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# Tracing the Transmission of Scandinavian Literature to the UK: 1917-2017

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PhD Scandinavian Studies  
University of Edinburgh  
2018



# Declaration

This thesis has been composed by the undersigned student, Ian Giles, and is the student's own work. The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Ian Giles



## Abstract

The interest in understanding how books move from a Scandinavian source culture to the British target culture has never been greater. This thesis analyses this buoyant demand by tracing the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain and its relationship with the British literary market over the past century. Through a series of case studies, the thesis examines what influences the likelihood of transmission and successful reception in Britain; the position of Scandinavian books in the British literary polysystem; how the transmission of Scandinavian books to Britain differs from the transmission to other polysystems; and how the publication practices of translated books have evolved. This approach is supported by an interdisciplinary framework encompassing translation, literary and sociocultural theories: key theoretical strands utilised are Holmes' theory of function-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies, Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, and Heilbron's sociology of translation. In addition, elements of book history and patronage theory are also applied.

The thesis comprises five case studies, spanning the years 1917-2017, of which one is Danish (Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*), two are Norwegian (Knut Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* and Agnar Mykle's four Ash Burlefoot novels), and two are Swedish (Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's Martin Beck decalogy, and Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* series, now continued by David Lagercrantz).

Each of these case studies draws upon a wide range of sources, including newspapers, periodicals, archival materials, interview transcripts, industry statistics, and a range of scholarship, in order to provide comprehensive and contextualised insight into the transmission and reception trajectory of its respective subject, exploring the sociological and literary background to both production and reception. The increasing commercialisation of publishing, and more specifically of translated Scandinavian literature, is explored alongside literary and social changes, with emphasis on the tendency for transmission to be most likely at moments of paradigmatic shift in British society. This is especially reflected in the emergence of genre fiction and hybrid forms of writing during the period in question.

Taken in combination, the case studies generate significant and original findings by identifying and analysing overarching trends that cannot be established through examining just one case subject or one source language. They both provide an historical account of Scandinavian literary transmission to Britain during the twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, and they identify and analyse the significant factors involved in that process. The research offers an enhanced understanding of the contemporary situation of the publication of Scandinavian books in Britain.



## Lay Summary

The interest in understanding how books move from a Scandinavian source culture to the British target culture has never been greater. This thesis analyses this buoyant demand by tracing the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain and its relationship with the British literary market over the past century. Through a series of case studies, the thesis examines what influences the likelihood of Scandinavian books being translated to English (transmission) and received positively by critics and readers (reception) in Britain; the position of Scandinavian books in the British literary market; how the transmission of Scandinavian books to Britain differs from the transmission to other markets; and how the publication practices of translated books have evolved. This approach is supported by an interdisciplinary framework encompassing translation, literary and sociocultural theories.

The thesis comprises five case studies, spanning the years 1917-2017, of which one is Danish (Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*), two are Norwegian (Knut Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* and Agnar Mykle's four Ash Burlefoot novels), and two are Swedish (Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's Martin Beck decalogy, and Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* series, now continued by David Lagercrantz).

Each of these case studies draws upon a wide range of sources, including newspapers, periodicals, archival materials, interview transcripts, industry statistics, and a range of scholarship. Case studies provide comprehensive and contextualised insight into the transmission and reception trajectory of each subject, exploring their sociological and literary backgrounds. The increasing commercialisation of publishing, more specifically that of translated Scandinavian literature, is explored alongside literary and social changes. Transmission occurs more often at moments of societal change in Britain. This is especially reflected in the emergence of genre fiction, such as crime and thriller books, and hybrid forms of writing that combine multiple genres.

Taken in combination, the case studies generate significant and original findings by identifying and analysing overarching trends that cannot be established through examining just one case subject or one source language. They both provide an historical account of Scandinavian literary transmission to Britain during the twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, and they identify and analyse the significant factors involved in that process. The research offers an enhanced understanding of the contemporary situation of the publication of Scandinavian books in Britain.





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Tracing the Transmission  
of Scandinavian Literature  
to the UK: 1917-2017



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## *List of Abbreviations*

<i>BLM</i>	<i>Bonniers Litterära Magasin</i>
CWA	Crime Writers' Association
DELT	Association of Danish-English Literary Translators
<i>DN</i>	<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>
DTS	Descriptive Translation Studies
fDTS	Function-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies
FSG	Farrar, Straus and Giroux
LAF	Literature Across Frontiers
NBA	Net Book Agreement
NORLA	Norwegian Literature Abroad
SELTA	Swedish-English Literary Translators' Association
<i>SBR</i>	<i>Swedish Book Review</i>
<i>SvD</i>	<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i>
<i>TLS</i>	<i>The Times Literary Supplement</i>

## *List of Abbreviated Book Titles*

- Beck 1* Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *Roseanna*, translated by Lois Roth and first published in Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1968.
- Beck 2* Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *The Man Who Went Up in Smoke*, translated by Joan Tate and first published in Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1970.
- Beck 3* Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *The Man on the Balcony*, translated by Alan Blair and first published in Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1969.
- Beck 4* Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *The Laughing Policeman*, translated by Alan Blair and first published in Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1971.
- Beck 5* Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *The Fire Engine That Disappeared*, translated by Joan Tate and first published in Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1972.
- Beck 6* Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *Murder at the Savoy*, translated by Amy and Ken Knoespele and first published in Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1972.
- Beck 7* Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *The Abominable Man*, translated by Thomas Teal and first published in Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1973.
- Beck 8* Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *The Locked Room*, translated by Paul Britten Austin and first published in Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1974.
- Beck 9* Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *Cop Killer*, translated by Thomas Teal and first published in Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1975.
- Beck 10* Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *The Terrorists*, translated by Joan Tate and first published in Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1977.
- Chatterley* D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, first published in full in Britain by Penguin Books in 1960.
- Elden* Stieg Larsson's *Flickan som lekte med elden*, first published in Sweden by Norstedts in 2006.
- Grøde* Knut Hamsun's *Markens Grøde*, first published in Norway by Gyldendal in 1917.
- Growth* Knut Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil*, translated by W. W. Worster and first published in Britain by Gyldendal in 1920.

<i>Hotel</i>	Agnar Mykle's <i>The Hotel Room</i> , translated by Maurice Michael and first published in Britain by Barrie & Rockliff in 1963.
<i>Kvinnor</i>	Stieg Larsson's <i>Män som hatar kvinnor</i> , first published in Sweden by Norstedts in 2005.
<i>Lasso</i>	Agnar Mykle's <i>Lasso round the Moon</i> , translated by Maurice Michael and first published in Britain by Barrie & Rockliff in 1960.
<i>Luftslottet</i>	Stieg Larsson's <i>Luftslottet som sprängdes</i> , first published in Sweden by Norstedts in 2007.
<i>Luna</i>	Agnar Mykle's <i>Lasso rundt fru Luna</i> , first published in Norway by Gyldendal in 1954.
<i>Millennium 1</i>	Stieg Larsson's <i>The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo</i> , translated by Reg Keeland and first published in Britain by MacLehose Press in 2008.
<i>Millennium 2</i>	Stieg Larsson's <i>The Girl Who Played with Fire</i> , translated by Reg Keeland and first published in Britain by MacLehose Press in 2009.
<i>Millennium 3</i>	Stieg Larsson's <i>The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest</i> , translated by Reg Keeland and first published in Britain by MacLehose Press in 2009.
<i>Millennium 4</i>	David Lagercrantz's <i>The Girl in the Spider's Web</i> , translated by George Goulding and first published in Britain by MacLehose Press in 2015.
<i>Millennium 5</i>	David Lagercrantz's <i>The Girl Who Takes an Eye for an Eye</i> , translated by George Goulding and first published in Britain by MacLehose Press in 2017.
<i>Rubin</i>	Agnar Mykle's <i>Sangen om den røde rubin</i> , first published in Norway by Gyldendal in 1956.
<i>Ruby</i>	Agnar Mykle's <i>The Song of the Red Ruby</i> , translated by Maurice Michael and first published in Britain by Barrie & Rockliff in 1961.
<i>Smilla</i>	Peter Høeg's <i>Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow</i> , translated by F. David and first published in Britain by Harvill Press in 1993.



## Notes

On the grounds that not all readers of this thesis will have a Scandinavian language, in addition to reasons of style and concision, all quotations in this thesis appear solely in English. An English translation is presented when an original quotation is in a foreign language and the reference directs the reader to the original source. All translations to English are the researcher's own, unless otherwise stated.

Sales data for books sold in the United Kingdom are taken from Nielsen BookScan, unless otherwise stated.<sup>i</sup> Nielsen BookScan is a private company that manages a commercial database recording book sales data for a number of countries around the world, including the UK.<sup>ii</sup> The database records the volume and value of book sales and is updated weekly.<sup>iii</sup> The service collates point of sale data for print book sales in the UK, which includes online sales channels such as Amazon, with around ninety per cent of all British sales recorded by Nielsen.<sup>iv</sup> The service is primarily used by the publishing and bookselling industries for commercial purposes, and is also used to form various bestseller charts for British national newspapers.<sup>v</sup> There are some drawbacks to using Nielsen BookScan for research purposes. The database only includes data from 1998 onwards, which means it is less helpful in examining sales for books published before this date, while the cost of accessing what is primarily a commercial service can be prohibitive.<sup>vi</sup> In line with a number of other, recent studies in the field, this thesis has used figures from Nielsen BookScan, where available, to provide an indication of the impact of books on the British literary polysystem, but this data is considered guiding rather than complete.<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Many thanks to Ellen Kythor who generously sourced the Nielsen BookScan data presented in this thesis.

<sup>ii</sup> According to John B. Thompson, the British version is considered to offer sales data with a high degree of reliability – better than, for instance, Nielsen's equivalent data for the USA. See Thompson 2010: 200.

<sup>iii</sup> Jerry Määttä notes that data is available as far back as 1998, but Thompson states that the service launched in December 2000. See Määttä 2014: 228, Thompson 2010: 199. This disparity in dates is likely a reflection of a series of mergers in the 1990s that resulted in the creation of Nielsen BookScan as it is known today.

<sup>iv</sup> Thompson 2010: 199-200. Sales are recorded for all books issued with a UK ISBN. Figures from Nielsen BookScan do not include e-book sales, and e-book retailers are frequently cautious about disclosing sales figures on their respective platforms on the grounds of commercial sensitivity.

<sup>v</sup> For example, *The Guardian* and *The Sunday Times* bestseller lists use data provided by Nielsen.

<sup>vi</sup> Määttä 2014: 228. The data cannot be said to be complete either, given Nielsen only covers ninety per cent of British sales.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, Broomé 2014c, Kythor Forthcoming.



# 1 Introduction

*'[A] coherent historical account of the  
transmission of Scandinavian literature into  
English [...] still waits to be done'*  
(Peter Graves 2011: 3)





# 1 Introduction

Translation matters. It always has, of course [...] but perhaps right now translation is more important than ever – for suddenly, foreign literature seems finally to be finding its place in Britain, an island where it has previously struggled to attract substantial numbers of readers. How did this happen? It’s hard to say, but perhaps it began, thinking back, with the Scandinavian crime sagas – by Stieg Larsson, Henning Mankell, Jo Nesbø et al. – that we all began gobbling up in increasingly vast quantities around the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup> (Rachel Cooke)

The Scandinavian literary invasion is complete – at least in terms of crime fiction produced in the Nordic countries: now, in sympathetic translations, that fiction is jostling for pole position with (often resentful) British and American practitioners in the field.<sup>2</sup> (Barry Forshaw)

Given that Britain is a country where publishers, critics and readers have traditionally been reluctant to engage with translated literature, the questions of where this golden age of translation has emerged from, and why it has happened since the turn of the century, have preoccupied many in both popular and academic spheres.<sup>3</sup> Rachel Cooke, above, writing in *The Observer* in 2016, describes the current situation and speculates on its causes. Barry Forshaw, meanwhile, views the wave of Scandinavian crime fiction as a literary invasion that has reached successful completion. These popular accounts of the rise of Scandinavian literature in Britain, and others like them, highlight the widespread engagement with this subject. They also indicate many of the issues, especially the rise of Nordic Noir in the past decade, that inform this thesis’ interest in the transmission of Scandinavian books to the UK and their subsequent reception.

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<sup>1</sup> Cooke 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Forshaw 2012: 1.

<sup>3</sup> This golden age is arguably the second such age to take place in Britain. The first, during the nineteenth century, saw the enthusiastic translation of writers such as Ibsen and Strindberg, as well as the sagas. This is discussed further in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Cooke makes several interesting points that highlight the need for a scholarly narrative in this field. Her use of the originally Scandinavian term ‘saga’ is interesting.<sup>4</sup> While it is true that the origins of the saga tradition are found in the Nordic region, Cooke’s application is immediately indicative of British perceptions of Scandinavian literature and narratives, despite the fact that the vast majority of literature emanating from Scandinavia during the last century has tended towards other literary forms. Forshaw is no less culpable, evoking Viking invasions to illustrate his point. Cooke equates contemporary Scandinavian translations with the genre of crime fiction – something which Forshaw supports, disregarding almost entirely all other literary forms – yet figures such as Kjell Espmark, a member of the Swedish Academy, are keen to highlight that there is more to Scandinavian literature than genre fiction.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Cooke implies that Scandinavian crime fiction can and does serve as a gateway to other foreign literature, which is in itself problematic.<sup>6</sup>

That Cooke’s and Forshaw’s respective assertions have been inspired by the development of the Nordic Noir phenomenon is without doubt. It is more or less impossible to answer ‘the vexed question of why all things Nordic have transfixed Britain here, now, in the 2010s,’<sup>7</sup> not least on the grounds that it is, as Kim Toft Hansen and Anne Marit Waade point out, very difficult to tell what Nordic Noir actually is.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, they argue that

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<sup>4</sup> And demonstrative of how strong the influence of the first wave of Scandinavian literature in the nineteenth century was.

<sup>5</sup> Espmark 2008: 77.

<sup>6</sup> This idea has been supported by Engles in Engles 2009: 63. Venuti, on the other hand, sees the recent dominance of translated crime fiction as an ‘unprecedented development in British and American publishing’ but notes that the ‘popular audience is not crossing over to elite foreign literature’ as a result. See Venuti 2008: 154-5.

<sup>7</sup> Although Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen argue that widespread media coverage is one of the core reasons. See Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 235. More broadly, the contemporary British interest in the Nordic region can also be seen as a form of escapism at a time when social democracy in the UK is in decline, while it is perceived to be thriving across the North Sea. Stougaard-Nielsen describes this as the ‘allure of accessible difference.’ See Stougaard-Nielsen 2016.

<sup>8</sup> ‘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

Nordic Noir ‘is a concept that we should take seriously, whether it makes empirical sense or not.’<sup>9</sup>

Cooke notes an increase in the number of readers of translated fiction, and an increase in the overall consumption of books, and highlights previous issues faced by imported literature in Britain. Forshaw suggests that Scandinavian crime fiction has entered the British literary canon and is now jostling for position with domestic literature. Both Cooke’s and Forshaw’s statements are problematic, engaging as they do with the recent literary past on an over-simplified basis; they overlook the bigger picture in relation to how literary transmission works in the long term and in relation to social change. For the researcher with a broader interest in Scandinavian literature in Britain, their Nordic Noir-inspired approaches offer a useful lens through which to observe a more inclusive, long term perspective, but a more holistic approach is required. Nordic Noir has not always been present in the British literary polysystem, and the phenomenon clearly did not precipitate itself. Cooke’s and Forshaw’s focus on just part of the much bigger picture is illustrative of how challenging it is to grasp what has happened during the transmission and reception of literature from abroad, even in the recent past. It demonstrates the necessity of an account of how the current situation for Scandinavian books in the British literary polysystem has been reached, and perhaps more importantly, why, without presupposing that the answer is ‘Nordic Noir’.

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that the term Nordic Noir seems to have little analytical value and a much larger brand value.’ Hansen and Waade 2017: 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.: 18.

Cooke's assertions that translated 'foreign literature seems finally to be finding its place in Britain' and that consumption of Scandinavian crime fiction is on the increase, are both relatively accurate. In 2016, around 2 million fiction books in translation were sold in the UK, with the ten bestselling titles including three translations from Swedish. Indeed, one of the biggest drivers of this boom has been literature translated from Swedish, which represented 19% of all translated fiction sales in 2016.<sup>10</sup> Since the turn of the millennium, Britain has been in the midst of a statistically demonstrable golden age of Scandinavian translation.<sup>11</sup> While the publication of Swedish literature grew at an average annual rate of almost 20% in the first decade and a half of this century, it now appears to have peaked.<sup>12</sup> Danish literature continues to lag somewhat behind, but Norwegian still sees healthy growth, which is likely to continue over the coming years thanks to Norway's role as guest of honour at the 2019 Frankfurt Book Fair.

This recent prominence in Britain of translated literature generally, and Scandinavian books in particular, has arrived fairly late in the day. Espmark noted that both France and Germany succumbed to waves of Swedish literature during the 1980s that had yet to break some two decades later.<sup>13</sup> However, Espmark's contention is that there has been widespread suspicion of twentieth-century Scandinavian literature in the anglophone book market, and that the British market has only opened in more recent years as it has

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that just four authors, David Lagercrantz, Jonas Jonasson, Fredrik Backman and Camilla Läckberg, represented more than three quarters of sales of translated Swedish books in 2016, and indeed, Forshaw's statement that the literary invasion is in the crime fiction genre is accurate according to Swope's analysis. See Swope 2017. Figures like this should be taken with caution, as it has been noted that bestsellers distort the overall figures. See Büchler quoted in Erizanu 2016.

<sup>11</sup> See Giles 2015, Giles 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Danish and Norwegian both grew at average annual rates of 9% during the same period.

<sup>13</sup> Espmark 2008: 66-7. Espmark argues that the post-war years are a golden age for Swedish literary exports, see *ibid.*: 68. As is clear from the review of existing bibliographic studies in Chapter 4.2 of the present thesis, alongside more recent statistical analyses, this assertion is applicable to the literary exports of all three Scandinavian languages.

become clear that Scandinavian literature is able to perform a function in the British literary polysystem that is not being fulfilled domestically.<sup>14</sup>

The impetus for this thesis was an open invitation issued by a pioneer in the study of the British reception of Scandinavian literature, Peter Graves. In his 2008 Hermann Pálsson Memorial Lecture to the Scottish Society for Northern Studies, Graves noted the remarkable absence of a ‘coherent historical account of the transmission of Scandinavian literature’ adding that it ‘still waits to be done.’<sup>15</sup> It was apparent that there was a necessity to conduct a comprehensive, descriptive study of the transmission of Scandinavian literature and its reception in the UK.<sup>16</sup>

The thesis comprises five case studies, spanning the years 1917-2017, of which one is Danish (Peter Høeg’s *Miss Smilla’s Feeling for Snow*), two are Norwegian (Knut Hamsun’s *Growth of the Soil* and Agnar Mykle’s four Ash Burlefoot novels), and two are Swedish (Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö’s Martin Beck decalogy, and Stieg Larsson’s *Millennium* series, now continued by David Lagercrantz). These case subjects vary in terms of their extent, genre and era. Furthermore, the status of the authors in each case varies. Thus, in the case of Hamsun, he has, despite a challenging personal legacy, acquired the status of a canonical writer. It would appear that Sjöwall and Wahlöö are gradually assuming a similar

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.: 74-6.

<sup>15</sup> Graves 2011: 3. That Graves should have delivered this memorial lecture on the reception of Scandinavian literature in Britain is entirely fitting. The late Icelandic scholar and translator Pálsson was Professor of Icelandic Studies at the University of Edinburgh until his retirement in 1988, and was, in the words of Graves, responsible for ensuring that English-speaking readers of medieval Icelandic literature in ‘the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond did not forget it’. Pálsson arguably did more for the transmission of Icelandic literature and culture to Britain than any other single individual during the twentieth century. See Graves 2002: 14.

<sup>16</sup> This necessity was observed once again some years later by Fjågesund, who argued that there was a necessity to examine Nordic literary exports to Britain up to the present day set in a wider cultural and political context. See Fjågesund 2017: 28.

status, at least in the world of crime fiction, while the legacies of Høeg and Larsson remain unresolved. Mykle, in contrast, has been largely forgotten outside of Norway. This variety in terms of the case subjects is intentional and designed to illustrate the wide array of forms of literary transmission that occur, in order to provide overarching findings that are as representative as possible.

1917 is chosen as the point of departure for this thesis on the grounds that Knut Hamsun's Nobel Prize-winning novel *Markens Grøde* was first published in Norway in December of that year, and its resultant success gave Hamsun and his publisher renewed confidence to take on the British market.<sup>17</sup> In many respects, the English translation of Hamsun's *Growth*, published in London in 1920, represents the first example of the commercially driven nature of the Scandinavian and British publishing trades, as well as helping to illustrate the subsequent fickleness of British readers. This trajectory has continued throughout the past century, unabated, and fuelled by social turns, paradigmatic shifts and changes to the commercial situation.

Mykle had a dramatic impact on the Norwegian literary scene during the 1950s, with *Sangen om den røde rubin* the subject of a widely covered obscenity trial and subsequent ban. Having opened up the debate on sexuality in Norwegian society, Mykle's arrival on British shores in early 1960 saw him briefly fulfil a similar role in the breaking down of social barriers and hierarchies in the UK, while enjoying huge commercial success.

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<sup>17</sup> Hamsun became the first author to be awarded the Nobel Prize on the basis of one work alone (in contrast to all previous winners who were honoured for their entire oeuvre) following the Nobel committee's re-examination of the statutes of Alfred Nobel's will. See Kolloen 2009: 176-7. The jury citation states that the 1920 Nobel Prize was awarded to Hamsun 'for his monumental work, *Growth of the Soil*.' Hamsun had appeared in English as early as 1899, with an ultimately unsuccessful translation of *Hunger*. See also Graves 1998a.

Sjöwall and Wahlöö's Martin Beck decalogy, considered radical in both literary and political terms in their native Sweden, was arguably ahead of its time when published in Britain during the period from 1968 to 1977. In spite of this, the full series of ten novels was published in English translation. The books later enjoyed a renaissance in the early-twenty-first century as a result of developments in the crime fiction genre and in the cultural climate in the UK during the intervening period.

Høeg's *Smilla* is the best-known Danish book of the twentieth century, and just as in the case of Hamsun, it transformed Høeg's fortunes. *Smilla* had mass appeal with British readers, assuming a highly central role in the literary canon. Its conspicuous use of hybridity, melding postcolonialism with the more popular thriller genre, brought what Venuti has termed 'elite literature' to the masses, and it was the first true Scandinavian bestseller for British publisher Christopher MacLehose.<sup>18</sup>

The final case study considers Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy, published in Britain in 2008-09 to a rapturous reception. Rarely has the work of any author, especially in translation, enjoyed a response, from critics and readers alike, akin to that experienced in Larsson's case. In many regards, the trajectory of this hybrid series, encompassing the thriller genre with aspects of 'Crunch Lit', mirrored that of *Smilla*, especially given the involvement of publisher MacLehose.<sup>19</sup> The case study also includes a brief examination of Lagercrantz's

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<sup>18</sup> Christopher MacLehose (1940-) has worked in publishing for five decades, including two decades as publisher at translated fiction specialists Harvill Press, and now runs his own imprint as part of Quercus. MacLehose has been an avid patron of Scandinavian literature in Britain, publishing significant numbers of translated Scandinavian books, and both commercially and critically, some of his greatest successes have had Scandinavian origins.

<sup>19</sup> The Crunch Lit genre concerns events around the British financial crisis of 2007-8. See Shaw 2015: 8.



authorised *Millennium* sequels in Britain, with the most recent title published in September 2017.

These five case studies examine the likely influences at play on their transmission and subsequent successful reception in Britain, the position of Scandinavian books in the British literary polysystem, how the transmission of Scandinavian books to Britain differs from the transmission to other polysystems, and how the publication of translated books has evolved. In order to address these issues, it has been necessary to draw upon a wide range of sources, including newspapers, periodicals, archival materials, interview transcripts, industry statistics, and a range of scholarship, in order to provide a fully comprehensive and contextualised insight. Taken in combination, the case studies generate significant and original findings by identifying and analysing overarching trends that cannot be established through examining just one case subject or one source language. They both provide an historical account of Scandinavian literary transmission to Britain during the twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, and identify and analyse the significant factors involved in that process.

While literary trends rarely adhere to neat date ranges, casting the net back one hundred years enables this thesis to tell an intriguing story of commercial nous, literary innovation, and at times outright luck, all tied to social turns, paradigmatic shifts and changing reading habits in Britain. It also neatly avoids the nineteenth century, an era of heavyweights such as Andersen, Ibsen and Strindberg, thus allowing us to examine the origins of the commercial literary world and trace its trajectory to the present day.

## 2 Research Questions and Methodological Approaches

*'I believe studying multiple units would be illuminating for translation research. More fruitful results can be attained by looking at more than one unit at a time, comparing and contrasting several units from a variety of angles, concentrating on the differences as well as the similarities, and creating patterns out of them both'*  
(Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva 2001: 172)



# 2 Research Questions and Methodological Approaches

The following sets out the research questions and associated hypotheses that will be used in this study; this thesis seeks to find answers to the questions and prove or disprove these assertions. The matter of how this task should be approached, which is examined in Chapter 2.2, can be addressed in two respects. Firstly, that of practical implementation, and secondly, the theoretical framework supporting the work.

## 2.1 Research Questions

1) Which factors influence the likelihood that a book will be transmitted from a Scandinavian source culture to the British target culture?

**Hypothesis:** It is hypothesised that a book is most likely to be transmitted from Scandinavia to Britain when it has enjoyed a positive reception in its original source culture from both literary professionals and external patrons/readers.

2) Which factors influence the likelihood that a translated Scandinavian book will succeed when received by the British target culture?

**Hypothesis:** It is hypothesised that a translated Scandinavian book is likeliest to succeed in the British literary system when it fulfils a hitherto unknown requirement of the British system while also engaging with and challenging the literary norms of the target culture.

3) What position do Scandinavian books enjoy in the British literary polysystem?

**Hypothesis:** It is hypothesised that the translated Scandinavian books selected enjoy a relatively central position in the British literary system within the socio-historical context for each publication, but that the position of such books fluctuates.

4) To what extent is the transmission and reception of Scandinavian books to the UK influenced by internal and external factors?

**Hypothesis:** It is hypothesised that Scandinavian literature is often successfully transmitted to the UK due to paradigmatic shifts that open up the British literary polysystem to outside influence. However, the role played by source-based agents, such as publishers and grant-giving bodies, can also be significant.

5) To what extent is the transmission of a Scandinavian book to the British target culture comparable to its transmission to another target culture?

**Hypothesis:** It is hypothesised that Scandinavian literature that is successfully transmitted to the UK has enjoyed success in its original source culture, and that it is likely to have enjoyed success in other target cultures that are comparable in terms of centrality to the UK's literary system. This pattern is likely to be discernible across the spread of case studies undertaken.

6) To what extent does the British reception of the selected case study books reflect the evolution of publishing and reading trends?

**Hypothesis:** It is hypothesised that the case studies selected for this thesis reflect the evolution of reading habits on sociocultural grounds and changes to the publishing industry through increasing commercialisation of literature, the developing appreciation of a range of genres, the emergence of new, hybrid genres, changes in internal and external influences, and new modes of consumption.

## 2.2 Methodology

### 2.2.1 Scope

Graves' call for a 'coherent historical account of the transmission of Scandinavian literature' to Britain represents a gargantuan task, which has already been partially begun.<sup>20</sup> This researcher's response to Graves will necessarily be limited by what can be realistically achieved within the confines of a doctoral thesis, making selection of a specified period of time for examination imperative. The selection of the beginning of the period is driven by the common trend of using the First World War to delineate seemingly between eras of the old and the new. Randall Stevenson notes that despite endeavours amongst British literary figures in the Edwardian era to rebel against Victorian conventions, in the years after the First World War they seemed in retrospect to be conservatives, while the war years through to the early 1920s heralded the supplanting of the Victorian/Edwardian paradigm with new conventions.<sup>21</sup> While Stevenson takes the view that the war itself was not the sole or primary cause of this literary shift, he notes that along with imperial decline, the changing times made their mark on British literature, bringing to a close a long nineteenth century of literary attitudes. In this respect, it seems appropriate to set the start date of this thesis' scope at the end of the First World War. 1917 specifically has been chosen as the point of departure for this thesis on the grounds that Hamsun's novel *Grødt* was first published in Norway in December of that year. The selection of an end date is driven by the recent 'Nordic cultural wave' that Britain has undergone since the turn of the millennium, as well as the bibliographic data provided by the Literature Across

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<sup>20</sup> Graves 2011: 3. There are in existence accounts of the transmission of various forms of Scandinavian literature to Britain in the past, including the sagas and the classics of the nineteenth century. See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

<sup>21</sup> Stevenson 1993: 28-9.

Frontiers (LAF) project as viewed from a Scandinavian perspective.<sup>22</sup> This will enable the researcher to draw conclusions based on contemporary events and consider the near future of Scandinavian literature in Britain. The result is a period comprising one century that encompasses a number of social turns or paradigmatic shifts in British society and reading habits.

In limiting the scope of this thesis, an easier study would arguably be facilitated through reducing Graves' posited coverage of all Scandinavia to one of its constituent countries and source literary systems.<sup>23</sup> However, this fails to take into account the inherent connections between the three Scandinavian countries both culturally and linguistically, as well as the collective attitude towards the region from the British target culture. Indeed, there are sound arguments for covering the full Nordic region as Charlotte Berry does.<sup>24</sup> This, however, leaves a project with too wide a scope and, critically, means that there are source languages, namely Finnish, Faroese, Icelandic and Sámi, with which the researcher has no familiarity.<sup>25</sup> In this respect, it is therefore most appropriate to retain a Scandinavian focus rather than scaling the focus up or down, while also ensuring fidelity to the original *raison d'être* of this thesis to contribute to the account of the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain.

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<sup>22</sup> Giles 2015, Giles 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Recent studies to have done so include Broomé 2014c, Goodwin-Andersson 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Berry 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Finland-Swedish is an oddity in this regard. Tia Strandén highlights the difficulty for Finland-Swedish literature in leaving Finland, making it difficult to compare it to the literatures of Sweden, Norway and Denmark. See Strandén 2013. Furthermore, Berry has examined the role played by the most obvious candidate for study in the Finland-Swedish context, Tove Jansson, at some length. See Berry 2014a.

### 2.2.2 Proposed Method

In practical terms, the most suitable method for answering the given research questions in a competent fashion is through the use of case studies. This will ensure that the research is feasible, while also complementing existing scholarship, which typically applies this type of methodology to engage with this kind of work.<sup>26</sup> While bibliographic research is, in universal terms, equally important, it should be noted that there is already a significant volume of existing data in this regard that provides a general overview to the researcher. Case studies are best used when addressing questions of how and why, which are prevalent in the questions this thesis seeks to answer.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva pinpoints that bibliographic surveys are far better suited for answering questions of who, what, where and so on.<sup>28</sup> She also notes that case studies have become one of the most common research methods in use in the discipline of Translation Studies, which is also arguably the case elsewhere in literary and cultural studies.<sup>29</sup> While she seeks to cast new light on the role being played by case research in Translation Studies, there are no fundamental objections to its use. Given this, the selection of case studies as the methodology for answering the research questions is justified.

The following sets out to foreground what case studies are and how they will be applied in this thesis. The case element of a case study is defined by Bill Gillham as ‘a unit of human activity embedded in the real world; which can only be studied or understood in context; which exists in the here and now; that merges in with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw.’<sup>30</sup> Such a unit may be anything from an individual up to

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<sup>26</sup> For instance, the British reception of Selma Lagerlöf is the subject of a case study. See Graves 1998b.

<sup>27</sup> Yin 1994: 1.

<sup>28</sup> Susam-Sarajeva 2009: 39.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: 37.

<sup>30</sup> Gillham 2000: 1.



a large-scale community. In the case of Translation Studies, a case can therefore encompass anything from an individual text in translation to an author, institution or even a full literary system. Case studies may, in turn, be examined either as single case studies or multiple case studies: turning once again to the Translation Studies paradigm, the hypothetical, textual study of Hamsun's *Growth* in English translation constitutes a single case study, while a comparison of the English and German translations of the same title would represent a multiple case study.

Case studies are used to answer specific research questions that cannot be adequately answered with just one source of evidence. Indeed, alongside the flexibility outlined above, the use of multiple sources of evidence is the characteristic that makes the case study a strong tool. As a qualitative methodology, it allows the researcher to investigate situations where little is known, with the possibility that further research may follow.<sup>31</sup> The benefits of the case study as a mode of investigation, particularly when compared with bibliographic study, include the opportunity to gain in-depth insight into a subject that would not be obtained by other means, while in the case of a study of transmission and reception such as this, the focus of case studies on context is especially useful.<sup>32</sup>

At present, multiple case studies are a rarity in Translation Studies, but offer considerable advantages over single-case studies.<sup>33</sup> As outlined above, the obvious advantage is the opportunity for general comparisons to be made. More specifically to Translation Studies, Susam-Sarajeva makes the point that the multiple case study approach was proposed and

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.: 11. A straightforward example of this kind of research continuation can be seen in the case of Graves and Fjågesund, where the latter develops the initial case study by the former, expanding the overview and providing some new findings. See Graves 1998a, Fjågesund 2009a.

<sup>32</sup> Susam-Sarajeva 2009: 39.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: 43-4.

dismissed by theoretician Gideon Toury due to its perceived difficulty. However, Susam-Sarajeva's contention is that a multiple case study approach is 'illuminating for translation research. More fruitful results can be attained by looking at more than one unit at a time, comparing and contrasting several units from a variety of angles, concentrating on the difference as well as the similarities' and that such an approach permits the researcher to create and identify patterns, most pertinently in this case of transmission and reception.<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately, Susam-Sarajeva makes the argument that case studies are highly suitable for addressing issues of significance, and providing an account of the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain certainly falls into this category.<sup>35</sup> The greatest benefit offered by the case study is the power to illuminate the contextual situation of cases in a systemic manner that clearly answers the research questions. This thesis will therefore use a multiple case study approach examining a number of units in order to answer the research questions.

### 2.2.3 Case Study Selection Criteria

Having established that a multiple case study is to be used as the methodology, the next decision for the researcher in their pursuit of answers to the research questions is what the subject of each case study should be. In determining which Scandinavian books or authors should form these units of study in the next step, it is necessary to identify which books are best used to illustrate the general transmission and reception of Scandinavian literature in Britain. The overall aim is to select books or authors that enable the researcher to answer the research questions most adequately: for example, question four calls for the

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<sup>34</sup> Susam-Sarajeva 2001: 171-2.

<sup>35</sup> Susam-Sarajeva 2009: 54-5.

selection of cases that are likely to generate findings, whether positive or negative, in relation to its hypothesis. Therefore, the selection of books or authors who have been, or have at least appeared to be, prominent or significant at paradigmatic shifts either in their source culture or in the British target culture, or both, is preferable. Several instances of this will allow for comparison, as well as drawing conclusions that permit generalisation in relation to Scandinavian literature as a whole. While it is clearly not plausible to select cases that accurately represent the complexity of a multifaceted reality in every respect, it seems reasonable to accept that books and authors selected on the basis of significance at paradigmatic shifts will be reasonably representative without being reductionist towards Scandinavian literature in transmission to Britain as a whole.

Representativeness is an important consideration in choosing case subjects. It is only possible to answer the research questions using the findings of the case studies if they are broadly representative of Scandinavian books. They should all come from Scandinavia – with an equal distribution across the three countries, all should have been translated not only to English but to other languages, and be standard book-length works of fiction. There should be a relatively even distribution across the one hundred years covered by the thesis in order to provide generalisable findings that trace changes in the publishing industry over the full period. Case studies should also reflect the changes in approach to genre, and the increasing popularity in genre fiction, over the period. Furthermore, a spread of author backgrounds in terms of their experience and longevity in their home market is desirable, namely, not all authors should be debut writers, or alternatively, highly experienced. It is also important to note that case subjects must have had an impact in Britain that can be identified, examined and analysed. If there is no discernible impact, then there is no case study. Furthermore, as part of the remit to account for the

transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain, it is clear that in some cases there should be clear development upon existing scholarship if the circumstances merit it, while others should endeavour to fill gaps in knowledge where possible. In these cases, the original and descriptive research embodied in a case may subsequently form the basis of another researcher's future work.

## 2.2.4 Final Case Study Selection

Five case studies have been conducted. These are as follows:

- *Growth of the Soil* by Knut Hamsun (originally published in Norwegian in 1917, first published in English translation in Britain in 1920).
- Agnar Mykle's Ash Burlefoot novels (comprising *Lasso round the Moon*, *The Song of the Red Ruby*, *The Hotel Room* and *Rubicon*, originally published in Norwegian in 1951-1965, published in English translations in Britain in 1960-1966).
- The *Story of a Crime* decalogy by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö (originally published in Swedish in 1965-1975, published in English translations in Britain in 1967-1977).
- *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* by Peter Høeg (originally published in Danish in 1992, published in English translation in Britain in 1993).
- The *Millennium* trilogy by Stieg Larsson (originally published in Swedish 2005-2007, published in English translations in Britain in 2008-2009), continued by David Lagercrantz (2015-).

The distribution between the Scandinavian countries is proportional to their respective literary outputs in Britain since the turn of the millennium.<sup>36</sup> In two cases, individual novels have been selected. In the case of Hamsun, *Growth* resulted in the award of the Nobel Prize and merits consideration on its own, while Høeg's *Smilla* is also considered to be a seminal novel. In both instances, it will also be demonstrated that the remainder of the authors' respective oeuvres had decidedly less impact on the British literary polystem.

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<sup>36</sup> Giles 2018, Trentacosti and Nicholls 2017.

In the case of Mykle, Sjöwall and Wahlöö, and Larsson, the respective series have been received collectively in Britain and must therefore be examined collectively. In Mykle's case, it happens to represent his entire novel-based oeuvre, while Larsson died before he had the opportunity to write further books – the consideration of their entire oeuvres is a result of these circumstances. In the case of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, both writers have authored other works of fiction, which are not considered. This approach ensures that a broad range of authors are covered.

The cases are well distributed in the century covered by the thesis, while there are two examples of literary fiction and three examples of genre fiction. All represent different paradigmatic shifts in British society. Hamsun represents the new dawn that emerged after the end of the First World War, Mykle the sexual liberation that took hold of post-war Britain from 1960 onwards, Sjöwall and Wahlöö the move towards genre fiction represented by the continued breakdown of social barriers, Høeg the new uncertainties brought about by the end of the Cold War and the impending millennium, and Larsson the continued uncertainties in the credit crunch era.

This diverse range of case studies will enable the researcher to identify trends relating to the transmission to and reception of Scandinavian books in Britain, mapping success factors in these processes and focusing on the context of these books once they make landfall in Britain's literary system. This also plays into an aim of examining the impact of Scandinavian literature on the British literary polysystem, while contributing to book history by providing descriptive research tracing the path of specific works or groups of works and their arrival in Britain.

# 3 Theoretical Framework

*Function-oriented [Descriptive Translation Studies] is not interested in the description of translations in themselves, but in the description of their function in the recipient socio-cultural situation: it is a study of contexts rather than texts.'*  
(James S. Holmes 2004: 177)



### 3 Theoretical Framework

The twenty-first century has seen a significant increase in the number of sociological historiographical studies of translation,<sup>37</sup> and this study will contribute to this field through research to generate findings in response to the niche identified by Graves, above. While Graves' statement is in itself an invitation to conduct a descriptive study of Scandinavian literature in transmission to Britain and its reception through the use of, in particular, the function-oriented strand of Descriptive Translation Studies, the theoretical approach requires further support in order to address the research questions adequately. This thesis proposes the use of a multiple case study as the vehicle for answering the research questions, while the following theoretical framework sets out the conceptual foundations of this approach. It is proposed that the framework will draw from a range of different concepts to tailor the approach required in this particular instance. The framework is primarily based on the work of James S. Holmes and Itamar Even-Zohar, both of whom have inspired further work by Toury.<sup>38</sup> However, it will also draw upon other theories from various fields. The largely descriptive approach is primarily intended to allow the researcher to act as a translation sociologist and book historian, rather than devoting specific focus to the process of translation itself or the inherent, textual content that signifies the outcome of the process. The below sets out the constituent parts of this thesis' theoretical framework.

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<sup>37</sup> Munday 2016: 123.

<sup>38</sup> The use of Even-Zohar's literary polysystem theory in conjunction with Holmes' and Toury's work on the function of translations in their target context by researchers has become commonplace over the past decades. See Merkle 2008: 176.



### 3.1 Descriptive Translation Studies

Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) was initially introduced by way of a 1972 paper by translator James S. Holmes given in Copenhagen.<sup>39</sup> However, Holmes' paper languished unpublished following its delivery in 1972, and only received wide exposure in its original and unedited form for the first time when it was published posthumously in 1988.<sup>40</sup> Toury argued that it offered the most fruitful conceptualisation of Translation Studies, and suggested that its initial non-publication was to the detriment of many scholars in the two decades when it was unavailable.<sup>41</sup>

The challenge facing the nascent discipline of Translation Studies identified by Holmes was that there was 'no consensus regarding the types of models to be tested, the kinds of methods to be applied, the varieties of terminology to be used. More than that, there is not even likemindedness about the contours of the field, the problem set, the discipline as such.'<sup>42</sup> Put plainly, an influx of researchers from a multitude of other disciplines were approaching the study of translation in all its forms from a plethora of different perspectives.

Holmes stated that Translation Studies research is designed 'to describe the phenomena of translating and translation(s) as they manifest themselves in the world of our experience'.<sup>43</sup> He posited that three different branches of research existed: theoretical, descriptive and applied. The former two were pure in nature. Focussing on DTS, Holmes proposed that this branch of the discipline would comprise three elements. Firstly,

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<sup>39</sup> Holmes 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Holmes 1988.

<sup>41</sup> Toury 2012: 2.

<sup>42</sup> Holmes 2004: 173.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*: 176.

product-oriented DTS, which would describe existing translations – in simple terms the analysis of translated texts.<sup>44</sup> Process-oriented DTS, in turn, related to the process or act of translation, attempting to identify the complex processes taking place in the mind of the translator.<sup>45</sup> Finally, Holmes proposed function-oriented DTS (fDTS), which ‘is not interested in the description of translations in themselves, but in the description of their function in the recipient socio-cultural situation: it is a study of contexts rather than texts.’<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, he argued that the examination of which texts were and were not translated would permit the development of ‘socio-translation studies’. Holmes emphasised that the relationship between Descriptive, Theoretical and Applied Translation Studies is dialectical, with each supplying materials for the others.<sup>47</sup> The merit of this conceptualisation of Translation Studies is the division of a large and complex set of frameworks and approaches into manageable units, ensuring that the number of foci for a study is not limitless.

In his seminal *Descriptive Translation Studies – and Beyond*, originally published in 1995 and revised in 2012, Toury set out to expand upon Holmes’ 1972 paper by outlining how the descriptive branch proposed by the latter might be used as a research framework. Indeed, Holmes had identified one aspect of his proposed model for Translation Studies that was lacking – the ‘meta-theoretical’ dimension, which concerned which methods and models were best used to achieve the most meaningful results.<sup>48</sup> Toury’s contribution was partially in response to this perceived need, as well as to what he saw as a marked tendency towards

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.: 177.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.: 183.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Applied Translation Studies over the decades since the 1960s, which had led to a ‘preference for prescriptivism at the expense of description, explanation and prediction.’<sup>49</sup>

Toury did attempt to provide development on what DTS was to achieve: ‘One of the objectives of descriptive studies is precisely to confront the position a certain translation (or group of translations) has actually assumed in the host culture with the position it was intended to have, and offer explanations for the perceived differences.’<sup>50</sup> The three branches of DTS posited by Holmes are, according to Toury, fully justified, and delimit legitimate and individual fields of study.<sup>51</sup> Theo Hermans notes that its major advantage is that it encourages researchers ‘to look at translations as they had turned out in reality and in history, not as some armchair critic thought they should have turned out.’<sup>52</sup> This pragmatic approach allows researchers to study translations as both historical and cultural phenomena.

A crucial addition to the DTS model was Toury’s argument that a critical starting point in any descriptive study was the acceptance of translations as facts of the target culture, along with the accompanying assumption that regardless of function or status, these were inherently tied to the target culture and reflected its systemic formulation.<sup>53</sup> At times, Toury asserts that translations can even form their own sub-system within the target culture.<sup>54</sup> Hermans regarded this particular element of Toury’s approach to be somewhat

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<sup>49</sup> Toury 2012: xii.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.: 8.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.: 5.

<sup>52</sup> Hermans 1995: 215-16.

<sup>53</sup> Toury 2012: 18.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.: 23.

questionable, but on the whole both useful and revolutionary to researchers, who were no longer obliged to justify the very presence of translations in a target culture at all.<sup>55</sup>

One issue with Holmes' approach highlighted by Toury is that each element of DTS is very much in isolation. Toury emphasises that 'functions, processes and products are not just "related", in some obscure way, but rather, form one complex whole whose constitutive parts are hardly separable from one another except for methodical (and, yes, convenience) purposes.'<sup>56</sup> It is therefore necessary to amend an approach using just one of these elements to ensure that the complex interrelations between all three are taken fully into account. This seems a fittingly pragmatic amendment to Holmes' original proposition, and is very much in line with the overall practical approach adopted by Toury.

Other flaws to DTS have been identified: for instance, the degree of familiarity with a target culture that a researcher has. Kirsten Malmkjær highlighted that target-oriented approaches can cause difficulties when carrying out analysis, because it is possible that an object of description, however odd, may comply with the norms or principles of the target culture.<sup>57</sup>

With regard to how descriptive studies are to be concluded, Toury argued that it is the duty of practitioners, rather than scholars, to draw points of action from research

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<sup>55</sup> Hermans 1995: 216.

<sup>56</sup> Toury 2012: 5.

<sup>57</sup> Malmkjær 2004: 142. In simple terms, lack of familiarity with a target culture will impact any research analysis. Malmkjær largely examines target cultures that are foreign to her personally, highlighting the potential importance of a researcher's own perspectives on the target culture in question in any such research.

conclusions that allow them to effect change in the surrounding world, rather than vice versa.<sup>58</sup> He did not see it as the role of the researcher to inform agents such as translators or publishers about what they should be doing or doing differently.

The importance of DTS has risen markedly in recent years, as demonstrated by the publication of *Beyond Descriptive Translation Studies*, a Festschrift in honour of Toury that examines the multifaceted impact of his framework on research both within and outside of Translation Studies.<sup>59</sup> Denise Merkle notes that through anchoring his work in a sociological background, Toury has enabled Translation Studies scholars to utilise advances in other research fields such as psychology.<sup>60</sup>

A general DTS approach is beneficial as it allows the researcher to examine the likelihood of books being transmitted from Scandinavia to Britain by means of tracing the reasons why a book is transmitted,<sup>61</sup> rather than solely focusing on the way in which this process takes place. While the reasons why a book is transmitted are inherently linked to the procedural element of it taking place, DTS also mandates examination of the source-culture situation in order to provide socioculturally-grounded descriptive findings. The majority of case studies selected enjoy a degree of prominence; that of Mykle is a particular instance where purely descriptive work has much to offer scholarship. To date, coverage of Mykle has tended to focus on textual and literary analysis, primarily in Norwegian, with little scholarship detailing the transmission of Mykle's work to Britain despite its

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<sup>58</sup> Toury 2012: 11.

<sup>59</sup> Pym, et al. 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Merkle 2008: 176-7.

<sup>61</sup> In practical terms, through examining publishing decisions, reflecting upon involvement of a range of individuals, and taking into account the sociocultural reasons for any such transmission.

importance at the time. While the overall theoretical approach will hone this study, it is also worthwhile for the simple reason that it has not been covered adequately in the past.

### 3.2 Function-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies

This project will rely partly on Holmes' original conceptualisation of DTS, with a particular emphasis on fDTS. While Holmes suggests it may also be termed 'socio-translation studies', it is more commonly known as the sociology and historiography of translation, and encompasses areas of research such as the study of the translation and reception of writers or canons between one language and another.<sup>62</sup>

The manner in which Toury developed DTS in his writings meant that while he retained a cursory interest in fDTS as part of his model, his emphasis on leveraging the interrelatedness of the three branches of DTS meant that, inevitably, some elements fell by the wayside. In the case of fDTS, Toury's interpretation of Holmes' call for 'socio-translation studies' is to use it as an approach to the text and translation, rather than engaging with contexts. However, its use as originally proposed – to examine the target culture and the reception of translated literature – is well established, albeit not always expressed in such terms.

In terms of Scandinavian literary transmission, examples of this approach are found in the work of Graves and, in particular, in Berry's work on Nordic children's literature.<sup>63</sup>

This approach has been adopted elsewhere, although the extent to which researchers elaborate on their use of Holmes' function-oriented approach is mixed. Margaret Brown,

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<sup>62</sup> Munday 2016: 21-2.

<sup>63</sup> Best typified by Graves 2011: 2, Berry 2013: 54.

for instance, outlines a framework largely reliant on reader reception theory, but her work is conspicuously a reception study drawing upon Holmes.<sup>64</sup> Studies of translated children's literature elsewhere seem to have found Holmes' approach a particularly fruitful approach, with recent non-Scandinavian examples including Li Li's study of China and Haidee Kruger's recent study of South Africa.<sup>65</sup> Edwin Gentzler even identified a project at the University of Tel Aviv during the late 1970s tracing the translation of foreign literature into Hebrew, worked on by Toury, as an example of fDTS used in this way.<sup>66</sup>

The fDTS approach, in particular, is useful as it governs the focus of the researcher to identify and describe the reception of a transmitted Scandinavian book in the British target culture along with its situation once it is established. This directly connects this theoretical strand to the research questions pertaining to the reception and position of Scandinavian literature in Britain. However, it is clear that additional theoretical lenses are required in order to address the research questions of this thesis adequately. Indeed, the researchers outlined above have all largely opted to integrate other theories from outside of Translation Studies into their own methodological frameworks, and this thesis will do the same.

### 3.3 Polysystem Theory

Polysystem theory was originally developed by Itamar Even-Zohar, using as its basis principles drawn from the Formalist movement in 1920s Russia.<sup>67</sup> This approach argues that a literary work should not be studied in isolation, but rather in a social, cultural,

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<sup>64</sup> Brown 1990.

<sup>65</sup> Li 2006: iii, Kruger 2012: 270.

<sup>66</sup> Gentzler 1993: 125-6.

<sup>67</sup> Munday 2016: 93.

literary and historical framework that systematises the subject at hand and also examines the ongoing struggle for centrality in such systems. Formalism ignored peripheral literary systems, such as genre fiction, children's literature and translated literature. Even-Zohar set out to rectify this, with his argument that translated literature functions in a system of its own.

Even-Zohar's article 'The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem',<sup>68</sup> the revised edition of which is dedicated to the memory of Holmes, is another theoretical attempt to develop on the premises set out in DTS, with a particular focus on the target culture. Even-Zohar argued that Translation Studies had for too long been product-oriented, examining individual translations without looking at the bigger picture. Even-Zohar posited that translations could form their own literary system. 'What kind of relations might there be among translated works, which are presented as completed facts, imported from other literatures, detached from their home contexts and consequently neutralised from the point of view of center-and-periphery struggles?'<sup>69</sup> More specifically, he posited that the selection of translations and adoption of literary norms are contingent on the target culture, rather than the source culture. The peripherality or centrality of a translated literature polysystem is dependent on the constellation of the host culture.

Even-Zohar argued that translated literature was potentially the most active of the literary polysystems and played a key role in shaping the very centre of a national literary polysystem. The introduction of foreign works allows new features previously unseen in

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<sup>68</sup> Even-Zohar 2004.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*: 192.



a polysystem to be introduced. The key instances in which the translated literature polysystem could influence the target culture were when a literature was deemed not to have crystallised, when a literature was deemed peripheral in itself, and finally in the event of turns, crises or vacuums in the literary system. In the case of the first, the benefit of translation is that the home polysystem benefits from the experience of other literatures in seeking to develop and expand itself. In the case of the second, the same is applicable, with peripheral areas of the national literature able to benefit from the experience of other literatures where the corresponding area holds a more central position in the literary polysystem. In the case of the third, the target culture is ripe to receive whatever it can.

For the most part, it should be added, Even-Zohar contended that despite the opportunity for influence, translated literature continued to constitute a peripheral system in the target culture, and that in many instances it could even become backward and conservative in nature, holding back the wider literary polysystem by reinforcing the status quo. By example, he argued that this is the case in the Anglo-American literary system, where translated literature holds an extremely peripheral position. Several of the case studies in this thesis will challenge this assertion, demonstrating that the role of translated literature from Scandinavia need not be one of extreme peripherality. Ultimately, the relationship between the target culture's centre and its translated literature is variable.

One of the advantages of using polysystem theory is that it easily allows for integration with social, economic and historical study – namely, an examination of context, in much the same way that Holmes described fDTS.<sup>70</sup> It also provides an approach that permits

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<sup>70</sup> Gentzler 1993: 120.

the study of translation within the literary and cultural systems in which it is found, rather than in isolation, while simultaneously separating the translation from its home culture and allowing analysis of the external factors at play in the target culture.

Even-Zohar's ideas on polysystem theory and translated literature have fed back into DTS. Toury highlights that translation is often a target culture's endeavour to fill a gap when it identifies such a gap, or alternatively the presence of a non-gap in another culture that the target culture has reason to emulate.<sup>71</sup> In the case of this thesis, it is obvious that fDTS and polysystem theory are natural bedfellows in a study of this type, which is perhaps unsurprising as Even-Zohar and Toury worked together at the same institution for many years.

Polysystem theory offers two crucial ideas. Firstly, that analysis in a manner that is not text-specific is both beneficial and appropriate. Secondly, that 'a text does not reach the highest hierarchical level within a given culture because of some inherent eternal beauty or verity, but because of the nature of the polysystem of the receiving culture and its social/literary historical circumstances.'<sup>72</sup> While, as previously discussed, DTS prescribes a descriptive approach, polysystem theory allows the researcher to determine where in the target literary system a translated book fits on an individual basis when examining its reception, while also approaching the issue of the position of a canon of Scandinavian literature in translation in more general terms. Similarly, the research question pertaining to the influence of internal and external factors on the transmission of Scandinavian books benefits from a polysystem-based approach: it is hypothesised that the most

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<sup>71</sup> Toury 2012: 21-22.

<sup>72</sup> Gentzler 1993: 124.

successful instances of literary transmission are during paradigmatic shifts in Britain that leave the polysystem weak and in need of outside influences, as outlined above. The studies examining Høeg's *Smilla* and Hamsun's *Growth* are both cases in point, arguably appearing in publication in Britain at points in the cultural continuum where the target system was especially receptive to outside influences. In these instances, polysystem theory can be used to describe the nature of apparently demand-driven translations in the British literary polysystem.

Polysystem theory cannot be used in this thesis' theoretical model in isolation. There are various criticisms of polysystem theory. Most prominent amongst them, Edwin Gentzler opines that Even-Zohar's approach is potentially too simplistic.<sup>73</sup> He develops this strand, arguing that the theory has a 'tendency to overgeneralise and establish universal laws', often on the basis of very little actual evidence.<sup>74</sup> Gentzler also contends that Even-Zohar is overly accepting of the Formalist framework, wilfully allowing concepts such as 'literariness' to persist without clear definition or consideration of non-literary polysystems.<sup>75</sup> Even-Zohar's occasional reluctance to consider the real-life constraints on books and his propensity for stating subjective views as fact do little to persuade Gentzler. However, in a defence of polysystem theory, Nam Fung Chang argues that allegations of over-simplicity in relation to polysystem theory are the result of interpretations that are in themselves also too simplistic.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.: 120.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.: 121.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.: 122.

<sup>76</sup> Chang 2011: 343. Chang argues that some have ignored later revisions to polysystem theory made by Even-Zohar and others, while all too often theory takes the blame for the fault of practice.

In the case of this thesis, the benefits of polysystem theory in assisting the researcher to address the research questions outweigh the concerns raised by scholars such as Gentzler. While these may be legitimate, Chang's suggestion that the best approach in using polysystem theory is to ensure that it is used with other complementary theories offers the best compromise.<sup>77</sup> This thesis will therefore adopt polysystem theory, but also seek to partner it with other suitable theories to make it more robust.

### 3.4 Heilbron's Sociology of Translation

Inspired by the efforts of polysystem theorists, Johan Heilbron's work conceptualises the international book translation market as a cultural world system based on a core-periphery system in broadly sociological terms, much like that posited by Even-Zohar, and works on the crystallisation of a clearer sociology of translation.<sup>78</sup> In setting out a series of observations of what he considers norms of the international system of translation, Heilbron emphasises that the system is inherently dynamic, with changes taking place at all times.<sup>79</sup> Additional observations made by Heilbron include the hierarchical nature of the translated book system, contingent on central, semi-peripheral and peripheral languages, which once again bears likenesses to the theoretical conception of polysystem theory.<sup>80</sup> According to Heilbron, books that are translated to one central language are likelier to be translated both to other central languages and to peripheral languages.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, canonisation in source cultures is often affected by performance of books in central target cultures, while the more central a language is, the less important translations

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Heilbron 2000.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.: 14-15.

<sup>80</sup> It is interesting to note that both Danish and Swedish are identified as semi-peripheral languages, along with Spanish, Italian, Polish and Czech, as they all represent 1-3% of translated books globally. See *ibid.*: 14.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*: 16.

from that language become.<sup>82</sup> Two cases in point are those of Sjöwall/Wahlöö and Høeg: the canonisation of the Martin Beck decalogy and *Smilla* in Sweden and Denmark, respectively, was accelerated by the strength of their performances in Germany and the anglophone markets, respectively. Heilbron concludes that examination of a target culture in the manner originally proposed by Holmes requires consideration of the target culture within the context of an international system, meaning in practice that to understand the British situation requires some degree of understanding of, for example, the contemporaneous German and American situations.

In practical methodological terms, Heilbron's approach underpins the approach required to answer several of the research questions posed. In particular, it is especially useful in tracing the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain, as well as examining the reception and situation of books upon arrival. In relation to the actual transmission, Heilbron's systematisation of book translation systems on the basis of hierarchies is especially useful. By determining the relative position of each respective source culture in relation to the British literary system, as well as the position of the Scandinavian sphere as a whole, it is possible to reflect on the likelihood of a book being transmitted on the basis not only of source-culture context, but also the relative peripherality of the source language as seen against the hyper-central English language. The study of Mykle's books is illustrative in this respect, given his huge impact in literary terms in his native Norway, the researcher must take this into account in an evaluation of the causes of transmission. Heilbron's model is also beneficial in the investigation of the reception and position of Scandinavian books in the British setting, granting the researcher licence to compare and

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.: 18-20.

contrast the socio-historical context in Britain with that of other, competing target cultures, as well as the source culture. This becomes particularly useful, and is more important, when a book or books have failed to live up to expectations in the British literary system on the basis of their position in the source culture, as detailed above. For example, the case of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's decalogy, published in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, is an excellent case in point. The contemporaneous reception of the series in Britain was not all that might be expected following comparison with the source culture, and it is therefore necessary to compare and contrast this with its performance in other target cultures.

Effectively, any descriptive work focussing on one target culture by means of a study of contexts requires additional work examining the wider, international context. Heilbron's model provides ammunition to tackle four out of the five research questions posed. Furthermore, Heilbron provides good overall justification for a study of this kind: changes taking place in dynamic systems need to be identified, and the transfer of books from the Scandinavian languages to a hyper-central language such as English is systemically remarkable. Descriptive work to trace these and subsequently identify and discuss the causes of such changes is necessary. While enhancing descriptive work and directing it to answer specific research questions through the provision of a more systematised worldview on book translation, it also works well hand-in-hand with polysystem theory, which imposes structure on the otherwise seemingly random world of book translation.

### 3.5 Book History

It is also helpful to draw upon the discipline of Book History in defining the nature and scope of the theoretical framework for this study. Books as products, rather than texts

themselves, are, as Finkelstein and McCleery note, ‘important vehicles for ideas that often challenge established norms and authorities’.<sup>83</sup> This description is not at all at odds with the approach outlined above drawing upon polysystem theory. While the thesis more generally seeks to draw conclusions from the findings of a small number of case studies that can be applied in more general terms to Scandinavian literature as a whole over a greater period of time, this is only possible through engaging in Book History studies of individual books.

Book History first began to take shape in the 1960s and 1970s under the auspices of scholar Don McKenzie. The key aspect of his research, certainly with regard to this study, was his expansion of what should be under examination: McKenzie took the view that all too often, literary criticism ignored external elements; the authors of bibliographic studies were too happy to omit sociological context; and that there was general ignorance of how books, once produced, entered circulation and were consumed by reading members of the public.<sup>84</sup>

In 1982, Robert Darnton surveyed the then-nascent field of Book History and declared that its approach was ‘interdisciplinarity run riot’.<sup>85</sup> He proposed an oversimplified general model for the analysis of books entering a literary system, termed as a ‘communications circuit that runs from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. The reader completes the circuit, because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition’.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery 2005: 2.

<sup>84</sup> For further details of McKenzie’s approach, see McKenzie 2002.

<sup>85</sup> Darnton 1982: 67.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

The one advantage this offered was the shift in focus from literary content to material aspects. However, Darnton's model was flawed in a number of respects: the use of the eighteenth century as the basis for the circuit failed to take account of developments in later centuries; it was very individualistic; and it appeared to exclude contextual elements from the primary approach.<sup>87</sup> Despite Darnton's attempt to move beyond the riot caused by his predecessors like McKenzie, his approach did not offer sufficient improvement.

Barker and Adams felt that Darnton was overly reductionist in his approach and too focused on the personal agents involved rather than the processes in more general terms.<sup>88</sup> They proposed a replacement model that incorporated publishing events. Their alternative model was based on the five life events of a text (publishing, manufacturing, distribution, reception and survival). This model is somewhat stronger than Darnton's, especially as it more effectively takes account of changing contexts and developing trends.

The use of a limited Book History approach is natural: the study is, to a degree, an examination of publishing and Book History. It is therefore beneficial to form an understanding of the most common theories in the discipline in the shape of Darnton and Barker and Adams. While Don McKenzie, working at the same time as Holmes was setting out the principles of Translation Studies, sought to expand the peripheries of Book History, with an emphasis on sociological contexts, the approaches of Darnton and Barker and Adams are arguably focused to a great extent on the process and product, rather than the function of books. That being said, it is well worth examining the objects

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<sup>87</sup> In much the same way that Bourdieu failed to accurately comprehend the role of various agents in contemporary, commercial publishing.

<sup>88</sup> Barker and Adams 1993.



of study from this angle given Toury's declaration that the three elements of DTS were not separable, but intrinsically linked. Finkelstein and McCleery emphasise that there is much to learn about the relationship between print and culture, and the respective impact of each on the other.<sup>89</sup> They also highlight the outright difficulty of identifying the way in which books affect readers differently in different contexts, while arguing strongly in favour of the importance of seeking to do so.

The study of translation within the framework of Book History is relatively unusual, but there are no good grounds why this should be the case.<sup>90</sup> Identifying and outlining the transmission of Scandinavian books to Britain, is in itself, very straightforward Book History that does not require a strong theoretical slant. However, seeking to determine the odds of success in reception for Scandinavian books in English translation calls for a multifaceted approach that not only considers the Darnton communications circuit, but also the events-based nature of publishing, in order to identify the reader response and the causes thereof. This specific application of a Book History approach in response to the matter of reception is clearly foreshadowed by McKenzie's pronouncements on the nascent discipline and developed by both Darnton's conceptualisation and Adams and Barker's development thereupon. Finkelstein and McCleery, on the basis of this work, highlight the importance of identifying the impact of books on readers. Ultimately the addition of this theoretical approach to the overall framework allows for the development of an enhanced understanding of the target culture during descriptive work.

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<sup>89</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery 2005: 3.

<sup>90</sup> Berry 2013: 28.

### 3.6 Patronage

The concept of patronage, posited by André Lefevere, regards the literary system in which a translation exists as being controlled by two primary elements: firstly, professionals within the literary system, and secondly, patronage from outside the system.<sup>91</sup> The former comprises critics who influence reception of translated works, academics who determine whether texts are studied or not and translators who influence the translation itself. The latter comprises persons or institutions who can promote or prevent the existence of literature, ranging from monarchs during times gone by to publishers in the present day, as well other institutions involved in the dissemination of literature. The key aspect of patronage from external parties is the relationship between literature and social system in place in the target culture. Lefevere notes that the dominant poetics of a place and time – in other words, the fashionable norm – is used ‘as the yardstick against which current production is measured. Accordingly, certain works of literature will be elevated to the level of “classics” within a relatively short time after publication, while others are rejected, some to reach the exalted position of a classic later, when the dominant poetics has changed.’<sup>92</sup>

There are three aspects of Lefevere’s theory of patronage to be drawn upon in addressing the research questions of this thesis. Firstly, it is necessary to identify the internal patrons within the literary system, especially in the form of critics, contributing to the impact of a translated book in a target culture, both in terms of mapping the reception of individual books and more generally in terms of clarifying the impact of these patrons on the situation of Scandinavian literature as a whole in Britain. At the beginning of the period

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<sup>91</sup> Lefevere’s chapter on patronage is found in Lefevere 1992: 11-25.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*: 19.

covered by the thesis, we see the involvement of multiple literary heavyweights promoting Hamsun, while towards the end of the twentieth century we find that publisher MacLehose has a hand, directly or indirectly, in almost every major Scandinavian literary transmission to Britain. Secondly, it is necessary to identify the general role played by external patrons in the transmission and reception of Scandinavian books, as well as whether there is crossover between the internal and external agents. The most obvious instances in which this is represented in reality are through the role played by source-culture literary agents marketing foreign rights, alongside grant-giving organisations. Thirdly, it is important to examine the relationship between imported literature and the dominant poetics of the target system, in order to better inform the researcher's understanding of the British receiving context. Only by understanding what the dominant poetics of Britain in the 1960s were, can we understand why Mykle appealed to readers in 1960, while Sjöwall and Wahlöö did not achieve the same fit with readers just a few years later in 1968.

Despite the more process- and practitioner-oriented nature of Lefevere's approach,<sup>93</sup> the application of his concept as set out above in collaboration, in particular, with polysystem theory and Book History, aids the researcher in accurately defining the agents and relationships at stake in the book translation system outlined by Heilbron, thus enabling the researcher to respond more thoroughly to the research questions. While the approach is directly applicable to all the selected case studies, the issue of unusual forms of patronage, at least in terms of Scandinavian book translation, is best seen through the examination of the work of Hamsun, Høeg and Larsson; all of these were transmitted to

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<sup>93</sup> Munday 2016: 109.

Britain in irregular manners that either actively sought to influence their reception or indirectly impact it.

### 3.7 Rejecting Bourdieu's Field Theory

Naturally, there are many theoretical approaches available that have been disregarded by the researcher for the purposes of this project. One of the most prominent is Pierre Bourdieu's field theory; scholars of Translation Studies who are engaged in the production of 'socio-translation studies' have increasingly come to rely on this.<sup>94</sup> Bourdieu sees a field as a system of social positions where the agents within it are engaged in a struggle on the basis of their power relationships.<sup>95</sup> While it is common for researchers to draw a connection between polysystem theory and field theory, Bourdieu himself is keen to distance himself from formalist structures, such as those found in Even-Zohar's polysystems that have consequently driven the development of theoretical approaches by scholars such as Heilbron.<sup>96</sup> Moira Inghilleri observes that the growing trend towards applying Bourdieusian field theory in research in Translation Studies is expressed through describing 'acts of translation and their resulting products' and that it has become increasingly common to place further emphasis on observing and analysing production techniques.<sup>97</sup> Heilbron and Sapiro also identify the lack of consideration for the international context of translation as problematic in the case of Bourdieu's work.<sup>98</sup> In the case of this thesis and its research questions, the focus on individual agents means that the application of field theory would skew the otherwise function-oriented approach

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<sup>94</sup> For an example of scholarship endeavouring to define and implement Bourdieu in Translation Studies, see Meylaerts 2005.

<sup>95</sup> Bourdieu 1991: 4-5.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, Deane 2011: 71.

<sup>97</sup> Inghilleri 2005: 126.

<sup>98</sup> Heilbron and Sapiro 2007: 94.

towards being overly process-oriented without providing any additional benefits to the researcher.

### 3.8 Summary of Theoretical Framework

This section has addressed the theoretical approaches that could justifiably form the basis of this study, and has sought to examine their merits and construct an approach tailored to this situation. Not all theoretical approaches are appropriate for this study, prominent amongst them Bourdieu's field theory, as briefly outlined above.

There has been a move, in general terms within Translation Studies, towards research conducted on a systemic basis examining whole target systems and genres.<sup>99</sup> This framework endeavours to fit into this canon of translation research while ensuring it is tailored to the requirements of the specific research questions. The research approach will be fundamentally grounded in the concept of fDTS. While the original form, posited by Holmes, has since undergone widespread development and interpretation – most notably by Toury, as discussed in some depth above – the originalist use of a Holmes-based approach has precedent in this type of study and offers a flexible framework to the researcher.

It is, however, both common and necessary to integrate additional theoretical approaches into the framework to address the research questions under examination. The most prominent of these in this case is that of polysystem theory, which provides a systemic approach to dealing with translations that are moving between source and target cultures.

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<sup>99</sup> Susam-Sarajeva 2009: 54.

This encourages analysis in much the same way as fDTS, in that it is not focused on the literary content of translations in itself. The interconnectedness of the global literary system is, however, something of an obstacle to the use of pure polysystem theory, as Heilbron emphasises that any sociological approach to translations in one system must also take into account other systems in the global system. In plain terms, this calls for descriptive work on other comparable literary systems in order to uncover findings pertaining to the literary system under examination.

This study solely concerns the publication of books in translation, which squarely sets it into the wider spectrum of Book History. While the discipline is in many regards descriptive, two of its common approaches to tracing Book History – communications circuits and publishing events – offer the researcher additional tools with which to perceive the situation in each case study. Similarly, Lefevere's concept of patronage offers two key elements that can be utilised in the present study. The first is the importance of identifying literary patrons, whether these are prominent critics, as in the case of Hamsun, or dynamic publishers such as MacLehose in the case of Høeg and Larsson, and examining their work and influences. The second is Lefevere's argument that translations are tested in target cultures against benchmark literature to determine their reception, which ties together with the approach posited by Even-Zohar in his polysystem theory.

Toury takes the view that individual studies are not obliged to develop and foster theoretical frameworks in Translation Studies, and indeed that doing so can often be unhelpful to both the study and theories at hand. 'One of the weaknesses of Translation Studies in the present phase of its evolution lies precisely in the fact that descriptivism as such is often frowned upon, driving every other scholar to indulge in theorising, very

often in a highly speculative manner.<sup>100</sup> In this respect, it should be noted that this study does not propose to break new theoretical ground in itself. Instead, through the application of a considered, multifaceted framework, it aims to comply with Toury's forecast for the development of Translation Studies methodology: namely, the transition to relational, conditional statements (e.g. 'if X, then the greater/the lesser the likelihood that Y').<sup>101</sup>

The proposed methodology and theoretical framework will aid the generation of significant and original findings through the structured consideration of five different case studies over a period of one hundred years. These theoretically grounded findings will both provide an historical account of Scandinavian literary transmission to Britain during the twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, and aid in the identification and analysis of key factors involved in that process, thus enabling the researcher to address the research questions conclusively.

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<sup>100</sup> Toury 2012: 301.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

## 4 Literature Review: Existing Scholarship on the Transmission and Reception of Scandinavian Literature in Britain

*'[I]t may seem necessary to move all the way up to the present day to find a genuinely new trend in terms of a literary export to Britain, and here, too, an explanation may have to be sought in a wider cultural and political context.'*

(Peter Fjågesund 2017: 28)





# 4 Literature Review: Existing Scholarship on the Transmission and Reception of Scandinavian Literature in Britain

Writing in 2017, Dan Ringgaard and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen note ‘a remarkable trend towards more attention to Scandinavian work in English in recent decades that had otherwise been mostly received in German or French, most likely as a testimony of increased internationalisation, not least of literary criticism.’<sup>102</sup> Despite this, English-language scholarship that addresses Scandinavian literature in transmission remains thin on the ground compared with equivalent works related to the literatures of other countries, cultures and languages.<sup>103</sup>

Given that the existing literature adequately addressing the issues inherent in this thesis’ research questions is so sparse, the researcher is compelled to visit additional neighbouring fields such as bibliographic studies and publishing history to seek inspiration for an appropriate approach to this thesis, as well as grounding the research within the context of what has gone before. For the purposes of this review, this literature has been divided into a number of categories encompassing British perceptions of Scandinavia, bibliographies as a mode of study, approaches focusing on publishing and agents, changing trends since 1979 as shown by a niche periodical, and finally research that

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<sup>102</sup> Ringgaard and Thomsen 2017b: 7. In this regard the authors are not necessarily wrong, and their observation correlates with the rising prominence of the anglophone market compared with the German and French markets noted in the export of Swedish literature by Espmark. See Espmark 2008: 66-7.

<sup>103</sup> Works comparable to the heavy tomes of the nineteenth century, such as William and Mary Howitt’s *The Literature and Romance of Northern Europe*, are few and far between, and where they do exist they have tended to be Scandinavian-funded and American-authored/published. See, for instance, Warne 1996.

specifically reflects on literary transmission and reception of Scandinavian literature. This chapter will outline these areas, following a broadly chronological approach throughout, although also making thematic divisions in places. This is particularly applicable in the case of approaches to crime fiction, and the use of the genre, or parts thereof as a case study in various publications, especially in more recent years. A gap in scholarship on the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain has been identified, and this thesis makes an original contribution in filling that niche. However, there is a body of existing scholarship: by surveying such literature, this researcher will not only be able to underpin the work of this thesis but will also be able to identify discontinuities in current research that can be addressed in this study.

## 4.1 British Borealism

Writing in 2017, Peter Fjågesund notes that ‘the North and the culture of the Nordic countries have exerted a profound impact on British culture.’<sup>104</sup> This is most certainly the case: the beginning of the nineteenth century saw many decades of change to the British perception of, and relationship with, Scandinavia. These developments have seen British critics and members of the public engage in various aspects of what this thesis refers to as borealism. Naturally, this framework, adopted en masse by many in Britain, has had a profound impact on the British reception of any Scandinavian cultural or literary imports. The following section will reflect on the origins of borealism in Britain and its trajectory to the present day.

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<sup>104</sup> Fjågesund 2017: 13.

The Norwegian writer Kjartan Fløgstad described borealism in the following terms:

At one time, the Palestinian writer Edward Saïd gave the name “orientalism” to Western preconceived ideas about the Far East. The word “boreal” comes from *Boreas*, which was the Greek mythological name for the north wind. In Norwegian, boreal covers northern areas outside the Arctic, while in English and Spanish it stands for everything that is northern, cold and wintry. [...] Maybe “borealism” could be a name for the Southern preconceived ideas about those who live at northern latitudes? In any case, it seems as if these ideas are in the best of health.<sup>105</sup>

Kristinn Schram has used the term regularly in research examining external perspectives on Iceland and Icelanders.<sup>106</sup> Schram’s definition is more refined than that set out by Fløgstad: rather than simply being ‘northern, cold and wintry’, borealism is defined as images of an exotic north.<sup>107</sup>

Although Fløgstad believed the ideas imbued in borealism were in the best of health, use of the term ‘borealism’ itself in English-language circles remains limited. A 2016 book published by Norvik Press, *Beyond Borealism: New Perspectives on the North*, engages with the term, suggesting that British borealist perspectives can be parochial in nature, and limiting to objective research.<sup>108</sup> The term is more commonly used in francophone scholarship and has gained significant traction during the 2010s. For example, in 2016 an entire special issue of *Études Germaniques* was dedicated to the subject, with editor Sylvain Briens providing an overview of the concept.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Fløgstad 2007: 13-4. English translation by Guy Puzey quoted in Giles, et al. 2016b: 9.

<sup>106</sup> Schram 2011a, Schram 2011b.

<sup>107</sup> Schram 2011b: 99. In particular, it is ‘the signification, practice and performance of the ontological and epistemological distinction in power between North and South.’

<sup>108</sup> Giles, et al. 2016b: 10. Evidence of the limited use of the term can be evidenced in two respects. Firstly, this researcher has observed that while the term appears to be used freely by Scandinavian Studies scholars at the University of Edinburgh, colleagues in Scandinavian Studies at University College London do not use the expression. Secondly, some members of the Norvik Press board were reluctant to agree to the use of the word ‘borealism’ in the title of a 2016 volume edited by this researcher on the grounds that the word was not in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

<sup>109</sup> Briens 2016.

The main reason why ‘borealism’ has not been more widely adopted is the existence of another competing term. That term is ‘nordientalism’, as coined by Hans Hauge, which refers to Nordic self-perceptions of the Nordic region, especially in the postcolonial era.<sup>110</sup>

While it is acknowledged to be a concept of self-portrayal, Scandinavian-based scholars such as Hansen and Waade have taken to using it to describe international perspectives on the Nordic region too.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, this term has gained some traction amongst scholars outside of Scandinavia, with British-based scholars such as Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen enthusiastically adopting the term. For instance, Stougaard-Nielsen writes: “‘Nordientalism’ may describe the allure of Nordic noir in the British reception, where all-things Nordic have come to represent an imagined desirable elsewhere’.<sup>112</sup> This application of the term, alongside Hansen and Waade’s, would appear to be a misinterpretation, as it refers to external impressions of Scandinavia, rather than Nordic self-perceptions.

This thesis is not comfortable with the term nordientalism due to the contradiction highlighted above. In proposing to use the term ‘borealism’, this thesis concurs with the approach adopted by Ellen Kythor. She defines ‘nordientalism’ as a form of autostereotyping of the Nordic countries within the Nordic countries, while defining ‘borealism’ as a form of xenostereotyping of the Nordic countries from outside the region.<sup>113</sup> This is evidently an area where scholarship is still engaged in conceptual development, but for the purposes of this thesis, borealism in the British context will be

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<sup>110</sup> The themes of ‘nordientalism’ were first discussed by Hauge in 1998, albeit without using the term. See Hauge 1998. Hauge first used the term (translated on that occasion as ‘northientalism’) in 2001. See Hauge 2001.

<sup>111</sup> Hansen and Waade 2017: 111-2.

<sup>112</sup> Stougaard-Nielsen 2016: 3.

<sup>113</sup> Kythor Forthcoming. Kythor highlights that it is possible for imagery to fall into both categories, citing the role of Andersen in perceptions of Danish literature.

taken to refer to those preconceived notions and exotic images of the north set out by Fløgstad and Schram.

Britain's love affair with boreal Scandinavia effectively began in the late-eighteenth century from something of a standing start – the fashion of the period being to see connections to the old Celtic world.<sup>114</sup> However, initial tentative endeavours to uncover Scandinavia's historical and, crucially, literary past, and how these conceivably tied in with Britain's own trajectory soon snowballed into something far bigger. The period from 1800 to the present day may therefore be characterised as one in which the British set about forming their own Scandinavian origin story, seeking, at times, to emulate or reflect their so-called cousins across the North Sea.<sup>115</sup>

Of course, Britain had long been aware of the region that eventually came to be known as Scandinavia.<sup>116</sup> However, for the majority of the second millennium, British awareness of Scandinavia had typically been on military, political or economic grounds.<sup>117</sup> It was the first half of the nineteenth century that saw the advent of what became known as the 'berserker school of old northernists', of whom the Orcadian Samuel Laing was an early and enthusiastic example.<sup>118</sup> Laing's 1844 translation of Icelandic saga *Heimskringla* was accompanied by a preliminary dissertation that displayed 'extravagant and uncritical' levels

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<sup>114</sup> Graves 2006: 248.

<sup>115</sup> In fact, Fjågesund goes back even further, examining in some detail the Scandinavian literary influence, looking as far back as the late-sixteenth century and up to and including the turn of the eighteenth century. See Fjågesund 2017: 14-9.

<sup>116</sup> As a rule, one tends not to forget the Vikings in a hurry. See, for example, Holman 2007.

<sup>117</sup> An entertaining example being the escapades of English merchant Anthony Knipe, who controversially meddled in seventeenth-century Swedish and Norwegian politics. See Grimshaw 2014.

<sup>118</sup> An anonymous reviewer coined this expression some years later, alluding to the pro-Scandinavian (in regional terms), or even borealist, views of proponents of Scandinavian and Norse literature. 'Review of Vansittart Conybeare 1877' 1878. Despite its rather odd appearance, the term berserker actually has firm Icelandic origins and is perhaps best likened to 'champion' in modern English. See Dale 2014.

of enthusiasm, applicable both to the saga-based northern past and the saga-less Scandinavian present day.<sup>119</sup>

In 1852, the boreal trend was reinforced by the first full English-language survey of Scandinavian literature, written by William and Mary Howitt.<sup>120</sup> Taking up Laing's northernist thread, the Howitts expressed surprise 'at the comparative ignorance which has prevailed in this country [Britain] of the literature of a people so allied to us by race and tone of mind as the Scandinavians.'<sup>121</sup> While the work expanded upon miscellaneous pieces of literary scholarship from the preceding century and covered the development of Old Norse literature in great depth, it was pioneering in its examination of contemporary Scandinavian literary culture. Most strikingly, the book's first chapter ('The Actual Influence Which the Scandinavian People Have Had on the Progress and Civilization of the English Race') set out to describe the 'transcendent influence of the blood and spirit of ancient Scandinavia on the English character' in great detail.<sup>122</sup> In agreeing with Laing that there is not only something positive about Scandinavia and its people to discuss, but also that there is an inherent connection between them and Britain, the Howitts set the tone for literature on Scandinavia in the years to come.

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<sup>119</sup> Wawn 2000: 92. Laing, in fact, had spent three happy years in Norway in the 1830s and was determined to tell anyone he could, in any form available to him. This coloured both his dissertation and translation as he depicted the contemporary values of Norway as the positive outcome of the medieval period. As Fjågesund puts it, 'the result was invariably a portrait of a Scandinavia that represented a moral innocence that had somehow gone missing in the harsher realities of modern Britain.' See Fjågesund 2017: 20.

<sup>120</sup> Howitt and Howitt 1852. An outline of the Howitts' career and impact on British literary circles is found in Graves 2006.

<sup>121</sup> Howitt and Howitt 1852: v. The Howitts went some way to dismiss the notion that English literature had origins in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, which had been prevalent until that period.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.: 1. Fjågesund and Symes find the uncritical use of the term 'English' to be problematic. See Fjågesund and Symes 2003: 131. However, Graves argues that the concepts of Englishness and Britishness are interchangeable with each other. See Graves 2006: 247.

In 1863, a decade after the publication of the Howitts' volume, the Norwegian writer Aasmund Olavsson Vinje's *A Norseman's Views of Britain and the British* was published.<sup>123</sup> Vinje echoed the rhetoric of Laing and the Howitts concerning Britain's Scandinavian ties and origins as he reflected on his visit to Britain.<sup>124</sup> In his book, Vinje went out of his way to indicate that pro-Scandinavian tendencies in Victorian Britain had become commonplace, and that they were repeated to visitors from Scandinavia as members of British society sought approval for their perspective. Given that he followed the Laing/Howitt line of thought, it is likely that Vinje's views had been influenced by contemporary borealist thinking during his visit to Britain.

The berserkers were still out in force some two decades later, when Frederick Metcalfe introduced his 1880 book *The Englishman and the Scandinavian*, saying 'the author is not aware of any book of the same character, instituting a comparison between the Anglo-Saxon and the Scandinavian'.<sup>125</sup> His publication is largely a dissection of Old English literature and a presentation of Old Norse literature, and adopted a compare/contrast approach as he attempted to draw connections between the two. Metcalfe left the reader in no doubt that he was a disciple of the berserker school of old northernists: he stated that the origins of English lay 'in the mountains of the far North' and that 'without a knowledge of the Northern literature nobody can be thoroughly furnished for the study

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<sup>123</sup> Vinje (1818-1870) was a Norwegian journalist known for being an early adopter of Norwegian Landsmål. His volume of letters written over the course of a year's visit to Britain are both informative and contain quips that would put Bill Bryson to shame.

<sup>124</sup> Vinje observes in one letter: 'as you go northwards you discover more and more of the Gothic, till you come to Yorkshire and Scotland, where the relationship to the Scandinavian tribes is obvious. In Scottish cities, more particularly in Edinburgh, I can almost fancy that I am walking in our Norse towns.' Vinje 1863: 15.

<sup>125</sup> Metcalfe 1880: x. Indeed, Metcalfe neglects to mention the Howitts in his acknowledgements and introduction, explaining that he had circulated an outline of the book privately in 1876 and that his readership had clamoured for the real thing. This is curious, given that the Howitts were well known in literary circles not many years earlier, and conceivably suggests an attempt by Metcalfe to hype his own contribution to pro-Scandinavian rhetoric.



of our mother tongue.<sup>126</sup> Unlike the Howitts, Metcalfe devoted little attention to the contemporary situation of Scandinavian literature, either in Scandinavia or Britain, but he saw connections to both Scandinavia's people and its language in the origins of England and English.<sup>127</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, the appropriation of Scandinavian literary history in order to craft a British origin story bathed in Scandinavian glory was taking place on an industrial scale.<sup>128</sup> There was some awareness that the various constituent parts of Scandinavia were different countries with differing characteristics.<sup>129</sup> Levels of self-awareness amongst nineteenth-century writers in relation to pro-Scandinavian bias varied. Some writers, such as Laing, were clearly aware of their uncritical approach to elevating Scandinavia in the eyes of their readers. However, Fjågesund and Symes argue that others were quite probably not aware that they were perpetuating the Scandinavian origin myth, but that they used the Scandinavian paradigm because it was 'genuinely part of the British tradition as they chose to define it.'<sup>130</sup>

However, there had been something of a sea change in the appreciation for Scandinavia by this time, with the influence of writers such as Ibsen, Brandes and Strindberg likely to have added to the impact. To an extent, the effect was to compound the initial enthusiasm of a few writers half a century earlier into full-throttled Scandinavian influence on

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.: 486.

<sup>127</sup> Metcalfe may have been of the view that there was no need for an account of the contemporary situation given his previous publications on Scandinavia focused on travel and sport. See, for example, Metcalfe 1858.

<sup>128</sup> For a fuller picture of the Victorian fascination with the Scandinavian north and its appropriation for use in British identity building, the reader is strongly recommended to consult Wawn 2000.

<sup>129</sup> Fjågesund and Symes 2003: 134. For example, Laing was especially pro-Norwegian, while writers such as the Howitts were arguably better disposed towards Sweden.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

contemporary British culture both politically and culturally.<sup>131</sup> This turn was reflected in a change of tone in works being produced on the subject. While books such as those by the Howitts and Metcalfe became less common, new books replaced them for a new era where the Scandinavian countries were more distinct. For example, C. B. Burchardt's 1920 volume *Norwegian Life and Literature* sought to 'trace the development in England of an interest in Norwegian matters down to the end of the last century', and was conspicuously focused on the newly independent nation rather than Scandinavia as a whole.<sup>132</sup> Burchardt provided an intriguing account of Ibsen's transmission out of Norway, but Burchardt's focus was on Ibsen himself and those agents around him, and was somewhat more hagiographical in nature than is helpful to the researcher in the present day. Grøndahl's and Raknes' lectures on Norwegian literature published in 1923 also marked this shift from the Victorian, saga-based borealism to a more specific, contemporary interest in the region and its literature.<sup>133</sup>

The period following the First World War becomes far more difficult to describe succinctly as the intricacies of interconnectedness developed exponentially during the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, this is a difficulty noted by Fjågesund, whose own account terminates in 1920.<sup>134</sup> To some extent, this is a reflection of a partial downturn in British borealism in the years after the First World War. As Fjågesund notes, 'at a first glance there seems to be a considerable period after 1918 during which this impact has been

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<sup>131</sup> Fjågesund 2014: 456. Fjågesund sees the influence of Scandinavia on Britain as being particularly strong at the turn of the nineteenth century. He highlights that William Morris influenced an entire school of writers during this period, with a significant number of saga-like adventures and historical novels in Nordic settings appearing in Britain, with mixed success. See *ibid.*: 485-6.

<sup>132</sup> Burchardt 1920: iii. While the book opens with a primer on Norwegian civilisation from the dawn of time, many of its pages are dedicated to tracing the transmission of Ibsen to the English language.

<sup>133</sup> Grøndahl and Raknes 1923.

<sup>134</sup> Fjågesund 2014: 497.

smaller, rather than greater, than in the previous century.<sup>135</sup> However, he does query ‘to what extent, then, has the period after the First World War witnessed a change to the nineteenth- and turn-of-the-century legacy?’<sup>136</sup> The years covered by this thesis encompass this period, and it will thus provide some answers in this regard. However, as noted in Chapter 1, this thesis is also seeking to identify how the state of affairs in the present day came about: Britain in the twenty-first century is characterised by the conspicuous presence of Scandinavian literature on its shores and interest in all things Nordic once again.<sup>137</sup>

Following the turn of the millennium, we find the British borealist fascination with Scandinavia stronger than ever. Examples of contemporary British borealism abound in print and online journalism, with far too many appearing to attempt to list them comprehensively.<sup>138</sup> This trend for borealist popular journalism has also become a hot publishing trend in the 2010s, with a slew of books describing life in Scandinavia, or how to live like a Scandinavian in Britain, dominating the non-fiction charts.<sup>139</sup> This has also carried over into volumes that verge on scholarship. Two titles published in 2016 will suffice as examples of this kind of work in what is a highly saturated market. The first is Robert Ferguson’s *Scandinavians: In Search of the Soul of the North*, a highly readable history

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<sup>135</sup> Fjågesund 2017: 28. Fjågesund suggests that this is a result of the association of sagas and the Nordic past with Nazi Germany, as well as the decline of the British Empire.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.: 27-8.

<sup>137</sup> This approach is supported by Fjågesund, who says, in reference to the paucity of observable trends, that ‘it may seem necessary to move all the way up to the present day to find a genuinely new trend in terms of a literary export to Britain, and here, too, an explanation may have to be sought in a wider cultural and political context.’ See *ibid.*: 28. That being said, the mid-twentieth century was not devoid of borealism in British circles. See Cohen and Cash 1970.

<sup>138</sup> Recent examples of borealist approaches include Adrian Mackinder’s evangelising about life in Denmark while commuting to the UK, as well as Charlotte Higgins’ account of the rise of *hygge*. See Mackinder 2015, Higgins 2016.

<sup>139</sup> See, for example, Booth 2014, Russell 2015, Wiking 2016.

of Scandinavia.<sup>140</sup> The book serves primarily as a series of borealist snapshots from various points in time, and is ultimately used as a framing device for Ferguson's autobiography. Throughout, Ferguson is complicit in building and maintaining the idea that Scandinavia is exotic and different. Similarly, Dominic Hinde's *A Utopia Like Any Other: Inside The Swedish Model* sets out to dissect the Swedish social model of the twentieth century, moving beyond the borealisation of the country and setting it in the context of present-day reality.<sup>141</sup> However, in the process of doing so, Hinde is at times guilty of promoting the British-perceived myth of Scandinavia that he seeks to dispel. The use of the word 'utopia' in the title serves to reinforce preconceived notions of Scandinavian superiority, while the jacket bears an illustration depicting the Swedish word for paradise. Similarly, interview subjects in the book seem likelier to add to the borealist myth than to dispel it.

This present-day borealist approach does, on the surface, appear to have changed from that described in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. There is an increased interest in Scandinavian models of society, social welfare, and lifestyles. Fjågesund questions whether 'this mean[s], then, that British readers and critics have finally buried the old stereotypes of a primitive, innocent and fundamentally peripheral North.'<sup>142</sup> This thesis takes the view that this is not the case. The enthusiasm of figures such as Laing and the Howitts in the nineteenth century continues to flourish, and the British desire for Scandinavian 'moral innocence that had somehow gone missing in the harsher realities of modern Britain'<sup>143</sup> remains firmly in place. Even the Viking and saga stereotypes have not really been forgotten, as was noted in the dissection of Cooke's and Forshaw's

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<sup>140</sup> Ferguson 2016.

<sup>141</sup> Hinde 2016.

<sup>142</sup> Fjågesund 2017: 30.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*: 20.

assessments of the contemporary situation for Scandinavian literature in Britain in Chapter 1.

Remnants of the berserker school of old northernists first fuelled by literary aficionados in Victorian Britain can still be found in the present day, but that same sense of pro-Scandinavian borealism has now become the domain of cultural historians and journalists, rather than upper-class literary travellers. Instead of seeking to draw connections between the noble Vikings depicted in the sagas or encountered in the early-nineteenth century while travelling in Norway, writers and disseminators now attempt to draw upon cultural phenomena in present-day Scandinavia and connect Britain to the region through emulation.

## 4.2 Bibliographies

An approach to tracing the transmission of Scandinavian literature, both in its Scandinavian source culture and in English translation in the British target culture, that gained traction during the twentieth century was that of bibliographic studies and the compilation of bibliographic databases.

Bibliographies and accompanying studies are an important element of literary and reception studies, providing, if nothing else, plenty of data to the researcher to verify when books were published. In the case of translated literature, this often provides details of agents involved such as translators and original source-market publishers. However, bibliographic studies tend to be very good at answering questions of who, what and

where,<sup>144</sup> whereas they often ignore sociological context and fail to examine what becomes of a book after it is entered into the records and therefore permitted to join the bibliography being constructed.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, many authors of the bibliographic studies considered in this review engage in little supplementary analysis or commentary on their data, leaving the researcher to ascertain the significance or relevance of bibliographic content.

The period pre-dating the twentieth century lacks a thorough bibliographic assessment of Scandinavian literature in English translation with the benefit of hindsight, with no all-encompassing work available. This is in contrast to the situation in, for example, Germany, where Robert Fallenstein and Christian Hennig provided an unparalleled degree of detail and accuracy in their 1977 volume tracing Scandinavian literary reception in Germany during the nineteenth century.<sup>146</sup> In the absence of such a work this section will outline those resources that are available for this period, in addition to those providing coverage for more recent years.

An early example of somewhat hotchpotch bibliographic work is the 1852 book by the Howitts, which included a good outline of contemporary works available in English, as well as what was available in Scandinavia.<sup>147</sup> Systematic bibliographies during the nineteenth century were few and far between. Thorvald Solberg, an American librarian,

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<sup>144</sup> Susam-Sarajeva 2009: 39.

<sup>145</sup> McKenzie 2002.

<sup>146</sup> Fallenstein and Hennig 1977. Indeed, there must be some degree of envy amongst numerous scholars working in other languages given that the volume is frequently featured as a source even in non-German contexts.

<sup>147</sup> Howitt and Howitt 1852. It should be noted, however, that a lack of referencing or list of sources leaves the researcher to guess at how they gathered their information, and the distinction between literature in its source language and in English translation (and, indeed, whether they are referring to published works or specimens) is often blurred.

assembled a substantial bibliography that appeared in 1901.<sup>148</sup> More recently, coverage for the pre-twentieth-century era has been provided by Robert E. Bjork's translator-focused bibliography covering the period from 1533 until 1900.<sup>149</sup>

Following the turn of the twentieth century, the trend towards assembling titles in bibliographies continues. One of the earlier examples is Grøndahl and Raknes' Norwegian literary history, published in 1923, which was appended by a thorough bibliography of English translations of Norwegian literature.<sup>150</sup> American researcher Marie Malmin devoted her 1929 master's dissertation to gathering details of Scandinavian literature in English translation.<sup>151</sup>

The period after the Second World War was characterised by the proliferation of smaller, niche bibliographies covering aspects of Scandinavian literature. These included Joanne Kunstman's study of children's literature from Scandinavia,<sup>152</sup> Karen Nelson Hoyle's bibliography of all Danish children's literature published in English translation between 1826 and 1973,<sup>153</sup> and Maria Ng and Michael Batts' compilation of a bibliography of Scandinavian literature in translation to English encompassing both Britain and North

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<sup>148</sup> Solberg 1901. This covered translations from Scandinavia, as well as books on the region, that had appeared in English. Solberg qualified this compilation by noting that it selected the 'most important' titles from amongst 2,000 in existence at the time. See *ibid.*: 415.

<sup>149</sup> Bjork 2005. This is still not on a par with Fallenstein and Hennig's German equivalent, and is openly a compilation of other bibliographies that aims to focus on translators rather than translations.

<sup>150</sup> Grøndahl and Raknes 1923: 297. It is noted that the bibliography is not exhaustive, and given that the volume was published by Gyldendal, it could be speculated that commercial considerations affected the selection of titles for inclusion in the bibliography.

<sup>151</sup> Malmin 1929. The bibliography is reportedly highly detailed. Unfortunately, this is now only available on microfilm in the USA. For further details, see Nelson 1975.

<sup>152</sup> Kunstman 1965. This bibliography is also confined to a single library collection in the USA.

<sup>153</sup> Nelson Hoyle 1982.

America for the period from 1928 to 1977 for use in teaching.<sup>154</sup> In an article published in 1975, Graves reported on the development of a bibliography of Swedish children's literature translated to English in the period 1950-1974.<sup>155</sup> Unusually for bibliographic studies of this kind, Graves engaged in a degree of analysis: he noted that over the ten years up to 1975, Swedish works had accounted for 20% of translated children's titles in Britain, indicating that Swedish children's literature was experiencing a boom.<sup>156</sup> However, Graves' works seem somewhat underdeveloped, suffering particularly from gaps in data. His attempt to build a full bibliography was clearly unusual, as can be seen by the limited resources available universally, and was eventually unsuccessful. A reasonable assumption, given Graves' stated interest in transmission and reception, is that the compilation of a bibliography did not provide satisfactory answers to the research questions he wished to address, highlighting the limited application of bibliographic studies in sociological approaches.

The decades after the Second World War were also a golden age for substantial and broad bibliographies of Scandinavian literature in English. Elias Bredsdorff's 1950 bibliography of Danish literature in English translation was perhaps one of the most comprehensive efforts ever to produce an account of Danish literary transmission to English, aiming as

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<sup>154</sup> Ng and Batts 1978. This is a comprehensive work in terms of detail, but it omits all children's literature, all works by Andersen, Ibsen, Kierkegaard and Strindberg – as well as what they term 'popular literature', although they note difficulty in making the distinction in this regard. See *ibid.*: viii.

<sup>155</sup> Berry assumes this was primarily drawn from the *British National Bibliography*. She also notes that the bibliography, which was not published, is 'no longer available'. See Berry 2013: 88. In the article, Graves acknowledges his own interests lie in literary transmission and reception in Britain, rather than specifically in bibliographic studies. See Graves 1975: 137.

<sup>156</sup> Graves 1975: 138. In an article that verifies and develops Graves' findings, Berry argues that 1950-1975 was a golden age for Nordic children's literature that was 'prolific and diverse'. See Berry 2011: 92. Patricia Crampton, a prominent translator of the second half of the twentieth century and founder member of SELTA, also concurs with both Graves and Berry regarding the period in question. See Crampton 1975.



it did to cover the period from 1535 until the date of publication.<sup>157</sup> However, the reliance on a limited number of sources of data for compilation is methodologically flawed, and it should be noted that almost half of the book covered the works of Hans Christian Andersen. Erling Grønland's 1961 publication set out to give Norwegian literature the same treatment, and included what was intended to be an all-encompassing survey of Norwegian literature in English translation from 1742 until 1959.<sup>158</sup> In Sweden, the task of compiling the corresponding bibliography initially fell to Nils Afzelius, with the outcome published in 1951.<sup>159</sup> However, Bure Holmbäck's 1968 bibliography charting English-language material concerning Sweden, Swedes and Swedish conditions was highly detailed and arguably the most advanced of the three nations' comparable bibliographic outputs in this era.<sup>160</sup>

In the march towards greater detail in the bibliographic curve, the next development following the publication of Bredsdorff's, Grønland's and Holmbäck's decisive, major works, was more regular dissemination. In Denmark, *Dania Polyglotta* provided a rolling annual publication detailing Danish literature in translation, as well as literature in foreign languages about Denmark, from the end of the 1960s for three decades.<sup>161</sup> Elias Bredsdorff's Danish bibliography was updated by Carol Schroeder to cover the period

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<sup>157</sup> Bredsdorff 1950. Bredsdorff's approach was one of meticulous examination of the British Museum's catalogues, along with those of the Universities of London and Cambridge, as well as the University of Copenhagen and the Royal Library of Copenhagen. Ibid.: 8.

<sup>158</sup> Grønland 1961. In contrast to Bredsdorff's Danish bibliography, Grønland's contribution is far slimmer. Whether this is on the grounds that there was simply less Norwegian literature in the period or the bibliography is less thorough is unclear, and has not been discussed in any detail by other scholars in the field.

<sup>159</sup> Afzelius 1951.

<sup>160</sup> Holmbäck 1968. Holmbäck's book covered 5,000 different titles, which were distributed into 22 different categories and 180 different sub-categories. While Holmbäck concedes that the volume is intended as a bibliography of bibliographies (including Afzelius), in the same vein as Bjork, this variety is far superior.

<sup>161</sup> See Library 1970-1998.

from 1950 until 1980 using the same style as the original.<sup>162</sup> Subsequent bibliographies were limited, but it is fair to suggest that *Dania Polyglotta* had the task covered.<sup>163</sup>

Similarly, Swedish is well represented by detailed bibliographies covering Swedish literature translated to English and published in Britain over the period from 1963, which marked the end of Holmbäck's coverage, to 2005. An initial bibliography for the first fifteen years from 1963 to 1978 was published in one fell swoop by the Swedish Embassy in London,<sup>164</sup> which was then followed by regular updates that first appeared in *Swedish Books* and later in its successor *SBR*.<sup>165</sup> In addition to this, the National Library of Sweden published an annual index titled *Suecana Extranea*, detailing the library's statutory purchases of all literature about Sweden in all languages other than Swedish, and translations of Swedish literature.<sup>166</sup>

The availability of bibliographies covering translations of Norwegian into English on a par with those being produced for Swedish and Danish was limited. There was little activity comparable with that of Norway's Scandinavian neighbours until the Internet age. The exception to this was Jostein Fet's bibliography of English literary translations of Nynorsk from 1880 to 1982.<sup>167</sup> Fet's work, drawing upon a wide range of sources, was

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<sup>162</sup> Schroeder 1982.

<sup>163</sup> There are two exceptions noted by this researcher. Pihl provides a brief résumé of all recent titles translated from Danish to English in her 1996 PhD thesis. See Pihl 1996. A highly comprehensive bibliography covering translated fiction in the period from 1990 to 2015 has been compiled in Kythor 2018. Elsewhere, Kythor has taken the view that bibliographies subsequent to Schroeder are inadequate, and outlines initiatives underway in Denmark and the UK to provide better bibliographies of recent English translations of Danish literature, see Kythor 2016: 194. Kythor 2018 remains a working paper and the corpus may change over time, but it is intended for inclusion in Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>164</sup> Geddes 1979b.

<sup>165</sup> Geddes 1979a, Geddes 1984, Geddes 1985, Geddes 1986, Geddes 1988, Geddes 1991, Geddes 1992, Geddes 1994, Geddes 1995, Geddes 1999, Geddes 2001, Geddes 2004, Geddes 2005.

<sup>166</sup> Sweden 1968-1996.

<sup>167</sup> Fet 1985.

thorough, encompassing not only standard publications, but also children's books, as well as short stories and poetry that had appeared in anthologies and magazines. Unusually, Fet also included translator biographies where these were available.

The years immediately preceding and following the turn of the millennium were marked by yet another transition in bibliographic terms, this time away from regular print dissemination of lists to the creation and upkeep of detailed, electronic databases, typically available via the Internet. *Suecana Extranea* has been Internet-based since it ceased to be available in print more than two decades ago.<sup>168</sup> In Denmark, the Royal Library's catalogue of translations of Danish literature has also moved online.<sup>169</sup> In line with its neighbours, Norway has also finally made a bibliography of Norwegian literature in foreign translation available online, which is maintained by the National Library of Norway in partnership with NORLA.<sup>170</sup> A further option open to researchers of translated literature is *Index Translationum*,<sup>171</sup> which is a list of books translated globally, originally created in print in 1932. This is now searchable via an online database containing cumulative bibliographic details for publications in one hundred UNESCO member states from 1979 onwards, while all previous entries are only accessible via print editions. However, the index is reliant on data supplied by UNESCO members, and is thus far from complete in much the same way as the national libraries and bibliographies of Scandinavia.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Rudberg 2009.

<sup>169</sup> Bibliotek.dk 2017. In the Danish case, the old *Dania Polyglotta* brand has not been retained, and researchers are now obliged to search through the standard web catalogue interface for the translation-related information they are seeking.

<sup>170</sup> Oria 2017.

<sup>171</sup> Tukaj 2003.

<sup>172</sup> For a fuller outline of the index and its colourful history, see Naravane 1999.

In Sweden and Denmark, the libraries are statutorily required to purchase books that are in foreign languages about the respective countries or that are foreign translations of national literature. The legal requirement is positive in that it should remove bias and justify the expense involved, but it also means that any title that a library is unsuccessful in procuring will not be entered into the bibliography. This trend towards globalised, big data has made bibliographies even more data-driven at the expense of sociological, transmission and reception issues.

The digitisation of major bibliographies of literature has opened up opportunities for increasingly statistical approaches to bibliographic research. In the sphere of Scandinavian literature in translation, Berry, Goodwin-Andersson and Kythor have made some use of statistical analysis of electronic bibliographies in their research.<sup>173</sup> A 2017 article by Berry also includes selected findings in relation to a bibliography covering Nordic literature for both adults and children published in the UK during the period from 1950 to 2010.<sup>174</sup> Her corpus is based on the *British National Bibliography*, and there are evidently some quirks with the data as a result.<sup>175</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the most interesting trend identified by Berry is that the most prolific publisher of Scandinavian fiction for adults in Britain is Harvill Press, who published 83 titles in the period in question, while other prominent publishers include Sphere, Penguin and Victor Gollancz.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Berry 2013, Goodwin-Andersson 2016, Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>174</sup> Berry 2017.

<sup>175</sup> For instance, Berry is seemingly misled by the data and notes that Sjöwall has published 33 titles in the UK, which is not the case. See *Ibid.*: 70.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*: 64. In terms of case studies in this thesis, Harvill Press is the publisher of *Smilla* while Victor Gollancz, Sphere and Penguin all published editions of Sjöwall and Wahlöö in the UK. See Chapters 8 and 9 for further details.

LAF reports published in 2015 and 2017 provide an interesting complement to Berry's bibliography.<sup>177</sup> In Scandinavian terms, this has enabled this researcher to identify the statistical importance of the Scandinavian languages as a source for translated books in Britain in terms of combined volume; it has also allowed intriguing observations about the rate of growth for such translations.<sup>178</sup> However, LAF's reports do not provide bibliographies, focusing solely on recent trends in terms of general publishing output. There is therefore no overview of which books are being translated, or indeed whether they are enjoying any degree of success.<sup>179</sup> The statistical offshoot of bibliographic studies can therefore provide a rich seam of fascinating data-driven insight to the researcher, but continues to fail in terms of involving real people and determining what sociological impact there is in the target market.

On the whole, it is clear that while bibliographies and accompanying studies provide satisfactory data to support the researcher in responding to the research questions set out, they are incapable of providing full answers when there is a sociological aspect to the study. The findings of such studies are typically the bibliographies that have been compiled, with little in the way of supplementary analysis or commentary provided.

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<sup>177</sup> Büchler and Trentacosti 2015, Trentacosti and Nicholls 2017. The LAF project sought to determine what percentage of literature published in Britain is translated. The project involved detailed processing, analysis and cleaning of data from the *British National Bibliography*.

<sup>178</sup> Between 2000 and 2012, the Scandinavian languages represented the third most common source of foreign literature in translation in Britain. See Giles 2015. Meanwhile, it has also been established that since 2000, Swedish translations published in Britain have enjoyed an annual rate of growth of 20%. See Giles 2018: 43. LAF have only provided detailed statistical data from 2000 onwards, but the growth identified is borne out by data set out by Berry. See Berry 2017: 79-80.

<sup>179</sup> Unlike Berry, who reflects on publishers, authors, translators, source languages and so on.

### 4.3 Focusing on Agents

Following the flourishing of substantial literary bibliographies of Scandinavian literature both in its domestic markets and in English translation in the years immediately following the Second World War, a new form of research emerged: the study of book history, as well as more widely the history of publishing and the involvement of various agents in the creation of books.

Traditionally, the study of translation within the framework of book history is relatively unusual,<sup>180</sup> but there are no good grounds why this should be the case. Initially, there was a tendency to merge this work into that of bibliography construction, as in the case of Graves.<sup>181</sup> However, it was following the turn of the millennium that approaches focussing on the agents involved in the transmission of translated Scandinavian literature came into fashion.<sup>182</sup> A representative, recent example of this new approach is Berry's PhD thesis,<sup>183</sup> which is ultimately a study of the 'hows', and to some extent the 'whys', of the translation process through identification of agents involved in the process and their agendas, focusing in her case on children's literature.<sup>184</sup>

Berry's output derived from her doctoral research confirms her agent-focused approach, with multiple articles examining the transmission of specific authors and titles, but

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<sup>180</sup> Berry 2013: 28.

<sup>181</sup> Graves 1975.

<sup>182</sup> In the context of examining Scandinavian literature in translation, this is very probably due to the significant increase in both the quality and quantity of Scandinavian translations appearing in Britain during this period, which was initially identified by Janet Garton. See Sigmundsdóttir 2005: 61.

<sup>183</sup> Berry 2013.

<sup>184</sup> Another scholar to focus on translated children's literature in some detail is Gillian Lathey, albeit with a more general and less Scandinavian perspective. Her work is particularly concerned with, *inter alia*, the selection of translators. See Lathey 2010.

typically from a publisher perspective.<sup>185</sup> Methodologically, these articles all adopt a similar approach to that found in her doctoral thesis. The result is a set of highly readable and detailed publishing histories taking account of many agents, but which omit to examine the impact of the books under scrutiny on readers and society as a whole. While Berry's approach encompasses various sociocultural aspects of Translation Studies theory, two of her doctoral research questions address the identification of agents from a book history perspective, as clearly do her articles. This approach is not wholly suitable for answering this thesis' research questions, as without a consideration of the sociocultural context of reception, it is not possible to discern the position of imported literature in the literary polysystem.

The concentration on agents involved in the transmission of Scandinavian children's literature has not been limited solely to academia. For example, Vanessa Thorpe, writing for *The Observer* in 2016 outlines her expectation that the next Pippi, or alternative children's classic of bygone years, is waiting in Sweden for a British publisher to commission her translation.<sup>186</sup> A similar and more general concern about other agents involved in the publishing process of translated literature, but not publishers specifically, is also found following the turn of the millennium. In a rather gloomy 2009 article, Amanda Hopkinson relays concern that there are insufficient translators and that they are rapidly aging without replacement.<sup>187</sup> While the disconnect between publishing and

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<sup>185</sup> Berry's contributions to the study of translated Scandinavian literature in the English language are invaluable and offer much in the way of inspiration to researchers following in her footsteps. See, for example, Berry 2012, Berry 2014a, Berry 2014b, Berry 2014c, Berry 2016.

<sup>186</sup> Thorpe 2016. Indeed, Maria Nikolajeva rejects the idea that Scandinavia could act as a source of cosy children's classics in translation, arguing that the publishing culture in the source market has long since moved on from what British readers expect. See Nikolajeva 2016.

<sup>187</sup> Hopkinson 2009: 321. The unfortunate nature of publishing lead times rears its head here. Her initial paper, presented at the Nordic Translation Conference held in London on 6-8 March 2008, was not published until 2009, by which time Larsson's English-language translations had exploded onto the British literary scene. See Chapter 9 for further details.

reading trends is illuminating in the former, and the unawareness of changes afoot in the latter, the researcher is once again reliant on examinations of publishing culture and agents, as well as the close reading of the books themselves, rather than any reflection on the target-market setting.

Another area that has seen extensive research into the agents involved in publication when it comes to Scandinavian translation is the genre of crime fiction. Paul Engles writes about Swedish crime fiction imported in translation to Britain, comparing and contrasting to Italian imports in the same genre.<sup>188</sup> Drawing largely on qualitative data obtained from focus groups of industry insiders, Engles seeks to draw out publishing-related findings. One of Engles' most intriguing, if somewhat speculative, findings is that the crime fiction boom at the time of writing was having a tangible and positive impact on the prospects of other, non-crime-related literary fiction in translation from Swedish.<sup>189</sup> Three articles by Stephanie Craighill, reflecting on Henning Mankell, Larsson, and imported fiction in Britain more generally, provide unusual levels of insight into the roles played by various agents in translating Scandinavian books into English.<sup>190</sup> In similarity with Engles, Craighill also makes use of qualitative interviews as her source of data. While both Engles and Craighill are far from comprehensive in their findings, they cast light on an otherwise often-ignored area.

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<sup>188</sup> Engles 2009, Engles 2010. Engles' views have developed since 2009, as can be seen in Kythor's interview with him in Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>189</sup> Engles 2009: 59. Engles speculated that Swedish crime fiction success was the result of beneficial grant schemes for translation and that such books were 'more commercially oriented' in Sweden. See *Ibid.*: 63. This is not necessarily the case, given grant-giving agencies' reluctance to fund adult fiction that is not perceived as highbrow.

<sup>190</sup> Craighill 2013a, Craighill 2013b, Craighill 2015.



The portrayal, re-imagining and perception of Scandinavia through literary marketing during the transmission of books from Scandinavia to Britain has typically also been tied to crime fiction. Researcher Agnes Broomé has contributed the lion's share of output in this area within the anglophone context.<sup>191</sup> Broomé's doctoral thesis examines the period from 1998 to 2013, studying in some detail the agency of various stakeholders in bringing Swedish books to the British literary market. Her work reflects on issues such as how publishers can influence British readers, drawing in particular on peritextual and epitextual strategies.<sup>192</sup> However, it does not take into account the target culture to the extent necessary to answer all the research questions posed in this study adequately, although it goes some way towards providing a partial model for how this might be approached. Furthermore, the case studies in Broomé's thesis, which are both excellent and illustrative, are occasionally held back by an overly complex theoretical framework using, amongst other approaches, Bourdieusian field theory and a range of publishing approaches.

Addressing the publication and re-publication, reissuing and re-translation of classic Scandinavian texts is an issue that has been fairly prominent in recent years. For instance, Janet Garton outlines the necessity to re-translate Ibsen for Penguin Classics,<sup>193</sup> while Elettra Carbone and Helena Forsås-Scott write in a similar vein about Norvik Press' endeavours to retranslate Selma Lagerlöf.<sup>194</sup> In both cases, the authors write from the combined perspectives of being researchers and publishers, while Garton is also a translator, but their arguments are clearly intended to justify to other publishing agents

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<sup>191</sup> See, for example, Broomé 2014a, Broomé 2014b, Broomé 2014c.

<sup>192</sup> For a more concise introduction to these concepts, see Broomé 2014a. The use of these strategies by publishers is perhaps not surprising given that even after the apparent increase in volume and quality of Scandinavian translations in Britain noted after the turn of the millennium, there was still some difficulty in obtaining any media coverage for books that made it to English. See Sigmundsdóttir 2005: 62-3.

<sup>193</sup> Garton 2014.

<sup>194</sup> Carbone and Forsås-Scott 2014.

the necessity of covering old ground in the world of translated literature. While there is little reflection on what the impact of the re-translations is, it is obviously implied that the works in question, having had a significant impact previously, have the potential to do so once again if only they are re-translated.

Within the same area, Kristoffer Almlund provides a contrast in his article reflecting on the apparent absence of English-language translations of Nordic literature published by Penguin Books.<sup>195</sup> He notes that Penguin's first foray into Scandinavian literature occurred by fluke, and that despite first-time success, it took several years before Penguin followed with any further translations from the region, despite the wide availability of prominent nineteenth-century Scandinavian literature that could have been reprinted in translation.<sup>196</sup> This disjointed approach appears to have continued throughout the twentieth century at Penguin. Almlund offers little in the way of evidenced conclusions as to why this may be, speculating that lack of profitability, copyright issues, or quality could all be potential reasons. A focus on the appearance and re-appearance of classics is particularly prone to an agent-based approach, and as noted, does not necessarily need to look in any depth at target-market impact as this is taken as read.

The role of literary agents in the transmission of Scandinavian literature to foreign markets, especially the anglophone market, has begun to attract the attention of

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<sup>195</sup> Almlund 2009.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.: 26. *Scandinavian Short Stories* was published in 1943, and curates a selection of short stories that Almlund argues were probably out of copyright, without making any mention that they are in translation. The next book published by Penguin from the Nordic region in 1948 was Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen's *Barbara*. Common to both was Estrid Bannister, who edited the 1943 volume, and was the translator of *Barbara*. More remarkably, she had also served as the inspiration to Jacobsen for the novel itself. See Batty 2017.

researchers in the last few years.<sup>197</sup> However, the most insightful piece of scholarship on the current state of play for literary agents marketing rights for acquisition abroad is Karl Berglund's article examining the hyping of Swedish literature to foreign buyers.<sup>198</sup> This notes that a recent development in the export of Scandinavian literature is the involvement of hyperbolic literary agents. There is little work examining the same phenomenon from a British perspective. Publisher MacLehose has, however, noted that there is often reluctance amongst British publishers to seek out their own foreign fiction, preferring instead to wait for agents to present pre-packaged ideas and concepts; this clearly provides anecdotal evidence that the emergence of a new class of Scandinavian literary agents, especially in Sweden, who are engaged in hype has had an impact in itself.<sup>199</sup> It is likely that there will be further research in the field examining literary agents, but they are by their very nature source-market-driven, and act in the interests of their clients and themselves, which means that an approach of this kind does not lend itself to providing answers to target-market-driven research questions.

As outlined, book histories and studies identifying and analysing the various agents involved in the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain and the English language have become commonplace in the field within the last decade.<sup>200</sup> They have obviously done much to enhance researchers' understanding of the status quo and of developments

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<sup>197</sup> There have been a handful of studies examining the contemporary situation of literary agents domestically in Sweden following a boom in the last two decades or so of this kind of commercial publishing activity. For example, see Göthberg 2001, Berglund 2012a, Sundin 2012.

<sup>198</sup> Berglund 2014. However, Berglund focuses primarily on the workings of literary agencies and their selling practices, rather than on specific examples of books in any great depth or with a focus on the requirements of target markets. He does, however, note that 'everyone in [the] business wanted to get their hands on the next Stieg Larsson, Henning Mankell, or Liza Marklund'. Ibid.: 103.

<sup>199</sup> Engles 2010: 37.

<sup>200</sup> They remain fashionable in other doctoral research currently taking place in the UK. Kythor's study of the dissemination of Danish literature and culture to the UK displays a keen interest in the various agents currently in the book market, see Kythor Forthcoming. Similarly, Barbara Tesio includes a detailed narrative anglophone publishing history of Karen Blixen's *The Angelic Avengers*, see Tesio Forthcoming.

in publishing, and can serve to provide much information that is of use in responding to the research questions posed. However, seeking to determine the likelihood of a successful British reception for Scandinavian books calls for a multifaceted approach that not only considers the agents involved in the dissemination of a book, but also the impact of said books on readers specifically and society as a whole.

#### 4.4 *Swedish Book Review* from 1979 to the Present Day

The publication *SBR* and its predecessor *Swedish Books* serve as important sources of trends and approaches to Swedish literature in English translation from the perspective of translators, cultural and publishing insiders and readers in general. Over the past four or so decades, we have entered an era in which practitioners involved in the transmission of Scandinavian literature have acquired increasing agency through the professionalisation of the industry. In particular, literary translators and literary agents have risen to prominence, and have contributed to public discussion on the issues surrounding Scandinavian translation and publication, enhancing the research field in the process. In the 1970s, there was little in the way of this kind of research, which meant that niche publications such as *SBR* were able to assume a crucial role in the dissemination of this type of discourse.

*Swedish Books* first came out in 1979 but was shortly thereafter superseded by *SBR*, which was first published in 1983 and continues to publish two issues annually. The publication is funded by grant from the Swedish Arts Council, but retains full editorial independence. It serves as the house journal of SELTA, founded in 1982, which represents the interests of literary translators of Swedish and seeks to promote Swedish-language literature in

Britain.<sup>201</sup> Norwegian and Danish literature lack equivalent publications, which means that *SBR* offers a unique case study in detailed commentaries on the contemporary state of affairs in the transmission of a Scandinavian country's literature to Britain; however, in many cases it can be reasonably concluded that the more general trends and findings are applicable to all the Scandinavian countries rather than Sweden exclusively.<sup>202</sup>

Over the years since their inception, the two journals have featured multiple articles of interest to this thesis which will be outlined chronologically. These have primarily pertained to the issue of transmitting Swedish literature to a British audience, and occasionally the pieces have reflected on the wider Scandinavian context.

A variety of contributors to *SBR* offer vastly differing perspectives on situations past, present and future in the transmission of Swedish literature to Britain and the wider anglophone world. Writing in the inaugural *Swedish Books*, Patrick Smith noted that 'Swedish writing is better than its reputation abroad.'<sup>203</sup> His rhetoric made clear the fact that he saw a disconnect between the contemporary literary situations in Sweden and Britain, and the parallel literary systems at conspicuously different stages in development.

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<sup>201</sup> Geddes 2006

<sup>202</sup> It is suggested by Kythor that Sweden's dissemination of its national literature benefits from a stronger international network than that of Denmark and Norway. See Kythor Forthcoming. This is finally changing in the 2010s. In 2014, the Association of Danish-English Literary Translators was established along similar lines by Kythor, and in addition to forming a translators' network is currently investigating the possibility of establishing an online-only equivalent to *SBR* for Danish literature. See Giles 2017c, 'About DELT' 2018. There has been increased interest amongst other stakeholders in this kind of dissemination too, with the most prominent example being the European Literature Network's 2017 publication, *The Nordic Riveter*. See Camel 2017.

<sup>203</sup> Smith 1979: 2. This seems primarily to be based on a documented sales boom in Swedish bookselling in the late 1970s. See *ibid.*: 3.

In the spirit of Smith, the pages of his publication's successor, *SBR*, played host to an intriguing literary debate in the early 1980s. This was initiated by Ruth Halldén, a literary critic for *DN*, who in 1983 told members of SELTA that 'Swedish literature is not much appreciated abroad. There seems to be a certain affinity with German readers, but elsewhere – and especially in England – Swedish fiction does not rank highly.'<sup>204</sup> Halldén attempted to determine the cause of this through a comparison of literary trends in Sweden and Britain. She identified a critical difference between the psyches of British and Swedish writers:

Whereas an English writer is content to produce novels with an exciting plot elegantly and competently narrated, and selects another literary form if he wishes to argue a case, defend a cause, or put forward a new theory, a Swedish writer is likely to use the novel for such purposes. The Swede thus tries to take the world by storm in his novels, to open people's eyes to beauty and truth over a wide spectrum of subject matter, to cultivate burning passions and dreams. This is not to be confused with self-confidence: Swedish writers do not have so much of that, but tend rather to be uncertain of their abilities and aims.<sup>205</sup>

Halldén also observed that Swedish contemporary novels typically had a social conscience, and were pretentious and moralistic.<sup>206</sup> Halldén argued that Sweden's difficulty in making a breakthrough with British readers required a new Swedish approach, proposing that Swedes should take up essay writing for an international audience. The proposition that Sweden had better give up on fiction altogether was a remarkable conclusion to draw in the discussion of how to improve the prospects of Swedish fiction in Britain, especially on the basis of no specific examples and wild generalisation. Yet Halldén's talk and subsequent article were illustrative in highlighting the dichotomy originally presented by Smith.

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<sup>204</sup> Halldén 1984: 27.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*: 28.

While Halldén had not explicitly stated that Britain and Sweden were two literary climates that were out of sync, the volley of responses in *SBR* made this clear. Forsås-Scott accused Halldén of holding a biased view of British literature, contending instead that a Lutheran tendency to moralise was one of the major dividing lines between Swedish and British literary cultures.<sup>207</sup> Forsås-Scott concluded her argument by stating that only a novel ‘can possibly bridge that cultural gap which [Halldén’s] article makes appear so depressingly wide.’ Karin Petherick, in turn, disagreed in the pages of the next issue of *SBR*.<sup>208</sup> She supported Halldén’s view that Swedish and British writers were simply too different. Crucially, Petherick argued that Swedish literature – with its cultural differences and moral compass – might eventually become an acquired taste for British readers.<sup>209</sup> While it is unknown to which particular books featuring moral compasses Petherick may have been referring, the eventual popularity of Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s Martin Beck series in Britain many years after publication, as well as Mankell’s widespread success, must both be obvious examples of how Petherick’s prediction came to pass, at least in part.<sup>210</sup> The very fact that three well-qualified and significant commentators drew such distinct viewpoints from the same reality available to all of them is remarkable. The concept of two literary cultures not moving in parallel is clearly shown in all their contributions to *SBR*, and merits further examination in any study tracing the transmission of Scandinavian literature.

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<sup>207</sup> Forsås-Scott 1984: 45. She observed that ‘perhaps the comparative success of modern Swedish literature in Germany can be explained in terms of the common Lutheran heritage.’

<sup>208</sup> Petherick 1985.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*: 51.

<sup>210</sup> See Chapters 7, 9 and 10 for further details.

Writing in 1983, Agneta Markås, a Swedish specialist in foreign-rights sales, described the difficulty of selling Swedish novels abroad.<sup>211</sup> She expressed particular frustration at the fact that Swedish publishers were expected to pay significantly more for second-rate books originally written in English than English-language publishers were ever willing to pay when books went in the other direction. In contrast, Markås considered the German market to be far more welcoming to foreign writers, including Scandinavians.<sup>212</sup> However, Markås was hopeful that the emergence of SELTA would lead to wider acceptance of Swedish literature in translation in Britain during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>213</sup> Markås' piece reflected a scarcity of literary transmission from Scandinavia to Britain, but also hope for the future.

There was subsequently something of a lull in commentary on the state of Scandinavian literature in translation, excluding a brief article in 1988 that outlined the difficulties of breaking into the English-language market but offered few conclusions.<sup>214</sup> Returning to the theme of her original article in a 1997 follow-up, Markås noted that little had changed in the fifteen years since.<sup>215</sup> Markås qualified her observations by noting that Swedish was in reality in no stronger or weaker a position than any other European language and its literature. She relayed that common grounds for non-translation of Swedish literature were 'that translation and production costs for a Swedish novel [are] so high, and that the book would not sell more than two to three thousand copies anyway.'<sup>216</sup> Focusing on the

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<sup>211</sup> Markås 1983: 42. According to Berglund, Markås drove 'the professionalization of literary agency in Sweden and [started] to focus [on] selling the rights to Swedish literature abroad instead of the other way around.'

<sup>212</sup> In similarity to Espmark 2008: 67.

<sup>213</sup> Markås 1983: 43.

<sup>214</sup> International Success for Swedish Authors 1988.

<sup>215</sup> Markås 1997.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*: 55.



1990s in particular, Markås observed that while Swedish had enjoyed an upturn in its fortunes in relation to transmission to other languages, English had lagged behind other literary polysystems, with only Harvill meriting praise for its approach to Scandinavian writers.<sup>217</sup> However, it is Markås' conclusion that offers particularly interesting food for thought in relation to the coming years at the turn of millennium.

However, at the time of writing (December 1997), it would be wrong not to mention that the signs point to a possible change that may have come about during the previous autumn. A small number of British publishers has responded to enthusiastic reports from both Swedish publishers and individual readers, and there are good grounds for hoping that high-quality Swedish literature might even become available to English-speaking readers on a larger scale than has been recorded to date – thanks not least to competent and reliable publishers' readers and translators, and the translation grants awarded by the Swedish Institute.<sup>218</sup>

While Markås herself did not identify any nascent changes in the field, it is possible to discern that changes were afoot, both in terms of translated Scandinavian bestsellers and boosted interest in niche work amongst multiple publishers. There was a possible cultural turn in the mid-to-late 1990s that can be identified, especially in light of the upward curve experienced by Scandinavian literature in translation during the 2000s.

Writing in 2000, Roger Greenwald addresses the issue of why so few Nordic books are translated to English.<sup>219</sup> He sees the anglophone literary market as 'a paradox: one of the potentially largest book markets in the world – the sum of all those who can read literature in English – is one of the smallest markets from the point of view of most publishers' in light of the fact that fewer English-speaking people tend to be readers.<sup>220</sup> Greenwald argues that to succeed, the Scandinavian countries must act in unison as a promotional

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.: 56.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.: 57.

<sup>219</sup> Greenwald 2000.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.: 27. He does, however, note that children's literature from Scandinavia tends to be the exception, enjoying reasonable rates of translation to English.

entity.<sup>221</sup> As he notes, ‘there is at present a good deal of energy and money devoted to trying to distinguish one Scandinavian country from another in the mind of the English-speaking reader. This is largely wasted effort. Scandinavia [...] is an established and digestible concept. It should be exploited rather than resisted.’<sup>222</sup> Amongst Greenwald’s suggestions are that the Scandinavian countries should jointly invest in subsidies, advertisements, and indeed the creation of a centralised website with an index of Scandinavian books in translation.

One of Greenwald’s fellow contributors in the same edition of *SBR* is Eric Dickens, who also examines the difficulties of publishing Swedish books in English translation in reasonably generalised terms.<sup>223</sup> Dickens identifies a flaw in the publishing system not regularly discussed: the point at which a publisher commissions a reader’s report. In Dickens’ view, there are far too few readers, and these are overly trusted by British publishers, making them ‘all-powerful in their field’.<sup>224</sup> While arguing for more consideration of forgotten classics and superior works, Dickens agrees with Greenwald that the Nordic countries are far too self-absorbed in projects interfacing with each other rather than combining forces to work with the world around them.

While many of Greenwald’s suggestions may seem overly optimistic in the present day, and while Dickens identifies an interesting niche for further examination by scholars of publishing, both make a sound argument for the consideration of Scandinavia as a whole

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.: 29.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Dickens 2000.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.: 35.

entity rather than in its constituent parts. Their commercial strategy perspective can similarly be applied to considering the situation from a research perspective.

Subsequent editions of *SBR* following the turn of the millennium have tended to dedicate fewer pages to the difficulties of making the transition across the North Sea, with incidental remarks on the matter typically confined to editorials or very brief reports.<sup>225</sup> A recent divergence from this trend is this researcher's article on the difficulties with Göran Tunström's work in English translation.<sup>226</sup> Focusing on Tunström's novel *Tjuven*, a text-specific approach is adopted, arguing that a sample translation published in the 1980s may have served the author poorly. However, this researcher reaches the conclusion that the rampant commercialisation of all forms of published literature in Britain means that success for quality literature in translation from Swedish has in many respects become even more of a pipe dream.<sup>227</sup> In retrospect, the study is flawed as the researcher argues that a textual approach can explicate publishing decisions, when in practice a study of why books are not translated would very probably be better served by a broader qualitative study of the agents involved in transactions. However, focussing on one title or author ensures the scope remains realistic if the researcher is to obtain usable findings.

While recent years have seen a developing interest in examining the transmission of Scandinavian literature in more general terms in the press, as well as further scholarship, for many years there was little in the way of examination of these issues.<sup>228</sup> However, *SBR* provided a forum in which academics, translators and professionals were able to discuss

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<sup>225</sup> For example, Arnegren 2003: 42. *SBR* has also included Swedish-focussed digests of LAF's 2015 and 2017 statistical reports. See Giles 2015, Giles 2018.

<sup>226</sup> Giles 2014.

<sup>227</sup> Giles 2014: 11.

<sup>228</sup> Regardless of whether academic and scholarly rigour is taken into account or not.

matters of literary transmission, inevitably leading to comment, discussion and speculation in relation to the socio-cultural environment in the target literary market.

## 4.5 Transmission and Reception Studies

The coverage of the transmission and reception of Scandinavian books and literature to Britain and the English language, both scholarly and lay, has, as shown, varied by some degree over the years. This researcher has already endeavoured to cover a range of approaches and forms of research that, at the very least, touch upon this subject through themes such as cultural history and contemporary journalism, bibliographic studies and the construction of bibliography, examining publishing agents, and finally niche publications in the field. All these provide useful elements that can be adapted for use in a study to respond to the research questions set out. This section will now turn to examine scholarship that focuses specifically on the transmission and reception of Scandinavian literature in Britain.

The literary heavyweights of nineteenth-century Scandinavia such as Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, and to a lesser extent Georg Brandes, all fall outside the period covered by this thesis, although no account of the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain and elsewhere abroad would be complete without taking them into consideration.<sup>229</sup> There is extensive scholarship examining all three and their impact on

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<sup>229</sup> For Strindberg, recent works that merit consultation include Robinson 2008a, Robinson 2010, Lysell 2014. A comprehensive study of Ibsen's British reception is provided in Davis 1984. See also Robinson 2006. For a specific study of Brandes in Britain, consult Skilton 1980. For a more general study of Brandes' reception outside of Denmark, see Hertel and Kristensen 1980. Ibsen remains the second most performed playwright in the world, and is said to appear on 100 different stages every month; see Leyton and Furhovden 2016. Strindberg has marginally less impact, but there has been a continuing interest in publishing new translations of his work in Britain via small presses such as Norvik Press. A recent example includes Strindberg 2012. As recently as the late 1980s, both Ibsen and Strindberg were amongst the three

the British literary scene, but it is of limited use to this researcher. There is a tendency towards a descriptive, somewhat historiographical approach, best suited for use by students of literature, rather than researchers of reception.<sup>230</sup>

A common issue in British scholarship on Scandinavian literature and its transmission to English is that of non-translation. For example, in a 1978 article about Sven Wernström, ‘one of the most discussed writers for young people in Sweden over the last decade’, Graves noted that none of his books had been translated into English, stating that ‘he is perhaps too overtly political and too open in matters of sex for British thinking on what makes suitable reading for young people.’<sup>231</sup> His assertion that British readers were not ready to take on board a text of this kind is a form of recognition of the sociological realities of the British target market, but is also influenced by the role played by publishers and translators.

The 1990s appear to have marked a watershed in research and output on Scandinavian literature in the British and anglophone context from a sociological and target-market-oriented perspective. In 1994, Mette Rudvin examined the propensity of the dominant English-speaking target system to use translated literature to confirm perceptions of a minority source culture, using the example of the association between Norway and the theme of nature.<sup>232</sup> Rudvin’s approach has much merit in that it considers the interests of

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most commonly performed foreign playwrights in Britain. See Meyer 1986: 29. Brandes, meanwhile, is largely confined to the syllabi of specialist courses at a limited number of British universities.

<sup>230</sup> This kind of descriptive work has not been limited to Ibsen, Brandes and Strindberg. A small number of textbooks published on small presses have also undertaken to provide limited outlines of the transmission to Britain of other authors in the Scandinavian literary canon under the guise of presenting them more generally as the subject of study by British literature students. See, for example, Scobbie 1999.

<sup>231</sup> Graves 1978: 73. Similar reflections can be found in, for example, Crampton 1975.

<sup>232</sup> Rudvin 1994: 199. Rudvin is, however, unsettled over whether the origins of the association between Norway and nature lie in Norway itself or in Britain. A better grounding in the Victorian love affair with northern values and landscapes might have offered Rudvin more ammunition in this respect.

the target market and reflects on the sociological status of the readers in that literary system, rather than focusing heavily on the Norwegian source market or the content of books beyond broad themes. Of particular interest is the assertion that Norwegian children's literature has carved itself a niche in the anglophone literary world on the grounds that British readers, for instance, have a preconceived and accepted image of Norway that influences their receptivity of Norwegian children's literature imports.<sup>233</sup> However, there is no suggestion that nature-themed Norwegian children's books have any great impact on the British literary market, as Rudvin observes that they are likely to be doubly peripheral through being children's literature and translated.<sup>234</sup>

Researcher Graves wrote several papers on the British reception of Swedish author Lagerlöf and Norwegian Hamsun just a few years later.<sup>235</sup> These contributions are all grounded in elements of sociological translation theory and reflect to some degree on the social context for the reception of the respective authors in Britain. His subsequent article from 2011 goes into further depth on the application of Holmes' fDTS theory in the examination of Scandinavian literature and its reception in Britain, focusing on the context rather than text.<sup>236</sup> Graves' approaches offer much in the way of inspiration to the researcher seeking to respond to the research questions posed, both in terms of form and approach. However, they are limited, by their very nature, in scope and detail, leaving much that is unanswered or to which further detail can usefully be added.<sup>237</sup> Additionally,

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.: 204.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.: 208.

<sup>235</sup> Graves 1998a, Graves 1998b, Graves 1999.

<sup>236</sup> Graves 2011.

<sup>237</sup> For example, in the case of his study of Hamsun, Graves' article serves as inspiration for Fjågesund's 2009 chapter going into further depth on Hamsun's British reception (as can be seen from Fjågesund's chapter title), thanks largely to access to additional archival resources not available to Graves. See Fjågesund 2009a.

by Graves' own admission, his articles do little to reflect on more general trends in Scandinavian literary transmission over the longer term. He states: '[A] coherent historical account of the transmission of Scandinavian literature ... still waits to be done.'<sup>238</sup>

This type of approach has been reasonably limited in its application in the Scandinavian-British context. Berry's and Broomé's studies have adopted similar theoretical approaches to their own areas of interest, but have ultimately, as has already been discussed, opted to focus primarily on publishing agents rather than the sociological context of the British target market as a whole.<sup>239</sup> A rare counter-example, albeit not strictly a Scandinavian one, is Magnus Magnusson's account of Halldór Laxness' translation and reception in the UK and the USA,<sup>240</sup> which goes into some detail on the matter of Laxness' British experience in a manner not dissimilar from Graves'. However, Magnusson does not explicitly set out an approach that is theoretically grounded in the same way as Graves.

Looking wholly beyond the Scandinavian and Nordic contexts, studies of this kind exist in other literary cultures. British publisher Continuum's *Reception Studies Series* has covered the international reception of a variety of primarily anglophone writers in recent years. For instance, Mitchell and Stuart's study of the American poet Emily Dickinson's international reception thoroughly examines her reception in a variety of countries and languages across twelve chapters.<sup>241</sup> The volume includes separate chapters on Dickinson's reception in Sweden and in Norway, as well as a dedicated chapter on Britain

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<sup>238</sup> Graves 2011: 3. This researcher considers this statement a call to action, and this thesis a response to that call.

<sup>239</sup> Berry 2013, Broomé 2014c. Other ongoing examples include Kythor's examination of the British reception of Jakob Ejersbo and Tesio's examination of the British and American reception of Karen Blixen. See Kythor Forthcoming, Tesio Forthcoming.

<sup>240</sup> Magnusson 2003.

<sup>241</sup> Mitchell and Stuart 2009a.

Nevertheless, the availability of titles such as this should not be mistaken for evidence that target-market, reception-driven studies are the norm beyond the Scandinavian paradigm.<sup>242</sup>

One genre that has gone some distance in bucking the trends outlined above, as indeed is the case for other approaches in this field, is that of crime fiction. A number of publications have been dedicated to the contemplation of the reception of Scandinavian crime fiction in Britain and the wider international context, although many of these have been popular rather than academic in nature.<sup>243</sup> Chief amongst these are the publications of Forshaw, whose books have sought to cover the diversity of the genre, ranging from Larsson specifically to Nordic Noir and its origins more generally.<sup>244</sup> While it is gratifying to see that Forshaw believes that ‘the day of the translator has unarguably arrived’, the examples he uses are sufficiently brief to be of little help to the researcher within the scope of this study.<sup>245</sup> Beyond Forshaw, there has naturally been substantial activity in the pages of national newspapers that are too many to list comprehensively, and most tellingly, via the medium of television.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> It is of note that the editors remark in their introduction that while various attempts have been made in print to approach the act of translating Dickinson to other languages, there has been little attention given to the impact of her translated work in target markets. See Mitchell and Stuart 2009b: 1-2.

<sup>243</sup> Taking Hansen and Waade at their word that Nordic Noir ‘is a concept that we should take seriously, whether it makes empirical sense or not.’ See Hansen and Waade 2017: 18.

<sup>244</sup> Forshaw 2011, Forshaw 2012, Forshaw 2013, Forshaw 2014. Following on Forshaw’s coattails are several other prominent examples of books seeking to respond to the crime boom, such as Burstein, et al. 2011, Jute and McCoy 2011.

<sup>245</sup> Forshaw 2014: 267.

<sup>246</sup> In December 2010, the BBC broadcast ‘Nordic Noir: The Story of Scandinavian Crime Fiction’. This featured a range of contributors providing a wide array of voxpops. Stougaard-Nielsen appears in the broadcast, framing the Nordic Noir genre from an academic perspective. Indeed, he has speculated that he may have been responsible for coining the very term ‘Nordic Noir’ during his participation in the broadcast, see Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 235.



As one might expect, attempts to describe the reception of Scandinavian crime fiction in scholarly terms also began to appear during the early 2010s. An early example is Andrew Nestingen and Paula Arvas' edited volume *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, encompassing a range of approaches to the subject, but avoiding the term 'Nordic Noir'.<sup>247</sup> One of the earliest British-specific publications to appear was Steven Peacock's 2014 book *Swedish Crime Fiction: Novel, Film, Television*, which seems to offer a tantalising opportunity to trace the origins of Swedish crime in English translation in some depth.<sup>248</sup> However, Peacock opts to focus his study more substantially on film and television adaptations of Swedish literature rather than the books themselves, or indeed their transmission to and reception in Britain.<sup>249</sup> While it provides an accessible and engaging portal into the broader cultural phenomenon, the lack of specific data and analysis concerning literary transmission and reception makes such a study of little use in responding to the research questions in this thesis. This is perhaps not altogether surprising given the difficulty of working out precisely what Nordic Noir actually is.<sup>250</sup>

Stougaard-Nielsen's *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* is an excellent primer for anyone wanting to dig deeper into the background of Scandinavia's fascination with the genre.<sup>251</sup> However, it focuses on the development of the concept in a broad and internationalised sense, without focusing specifically on the British context.<sup>252</sup> He suggests that 'the local as well as the international success of Scandinavian crime narratives in print and on the screen is

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<sup>247</sup> Nestingen and Arvas 2011.

<sup>248</sup> Peacock 2014.

<sup>249</sup> This approach has become the norm in pursuit of the elusive concept of Nordic Noir, with the televisual forming the basis of Hansen and Waade's *Locating Nordic Noir*. It appears that 2018 will offer yet another volume taking this approach, see McCulloch and Proctor Forthcoming.

<sup>250</sup> See Chapter 1 for further discussion.

<sup>251</sup> Stougaard-Nielsen 2017.

<sup>252</sup> This despite the fact that Stougaard-Nielsen works in Britain and the work is published in Britain. He has additionally noted the British influences on his own research approaches elsewhere in Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 235.

centrally tied to their at times nostalgic, sentimental and melodramatic insistence on values associated with fundamental, perhaps long-forgotten, aspirations of the Scandinavian welfare societies.<sup>253</sup> The British-based researcher can thus infer that Stougaard-Nielsen sees Britain as especially receptive to Scandinavian crime fiction on the grounds that many British readers are so enamoured with the Nordic region as a concept, as is previously outlined in the consideration of borealism in Britain.<sup>254</sup>

Stougaard-Nielsen's book is a worthwhile contribution to an expanding field of scholarship seeking to address the Scandinavian crime fiction wave, however, reflections on the impact of the cultural phenomenon with particular reference to the British target market are arguably better set out in his joint article with C. Claire Thomson.<sup>255</sup> The authors consider the popularity of Nordic Noir in the UK, using a series of case studies from both literature and culture.<sup>256</sup> Their study briefly considers the experience of Danish literature in English translation in recent years within the remit of Nordic Noir.<sup>257</sup> They note that while the genre dominates English-language translations of Danish books, Danish books are the smallest segment of the genre in Scandinavian terms.<sup>258</sup> The authors' findings are particularly interesting to this study in that they argue firstly that Scandinavian crime fiction is inherently easily translatable,<sup>259</sup> secondly that cultural products with Scandinavian origins 'shape shift' as they are transmitted to Britain to suit their new

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<sup>253</sup> Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 11.

<sup>254</sup> Stougaard-Nielsen pursues this particular thread with an examination of the 'allure of accessible difference' in Stougaard-Nielsen 2016.

<sup>255</sup> Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen 2017. The authors summarise ground covered in more detail by Kythor in her forthcoming thesis, where she unpacks many of the issues covered fleetingly by Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen. See Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>256</sup> Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen 2017.

<sup>257</sup> Indeed, the authors are clearly reliant on Kythor for the data-driven elements of their arguments. See Kythor 2016.

<sup>258</sup> Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 240.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*: 246.

prospective audience,<sup>260</sup> and thirdly that many individuals in the British target culture are engaged in collective imagining and re-imagining of what actually constitutes Scandinavia.<sup>261</sup> On the whole, there is much to draw from Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen's work, especially in terms of their well-structured attempt to draw longer-term, general conclusions out of case studies that are mere snapshots. The difficulty, from the perspective of this researcher, with integrating the authors' findings more thoroughly into this study is that they have sought to redefine literature as a cross-cultural concept encompassing everything from television to Instagram posts.<sup>262</sup> While this is a pragmatic approach driven by modern realities, it makes it difficult to discern what constitutes the behaviour of readers and critics in a literary polysystem, and what refers to other activities and behaviours.

It should be noted that this thesis has outlined research relating to Scandinavian crime fiction on the grounds of its frequency and availability, especially compared to other studies, rather than on the grounds of being inherently suitable for replication.

## 4.6 Final Reflections

In general terms, the understanding of the role played by translated Scandinavian literature in Britain is inconsistent. Writing in 1994, Mette Rudvin noted that excluding traditional heavyweights, such as Ibsen, Hamsun and Undset, Norwegian literature was little known in anglophone countries.<sup>263</sup> Just a decade later, MacLehose expressed astonishment at the rate of growth experienced by the Scandinavian languages in Britain since he had

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid.: 254.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.: 256. This collective re-imagining is particularly well illustrated in relation to the concept of *hygge*. See Kythor 2017, Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>262</sup> Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 258.

<sup>263</sup> Rudvin 1994: 203.

commissioned his first translation in 1978.<sup>264</sup> While one commentator was considering the Norwegian situation and the other more generally the Scandinavian situation, what is clear is that in the period between 1994 and 2004 there is perceived to have been an upturn in terms of Scandinavian literary transmission to Britain. Rudvin's observation of Norwegian's low-status position in the British literary culture is not qualified by noting the outstanding performance of either of the other Scandinavian languages, yet MacLehose sees a language constellation enjoying relative success. Further examination of this period in relation to literary transmission to Britain may therefore yield interesting and original findings. Studies that are restricted to one book or author provide limited findings, while those that draw on multiple examples or case studies allow researchers to develop findings that can be used more widely.

The approach required to address the research questions that have been set out in this thesis cannot be restricted to any single approach used by others working in this area. Any successful approach in this endeavour must be constructed to allow the inclusion of British perspectives on Scandinavia, bibliographic studies, and agent-focused studies, as well as those limited examples of transmission and reception studies that are better suited to addressing questions of this kind. It is clear from the existing literature in the field that while the nineteenth century has benefited from extensive contemporary scholarship from a variety of perspectives, in addition to a reasonable array of retrospective work, the twentieth century has not received the same treatment. At the micro level, studies of individual Scandinavian writers and texts from a sociological translation perspective have been very limited, and not always wholly satisfactory. At the macro level, studies have

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<sup>264</sup> MacLehose 2004: 108.

tended to focus overly on list-making or identifying agents involved in past activities, rather than tracing the impact of books themselves and the social causes thereof. It appears that there may have been a cultural upturn in the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain around the turn of millennium, but such changes have surely taken place at many other points during the past century. Fjågesund takes the view that only through examining the period since the turn of the millennium will it be possible to find genuinely new trends pertaining to Scandinavian literary exports to the UK, and then only by taking into consideration wider cultural and political contexts in the target market.<sup>265</sup> Moments have also been identified in this review where the Scandinavian source market and the British target market have arguably been out of sync, and these disconnects may well be more prevalent. Only through a sociologically driven examination, of the kind proposed by Fjågesund, of the publication of translated Scandinavian books in Britain, is it possible to respond to the research questions and adequately identify cultural shifts and disconnects of these kinds, while also understanding why they occurred.

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<sup>265</sup> Fjågesund 2017: 28.

## 5 Gyldendal Goes to London: the British Reception of Knut Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil*

*'The result was the most read, most translated, most praised and least characteristic novel that Hamsun ever wrote, and which by its almost chance fame in being linked with the award of the Nobel Prize has done more to misrepresent Hamsun (in England and America at least) than anything else.'*  
(James McFarlane 1960: 155)



**Norway**

*Markens Grøde* (1917)

**Britain**

*Growth of the Soil* (1920)





## 5 Gyldendal Goes to London: the British Reception of Knut Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil*

The novel is what it is today in large part because of what Knut Hamsun wrought, which is a fact that no amount of revisionist history can wipe away. It's time we accept this and try to figure some way to bring the man's books back into the canon, while leaving his horrid politics out in the cold where they belong.<sup>266</sup>

Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun is considered by many to be a pioneer of modern literature, with an emphasis on works written earlier in his career such as *Sult*. This was indeed Hamsun's first work to be translated to English, appearing in 1899 as *Hunger*, but there was little notice paid to Hamsun until 1920, when his novel *Growth* was published in Britain. In global terms, the latter novel had widespread impact, securing Hamsun the Nobel Prize in Literature in the same year, while in Britain it secured him the critical attention and appreciation he had craved from anglophone audiences for so long.<sup>267</sup> However, *Growth* was, in the words of James McFarlane, 'the least characteristic novel that Hamsun ever wrote'.<sup>268</sup> This was reflected in Hamsun's poor commercial performance in Britain, as well as the widespread critical apathy that came to be associated with much of his oeuvre. This chapter examines the reception of *Growth* in order to identify which nascent publishing trends can be observed, as well as the position of the novel and its author in the British literary polysystem.

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<sup>266</sup> 'The Nazi Novelist You Should Read' 2008.

<sup>267</sup> Hamsun's desire for anglophone success is outlined in Kolloen 2009: 173. Hamsun became the first author to be awarded the Nobel Prize on the basis of one work alone, as is discussed in Chapter 5.3.1.

<sup>268</sup> McFarlane 1960: 155.

## 5.1 Hamsun and *Markens Grøde*

### 5.1.1 About Knut Hamsun

Knut Hamsun (1859-1952) was, to quote the jacket of the English translation of Ingar Sletten Kolloen's biography, 'both brilliant and controversial'. Born into a poor peasant family in the Gudbrandsdal, he spent his early years engaged in a range of occupations, as well as spending two spells in the American Midwest. His own struggles as an aspiring author formed the basis of his first novel, *Hunger*. He was a prolific writer, working as a playwright, poet and regular contributor to the newspapers, but it was as a novelist that he made his mark on both Norway and the surrounding world, with his oeuvre produced over a period of seven decades. During the Second World War, he was highly sympathetic to the Nazis, and at the end of the war he was tried and convicted of treason. He was, in short, a figure of great literary significance to both Norway and the world, and a highly controversial character.<sup>269</sup>

### 5.1.2 The Publication and Reception of *Markens Grøde* in Norway

Hamsun completed *Grøde* in November 1917,<sup>270</sup> and it was published on 1 December 1917 by Copenhagen-based Gyldendalske Boghandel, which was one of the dominant publishers in Denmark and Norway at the time.<sup>271</sup> Reviews of the novel in the Norwegian

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<sup>269</sup> Good biographies of Hamsun include Ferguson 1987, Kolloen 2003, Kolloen 2004, Kolloen 2009, Rem 2014. See also McFarlane 1960: 114-57.

<sup>270</sup> *Growth* is an example of Norwegian New Realism, and concerns Isak who ventures into the Norwegian hinterland to clear land and build a farm and life. The novel is considered by many to be a response to the rapid industrialisation and technologisation of society, with its back-to-nature, agrarian message. Others have also identified *Growth* as containing an anti-war message, given that it was written during the First World War. For instance, Alrik Gustafson noted that Hamsun 'had found [...] civilization in many ways ill adapted to the fundamental needs of man' in several of his books during the 1910s and 1920s, see Gustafson 1940: 241. Other detailed literary critiques of *Growth* include Simpson 1984 and Næss 1986.

<sup>271</sup> Hamsun's works, including *Grøde*, returned home to Norway in 1925 through the formation of Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, which was established in Oslo and took over the Norwegian rights previously owned by Gyldendal in Denmark. The new Norwegian publishing operation received significant financial backing from Hamsun himself. See Röhne 2013.

newspapers followed immediately and were highly positive. For example, Ronald Fangen was effusive, questioning whether there could be a greater storyteller in Europe than Hamsun, and adding with delight that it helped that Hamsun was also an excellent writer of novels.<sup>272</sup> Despite being a fairly lengthy novel, Olav Hoprekstad found it to be both readable and entertaining.<sup>273</sup>

In commercial terms, *Grøde* was a remarkable success, and is credited with transforming Hamsun's financial fortunes.<sup>274</sup> 18,000 copies of the novel were printed before Christmas 1917.<sup>275</sup> During 1918 Hamsun earned royalties in Norway worth more than NOK 90,000. Hamsun's large ongoing expenses related to Nørholm farm, his recently acquired home, meant that he was borrowing heavily from Gyldendal against earnings on his future, as yet unwritten, books. Evidently, Hamsun was a highly bankable publishing commodity. In 1919, there was a new run of 10,000 copies of *Grøde* in Norway.<sup>276</sup> In 1920, his Norwegian/Danish sales alone amounted to NOK 110,000.<sup>277</sup> In short, *Grøde*, while far from being Hamsun's first literary success, was arguably his first commercial smash hit.<sup>278</sup> The Norwegian commercial success for *Grøde* was not short-lived: by 1927, 55,000 copies had been sold since original publication in Norway and Denmark, and according to Arvid Østby, 214,000 copies had been sold by the time the 1958 edition sold out.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Fangen 1917.

<sup>273</sup> Hoprekstad 1917. For similar examples of other positive notices in the Norwegian press, see Halvorsen 1917, Nissen 1917.

<sup>274</sup> Kolloen 2009: 160.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. Hamsun's good fortune with *Growth* was matched by the performance of his *Samlede verker*, which were reissued at around the same time after selling out their initial print run of 8,000.

<sup>276</sup> Kolloen 2003: 388.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.: 406.

<sup>278</sup> Hamsun even says as much in a letter to the tax authorities. See Næss and McFarlane 1998: 149. Kolloen describes *Growth* as 'a licence to print money', see Kolloen 2003: 355.

<sup>279</sup> Østby 1972: 32.

### 5.1.3 English-language Publication Details

Fjågesund describes Hamsun's road to the British literary scene as arduous.<sup>280</sup> When *Sult* was published in Norwegian in 1890, Hamsun hoped to secure an English translation and a favourable British reception.<sup>281</sup> In practice, it would be almost a decade before George Egerton's translation appeared in the UK, and even then only with a publisher better known for its erotic content.<sup>282</sup> The publication of *Hunger* in 1899 merited little excitement, with several newspapers adding the title to their 'books received' columns; a brief notice and excerpt that appeared in the *Standard* was faintly positive, without giving any impression that the reviewer had read the book.<sup>283</sup>

Writing shortly before the publication of *Hunger*, Edmund Gosse, doyen of British literary tastes relating to the North and 'Ibsen's prophet to English readers', fired his first shot across Hamsun's bows, accusing him of lacking moral fibre and misrepresenting the world around him.<sup>284</sup> Indeed, there are negative references to Hamsun in Gosse's work at irregular intervals throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Subsequent mentions of Hamsun in the British press were limited. An anonymous article in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1901 is something of an exception to this, discussing many writers from Scandinavia, but dedicating much space to Hamsun. In his analysis of the article, Graves notes that the article's author is seemingly uncertain of whether Hamsun

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<sup>280</sup> Fjågesund 2017: 24.

<sup>281</sup> Fjågesund 2009a: 66.

<sup>282</sup> Strangely, however, Hamsun was mentioned in the pages of the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* in 1893, which noted Hamsun's fame on the grounds of *Hunger*. See 'How to Learn a Language' 1893.

<sup>283</sup> See *Novels of the Day 1899*. Other notices also focused on the niche quality of the publication, as well as the art used for the book jacket, see Rem 2002: 66-8.

<sup>284</sup> Gosse 1898: 540. Graves reflects at some length on Gosse's influence on British tastes in relation to Scandinavian literature during this period in Graves 2012.

is sane, and surmises that there is likely to be little interest in work of Hamsun's kind in Britain.<sup>285</sup> With the exception of a handful of brief mentions in the pages of literary journals about translations of Hamsun into other European languages, primarily German, the novelist remained off the radar of British readers until *Shallow Soil* came out in 1914.<sup>286</sup> *TLS* described Hamsun as 'practically little known to English readers', while Graves summarised the lacklustre British reception of *Shallow Soil* as 'cool'.<sup>287</sup>

The background to Hamsun's third transmission to Britain with *Growth* in 1920 is to be found some four decades earlier.<sup>288</sup> Hamsun had long benefitted from a good relationship with his publishers Gyldendal. As a rule, any requests Hamsun made were met: in 1906 he demanded the same terms granted to Ibsen and Bjørnson and received them.<sup>289</sup> In 1917, he once again benefitted from improved terms after threatening to leave.<sup>290</sup> Things came to a head when Gyldendal's director of Norwegian operations, Christian Kønig, came to visit Hamsun to discuss the author's position in Britain.<sup>291</sup> He had thus far been wholly unsuccessful in Britain, and Gyldendal had struggled to interest British publishers in his work – in Kønig's view because it was not an auspicious time for foreign writers in English – but a new attempt was to be made with *Pan*.<sup>292</sup> Critically, Gyldendal had proposed that it manage the third transmission of Hamsun to Britain via a new publishing

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<sup>285</sup> For further details, see Graves 1998a: 23-6.

<sup>286</sup> See, for example, 'Notes' 1909. The reception of Hamsun in other international literary polysystems is considered in Fjågesund 2009b.

<sup>287</sup> 'Notes' 1914, Graves 1998a: 27.

<sup>288</sup> Kolloen 2009: 12.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*: 115-6.

<sup>290</sup> Kolloen 2003: 355.

<sup>291</sup> Kolloen 2009: 173. Kolloen dates this meeting to the summer of 1920, but this would seem unlikely given that Gyldendal's branch in London was already operational by April 1920, and had announced that it would publish Hamsun. This researcher believes the meeting may have taken place either earlier in 1920, or indeed in the summer of 1919.

<sup>292</sup> Oddly enough, no specific mention is made by Kønig or Hamsun in relation to *Growth* and the attempt to break Britain – despite its magnificent sales in Norway, there was no apparent urgency to translate it to English. See *ibid.*

arm in London.<sup>293</sup> Evidently, Hamsun must have spurred them on, as Kønig was dispatched back to Copenhagen to convey Hamsun's dissatisfaction with the British status quo.

Hamsun and Kønig's dissatisfaction with the anglophone situation was – primarily, one suspects – for monetary reasons; they had good grounds to believe that Hamsun could deliver a stellar commercial performance in Britain. Hamsun's performance in Scandinavia during the 1910s had been excellent, and *Growth* was showing promising signs in foreign markets. Rights to the novel were quickly snapped up and the Swedish and Finnish editions were published before the end of 1918, both with significant print runs.<sup>294</sup> There was an eagerness to translate the book into Dutch and Hungarian – both markets fresh from success with translations of *Hunger*.<sup>295</sup> In Germany, Hamsun's most significant foreign market, his publishers Langen continued to sell the *Gesammelte Werke* with great success despite the perilous state of the economy after the end of the war.<sup>296</sup> Hamsun was enjoying success in most foreign markets, many of which kept up with his sales in Norwegian.<sup>297</sup>

In April 1920, an advertisement was placed in *The Times* by the newly established London office of Gyldendal.<sup>298</sup> The publisher stated that they hoped to 'offer the English-reading public representative works of outstanding quality by Scandinavian writers.' All

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Kolloen 2003: 368.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.: 388.

<sup>296</sup> Kolloen 2009: 164.

<sup>297</sup> In an irate letter to the Larvik Tax Authorities, Hamsun even bemoans lost earnings abroad due to the war, with a particular emphasis on the mighty royalties he was previously paid by his publishers in Russia – and the fact that they continued to publish without paying him. See Næss and McFarlane 1998: 149.

<sup>298</sup> See 'Preliminary Announcement of Gyldendal's Books' 1920. Subsequent titles by Hamsun included on the Gyldendal list in London are discussed further in Chapter 5.3.2.

Gyldendal's launch titles were by Scandinavians, with the exception of a non-fiction book, rather implausibly about Rudyard Kipling, authored by W. W. Worster, the translator of *Growth*.<sup>299</sup> *Growth* featured in a number of summarised lists in the press rounding up new releases.<sup>300</sup> This was an unusual situation for Scandinavian literature being imported to Britain. The English rights had not been acquired by a British (or American) publisher: instead the author's domestic publisher had set about publishing it by themselves in the target market. While arrangements similar to this have become more common in the twenty-first century, finding instances akin to that of Gyldendal in London, where an author's domestic publisher physically establishes itself abroad in order to publish translations has not been possible and may in fact be unique.<sup>301</sup>

## 5.2 The Reception of *Growth*

### 5.2.1 Critical Reception

Hamsun had featured briefly in the pages of British literary reviews over the past two decades, but there was little brand recognition for Hamsun when *Growth* arrived in 1920. Indeed, writing before publication of the translation, Josef Wiehr was unsure of its

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<sup>299</sup> Worster 1920b. Little is known about Worster, who was only active under this name in the 1920s, or on what basis he was selected as a translator by Gyldendal. For instance, his 1920 book *Merlin's Isle: A Study of Rudyard Kipling's England*, has the feel of being a university dissertation. Worster translated a number of Scandinavian books during the 1920s, including Lagerlöf's *The Outcast* for Gyldendal, before disappearing from prominence. Linda Schenck, translator of Norvik Press' forthcoming retranslation of *The Outcast*, has noted in discussion with this researcher the difficulty of establishing anything about the enigmatic Worster in preparation of her translator's afterword for the volume.

<sup>300</sup> This sort of presentation was typical, and readers of *The Times* were notified that the book was featured on the 'Library List' for the week – with the suggestion they spend nine shillings to acquire it. See 'Books of the Week' 1920.

<sup>301</sup> The involvement of the source market in the dissemination of translated Scandinavian literature has tended to take slightly other forms. In 2017, Swedish literary agent Niclas Salomonsson bought back the North American rights to Lars Kepler's work and commissioned retranslations, bypassing all the standard translation publishing mechanisms. See Milliot 2017. In terms of source-market-based publishers, a good example in recent years is Stockholm Text, which took to publishing primarily Swedish crime and children's books in English translation (such as Jenny Jägerfeld's *Me on the Floor, Bleeding*) for the North American and British markets. See Habash and Milliot 2013. Yet Stockholm Text, which at the time of writing appears to be defunct, was still an independent publishing entity in Sweden, acquiring foreign-language rights, and Salomonsson still sought out a new publisher in the USA rather than going it alone.



prospects: ‘how the rank and file of English and American readers will receive this novel remains to be seen.’<sup>302</sup> Gyldendal, having failed to secure a British publisher and having instead opened their own branch in London, were clearly aware of this difficulty too. There was a concerted effort to generate some degree of marketing hype, with the literary agent Curtis Brown engaged to turn the wheels. He even went so far as to commission a reader’s report from H. G. Wells in order to bolster Hamsun’s position in Britain.<sup>303</sup> Wells’ write-up was glowing.

I do not know how to express the admiration I feel for this wonderful book without seeming to be extravagant. I am not usually lavish with my praise, but indeed the book impresses me as among the very greatest novels I have ever read. It is wholly beautiful; it is saturated with wisdom and humour and tenderness; these peasants are a triumph of creative understanding.<sup>304</sup>

Given he was being paid by Brown, it is unclear whether Wells was as effusive as his words suggested.<sup>305</sup> Yet Wells’ enthusiasm did not diminish: writing in *The Salvaging of Civilization*, he discussed what ought to be included in a canon equating to the new bible for civilisation. He pleaded the case of Hamsun as one of just a couple of foreign-language authors that merited inclusion in full: ‘It seems to me that Tolstoi’s *War and Peace* and Hamsun’s *Growth* are books on an almost Biblical scale’.<sup>306</sup> Brown’s work to generate positivity around Hamsun and *Growth* clearly worked to great effect in the case of Wells, and reportedly to the great satisfaction of Hamsun.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Wiehr 1922: 112.

<sup>303</sup> Fjågesund 2009a: 68.

<sup>304</sup> This appears in marketing for *Growth* in the back of Gyldendal’s 1920 edition of *Pan*. It may be assumed that this is a direct quotation from Wells’ report on the grounds that the quotation does not appear in *The Salvaging of Civilization*, which was first published in 1921, while the edition of *Pan* bearing the words appeared in the autumn of 1920. See Hamsun 1920b: 233.

<sup>305</sup> Wells was known to be having an affair with Rebecca West, who reviewed *Growth* for the *New Statesman* in highly positive terms, at the time of the review. Fjågesund hints at a degree of collusion between the two. See Fjågesund 2009a: 68.

<sup>306</sup> Wells 1921: 123-24.

<sup>307</sup> Kolloen 2003: 392.

Worster noted that reviewers of *Growth* laid aside stock phrases and were satisfied to come across a literary piece that demanded attention.<sup>308</sup> Not only this, but reviews appeared in a wide range of publications in the UK. It is likely that Brown had, at least partially, managed to exert sufficient influence on elite literary circles to secure good reviews for a seemingly new author, published by a new press, in translation.<sup>309</sup>

Reviewing in *The New Statesman*, Rebecca West did not start out by giving the impression that she was likely to look upon *Growth* favourably.<sup>310</sup> She questioned whether Hamsun was as great an author as had been suggested, stating ‘some of the most acclaimed Scandinavians have been of value chiefly as foolometers’.<sup>311</sup> Her pessimism continued: ‘One hardly cared to become excited about Knut Hamsun. The chances seemed so very great that he would be just one more [...] Nordic dud.’ However, West was of the opinion that from the very first chapter, Hamsun was in fact ‘Godlike’, and that there was not a dull moment to be found in the book. In an almost hyperbolic conclusion, reminiscent of Wells’ own praise, she said: ‘One hopes [the publisher] will make haste to publish translations of everything that Knut Hamsun has ever written.’<sup>312</sup>

Katherine Mansfield, writing in *The Athenaeum*, lamented that despite Hamsun’s fame, advanced age, and assured reputation, no works except for *Shallow Soil* had been translated to English, remarking ‘we have had nothing but the echo of his fame to feed upon.’<sup>313</sup> She

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<sup>308</sup> Worster 1920a.

<sup>309</sup> According to Graves, the review coverage for *Growth* was far wider than that granted to any other Scandinavian title during the period. See Graves 1998a: 28.

<sup>310</sup> West 1920.

<sup>311</sup> West told her readers that ‘Strindberg was a certifiable lunatic of weak character’.

<sup>312</sup> West even speculated on whether Hamsun’s plays might be worth translating first for ‘it is extremely difficult to imagine what kind of a play this man...could possibly write’, lamenting the constant exposure in Britain to the epilepsy of Strindberg.

<sup>313</sup> Mansfield 1920: 767. Mansfield was apparently unaware of the 1899 publication of *Hunger*.

was clearly impressed by the novel, stating ‘if “Growth of the Soil” can be said to have any plot at all [...] it is the very ancient one of man’s attempt to live in fellowship with Nature. [...] never was there a time when its message was more needed.’ Mansfield believed she spoke for all when describing the delight she felt at reading of how tracks were made, bushes felled, and so on. She dwelled on the richness of the characters and the landscape in Hamsun’s book, concluding with her reflections on the book’s ending and overall impact on her and stating that ‘we feel, as we feel with all great novels, that nothing is over.’

*The New Age* featured a review of all of Gyldendal’s launch titles in September 1920, in which the reviewer highlighted the difficulty for the discerning reader in establishing what they were being deprived of by publishers who were omitting to translate masterpieces. The case in point, according to the reviewer, was *Growth* which was ‘one of the best novels [to] have appeared in English for some time.’ Comparing Hamsun to his Scandinavian compatriots in the Gyldendal stable, the reviewer noted that ‘Hamsun is certainly greater than any novelist we have at present.’<sup>314</sup>

The sense of Hamsun as a talented writer and *Growth* as highly topical was continued in the *Manchester Guardian*’s review.<sup>315</sup> It pitched the publication of *Growth* as being the latest endeavour by Gyldendal to establish themselves on the British publishing scene, an aim of which the writer approved: ‘we wish success to their [...] venture [...] for the modern

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<sup>314</sup> W. J. A was referring specifically to Svend Fleuron, Gunnar Gunnarsson, Johannes Linnankoski (who was Finnish, rather than Scandinavian) and Sigrid Undset. See A. 1920.

<sup>315</sup> E.G. 1920: 7. The reviewer was clearly somewhat confused by the Scandinavian countries. E.G. informed readers that Hamsun had enjoyed ‘a great reputation in Sweden, [but] has had no success with the phlegmatic Briton.’ This was unintentionally propitious, given that just months later, Hamsun would be awarded the Nobel Prize by the Swedish Academy.

Englishman is disgracefully ignorant of Scandinavian letters, even of Brandes.’ E.G. saw the work as more sophisticated than that of equivalent Russian or Latin authors and reassured readers that they should not be put off by the ‘strangeness’ of the book.

A range of reviews appeared elsewhere in periodicals and the press. A brief review of *Growth* in *TLS* told its readers that the primary purpose of its publishers, Gyldendal, was to publish English translations of Scandinavian books, of which *Growth* was one of its first editions – showcasing ‘the leading Scandinavian novelist’ and highlighting ‘the struggle between primitive nature and the artificial growth of civilization.’<sup>316</sup> The magazine *Land and Water* was effusively positive, suggesting that the novel was a once-in-a-decade literary occurrence, and that it made the reader most happy: ‘There is a magic about the book which can only be compared to the magic of great music.’ Declaring the novel a masterpiece, the *Liverpool Courier’s* reviewer was in no doubt as to the power and beauty of the work, and went on to say ‘not since Ibsen has a Scandinavian writer stirred us so.’ The reviewer at the *Evening News* set out how Hamsun had triumphed over Hardy thanks to the inherent inspiring hope and faith present in *Growth*. The *Westminster Gazette* felt that *Growth* was ‘a beautiful work of genius [...] by a proved master’. *The Daily Telegraph* was quick to praise the depiction of tender humanity found in the novel, while Clement Shorter, writing in *The Sphere*, marvelled at the characterisation of Isak Sellanraa.<sup>317</sup>

As is apparent, *Growth* was reviewed by a wide range of publications and was received almost unanimously positively. The overarching impression to be drawn from these

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<sup>316</sup> ‘List of New Books and Reprints’ 1920. While *TLS’s* entry was no more than the briefest of reviews, it was a positive one featuring on a page where not every new release benefitted from the same treatment.

<sup>317</sup> All cited in Gyldendal 1920.

reviews was that Hamsun was being received as a living master and that he had delivered to the literary circles the book they were looking for. In the words of Graves, ‘the reviewers were also united in stressing that this book was, above all, a book for Now, for 1920.’<sup>318</sup>

## 5.2.2 Popular Reception

Tracing the sales and public response to *Growth*, and Hamsun more generally, is challenging given the absence of coherent sales figures from the period. It is possible to draw together some fragmentary evidence, largely drawn from sources related to Hamsun himself, to ascertain what the British popular response, at least in sales terms, may have been like.<sup>319</sup>

Hamsun paid keen attention to his royalty statements. Sales of *Growth* in Britain during the second half of 1920 totalled 1,600 copies.<sup>320</sup> Kolloen also provides an illustrative snapshot of later sales.<sup>321</sup> *Growth* had sold almost 30,000 copies in the USA during 1921 and the first half of 1922 while in Britain only 2,000 copies had sold in the corresponding period.<sup>322</sup> The British royalties, arriving in pounds, shillings and pence, appeared so

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<sup>318</sup> Graves 1998a: 28.

<sup>319</sup> Constraints on the availability of existing data to this researcher also limit insight into this matter. Graves does not reflect on sales or popular consumption at all. In contrast, Kolloen had access not just to publicly available sources, but also to Hamsun’s private archive, Gyldendal’s private corporate archives and a range of other inaccessible resources. See Kolloen 2003, Kolloen 2009. Kolloen compiled a database, which Fjågesund relies on. See Fjågesund 2009a: 76-7. Naturally, this approach is reliant not only on the accuracy of Kolloen’s archival work, but also on the veracity of the record-keeping at Gyldendal’s London branch.

<sup>320</sup> Fjågesund 2009a: 70.

<sup>321</sup> Kolloen 2003: 429. It is noteworthy that in Hamsun’s correspondence, he regularly highlighted instances in which his work was enjoying commercial success (and sometimes that he had not received any payments in lieu of this success), but he rarely addressed the performance of his own work in Britain when writing letters. The strength of Hamsun’s performance in America led to Knopf informing Hamsun that they wished to publish a sequence of his other works in English translation as a result. See *ibid.*: 407.

<sup>322</sup> In his discussion, Kolloen does not explicitly set out dates, but on the basis of Hamsun archival material referenced, this is the likeliest timeframe.

derisory to Hamsun that he even checked the figures in the margin of the statement. His British sales in this period were just NOK 2,000, while in America they were NOK 130,000.<sup>323</sup> Hamsun's British sales maintained a steady decline, and in the first half of 1923, just 349 copies of *Growth* were sold.<sup>324</sup> Put in context, these sales figures were simply dreadful and represented failure for an author accustomed to success.<sup>325</sup>

In 1925, with Hamsun's paltry British sales dwindling even further, a new royalty account arrived for his foreign sales – and he was forced to note in the margins that he had sold more books in the Netherlands than he had across the entire British Empire.<sup>326</sup> This signalled the end of the Gyldendal venture in London: having ostensibly set up an entire publishing house for the benefit of Hamsun five years earlier, it was no longer commercially viable and during the summer of 1925 Gyldendal wound up its operations.<sup>327</sup> Summarising the overall experience of his third attempt to break into the UK market in a letter in 1929, Hamsun noted that his own print runs in Britain were never large and instructed his publisher to attempt to lower the percentage payable to his agent in order to encourage them actually to try and sell his books.<sup>328</sup>

Comparing the evidence presented by Hamsun's accounts and correspondence with Østby's Hamsun bibliography corroborates the poor sales of *Growth*: while the novel ran

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<sup>323</sup> In Germany, 23,000 copies of *Segen der Erde* sold in the equivalent period, alongside almost 60,000 copies of other Hamsun works.

<sup>324</sup> Sales of other Hamsun works also made for gloomy reading. *Wanderers* sold just 17 copies in the equivalent period, and even the bestseller for the period, *Victoria*, only sold 1,043 copies. See Fjågesund 2009a: 71.

<sup>325</sup> According to Bloom, bestsellers in the mid-nineteenth century typically sold 50,000 copies in Britain, which had doubled by 1955. See Bloom 2008: 3. Yet he also notes that Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* sold 100,000 copies annually from 1895 until the start of the First World War. See *ibid.*: 25.

<sup>326</sup> Kolloen 2003: 442.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>328</sup> Hamsun 1999: 228-29.

through five editions in the UK during the first half of the 1920s, this was more or less the end of its shelf life. A brief revival by John Lane's week-end library series in 1935 generated three reprints over the subsequent 20 years. In contrast, reprints and reissues in the USA appear to have been commonplace for many years.<sup>329</sup>

Gyldendal had obviously been aware of the uphill struggle it faced in a new market and had engaged the services of Curtis Brown to ensure positive reviews for the book. As noted, this was achieved and positive notices were incorporated into a print advertising campaign run by Gyldendal for its list, and for Hamsun more specifically. There was, however, no emphasis on the size of print runs or sales successes in Gyldendal's advertising. Looking further afield, it is not possible to identify any broader British response to *Growth* during the 1920s.<sup>330</sup> Despite enjoying almost unanimous support from the literary elite, the novel's critical acclaim did not translate into commercial success in the UK.

## 5.3 1920: Hamsun's Great Year in Britain?

### 5.3.1 Award of the Nobel Prize

Despite the commercial disappointment, Fjågesund writes that 'if ever there was one, 1920 was Hamsun's great year in Britain'.<sup>331</sup> Having finally been published in English with what was considered the appropriate levels of pomp and circumstance, albeit by his Norwegian publisher in the case of the UK, 1920 was effectively the highlight of

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<sup>329</sup> Østby 1972: 32-3. By comparison, *Grødt* had sold over 200,000 copies by the end of the 1950s in Norway, while the German *Segen der Erde* had reached 334,000 copies by 1951.

<sup>330</sup> The sales figures indicate that few copies were sold, and there is no evidence to suggest that the books were prominently featured in lending libraries.

<sup>331</sup> Fjågesund 2009a: 68.

Hamsun's British experience. Although *Growth* was published in 1920, it came out some six months prior to the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature, which in itself had a significant impact on Hamsun, but less of one on his British reception. The influence of *Growth* amongst critics began to ebb, while sales were poor. A string of new Hamsun translations was commissioned, but these also struggled, while there was no subsequent surge in Scandinavian literary imports to Britain as a result of Hamsun's critical success.<sup>332</sup>

Hamsun took an active interest in his own prospects as a potential recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, which was not only a reflection of the prestige associated with the prize, but also of some degree of personal avarice, as he was eager to support his extravagant spending habits.<sup>333</sup> During the summer of 1919, there was much gossip in Scandinavian newspapers and literary, as well as cultural, publications about the possibility of Hamsun receiving the Nobel Prize.<sup>334</sup> Much praise was heaped on him from many influential directions, although Lagerlöf, herself a Nobel Laureate and a member of the Swedish Academy, was careful to limit her praise to *Growth*. Hamsun had indeed been nominated for the prize, but there was some doubt about his suitability. Kolloen notes that while Norwegians struggled in terms of recognition by Swedes in the years following Norwegian independence, it was likely that more serious issues were at the heart of the issue.<sup>335</sup> Lagerlöf and Henrik Schück, both members of the Swedish Academy's Nobel Committee, were reportedly unhappy with Hamsun as a choice and were agitating instead for Brandes.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Unlike in the aftermath of Høeg and Larsson, see Chapters 8 and 9.

<sup>333</sup> Kolloen 2009: 169.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Kolloen 2003: 396.



The Swedish Academy had discussed Hamsun at length during their deliberations in 1919, but there had been concerns over his literary merit.<sup>337</sup> In 1920, Hamsun was eventually the winner as a result of the committee's re-examination of the statutes of Alfred Nobel's will and the conclusion that it was possible to award the prize on the basis of one work alone, in contrast to all previous winners who had been honoured for their entire canon of work.<sup>338</sup> While further details in this respect have been made available with the passing of time, it was no secret that it was *Growth* that had won the prize, as was noted by Alrik Gustafson.<sup>339</sup>

Winning the Nobel Prize generated almost unbelievable levels of sales for Hamsun, not only in the Scandinavian market, but also in new markets abroad that had only become aware of the novelist due to the prize.<sup>340</sup> Kolloen notes that despite this world fame and unprecedented sales bonanza, British readers were simply not interested.<sup>341</sup> This was not for want of trying: Gyldendal made sure that they used the prize in their marketing materials. An advertisement in *TLS* in late November 1920 drew attention to Hamsun's award, in addition to how many other Nobel laureates were also published by Gyldendal.<sup>342</sup> This continued, with an advertisement in October 1921 selling just *Growth* which was described as 'Knut Hamsun's Great Masterpiece' and 'the work for which he was probably awarded the Nobel Prize.'<sup>343</sup> Hamsun may have been the first author to win

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<sup>337</sup> Kolloen 2009: 169.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.: 176-7. It has been claimed by some critics that Hamsun had written the book with the specific intention of being awarded the Nobel Prize, see Næss 1984: 110. What degree of truth there is to this speculation is unknown.

<sup>339</sup> Gustafson 1940: 262.

<sup>340</sup> Kolloen 2003: 429.

<sup>341</sup> Fjågesund observes that there was an increase in sales, noting that *Growth* ran through two editions in 1920 and a further two in 1921, although he goes on to note that sales were disappointing compared to those enjoyed in other territories. See Fjågesund 2009a: 69-70.

<sup>342</sup> See 'Advertisement' 1920. *Growth* featured prominently, while the advertisement also boasted that Gyldendal published Bjørnson and Lagerlöf.

<sup>343</sup> See 'Advertisement' 1921.

the Nobel Prize on the basis of just one book, but there was little to show for it in the British context.

### 5.3.2 Publication of Other Translated Works by Hamsun

Having relaunched Hamsun in Britain with *Growth*, Gyldendal followed up with *Pan* in the same year. The positive critical response in Britain to *Growth*, alongside the award of the Nobel Prize, appears to have encouraged Gyldendal to press ahead with more Hamsun translations during the first half of the 1920s.<sup>344</sup> Hamsun effectively managed one book per year in English, with fifteen new titles in addition to *Growth* appearing in Britain between 1920 and 1934.<sup>345</sup> *Growth's* translator, Worster, translated a further three titles, before being replaced by a number of other translators, chief amongst them Arthur G. Chater. *Segelfoss Town* was the final Hamsun novel to be published by the Gyldendal branch in London, and from 1926 to 1930, all of Hamsun's new translations into English were published in London by his American publisher, Alfred A. Knopf. Hamsun was eventually taken on by a British publisher again, in the form of Cassel & Co., for *Vagabonds* and *August*, before moving to Rich & Cowan. This reflected the sad state of affairs for Hamsun in the UK, and to some extent in America. In 1929, he even attempted to engineer a move to a prominent literary agent in an attempt to reignite his anglophone experience, complaining that he had barely sold 5,000 copies in Britain.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Given that Gyldendal's London operation was a deliberate construct to market Hamsun in English to British audiences, translations would surely have followed in any case, but now they possessed the marketing tools in the form of initially positive reviews to push Hamsun's case harder. It should be noted that Hamsun was also a playwright, but there appears to have been no demand for his work in Britain, which appears neither to have been published in English nor performed in the UK.

<sup>345</sup> Hamsun 1920b, Hamsun 1921b, Hamsun 1922, Hamsun 1923, Hamsun 1924a, Hamsun 1924b, Hamsun 1925, Hamsun 1926a, Hamsun 1926b, Hamsun 1927, Hamsun 1928, Hamsun 1930, Hamsun 1931, Hamsun 1932, Hamsun 1934. George Egerton's 1899 translation of *Hunger* was also reissued, including a new translator's note. See Hamsun 1921a.

<sup>346</sup> Harald Grieg was dispatched to London to secure the services of the Watt literary agency, who were to manage Hamsun's affairs in both the British Empire and North America. Already without a British-based publisher, Hamsun was keen to drop Alfred Knopf too. See Hamsun 1999: 228-9.

The deluge of Hamsun translations in Britain coincided with a noticeable shift in reviewers' attitudes towards the novelist.<sup>347</sup> The tone of reviews of Hamsun's other works was, almost without exception, negative. Aspersions were cast regarding the quality of writing and Hamsun was accused of literary inferiority. Even more common were the nostalgic, longing references to *Growth*, with reviewers clamouring for more of the same.<sup>348</sup> A further reflection of this disenchantment amongst British critics can be seen in the 1929 Festschrift prepared for Hamsun's seventieth birthday by Gyldendal in Oslo. This volume included just two British contributors, John Galsworthy and Wells.<sup>349</sup> Just as quickly as Hamsun had arrived at the centre of the British literary elite's attention, he was on his way out again.

Elite literary reviewers in Britain had ignored Hamsun for two decades prior to 1920, but it was this group that lauded *Growth*. The very reason they admired the novel – a conservative presentation of traditional values – was why Hamsun had been ignored, and fell out of favour after that fateful year.<sup>350</sup> *Growth* had been a critical success in Britain, even if its commercial performance did not match that. Both Graves and Fjågesund pursue the thesis that Hamsun was translated to English in the wrong order.<sup>351</sup> The literary old guard were simply not ready for Hamsun, the pioneer of modernism. Graves notes that 'the reception of Hamsun provides a case-study that reflects the slow and reluctant

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<sup>347</sup> Fjågesund 2009a: 70.

<sup>348</sup> See Graves 1998a: 29-31, Fjågesund 2009a: 71. Fjågesund notes that sales for titles published by Gyldendal after *Growth* were, by and large, dreadful.

<sup>349</sup> Hamsun, et al. 1929. Fjågesund notes that the British contributions were markedly shorter and less effusive than many of the others. 'It is difficult not to be left with a feeling that probably neither of the two writers knew Hamsun's work very well at all, and that they are responding to Gyldendal's invitation with a set of polite but rather empty phrases.' See Fjågesund 2009a: 72.

<sup>350</sup> Graves 1998a: 34.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*: 31-2, Fjågesund 2009a: 70-1. The difficulty for British readers was to draw the connection between *Growth* and other, earlier Hamsun titles. As Graves noted, 'it is quite impossible to read his early novels – *Hunger*, *Pan*, *Mysteries* – as other than radical new departures in the art of the novel'.

acceptance of modernism in Britain.<sup>352</sup> Fjågesund emphasises that with a few notable exceptions, Hamsun was also almost entirely excluded from the writings and correspondence of his leading British contemporaries in the 1920s and 1930s, for the simple reason that his works did not appeal to the British reading public or literary sphere after 1920.<sup>353</sup>

### 5.3.3 Trajectory for *Growth* and Hamsun

There was one key attempt during the 1930s to revive Hamsun's flagging fortunes in Britain, when publisher John Lane produced an edition of *Growth* in 1935 using a new, cheaper format.<sup>354</sup> Here, at last, one might imagine, was the opportunity for commercial, widespread success – a keen price point combined with the critical enthusiasm from a decade and a half earlier. Unfortunately, the result was an embarrassment – Hamsun's British Empire royalties for 1934-36 totalled NOK 400, while his German royalties in the first half of 1937 were NOK 40,000.<sup>355</sup> The attempt to promote Hamsun on his own terms to the mass market in an era far removed from the immediate aftermath of the First World War was an abject failure.

By the 1930s, the literary old guard who had so adored *Growth* had been superseded or had fallen out of love with Hamsun: they could only be disappointed so many times before giving up. The gradual disenchantment with Hamsun, the unfortunate failure to relaunch in the 1930s and the path to obscurity were compounded by Hamsun's political position during the Second World War. After the war, Peter Jackson notes that Hamsun was

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<sup>352</sup> Graves 1998a: 34.

<sup>353</sup> Fjågesund 2009a: 72.

<sup>354</sup> Hamsun 1935.

<sup>355</sup> Fjågesund 2009a: 72.

effectively unavailable in Britain until the mid-1970s.<sup>356</sup> McFarlane described the British perception of Hamsun in 1960: ‘our national attitude remains one of mutilating indifference.’<sup>357</sup> Fjågesund, meanwhile, ascribes a gradual increase in British interest in Hamsun from the 1970s onwards to McFarlane’s work promoting the credentials of Scandinavian writers – Hamsun foremost amongst them – as pioneers in the field of modernism.<sup>358</sup> The outcome has been the displacement of *Growth* by *Hunger* as the work that most merits attention. As Fjågesund summarises: ‘All in all, *Hunger*, marketed as a modern (or modernist) classic, appears to have replaced *Growth of the Soil* as Hamsun’s most well-known work in Britain.’<sup>359</sup>

Hamsun and his works have not been entirely forgotten. Recent decades have seen the publication of biographies and retranslations of Hamsun’s work. Ferguson’s English-language biography of Hamsun received good review coverage in Britain. In these reviews, the Nobel-winning novel, *Growth*, was typically ignored. For instance, *The Observer*’s D. J. Enright gave considerable thought to *Hunger* and *Mysteries*, but *Growth* merited only a throwaway sentence by comparison.<sup>360</sup> Similarly, *TLS*’ review ran to more than 3,000 words, but mentioned *Growth* only once.<sup>361</sup> This approach to Hamsun with its disregard for *Growth* is also found in British reviews of Kolloen’s Hamsun biography: namely that *Growth* is mentioned in passing, while *Hunger* is lauded, alongside lengthy and

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<sup>356</sup> Jackson 2004: 27.

<sup>357</sup> McFarlane 1960: 116.

<sup>358</sup> Fjågesund 2009a: 73-4.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*: 74. *Hunger* is taught at the University of Edinburgh both to students of Scandinavian Studies, and to students of Comparative Literature, as an early example of modernism. In contrast, other Hamsun novels are no longer featured on the syllabus.

<sup>360</sup> Enright 1987.

<sup>361</sup> Hofmann 1987.

prominent discussion of Hamsun's politics. The same approach was also found in reviews of Sverre Lyngstad's retranslation of *Hunger* published in 1997.<sup>362</sup>

A retranslation of *Growth* by Sverre Lyngstad was published by Penguin in 2007. However, this new translation was published solely in the USA and is not available for purchase in Britain.<sup>363</sup> Reviews appeared widely in American newspapers and journals – some were favourable, one lambasted the quality of the translation, and many ruminated on Hamsun's politics – but none whatsoever appeared in Britain.

### 5.3.4 Did a Scandinavian Wave Follow Hamsun?

One might assume that the years that followed Hamsun's Nobel Prize and critical success in Britain would result in the pursuit of other Hamsuns and other Scandinavian writers.<sup>364</sup> However, a survey of literary reviews during the 1920s finds little evidence to suggest that Scandinavians, whether or not they were in the image of Hamsun, were being imported in English translation. In contrast, the interwar period, in particular, appears to have been a fallow period for Scandinavian books in Britain.<sup>365</sup> Fjågesund reflects on the position of various Nordic Nobel laureates during the first half of the twentieth century in Britain, and finds that few gained any degree of stature or suited British tastes.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Steiner 1997. Despite such prejudices against Hamsun in British literary circles, there is an awareness of his background, conceivably aided, as Fjågesund suggests, by McFarlane's work. George Steiner, reviewing *Hunger* under the heading 'Knut Hamsun had just one fault. He liked Hitler', found it remarkable that despite a lengthy mini-biography being included in the publication, no mention was made of Hamsun's Nobel Prize. More remarkably, to this researcher at least, having lamented the absence of the Nobel Prize in the novel's paratext, Steiner omits to mention *Growth* at any point in what is a lengthy article reflecting on Hamsun as an author.

<sup>363</sup> This researcher obtained a copy from AbeBooks, and it should be noted that the 2007 edition is not held by the British Library.

<sup>364</sup> As noted in the cases of Høeg and Larsson in Chapters 8 and 9 of this thesis.

<sup>365</sup> Reflecting a downturn in British interest in Scandinavian culture discussed in Chapter 4.1 of this thesis.

<sup>366</sup> Fjågesund 2017: 26.

One of the most obviously comparable authors, cited by both Graves and Fjågesund, is Nobel laureate, Lagerlöf.<sup>367</sup> Like Hamsun, the vast majority of Lagerlöf's work was translated to English, and her British experience was also nuanced compared with her reception in other literary polysystems. Björn Sundmark notes that Lagerlöf tended to fare far worse in the Anglo-Saxon world than in countries such as Germany and France.<sup>368</sup> Graves argues that 'Lagerlöf was not well-served by her translators [into English]'.<sup>369</sup> Indeed, Graves notes that while British reviewers of Hamsun rarely discussed translation quality, reviewers of Lagerlöf often discussed little else. In contrast to Hamsun, Lagerlöf's works were generally translated fairly shortly after they were published in Swedish, while the Norwegian saw his works translated out of order, and in many cases years after their original publication.<sup>370</sup> In similar fashion, critical responses to Lagerlöf became warmer as time passed, while the critics fell out of love with Hamsun. Graves notes that while the media was often willing to dedicate significant column inches to reviewing the novelist's work, there is little comment relating to her amongst the literary trendsetters of the period.<sup>371</sup>

Another interwar contemporary of Hamsun and Lagerlöf was Hjalmar Bergman. Unlike Lagerlöf, he was not a Nobel laureate, but he is an interesting point of comparison as his novels translated in the 1930s were funded using Swedish finances. Bergman experienced little in the way of British critical or popular reception.<sup>372</sup> Writing in 1975, Petherick noted

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<sup>367</sup> Graves provides a comparative account of Hamsun's and Lagerlöf's respective British receptions. See Graves 1999. It should be noted that Lagerlöf's *The Outcast*, published by Gyldendal in 1920, was also translated by Worster. Fjågesund notes that Lagerlöf has the highest number of entries in the British Library catalogue amongst Nordic Nobel laureates. See Fjågesund 2017: 26.

<sup>368</sup> Sundmark 2008: 169. Indeed, Lagerlöf herself did not expect significant success in Britain. See *ibid.*: 173.

<sup>369</sup> Graves 1998b: 14.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*: 10.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*: 16-17.

<sup>372</sup> Which was not for lack of colour. Susan Brantly remarked that Bergman's lifestyle was comparable to that of Michael Jackson. See Brantly 1996: 266.

that it ‘is a sad but undeniable fact that Hjalmar Bergman, one of the greatest Swedish writers of this century, is very little known abroad, and [...] the small number of translations of his works into English are long since out of print.’<sup>373</sup> Gyldendal’s London operation had published Bergman’s novel *God’s Orchid* in 1924, but no further attempts at publishing Bergman in Britain during his lifetime were made.<sup>374</sup> *The Head of the Firm* and *Thy Rod and Thy Staff* were published in 1936 and 1937 respectively – with Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation funding.<sup>375</sup> While there was limited, broadly favourable press coverage of the books following Bergman’s death, there was little to suggest the emergence of a new master author or the desire for further translations.<sup>376</sup>

### 5.3.5 Publishing Early-twentieth-century Scandinavian Books in the Twenty-first Century

Lagerlöf was read widely in English until her death, but has now more or less vanished from the consciousness of the vast majority of British readers. Although this may be a reflection of dated English translations, Lagerlöf appears to have been forgotten even by the literary elite. Attempts to introduce twenty-first-century British readers to writers such as Lagerlöf and Bergman has been the preserve of smaller publishers, such as Norvik Press. In 2007, they published Bergman’s *Memoirs of a Dead Man*, while in 2011 they launched their ‘Lagerlöf in English’ series, which has been retranslating Lagerlöf’s works

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<sup>373</sup> Petherick 1976: 345.

<sup>374</sup> The novel was subject to a hatchet job of a review by Worster. According to him the plot was lacking, while ‘the translation, too, is crude’. Quite why Worster took such umbrage at a Scandinavian translation published by Gyldendal, his own publisher, is unclear, but hints at some of the difficulties that were faced by Gyldendal’s London-based operation. See Worster 1924.

<sup>375</sup> Holroyd 1997: 812. The foundation was originally established following George Bernard Shaw’s donation of his Nobel Prize money to an endowment fund. Its object was defined as ‘the encouragement of cultural intercourse between Sweden and the British Isles’, and it appears that during its early years, translation of Hjalmar Bergman was one of its most important commitments.

<sup>376</sup> A characteristic example is seen of this in J.S. 1937.



to English.<sup>377</sup> Despite this, Carbone and Forsås-Scott noted that reviving interest in authors such as Lagerlöf is immensely challenging.<sup>378</sup> There is an interesting comparison to be drawn here to Hamsun: Norvik Press do not currently publish any works of fiction by Hamsun, although they have published two volumes of Hamsun's correspondence in English translation, alongside Fjågesund's volume considering the reception of Hamsun outside of Norway.<sup>379</sup>

## 5.4 The Impact of *Growth* on Britain

### 5.4.1 The Gyldendal Experiment

Gyldendal had opened a London branch in 1920 at the behest of Hamsun himself. This demonstrates the cachet he had with his publishers given that there must have been concerns about the commercial viability of this from the outset: Gyldendal had successfully found a US publisher in the form of Knopf, but were unable to do the same in Britain. Naturally, there were benefits to this arrangement: they did not have to acquire rights, and they could split translation costs with Knopf, but it hardly spoke volumes for their prospects. By 1925, Gyldendal in London was deemed commercially unviable, and it was wound up in the summer of that year.<sup>380</sup>

Gyldendal's British expedition took place during an era when the publishing industry was rapidly professionalising. David Ayers noted that the aftermath of the First World War in

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<sup>377</sup> For a not-for-profit publisher, this kind of work is all contingent on receipt of grant funding. See Carbone and Forsås-Scott 2014: 25.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Næss and McFarlane 1990, Næss and McFarlane 1998, Fjågesund 2009b.

<sup>380</sup> Kolloen 2003: 442. As discussed, Hamsun's sales in Britain were paltry, but it transpired that he had in fact been Gyldendal's bestselling author in Britain – a sad indictment of the entire operation. See Fjågesund 2009a: 71.

publishing was characterised by the ‘rapid expansion of the bestseller market and its professionalization along the lines of tabloid journalism and advertising during the 1920s’.<sup>381</sup> Similarly, the literary critic Q. D. Leavis observed that the British public, with high levels of literacy, could at times be highly susceptible to the influence of newspapers and lending libraries on their reading habits.<sup>382</sup> There was every possibility of success in the British literary market for Gyldendal, but their approach would matter. As an unknown, foreign entrant to British publishing, at a time when finances across borders were tough, Gyldendal would have been at a genuine disadvantage from the beginning, especially as they were primarily in existence for the purpose of promoting Hamsun. Naturally, they had the advantage of already knowing Hamsun and his work in a way that a British publisher would not have, but they conversely had little understanding of the British literary market or its readers.

Gyldendal and Hamsun’s motives were primarily financial: they wanted commercial success and increased royalties. The problem with *Growth*, published during a period of paradigmatic shift away from the old Victorian values in British society, was that it failed to tick a number of boxes for ordinary British readers. It was historical fiction, set in a location few British readers would have been familiar with, in the mould of an epic family saga – all of which were literary trends on the way out. As has also been discussed, much of Hamsun’s remaining oeuvre was conversely too cutting-edge for British readers. A domestic British publisher would have foreseen some of the issues faced in the dissemination of Hamsun to the British, but Gyldendal simply pumped Hamsun works

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<sup>381</sup> Ayers 1999: 116.

<sup>382</sup> Leavis 1932: 5-6.

into the British market with a zeal encouraged by the reception of his works in Norway, Germany and elsewhere.

However, it would appear that Gyldendal were aware of their limitations, having commissioned Curtis Brown to commission positive reader reports from prominent literary figures such as Wells. Materials included with review copies of *Growth* appear to have drawn comparisons between Hamsun and Thomas Hardy, judging by some reviews.<sup>383</sup> Indeed, Gyldendal later openly advertised Hamsun using the Hardy connection.<sup>384</sup> Yet, despite the opportunity posited by Q. D. Leavis to influence readers through reviews, Gyldendal seem to have failed to capitalise on this situation. They might have enjoyed greater success if they had worked more on opinion-formers and influencers, rather than relying on their fairly run-of-the-mill advertising campaigns. As was noted by publisher Stanley Unwin in 1926, advertising books that were unlikely to sell without advertising was, in his view, a waste of a publisher's money.<sup>385</sup>

Gyldendal's British expedition should perhaps never have left Scandinavia once it was clear that a British publisher could not be found to publish *Growth*. Once on location, Gyldendal evidently should have relied more on British knowledge and expertise in the literary market to try and secure success for their authors, rather than relying on their perception of Hamsun's inherent quality.

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<sup>383</sup> For example, an anonymous review in *The Scotsman* appears to lift words from such materials verbatim: 'Hamsun is reckoned the greatest living Scandinavian novelist. In the present book he is not unsuggestive of a Norwegian Thomas Hardy'. See 'New Fiction 1920'.

<sup>384</sup> In an advertisement for *Wanderers*, Gyldendal say: 'This book is as far above the ephemeral "sellers" of the day as the masterpieces of Hardy were above the kindred stuff of the nineties'. See Hamsun 1923: 217.

<sup>385</sup> 'The conclusion at which we arrive, regrettable as it may sound, is that it pays to advertise a book if it shows signs of being successful without advertising, but that it does not pay to advertise at all extensively a book that shows no sign of catching on.' See Unwin 1926: 263.

### 5.4.2 Give the Critics What They Want

In *Growth*, the British literary critics of 1920 were provided with a novel that fulfilled many of their contemporary needs. Chris Baldick sees the 1920s as a period of disillusionment, with Britain's self-confidence having been crushed in the aftermath of the First World War, resulting in a dramatic impact on writing and reading trends.<sup>386</sup> Randall Stevenson, too, notes that 'the war also dislocated any broader faith in an evolving, coherent history, advancing steadily through the months and years'.<sup>387</sup> Stevenson observes that post-war authors were drawn back into history, long before the war, due to the uncertainties they faced in relation to their present and future.<sup>388</sup> What can be observed in the immediate aftermath of the war is a back-to-basics approach that reflects on a past where the technologised machinery of war could not tear apart the fabric of society.<sup>389</sup> Baldick notes that little literature of the 1920s took the measure of contemporary life.<sup>390</sup>

*Growth* was a novel that responded to all of these trends. Graves described the novel as a book for Now, while Fjågesund described 1920 as 'Hamsun's great year in Britain', yet the only people who were impressed by *Growth* were in fact the critics themselves.<sup>391</sup> Harald Næss suggested that the ideals of protagonist Isak were shared by city dwellers the world over, especially in Britain where the population had been ravaged by machine-based war.<sup>392</sup> This researcher takes the view that this largely applies to the literary elite in the British context.

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<sup>386</sup> Baldick 2012: 4.

<sup>387</sup> Stevenson 2013: 191.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*: 192.

<sup>389</sup> Stevenson argues that literature offered one of the few avenues through which people could push back against the developments that had led to the First World War. See *ibid.*: 220.

<sup>390</sup> Baldick 2012: 7.

<sup>391</sup> Graves 1998a: 28, Fjågesund 2009a: 68.

<sup>392</sup> Næss 1975: 75.

If *Growth* was a novel that gave the literary establishment what it wanted in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, we find that the rapidly changing literary scene in the 1920s, combined with the fact that Hamsun was translated to English in the ‘wrong’ order, explains why reviewers fell out of love with the author.<sup>393</sup> Clive Bloom observes that the 1920s saw the emergence of distinct genre categories for the first time, which came hand-in-hand with a trend towards literature that was less moralistic and more liberal.<sup>394</sup> Baldick identifies a downward trend for historical fiction.<sup>395</sup> More pertinently, other well-worn favourites, such as the family saga, also fell by the wayside. Baldick reflects that Galsworthy’s *Forsyte Saga* published in 1922 was a late example of the genre, and one of the only of its kind to appear in Britain in the 1920s.<sup>396</sup> Where *Growth* had suited the needs of the polysystem in 1920, Hamsun’s oeuvre, being translated out of order, did not conform with these changes. Other works in the style of *Growth* not only failed to live up to the Nobel Prize-winning ‘original’, but were also rapidly becoming unduly old-fashioned and conservative. Meanwhile, works such as *Hunger* were still ahead of their time, given the reluctant and late acceptance of modernism in Britain.<sup>397</sup>

### 5.4.3 Disenchanted British Readers

A number of reasons why *Growth*, and more generally Hamsun, failed to appeal to British readers have been offered by various critics. Ferguson argued that Hamsun’s English translations were often stilted and too diverse in themes and material to suit a British

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<sup>393</sup> Baldick argues that the 1920s are a forgotten era of British literature characterised by a lack of coherency, while the 1930s are now granted far more attention by scholarship due to the ascendancy of modernism – and the perception that its origins lie in the 1930s. See Baldick 2012: 1-2.

<sup>394</sup> Bloom 2008: 109-10.

<sup>395</sup> Baldick 2012: 9.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*: 11.

<sup>397</sup> Graves 1998a: 34.

readership.<sup>398</sup> Graves did not take this view, noting that British reviewers of Hamsun rarely discussed translation quality at all.<sup>399</sup> Furthermore, it may be noted that retranslations of Hamsun have, until the last two decades, been fairly thin on the ground, indicating that there has been no strong sense that the translations are wanting.<sup>400</sup>

Q. D. Leavis was concerned that lending libraries, the source of reading material for many, were only stocking bestsellers rather than appropriate literature.<sup>401</sup> Although she felt that British readers in the 1920s were more susceptible to the influence of newspapers and reviewers than ever before, they were clearly unable to access books that were not available to them. This suggests, partially, that Gyldendal may have been at fault in terms of its distribution channels. However, it also alludes to a disconnect between the interests of elite literary reviewers and ordinary readers touched upon in Chapter 5.4.2: quite simply, British readers did not share the interests of those writing book reviews, which nullified their influence.

This sense that Hamsun's work, even *Growth*, was in fact out of touch with the interests of British readers is one that offers the most cohesive explanation for the reception of the novel and author, respectively.<sup>402</sup> In the British receiving context, 'Hamsun's works did not make sense: on the contrary, they jarred fundamentally with British taste and

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<sup>398</sup> Ferguson 1987: 301-2. Whether this is a fair criticism remains to be seen: at present, there is no published comparison of the Worster and Lyngstad translations of *Growth*.

<sup>399</sup> Graves 1998b: 10. Fjågesund is not wholly persuaded by Ferguson either, but does propose that detailed studies of Hamsun's translations into English may yield dividends in the study of his reception and resultant unpopularity in Britain. See Fjågesund 2009a: 75.

<sup>400</sup> A number of Hamsun's novels have been retranslated in North America by the late Sverre Lyngstad, including *Growth*.

<sup>401</sup> Leavis 1932: 5-6.

<sup>402</sup> Hamsun's experience in this regard is in fact mirrored by his first English translator George Egerton, whose own literary career began with aplomb in 1893 when she published *Keynotes*, delivering a book that agreed with critics in terms of tone and content, but then failing to follow-up subsequently. For further details, see Fjågesund 2002.

expectations.<sup>403</sup> British readers also struggled with the lack of sympathy that Hamsun showed to his characters in most of his novels, noting that one critic even felt Strindberg – so criticised by reviewers such as West – managed more sympathy than Hamsun.<sup>404</sup> *Growth* did not date well either: McFarlane argued that following the advent of modernism in literature, and the modern age in reality, the typical reader had no time for ‘anything so ineluctably earthbound’ as *Growth*.<sup>405</sup>

A key reason for the poor traction experienced by Hamsun and *Growth* in the British setting is the decline in borealism in Britain identified by Fjågesund that set in during the post-war years.

A strongly centralised British literary Establishment, in other words, showed a profound sympathy towards everything Nordic for as long as the cultural impulses coming from the region were compatible with the conservative, if not reactionary, values that had played such an important role in the British nation-building project of the previous century. The moment these impulses, launched from the periphery, proved to be not only avant-garde, but also expressive of a sense of cultural pessimism that frequently implied a criticism of the centre itself, however, the sympathy rapidly evaporated.<sup>406</sup>

Effectively, Hamsun’s work did not suit the sensibilities of British readers in the 1920s or later. The positive response from writers of the pre-war old school such as Arnold Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells to *Growth* meant Hamsun was effectively classified as such himself, at a time when British readers’ preferences were for writers such as Hugh Walpole, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Fjågesund 2017: 25. For example, *Hunger*’s setting in a capital city, made the novel ‘a contradiction in terms, for the simple reason that urban scenes were incompatible with the notion of what Norway represented.’

<sup>404</sup> Ferguson 1987: 303.

<sup>405</sup> McFarlane 1960: 114.

<sup>406</sup> Fjågesund 2017: 25.

<sup>407</sup> Stevenson 1986: 11-2. Despite this, Stevenson noted that the writers of the pre-war period, such as Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells, did not disappear in the 1920s, and remained widely read and discussed. See *ibid.*: 26. The boundaries between one generation and the next are evidently blurred here, given that in 1926 Bennett described Hamsun as ‘incomparably the greatest Continental novelist’ but stated that he ‘belongs to the old brigade.’ See Mylett 1974: 6.

According to Bloom, this reflected a loss of interest in ‘Victorian sentimental morality’ amongst readers following the end of the First World War.<sup>408</sup> Hamsun was in the wrong place at the wrong time, simultaneously too old-fashioned and too innovative, while also coming from the wrong source market for the contemporary British public.

#### 5.4.4 *Growth* and Hamsun in the British Literary Polysystem

Given the response to Hamsun, and in particular the contemporary reception of *Growth* elsewhere, the British reception is an intriguing study in what might have been. Graves was correct in his observation that ‘reviewers [of *Growth*] were also united in stressing that this book was, above all, a book for Now’,<sup>409</sup> but that is effectively where this contemporary quality begins and ends. The most successful dimension of *Growth* in the British context was in persuading critics to write favourable reviews, and it is clear that this was very much a critics’ novel.

The difficulty in assessing the reception of Hamsun, and his position in the British literary polysystem is exacerbated by *Growth*, which itself has been over-emphasised in terms of impact by other scholars. As McFarlane said in 1960:

[*Growth*] was the most read, most translated, most praised and least characteristic novel that Hamsun ever wrote, and which by its almost chance fame in being linked with the award of the Nobel Prize has done more to misrepresent Hamsun (in England and America at least) than anything else.<sup>410</sup>

We find that Hamsun had, to all intents and purposes, made his literary debut in the UK with the novel of the century and promptly received the Nobel Prize in Literature, seemingly placing him at the heart of the British literary polysystem. Yet this was not

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<sup>408</sup> Bloom 2008: 37.

<sup>409</sup> Graves 1998a: 28.

<sup>410</sup> McFarlane 1960: 155.



sustainable, as his follow-ups in translation engaged in dangerous modernism, or what critics saw as poor quality, overly conservative writing. While *Growth* was a new, and perhaps momentarily significant, entry into the British literary polysystem, it is apparent that the polysystem was not developing in a way that would support the novel or other Hamsun works in the medium or long term. *Growth* might have been catapulted to the heart of the literary polysystem through the use of hype, 1920s-style, and the good fortune of winning the Nobel Prize, but it failed to generate momentum for Hamsun or other Scandinavians and, denied the critical mass of widespread popularity, it did not survive for long.

Hamsun's position in the British literary polysystem in the present day is one almost solely based on the role of *Hunger* as an early and prominent example of modernism. Indeed, while retranslations of Hamsun have appeared in publication in America, few have appeared in Britain and there appears to be little interest in reviving Hamsun's British fortunes. The legacy of Hamsun's personal views during the Second World War has done little to aid him in this regard. *Hunger* has meant that Hamsun has the status of a canonical writer, considered to be in a class including Andersen, Ibsen and Strindberg, but this does not correlate with a central position in the literary polysystem.

#### 5.4.5 Hamsun's Most Successful Unsuccessful Outing

In *Growth*, we have a single novel lauded by elite critics as the heralding of a new literary super-power. This exuberance of literary patrons was, however, unmatched by ordinary readers and book buyers, with sales in the first half of the 1920s totalling the low

thousands.<sup>411</sup> While Wells proposed the use of the novel in the founding of a new civilisation, the book in fact disappeared from public consciousness over the years before the Second World War, with what should have been a successful paperback edition proving a failure. The critical success of this one book in partnership with the awarding of the Nobel Prize led to a series of Hamsun translations, but appears not to have led to a pursuit of other Hamsuns or a boost to Scandinavian imports more generally.

When dwelling upon Hamsun's British reception, the tendency has been to assume that critical success in the case of *Growth* equated to reasonably popular success.<sup>412</sup> Both Graves and Fjågesund astutely provide explanations for the failure of Hamsun's oeuvre in Britain, but against an implied backdrop of the successful *Growth*. Despite winning Hamsun the Nobel Prize and selling many hundreds of thousands of copies internationally, it was a commercial failure in Britain. This researcher takes the approach that *Growth* was merely Hamsun's most successful unsuccessful outing into English in the British context.

In reflecting upon why *Growth* was not a popular success in Britain, we find that the novel received positive reviews from old-fashioned members of a rapidly evolving literary elite in a book market that was changing dramatically. The influence of such critics on British book buyers and readers was not significant. However, we also find that the approach adopted by Hamsun and Gyldendal was inefficient. It seems probable that Hamsun continued to be published in English until the mid-1920s under the Gyldendal brand due to the enhanced esteem offered to the author by the Nobel Prize, even though the

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<sup>411</sup> Sales of *Growth* in the second half of 1920 were 1,600 copies, while just 349 copies were sold in the first half of 1923. See Fjågesund 2009a: 71. Meanwhile, Hamsun noted in the late 1920s that his books in Britain had never achieved sales in excess of 5,000. See Hamsun 1999: 228.

<sup>412</sup> Graves did not have access to sales figures, while Fjågesund contextualises Hamsun's British figures against other foreign markets for Hamsun, rather than book sales in Britain.

commercial viability of the operation must have been in question almost from the beginning. The initial use of Curtis Brown to drive publicity appears to have been helpful, but there is little to suggest any degree of subsequent work to maintain the position of Hamsun in literary circles. In the words of Fjågesund, 'his [Hamsun's] reputation never came anywhere near that he held on the Continent.'<sup>413</sup> Given the product and tools at their disposal, Gyldendal could have done better.

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<sup>413</sup> Fjågesund 2017: 24.

# 6 Scandalous Rogue or Man of Letters? The British Reception of Agnar Mykle

*'When I made my way to the W.H. Smith branch at Heathrow airport, I amazed myself and everyone else by taking an order for fifty copies of a new novel by the softporn Norwegian novelist Agnar Mykle'*  
(Christopher Hurst 1997: 262)



### Norway

*Tyven, tyven skal du hete* (1951)

*Lasso rundt fru Luna* (1954)

*Sangen om den røde rubin* (1956)

*Rubicon* (1965)

### Britain

*The Hotel Room* (1963)

*Lasso round the Moon* (1960)

*The Song of the Red Ruby* (1961)

*Rubicon* (1966)



## 6 Scandalous Rogue or Man of Letters? The British Reception of Agnar Mykle

Norwegian authors who have enjoyed sales success abroad are few and far between, and those that have topped the charts in the Anglo-Saxon world are even rarer. Agnar Mykle is amongst this latter group. He is held in high esteem by international commentators, and it has been asked whether his restricted Norwegian contemporary setting is capable of understanding that he is one of the greats of world literature.<sup>414</sup>

Agnar Mykle, an *enfant terrible* of mid-twentieth-century Norwegian literature, has long been acknowledged and considered remarkable in his home country for his foreign impact. However, assertions such as Willy Dahl's above should be handled with caution: it is riddled with hyperbole, and writing as he was in 1975, Dahl was hardly in a position to describe the lasting impact, or lack thereof, of Mykle in the English-speaking world.

Indeed, the situation described by Dahl in the 1970s has been reversed. In the present day, Mykle is forgotten by his English-language readership, out of print, and has become a footnote in studies on pornography and censorship.<sup>415</sup> Yet in Norway, Mykle has enjoyed renewed popularity in the years since his death amongst both readers and researchers, reflecting the development of his legacy and the contrast between the Scandinavian and British polysystems.

All these elements, alongside the hype surrounding Mykle's 1957 obscenity trial in Norway, make the transmission of Mykle from Scandinavia to the UK in the 1960s an intriguing case study. This chapter identifies and examines the role played by Mykle's four

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<sup>414</sup> Dahl 1975: 87.

<sup>415</sup> Sjøvik 2006: 36, Petersen 2015: 1741.



novels in Britain by tracing their transmission to the UK in English translation before looking at the critical and popular reception of these books. This reception is subsequently contextualised in relation to the social and literary trends of the period.

## 6.1 Mykle and His Ask Burlefot Novels

### 6.1.1 Agnar Mykle

Agnar Mykle (1915-1994) was and remains a fascinating figure in literary Norway. He has captured the imaginations of readers and scholars alike over the decades since he made his breakthrough in the 1950s. Born Agnar Myklebust in Trondheim in 1915, he was a star pupil at the commercial college in Trondheim before becoming the youngest school principal in Norway, at twenty-one, at the commercial college in Kirkenes. Over the course of barely a year, he changed jobs once and got two women pregnant, subsequently marrying one of them. In 1939, he moved to Bergen to study at the Norwegian School of Economics. While he was heavily involved in campus life politically, culturally and personally (he met his second wife), it rapidly became clear that his interests did not lie in commerce. He wrote copy for the Norwegian Labour Party, and soon took to drafting short stories of his own. He changed his surname to Mykle in 1944.<sup>416</sup>

### 6.1.2 The Books

Mykle made his literary debut in 1948 with the short-story collection *Taustigen*, which was followed by the first of his four full-length novels in 1951. *Tyven, tyven skal du hete*

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<sup>416</sup> For further details on Mykle's life, see Eggen 1994, Jacobsen 1994, Heger 1999, Larsen 2004, Heger 2012, Hagen 2016.

(translated as *The Hotel Room*), was published by Tiden Norsk Forlag.<sup>417</sup> This is the first time that the semi-autobiographical Ask appears in Mykle's work – in this novel he is called Ask Grande. The novel takes the form of a courtroom drama in which Grande, a reporter, is prosecuted for an attack on a hotel porter who has interrupted him during a tryst with a young woman.

Alice Tonzig's survey of the novel's Norwegian reception shows that its impact was mixed.<sup>418</sup> Mykle's inclusion of erotic content, unusual form and stylistic variation all merited comment.<sup>419</sup> Many critics found swathes of the book amateurish and requiring further editing.<sup>420</sup> Even forty years later, critics were divided: Finn Stenstad argued that readers encountered the fingerprints of an unsurpassed and visionary literary master, and Øystein Rottem condemned the book as 'amongst the weakest of [Mykle's] work', complaining that it was difficult for the reader to grasp what the author was attempting to achieve.<sup>421</sup>

Nevertheless, Mykle's first novel caught the attention of Gyldendal's Harald Grieg, who wanted to recruit this 'innovative and daring novelist'.<sup>422</sup> While Mykle was to pose something of a headache to his publishers,<sup>423</sup> he eventually produced his first novel for

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<sup>417</sup> For a full bibliography of Mykle's works in Norwegian and translation up to 1981, see 'Agnar Mykle født 8/8-1915' 1981.

<sup>418</sup> Tonzig 2005: 2-5.

<sup>419</sup> The inclusion of erotic content was particularly remarkable, given that in 1951 *Lady Chatterleys elsker* had not yet been published in Norway.

<sup>420</sup> Tonzig 2005: 3.

<sup>421</sup> Stenstad 1995, Rottem 1996: 307. This uncertainty is unsurprising given the unusual form adopted by Mykle. Tonzig argues that the book appears to readers to be a series of interconnected sketches and essays, rather than a novel. See Tonzig 2005: 3-4.

<sup>422</sup> Jacobsen 2000: 428.

<sup>423</sup> Having arrived at Gyldendal, Mykle set about demanding revisions to the publisher's standard contract terms and, much to Grieg's despair, initially produced a collection of short stories (*Jeg er like glad, sa gutten*) rather than the much-hoped-for 'big novel'. *Ibid.*

them in 1954: *Lasso rundt fru Luna*. Translated as *Lasso round the Moon*, this was Mykle's breakthrough. It tells the story of a young composer, Ask Burlefot, as he leaves home in pursuit of beauty, and is effectively a *Bildungsroman* drawing heavily on Mykle's own life. Around 2,000 copies sold upon publication, but the novel was reissued several times, including in 1969 when it was selected as book of the month by *Den Norske Bokklubben* with a print run of 75,000 copies.<sup>424</sup>

Summarising the reception of *Luna* with the benefit of hindsight, Rottem stated that 'despite many digressions, it is cogent both compositionally and narratively,' while Dahl noted that despite the novel being tragic and bitter, 'there are so many smiles in the novel that the reader often forgets the depth and seriousness of it.'<sup>425</sup> There was widespread review coverage upon publication. Elling Tjønneland called the book 'our greatest novel sensation in many years' while Gordon Hølmebakk called it a 'precious and stunning work of art.' Not all reviews were as positive. Johan Borgen thought Gyldendal had over-indulged Mykle, and even the positive Hølmebakk suggested that the book could have been 200 pages shorter. As Paul Gjesdahl put it, *Luna* demonstrated that Mykle was 'a true poet and a charming windbag'.<sup>426</sup>

The sequel to *Luna*, *Sangen om den røde rubin* (translated as *The Song of the Red Ruby*) published in October 1956, continued the tale of Ask Burlefot. As previously, the novel focuses on the protagonist's sentimental, highly romanticised desire for love. This runs in parallel with the ceaseless pursuit of sexual experiences, described in language surprisingly frank

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<sup>424</sup> Tonzig 2005: 5. By way of example, Tonzig highlights that in 1950s Norway, a literary bestseller could hope to sell 20,000-30,000 copies and that the most popular books of the period were about the war, which in exceptional cases, could reach sales of 50,000 copies.

<sup>425</sup> Dahl 1975: 90, Rottem 1996: 310.

<sup>426</sup> All cited in Tonzig 2005: 5-7.

for the period. The novel was a *roman à clef* based on Mykle's own university days, set in a thinly disguised Bergen, with some of Ask's conquests identifiably real people, and prominent figures in the Norwegian labour movement depicted in an unflattering light. An initial run of 4,000 copies was quickly sold and a reprint of another 6,000 copies followed before Christmas 1956, with a further 10,000 copies being printed in January 1957.<sup>427</sup>

The Norwegian response to *Rubin* ranged from outright rejection to adulation. Most critics agreed that the novel was not up to the same standards as *Luna*. Philip Houm read both novels together for the first time, but he found *Rubin* to be 'flatter and drier' than *Luna*, which he was enthusiastic about. Odd Eidem saw *Rubin* as being 'so messily composed that it can barely be called a *novel*.' Jens Bjørneboe commented that it was no novel at all – instead it was a book that threatened to kill the reader through physical fatigue.<sup>428</sup> While critics agreed that Mykle had literary merit, they were frustrated by his inability to limit himself. However, Annæus Schjødt observed that as time passed from the date of publication, the sexual descriptions in the book came to dominate discussion concerning the novel at the expense of all else.<sup>429</sup>

Mykle's fourth and final novel was *Rubicon*, published in 1965. The protagonist, Valemon Gristevåg, is obviously Ask Burlefot: in *Rubicon* he travels to Paris by motorcycle – as Burlefot had planned in the previous book – and the novel details his first 24 hours in the

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<sup>427</sup> A full overview of print figures and reissues is provided in Larsen 2001: 71-4.

<sup>428</sup> All cited in Tonzig 2005: 8-9. For a full survey of the Norwegian reception of *Rubin*, see Schjødt 1958: 13-29, Grieg 1971: 268-75.

<sup>429</sup> Schjødt 1958: 14.

city. The novel did reasonably in Norway, with an initial print run of 4,500 copies and a reprint of another 1,500 following within a year of publication.<sup>430</sup>

In retrospect, Rottem commented that *Rubicon* 'is often considered to be weaker than the two [official] Ask novels, but this is a rush to judgment,' commending the novel for being just as lavish as its two predecessors, despite its digressions.<sup>431</sup> Contemporary reviewers of *Rubicon* found the novel to be weaker than Mykle's previous books in terms of structure, form and plot, and they were puzzled by the fact that the book was an obvious continuation but not officially so.<sup>432</sup>

### 6.1.3 The Trial of the Century

In February 1957, Grieg and Mykle were informed that they were being prosecuted for obscenity.<sup>433</sup> This was the first time in seventy years that the Norwegian public prosecutor had pursued a literary work on these grounds, and the widespread view in literary circles was that a successful prosecution against a work of literary merit was not possible. The Mykle trial, alongside the prosecution of Jens Bjørneboe on obscenity charges relating to *Uten en tråd* in 1967, has taken on a role in Norwegian cultural history similar to that of the 1960 prosecution of Penguin Books in Britain for seeking to publish D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Tonzig 2005: 10.

<sup>431</sup> Rottem 1996: 314.

<sup>432</sup> Tonzig 2005: 10-12.

<sup>433</sup> For a comprehensive account of the trial, see Schjødt 1958.

<sup>434</sup> Sabo 2009. Charges against Penguin Books in Britain were filed before the advertised publication date for *Chatterley* in 1960. See Chapter 6.3.3 for further details.

The prosecution was not entirely unexpected: Anders Heger states that the book was first reported to the police just a fortnight after release,<sup>435</sup> while the government committee responsible for recommending books to public libraries had failed to include *Rubin* on its list in early 1957.<sup>436</sup> Literary critic Philip Houm was unimpressed by the charges, and wrote a pamphlet in the summer of 1957, in which he remarked that the prosecution of Gyldendal and Mykle was one of the worst things to occur in Scandinavian society since the end of the war.<sup>437</sup>

The prosecutor called for prison sentences for both Mykle and Grieg, fines equivalent to the proceeds of book sales, and seizure of all remaining copies. The trial began on 16 September 1957 in Oslo District Court, with the novel being read in full in open court – parts by Mykle himself. A range of heavyweight witnesses, ranging from publishers and authors to academics, critics and foreign specialists, were called by the defence to testify on issues such as Mykle's place in the echelons of Norwegian literature, and the literary merits of *Rubin*.<sup>438</sup> In a nutshell, the defence argued that the novel was of such literary quality that it was not possible for it to be obscene. On 10 October, Mykle and Grieg were acquitted on the grounds that they were assumed to have acted in good faith, but the book itself was banned and all copies confiscated. In May 1958, an appeal was heard at the Norwegian Supreme Court by a panel of fifteen judges, rather than the usual five. The ban on *Rubin* was overturned, with several judges emphasising that the nineteenth-century law forming the basis of the prosecution was incompatible with the liberalisation

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<sup>435</sup> Heger 1994: 19.

<sup>436</sup> Schjødt 1962: 346.

<sup>437</sup> Houm 1957: 9. Houm's view was that if *Chatterley* was permitted in Norway, then Mykle had to be too. Ibid.: 65.

<sup>438</sup> Jacobsen 2000: 434. Witnesses for the defence included Finn Bø, Torolf Elster, Karl Evang, Henrik Groth, Sigurd Hoel, Jens Kruuse, Olof Lagercrantz, Arnulf Øverland and Tarjei Vesaas.

of Norwegian social attitudes in the 1950s. Additionally, they cited similar literature already published in Norway without facing legal issues, such as Lawrence's *Lady Chatterleys elsker*, which had been published without issue in Norway in 1952.<sup>439</sup> The declaration by the conservative, legal establishment that the law was out of tune with modern Norway was remarkable, and reflected the extent of the paradigmatic shift taking place in Norwegian society.

Naturally, the duration between charges being announced and the trial taking place led to a sales bonanza. Between February and May 1957, almost 25,000 copies of *Rubin* were sold,<sup>440</sup> while figures were even higher following the Supreme Court's decision. However, even decades later, Mykle felt that the Norwegian people had never cleared him, even though the courts did so in both 1957 and 1958.<sup>441</sup> This marks a contrast to the outcome of the *Chatterley* trial, discussed further in Chapter 6.3.3, after which there could hardly be a person in Britain unaware that Penguin Books had been acquitted. In Mykle's case, much of his time after the trial and appeal was spent travelling abroad, while dealing with what appeared to be fairly serious writer's block. He secured advances from his Scandinavian publishers against his novel that never was – *Mannen fra Atlantis*.<sup>442</sup> As Dahl noted, the trial had been good for Mykle's wallet, but had hardly been beneficial for either the author or Norwegian literature as a whole.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> For further details of Lawrence's Norwegian reception, see Fjågesund 2007.

<sup>440</sup> Heger 1994: 37.

<sup>441</sup> Jacobsen 1994: 55. Tove Pedersen argues that many Norwegians remain unaware of Mykle's acquittal. See Pedersen 1998: 175.

<sup>442</sup> Jacobsen 1994: 60-2.

<sup>443</sup> Dahl 1975: 94.

The response to the trial internationally was varied. While in Sweden there was a belief that the case was baseless, in Denmark there was concern at the involvement of the long arm of the law in the censorship of the free word, the experiences of Nazi occupation being still fresh in the collective memory.<sup>444</sup> In the UK, it garnered significant press coverage for a foreign trial. *The Daily Telegraph* reported on the case, drily noting that ‘although the case has aroused great interest throughout Norway, there was no queue for the 20 public seats in the court. The court was crowded with 50 reporters.’<sup>445</sup> Details of the book’s tribulations in Finland were also featured in the British press.<sup>446</sup> A discussion on the letters page of *TLS* also demonstrates that well-informed watchers of Norway were aware of Mykle and the ongoing trial.<sup>447</sup>

#### 6.1.4 English-language Publication Details

The first English translation of Mykle, by Maurice Michael, was published by British publisher Barrie & Rockliff in 1960. The facts of his transmission from Norway to Britain are, however, unclear. Indeed, it is surprising that an English translation did not appear at an earlier stage, given the coverage the 1957 obscenity trial in Oslo had received in the British media. The researcher is left to piece together the transmission of Mykle’s novels to Britain from a number of tangential pieces of evidence.

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<sup>444</sup> Houm 1957: 70-3.

<sup>445</sup> See B.U.P. 1957: 16. It is rare, even today, for an author to have a marketing department of fifty!

<sup>446</sup> See ‘Finns Ban Novel’ 1957, ‘Norwegian Book in Dispute’ 1957. In the case of the Finnish translation of *Rubin*, *Laulu punaisesta rubiinista*, it was promptly banned in 1957 and seized copies were burnt. See Kantola 2016: 337. In later years, Mykle became a regular fixture on the Irish Censorship of Publications Board’s banned books list. See ‘487 Books Banned Last Year’ 1960, ‘Board Bans 17 Books’ 1964.

<sup>447</sup> Dodderidge 1957, Futrell 1957, Malleson 1957. The trial was also the subject of contemporary academic discussion. See Næss 1957: 477. There was some limited British press coverage in 1959 when Mykle attempted to sue a Stockholm hotel that had prevented him from having a female visitor in his room late at night. Little connection was made, however, between Mykle the man of the obscenity trial and Mykle, the man at the centre of this story. See ‘Women Visitors to Men’s Rooms’ 1959.



Quite how Barrie & Rockliff acquired the rights to Mykle is uncertain, but publisher Christopher Hurst mentions dealings with Danish literary agent Björn [sic] Hansen.<sup>448</sup> Heger states that British literary agent and translator Maurice Michael represented Mykle in all matters foreign.<sup>449</sup> Michael was evidently experienced in this regard: Graves argues that he was ‘heavily involved in the selection of Scandinavian texts proposed to publishers’, operating not only as a professional translator but also as an author’s and publisher’s agent.<sup>450</sup> It seems likely that the decision to acquire Mykle’s novels for translation, at least in Britain, was influenced by Michael himself. The translator had reportedly engaged in a letter-writing campaign to British publishers, proposing the publication of Mykle.<sup>451</sup> English-language rights were eventually acquired by Barrie & Rockliff in the UK, and Dutton in the USA.<sup>452</sup> Barrie & Rockliff seemed a good fit for Mykle. They had come about through a series of mergers and acquisitions, which had resulted in rather eclectic lists: most notably they had a penchant for translations.<sup>453</sup> The reason for the acquisition is clear from the substantial sums of money involved: Mykle was evidently considered significant from a commercial and publishing perspective. Eystein Eggen reports that US publisher Dell paid a USD 30,000 advance for the right to publish *Ruby* in paperback in America.<sup>454</sup> While there is no indication of how much was

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<sup>448</sup> Hurst 1997: 291. Hansen appears to have acted as a Scandinavian sub-agent, or indeed more broadly as a roving fixer into and out of the Scandinavian literary market for British publishers. However, Hurst was also a regular at Frankfurt Book Fair in the 1960s, which means that it is naturally possible that Mykle’s work was being offered at an international trade event such as this.

<sup>449</sup> Heger 1999: 335. A brief account of Michael’s career is provided by Graves, see Graves 2011: 12.

<sup>450</sup> Graves 2011: 12.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*: 13.

<sup>452</sup> Few hints are offered about Barrie & Rockliff’s rationale for the acquisition, despite a letter from publisher J. M. Bunting to *The Guardian* in 1960 admonishing the newspaper for publishing a review of *LASSO* early, and for misunderstanding the obscenity trial in Norway. See Bunting 1960: 4.

<sup>453</sup> A succinct history of the firm is provided by the publisher Christopher Hurst in his memoirs, as Barrie & Rockliff was his first employer in the world of publishing. See Hurst 1997: 257-60.

<sup>454</sup> Eggen 1994: 128. USD 30,000 in 1960 is worth approximately USD 250,000 at 2017 rates. The original sum remains a remarkable advance for a foreign author in America in the present day and would have been unheard of in 1960. Given that Mykle’s income in the years directly after the obscenity trial was vast (see *ibid.*, Heger 1999: 132.) it is likely that his advances for hardback editions and from the UK were comparable in their extent.

paid for *Lasso*, it is likely that the rights to both *Lasso* and *Ruby* were sold at once, with a view to publishing then consecutively. A further consideration is that the acquisition may have represented good value for money. For his part, Hurst seems to have been keenly aware of translation grants offered by Scandinavian cultural bodies and even publishers, which raises the question of whether Gyldendal in fact contributed towards the cost of Michael's English translation.<sup>455</sup>

In 1960, the new decade was marked by the simultaneous publication of *Lasso* in Britain and America on 22 April 1960, having been advertised heavily on both sides of the Atlantic in publishing trade publications.<sup>456</sup> However, this launch date was almost missed. Mykle had reportedly spent a full week working together with English translator Maurice Michael and was most satisfied with his translation.<sup>457</sup> Yet when he received copies of the US edition from Dutton, Mykle initiated legal proceedings against the American publisher, suing for USD 20,000 on the grounds that such significant elements of the novel had been cut that it was no longer his own work.<sup>458</sup> Mykle even tried to involve his Norwegian publisher, Grieg, in the dispute, arguing that 'it was a case of supporting Norwegian literature in the face of American gangsters.'<sup>459</sup> While it is unclear why the

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<sup>455</sup> Hurst 1997: 330. While this is speculative, Gyldendal would have been in a strong financial position to do so off the back of sales in the aftermath of their acquittal in 1958, and they had past form in this regard, having backed Hamsun's third attempt to crack the British literary market. See Chapter 5. A further consideration in this regard is that a division of translation expenses with Dutton would have reduced costs. Given that Michael was writing to British publishers as late as 1960 to propose publication of *Lasso*, yet the novel came out in April of that year, it is even possible that the translator had already translated the novel without a publication contract in place.

<sup>456</sup> Heger 1999: 335, 46. Ask Burlefot became Ash Burlefoot in English translation.

<sup>457</sup> Mykle reportedly disliked being ignored by his translators – 'no one has ever fought so madly with their translators as he, and had he understood more languages he would have been destroyed by it.' See Jacobsen 1994: 80.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*: 81.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.* The reasons why Mykle opted to pursue the US publisher rather than the British publisher in this matter are unclear, given that Heger states both publishers had made cuts. Heger 1999: 335. It could be speculated that it stemmed from the mutual respect that Mykle and his translator Maurice Michael had for each other.

changes were made, there are two credible reasons. The first is that cost considerations may have played a role, given the length of the novel. The second, perhaps likelier, explanation is that a standardised clause in the American contract stipulated that the work could not contain obscenities, although quite where the line was drawn between obscenity and non-obscenity is unknown. Either way, Mykle put his foot down and got his way. Late in the day, Maurice Michael was tasked with hastily translating missing chapters, which were then included.<sup>460</sup>

With regard to subsequent Mykle books in English, the path is no clearer. *Ruby* was published in April 1961 on both sides of the Atlantic, with *Hotel* following in April 1963, and *Rubicon* in September 1966. This was the end of it though: in a letter to Michael, Mykle noted reluctantly that the chances of securing a sale of English-language rights of *Largo* were minimal, although Michael had reportedly believed the chances of a sale to a minor press in America were better.<sup>461</sup>

## 6.2 Mykle in Britain

Landfall for Mykle's four novels in Britain took place between 1960 and 1966. In terms of critical reception, and to a lesser extent popular reception, Mykle's trajectory was one marked by an initial peak and subsequent decline.<sup>462</sup> This decline can be identified in terms of review coverage of Mykle's works, which reduced significantly following the release of *Lasso*, as well as critics' opinion of the author and his work. Similarly, an initial discussion of erotic content contained in *Lasso* was not repeated at length in reviews of subsequent

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<sup>460</sup> Heger 1999: 336. In contrast, Manalo argues that many of the initial sales in English were of heavily abridged editions. The reality regarding this point is unclear. See Manalo 2010.

<sup>461</sup> Mykle 1998: 75-7.

<sup>462</sup> In contrast to the suggestion made by Dahl in the 1970s that Mykle continued to be held in high esteem in the Anglo-Saxon publishing world. See Dahl 1975: 87.

works. Unlike in Norway, where the furore surrounding Mykle had been caused by the publication of *Rubin*, in Britain it was *Lasso* that received the lion's share of coverage, while *Ruby* caused little-to-no scandal. The eventual conclusion was one of critical confusion. While the data available to support analysis of the popular reception is limited, the indications are that a similar trajectory was followed in sales terms.

## 6.2.1 Critical Reception

Mykle had featured in *TLS* on literary, rather than legal, grounds on two occasions prior to his release in English.<sup>463</sup> However, once Mykle's work was available in English translation, he received fairly widespread coverage, although it tended to be confined to the broadsheets and literary journals. The most frequent reviewers of Mykle were *TLS* and *The Spectator*.

### 6.2.1.1 *Lasso round the Moon* (1960)

Erik Routley and Patrick Cruttwell both mistook *Lasso* for *Ruby*, believing the book they were reviewing had been banned in Norway, while also trailing the suggestion that it had sold 500,000 copies in Norway.<sup>464</sup> This would suggest that material provided by Barrie & Rockliff alongside advance copies to critics was over-enthusiastic in boasting the obscene credentials of *Lasso*.

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<sup>463</sup> Mykle's first appearance in *TLS* was in a 1955 survey of contemporary Norwegian literature. See Martin 1955: 453. A piece in August 1957 by Dodderidge discussed Mykle as a controversial literary figure in Norway, but failed to mention his impending trial. See Dodderidge 1957: 500.

<sup>464</sup> Cruttwell 1960: 14, Routley 1960: 2. Routley was effusive in his positivity about the serious depiction of love by Mykle, and looked forward to the next instalment. This response was interesting, given Routley's background as a minister and prominent scholar of church music. Routley appears to have had a wide-ranging interest in genre fiction, judging both by his reviews and columns in the *British Weekly* and by the fact that he authored a monograph surveying the history of detective fiction. See Routley 1972, 'Rev Dr Erik Routley' 1982.

Daniel George's glowing review promised readers a novel that was the work 'of a Norwegian genius [that] will create a sensation here' and concluded that 'no standards exist by which this remarkable work may be judged. It is a major novel of a new kind.'<sup>465</sup> George's enthusiasm was probably not entirely based on Mykle's book, however, as George happened to be the father of Barrie & Rockliff publisher J. M. Bunting.<sup>466</sup> Other critics, who were not related to Bunting, but were positively inclined towards *Lasso* included V. S. Naipaul and Peter Green, both of whom wholeheartedly recommended the novel.<sup>467</sup>

Other critics were more cautious in their responses. Karl Miller found Ash Burlefoot to be an appealing protagonist, but was less enthusiastic about other elements of the novel.<sup>468</sup> Similarly, Morris Dodderidge sought to withhold judgement until the forecast trilogy was available in full, but noted in the interim Mykle's propensity for 'lapses of taste, the inclusion of utterly irrelevant material, repetitiveness, occasional flatness and slipshod writing, some pretentiousness.'<sup>469</sup> John Coleman and *The Times* were singularly unimpressed, and found few redeeming features in *Lasso*.<sup>470</sup>

On the matter of the erotic content, critics were divided in relation to the zeitgeist. Some, like Routley, Naipaul and Dodderidge, offered robust defences of the sexual descriptions, arguing that Mykle was portraying love in a serious and considered manner. Naipaul considered the 'frank sexual detail' to be 'of a piece with the intensity and honesty of the

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<sup>465</sup> George 1960: 48.

<sup>466</sup> Hurst 1997: 258.

<sup>467</sup> Green 1960: 17, Naipaul 1960: 602.

<sup>468</sup> Miller 1960: 25.

<sup>469</sup> Dodderidge 1960: 269.

<sup>470</sup> Coleman 1960: 34, 'New Fiction' 1960: 17.

rest of the book'. Other critics were less impressed. Cruttwell, Miller and Coleman were all explicit in their disdain for what they felt was tedious erotic content. Coleman went so far as to say, 'everything in it, even the bits of intercourse, is as dull and wholesome as a fjord.'<sup>471</sup>

#### 6.2.1.2 *The Song of the Red Ruby* (1961)

Despite being the officially obscene Mykle book, *Ruby* received fewer reviews upon publication in 1961 than *Lasso* had done a year earlier. The most conspicuously positive – and certainly the longest – review of *Ruby* was written by Burns Singer. He foregrounded a number of reservations, noting that at times Mykle wrote 'very badly and always at inordinate length.'<sup>472</sup> However, he argued that Mykle's work had a quality that stifled all such criticism.

Geoffrey Grigson, David Holloway and Richard Mayne were seemingly torn by *Ruby*.<sup>473</sup> Grigson and Holloway both criticised Ash Burlefoot as tiresome and unlikable, opining that Mykle's style and writing ability were the redeeming features. In this regard, Mayne differed in his view, arguing instead that the protagonist was the highlight, but that Mykle was a try-hard author who had failed in his endeavours.

Norman Shrapnel and Fred Urquhart were both clearly dissatisfied with the novel in a number of respects from their reviews, but the most critical write-up came from the pen of Walter Keir.<sup>474</sup> He was concerned by the loquaciousness of the novel, noting that

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<sup>471</sup> Coleman 1960. Coleman was presumably well-qualified to comment given his background as an author of erotic fiction for Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press. See Harrison 2001.

<sup>472</sup> Singer 1961: 34.

<sup>473</sup> Grigson 1961: 34, Holloway 1961: 19, Mayne 1961: 678.

<sup>474</sup> Keir 1961: 297, Shrapnel 1961: 9, Urquhart 1961: 7.

‘earlier reviewers compared Mr. Agnar Mykle with both Lawrence and Thomas Wolfe, and undoubtedly intended by these comparisons praise of a high order. But such comparisons, to the perceptive, also carry a clear warning, particularly of wordiness.’ An unflattering review concluded that he ‘cannot help feeling that Mr. Agnar Mykle has been overpraised.’

As with *Lasso*, critics had differing views on the erotic content, although in the case of *Ruby* this was primarily how bad it was, rather than discussing whether its inclusion was merited. Grigson and Mayne alluded to the commercial potential of sexual content with a degree of distaste, while Keir loathed the repetitive sexual descriptions, arguing that Mykle’s lyricism ‘is apt to become forced and self-conscious.’ Only Singer was dismissive of the charge that Mykle over-indulged in the erotic content, arguing instead that he was inherently interested in studies of the female character.

### 6.2.1.3 *The Hotel Room* (1963)

Appearing two years after *Ruby*, *Hotel* received only limited notices in the UK press. Few reviewers found anything especially positive to say about the novel, with one notable exception being Walter Keir, responsible for one of the most negative reviews of *Ruby*, who said that *Hotel* ‘is not only frank, sensitive, and impassioned; it is also morally good; it is for life.’<sup>475</sup>

Critics such as Sam Barnes, Bernard Share and Christopher Ricks struggled to get to grips with the novel, questioning its polemic, yet over-simplified nature.<sup>476</sup> Ricks was especially

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<sup>475</sup> Keir 1963: 291.

<sup>476</sup> Barnes 1963: 25, Ricks 1963: 647, Share 1963: 8.

indignant at Mykle's implied condoning of violence. Other critics struggled to engage with Ash Grande in particular. R. G. G. Price found it difficult as a reader to evaluate the sanity of Mykle's characters: 'I *think* the hero is insane, but I may be making the same kind of error of interpretation of an alien culture that made early readers of Russian novels in translation assume they were intended to be case-histories.'<sup>477</sup> David Lodge, meanwhile, noted that 'unfortunately nothing distinguishes the hero from a promiscuous thug except the quality of his consciousness, and even this makes one uneasy at times.'<sup>478</sup>

#### 6.2.1.4 *Rubicon* (1966)

*Rubicon* was the final novel by Mykle, and was published in English translation more than three years after Mykle's last instalment, and six years after the initial hype around *Lasso*. Arguably, the zeitgeist in British literary circles had moved on, and the result was limited review coverage for the novel.

Polite confusion perhaps best characterises Robert Nye's review, in which he said that Mykle was 'a passionate simpleton who genuinely believes he is dealing in profundities.'<sup>479</sup> However, Nye also observed that 'it is all so earnest and artless that it is impossible to dislike it. *Rubicon* works; it hangs together; it has power and abundance and passion. Not really a novel, but a convincing chunk of confession.'<sup>479</sup> This sentiment was echoed by John Coleman who argued that the novel had potential but required more effort from Mykle.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Price 1963: 753.

<sup>478</sup> Lodge 1963: 20-3.

<sup>479</sup> Nye 1966: 8.

<sup>480</sup> Coleman 1966: 27.



An emerging theme with the reception of *Rubicon* was the tendency to praise translator Maurice Michael rather than Mykle. *TLS*' anonymous critic was unimpressed, having found Mykle's previous books 'more attractive and successful' because the author had better applied himself.<sup>481</sup> For them, the redeeming feature of the novel was the excellence of Michael. Likewise, Martin Seymour-Smith argued that the novel had too many digressions, mitigated only by its being 'superbly translated.'<sup>482</sup>

## 6.2.2 Public Reception and Sales

It was perceived common knowledge in 1960s Norway that Mykle was a bestseller abroad.<sup>483</sup> Tracing the sales and the public response to Mykle is only possible through the consideration of fragmentary evidence, largely drawn from Norwegian, rather than British, sources.<sup>484</sup> Actual data is difficult to obtain, with some of the strongest evidence for Mykle's British sales derived from Eggen's biography of him. Eggen noted that the German edition of *Lasso* had sold in excess of a quarter of a million copies in the 1960s, but that this was modest in comparison to the 'enormous Anglo-American market where new editions in both hardback and paperback were published constantly.'<sup>485</sup> Paperback editions of *Lasso* and *Ruby* reportedly went through 14 reissues and sold one million copies in the UK between 1962 and 1968.<sup>486</sup> This would be an astonishing figure for any author

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<sup>481</sup> For Butter or Worse 1966: 946.

<sup>482</sup> Seymour-Smith 1966.

<sup>483</sup> Dahl 1975: 87. Dahl's views are discussed in further detail in the introduction to this thesis chapter.

<sup>484</sup> Barrie & Rockliff's records are now held by the Random House Archive & Library. Unfortunately, they hold no editorial files, review material, or crucially, sales figures for Mykle's titles as part of this collection. The period in question also comes long before bestseller lists were produced by third parties, see Bloom 2008: 98-9.

<sup>485</sup> Eggen 1994: 128.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.* Quite where Eggen, Mykle's son-in-law, sourced this data is unknown. The two likeliest options are either through idle speculation at the Mykle family dinner table or through access to private Mykle family papers. The British Panther paperback edition of *Rubicon* does state that 'a million copies of Agnar Mykle's novels have been sold in the Panther editions alone', see Mykle 1968. It is worth noting that Eggen goes on to state that American editions sold in far greater numbers still. There is a reasonable degree of vagueness in terms of sales figures for books in this period. Eggen's figures occasionally appear elsewhere, often

in present-day Britain, let alone a translated author in the era of the NBA.<sup>487</sup> Regrettably, there is no indication of what the split between the two titles might have been, what sales figures Mykle's other two novels achieved, or how well the hardback Barrie & Rockliff editions did.

A further consideration when accepting these figures is the tendency towards exaggeration associated with Mykle's work. Mykle was prone to embellishment and this seems to have extended to those around him. It can be inferred that Barrie & Rockliff's covering letter sent out with review copies of *Lasso* had sought to emphasise the scandal around Mykle and his trial, and had exaggerated Norwegian sales figures, claiming that Mykle had sold 500,000 books by 1960.<sup>488</sup> This was patently untrue, as can be established from any survey of Norwegian print runs and sales.<sup>489</sup> Even if generously accounting for massive sales in the rest of Scandinavia, the figure of 500,000 seems to benefit from some generous rounding. It is therefore worth questioning whether Eggen's figures for foreign sales suffer from the same defects. Nonetheless, the figures indicate the scale of British sales, which were clearly significant, even if they were not as high as stated.<sup>490</sup>

From the publishing world, Hurst offered some evidence of Mykle's sales success. Hurst noted that he succeeded in securing an order for fifty copies of 'a new novel by the

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unreferenced. For example, it seems likely that Lewis Manalo's suggestion that *Ruby* sold over one million copies is derived from here. See Manalo 2010. The sales figures stated for the British paperback editions, if accurate, would indicate that Mykle was the bestselling Norwegian author in Britain prior to the twenty-first century – that crown having been surrendered to Jo Nesbø, who has sold in excess of 3.2 million books in the UK, as at 7 July 2017.

<sup>487</sup> See Chapter 8.2.2 for further discussion of the NBA.

<sup>488</sup> A frequently recurring statement in reviews of *Lasso*. See, for instance, Routley 1960: 2.

<sup>489</sup> Larsen 2001: 71-4.

<sup>490</sup> Bloom considers sales of 100,000 to signify a bestseller in the 1950s, and that sales of 500,000 were possible in rare cases. This would indicate that Mykle was, even with generous rounding, a bestseller in 1960s Britain. See Bloom 2008: 3.

softporn Norwegian novelist Agnar Mykle' at the Heathrow branch of W.H. Smith.<sup>491</sup> It would appear from the context that this was *Lasso*, and it is implied that there was a lucrative business in selling Mykle.

The broader public response to Mykle in English during the 1960s is difficult to determine. While it is clear from the sales figures stated above that readership and ownership of the books must have been substantial in the UK, there is little in the way of statements from ordinary readers, either at the time or in hindsight, reflecting on the books in English translation. Unlike, for example, Sjöwall and Wahlöö's Martin Beck series, which has enjoyed a twenty-first-century renaissance with reissues and new introductions, the fact that Mykle is now out of print contributes to this dearth of material.

## 6.3 Hype by Obscenity

### 6.3.1 The British Reception Digested

The British critical reception of Mykle was mixed, not unlike that in Norway. Complaints by British reviewers concerning loquaciousness and poor style can also be found in the write-ups by their Norwegian colleagues. The widest coverage and best reviews were received for *Lasso*, and the positivity and volume of reviews reduced for Mykle's remaining books.<sup>492</sup> The popular reception also mirrored that of Norway: Mykle enjoyed exponential British sales that placed a mass of English-language Mykle novels into the hands of British readers in the first half of the 1960s.

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<sup>491</sup> Hurst 1997: 262.

<sup>492</sup> Coverage of *Hotel* and *Rubicon* were especially limited. Mykle was not forgotten by all though: *TLS* carried a review of *Largo*, only available in Norwegian. The reviewer was unimpressed. See Calf-Love 1968: 5.

The response to *Lasso* was one that responded to and mirrored the pre-release hype perpetuated by Barrie & Rockliff through their advertising campaign and presumably in material provided to reviewers. Having been provided with a novel, *Lasso*, framed in terms of the *Ruby* obscenity trial, what united most reviewers was that they commented on the erotic content, the trial and the Norwegian sales figures. Another point of agreement was a general dislike of Ash Burlefoot. Beyond this, critics differed in their views, engaging with the novel on a number of different levels, identifying themes such as landscape, solemnity, and provincialism.

The reception of *Ruby* benefited from the positivity attributed to *Lasso*. Some reviewers make clear references to Mykle's writing skill, although seemingly in terms of *Lasso* rather than the book before them. The dominant theme is one of frustration with the length of the book. Even the largely positive Burns Singer noted that Mykle wrote 'very badly and always at inordinate length.'<sup>493</sup> Other critics were less forgiving. While the erotic content merited some comment, *Ruby* appears to have been received on its own terms rather than enveloped in the hype of the obscenity trial, marking a reversal of its fortunes in Norway.

As regards the industry perception of Mykle and his work, it is striking that Hurst is negative about Barrie & Rockliff's efforts in terms of literary fiction. He noted that none of their novels entered the British literary canon. In the case of Mykle, Hurst cites a review in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* of an unnamed Mykle novel that said it was 'the greatest novel I have ever read', but notes that this was not typical: 'the reaction elsewhere was lukewarm, and the provenance of this quote meant that if we had used it in press ads it

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<sup>493</sup> Singer 1961: 34.

would have caused mirth rather than a rush to the bookshops.<sup>494</sup> Despite the string of literary character witnesses who had testified on behalf of Mykle and Gyldendal at their trial in 1957, and Barrie & Rockliff's awareness of this,<sup>495</sup> in Britain the work was not seen as being sufficiently literary.

### 6.3.2 North America

Much like Hamsun's, Mykle's relationship with America was decidedly more positive than that with Britain.<sup>496</sup> Eggen noted that American readers loved Mykle for his individualism.<sup>497</sup> This was probably best outlined in Ben Ray Redman's review of *LASSO*, which described Mykle as 'a passionate poet and a naked realist.'<sup>498</sup> Redman was almost hyperbolic, arguing that Mykle's 'literary talent is one of the greatest that I have encountered in forty years of reviewing.' However, Redman's lavish praise was the exception rather than the norm for Mykle in America.

The most widely reviewed of Mykle's books in North America was *LASSO*, but critics were surprisingly unflattering. Some reviews, such as Orville Prescott's, picked up on the same editorial and characterisation issues discussed in British reviews: the book was too long and Ash Burlefoot unlikable.<sup>499</sup> Criticism in America seemed to extend beyond these two dimensions though, with both Charles J. Rolo and Glendy Culligan expressing disdain in

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<sup>494</sup> Hurst 1997: 263.

<sup>495</sup> As demonstrated in Bunting 1960: 4.

<sup>496</sup> Like Hamsun, Mykle appears to have developed a love of the USA by visiting. He was a Fulbright Scholar in 1951. His letters home have been published, see Mykle 2001. Unlike Hamsun, there is no suggestion that Mykle hated Britain – but his letters demonstrate that he was impressed by America, and it is noteworthy that in discussions with Maurice Michael, Mykle was most keen to secure a US, rather than UK, publisher for *Largo*.

<sup>497</sup> Eggen 1994: 176-7.

<sup>498</sup> Redman 1960: 15.

<sup>499</sup> Prescott 1960: 27.

relation to Mykle as an author and individual, as well as in relation to his US publisher, Dutton, for over-hyping him to the American reading public.<sup>500</sup>

Reviews of *Ruby* and *Hotel* merited few column inches.<sup>501</sup> By the time *Rubicon* was released, it was described by one reviewer as ‘very dead and a cold turkey,’<sup>502</sup> while P. M. Mitchell accused Mykle of padding his novel with pointless facts and attempting to cash in on his reputation with what had become commonplace descriptions of sexuality during the 1960s.<sup>503</sup>

Mykle’s American critical reception was not the most positive or widespread. While there was a tendency to draw attention to issues noted by British critics, it was often done in stronger terms. Yet Eggen’s suggestion that American readers appreciated Mykle’s individualism, alongside the indication that US sales figures were higher than Britain’s, would imply that Mykle did very well in popular terms in America, where readers were more accommodating than critics.

### 6.3.3 *Lady Chatterley* and Mykle

The 1960 prosecution of Penguin Books for seeking to publish Lawrence’s *Chatterley* is often drawn upon as a parallel to Mykle and his own obscenity trial in 1957.<sup>504</sup> The novel was originally published privately in Italy in 1928, and for many years was only available

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<sup>500</sup> Culligan 1960: 78, Rolo 1960: 50.

<sup>501</sup> Lindgren 1963: 2728, Moritsugu 1963: 27.

<sup>502</sup> Coles 1967: 14.

<sup>503</sup> Mitchell 1967: 97.

<sup>504</sup> Nielsen 2013, Petersen 2015: 1741. Lawrence was cited as evidence of liberalisation of society in the Norwegian Supreme Court’s decision to overturn the ban on *Rubin*, while English reviewers were often quick to compare Mykle with Lawrence. Indeed, in outlining Mykle’s literary legacy to the uninitiated, this researcher has also often resorted to framing Mykle in terms of Lawrence.

in Britain in expensive, privately published editions imported from the continent, given that the novel fell foul of British obscenity legislation.<sup>505</sup>

There is a distinction to be made in terms of the two authors: Mykle and Lawrence. In the Norwegian setting, the backlash against the obscene material in Mykle's book was a campaign against a living, native author who was a presence in public life. In contrast, Lawrence was a dead foreigner in translation, lending him an air of authority that could not be disputed directly with the author. In Britain, there was a role reversal – while Lawrence might have been dead, he naturally had a position in British literary society, while Mykle was an absent, foreign, translated writer. Lawrence was an establishment writer, and *Chatterley* was effectively already established in the public imagination despite not having been released in Britain, as the dispute around the work had held the public's attention for three decades. The act of translation and the distance it provided appears to have offered each writer a degree of inoculation against charges of obscenity, whether this was a trial in a court of law or by public opinion.<sup>506</sup>

A Norwegian translation, *Lady Chatterleys elsker*, was published in 1952, selling 60,000 copies in its first three years on sale.<sup>507</sup> Jan-Erik Ebbestad Hansen argues that this was the first time Norwegian readers had been exposed to 'passion described in language that directly challenged Christian morality.'<sup>508</sup> Hansen notes that it was the specific sexual

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<sup>505</sup> Thomas 2007: 240-1. Even imports were subject to confiscation if discovered: Thomas describes the case of a Swedish citizen in transit through the UK in 1959, whose copy of *Chatterley* was found in their luggage by customs officers and seized.

<sup>506</sup> This import trend was not confined solely to translations. Publishers such as Olympia Press, based in Paris, published English-language authors such as Samuel Beckett and Henry Miller beyond the reach of British and American obscenity laws. See *ibid.*: 231-2.

<sup>507</sup> Hansen 2011: 59.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*: 60.

descriptions contained in the novel that turned it into a Norwegian bestseller. The publication of *Lady Chatterleys elsker* predated both *Luna* and *Rubin*, and its overt nature made it an obvious point of reference when these were subsequently published, being referenced by the Supreme Court as it overturned the ban on *Rubin*.<sup>509</sup> *Chatterley* therefore served as an international point of comparison in relation to obscene content in the Norwegian context.

In Britain, meanwhile, there remained legal barriers to the publication of *Chatterley*. However, there were initiatives to overcome these obstacles which culminated in 1959 in the enactment of the new Obscene Publications Act.<sup>510</sup> The intention of the 1959 legislation was to ensure that there were fewer applications of the legislation to legitimate literary works and other works of non-fiction, such as medical textbooks. The aim was to make the law clearer while also protecting literature itself.<sup>511</sup>

In parallel with the passing into law of the new Act, preparations were underway to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Lawrence. According to Donald Thomas, the public interest in Lawrence had never been greater,<sup>512</sup> and it was only natural that Penguin Books, who had published all of Lawrence's other works, should wish to publish *Chatterley*. The problem was that *Chatterley* had all the hallmarks of being an obscene publication, at least under the old system using the Hicklin test.<sup>513</sup> Thomas believes that a

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<sup>509</sup> See Chapter 6.1.3.

<sup>510</sup> Its predecessor was almost a century old. Previously, the matter of obscenity in books had been governed by the 1857 Obscene Publications Act and had relied on the Hicklin test, established in *R v. Hicklin* in 1868. In short, any material that tended to 'deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences' was deemed obscene, regardless of context or literary merit.

<sup>511</sup> Further contemporary analysis of the legislation is found in Hall Williams 1960.

<sup>512</sup> Thomas 2007: 241.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*: 239.



test case was inevitable: Penguin Books were bound to publish *Chatterley* and the Director of Public Prosecutions would respond in kind.<sup>514</sup> This was indeed what happened. A print run of 200,000 was ordered and scheduled for publication at the end of August 1960, which resulted in a summons followed by charges against Penguin Books, with the resultant trial taking place in late October 1960.<sup>515</sup>

A significant element of Penguin Books' defence was to emphasise the publisher's determination to democratise access to literature. Gerald Gardiner, defending, said:

Penguin Books was formed to fight against [...] this attitude that it is all right to publish a special edition at five or ten guineas, so that people who are less well off cannot read what other people do. Is not everybody, whether they are in effect earning £10 a week or £20 a week, equally interested in the society in which we live, in the problems of human relationship, including sexual relationship?<sup>516</sup>

The case was seen as a determination of what it was appropriate for general readers to consume, in a fashion not dissimilar to that adopted by the Mykle/Gyldendal defence in 1957. Peter Stansill notes that many working-class readers had, in fact, already read the novel by the time of the trial, but that the opportunity to purchase copies openly at an affordable price – rather than for a cost equivalent to a week's pay – was at stake.<sup>517</sup>

Fighting the *Chatterley* trial cost Penguin Books half a million pounds at 2007 rates,<sup>518</sup> and it would later be described by Penguin as 'probably the most thorough and expensive seminar on Lawrence's work ever given'.<sup>519</sup> The new 1959 law permitted the use of expert witnesses to establish the literary merit of any work being prosecuted. The defence had

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid.: 241.

<sup>515</sup> For a more detailed account and analysis of the trial, see Matthews 2009.

<sup>516</sup> Cited in Hyde 1990: 268.

<sup>517</sup> Stansill 2010.

<sup>518</sup> Thomas 2007: 247.

<sup>519</sup> Matthews 2009: 171.

summoned a wide range of expert witnesses from the worlds of academia, writing and religion, to comment on the quality of the novel in academic terms, its literary merit and its wider importance to society in moral terms.<sup>520</sup> The use of expert witness testimony was a novelty for this kind of trial in England, just as it had been for the Mykle trial in 1957 in Oslo, drawing interesting parallels between the two. Where the two differ is that in the case of Mykle, the expert witnesses failed to persuade a judge of the inherent literary merit of *Rubin*, while in the *Chatterley* trial, the experts had to persuade a jury, and were successful in doing so. The jury took just three hours to acquit Penguin Books.<sup>521</sup>

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, a small circle of upper-class entrepreneurs sought to drive forward cultural and societal change.<sup>522</sup> This was especially the case in British literary circles, where publishers, in particular, felt they had an opportunity to promote social change while benefiting commercially. Penguin Books' publication of a paperback edition of Peter Wildeblood's *Against the Law* in 1957 at the personal behest of its founder Allen Lane had marked a watershed in this respect.<sup>523</sup>

While there was almost certainly a significant commercial appeal to publishing *Chatterley* in a mass-market paperback, Lane was primarily focused on the social and moral considerations of publishing a book of its kind.<sup>524</sup> The aim was to drive through change in the publishing world in relation to what might have been considered obscene material,

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<sup>520</sup> Thomas 2007: 244-5. Witnesses included academic Richard Hoggart, the Bishop of Woolwich, and authors such as E. M. Forster and Rebecca West (an enthusiastic reviewer of Hamsun some four decades earlier, see Chapter 5).

<sup>521</sup> An interesting point of speculation, given the citation of *Chatterley* by the Norwegian Supreme Court in overturning the ban on *Rubin*, is whether Mykle might have been cited in return had Penguin Books been found guilty and then appealed to a higher court. As it was, jurors at the Old Bailey were unlikely to be familiar with the intricacies of comparable obscenity cases in northern Europe.

<sup>522</sup> Groes 2016: 3.

<sup>523</sup> Mars-Jones 2017.

<sup>524</sup> Matthews 2009: 175.

while also opening up the work of an author in the British canon to general readers. At Penguin, there was a sense of optimism: a court in New York had found in favour of *Chatterley* in 1959, and there was the belief that Lane was unlikely to face a prison sentence even if the case was lost.<sup>525</sup> Ultimately, pushing for publication represented a low-risk venture for Lane and Penguin, but the returns – both in social and commercial terms – were potentially enormous.

There are thought-provoking parallels with the publication of Mykle in translation. The release of an author who had attracted the attention of the authorities in a neighbouring country on the grounds of obscenity was a clear attempt to establish which way the wind was blowing in literary Britain in 1960. The publication of *Lasso* can be seen in the same light as Lane and Penguin's publication of *Chatterley* – Barrie & Rockliff were seeking to effect social change, while hoping to make a healthy profit in the process.<sup>526</sup> In this regard, Mykle was a good choice. While he had been banned in Norway, the ban had been promptly overturned on appeal. If Mykle could be published successfully, then it might pave the way for others to follow. While Barrie & Rockliff did not enjoy the same reputational credit as the mighty Penguin Books, they were able to reduce the risk they faced by opting for a translated work.<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>525</sup> Thomas 2007: 242-3. Lane's 'reputation was said to be of a kind that stands like credit at the bank to a defendant in criminal proceedings.'

<sup>526</sup> While Barrie & Rockliff published in hardback, the licensing deal with Panther Books for paperback editions sent a clear message that the intention was to market Mykle to the wider public.

<sup>527</sup> In the event of legal difficulties, they had the plausible excuse that they had been unaware of what the original said or the option of blaming a translator. Additionally, there was the reassurance for the publisher that Mykle had already been a commercial smash hit in his home country: if that success could be replicated, it would be a silver lining to what was effectively an attempt to influence the zeitgeist. Graves takes a somewhat stronger view on the matter, arguing that the decision to publish Mykle in English was solely commercial. See Graves 2011: 14.

While Barrie & Rockliff was a fairly small publisher, they eventually shared the risk with Panther Books. Panther was one of the largest publishers of popular paperbacks in the 1960s, competing primarily with Penguin Books. Panther's founder, William Miller, believed that good books could be popular and that popular books could be good. While a licensing deal with Penguin might have been more prestigious for Mykle, Penguin were in the midst of publishing *Chatterley*, and Panther was by no means a poor choice. Panther offered a wealth of experience in successfully publishing paperback reprints of previously issued books, and although it published a wide range of distinguished and successful authors, it also sought to court controversy.<sup>528</sup> It was, for instance, not only the publisher of other doyens of the 'obscene' book such as Henry Miller, but it also released the first British mass-market paperback edition of the *Kama Sutra*.<sup>529</sup>

In similarity to the Mykle trial in Norway, the *Chatterley* trial had a remarkable impact in terms of generating additional public interest. Where sales of Mykle had continued until the trial, and had then enjoyed a significant boom after the ban was overturned in 1958, *Chatterley* had not yet been published when Penguin was prosecuted. However, following the acquittal of Penguin, the initial run of 200,000 copies of *Chatterley* sold out on the day of release on 10 November 1960.<sup>530</sup> The novel went on to amass sales of two million copies within a year, and just fifteen years later, Penguin had sold four million copies.<sup>531</sup>

In legal terms, the Director of Public Prosecutions was reluctant to bring proceedings over subsequent decades in a range of controversial cases as a result of the loss in the

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<sup>528</sup> The Panther brand eventually ended up in the hands of HarperCollins, and subsequently published a paperback edition of Høeg's *Smilla* in the 1990s. See Chapter 8.2.2.

<sup>529</sup> See William Miller 2009. Panther also made frequent use of eye-catching and explicit cover images, even for its more highbrow writers. For instance, editions of Kingsley Amis' novels published by Panther in the early 1970s feature naked women on the front cover. See Charles 2009.

<sup>530</sup> See '1960: Lady Chatterley's Lover Sold Out'.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, Thomas 2007: 247.

*Chatterley* trial.<sup>532</sup> This marked a sea change in terms of the way erotic content in literature was viewed, and led to a flurry of publications of other supposedly obscene literature over the course of the 1960s as publishers sought to test the boundaries established by legal precedent and amended laws on obscenity in Britain.<sup>533</sup>

The most interesting consideration in comparing and contrasting the respective trials in Norway and Britain is whether the publication of *Lasso* and *Ruby* in the UK benefited from the hype around the *Chatterley* trial. *Lasso* was published in April 1960, while Penguin Books was charged in August of the same year, with the trial taking place in October. *Chatterley* was published in November 1960, while *Ruby* was released in hardback in April 1961. Paperback editions of *Lasso* and *Ruby* followed in 1962 and 1963, respectively. It would seem plausible that the *Chatterley* publicity helped Barrie & Rockliff, and later Panther, to raise awareness of their own ‘obscene’ novelist. However, there is little to suggest that this was their approach, either in marketing materials or in reviews after the *Chatterley* trial ended. By the time *Ruby* was published, the zeitgeist had arguably already begun to move, as the polysystem changed rapidly. Barrie & Rockliff had also heavily publicised the Norwegian obscenity trial in relation to *Lasso*, making it harder to rely on yet another trial as a marketing tool. *Chatterley* came to dominate the narrative and public imagination in relation to obscene books.

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<sup>532</sup> Thomas 2007: 247.

<sup>533</sup> Bradbury 1993: 341.

## 6.4 Mykle since the 1960s

In correspondence with the Norwegian government ministry responsible for awarding author stipends in 1966, Mykle stated ‘I am aiming to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1984.’<sup>534</sup> In an interview in *Aktuell* in 1967, he went so far as to suggest he would win a double Nobel Prize – taking not only his own winnings, but also those rejected by Sartre. Suffice to say, this did not happen. Mykle’s *Largo*, released in Norway in 1967, was his final work published in his lifetime. 1966’s *Rubicon* was his final English translation.<sup>535</sup> Mykle disappeared from public view until his death in 1994.<sup>536</sup> His trajectory in the public eye in Norway has seen a gradual but upward curve, while in the anglophone world he slowly but surely disappeared from the public’s awareness.

In the 1970s in Norway, there was limited scholarly interest in Mykle. Mykle was included in *Norges litteraturhistorie*,<sup>537</sup> and he featured in researcher Barbara Gentikow’s book on pornography in Norwegian literature.<sup>538</sup> In 1981, Jahn Thon named Mykle as one of Norway’s greatest post-war writers, but expressed concern that he was in the process of being forgotten.<sup>539</sup> Mykle’s reputation abroad dissolved quickly without further input and fresh works. Interviewed in 1981 on the topic of Mykle outside of Norway, Barbara Gentikow offered little to suggest that there was an ongoing response to Mykle at that

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<sup>534</sup> Quoted in Heger 1994: 179.

<sup>535</sup> Reprints and reissues of Mykle’s translations more or less died out in Britain after the 1960s and he is now out of print.

<sup>536</sup> A Danish film adaptation of *Ruby* directed by Annelise Meineche was released in 1970. Jack Stevenson notes that while erotic scenes were daring in a previous era, ‘it was, all considered, a rather lame film [...] to be releasing on the cusp of the sexual revolution.’ See Stevenson 2010: 158. The film was a hit in Norway, where censors permitted an uncut version to be screened, but Mykle described the production as an act of vandalism and declared war on Denmark. See *ibid.*: 157-8. The film saw a limited release in Britain, but critics were generally unimpressed and there was little or no reference to the fact that the film was an adaptation of the scandal-hit novel from a few years earlier. See, for example, Gibbs 1970: 11.

<sup>537</sup> Dahl 1975.

<sup>538</sup> Gentikow 1974: 131-44.

<sup>539</sup> Thon 1981b: 2.

time, although she argued that she ‘believes that Mykle is relevant today too – and not just in Norway.’<sup>540</sup>

There has been a discernible renewal in interest in Mykle in both popular and scholarly circles in Norway since his death,<sup>541</sup> which has led to a flurry of Mykle-related publications in Norway, and various posthumous Mykle publications too.<sup>542</sup> However, none of these have appeared in English translation, and there is no suggestion that they are likely to do so. Mykle’s death merited little comment in the UK press,<sup>543</sup> and reflections on Mykle in anglophone scholarship have been limited. Norwegian-American scholar Anne G. Sabo has written articles on Mykle,<sup>544</sup> while Tonzig has produced the only English-language doctoral thesis on Mykle.<sup>545</sup>

Max Suhr Olesen and others have made occasional connections between Mykle and contemporary Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård.<sup>546</sup> These connections have not been made in English-language circles, despite the fact that Mykle is available in translation, presumably on the grounds that there was less awareness in the UK that Mykle’s works were autobiographical.

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<sup>540</sup> Thon 1981a: 8.

<sup>541</sup> Tonzig 2005: ii.

<sup>542</sup> Mykle 1997, Mykle 1998, Mykle 2001, Mykle and Hølmekbakk 2005.

<sup>543</sup> For an exception, see ‘Grapevine’ 1994: 91.

<sup>544</sup> Sabo 2005, Sabo 2009, Sabo 2012.

<sup>545</sup> Tonzig 2005.

<sup>546</sup> Olesen notes that the fourth instalment in Knausgård’s *Min kamp* series, *Min kamp: Fjerde bok*, is *Lasso* paraphrased in 400 pages. See Olesen. Others, such as Frode Boasson, have traced a connection from Knausgård, via Mykle, as far back as Hamsun. See Boasson 2017. Knausgård himself has acknowledged the impact of Mykle on his own writing – although apparently not anywhere in the anglophone sphere. See, for example, Nilsen 2015. The connection between Knausgård and Mykle is one that is likely to be expanded upon in scholarship over the coming years.

## 6.5 The Mykle Effect?

Establishing the position of Mykle in the British literary polysystem in the present day is straightforward: he is extremely peripheral, playing at most a minor role as an historical footnote in a polysystem of titles previously banned for obscenity. On the other hand, determining the position of Mykle in the British polysystem through drawing on a consensus of contemporaneous critics is challenging: there is no perceptible agreement on the role and impact of his work on British readers. For each positive critic who drew a favourable comparison with authors such as Wolfe and Lawrence, there was another who argued he was overrated and under-edited. This difficulty in identifying a particular position reflects, to an extent, the ongoing movement in the literary polysystem that Mykle experienced in the course of just a few short years.

As has been discussed in Chapter 6.3.3, Mykle represented a safe choice for publisher Barrie & Rockliff to challenge the status quo in terms of obscene literature in Britain. Furthermore, Mykle was a good choice because his first book, *Lasso*, conformed to a number of the norms of the British literary scene at the turn of the 1950s. British literary culture was in a state of flux, but scholarship does not agree on the precise situation. Malcolm Bradbury argued that the 1950s were marked by regular injections of outside inspiration into British literature, while conversely, Michael Gorra argued that Britain proactively sought to isolate itself culturally in the years immediately after the war.<sup>547</sup> What is clear is that the British polysystem was susceptible to outside influences if they could make it across the initial hurdle of not seeming overly novel.

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<sup>547</sup> Bradbury 1987: 90, Gorra 1990: 200.



James Gindin argued that British fiction in the 1950s had come to be characterised by angry young men, seemingly in terms of both the authors and characters.<sup>548</sup> In noting that a 1950s literary hero was often an ‘intelligent and irreverent young man from the lower or lower middle classes, educated by scholarship but let loose in a society still permeated by class distinction and respect for breeding,’ Gindin could very well have been describing either Mykle or his protagonist Ash Burlefoot. This facilitated the transition into the British literary polysystem for Mykle’s works. Bradbury argued that the assertion that 1950s literature comprised nothing but angry young men oversimplified a more complex situation – not least that many authors categorised as such had actually quietly moved on from this style to other literary forms during the late 1950s.<sup>549</sup>

Mykle and Ash Burlefoot were both angry young men to whom Britain had become accustomed in the 1950s. The obscenity dimension meant that books such as *Lasso* were different, but not too different, and could have the maximum impact in the British polysystem. Effectively, *Lasso* fitted into the gap described by Bradbury of literature that had begun to take its first steps away from angry-young-man literature, but was not too distant. This was demonstrated by the fact that *Lasso*’s marketing played on the scandal of an obscenity trial in Norway and that it was successfully published without incident in Britain months before the *Chatterley* trial.

The publishing world’s efforts to drive through social change in opposition to the conservative establishment by means of the publication of supposedly obscene literature was backed by a largely upper-middle and upper-class group of literary professionals.

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<sup>548</sup> Gindin 1963: 2.

<sup>549</sup> Bradbury 1987: 110.

These critics were more favourable towards *Lasso* than they might have been, especially given their subsequent criticisms of his later works. The hegemony of the upper classes in the publishing world extended to influencing the public via literary critics. In Parliament, the view on such matters was also clear. In relation to Lawrence, parliamentarian Alan Thompson stated in 1959 that the controversy surrounding the long-deceased author had died with him, and that ‘he is now [in 1959] recognized as a major English novelist’.<sup>550</sup> Even conservative mouthpieces such as *The Daily Telegraph* considered the persecution of highbrow literature, such as *Chatterley* and Mykle, to be a waste of time and public money.<sup>551</sup>

This perception that change was necessary, or had indeed already happened, was also common amongst the wider public. Thomas points out that a reported nine out of twelve jurors in the *Chatterley* trial were for acquittal before the trial began, and that this was largely due to ‘a feeling in the post-war world and the reformist decade of the 1950s that what people chose to read was up to them.’<sup>552</sup> Hilliard takes the view that this was change that had been coming for even longer – since the First World War – and that the acquittal of *Chatterley* reflected both the democratisation of society and the development of new modes of consumption.<sup>553</sup>

Increasingly relaxed attitudes towards sex began to permeate through British society and literature in the 1960s. In his poem ‘Annus Mirabilis’, Philip Larkin wrote that sexual intercourse was invented in 1963 ‘between the end of the Chatterley ban and the Beatles’

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<sup>550</sup> Thomas 2007: 241.

<sup>551</sup> Sandbrook 2010.

<sup>552</sup> Thomas 2007: 243.

<sup>553</sup> Hilliard 2013: 657.

first LP'.<sup>554</sup> In the case of *Chatterley*, Stansill notes that the novel not only marked a shift in perceptions of sexuality, but that it also broke down social-class barriers.<sup>555</sup> However, this revolt against every conceivable form of old-fashioned hierarchy and the resultant changes to the literary scene did not occur instantaneously.<sup>556</sup> Bradbury stated that 'if the Sixties was a style going somewhere, it took most of the decade to get there.'<sup>557</sup> Indeed, many of the developments in the formation of a 1960s counterculture towards the end of the decade simply reflected a general expansion of the cultural sector to encompass artistic concepts and forms that had not previously been permitted.<sup>558</sup> It is apparent, though, that the new obscenity legislation enacted in 1959 occurred, in the words of Hilliard, at 'a critical moment in the reconfiguration of the relationship between elite authority and democratic culture.'<sup>559</sup>

The initial popular response to Mykle can be attributed to a number of factors. In broad terms, it was a reflection of the sea change in British social attitudes towards sex. Sex has always sold, and readers were almost certainly attracted by the erotic content: it was emphasised by the publisher in publicity, and reviewers drew attention to it. *Lasso* was a rare example of a novel published openly in Britain that offered plentiful and easily accessible erotic content to the wider public, and that had found patronage in publishing and reviewing circles. The changes taking place in society, being spear-headed by the cultural elite embodied in this case by publishers, could be supported by readers through buying or reading the book, enabling individuals to indicate approval while also acquiring

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<sup>554</sup> Larkin 1974: 34.

<sup>555</sup> Stansill 2010.

<sup>556</sup> Bradbury 1993: 341.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*: 340.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*: 343.

<sup>559</sup> Hilliard 2013: 669.

a sense of involvement in the campaign. Some of Mykle's initial impact is due to the hype and publicity that surrounded the publication of *Lasso*: readers were drawn in out of sheer curiosity.<sup>560</sup> Additionally, there was the auxiliary effect of the *Chatterley* trial in the autumn of 1960, which drew further attention to 'obscene' novels that were available in the British literary market.

Mykle's position in the British literary polysystem was initially central. *Lasso*, and to a lesser extent, *Ruby*, conformed to various literary norms established in the previous decade, while also pushing social progress and liberalisation of the 1960s out of the starting blocks. Yet in the years after 1960, Mykle began to drift away from the centre of the polysystem. The most obvious reason for this was the displacement of Mykle from the public consciousness as one of the earliest pioneers of obscene literature in the new era of British social liberation by other more prominent actors: most notably Lawrence. While Mykle was published before Lawrence, and both initially enjoyed a degree of notoriety that hinged on their respective obscenity trials, it was *Chatterley*, effectively already a part of English literary canon and backed by a major publisher, that came to dominate discussions relating to the legal difficulties associated with literary indecency, as evidenced by its mass sales following the acquittal of Penguin in October 1960.

Mykle's impact on the movement to liberalise British literature was lessened by an influx of other, domestic literature that emerged after the *Chatterley* trial, and awareness of the role played by Mykle and his UK publishers – successfully publishing a banned, obscene author from a neighbouring country ahead of the *Chatterley* trial – was soon forgotten.

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<sup>560</sup> Sales of Lars Mytting's 2015 non-fiction book *Norwegian Wood: Chopping, Stacking and Drying Wood the Scandinavian Way* are an apt demonstration that outright curiosity can be a major sales driver.

This was not helped by the publication of *Hotel* and *Rubicon* in 1963 and 1966, which did nothing to reinforce Mykle's position in the polysystem. In the case of the former, it was out of keeping with Mykle's other work and put off British readers and critics. In the case of the latter, it was a weak return to same old formula, which by 1966 was no longer innovative in the way it would have been in 1960. There was also no conspicuous secondary wave of other Mykle-esque writers from Scandinavia arriving in English translation during the 1960s.<sup>561</sup> With Mykle's sales dwindling and no further media commentary forthcoming as books first disappointed and then ceased, his position became increasingly peripheral throughout the decade. As early as 1970, reviews of the Danish film adaptation of *Ruby* omitted the author altogether. By 1971, there was already more interest in examining the legacy of Hamsun than in reflecting on the authorship of the still living writer, Mykle.<sup>562</sup>

In popular terms, Mykle's decline in Britain and resultant marginalisation to the peripheries of the polysystem surely reflect the increase of choice for British readers. While *Lasso* put Mykle and his publishers in a position of strength, offering readers sexual content in a market typically deprived of such material, the literary context changed dramatically and quickly in the months and years that followed. By the time *Ruby* was published, just one year later, *Chatterley* and other 'obscene' books had reached the market and readers had a choice. Mykle was effectively overtaken by a rapidly developing polysystem.

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<sup>561</sup> Indeed, there was a paucity of Scandinavian fiction in translation arriving during the 1960s. The lukewarm British reception of Sjöwall and Wahlöö later in the decade demonstrates that Mykle had done little to elevate the status of Scandinavian literature as a whole. See Chapter 7 for further details.

<sup>562</sup> Jones and McFarlane 1971.

Mykle managed to attract new readers throughout the decades following his publication in Norway. This was not the case in the UK, where he almost immediately became something of a forgotten man despite his enormous penetration in critical and sales terms upon publication. While a sense of unfulfilled potential might be diagnosed, in line with Norwegian critics, there has been no desire or interest to revisit Mykle and his work in Britain.<sup>563</sup> *Lasso*, backed up by the hype of the Norwegian obscenity trial, served its purpose as a foot soldier in the battle against literary conservatism in 1960s Britain, and once the war was won and the era of challenging book bans had moved on, so did British readers.

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<sup>563</sup> Naturally, this situation could change at any time. The rise of Knausgård in British literary circles arguably means there is great potential for a revival of interest in his literary predecessors, and in particular Mykle.



## 7 The Arrival, Disappearance and Re-emergence of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö in Britain

*'People nowadays writing about  
Scandinavian crime fiction always point to  
the Swedish pair Maj Sjöwall and Per  
Wahlöö. At the time they were published,  
very, very few people read those books.  
They've been resurrected once or twice.  
Then along comes Henning Mankell.'*

(Christopher MacLehose,  
interview in *Kythor* Forthcoming)





## Sweden

*Roseanna* (1965)

*Mannen som gick upp i rök* (1966)

*Mannen på balkongen* (1967)

*Den skrattande polisen* (1968)

*Brandbilen som försvann* (1969)

*Polis, polis, potatismos!* (1970)

*Den vedervärdige mannen från Sjöfå* (1971)

*Det slutna rummet* (1972)

*Polismördaren* (1974)

*Terroristerna* (1975)

## Britain

*Roseanna* (1968)

*The Man Who Went Up in Smoke* (1970)

*The Man on the Balcony* (1969)

*The Laughing Policeman* (1971)

*The Fire Engine That Disappeared* (1972)

*Murder at the Savoy* (1972)

*The Abominable Man* (1973)

*The Locked Room* (1974)

*Cop Killer* (1975)

*The Terrorists* (1977)



# 7 The Arrival, Disappearance and Re-emergence of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö in Britain

One of the best-known examples of literary transmission from Scandinavia to the UK during the decades following the end of the Second World War amongst both readers and scholars of today is that of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö.<sup>564</sup> The couple co-wrote ten novels over the period from 1965 to 1975, which were first published in Britain between 1968 and 1977. Following the decision by Harper Perennial, in light of the stellar success enjoyed by fellow Scandinavian author Henning Mankell in Britain since the early 2000s, to reissue the series in full in 2006-07, it has enjoyed something of a renaissance with British readers, and the series and its authors have garnered widespread coverage both in the British media and in scholarship.<sup>565</sup> This was not the case when the novels first appeared in publication in Britain almost half a century ago. This case study examines the transmission of the entire series to Britain and traces its reception over the subsequent decades.

## 7.1 *The Story of a Crime*

### 7.1.1 Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö

Per Wahlöö (1926-1975) was a reporter with Malmö newspaper *Kvällsposten* in the 1950s, his remit primarily covering crime, but extending occasionally to the culture pages.<sup>566</sup> He

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<sup>564</sup> Crace 2009.

<sup>565</sup> In the case of the former, Louise France's profile of Sjöwall from 2009 borders on hagiographic. See France 2009b. Meanwhile, a good example of recent scholarship that looks at Sjöwall and Wahlöö in some depth is Stougaard-Nielsen's 2017 book *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*.

<sup>566</sup> Tapper 2014: 67-8.

moved on to work for a variety of other publications in the early 1960s, as well as starting his novel-writing career. Wahlöö had written his first novel *Himmelsgeten* for Norstedts in 1959, with his publisher Lasse Bergström being impressed by the way in which Wahlöö's writing was evocative of contemporary American literature.<sup>567</sup> Evidently, Wahlöö was considered to be a bankable commodity, as a further six books were published up to and including 1965.<sup>568</sup> Wahlöö's status as a respectable but not major name on the Swedish literary scene changed when he met Maj Sjöwall (1935-) in the summer of 1962 while they were working for different weekly magazines within the same publishing concern.<sup>569</sup> Aged just 27 at the time, Sjöwall's background was in publishing. During that initial summer, Wahlöö was writing a bonus book for a book club, drafts of which he would pass to Sjöwall, occasionally asking her to supplement the material.<sup>570</sup> Sjöwall notes that 'this was the first time we tried out working together [...] we also began to talk about the lack of realistic descriptions of police work in the crime fiction genre', laying the foundations for their future collaboration.<sup>571</sup> By 1963, they had moved in together, with their first book, *Roseanna*, published in 1965.<sup>572</sup> Wahlöö died of cancer in 1975, just after the couple had completed their final book.

### 7.1.2 The Books

Sjöwall and Wahlöö planned their series *Romaner om ett brott* (*The Story of a Crime*) on the basis of three conditions: they wanted to break away from so-called mansion novels, to write about professional police rather than amateurs, and to depict the collective rather

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<sup>567</sup> Bergström 1998: 314.

<sup>568</sup> For a detailed bibliography of Wahlöö's writings, see Hellgren.

<sup>569</sup> Eklund 2010.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid. On Sjöwall and Wahlöö's lives and origins, see also France 2009b.

than the individual.<sup>573</sup> Although these are the hallmarks of a police procedural, Bo Lundin argued that the hard-boiled California school of crime, featuring writers such as Dashell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, was the greater inspiration for Sjöwall and Wahlöö.<sup>574</sup> In 1965, when *Roseanna* was published in Sweden, police procedurals remained a new concept to Swedish readers, making the approach genuinely novel.<sup>575</sup>

Sjöwall and Wahlöö stepped away from many of the accepted norms in Swedish crime writing. The decalogy follows a team of colleagues in the Stockholm-based National Murder Squad, headed by Martin Beck, rather than the isolated detective often found in preceding Swedish and American crime fiction works. The team are followed both at work and in their private lives. The depiction of criminals also differs to established norms of the period: they are often presented sympathetically to the reader, regardless of the extent of their crimes.<sup>576</sup> This approach was intended to ground acts of crime in a social context, providing readers with an understanding for criminal acts that had previously been absent from works of crime fiction.

Although Sjöwall and Wahlöö consciously set out to expose the Swedish welfare state, they initially used a fairly light touch in their attempts. Reviewing *Roseanna*, Swedish critic

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<sup>573</sup> Guillou 1993. By 1966, Wahlöö had set out the premise of ten books roughly equal in length that sought to analyse crime as a social function in relation to society. See Wahlöö 1966: 85. Sjöwall and Wahlöö expanded on the reasons for writing the series in a 1967 essay. See Sjöwall and Wahlöö 1967a.

<sup>574</sup> Lundin 1981: 34. The *Classic Crime Fiction* website notes that a police procedural ‘thrusts the detective into the middle of a working police force, full of rules and regulations. Instead of bypassing the police, as its predecessors, the procedural takes the reader inside the department and shows how it operates.’ See ‘The American Police Procedural’.

<sup>575</sup> Obvious American writers such as Ed McBain had not been translated to Swedish. Only in 1966 did Norstedts first acquire any translation rights to McBain, who was translated by Sjöwall and Wahlöö. See Bergström 1998: 171.

<sup>576</sup> Muncie and McLaughlin note that telling ‘stories about the relationship between types of crime and types of social order’ enable readers to see crime differently – leading to an ambiguity that allows them to enjoy crime in a way that they would never do otherwise. Muncie and McLaughlin 2001: 3-4.

Claes Collenberg commended the depiction of Swedish police procedure, but argued that the novel was attempting to profit from murder victims and murderers alike – ‘a new form of detective novel: murder reportage turned into fiction’.<sup>577</sup> There was little suggestion that it was overly political in the early stages, but as the series progressed, so did the political dimension.<sup>578</sup> By the time Collenberg reviewed *Den vedervärdige mannen från Säffle*, the political dimension was both identified and appreciated. While the authors were not always successful in their attempt to write politically, consistent throughout is the use of the police procedural form describing the work of a collective police force, alongside the creation of characters that were relatable to readers, regardless of which side of the law they were on.

## 7.2 Sjöwall and Wahlöö on Home Turf

Norstedts published the series over a decade from 1965 until 1975. Although the focus of this chapter is primarily on the British reception of the series, there is a significant disconnect between the initial reception of the books in Sweden compared with that in Britain, necessitating a closer examination of the domestic reception in Sweden.

### 7.2.1 Critical Reception

Inevitably, given the stature of the series’ publisher, Norstedts, and Wahlöö’s existing reputation as a writer, *Beck* received widespread Swedish press coverage.<sup>579</sup> The extent of

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<sup>577</sup> Collenberg 1966.

<sup>578</sup> The same is true of the British reception of the early titles. *The Guardian*’s review of *Beck 1* considers the book to be ‘good solid reading’, with no mention of any political dimension. See Iles 1968. For the purposes of this chapter, it is accepted that the authors set out to critique Swedish society from a number of perspectives and that they experienced mixed success. This chapter does not discuss their strategies in any great depth. For an introduction to this research strand, see Beyer 2012.

<sup>579</sup> This was also a Swedish crime fiction boom: Lundin noted that half of all crime stories published in the twentieth century had been released between 1958 and 1981. See Lundin 1981: 33.

this coverage increased as the series continued, reflecting the expanding impact of the books on Sweden.<sup>580</sup>

One of the few Swedish critics to review all ten novels was *DN*'s Collenberg. He was not initially enthused. In a lukewarm review of *Roseanna*, he accused Sjöwall and Wahlöö of exploiting a grisly murder that had gripped Sweden a year earlier.<sup>581</sup> His indignation was mitigated somewhat by the skill with which the authors dealt with the subject at hand. Åke Janzon, reviewing in *SvD*, complained that 'the deliberate realism' of the book was offensive to crime fiction readers, while Leif Nylén absented himself from the role of critic, saying he did not know 'enough about the genre' to comment in any depth on the novel.<sup>582</sup>

Although Michael Tapper identifies a dissipation in Swedish reviewers' negativity for subsequent titles, this was not the case for all critics.<sup>583</sup> Collenberg's review of *Mannen som gick upp i rök* in 1966 flippantly opens with the assumption that the novel must also be based on another true crime, before noting that it is impossible to identify which one – and that the novel is not so thoughtless as its prequel.<sup>584</sup> *Mannen på balkongen* was 'the least satisfying of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's books so far'.<sup>585</sup> Collenberg's response appears to have gone against the grain of other Swedish critics. For example, Jörgen Elgström in *Expressen*

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<sup>580</sup> Tapper believes the lack of coverage for earlier books is a result of genre snobbery. Tapper takes the view that while reviews tended towards the positive end of the spectrum, reviewers were often uncertain of how to respond to the books compared with Wahlöö's solo works. See Tapper 2014: 102-6.

<sup>581</sup> Collenberg 1965. For a comprehensive overview of Swedish reviews of the *Romaner om ett brott* series, see Tapper 2011: 798.

<sup>582</sup> Janzon 1965, Nylén 1965.

<sup>583</sup> Tapper 2014: 103.

<sup>584</sup> Collenberg 1966.

<sup>585</sup> Fickboken 1968.



praises the authors' ability to work with their form without 'the story turning grey or whiny', while *BLM*'s Petter Bergman exclaimed that 'it is a bloody good book.'<sup>586</sup>

*Den skrattande polisen* marked a watershed for Swedish reviewers.<sup>587</sup> *BLM*'s Bergman, who described the series as one of 'quality books', was joined by practically all critics in holding this view by the time the fourth Beck novel came out.<sup>588</sup> Collenberg began to warm to the authors, suggesting that this was the first time in the series that the authors had developed any depth and warmth in their work.<sup>589</sup> The novel enjoyed particular success in Sweden, being awarded the Sherlock prize by the *Expressen* newspaper for best crime novel of 1968.<sup>590</sup>

As the series developed into a phenomenon, Gunnar Unger declared *Brandbilen som försvann* to be 'a masterpiece that in my view is world class'.<sup>591</sup> Unger's positivity was not constant, as he noted in relation to *Polis, polis, potatismos!* that the authors had lost their sense of nuance in their social criticism, transitioning from referencing to agitating.<sup>592</sup> As the series progressed, one of the more unusual occurrences in the Swedish reception was in relation to *Det slutna rummet*: the *Expressen* newspaper reviewed the book twice, presenting the reviews together on the same page.<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>586</sup> Elgström 1967. This general sense is reflected in reviews from *Arbetarbladet*, *Kvällsposten* and *BLM*. See 'Spänning hela världen över' 1967, 'Tycker ni om svenskt?' 1967, 'Läsupplevelser' 1967.

<sup>587</sup> Indeed, it was named the best Swedish crime novel of all time in a 1972 critics' poll. See Adrup 1972.

<sup>588</sup> Tapper 2011: 208.

<sup>589</sup> Collenberg 1968.

<sup>590</sup> 'Heffaklumpen och Sherlock' 1968.

<sup>591</sup> Unger 1969.

<sup>592</sup> Unger 1970.

<sup>593</sup> Böre 1972, Gustafsson 1972. Curt Böre thought the authors were cynically rubbishing Sweden's reputation to maximise foreign sales, while Lars Gustafsson believed the duo were on the same level as Simenon. It was clear that a growing international perspective was beginning to inform the Swedish reception.

Wahlöö's death in 1975 allowed reviewers to indulge in hagiography. Collenberg declared himself a wholehearted convert to the Sjöwall and Wahlöö oeuvre, in spite of his mixed responses over the previous decade, and mourned the passing of characters that he had come to know and enjoy spending time with.<sup>594</sup> He argued that it was only natural for readers to be drawn eventually to the authors' criticisms of society, concluding 'that it would be an injustice if Wahlöö was remembered as the author of something we happened to simply refer to as good books.'<sup>595</sup>

### 7.2.2 Public Reception and Sales

The books in the series were typically issued in initial print runs of 11,000 copies at a time, which was comparable to the standard print runs of other titles being issued by Norstedts during the period, as well as by other major Swedish publishers.<sup>596</sup> A typical run for Sjöwall and Wahlöö's novels – once paperbacks were included – was 20,000-25,000 copies.<sup>597</sup> While respectable, these were not market-leading figures. According to Hans Stertman, prominent Swedish authors such as Stieg Trenter, Maria Lang and Bo Balderson were capable of running through 30,000-50,000 copies.<sup>598</sup>

A significant volume of advertising appeared in Swedish newspapers promoting Sjöwall and Wahlöö's books to the public. However, the contemporary response of the reading public is unclear. Mankell writes 'I no longer remember how I reacted [to *Roseanna*] forty

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<sup>594</sup> Collenberg 1975a.

<sup>595</sup> Collenberg 1975b. Indeed, following Wahlöö's death, criticism of any kind of the couple's decalogy was extremely rare in Sweden, as they became an 'untouchable and sanctified legend.' See Tapper 2014: 102.

<sup>596</sup> Sales figures are challenging to come by for this period, but print-run figures are available through advertisement features in the Swedish press. See, for example, 'Våra mest lästa böcker i höst...nya upplagor' 1969, 'Här kommer de nya upplagorna!' 1970, 'Höstens bästa – en deckare i världsklass' 1971.

<sup>597</sup> Tapper 2011: 237.

<sup>598</sup> At the top end of the bestseller market, Tage Erlander's memoirs had a run of 140,000 copies. Further examination of sales figures in Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s are to be found in Stertman 1978.

years ago, but I think it was a revelation to see such real people as police officers in *Roseanna*.<sup>599</sup>

Some Swedish critics, such as *BLM*'s Bergman, felt Sjöwall and Wahlöö could do no wrong. However, the perspective of the most prominent reviewers in this survey, *DN*'s Collenberg and *SvD*'s Unger, was not quite so black-and-white.<sup>600</sup> Collenberg gradually warmed to the political dimension, while Unger appreciated their journalistic realism but not their social radicalism. This scepticism about the authors' left-wing credentials was shared by others: for instance, Rune Johansson noted in 1974 that 'they have oddly enough managed to keep their readers despite having a clear and radical left-wing approach in their books'.<sup>601</sup> Johansson illustrates the disconnect between literary professionals and the wider public in Sweden at the time. Clearly, the series was responding to the zeitgeist if readers kept returning to the books, as indicated by the print-run figures, despite the misgivings of reviewers. Tapper observes a tendency amongst Swedish critics to focus on 'realism' in their reviews.<sup>602</sup> For Collenberg and Unger, this was equated with high-quality journalism, and enabled them to categorise the books as good literature. For leftist critics, 'Sjöwall and Wahlöö's political analyses are seen as a triumph of realism over the artistic limitations of the genre'.<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> Mankell 2006: viii. Journalist Bengt Eriksson offers similar reflections in a retrospective on the enduring quality of the series in Sweden. See Eriksson 2016.

<sup>600</sup> Tapper describes them both as liberal-conservatives despite the fact that they came from newspapers on opposite sides of the Swedish political divide. See Tapper 2014: 103.

<sup>601</sup> Johansson 1974.

<sup>602</sup> This is to be expected: Swedish literature of the period was characterised by a focus on realism and documentarism, typified by writers such as P. O. Enquist, Sven Delblanc and Göran Palm.

<sup>603</sup> Tapper 2014: 103.

## 7.3 Sjöwall and Wahlöö in Britain

### 7.3.1 English-language Publication Details

The acquisition of English-language translation rights for the Sjöwall and Wahlöö novels originated in the friendship between Norstedts publisher Bergström and New York-based Pantheon publisher André Schiffrin.<sup>604</sup> They first met in New York in 1966, when Bergström was selling world rights to the writings of Ingmar Bergman, as well as rights to *Roseanna*.<sup>605</sup>

Schiffrin's willingness to acquire the American rights to an obscure debut work from Sweden can be explained by three causes. Firstly, professional courtesy: Norstedts' new imprint, PAN, and Pantheon were engaged in substantial business at the time.<sup>606</sup> Secondly, Schiffrin was keen because 'there was nothing more gratifying than launching a quality thriller with the promise of a further nine to follow with the same protagonists woven into new intrigue.'<sup>607</sup> Thirdly, *Roseanna* came with an excellent recommendation from Paris-based translator and scout, Carl Gustaf Bjurström.<sup>608</sup> The emergence of the police procedural as a popular sub-genre in both book and televisual form,<sup>609</sup> the fact that

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<sup>604</sup> André Schiffrin was the son of Frenchman Jacques Schiffrin, who had moved to New York in the 1940s and had co-founded Pantheon Books together with Helen and Kurt Wolff. Jacques died early in 1950, and when the Wolffs sold the firm to Random House in 1961, André was made publisher. For further details, see 'André Schiffrin – Obituary' 2014: 27.

<sup>605</sup> Bergström 1998: 174.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.: 175.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

<sup>608</sup> For further details on the role of Bjurström as a promoter and disseminator of Swedish literature abroad, see Tegelberg 2016.

<sup>609</sup> The first literary example of the police procedural can be traced to 1945 in the shape of Lawrence Treat's *Vas in Victim*, although it has been argued that the coming of age of procedurals was the popularity in America of the *Dragnet* television series, first broadcast in 1951. Television played a major role in developing the book-based crime fiction genre from the 1950s onwards, especially in terms of sub-genres such as the police procedural. See Dowler 2016. This has latterly become a symbiotic relationship: Hansen and Waade argue that the emergence of twenty-first-century shows such as DR's *The Killing* would not have been possible without crime fiction books. See Hansen and Waade 2017: 106.

Schifftrin was likely to be sympathetic to the political persuasions of the Swedish authors, and a 60-page sample translation, are all likely to have contributed as well.<sup>610</sup>

*Beck 1* first appeared in English translation in America in 1967. The US editions came out at one-year intervals until 1976. This pace required a steady supply of translators, with a total of seven working on the ten books: Paul Britten Austin, Alan Blair, Amy and Ken Knoespel, Lois Roth, Joan Tate, and Thomas Teal. This roster included two British translators, four Americans and an Australian. The inevitable lack of consistency suggests that Pantheon's primary concern was to maintain a steady pace of publications.

Following publication in America in 1967, Victor Gollancz acquired British and Commonwealth rights to the series. *Beck 1* was published in Britain in October 1968, with subsequent titles published roughly once per year until 1977.<sup>611</sup> The Gollancz archives show the series to have been an ordinary feature on the publisher's list: the rates payable to both Pantheon and to the authors are commensurate with most other titles being published by Gollancz during this period. In the case of *Beck 1*, the authors were paid an advance of £150, and Pantheon Books was paid USD 50, in addition to £200 towards translation costs.<sup>612</sup>

Gollancz had been persuaded to buy into the Sjöwall and Wahlöö vehicle by American sales of *Beck 1* that Gollancz director Giles Gordon noted were 'very, very high for this

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<sup>610</sup> The decision was clearly taken on the basis of more than positive reports and gut feelings, however. A 1967 report in *DN* outlined that Pantheon had been provided with a 60-page sample translation, which, it was argued, had sealed the deal. See Mari 1967.

<sup>611</sup> It should be noted that *Beck 2* and *Beck 3* were published in reverse order, although subsequent new editions have published them in the original sequence.

<sup>612</sup> MSS.318/2/2/8: 64. Costs for subsequent books were in a similar range, although percentages relating to sub-rights became more detailed.

kind of book.<sup>613</sup> He went on to note that Wahlöö's existing presence in the UK market via Michael Joseph, responsible for publishing his solo novels in English translation, would also assist Gollancz. He additionally noted that while 'the authors' names are unpronounceable, Roseanna isn't!'<sup>614</sup>

The commercial dimension of the Sjöwall and Wahlöö series is obvious when examining Gollancz's ledgers: the *Beck* series represented a low-risk option.<sup>615</sup> For example, Sphere Books was granted an exclusive five-year licence to reissue *Beck 1* three years after the original Gollancz release, for which an advance of £150 was paid to Gollancz on signature and the same amount again upon publication,<sup>616</sup> effectively covering the bulk of Gollancz's expenses before they had even sold a copy. Similar deals were signed for subsequent titles in the series too.

The Gollancz archives, which are not exhaustive, provide some insight into the arrangement between Pantheon and Gollancz. Livia Gollancz wrote from New York in 1968: 'The new Sjo wall-Wahloo [sic], [*Beck 3*] is nearly ready. There is also going to be a new straight novel soon which will go to his regular straight pub [sic] in England.'<sup>617</sup> News about Sjöwall and Wahlöö, and their upcoming work, was typically directed to Schiffrin,

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<sup>613</sup> MSS.318/7/QU/21/2 (Supplementary sheet no. 768).

<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> British publishing was in a precarious state in the late 1960s. An ongoing slide in sales combined with the changing financial dimensions of publishing saw many publishers and booksellers forced out of business. The result was a shift towards concentrating on providing literature with mass appeal at reasonable prices in order to secure profit, rather than impressing sophisticated literary critics. See Gedin 1983: 411.

<sup>616</sup> MSS.318/2/2/8: 64.

<sup>617</sup> MSS.318/3/LIV/32. The 'straight novel' referred to is almost certainly Wahlöö's *The Steel Spring*. Livia Gollancz undertook annual trips to New York from the mid-1960s until her retirement to meet with US publishers. Letters exchanged with the office in London during her absence often discuss titles and authors in code for fear of letters falling into the wrong hands.

who was in the driving seat where English-language relations were concerned.<sup>618</sup> Such news was in turn passed onto Gollancz, resulting in an indirect channel of communication between Sweden and Britain.

This distance between the authors and their British publishers could partially be explained by the fact that it was Pantheon who had made the original acquisition and who were responsible for managing the translation to English. The lack of interaction between Gollancz and Sjöwall/Wahlöö is unusual, but the lack of communication between Gollancz and Pantheon was even more surprising. It appears that Livia Gollancz rarely managed to meet with Schiffrin while in New York, in marked contrast to her correspondence, meetings and engagements with other publishers.<sup>619</sup> Given her reputation as a micro manager who involved herself in activities at almost every level in the firm, this lack of interest in what must have been a significant commercial undertaking is odd.<sup>620</sup>

The transmission of Sjöwall and Wahlöö to Britain was stage-managed from New York, but it is evident that the *Beck* series was considered to have both literary and commercial potential in the British market, given that the acquisition of a decalogy in translation would otherwise have been a highly unusual manoeuvre.

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<sup>618</sup> Sjöwall and Wahlöö do not appear to have had an agent during the 1960s and 1970s. Gollancz contract ledgers note their representatives as being Norstedts. See MSS.318/2/2/8: 64.

<sup>619</sup> See correspondence between André Schiffrin and Livia Gollancz in January 1974, in MSS/3/LIV/16 and MSS/3/LIV/17.

<sup>620</sup> MSS.318/7/AD/1: 2. Bergström pointed out that Schiffrin was 'a very French American': this researcher believes that age-old Anglo-French antagonism may have reared its head in the Gollancz-Schiffrin relationship. See Bergström 1998: 173.

### 7.3.2 Critical Reception

The series was reviewed in a variety of publications in Britain upon publication during the 1960s and 1970s. Coverage tended to be in broadsheets and journals, and reviews were both longer and more frequent in left-of-centre publications such as *The Guardian* and *The Observer*.<sup>621</sup> In terms of reviewers, there was a range of figures. *The Observer*'s Maurice Richardson, a former member of the Communist Party, reviewed all the books except for *Beck 7* and *Beck 8*.<sup>622</sup> *The Guardian*'s Matthew Coady, another left-winger who later went on to write for the *New Statesman*, reviewed *Beck 4* to *Beck 9*. *TLS* reviewed all books barring *Beck 6* and *Beck 7*, although its reviews were often anonymous. Reviews were not solely confined to the pages of left-wing newspapers: *The Daily Telegraph*'s Violet Grant and *The Sunday Telegraph*'s Francis Goff both reviewed the first half of the series in their respective, right-of-centre newspapers. Reviewers were often crime writers themselves, and reviews often appeared in notices that combined several titles at once.<sup>623</sup> While Sjöwall and Wahlöö were reviewed intermittently in the regional press, coverage of their English translations in the tabloids was very limited.

*The Guardian* and *The Observer*, seemingly the likeliest publications – editorially and in terms of reviewer selection – to be favourable towards socio-crime of the kind written by Sjöwall and Wahlöö, were not always as receptive as might be expected. It started well enough, with *The Guardian* describing *Beck 1* as ‘good solid reading’ and *The Observer*'s Richardson considered it ‘solidly interesting.’<sup>624</sup> The first novel reviewed by Coady for *The Guardian*

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<sup>621</sup> Where available, original reviews have been consulted. In some cases, originals have not been available, in which case cuttings and copies contained in the Victor Gollancz archive have been used.

<sup>622</sup> Richardson was also *The Observer*'s television critic, and was well-versed in popular culture.

<sup>623</sup> In contrast, Wahlöö's solo work was reviewed in lengthier, standalone notices and categorised as literature, rather than crime fiction. See, for example, Tatlock 1966, Z 1974.

<sup>624</sup> Iles 1968, Richardson 1968.



was *Beck 4*, which he found to be a novel written ‘with immense accomplishment’, while Richardson, despite a rather glib review, also commended the authors on using the procedural form ‘with passionate intensity’.<sup>625</sup>

However, both found *Beck 5* to be a disappointment, with Coady complaining that ‘the telling is slow’ while Richardson, calling into question the novel’s realism, also noted it was ‘ingenious but a bit disorderly’.<sup>626</sup> This sentiment continued, with Richardson finding *Beck 6* ‘intelligent as ever’ but speculating that the authors ‘may have been feeling a little jaded’.<sup>627</sup> Indeed, Richardson’s column failed to review *Beck 7* at all. While Coady is far more positive about *Beck 6* and *Beck 7*,<sup>628</sup> by the time *Beck 8* was released he too joined Richardson in expressing frustration at the progression of the series, stating that ‘until now S. and W. have treated crime as a serious business. They should continue do so.’<sup>629</sup> *Beck 9* marked something of a return to form, according to Richardson, but it seems likely that Wahlöö’s death influenced this, given the complaint that *Beck 10* was poorly plotted.<sup>630</sup> There is a sense from the left-wing critics that having started energetically, the series lost its lustre later on. Of course, a further consideration, especially in the case of Richardson, is that the critics were frustrated by Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s approach not being sufficiently radical in political terms.

*The Daily Telegraph* and its sister paper *The Sunday Telegraph* both featured reviews of several of the *Beck* series, with both papers including good crime fiction review columns. Grant

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<sup>625</sup> Coady 1971, Richardson 1971.

<sup>626</sup> Coady 1972a, Richardson 1972b.

<sup>627</sup> Richardson 1972a.

<sup>628</sup> Coady 1972b, Coady 1973.

<sup>629</sup> Coady 1974.

<sup>630</sup> Richardson 1975, Richardson 1977.

of *The Daily Telegraph* tended towards positivity, finding much to compliment about both Beck as a protagonist and the Swedish setting.<sup>631</sup> Her Sunday colleague, Goff, was also impressed by the authors' use of setting and found *Beck 3* to be 'authentic seeming, grim, but fascinating.'<sup>632</sup> By the time *Beck 4* was released, Goff was singing the praises of the series as a whole, asserting 'if you haven't read Sjöwall & Wahlöö, start now.'<sup>633</sup> By 1972, with the release of *Beck 5*, Grant's review acknowledged the success the series was enjoying in America: '[the authors] have been steadily adding to their reputation as their work has become better known in this country and America.'<sup>634</sup> Despite this, both Grant and Goff continued to emphasise the setting and procedural elements of the novels, rather than addressing the political dimension. Neither title reviewed *Beck 6*, but in reviewing *Beck 7*, both Grant and Goff were highly positive.<sup>635</sup> Of particular note is that for the first time a *Telegraph* review, Grant's, commented – not in negative terms – on the social criticism being levelled by the authors at Swedish society. Despite this continued positivity from both *Telegraph* writers, no further reviews appeared for the final three *Beck* titles. One possible reason for the good reviews offered by both Grant and Goff is the procedural style, which as with more conservative critics in Sweden, allowed the two *Telegraph* reviewers to justify the books to readers in a way that would not be possible if they were presented as socialist and political texts.

Reviews in other conservative newspapers displayed similar levels of positivity. *The Sunday Times'* reviewer, crime fiction author Edmund Crispin, found *Beck 4* to contain 'less prickly

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<sup>631</sup> Grant 1968, Grant 1970.

<sup>632</sup> Goff 1970, Goff 1969.

<sup>633</sup> Goff 1971.

<sup>634</sup> Grant 1972.

<sup>635</sup> Grant 1973, Goff 1973.

Leftiness than usual, and more humour',<sup>636</sup> while he expressed his appreciation of the authors' 'mused, sarcastic comments on modern Sweden' in *Beck 5*.<sup>637</sup> While it might be assumed that this was gleeful satisfaction that the Swedish welfare state was failing, a straight-faced Crispin found *Beck 7* to be 'good socially-oriented stuff'.<sup>638</sup> William Weaver, the translator of Umberto Eco, reviewed several of the later *Beck* novels for the *Financial Times*. While he was generally positive about *Beck 7* and *Beck 8*, this was primarily in similar terms to Grant and Goff – namely that the setting and characters were accomplished, but that the reader was obliged to learn 'rather a lot' about the ills of Swedish society.<sup>639</sup> However, by *Beck 10*, Weaver had become more lukewarm, stating that 'constant wry wisdom, however right, can become wearing after a while'.<sup>640</sup>

*TLS*, which typically reviewed Sjöwall and Wahlöö without a by-line, was initially highly negative about the series. Of *Beck 1*, it said 'it's a fair model of what we British might ignorantly suppose to be Swedish light work'.<sup>641</sup> *Beck 2* was 'a solid, not very exciting story of investigative work',<sup>642</sup> while *Beck 3* was 'painstaking, thorough and rather dull'. Additionally it complained about 'the nature of the crimes which are, as in these authors' last book, determinedly sexual'.<sup>643</sup> Yet by *Beck 4*, the anonymous reviewer noted that 'sex is happily less obtrusive than usual (but there, of course), and the investigation is clever, complicated and solid'.<sup>644</sup> Unlike Coady and Richardson, *TLS* considered *Beck 5* to be 'the best yet from these Swedish authors', adding that it contained 'this time as little sex as,

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<sup>636</sup> MSS.318/7/QU/24/1.

<sup>637</sup> MSS.318/7/QU/25/1.

<sup>638</sup> MSS.318/7/QU/26/1.

<sup>639</sup> Weaver 1973, Weaver 1974.

<sup>640</sup> Weaver 1977.

<sup>641</sup> 'Down Death Row' 1968.

<sup>642</sup> 'Crime in Brief' 1970.

<sup>643</sup> 'Crime in Brief' 1969.

<sup>644</sup> 'Your Friendly Neighbourhood Death Pedlar: New Crime' 1971.

from a Swedish book, we could reasonably hope for.<sup>645</sup> Despite such nascent positivity, *TLS* omitted to review both *Beck 6* and *Beck 7*. While Coady and Richardson were frustrated by the series' progression, *TLS* was most satisfied with the switch to 'a mordant humour far more taking than their former ponderous sexual philosophizings.'<sup>646</sup> *Beck 9* was reviewed by crime writer P. D. James, who was more positive than the previous anonymous reviewers had been.<sup>647</sup> This gradual change in the pages of *TLS* leapt forward in T. J. Binyon's review of *Beck 10*.<sup>648</sup> Binyon's lengthy review engaged in a degree of eulogising, concluding that the decalogy is 'certainly as interesting and as individual an achievement as any in recent crime fiction, and *The Terrorists* is perhaps the best of the lot.' Many other reviewers, as noted, had found *Beck 10* to be something of a disappointment.

In his review, Binyon compared Beck in favourable terms to Freeling's Van der Valk and Simenon's Maigret.<sup>649</sup> However, Binyon argued that the Swedes differed in their approach to depicting collective police work, drawing a firm connection to McBain's 87<sup>th</sup> *Precinct* series. Binyon outlined in some detail why the *Beck* series was more serious in its intent than McBain's, and demonstrated a keen eye for the social criticism contained in the books. Binyon's drawing of connections from Sjöwall and Wahlöö to Freeling, Simenon and McBain was nothing new – British reviewers had been using all three as benchmarks since 1968. The *Financial Times* and *Oxford Mail* had highlighted the similarities of *Beck 1*

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<sup>645</sup> 'Crime in Short' 1972.

<sup>646</sup> 'Crime in Short' 1974.

<sup>647</sup> James 1975.

<sup>648</sup> Binyon 1977. Binyon was himself a crime fiction author, and also wrote a literary criticism of detective fiction. See Binyon 1989, Curtis 2004.

<sup>649</sup> Georges Simenon's Maigret is often considered to be a proto-example of the police procedural sub-genre, although John Scaggs notes this is problematic in some regards, given that Maigret is something of an individualist. See Scaggs 2005: 87.

to Maigret and Van der Valk, respectively.<sup>650</sup> The *Oxford Mail* continued to emphasise the international context of Beck, suggesting that *Beck 3* was ‘very much an 87<sup>th</sup> Precinct [...] police thriller, only in a Swedish setting and Swedish idiom – and none the worse for that.’<sup>651</sup> The *Oxford Mail* was not the only provincial paper to fall back on this kind of comparison for its readers. The *Western Mail* informed its readers that the book was ‘on a par with the best of Ed McBain’,<sup>652</sup> while *The Yorkshire Post* considered ‘Insp. Beck [to be] a sort of Swedish Maigret’ in the most positive of terms.<sup>653</sup> F. E. Pardoe reviewing *Beck 9* in the *Birmingham Post* described Beck’s approach as a ‘Maigret-style of investigation.’<sup>654</sup> In the national press, Coady and, in particular, Richardson were inclined to see Maigret reflected in Beck. Richardson described Beck as ‘a Scandinavian Maigret specialising, so far, in sex maniacs’,<sup>655</sup> and he noted in a later review that Beck ‘reminds one agreeably of Maigret.’<sup>656</sup>

### 7.3.3 Public Reception and Sales

Tracing sales of Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s series is challenging, given the absence of public sales figures or bestseller lists during this period,<sup>657</sup> and the fact that the Victor Gollancz archives do not contain sales data. The publisher advertised widely during the years of publication, but each Beck book was typically one of several titles being pushed.<sup>658</sup> These advertisements do not indicate the extent of print runs or sales figures in promotional terms. Given that the series was licensed for paperback editions by Sphere and later

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<sup>650</sup> Houston 1969. MSS.318/7/QU/21/2 (press cuttings).

<sup>651</sup> MSS.318/7/QU/22/1.

<sup>652</sup> MSS.318/7/QU/24/1.

<sup>653</sup> MSS.318/7/QU/25/1.

<sup>654</sup> MSS.318/7/QU/28/1.

<sup>655</sup> Richardson 1969.

<sup>656</sup> Richardson 1970.

<sup>657</sup> Bloom 2008: 99.

<sup>658</sup> Gollancz’s advertising strategy was not considered a wholesale success, however. Gordon noted that sales for some advertised books were, in fact, mediocre. See MSS.318/7/AD/1: 6-8.

Penguin, it may be inferred that the books enjoyed modest success. Elsewhere, Swedish press coverage of the authors' financial situation made no reference to their British earnings, unlike their huge American earnings.<sup>659</sup>

It is also difficult to determine what the broader public response to the books was. There is little in the way of contemporary responses to the series, notwithstanding newspaper reviews. Arguably, this reflects the non-reception of *Beck* at the time of original publication. Even with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear the books went unnoticed by many. Writing an introduction for a new Harper Perennial edition of *Beck 5* in 2007, the late crime writer Colin Dexter noted that he had not read the books until commissioned to write his piece.<sup>660</sup> This lack of awareness extends beyond those in the crime fiction world to practitioners in the field of Scandinavian Studies, who anecdotally report little interest in *Beck* in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>661</sup>

## 7.4 The Decalogy That Disappeared

### 7.4.1 Led by Genre or Social Criticism?

In the Swedish context, the use of the police procedural genre in the 1960s was new and innovative and the dimension of social criticism revolutionary.<sup>662</sup> In the American context, the police procedural had been a presence for almost two decades, while in Britain it was

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<sup>659</sup> In a dispute with the Swedish Tax Agency, it was suggested the authors might have hidden earnings abroad, with an emphasis on America – a charge denied by the couple. See, for example, Larsson 1974.

<sup>660</sup> Dexter 2007: v. In the period when the Beck series was originally released, Dexter would have been in his thirties to forties, and familiar with the field given his first crime novel was published in 1975. Other introductions for Harper Perennial are similar in this regard – writers either read the novels much later on, or read them in Swedish – rather than in 1960s and 1970s Britain in English translation.

<sup>661</sup> Personal communications with Forsås-Scott and Graves, both of whom were involved in the teaching of Swedish at the University of Aberdeen in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

<sup>662</sup> An article in *The Guardian* noted that Sjöwall and Wahlöö were the first Swedish writers to use the form. See 'Miscellany' 1968.

beginning to make its mark following the wane of the British Golden Age of crime fiction.<sup>663</sup> Immediately after the war, imports of American hard-boiled detective fiction to the UK had become common, booming during the 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>664</sup> Scaggs considers the arrival of Ed McBain's 87<sup>th</sup> *Precinct* novels in the 1960s as the moment British readers first took notice of the police procedural.<sup>665</sup> McBain and the police procedural sub-genre were novelties in Britain, with a degree of exoticism associated with the setting of American police departments. In turn, British writers began to take a greater interest in the procedural form in the early 1970s. New crime writers, such as Dexter and Ruth Rendell, chose to emulate their American colleagues of the 1950s and 1960s in writing about professional police in collective environments, rather than upper-class private investigators typical of the British Golden Age.<sup>666</sup>

Charlotte Beyer argues that the authors challenged 'the somewhat simplified binary opposition of British "Golden Age" versus American hard-boiled – the genre's "master narratives"', breaking new ground in the process.<sup>667</sup> This is accurate in the Swedish context, where the *Beck* series was an example of home-grown literature rather than a translated import. However, in the British setting, reviewers were often quick to draw comparisons to American police procedural writers such as Ed McBain, and the novels were being reviewed through the lens of this sub-genre – considered to be an American concept – rather than as being Swedish in themselves.<sup>668</sup> British reviewers obviously

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<sup>663</sup> For an excellent introduction to the world of crime fiction, see Scaggs 2005: 7-8.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*: 29. Scaggs argues that this sub-genre of crime is inherently more flexible and democratic for writers and readers alike.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*: 30. The first McBain novels appeared in Britain in 1959, and a steady stream were published over the subsequent four decades.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*: 31.

<sup>667</sup> Beyer 2012: 151.

<sup>668</sup> For example, *TLS* described Sjöwall/Wahlöö in unfavourable terms as the Hillary Waugh of Sweden. See 'Down Death Row' 1968. Translated Scandinavian crime fiction was unusual at the time. Indeed, while the three decades following the Second World War were a Golden Age for the translation of Scandinavian

grasped that the books were from Sweden, as is discussed in Chapter 7.3.2, but the reason the novels were being reviewed at all was because they fitted with the appetite of the zeitgeist for American police procedurals. Indeed, given that Victor Gollancz had acquired the titles from Pantheon in New York, this was not an altogether unfair assessment by the British literary reviewing sphere.

The matter of the social criticism in the novels is one that is inevitably focused on heavily in recent scholarship.<sup>669</sup> Indeed, there is more generally a perception that the 1960s and early 1970s were a time of popular opposition to the establishment, which was espoused through Britain's literary output.<sup>670</sup> While it is true that contemporary fiction in the 1960s was gradually being permeated by an increasing sense of social awareness,<sup>671</sup> Dominic Head argues that a counterculture opposed to the societal and literary establishment did not truly begin to emerge in British literature until the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>672</sup> Yet when examining the contemporary reception, Sjöwall and Wahlöö's critique of Swedish society rarely factors in reviews. Indeed, the left-wing polemics – when referenced – seem to be taken as a negative feature. As previously mentioned, Edmund Crispin expressed relief that *Beck 4* contained 'less prickly Leftiness than usual' in 1971.<sup>673</sup> Even statements

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children's literature, it was a less fruitful period for other genres. See Berry 2011. The period is characterised by very few translated Scandinavian literary highlights in volumes such as Binding 1999. Deborah Dawkin notes that Scandinavian classics, including Strindberg and Ibsen, were well represented in English translation during this period, thanks to the work of prolific translators such as Michael Meyer. See Dawkin 2015.

<sup>669</sup> Beyer 2012, Forshaw 2013, Tapper 2014, Stougaard-Nielsen 2017. In these cases, writers arguably fail to distinguish between the application of social criticism in the original novels in Sweden over four decades ago, and the reception of such criticism in foreign markets.

<sup>670</sup> A general liberalisation in terms of attitudes towards sex, gender roles and conventions occurred in the 1960s, which was precipitated in the publishing world by the acquittal of Penguin Books in the 1960 *Chatterley* trial. See Chapter 6.

<sup>671</sup> Head 2002: 225. This represented the next natural step after the move away from literature about and by angry young men, discussed in Chapter 6.5.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*: 27-30.

<sup>673</sup> MSS.318/7/QU/24/1.



in favour of the authors' approach, such as Coady's remark that that *Beck 6* refuted 'the charge that crime fiction "has nothing to say"' or Grant's praise for the authors for highlighting the issues faced in Swedish society, are somewhat vague.<sup>674</sup> Although reviewers appear to have been aware of the authors' intentions, their notices tended to prefer to focus on the use of genre in isolation, rather than the social and political dimensions. Given Head's assertion about the emergence of a literary counterculture in Britain, it is clear that while *Beck* conformed with the zeitgeist in terms of genre, the social criticism was ahead of its time in the British context.

#### 7.4.2 'As little sex as, from a Swedish book, we could reasonably hope for'

An intriguing predilection amongst British critics was to focus on and emphasise erotic content in the novels in what were often rather brief reviews. Interestingly, critics appeared to make little distinction in their reviews between crimes that were 'determinedly sexual' and the sex lives of characters, whether they are police, criminal or otherwise. The strongest complaints were found in *TLS*, which found the crimes in *Beck 3* to be 'determinedly sexual', had found the inclusion of sex in the first three books to be overly obtrusive, and stated with relief in relation to *Beck 5*, as previously noted, that it contained 'as little sex as, from a Swedish book, we could reasonably hope for.'<sup>675</sup> This was not limited to *TLS* however, with *The Observer's* Richardson also focusing on the sexual dimension, describing Beck as 'a Scandinavian Maigret specialising, so far, in sex maniacs'.<sup>676</sup> This perception evidently extended to the wider public as well. Introducing

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<sup>674</sup> Coady 1972b, Grant 1973.

<sup>675</sup> 'Crime in Brief' 1969, 'Your Friendly Neighbourhood Death Pedlar: New Crime' 1971, 'Crime in Short' 1972.

<sup>676</sup> Richardson 1969.

*Beck* 5 decades later, Dexter expressed surprise at the lack of sexual content in the novel.<sup>677</sup> This lack of awareness of what these socially aware police procedurals actually contained is an apt illustration of the greater forces influencing the contemporary British reception of *Beck*. Effectively, what can be observed in this instance is that many recipients of the series in Britain, whether active or passive, were in fact receiving Sweden as a whole through the books, or the concept of the books, rather than the works themselves.<sup>678</sup> In France, the series was actively marketed using connotations of Swedishness with pornography and sexual liberation, explicitly suggesting to French readers that the books contained nothing but sex.<sup>679</sup> While this was not the case in Britain, it is apparent that British readers still had the impression of Sweden ‘as a pornographic paradise, where sexual liberation is in full swing’.<sup>680</sup> Anne Grydehøj sees the French perspective on Sjöwall and Wahlöö as a transition from erotica to exotica.<sup>681</sup> Arguably, it is an instance of borealism: presumptive British borealists were convinced that Sweden was a sexually liberated utopia or dystopia, depending on their own perspectives.<sup>682</sup> The contents of the novels could not influence reviewers and the wider public otherwise.<sup>683</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> Dexter 2007: vi.

<sup>678</sup> It was only in later decades that the works came to be received for what they were, Scandinavian police procedurals, as is discussed in Chapter 7.5.

<sup>679</sup> Grydehøj 2017.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid. Ingmar Bergman and Vilgot Sjöman films had clearly influenced such views, alongside other events of the 1960s such as the import of Mykle. See Chapter 6.

<sup>681</sup> Grydehøj 2017.

<sup>682</sup> Other instances of borealism are discussed in Chapters 4.1 and 8.4.4. More generally, other borealist perspectives can also be found in the British reception of *Beck*. For example, *Punch*'s Leo Harris congratulated translator Alan Blair on having ‘successfully retained the Ibsenish seriousness of the Swedish original’ in *Beck* 2. See MSS.318/7/QU/22/1.

<sup>683</sup> Grydehøj notes the same disconnect between the contemporary critical reception of *Beck* in France and the actual contents of the novels. See Grydehøj 2017.

### 7.4.3 Wanted Dead or Alive: The Role of Per Wahlöö

Any examination of the British reception of the *Beck* series needs to reflect on the existing relationship that Wahlöö had with Britain, as well as the impact of his untimely death in 1975. As noted in Chapter 7.3.2, Wahlöö's solo novels in English translation published from the mid-1960s tended to receive more prominent review coverage that evaluated the author in more serious literary terms than the reviews of the *Beck* series did.<sup>684</sup> This was considered advantageous by Gordon, who believed that readers' familiarity with Wahlöö would boost Gollancz's promotion of *Beck*. That being said, the impact was perhaps not as great as Gordon had hoped: *Beck* reviews rarely referenced Wahlöö's solo novels, and, indeed, the same applied in reverse when it came to reviews in the British press of Wahlöö's own works.<sup>685</sup> There appears to have been little cross-over in terms of who was responsible for reviewing these books, and it was unhelpful that Wahlöö was published by Michael Joseph under the name 'Peter Wahloo'.

Chapter 7.2 shows how Wahlöö's death marked a sea change in the reception of *Beck* in Sweden, and the same was true – to an extent – in Britain. As Wahlöö died in 1975, it fell to reviewers of *Beck 9* to note his passing, where they were aware of the circumstances.<sup>686</sup> Some reviewers of *Beck 10* were also engaged in eulogising Wahlöö: perhaps most notably *TLS*' Binyon. The prevailing view on the *Beck* series was altered in both Sweden and Britain by Wahlöö's early death. This was on the grounds that it ensured an air of finality to the series – no more books by Sjöwall and Wahlöö would be published – and it also

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<sup>684</sup> See, for example, Tatlock 1966. More remarkable still, while no retranslations of *Beck* have been commissioned (see Chapter 7.5.2), Vintage published new translations of Wahlöö's *The Steel Spring* and *Murder on the Thirty-First Floor* in 2011 and 2012 respectively.

<sup>685</sup> A rare exception was when *The Irish Times* printed reviews of *Beck 1* and *The Lorry* side by side. See 'Welcome' 1969.

<sup>686</sup> Coady's review of *Beck 9* is a good example. See Coady 1975.

enhanced Wahlöö's celebrity status, as his death enabled readers and critics to form a closer bond with the author without him changing their perceptions.<sup>687</sup>

#### 7.4.4 Sweden to the UK – Reception Compared and Contrasted

Comparing Sjöwall and Wahlöö's British and Swedish receptions, there are a number of identifiable parallels that can be observed. *Beck* was widely reviewed in a varied range of publications in both Britain and Sweden upon publication, despite being genre fiction – and in the British context, translated. In both settings, genre fiction appears to have transcended political divides – there was an interest in *Beck* from both left- and right-wing critics. Furthermore, the willingness of right-wing critics to write highly positive notices of what were borderline-polemical left-wing novels is interesting. In both instances, it is likely that conservative critics felt the social criticism in the novels was justified, while left-wing critics were prone to agree with the authors. Critics on both sides of the North Sea agreed that *Beck 4* was a breakthrough novel for the couple.<sup>688</sup> There were also complaints in both literary markets that some of the books were, at least at times, dull. For example, *TLS*'s anonymous reviewers and *DN*'s Collenberg pursued similar lines of argument in their respective reviews.<sup>689</sup> Both Swedish and British critics were prone to drawing comparisons to Simenon and McBain, and there was some degree of eulogising from all parties following Wahlöö's death. An interesting facet of the British reception is the way Scandinavians were actively involved in aiding the interpretation of the translated works, influencing the prevailing views of literary professionals even at an early stage. The 1974 annual conference of the CWA featured two Scandinavian speakers, who provided

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<sup>687</sup> The role of deceased authors is discussed further in Chapter 9.4.2 in relation to Larsson.

<sup>688</sup> It should be noted that British critics were conceivably influenced by the Edgar Allan Poe Award handed to *Beck 4* by the Mystery Writers of America.

<sup>689</sup> See, for example, *Crime in Brief* 1969, *Fickboken* 1968.

delegates with clear markers on what to think about and where to position the works of Sjöwall and Wahlöö on the basis of the authors' Scandinavian reception.<sup>690</sup>

In terms of popular reception, there is a clear distinction between Britain and Sweden. In Sweden, the books were bestsellers and made celebrities of their authors. In contrast, the books arrived on British shores, and, following appearances in newspaper review pages, promptly disappeared from the public consciousness. Facets of the British critical reception that differed from the Swedish reception included a focus on place and setting by British critics.<sup>691</sup> Similarly, the obsession with the presence of sexual content in the novels, which became such a focal point for a range of critics, especially *TLS*, is not touched upon at all in the Swedish reception. Both Sweden and Britain were beginning to engage with the police procedural form, imported from America, but only Sweden was beginning to use fiction for social criticism, demonstrating a disconnect between the two literary cultures.

#### 7.4.5 The Contemporary Position of Sjöwall and Wahlöö in the British Literary Polysystem

In popular terms, Sjöwall and Wahlöö effectively disappeared upon arrival in English translation in Britain. They were widely reviewed, but they were not bestselling popular successes, and they did not become part of the contemporary crime fiction canon. This is arguably on the grounds that they were received solely as police procedurals viewed through the lens of the American origins of the sub-genre. Any acknowledgement of their Swedish origins tended to be either ignored or viewed negatively. Positivity towards

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<sup>690</sup> Further details provided in Saddler 1974.

<sup>691</sup> For instance, even negative reviews from *TLS* tended to be complimentary in this regard. See Crime in Brief 1970.

elements such as the Swedish setting were qualified in terms of exoticism – but were seen as parallel to works such as those by McBain.

Writing in 1982, Tom Hastie argued that the British acceptance and expansion of the police procedural had been boosted by authors such as McBain and Sjöwall/Wahlöö.<sup>692</sup> This was naturally the case in terms of providing extra titles to the police procedural sub-genre in the British literary polysystem, generating critical mass and moving the genre closer to the polysystem centre. John Clarke notes that the police procedural is one of the most translation-friendly genres, and is well suited for introduction to other literary polysystems.<sup>693</sup> This explains why reviewers were amenable to reviewing books for the series, and how it helped to bolster the procedural genre as a whole. The effort by reviewers to draw comparisons with McBain, as well as Maigret and Van der Valk, were conscious attempts to integrate the *Beck* series into the polysystem, but this also overlooked the social and political dimensions of the novels through the regular comparisons with Maigret and Van der Valk.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Sjöwall and Wahlöö were not blazing a new trail into the British literary polysystem with *Beck*. Instead, they were joining a nascent cluster of imported police procedurals and assisting in the centralisation of this sub-genre within the polysystem. While this was ultimately successful, as reflected by the emergence of domestic police procedurals in Britain, the polysystemic impact of the *Beck* novels themselves was limited. They were not situated in a central position, and they did not give

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<sup>692</sup> See Hastie 1982.

<sup>693</sup> Clarke 2001: 88.

rise to a more central position for other Scandinavian books in Britain. Instead, they assisted in the development of an American genre in the British literary system.

## 7.5 Reissues and New Attitudes

### 7.5.1 Dead and Forgotten?

As has already been noted, the death of Wahlöö was marked by many British reviewers who concluded that the series had drawn to a close, with no prospect of continuation. Indeed, many publications did not even bother to review the translation of *Beck 10* published in 1977 – two years after Wahlöö’s death. This was the last time during the twentieth century that there was any regular press coverage of the authors; it subsequently became a rarity to refer to Sjöwall and Wahlöö in the press. There were occasional exceptions to this hiatus. For example, Binyon referenced Sjöwall and Wahlöö in a review of David Serafin’s *Christmas Rising*, suggesting there was room in the midst of fictional foreign policeman such as Van der Valk and Beck for one more.<sup>694</sup> *Daily Telegraph* columnist Auberon Waugh was one of the few to draw a connection between Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s *Beck 10*, in which the Prime Minister is killed, and real-life events following the assassination of Olof Palme.<sup>695</sup> Unlike authors such as Høeg or Larsson, there is little evidence to suggest the *Beck* series or its authors had entered either popular culture or the cultured, literary mindset.<sup>696</sup> The decalogy had disappeared from the British literary polysystem.

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<sup>694</sup> Binyon 1982.

<sup>695</sup> Waugh 1986.

<sup>696</sup> Høeg and Larsson feature in Chapters 8 and 9, respectively.

### 7.5.2 Reissue Trajectory

In the years that followed the publication of the series, the books appeared in paperback editions via a number of different presses. The first five books in the series appeared in Sphere paperback editions, while later books featured on the Penguin Books crime fiction list during the mid-to-late 1970s, with the final book in the series, *Beck 10*, receiving its Penguin jacket as late as 1984.<sup>697</sup>

Victor Gollancz published new editions of the first four novels in the series from 1989-1991, following the sale of the firm to Houghton Mifflin.<sup>698</sup> The response to these new editions was limited, although a review of *Beck 4* by Lisanne Radice in *The Times* was positive about the social criticism contained in the novel.<sup>699</sup> Gollancz was resold in 1992 to Cassel & Co., which then ended up as part of Orion, within the Hachette conglomerate, in 1998.<sup>700</sup> Orion published *Beck 1* and *Beck 4* in 2004 and 2002 respectively, but their interest ended there.<sup>701</sup>

By the mid-2000s, the *Beck* series ended up in the hands of HarperCollins, which published a full set of new paperback editions during 2006-2007 in matching jackets through its Harper Perennial imprint. They also commissioned introductions for seven of the ten books, as well as informational afterwords called 'P.S.', a common feature in

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<sup>697</sup> Sphere was founded in 1966 by the Thomson Group to publish paperback editions, and was part of a diverse publishing scene that included other publishers such as Penguin Books and Panther Books. See Chapter 6.3.3.

<sup>698</sup> The new owners were eager to exploit the Gollancz backlist. Andrew Taylor recounts being commissioned to evaluate the crime fiction backlist, for instance. See Taylor 2007: ix.

<sup>699</sup> Radice 1991.

<sup>700</sup> For further details, see Orion Publishing Group Incorporating Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

<sup>701</sup> Nielsen BookScan shows that Orion's *Beck 4* has sold 2,713 copies as at 7 July 2017, while the 2004 edition of *Beck 1* has sold 1,702 copies.



Harper Perennial books.<sup>702</sup> These editions have since been re-jacketed and issued by Fourth Estate in 2011-12.<sup>703</sup> In broad terms, the introductions tend to allude to the importance of Sjöwall and Wahlöö to other writers in the anglophone market, or, in the case of introductions written by authors, they often comment on the impact upon their own work. One of the most common conclusions is that Scottish writer Ian Rankin was influenced by Sjöwall and Wahlöö.<sup>704</sup> One notable exception to this is Dexter, who states in his introduction that he has enjoyed reading the series, but that it has ultimately been of little importance to him.<sup>705</sup>

An interesting feature of this re-emergence of the series in the twenty-first century is that there has been no move to commission new translations. Carbone and Forsås-Scott argue that new translations of key works are required every thirty to fifty years, which would indicate that new translations of Sjöwall and Wahlöö are long overdue.<sup>706</sup> Indeed, looking to the comparable case of Simenon's Maigret novels, Penguin Books has agreed to retranslate a total of 75 Simenon novels,<sup>707</sup> demonstrating that this does occur for other titles in the genre of classic translated crime fiction. British sales of Sjöwall and Wahlöö since 1998 have totalled £825,000, meaning new translations would be affordable and could potentially be leveraged as a promotional tool to generate further sales. Naturally, the advantage of the existing translations is that they are part of the publisher's backlist

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<sup>702</sup> The introductions are as follows: Mankell 2006, McDermid 2006, Carlson 2007, Connelly 2007, Dexter 2007, French and French 2007, Taylor 2007.

<sup>703</sup> The move to Fourth Estate is evidently an attempt to situate *Beck* as a literary work. HarperCollins describes Fourth Estate as being 'the home of literature at its best', and publishes writers such as Proulx, Jonathan Franzen and Hillary Mantel. For further details, see 'Books for the Independent Reader'.

<sup>704</sup> Carlson 2007: vi. It is worth noting in this regard that while Rankin himself has frequently referenced the importance of Sjöwall and Wahlöö to the genre, he believes that he had already written several Rebus novels before reading his first Beck book. Rankin has acknowledged that he is uncertain whether he was aware of their approach to crime writing at the time that he began his own writing career. See Hall 2015.

<sup>705</sup> Dexter 2007: ix.

<sup>706</sup> Carbone and Forsås-Scott 2014: 21.

<sup>707</sup> Bartlett 2013.

and free to use, making the publication of new editions a relatively low-risk venture in commercial terms.

### 7.5.3 New Editions, New Attitudes: Twenty-first-century Reception

The reception of the twenty-first-century editions offered fresh perspectives, primarily from reviewers who acknowledged that they had not previously read the *Beck* series. For instance, prominent crime fiction reviewer Maxine Clarke noted that despite her extensive interest in the genre, she had not read any Sjöwall and Wahlöö books until the release of the Harper Perennial editions in 2006, and drew particular solace from the fact that the introduction to the first book, *Beck 1*, was written by Mankell.<sup>708</sup> Janette Currie, reviewing the full series as a first-time reader, was also broadly positive but dissatisfied with the quality of the English-language translations.<sup>709</sup>

In many respects, reviews of the new editions picked up where critics in the 1960s and 1970s had left off, identifying many of the same issues. However, the issue of social criticism was now typically accepted without extensive comment, while there was also a propensity to treat the books as higher quality, more canonised literature than had been the case previously. *The Guardian's* Laura Wilson was broadly positive, even though *Beck 1* was 'not slick, or even particularly lively', concluding that 'if you haven't come across Beck before, you're in for a treat.'<sup>710</sup> *The Times's* Marcel Berlins, meanwhile, was effusive when he said that Sjöwall and Wahlöö showed 'the crime fiction world how good, and

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<sup>708</sup> Clarke 2006.

<sup>709</sup> Currie 2010. This lends further weight to the idea that if retranslations were commissioned, sales of *Beck* would be enhanced.

<sup>710</sup> Wilson 2006.

how innovative, Scandinavian writers could be’, and that they were also ‘pioneers of the modern police procedural’ together with McBain.<sup>711</sup> The new introductions were also received well by critics, who felt they improved the product on offer to the reader.<sup>712</sup>

Since 1998, Sjöwall and Wahlöö have recorded strong British sales.<sup>713</sup> They have sold more than 122,000 books in Britain in this period, although this is modest in comparison with other Scandinavian authors in the 2000s. For example, Mankell’s sales figures for the corresponding period across all his books total almost 1.7 million books sold.<sup>714</sup> Looking at the books published since 2006, the earliest books in the series are the bestsellers. *Beck 1* sold far in excess of any other title, with sales of more than 28,000 copies – one quarter of Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s combined modern-day sales. While it is natural for the first title in a series to sell well, as can be seen in the case of Larsson in Chapter 9, the success of the 2006 edition of *Beck 1* is also likely to be associated with the use of Mankell’s introduction in the book, which is clearly signposted on the cover.<sup>715</sup>

#### 7.5.4 Sjöwall and Wahlöö as Proto-Mankellians

The turn of the millennium marked a shift in the British reception of Scandinavian crime fiction. The initial impetus for this came with the 1993 release of Høeg’s *Smilla*,<sup>716</sup> but the tidal wave of Nordic crime imports that followed in the early-twenty-first century was truly precipitated by the arrival of the first English translation of the Swedish author

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<sup>711</sup> Berlins 2006. Frenchman Berlins’ enthusiasm for translated Scandinavian crime fiction is reflected in his appreciation of writers such as Høeg, Mankell and Larsson. See Chapters 8 and 9.

<sup>712</sup> For instance, Ananth Krishnan describes Andrew Taylor’s introduction to *Beck 3* as providing a ‘brilliant’ addition to the reader’s understanding of the novel and series as a whole. See Krishnan 2012. Maxine Clarke is similarly positive about the role played by the newly written introductions. See Clarke 2008b.

<sup>713</sup> All figures stated are as at 7 July 2017.

<sup>714</sup> Further comparative sales figures for translated Scandinavian books and crime fiction are provided in Chapter 9.3.3.

<sup>715</sup> Mankell 2006.

<sup>716</sup> See Chapter 8 for further details.

Henning Mankell (1948-2015) – ‘a Trojan horse for foreign crime in translation’ – on British shores in 2000.<sup>717</sup> The outcome was what would become the first wave of Scandinavian crime fiction to strike Britain in the twenty-first century, in addition to a thirst for knowledge as to the origins of this new sub-genre.<sup>718</sup> Mankell’s British impact has been significant, and in addition to recasting the role of Sjöwall and Wahlöö in the British literary polysystem, he also paved the way for the later success of writers such as Larsson. The role of Mankell as an auxiliary to other Scandinavian literary transmissions to Britain is also discussed in Chapters 9 and 10.

In a parallel with Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s transmission to Britain, Mankell’s first novel in English translation, *Faceless Killers*, was originally published in the USA in 1997. Despite the American origins for Mankell in English, it was arguably in Britain that he came to have the greatest impact in the anglophone literary world. The book was first published in Britain by Harvill Press in 2000, and met with a positive reception in limited reviews.<sup>719</sup> *The Independent’s* Mark Timlin described it as ‘an excellent thriller, full of northern European angst’ while drawing a comparison with Dexter’s Inspector Morse series.<sup>720</sup> It did not take long for literary professionals to be taken with Mankell and his Wallander novels. By 2003, *The Guardian’s* Mark Lawson was waxing lyrical about the author, noting ‘the Swedish setting is largely unexplored for English readers and the sense of the nation as a lapsed paradise – a liberal’s dream increasingly disfigured by crime – adds greatly to the power of the books.’<sup>721</sup> He went on to add that ‘Mankell has the talent to become [...]

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<sup>717</sup> See Forshaw 2014: 258.

<sup>718</sup> The two waves of Scandinavian crime fiction to arrive in Britain during the twenty-first century to date are discussed in Chapter 9.

<sup>719</sup> The publisher at Harvill was MacLehose. His key role in promoting the rise of Mankell in Britain, alongside other Scandinavian authors, is discussed in Chapters 8, 9 and 10.

<sup>720</sup> Timlin 2000.

<sup>721</sup> Lawson 2003.

the Ibsen of thrillers.’ This was a clarion call for the creation of a proto-Mankellian origin story.

The British audience was eager to understand the origins of this Mankell-driven trend.<sup>722</sup> This search for a proto-Mankellian origin story has drawn in journalistic and scholarly authors alike. In both cases, the desire was to draw other works around the newly-discovered Mankell in the literary polysystem, and to canonise his work by finding illustrious predecessors. In 2000, *The Times*’ Berlins was conceivably the first to draw a connection between Mankell and Sjöwall and Wahlöö, at least in the British context. He notes that ‘Swedish detectives aren’t entirely unknown to readers in this country – remember the excellent Seventies series *Beck* by Per Wahlöö and Maj Sjöwall [sic], featuring homicide chief Martin Beck? – but there have been few of them.’<sup>723</sup> Hugh Macpherson, reviewing in *TLS*, is similarly well-informed and suggests that Mankell is the natural heir to the ‘increasingly acerbic’ Sjöwall and Wahlöö, who remain ‘very readable’.<sup>724</sup>

The initially positive reception for Mankell continued with the release of *Sidetracked* in 2000, and a subsequent string of further Mankell novels during the early 2000s. In addition to positive reviews from figures such as Berlins and Lawson, there was extensive coverage for Mankell himself in the shape of interviews and profiles in the broadsheet press.<sup>725</sup> There also developed a voracious appetite, amongst readers, critics and publishers alike, for further Nordic works of crime fiction in translation to complement Mankell, with an

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<sup>722</sup> The Mankell-driven trend is in evidence in scholarship, with the Swede used as a case study by Venuti and forming the basis of much of Engles’ dissertation. See Venuti 2008, Engles 2009. A boom also followed in more popular works examining the trend, typified by Forshaw. See, for example, Forshaw 2008, Forshaw 2012, Forshaw 2013.

<sup>723</sup> Berlins 2000.

<sup>724</sup> Macpherson 2000.

<sup>725</sup> For instance, Thomson 2003.

emphasis on crime with a conscience.<sup>726</sup> Mankell's rise to prominence was aided by his winning the 2001 CWA Golden Dagger with *Sidetracked*, while Icelandic writer Arnaldur Indriðason, another writer engaging social criticism, won in 2005 with *Silence of the Grave*. Other Scandinavians to make their British debuts in the early 2000s included Karin Fossum, herself shortlisted for the Golden Dagger, as well as future bestseller Jo Nesbø.

This initial wave of crime fiction was not what has come to be known as Nordic Noir, discussed in further detail in Chapters 9 and 10, but it reflected a growing interest in socially conscious crime fiction amongst British readers that had not been present in previous decades. For instance, Forshaw argues that 'the ingredient that is most crucial to the celebrity of [Mankell's books] is the infusion of the writer's own energetic social conscience'<sup>727</sup> This marks a change from the British recipient environment in the 1960s and 1970s, when reviewers noted the use of social criticism in *Beck* but did not consider it a vital or defining element, unlike the use of the police procedural form. What Forshaw does not identify is that there exists a temporal disconnect between the emergence of a literary social conscience in 1960s Sweden and the equivalent trend developing in Britain several decades later.

As the 2000s progressed, the narrative suggesting that Sjöwall and Wahlöö were the progenitors of the Mankellian crime wave came to be repeated more frequently. A typical example is Louise France's 2009 interview with Sjöwall in *The Observer*, repeating the oft-stated Scandinavian assertion that the *Beck* series was crucial to the formation of a socially

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<sup>726</sup> This was hardly surprising given that Nicholas Clee, editor of *The Bookseller*, had noted a Mankell-effect on sales of translated crime fiction in Britain as early as 2003. See Clee 2003.

<sup>727</sup> Forshaw 2013: 18.

conscious crime fiction genre, but conflating this with the British reception.<sup>728</sup> Similarly, Michael Carlson argues that the impact of Sjöwall and Wahlöö in Britain was substantial, with multiple writers strongly influenced by their work, but offers little evidence, and in places conflates the British and American receptions.<sup>729</sup> John Crace remarks that Britain is a latecomer in terms of taking crime fiction seriously, saying that ‘it’s a well-established genre in the rest of Europe.’<sup>730</sup> However, Crace also provides a prominent repetition of the Scandinavian perspective that Sjöwall and Wahlöö were the originators of crime fiction in the region, which has been repeated fairly widely.<sup>731</sup> He considers the sense of other and location of Scandinavian crime books as a whole to be the key to their success, although the article also calls for more hype around *Beck*, saying of the books that they are ‘almost certainly overdue a revival here.’<sup>732</sup>

This trend to promote Sjöwall and Wahlöö as the source of the Mankellian strain of crime fiction merged with the desire to explicate the Nordic Noir phenomenon, discussed in Chapter 9, with the arrival of the 2010s. BBC Four’s ‘Nordic Noir: The Story of Scandinavian Crime Fiction’ broadcast in December 2010 propagated the Sjöwall/Wahlöö proto-Mankellian origin story, while also conducting one of the earliest

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<sup>728</sup> France 2009b.

<sup>729</sup> Carlson 2007: vi. It should be noted that the overall American reception of Sjöwall and Wahlöö differed significantly to the British reception. Several of the *Beck* titles were reviewed in depth – with *Beck 4* marking the zenith of the American publishing trajectory. American critics appeared to embrace the books as well-executed examples of foreign crime fiction, and had a tendency to be more generous in their notices than their British counterparts. It is clear from both American and Swedish press coverage that the series was a substantial commercial success in America in a way that was not true for Britain. Similarly, the impact of *Beck* on other markets was also significant – the series was one of the most important Swedish literary imports to both West and East Germany. For details of reception in the West, see Brönnimann 2001. For details of reception in the East, see Gahnz 2003.

<sup>730</sup> Crace 2009.

<sup>731</sup> See, for example, Beyer 2012.

<sup>732</sup> In reality, this assertion that the series is overdue appears as a sidebar to the article and is presumably not authored by Crace, but an overzealous subeditor at *The Guardian*. Michael Carlson is rather unforgiving of this, pointing out that the Harper Perennial reissues had been available for over two years at this stage. See Carlson 2009c.

popular examinations of Nordic Noir. The documentary relied particularly heavily on Scandinavian commentators interpreting the Sjöwall/Wahlöö effect in their domestic market, while conflating this with the British reception. In 2015, Sjöwall was the guest of honour at Crimefest in Bristol, once again developing the status of *Beck* in the British literary polysystem.<sup>733</sup>

In print journalism, *The Daily Telegraph's* Jake Kerridge has been an enthusiastic proponent of the Scandinavian narrative about Sjöwall and Wahlöö's role in the crime fiction genre, delivering the good (Swedish) word straight into the heart of the British target market. He writes: 'Over the years I've spoken to more Scandinavian crime writers than I've had hot smörgåsbords, and without exception they have cited Sjöwall and Wahlöö as the begetters of what we now know as Nordic Noir.'<sup>734</sup> Kerridge goes so far as to disclose that his sources are largely anecdotal, and Scandinavian-based. However, the placement of the term 'Nordic Noir' in a profile of and interview with Sjöwall in a British newspaper means that for many readers, the clear inference is that a very British sensation – the fascination with Nordic crime fiction in the twenty-first century in English translation – was in fact caused decades earlier by just two writers.

Much of the twenty-first-century reception of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, as well as Scandinavian crime fiction as a whole, reflects a sea change in the popular and scholarly field courtesy of internationalisation. The blurring of the boundaries by means of internationalisation in the British reception of *Beck* has not gone unnoticed. The British-based Swedish book blogger Ann Giles notes the re-emergence of the Sjöwall and Wahlöö books into the

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<sup>733</sup> 'Maj Sjöwall in Conversation with Lee Child at Crimefest' 2015.

<sup>734</sup> Kerridge 2015a.



British consciousness with wry amusement, saying that she ‘never thought these crime novels from my past, read by all my leftist friends, would re-surface.’<sup>735</sup> Carlson, himself a British-based American, sees the success of Scandinavian crime fiction in the 2000s as being down to the fact that ‘Scandinavian society has many of the same reserves and divisions as British [society],’<sup>736</sup> and believes that the success can be ascribed to the relative ease of producing high-quality translations of the Scandinavian languages in English. While Carlson’s perspective seems somewhat misguided in relation to his comparison of British and Scandinavian society, the emphasis on receptivity towards social issues in genre fiction is apt.

In terms of scholarship, the internationalisation of literary reception is also in evidence. The most obvious instances of this are Scandinavian academics working in the British research environment. For example, Beyer’s 2012 article appears to be partially shaped by her own Danish roots.<sup>737</sup> Likewise, Stougaard-Nielsen’s 2017 book *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* essentially ignores much of the British recipient context, despite setting out to elucidate on the subject for English-speaking readers. This offers some degree of insight into how the Scandinavian proto-Mankellian origin story has taken hold in Britain.

Speaking in 2017, MacLehose said that ‘people nowadays writing about Scandinavian crime fiction always point to the Swedish pair Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. At the time they were published, very, very few people read those books. They’ve been resurrected once or twice. Then along comes Henning Mankell’.<sup>738</sup> Through the propagation of the

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<sup>735</sup> Giles 2009.

<sup>736</sup> Carlson 2009c.

<sup>737</sup> Beyer 2012.

<sup>738</sup> Interview in *Kythor* Forthcoming.

origin narrative dictating that Mankell, and by extension Mankell's British success, only came about courtesy of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's *Beck* series in the 1960s and 1970s, *Beck* suddenly found itself being drawn towards the centre of the British literary polysystem in a way that it had not been when it was originally published. Rather than being part of the American police procedural, Sjöwall and Wahlöö now found themselves as proto-Mankellian writers.

## 7.6 Re-emerging in the New Millennium

Sjöwall and Wahlöö's *Beck* series has performed more than one polysystemic function over the course of its life to date, generally acting in an auxiliary role. At the time of original publication in Britain, *Beck* contributed the critical mass of titles in the police procedural sub-genre, ensuring that this American import took hold on the British polysystem. Thirty years after the original publishing run concluded, the novels took on a new polysystemic role when they formed the bedrock of an origin story concerning Scandinavian crime fiction in Britain, acting as examples of proto-Mankellian literature. Common to both of these situations has been the fact that *Beck* has represented a low-risk option to its publishers. In the 1960s and 1970s, the project was directed by Pantheon in New York, with costs shared across the Atlantic, and risk in Britain managed through paperback licensing deals. In the 2000s, the series has represented a low-risk, low-cost option in building the proto-Mankellian narrative: all the publisher had to do was print new editions and start selling.

The Swedish and British literary cultures of the late 1960s and early 1970s were clearly out of sync. While Sweden was well positioned to receive genre fiction with a social conscience, British readers were lagging behind. There was, however, an interest in

importing and developing the American police procedural sub-genre, with the USA providing impetus for polysystemic change in Britain. By attaching itself to this trend, *Beck* received a fairly widespread critical reception in Britain, but there was little in the way of a popular reception. The poor popular response may have been related to a lack of application by Victor Gollancz, and the impact of a diverse range of translators edited in America is also unknown. Carlson highlights that the British literary establishment is often unwilling to accept peripheral genres in the centre of the polysystem without the push of translated literature to assist it.<sup>739</sup> Yet the role of *Beck* at this stage was in many respects to be channelled through the conduit of an American publisher and to reinforce an American concept. When the Scandinavian origins of the novels were acknowledged in their British reception, it was typically through broad brush strokes. Rather than reflecting on the emergence of Swedish police procedurals, reviewers saw *Beck* in light of Maigret and Van der Valk. More strikingly, the novels were often received as representatives of the Swedish nation,<sup>740</sup> along with all the connotations this engendered, regardless of the realities of the contents of the books in question, as seen in the focus on sexual content by a group of reviewers.

There were multiple, failed attempts to reboot *Beck* in the years following the end of the original publishing run in 1977. Success was only achieved following the turn of the millennium and the emergence of Mankell, who generated interest amongst British readers, reviewers and publishers in the wider possibilities offered by the Scandinavian source market. Most pertinently, British readers were now willing and able to receive genre fiction with a social agenda on those terms, rather than ignoring the social

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<sup>739</sup> Carlson 2009c.

<sup>740</sup> Grydehøj argues that this is also the case in the French reception of Sjöwall and Wahlöö.

dimensions as was the case in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>741</sup> The resultant hunger for other Scandinavian books, driven by Mankell's success, meant that the source market was scoured not just for new authors to import, but also for existing translations that could be repurposed for use in the twenty-first century. The impetus for polysystemic change was now coming from Scandinavia, rather than the USA, and this was reflected in the adoption of a source-market-driven origin story concerning Mankell's predecessors being Sjöwall and Wahlöö, even in the British receiving context. Carlson emphasises that this lends a degree of heritage to what seems to many British readers to be a fairly new genre.<sup>742</sup> This dynamic saw *Beck* pulled towards the centre of the British literary polysystem, now representing the origins of the Scandinavian socially conscious crime genre, rather than the American police procedural. While this was in response to what is considered to be a first, Mankell-inspired wave of Scandinavian crime fiction in Britain during the early-twenty-first century, the emergence of the second wave, commonly referred to as Nordic Noir, has served to further strengthen the position of Sjöwall and Wahlöö in the contemporary literary polysystem.

Sjöwall and Wahlöö's *Beck* series has demonstrated a symbiosis between the source and target market. The Scandinavian source market has been eager to propagate the narrative that the authors were the origin of the Scandinavian crime genre in order to secure its contemporary position as the premium supplier of translated crime fiction to Britain, while British publishers have eagerly accepted the origin story in order to turn a profit. This series demonstrates that there is flexibility in the British literary polysystem, and that

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<sup>741</sup> Even *The Daily Telegraph*, a highly conservative newspaper since the turn of the millennium, has warmed to the social dimension of Sjöwall and Wahlöö during the 2000s and 2010s.

<sup>742</sup> Carlson 2009c.

while books often begin in more central positions, if they have an impact, before moving to the peripheries, it is possible for books to move to the centre sometime after their initial arrival in the polysystem. Sjöwall and Wahlöö remain part of the contemporary narrative concerning the origins of Nordic Noir, sales remain strong, and their publisher continues to issue new editions. Thus, the likelihood is that the series will retain a relatively central position in the polysystem for some time to come. It remains to be seen for how long: if the publisher were inclined to take a chance on what has to date been a low-risk option, they might opt to commission new translations, which would offer significant potential in the current environment. The investment in a full set of new editions with celebrity introductions and other paratextual elements in the mid-2000s was a successful move, while Penguin are investing in retranslations of Simenon. Such an initiative to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the British release of *Roseanna* might very well have a major impact on the polysystem and be well received, and for the first time it might enable the series to stand on its own two feet rather than as an auxiliary to a different literary trend.

8 Transatlantic Weather Book or  
Early Nordic Noir?  
Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's  
Feeling for Snow*

*'The novel, written by a little-known Danish writer who has refused to be interviewed, has an inhospitable, wintry heroine, a strange title and a sombre blue-black jacket. And although HarperCollins has marketed it as a "thriller", it is a bleak discourse on the terrors of modern life with long, often scientific descriptions of ice and snow. So why has Peter Høeg's Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow been near the top of the bestseller lists for three months?'*  
(Nicci Gerrard 1995a)



**Denmark**

*Froken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* (1992)

**Britain**

*Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (1993)





## 8 Transatlantic Weather Book or Early Nordic Noir? Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*

The cover of the current Vintage Books e-book edition of Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* proclaims the book to be 'the original Scandinavian thriller'. While this is not the case, as has been demonstrated earlier in this thesis through an examination of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's transmission to Britain, it was nevertheless groundbreaking in a number of respects. Stougaard-Nielsen and Thomson identify it as the sole Danish crime fiction international bestseller,<sup>743</sup> while this thesis takes the view that it is in fact the most significant Danish book transmitted to Britain in the last century in terms of impact upon reception. Additionally, the success of *Smilla* in Britain in the early 1990s represents the decline of genre boundaries in the British literary polysystem, as described by Bloom.<sup>744</sup> With its use of hybrid genre, which appealed to the contemporary British audience in a way not previously seen in the UK, the novel not only transformed the fortunes of its author, but it was also the first major Scandinavian bestseller for its publisher and it entered the British literary canon.

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<sup>743</sup> Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 240. Kythor, meanwhile, emphasises the standalone nature of *Smilla* as a vehicle for Danish literature in Britain, noting that the novel did not immediately usher in other Danish titles to the UK. See Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>744</sup> Bloom 2008: 10.

## 8.1 Høeg and *Smilla*

### 8.1.1 About Peter Høeg

Peter Høeg (1957-) has been a presence on the Danish literary scene since the late 1980s, writing a range of novels in different styles. In particular, he is known for being reluctant to be in the public eye, and has been portrayed over the decades in equal measures as a literary great and as an overrated eccentric.<sup>745</sup> The story of how Høeg came to be published by the small press Rosinante, run by Merete Ries – former publisher at Gyldendal – is one that has been repeated regularly in both the press and scholarship over subsequent years.<sup>746</sup> Høeg's debut novel *Forestilling om det tyvende århundrede* (*The History of Danish Dreams*) was published in August 1988, and its saga-like style drew immediate attention. It was a front-page sensation in the Danish press, with parallels being drawn to H.C. Andersen, Blixen, and Kierkegaard.<sup>747</sup> It won one of Denmark's leading literary prizes, *Weekendavisens litteraturpris*, in its year of publication.<sup>748</sup> This set it on a path to relative success for a work by a literary newcomer, being reprinted eight times before enjoying a print run of 30,000 in 1991 when it was added to a book club list.<sup>749</sup> A subsequent collection of short stories, *Fortællinger om natten* (*Tales of the Night*), was also received positively. This led to limited success for Høeg with translations into other Scandinavian languages and German. By the early 1990s, Høeg enjoyed a position within the Danish

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<sup>745</sup> For a thorough introduction to Høeg's biography and literature, see Høeg 2011.

<sup>746</sup> In something of a publishing fairy tale, Høeg, an intense young man, arrived at the home of Ries by bicycle to request that she read his manuscript. Perhaps the best account is provided by Ries herself in Ries 1998. Ries has had a remarkable impact on Danish literature during the final quarter of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. See Kassebeer 2013: 11.

<sup>747</sup> Ries 1998.

<sup>748</sup> 'Weekendavisens litteraturpris' 2014. Høeg's award-winning credentials continued. He received the Golden Laurel in 1993 for *De måske egnede* (*Borderliners*).

<sup>749</sup> Ringgaard 2006.

literary establishment as an entrenched newcomer who was unlikely to be dropped by his publishers or the reading public, setting the scene for continued literary experimentation.

### 8.1.2 The Publication and Reception of *Smilla* in Denmark

Rosinante published Høeg's third book in April 1992 with the Danish title *Froken Smillas fornemmelse for sne*.<sup>750</sup> The novel received rapturous press reviews upon release. Jens Kistrup said that 'the novel's Danish virtuoso had done it again' while Søren Vinterberg congratulated Høeg on successfully taking on the thriller genre and succeeding.<sup>751</sup> The impact on Rosinante was tremendous, transforming the commercial prospects of the publisher from a house with literary prestige but serious liquidity issues into a publishing commodity that eventually attracted the attention of Gyldendal.<sup>752</sup> This impact was not instantaneous, however. In 1992, the Danish edition of *Smilla* sold just 10,000 copies, just one tenth of other bestsellers in the Danish market at the time.<sup>753</sup> Carsten Andersen noted that it was the success of *Smilla* in the anglophone world that kick-started mass sales in Høeg's native Denmark. Despite initially slow sales in Denmark, the widespread critical positivity was noted in a brief article in *The Guardian* in 1992.<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>750</sup> *Smilla* draws on the genres of crime fiction, thriller and science fiction, and the theme of postcolonialism to tell the story of its half-Greenlandic protagonist, Smilla. As a result of investigating the death of a child in her Copenhagen block of flats, she ends up entangled in a complex web of intrigue that takes her to sea and to the fictional island of Gela Alta off Greenland.

<sup>751</sup> Kistrup 1992, Vinterberg 1992. Other equally positive Danish press reviews include Bredal 1992, Bukdahl 1992, Schou 1992, Wiemer 1992. Beyond newspaper reviews, the book was clearly appreciated for its crime fiction credentials, being nominated as Denmark's entry for the 1993 Glass Key award, and winning this prize.

<sup>752</sup> Høeg precipitated a boom and bust effect on Rosinante. See Andersen 1996, Andersen 2002.

<sup>753</sup> Andersen 2006.

<sup>754</sup> 'Hit List: Denmark' 1992. The article outlines *Smilla's* position on the Danish bestseller lists, and reflects on other contemporary Danish trends. Interestingly no suggestion is made that the book may be translated into English.

### 8.1.3 English-language Publication Details

Høeg's foreign rights were marketed by Rosinante directly. While some foreign-rights sales had been achieved, there was little success in attracting the attention of the anglophone market for Høeg's previous works: 'the suggestion that they should consider buying from one a novel by an unknown Dane about Danish dreams resulted in blank faces.'<sup>755</sup> This reflects a variety of issues, not least the difficulty of selling as a small publisher in a global market, alongside the slow pace of literary exports from Denmark in the 1980s.<sup>756</sup>

World English rights to *Smilla* were bought by American publisher FSG before publication in Denmark, with UK rights sublicensed to Harvill Press.<sup>757</sup> Ries attributes this to FSG's Danish editor Elisabeth Dyssegaard, although it should be noted that there is more to the backstory of the English-language rights than Ries' account would suggest.<sup>758</sup> Harvill published its edition on 6 September 1993.<sup>759</sup>

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<sup>755</sup> Ries 1998: 36-37.

<sup>756</sup> This slow pace is clear to see in hindsight. For instance, Kythor opts to use 1990 as the start date for the corpus data used in Kythor 2018.

<sup>757</sup> Ries 1998: 37. Harvill was founded in 1946 by two former employees of the Foreign Office with a view to rebuilding cultural bridges to Europe and Russia by translating distinguished foreign authors to English in the aftermath of the Second World War. See 'Harvill Secker: About Us' 2014.

<sup>758</sup> MacLehose initially believed he had secured UK rights to *Smilla* on behalf of Harvill, only to find that FSG had acquired World English rights, due to a mix up at Rosinante. Subsequently, MacLehose reached a gentleman's agreement with FSG's Roger Straus to acquire UK rights. For full details of the acquisition of *Smilla*, see Kythor Forthcoming. Furthermore, the context of the British acquisition is further muddled by a suggestion that an EU pilot project for funding the translation of European literature had provided support for the translation of Høeg to English, which undoubtedly would have sweetened the deal for Harvill. It should be noted that the EU was only formally established at the end of 1993, but that the reporter refers explicitly to the EU. See Tucker 1995.

<sup>759</sup> It is worth noting that *Smilla* represented a genuine instance of a British literary discovery of a Scandinavian author ahead of other key markets. The English translation was one of the first translations of *Smilla* to appear, with the vast majority of foreign translations appearing in the period 1994-96. Even German, in which Høeg's *The History of Danish Dreams* was published in 1992, was outflanked by English.

### 8.1.3.1 Marketing

*Smilla* is the first case study subject in this thesis for which a thorough marketing strategy was adopted, reflecting the increasing professionalisation of book publishing. In a piece about Høeg's international success written in 1998, Ries concentrated on the American transmission, noting that FSG's editor Elisabeth Dyssegaard had been championing the novel in isolation until a draft translation was available, at which point the publisher's marketing team realised they might have a bestseller on their hands.<sup>760</sup> In Britain, there was a sophisticated approach to selling copies of *Smilla* that began long before publication, and sought to engage not just readers, but also booksellers.<sup>761</sup>

According to Steven Williams, publicist for *Smilla*, the ground had been prepared with literary editors and booksellers markedly far in advance for a translated book of this kind.<sup>762</sup> In particular, there was a focus on securing prominent positions for the book in major bookshops such as Waterstone's, while also ensuring consistent word-of-mouth recommendations from booksellers to customers.<sup>763</sup> Booksellers were engaged through the use of promotional gimmicks such as a *Smilla*-themed jigsaw puzzle sent en masse to bookshops in Britain,<sup>764</sup> which was carried through to the marketing directed at consumers.<sup>765</sup>

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<sup>760</sup> Ries 1998: 37. Eva Hemmungs Wirtén provides a detailed account of the marketing strategy adopted by FSG in the USA, which appears to have relied upon large print runs, an expensive advertising campaign and strong independent bookshop sales. See Wirtén 2004: 43.

<sup>761</sup> It is speculated that the generous marketing budget allotted to *Smilla* by Harvill may have benefitted from European grant support. MacLehose has indicated that such grants are often used by publishers flexibly, and that they may be used for costs not directly associated with translation. See interview in Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid. MacLehose reportedly decided that *Smilla* was to be promoted at the top of Harvill's list for autumn 1993, more intensely than any other book they were releasing. See Pihl 1996: 111.

<sup>763</sup> Specially designed stands for copies of *Smilla* were provided to booksellers, and the novel was Waterstone's book of the month in December 1993. See Pihl 1996: 107-10. Indeed, Williams highlights the marketing prowess of Waterstone's, in particular, as a major contributory factor in *Smilla*'s success. See Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>764</sup> Pihl 1996: 111.

<sup>765</sup> Kythor Forthcoming.

Notably, Høeg was extensively involved in the British launch of *Smilla*. Tina Pihl observes that Høeg gave four different radio interviews, while also being interviewed by two British newspapers ahead of the book's release.<sup>766</sup> He also made personal appearances for the book launch in London.<sup>767</sup> The newspaper articles focused heavily on Høeg as an eccentric, covering extensively his past as an actor, dancer and fencer, while glossing over his literary success.<sup>768</sup>

### 8.1.3.2 Role of the Translator

FSG commissioned Tiina Nunnally to translate *Smilla* on the basis of a strong translation of another book, Mette Newth's *The Abduction*, translated together with her husband Steven Murray in 1989.<sup>769</sup> Nunnally's translation, which was published by FSG, went on to win the Lewis Galantière Award from the American Translators Association.<sup>770</sup> Høeg, however, was unhappy with the translation. Nunnally suggests that it was Høeg's unfamiliarity with English and nervousness due to the stakes involved in publishing in English that were the cause of his disappointment.<sup>771</sup> Høeg, in turn, stated that he had misgivings in relation to Nunnally's translation, feeling that it was not only error-strewn, but also normalised *Smilla* when he preferred what could be described as a quirkier approach.<sup>772</sup> Høeg reportedly sent a 40-page letter to FSG with corrections and suggestions, but found that many of these were ignored. When Harvill sent the translation

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<sup>766</sup> Pihl 1996: 108-12.

<sup>767</sup> MacLehose personally credited Waterstone's with providing readers nationwide with an intellectual challenge through the exponential increase in bookshops and book sales, particularly in 'niche' areas like foreign fiction. See Wagner 1998.

<sup>768</sup> For example, see Binding 1993.

<sup>769</sup> Gwinn 2001.

<sup>770</sup> An award bestowed biennially on a book-length literary translation into English from any language except for German, and published in the USA; it is awarded directly to the translator for their translation effort. For further details see Feuerle 2014.

<sup>771</sup> 'He went from a market of 5 million people to the rest of the world'. See Gwinn 2001.

<sup>772</sup> Follin 1997: 35.

to the author anew, MacLehose reports that Høeg effectively rewrote the novel in the margins.<sup>773</sup> Despite Harvill sharing the heavily revised translation with FSG, the American publisher opted to stick with its own version, and Nunnally refused to approve the British version. According to MacLehose, the British edition is a ‘much more lively, visually exact text’ as desired by the author.<sup>774</sup> Nunnally describes it as ‘rife with grammatical errors and strangely contorted sentences’.<sup>775</sup> Høeg was unaware that he was in a position to veto the American translation, but stated in 1996 that he wished he had done so.<sup>776</sup> The range of narratives about this situation tend to overlook the role played personally by MacLehose at Harvill, but given the length of the British editorial process, MacLehose’s involvement must have been extensive.<sup>777</sup>

The outcome was two different English-language translations, one British, one American derived from Nunnally’s work, which were published simultaneously on each side of the Atlantic. Nunnally requested her name be removed from the Harvill edition in the UK on the understanding that it appear without a translator credit, but it was instead published under the pseudonym of ‘F. David’.<sup>778</sup> Høeg reportedly chose to withdraw from participating in work on subsequent translations as a result of the latent hostility of the situation with Nunnally.<sup>779</sup> Furthermore, a number of comparative academic studies

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<sup>773</sup> Gardner 2010, *Kythor* Forthcoming.

<sup>774</sup> Gardner 2010.

<sup>775</sup> Follin 1997: Letter inserted after page 34.

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*: 36.

<sup>777</sup> This is borne out by observations on the Britishisation of Mankell novels by MacLehose in Venuti 2008: 157. Similar trends have been observed in the case of Larsson’s *Millennium* series. See Chapter 9.1.4.

<sup>778</sup> Follin 1997: Letter inserted after page 34.

<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*: 34-5. Indeed, speaking in 2017, Høeg’s description of his involvement with his current English-language translator, Martin Aitken, is the complete opposite of his involvement with the translation of *Smilla* in the 1990s. See Giles 2017a.



compare the two translations,<sup>780</sup> while the subject is often discussed by *Smilla*'s British publisher, MacLehose.<sup>781</sup>

## 8.2 The Reception of *Smilla*

### 8.2.1 Critical Reception

Writing some years after publication, Bloom described *Smilla* as a surprise bestseller, noting that the 'complexity of the plotting, nature of the thematic concerns and seriousness of purpose may make *Smilla* one of many bestsellers bought but never fully read.'<sup>782</sup> Nevertheless, the book was widely reviewed upon release, albeit mostly in the broadsheets, and largely received by critics in positive terms.<sup>783</sup>

Many reviewers chose to focus on the literary quality of *Smilla*. An anonymous review in the *Financial Times* noted that '[i]t's a novel, of course, not a "thriller" – but that has to be said of all good thrillers, because the word, so inappropriate to the boring bulk of them, devalues the exceptions.'<sup>784</sup> Geraldine Brennan, writing in *The Observer*, took a similar line in her review, describing *Smilla* as 'a riveting psychological novel.'<sup>785</sup> Even a brief but positive review published in *The Mail on Sunday* sought to establish Høeg's literary credentials: 'Hoeg [sic] is a masterful writer, using a thriller-like plot as a means of investigating other, more profound matters, like the experience of foreignness or the longing that is nostalgia.'<sup>786</sup>

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<sup>780</sup> Satterlee 1996, Follin 1997, Thomson 1997.

<sup>781</sup> MacLehose 2004, Gardner 2010, Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>782</sup> Bloom 2008: 305.

<sup>783</sup> Pihl notes that this was far in excess of what Danish or other translated books tended to receive in the British press during this period. See Pihl 1996: 109.

<sup>784</sup> 'Books – Thrills at Turn of Leaf' 1993.

<sup>785</sup> Brennan 1993.

<sup>786</sup> Trelawney 1993.

Beyond straightforward literary quality, more than one reviewer was attuned to the hybridity of *Smilla*. Writing in *TLS*, Jim McCue clearly found pleasure in Høeg's '[obliviousness] to the dangers to his narrative...he writes like an escapologist' as well as in many of the jokes that are added to the prose at the most unexpected of moments.<sup>787</sup> Clive Sinclair, writing in *The Independent on Sunday*, found the novel's ending strongly reminiscent of Shelley and Herge.<sup>788</sup> Berlins, writing for *The Sunday Times*, was particularly impressed by Høeg's achievement in taking ice beyond the work of writers such as Martin Cruz Smith and Alistair Maclean and making it, along with snow, an essential character in the book, representing the moods and actions of Smilla.<sup>789</sup> Berlins' argument was that while the book is 'a good straight thriller: a tight, unusual plot with politico-ecological overtones, lots of tough action, multiple twists and a shocking, unforeseeable climax', its strength lay in the work that Høeg had done beyond those key elements of any thriller. Writing in *New Statesman and Society*, John Williams argued that *Smilla* demonstrated the elasticity of the contemporary crime novel.<sup>790</sup> He joked that the plot came straight from a Michael Crichton science fiction thriller.

There was also a tendency for predominantly male reviewers to be enchanted by the protagonist, Smilla. This was found in the *Financial Times*' review, while literary translator Shaun Whiteside's review for *The Guardian* lauded the first half of the novel: 'the beguiling build-up is slow, strange, and often very funny, with plenty of quirky detail', and emphasised that the strength of the novel at this stage lies in the humanity of Smilla's journey of discovery as she finds out more about the child Isiah, in tandem with reflecting

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<sup>787</sup> McCue 1993.

<sup>788</sup> Sinclair 1993.

<sup>789</sup> Berlins 1993.

<sup>790</sup> Williams 1993.

upon her own relationship with her mother.<sup>791</sup> Ultimately, Whiteside reflected that he would have happily met Smilla under other circumstances. Sinclair commented: 'I look forward to seeing Sigourney Weaver as Smilla Jaspersen'.<sup>792</sup>

In terms of the presence of Greenland throughout the novel, and the postcolonial dimension to the novel, the British critical response was muted. When that aspect was raised, it was with a degree of scepticism. Sinclair highlighted the linguistic determinism of the novel in introducing the reader to the extensive Greenlandic vocabulary for snow, while remaining unconvinced about Høeg's empathy for the Greenlanders. Sinclair suggested that 'when all is said and done...he is more influenced by American movies than by Inuit culture...indeed, the book really comes to life in the numerous passages which describe the shedding of blood, not the falling of snow.' *The Guardian's* Whiteside merely felt the novel offered unusual insight into Greenland. John Williams appeared not to read the novel as a postcolonial text as such, but reflected that Høeg had successfully transformed what is typically an empty wilderness in literature, Greenland, into a place where people live. Critics like Berlins had remarkably little to say about the Greenlandic or postcolonial elements of the novel altogether. The picture is one of blithe disinterest in the topic in book-reviewing circles.

Not all reviews were wholly positive. *The Herald's* Alan Chadwick appeared to damn *Smilla* with faint, or perhaps non-specific, praise, finding it 'chilling', and noting that Høeg is 'probably the best thriller writer in Denmark'.<sup>793</sup> Other reviewers, in particular the *Financial*

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<sup>791</sup> Whiteside 1993.

<sup>792</sup> Sinclair 1993.

<sup>793</sup> Chadwick 1993.

*Times* and Whiteside, had been underwhelmed by the quality of the second half of the novel.

Paul Binding's review in *The Independent* provides excellent insight into the cumulative critical response to *Smilla*.

*Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* is, on one level, both a whodunnit and a thriller – ingeniously, elaborately and satisfyingly plotted and with a breathless narrative pace. It is extremely hard to put this long novel down and the excitement it engenders spills over into your time away from it. But this is only one of its attributes; it is also a novel of a riven society, of the relations between Europe and an under-considered part of the world, of science versus the atavistic, of humankind versus the terrifying vastness and power of Nature.<sup>794</sup>

The majority of critics were positive, highlighting the inherent readability of the book due to its thriller and crime fiction tropes, alongside the more highbrow literary qualities of the novel. While there were some nods to Høeg's postcolonial approach, the majority of reflections upon Greenland were largely related to setting and snow, imbued with lashings of borealism in response to depictions of the exotic north.

## 8.2.2 Popular Reception

When Roger Straus and I first published Peter Høeg, we thought we were doing something of a favour for Danish literature, and then “Miss Smilla” abruptly sold a million copies in both England and America.<sup>795</sup> (Christopher MacLehose)

Tracking the undeniable sales success of *Smilla* in the years immediately after release is something of a challenge given the limitations of Nielsen BookScan, which only tracks British sales from 1998 onwards. Bloom laments the absence of a coherent bestseller list during the 1990s, and notes that they were often incomplete. As an example, he remarks

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<sup>794</sup> Binding 1993.

<sup>795</sup> Hitchens 2011: 19. In the early 2000s, Høeg was the all-time bestselling author in translation in the USA. See Wirtén 2004: 42.

that while *Smilla* did not feature on the bestseller list for 1995, the book had sold 400,000 copies in the space of two years.<sup>796</sup> Consequently, we are left with the word of *Smilla*'s publisher, which is not necessarily always wholly accurate.<sup>797</sup>

We can dig deeper into these earlier years through consulting the bestseller charts, even if they are deficient, alongside other fragmentary information available to the researcher. Most pertinently, Pihl notes that the first print run of *Smilla*, totalling 10,000 copies, sold out quickly, and that three months after release a total of 21,000 copies had been sold.<sup>798</sup> However, the spread of these sales over what may have been multiple editions adds to the confusion: while most newspaper reviews in September 1993 reference a hardback edition selling for £15.99, a paperback issue, also published by Harvill, entered the *Observer*/Waterstone's bestseller charts in December 1993.<sup>799</sup> It rose as high as number 5,<sup>800</sup> before falling to number 10 by mid-January 1994.<sup>801</sup>

A Flamingo paperback edition published in October 1994 at a reduced price of £5.99 appeared to have some impact, with the book placed at number 1 in the bestseller list following a fortnight on sale.<sup>802</sup> It continued to remain in the top 10, moving up and down, before returning to number 1 in the run-up to Christmas 1994.<sup>803</sup> It is, however, of note

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<sup>796</sup> Bloom 2008: 99.

<sup>797</sup> It has not been possible to obtain detailed sales figures from Harvill's archives on the grounds of copyright and commercial sensitivity. The figure of one million has been used rhetorically by MacLehose, and others, for many years, including in conversation with this researcher. Given that at the time there was an interest in driving hype through high sales figures, and subsequently in building the story of a bestseller, the publisher evidently has a vested interest in sharing this figure. More pertinently, publisher sales figures reflect how many copies it sells to retailers, not how many copies are bought by consumers.

<sup>798</sup> Pihl 1996: 113. This three-month period cited by Pihl would have covered the majority of the run into Christmas 1993, one of the most important times of year in bookselling.

<sup>799</sup> '*Observer*/Waterstone's Best-Seller List' 1993.

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>801</sup> '*Observer*/Waterstone's Best-Seller List' 1994a.

<sup>802</sup> '*Observer*/Waterstone's Best-Seller List' 1994b.

<sup>803</sup> '*Observer*/Waterstone's Best-Seller List' 1994a.

that in a compilation of the top-rated books by a spread of publications at the end of 1994, *Smilla* had not made the cut as a regularly selected top book to buy for Christmas – despite being a regular fixture in the bestseller list during the run-up to Christmas.<sup>804</sup>

A major publishing event in 1995 was the collapse of the NBA.<sup>805</sup> Those who had argued in favour of keeping it believed that its loss would lead to a narrowing of the market, a cut in titles published accompanied by price rises on less popular titles, and shorter print runs. The converse argument was that much of the ‘rubbish’ published with the support of the NBA would no longer reach the market and that expenditure on books would increase.<sup>806</sup> The end of the NBA had a significant impact on the literary market, permitting true mass production of books for the very first time. This was true in the case of *Smilla*, with the Flamingo edition ending 1995 at the top of the year’s bestselling paperbacks list.<sup>807</sup> *The Guardian* even noted that the continued success of *Smilla* throughout 1995 was highly unusual in publishing terms.<sup>808</sup> It examined a number of changes in the publishing industry that had had an impact on sales trends. Apart from the collapse of the NBA, airport sales were said to make up a large proportion of receipts.

By early 1996, *Smilla* had spent a full year in the paperback bestseller chart.<sup>809</sup> The novel benefitted from another repackage in 1996 with the establishment of the Panther

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<sup>804</sup> ‘Top of the Tops’ 1994.

<sup>805</sup> The NBA was an agreement between British publishers and booksellers that set the price paid by British customers for books. It collapsed following the withdrawal of publisher Hodder Headline from the agreement and the ensuing domino effect as all other major publishers followed.

<sup>806</sup> Macdonald 1994. A good overview of the decline of the NBA is provided by Jordison 2010.

<sup>807</sup> ‘Best Sellers of 1995’ 1995.

<sup>808</sup> ‘Titans and Terrors in a Troubled Industry’ 1996.

<sup>809</sup> ‘Chart Watch’ 1996.

paperback list, intended to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Harvill Press.<sup>810</sup> From this point onwards, sales began to slow down. The main paperback edition of *Smilla*, which continues to be published under the same ISBN, even if jacket designs have varied somewhat, was published on 1 April 1996. Sales figures for this in its first two years of sales are unavailable, but since 1998, 37,494 copies have been sold in the UK.<sup>811</sup> We have Bloom's assertion that *Smilla* sold 400,000 copies in 1994-95. He also notes that it sold 140,000 copies in 1995 – two years after its initial release.<sup>812</sup> The origins of the oft-repeated statement that the novel sold one million copies in the UK are hard to trace, but by the turn of the millennium, it was being stated as fact.<sup>813</sup>

Comparing the limited sales figures to hand for *Smilla* is challenging. Ongoing sales of *Smilla* since 1998, covered by Nielsen, are comparable to those experienced by titles like *Roseanna* by Sjöwall and Wahlöö, while the estimated figures for the first few years of sales are obviously significant but pale when compared to a modern megaseller such as Larsson. Nevertheless, if the figure of one million is taken at face value, it means that Høeg has sold more books than present-day bestsellers such as Robert Galbraith.<sup>814</sup>

In 1996, MacLehose led a management buyout of Harvill from HarperCollins, making Harvill independent. Høeg proactively ensured that he remained with MacLehose and Harvill, rather than parent company HarperCollins, suggesting a strong relationship with

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<sup>810</sup> Panther had of course been responsible for the publication of mass-market paperback editions of Mykle's books in Britain. Also amongst the four launch titles for the list was Høeg's *Borderliners*. Høeg was evidently considered to be a marquee name who could carry the new brand in its start-up phase.

<sup>811</sup> As at 15 July 2017. This two-year gap is significant, however, as the film adaptation was released in 1997 and would presumably have had an impact on sales in that year.

<sup>812</sup> Bloom 2008: 305.

<sup>813</sup> Jaggi 2000.

<sup>814</sup> Galbraith having sold 900,883 books across three titles as at 15 July 2017.

his British publisher.<sup>815</sup> However, the commercial sensitivity of this decision can be seen in the repercussions that followed. HarperCollins reportedly dispatched a private investigator to Copenhagen to track down Høeg and offer him a lump sum of £50,000 to stay with them – to little effect.<sup>816</sup> In 1997, matters became more fraught, with HarperCollins issuing a high court writ against Harvill with a view to retrieving the profitable author Høeg and *Smilla*.<sup>817</sup> While the matter appears to have been settled, this degree of animosity indicates the commercial value of Høeg to his British publisher.<sup>818</sup>

Sales of *Smilla* over the first three or four years after publication were evidently remarkable, all the more so given the relative lack of interest in Scandinavian literature at the time; beyond the book itself capturing the imaginations of reviewers and readers, the marketing initiatives adopted by Harvill must also have been effective. This was evidently combined with canny use of affordable paperback editions, healthy airport sales, and conceivably the additional commercial edge provided by the collapse of the NBA.

## 8.3 Heirs to Høeg

### 8.3.1 Høeg on British Shores

It is possible to discern a range of outcomes from the publication of *Smilla* in Britain in 1993. Most notably, beyond the positive critical reception and sales success, the book was

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<sup>815</sup> France 1996.

<sup>816</sup> Andersen 1996.

<sup>817</sup> 'Snow Joke for Smilla' 1997.

<sup>818</sup> Interestingly, Høeg remains with Harvill Secker at the time of writing. MacLehose notes that it was not possible to extract Høeg, while Engles has speculated that Høeg may yet end up being published by MacLehose Press in future. See Kythor Forthcoming.



an award winner, receiving the Fiction Silver Dagger from the CWA in 1994.<sup>819</sup> However, *Smilla*, and to some degree Høeg himself, were adopted into the British literary canon, at a time which saw the number of Scandinavian authors being imported to the British literary polysystem increase. *Smilla* was broadcast as Radio 4's *Book at Bedtime* in 1996, situating it firmly in the heart of the British literary establishment, while a big-budget film adaptation starring a predominantly British and Irish cast further solidified this sense, even if the film itself disappointed.<sup>820</sup> In terms of popular culture, it appears that Høeg's work generated popular recognition of the multiple Inuit words for snow, with a multitude of articles published in the press in the subsequent decade mentioning different types of snow in the same breath as Høeg.<sup>821</sup> In many respects, the novel also became a reference point for the early to mid-nineties, being cited over a decade later in print journalism on multiple occasions each year.<sup>822</sup>

The success of *Smilla* led to the rapid acquisition and translation of Høeg's other works, with four books appearing over a period of three years from 1995.<sup>823</sup> *Borderliners*, published in 1995, was generally found to be wanting by critics. John Bradley found the book frustrating on a number of levels, most notably complaining that Høeg was questioning

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<sup>819</sup> See 'The CWA Gold Dagger'. The novel was also an award winner in the USA, where it was a finalist for the Edgar Award for Best Mystery Novel, while translator Nunnally won the 1994 Lewis Galantière Translation Award for her involvement.

<sup>820</sup> 'A Bond Movie on Ice' 1997. Reviewers appeared to find multiple plot changes in the film problematic.

<sup>821</sup> A typical example of the representation of Høeg is found in an article by Suzanne Moore, see Moore 1995. Indeed, Høeg and his words for snow became so ubiquitous that journalists were able seemingly wilfully to mislead their readers without clarity being lost. Ron McKay, writing in *The Observer*, managed to misidentify Høeg as being Norwegian, and attributed the multiple words for snow to him personally. See McKay 1995.

<sup>822</sup> It has even led to a range of rather tangential outputs, including a blog detailing how to cook meals found in *Smilla*. See Chris 2014.

<sup>823</sup> Høeg 1995, Høeg 1996a, Høeg 1996b, Høeg 1997. These novels were all translated by Barbara Haveland, who reportedly enjoyed a far more positive relationship with the author than her predecessor. See Cunningham 1997.

the intelligence of the reader through his prose.<sup>824</sup> 1996's *The History of Danish Dreams* briefly managed to reach the bestseller top 10.<sup>825</sup> Yet *The Observer* described it as 'a young man's ramble', overly reliant on a debased form of magic realism.<sup>826</sup> 1997's *Tales of the Night* did little better with the critics.<sup>827</sup> The worst criticism was reserved for *The Woman and the Ape*, published at the end of 1996, which was met with incredulity over the fact that its author could also have written *Smilla*. Emma Tennant suggested that it was likely to win the Bad Sex Prize, while noting that 'the characterization and the plot are difficult to follow; the book is frequently incomprehensible.'<sup>828</sup>

Following the 1997 publication of *Tales of the Night*, Høeg entered a decade-long hiatus before returning in 2007. All three of Høeg's novels written this century have been published in English translation.<sup>829</sup> *The Quiet Girl*, published in 2007, was received well in critical terms, with the suggestion that it was a welcome return by Høeg to the literary scene.<sup>830</sup> 2012's *The Elephant Keepers' Children* was met with a somewhat more lukewarm response.<sup>831</sup> *The Susan Effect*, published in 2017, has been met with more positivity, although reviews have tended towards drawing strong connections between the new novel and *Smilla*. Forshaw harks back to the original, and sees *Susan* as a near cousin, while *The Economist* states that Høeg 'reverts to the Smilla model'.<sup>832</sup> Høeg's two bursts of literary

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<sup>824</sup> Bradley 1995.

<sup>825</sup> 'Best Sellers' 1996.

<sup>826</sup> 'Remains of the Dane' 1995. Laura Cumming found the protagonist to be inept and distinctly less likeable than Smilla. See Cumming 1996.

<sup>827</sup> For a typical disappointed reviewer, see Knight 1997.

<sup>828</sup> Tennant 1996.

<sup>829</sup> Høeg 2007, Høeg 2012, Høeg 2017.

<sup>830</sup> Lawson 2007. 12,865 copies have been sold in the UK as at 15 July 2017.

<sup>831</sup> Moss 2012. Only 2,234 copies have been sold in the UK as at 15 July 2017.

<sup>832</sup> Forshaw 2017, 'Peter Hoeg's New Novel Is a High-Concept Thriller' 2017. As at 7 October 2017, 943 copies of *The Susan Effect*, published on 3 August 2017, had been sold in Britain.

activity in Britain, one over the past decade, and the preceding burst in the 1990s, have all fallen into the shadow of the critical and commercial success enjoyed by *Smilla*.

### 8.3.2 The Hunt for Other Scandinavian Høegs

The fulsome acclaim granted to Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* [...] was a clarion call to British readers that there was (in the words of Shakespeare's Coriolanus) "a world elsewhere".<sup>833</sup>

The race was on to find other equivalent Scandinavian authors to import to the UK. The focus of every British publisher at the 1995 Frankfurt Book Fair was to find the next Scandinavian hit,<sup>834</sup> while Ries noted that every publisher wanted to buy the translation rights of a book by any foreign author, so long as they were Høeg.<sup>835</sup> Ries cites the impact of Høeg, in direct parallel with the success of writers such as Jostein Gaarder and Kerstin Ekman, as the reason why Danish and other Nordic writers suddenly became interesting to rights-acquisition departments around the world.<sup>836</sup>

The outcome in this pursuit of other Høegs saw some Scandinavian writers fare better than others in the British literary market. Reviewing Herbjørg Wassmo's *Dina's Book* in 1996, Sam Taylor complained that *Smilla* had 'ploughed a path for lesser compatriots' before going on to say that 'Wassmo writes like Gabriel Garcia Marquez [sic] with a learning impediment.'<sup>837</sup> Pernille Rygg's 1997 debut, *The Butterfly Effect*, found itself subject to similar comparisons with *Smilla*. For instance, Amanda Craig of *The Times* found Rygg's

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<sup>833</sup> Forshaw 2012: 5.

<sup>834</sup> 'Happiness Is A' 1995.

<sup>835</sup> Ries 1998.

<sup>836</sup> Ibid. The degree of interest remained limited. In the case of Danish, which had evidently enjoyed an upswing in the years after Høeg's initial success, it has been noted that of 125 books published in the UK in English translation between 1990 and 2015, half appeared after 2010, indicating a rather sparse distribution in the period from 1990 to 2010. See Kythor 2018.

<sup>837</sup> Taylor 1996.

efforts in a post-*Smilla* era to be predictable and ‘no great challenge to anything but your patience’.<sup>838</sup>

While Wassmo and Rygg failed to engage British critics as they experimented with what was perceived to be *Smilla*-esque hybridity, writers such as Ekman, toying with the crime genre in a fashion similar to Høeg, enjoyed greater traction in the UK. Her first English translation, published in 1995, was *Blackwater*, which sold 16,000 copies during its launch year despite little-to-no press attention.<sup>839</sup> Reviewers were generally impressed, as with Høeg, by the literary quality of Ekman’s work alongside the hints of genre fiction.<sup>840</sup> Binding went so far as to describe it as the most important Swedish novel in Britain of the 1990s.<sup>841</sup> Despite all these factors, Ekman’s British publisher in the mid-1990s, Chatto & Windus, appears to have missed an opportunity to capitalise on her as the next Høegesque bestseller.<sup>842</sup>

The other major Scandinavian bestseller of the 1990s in Britain was found in the form of a novel almost wholly unlike *Smilla* – Gaarder’s *Sophie’s World*. The critical response upon publication in 1995 was typically impressed by the philosophical dimension of the book, but tended to question whether it was a true novel.<sup>843</sup> By 1998, *Sophie’s World* had sold over half a million copies and spent 83 weeks on the bestseller list.<sup>844</sup> Gaarder, however,

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<sup>838</sup> Craig 1997.

<sup>839</sup> Feay 1996.

<sup>840</sup> O’Sullivan 1995.

<sup>841</sup> Binding 1998.

<sup>842</sup> Stougaard-Nielsen considers *Smilla* and Ekman’s *Blackwater* as literary equals, see Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 139. While the eco-criticism found in *Blackwater* differs from Høeg’s postcolonial approach, Forsås-Scott has argued that other works by Ekman, such as *The Wolfskin* trilogy, engage with postcolonialism, see Forsås-Scott 2014.

<sup>843</sup> See, for example, May 1995.

<sup>844</sup> Thackray 1998. As with *Smilla*, sales figures are hard to come by in the pre-Nielsen BookScan era. The book had reportedly sold 50,000 copies in the UK in its first three months on sale, and ended 1995 at number 2 in the hardback bestseller list. See ‘Best Sellers of 1995’ 1995, Lyall 1995. The paperback

was not another Høeg. Yet, it is evident that the success enjoyed by Harvill Press with a Scandinavian author meant that other publishers were also inclined to consider their options for importing Scandinavian literature in a way they had not done before. In many ways, the success of Høeg and Gaarder with UK readers foreshadowed the diversity of Scandinavian literature that was to arrive on British shores in the two subsequent decades.

### 8.3.3 Transatlantic Weather Books

A further trend that can be identified in the years after *Smilla* is a wave of other novels being published, largely produced in English, that critics began to classify as belonging in the same category as Høeg's novel. This thesis refers to these works as 'transatlantic weather books'. Prominent examples of these books include David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*, Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*, and even Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong*. Writing in 1996, just over two years after *Smilla* was published, Catherine Bennett described a new genre of 'weather-books' which had been established by Høeg, stating that the genre label had become so established in publishing that a publisher had 'boasted recently of buying "next year's snow book."'”<sup>845</sup> Jason Hazeley chose to focus on snow in particular, describing it as the 'Fargo Factor', a reference to the 1996 film *Fargo*.<sup>846</sup>

The categorisation of these novels typically manifested itself through reviews in the press. For example, in the case of Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*, reviewers were quick to draw connections between Høeg and Guterson, as well as Proulx.<sup>847</sup> Guterson enjoyed

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edition, also published in 1995, managed to sell in excess of 160,000 copies before the turn of the year. See Ritchie 1996.

<sup>845</sup> Bennett 1996.

<sup>846</sup> Hazeley 1997.

<sup>847</sup> Gerrard 1995b. Indeed, it was later suggested by Gerrard that a natural response to finishing *Smilla* was to read Guterson's novel. See Gerrard 1995c.

success far and away beyond that expected of a debut writer in much the same fashion as Høeg, with his book selling around 11,000 copies in hardback.<sup>848</sup> As well as the similarity in title, and the parallels drawn between Guterson's plot and Høeg's, it is of note that the marketing of the book actively sought to place the novel into the category of 'Nordic thriller', despite its American origin.<sup>849</sup> Guterson told Suzi Feay that he had not read Høeg's work, but said 'we're all just telling the same stories for a new generation. Nobody has any new ideas.'

Feay suggested that this spate of novels represented a new and fashionable masculine romance, acceptable for men as well as women to read, suited to the 1990s.<sup>850</sup> Literary agent Giles Gordon suggested that the very word 'snow' was at the heart of this trend.<sup>851</sup> This thesis takes the view that Bennett's 'weather-book' best reflects the variety of the books in this sub-genre, but that it could be better described as transatlantic to demonstrate that it is not solely a European or North American trend. Other than the focus on grey, weather-driven settings, and in many cases snow, the other trait of these novels is the use of hybridity in the shape of quality literary credentials to present books as elite literature, while making use of genre fiction tendencies to make the books appealing to a wider cross-section of readers.

## 8.4 Trends and Hybridity: *Smilla* in Britain

In *Smilla*, we have a single novel lauded by critics as both literary and readable, exotic and yet somehow familiar. The positivity of reviewers is matched by book buyers, who happily

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<sup>848</sup> Feay 1996.

<sup>849</sup> Ibid. In fact, Guterson's novel takes place in a Japanese community in the Pacific Northwest of the USA.

<sup>850</sup> Ibid.

<sup>851</sup> Quoted in Hazeley 1997.

turned the book into the bestselling Scandinavian novel of the decade, and regardless of glib comments that few manage to complete the book, many of the central themes have been adopted into British popular culture. The impact of this one book was also remarkable, with a notable Høeg-inspired flurry of Scandinavian translations commissioned in the years that followed *Smilla's* arrival in Britain, as well as the emergence of other, less Høegesque Scandinavian writers and the establishment of a transatlantic weather book sub-genre. What follows is an analysis of why this happened, along with an appraisal of the position of *Smilla* and Høeg in the British literary polysystem.

#### 8.4.1 Response to Contemporary Trends

In literary terms, Britain in the 1990s was characterised by diversity: ‘examples of novels can be identified that address issues of provincialism and globalization, multiculturalism and specific national and regional identities, experimentation and a reengagement with a realist tradition, as well as renewed and reinvigorated interest in a range of differing and overlapping identities: nation, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and even the post-human.’<sup>852</sup> It was a decade of healthy literary production as writers and readers sought to engage with their identities on a number of levels ahead of the looming twenty-first century.

*Smilla's* reception, in particular, with both reviewers and readers is a reflection of the prevailing literary trends in the early 1990s in Britain. Literature of the decade, a *fin de siècle*, was characterised by reflection on the past century, as well as ambivalence about the future.<sup>853</sup> Uncertainty surrounding a rapidly changing, technologising society concerned

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<sup>852</sup> Bentley 2005b: 1.

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid.*: 2.

about the looming millennial shift was accentuated by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which had for so long provided a straightforward paradigm to many of us versus them. In this wavering light lay fertile ground for *Smilla* to make an impact on British readers, as a novel that reflected the grey areas of society and the places where fact and fiction were easily confused.

Bloom noted that waves of immigration from the 1940s to the 1970s were being reflected upon through second- and third-generation immigrant literature in the 1990s.<sup>854</sup> Høeg's examination of the postcolonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland, most astutely identified by reviewers such as Binding, and also hinted at by Sinclair and Whiteside, was obviously one that spoke strongly to British readers of the early 1990s. In addition to exploring the experience of non-white immigrants in Britain, Bloom also identifies a trend towards 'ethnically inflected novels' that specifically aim to give white readers a greater understanding of other cultures. While Bloom cites authors such as Alexander McCall Smith, Kazuo Ishiguro and Khaled Hosseini in this regard,<sup>855</sup> the designation is obviously applicable to *Smilla* – a novel about a non-European outsider in Copenhagen, with the remote and unfamiliar setting of Greenland.

Sara Danius argued that the greatest strength of *Smilla* was its contemporary quality, which is imbued with postmodern uncertainty and postcolonial ambivalence.<sup>856</sup> This contemporary quality in the British setting, and the novel's adhesion to British literary

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<sup>854</sup> Bloom 2008: 129.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid.: 15-6.

<sup>856</sup> Danius 1994. Wirtén argues that the most important aspect of *Smilla* was the postcolonial dimension, but is less enamoured with the argument relating to contemporariness. See Wirtén 2004: 44.



currents of the early 1990s, obviously allowed *Smilla* to take up a more central position in the literary polysystem than is typically afforded to translated books.

#### 8.4.2 Bestseller by Hybridity

*Smilla*'s successful arrival in Britain was not solely the result of conformance with contemporary literary trends. It went further, by being at the forefront of literary developments in the early 1990s. Figures such as Bill Buford, editor of *Granta*, had pronounced the death of the English novel by the 1980s, suggesting novels had become an essentially middle-class and whining monologue, no more than a 'longish piece of writing with something wrong with it.'<sup>857</sup> Yet Pamela Bickley notes that the 1990s marked the arrival of a diverse range of new literary forms, revitalising the novel in the process.<sup>858</sup> *Smilla* certainly fits into this category.

Høeg's representation of postcolonial issues and pre-millennial uncertainty was presented innovatively, making use of genre hybridity. His use of less prestigious genre forms such as the thriller, and to some extent also science fiction, meant that *Smilla* was not only more appealing to a wider audience, but also at the heart of the revitalisation of the novel in Britain at the time. Ola Larsmo argued that in *Smilla*, Høeg had taken on a genre and twisted it, managing to exploit the clichés of that genre but to his own end.<sup>859</sup> The use of genre no longer set a novel apart as being lowbrow as it might once have done, and indeed became a point of strength for the fickle commentariat when they considered it had been done well.<sup>860</sup> Bo Tao Michaëlis argued that the way in which Høeg not only took into

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<sup>857</sup> Quoted in Bickley 2008: 10.

<sup>858</sup> *Ibid.*: 11.

<sup>859</sup> Larsmo 1995: 17.

<sup>860</sup> This reflects the collapse of genre towards the end of the twentieth century, as noted in Bloom 2008: 10.

consideration issues understood in the anglophone sphere, but also presented them through the use of the thriller genre made *Smilla* ripe for export from Denmark, comparing Høeg to authors such as John Le Carré and Alistair Maclean.<sup>861</sup> This kind of hybridity has worked well over past decades, and *Smilla* took advantage of the growing British predisposition towards books of this ilk.

Mark Morris went a step further in his classification of *Smilla*.<sup>862</sup> He argued that it, along with other titles in what has been designated the transatlantic weather book sub-genre in this thesis, was a big bourgeois hit. This was on the grounds of hybridity actualised through these works being sufficiently literary to appear clever to readers, while actually remaining accessible to those readers who did not read widely. *Smilla* was a fresh addition to the literary polysystem, and one that appealed to a broad cross-section of readers of both popular and elite literature.

### 8.4.3 Tell the People What They Want

While the conformance of *Smilla* to prevailing literary trends paired with its innovative use of hybridity appealed to British readers and reviewers of the early 1990s, this did not occur in isolation. The extensive marketing campaign run by Harvill was clearly a significant contributory factor to the reception, popular and critical, of the novel.

Roger Luckhurst argued that the 1990s was a period in which there was capacity in the market, and the commercial conditions existed, for alternative, genre fiction forms to

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<sup>861</sup> Michaëlis 2005: 148.

<sup>862</sup> Morris 2002.

flourish.<sup>863</sup> Harvill were thus in a position to leverage this and direct a wider range of readers towards *Smilla* than might have been the case in previous decades. According to Jane Thurlow, responsible for marketing *Smilla* in Britain, the hybridity of the novel became a selling point in itself.<sup>864</sup> Thurlow notes that the novel was positioned ‘as a mainstream book, not as a translation. But that it wasn’t just a thriller, it was something that really was quite unique in a way.’<sup>865</sup> British book buyers were not only receptive to this kind of book, but were also actively having their attention drawn to it.

Joanna Pitman strongly suggests that the popular success of novels such as *Smilla* was contingent on word-of-mouth recommendations and an apparent faith in ‘solid’ plots that are easy to follow.<sup>866</sup> There is certainly truth in this observation, but it assumes that the initial recommendations stemmed from straightforward enthusiastic readers passing on tips. In practice, as has been established, Harvill had run a comprehensive campaign to target reviewers and booksellers prior to release, in addition to an advertising campaign run after publication. As can be seen from the range of newspaper articles discussing its success during subsequent years, Harvill were also highly effective at continuing to drive mentions of *Smilla* and accompanying hype. Word-of-mouth recommendations clearly had an impact, but it was only possible for them to do so through a concerted effort to tell people to make those recommendations.

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<sup>863</sup> Luckhurst 2005: 83.

<sup>864</sup> Interview in Kythor Forthcoming. Descriptions of the novel provided to booksellers were as follows: ‘Part thriller, part love story, part elegy for a vanishing way of life. It’s a rare thing: a novel so daringly original that it defies definition and appeals to the widest possible readership.’

<sup>865</sup> Ibid.

<sup>866</sup> Pitman 1997.

British readers were also provided with an author with whom they could engage beyond the book. As noted, Høeg was involved in the launch of *Smilla* and press coverage of him served to highlight his consumable eccentricity. Høeg also conveyed a certain degree of mystique: it has been widely reported that he dislikes publicity work.<sup>867</sup> Despite this, Høeg has been interviewed semi-regularly for all of his books' publications in Britain, and has made public appearances at book shops and literary festivals over the course of the past two decades.

The widespread popular impact of *Smilla* in the early years is down to an intelligent and driven marketing strategy that ensured that patrons of literature, whether reviewers or gatekeepers, as well as consumers, were fully enthused by the book on offer. In terms of Scandinavian books in translation, this arguably represents the first successful attempt to create a bestseller, by engaging with readers and reviewers on their terms and providing the literary polysystem with a product that fulfilled many contemporary requirements.

#### 8.4.4 Transatlantic Weather Books and Borealism

Robin Hunt observed that many books in the early nineties, especially thrillers, used settings that were 'remote, high and cold'.<sup>868</sup> While literature has arguably always acted as a conduit for escapism, the desire of writers to take their readers to places they have never been or imagined seems to have been particularly common during the 1990s, reflecting the increasing uncertainty in a post-Cold War, pre-millennial world. This might be thought of as the 'Fargo Factor', as mentioned earlier, or indeed part of a longer running trend for

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<sup>867</sup> O'Neill 1995. Høeg reportedly 'feels at odds with 20<sup>th</sup>-century society, unable to move at the pace of modern life.' In an appearance at the 2017 Edinburgh International Book Festival, he lamented the role the Internet had played in altering the way society communicates and thinks.

<sup>868</sup> Hunt 1996.

snow and ice to feature in certain genres.<sup>869</sup> However, the identification of a transatlantic weather book sub-genre common in the 1990s helps to trace the way in which *Smilla* successfully integrated itself into the British literary polysystem. In particular, this sub-genre clearly interfaced well with existing British notions of borealism through its depiction of the exotic north, especially amongst the literary elite responsible for publishing, reviewing and recommending books such as *Smilla* to the reading public.

An excellent example of the interaction with borealism is found in Jane Jakeman, who was quick to draw connections between authors such as Høeg and Ekman and the Norse sagas, while also alluding to the enduring and strong appeal of snow-laden Nordic writing to specifically British readers.<sup>870</sup> Harry Bingham, meanwhile, noted that the Danish-Greenlandic element of the novel meant it was easy to portray it as an exciting novelty.<sup>871</sup> The connection between transatlantic weather books is hinted at by Nicci Gerrard, who noted that *Smilla* was not the only work of the early 1990s in a northern setting to catch the British imagination, citing Proulx and Gaarder too.<sup>872</sup> Her thesis was that the protagonists' desperation in *Smilla* and *The Shipping News* to escape harsh urban landscapes reflected British pre-millennial fears. Drawing a direct connection between Britain and Scandinavia, Gerrard concluded 'the British are a puritanical race – we associate pleasure with fecklessness and sin; a life that is easy must be wrong. Life is not easy in the northern countries.' Thorpe went further, describing the sub-genre as 'northern-oriented fiction' reliant on 'ice-storms, stalling conversations, brooding depression and low temperatures'.<sup>873</sup> In both playing upon the tropes of the transatlantic weather book sub-

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<sup>869</sup> Hazeley 1997.

<sup>870</sup> Jakeman 1997.

<sup>871</sup> Bingham 2006.

<sup>872</sup> Gerrard 1995a.

<sup>873</sup> Thorpe 2002.

genre and tugging on the borealist heartstrings of British critics, *Smilla* effectively added a further layer of hybridity that gave it appeal to UK readers and facilitated a smooth passage to the centre of the literary polysystem.

Finally, the presumption of exceptionalism in the case of the British-Scandinavian literary relationship is also worth noting in this regard. Kristine Anderson has observed that there has been a tendency for Danish writers translated to English to be categorised amongst English-speaking writers, rather than as translated authors. She cites Brandes and Andersen, and speculates that the natural progression is for Høeg's work to become part of the canon of a British 'female detective genre' rather than being categorised as foreign fiction.<sup>874</sup> This is ultimately a borealist perspective, drawing on the sense that Britain and Scandinavia's shared heritage means that a Danish novel can be considered as part of Britain's domestic literary canon.

#### 8.4.5 The Position of *Smilla* and Høeg in the British Polysystem

Overall, the public response to *Smilla* was remarkable, particularly given that it was a translated novel from a small source market. However, as set out above, the novel clearly responded to a number of prevailing literary themes, and was almost universally appreciated by critics on various levels as a diverse, pacey thriller and a complex postcolonial novel. As discussed above, the changes to the British book market that occurred in parallel with the publication of the various early editions of *Smilla* are likely to have aided its continued success – a popular, critically acclaimed book was available in mass-produced form in a wider number of retail outlets than ever before, and

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<sup>874</sup> Anderson 2000: 335.

competitively priced. Given these elements, it is hardly surprising that the response from the buying and reading public was positive.

*Smilla* acted as a tonic to the British literary polysystem, reinvigorating the thriller, crime fiction, and science fiction genres, while also highlighting the role to be played by hybrid literature in drawing in new, larger audiences. Discussing the role of thrillers in contemporary literature in 1995, Gerrard remarked that *Smilla* had ‘made whodunits chic and sexy and unfamiliar again,’<sup>875</sup> while highlighting the increasing prevalence of ‘serious’ writers, such as Høeg, turning to genre fiction to make a living. Ultimately, Danius’ argument that *Smilla*’s greatest strength was in contemporariness demonstrates what gave the novel such a significant position in the British literary polysystem during the 1990s.

As a critical and popular success, *Smilla* had a highly central position in the British literary polysystem, and Høeg was also adopted by the British polysystem. While his star has waned in the years that have followed, *Smilla* remains a presence on the British literary scene.<sup>876</sup> To some extent, it seemed as if Høeg had pitched the perfect British novel at the British market at the right moment in time.<sup>877</sup> In practice, *Smilla* conformed with the cutting-edge British literary trends of the 1990s, fitting into a popular but sophisticated sub-genre that interfaced with borealism. While there is perhaps some disconnect in this regard between reviewers and readers – reviewers having been sold on the weather book dimension whereas readers were drawn in by the hybrid genre and associated themes – it is clear the book appealed to popular and elite audiences alike.

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<sup>875</sup> Gerrard 1995c.

<sup>876</sup> As is obvious from Høeg’s sales figures for his books published since the turn of the millennium.

<sup>877</sup> Eric Korn suggested that this was a direct result of Høeg’s Anglophile tendencies, stating ‘Høeg knows England’. See Korn 1996.

9 The Girl Who Appealed to  
Credit Crunch Brits:  
The *Millennium* Series

*Let us be upbeat in downbeat times.  
Everything seems to be coming together, and  
we can justifiably talk of a new Swedish  
wave. The seemingly unstoppable Stieg  
Larsson juggernaut steams on.'*  
(Sarah Death 2009: 2)





## Sweden

*Män som batar kvinnor* (2005)

*Flickan som lekte med elden* (2006)

*Luftslottet som sprängdes* (2007)

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*Det som inte dödar oss* (2015)

*Mannen som sökte sin skugga* (2017)

## Britain

*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2008)

*The Girl Who Played with Fire* (2009)

*The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest* (2009)

*The Girl in the Spider's Web* (2015)

*The Girl Who Takes an Eye for an Eye* (2017)



## 9 The Girl Who Appealed to Credit Crunch Brits: The *Millennium* Series

Nordic Noir is arguably the second wave of Scandinavian crime fiction in translation to have an impact on Britain this century. The first was driven by the arrival of Mankell in translation in Britain. Mankell's first novel published in the UK was *Faceless Killers*, released in 2000. Mankell's impact was significant, with the author and his books garnering widespread praise and media coverage, in addition to winning literary prizes and achieving significant sales figures.<sup>878</sup> The success of Mankell, building upon the success of *Smilla* in the 1990s, encouraged UK publishers to look for other Nordic titles, especially in the crime genre.<sup>879</sup> The culmination of this first wave of Scandinavian crime fiction in Britain was the decision by the BBC in 2007 to commission *Wallander*, an English-language television adaptation of Mankell's books.<sup>880</sup>

The broadcast of *Wallander* in the winter of 2008 marked the transition from the first wave to the second wave of Scandinavian crime fiction in the UK.<sup>881</sup> The move was rapid: the first *Millennium* book was published in the same year, while 2009 saw the release of the Swedish-language *Millennium* films. In 2011, the Hollywood remake of the first film was released, and the subtitled Danish crime drama *The Killing* was broadcast by the BBC.<sup>882</sup>

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<sup>878</sup> Mankell has sold almost two million books in the UK to date, as at 17 June 2017. Berlins, a keen enthusiast for *Smilla* as well as *Millennium*, is also a keen supporter of Mankell. See Berlins 2000.

<sup>879</sup> The result was the successful import of writers such as Karin Fossum and Arnaldur Indriðason during the first half of the 2000s.

<sup>880</sup> McCabe 2015.

<sup>881</sup> This transition from one wave to the next is supported by Janet McCabe, who sees the Mankell-book-based era of Scandinavian crime fiction in the early 2000s as distinct from the era of Nordic Noir fuelled not just by books but by film and television. See *ibid.*: 756. Broomé sees the years 2008 and 2009 as the height of a unified Scandinavian crime fiction wave. However, she notes the importance of Larsson in this, which lends credence to the idea of a shift from one wave to a second. See Broomé 2014a: 269.

<sup>882</sup> MacLehose argues that the impact of the televisual imports has been to remove the taboo element to the use of the word 'foreign' in selling literature. See Djurberg 2017: 16.

Nordic Noir initially emerged on the small screen, but was quickly assimilated by British publishers.

The shift from one wave to the next was identified by contemporary commentators as early as 2009. Sarah Death noted in the spring of 2009 that Larsson had become an ‘unstoppable juggernaut’, while Engles’ dissertation produced in the autumn of 2009 focuses on contemporaneous crime fiction publishing trends with a focus on Sweden in particular.<sup>883</sup> Stougaard-Nielsen sees the final years of the 2000s as the breeding ground for fully-fledged Nordic Noir, citing several writers and television shows, but mentioning Larsson several times as a key lynchpin in the development of the genre.<sup>884</sup>

Although the Nordic Noir narrative has not yet crystallised fully, it has become an important tool for publishers and object of research for scholars. In a 2017 article, Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen discuss the causes of the British fascination with all things Nordic, and especially the phenomenon of Nordic Noir, citing the difficulty of getting to grips with precisely what is and is not included in the cultural wave and when it began.<sup>885</sup> What is clear to the authors is that this is a trend originating around the beginning of the present decade.<sup>886</sup> There is thus a puzzling situation in the 2010s. It has been firmly acknowledged and identified across the spectrum of journalism, popular literary criticism and serious scholarship that a new cultural trend took off at the end of

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<sup>883</sup> Death 2009: 2, Engles 2009.

<sup>884</sup> Stougaard-Nielsen 2016. Forshaw pursues a similar line, see Forshaw 2013: 11.

<sup>885</sup> Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen 2017.

<sup>886</sup> This date would seem accurate – the first explorations of the influx of Scandinavian literary crime date to around this time. For a populist examination of the phenomenon, watch the BBC’s ‘Nordic Noir: The Story of Scandinavian Crime Fiction’ 2011. A piece in *The Economist* from 2010 also reflects on this state of affairs, see ‘Inspector Norse’ 2010. A broader scholarly perspective is provided in Nestingen and Arvas 2011.

the 2000s, which has had mass ramifications for the transmission of Scandinavian literature to the UK in the years that followed. However, it remains the case that there is little objective examination of the oft-cited cause of this, namely Larsson and his *Millennium* trilogy, in terms of transmission and reception.<sup>887</sup>

The situation, often presented in simplistic, positive terms with the benefit of hindsight, especially by those proactively involved in Larsson's transmission to Britain, is in fact more nuanced – despite the undeniable runaway success experienced by the series. The typical narrative is that there was a general British interest in Scandinavian crime fiction which provided Larsson with a springboard to success, as demonstrated by the successes of Høeg and Mankell in the 1990s and 2000s respectively, alongside the successful reissue of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's Martin Beck series in 2006 and the heavy presence of Nordic crime writers on award shortlists.<sup>888</sup>

What tends to be overlooked in this rather simple but largely accurate telling of the conditions that led to Larsson's success is that the situation could just as easily have been symptomatic of market saturation. This was something Swedish observers were conscious of. According to Jan-Erik Pettersson, the situation in 2005 for Swedish crime fiction could not have been less promising on the European stage.

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<sup>887</sup> There have been straightforward reflections on Larsson in the British publishing context, such as the *Afterword* volume released by MacLehose Press, and other deeper examinations such as Craighill's study of the publishing networks that enabled Larsson's dissemination across Europe, see Craighill 2013b. However, this case study fills a gap relating specifically to the British reception and analysis thereof. More broadly, Sara Kärrholm discusses the impact on research – a so-called '*Millennium* effect' – reflecting the sociological and genre-focused approaches that have dominated scholarship on Larsson. See Kärrholm 2014.

<sup>888</sup> The early 2000s saw the emergence of Nordic writers on the CWA Golden Dagger shortlist, with Mankell winning in 2001, and in 2005, Indriðason taking the prize while Fossum was shortlisted. This winning streak for Nordic authors stopped with the establishment of the CWA International Dagger in 2006, although every single shortlist from 2006 until 2015 included at least one Nordic writer.

Just as Stieg Larsson's books were about to appear it was beginning to look as though the crime fiction wave had peaked. European publishers, and Germany in particular, had bought the rights to a great number of Swedish crime writers. Some had achieved commercial success, but others had failed to live up to expectations. There was talk of the European market becoming saturated with Swedish crime novels.<sup>889</sup>

How was a crime writer from peripheral Sweden, a country whose literature had seemingly already managed to punch above its weight in various foreign polysystems, to make their breakthrough – especially one who was already dead? Larsson's prospects did not seem altogether positive. Yet, just over a decade later it is apparent that far from marking the demise of Scandinavian crime fiction in the UK, Larsson's arrival on the British literary scene in 2008 significantly elevated the volume of Scandinavian books in translation, arguably driven by a boost to translated genre fiction.<sup>890</sup> The impact on both readers and the publishing industry was dramatic, leading to the formation of a sub-genre, Nordic Noir. This case study examines how this came about through tracing the transmission of Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy and its reception, in addition to comparing and contrasting this with the two novels by Lagercrantz that are considered part of the *Millennium* canon published to date in the 2010s.

## 9.1 Stieg Larsson and *Millennium*

### 9.1.1 The Author: Stieg Larsson

'I'm fifty, damn it!'<sup>891</sup> were reportedly the final words of budding author Stieg Larsson (1954-2004) as he was transported to hospital in Stockholm in November 2004 after suffering a heart attack.<sup>892</sup> Larsson was certainly not new to writing even if he was a

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<sup>889</sup> Pettersson 2011: 256.

<sup>890</sup> Giles 2015.

<sup>891</sup> Holmberg 2010: 77.

<sup>892</sup> For more background on Larsson in English see Baksi 2010, Pettersson 2011. A more colourful account of Larsson's life, replete with various conspiracy theories, is found in Jute and McCoy 2011.

newcomer to writing fiction. In an interview published days before Larsson's death, Lasse Winkler wrote that 'Larsson is probably one of the most experienced literary debuts that will ever be seen in the Swedish publishing world.'<sup>893</sup> Not only was he an experienced journalist, but he had also authored multiple non-fiction books previously. He worked for the Swedish news agency TT from 1977 until 1997. He was one of the founders of the anti-fascist magazine *Expo* in 1995, and was also its editor.

### 9.1.2 *Millennium* and Norstedts

In terms of writing fiction, Larsson had dabbled in science fiction in his youth.<sup>894</sup> There is general disagreement about when Larsson began writing his *Millennium* novels, with some suggesting that it was during the 1990s, and others arguing – perhaps more plausibly – that it was in the early 2000s.<sup>895</sup> In 2003, Larsson submitted two completed manuscripts to the Swedish publisher Piratförlaget for their consideration, where they were rejected out of hand.<sup>896</sup> Robert Aschberg, Larsson's colleague at *Expo*, persuaded Larsson to submit his work to Norstedts in early 2004.

Svante Weyler and Eva Gedin at Norstedts were the first to read the two manuscripts and were impressed. Retired Norstedts publisher Lasse Bergström, responsible for Sjöwall

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<sup>893</sup> Winkler 2004: 12.

<sup>894</sup> Holmberg 2010: 55-6.

<sup>895</sup> Questions have been raised about whether Larsson was the sole author of the *Millennium* books, with a particular focus on whether Larsson's partner, Eva Gabrielsson, was involved in their creation. For instance, *Kvinnor* was written during a period when Larsson and Gabrielsson were away together, which would make for interesting parallels to Sjöwall and Wahlöö. See Holmberg: 76. Gabrielsson's own account is vague. See Gabrielsson and Colombani 2011. Larsson's Swedish editor, Gedin, is in no doubt that Larsson is the sole author of all three books, see McGrath 2010: 26.

<sup>896</sup> Pettersson 2011: 248-9. Pettersson states that the unusual profit-sharing arrangements used by Piratförlaget with its authors particularly appealed to Larsson.



and Wahlöö in the 1960s, was commissioned to produce a reader's report.<sup>897</sup> Bergström was also impressed by Larsson's efforts.

It is worth noting that I have never previously been able to read *two entire* novels by an unpublished writer one after the other. So even as he comes in through the door, Stieg Larsson can prove that he is anything but a one-off. [...] What is new about Stieg Larsson in relation to Sjöwall and Wahlöö, Mankell, Edwardson and other successful Swedes in a genre with rather too many practitioners is that he has a kind of encyclopaedic gift for literary tension and entertainment, and without any apparent effort can move between different planes of action with barely a noticeable change of gear. It is no coincidence that the two novels are long. Larsson is able to keep several plots going at the same time, and to bring all the threads together at the end.<sup>898</sup>

Norstedts' Publishing Director at the time, Weyler, agreed with Bergström, noting 'that even if he has a lot in common with the biggest names in this field – Sjöwall and Wahlöö, Henning Mankell, Åsa Larsson, Åke Edwardson, Håkan Nesser – there is even more that distinguishes him from them.'<sup>899</sup> He speculated that Larsson could be a new Mankell for the publisher.<sup>900</sup>

In light of Weyler and Bergström's positivity, Norstedts signed Larsson up on a three-book contract – the first they had ever offered to an author.<sup>901</sup> The contract included paperback rights, and paid Larsson an advance of SEK 600,000 – an unusually high sum for a debut author in Sweden.<sup>902</sup> Gedin was assigned as Larsson's editor: it was the first time she had ever dealt with a crime fiction writer.<sup>903</sup>

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<sup>897</sup> Gedin 2010: 11.

<sup>898</sup> Cited in *ibid.* Bergström was similarly effusive when tasked later in 2004 with reading the third novel, saying: "Unputdownable", as my old English scout used to say when he had found a commercially viable novel that also satisfied his demand for plausibility, excitement, thrilling depictions of people and settings etc. Very few, if any, English-language crime novels in recent years have induced me to stay in bed.' *ibid.*: 16. The remarks on commercial viability and comparisons with the anglophone crime fiction market are particularly illustrative of the potential that Norstedts saw in Larsson both domestically and internationally.

<sup>899</sup> Weyler 2010: 80.

<sup>900</sup> Winkler 2004: 12.

<sup>901</sup> Gedin 2010: 12.

<sup>902</sup> Pettersson 2011: 250-1.

<sup>903</sup> Gedin 2010: 10.

### 9.1.3 Swedish Reception

Despite Larsson's untimely death in November 2004, Norstedts pushed ahead with the publication of all three *Millennium* books.<sup>904</sup> Norstedts hoped to sell 20,000 copies of the first book, *Män som hatar kvinnor*, but by the end of its year of publication in Sweden, 2005, they had sold more than 50,000 copies in hardback.<sup>905</sup> The series successfully built on this momentum, with *Flickan som lekte med elden*, published in 2006, selling 100,000 copies in hardback in Sweden, while the third instalment, *Luftslottet som sprängdes*, sold 400,000 hardbacks in its first year alone.

*Kvinnan* received mixed reviews in Sweden, where some critics complained about its overtly political stance, while others found Lisbeth Salander problematic, and felt that the plot and style was occasionally in need of editing.<sup>906</sup> The response to *Elden* and *Luftslottet* was generally more positive amongst Swedish critics, although there were still criticisms of Larsson's writing style in particular.<sup>907</sup> Parallels can be drawn to the Swedish response to Sjöwall and Wahlöö four decades earlier: critics became increasingly positive about Larsson and his work as his domestic sales soared and his international reputation developed.<sup>908</sup> By 2007, when the final book was published, even critical reviewers were broadly convinced of the exceptional nature of the series and its position in the Swedish canon.

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<sup>904</sup> Ibid.: 21.

<sup>905</sup> Pettersson 2011: 255.

<sup>906</sup> A summary of the Swedish reception of *Kvinnor* can be found in Tapper 2011: 630-3.

<sup>907</sup> Summaries of the Swedish receptions of *Elden* and *Luftslottet* can be found in *ibid.*: 636-40.

<sup>908</sup> See Chapter 9.4.2 for further details of Larsson's emerging international reputation.

#### 9.1.4 English-language Publication Details

Gedin describes the buzz around Larsson, then still unpublished, at the 2004 Frankfurt Book Fair, where Norstedts managed to sell German translation rights to the series for a substantial sum.<sup>909</sup> Weyler refused to disclose the sum the German rights to the trilogy were sold for, but noted that it was a deal with a publisher Norstedts had not previously worked with, for a sum that demonstrated Norstedts' faith in Larsson, and that meant the Germans would seriously invest in the translated series.<sup>910</sup> The Norstedts foreign-rights department worked tirelessly to secure other rights sales, aided by the huge response to the books as they began to be published in Swedish, with sales to major languages such as French, Italian and Spanish secured.<sup>911</sup> The path to English was not quite as straightforward.

An English translation had been commissioned jointly by Norstedts and Swedish film production company Yellow Bird, with all three books translated in one go by American translator Steven Murray.<sup>912</sup> The translation was reportedly never intended for publication, but was for use by a monolingual anglophone screenwriter.<sup>913</sup> However, Norstedts began to use this to market the English-language rights to the *Millennium* trilogy.

By 2007, the series was being presented to British and American publishers by Norstedts who were arguing that there was an existing translation in place, prizes in Sweden and the endorsements of several European editors, as well as a recommendation from the Swedish

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<sup>909</sup> Gedin 2010: 19-20.

<sup>910</sup> Winkler 2004: 12. The sale of German rights at Frankfurt led to foreign-rights auctions for several other languages, see Sjöshult 2009.

<sup>911</sup> Craighill 2013b: 25.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid.

<sup>913</sup> McGrath 2010: 30.

Arts Council.<sup>914</sup> There was, however, still uncertainty in the anglophone publishing world about taking on a dead author.<sup>915</sup> MacLehose said: ‘I must have been about the eighth publisher in Britain to consider the books.’<sup>916</sup> MacLehose bought world English rights on behalf of MacLehose Press, before selling on US rights to Knopf.<sup>917</sup> While the financial details of this transaction are confidential, it seems likely a compromise solution was found that suited all parties. Fredrik Sjöshult makes it clear that Norstedts were fully aware of the commercial potential of the *Millennium* series,<sup>918</sup> but, on the other hand, MacLehose was in a strong negotiating position given the difficulty of selling rights. Whatever the eventual cost of acquiring the rights, MacLehose Press’ swift sale of North American sub-rights to Knopf must have recouped a significant amount of money.<sup>919</sup> Additionally, as there were no translation costs, it was probably a safer gamble for the publisher to take.

Despite the English translations not being intended for publication, MacLehose did not commission new ones. Instead he polished them and prepared them for release. More notably, the English-language titles were changed by MacLehose on his own initiative.<sup>920</sup> It seems that there was little involvement of the translator in this process: according to Murray, a misunderstanding meant he was only able to vet 130 pages of manuscript from

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<sup>914</sup> Craighill 2013b: 26.

<sup>915</sup> Larsson being a deceased author at the time of publication in Britain is discussed in further detail in Chapter 9.4.2.

<sup>916</sup> Pettersson 2011: 259.

<sup>917</sup> MacLehose Press is an imprint of Quercus, which began publishing in 2008. See ‘About MacLehose Press’. *Millennium 1* was MacLehose Press’ launch book, feted at a party in mid-January 2008, see ‘Former Harvills Boss Launches New Publishing House’ 2008. For an in-depth profile of the publisher Christopher MacLehose, see Wroe 2012.

<sup>918</sup> Sjöshult 2009.

<sup>919</sup> It is unclear whether MacLehose/Knopf paid again for the English translation by Murray, or whether the cost of this was footed solely by Norstedts and Yellowbird. Much of the rhetoric around the transaction would imply that there was no payment, but the matter is clouded in commercial secrecy.

<sup>920</sup> MacLehose has since noted that he regrets amending Larsson’s preferred titles, and would not have done so had he been aware of the author’s wishes at the time of acquisition. See MacLehose 2010: 87.

all three books and so it was published under the pseudonym Reg Keeland.<sup>921</sup> However, Murray later complained to Charles McGrath that MacLehose's 'tinkering' with the translation led him to request his name be taken off.<sup>922</sup> This position has been supported publicly by Eva Gabrielsson, who has stated that MacLehose 'needlessly prettified the translation' in English.<sup>923</sup> John-Henri Holmberg concludes that the English translations of Larsson are 'disappointingly sloppy and inaccurate.'<sup>924</sup>

The books were published in relatively quick succession in Britain, with the first being released in hardback in January 2008, the second in January 2009 and the third in October 2009. Paperback editions of each book followed around six months after the initial release.<sup>925</sup>

## 9.2 The British Critical Reception of *Millennium*

### 9.2.1 *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2008)

The release of *Millennium 1* in January 2008 garnered respectable coverage from reviewers, presumably a reflection of the reputation of MacLehose and the novelty of his new

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<sup>921</sup> Gwinn 2009.

<sup>922</sup> McGrath 2010. Jute and McCoy directly asked Murray which was true but have been unable to determine the answer. Jute and McCoy 2011: 91%. The parallels with the English-language translation of Høeg's *Smilla* are interesting in this regard. Published by MacLehose when he was publisher at Harvill Press, the original translation of *Smilla* into English was not commissioned by MacLehose but arrived with him in a finished state. *Smilla*'s translator, Tiina Nunnally, was so dissatisfied with the MacLehose-led editorial process that she requested the use of a pseudonym for publication (F. David). By coincidence, Murray/Keeland and Nunnally/David are married. See Chapter 8.1.3.2.

<sup>923</sup> McGrath 2010: 28.

<sup>924</sup> Holmberg 2011a: 34.

<sup>925</sup> The international reception of Larsson has been discussed to varying degrees in recent years. Remarkably, for titles with such a sales impact, coverage does remain limited. Tapper's survey, for instance, is more concerned with the Swedish and American film adaptations. See Pettersson 2011: 256-66, Craighill 2013b, Tapper 2014: 258-9. It should also be noted in terms of critical reception that Larsson's work in English translation has been the subject of at least two digested reads. See Burke 2010, Ephron 2010.

imprint, as well as more generally the marketing efforts being directed at pushing the novel.

Reviews appeared primarily in the broadsheets, although coverage was not exhaustive – a notable absence amongst publications reviewing the book was *The Guardian*. Reactions were mixed. While critics such as Berlins and Joan Smith felt that the book delivered on all fronts for the reader and merited the hype surrounding the author,<sup>926</sup> others were less certain. In the right-wing press, reviewers were less enamoured with Larsson's approach. Kerridge writing in *The Daily Telegraph* admired Lisbeth Salander but concluded: 'I can tell it is a book motivated by righteous anger, but it does not make me feel or share that anger.'<sup>927</sup> Similarly, Carla McKay writing in the *Daily Mail* noted the political dimension of Larsson's writing in somewhat disparaging terms.<sup>928</sup> While several reviewers focused on the themes of corruption and abuse of power,<sup>929</sup> only Peter Guttridge writing in *The Observer* suggested comparisons with Sjöwall and Wahlöö, as well as Mankell. Jonathan Gibbs, meanwhile, anchored Larsson firmly in the position that the author himself had intended in describing Salander as 'a kind of goth-geek Pippi Longstocking'.<sup>930</sup>

In the blogosphere, the response largely mirrored that of the print media, although bloggers were more inclined to point out the flaws in Larsson's writing. Martin Edwards, Maxine Clarke and Uriah Robinson all qualified their praise for the novel by stating that better editing would have been preferable.<sup>931</sup> Clarke was quick to identify the connection

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<sup>926</sup> Berlins 2008: 12, Smith 2008: 50.

<sup>927</sup> Kerridge 2008: 30.

<sup>928</sup> McKay 2008: 74.

<sup>929</sup> Guttridge 2008, Morse 2008, Perkins 2008.

<sup>930</sup> Gibbs 2008.

<sup>931</sup> Clarke 2008a, Robinson 2008b, Edwards 2009.

to Sjöwall and Wahlöö too, although she went on to make unfavourable comparisons with recent books released in English by Åsa Larsson and Liza Marklund.

### 9.2.2 *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (2009)

Upon publication a year later, in January 2009, *Millennium 2* was reviewed more widely than *Millennium 1*, reflecting the momentum being built around the series in Britain. Coverage typically remained in the broadsheet newspapers, although the book was also reviewed in the pages of the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*. The prevailing view amongst critics seems to have been that the book was a significant improvement on the first.<sup>932</sup>

Berlins remained impressed by Larsson, noting that despite being overly long, the novel was overall a riveting read, and suggesting that Larsson was writing in the style of Swedish noir.<sup>933</sup> Both Lawson and France noted that Larsson was writing in the tradition established by both Sjöwall and Wahlöö and Mankell, with France arguing that *Millennium 2* was decidedly stronger than the first book.<sup>934</sup> Boyd Tonkin also saw the similarities to Mankell, but argued that Larsson ‘is harder-boiled and sharper-tongued than his compatriot Henning Mankell. And his writing often feels like keen-edged steel compared to Mankell’s seasoned timber.’<sup>935</sup> Brandon Robshaw, engaging with the *Millennium* books for the first time, was persuaded of Larsson’s quality by the character of Lisbeth Salander, and he saw similarities between Salander and Høeg’s Miss Smilla.<sup>936</sup> Despite the positivity

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<sup>932</sup> While both *Kvinnor* and *Luftslottet* won the coveted Glass Key Award, *Elden* won the Swedish Crime Writers’ Academy Best Swedish Crime Novel Award, suggesting that this positive view of the second instalment was shared across borders. This may well reflect the preferences of critics in the field: Bergström identifies *Elden* as a police thriller. See ‘The Larsson-Norstedts E-Mail Exchange’ 2010: 49.

<sup>933</sup> Berlins 2009b: 13.

<sup>934</sup> Lawson 2009: 11, France 2009a: 22.

<sup>935</sup> Tonkin 2009b: 30.

<sup>936</sup> Robshaw 2009.

of many reviewers, especially towards Salander, not all agreed. *The Daily Telegraph's* reviewer remained unconvinced, accusing Larsson of negatively mythologising Salander.<sup>937</sup> More broadly, Heather O'Donoghue, while impressed by Salander, was concerned by the framing of the book, describing the beginning and ending as 'dodgy bookends'.<sup>938</sup>

Online reviewers once again mirrored their print colleagues' general responses, but tended to qualify their views more, being without print-space restrictions. Robinson, who had expressed scepticism about the hype surrounding book one, was noticeably impressed by book two.<sup>939</sup> Clarke's review was also more positive than her review for *Millennium 1*, potentially reflecting the hype that had developed around the series in the interim.<sup>940</sup> A particularly interesting review was written by Michael Carlson on his blog – as several before had done, he identified the similarities to Sjöwall and Wahlöö, but he went one step further, outlining why he believed Larsson had already taken on the mantle of being a modern classic.<sup>941</sup>

### 9.2.3 *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest* (2009)

*Millennium 3*, released in October 2009, also received a wide range of reviews, although slightly fewer than for *Millennium 2*. There was, however, development in terms of the media outlets granting coverage to the book. Not only did the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*

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<sup>937</sup> Jehu 2009.

<sup>938</sup> O'Donoghue 2009.

<sup>939</sup> Robinson 2009.

<sup>940</sup> Clarke 2009b.

<sup>941</sup> Carlson, a British-based American, is also a professional critic for various print publications (in addition to working as a commentator for televised basketball), lending a hybrid perspective to his reviews. See Carlson 2009b.



review the title, but even the *Daily Mirror* also commissioned a review.<sup>942</sup> In critical terms, reviewers had clearly been more enamoured with the second book in the series than they were with the third.

Berlins remained positive in his outlook, going so far as to see Larsson as being almost on the same level as Marcel Proust, although Berlins felt that he did not quite reach such a lofty elevation – his work, though poorly written, was ultimately fresh for a genre in need of revitalisation.<sup>943</sup> This broader, comparative approach was not unique to Berlins: Nick Cohen also reflected on whether Larsson was of sufficient quality to become a canonised writer, arguing that he was no Le Carré, and that he was a poor match for Ian Rankin.<sup>944</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* appears not to have reviewed the novel at all in its pages. Meanwhile, Joan Smith found this version of Pippi Longstocking to contain excessive gratuitous violence, while Andrew Neather speculated that the success of the books lay in the flatness and stolidity of the northern setting that meant ‘the foreign never quite becomes exotic or distracting’.<sup>945</sup>

The impression that a zenith was reached in the critical response to the trilogy when reviewing *Millennium 2* is confirmed by the response of bloggers to the third. While Clarke became almost hagiographic in her review, echoing the tone found in reviews of Sjöwall and Wahlöö in the mid-1970s after Wahlöö’s death, when she came to discuss the book itself she identified flaws.<sup>946</sup> Michael Carlson, while largely positive, argued that the novel’s

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<sup>942</sup> Forshaw 2009, McKay 2009, Sutton 2009.

<sup>943</sup> Berlins 2009a.

<sup>944</sup> Cohen 2009.

<sup>945</sup> Neather 2009, Smith 2009.

<sup>946</sup> Clarke 2009a.

strong political dimension might divide the readership, and also suggested that it detracts from the book's narrative.<sup>947</sup>

While many reviewers in both print and electronic media expressed regret in their reviews of *Millennium 3* that there would be no further books by Larsson, their tone and critiques indicated that this was possibly for the best. There is a sense that critics universally felt that *Millennium 3* was wanting in terms of finishing touches and that this affected the quality.

### 9.3 British Sales of *Millennium*

Dwelling on the sales figures for the three Stieg Larsson thrillers is not the best way to commemorate the genius of the Swedish author and journalist, who famously and sadly died at an early age before any of his extraordinary novels were published. But the figures do give some idea of the astonishing impact of the novels<sup>948</sup>

#### 9.3.1 Public Reception and Sales

Craighill described the initial response to *Millennium 1* in the UK as 'unfavourable' on the grounds that the initial hardback print run only managed sales of 8,000.<sup>949</sup> In the retelling of the publication story in subsequent press coverage, this sense of despair at sluggish sales was emphasised by Quercus founder Mark Smith, who detailed that retailers refused to stock Larsson's book and that the publisher was concerned enough to engage in unorthodox marketing practices.<sup>950</sup>

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<sup>947</sup> Carlson 2009a.

<sup>948</sup> 'In Praise of... Stieg Larsson' 2009: 38.

<sup>949</sup> Craighill 2013b: 26.

<sup>950</sup> A typical example of such a retelling is an interview with Nick Clark, see Clark 2010: 20. In practice, the suggestion that Quercus and MacLehose Press engaged in a kneejerk, panicked marketing strategy seems implausible. A piece in *The Bookseller* suggests that alongside the conscious rebranding of the book titles in English, a 'left-field' approach to promotion was always part of the plan. In London, free copies of *Millennium 1* were handed out in the street and left in taxi cabs, while a promotion was run with the *London*

In reality, there was never any serious likelihood that MacLehose Press would fail to make a commercial success of *Millennium 1*. Total sales of the first hardback edition were in excess of 14,000, with almost another 1,000 copies of the trade paperback edition sold on top of this, a most respectable figure for a foreign author's debut in English translation.<sup>951</sup> Responding to the positive critical reception for *Millennium 1*, the publisher announced via its blog in 2008 that it would be ordering a print run of 200,000 copies of the book for its paperback edition.<sup>952</sup> Given that in excess of 50,000 copies were sold in paperback during the second half of 2008, alongside the same figure again given away by the *London Evening Standard*, there were considerably more than 100,000 copies of *Millennium 1* in British circulation by the end of year. Effectively, the publisher announced that there would be a rush to buy copies of the book, precipitating precisely the sales boom they had forecast.

The commercial impact on MacLehose Press and its parent, Quercus, was significant. Its year-on-year revenue for 2010 rose 100% to £23.3 million, of which 78% was generated by Larsson sales.<sup>953</sup> While Quercus was commended for its response to the mass Larsson sales in an investment note,<sup>954</sup> an entire section of the note was dedicated to addressing how the publisher might maintain its revenues 'after Larsson peak' – indicating quite how unusual the profit bonanza generated by Larsson had been.<sup>955</sup> As of summer 2017,

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*Evening Standard* to give away 50,000 free copies. This kind of marketing strategy is too extensive and too expensive to have been done as an afterthought. See Broughton 2010.

<sup>951</sup> As established in the case of Ekman's *Blackwater*, which sold 16,000 copies in 1995 – and was considered to be a significant, commercial success for translated literature. Feay 1996.

<sup>952</sup> 'Larsson Goes to 5,867,497' 2008.

<sup>953</sup> 'Quercus Break Records with 2010 Results' 2011.

<sup>954</sup> 'Quercus Publishing' 2011: 4.

<sup>955</sup> *Ibid.*: 10.

Larsson books have recorded sales in excess of £34 million in the UK according to Nielsen BookScan, not including e-books or audiobooks.

### 9.3.2 UK Sales Observations

*Millennium 1* is the bestselling of the three titles, with just over 2.4 million copies sold as at 17 June 2017.<sup>956</sup> *Millennium 2* has sold just under 1.9 million copies, while *Millennium 3* has sold just over 1.8 million. Combined omnibus editions have sold approximately 25,000 copies in addition to these figures. Larsson's total sales in the UK as at 17 June 2017, as recorded by Nielsen, are 6,149,655 copies.<sup>957</sup>

Lifetime sales data for the bestselling editions of the Larsson *Millennium* books are set out in Table 1. It is interesting to note that sales volumes increased for hardback first editions and trade paperback editions: in the case of hardbacks, *Millennium 3* sold 13 times more copies than *Millennium 1*. In the case of the trade paperback edition, sales of *Millennium 3* were 36 times greater than those of *Millennium 1*. This trend was not present in the sales of the first paperback editions, where the highest number of total sales was recorded for *Millennium 1*, with a decline of around 10% in sales upon the release of *Millennium 2*, and a similar decrease for *Millennium 3*. A similar trend was identifiable in the release of the subsequent paperback editions as film tie-ins, with *Millennium 1* selling almost as many copies as *Millennium 2* and *Millennium 3* combined.

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<sup>956</sup> Stronger sales of the first book in a series are to be expected, given that many readers will not move on from the first. A similar pattern is observed in the case of Sjöwall and Wahlöö in Chapter 7.5.3.

<sup>957</sup> This figure also includes sales of Larsson's *The Expo Files: Articles by the Crusading Journalist*.

Table 1: Sales Figures for Selected Editions of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* Series

ISBN	Book	Publication Date	Sales Volume	Total Sales Value	RRP	Average Sale Price
<b>First Hardback Editions</b>						
9781847242532	<i>Millennium 1</i>	10/01/2008	14,847	£161,884.80	£20.00	£10.90
9781847245564	<i>Millennium 2</i>	08/01/2009	48,241	£507,560.20	£20.00	£10.52
9781906694166	<i>Millennium 3</i>	01/10/2009	196,647	£2,190,555.67	£18.99	£11.14
<b>Trade Paperback Editions (Airport/Export Sales)</b>						
9781847243492	<i>Millennium 1</i>	10/01/2008	962	£10,826.29	£11.99	£11.25
9781847245571	<i>Millennium 2</i>	08/01/2009	7,800	£89,291.67	£12.99	£11.45
9781906694173	<i>Millennium 3</i>	01/10/2009	36,665	£413,425.94	£12.99	£11.28
<b>First Paperback Editions</b>						
9781847245458	<i>Millennium 1</i>	14/06/2008	1,712,447	£9,233,811.83	£8.99	£5.39
9781906694180	<i>Millennium 2</i>	09/07/2009	1,510,230	£7,846,436.18	£8.99	£5.20
9781849162746	<i>Millennium 3</i>	23/01/2010	1,366,891	£6,896,934.12	£8.99	£5.05
<b>Second Paperback Editions (Film Tie-In)</b>						
9781849162883	<i>Millennium 1</i>	21/11/2009	547,628	£2,891,795.07	£7.99	£5.28
9781849163422	<i>Millennium 2</i>	29/07/2010	297,855	£1,600,799.46	£7.99	£5.37
9781849163439	<i>Millennium 3</i>	28/10/2010	200,042	£1,104,536.13	£7.99	£5.52

Almost three quarters of Larsson's sales in the UK, 4.58 million books, are accounted for by the first paperback editions, each published around six months after the initial release of their corresponding hardback edition. The sales figures for these titles in their first full-quarter and first full-year of sales, set out in Table 2, therefore provide insight into the rate at which these sales took place, reflecting the growth of the Larsson and *Millennium* phenomena. Despite falling overall sales as each instalment was released in paperback, sales in the first full-quarter increased dramatically, with first-quarter sales of *Millennium 3* almost ten times greater than those for *Millennium 1*.<sup>958</sup> It is also interesting to note that the percentage of the total sales of each edition sold in the first full-year increases over the series. Less than 10% of the total lifetime sales for *Millennium 1* were in its first year, while the corresponding figure for *Millennium 3* was 70%.

<sup>958</sup> Indeed, *Millennium 3* sold almost 100,000 copies in paperback in its first three days from release – one of the strongest performances for paperback fiction since records began. See Jones 2010.

Table 2: First Full-Quarter and Full-Year Sales Figures for the First Paperback Editions of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* Series

First Paperback Edition – First Full-Quarter and First Full-Year		
Book, ISBN	First Full-Quarter Volume	First Full-Year Volume <sup>959</sup>
<i>Millennium 1</i> , 9781847245458	46,281	187,267
<i>Millennium 2</i> , 9781906694180	131,436	710,502
<i>Millennium 3</i> , 9781849162746	423,967	1,044,341

The equivalent figures for hardback editions, set out in Table 3, make for interesting reading. The supposedly poor sales cited by Craighill are borne out to a degree – only around half of *Millennium 1* hardback sales occurred during the first full-year. This is in contrast to *Millennium 2*, where approximately two thirds of sales took place in the first full-year and *Millennium 3*, where 99% of sales took place in the first full-year. The development in hardback sales, when compared with the trends for paperback sales, demonstrate the overall development of the Larsson vehicle during 2009-10 in particular.

Table 3: First Full-Quarter and Full-Year Sales Figures for the First Hardback Editions of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* Series

First Hardback Edition – First Full-Quarter and First Full-Year		
Book, ISBN	First Full-Quarter Volume	First Full-Year Volume
<i>Millennium 1</i> , 9781847242532	4,766	7,327
<i>Millennium 2</i> , 9781847245564	29,544	43,831
<i>Millennium 3</i> , 9781906694166	100,648	195,332

In terms of longevity, *Millennium* continues to do well. The most recent editions of the series were released in June 2015 in paperback, and continue to sell strongly. *Millennium 1* sold approximately 6,000 copies in its first quarter on sale, and continues to sell in excess of 1,000 copies per quarter. *Millennium 2* and *Millennium 3* are selling around 20% fewer copies than *Millennium 1*, but also remain steady sellers. These strong sales are doubtless aided by the wide, continued availability of the books. In addition to being on sale via

<sup>959</sup> All full-year sales figures are calculated on the basis of using the first 13 reporting periods provided by Nielsen BookScan, in addition to any limited sales made ahead of the official publication date.

normal channels such as book shops and Amazon, the books are also stocked by the major supermarket Tesco, opening them up to a far broader base of potential customers.

### 9.3.3 How Do These Figures Compare?

Table 4: Comparison of Total Author Sales and Bestselling Title Sales

Total Author Sales and Bestselling Title Sales Comparison <sup>960</sup>				
	Author	Lifetime Sales	Bestselling Title	Title Sales
<i>Case study subject</i>	Stieg Larsson	6,149,655	<i>The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo</i>	2,417,343
<i>Translated authors from Scandinavian languages</i>	Karl Ove Knausgård	86,327	<i>A Death in the Family</i>	42,165
	Henning Mankell	1,690,485	<i>Faceless Killers</i>	170,248
	Jo Nesbø	3,292,135	<i>The Snowman</i>	539,613
<i>Non-Scandinavian translated authors</i>	Elena Ferrante	552,367	<i>My Brilliant Friend</i>	249,363
	Pierre Lemaitre	68,417	<i>Alex</i>	41,204
<i>British crime</i>	Robert Galbraith	900,883	<i>The Cuckoo's Calling</i>	437,288
<i>Megasellers</i>	Dan Brown	16,073,129	<i>The Da Vinci Code</i>	5,120,181
	E. L. James	12,448,727	<i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i>	4,781,019

It is difficult to compare the sales figures for Larsson's works conclusively with the entire market, although it is evident in terms of sales volume and value that Larsson is a remarkable case. Table 4 compares Larsson's lifetime sales with those of other comparable authors, in addition to the sales of each chosen author's bestselling title to date. Larsson has been conspicuously more successful than other notable Scandinavian authors of the twenty-first century who have appeared widely in English translation. Mankell, considered to be the writer who paved the way for Larsson, has excellent lifetime sales figures, but these pale into insignificance beside Larsson. Nesbø, meanwhile, has enjoyed exponential sales success, with remaining potential to develop on these figures over coming years.<sup>961</sup> Both Mankell and Nesbø have a greater spread of successful books: their bestselling titles account for just 10% and 16%, respectively, of their lifetime sales

<sup>960</sup> All figures for Larsson, Knausgård, Mankell and Nesbø as at 17 June 2017. All figures for Ferrante, Lemaitre and Galbraith as at 15 July 2017. All figures for Brown and James as at 9 September 2017.

<sup>961</sup> Larsson and Mankell will doubtless continue to sell in modest volumes, but as both are deceased they are unlikely to produce any further new, original works that can provide a boost to their total sales.

compared with *Millennium 1*, which represents 39% of Larsson's lifetime sales. Remarkably, meanwhile, Knausgård, who has been the subject of widespread coverage in British broadsheets and literary publications, has surprisingly low overall sales – indeed, the best-selling Knausgård ISBN to-date is the paperback edition of *A Death in the Family*, which has only sold just over 40,000 copies, and represents almost half of Knausgård's lifetime sales.<sup>962</sup>

Looking beyond the Scandinavian languages to authors translated from other European languages who have been subject to widespread interest, hype does not necessarily translate into enormous commercial success. In the case of Pierre Lemaitre, a French crime writer and several-times winner of the CWA International Dagger, his total sales are respectable but hardly record-breaking. Indeed, 60% of his lifetime sales are for his bestseller *Alex*. Similarly, the literary flavour of 2016, Elena Ferrante, is reliant on the success of *My Brilliant Friend*, which accounts for almost half of her lifetime sales. Nevertheless, her lifetime sales figures – five times greater than Knausgård's – are impressive in light of the fact that her books are translated, literary fiction. Seeking out a genre-related benchmark for comparison in the English language, the pseudonymous Robert Galbraith seems a fitting example. Once Galbraith's publisher became aware of the author's true identity, the marketing campaign to sell Galbraith might be considered comparable to that used to market Larsson. Both Larsson and Galbraith were first-time authors in genre fiction, with a degree of mystery attached to the author. Galbraith's sales are large by the standards of British crime fiction, but no match for either Larsson, or

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<sup>962</sup> The propensity for the literary establishment to imply that every member of the reading public has read Knausgård is taken up by Tim Parks in a 2014 article, see Parks 2014.



indeed Galbraith's alter ego, J.K. Rowling.<sup>963</sup> Looking to other megasellers of the twenty-first century, both Dan Brown and E. L. James have outsold Larsson by some margin. In Brown's case, he has the benefit of more books to rely upon – five different Brown titles have sold in excess of one million books, and *The Da Vinci Code* has sold in excess of five million copies across its combined editions. James, meanwhile, managed sales of more than three million copies for her first three books. There is a degree of similarity between James and Larsson, with their bestselling titles each accounting for just under 40% of their lifetime sales. As can be seen when comparing lifetime sales and bestselling title sales, Larsson is reaching for the category of megaseller in a way that other bestselling Scandinavians such as Mankell and Nesbø are not.

Table 5: Comparison of First Full-Quarter and Full-Year Sales for Paperback Editions

First Paperback Edition Comparison		
Book, ISBN	First Full-Quarter Volume	First Full-Year Volume
<i>Millennium 1</i> , 9781847245458	46,281	187,267
<i>Millennium 2</i> , 9781906694180	131,436	710,502
<i>Millennium 3</i> , 9781849162746	423,967	1,044,341
<i>Millennium 4</i> , 9781848667785	117,292	178,094
<i>Knausgård 1</i> , 9780099555162	1,189	4,244
<i>The Snowman</i> (Nesbø), 9780099520276, <sup>964</sup>	167,187	401,115
<i>The Troubled Man</i> (Mankell), 9780099548409, <sup>965</sup>	28,054	63,665

In terms of sales performance in the first full-quarter and full-year of sales, Larsson compares favourably with the competition, as is shown in Table 5. The only comparable writer is Nesbø, whose greatest hit, *The Snowman*, managed sales of more than 400,000 in

<sup>963</sup> Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, a stage script, sold 1.45 million copies in 2016 alone. See Campbell 2017.

<sup>964</sup> *The Snowman* was published two weeks before the end of the Nielsen reporting quarter. The figure stated in the table reflects the first full-quarter of sales, but an additional 47,613 copies were sold in this initial two-week period.

<sup>965</sup> *The Troubled Man* was published just prior to the beginning of a new quarter. The figure in the table reflects the first full-quarter of sales, but an additional 112 copies were sold prior to this period.

paperback in its first full-year.<sup>966</sup> What is clear is that Larsson is an undeniable commercial success in the context of translated Scandinavian literature as well as translated literature more generally, and that he performs well when compared to British crime fiction.

### 9.3.4 Separating Out E-books and the USA

Naturally, the degree of similarity in the American popular reception of the *Millennium* trilogy to the British reception has been high. This is reflected in high sales figures recorded by Nielsen. For example, in mid-2010, it was noted that Larsson had achieved total sales of 3 million books despite being on a publishing schedule almost one year behind that of the UK, where the figure stood at 2.3 million.<sup>967</sup> In terms of print sales, the North American reception has tended to mirror the British reception, to the extent that some media and critical coverage does not seek to separate the two.<sup>968</sup>

Where there is a marked difference is in relation to the impact of e-books on Britain and the USA, respectively. Figures from Nielsen BookScan do not include e-book sales, and e-book retailers are frequently cautious about disclosing sales figures on their respective platforms on the grounds of commercial sensitivity. In 2010, there was widespread media coverage of claims made by Amazon in the USA that it was selling 143 e-books via its Kindle store for every 100 hardback books it sold.<sup>969</sup> This was followed just days later by the news that Larsson was the first author to sell more than one million Kindle e-books

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<sup>966</sup> Nesbø had the additional advantage of being better established on the British literary scene when *The Snowman* was published, as it was his fifth Harry Hole novel in English translation.

<sup>967</sup> 'The Phenomenon That Is Stieg Larsson' 2010. The figure is particularly remarkable given that many of these sales were of imported UK editions with hardback editions of *Millennium 3* selling for up to USD 45. See Rich 2009.

<sup>968</sup> The parity in uptake of print editions in the UK and US is confirmed by Quercus' Marketing Manager Iain Millar in Flood 2010. Jute and McCoy, writing in Ireland, make little distinction between the UK and US. See Jute and McCoy 2011.

<sup>969</sup> Teather 2010.

via Amazon's US online store.<sup>970</sup> In July 2010, Larsson's trilogy topped the Kindle charts in both the USA and UK, and was additionally at the top of the Waterstone's e-book chart. Meanwhile, sales of Larsson's e-books in the UK were 'nowhere near the million mark', with the American e-book sector being far more mature than its British equivalent.<sup>971</sup>

André Jute and Andrew McCoy consider the significance of the Amazon Kindle in relation to Larsson's sales at some length, arguing that the real breakthrough came as a result of a price reduction for the e-reader and the release of new, superior hardware.<sup>972</sup> They note that through the availability of substantial, free samples of the *Millennium* trilogy on the Kindle platform, American readers were empowered to make book-buying decisions in a new and original way.<sup>973</sup> Jute and McCoy argue that the outcome was a word-of-mouth campaign in favour of the books, especially via Amazon reviews, that fed into sales on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>974</sup>

### 9.3.5 Library Lending

Berglund uses library lending to establish the popularity of writers.<sup>975</sup> Nielsen has run a panel similar to its BookScan service for British library lending since 2009. Data is typically only available commercially, and there is a partial disconnect between the true heyday of

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<sup>970</sup> Flood 2010.

<sup>971</sup> Ibid.

<sup>972</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 10%.

<sup>973</sup> The eventual explosion of the e-reader onto the British market is likely to have precipitated similar outcomes, but there is little to no data available to support this. A 2010 report by PricewaterhouseCoopers examining the emerging e-book trade notes that both publishers and readers in North America are more amenable to e-books than their European counterparts. See PricewaterhouseCoopers 2010.

<sup>974</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 11%.

<sup>975</sup> Berglund 2012b: 40. It should, however, be noted that Berglund has access to reliable, statistical data covering a long period of time in the Swedish context, while comparable data is not available for the UK, see *ibid.*: 54.

the *Millennium* trilogy, at least judging by sales, and the availability of LibScan. However, it is possible to glean some data. In mid-2010, Nielsen noted in a press release that just a few months after the release of *Millennium 3*, the book was at number 25 in the adult fiction chart for library lending.<sup>976</sup> At the end of 2010, the title ended as the sixth most borrowed book from UK libraries for the year with 133,000 loans.<sup>977</sup> *Millennium 1* and *Millennium 2* both managed in excess of 100,000 loans in 2010, ending the year on 122,000 and 109,000 loans respectively. There tends not to be longevity in the case of books such as Larsson's when it comes to library lending. In 2012, Larsson did not feature in the list of most borrowed authors or the top 20 chart of most borrowed works in the LibScan chart.<sup>978</sup> This is not surprising and has been observed elsewhere: Berglund notes that Larsson's library-lending figures in Sweden were modest compared to his sales figures, and that contemporaries such as Liza Marklund and Camilla Läckberg have had similar experiences.<sup>979</sup> Berglund argues that the sheer affordability of paperback editions has stolen readers who might have borrowed books but are persuaded instead to buy.

### 9.3.6 Literary Prizes

The rise of the literary award merits brief comment in relation to Larsson's experience in the UK. Having won the Glass Key Award in Scandinavia, it was clear that it was possible for *Millennium* to win prizes. In Britain, Larsson's award success was not as prolific as in Sweden and Scandinavia. *Millennium 1* was the book to have the most impact in terms of prizes. In 2008, he was awarded the ITV3 Crime Thriller Award for International Author

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<sup>976</sup> 'The Phenomenon That Is Stieg Larsson' 2010. The role of library lending as a mode of consumption is also considered in Chapter 10.2.1.

<sup>977</sup> Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol*, the number one title for 2010, managed 183,000 loans in the same period. See Jones 2011.

<sup>978</sup> Tivnan 2013.

<sup>979</sup> Berglund 2012b: 48.

of the Year on the basis of *Millennium 1*, while in 2009 he was also awarded the Crime Thriller of the Year Prize at the British Book Awards for the same book. Each *Millennium* book was shortlisted for the CWA International Dagger award, but none of them won. Of course, the role played by literary prizes of these kinds is not solely to rubber stamp mass impact in terms of commercial success, and it could be that prize juries felt there was no need for Larsson to win. While Larsson was beaten in the International Dagger in 2008 and 2009 by translations of French writers, it is particularly interesting that in 2010 he was beaten by Johan Theorin, a fellow Swede, who is far less well known than Larsson.<sup>980</sup>

## 9.4 A Critical and Commercial Smash Hit

### 9.4.1 The British Reception Digested

In terms of the transmission of *Millennium* to Britain, it is worth noting that the volume of press coverage it received outside Sweden was unusual for a title originally released in Scandinavia.<sup>981</sup> The British reception of the *Millennium* trilogy had been fairly positive even from the beginning when Larsson was an unknown to British reviewers. As the series was published, this developed into a stronger regard for the writer and his works that was probably grounded in the commercial success of the series, and possibly partly in response to the novelty of having posthumous, translated publications at the top of the bestseller charts. This trend towards increased positivity is easily observed in the trajectory followed by the right-wing press, which was initially lukewarm towards *Millennium 1*, with critics in the *Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph* largely underwhelmed. Yet, within the space of two

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<sup>980</sup> Although as a winner of the Best Swedish Crime Novel Award, the Glass Key, and the CWA John Creasey (New Blood) Dagger, there is no disputing Theorin's crime writing pedigree.

<sup>981</sup> Tapper 2011: 646.

years, they had become decidedly more positive, and *The Daily Telegraph's* Kerridge has written a number of articles in the years that have followed that are highly positive about Larsson and *Millennium*.<sup>982</sup>

Reviewers seem to have found *Millennium 2* the most satisfying of Larsson's books, with the non-professional reviewers in the form of bloggers particularly impressed by the step up from book one to book two. Reviews of *Millennium 3*, on the other hand, had already moved on to discussing the Larsson literary legacy and where his works fitted into the literary scene. This leaves the impression of a critical upward trajectory from book one to two, followed by a downward trajectory to book three.

The sales experienced by the books were, as detailed above, extraordinary. The financial impact on publisher MacLehose Press and the Larsson estate was significant, and the sheer number of copies of Larsson books in English translation in circulation was incredible, especially when compared to other writers and books. Similarly, the volumes of sales in the first quarters and first full-years of publication were illustrative of the degree of hype surrounding Larsson as he was published in Britain.

Jute and McCoy have argued that Larsson's mass-sales success was through serendipity. His books were launched at precisely the right moment into the nascent e-book market, taking advantage of a low pricing strategy before the sector came to be controlled by major publishing forces.<sup>983</sup> However, as has been noted previously, Jute and McCoy fail

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<sup>982</sup> This adoption of supposedly left-wing genre fiction by the right-wing media is nothing new. As noted in Chapter 7.2.1, liberal-conservative critics in Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s came to appreciate Sjöwall and Wahlöö despite their political views.

<sup>983</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 82%.

to distinguish between the British and American market in their assessment of the importance of e-books to Larsson's sales. In practice, while Larsson also enjoyed healthy electronic sales in the UK, what makes his success all the more remarkable is the sheer volume of hard-copy books sold in the twenty-first century in such a brief span of time.

What is apparent from considering sales and library-lending figures is that the public took to Larsson in their droves, regardless of what reviewers or prize juries had to say. The fact that these agents tended towards positivity in relation to Larsson clearly helped. Yet readers were often ignoring the criticism found in reviews about Larsson's style, the translation quality or politics and characterisation, suggesting that they were not taking the reviews altogether seriously. Instead, Larsson's success was achieved through the use of new marketing techniques for the twenty-first century: while he was sold by word of mouth, this hype was generated through MacLehose Press' initial give away and through the medium of online reviews on sites such as Amazon.

#### 9.4.2 Why This Reception?

When considering why the *Millennium* books enjoyed the impact that they did with British readers, it is clearly worth reflecting on whether this was a straightforward case of literary quality winning through. It would seem obvious from the distilled remarks of reviewers in all spheres about poor style and editing, alongside more specific comments such as those of Holmberg in relation to the quality of the English translation, that these are not

literary books.<sup>984</sup> Jute and McCoy argue in the strongest terms that Larsson's work was wanting in terms of quality.<sup>985</sup>

On the other hand, it ought to be noted that Larsson's attempt to vary the genre of each book in the series, with the first an orthodox crime novel, the second a police thriller and the third a political thriller demonstrates a keen awareness of trying to maintain some literary freshness.<sup>986</sup> Similarly, regardless of whether the books are of a good literary standard or not, Larsson's foreign success and prizes were clearly useful attributes to present the illusion to British readers that these were literary successes.<sup>987</sup> Likewise, the involvement of a publisher such as MacLehose lent a great deal of credibility to the books in terms of literary standards and bestseller potential, as well as the fact that a widely revered editor had been involved in the production of the English translation.

Beyond the use of Larsson's foreign reputation and a determined word-of-mouth marketing strategy by the publisher, there are other elements of the approach to marketing the books that may have formed the way they were received. As Claire Squires notes, cover designs are a conspicuous form of branding strategy that relate to the reader experience.<sup>988</sup> The use of a close-up photo of a woman on each book's front cover set apart the British editions of *Millennium* from most other Scandinavian translations being

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<sup>984</sup> Holmberg states that he feels 'strongly that the English translation is stilted, reads badly, is full of unwarranted cuts, deletions, changes, and misunderstandings, and gives no true impression of the style, atmosphere, or storytelling "voice" of Stieg Larsson's novels.' See Holmberg 2011a: 40-1.

<sup>985</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 78%.

<sup>986</sup> The strategy is identified by Bergström, who is quoted by Gedin in 'The Larsson-Norstedts E-Mail Exchange' 2010: 49. This was definitely a conscious approach adopted by Larsson, who in his final email to Gedin before his death wrote: 'It is most satisfying to see that Lasse noticed that I had changed the genre from one novel to the next: he cottoned on exactly to what I was trying to do.' See *ibid.*: 51.

<sup>987</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 9%. As the authors note, these kinds of opportunities are typically not available to native English writers, who cannot rely on a literary reputation generated in a different language.

<sup>988</sup> Squires 2007: 89.



published in Britain during the second half of the 2000s.<sup>989</sup> This raises the intriguing question of whether there was a deliberate attempt to use sex to sell the books, and more specifically whether it was seeking to capitalise on the general perceptions in Britain of Sweden, in particular, as sexually liberal.<sup>990</sup> The scope of this thesis does not extend to a detailed examination of paratextual elements, but Broomé has noted that this type of book cover design rapidly became a new way to signal Scandinavian identity via book covers.<sup>991</sup> Similarly, the commercial success and mythology associated with Larsson meant that his name became a byword for the *Millennium* series, and more generally for books in the emerging Nordic Noir genre.<sup>992</sup> The efficacy of these initiatives in promoting Larsson to British readers evidently worked, given the subsequent consideration of them in scholarship.

Larsson being dead contributed significantly to his celebrity and was also an important factor in his British reception.<sup>993</sup> There had been uncertainty about acquiring his works amongst many English-language publishing houses on the grounds that a deceased author will deliver no further books, and that they cannot carry out promotional duties. In the case of Larsson and *Millennium*, of course, this did not present an obstacle in practice. As detailed in Chapter 9.5, sequels to Larsson's original works were commissioned during the 2010s, while his publisher MacLehose was more than happy to speak to the British press on his deceased author's behalf.<sup>994</sup> In terms of promoting the books themselves,

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<sup>989</sup> Broomé 2014c: 106.

<sup>990</sup> For example, the expectation amongst British reviewers of Sjöwall and Wahlöö that the books would be ridden with sex, and the reviewers' constant ability to find sexual content where there was little to none. See Chapter 7.4.2.

<sup>991</sup> Broomé 2014c: 107. Broomé sees it as a trope of British publishing as early as 2011. See *ibid.*: 119.

<sup>992</sup> In the words of Bloom, 'an author's name may stand in for any one particular title, becoming, as it were, a label for a self-contained oeuvre'. Prominent examples include Agatha Christie, Catherine Cookson, Ian Fleming, and Stephen King. See Bloom 2008: 38.

<sup>993</sup> Ohlsson, et al. 2014: 37.

<sup>994</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 91%.

there was an advantage for MacLehose Press inasmuch as Larsson's death meant that the trilogy could be marketed to readers with an air of finality – a scarcity value could be applied to the works on the basis that there was little else for readers to engage with.<sup>995</sup> With regard to promoting an author brand to British readers, MacLehose strongly asserts that this was not the case with Larsson: 'It has been said that it was – a vile thought – a marketing plus that he had died. I don't hold with that one way or the other.'<sup>996</sup> Despite the insistence of MacLehose that no marketing capital was derived from Larsson being a dead author, Louise Nilsson observes that a dominant factor in the marketing of Larsson was the use of regular allusions to his being deceased.<sup>997</sup> In terms of influencing literary professionals, this offers an advantage in that there tends to be an aversion to speaking ill of the dead.<sup>998</sup> The finality that applies to the author's work also applies to their personal brand. It typically means that readers can form stronger links with the author in question, and that it is easier for an author to complement audience ideals, as the author is unable to re-emerge and contradict such perceptions.<sup>999</sup> In the case of Larsson, Jute and McCoy go so far as to suggest that the author also exuded 'suicide chic just like Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf' having lived dangerously and died prematurely.<sup>1000</sup> This was in evidence even in early coverage of Larsson in the British media, with MacLehose describing Larsson's smoking and workaholic tendencies to Forshaw in terms of quiet admiration.<sup>1001</sup> Despite MacLehose's later protestations, Larsson's being dead was clearly leveraged by

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<sup>995</sup> There are similarities in this regard with the way that Sjöwall and Wahlöö were presented to readers, especially in Sweden. See Chapter 7.4.3.

<sup>996</sup> Interview in Kythor Forthcoming. Yet MacLehose makes clear that many of the other anglophone publishers to reject Larsson did so on the very basis that he was dead.

<sup>997</sup> Nilsson 2016: 10.

<sup>998</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 32%.

<sup>999</sup> Ohlsson, et al. 2014: 38.

<sup>1000</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 82%.

<sup>1001</sup> Forshaw 2008.

his publishers for promotional purposes, and British readers were amenable to such triggers.

Thematically, there are three clear issues that can be identified as appealing directly to the British reading public in the period from 2008 to 2010: the role of finance and capitalism in society, the reading needs of the wider public in times of societal change and crisis, and the presence of a female protagonist.

It is likely that Larsson's negative portrayal of capitalism contributed significantly to the positive British reception. Larsson wrote the *Millennium* series a decade after the Swedish financial crisis of the early 1990s, and there is nothing to suggest that he possessed financial-market soothsaying abilities. In her 2015 book *Crunch Lit*, Katy Shaw examines the trend of fiction that represents and engages with the events of the 2007-8 financial crisis.<sup>1002</sup> In the shape of his trilogy, with a particular focus on *Millennium 1*, Larsson produced books that contributed to this wave of Crunch Lit in the late 2000s. Jute and McCoy, for instance, argue that the choice of a crooked financier as the initial villain in *Millennium 1*, even if the true villain is eventually revealed to be a serial killer, acted as a particularly strong draw to anglophone readers at the time of release.<sup>1003</sup> Literary critic Tonkin directly attributes Larsson's stellar success to the performance of national economies and his late arrival onto British shores, as opposed to other European markets.<sup>1004</sup> Tonkin believes that it was only as a result of the 2008 credit crunch that British readers became interested in Larsson. What can be observed in the case of

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<sup>1002</sup> Shaw 2015: 8. Scholarship looking specifically at Crunch Lit is fairly limited, with Shaw the main contributor. See, for example, Shaw 2014. However, the trend was identified at an earlier stage, with Tonkin ruminating in 2009 on the possible literary silver lining offered by the credit crunch. See Tonkin 2009a.

<sup>1003</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 78%.

<sup>1004</sup> Tonkin 2009b: 30.

*Millennium* is that it inadvertently, in the British context, became a hybrid genre series of books: thrillers crossed with Crunch Lit.<sup>1005</sup>

More generally, the need for escapism in challenging times is a trend identified in the literature of the twenty-first century by James Acheson, who notes that an increasingly complex world has given rise to increasingly complex literature.<sup>1006</sup> The response from contemporary readers is a desire for literature that they can navigate as there is a move towards complexity, while also providing them with distraction from the social issues of the day.

The need for navigable literature in an ever-increasingly complex world is nodded at by Jute and McCoy, who suggest that the *Millennium* series benefited from an enormous pool of readers as a result of crossover appeal, including to readers of fantasy fiction.<sup>1007</sup> This seems entirely credible. Larsson had a longstanding interest in sci-fi, having founded and edited several zines, before later serving as Chair of the Scandinavian Science Fiction Association and editor of its journal.<sup>1008</sup> Holmberg provides extensive detail not only on Larsson's experiences of writing sci-fi in the 1960s and 1970s, but also reflects in some depth on the way it shaped him and his crime writing.<sup>1009</sup> Thus, it would appear that a higher share of Larsson's British readership was drawn from genre backgrounds other than simply crime and thrillers, with such readers appreciating the opportunity to read a

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<sup>1005</sup> The use of hybridity is not uncommon during times of societal uncertainty, as is seen in the case of *Smilla*. See Chapter 8.4.2.

<sup>1006</sup> Acheson 2017: 1. Acheson observes that much contemporary literary fiction is sufficiently complex that it is confusing to present-day readers.

<sup>1007</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 81%.

<sup>1008</sup> Pettersson 2011: 23.

<sup>1009</sup> Holmberg 2011b.

book reflecting their present-day concerns outside of their usual genre.<sup>1010</sup> Effectively, readers were being borrowed from other genres. This reflects changes to the book market observed in the late 1990s and early 2000s in relation to the perceptions of genre. In the case of children's literature, for instance, readers from other age and genre categories began to be drawn to children's books.<sup>1011</sup> The emergence of authors such as E. L. James also reflects the tendency to draw on diverse Internet-based groups of readers as potential consumers of books.<sup>1012</sup> While this is a demonstration of the growing acceptance of a plurality of genres amongst the wider reading public, it also illustrates the move by publishers towards securing new consumers from what would previously have been unlikely sources.

The appeal of a strong female protagonist from Scandinavia had clearly gripped readers previously. In the case of Lisbeth Salander, many reviewers cited her as the highlight of the books and the comparisons to *Smilla* are unavoidable.<sup>1013</sup> These similarities were not lost on other reviewers, such as Brandon Robshaw, who saw *Millennium* as *Smilla* reinvented.<sup>1014</sup> This is unsurprising, given that reading and genre trends rarely adhere to neat timespans, and while genres flourish in certain periods and not others, they are easily recycled and repurposed.<sup>1015</sup> Consequently, the qualities that drew reviewers and readers to *Smilla* were still conceivably alive and well in the late 2000s.

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<sup>1010</sup> The use of a Gothic heroine in the shape of Lisbeth Salander, alongside the grotesquery of much of the plot in *Millennium* would arguably also draw readers of horror and other related genres. See Leffler 2016.

<sup>1011</sup> Squires 2007: 161, Bloom 2008: 130-48. In the words of Claire Squires, 'in order to gain broader recognition, these children's books extended their appeal outside of their traditional markets of children and young adults, and their parents, teachers and librarians. Just as children's books came to be awarded adult literary prizes, so they also found adult readers outside of the usual markets for children's books.' See Squires 2007: 165-6.

<sup>1012</sup> Literary agents now reportedly consider established fan-fiction writers with dedicated followings to offer tremendous potential in the traditional world of book publishing. See Ting Lipton 2015.

<sup>1013</sup> See Chapter 8.2.1.

<sup>1014</sup> Robshaw 2009.

<sup>1015</sup> Bloom 2008: 35.

Beyond considerations of literary merit, marketing strategies, thematic strands and the sociocultural situation of British readers, there are a couple of other points worthy of note in a reflection of why the *Millennium* books had the impact they did. Firstly, that Larsson in Britain almost certainly benefited from being consumed in translation. Jute and McCoy argue that the standard of the books, purely objectively, is not high enough that an English-language debut author without the backing of foreign success would ever have secured the prestigious publishing deal with MacLehose Press, or the subsequent approval of reviewers and readers.<sup>1016</sup> The cachet of being a translation papers over some of the tangible cracks identified by critics in Larsson's work, while also working as a marketing tool in itself, implying a degree of exoticism that would be absent from a native author's work and thus drawing once again upon the need for escapist literature. The impact on the wider public of Larsson being deceased should also not be underestimated in this regard, as, despite MacLehose's protestations otherwise, it acted as a key marketing advantage. Secondly, it is important to remember that the mass impact of the *Millennium* books is the result of the hype generated by all of the factors discussed previously. Huge numbers of readers were drawn in by the newspaper coverage and word of mouth simply to see what the fuss was about, rather than because they were actively seeking out escapist, crossover literature. The hype related to translated literature may have helped in this regard, as it further added to the intrigue of the situation.

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<sup>1016</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 54%.

## 9.5 David Lagercrantz

### 9.5.1 *Millennium*: A Sequel for the 2010s

It had long been suggested that a partially completed fourth instalment of the *Millennium* series authored by Larsson existed on a laptop being held hostage from the Larsson estate by his partner Eva Gabrielsson, however, this book has not, to date, seen the light of day.<sup>1017</sup> Writing at the turn of the decade, Jute and McCoy speculated that the 2010s were likely to see the publication of one or more *Millennium* sequels, potentially making use of a ghost-writer as was done with deceased writer Robert Ludlum.<sup>1018</sup> It was not long before this prophecy came to pass. In 2013, an agreement was reached between Lagercrantz and the estate of Larsson for the publication of a fourth *Millennium* book by Norstedts; the English-language rights were acquired by MacLehose Press with a simultaneous publication date scheduled for August 2015.<sup>1019</sup>

### 9.5.2 The Other Author: David Lagercrantz

David Lagercrantz (1962 -) is probably best known in Sweden for being a member of the prominent Lagercrantz family. His father, Olof Lagercrantz, was a literary critic and former *DN* editor,<sup>1020</sup> while his sister is a well-known actress. He has published a range of fiction and non-fiction books, but prior to being engaged as the Larsson replacement, he was perhaps best known for having ghost-written the autobiography of footballer Zlatan Ibrahimović.

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<sup>1017</sup> Singh 2015a.

<sup>1018</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011: 77%.

<sup>1019</sup> Farrington 2013. Gabrielsson described Lagercrantz as a 'totally idiotic choice', while others were more optimistic. See Singh 2015a.

<sup>1020</sup> Olof Lagercrantz also appeared as a witness for the defence in Mykle's obscenity trial. For an in-depth profile of David Lagercrantz, see Cooke 2015.

While Lagercrantz's upper-class credentials might seem to set him apart from Larsson, Gedin justified Lagercrantz's selection on the grounds that he satisfied a rigorous set of criteria for the new writer.<sup>1021</sup> She also noted that Lagercrantz worked well when set a framework for his work, citing Ibrahimović's autobiography.<sup>1022</sup>

Lagercrantz had been published in English translation twice prior to his regeneration as Larsson. *I Am Zlatan Ibrahimović* was published in 2013 by Penguin Books in a translation by Ruth Urbom.<sup>1023</sup> This has sold modestly, despite being shortlisted for the William Hill sports book of the year, with the paperback edition selling only 1,817 copies since publication. MacLehose Press added Lagercrantz to their list, publishing his novel, *Fall of Man in Wilmslow*, in a translation by George Goulding in May 2015, just a few months before the release of *Millennium 4*.<sup>1024</sup> To date, this has sold 2,635 copies in the UK, with around three quarters being sold in paperback.

### 9.5.3 Critical Reception of Lagercrantz's *Millennium*

There was widespread coverage of Lagercrantz's first *Millennium* book, the fourth in the series, with considerable newspaper interest in the months prior to publication, and, for the first time, the opportunity to interview the author, which naturally changed the promotional and marketing strategies around the books. In the case of the second

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<sup>1021</sup> Unfortunately, Gedin does not disclose what these criteria were, but it seems unlikely the position was open to all.

<sup>1022</sup> Kerridge 2015b.

<sup>1023</sup> Given that Lagercrantz has acknowledged he made up all quotes attributed to Ibrahimović in the book, this is arguably a work of literary non-fiction. See Singh 2015b.

<sup>1024</sup> *Fall of Man in Wilmslow* is a fictionalised account of the police investigation into the suicide of Alan Turing in 1954. Reviews were generally positive. See, for instance, Forshaw 2015, Root 2015. According to Engles, the publication of the novel was a deliberate move by MacLehose Press to establish Lagercrantz's writing credentials with British readers and critics in his own right, making it effectively part of the wider marketing strategy for the fourth *Millennium* novel. See interview in Kythor Forthcoming.



Lagercrantz book, published in September 2017, the critical reception has thus far been limited and is only briefly surveyed here.

### 9.5.3.1 *The Girl in the Spider's Web* (2015)

The critical response to the first follow-up to the Larsson *Millennium* books – the fourth instalment of the trilogy – received widespread coverage upon publication in the late summer of 2015.<sup>1025</sup> Old hands at reviewing Larsson, both Berlins and Joan Smith filed reviews with their respective newspapers.<sup>1026</sup> In Berlins' case, he was overwhelmingly impressed by Lagercrantz's effort, recommending that *Times* readers read the novel, although he noted that he was both a more subdued writer than Larsson and tended towards being more long-winded. Smith, on the other hand, felt that Lagercrantz had over-complicated a winning formula, and had presented what seemed to her like an unauthorised copy rather than the genuine, Larsson article. This was qualified by Smith, who felt that Lagercrantz was a more talented novelist in his own right. Alison Flood and Kerridge were both inclined to accept the change in author, with both expressing that they had at times forgotten that Lagercrantz was involved.<sup>1027</sup> Unlike Smith, Kerridge argued that Lagercrantz's own work was dull, but that this did not affect the Larsson novel. Lawson and Clark both saw Lagercrantz's efforts as workmanlike, and felt that he was a safe pair of hands in which to leave the project.<sup>1028</sup> Not all critics were satisfied, however. *The Daily Mail's* Geoffrey Wansell was thoroughly unimpressed, expressing disappointment that a book of which he had had such high expectations was so dull. Instead, he noted that 'the pace is ponderous and the plotting over-complicated. Where

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<sup>1025</sup> For a further summary of critical responses, see Shaffi 2015.

<sup>1026</sup> Berlins 2015, Smith 2015.

<sup>1027</sup> Flood 2015, Kerridge 2015c.

<sup>1028</sup> Clark 2015, Lawson 2015.

one sentence would do, he uses three paragraphs. The characters feel like marionettes with the exception of a dazzling savant child while the astonishing drive of the original trilogy has disappeared.<sup>1029</sup> Wansell aside, though, the general sense from most reviewers was that the gamble on Lagercrantz had paid off and that they would welcome further instalments.<sup>1030</sup>

### 9.5.3.2 *The Girl Who Takes an Eye for an Eye* (2017)

At the time of writing, only limited critical responses to the fifth instalment in the *Millennium* series were available, as the book was released in September 2017. However, reviews have appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Times*.<sup>1031</sup> Margie Orford, a first-time reviewer of the *Millennium* franchise, was unimpressed. She took the line that Lagercrantz had done a poor job, removing both the adrenaline found in previous instalments and the prominence of Lisbeth Salander. Berlins, one of the few critics to have reviewed every book in the series, was similarly disappointed. His highly negative review also admonished Lagercrantz for omitting to include Salander in much of the narrative, while calling upon the publishers to cease publishing further instalments in the series. Kerridge, who had oscillated between negativity and positivity in relation to the series, echoed Berlins' sentiments. Despite the perceived negativity towards the title, its publisher MacLehose argued this was positive, indicating that critics and readers still cared about the series, and said he was happy to continue publishing Lagercrantz-authored additions to the series.<sup>1032</sup>

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<sup>1029</sup> Wansell 2015.

<sup>1030</sup> As in the case of the original three books, the response from bloggers tended to reflect the mainstream media reception. See, for instance, Sisterson 2015.

<sup>1031</sup> Berlins 2017, Kerridge 2017, Orford 2017.

<sup>1032</sup> Djurberg 2017: 16.

#### 9.5.4 Public Reception and Sales

In terms of the public response to *Millennium 4* and *Millennium 5*, sales were strong although not on the same level as the sales boom experienced by the original three titles at the end of the 2000s.

The 2015 *Millennium 4* hardback edition has sold just over 100,000 copies, while the paperback edition released in 2016 has sold almost 200,000 copies. Adding in respectable sales of trade paperback editions, the current total sales volume stands at 315,025.<sup>1033</sup> While this total figure is modest when compared to the sales achieved by Larsson, it remains impressive when compared to general sales trends.<sup>1034</sup> Sales of both hardback and trade paperback editions were only surpassed by *Millennium 3*, demonstrating that there was a keen initial interest amongst readers in buying copies. In its first full-quarter, the crucial period running until Christmas 2015, the hardback edition sold 31,280 copies, while the paperback edition released in spring 2016 ahead of the summer holidays sold 117,292 copies in its first full-quarter. In terms of sales value, sales of *Millennium 4* have exceeded £2.3 million to date, representing a healthy return for MacLehose Press.

*Millennium 5*, published on 7 September 2017, sold 7,927 copies across its hardback and trade paperback editions in its first three days on sale, and added a further 7,341 sales in the subsequent fortnight, placing the initial sales volume in the first eighteen days at 15,268 copies. Sales remained strong throughout the autumn of 2017, and by 30 December 2017, total sales of *Millennium 5* stood at 53,898, of which almost a quarter

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<sup>1033</sup> As at 9 September 2017.

<sup>1034</sup> Engles notes that sales of *Millennium 4* were not ‘epoch-defining’. See interview in Kythor Forthcoming. There is perhaps a degree of false modesty in this statement, given that the paperback edition was the bestselling translated book in Britain in 2016. See Swope 2017.

were trade paperback editions. In spite of the poorer reviews for the fifth instalment in the *Millennium* series, the sales performance up to Christmas therefore exceeded that of *Millennium 4* in the autumn of 2015.

### 9.5.5 Lagercrantz ≠ Larsson

Upon initial examination, it could be argued that there were clear parallels between Lagercrantz's and Larsson's receptions in Britain – not least in terms of hardback sales figures, which were highly respectable. Yet the response to Lagercrantz has been wholly couched in terms of Larsson's legacy and the original works, which were consumed by the vast majority of critics and ordinary readers during a brief window of time at the end of the 2000s. Thus the largely positive response to Lagercrantz's first book can be ascribed to a degree of nostalgia amongst reviewers, while the strong sales reflect the strength of the Larsson and *Millennium* brands fostered by MacLehose Press over a period of several years through marketing campaigns, reissues and film tie-ins. Larsson may have had a reputation based on his reception in Sweden, Germany, France and elsewhere to fall back on when he arrived in Britain, but this is clearly not comparable with the boost provided to Lagercrantz by having Larsson's reputation back him up.<sup>1035</sup>

In contrast to the period 2008-2010, by the mid-2010s, Britain's economic and social circumstances had changed again as the country underwent years of austerity. To an extent the anger of the late 2000s directed solely at financial institutions, common to Crunch Lit,

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<sup>1035</sup> Furthermore, Lagercrantz's existing role in the British literary polysystem was one of modest respectability, as a biographer and literary novelist shortlisted for various prizes, while Larsson benefitted from none of this cachet.

has been replaced by other emerging trends, including ‘Brexit’.<sup>1036</sup> This means that Lagercrantz’s books do not in themselves offer a conduit for the contemporary public zeitgeist, nor do they in fact address issues of capitalism or progressive feminism to the same extent that Larsson’s originals did. The critical element that generated such an impact for the original Larsson books was the ability to draw in readers from outside the immediately obvious readers for his works on the grounds of them being crossover, hybrid works. In the case of Lagercrantz, his works have failed to replicate this effect with British readers – the sales volumes recorded for Lagercrantz are far more commensurate with what would be expected for any fairly major writer within the genre, rather than that of a bestselling, commercial super star.<sup>1037</sup>

While the *Millennium* reboot has by no means been a commercial failure for MacLehose Press, it has not been the commercial smash hit that the original books in 2008 and 2009 were. This is partially a reflection of straightforward changes in parameters, such as the loss of the original author, but it is also a reflection of the changes in the sociocultural situation of British readers in the mid-2010s compared with the late 2000s.

## 9.6 Literature for the Credit Crunch

Larsson’s *Millennium* series represents a megaselling phenomenon, whose global impact has been dramatic. In the British context, readers and critics have both been vociferous consumers and proponents of Larsson’s books, and by extension, the works of other

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<sup>1036</sup> Jon Day examines ‘Brexit’ as an emerging trend in British literature in a 2017 article in the *Financial Times*. See Day 2017. According to Alex Preston, the first serious Brexit novel to be published is Ali Smith’s 2016 novel *Autumn*. See Preston 2016.

<sup>1037</sup> It should be noted, for instance, that Le Carré’s *A Legacy of Spies* was published at the same time as Lagercrantz’s second novel, and in the initial weeks after publication was selling more than two copies for every copy of *Millennium 5* sold. MacLehose argued that *Millennium 5* was at a natural disadvantage and would have performed more strongly if it had not been up against Le Carré. See Djurberg 2017: 16.

Scandinavian books and cultural products imported to Britain during the 2010s, including Lagercrantz's two *Millennium* novels. The following reflects on why this happened, and sets out the position of *Millennium* and Larsson in the British literary polysystem.

Crime fiction is a genre that has enjoyed a boom since the turn of the millennium, unmatched in terms of diversity and unparalleled in terms of popularity since the British Golden Age of crime almost eight decades ago.<sup>1038</sup> The British reception of Larsson reflects a series of changes to twenty-first-century readers and their reading habits, particularly in relation to genre. As well as the growing mainstreaming of formerly niche genres such as crime, there is an increasing tendency towards literary crossovers and towards borrowing readers. *Millennium* was a crime/thriller series with sci-fi/fantasy stylistic tropes, that also fitted into the Crunch Lit trend. This enabled it to appeal to a wider audience and secure a mass of readers through borrowing them from other reading backgrounds and genres, especially younger readers accustomed solely to reading genre fiction.

The case of *Millennium* also illustrates the ways in which the consumption of books has changed, with the emergence of the megaseller.<sup>1039</sup> While this chapter contrasts Larsson and *Millennium* with other comparable authors and works from the past decade in terms of translated origins and genre background, Larsson's explosion into the public consciousness means that there are better grounds for comparison with authors such as Dan Brown and E. L. James. This has contributed to the hype surrounding the series in

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<sup>1038</sup> Armstrong 2013.

<sup>1039</sup> 'Megasellers' sell far more books than even bestsellers, but only a few of them can be expected to occur globally each decade. See Steiner 2014.

a way that would not have occurred had sales been lower, thus contributing to further sales. In terms of appealing to book buyers, Larsson arrived in Britain at the perfect moment, in the midst of the UK credit crunch, with the stamp of authenticity provided by publisher MacLehose. There was an awareness of this, given MacLehose Press' decision to order an initial paperback print run of 200,000 copies. Further weight was lent to this approach by the enhanced degree of celebrity imbued in Larsson by his being dead. The carefully orchestrated and well-funded campaign to market *Millennium* succeeded in producing extensive word-of-mouth recommendations, driving further coverage and sales.<sup>1040</sup> While e-books are known to have played a prominent role in the success of *Millennium* in the USA, this was not the case to the same extent in Britain.<sup>1041</sup>

As Craighill notes, international bestsellers can emerge from even the most unlikely of sources, including a peripheral language area, such as Swedish, and in the shape of a writer who has been widely critiqued for poor writing style.<sup>1042</sup> British readers in the late 2000s were reeling from the impact of the financial crisis, and *Millennium* offered them an accessible crime-fiction-based form of Crunch Lit responding to this, while also appealing to the readers of various other genres. This potent combination of topicality and reader mass pushed Larsson and his series towards the very centre of the British literary polysystem.<sup>1043</sup>

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<sup>1040</sup> The true extent of this impact remains unclear, despite Jute and McCoy's assertion otherwise. See Jute and McCoy 2011: 10%. Examinations of online communications via review sites, forums and other channels between individual readers may have much to offer in developing a better understanding of the impact that new modes of book consumption have on translated literature. An early example of such an approach is found in Wirtén's study of message board threads pertaining to English-language translations of *Smilla*. See Wirtén 2004.

<sup>1041</sup> A fruitful future avenue of research would be to examine e-book sales of translated Scandinavian books in Britain during the 2010s, should appropriate data become available.

<sup>1042</sup> Jute and McCoy 2011, Craighill 2013b: 24.

<sup>1043</sup> Craighill argues that Larsson is a resounding example of the potential for writers from smaller literatures to circumvent cultural hierarchies. See Craighill 2013b: 27.

The emergence of Nordic Noir in the late 2000s and early 2010s means that Larsson and his books have remained in a position of centrality to date. The wider impact on Scandinavian translated literature has also been one of collective movement towards the centre of the polysystem, which has been reflected in the surge in translations from the Scandinavian languages being published in Britain.<sup>1044</sup>

It would appear that British readers of the mid-2010s are less receptive to *Millennium* than they were in the late 2000s, meaning that Lagercrantz has produced, in the form of *Millennium 4* and *Millennium 5*, bestsellers, rather than megasellers. While Lagercrantz did not take up a position of centrality in the British literary polysystem corresponding to Larsson's hypercentral one, he is clearly in a relatively central position. His continuation of the *Millennium* series also contributes to maintaining the presence of the books themselves in the centre of the polysystem.

As to whether Larsson's position in the polysystem will endure: only time will tell. His books continue to sell strongly, and for the time being are benefitting from the publication of Lagercrantz sequels. Larsson has become a brand, interchangeable with his book titles and the genre as a whole. However, a gradual shift away from the centre of the British literary polysystem would appear inevitable given that, as Bloom notes, 'the bestseller is the one style of book that both succeeds and is destroyed by its own appeal to a singular and momentary contemporaneity.'<sup>1045</sup> The real success of *Millennium* was its success in fulfilling the polysystemic needs of Britain in the late 2000s and matching the zeitgeist.

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<sup>1044</sup> Giles 2018.

<sup>1045</sup> Bloom 2008: 37.





# 10 Conclusions

*'Maybe "borealism" could be a name for the Southern preconceived ideas about those who live at northern latitudes? In any case, it seems as if these ideas are in the best of health.'*

(Kjartan Fløgstad 2007: 14.  
Translation by Guy Puzey  
in Giles, et al. 2016: 9.)



# 10 Conclusions

Having presented the five case studies in this thesis in full, the present chapter will outline and analyse the overarching trends that can be identified from these cases, situating these observations in the context generally of the evolving publishing industry, and more specifically in terms of the role played by Scandinavian books in Britain over the past century. While highlighting significant and original findings from individual case studies, this chapter will also draw connections between the case studies, where appropriate. The chapter will initially reflect on the business of publishing and the way that it interacts with and influences the British literary polysystem by acting as a conduit for Scandinavian books, before going on to examine the way that the consumption and marketing of such books take place in the British market. Subsequently, the chapter will trace the development and emergence of genre fiction over the duration covered by the thesis, before reflecting upon how representative the selected case studies are of the wider Scandinavian literary transmission to Britain, and what generalisations can be made using the findings of this thesis. Finally, this chapter will return to the original research questions and provide responses to each in light of the evidence provided through the case studies, before concluding with a series of final remarks.

## 10.1 The Business of Publishing

### 10.1.1 Publishers

Recent decades have seen a significant increase in awareness of Scandinavian books in Britain: the case studies of *Smilla* and *Millennium* both demonstrate widespread consumption and appreciation of the respective publications by British readers. This has

been reflected in a real-terms increase in the number of Scandinavian fiction books that are published in English translation.<sup>1046</sup> Where the range of suitable subjects for case studies during earlier phases of the thesis' scope was limited, no such difficulties were encountered later on. This reflects a number of developments in the British publishing industry and the literary polysystem, but the role played by specific individuals in this regard should not be overlooked.

One key figure of interest in this context is the publisher Christopher MacLehose (1940-). MacLehose's five-decade career in publishing has seen him edit P.G. Wodehouse at Cresset Press, rise to editorial director of Chatto & Windus, take on the role of publisher at Harvill Press for two decades, and finally establish his own imprint under the Quercus umbrella. The first translation MacLehose ever commissioned in 1978 was from Swedish.<sup>1047</sup> In the four decades since, MacLehose has been an avid patron of Scandinavian literature in Britain, publishing significant numbers of translated Scandinavian books.<sup>1048</sup> His reputation in Scandinavia is excellent. In 2017, *Svensk Bokhandel* featured an interview with MacLehose, whom they described as 'knowing which Swedish books Brits want', which took top billing on the front cover of the issue.<sup>1049</sup>

In terms of commercial and popular impact, some of MacLehose's greatest successes have been translations of Scandinavian books. This thesis has examined *Smilla* and *Millennium*, which appealed to British readers in a way that translated literature rarely does. *Smilla* sold in excess of one million copies in the UK, while in excess of six million copies of

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<sup>1046</sup> Giles 2018.

<sup>1047</sup> Henrik Tikkanen's *Snobs' Island* translated by Mary Sandbach. See MacLehose 2004: 107.

<sup>1048</sup> As of October 2017, MacLehose Press is the publisher of thirteen different Scandinavian-language authors, in addition to one Finn and one Icelander.

<sup>1049</sup> Djurberg 2017.

*Millennium* have been sold. In the case of MacLehose, lightning can and has struck more than twice. Mankell, also published by MacLehose during his time at Harvill, has sold approaching 1.7 million books in the UK to date.<sup>1050</sup> Harvill published their first Mankell novel, *Faceless Killers*, in 2000.<sup>1051</sup> Mankell has since enjoyed an excellent reception in the UK, receiving widespread praise and media coverage, in addition to winning the CWA Golden Dagger. But for the subsequent impact of Larsson, Mankell would have been a prominent option for selection as a case study subject in this thesis.<sup>1052</sup> However, it should be noted that following a tried and tested formula, even in combination with MacLehose's stardust, does not always work. A recent example is the late Danish writer Jakob Ejersbo. Ejersbo's *Afrika* trilogy was published posthumously by MacLehose Press from 2011 to 2014.<sup>1053</sup> In Britain, the series has been a commercial and critical failure. Kythor highlights a lukewarm response from bloggers and newspaper reviewers, and suggests that the marketing strategy for Ejersbo was 'disjointed and incomplete'.<sup>1054</sup>

Notwithstanding the occasional failure, MacLehose is the single most important publishing figure within the scope of this thesis, associated with the trajectory of several case studies in this thesis in much the same way that Mankell is. In 2004, MacLehose wrote about the importance of key mid-twentieth-century publishers for literature

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<sup>1050</sup> As at 17 June 2017. Sales figures for the first four Mankell novels published by Harvill Press were reportedly around 12,000 copies of hardback and trade paperbacks, 45,000 copies of initial mass-market paperbacks, and with all having sold in excess of 100,000 copies each by 2006. See Venuti 2008: 154.

<sup>1051</sup> Some of Mankell's early translations were subject to extensive Britishisation by Harvill, see *ibid.*: 157. Interestingly, several American translations of Mankell later published by Harvill have been by Murray and Nunnally, the translators of *Millennium* and *Smilla* respectively.

<sup>1052</sup> Beyond Mankell, another example of a prominent Scandinavian writer brought to Britain by MacLehose is Norwegian crime writer Jo Nesbø, who was contracted to Harvill by MacLehose shortly before MacLehose left the company. See interview in Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>1053</sup> Ejersbo 2011, Ejersbo 2012, Ejersbo 2014. Interviewing MacLehose, Kythor speculates that the publisher may have been influenced by his successes with writers such as Mankell and Larsson when deciding to publish Ejersbo in English. See Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>1054</sup> Kythor Forthcoming. By late 2017, only around 600 copies in total had been sold in Britain across the entire trilogy.

translated into English. Amongst the names highlighted are Manya Harari, Leopold Ullstein and Helen and Kurt Wolff.<sup>1055</sup> While MacLehose goes on to draw attention to some of the successors to these publishers, he modestly excludes his own name. However, it is clear that in any consideration of the key publishing figures involved in the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain over the past century, MacLehose rises to the top of this list.

There are a number of other key publishing personalities to be found in this thesis who demonstrate the evolving nature of the industry. While MacLehose remains active after five decades in the industry, there are many who are either following in his footsteps or taking a different path, as the output of Scandinavian books in translation increases. These include what is arguably a wider range of individuals from a more pluralistic background, albeit in relative terms for the largely homogenous UK publishing trade. The obvious successor to the MacLehose mantle is Ellie Steel, who is currently an editor at Harvill Secker; Steel has a strong interest in translated literature, especially from the Nordic region, and engages proactively with the translation community as the organiser of the annual Harvill Secker Young Translators' Prize.<sup>1056</sup> Another contender in this regard is Adam Freudenheim, publisher at Pushkin Press, which has become a significant publisher of literature in translation since Freudenheim acquired the company in 2012. In terms of publishers pursuing alternatives, we see examples such as Orenda Books, founded in 2014, which has quickly become a leading publisher of English translations of Nordic

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<sup>1055</sup> MacLehose 2004: 114. Harari founded Harvill Press, where MacLehose was publisher from 1984 to 2004 and which published *Smilla*. Ullstein was the owner of Barrie & Rockliff, the publishers of Mykle in Britain, and eventual owners of The Cresset Press, MacLehose's first employer. The Wolffs were the founders of New York publisher Pantheon Books, responsible for bringing Sjöwall and Wahlöö to the English language.

<sup>1056</sup> In her present role, Steel edits authors including Knausgård and Dag Solstad.

crime fiction. Stefan Tobler's *And Other Stories* is, like Norvik Press, a non-profit publisher, but opts instead for an innovative subscription model in addition to obtaining grant support. Nordisk Books, founded in 2016 by Duncan Lewis, is perhaps the most recent example of a start-up in the Scandinavian translation niche, and is thus far remaining afloat. The role played by publications such as *SBR* in drawing attention to Swedish-language literature should also not be overlooked.<sup>1057</sup> The diversity of individuals and companies in the current British publishing scene is outlined in brief here in order to illustrate quite how many there are presently who are able to publish Scandinavian books in Britain sustainably; this also demonstrates quite the impact that MacLehose currently has, having published several of the biggest bestsellers to come from Scandinavia in recent decades. Regardless, it is clear that in a post-MacLehose publishing landscape, successors will be ready to step into the breach – while MacLehose may be the current conduit extraordinaire of Scandinavian literature, the future position of Scandinavian books in the British literary polysystem is not inherently tied to him.

There is less diversity in terms of which Scandinavian publishers tend to publish books that are subsequently successfully transmitted to Britain. Both Norwegian case studies in this thesis were originally published by Gyldendal under the control of Grieg despite appearing decades apart.<sup>1058</sup> While Norwegian publishing has diversified, Gyldendal remains the largest firm in the country, and is additionally one of the major foreign-rights agencies, representing more than 200 authors. The route to Britain from Norway for many writers lies via Gyldendal. Both Swedish case studies were published by Norstedts, the

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<sup>1057</sup> Also of importance are organisations such as SELTA and, latterly, DELT that have done much to professionalise the Scandinavian literary translation field. For further details concerning *SBR*, SELTA and DELT, see Chapter 4.4.

<sup>1058</sup> Grieg's lengthy four decades of service have not been matched, although Gyldendal publisher Geir Mork was in charge for twenty years until 2015. The house clearly thrives through managerial stability.



oldest publisher in Sweden and one of the largest. In both cases, Lasse Bergström was involved, despite, once again, a gap of four decades.<sup>1059</sup> Swedish publishing is flourishing, with a plethora of presses operating, but similarly to Norway it remains true that Norstedts is one of the key routes to Britain for Swedish literature. Only one case study in this thesis was published by a smaller press: Høeg's *Smilla*. Yet the publisher of *Smilla*, Rosinante, was run by Ries – former publisher at Gyldendal in Copenhagen, and a significant figure in the Danish literary market since the 1960s. While the young, largely unknown Høeg successfully made it to English, the value of an experienced publisher like Ries should not be underestimated.<sup>1060</sup> Most Danish literature that does successfully make it to the UK tends to be published by Gyldendal.<sup>1061</sup>

What is apparent is that although the British publishing scene has expanded significantly, and the number of publishers involved in the publication of translated Scandinavian books has increased, those involved in the publication of books with significant impact on the British literary polysystem are likeliest to remain those with a track record of previous success.<sup>1062</sup> This is even more markedly the case when examining which figures are involved in the dissemination of books to Britain from the Scandinavian end.

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<sup>1059</sup> Swedish publishing can appear somewhat dynastic at times. Larsson's editor, Eva Gedin, is the granddaughter of Sweden's first literary agent, Lena Gedin, daughter of Lena-Fries Gedin, the Swedish translator of Harry Potter, and niece of Per Gedin, considered the father of the Swedish paperback novel and former publisher at Albert Bonniers förlag.

<sup>1060</sup> By the time *Smilla* was published, Rosinante had already been acquired by the Munksgaard Group, and in 1998 Ries returned to the Gyldendal fold when Rosinante was spun off and sold to Gyldendal, with Gyldendal and Ries becoming joint owners. The success enjoyed by Ries, in particular with Høeg, led to Rosinante's eventual demise. See Chapter 8.1.2.

<sup>1061</sup> The dominance of Gyldendal in the export of Danish literature is noted in Böker 2018: 268-9.

<sup>1062</sup> This all plays into the challenge of legitimising translations generally in the eyes of British readers. Publisher Allan Cameron has remarked that people will read Tolstoy 'because they've been told he's a great writer.' Quoted in Craighill 2015: 14.

### 10.1.2 Professionalisation

The rise of the literary intermediary and the professionalisation of foreign-rights sales is reflected in these case studies.<sup>1063</sup> Whereas Hamsun's transmission to Britain was reliant on the engagement of his own publisher in Norway, and Mykle benefited from the continued interest and advocacy of his translator Maurice Michael, the role played by professionals in transmitting Scandinavian literature in the post-war years increased significantly. Espmark notes that in the past, C.G. Bjurström acted as a bridgehead in France to allow Swedish literature to penetrate the French market.<sup>1064</sup> As has been established, Sjöwall and Wahlöö were scouted on behalf of Pantheon Books by Bjurström in the 1960s. The sale of Høeg by Ries at Rosinante remains perhaps a late example of a small publisher single-handedly pulling off a major foreign-rights deal. Høeg went on to be represented by the major literary agent Anneli Høier, the agent responsible for bringing Mankell to the world.<sup>1065</sup> Larsson's foreign rights were pushed in-house by Norstedts, but professional agent Markås was responsible for much of the success and is considered to have revolutionised the way that Scandinavian literature is sold abroad.<sup>1066</sup> All major figures in Scandinavian literature now enjoy bolstered foreign representation – even Sjöwall is represented by Salomonsson Agency. Where the focus previously was for publishers to meet other publishers, as in the case of Livia Gollancz's visits to New York in the 1960s, the focus now for publishers such as MacLehose is on attending the major

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<sup>1063</sup> Giles Gordon, former Editorial Director at Victor Gollancz during the Sjöwall/Wahlöö years, and later a literary agent and theatre critic, noted that the emergence of foreign-rights agents outside of the Anglo-American sphere was a new trend in the 1990s, see Gordon 1996: 130. The most thorough illustration of these changes can be found in Berglund 2014.

<sup>1064</sup> Espmark 2008: 68.

<sup>1065</sup> Høier represents one of the first major successes for a literary agent based in Scandinavia in terms of the mass sale of a Scandinavian author's foreign rights, thanks to her work on behalf of Mankell.

<sup>1066</sup> Espmark 2008: 72. What gave rise to this literary agent boom is the subject of speculation, with the suggestion being that the rise of Scandinavian crime fiction outside of Scandinavia led to a steep increase in the number of literary agents representing it. However, Berglund points out that the expansion of crime fiction was partly fuelled by the plethora of new literary agents. Determining which came first is almost impossible. See Berglund 2014: 104.

book fairs in London and Frankfurt, where they meet with agents rather than publishers.<sup>1067</sup> The number of agents active has mushroomed and their sales strategies are more costly and proactive: they now regularly commission lengthy sample translations to aid the sale of foreign rights, especially to English.<sup>1068</sup>

### 10.1.3 Finance and Funding

Early in the twentieth century, largely unwritten policy came to prevail among anglophone publishers. Buy the translation rights to a single book by a foreign author. If soon after publication the translation suffers a substantial loss or fails to earn back its production costs or to realise a modest profit, then stop publishing translations of the author's books. If, however, the first translation manages to break even or to approach a break-even point, then continue to publish translations of that particular author in the hope that more will create a readership and add profitable titles to the backlist, which itself might begin to turn a profit.<sup>1069</sup>

Lawrence Venuti observed that this outline for the typical approach to publishing translations had become the industry standard by the 1940s, and that for many decades projected sales of 5,000 books were used as the benchmark for whether a book should be acquired or not. While similar formulae have undoubtedly also been applied to domestically produced books, there are key financial differences in publishing a translated book, not least the costs of translation themselves.

In the case of Hamsun, the author's personal demand for success in the anglophone world and cachet with his Norwegian publisher played a significant role.<sup>1070</sup> He obviously hoped to follow the model outlined by Venuti, generating new readers and additional profit. However, there must have been concerns about the commercial viability even at the

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<sup>1067</sup> Berglund 2014: 107.

<sup>1068</sup> Giles 2017b: 26.

<sup>1069</sup> Venuti 2013: 159.

<sup>1070</sup> Following the publication of *Growth*, Hamsun also had a number of major cultural figures in his corner, including Wells and Mansfield, but it did not lead to popular success.

outset: Gyldendal successfully found a US publisher in the form of Knopf, but in the UK, they were obliged to publish the book themselves. While this offered the advantage that they did not have to acquire rights, and could split translation costs with Knopf, it was hardly an auspicious attempt to relaunch Hamsun in Britain. Gyldendal's London branch, set up apparently at Hamsun's behest to market several of their Scandinavian authors in English translation, closed down in the mid-1920s. This, together with the modest sales of *Growth* and other Hamsun works, suggests that the Nobel Prize and accompanying prestige boost was the primary reason for Hamsun's continued publication, rather than commercial sense.

Hamsun's Gyldendal stablemate Agnar Mykle was less commercially vociferous than Hamsun, although he too was conspicuously determined to break into the English-speaking publishing world.<sup>1071</sup> In his case, the model posited by Venuti was followed to a tee: sales of *Lasso* and then *Ruby* meant that he continued to be published in English, particularly in light of the initial, central position he held in the British literary polysystem. Whether Barrie & Rockliff would have continued to publish Mykle had he kept writing is a purely academic question; however, the failure by Mykle to live up to the promise of his first works in English and the associated hype would surely have led to the eventual discontinuation of his publication in English, without the added incentive provided in the pre-*Chatterley* era of breaking down social barriers.

Sjöwall and Wahlöö arguably represented a low-risk option for their British publisher Victor Gollancz. Not only were rights acquired from Pantheon in America, but translation

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<sup>1071</sup> It should be noted, however, that his main interest lay in securing an American publisher.

costs were also shared. Licensing deals for paperback editions, initially with Sphere and later with Penguin, as well as book club releases, meant that Gollancz's costs were effectively covered before they had even started trying to sell books. While this thesis proposes that the initial critical and commercial response to Sjöwall and Wahlöö in Britain was rather lukewarm, it would appear that the books turned a profit given the continued publication of a full series of ten. While the financial return on Sjöwall and Wahlöö in Britain would not have matched the windfall generated by Mykle, the continued publication of the Swedish duo in the UK reflected a publishing industry moving towards a more sustainable, commercial approach to translation.

Venuti also proposed a best practice for publishing translations in the following terms:

Publishers should make their choices in relation to previously published translations, not as one-off deals but as contributions to the context that those translations have worked to create, whether by conforming to or by diverging from translation patterns. Publishers should be prepared to translate several texts from the same foreign literature and to sample past and contemporary texts as well as texts that appeal to both elite and popular tastes.<sup>1072</sup>

Over the course of the span of this thesis, we see progress being made towards the approach Venuti suggests. What Venuti disregards is the matter of profit: he is primarily concerned with the health of the literary polysystem and ensuring a diversity of translated books. However, his best practice is arguably a good way of potentially securing commercial success too.

In the case of *Smilla*, we see the selection of a book that appealed to both elite and popular tastes, and more broadly fitted with the emerging literary trend for pre-millennial works that reflected reader anxieties and engaged with postcolonial thinking. While the British

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<sup>1072</sup> Venuti 2013: 164.

publication of *Smilla* may have adhered to the early-twentieth-century model of translation outlined by Venuti in some respects, it also partially followed Venuti's proposed best practice by forming a context for subsequent Scandinavian translations in the 1990s and 2000s. The publication of writers such as Mankell, and especially Larsson, became contributions to a context that was shaped by *Smilla*, while also further developing the polysystem of translated Scandinavian literature. This is reflected in an increased willingness to publish other Scandinavian works alongside those with obvious commercial potential. A notable example is Lagercrantz: while the publication of *Millennium 4* and *Millennium 5* was a commercially-driven decision, it also conformed with Venuti's suggestion. In particular, the choice to publish a translation of Lagercrantz's own novel, *Fall of Man in Wilmslow*, reflects not only the commercial decision to market the author but also an endeavour to provide a book appealing to elite tastes.

A constant throughout the past century has been the desire to ensure the commercial viability of Scandinavian translations in Britain. Through developing an approach to publication that takes into account the sociocultural situation in the British literary polysystem – contexts rather than texts – it becomes possible to generate further commercial success. Where Hamsun was essentially a commercial failure and Mykle's initial significance was overtaken by the rapidly developing literary polysystem, Høeg not only made a significant impact upon release, but has continued to be polysystemically relevant over the subsequent years. While it is too early to determine whether Larsson will remain relevant, he has been available to the British market for almost a decade and remains a steady seller subject to popular references and a range of research. As well as providing impetus for the translation of other Scandinavian books, Høeg and Larsson, amongst others, have exerted a pull on books already in the polysystem such as Sjöwall

and Wahlöö. A more widespread appreciation of genre fiction and the emergence of hybrid genres, and publishers' understanding of these trends have led to increased commercialisation of Scandinavian translations as publishers have got to grips with how to leverage this.

Forms of financial support available to support the transmission of Scandinavian books to Britain have developed extensively over the period covered by the thesis. Where the involvement of the Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation in the translation and publication of Hjalmar Bergman books in the 1930s was an oddity, it is now rare to find circumstances in which financial support has not been sought from a grant-giving body or agency for translation.<sup>1073</sup> There is support available for translation costs, and in some instances production costs, from the Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation and the Swedish Arts Council in Sweden, NORLA in Norway, and the Danish Agency for Culture in Denmark. FILI/Finnish Literature Exchange also provides similar funding for translations of Finland-Swedish literature.<sup>1074</sup> There is the potential to apply for funding to support marketing costs, for promotional tours involving the author, or even, in some cases, to support a sample translation before the English-language rights have even been acquired. Naturally, the proactive involvement of and funding by Scandinavian cultural and state bodies is a significant external influencing factor on the transmission of books to Britain – without such support, there are many transmissions which would simply not take place. While British publishers and translators must apply for funds of this kind in a way that

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<sup>1073</sup> The role of the Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation in publishing Bergman in the 1930s, as well as its inception, are discussed in Chapter 5.3.4.

<sup>1074</sup> Agency for Culture and Palaces 2017, FILI 2017, NORLA 2017, Swedish Arts Council 2017. Scholarly considerations of support provided for translations of Scandinavian literature are limited. Broomé provides an overview of Swedish state support for translations out of Swedish while Kythor includes a more thorough examination of Danish state support for translations from Danish. See Broomé 2014c: 205-34, Kythor Forthcoming.

typically takes into account the British literary polysystem, the approach is nevertheless heavily source-driven. The outcome is that support of this kind often fails to meet British needs adequately.<sup>1075</sup> On the other hand, it increases the number of Scandinavian books in the British literary polysystem overall, and in many cases can alter the commercial prospects of a translated book for a British publisher. While such funds tend not to support genre fiction, enabling more translations and more publishers to participate means that it is possible that future polysystemic needs in Britain could be fulfilled thanks to opportunities funded by grant-givers.

## 10.2 Dissemination and Consumption

### 10.2.1 New Modes of Consumption

The publishing industry and the reception of Scandinavian books in Britain have been greatly impacted by new modes of consumption of literature. This has included the advent of terms like ‘consumption’ when applied to books and literature.<sup>1076</sup> The period covered by this thesis has seen multiple innovations related to the consumption of books, meaning, for instance, that Larsson’s *Millennium* books were available to a far wider audience via a greater number of channels than Hamsun’s *Growth*. These innovations include the advent of the affordable paperback edition, the formation of book clubs, the emergence of online book sales, and entirely new ways of consuming literature such as through audiobooks and via e-readers. As is to be expected, the arrival of new modes of consumption has seen a decline in other modes: libraries are now less widespread than

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<sup>1075</sup> Ejersbo’s *Exile* reportedly received a grant of DKK 60,000 to support its marketing efforts in the UK, with little to show for it in return. See Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>1076</sup> For further discussion of book ‘consumption’, see Helgason, et al. 2014b: 27.



they were throughout the course of the twentieth century and lending has decreased, while book clubs, once an innovation, are now also on the wane.<sup>1077</sup>

One of the most dramatic changes to take place in the UK during the period covered by this thesis was in 1995 when the NBA collapsed. The fear that its loss would lead to a cut in the number of books published and price rises on less popular titles was to some extent borne out, with the shelf life of books in shops reduced and the number of books achieving publication also down.<sup>1078</sup> However, it changed the way that books were sold and consumed. The ability to sell books at discounts meant that readers were likelier to buy books than they were to borrow them from libraries. It also changed where they purchased books, with the mass sale of deeply discounted books from a limited range of stock becoming the norm in British supermarkets. They in turn were in competition with online platforms such as Amazon. Sam Jordison observes that this had led to a situation where supermarkets were often involved in setting prices and influencing other paratextual elements of books on sale.<sup>1079</sup> It should be noted that the collapse of the NBA may have helped to draw Scandinavian books towards the centre of the British polysystem: it has already been suggested in this thesis that *Smilla* benefited from discount sales, and data from Nielsen BookScan shows that Larsson's books all sold for an average price that was considerably below the cover price. The *Millennium* books remain stocked by major supermarkets such as Tesco, and continue to enjoy healthy sales.<sup>1080</sup>

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<sup>1077</sup> Waterstone 1996: 114.

<sup>1078</sup> Jordison 2010.

<sup>1079</sup> Ibid. The role played by Amazon in securing the success of *Millennium* in the American market through domination of the e-reader sector is discussed in Chapter 9.3.4. Jordison notes that supermarkets were able to exert influence on publishers in relation to major paratextual elements of books, including titles and cover images.

<sup>1080</sup> In 2016, the 2015 paperback edition of *Millennium 1* sold 6,963 copies, and the corresponding editions of *Millennium 2* and *Millennium 3* sold 5,375 and 4,886 copies respectively. For books that one might conceivably believe practically everyone already owned, these are excellent sales figures. Further details of average sale prices are included in Chapter 9.3.2.

### 10.2.2 The Bestseller

Changes to the nature of the book market in recent years, especially the collapse of the NBA, have increasingly led to the rise of the bestseller as a separate entity to all other books, categorised almost as a genre in itself.<sup>1081</sup> These are easier to generate hype around and being a bestseller now generally has a ‘snowball’ effect on sales and consumption amongst British readers: namely that a book selling lots of copies is likely to sell even more copies.<sup>1082</sup> An early example of this hype element was observed in the Mykle case study in relation to *Lasso* and *Ruby*, both of which ran through multiple paperback editions, but the increased commercialisation in publishing since the 1960s has seen this honed, especially in the cases of Høeg and Larsson. In both instances, marketing of the books – and resultant press coverage – has focused extensively on the number of copies sold. *Smilla* is regularly cited as having sold in excess of one million copies in Britain, while *Millennium* has sold several million copies. A bestseller requires large print runs to facilitate mass sales, and even the order of a large print run has now become a regular marketing ploy. Press releases from MacLehose Press regarding the impending release of *Millennium* books, for instance *Millennium 1*, have focused on the number of copies in the print run. This is a development of the type of hype where people buy books because others are doing so, to a more sophisticated marketing strategy whereby the publisher announces beforehand that many people will buy the book, thus encouraging sales.

Beyond purely marketing-related issues, there is also an impact on the position of an author or their work in the literary polysystem as a result of the rise of the bestseller. In the case of Larsson, the effect of being a bestseller is even greater when ascertaining his

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<sup>1081</sup> Bestsellers can see sales of several million copies, according to Bloom 2008: 3. Indeed, this thesis may be situated as an example of ‘bestseller research’, as posited in Kärholm 2014: 124.

<sup>1082</sup> The notion of ‘hype’ is discussed in Helgason, et al. 2014b: 6.

position in the literary polysystem. In many respects, it is easier to categorise Larsson as belonging to a polysystem that includes other megaselling authors such as J.K. Rowling, Dan Brown and E. L. James, rather than fellow crime writers or Scandinavian writers.<sup>1083</sup> Larsson's position within the British literary polysystem at the time of publication was one of absolute centrality, and he continues to remain a key figure in the polysystem today. More generally, Scandinavian books have evidently enjoyed a ripple effect from Larsson in their collective position in the British literary polysystem. More books originating in Scandinavia are translated, reviewed, and sold than ever before in the aftermath of Larsson's arrival in Britain. While a bestseller does rank in its own class, its impact is not therefore in isolation. Larsson has developed a demand amongst British readers for Scandinavian books, especially in the crime and thriller genres, that has widened a gap in the polysystem gladly filled by a glut of new imports. It has resulted in the discovery of a new Scandinavian bestseller, Nesbø, and it is the centralisation of Scandinavian literature in the British polysystem more generally that has enabled Lagercrantz to push to the centre of the polysystem in the period 2015-17, even if the impact has not been on the same scale as Larsson's during the 2000s.

### 10.2.3 The Role of the Author

The emergence of authors as commodities themselves – or celebrity culture – and the weight this can lend to marketing Scandinavian books is another new trend observed during the period covered by this thesis, especially during the last two or three decades.<sup>1084</sup>

However, the need for an author backstory, as well as a source-market publisher who can

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<sup>1083</sup> Bloom has noted that it is impossible to categorise writers at this level in terms of whether they are, for instance, highbrow or lowbrow. See Bloom 2008: 3.

<sup>1084</sup> It should be noted that some earlier authors also benefited from other forms of celebrity status. Ibsen is one such writer, see Davis 1984: 41-3. Further reflections on author celebrity culture are offered in Helgason, et al. 2014b: 37.

generate appropriate publicity, is a more traditional requirement influencing the selection of books for transmission and subsequent success.<sup>1085</sup>

The focus on ensuring that Scandinavian authors have strong, marketable personalities, and that they are available for promotional work and public appearances in Britain are both relatively new trends. Hamsun famously only visited England on one occasion, and Mykle and Sjöwall and Wahlöö had little personal involvement in the dissemination and promotion of their works in English translation in Britain. In contrast, the involvement of Høeg is considered to be an important factor in the initial success enjoyed by *Smilla*.<sup>1086</sup> This new mode of marketing was one that often ignored the book altogether: in Høeg's case, journalists were seemingly more interested in his past as a dancer, while in more recent years his widely perceived eccentricity has been consumed by readers through his irregular public appearances at book festivals. While Larsson was not personally involved in influencing the reception of his work in Britain, his absence was used instead as a novelty, and his publishers Gedin in Sweden and MacLehose have spoken in public frequently since Larsson's publication in a capacity that would almost certainly have been covered by Larsson himself had he been alive.<sup>1087</sup> Lagercrantz has been heavily involved in the promotional work for *Millennium 4* and *Millennium 5*, with interviews appearing in various press outlets, and the author being available for public appearances in front of

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<sup>1085</sup> Marketing has also been subject to increasing professionalisation, as Jacqueline Graham highlights. See Graham 1996: 149. This is emphasised by the fact that successful book marketing relies upon hard work rather than serendipity. See *ibid.*: 151.

<sup>1086</sup> Pihl 1996: 112-3, Kythor Forthcoming.

<sup>1087</sup> Jute and McCoy rather uncharitably note that Gedin will 'go anywhere, anytime, to tell a fawning interviewer "what Stieg was really like"'. Jute and McCoy 2011: 91%. This is not unexpected, given Bloom's observation that well-known authors, who are otherwise occupied, are now sometimes represented in public appearances by other celebrities instead. See Bloom 2008: 17. The role of deceased authors is also discussed in Chapters 7.4.3 and 9.4.2.

large audiences, generating publicity not only in Britain but in other non-British literary polysystems too.<sup>1088</sup>

With regard to transmission, the ability of books to generate publicity in their original source-culture market is an absolute necessity: without a documented capacity to generate interest amongst reviewers and readers, there is little chance of a book being transmitted to any foreign polysystem. However, over the past century, the ability of books to generate publicity in other, foreign polysystems has also become increasingly important in selecting Scandinavian books for transmission.<sup>1089</sup>

In terms of the authors considered in this thesis, the best way to make headway in Britain as a Scandinavian is to have some degree of novelty value as an individual, or alternatively, high levels of esteem. In the case of Agnar Mykle, the obscenity trial and book ban were highly useful sales tools in the UK, as they allowed his publishers to project him as something of a scandalous rogue. In the case of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, there was the initial novelty of their writing as a couple, later superseded by Wahlöö's early death which led to various hagiographies of him. Similarly, Larsson being published posthumously lent weight to the marketing efforts through its novelty – publishing a full trilogy in translation by a dead author was highly unusual.<sup>1090</sup> Hamsun, rather than being especially novel, was promoted on grounds of esteem. His arrival on the British literary scene in 1920 was presented as the long-awaited launch of a grand European writer, verified just months

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<sup>1088</sup> A typical Lagercrantz interview is found in Cooke 2015. To mark the release of *Millennium 5*, Lagercrantz appeared in conversation with the books editor of *The Guardian*, Claire Armistead. See 'David Lagercrantz in Conversation with Claire Armitstead' 2017.

<sup>1089</sup> A case in point being the *Millennium* books, which only gained widespread traction in foreign polysystems once it had been demonstrated that it was possible to successfully market the series in the German literary polysystem. See Craighill 2013b: 24.

<sup>1090</sup> One other notable example is Jakob Ejersbo. See Chapter 10.1.1.

later by the award of the Nobel Prize. Høeg, meanwhile, was on the one hand portrayed as an eccentric to the British, and on the other, his credentials as a literary award winner were also pushed.<sup>1091</sup>

#### 10.2.4 Other Considerations at Home and Abroad

Efforts to ensure a successful British reception have also resulted in developments in the way that translations are prepared for the British market. The commissioners of the translations considered in this thesis have varied, and the backgrounds of the translators involved have been diverse. In the case of two case studies, Hamsun and Larsson, the translations were commissioned by the source publisher rather than a British publisher. Translations for both Høeg and Sjöwall/Wahlöö were commissioned by American publishers. This variety makes it challenging to discern many trends, although it does reflect the variety of approaches used to transmit literature from Scandinavia to the UK. It should be noted though, that in the final two case studies, Høeg and Larsson, the approach adopted by MacLehose has been to edit American translations heavily to suit British audiences.<sup>1092</sup> Regardless of the relative merits or lack thereof in such an approach, it would appear that contemporary British readers are amenable to a strategy of this kind. Furthermore, it would be particularly interesting to examine whether the use of British

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<sup>1091</sup> Mankell was also pitched at British reviewers and readers in a similar manner to Høeg. There was a strong endeavour to obtain media coverage of both authors, with both widely covered and made available for publicity activities, aided by their strong English-language skills. Steven Williams, publicist for *Smilla*, states that in addition to extensive follow-up work with literary editors, biannual meetings between MacLehose and literary editors were used to highlight forthcoming titles, with *Smilla* having been highlighted to newspaper reviewers and booksellers for some time prior to release. See *ibid.*

<sup>1092</sup> Venuti 2008: 157-8. Some brief comparisons of British and American translations are included in Venuti. There are multiple comparisons of the British and American translations of *Smilla*. See Chapter 8.1.3.2. Speaking at ‘How to Write “Riveting Reviews”?’ a workshop held by the European Literature Network at Europe House in London on 1 February 2017, Tonkin described *Smilla* as ‘that well-known bestseller by Christopher MacLehose with help from a few other people’.

translations or the Britishisation of American translations of Sjöwall and Wahlöö would have had a positive impact on their reception.

All the case studies in this thesis demonstrate the importance of other comparable literary polysystems as benchmarks by British publishers. Hamsun, Mykle and Larsson were all published in English translation in Britain sometime after their initial impact in their source cultures, as well as after they had made an impact in other literary markets. While the release of *Growth* came just three years after it was published in Norway, Hamsun was an established author who had been widely translated, with Germany and Russia prime examples. In Mykle's case, the English translation was a fairly late addition to the selection of foreign translations of the Ask Burlefot series, with *Lasso* not appearing until 1960 – six years after publication in Norway and three years after the obscenity trial. German and Swedish translations had appeared far more promptly. Larsson did not appear in publication in Britain until three years after he had done so in Swedish. While this may seem insignificant compared to the experiences of Mykle and Hamsun, Larsson had been widely translated into other key polysystems with great success by the time he arrived in English: most notably German, which was the first foreign-rights sale for Norstedts while Larsson was still alive, and French, which Craighill cites as a catalyst in the dissemination of Larsson.<sup>1093</sup> We therefore see that of the three case studies that arrived 'late' in Britain, both Mykle and Larsson made an impact that was comparable to their impact in another major literary polysystem. In this instance, Hamsun was something of an exception.

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<sup>1093</sup> Craighill outlines how the French, German and Dutch publishers of Larsson were convened at Frankfurt 2007 to espouse the merits of Larsson/*Millennium* as a publishing commodity to other publishers, and that this led to the acquisition of Italian and Spanish rights. See Craighill 2013b: 24.

Sjöwall and Wahlöö were published in English translation fairly early compared with other major literary polysystems, although their work was available in both the USA and Germany at comparable points in time. There were few comparable markets in which the Martin Beck series was released early enough for there to be a discernible benchmark against which to compare the British experience, but as has been noted, the series failed to gain the same degree of traction that it had done in markets such as Germany, America and even Denmark. In later years, on the other hand, the impact of the proto-Mankellian school of thought has arguably been the strongest in Britain, where the Nordic Noir narrative and subsequent search for an origin story has gripped the media and readers more than anywhere else.<sup>1094</sup>

Høeg is the interesting counterpoint in this regard. *Smilla* was published in Danish in 1992 and in English translation in 1993. The English translation was one of the first foreign translations of *Smilla* to appear, with the vast majority of foreign translations appearing in the period 1994-96. Even German, in which Høeg's *Forestilling om det tyvende århundrede* was published in 1992 as *Vorstellung vom zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, was outflanked by English. In this particular instance, neither *Smilla* nor Høeg had enjoyed major success in a literary system that was comparable to Britain's. This is interesting because *Smilla* represents the only genuine instance in this thesis of a British literary discovery of a Scandinavian author ahead of other key polysystems, where the British reception in turn had the opportunity

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<sup>1094</sup> Nordic Noir has not taken off in the USA to the same degree, while countries such as Germany have a more longstanding tradition of *Krimis* to fall back on and have long translated extensively from neighbouring Scandinavia.



to act as an external influencing factor on the reception of Høeg in other polysystems such as German and French.<sup>1095</sup>

### 10.2.5 Nordic Noir and Other Phenomena

There have long been other factors that have had an impact on the way that books and authors are received by British readers.<sup>1096</sup> In the past, these were more straightforward in the shape of things such as film adaptations.<sup>1097</sup> More recently, these have been even more substantial in their effect. The film adaptation of *Smilla* was big-budget and did well at the box office, while the Swedish film adaptations of *Millennium* were sufficiently successful to lead to a Hollywood remake of *Millennium 1*. Over the past few decades, it has become ever more common to have film tie-in editions of books; these have been noted across the case studies in this thesis as early as 1973 when *The Laughing Policeman* was released in Hollywood. It is only natural that these media adaptations of novels lead to increased coverage and further centrality in the polysystem for the original books. In the contemporary era, it would seem that adaptation of a book can only serve the book well – if the adaptation is successful, the book is also lauded. If the adaptation is a failure, the book is held up as the better version.

More broadly, the reception of Scandinavian books in Britain has increasingly been influenced by the prominence of imported Scandinavian television programmes over the past decade, as well as broader cultural trends such as the current, presumably transient,

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<sup>1095</sup> It is easy to envisage that the success enjoyed by *Smilla* in the UK and USA may have been used to pitch foreign rights to other language areas in much the same way as described by Craighill for Norstedts' endeavours to sell Larsson.

<sup>1096</sup> The creation of media franchises around literary works, and the subsequent feedback effect that sees an increase in sales figures, is discussed in Helgason, et al. 2014b: 29-31.

<sup>1097</sup> Although, as has been noted, a film adaptation of *Ruby* hardly registered with UK audiences, while adaptations of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's work for the big screen had only niche appeal.

*hygge* phenomenon. The impact of televisual imports has removed the taboo element from the use of the word ‘foreign’ in the sale of translated literature, with consumers becoming far more open minded.<sup>1098</sup> The success of subtitled shows such as *The Killing*, *The Bridge* and *Borgen* has helped fuel a second wave of Scandinavian crime fiction in translation from 2010 onwards.<sup>1099</sup> Even more remarkable has been the flourishing of a British production line of television products of this kind, including the BBC production *Wallander* as well as the big-budget Sky Atlantic show *Fortitude*.<sup>1100</sup> While the inclusion of shows such as *Borgen* in this discussion may seem odd, given that it is a political drama rather than crime-focused, it highlights the problematics of the Nordic Noir narrative. Hansen and Waade observe that while the term has been adopted in research in recent years, there has been little work to identify its scope.<sup>1101</sup> Consequently, it might very well include political shows such as *Borgen* – or indeed British-produced shows such as *Fortitude* which take place in imagined spaces in the north.<sup>1102</sup> Waade and Hansen believe that the key lies in the Nordic setting, and that the plots and characters are secondary in nature.

Although the Nordic Noir narrative has not yet crystallised fully, it is undoubtedly a key marketing tool in selling Scandinavian books in Britain. While it can be a challenge to persuade readers to move from crime fiction to elite literature, the transition from subtitled television drama to translated literature is much easier to effect. While Nordic Noir was initially a concept that arguably emerged on the small screen, it was quickly

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<sup>1098</sup> Djurberg 2017: 16.

<sup>1099</sup> This reflects the somewhat cyclical nature of modern cultural consumption. Hansen and Waade argue that the success of shows such as DR’s *The Killing* is grounded in the past success of Scandinavian crime fiction. Hansen and Waade 2017: 106. Beyond precipitating a new wave of Scandinavian crime fiction in translation, the success of these Scandinavian television shows at the end of the 2000s and in the early 2010s has also led to a boom in imports of subtitled television. See Tate 2016.

<sup>1100</sup> Stougaard-Nielsen 2016: 3.

<sup>1101</sup> Hansen and Waade 2017: 7.

<sup>1102</sup> For instance, Forshaw includes the Danish political drama *Borgen* in his 2013 book on Nordic Noir. See Forshaw 2013.

adopted by the publishing industry and used as a catch-all term to market their books. This illustrates the symbiosis that has developed between the world of books and the world of television both in relation to innovations in dissemination and in relation to the transmission of Scandinavian products to Britain.

### 10.3 Social Change, Genre Fiction and Hybridity

The 1920s saw the emergence of genres to categorise literature, with genre fiction, such as crime or sci-fi, confined to the margins.<sup>1103</sup> Over the past century, genre fiction has gradually moved towards the centre of the British literary polysystem, to the extent that the boundaries between mainstream fiction and genre fiction have now collapsed.<sup>1104</sup> The case studies in this thesis demonstrate that translated fiction can be seen to be offering innovation in this regard, highlighting the need for genre fiction solutions to British polysystem needs.<sup>1105</sup> A further trend observed is the emergence of hybrid genres and sub-genres that combine different forms and styles to draw new readers to them, fulfilling new requirements in the British literary polysystem through more specific solutions that suit British readers.

#### 10.3.1 Breakthroughs in Social and Cultural Shifts

The two Norwegian case studies, Hamsun and Mykle, both represent shooting stars in the British literary polysystem. Appearing, at least to British eyes, out of nowhere, they had an initial, dramatic impact on the British literary polysystem. In Hamsun's case, a positive critical response to *Growth* in the spring of 1920 was followed up with his receipt

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<sup>1103</sup> Bloom 2008: 108-9.

<sup>1104</sup> Ibid.: 10.

<sup>1105</sup> Not to mention the needs of British publishers, who tend to use genre fiction for profit-making purposes in order to subsidise the remainder of their lists. Ibid.: 2.

of the Nobel Prize in Literature in the autumn, suggesting a remarkable trajectory from the peripheries of the polysystem into the heart of the British literary system, as Mansfield demanded that all Hamsun works be translated immediately. Likewise, Mykle exploded onto the scene, making an immediate impact in the pre-*Chatterley* era. Both benefited from widespread exposure amongst critics drawn from the cultural elite, who authenticated their literary credentials and hastened their progress towards the centre of the polysystem. Indeed, Mykle was catapulted to the centre of the polysystem, before gradually being drawn back towards the margins of the polysystem as a result of changes to the literary zeitgeist and developments in home-grown literature in Britain over the subsequent decade, alongside the fact that he did not continue writing. Now out of print in Britain, Mykle has become a footnote in the history of literary censorship. Hamsun's British decline, meanwhile, was somewhat slower, but the incongruity of his other works against *Growth*, as well as his personal views, saw him banished to the peripheries of the British literary polysystem also. Høeg has thus far endured, and it will be interesting to observe how long *Millennium* lasts in the centre of the literary polysystem.

Hamsun has acquired the status of a canonical writer, more akin to Andersen, Ibsen or Strindberg, which sets him apart from the other case study subjects in this thesis. However, it is not *Growth* but *Hunger* that now interests lay and scholarly readers. What is clear though is that neither he nor Mykle generated any semblance of critical mass on behalf of other Scandinavian books in the British literary polysystem. There was no pursuit of other Hamsuns or Mykles, and the interwar period was especially quiet in terms of imported Scandinavian literature in the UK. Effectively, both authors' positions in the polysystem stood apart from their source culture and were instead based on the

sociocultural function performed by their respective works during paradigmatic shifts in British culture.

Sjöwall and Wahlöö are outliers to some degree in this respect, having found more recognition and success decades after they were first published. While literary and non-literary developments can affect the legacy of writers, drawing them away from the centre of the literary polysystem (in the case of Hamsun, being a Nazi did not help; in Mykle's case, liberalisation of society meant he was no longer cutting-edge), it is also possible for books to move from the peripheries towards the centre on the same grounds. While British readers and critics were not wholly receptive to politicised genre fiction in the 1960s and 1970s, they were very much more accepting by the 2000s, especially in light of the desire to find an origin story for other contemporary writers such as Mankell and Larsson.<sup>1106</sup>

Ultimately, the likelihood of success for a translated Scandinavian book is at its highest at points when the British literary polysystem has gaps to fill, and is thus receptive to new ideas and forms. In practical terms, this refers to times when ordinary readers are more receptive to new types of books and genres on the basis of recent or ongoing societal changes. British readers were receptive towards *Growth* in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. Mykle arrived in Britain after a period when the literary polysystem had been closed off to outside ideas: by challenging the existing literary norms, and being the subject of patronage from the publishing world, it was possible for Mykle to succeed. Sjöwall and Wahlöö did not arrive in auspicious circumstances in the 1960s and 1970s.

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<sup>1106</sup> Le Carré was an early example of a writer succeeding in the UK with politicised genre fiction, with his first novel, *Call For The Dead*, appearing in 1961.

However, by the 2000s, the British polysystem, expanding through the development of genre fiction, required more imports to fuel the initial wave of Scandinavian crime fiction and the second wave of Nordic Noir, increasing the chances of success for Scandinavian books. In the case of Høeg and Larsson, both exploited hybridity in different ways to perform unfulfilled functions in the literary polysystem. In Høeg's case, *Smilla* gained entry to the literary polysystem's centre through the use of the thriller genre in a literary style, while Larsson appealed to a range of different readers from other genres.

Sjöwall and Wahlöö were another example of external factors influencing the British literary polysystem, albeit via America. Acquired for translation by Pantheon Books in the USA via a Swedish scout in France, before British rights were sold on to the Victor Gollancz, it would appear that the arrival of Sjöwall and Wahlöö in Britain was entirely influenced by external factors. Crucially, the greatest external influence was that of America – in both publishing and genre terms. The British polysystem was out of sync with those around it in terms of genres such as crime fiction, which remained conservative and peripheral, but it was gradually opening up to change, influenced primarily by trends in America. The import of the Martin Beck series was therefore a reflection of an interest in emulating America, rather than taking fresh ideas from Sweden specifically. As has been noted, the emergence into the centre ground of Sjöwall and Wahlöö decades later from the polysystem peripheries was partially the result of a demand-driven need for progenitors of the Scandinavian crime genre. However, the commonly disseminated narrative that Sjöwall and Wahlöö were these progenitors largely originated in Sweden and was broadcast to Britain in what might be considered a marketing ploy. Whether the resultant success for the authorial duo after the turn of the century was thanks to Swedish engagement with the British target market, or the increased maturity of the British market

leading it to engage with books of this kind is unclear, but a clear source-driven strain of influence can be identified in this case too.

### 10.3.2 Social Change through Genre Fiction

Sjöwall and Wahlöö sought to effect social change in Sweden through critiquing the failings of society via the medium of genre fiction. Their original British reception, which was lukewarm, suggests that a progressive Swedish literary product was not necessarily desirable for British readers of the time. Their use of crime fiction was problematic in the British context as a populist but critically unappreciated part of the polysystem, dominated in Britain by writers such as Agatha Christie. While the polysystem was partially receptive to new sub-genres, the impetus for this change came from America, in English, rather than elsewhere in translation, and can be seen in the gradual emergence of the police procedural amongst a new school of British writers in the mid-1970s. The political slant to Sjöwall and Wahlöö may not have helped, given that the UK's counterculture was developing out of sync with those found in Scandinavia and the USA. There was no rush to discover other new Sjöwall and Wahlöös for import and the 1960s and 1970s were a fairly slow period for the import of Scandinavian books more generally to the UK. The polysystemic fortunes of Sjöwall and Wahlöö changed over the following decades: whereas the 1980s and 1990s were largely silent, the emergence of writers such as Høeg, Mankell and later Larsson, saw the Martin Beck series drawn towards the centre of the literary polysystem.

### 10.3.3 Sex Sells

It may be a little glib, but it is clear from the case studies in this thesis that sex sells. In the case of Mykle, this was quite literally the main contributory factor in the sale of hundreds

of thousands of copies of the book in Panther paperback in the early 1960s, regardless of the intentions of the author and his publishers, and the response of bourgeois book reviewers. Yet this is not confined to this case study: contemporary reviewers of Sjöwall and Wahlöö frequently complained of the overt sexuality expressed in the Martin Beck decalogy, as well as more broadly about liberal Sweden, despite what was in fact a very low level of sexual content. However, given their publication just a few years after Mykle, the reviewers' shock at the sexual content is likely to have helped generate interest in the books.

The perception of bodily appeal is a key feature in the case of both Høeg's and Larsson's work. Male reviewers of *Smilla* were unmistakably enchanted by the female protagonist, marked out from the beginning by the use of 'Miss' in the book's title. Similarly, the *Millennium* books contain their fair share of sexual content, but the signposting begins early through the use of the word 'girl' in the book titles, as well as suggestive cover images.

That sex sells clearly remains the case – in Lagercrantz's *Millennium* books, the same approach has been maintained. Høeg has, after more than two decades, returned to write about a highly sexualised protagonist in the style of Smilla in his latest book, *The Susan Effect*.<sup>1107</sup> Even the present-day perception of Sjöwall and Wahlöö remains predicated on this basis, with Dexter expressing surprise at the lack of sex.<sup>1108</sup>

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<sup>1107</sup> Susan 'possesses an Olympian sexual appetite'. See Forshaw 2017.

<sup>1108</sup> Dexter 2007: vi. In this regard, cinematic works by directors such as Ingmar Bergman and Vilgot Sjöman obviously had an impact on British perceptions of Scandinavian sexuality, but the arrival of Mykle in translation just a few years earlier and the associated hype relating to both the obscenity trial and sexual content of his novels must have further coloured British views. See Chapter 7.4.2.



### 10.3.4 Hybridity: Rainy Postcolonialism

Høeg's *Smilla* took the use of hybrid genre to a new level. The novel was a combination of thriller and elite fiction, arguably with side servings of science fiction. Despite this, the reception of the book often saw its literary credentials emphasised over its genre fiction features – this was very probably reinforced by its postcolonial dimension, meaning not only that it appealed to the sensibilities of British readers in the early 1990s, but also that it was seen as a serious book worthy of attention. Indeed, in the case of *Smilla*, it was not merely the use of hybrid genre by the writer that contributed to its successful reception – attention was also actively drawn to this hybridity in the marketing of the book at a time when it was not possible to market the book solely on the basis of its Scandinavian origins.<sup>1109</sup>

*Smilla* had a highly central position in the British literary polysystem, and arguably remains a key work. Høeg was also adopted by the British polysystem, although his position gradually diminished over the following two decades as subsequent works failed to live up to the commercial or critical success of *Smilla*. In straightforward terms, subsequent Høeg novels did not engage with postcolonialism or adopt the same hybrid genre approach again, and sales flagged as the author's subsequent books were considered too odd.<sup>1110</sup>

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<sup>1109</sup> In an interview, the marketer for *Smilla* in 1993, Jane Thurlow, notes that the novel was positioned 'as a mainstream book, not as a translation. But that it wasn't just a thriller, it was something that really was quite unique in a way.' See Kytthor Forthcoming.

<sup>1110</sup> In this respect, Høeg's decline differed from Hamsun's. While Hamsun, translated in the wrong order, lacked a back catalogue of works to suit conservative literary critics in 1920s Britain, he was out of step with British literary culture, rather than anything more drastic. Høeg, on the other hand, may be considered to have fallen out of step with himself in his later works. Only with the publication of *The Susan Effect* in 2017 has Høeg made a return to using the kind of hybridity found in *Smilla*.

Identifying whether Høeg had a substantial impact on the position of Scandinavian literature in Britain more generally is challenging: on the one hand, there was a clear endeavour to find other Høegs in the mid-1990s, seen in the publication of writers such as Rygg, Wassmo and Ekman.<sup>1111</sup> Furthermore, the publication of other works by Høeg himself meant that Scandinavian books were enjoying more releases, sales and press coverage during the 1990s in the UK than they had in decades. On the other hand, the receptivity of British readers to *Smilla* was arguably less to do with its Scandinavian origins and more to do with its use of the hybrid ‘weather book’ sub-genre, imbued with a degree of literary sophistication while simultaneously being accessible to readers. Given that the writers following in Høeg’s footsteps in this niche area of 1990s publishing success were writers such as Guterson and Proulx, it is perhaps more justifiable to state that Høeg in fact drew a certain brand of transatlantic book towards the centre of the British literary polysystem, rather than Scandinavian books.<sup>1112</sup> Notwithstanding this, *Smilla* has remained a central book in the polysystem in the years since publication. It continues to sell respectably, it continues to be read, it continues to be referenced in both popular terms and as a literary benchmark, and Høeg’s most recent novel, *The Susan Effect*, attempts to replicate *Smilla* in order to boost his fortunes in the polysystem.

### 10.3.5 Hybridity: Crunch Lit Meets Sci-Fi

In 2017, MacLehose complained that the British were not interested in reading proper literature: they were only interested in watching football.<sup>1113</sup> This does seem a little

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<sup>1111</sup> The failure by Chatto & Windus to capitalise on Ekman as the next Høegesque bestseller is discussed in Chapter 8.3.2.

<sup>1112</sup> It is interesting to note that the reception of Mankell’s early novels in Britain also featured a similar fascination with the weather. MacLehose evidently has a knack for identifying hybridity that can fulfil polysystemic needs.

<sup>1113</sup> Djurberg 2017: 16.

disingenuous, given the success that he has enjoyed with writers such as Høeg and Mankell, and especially Larsson, whose *Millennium* series would be considered genre fiction by the standards of most. To some extent, the fact that MacLehose considers Larsson to be ‘proper literature’ demonstrates the extent to which hybrid genre literature has become acceptable and part of the literary mainstream in recent decades.<sup>1114</sup>

In the case of the *Millennium* series, the hybrid approach adopted differed to that found in the case of *Smilla*. The subjects of both case studies were published in periods of societal uncertainty and unrest, but the concerns of British readers differed somewhat in these different periods. Where readers in the early 1990s had been interested in postcolonial issues set against a backdrop of pre-millennial anxiety, readers in the late 2000s were more concerned about their financial futures. We can observe in the case of the original trilogy that they are examples of thrillers crossed with Crunch Lit, a hybrid genre. This only works in the British reception of the books, as Crunch Lit is a genre concerning the events around the British financial crisis of 2007-08.<sup>1115</sup> Writing in the early 2000s in Sweden, a decade after the Swedish financial crisis of the early 1990s, Larsson could clearly not have predicted what was to come in the UK. The original three books are thus an example of an inadvertent hybrid.<sup>1116</sup>

Larsson’s background interest in science fiction means that, beyond the obvious fact that as huge bestsellers they have many readers who would not ordinarily engage with

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<sup>1114</sup> Bloom notes that British reading habits have become more eclectic, and significantly less literary than they were in the past. See Bloom 2008: xvi.

<sup>1115</sup> Shaw 2015: 8.

<sup>1116</sup> Interestingly, Shaw cites Faulks as one of the key writers of the Crunch Lit movement. See *ibid.* Faulks is also named amongst the contemporaries to Høeg in the imagined transatlantic weather-book genre in the early 1990s. See Chapter 8.3.3. What we may be observing here is the capacity for MacLehose to identify books that use hybridity, thus giving them an edge against what might be thought of as ‘normal’ literature.

Scandinavian translations, the books have a specific hybrid readership. Through borrowing readers who would typically read sci-fi or fantasy, and combining this with a hybrid genre that appealed to readers in Britain in the late 2000s, the *Millennium* series was a potent import. The timeliness of this literary transmission is possibly best observed in the reception of *Millennium 4* and *Millennium 5* in 2015 and 2017, which have done well but not lived up to the success of the originals. Gone is much of the hybridity in genre terms, with Crunch Lit being a genre with a limited shelf life that is no longer directly applicable to the concerns British readers in the mid-2010s have.<sup>1117</sup>

#### 10.4 Reflections on Case Study Representativeness

Establishing the representativeness of the case studies in this thesis is important, because it is only possible to answer the research questions using the findings of the case studies if they are broadly representative of Scandinavian books. In general terms, they are comparable: all have come from Scandinavia, all have been translated not only to English but to other languages, and all are standard book-length works of fiction. The three Scandinavian countries are covered more or less equally, with Sweden and Norway both providing two case studies, while Denmark provides one.

Three case studies encompass the crime fiction genre, while two are examples of literary fiction. The fact that the three crime-based case studies are the three most recent is no coincidence, and reflects a developing appreciation of a wider range of genres in the UK,

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<sup>1117</sup> An emerging trend in British literature in 2017 is 'Brexlit', written in response to Brexit. See Day 2017. It remains to be seen whether this leads to the translation of works from the Scandinavian languages.

in both translated and domestic literature, over the past five decades. This has culminated in Scandinavian crime fiction becoming a dominant force at present.<sup>1118</sup>

In terms of author demographics, the authors featured in the case studies come from a range of backgrounds and had differing degrees of writing experience. *Millennium* represented Larsson's entry into the world of fiction, while *Smilla* was only Høeg's second full-length novel. Mykle had already written three full-length novels, and been the subject of a lengthy obscenity trial, when he was translated to English, more than a decade after he made his full literary debut. The Martin Beck series represented Sjöwall's writing debut, but Wahlöö was a seasoned writer of fiction with half a dozen novels in Sweden to his name. Similarly, Lagercrantz had a breadth of experience in writing fiction when he took on the *Millennium* project. At the very far end of the spectrum, we find Hamsun, who was sixty years old when *Growth* was published in Britain, and had already made his fortune, in the process establishing himself as one of Norway's literary greats. With the exception of Sjöwall, all case studies concern male writers, male gender having been recognised to offer a statistically inherent advantage in securing transmission to foreign literary cultures.<sup>1119</sup> While the bias towards male writers is not representative of the overall literary

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<sup>1118</sup> The rise of genre fiction, especially in translation, has not been at the expense of literary fiction. The Man Booker International Prize 2017 included two Scandinavian authors on its shortlist of six (Dorthe Nors and Roy Jacobsen), and Knausgård has enjoyed widespread interest in the UK in recent years.

<sup>1119</sup> It has been suggested that only around a quarter of translated authors in the present day are female. See Anderson 2013. By comparison, it is suggested that around one third of the general author population are female. See Guest 2017. Corresponding statistics for Scandinavia are difficult to come by, but it would appear that the gender distribution in Scandinavia is similar to that found in Britain. For instance, Berglund states that around one third of crime fiction books written in Sweden during the 2000s were by women, see Berglund 2012b: 44. Similarly, a 2011 report issued by the Norwegian Authors' Union notes that 34% of its members were women, and that over the period 2001-2010, 39% of the union's stipend recipients had been women. See Oterholm 2011.

output of Scandinavia, it is representative of those works transmitted to Britain that have made a discernible impact on the reading public.<sup>1120</sup>

As the case studies in this thesis demonstrate, the position of individual books or authors within the British literary polysystem varies not only upon arrival in Britain, but can also diminish or fluctuate greatly over subsequent years. Sjöwall and Wahlöö's works have come to greater prominence, taking on a more central position in the polysystem decades after initial publication.<sup>1121</sup> In seeking to describe writers and works that have had a discernible impact on the British literary polysystem, this thesis inevitably concentrates on a limited selection of the many Scandinavian books translated. Almost 1,000 Scandinavian literary books were published in English translation in Britain in the period 2000-2015, and the vast majority of these generated no impact of any description in the UK, disappearing without a trace upon publication.<sup>1122</sup> The position of such books in the British polysystem is one of abject peripherality. However, while individual works may sink, the documented flood in itself raises awareness of Scandinavian books in the

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<sup>1120</sup> Furthermore, obvious twentieth-century female candidates for study, such as Astrid Lindgren or Tove Jansson, have already been the subject of similar and recent research by Berry. See Berry 2014a, Berry 2014c. The twenty-first century offers more plausible candidates, with the most prominent example being Camilla Läckberg. Like Larsson, Läckberg was first published in the UK in 2008. Unlike Larsson, she continues to write, and at the age of just 43 surely has decades of writing ahead of her. A study of Läckberg's impact on the British literary polysystem will be more comprehensive in a few years' time.

<sup>1121</sup> Sjöwall and Wahlöö are one of the most prominent examples of this revitalisation, experiencing multiple reissues, healthy sales and refreshed academic and media coverage. They illustrate the argument advanced by Määttä that originally popular works of fiction can eventually be consecrated as literary works meriting attention, making them indistinguishable from literary classics. See Määttä 2014: 214. However, they are not the only example. On a smaller scale, there are also efforts to draw modern classics such as Tarjei Vesaas' *The Ice Palace* back towards the centre of the polysystem through the reissue and subsequent promotion of a new hardback by its publishers Peter Owen. Similarly, there are endeavours to trigger the rediscovery of writers such as William Heinesen, see Sjón 2017. On a grander scale, the interest in Tove Jansson's Moomins (and the rampant commercialisation) has never been greater, with Sort Of Books reissuing Jansson's work in a manner similar to the way in which Sjöwall and Wahlöö were reissued in the 2000s. See 'Moomin Special Editions' 2017.

<sup>1122</sup> Giles 2018.

polysystem as a whole.<sup>1123</sup> Thus, while the selected case studies are not representative of the average Scandinavian book transmitted to Britain, they are representative of Scandinavian books that make an impact on the British literary polysystem upon reception, and are appropriate for use in developing a coherent account of literary transmission while also addressing the thesis research questions.

## 10.5 Scandinavian Crime Books: A Gateway to All Translated Literature?

Having established that the case studies are representative of Scandinavian books more widely, we can reflect upon Cooke's speculation that the rise of translated fiction in 2010s Britain is down to Scandinavian crime fiction.<sup>1124</sup> The idea that readers of Scandinavian crime fiction have been inspired to read other translated literature has been taken up by various figures over the past decade. One enthusiastic proponent is Engles, who argues that readers of Scandinavian crime fiction are encouraged to divert their reading habits to other, elite literature in translation.<sup>1125</sup> This view is supported wholeheartedly by MacLehose, who firmly believes that readers do transition to elite literature as a result of reading Scandinavian crime fiction in translation.<sup>1126</sup> A contrasting view is provided by Espmark, who contends that such transitions from popular to elite literature simply do not happen, and that the only way to secure readers for elite literature is actively to promote it to readers in its own right.<sup>1127</sup>

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<sup>1123</sup> There are two points of further justification: firstly, that many domestic books produced in Britain also sink without a trace, having no discernible impact on the polysystem, and secondly, that the very nature of fluctuations in the polysystem makes it possible, at least theoretically, for even the most peripheral work to be drawn towards the centre at a later date.

<sup>1124</sup> Cooke 2016.

<sup>1125</sup> Engles 2009: 63.

<sup>1126</sup> *Ibid.*: 73. It is worth noting that since carrying out his research, Engles has taken up a position as an editor at none other than MacLehose Press.

<sup>1127</sup> Espmark 2008: 77.

Translation scholar Venuti has been inconsistent in his approach to the matter, stating on the one hand that the recent dominance of translated crime fiction is an ‘unprecedented development in British and American publishing’ while qualifying this with the statement that the ‘popular audience is not crossing over to elite foreign literature’ as a by-product of this success.<sup>1128</sup> Yet in an interview with Mason in the same year, Venuti appears to contradict himself:

But a reader who has read a few works translated from a foreign literature, past and present, will feel better equipped to brave some newcomer. This is undoubtedly what’s happening with the foreign crime fiction, which is selling in unprecedented numbers for translations. Each of Henning Mankell’s crime novels have sold more than 100,000 copies in the UK alone [...] Readers who wouldn’t read a Swedish novel now avidly read all of his and then look for other Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic crime writing. Genre matters enormously here. But the case is also worth the attention of publishers who might want to invest in more literary works.<sup>1129</sup>

Venuti argues that the commercial success and popular reception of Scandinavian crime fiction increases the probability that British readers will subsequently engage with further examples of Scandinavian or even Nordic crime writing. The key to this statement is Venuti’s qualification that ‘genre matters’ – in this thesis we see a natural connection between *Smilla* and *Millennium* not just in the form of their British publisher, but also in terms of genre. Neither is explicitly pure crime fiction, drawing instead upon hybridity to take shape, but it is highly likely that the success of *Smilla* fuelled an interest in similar, hybrid genre Scandinavian translations in the years that followed. In between, there were authors such as Mankell, who reinforced this, extending interest to past works such as Sjöwall and Wahlöö. Venuti’s final remark is worth evaluating: here, he changes tack from his previous position and suggests that while there are no certainties, there is a potential

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<sup>1128</sup> Venuti 2008: 154-5.

<sup>1129</sup> Mason 2008.



for readers to move from genre fiction to elite literature as a result of increased engagement with the former.

Further nuance on the matter is offered by Harvill Secker editor Ellie Steel, who in 2009 expressed vague optimism that the success of international crime fiction would encourage readers to look further afield, namely to elite literature. Unlike MacLehose, she did not explicitly state that this was happening. She did indicate that the success of crime fiction had made British publishers likelier to look beyond specific genres when seeking out new source material to translate.<sup>1130</sup>

Steel's views had shifted by 2015, when she stated that Scandinavian translations had become less highbrow in the eyes of British readers, as genre definitions had become more fluid.<sup>1131</sup> This perceived lowering of the bar to accessing elite literature could thus be seen as the development of a trend where readers did cross over to elite literature, which they no longer saw as being quite so intimidating. In 2017, MacLehose argued that the era of the Scandinavian crime novel was over, and that British readers, while remaining wary of translations in general, were now demanding 'brilliant writers' rather than specific genres.<sup>1132</sup>

So what to make of Cooke's remarks regarding Scandinavian crime translations as the gateway to translated literature? Craighill argued in 2015 that high sales of Scandinavian crime fiction in Britain had led to a skewed perspective on the success of translated books

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<sup>1130</sup> Engles 2009: 69.

<sup>1131</sup> Craighill 2015: 13.

<sup>1132</sup> Djurberg 2017: 16.

as a whole, with too many industry figures potentially being overly optimistic.<sup>1133</sup> We find that Venuti's more general statement regarding translated crime fiction and its role in drawing readers to elite literature does not satisfactorily map onto the Scandinavian situation, at least in the British context. The idea that Scandinavian books are an exception to the general trends in translation, especially following the turn of the twenty-first century, is not far-fetched. The number of Swedish literary translations published in Britain has grown at an annual rate of 20% since the turn of the millennium, more than any other significant source language in the world, while Norwegian and Danish have also seen healthy growth over this period.<sup>1134</sup> The idea that publishers have been inspired to turn to Scandinavia for imports more frequently is accurate, while Steel's speculation that they might be inclined to look beyond the most common genres seems plausible. In an interview in 2017, Engles suggests that the real cross-over effect, at least in terms of Scandinavian literature, is the bolstering of other niche sub-genres.<sup>1135</sup> More generally, it seems likely that the Scandinavian propensity to use hybrid genres when producing literature has made Scandinavian literature increasingly appealing to British readers over recent decades, and consequently to British publishers. Consequently, we see that reading Scandinavian books does not necessarily encourage readers to move onto other books translated from non-Scandinavian languages, but that it does seem likely that they are encouraged to engage with more Scandinavian books.

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<sup>1133</sup> Craighill 2015: 13.

<sup>1134</sup> Giles 2018.

<sup>1135</sup> Interview in Kythor Forthcoming. Engles cites authors such as Jonas Jonasson and Fredrik Backman as particular examples of this. As of October 2017, Backman has sold almost 150,000 books in the UK, with *A Man Called Ove* his bestselling novel. Jonasson, best known for *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared*, has sold 867,000 books in Britain worth in excess of £6 million.

## 10.6 Concluding Consideration of the Research Questions

### 10.6.1 The Research Questions

The strands of the separate case studies having been drawn together, the findings have been presented in a collective account of the transmission of Scandinavian literature to Britain, with a particular focus on how the publication of Scandinavian books has evolved and the way in which British readers have accommodated such works in their own literary system. It is now appropriate to return to the original research questions posed at the beginning of the thesis.

In the case of research question 1, concerning the likelihood of Scandinavian books being transmitted to Britain, it was hypothesised that books were likeliest to be transmitted when they had enjoyed a positive reception from both literary professionals and external patrons/readers in their original source culture. The factors that influence the likelihood of transmission are varied, and at times can appear random. The hypothesis was borne out by the case studies, all of which enjoyed success, exponential in some cases, in their Scandinavian home markets. To further qualify this observation, the case studies were diverse in terms of authors' literary backgrounds, age, experience and genre. Case studies were drawn from a period of one hundred years, and this trend was observed throughout the duration.

In the case of research question 2, concerning the factors that influence the probability of a successful British reception for a Scandinavian book, it was hypothesised that a successful reception was likeliest to occur when the book in question met previously unfulfilled requirements in the British literary system while simultaneously engaging with

and challenging British literary norms. This hypothesis was largely accurate across all of the case studies contained within the thesis. It was clear that the most successful case study subjects were those that most convincingly performed vital functions in the British literary system at times of paradigmatic shift, whereas those cases that were less successful in their impact were less suitable fits for the contemporary requirements of British society.

In the case of research question 3, concerning the position of Scandinavian books in the British literary polysystem, it was hypothesised that the specific case study subjects would all enjoy relatively central positions in the polysystem within the contemporary context of each publication, but that such a position could and would fluctuate over time. All case study subjects in this thesis have enjoyed a degree of centrality in the British polysystem at some point in time. Naturally, the position of those cases examined does not correlate with the overall position of Scandinavian literature in the British literary polysystem. Thus, centrality for one author or book does not equate to centrality for Scandinavian literature as a whole. Across the five case studies, two have experienced terminal decline in terms of centrality, with little prospect of a reverse. Two are sufficiently recent that it is problematic to identify fluctuations at present, and the hypothesised fluctuations in position have been observed in the case of Sjöwall and Wahlöö. It is suggested that the position of Scandinavian literature diverges from that of translated literature as a whole, although whether this is a temporary or permanent state is not clear.

In the case of research question 4, concerning the internal and external factors of influence on the transmission of Scandinavian books to Britain, it was hypothesised that a successful transmission was often the result of paradigmatic shifts in British society, although the role of source-culture agents could also be critical. In short, one of the

strongest influences on a literary transmission is likely to be a British sociocultural, demand-driven pull factor. However, Scandinavian source cultures are also often found to be pushing their own literary products onto target cultures. Not surprisingly, the roles played by internal and external influences vary substantially on a case-by-case basis. This hypothesis has largely been borne out, although it is difficult to identify overarching trends in relation to the split between internal and external factors.

Research question 5 concerned the comparability of Britain's literary polysystem as a target market for Scandinavian books to other literary polysystems. It is challenging to compare the British literary situation to that found in other countries and language areas on a general level, even at specific moments in time, due to the size of literary polysystems. However, comparing the trajectory of one book or author offers greater possibilities, strongly supporting the approach adopted in the present thesis. It was hypothesised that Scandinavian books that go on to be transmitted to the UK and enjoy successful receptions here are typically those that not only have enjoyed success in their source cultures but have also been successfully transmitted to and received by other literary polysystems that are comparable to Britain in terms of their centrality. In the cases of Hamsun, Mykle and Larsson, all had enjoyed widespread commercial and critical success not only in Norway and Sweden respectively, but also elsewhere, with Germany often being a focal point. Sjöwall and Wahlöö's transmission to Britain differed somewhat as Wahlöö had already been translated into English in his own right, while Høeg was plucked from relative obscurity, with his appearance in English being one of his earliest translations. The hypothesis has been borne out across the case studies in this thesis, although to varying degrees.

In the case of research question 6, concerning the evolution of publishing and reading trends and the way in which these are reflected by the selected case studies, it was hypothesised that the cases would together reflect the increasing commercialisation of literature, especially as a result of developments in terms of genre, influences and modes of consumption. This hypothesis has been proven: throughout the period covered by the thesis, each study reflects new aspects of the evolution of publishing and reading trends in Britain from both a sociocultural perspective and in terms of the commercial dimension. The past century has seen significant development in terms of the genres that are willingly received by the literary polysystem, and in particular the use of hybridity. The influencing factors on the transmission of Scandinavian books have become increasingly professionalised, while increased commercialisation has seen the emergence of multiple new modes of consumption for literature.

### 10.6.2 Formula for Transmission

These research questions and their answers enable us to draw conclusions about a possible formula for the transmission of Scandinavian books to Britain. In order for a Scandinavian book to be selected for transmission to Britain, it must typically have first been successful in its home market. It should be noted that it is not an absolute necessity for a Scandinavian book to have been successful in a different literary system prior to its transmission to Britain, but that if it has enjoyed success in other major literary polysystems, its chances of transmission are further increased. Once a Scandinavian book is transmitted to Britain, its likelihood of success upon arrival is governed by a myriad of factors. The surest way of securing a positive reception from British readers, and ensuring a commercial success for a publisher, is to provide these readers with something that is not readily available domestically in Britain. Any Scandinavian book that is the subject of

demand-driven transmission to Britain, namely that British readers need that kind of book, will be far likelier to succeed upon arrival than a book that is independently pushed onto the British literary system by the source culture. However, the value of the source culture in driving forward a transmission should not be overlooked: when partnered effectively with target-culture demand, it can enhance the potential of a book in translation. If a Scandinavian book is transmitted to Britain successfully, it is possible for it to enjoy a highly central position in the British literary polysystem. As would be expected with any book, including domestic literature, such a position will typically become gradually more peripheral. However, this is not always the case and fluctuations in polysystemic fortunes towards the centre are also possible later on in the trajectory of a transmitted Scandinavian book.

## 10.7 Final Remarks

Scandinavian literature as a whole would appear to have a not insignificant role to play in the British literary polysystem. Existing bibliographic studies demonstrate that translations have taken place regularly throughout the period covered by this thesis, statistical analyses since the turn of the twentieth century demonstrate that the publication of Scandinavian translations is on the increase in Britain, and it has been possible to select representative case studies from throughout the past century for presentation in this thesis.

There are multiple avenues of future research that could be pursued as a result of this research. It is altogether possible that scholars will consider the past quarter of a century to be an anomaly, especially on the grounds of the vociferous consumption of Scandinavian crime fiction in Britain. Further study of the role of other imported genres

and sub-genres from Scandinavia would enhance the understanding of Scandinavia as a source literary culture. Just as this thesis sought to reframe analysis of Scandinavian literature through the omission of figures from the nineteenth century such as Andersen, Ibsen and Strindberg, so it may be advantageous to omit figures such as Larsson and Høeg.

Beyond the straightforward considerations of which authors and works to include or omit from future studies, it should be noted that two of the case studies feature authors who remain active: Høeg and Lagercrantz. There is thus the possibility that they may further influence the position of their oeuvre in the British literary polysystem. Indeed, as has been noted, it is possible for the position of a work to fluctuate many years after its initial publication: Mykle may be overdue for rediscovery by the British literary polysystem. Just as Hamsun was putting the finishing touches to *Growth* one hundred years ago, there is the likelihood of a Scandinavian author currently in the midst of producing the next major work that will appeal to British readers, and that will form a worthy subject of a future case study. While the thesis and its findings may provide a formula of sorts to enable a publisher to identify such a work, it is by no means fool-proof, and the researcher will be obliged to wait until there is further data to work with.

Within the spectrum of increasing professionalisation and commercialisation of literature and publishing, there are several intriguing strands ripe for further examination, including new modes of publishing in a new, transnational marketplace, the role of literary agents and cultural funders, and the impact of other cultural modes of dissemination on literature. Just as the nineteenth century was the golden age of Scandinavian theatre on



export to Britain, so the early-twenty-first century has seen a wealth of televisual exports that have had an undeniable impact on literary dissemination.

This thesis has speculated that the prevailing approach to literary translations as products, and the way they are interacted with by readers, as posited by Venuti, does not map onto the Scandinavian situation. Readers do not necessarily move to elite literature, or read non-Scandinavian translated books, while publishers have embraced hybrid sub-genres. This poses the question of whether Scandinavian literature in Britain is *sui generis* when compared more broadly to translated literature. This can only be answered through a much larger examination of a wide range of both qualitative and quantitative data.

The methodological vehicle adopted for this project, as proposed by Susam-Sarajeva, has been that of a multiple case study. The thesis has also benefited from the application of a considered, multifaceted framework, tailored to the requirements of the specific research questions, enabling the researcher to draw conclusions using relational, conditional statements. This framework is a direct response to Toury's critique of the tendency towards theorising rather than descriptivism in translation research. The use of Holmes' fDTS has ensured flexibility in this thesis, while the use of Even-Zohar's polysystem theory has ensured that the focus has remained on transmission and reception, rather than on literary quality. A comparative dimension has been provided by Heilbron's sociology of translation, while Lefevere's concept of patronage has enabled the researcher to reflect on the patrons of literature and the use of target-culture literary benchmarks. Drawing on these scholarly approaches has ensured a robust response to the research questions and aided the production of a coherent account of the literary transmission.

This thesis has analysed the evolution of publishing and reading trends in Britain at key moments during the period 1917-2017, as reflected by translated Scandinavian books. Furthermore, it has interrogated the current tendency to cite Scandinavian literature as the progenitor of popular translated literature in the present day. While literary trends rarely conform to neat time periods, this study of the past century of Scandinavian literary transmission to Britain is a cohesive response to Graves' open invitation to scholars to produce a 'coherent historical account of the transmission of Scandinavian literature', and inspires further contributions to the understanding of Scandinavian literary imports to Britain.



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Sources are listed in the following order:

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*This includes the first Scandinavian edition and the first British edition of all case study subjects.*

## Archival Matter

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N.B.

*The following bibliographies are alphabetised according to British English spelling standards. Non-English letters of the alphabet such as Æ, Ä, Ø, Ö, Å therefore appear in the English order, rather than at the end of the list. For example, Østby appears under 'O'.*

*Icelandic authors are listed as if according to surname, rather than the usual Icelandic practice of forename followed by patronymic.*

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## Archival Matter

Victor Gollancz Limited, publishing archive, University of Warwick (ref. MSS.318)

The table below outlines references used in the body of the thesis, and notes which specific item is referred to. It should be noted that the reference is more general than the specific item, i.e. that a specific letter will be one of several held in that particular file.

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Description</b>
MSS.318/2/2/8	Contact ledger 1966-1978
MSS.318/3/LIV/16	Exchange of letters between André Schiffrin and Livia Gollancz in January 1974
MSS.318/3/LIV/17	Exchange of letters between André Schiffrin and Livia Gollancz in January 1974
MSS.318/3/LIV/32	Letter written by Livia Gollancz, 10/01/1968
MSS.318/7/AD/1	Memo by Giles Gordon dated 18/09/1967
MSS.318/7/QU/21/2	Supplementary sheet no. 768 by Giles Gordon
MSS.318/7/QU/21/2	<i>Roseanna</i> press cuttings
MSS.318/7/QU/22/1	<i>The Man on the Balcony</i> press cuttings
MSS.318/7/QU/23/2	<i>The Man Who Went Up in Smoke</i> press cuttings
MSS.318/7/QU/24/1	<i>The Laughing Policeman</i> press cuttings
MSS.318/7/QU/25/1	<i>The Fire Engine That Disappeared</i> press cuttings
MSS.318/7/QU/25/2	<i>Murder at the Savoy</i> press cuttings
MSS.318/7/QU/26/1	<i>The Abominable Man</i> press cuttings
MSS.318/7/QU/27/1	<i>The Locked Room</i> press cuttings
MSS.318/7/QU/28/1	<i>Cop Killer</i> press cuttings
MSS.318/7/QU/30/2	<i>The Terrorists</i> press cuttings

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