunter/Codename Hunter* (2007–2008); and the miniseries *Størst av alt* [The Greatest of All] (2007), directed by the above mentioned Eva Isaksen as well as Erik Skjoldbjærg, a well-known Norwegian director who would later develop *Occupied* with Jo Nesbø for the Swedish production company Yellow Bird, broadcaster TV 2 Norway and Arte France. In other words, in the period covered in this book and coinciding with dominant transnational collaboration, we notice the very evident and direct replacement of adaptations in Norwegian television crime drama production in favour of original content written for the television screen, resulting in the recent NRK drama *Taxi* (2011), the TV 2 drama *Det tredje øyet/The Third Eye* (2013–), the NRK drama *Øyevitne/Eyewitness* (2014), which has been remade in both the US and Romania, the NRK drama *Mammon* (2014–2016) and finally the TV 2 drama *Acquitted*. Of these five dramas, the miniseries *Taxi* and the two seasons of *Mammon* take place mostly in Oslo, while two seasons of *The Third Eye* are located an hour's drive outside of Oslo in Drammen, *Eyewitness* an hour's drive in the other direction from Oslo in Mysen, and *Acquitted* in picturesque locations between firth and fell. As in Swedish and Danish drama, this also reflects the increased attention towards rural and provincial localities seen in Norwegian drama.

The story in *Acquitted* revolves around a local solar energy business in a town called Lifjord, which is close to collapsing because an international partner is declared bankrupt, and one plotline deals with saving a local industry in a rural area in Norway. Aksel, who lives in Kuala Lumpur and works at a global investment company, convinces his manager to invest in the Lifjord business and chooses to return to his native town in order to settle the deal. However, 20 years ago Aksel was acquitted for the murder of Karine, and the other plotline narrates the story of a failed investigation and the local suspicion that has kept Aksel away for so long. Karine's mother Eva, who happens to be the CEO of the local solar business, still suspects Aksel of committing the murder. Engelstad refers to the number of coincidences that are needed to ensure the progression of the plot as 'serial soap', in this case in combination with 'crime drama with distinct elements of Nordic Noir', however, he does admit that it 'works surprisingly well'. According to Engelstad, the murder of Karine, which is still an open wound for the people associated

with the town, is very loosely based on actual events, and the imagery in the series bears 'striking resemblance to the press material from the case, most notably a picture of Karine in *bunad* (the Norwegian folk costume)' (Engelstad 2016). It is worth noting that the series references a real case as naturalisation of the soap elements of the drama, introduces mystery into a story about local and global business relations, and presents a well-known piece of local colour from Norway. Consequently, the two plotlines quickly become deeply entangled. However, in this way the drama succeeds in establishing double storytelling, as described in Chap. 8 about Danish DR drama. The basic plot is of course about both a murder and relationships in a local town (Bygda) in Norway, but at the same time, the moral premise of the story deals with the urban/rural complexities in Norway; already in the first episode Eva complains that there appears to be no political will to help a local business in Lifjord, which is of critical importance for a small town. Entrenched in this premise lies an eco-critical discussion about solar energy and renewable energy sources. Thus, *Acquitted* bears similarities to other dramas dealing with eco-critical issues as part of their moral premise, such as *Trapped, The Cliff* and *Bedrag/Follow the Money* (2015–). However, the visual screen idea of *Acquitted* is exceedingly dependent on the beauty of the surrounding landscape, to such an extent that Engelstad notes that the recurring, striking images of firths mounting over the gorgeous fell appear to be 'taken straight out of a tourist brochure' (Engelstad 2016).

The town name Lifjord (the setting of *Acquitted*) is a fictive town inspired by the name Lifjorden, a small part of the stunning 120-mile long Sognefjord two hours drive north of Bergen. The more precise settings of the drama are supposedly the municipalities of Lærdal and Årdal, standing at the far end of Sognefjord from Lifjorden (Menne 2016). A brief visit to the area's tourist site Sognefjord.no will convince anyone of the touristic stylistics of the landscape images in *Acquitted*, but clearly, the romantic genealogy of imagery in *Trapped* is also at play in this Norwegian series. With reference to John Urry's notion of a shift in the perception of a landscape, Anne Marit Waade points out that *the tourist gaze* is 'a visual matrix related to the romantic landscape gaze' (Waade 2010, 154). She refers to landscape painters such as Norwegian Johan Christian Dahl and Danish Johan Thomas Lundbye, but she might as well have cited above mentioned Þórarinn K. Þorlákssson too. As a result, there is a direct line of influence running from the romantic landscape paintings into the tourist matrix of local representation, which has

now had a striking and very powerful influence on the visual style of film and television drama. In Chap. 4, we refer to this as the commodification of the Nordic landscape, and related to this, we also noted that an obvious stylistic similarity exists between Dahl's landscape paintings that portray the area around Sognefjord and the visual style in *Acquitted,* which, in this way, becomes a very interesting example of the neo-romantic tendency in Nordic crime fiction referred to in Chap 5. This sense of romanticism *light* or even sublimity *light* in a drama such as this ties in very closely to visual elements in *Acquitted*, substantiating Engelstad's claim of soap drama features in the series.

The very early images as well as the title sequence of the drama negotiate both this relationship between romanticist landscape interpretations and the double story strategy in the drama outlined above. The opening image of the drama locates the story in the area around Sognefjord with familiar snow-clad mountaintops rising above the waterline, stressing the likeness to especially Dahl's paintings. However, shortly after presenting the financial issue of the local business in Lifjord, the series cuts to Kuala Lumpur's striking skyline, establishing a visual dichotomy between the local and the global as well as the rural and the urban. Thus, the fictive village Lifjord is not only provincial in Norway or Scandinavia, Norway or even 'the North' becomes provincial in the globalised world, and Lifjord is now subject to what Alsen and Landmann refer to as *the peripheral gaze*: 'the European North is often designated as periphery per se—from the perspective in which the central European metropolises such as Paris, Berlin, and London function as the center' (Alsen and Landmann 2016, 18). In *Acquitted*, this spatial claim is taken even a step further, in that Europe may be peripheral to powerful Asian financial interests.

In the title sequence, the spatial encounter of local and global forces is elided for the benefit of establishing a local sense of place. Also, Aksel as a main character against a scenic backdrop is in a sense situating the drama while telling a minor mini-narrative. The first image presents Aksel walking on water with snowy, hazy mountains in the background, as the actor's real name Nicolai Cleve Broch appears on the screen, establishing his status as a well-known Norwegian face as well as the main character of the drama. The second image of hazy mountains surrounding a deep valley, emphasising the attention paid towards place, turns into a double exposure of misty mountains and Aksel's troubled face. Immediately after, Aksel plunges into dark waters, which conveys

a narrative indication of the development away from his self-assured character traits in the beginning of the drama. Besides place and character attention, this water metaphor also bears a striking resemblance to the title sequence in *Follow the Money*. Double exposure and creative dissolves are heavily used throughout the title sequence, indicating numerous analogies and controversies, e.g. the clash between the images of red wooden village houses and the modern architectural style of the local solar energy business. In the end, Aksel is shown entering a spiral staircase, doubly exposed together with yet another landscape image of snowy mountains, and the title screen shows Aksel sitting alone at the top of the stairs with luring, light-consuming darkness below. The title sequence is at once an immense blend of commonly decipherable metaphors such as the play with light and darkness, a drowning man and a spiral staircase with a melancholic balance of character traits against a backdrop of images shaped by endeavours into an aesthetic melting-pot of the sublime from both tourist images and romanticist visual arts. The first episode includes a self-referential intertextual comment expressed by Aksel's Asian colleague on the overwhelming use of the Norwegian green fairy tale landscape: 'It's like fucking Hobbit-land down there.' And it really is.

Even though the drama is successful in placing itself in a fictive village in the Sognefjord area, only 20% of the drama was shot there. The remaining locations were found within driving distance of Oslo, where the production company Miso Film has its Norwegian office and where most of the creative personnel in Norway are based. 'We had 100 days of shooting. Four days in Malaysia, 16 in the Westland and the rest in and around Oslo', says producer Brede Hovland in an interview (Bakkejord 2015). The reason for not shooting everything on-location is quite common: 'We could not afford to set up all locations out there so we had to use some technique,' which is 'a completely normal procedure when you make TV-series or film,' he states. The closer the proximity of the two types of production sites, i.e. the locations of the shooting and the location of company people, the more cost-efficient a production like *Acquitted* will be. For instance, the solar tech company in Lifjord was created by on-location shooting in Sandvika, and studio shooting was used for most of the interior scenes. The essential spiral staircase mentioned above was found at the renowned architecture firm Asplan Viak in Sandvika, which represents a double strategy and, in a distinct and different way compared to other Nordic dramas, includes Nordic architecture

in the series, while at the same time placing the business in a very small village, which is perhaps hardly realistic. The studio shootings of Eva's office are, in this respect, perhaps even more noteworthy: the window panes behind her desk are almost a landscape image in themselves, while a large, imposing and very dark painting of a snowy mountain hangs on a wall on which the camera dwells early in the first episode. This places Eva as a small figure besides the large canvas: metaphorically, this is a mediated version of Eva, a diminutive human being, overwhelmed by forces that she is unable to control, resembling Caspar David Friedrich's tiny people subjected to sublime nature. It is perhaps very indicative of the spatial and visual screen ideas of *Acquitted* that the place is fictive, generated on the basis of shootings in different locations, just as the sublime experience is recreated in a studio as a result of a painting and not from an experience of nature in itself.

'Borealism', Pan-Identity and Televised Art

As we have seen in this chapter, the imagination of the North, of local imagery and of landscape portrayals in television drama are closely linked to a deep intersection with romanticist visual arts from the Nordic region when creating a specific sense of place. Thus, both the tourist gaze and the romanticist framing of landscapes as an evocative indication of emotion become a tacit or conscious part of the intertextual vocabulary that creatives draw upon when planning, shooting and editing Nordic television drama. This combined vision of the Nordic region with common traits as well as great differences in nature, climate and landscape is also deeply imbued in creative and financial collaboration and in what Engelstad refers to as a pan-Scandinavian production identity. However, based on the analyses and overview of this in former chapters, we would at the same time insist that a recognisable local influence is found as regards both the visual qualities of the dramas and the logic of place presented to the viewers. This notion of a pan-identity in at least the three Scandinavian countries, and perhaps in the Nordic region too, is directly reflected in the way that much drama is financed by Nordvision and in the collaboration between PSBs across the region. 'Boreal' means northliness, and 'borealism' as a phrase comes from the envisioning of the Nordic as a common culture (Alsen and Landmann 2016, 24), which is at least a goal or an ideology behind a political organisation like The Nordic Council and also behind a collaborative unit like Nordvision,

which works explicitly for 'the strengthening of public service in the North' (Nordvision 2017). As seen through the lenses of Nordic Noir, the pan-identity of Nordic television drama is not a fixed and permanent identity, but is culturally, financially and quite literally a notion that is up for perpetual reinterpretation. It is very literal, in that a pan-Nordic or a pan-Scandinavian identity is often reflected in the cast of the dramas or the creative personnel behind the cameras, e.g. the role of Danish actor Bjarne Henriksen in *Trapped* (which of course is a direct reference to his central role in *The Killing* too) or the different locations from Denmark and Norway in the crime drama *Eyewitness*. In such ways, Nordic Noir as a common reference and Nordic crime dramas bear a cultural resemblance to the environment in the late nineteenth century among landscape painters and in the widespread acknowledgement of the Nordic landscape painting:

> The landscape is *the* genre of Nordic painting, and has also been subject to the greatest international attention. Numerous exhibitions and publications concern themselves with this 'typically Nordic' genre and thus on a broad level they convey the impression of a symbiotic relationship between man and nature in the north of Europe. […] In the late nineteenth century, landscape painting experienced a boom and contributed significantly to typical local nature being perceived as an extension of the subject and as an element of connection to that subject's innermost self. The images of landscape were often accompanied by a romanticising, homogenizing idea of 'the North' as an idyll on the periphery, in which the boundaries between an authentically felt connection to nature and a nationalistically informed artificial construct were blurred. (Alsen and Landmann 2016, 136)

In a sense, Nordic television drama and Nordic Noir have become the landscape paintings of today, attracting just as much international attention as did the nineteenth century painters.

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