

**Literature of Crisis:
Reading Recent Scandinavian
Crime Fiction**

INTRODUCTION

At its best, crime writing can offer unique insight into society, race, gender, and human behaviour. In essence, every crime novel is an exploration of what it is to be human. They question the role of goodness and the essential nature of evil. In turn, they challenge our perceptions of humanity and our belief on social institutions and yield different answers to questions on values and worldviews. Hence, they are worthy of critical study and close analysis.

Many different titles have been coined over the years to describe this genre of literature which has crime at its centre from 'Detective fiction' to 'Whodunits' but the term 'Crime fiction' seems to be all-encompassing gathering within its folds the meandering history of this genre of literature which cuts across different subgenres. On a basic level crime fiction followed a plot structure as described by P.D James, a British crime novelist—

“what we can expect is a central mysterious crime, usually murder; a closed circle of suspects each with a motive, means and opportunity for the crime; a detective, either amateur or professional, who comes in like an avenging deity to solve it, and by the end of the book, a solution which the reader should be able to arrive at by logical deduction from clues inserted in the novel with deceptive cunning but essential fairness” (15).

However, this categorisation of crime fiction does not take into consideration the variety of novels under this genre and is limited in scope. Crime fiction over the years has grown so much

in number and kind that contemporary crime fiction no longer adheres to this definition. Thus, P.D.James writes further that although not inaccurate, “it now seems unduly restrictive” (15) illustrating how difficult it is to put crime fiction in neat categories.

As its history reveals, crime fiction is a hybrid genre which has always been flexible and open to innovative reinventions. This hints at a lack of restriction which is vital for the genre of crime fiction too—“The genre in its present form, no longer adheres to the rules [...] The so-called rules that were on offer [...] were violated to such an extent that it is, nowadays no longer possible to come up with a set of features that all contemporary crime novels adhere to” (Gregoriou 2007: 37). The fact remains that this form was born out of fusion and reworking of many different sub-genres bearing witness to the fact that this genre is more dynamic than static.

CRIME FICTION AS LITERATURE OF CRISIS

One aspect of crime fiction that has remained constant over the years is that it has flourished when society is faced with various crises. The word ‘crime’ itself hints at stories of chaos and disorder. The crime novel has a murder at its center which leads the individuals as well as the community into a state of crisis. When faced with this disastrous predicament each generation of crime novelist has had a different way of dealing with it as reflected in their writings. Hence, it is an apt vehicle to chronicle the various conflicts that society as a whole undergoes as it effectively captures the anxieties of the individual as well as that of the larger state.

At a time when crime and unrest created a social crisis, tales of violence where the perpetrator was caught and duly punished were often publicised as a form of cautionary tales for the public. These entertaining and absorbing writings garnered huge popularity as well as controversy in

their dealing with the various types of sensational crimes. They later came to be called the Newgate novels which laid the foundation of crime fiction. Stephen Knight rightly points out—"the warnings these stories provided were intended as a way of maintaining social order and personal security under threat from rising crime rates" (cited in Scaggs 2005: 14). This feature of the Newgate stories made it more acceptable to all the strata of the reading public.

This suggests that the crime story was mainly concerned with restoring order which goes hand in hand with the thought of crime writing as cautionary tales. The establishment of the new police force by Sir Robert Peel in 1829 was an important event in the history of crime fiction. Faith in science and reason also contributed to the modern police work, while the invention of photography in 1839 allowed accurate recording of important details of the crime and known criminals. Therefore, the time was ideal for crime fiction to flourish in a society with an organised system of law enforcement in place.

However, society was soon plunged into two world wars which had a lasting impact on all spheres of life. Crime writers like Agatha Christie inaugurated the Golden age of British detection during these years as they began to write crime novels prolifically. These were the formative years for the development of this genre. So at a time when the belief in the intrinsic goodness in men was shaken, why was the reading public so enchanted by a genre that had untimely death as its centre? Over the years critics have tried to come up with a reasonable answer to this question. It has been remarked that these stories set in the cosy countryside lacked realism especially when the socio-political backgrounds of these times are taken into account. "There was the news of a revolution, of a possible war, and of an impending change of government; but these did not come within the horizon of my companion"(4)—remarks Dr.

Watson in *His Last Bow*, as he comments on Holmes lack of interest on troublesome realities. But this lack of references to contemporary events has been seen as a form of escapism. The need to reinstate order, in the end, is also a reflection of a form of escapism from the realities that were troubling the times.

This accusation of lack of realism in these books is not entirely accurate as a close inspection of these stories—"reveal hidden tensions beneath the surface of genteel English society, exhibiting its insularity, its greed, the instability of identity, its obsession with the hierarchies of class and gender" (Horsley 2005: 32). Any form of crime reveals the shortcoming of the society; hence, any fiction which has crime at its centre is bound to engage with the tensions and hypocrisy which plagues even the supposedly genteel and peaceful countryside. While the crimes that are dealt with in the clue-puzzle form of the British crime fiction was mostly limited to the bourgeoisie class, the need to commit crime and the need to hide it revealed the ugly truth of these idyllic countrysides. In this reading of British crime fiction, as a result of various individual and social crisis the detective becomes a saviour figure whereas—"the criminal [becomes] a source of contemporary anxiety" (Horsley 2005: 40). Since crime itself is a symptom of a diseased social structure and reflects a moment of crisis, no amount of escapism can effectively insulate this genre from revealing hypocrisies of society.

While the Golden age of British detection exposed politics of power and elaborate human hypocrisies implicitly, Hard Boiled tradition on the other side of the continent launched a direct attack on the capitalist exploitation in America—telling the story of a society that was reeling from two world wars. A severe economic depression had hit many countries in the 1930s.

Belief in religion and God had been shaken by the two world wars which shook the very foundation of humanity. In the United States, prohibition inaugurated the era of organised crime which led to rampant government and police corruption. In the presence of this overwhelmingly bleak social mood, a new sub-genre of mystery fiction evolved i.e. Hardboiled fiction.

The post-war magazines such as 'Black Mask' forged a new tradition of American crime writing with Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler as the most important writers. The iconic image produced by this age is that—"of the lone investigator cutting through the polished surface of society to reveal the decay beneath" (Forshaw 2012: 33-34). Born out of the western frontier novels, hardboiled mode relocated the frontier hero to an urban landscape of the crime-filled streets of the city which was keenly feeling the effects of depression and prohibition era. Ernest Mandel notes that "this movement from the western frontier to a hostile urban environment was accompanied by an abrupt shift from the artificial gentility of the classical detective story to the creation of a fictional world of social corruption and 'real' crime" (cited in Scaggs 2005: 57). Hence, this was an important development in the history of crime fiction for it changed the thematic concerns of this relatively new sub-genre. While the British detective story was concerned with creating order and reassurance—"a genre of reconciliation and social healing" (James 2009: 72), the practitioners of hard-boiled mode were concerned with exploration of social upheavals—"lawlessness, prohibition, corruption, the power and violence of [...] gangsters who were close to becoming folk heroes, the cycle of boom and depression- and creating detectives who were inured to this world and could confront it on their own terms" (James 2009: 72). Thus, it is amply clear that 1920s saw a flowering of two distinct schools of crime writing each reflecting a different cultural background.

This was a time when the genre was undergoing various transformation and innovation. Innovative ideas soon laid down the basis of the procedural formula which relied on police work to effectively combat crime. This subgenre of crime fiction known as police procedurals made the detective part of a professional investigative team and emphasized the methods and procedures via which the team captured the concerned criminal. It was in the late 1950s that the separate developments in the procedural sub-genre were channelized into an impactful new sub-genre with the 87th precinct novels of Ed McBain. In his novels, he presents the police squad of the 87th precinct in a city called Isola which is a fictionalized New York City. Stephan Knight writes about this new subgenre—"a substantial police represents the multiracial characters of city life [,] the police tend to work in pairs and have many cases on at the same time [,] procedures are stressed, with forensic reports and record-searching [but] the human impact of the police and their credible reliance [...] is the main thrust of the plots and their resolution" (156).

Besides the above-mentioned elements, the setting of the narrative is also central to the police procedural. The large urban centres are the hot-bed of crime due to decaying social welfare, rampant poverty, and unemployment which is juxtaposed with the expectation of development and opportunities that is associated with urban centres. These large fictional cities of the world of crime fiction are critical to the projection of realism in police procedural which aptly portrays "crime as an everyday occurrence arising from the tensions of modern life" (Scaggs 2005: 93). Thus, the cityscape of "Isola becomes a symbol of a contemporary metropolis in general and the contemporary American metropolis in particular" (cited in Scaggs 2005: 93).

This emphasis on the urban setting of the police procedural is the basis for social realism which had a huge impact on this subgenre.

In the late 1960s, the police procedural was seized as a form by a Swedish husband-wife writer duo—Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo who would “situate ideological and political critique within the sympathetically portrayed lives of several police officers working in an investigative team” (Nestigen and Arvas 2011: 3). Together they published a series of ten novels featuring Inspector Martin Beck and his team. Drawing upon a real-life murder investigation, Sjöwall and Wahloo published *Roseanne* in the year 1965 and ended the Martin Beck series with *The Terrorist* in 1975. While the duo did not invent the procedural form they moulded it to serve their need for a political critique. Sjöwall and Wahloo had worked on the translation of the American police procedural novelist Ed McBain’s 87th precinct novels which narrated a police team investigation which—“lent itself to criticism of the police institution and associated bureaucracies, at the same time it made possible a rounded but ultimately sympathetic account of the officers relationships, personal problems, struggles with colleagues and the like” (Nestigen and Arvas 2011: 3). This criticism of institutions and bureaucracies served the Marxist couple well who used the procedural form to critique the Swedish welfare state.

A look into the literary history of Sweden reveals that the 1960s were turbulent times for the nation with the increase in political activism. The McBain inspired police procedural was finding a foothold in the literary sphere which gave rise a new kind of crime fiction which “often articulate[s] social criticism, critiquing national institutions and gender politics in particular” (Nestigen and Arvas 2011: 2). This was the very reason for the novels popularity and lasting influence because they captured a general political ‘awakening’—“an increased awareness of social injustices and a politicization of the intellectual and public spheres”

(Bergman 2014: 21). In doing so Sjowall and Wahloo politicized the crime novel and the police procedural in particular and set the standardized norm for Scandinavian crime fiction. This thought is echoed by Paula Arvas and Andrew Nestingen—

“the fit between the police procedural and the socio-political arrangements in Sweden, as well as in the other Scandinavian countries, has contributed to making the socially critical police procedural the definitive form of the crime novel since the 1960s, and hence the foundation of the Scandinavian crime-fiction tradition” (3).

Thus, while Sjowall and Wahloo were not the first crime writers in the Scandinavian nation their legacy defines and continue to shape Scandinavian crime fiction.

SCANDINAVIAN CRIME FICTION

‘The Scandinavian literary invasion is complete’—Forshaw

While it is the Vikings who are associated with invasions, in current years the wide-scale translation of Scandinavian crime fiction has led to its wide-scale availability in the global arena. Scandinavian crime fiction includes crime fiction from the Nordic countries of Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland, and Denmark. Readers have become familiar with the Larson phenomenon and the TV series ‘The Killing’ which gripped the minds of millions. This export from the Scandinavian regions has created a sub-genre of its own as critics have come to believe in the inherent merit of the crime fiction produced in these Northern regions. Can the Scandinavian crime series be read as novels which delve into the core of individuals and society? Is it a reaction/ product of the traditional school crime fiction? How has Scandinavian crime fiction grown into a sub-genre of its own? What are the features of Scandinavian crime fiction? Since the introduction of this celebrated genre to the English speaking world, efforts

have been made to provide answers to these questions and uncover the richness of this genre. This thesis is a generic study of this literary phenomenon makes for some fascinating conclusions, providing an insight into the Scandinavian society and the intrinsic literary merit of the genre popularly known as Scandinavian crime fiction.

While Scandinavian crime fiction has reinvented the police procedural, it is the presentation of the unvarnished portraits of modern life that holds the key for its success. The characters with their deep moral complexity set against the bleak Scandinavian landscape—places that are at once a personal hell and a personal salvation have created a new sub-genre in crime fiction namely Scandinavian crime fiction. The term ‘Scandinavian crime fiction’ does encompass the number of crime novels being exported out of these lands but many use the term Nordic crime fiction or Nordic Noir to describe this unique new genre in the crime novel so both these terms have been used to describe this subgenre.

Geographically, the Scandinavian countries lie close to each other and have many common features and share common political views too. In order to discuss the similarities in the crime novel from all these nations, one crime novelist will be put under the microscope from each of these five nations which comprise Scandinavia. Barry Forshaw elucidates the similarities these nations share his *Death in a cold climate*—

“The Scandinavian countries [...] are at once both similar and markedly different. All boast a high standard of living, a high GDP, a pronounced level of social awareness and [...] extensive welfare arrangements. To outsiders, they may seem very similar-but among themselves; they display noticeable differences, both in culture, language,

traditions, politics and economic life. All have common roots, however, and their ethnicity and language reflect this” (97).

While the term Scandinavia refers to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway due to linguistics affinity within the region, the term Scandinavia often includes Iceland and Finland too which is a conventional usage outside of this region. The term Scandinavian is also used synonymously with the term Nordic which is often used to describe the region. This generalized term Scandinavian crime fiction has been a site for heated debated. Mostly because critics believe that this term fails to recognize the literary and cultural history of the five nations which make up Scandinavia. History bears witness to the differences between these nations which is evident from the legacy of the Second World War. The five Scandinavian countries had different political reactions to the war proving that these countries were surely not a unit as etched in the minds of readers. Andrew Nestingen and Paula Arvas in their introduction to *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* reflects that this difference is highlighted in their varying attitude towards the World Wars which had a huge impact in Europe and across the world—“Iceland was occupied by the allied powers, while Denmark and Norway were occupied by the Nazis [...] at first, the Danish government cooperated with the Nazi occupiers [while] Sweden remained neutral during the war” (7).

While the Second World War exposed the differences in political attitude, the complexities of the war resulted in the formation of the welfare states in the post-war period. Initially, a Swedish model, the formation of the welfare state known as the Nordic welfare model has tied these nations together making it a coherent unit. The welfare state has been defined in the introduction to *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* as—

"a mode of governance premised on the idea that all citizens should be provided with adequate resources to live secure lives while pursuing life projects [...]this means [that] the state provides universal health care, education, retirement and child support, in addition to maintaining functional social infrastructure" (8).

At one time these nations were the poorest in Europe but rapid post-war developments evolved these nations into a modern day utopia. This has created an image of a real-life utopia on earth as the Scandinavian lands have always been etched in our minds as a picture perfect image of an idyllic landscape. This idea of the welfare state is vital to the understanding of the socially charged crime novel which has an ordinary policeman as a hero. It also marks the important trends in crime fiction from the Nordic countries which when tied together form an important sub-genre of crime fiction.

Initially, the crime writers from these nations like Prins Pierre were influenced by the stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Allan Poe. Most of the authors blended the mystery element of the crime novel with a spirit of adventure which became popular at the time. Following the British tradition, 'whodunits' were equally popular and their villain was drawn as a social outsider of a—"foreign pedigree, commonly originating from the Mediterranean or from some fictional South American republic" (Bergman 2014: 15). This is a model on which most Sherlock Holmes stories are based on which emphasized the idea that the society they inhabited was essentially good where evil is an outside force and hence could easily be removed. This optimistic note of the puzzle form of crime writing was challenged by Swedish writer Stieg Trenter who shifted the setting of the crime novel to more urban locales and depicted more action. Influenced by the American hardboiled tradition, Trenter depicted realistic action centered on human characters as opposed to the 'superhuman' detective like

Dupin and Holmes. But crime fiction still catered to mass entertainment including crime/adventure stories for children and did not have the characteristic depth of contemporary Scandinavian crime fiction.

The formative years of the subgenre of Scandinavian crime fiction as we know today came later. Following the socially turbulent times of the 1960s, a need for realistic political fiction arose. The crime novel too needed to reinvent itself in order to cater to the public undergoing 'political awakening'. Hence, the year 1967 saw the publication of *Roseanna* introducing Martin Beck created by the journalist husband-wife duo Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. Any study of Scandinavian crime fiction has to take into consideration the lasting influence of the Martin Beck series. Authors like Henning Mankell, Karin Fossum, and Arnaldur Indridason have all named Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö as their source of inspiration.

Based on the subgenre of a police procedural the writer duo presented a realistic figure of the detective shifting from the earlier tradition of 'whodunits'. While this subgenre had been used by writers before, Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö added a newer dimension of social critique which had earlier been considered detrimental to the entertainment value of crime fiction. Born out their dissatisfaction with the gap between the welfare state ideals and the capitalistic undertone of the society the writers took to crime fiction to raise their voices. In their crime series, the state became an important character that was held up for scrutiny. The intention of social critique is clarified by Sjöwall—

"We realized that people read crime, and through the stories, we could show the reader that [underneath] the official image of welfare-state Sweden there was another layer of poverty, criminality, and brutality. We wanted to show where Sweden was heading:

towards a capitalistic, cold and inhuman society, where the rich got richer, the poor got poorer" (Bergman 2014: 34).

While Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's police procedurals expanded the parameters of a crime novel adding a distinct Scandinavian theme to it, their contribution to this subgenre is not limited to social criticism. Each Scandinavian crime writer writing after the publication of the Martin Beck series is directly or indirectly indebted to this series which spawned the tradition of a new sub-genre in crime writing with a distinctly Nordic flavour. The reworking of the police procedural can be sourced to the influence of the American hardboiled tradition but the Martin Beck series is distinct from its predecessors in its presentation of the central detective who is part of a team. The cases bring the investigators in contact with people from all strata revealing the uneasy truths of society and the police procedural form ensures the criticism of bureaucracy and exposure of corruption within the law keepers.

While the 'Scandinavian model' was reeling from political, economic and social disturbances, it was during these turbulent years that the Scandinavian nations went through an awakening which was reflected in all art forms including the crime genre. At the centre of these turbulent times was the assassination of the Swedish prime minister in 1986 remains an unsolved crime and can be considered to be the final nail to the coffin. In 1986, Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme' assassination in Stockholm shocked a country that had regarded itself as a utopian welfare state. At the time of the assassination, Prime Minister Palme did not even have any security with him when he went out into the city square that night, typifying the total and complete trust Swedes and other Scandinavians had in their fellow citizens and in their states' security. Unfortunately, the police did not follow proper procedures to protect evidence from the crime scene. As a result of the police error, the mystery of the murderer's identity remains

unsolvable to this day, instilling in the Swedish psyche a deep distrust of authorities. While watching these events unfold, the greater Scandinavian population also became disillusioned with what they believed to be 'perfect' governments. While the traumatic epicentre for the widespread disillusionment was the 1986 assassination Mitzi M. Brunsdale in her *Encyclopedia of Nordic Crime Fiction* identifies important events in other Scandinavian nations—"for Norway, the 2011 terrorist massacre carried out by Anders Breivik; for Denmark, the immigration crisis leading to the 2014 terrorist attacks on Copenhagen; for Iceland the near-disastrous 2008 financial "Crash"; and for Finland, its costly 20th century wars and its complex relationship with Russia and Russians."(4). Together all these events had deep ramifications in the minds of its citizens.

In response to this new public consciousness reflecting the turbulent times, Scandinavian crime fiction exploded onto the scene. Any intelligent reader of this genre will be quickly aware of the socio-political insights afforded by these novels, building up a complex picture of Scandinavian society—in particular, the cracks that have appeared in the social democratic ideal, an ideal which has been cherished for so long by observers in America, Britain and the rest of Europe. While the novels of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö with their famous Martin Beck series set a literary precedent for Scandinavian mystery writing the essence of Scandinavian crime fiction has to take into account the puncturing of the social democratic ideal.

The choice of crime fiction, as opposed to any other type of writing, is deliberate. Crime fiction can offer insight into a changing society since every crime story explores and sheds light into the darker realities of life. It is true that crime fiction "mirrors its audience's fears, and that its genre development reflects the changing perception of threats to society" (Bergman 2011: 34).

The use of art and literature can be interpreted in different ways but one important element of

literature is its ability to deal with human concerns. This is what separates Scandinavian crime fiction from other popular genre fiction- the choice to engage with contemporary society and hold a mirror to the darker realities of life. In this sense, the crime novel is more than just about solving the mystery. In fact, in the Nordic mysteries the central murder or crime is just a catalyst to get things going and this holds true for the best of crime fiction. The crime novel thus raises a mirror to the society while raising a mirror to the individual: "the crime novel can create an exaggerated sense of reality, and urgency for enquiry—both into a specific issue and, crucially, into life itself, for human beings living today. The crime fiction form can be a fulcrum for an examination of the very core of human existence" (Forshaw 2012: 46).

This thought is further elucidated by Leonard Cassuto who argues that genre fiction is a "cultural symptom, not a cultural cure [and as all] complicated cultural symptoms, that itch has a lot of causes" (cited in Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 3). Following the fall from the self-perpetuated illusion of a utopic ideal, the notion of a perfect society underwent a change revealing the underlying violence. This preoccupation with violence which is central to crime fiction became an ideal vehicle to reveal the dystopian welfare state as seen in the works of left-wing writers like Sjöwall and Wahloo. This potential of crime fiction to expose this collective 'itch' has led to its preoccupation with social critique. Writers like Stieg Larsson have exposed the failures of the state to provide justice and reflects the skepticism for authority figures following the shattering of the social ideal. The state's obsession with progress at the cost of individual freedom is seen as one of the cultural symptoms resulting in crime. The increasing number of crime fiction from these nations with its themes of alienation and victimization are all connected to the idea of the welfare state. Hence, the alarming number of crime recorded in the fictional world is seen as a—"symptom of an age of uncertainty where the comforts of the

welfare states have ceased to provide the ointment that may relieve the collective itch" (Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 5).

SCANDINAVIAN CRIME WRITERS

Any discussion of Scandinavia begins with the nation of Sweden mostly because of its massive cultural and commercial exports in terms of cinema and more recently crime novels. The highlight of Sweden's crime fiction is that it has the highest number of crime writers compared to the other Nordic countries. Geographically Sweden presents a picture-perfect image of massive lakes and inspiring forests. While Stockholm is the focus for many of the crime writers from this region, the brutal winters and long nights are also celebrated by the crime novelist.

The one crime writer who has received classic status is Sweden's Henning Mankell. Henning Mankell who is described as a Swedish crime writer, children's author, leftist activist, and dramatist has written forty-five plays, three screenplays, and over forty novels till date. But his fame rests on the award-winning crime novels which form the Inspector Wallander series which led him to be named as the 'Master of Swedish Crime Fiction'. A look into the question of his choice of the crime-genre will be immediately answered by his biography. At the age of two his father, Ivar Mankell was offered to serve as a court judge in a small town in the north of Sweden called Sveg, where Mankell spent his childhood. Ian Thomson in an article for 'The Guardian' describing his childhood illuminates his choice of crime writing in a better way—"the Mankell siblings lived in a flat above the law courts where their father was the judge.[...]one day an orderly hurried upstairs to ask little Henning if he could borrow his toy cars. They were needed to demonstrate how a traffic accident had occurred, and Mankell was

thrilled to help. Another time, the children's school holidays were prolonged as Henning's father investigated a local murder". In this way, he did experience crime and its effects at close quarters. However, the creation of his introspective detective on his brooding existential journey was not a deeply thought out plan as Mankell chose the name of his detective from a telephone directory. He decided to make the crime novel a medium for his critique of the growing racism in Sweden following the aftermath of the assassination of the prime minister.

The cause for the popularity of Henning Mankell's brilliant Kurt Wallander crime novels is the central character of Wallander, a kind of dishevelled, stoic, and utterly baffled human character fighting a losing battle against a tide of violence and senseless crime in a location that has often been described as an earthly paradise of social planning and as a triumph of the welfare state. The Wallander novels have a crawling sense of dread which at the outset feels out of place in the quiet towns of Sweden, but soon becomes so natural because it is so familiar. In this way, Mankell turns what could have been simply an all in rage police procedurals into a highly-nuanced character study. The Wallander novels form the basis of a systematic interrogation of the failures of the welfare state and a deconstruction of the social engineering promises that were made so easily, and with little foresight. This locates the Wallander series within the framework of crime-writing which has been exploring and illuminating the dark corners of society.

While Sweden takes center stage, Norway remains exotic in the minds of the readers with "its storm blown northern coast and massive fjords [with] isolated communities [that] are spread along the line of the coast which reaches to the borders of Russia" (Forshaw 2012: 4). Norway can also boast of its rich Norse traditions and impressive culture. Henrik Ibsen, Edvard Munch,

and Edvard Greag are artists whose works encapsulate the flavour which is distinctly Norwegian. The psychological angst of these artists has found an echo in the works of the crime writers hailing from this region. Initially regarded as a poor relation to the rest of Scandinavia, the discovery of North Sea oil in the 1970s has made Norway a country grossing highest per capita income which finds resonance in the crime novel.

Karin Fossum is the author of the celebrated Inspector Sejer series. Fossum's protagonist has particular existential, fatalist almost nihilist point of view which has become a hallmark of Scandinavian crime fiction. This makes the Inspector Sejer series part of the genre of police procedurals that present gloomy characters set in a backdrop of a bleak landscape. Her writings focus on the presentation of the landscape—in this case, Norway while locating the particular political, historical and cultural roots of the series. By making the protagonist the focal point, the series explains how the roots of the fascination towards the introspective detective lay in its reflection of the fallibilities of human life. Together the series illuminates the character of Sejer as well as the fine skill of the author.

Often referred to as the 'Norwegian Queen of Crime', Karin Fossum began her writing career in 1974 after working in psychiatric wards, rehabilitation centre and even as a taxi driver. She has won numerous awards including the Glass Key Award for the best Scandinavian crime novel, an honour shared with Henning Mankell. Writing since she was 18 years old, she fell into crime literature by coincidence. Her first story, *Eve's Eye* (1995), was never meant to be a crime story as she made the decision halfway through the book.

Like the best of crime novels, her novels are dark and unsettling, questioning the reasons why people commit crime and the devastating effect it has on the people's lives. Tackling societal

problems head-on, her novels are a further reminder that Fossum is not in the business of offering readers a comfort zone. As her steely protagonist Inspector Sejer investigates series of deaths, Fossum's Norway becomes an apposite setting for a dark night of the soul. Sejer seems the persona of a stable Europe that is struck by the erosion of societal structures. He sees young adult men with no purpose, with mindless jobs or no jobs, drinking and easily almost naturally falling into violence against others, although there is mortification after the fact. The author refers to the psychological motivation of a childhood of a crazed killer and other elements like repressed homosexuality. However, the peak of town life in Norway is wonderfully presented and it is psychologically evocative even though the series presents a disturbing view of humans.

Matti Joensuu is one of Finland's most respected and widely-read writers of crime fiction. In addition to his literary career, Joensuu worked as a police officer and a detective in Helsinki. He retired from the Helsinki Police Department's Criminal Investigation Division in 2006, despite having been a successful novelist for some twenty years before this. The best known of Joensuu's works are his Harjunpää novels which depict the life and work of Detective Sergeant Timo Juhani Harjunpää of the Helsinki Police Department's CID unit. Joensuu's last novel was *Harjunpää and the Iron Room*, published in 2010, after a break of seven years. Joensuu was awarded the State's Literature Prize in 1982, and The Clue of the Year prize for the best Finnish crime novel in 1985, 1994, and 2004 granted by the Finnish Whodunit crime fiction society. In 1987, Joensuu received the Martin Beck Award.

Joensuu's novels are mostly set in Helsinki and revolve around his central detective Timo Harjunpää. His profession is reflected in his work which realistically depicts the life of an ordinary policeman who has to deal with multiple cases at a single time. At the same time, there

is a depth in his characterization especially in the central protagonist who has to endure deep torment as he is constantly surrounded by morbid crimes and death. His novels shed a light into the deep recesses of the human mind to expose the effects of evil. But his themes expose the rotting bone structure of the much-celebrated welfare policies as his city is filled with citizens who take up a life of crime.

In addition to their common profession, the author and the hero also share a strong social conscience and a tendency towards melancholy. Timo Harjunpää is one of the most well-known policemen in Finland. This is perhaps slightly odd, as there is nothing at all special about him – he is a conscientious officer who solves crimes committed by ordinary people. Harjunpää resembles his creator in many different ways. His colleagues, however, have sometimes not been very pleased that Joensuu chooses to write about problems rife within the police force. Prejudice, greed, and abuse of power are a smear on the police as well as on the rest of society. The world of his novels – the first of them was published in 1976 – is seemingly realistic, something which in Finland, at least, appeals to a very wide readership. The critics, too, have acclaimed Joensuu's social criticism, his strong sense of drama, his logical narration and precise use of language.

Denmark, home to Hans Christian Andersen and the little mermaid is no longer a fairy-tale country. It is no surprise that crime fiction is on the rise in this Scandinavian country too. One of the most highly regarded and best-selling Danish crime writer is Jussi Adler-Olsen who tackles the issue of abuse of power- within the police, armed forces and among politicians, in uncompromising terms. His edgy novels deal with corrupt individuals, social outsiders, manipulative psychopaths, and strips away the fairy tale varnish that has been Denmark's prerequisite since the nineteenth century. Jussi Adler-Olsen grew up in various mental hospitals

across Denmark where his father was a psychiatric doctor. He later studied medicine, sociology, and cinematography before launching a career as a publisher, editor, and writer within a wide-ranging field - from Groucho Marx biographies to a non-fiction piece on marital relations. Since 2007, Jussi is fully focused on writing crime fiction and has won the Glass Key Award. Jussi Adler-Olsen psychological thrillers have been praised in Scandinavia as well as internationally for their gripping storytelling and dark humour.

His first novels in the crime-fiction are the Department Q series. Jussi's protagonist is the deeply flawed Copenhagen detective Carl Morck, head of Department Q, a special police unit created for a type of unsolved crimes that the political establishment has deemed as deserving 'special scrutiny'. However, Carl Morck is only left with modest resources to resolve grim crimes others have labelled a 'waste of time'. Morck has been through a traumatic event with his previous team. During the course of an investigation, his team is shot at which leaves one teammate dead and the other paralysed for life. When Morck finally returns to duty he suffers for the effects of this trauma leaving him alienated. As a solution, he is made the head of the newly formed Department Q which is set up in the basement. Initially, Morck is happy to spend his time alone in the basement with nothing to do. But he learns the true cause behind the opening of this new department. Department Q is allotted a good amount of funds which is being siphoned to other departments, this spurs him into action so he demands for an assistant who turns out to be Assad who is Syrian immigrant. Together these two people form an unlikely partnership and solve crimes deemed as 'cold cases'.

Arnaldur Indridason, the author of a series of novels starring the fantastically gloomy Detective Inspector Erlendur, is Mankell's closest competitor when it comes to sending out mixed

messages. Like Wallander, Erlendur is a traditionalist figure with an unexpectedly compassionate approach to his work, but Indridason has to work much harder to make his Icelandic settings flicker between being Great Good and Great Wrong Places. In Swedish and Norwegian crime novels the characters are often shocked by the brutality or ingenuity of murders, but it doesn't seem unlikely to them that serial killers or vengeful ex-Nazis should be going about their business in Oslo or Skåne. This is a bigger problem for crime writers in countries with smaller, more homogeneous populations: Erlendur, similarly, never expects to be called out for anything more dramatic than 'a pathetic Icelandic murder' (*Jar City* 22).

The central protagonist is complex, flawed and a mass of contradictions. Like Wallander, Inspector Erlendur is emotionally numb, has problems with social and intimate relationships and there is a general lack of joy in his life. Though part of the tradition of the introspective detectives of the Scandinavian crime fiction, there are particular characteristics that make Inspector Erlendur a fully rounded character and not just a stereotype. The other aspect of the writer's art comes across in his presentation of Iceland. Though we look at the Scandinavian nations as a homogeneous group, each country has its own set of history, political background, and cultural influences and this comes across in Indridason's writing.

Indridason's mysteries glance at the changes in Icelandic society like the psychic effects of the country's huge genetic database in *Jar City*; rapid urbanization in *Silence of the Grave*. Although Indridason has a sense of humour, both Erlendur and the cases he investigates are relentlessly sad – so sad that when a forgetful witness refers to him as 'that other detective ... the sad one' (*Silence of the Grave* 159), no one has to ask which one she means. A stocky man

in his fifties, shabbily dressed, rumped from sleeping in an armchair, he lives on cold boiled sheep head and tubs of curds. Erlendur has a traumatic childhood back-story, and his ex-wife has never forgiven him for leaving her. His back-story which unfolds as the series progresses explains his obsession with missing person cases and his melancholy. He's a man we cheer for when a little bit of happiness turns up at his door at the end of the novel. The series are stories of murder investigations but more importantly, it is an exploration of loss. Indridason populates his story with multiple characters that are searching for lost loved ones. He weaves all of these stories of loss together and creates echoes and resonance, culminating in a beautiful and very moving ending. A mystery is solved, yet the characters continue to feel a sense of emptiness and loss.

It is clear that an examination into the field of Scandinavian crime fiction in translation renders it possible for us to not only look into the ever-growing commercial success of this genre but also stress the literary factor and the genre's foregrounding of political and socioeconomic observations. This seems apt as reflected in other art forms as well. Ingmar Bergman, an acclaimed Swedish film director moves in a universe in which interaction between his characters, violent, extreme and confrontational, suggests parallels with the darker recesses of the human soul customarily accessed in crime fiction. His stark, grim and boldly poetic cinema questions faith and tend to focus on the darker side of humanity with emphasis on loneliness and desire. Likewise, the famous Swedish pop sensation of the yesteryears ABBA songs can be described as songs of the alienation of modern life. All of these antecedents are part of the Scandinavian culture and these cultural antecedents have left a pronounced mark on the literary genres as well.

Therefore, the premise of this study begins with the sociological and political question that lies at the heart of Scandinavian crime fiction. Chapter One examines how Scandinavian crime writing reflects the decay of the welfare state which has turned a blind eye to the deviating individuals. The Scandinavian crime series act as chronicles of changes in turbulent societies which are in a metamorphosis stage. This allows the crime novel to bring into focus the tension and repressive forces that give the crime series a political dimension as well. The crime novel consequently discusses the Scandinavian socio-political system where apparent equality and social justice are exposed as a cover-up. The Scandinavian crime series, therefore, interprets the detective's role of disclosing or exposing to artfully expose certain aspects of the society to the readers. Hence, Chapter Two shifts the focus to the figure of the detective who reflects the larger predicament of an individual in a dystopic world. The detective of the Scandinavian crime novel is no longer a heroic figure. Instead, he is a tortured soul full of self-doubt in a quest to overcome his flaws. All five detectives examined in this study are part of the police force but their roles move beyond the role of a law enforcer. The detective becomes a symbol of the individual as well as the state in Scandinavian crime fiction acting as a voice of critique. This has led to a shift in the focus of the crime story from 'whodunit' to 'whydunit'. In order to answer this question, Scandinavian crime fiction explores the story of the criminal too. Chapter Three looks into the question of how criminality is a symptom of state failure and a site for critique in Scandinavian crime fiction.

Many of the Scandinavian crime series deal with crimes that are typically related to men's dominance of women. Hence, Chapter Four serves to shed light into the life of a modern woman in the welfare state, an egalitarian land where women share an equal place with their male counterpart. Women play an important role in crime fiction and the series discussed in this

study scrutinizes women both as lawbreakers and law enforcers. As the emphasis on the word Scandinavian suggests location has an important role to play in this subgenre. Chapter Five focuses on the landscape and setting which often mirror the dark and gloomy thoughts of the characters. The harsh Scandinavian landscape is effectively evoked to become a character in itself. Chapter Six raises the question of resolution in a crime novel. Since Scandinavian crime fiction reflects uncertain times the ending of the novels too express a moral ambiguity of contemporary times.

By making five Scandinavian crime writers from each of the five Scandinavian nations, Henning Mankell, Karin Fossum, Arnaldur Indridason, Matti Joensuu and Jussi Alder-Olsen, the focal point, the present study will look into the angst-ridden protagonists of the novels to illuminate the art of crime fiction while exploring the tenets that make it uniquely Scandinavian. Together the idyllic location with the exploration of the victim, the murderer, and the investigator acts as a microcosm to reflect the predicament of a larger world in which even a seemingly utopian society cannot escape an inherent dark under-belly of crime and evil. The theme here is one of inner and outer crisis that goes hand in hand with the question of existence.

This thesis will, therefore, examine select Scandinavian crime novels to chart out the historical and cultural influences on the genre. It traces the development of the genre and places Scandinavian crime fiction in the historical trajectory of crime fiction. While doing so this study charts the various features of Scandinavian crime fiction which have made this a unique subgenre of its own within the broader genre of crime fiction. The past decade has seen a lot of excitement surrounding this new development in crime fiction so this study will answer the question whether this literary excitement is justified or not and what is the key for its global success