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Locating Nordic Noir

From Beck to The Bridge

palgrave
macmillan

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Palgrave European Film and Media Studies
ISBN 978-3-319-59814-7 ISBN 978-3-319-59815-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-59815-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017944173

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

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Where Is Nordic Noir?

Scandinavian police procedurals have been attracting worldwide attention for quite some time. Since Mai Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö introduced the socially sensitive sleuth in the 1960s, this genre from especially Sweden, and literary crime fiction in particular, have built up a wide readership and developed a broad appeal outside of the region of its origin. Swedish novels by Henning Mankell, Leif G.W. Persson and Stieg Larsson have reached a very large audience and have paved the way for the immense international success of Nordic crime fiction in film and television that we have seen since the mid-1990s. This long-term cross-media trend has recently been re-branded as *Nordic Noir*.

However, books have one apparent advantage in the popular culture market: they are easily translatable. This does not apply to Scandinavian crime films and TV drama, which must generally be subtitled, and subtitled drama in other languages than English usually struggles to gain a wide international audience (Collins 1989). Nevertheless, during the past decade, increasing and unprecedented attention has been paid to subtitled Scandinavian drama outside of the Nordic region. Internally, the Nordic countries have a long tradition of exchanging TV drama, even though this was challenged by very successful domestic productions as well as American drama, particularly during the 1990s. However, according to Katrine Vogelsang, Head of Fiction at Danish TV2, in the mid-2010s it is very difficult to promote an American drama in prime time. Instead, the commercial broadcaster is increasingly investing in Nordic dramas in order to secure broadcasting rights while producing

K.T. Hansen and A.M. Waade, *Locating Nordic Noir*, Palgrave European Film and Media Studies, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-59815-4_1

an increasing amount of domestic drama—2015 so far being the broadcaster's peak in terms of original TV drama content (Vogelsang 2015). Basically, what is being seen is perhaps a counterintuitive centripetal orientation towards domestic dramas, regional co-funding and co-production models combined with the overwhelming and unprecedented centrifugal international accomplishments of the same dramas, helped along by improved co-funding opportunities from sources outside of the Nordic region. TV dramas produced in the Nordic countries have become very local and very global at same time.

Adaptations such as *Wallander* (2005–) and *Millennium* (2009–2010) and originals as *Forbrydelsen/The Killing* (2007–2012) and *Bron/The Bridge* (2011–) are very symptomatic of the recent development of Nordic TV drama in general and of the Scandinavian police procedural in particular. *Wallander* and *Millennium* were both primarily literary successes prior to their wide appeal on film and television. The adaptations of Stieg Larsson's three novels was successful as feature films, though only the first novel was originally intended as cinematic release, but its great success spurred the producers to edit feature film versions of the second and the third TV releases as well. But then the three films were planned and broadcast as the six 90-minute episode TV series *Millennium* (2010). The 90-minute feature length productions of *Wallander* had been mainly DVD-film and telefilm successes, even though some of the films had been shown in Swedish cinemas. While only two of the dramas are adaptations of the Mankell novels, most of the series is original content written for the screen, causing the *Wallander* series to hold a threshold position in more than one way. At root, the route from novels to visual adaptations is marked by the slogan of the production company Yellow Bird, who produced both *Wallander* and *Millennium*: 'We turn bestsellers into blockbusters'. In other words, what sells well as a novel can be marketed as a success on film and TV. While producing the Swedish series, Yellow Bird co-produced the British versions of *Wallander* (2008–), which are adaptations of Mankell's original Wallander novels. In other words, the international attention towards the Scandinavian police procedural on TV is based on the previous success of Nordic crime novels. Moreover, the fact that the *Wallander*—series consists of both adaptations and original content points towards the major international game changers of Nordic crime dramas on television: *The Killing* and *The Bridge* were both written for the screen, spoken in Scandinavian languages (Danish and Swedish), and internationally

broadcast undubbed with subtitles, at least in most countries. Generally, regional TV drama successes, often with a viewership share above 50% during the domestic broadcast, are now being widely sold, in a few cases to well over 100 different international audiences. They are mostly broadcast by niche channels with a critical audience taking—from a distributor's point of view—a desirable interest in subtitled drama. So when Yellow Bird turns bestsellers into blockbusters, the international success of Scandinavian TV drama seems to turn large domestic *broad*casts into art-television *narrow*casts abroad. For instance, the first season of *The Killing* is considered the game changer (Forshaw 2013, 134; Jensen et al. 2016) and was rather successful on BBC4 in Britain, with an average rating of above 500,000 viewers, which is good for BBC4. But actually this was only a third of the viewers that it had in Denmark during the original broadcast, even though BBC4 reaches a much larger audience than DR1. The following seasons were more successful, but the ratings never reached the domestic number of actual viewers (Bondebjerg and Redvall 2015, 220). Olof Hedling points to the same issue when comparing the ratings of the British and Swedish versions of *Wallander*: the BBC adaptations attracted ten times as many viewers as did the Swedish TV series (Hedling 2014, 4). Nordic Noir may be 'challenging "the language of advantage"' (Jensen and Waade 2013, 259), especially on British television, but there is nothing to suggest that it will outplay spoken English on the BBC. This is why, according to Hedling, the international attainment of Nordic Noir can only amount to what he refers to as 'relative transnational merits' (Hedling 2014, 3).

Even though the four titles mentioned above have reached different levels of success, one common feature characterises them all: all four have been remade into new series and/or films. Stieg Larsson's first novel, *Män som hatar kvinnor/The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2005), was adapted into an American film version with the same title by David Fincher (2011); as mentioned above, the Wallander brand has been used to readapt nine of Mankell's novels into a BBC series; *The Killing* was remade by AMC Networks (2011–2013), but was revived by Netflix for a fourth season (2014), and partly remade for Turkish Kanal D as *Cinayet* (2014); and *The Bridge* has been remade into a French-English version as *The Tunnel* (2013) as well as an American-Mexican version entitled *The Bridge* (2013–). TV dramas from Nordic, especially Scandinavian, countries are increasingly being picked up by international distribution, but a tendency is still seen towards regional drama being

*re*made in order to avoid subtitled drama. However, the case of Nordic Noir still shows a remarkable international interest in drama produced in the Nordic countries.

Nordic Noir: A Transnational Brand

The story of Nordic Noir is about regional genre stories that have received unprecedented international attention in one way or another, whether adapted from a novel, remade from a TV drama, or watched in its original domestic version. However, this blends well into the recent extensive international spread of television drama, a success that has been described as 'the third golden age of television' (Lavik 2014), 'complex TV' (Mittel 2015) or 'quality television' (McCabe and Akass 2007).

Three tendencies combine in the international appeal of Scandinavian crime fiction. The bestselling story of literary Nordic crime fiction emerged and attracted worldwide devotion while the international popularity of TV drama was increasingly challenging the domination of cinema. The hotchpotch of an already well-established genre with a large amount of writing talent together with the final artistic breakthrough of TV drama was a powerful mixture that created an increase in the demand for Nordic crime fiction and Nordic TV drama in general. During the 1990s, Danish DR's drama department made significant changes in its production culture, which altered the way in which TV drama was generally perceived (Redvall 2013, 55–81). This transformation of production culture paved the way for Danish drama especially from DR to seize the opportunity when it appeared. After the turn of the millennium, DR won several prizes for its dramas, for instance Emmys for *Rejseholdet/Unit One* (2000–2004), *Nikolaj & Julie* (2002–2003), and *Ørnen/The Eagle* (2004–2006). This led to the international distribution boom of *The Killing*, which did *not* win an Emmy, although it was nominated in 2008 and won the British BAFTA award in 2012. We should bear in mind, however, that two out of the three Emmy winners were in fact police procedurals, and in 2009 the police story *Livvagterne/The Protectors* (2009–2010) won yet another Emmy. So if Swedish crime fiction paved the way for the international success of Scandinavian crime literature, DR drama in the 2000s really took a firm hold of the international exposure of Nordic TV drama. These are the three merging tendencies in the narrative of the international scope

of Scandinavian TV crime drama: a well-oiled crime fiction production that goes back decades, new international attention on and a demand for quality TV drama, and a Danish public service institution ready to service this particular demand.

With the police procedural as the vital element of the international success of Nordic TV drama, it may come as no surprise that the genre quickly turned into the commercial brand Nordic Noir. According to Gunhild Agger, 'the term was coined by the Scandinavian Department at the University College of London; the department launched a Nordic Noir blog and a book club in March 2010' (Agger 2016, 138). Shortly after, the term was usurped by the critical press in the UK and, in December 2010, popularised by the BBC, one of the very active players on the market with a great interest in Scandinavian crime fiction, in their documentary film *Nordic Noir: The Story of Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (2010). About a year later, the English distribution company Arrow Films registered the website nordicnoir.tv, from which they started to market Scandinavian TV crime drama. Until today, three dramas act as spearheads of their distribution: *The Killing*, *Borgen* (2010–2013), and *The Bridge*, and already here, the generic quality of the concept Nordic Noir disintegrates, because including *Borgen* as crime fiction would require considerable bending of the characteristics of the crime genre. A suspicious death certainly occurs early in the first season, but the series never turns into crime fiction. The narrative similarity between *The Killing* and *Borgen* derives instead from the engagement in political drama seen in both series.

Watching through the 2014 showreel from Arrow Film, we notice that they distribute dramas that are, as they say, Nordic Noir, but now they also go *beyond* Nordic Noir (today, the title of the website is 'Nordic Noir and Beyond'). However, their core illustrations of Nordic Noir are still *Wallander*, *The Killing, Borgen* and *The Bridge*, which indicates an overriding concentration on the police procedural with three out of the four core series associated with this genre. The showreel reads: 'A label is born: Nordic Noir,' which underlines that to them, these four series are the defining series of Nordic Noir. Having settled for a definition, the showreel then tells a story of a distribution company in search of more: 'We looked back… and then there was more'. The titles now include *Anno 1790* (2011), *Unit One*, *Mammon* (2014) and *Mördaren ljuger inte ensam/Crimes of Passion* (2013). Firstly, it is very interesting that they 'look back', but only one title of the four was actually

produced before *Wallander*. Secondly, the choice of genre still revolves around crime fiction. Subsequently, the showreel goes 'beyond', but it is striking that the graphics of the showreel do not indicate that it goes beyond the police procedural. Throughout the reel, we move in and out of a European map that tells us where the dramas originate, which is a noteworthy cartographic marketing of crime fiction. But going 'beyond' signals that they now go beyond *Nordic* and not beyond *Noir* in particular. This is followed by excerpts from e.g. Belgian, Welsh, Irish and German TV series, including a very wide representation of different genres such as war drama, historical drama and yet more crime fiction. Anything can now be included under the brand name *Nordic Noir*, but the framing and recurring genre throughout the entire showreel is crime fiction. Even so, when the showreel announces the upcoming dramas *Gomorrah* (2008), *Arvingerne/The Legacy* (2014–) and *1864* (2014), only *Gomorrah* may be considered crime fiction. The last two Danish dramas are a family drama and a war epic with no real parallels to crime fiction. Nevertheless, when *The Legacy* was distributed on British DVD, the cover was tinted with a dark-blue colour tone, which essentially has nothing to do with the red/yellow production design of the series. In other words, the success of Scandinavian crime fiction is, by way of the alliterative and adhesive brand Nordic Noir, used to market products that have nothing or at least very little in common with crime fiction. This indicates that the term Nordic Noir seems to have little analytical value and a much larger brand value. Besides a generic equation of Scandinavian crime fiction and Nordic Noir, Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen stresses that both references have 'become a local as well as a global obsession described as forming a recognisable international brand' (Stougaard-Nielsen 2016a).

Deriving from a British critical and commercial context, Nordic Noir may have turned into an analytically cumbersome brand name. Positioning new TV dramas as well as new novels and films within the category is not problematic from a branding perspective; in this respect it works very well as an inclusive term to market new products under the same heading. From a critical point of view, however, we have lately seen a very cautious balancing act by writers on crime fiction. For instance, Barry Forshaw published his *Death in a Cold Climate* (2012), intentionally describing what he called a 'literary invasion' from Scandinavia (Forshaw 2012, 1). Only a year later, he published the pocket guide *Nordic Noir*, which covered practically the same ground as his former

book, the difference being that by now he may have realised the brand value of having 'Nordic Noir' on the book cover (and if you accuse the writers of the book at hand of the same offence, we hasten to plead guilty as charged). Forshaw has specialised as a journalist in Scandinavian crime fiction and has exerted considerable influence on popularising the concept. But already in his second book on the topic, he guardedly acknowledges the perhaps too inclusive appeal of the term. He includes a passage on *Borgen* in the book, but asks the very obvious question: 'But does it belong in a book called *Nordic Noir*?' (Forshaw 2013, 140). Indirectly, Forshaw asks a very good question: Which titles should we include in a book about Nordic Noir?

During the past few years, the concept has made its way into literary and media research, but it has not yet been tested in terms of its scope as an analytical term. For instance, Jensen and Waade mention *Borgen* in their effort to qualify the term, but only with a view to describing the series that went into British distribution in the wake of the success of *The Killing* (Jensen and Waade 2013, 260). The subtitle of Kerstin Bergman's *Swedish Crime Fiction: The Making of Nordic Noir* anachronistically suggests that Nordic Noir originated in a Swedish literary context during the late nineteenth century. So does Jake Kerridge, a journalist at The Telegraph, when claiming that Sjöwall and Wahlöö were the inventors of Nordic Noir (Kerridge 2015). Jensen and Waade use such filmic production terms as 'setting' and 'lighting' to describe the distinctive features of Nordic Noir, but such terms are difficult to use when describing literary versions of the same stories or the same type of stories. This indicates that Nordic Noir literature should be distinguished from Nordic Noir film or television, however 'dark' their literary 'settings' may be. While the broad term 'Scandinavian crime fiction' indicates that it originates from Scandinavia, it deals with an aspect of crime, and it does so fictitiously; the narrower term 'police procedural', which may cover a very large proportion of the Nordic Noir productions in question, refers more specifically to the investigating unit. But the term Nordic Noir both broadens the geographical scope of the concept and blurs the thematic references, causing them to merely indicate that the stories include something 'dark/black' in the Nordic region. As a concept, Nordic Noir becomes more textually inclusive; but going down that (marketing) road, it also develops into a more imprecise reference to bleakness and, implicitly, to a popular French conception of American crime films from around the Second World War in particular.

Film noir developed as a critical concept too, but was later picked up in academic works about the films in question (Spicer 2002, Naremore 2008). Basically, 'Nordic Noir' sounds slightly more sexy and appealing than 'Scandinavian crime fiction', or the abbreviated 'Scandi-crime'. It is infused with brand value.

But does this really rule out the concept as a tool for marking out similarities between particular narratives or, in the case of this book, certain TV dramas in particular? And is this particular discussion different from any other discussion of a genre? In other words, would it generally be possible to regard Nordic Noir as a subcategory of the more general and much more acknowledged genre 'crime fiction', in the same way as film noir is sometimes referred to as a more specific, stylistic, hardboiled type of crime fiction? In the same way as the success of Nordic Noir developed out of literary crime fiction, so did film noir develop out of 'roman noir' (Scaggs 2005, 69). But what is much more interesting is the fact that both roman and film noir refer to the medium in question (books and film), while Nordic Noir refers to the place of origin or the narrative diegetic space. The concept film noir was introduced by a French critical elite singling out specific qualities from popular American films from an otherwise belittled genre—and with great success. Today, some of the titles referred to as film noir are revered as important titles in film history. Thus, film noir helped brand a medium that, at the time, was still struggling for critical recognition. During the past decades, TV has moved out of the shadow of film and has gained its own artistic and academic recognition, and in this development, crime fiction in general and Nordic Noir in particular have been instrumental in building a reputation for TV drama. HBO titles such as *The Wire* (2002–2008) and *True Detective* (2014–) have introduced crime fiction in a way that has been critically acclaimed and academically noted: these are rich texts worthy of close textual analysis. But what is striking about such titles, as well as numerous Nordic Noir titles, is the specific spatial references that are included. There would be no *The Wire* without Baltimore; there would be no *True Detective* (at least the first season) without the US state of Louisiana; there would be no *The Bridge* without Copenhagen and Malmö; and there would be no *Wallander* without Ystad. However, the use of place in crime fiction is nothing new in itself. The entire genre revolves around crime scene investigations, which means that the basic narrative catalyst in crime fiction is a spatial one; generally, in its literary development, the genre has focused on and benefited from places in

a significant way. There would be no Dupin or Maigret without Paris; there would be no Sherlock Holmes without London; there would be no Philip Marlowe without Los Angeles; and there would be no Martin Beck without Stockholm. With crime fiction as a world brand, it is hardly surprising that narratives taking place locally are used locally to brand places. Altogether, places, themes and characters are closely tied in crime fiction—and this clearly applies to Nordic Noir as well.

Local Colour and the Transnationalised Context

The objective of this book is to take the reference to place in Nordic Noir literally and focus more specifically on this in order to identify the characteristics of recent Scandinavian crime fiction. In line with this, the title of this book is *Locating Nordic Noir*, which is a specific reference to our focus point: locations in Nordic Noir. This also indicates a critical approach to the far-reaching use of the notion of a Nordic Noir genre. The basic position in this book is that Nordic Noir is *not* a clearly defined genre, but a concept with genre affinities. However, we do not claim that other genres are essentially fixed. In his seminal book *Film/Genre* (1999), Rick Altman writes that 'genres are perpetually caught up in the process of becoming', suggesting that no genres would ever be easily defined (Altman 1999, 140). Easily defined genres are dead genres. Instead, Altman uses Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances' to introduce a way of discussing texts that, in one way or another, have similarities (Altman 1999, 98). This means that specific texts may in some ways be similar, but in other ways they may be different. Generally, the perspective in 'locating Nordic Noir' involves underlining not just that the TV dramas referred to as Nordic Noir to a very large extent and in various ways use real, geographical places that we may visit as tourists or actually live in. There are also certain characteristic ways in which places are employed in the planning of the series, in producing the series, in the final style of the narratives, and ultimately in the critical reception of the series. This book introduces the concept 'local colour' in order to discuss a very general, trans-textual and stylistic way of talking about very different, local places in their own right. Places are dominant in production interviews with television and film makers; places play an essential role in the dramas themselves, causing towns themselves to play leading roles in drama series; and places become augmented after reception because places seem to gain new

meaning if viewers know a location from a specific TV series. As for producers using them to create narratives and atmosphere in the dramas, places become 'intertextual locations' in the minds of the viewers (Christensen and Hansen 2015). Thus, the main title refers to the idea of 'tracking down' the characteristics of Nordic Noir, and methods used to do so are production studies, location studies and policy studies which also 'locate' Nordic Noir; such approaches tell us a great deal about *why* a single drama is located at *that* particular place. Instead of asking 'what is Nordic Noir?, which in itself is a very difficult question to answer, this book asks 'where is Nordic Noir?'. This enables us to pinpoint a conspicuously spatial modus operandi, a topography, in the accentuation of place in Nordic Noir and, perhaps, in TV drama in general.

This spatial approach to Nordic Noir is an acknowledgement of present-day TV fiction's constant negotiation with the apprehension of real places. A blurring of the boundary between the fictional and the alleged real world is often referred to as an indication of a postmodern mind frame (McHale 1987, 32; Booker 2007), and it may be so to some extent; but historically, the role of real places in fiction is probably as old as human communication. Even today, real places play a very important role in modern visual fiction in a way which does not, in fact, pose any real epistemological questions about the ontological status of place and location. Serra Tinic's argument that places as such should be 'acknowledged rather than erased' has several similarities with our argument (Tinic 2015, 159). Places can 'play a role' in TV drama almost in the same way as an actor or actress plays a part as a character. We do not doubt that 'inside' Sarah Lund we find Sofie Gråbøl, nor should we question that 'behind' a diegesis we may find a real place (urban or rural, city or town, village or landscape). For the viewer, navigating between the fictional diegesis and the actual world seems much less of a controversy than postmodern thinkers seem to argue. For the localities in question, i.e. the places where the production takes place, a fictional representation of a place is very often regarded as a highly attractive brand strategy for the actual, real place. *Place-as-character* in fiction has a noteworthy brand value for localities, municipalities and regions which are paying much attention to the attraction of media productions of various dimensions, administratively, politically and commercially. We will explore this much more straightforward and somewhat unproblematic relationship between fictional and actual places as locations, with a strong resonance from Lynn Spigel's concept *TV places* in her work on

TV heritage (Spigel 2005). Rather than working with locations as such, Spigel focuses on TV archives as 'public relations', i.e. the generation of cohesion and memory through archived historical material, as an 'art museum', i.e. merging the art world with commercial television, and as a 'tourist site', i.e. exhibiting TV's history as a local attraction. A TV archive is in itself very physical, but TV in general and TV drama in particular can serve as a motivator for 'public relations', 'art qualities' and 'tourist attractions', even if it is not archived material. Spigel discusses how TV in itself can constitute its own archive, referring to this as 'nostalgia networks', which are networks that air vintage reruns, i.e. old, often well-loved TV programmes. But TV broadcasters' constant use of reruns, including TV dramas, may be regarded as an archival mind frame. In addition, the Danish public service broadcaster DR has the online archive of material called *Bonanza*, which includes some early TV dramas, and NRK has *Fjernsynsteatret* (the television theatre); both of these serve as online historical archives of material. Today, however, recent co-funding models and, as a result, new distribution contracts among co-producers cause recent TV drama from DR *not* to be available online side by side with older material, which, in line with Spigel's argument, may challenge the public relations aspect of Danish public service.

According to Spigel, such networks and archives may constitute 'shared places' (Spigel 2005, 86), and networks acting as material archives, she continues, 'has blurred the lines between TV places and real places by creating tourist and shopping venues that allow people to interact with TV storyworlds' (Spigel 2005, 87). Spigel's approach to archives and networks is much more material than our approach in this book, but again we find a striking resemblance between her use of historical archives as interaction between real places and places on TV, and the way in which recent TV drama distorts the same link between a real location and a diegetic storyworld. Spigel does not qualify her concept 'TV places', but indicates that these are places that we find on TV, and that they may be considered different from real places. However, Spiegel does seem to suggest that interaction between real places and TV places may be very natural. In this book, we regard such TV places as places that serve the diegetic narrative, on the one hand, while serving the real world, on the other. In policy making, in production cultures, in the TV dramas themselves, and in the local dissemination of place relations in TV drama there is increasing awareness that such use of places can generate additional funding for production, boost local pride in being part

of a storyworld, and lead to growth, innovation and the stabilisation of regional imbalances (Roberts 2012, 10). Housing a local TV drama production may indeed have very real effects for a local community, with the 'shared place' potentially resulting in improved communality as well as the attraction of attention from outside and the creation of local pride among the people who live there.

In other words, this book reads Nordic Noir within the context of what has been called 'the spatial turn in media studies' (Falkheimer and Jansson 2006). A new interdisciplinary field has emerged in media studies, which is indicated by recent concepts and phrases such as 'geography of communication' (Falkheimer and Jansson 2006), 'cinematic geography' (Roberts 2012), 'mediaspace' (Couldry and McCarthy 2004), 'mediascapes' (Appadurai 1996, 35–40), 'locative media' and 'location based media technology' (de Souza e Silva and Sheller 2015); as a result of this, the attention devoted to space and place in media in general has increased. In crime fiction, place and space are of great importance, with the crime scene acting as the basic plot launcher and the detective as a very mobile traveller through local space in order to investigate crimes committed. This means that connecting place, space and mobility, on the one hand, and crime series, on the other, may be regarded as rather obvious and commonsensical; but in media studies, the implications of such an argument are connected with several issues, such as linking the global and the local, practising production studies while paying special attention to locations, and observing specific funding policies within and across nations, to mention but a few. The title of this book signals a new approach to analysing locations in crime fiction, while placing this particular approach within the vast sociological scholarly debate about the relationship between localities and globalisation. In this view, locations form particular links between worlds of fiction and the actual world, but they also constitute a very hands-on way of analysing the implications of local media production in an increasingly globalised and mediatised world. With Nordic Noir as a somewhat fuzzy global brand name, the basic idea in this book is quite literally to 'localise' the Nordicness (localness) of and in crime fiction. Thus, *Locating* Nordic Noir is a new methodological way to capture the somewhat intangible reference to Nordic Noir, which as a *brand* may indicate just about anything: from genre characteristics to a geographical orientation—and even a brand value in marketing consumer products such as clothing (Bertoni's Nordic Noir Collection) and beverages (Nordicana sponsors Kolson's beer as 'the

taste of Nordic Noir'). The fact that TV dramas referred to as Nordic Noir are very local may be an imperative reason for their global appeal: the local can be very global. Locations may be links between real places and settings in TV drama, but they may also be localised ways of finding stories springing *from* specific places that relate to a global audience. Even a popular fantasy serial such as *Game of Thrones* (2011–) is very spatial in its narrative construction, which is marked and framed by the title sequence zooming in and out of a bird's eye view covering a map of the storyworld. As a result, fantasy productions such as *Game of Thrones* and the film series *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003) which seem to have no similarity with the so-called real world as they are, so to speak, without direct references to real places, still attract attention to the locations in which they were filmed. Real places matter in different ways when producing drama. In general, a spatial approach to crime fiction acknowledges the importance of place in Nordic Noir, while 'grounding' the gemmation of the different novels, films and TV dramas included under the heading of Nordic Noir.

Critical Approaches to Nordic Noir

Attempts have been made to qualify or relate to the concept Nordic Noir as an analytical tool based on a genre theoretical framework (Agger 2012, 2016; Eichner and Waade 2015; Gamula and Mikos 2014; Jensen and Waade 2014; Nestingen 2014; Creeber 2015; Hedling 2014). Gunhild Agger has used the term in connection with the British reception of *The Killing*, but she did not really in that context qualify it as a concept. Instead, she described *The Killing* as a 'combination between thriller, crime fiction and political drama', which indicates that Nordic Noir may refer to a certain blend of different genres (Agger 2012, 42). Later, Agger has argued that the social and political positions of the welfare state are perhaps the most common feature of Nordic Noir, while place and location are presented as being very different throughout the region (Agger 2016). Jensen and Waade referred to 'a specific use of Nordic imagery and a feeling of melancholy', which is 'created through landscapes, climate, architecture, colours and light' (Jensen and Waade 2013, 262), as well as to 'thematic elements', predominantly gender issues such as strong women and less traditional male figures. Very recently (after the deadline of this book), two noteworthy volumes on crime fiction and Danish television drama were published: Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen's *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (2017) draws a convincing

history of mostly written crime fiction, including references to audiovisual material as well, and discusses landscapes in crime fiction from the very operational idea of *hyperlocations*. Tobias Hochscherf and Heidi Philipsen's *Beyond the Bridge* (2017) portrays the evolution of Danish television drama in general, and includes a brief discussion about Nordic Noir too; here, they show an important hesitance towards the too inclusive generic notions of the phrase. Both Agger and Jensen/Waade supply Glen Creeber with a framework for introducing the most thorough aesthetic approach to Nordic Noir so far. His consideration of Nordic Noir is academically very stimulating and thought-provoking, because he goes a long way in his attempt to create a sound base from which to discuss Nordic Noir as 'a broad umbrella term that describes a particular type of Scandinavian crime fiction' (Creeber 2015, 21). Creeber singles out a range of characteristics that may help to describe Nordic Noir, even though his approach is not unproblematic. However, the problems that we may locate in Creeber's genre definition of Nordic Noir are not in themselves problems that have to do with Nordic Noir in particular, but derive from epistemological issues grounded in 'concepts' as such.

Brian Price touches upon similar definition problems when writing the following: 'Perhaps the most difficult aspect of understanding what a concept is involves making sense of how a concept is something that is both similar and general' (Price 2015, 106). In fact, this discussion shares the characteristics of Rick Altman's use of Wittgenstein's 'family resemblances' in his genre theory. A concept is, continues Price, 'singular, insofar as it is decidedly different from other concepts—other possible relations that may very well involve some partial aspect of another concept—and general, since it must describe something that can contain more than one instance' (Price 2015, 106). Interestingly enough, Price uses Paul Schrader's seven stylistic criteria of what film noir is as an example (Schrader 1972). 'As genre theorists have long been aware,' writes Price, 'the appearance of all seven of these elements might be a sufficient condition for membership of the category of *film noir*, but those conditions can never constitute a totality' (Price 2015, 107). According to Price, a category comes from uncovering many examples by way of using a concept as a frame of reference, which means that in order to develop from a concept (the singular instances) to a category (a general genre or subgenre), we need a comparatively large number of examples resulting in 'an absolute expression of identity' (Price 2015, 107). 'This is where the genre theorist typically protests' (Price 2015, 107), continues Price, and this is basically where our approach to and critique of the concept derives from. Nordic Noir may be a workable concept that can

help us describe instances, but we are still far from having collected enough instances to enable us to categorise. Consequently, the showreel from Arrow Film and the anachronistic idea of seeing Sjöwall and Wahlöö as the inventors of Nordic Noir are very indicative: in order to qualify the category, additional examples are needed, even though the similarities may be less than apparent.

Let us again take *Borgen* as an obvious example. The TV drama is often mentioned as a core example of Nordic Noir, for instance by Jace Lacob in the online news source *The Daily Beast*: 'Nordic Noir – embodied in Scandinavian dramas like *The Killing*, *The Bridge*, and *Borgen* – have become cult hits in the UK, and are about to become the go-to formats for American TV pilots' (Lacob 2012). So when Creeber never mentions *Borgen* as a series referred to as Nordic Noir, even though it is a core example especially in the British reception, this is his indirect method of narrowing down examples in order to create a concept that, in his article, may appear more like a category. Reading his article, the very first sentence quoted above actually singled out the problem at hand: '*Nordic noir* is best understood as a broad umbrella term that describes a particular type of Scandinavian crime fiction' (Creeber 2015, 21). How can a concept be both 'an umbrella term' *and* 'a particular type' at the same time? Is Scandinavian crime fiction then *not* an umbrella term for different types of crime fiction in Scandinavia, and where between the general category and the specific type do we then find Nordic Noir? Unconsciously, perhaps, this indicates that in Creeber's view, Nordic Noir is still caught somewhere in between being a concept and a category, situated in the very early stages of the perpetual process of becoming.

As a result, Creeber's notion of Nordic Noir has some very convincing features, but a few teething troubles are found in his enthusiastic attempt to find specific characteristics that would cover Nordic Noir, and even go geographically beyond the Nordic. For Creeber, the Nordic is principally limited to Scandinavia, since his examples are only taken from Denmark, Sweden and Norway, which is a common contraction and mistake (Aylott 2014, 30). Writing about the 'particular type', he notes that Nordic Noir is 'typified by its heady mixture of bleak naturalism, disconsolate locations and morose detectives' (Creeber 2015, 21). Scandinavian crime fiction, especially the police procedural, has a long tradition for morose detectives, and we too agree that they are an important aspect of Nordic Noir. But it seems rather odd to define the striking aesthetic beauty of Nordic rural landscapes and urban metropoles as simply disconsolate. The beauty of Copenhagen or Malmö at dusk in *The Bridge* and Ystad in *Wallander*

does not directly appear dejected as Creeber would have it. The themes and the overall atmosphere of the dramas may indeed appear melancholic and, perhaps, disconsolate, but that does not really render the locations themselves particularly depressing. As we will show later, melancholy is a complex sensation that may not be entirely negative, just like the beauty of autumn decay in many series also appears rather multifaceted. However, it is the idea of naturalism that distracts us the most. First of all, in a Scandinavian context, naturalism refers both to a philosophy that reacts against the supernatural or even religious aspects of life and to a literary movement that sought to explore social conditions and heritage rather than divine associations as the prime movers and basic terms of life. The murderer in the first season of one of Creeber's core examples, *The Bridge*, may disguise the killings as socially motivated, but as it turns out, this is a very personal motivation not including the often mentioned social consciousness of Scandinavian crime fiction dating back to Sjöwall and Wahlöö. Later, Creeber even refers to 'a 'metaphysical' subtext' in *The Killing* which we find difficult to relate to the naturalist setting described above. In fact, within Scandinavian crime fiction, increasing attention has been paid to religion, metaphysics and the supernatural during the past two decades (Hansen 2011, 2012, 2014). This schism between naturalism and metaphysics has consequences for Creeber's notion that 'what makes *Nordic Noir* so distinctive is the sense of realism embedded in its very fabric' (Creeber 2015, 24). First of all, the narratives of many stories which are considered to be Nordic Noir do not appear particularly verisimilar. In the criminological history of Scandinavia, we have seen very few cunning serial killers like those we see in all seasons of *The Bridge*, and the murder rates are quite low compared to other places; but still Scandinavian crime fiction—and Nordic Noir—is crawling with scheming killers with a masterplan. 'None of these stories', continues Creeber, 'explicitly involve supernatural events to explain the interconnectedness of its different characters and storylines' (Creeber 2015, 24). Consequently, it appears that Creeber defines the realistic character of Nordic Noir by way of the *lack* of supernatural traits, which means that realism is defined by the *absence* of something, rather than referring to noticeable and significant textual or contextual aspects that may be noted as realism.

Even if Creeber's contextual framing of his 'particular type of Scandinavian crime fiction' may appear inadequate as regards its accentuation of predominant characteristic traits of Nordic Noir, his further definition and description invite sympathy. Just as we may intuitively recognise specific traits as typical of film noir, a number of salient features can be found

in many (but not necessarily all) dramas dubbed Nordic Noir. Incidentally, in the quote below it is worth noting that he calls Nordic Noir a genre:

> These dramas are typified by a dimly lit aesthetic (hence its implicit reference to film noir) that is matched by a slow and melancholic pace, multi-layered storylines and an interest in uncovering the dark underbelly of contemporary society. The genre has also been associated with serials that span a large number of episodes, allowing their central murder mystery to act as a catalyst around which a whole number of other storylines and themes (often ethical, social and political in nature) can revolve. These issues are frequently reflected in an intense sense of place, their enigmatic and barren landscapes often seen as symbolizing the psychological mood of its frequently troubled detectives. (Creeber 2015, 22)

To illustrate how this definition works, we may compare series such as *Wallander* and *The Killing*, with the latter perhaps appearing to be a very defining series, because it complies with all the characteristics mentioned by Creeber. *Wallander* does indeed have the troubled detective theme which Mankell picked up as the alleged successor of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's detective Martin Beck. It also reflects the socially critical perspective on society, and the series has an intense atmosphere of Southern Sweden. But the aesthetics of the series does not really appear as dark as suggested by Creeber, and the episodic structure of the series makes it very difficult to decipher a multi-layered storyline as well as a particularly slow pace. Apparently, this would make *Wallander* less Nordic Noir than *The Killing*, and we seem to be still circling around the question of 'what is Nordic Noir?' This book therefore offers a critical approach to Nordic Noir while retaining the option of locating the melancholic mood included in the intense sense of place. This introductory discussion of the concept of Nordic Noir will be resumed throughout the book. It serves as an illustration of the challenges permeating specific and precise analyses of Nordic Noir rather than Scandinavian crime fiction in general: is this a certain blend of genres? Does it really make sense to discuss a specific TV drama as relating to only one umbrella genre? If *The Killing* is the essential defining drama from an international point of view, how can we develop more specific characteristics of Nordic Noir from this starting point? How do we develop, discuss or critically scrutinise such a 'wild' and intangible concept? How do we 'locate' salient features that can help us explain a brand such as Nordic Noir?

Core Examples, Methods, Chapters

Inherently, Nordic Noir has developed from being a reference used by critics and distributors into a concept employed by producers of TV drama as well as by scholars conducting genre analyses. As noted above, this is not in itself unproblematic, but it implies that it is a concept that we should take seriously, whether it makes empirical sense or not. The fact that the concept seems to have penetrated practically all dimensions of TV drama calls for a wide-ranging approach. This book takes its point of departure in four associated methodological approaches: location studies, production studies, policy studies and genre studies. From these different angles we gauge the breadth of the concept Nordic Noir, analysing specific Nordic TV dramas.

Location studies is a new, rich and emergent approach to both film and TV drama productions, and locations are the fundamental basis from which an enriching interaction between real and fictive places commences. The intense sense of place in Scandinavian crime fiction practically demands a further analysis of how locations are used in TV drama. The more general methodological framework in which to include location studies is *production studies*, and what is really striking and still somewhat surprising in our research for this book is the constant, ubiquitous reference being made to place in our interviews with the makers of TV drama. Producing TV drama in general, and crime fiction in particular, seems to involve the all-embracing sense of place that Creeber finds empirically in the dramas. Moreover, in recent local, national and international cultural policies we also find a very noticeable interest in places. Increasing local interest in attracting and funding TV drama is seen, and we find this trend represented in local, national and transnational policies as well.

In many ways, production and policy have become entangled to such an extent that studies in TV drama production require references to policies affecting the development of new dramas. Finally, these approaches all point to *genre studies*, because what seems to be at the very centre of attention in locating, producing and receiving Nordic Noir at least are references to specific and relocatable genre traits, however troublesome the specificities may be. Genre studies are a broad methodological approach that includes analytical framings of the particular styles of the dramas in question as well as the more pragmatic view as to how the genres are actually used by critics, distributors and everyone speaking

and writing about genres. Genre studies also include analyses of paratexts such as showreels, advertisements and the 'packaging' of the shows themselves online, on DVDs and in other media of communication. By way of this cross-disciplinary approach, this book will show how the concept of Nordic Noir is actually used (and perhaps abused), discussing how this may be seen in and demonstrated through the TV dramas themselves. That being said, we have not conducted production studies of all the series mentioned in the book: our main approach to the series will therefore be to study the relationship between locations, real places and genres/styles, while using references to interviews with workers in the TV industry as indications of a mind frame within networks of production. The TV dramas themselves are our focus of attention, but involvement with the industry serves as a basis for our assumptions about the dramas.

In this book, our main interest is to explore the relationship between the crime fiction genre, mostly on television, and the brand value of Nordic Noir; i.e. we read Nordic Noir understood as crime fiction. Thus, three areas of interest will be scrutinised throughout the book: (1) the specification and qualification of the concept Nordic Noir as crime fiction, (2) a historical outline of the development of Nordic television crime drama from the 1990s until today, and (3) a general analysis of the increasing transnationalisation of Nordic television drama production and funding throughout the period in question. The subtitle of the book *From Beck to The Bridge* indicates the historical period covered by the book: a very direct line runs from the changes in the television and film industries around different Beck adaptations to the international success of *The Bridge*. Part I of the book includes three chapters which outline the theoretical, methodological and contextual ambitions of the book. Chapter 2 presents local colour as a concept and central place theories as an explanatory approach to Nordic Noir; Chap. 3 introduces location studies as a methodical approach to studying places and locations in and around Nordic crime dramas, including a topography of Nordic Noir; Chap. 4 delineates four perspectives which constitute the contextual framework of the development of Nordic Noir: Nordicana and design, Nordic melancholy, commodified Nordic landscapes and the Nordic welfare structure.

Part II of the book focuses on how crime literature paved the way for the international attention towards television crime drama from the region. Chapter 5 analyses how the spatial sensibility in Nordic Noir is plentifully rooted in written crime fiction; Chap. 6 elaborates this

argument paying special attention to television crime dramas specifically adapted from literary fiction, using *Beck* (1997–2016) as an important trigger of what we term character adaptation, i.e. dramas that build on literary characters; Chap. 7 examines this early period of internationally increasing attention towards Nordic crime fiction as an epoch in which the intensified transnationalisation of drama production and funding coincided.

Part III includes analyses of Danish television crime dramas. While Swedish written crime fiction and television drama set the standard from the middle of the 1990s, Danish crime drama production, mainly from DR, played this role from the middle of the 2000s. Chapter 8 refers to *The Killing* and the so-called Danish model at DR as a very important game changer in Nordic crime drama production; Chap. 9 shows how this has also influenced recent dramas from the Danish commercial PSB TV 2, with *Norskov* (2015–) as the main example; Chap. 10 continues the transnationalisation argument with specific reference to *The Team*, which represented a particularly Danish production method.

Part IV demonstrates the great effect of these changes within the Nordic production environment on crime drama production in Norway, Sweden and Iceland. Chapter 11 shows how the Danish production of *The Killing* as a long serial narrative without episodic closure has spurred a Swedish interest in both original drama and long serial drama, with the Swedish drama *Blå ögon/Blue Eyes* (2014) as an obvious example; Chap. 12 reads original crime drama serials from Norway and Iceland with analytical attention towards *Ofærð/Trapped* (2015–) and *Frikjent/Acquitted* (2015); finally, Chap. 13 studies how the process of transnationalisation also influences recent Nordic drama production in general, with *The Bridge* and *Midnattssol/Midnight Sun* (2016–) as the most important examples.

Even though Nordic Noir as a concept has only been around for very few years, its consequences and implications may now seem obvious. It has changed our view of Scandinavian crime fiction, because a slight conceptual change may help us capture and understand aspects of the genre(s) that we may not have noticed before. It may also constitute a new vital marketing tool for the international distribution of Scandinavian crime fiction, since the concept has turned out to be an important driving force behind the propagation of new Scandinavian TV drama in general. In the context of this book, the main new insights derive from the implicit reference to place in the concept *Nordic* Noir.

Moreover, this new perception of crime dramas may help us understand why Nordic TV drama suddenly received unprecedented international attention. This may even enable us to shed a little light on the broader question: what causes Nordic TV drama series to travel outside of the Nordic region?

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