

Abstract.

This chapter describes the ways missing, murdered and abused children have become integral to the Nordic-noir crime genre in literature and their adaptations in television, theatre and film. The absent child and ruined childhood are often the lenses through which the genre's stock themes of urban crime, political corruption and dis-functional relationships are explored. In this sense, almost all Nordic-noir texts contain a horror narrative within them, and the damaged childhoods of central characters cast long shadows: in the genre's 1992 antecedent, *Miss Smilla's Feelings for Snow*, the eponymous hero searches for a missing child; *Forbrydelsen's* (*The Killing*) Sarah Lund investigates the murder of the teenage Nana Birk Larsen; Saga Norén negotiates a confusing adult world while dealing with her own child abuse and death of her twin sister in *Broen/Bron* (*The Bridge*), while similarly the *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo's* Lisbeth Salander seeks out her absent twin sister and takes revenge on their childhood abusers while solving the disappearance of a teenage girl.

As Nordic-noir texts gained in popularity, many were remade in other English-language media, becoming something of a transnational genre. The US remake of *Forbrydelsen*, (*The Killing*) shifted the context of the narrative to Seattle but retained the murdered teenager (here renamed Rosie Larson). *Broen/Bron's* UK/French remake, *The Tunnel*, developed further the childhood horror of the central character (now called Elise Wassermann) in ways, which would later directly influence its progenitor text. Stylistically, David Fincher's 2011 version of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* differed markedly from the Swedish television adaptation, but Lisbeth Salander's ruined childhood was kept intact. So, while the adaptations of Nordic-noir texts inevitably brought about alternative creative decisions, the central trope of ruined childhood almost always remained.

This chapter will argue that it is this particular framing of childhood, which has most endured, as the visual expression of Nordic-noir meets, influences and merges with other genres. Examples of this will include David Lagercrantz's further examination of Lisbeth Salander's childhood in his anthology

novel, *The Girl in the Spider's Web* - in ways only hinted at by original author, the late Steig Larsson. Similarly, the Nordic-noir influenced French TV series *Les Revenants* (*The Returned*) deals explicitly with mass child abduction, while the British crime series *Broadchurch* (and its US remake *Gracepoint*) is a direct appropriation of Nordic-noir tropes (including the death of a child) set in a different national and political context. Finally, novels from an emerging Scandi-horror genre, namely John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Let the Right One In* and Stefan Spjut's *Stallo*, return to the deserted parks and empty swings of Northern Europe, but with a supernatural element which effectively meshes Nordic-noir with the horror genre's fear of children. This hybrid genre serves to reconfigure childhood completely; children may now be present, but shifting relationship between childhood and the adult world becomes elusive, abstract, and horrifying. The narrative power of *Let the Right One In* and *Stallo* comes from directly confronting childhood in ways, until now, the Nordic-noir genre has only hinted at.

Keywords: Nordic Noir; Crime; Child; Childhood; Abuse; Horror.

Biography.

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Introduction.

In many ways, the Nordic-noir genre of North European crime fiction owes its popularity, and longevity to adaptation; from Stieg Larsson's blockbuster *Millennium Trilogy* (2005 – 2007) novels - featuring his enigmatic computer hacker, Lisbeth Salander – to the television serials *Forbrydelsen* (2007 – 2012) and *Broen/Bron* (2011 -), both of which were almost instantly remade into English language versions (see Berger 2016). This only increased their appeal and popularity; to date, there are two different remakes of *Broen/Bron* in close synchronicity with the original Danish/Swedish co-production: the UK/French co-production, *The Tunnel* (2013 -) and the US/Mexico co-production, *The Bridge* (2013 -). Larsson's novels were also adapted into three very successful Swedish films: *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Oplev, 2009), *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (Alfredson, 2009) and *The Girl Who Kicked a Hornet's Nest* (Alfredson, 2009). In 2010, David Fincher directed an English-language version of *The Girl with a Dragon Tattoo*, and a US television series based on the Lisbeth Salander character is currently in development. This suggests then that Nordic noir tropes have a great deal of transnational currency and reach.

The Nordic-noir crime genre (or 'Scandi-lit) is now firmly established as fairly stable utterance in literary and visual culture. The genre has been defined by its used of Scandinavian urban decay, abandoned islands, deserted parks and political corruption, all delivered with a low-sun lit snowscape backdrop of stark leave-less trees against grey skies. Sue Turnbull describes Nordic-noir as a, 'combination of deeply shadowed interiors and wash-out daylight exteriors in urban and rural Denmark' (2014: 186).

A signature trope also seems to be misogyny; the original Swedish title for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* was *Men Who Hate Women*. The titular 'Girl', Lisbeth Salander is abused throughout her childhood, and well into adulthood; the first series of *Forbrydelsen* deals with the rape and murder of

a 19-year old woman and *Broen/Bron's* central character, Saga Norén investigates the bizarre double-murder of a female politician and a prostitute.

Some Swedish crime fiction scholars, such as Andrew Nestingen and Paula Arvas, suggest that attempting *any* one definition of a literary genre, which spans five countries, all with quite distinct cultural differences, is problematic. However, key connecting themes could be the, 'melancholy detectives who are silent, depressed, thirsty and so on' (2016: 9). Other writers, such as Steven Peacock, suggest that one reason for the enduring appeal of these crime stories is that, 'there is a particularly "bleak" aspect to Nordic noir, a certain strand of Scandinavian sensibility that the crime drama can tap into more than any other genre' (2014: 3).

At first glance, Jo Nesbø's *Harry Hole* novels and Henning Mankell's *Wallander* crime stories are both seen as the antecedent texts of the Nordic-noir genre - and many have been adapted and remade into English-language versions. However, Peter Hoeg's 192 novel, *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* is a more likely origin – later adapted as *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (August, 1997). This novel features a central female protagonist, possessed of unusual analytical gifts (just like Lisbeth Salander, Saga Norén and *Forbrydelsen's* Sarah Lund). While the novel does deal with standard Nordic-noir signature tropes - such as presenting a central character, who has difficulty in forming meaningful relationships, while negotiating a murky world of political corruption and conspiracy theories - the narrative is ostensibly about a missing child.

Beginning with *Miss Smilla...*, this chapter is an attempt to describe the ways missing, murdered and abused children are integral to the Nordic-noir crime genre in literature and their (almost simultaneous) adaptations in television, film and theatre. I hope to demonstrate that the absent child, and ruined childhood more broadly, are often the lenses through which the genre's stock themes of urban crime, political corruption and dis-functional relationships are explored, and this is something until now, which has been overlooked by most Nordic-noir scholarship.

Smilla and Camilla.

Smilla Qaavivaq Jaspersen is the 37-year old daughter of an Inuit woman and a deceased Danish doctor, living an isolated life in Copenhagen. She may, or may not, display elements of autism/Asperger syndrome – this is not specifically addressed – but she has a keen intuitive knowledge of ice and snow. When a five year-old boy she has befriended, Isaiah, mysteriously falls from a warehouse roof, Smilla sets out to ‘solve’ the crime. Despite there being only one set of footprints in the snow, Smilla knows that the boy was scared of heights, and ‘feels’ that he was running from someone. The amateur investigation leads Smilla on sea journey North, to the deserted arctic island of Gela Alta. Here, a high-level conspiracy is revealed featuring a weaponised meteorite, a side-effect of which has caused an infestation of a lethal parasite – which Isaiah seems to have been suffering from. The novel ends with Smilla venturing out onto the ice, in pursuit of the man she considers the boy’s murderer. The unresolved ending perhaps suggests that the absent child is something of a sub-plot, but in this novel, the device is used to explore Smilla’s loneliness; like Smilla, the boy is similarly displaced and lost in Copenhagen (he is originally from Greenland). In the film adaptation, *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, the film opens with the meteorite crashing to Earth and Isaiah is a far more visible presence, shown in flashback. The film ends with the death of the suspected murderer, and is far less ambiguous than the novel’s denouement.

Missing children are also a central device in Stieg Larsson’s *Millenium* novels. In the first book, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, crusading journalist, Mikael Blomkvist is hired by a rich businessman, Henrik Vanger, to solve the mysterious disappearance of his teenage grand niece 40-years earlier; Harriet Vanger vanished during a village parade in 1966. Blomkvist teams up with an enigmatic young woman, who like Smilla, is socially and emotionally dysfunctional, but has a unique ability: this time, computer hacking and data mining, combined with a photographic memory. For Peacock, Salander is, ‘the archetypal outsider: socially ostracised and awkward, pronouncedly “other” in her physical appearance, legal status and sexual orientation’ (2014: 76), while Karsten Wind Meyhoff appraises this odd double-act as, ‘an asymmetric relationship, intellectual and sexual, in which Salander is the object of Blomkvist’s sexual and intellectual desire. She is superior to him in almost every way, but

Blomkvist is dogged, practical and a man of action. The sexual dimension notwithstanding, this is the most familiar trope of the who-dunnit: the dunderheaded assistant and the genius sleuth" (2011: 180).

An intriguing sub-plot deals with Salander's abusive childhood and her subsequent blackmailing at the hands of her sadistic legal guardian, Nils Bjurman. This sub-plot does survive the adaptation process: both the Swedish 2009 film, and the 2010 US remake, depict Salander's revenge on those who traumatised her as a child. While the Swedish adaptations of the two other *Millennium* novels do deal with Salander's father, another character is missing: Lisbeth's twin sister Camilla. Separated at a young age, the 'present absence' of Lisbeth's sister is a powerful narrative device.

Stieg Larsson died unexpectedly in 2004, and never lived to see the success of both his trilogy of Swedish crime novels, and their native and English-language adaptations. However, this was not the end of Lisbeth Salander and Mikhael Blomkvist; in 2015, *The Girl in the Spider's Web*, was published. This continuation novel was written by David Lagercrantz, himself a former crime journalist and an established writer of thrillers - a similar biography to Stieg Larsson himself, in fact. There has been much written on fan-writing and while Lagercrantz is much more than a 'fanfic' (or even 'profic') author, his contribution to the *Millennium* stories do serve to fill some of the 'gaps' left behind in the 'official' media, which transmedia theorists such as Henry Jenkins (1992 & 2008) describe.

The Girl in the Spider's Web does provide neat symmetry with *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, as this time, Lisbeth Salander befriends an autistic child, who is witness to a terrible crime. Meanwhile a mysterious woman, Rebecka Mattson, attempts (unsuccessfully) to seduce Mikhael Blomkvist. Filling in a great deal of the back-story mobilised in the first *Millennium* novel, Mattson is later revealed to be Lisbeth's estranged 'evil twin', Camilla. Lisbeth however, is unable to kill her sibling in the novel's dramatic conclusion, and Camilla escapes to no doubt feature in further stories. While canonical, *Spider's Web* is something of a departure from the original trilogy – and allied adaptations – as the novel returns to the themes of the original Salander/Blomkvist story; however, it is not a *child* which is missing as such, but a *childhood*, as both Salander sisters were brutalised when they were young

girls, and denied access to a space of innocence and purity in their early years. The *Millennium* novels, augmented by *Spider's Web*, question whether childhood can ever be truly innocent, by having both the (now) adult Harriet Vanger and Camilla Salander return from 'the dead'.

Saga and Sara.

Saga Norén (Sofia Helin) is straight out of the Smilla/Lisbeth textbook: while an excellent and intuitive investigating detective, her connections to her colleagues and her family are extraordinarily awkward and complex. While autism and Asperger's syndrome is again, never directly acknowledged, Saga the Porsche driving, leather trousers wearing sleuth, does admit to having problems relating to people; a comic element is added in the form of her partner, Martin Rohde (Kim Bodnia), who often has to explain away her odd behaviour and unintentional insensitivity. The central conceit of *Broen/Bron* is that a dead body is discovered at the midpoint of the Øresund Bridge, which connects Sweden and Denmark, compelling two national police forces to collaborate. The body, however, is made up from two different corpses: a prominent female politician and a prostitute. The endearing double-act of Norén and Rohde, takes on a further poignancy as the Danish Rohde becomes protective of his Swedish partner's problems in encountering the world.

In the second series of *Broen/Bron*, Rohde discovers that Norén used to have a twin sister, Jennifer, who committed suicide when she was fourteen. It is clear that Norén is haunted by the death of her sibling, and perhaps blames herself. In 2013, the Swedish–Danish co-production was remade for English-language audiences, as Anglo-French series, *The Tunnel*. In this version, the composite body is found at the mid-way point in the Channel Tunnel, caught directly betwixt France and the UK. This time, a French detective, Elise Wassermann (Clémence Poésy) is forced to team-up with British investigator, Karl Roebuck (Stephen Dillane). It is clear that while Wassermann does not display some of the more extreme behavioural issues of a Saga Norén, she is still a distinctly traumatised young woman. This first series of *The Tunnel* goes into much more detail than *Broen/Bron*, regarding its central protagonist's childhood; while Wasserman's sister also died when she was a child, she

drowned in a beach accident. Here Wasserman's 'guilt' stems from the fact her parents tried to rescue both of them, but could only save one daughter.

The now synchronous nature of adaptations and remakes (Berger 2016), mean that multiple related versions of texts can exist simultaneously, and can in some instances overlap and connect. Like cards being shuffled in a deck, hard-on-the-heels of the first series of *The Tunnel*, came the third series of *Broen/Bron*. Seemingly taking its cue from its progeny series, *Broen/Bron* this time dealt with Norén's childhood head-on: Saga and her sister, Jennifer were being abused by their mother, who was suffering from Munchausen syndrome by proxy. Here, Saga's guilt stems from her (falsely) accusing her mother of sexual abuse as a way of removing both sisters from harm. This ultimately failed as it drove Saga's sister to suicide. The third series of *Broen/Bron* deals with Norén's mother's (brief) return. Norén's new partner (and on/off lover) Henrik Sabroe, is caught between which of the Norén women to believe/trust. Like the *Millennium* novels, *Broen/Bron* is interested in missing *childhoods*, rather than missing children, although both Norén and Wasserman are quite child-like in their dealings with the world.

Forbrydelsen's Sarah Lund (Sofie Gråbøl) is neither or stylish or suffering from an Asberger's like condition. In a seeming contrast with Saga Norén: 'Sarah Lund's unkempt ponytail and ubiquitous Faroese sweater, and jeans signify her complete lack of personal vanity' (Turnbull 2014: 179). When we first meet her, she is in a happy stable relationship, and about to finish her last day at Copenhagen police department, before moving to Sweden to begin a new life. However, she indefinitely delays her departure – at the eventual cost of her relationship - to investigate the disappearance of a 19-year old woman, Nana Birk Larsen (Julie Ølgaard). Over the span of 20-days, Lund and her partner Jan Meyer (Søren Dyrberg Malling) investigate what becomes a brutal rape and murder. The series is a painfully detailed study of the effects the death of a teenage woman has on her family: '[w]hat women should fear most, this narrative suggests, is not an unknown serial killer, but someone close to them' (ibid).

Forbrydelsen was almost instantly remade as *The Killing*, for English-speaking audiences. While the Danish series was extremely popular across Europe, US audiences do historically have problems with

subtitled television programmes (Kaufman 2014). The remake is very faithful to the original, some Anglicisations aside: the series is set in a suitably rainy Seattle (although filmed in Vancouver), and Sarah Lund becomes Sarah Linden (played by Marie Mireille Enos) while Nana Birk Larsen changes to Rosie Larsen (Katie Findlay). Both versions successfully mirror the murder of Nana Birk/Rosie Larsen, with Lund/Linden's relationship with their similarly aged teenage offspring; as Lund/Linden gets closer to solving the case, and unmasking the murderer, the further she seems emotionally to move away from her son. Lund/Linden's obsession with a dead teenager, comes at the cost of her own relationship with her own adolescent son. In solving the case, the obsessive work alcoholic detective loses everything: her fiancé, the familial connection with her child and her status and authority within the Copenhagen police force. It seems that Lund/Linden's relationship with the 'living' are far more complex than those with the 'dead'.

'I'm twelve. But I've been twelve for a long time'.

John Ajvide Lindqvist's Swedish 2004 novel, *Let the Right One In*, also deals with loneliness, but this time the shared loneliness of two 'lost' children. Oskar is 12-years old, and lives a solitary life with his mother, on a run-down housing project in 1980s Stockholm. His almost silent world of empty swing-parks erected on snow-covered waste ground between tower blocks, is interrupted when he meets and befriends Eli. At first glance, Eli is a 12-year old girl, but it is gradually revealed that 'she' is a 200-year old male vampire, who was castrated when he was 'turned' as a pre-pubescent child. Eli has been trapped in a twelve year old's body for centuries, and is forced to live with a convicted child abuser, Håkan. A former teacher, whose desire forces him into a relationship of compliance and servitude with Eli, Håkan seeks out the victims whose blood Eli needs to feed on to survive.

While the novel does deal with paedophilia and necrophilia, it is essentially about the relationship between two children; Eli never seems to be 'completely' adult, despite his advanced age. This hybrid genre of 'Scandi-horror' serves to reconfigure childhood completely; children may now be present, but the shifting relationship between childhood and the adult world becomes elusive, abstract, and horrifying. Like the missing Isaiah, in *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, Eli disappeared from his family,

and is technically, a missing child – despite the fact his family is now long dead. He has had his childhood taken from him, in a similar way to Lisbeth Salander and Saga Norén, he is forced to occupy a space between childhood and adulthood, but never quite achieving either. Unlike Salander and Norén, however, he also hovers between the living and the dead, or as Susan Hancock, when writing about ‘haunted’ children in horror cinema, puts it: ‘between the Devine and the Diabolic’ (2009). Oskar too, is caught in the fracture that exists between early adolescence and full maturity; he is savagely bullied by some older boys and Eli’s revenge is suitably exacting. The novel closes with a now implicated Oskar, absconding with his 200-year old friend.

In setting the novel in the 1980s, thematically at least, Lindqvist’s novel is located within a period rich with ‘evil children’ in horror literature and film; for Karen J. Renner, ‘these texts were less interested in children who were born bad, but rather in those who had been made so’ (2011). Remaining faithful to the 1980s, the 2008 Swedish film adaptation, directed by Tomas Alfredson (brother of Daniel, who directed two of the three *Millennium* adaptations), was critically acclaimed, garnering many plaudits and awards on the international film festival circuit. Alfredson’s version – based on a screenplay written by Lindqvist – eschews many of the usual horror/vampire film conventions, and chooses to focus on the relationship between the two ‘children’. The supernatural elements of the novel are downplayed in this filmed version, in favour of developing the relationship between Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) and Eli (Lina Leandersson). Eli tells the boy, ‘I am not a girl’ fairly early on, and the two enter into something close to an adult relationship. While initially appalled at Eli’s need for blood (and therefore reason to kill), Oskar is encouraged to by the vampire to embrace his desire for revenge on his tormentors. As the two protagonists make their escape at the end of the film, you can almost imagine the crunch of Saga Norén’s Porsche tyres in the snow, as she rolls up to solve the murders.

The 2010 US-UK remake, directed by Matt Reeves, is a far more conventional affair. Reeves (who also wrote the screenplay, based on Lindqvist’s adaptation of his own novel) was clearly going for a more mainstream appeal. Set in a snow-bound Reagan-ite 1980s New Mexico, *Let Me In*, locates itself firmly in the US horror film tradition. This version also is keen to avoid the androgynous complications of the novel and the Swedish adaptation; here ‘Abby’ (Chloë Grace Moretz) the vampire is very much

the pre-teen high-school girl. Her friend, Owen (Kodi Smit-McPhee), is awkward and bullied, but no more so than is seen in many mainstream horror films aimed at teenage audiences. *Let Me In* is more of a 'coming of age' movie, than the dark exploration of innocence, which defines many Nordic-noir texts.

The appeal of Scandi-horror, of the type typified by *Let the Right One In*, seems universal and completely adaptable: in 2010, Hammer and Dark Horse released the prequel comic book series, *Let Me In: Crossroads* – interestingly taking its cue from the title of the US filmed version. The comic book also features 'Abby' and not 'Eli' in providing more material in filling in the 'gaps' of the vampire/child's origin story - here firmly framing an adaptation as 'source text', as visually, Abby is clearly based on US actor, Chloë Grace Moretz. Lindqvist returned to his novel again a year later, in 2011, this time to create a stage production, which was successfully revived the following year. Separately, the National Theatre of Scotland also developed their own theatrical version in 2013. This play, written by Jack Thorne, toured throughout the UK, and then across the US in 2015. In 2016, another stage version of the novel opened on Seoul, South Korea. At the time of writing, the US network, TNT, has ordered a pilot for a planned television series, based on Lindqvist's novel.

Furthering the genre's promiscuity and demonstrating the ease in which it can mesh with more traditional folk mythology, Stefan Spjut's 2012 novel *Stallo*, is a master-class in Scandinavian horror. Opening in the year 1978, Magnus Brodin, a small boy, vanishes when playing in the woods of rural Sweden. Mona, his distraught mother, claims he was abducted by a giant. 25-years later, Susso Myrén, a young female blogger with an interest in North European folk mythology, specifically 'crytozoology', hears about an old woman who claims that her and her grandson have been under constant surveillance by a troll-like creature for years. In 1977, her famous wildlife photographer took an image of a bear, which what seems like a small troll-like creature on his back. Thinking that these curious events could all be connected, she sets out with her mother to find out what happened to the missing child and to find the proof she needs to substantiate her grandfather's much ridiculed legacy. In Susso, *Stallo* has its own Smilla-like protagonist (a lonely young women with an obsession), and

effortlessly blends Nordic-noirish tropes of child abduction and absent fathers, with the snow-washed folk culture of Northern Europe's 'Sami' people.

The Danish television series *Heartless* (2014 -), further foregrounds Nordic-noir's obsession with sibling relationships; two twins with unexplained supernatural powers, Sebastian (Sebastian Jessen) and Sofie (Julie Zangenberg), enrol at the mysterious Ottmannsgaard boarding school. Raised in an orphanage, the brother and sister seek to find out who their mother was, as she may have a connection with the school, and to try and understand why they need to feed-off the energy from other humans – while the similarities with *Let the Right One In* are obvious, it is more likely that US-made contemporary horror texts, such as the *Twilight Saga* (2008 – 2012) - themselves adaptations of Stephanie Meyer's teenage vampire novel series - are more likely to be an influence here. Its Nordic-noir pedigree is assured however, by the fact that its director is Natasha Arthy (*Forbrydelsen*) and it is partly written by Nikolaj Scherfig (*Broen/Bron*). *Heartless* is very much a coming-of-age tale for older teens, and ritualises this aspect of adolescence, while providing an historical account of superstition in 17th century Denmark – a series of flash-backs provide information on the ancient 'curse' Sebastian and sister are under. Missing parents are mirrored, as the head-teacher's daughter's, Emilie, Ida and Clara, have also lost their mother; *Heartless* takes place in a story-world with few adults.

Returning...

One indicator of a genre's maturity – which naturally books a place for its future longevity – is when it transcends narrative, and becomes a 'style'; its mise-en-scène is appropriated and recycled in other forms. Based on a 2004 film, the French television series, *Les Revenants* (2012 – 2015) at first glance has none of the gritty realism of a *Forbrydelsen* or a *Broen/Bron*, and is clearly situated within a 'telefantasy' genre (Johnson 2005), which would include more supernaturally and fantasy focused texts, such as *Twin Peaks* (1990 – 1991). However, at its heart is a tragedy worthy of a Lisbeth Salander or a Saga Norén: a small, isolated village is suddenly visited by the return of people who had previously died. Among the 'returned' are an eight-year-old boy - who had been killed by burglars 35 years ago - a 23-year-old man who died a decade ago, the day before he was due to marry his fiancé

(who still lives in the town), a serial killer, and Camille (Yara Pilartz), the 15-year-old identical twin sister of Léna Séguret (Jenna Thiam) who had died in a bus accident, four-years earlier. Like Saga Norén before her, Léna has had to deal with the ‘absent present’ of her twin sister; *Les Revenants* works to mirror Lisbeth’s own eventual encounter with her ‘missing’ sister, also called Camille. However, this Camille is tragically ‘fixed’ as four years younger than her identical twin sister. *Les Revenants*’ mise-en-scène full of boarded-up shops, barren waste-ground, empty streets threading through an isolated town by a sinister shimmering lake, surrounded by woods full of empty shacks. All of this is presented in a wintery low-light glimmer, to give it a very distinctly Nordic-noir-ish look. True to form, *Les Revenants* was remade as the US-produced series, *The Returned*, in 2015.

Another television crime series which took its cue from *Forbrydelsen* and *Broen/Bron*, was the UK’s *Broadchurch* (2013 -). Chris Chibnall, the series creator, was already a self-confessed fan of Nordic-noir, and in particular the music of Icelandic artist Ólafur Arnalds. Like *Forbrydelsen* before it, *Broadchurch* examines the ways in which the murder of a teenage boy affected his family, friends and immediate community. The setting was an isolated Dorset town, where a local police officer - played by Olivia Coleman (whose son is a friend of the murdered child) - is forced to work with David Tennant’s traumatised investigator, who has been brought in from another force – in ways similar to Saga Norén and Martin Rohde’s mismatched pairing in *Broen/Bron*. Each episode ends with a different potential suspect, just like its antecedent series had, and the UK was gripped. A second series soon followed, and in 2014, despite *Broadchurch* being a BBC-produced English-language series, it was remade (almost) shot-for-shot as *Gracepoint* for US audiences. The remake even retained Tennant’s downtrodden detective (albeit this time with a much maligned American accent).

What links all of these Nordic-noir (and inspired by Nordic-noir) texts is missing children, and missing or damaged childhoods. These texts are also often concerned with the past – many narratives begin in the 1970s or 1980s, before shifting into an historical present. The *Millennium* novels, *Heartless* and *Stallo* are very much about how the past affects the present, while *Forbrydelsen* and *Broen/Bron* both deal explicitly with a broken political system, left behind after decades of corruption. *Let the Right One In* just leaves audiences contemplating a horrific future present: ‘It seems as if the “child that

haunts us” is the child of fururity, the one we periodically fear will not grow according to our desires, the one we periodically fear we can never protect, and the one we ultimately know will move beyond care’ (Hancock 2009). The absent child and ruined childhood are the lenses through which the genre’s stock themes of urban crime, political corruption and dis-functional relationships are explored. In this sense, almost all Nordic-noir texts contain a horror narrative within them, and the damaged childhoods of central characters cast long shadows.

In these, ‘powerful discussions of the past’ (Meyhoff 2011), missing children and damaged childhoods also work as stand-ins for a loss of innocence. The *Millennium* novels do deal with Sweden’s recent political past, fairly comprehensively, particularly the assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986. This unsolved crime has resulted in the circulation of a great number of conspiracy theories, particularly online. It seems no accident then that Stieg Larsson’s titular heroine is a computer hacker, on the trail of government corruption and corporate crime. In writing about David Fincher’s 2011 remake of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Steven Peacock observes that, ‘cyberspace and electronic forms of communication are not just plot devices, themes to be addressed via the narrative, in dialogue or items of tech-y décor scattered throughout to make the film feel up to date and cutting edge’ (2014: 130). It seems that Nordic-noir tropes were particularly attractive to a US society reeling from the establishment of Wikileaks in 2006 and Chelsea Manning’s disclosures in 2010. North European political paranoia is catching, these adaptations and remakes seem to suggest.

On the surface at least, Scandinavian countries look like ‘perfect’ societies; they are externally defined as having low crime, low unemployment, good healthcare and an outstanding education system. However, Nordic-noir is a genre which challenges this position, by critiquing the hubristic political influence of large companies held by powerful North European dynasties. While the *Millennium* novels confront these issues explicitly - Mikael Blomkvist investigates these organisations for a living – Smilla Jaspersen, Saga Norén, Sarah Lund and Susso Myrén all come up against obstructive and elusive corporate figures and shadowy commercial operations. The Ottmannsgaard boarding school in *Heartless* could also be a stand-in for unknowable corporate hostility. Missing children and childhoods are often the both the symptom of big business going bad, but also a metaphor for a type

of post-Second World War malaise, behind which vested interests rule and corruption has been taking place for decades. The evil/haunted children of *Let the Right One In*, *Heartless* and *Stallo* just serve to extend this still further. These missing and damaged children, tap into central fears, as news stories abound about the dreadful experiences of unaccompanied minors from Syria and Iraq in refugee camps across Europe - at a time when the continent's hostility towards migrants is of a type not seen since the 1930s and 1940s. In this light, it looks very much then that the dead body of 11-year old Danny Latimer, on the beach in *Broadchurch*, was eerily prescient: just two years after the first series was broadcast in 2015, three-year old Kurdish boy, Aylan Kurdi, was washed-up on a Turkish beach, making headlines around the world.

These are the reasons why Nordic-noir has become so globally popular in recent years, and why the edited collection you are now reading, even exists; in a post-politics/post-truth world, it looks very much as if Western democracies are waking-up to what the Scandinavian nations have known all along regarding their political rules and their corrupt relationships with big business. The rapid and synchronous adaptations and remakes of the *Millennium* novels, *Forbrydelsen*, *Broen/Bron*, and *Let the Right One In*, demonstrate an appetite for stories featuring brilliant, but socially and emotionally flawed characters, trying to make sense of the horrific acts humanity can carry out, and the lengths they will go to cover them up; in these crimes, children are almost always the victims and childhood the collateral damage. *Heartless*, *Les Revenants/The Returned* and *Broadchurch/Gracepoint*, illustrate neatly, just how far this sphere of influence extends. While *Stallo* ensures that Scandi-lit is far from being a dead literary property.

The crime genre is perfectly comfortable spanning media, particularly literature, television, radio and film. What makes Nordic-noir distinctive, is that it is now defined by its transnational appeal and a fluid 'adaptiveness', perfect for today's 'everything at once' box-set generation: 'In this networked television era, the exhibition of these [Nordic-noir] texts on film and television, and their close parallel with each other, and other related works, is perfectly aligned with the tastes and instantaneity audiences now demand' (Berger 2016). The reproducibility of crime fiction from Northern European countries, resulting in a plurality of synchronous versions, all interconnected, often situated in varying

national contexts, is the very reason for the genre's appeal and longevity: if you're missing Lisbeth Salander or Smilla Jaspersen, then a Saga Norén or Sarah Lund will be along in a minute (or their US cousins). The multitude of different versions of essentially the same thing, all co-existing and influencing each other, demonstrates perhaps, that networked global audiences enjoy enacting comparative approaches between Nordic-noir texts. This occurs in ways not necessarily identifiable with more 'prestige' literary genres, and their often more asynchronous adaptations/remakes. It seems you're never too far, from more Nordic-noir.

Words: 5153.

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