Beyond Stieg Larsson: Contemporary Trends and Traditions in Swedish Crime Fiction

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Abstract Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy is the product of a long and diverse Swedish crime fiction tradition, but it has also become a generative force in the said tradition. By surveying the landscape of Swedish crime fiction both before and after the trilogy, this article aims to shed light on current trends and developments in the genre. Particular focus is placed on the changing role of the police procedural, the new wave of women writers, recent diversification, and the current Europeanization of Swedish crime fiction. It is concluded that Swedish crime fiction today is characterized not only by an increasing diversification in terms of genre, detective characters, and setting, but also draws new inspiration from both within and outside the genre. The *Millennium* trilogy is shown to be a likely stimulus for many of these developments. A majority of crime novels today are set in rural, idyllic locations, and the police procedural characterized by social criticism is now losing its preeminent position. Authors with ambitions to continue exploit the crime genre for political purposes now tend to expand their horizons beyond the national and Swedish. They are thus moving one step further than Larsson, who primarily criticized social and political issues in a national context.
Key Words Swedish crime fiction; Stieg Larsson; Henning Mankell; police procedural; genre, detective characters

Following the success of Swedish crime writer Stieg Larsson and his *Millennium* trilogy (2005 - 2007),[1] Swedish crime fiction is now in great demand all over the world. In the last few years, Stieg Larsson and Henning Mankell have been among the world 's bestselling authors of any fiction genre (Kovac and Wischenbart; Flood); but they are not the only Swedish writers experiencing international success. At the same time as Swedish crime fiction is garnering substantial attention within Sweden, an increasing number of new Swedish crime writers are being translated into different languages.[2]

The product of a long and diverse Swedish crime fiction tradition, Stieg Larsson' s trilogy has also become a generative force in this tradition. This article surveys the canon of Swedish crime fiction both prior and subsequent to the *Millennium* trilogy, thus aiming to shed light on current trends and developments in Swedish crime fiction beyond Stieg Larsson. In particular, the role of the police procedural, the new wave

of women writers, the recent genre diversification, and the current Europeanization of Swedish crime fiction will be addressed.

The Rise and Fall of the Police Procedural

Ever since the mid-1960s, when Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö launched[3] their ten-novel series, *Roman om ett brott* (*The Story of a Crime*, 1965 – 1975), the police procedural has come to be the preferred crime fiction sub-genre among Swedish crime writers. Sjöwall and Wahlöö's novels were inspired by the American version of the police procedural genre, in particular the type of novels written by Ed McBain, among others.[4] However, the novels of Sjöwall and Wahlöö were also a product of their time. In Sweden, the 1960s and early 1970s were characterized by a general political "awakening," and Sjöwall and Wahlöö explicitly set out to employ the crime genre in order to reach as large an audience as possible with their social and political criticism. Wanting to explore and expose the shortcomings of the Swedish welfare state (Sjöwall and Wahlöö 9 – 10), they found the police procedural particularly suitable for this end. Internationally, the author duo is also well-known for having politicized the police procedural genre (Dove 19, 23, 217 – 224, 240, 242).

Inspired by the success of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's novels, many Swedish crime writers later used police procedurals to advance social criticism, often even using the same ten-installment format. In addition to Henning Mankell, representative of other authors writing in this tradition in the 1990s and early 2000s were Håkan Nesser, Åke Edwardson, Leif G. W. Persson, and Arne Dahl (pen name for Jan Arnald). Mankell is the most political of the four, sharing the same 1960s' socialist background as Sjöwall and Wahlöö, as well as having started out as a proletarian realist writer before turning to crime fiction in the 1990s. Mankell's debut as a crime writer came in 1991 with *Mördare utan ansikte* (*Faceless Killers*), the first novel in his popular Kurt Wallander series. Like his influential predecessors, Mankell also claims to use the crime genre to reach out to a broader public with a socialist message (Thomson). Already in *Mördare utan ansikte*, Mankell introduced his readers to the themes of racism and the relation to the ethnic "Other" (Westerståhl Stenport, Passim). These themes would come to characterize the whole Wallander series (McCorrestine 77 – 80; Nestingen 252), as well as Mankell's other crime novels. Andrew Nestingen notes that "Mankell's novels are a discourse on solidarity and they attempt to force readers to think through solidarity's ethical and political dimensions" (232). The concept of solidarity found in Mankell's novels is transnational, with a socialist underpinning. In *Kennedys hjärna* (*Kennedy's Brain*, 2005), for example, he strongly criticises Western pharmaceutical companies for exploiting poor Africans as guinea pigs in the search for a cure for AIDS.[5] In order to raise awareness and understanding of the urgency of the AIDS problem in Africa, Mankell also explores the possibility of building solidarity by trying to understand, and bridge the distance to, the African "Other" (Bergman "Paradoxes", Passim).

By setting his Wallander novels in the small town of Ystad on the south coast of Sweden, Mankell abandons the urban setting characteristic of the police procedural

tradition made popular in Sweden by Sjöwall and Wahlöö. His ties to the latter are still strong in his promotion of social criticism, however; and strong parallels can also be drawn between the figure of Inspector Wallander and Sjöwall and Wahlöö's police detective Martin Beck. Both detectives are at the center of the story and the police team, and they are both divorced, middle-aged men with daughters. Furthermore, they both suffer from health issues and have melancholic tendencies. Indeed this type of detective has become the "poster boy" for Swedish crime fiction, appearing in the majority of police procedurals from the 1960s until well into the first decade of the 2000s. Typical examples can be found in the novels, among others, by Håkan Nesser, Karin Wahlberg, and Mari Jungstedt. In Sweden, this detective type is sometimes referred to as "the gastric ulcer detective" (*magsårsdetektiven*), or the melancholic detective (Arvas and Nestingen 9; Kärrholm "Detektivgestalten" 62 - 63, 65; Lundin *Århundradets svenska deckare* 7 - 8). In many ways, he—for it is usually a man—resembles detectives of the British tradition such as Inspector Morse or Inspector Wexford, rather than the cops of the American tradition. There is also a specific Swedish sense of humility in the melancholic Swedish detective, as he often doubts his own competence and is always fallible. "When they drink too much liquor they tend to act stupid. When they drink too much coffee their stomachs hurt," Margo Jefferson concludes in *The New York Times* in comparing Swedish crime fiction detectives with their American counterparts.

In addition to these central characters, the investigative teams in Swedish police procedurals today consist of a diverse set of charactersin terms of age, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. To some extent, this diversification is an expression of political correctness, but it is also a way to attract a wider range of readers by making them more likely to identify with some of the characters; and, perhaps most importantly, it reflects the increasing diversity in Swedish society. The presence of favorably portrayed homosexual (and bisexual) characters in Stieg Larsson's trilogy is thus no sign of originality but a relatively common genre trait in Swedish crime fiction (Bergman "Lisbeth Salander" 141). Notwithstanding, this diversity is not as pronounced among the protagonists as it is among the supporting cast of characters. Although women central characters are now common, the Sjöwall and Wahlöö model revolving around a middle-aged, heterosexual, ethnic Swede—preferably the melancholic detective type—has remained a very persistent one.

Despite the majority of the Wallander novels having been written and set in the 1990s, Mankell does not abandon his melancholic detective until he finally writes him off for good in *Den orolige mannen* (*The Troubled Man*, 2009). In Wallander's succumbing to Alzheimer's disease, Mankell makes it clear that not only is Wallander's time up, but also that the days of this particular type of Swedish police detective are over. In this last novel of the series, the main mystery is not even a case Wallander handles as a police officer (indicating that his police work no longer takes center stage); instead, he works as a private investigator, investigating a disappearance in his family. Mankell thus signals a generational shift by announcing that it is time for a new type of detective in Swedish crime fiction—a detective more fit to handle the Europeanization, globalization, individualization, technologicalization, and brutalization

of Sweden in a post-welfare state era (Bergman "Initiating a European Turn"). Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander is thus an early example of an attempt to create such a detective, another being Swedish crime writer Arne Dahl's new crime series (beginning with *Viskleken* (*Chinese Whispers*, 2011) about an operational group within Europol, where a group of modern police officers from different parts of Europe cooperate.

What Larsson suggested—particularly by his use of the Salander character as investigator, but also with her journalist partner Mikael Blomkvist—Mankell thus confirms. The police novels of the early 2000s have also tended to devote less attention to *each* member of the police team, favoring instead one or two central characters who are surrounded by more vaguely sketched colleagues. Whereas this is an expression of the increasing individualism present in Swedish society (Bergman "Polisromanen" 118), it can also be interpreted as part of the diversification of the genre currently taking place in Sweden. Sometimes the main police character is also matched, or competes, with an investigator from another profession; Camilla Läckberg's police protagonist, for example, is paired up with an author, writing duo Michael Hjorth and Hans Rosenfeldt's with a psychologist, and Jungstedt's with a journalist. Additionally, there is now a greater diversity of Swedish crime fiction detectives, not only in terms of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, but also when it comes to their professions: it is increasingly common to encounter medical doctors, journalists, lawyers, medical examiners, and many other professional categories. Furthermore, more extreme characters have also started to emerge. One of the most notable is profiler and psychologist Sebastian Bergman, one of the protagonists in the police novels by Hjorth and Rosenfeldt. Sebastian Bergman is a truly unsympathetic character, brilliant in his profession, but manipulative and completely indifferent to other people's feelings. Drafted in to work on cases by a reluctant police force, he also suffers from a sex addiction that sees him initiate sexual encounters with suspects and witnesses alike. In the second novel, *Lärjungen* (*The Disciple*, 2011), the case investigated even involves a murderer who starts targeting women with whom Sebastian Bergman has had sex.

While it is by no means unique, it has not been a particularly common feature of Swedish crime fiction that characters in the investigative role become personally involved in their cases in the way Sebastian Bergman does in *Lärjungen*. Recent years, however, have seen the more frequent use of devices from the psychological thriller genre, which means that this kind of personal involvement has increased. This is undoubtedly a result of the increasing international popularity of serial killer fiction, where it is common for the murderer to challenge and target the lead detective (Priestman 182). In Sweden, meanwhile, Stieg Larsson's weaving of his characters' private lives into the plot might also have inspired a growing blurring between detectives' professional and personal lives.

Although the police procedural characterized by elements of social criticism is still popular among a number of Swedish crime writers, it has encountered competition in the first decade of the 2000s. In particular, many writers are now developing neo-romantic, apolitical police novels set in a timeless countryside, characterized by a small-town bourgeoisie mentality (Bergman "Well-Adjusted Cops"). Even if some

writers still follow the path of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, it is clear that the majority of Swedish crime writers today are leaving politics behind. Bestselling authors such as Läckberg, Jungstedt, Wahlberg, and many others, tend to dedicate their stories and murder motifs to past individual and personal injustices, rather than addressing issues of contemporary national or international politics. Instead, these novels primarily promote traditional family values and outdated gender stereotypes, and they are set in a Sweden that almost harks back to the welfare utopia of the 1950s—unaffected by globalization, organized crime, and the negative influences of new information technology. These novels show what can be described as a current feminist backlash in Swedish society, and they are also characterized by a liberal ideology, mirroring the more individualistic society that Sweden has become (Westerståhl Stenport and Ovesdotter Alm; Bergman "Well Adjusted Cops" 37). In large part, this focus on personal rather than political mysteries constitutes a revival of influences stemming from the British crime fiction tradition that dominated the Swedish crime fiction scene up until the arrival of Sjöwall and Wahlöö (Kärrholm "Konsten att lägga pussel" 8; Persson 389). Jungstedt, for example, takes the isolation from the contemporary, surrounding world to the degree that the world outside the island of Gotland, the setting for her mysteries, does not seem to exist at all in her novels, other than as a distant and decadent "otherness" (Bergman "Well-Adjusted Cops" 41 - 43). The popularity of these neo-romantic novels among Swedish, and perhaps international, readers is partly a reaction to a world that is perceived as increasingly alien and frightening. These novels create an illusion of a society that is safe and recognizable, where murderers are just single individuals with personal motifs, and where they can be captured by good police officers restoring safety to the community.

The few Swedish authors today who still convey social criticism seem to focus on aspects of societal change that have been brought about by globalization, rather than critiquing perceived injustices on the part of the Swedish authorities. This is true for authors like Dahl, Persson, the writing duo of Anders Roslund and Börge Hellström, and several others. Many of their novels address trafficking and organized crime: Sweden is often depicted as being hit by a wave of criminality from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics. In these novels, the Internet enables everything from pedophilia to economic crimes and the abuse of women; gang-related violence is also well-established in the major Swedish cities. Those who like Stieg Larsson still deal with national politics, often focus on media criticism, or address the lack of resources of the Swedish police. Criticism of secret fractions among the Swedish security police in the manner of Stieg Larsson is rare today, but clearly in the tradition of Sjöwall and Wahlöö. Some of the more politically interested crime writers are also starting to "leave" Sweden, as they set their novels outside its borders.

Henning Mankell, Stieg Larsson, and others have brought the Sjöwall and Wahlöö tradition of crime fiction—one filled with socialist cops, capitalist villains, and critical depictions of the Swedish welfare state—to an international audience. It is clear, however, that this is not the only type of Swedish crime fiction attractive to readers outside of Sweden today. As many of the neo-romantic novels are also being translated, the idyllic picture painted of Sweden—the ideal society that has little to

do with real-world Sweden—seems to be just as appealing. With an increasing international readership, this image of Sweden as the perfect welfare state will continue to be transmitted and preserved in the minds of readers worldwide—despite the fact that this is a society that hardly exists any more, other than in fiction. For many of these non-Swedish readers, in fact, crime fiction might be the primary source of knowledge about Sweden. In consequence, the image of the utopian welfare state will continue to persist and spread as an alternative to the more critical picture provided by for example Stieg Larsson and Mankell. Perhaps it is precisely this dream of the existence of a true welfare society that is attractive to many of the international readers, regardless of whether it has anything to do with Swedish reality or not.

Women Crime Writers

In the 1990s, British and Norwegian women crime writers were immensely popular among the Swedish reading public; by comparison, it seemed puzzling that there were hardly any women authors of Swedish crime fiction. With the exception of Maj Sjöwall and Maria Lang (pen name for Dagmar Lange, who from 1949 to 1990 wrote numerous popular whodunits in the style of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers), Swedish women crime writers have been a relatively unacknowledged minority. During the first century of Swedish crime fiction, up until 1993, there were a total of about seventy women crime writers, the vast majority of whom had only published one or two novels. Of these only ten, including Lang and Sjöwall (writing with Wahlöö), had written more than a handful of crime novels (Wopenka "Bibliografi" 69 – 107).[6] In the first part of the 1990s, moreover, Åsa Nilsonne and Kerstin Ekman were the only contemporary women crime writers to have received any critical attention; during this time, Nilsonne wrote two successful novels, *Tunnare än blod* (*Thinner than Blood*, 1991) and *I det tysta* (*Quietly*, 1992). Ekman, who had written several crime novels between the late 1950s and the early 1970s—thereafter she became established as a mainstream author—returned to the crime genre in 1993 with *Händelser vid vatten* (*Blackwater*). *Händelser vid vatten* became a huge bestseller in Sweden, receiving awards for the best Swedish crime novel of the year (by The Swedish Academy of Detection 1993), best Swedish novel of the year (The August Prize 1993), and as the best Nordic novel of the year (Nordic Council's Literature Prize 1994). In combination with Mankell's success after his debut as a crime writer in 1991, Ekman's achievement can be regarded as heralding a new wave in Swedish crime fiction that later grew to dominate the Swedish book charts at the turn of the twenty-first century.

As late as 1997, however, the number of women writers of Swedish crime fiction was still notably low, which prompted the Swedish crime fiction journal *Jury* (1972 – 2008) to take action to promote crime writing by women. They did so by establishing the Poloni prize (named after Swedish crime writer Helena Poloni, pen name of Ingegerd Stadener who wrote three crime novels 1956 – 1978). The new prize was to be awarded on a yearly basis to the most promising Swedish woman crime writer. The first winner was Liza Marklund in 1998, followed by Aino Trosell in 1999, Åsa Nilsonne in 2000, and Eva-Marie Liffner in 2001. Thereafter it was decided that the prize was no longer needed. In the space of just a few short years, the prize had

helped launch a new generation of Swedish women crime writers, to the extent that, in 2001, seventeen of the fifty new Swedish crime novels published were written by women (*Jurys deckarkatalog* 18 - 19).[7]

Liza Marklund's prize-winning novel, *Sprängaren* (*The Bomber*, 1998), set an example for many aspiring women crime writers, and not least the feminist messages of the novel contributed to its success. Marklund's protagonist, crime journalist Annika Bengtzon, received widespread attention for her struggles to balance a career and family life—a motif that has since become a staple in Swedish crime fiction (Bergman "Well-Adjusted Cops" 39). Whereas previous Swedish crime novels had neglected the everyday life of Swedish women, Marklund was largely responsible for introducing this aspect of society into the genre. Throughout the series following the life of Annika Bengtzon, Marklund aims to convey a feminist message by focusing on "not allowing women to be abused by men and by society as a whole, and empowerment, enabling women to occupy more positions of power in society" (Kärrholm "Swedish Queens" 142). The ninth installment in the series, *Du gamla, du fria* (Thou ancient, thou free (also the title of the Swedish national anthem)), was recently published. And while Bengtzon seems to have become more and more of an eccentric loner, and less of a wife and mother, she nonetheless continues to be a feminist presence in Swedish crime fiction.

The first decade of the 2000s saw women writers finally achieve a major breakthrough in Swedish crime fiction. More than eighty Swedish women crime writers wrote their debut novels between 1998 and 2007 (Wopenka "Kvinnlig deckarhistoria" 7), and in 2010, out of a total of 112 new original Swedish crime novels to be published, forty-one were written by women ("Deckarkatalogen").[8] This represents therefore a substantial increase in the number of novels written by women, and yet the proportion of women crime writers compared to men is almost identical to that in 2001. However, in terms of the most successful novels in 2010, the percentage of women writers was substantially higher: of the twenty-two Swedish crime novels reaching the top ten on the Swedish bestseller list for fiction that year, women were authors of ten of them ("Topplistor").

Women writers are thus well established and popular on the contemporary Swedish crime fiction scene. Among the mostpopular in recent years, apart from Marklund, are Åsa Larsson, Inger Frimansson, Karin Alvtegen, Aino Trosell, Camilla Läckberg, Anna Jansson, Mari Jungstedt, and Helene Tursten. They have all written long series of novels, most of them have followed the same protagonists since the late 1990s or early 2000s, and all of them have been translated into many different languages. Åsa Larsson, Frimansson, Alvtegen, and Trosell write primarily in the psychological thriller genre, and are often considered somewhat more "literary" than the others. Läckberg, Jansson, and Jungstedt all write neo-romantic police procedurals set in the Swedish countryside, while Tursten writes more in the Sjöwall and Wahlöö tradition of the police procedural and sets her novels in urban Gothenburg.

Except for Jungstedt, all these writers use women protagonists in their novels. Some of them are quite traditional police detectives, such as Tursten's Irene Huss or Jansson's Maria Wern, while the others occupy a wide range of professions, from

Läckberg's author Erika Falk to Åsa Larsson's lawyer Rebecca Martinsson. Most original is Trosell's main character, Siv Dahlin, who is an ordinary middle-aged woman from a working class background. In the different novels Dahlin is variously depicted as unemployed, struggling to pay her bills, and having to take on whatever job comes along just to make ends meet. In *Om hjärtat ännu slår* (*If the Heart Still Beats*, 2000), she works in a tannery, while in *Se dem inte i ögonen* (Do not Look Them in the Eyes, 2002) she is a cleaner in a ski resort hotel. In *Tvångströjan* (*The Strait-Jacket*, 2004), furthermore, she works as a caregiver, driving around and helping the sick and elderly in their homes, at the same time as cleaning holiday homes in the mountains, while in *Järngreppet* (*The Iron Grip*, 2008) she is employed as a cook at an isolated hotel conference center. The portrayal of Siv Dahlin gives Trosell the opportunity to dissect Swedish society "from below," and all her novels contain a strong class critique as well as a feminist social critique. This makes Trosell unique in contemporary Swedish crime fiction. Although there are a few authors who also express explicit class criticism, for example Kjell Eriksson, feminism is scarce.[9] The combination of the two is only found really in Trosell's works.

Despite the prevalence of so many women writers, and women protagonists in novels by both men and women writers, Swedish crime fiction is still dominated by traditional gender stereotypes (Bergman "Well-Adjusted Cops" 38 – 39). Stieg Larsson, Marklund, and Trosell are the most important feminist examples, but they have not had much in the way of competition in this area. Some of the most recent women writers do, however, display feminist ambitions, as is explored further below. Nilsonne's *Kyskhetsbältet* (*The Chastity Belt*, 2000) should also be mentioned as a feminist contribution, which criticizes the specific pressures women holding high-ranking positions face in the workplace (Bergman "Crime Fiction" 197), a topic that was also central to Marklund's *Sprängaren*. In spite of the current paucity of feminist perspectives and social criticism, the novels of Swedish women writers do contribute to the fictional portrayal of Swedish everyday life. From Sjöwall and Wahlöö onward, crime fiction has become the dominant genre in Sweden for depicting contemporary society and social life, with numerous women writers since the late 1990s having further enriched the genre through the depiction of women's lives and perspectives.

Today, a new generation of women writers is emerging in Swedish crime fiction. Among those promising authors likely to have a future bearing on this field are Kristina Olsson, Karin Gerhardsen, the sister duo of Camilla Grebe and Åsa Träff, and Katarina Wennstam. While Olsson and Gerhardsen both write traditional police procedurals set in Stockholm, their uniqueness lies with the women detectives—Olsson's Fredrika Bergman and Gerhardsen's Petra Westman—assuming important roles within their respective police teams. Fredrika Bergman is a young criminologist who comes to work for the police, and while being in a long-term relationship with a married, older man, she dreams of having children. In *Tusenskönor* (*Daisies*, 2010), she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a daughter but under far from ideal circumstances, as the father of the child becomes a suspect in a murder investigation.[10] Petra Westman meanwhile is a young, single police officer who in the first novel of the series, *Pepparkakshuset* (*The Gingerbread House*, 2008), gets drugged and raped by a man

she meets in a bar, and in parallel with the main official cases handled by the police through the series, the reader follows her in her attempts to extract revenge. Both these heroes depart from the norm of how the majority of women police officers were characterized in Swedish crime fiction in the early 2000s. Following the success of Marklund's journalist detective, other authors have also followed in her wake by similarly depicting their women police officers as married with children, struggling to balance work pressures with family life. Indeed, with a new generation of authors—perhaps inspired in part by Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander—character variation is increasing considerably in all crime genres.

Grebe and Träff employ a woman psychologist, Siri Bergman, as their main character. She is a loner, afraid of commitment after her husband's suicide, and in the first novel of the series, *Någon sorts frid* (*Some Kind of Peace*, 2009), she is targeted by a violent stalker. Through her clients, Siri Bergman becomes entangled in mysteries and ends up in dangerous situations, a particular feature that contributes to placing Grebe and Träff's novels close to the psychological thriller genre. Furthermore, this writing duo deploys a strong theme that underlies each novel. In *Någon sorts frid* it concerns coming to terms with grief for loved ones who have died or left, and in *Bittrare än döden* (*More Bitter than Death*, 2010) the destructive power of love is at the center of the plot. *Bittrare än döden* can be considered a feminist crime novel, because while highlighting the humiliation, violence, and sacrifices women are subjected to and put up with in the name of love—from date rapes and incest, to decades in violent relationships—the mechanisms that make women suffer this kind of abuse are simultaneously criticized. Almost unique in the Swedish context is also the use of the therapeutic session as a narrative element.

Wennstam is also a crime writer with strong feminist ambitions. In a trilogy that portrays district attorney Madeleine Edwards as the main detective, Wennstam explores traditional male-dominated professions and the exercise of power over others, one that can easily be abused. In particular, it is these men's power over women's lives and bodies that is at stake. In *Smuts* (2007, Dirt) the legal profession is in focus; *Dödergök* (*Omen of Death*, 2008) deals with the police; and *Alfahannen* (2010, The alpha male) with the film industry. Wennstam has also recently begun a new trilogy with similar ambitions, this time featuring two women protagonists—a police detective and a lawyer. The first novel in the new series, *Svikaren* (*The Deserter*, 2012), is a critical investigation of intolerance and violence in the world of sport.

The up-and-coming generation of women crime writers in Sweden would thus seem to bode well for the future of the genre—and women writers in it—in spite of the feminist backlash in Swedish society in the last decade. What is more, there have been many attempts by new women writers to further develop the genre in fresh directions, and feminism now seems to have become more prominent again, at least in crime fiction.

Hybrids and Genre Experiments

In the wake of Stieg Larsson's success, Swedish crime fiction has expanded substantially to encompass many different varieties of the genre. The recipe for his success

rests on two parameters in particular: the woman protagonist Lisbeth Salander, and the way Larsson plays with the genre.[11] In the *Millennium* trilogy, Larsson employs and refers to a great number of crime fiction subgenres (Agger; Lundin "Larssons trilogi" 20; Thomassen). While this creates moments of recognition as well as surprise for crime fiction readers, thus contributing to the enormous popularity of the novels, it has also made it clear to other crime writers that the police procedural is no longer the only path to success in the genre.

Stieg Larsson's genre meddling has been inspirational to many Swedish crime writers. Some of them have even attempted to "invent" their own genre hybrids with the aim of attracting particular groups of readers, many of whom were not previously avid consumers of crime fiction. Former chick lit author Denise Rudberg writes what she calls "Elegant Crime," crime novels set in high society and filled with lifestyle and romance elements. Jens Lapidus, a lawyer practicing criminal law, has written a trilogy which mainly depicts criminals as the protagonists in a genre he refers to as "Stockholm Noir," and one which is heavily influenced by James Ellroy. Another of this new generation of writers is Christoffer Carlsson, who writes thrillers set in the Swedish countryside under the genre heading "Countryside Noir" (*glesbygd noir*).[12] It is worthy of note that attempts at naming and branding new genres serve primarily promotional purposes, not really contributing anything new to the crime genre at large. However, in the Swedish context, they—and Lapidus in particular, to whom I will return—do nevertheless constitute a fresh take on the genre.

Even when not attempting to name new genre hybrids, Swedish crime writers today often mix different crime fiction subgenres, and sometimes they introduce elements from other popular fiction genres as well. Since2000, there has for example been an increasing use of romance in Swedish crime fiction, a tendency influencing all subgenres. Most crime writers today dedicate notably more page space to their heroes' love lives than they did just ten years ago. This also means that there is now more sex in Swedish crime fiction. Previously, sex was almost only present as a criminal act in the form of rape and abuse. Today, however, it is common to find explicit depictions of the sex lives of the fictional detectives. The action genre has also found its way into Swedish crime fiction, and not only in the shape of action thrillers. Among the most successful recent authors is the writing duo behind the pen name Lars Kepler (Alexander Ahndoril and Alexandra Coelho Ahndoril) and, particularly in the novel *Paganini-kontraktet* (*The Paganini Contract*, 2010), they insert scenes reminiscent of a Hollywood action thriller into what is otherwise primarily an unusually violent police novel.

Horror fiction has become another favorite source of inspiration for Swedish crime writers lately, a trend in line with the success of Swedish vampire films such as *Frostbiten* (*Frostbite*, directed by Anders Banke, 2006) and *Låt den rätte komma in* (*Let the Right One In*, directed by Tomas Alfredson, 2008). Johan Theorin has been the most successful writer in incorporating horror elements into his novels. Set on the island of Öland off the east coast of Sweden, his novels, which include *Skumtimmen* (*Echoes from the Dead*,2007), *Nattfåk* (*The Darkest Room*, 2008), and *Blodläge*

(*The Quarry*, 2009), are all characterized by dark moods that evoke the horror genre.[13] Although Theorin never lets his stories cross over into the supernatural, a few other Swedish writers have. A recent example is Amanda Hellberg's *Döden på en blek häst* (Death on a Pale Horse, 2011), in which a Swedish student at Oxford University encounters the supernatural while trying to solve the murder of her mother. Two other Swedish crime writers who tread the borders of the supernatural are Åsa Larsson and Mons Kallentoft. The latter both let their dead speak—often in long monologues set in italics, where they reflect upon their own life and death, as well as on the ongoing investigation. Sometimes the investigator protagonists, Åsa Larsson's lawyer Rebecka Martinsson and Kallentoft's police detective Malin Fors, sense a presence, but the border is never literally crossed. The monologues of the dead can therefore be interpreted as just narrative finesse, rather than a deviation into the fantasy genre. Additionally, Kepler also evokes this trend by a recurring play with elements bordering on New Age and the supernatural, but eventually a rational explanation is always provided.

Another genre variation becoming increasingly common are novels depicting Swedish society from "below." Often the protagonists of these novels are criminals in a metropolitan environment; young men ranking low in the criminal hierarchy. The most important writer representing this development is Lapidus. With exceptional linguistic sensibility, he portrays the underbelly of Stockholm, spanning from the rich brats posturing in the fancy bars around Stureplan, to the second-generation immigrant kids from the poor suburbs. Lapidus skillfully alters his language depending on who is talking, and even though it is a fictional oral language, he manages to make his prose sound convincing. Lapidus' use of language thus lends an authentic feel to his novels and, in combination with his presenting lesser-known aspects of Stockholm—hitherto neglected or obscured—as well as new types of crime fiction hero, is an innovative addition to the Swedish crime fiction genre.

Another author who also provides an underdog view of Stockholm and of Swedish society is Anders De La Motte. While in contrast to Lapidus his main characters are all of Swedish descent, some of them are also petty criminals. De La Motte's debut novel, *Geim* (*Game*, 2010), concerns a young man who is lured into playing an alternate reality game, and forced to complete increasingly extreme and illegal missions. Characteristic for both Lapidus's and De La Motte's novels is that the heroes are outsiders in society, fighting from disadvantageous positions for survival and success. It is likely that Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander has also played a part in paving the road for these new non-traditional heroes.

In addition to the genre diversity, therange of professions that Swedish crime fiction detectives occupy has increased, following the publication of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy. A notable new category that should at least be mentioned is that of medical examiners and the forensic genre. Although the forensic genre has been popular among Swedish readers since the 1990s, and the television audience since the early 2000s, it has not been until very recently that Swedish authors have contributed to the genre. This has many explanations, probably the most significant of which is the fact that up until recently the overriding majority of Swedish crime writers had a

background in the humanities or the social sciences (Bergman "Crime Fiction" 195). Increasing diversity in recent years can therefore also been observed in terms of author backgrounds, with several writers, most notably Elias Palm and Varg Gyllander, making forays into the forensic genre. Palm writes about a woman forensic pathologist, Ella Andersson, and Gyllander's protagonists are forensic experts Ulf Holtz and Pia Levin. While Gyllander never dwells on scientific and technical details, these are the more prominent in Palm's novels, something that can likely be attributed to the fact that Palm himself works in forensic medicine.

Ascribing all the credit for the new diversification of Swedish crime fiction to the success of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy is of course an exaggeration. The general expansion of the crime fiction scene and other current trends in popular culture—such as the increasing popularity of fantasy and forensic television series, to name but a couple—have also been influential. Still, there is no doubt that Stieg Larsson's trilogy has been important for breaking the domination of the police procedural, for presenting possible alternatives as to how crime writers can get in amongst the bestseller lists, and for increasing the national and international demand for Swedish crime fiction.

Europeanization of Swedish Crime Fiction

Some authors, who during the 1990s and early 2000s wrote police procedurals characterized by social criticism in the tradition of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, continue down that path. However, while the main target of criticism used to be the disintegration of the Swedish welfare state, it is now the influences of globalization, and largely, Europeanization, that have become the new center of focus.[14] Furthermore, fictional Swedish detectives are now beginning to solve crimes outside the national borders of Sweden. The most characteristic example is Arne Dahl, who after writing a long series of Stockholm police novels closely following Sjöwall and Wahlöö's lead, has redeployed some of his Swedish police characters in a new series about an operational unit within Europol. The first novel in Dahl's new series, *Viskleken* (2011), spans topics that range from economic corruption in American banks and environmental crimes in China, to organized crime in Italy and the Baltic states—everything with far-reaching international consequences.

Dahl is by no means the first to offer up more European perspectives in his novels. Mankell's last Wallander novel, *Den orolige mannen* (2009), presents a society where people—criminals and others alike—are no longer limited by (Swedish) national perspectives. Mankell depicts this as a necessary generational shift: the generation born in the 1940s that has until recently occupied most positions of power in Swedish society, is being replaced by new generations identifying themselves as Europeans, rather than as Swedes (Bergman "Initiating a European Turn"). Other authors who show similar tendencies, and who set their novels outside of Sweden, are Håkan Nesser, Åke Edwardson, and Liza Marklund. For example, Marklund's *Du gamla, du fria* (2011) explores the consequences of the European Union creating economic and political barriers against in particular the countries of East Africa. For those Swedish crime writers who still have the ambition to present social criticism and

discuss political issues in their fiction, topics similar to those addressed by Dahl and Marklund are likely to appear more frequently in the future.

Today Swedish crime fiction is characterized by a strong and increasing diversification in terms of genre as well as detective characters and setting, with new inspiration coming from both within and outside the genre. Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy has also been an important source of inspiration for many of these developments. While the type of police procedural made popular by Sjöwall and Wahlöö is now losing its dominant position, many authors still favor the police novel, and are exploring it in new forms. Therein, social criticism is not as prominent as it used to be, and a majority of the police novels today are set in rural, idyllic locations, drawing heavily from the British tradition. Authors with ambitions to use the genre for political purposes, by presenting social and political analysis and criticism, now tend to expand their horizons beyond the national and Swedish. In thus doing, they are venturing a step further than Stieg Larsson, who primarily dissected Swedish institutions and dealings in the manner of Sjöwall and Wahlöö.

Although Swedish crime fiction has a long and multifaceted history, the contemporary Swedish crime novel builds primarily upon the modern crime novel developed in the mid-1960s by its founding "parents," Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. Within this modern tradition, there have been a number of milestone novels that have been particularly important for the development of the genre. I would suggest that these novels are Sjöwall and Wahlöö's *Roseanna* (1965) and *Terroristerna* (1975), Mankell's *Mördare utan ansikte* (1991), Ekman's *Händelser vid vatten* (1993), Marklund's *Sprängaren* (1998), Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy (2005 – 2007), Lapidus' *Snabba Cash* (2006), Mankell's *Den orolige mannen* (2009), and Dahl's *Viskleken* (2011). Sjöwall and Wahlöö introduced the character of the melancholic detective and the police procedural characterized by social criticism in *Roseanna*, with their influential "style" culminating in their last novel *Terroristerna*. Mankell's *Mördare utan ansikte*, for its part, revitalized the tradition of Sjöwall and Wahlöö and popularized the rural setting in the police procedural genre. Ekman made an important contribution towards the acceptance of the genre as an important part of Swedish culture, while Marklund best epitomizes the breakthrough of women crime writers, who have become increasingly prominent in the last decade. Stieg Larsson, even if posthumously, has played a central role in motivating the diversification of the genre, as well paving the ground for the international success of Swedish crime fiction. Mankell's *Den orolige mannen* closes the chapter on the much-loved melancholic detective and points to the importance of a European perspective. Lapidus breaks new ground by combining social criticism and criminal heroes, whilst employing a diversity of language forms. It is safe to assume that he will likely inspire many Swedish authors to come. Finally, Dahl truly adopts the mantle of the European perspective laid down by Mankell, and *Viskleken* thus sets the scene for a new version of the Sjöwall and Wahlöö tradition. Whether this narrative of Swedish crime fiction of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, with its constellation of key authors and titles, will still be applicable in ten or twenty years' time, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, judging from the current buoyant state of the genre, the diversification, renewal, and

popularity of Swedish crime fiction will most likely continue well into the future.

Note

1. The Millennium trilogy consists of Män som hatar kvinnor (2005, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*), Flickan som lekte med elden (2006, *The Girl Who Played with Fire*), and Luftslottet som försvann (2007, *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest*).
2. The top ten bestseller lists in Sweden (published since 2001 by *Svensk Bokhandel*, a Swedish book trade journal) invariably include a high proportion of crime novels, most of them Swedish. In the top ten for fiction in 2010, eight of the books were crime fiction, seven of them Swedish (if counting a novel co-written by the Swede Liza Marklund and American James Patterson); in 2009 seven out of ten were crime fiction, six of these Swedish; in 2008 eight were crime fiction, all of them Swedish; in 2007 seven were Swedish crime fiction; also in 2006 seven were crime fiction, six of them Swedish; in 2005 seven were crime fiction, four of them Swedish (in this year the top three were Dan Brown novels); and finally, in 2004, five novels in the top ten were crime fiction, four of them Swedish. Before 2004 only monthly lists were made ("Topplistor").
3. For a substantial English introduction to Sjöwall and Wahlöö's novels, see Winston and Millerski 16 – 51.
4. Sjöwall and Wahlöö also translated Ed McBain. A difference between McBain and his followers are that Sjöwall and Wahlöö's characters develop throughout the series, while McBain's are rather static.
5. Outside of his crime novels, Mankell has also shown great engagement in creating awareness of the AIDS situation in Africa (cf. Bergman "Paradoxes" 337), and he is often invited to comment on social and political issues (Frisch 218; Nestingen 224 – 25).
6. It is impossible to produce exact numbers because many of the Swedish crime writers used pen names, and many of the real names—and thus also the sex—of these authors are still unknown.
7. Short story collections and a novel written in Swedish but published in Åland (Finland) during 2001 were not counted.
8. Two short story collections and two novels written in Swedish but published in Finland during 2010 were not counted.
9. Eriksson is available in English with Prinsessan av Burundi (2002, *The Princess of Burundi*), Nattens grymma stjärnor (2004, *The Cruel Stars of the Night*), Mannen från Bergen (2004, *The Demon of Dakar*), *and Den hand som skälver* (2007, The Hand that Trembles).
10. Ohlsson's first crime novel, Askungar (2009, *Unwanted*), is available in English.
11. Salander has many Swedish crime fiction "sisters," characters who are similar to her in one sense or another (Bergman "Lisbeth Salander"). However, the socially inept, physically dangerous, brilliant computer hacker is also someone who with her quirks, her ability to improvise, her survival skills, and her childish, Goth appearance, simultaneously constitute a new type of Swedish crime fiction hero, whose forerunners are primarily found among women in the action film genre. It has also been suggested that Salander is based on "the conventional male action hero" (Westerståhl Stenport and Ovesdotter Alm 171).
12. So far, only Lapidus is available in English, with the first novel in the trilogy, *Snabba cash* (2007, *Easy Money*).
13. Most of Åsa Larsson's novels are translated into English, while so far only Kallentoft's first in the Malin Fors series, Midvinterblod (2007, *Midwinter Sacrifice*), has been released to the English-speaking market.
14. Although for example Mankell, Karin Alfredsson, and a few other authors, have also set crime novels outside of Europe in the last decade, it appears that Europe and Europeanization is now fa-

vored by Swedish crime writers (cf. Bergman "Initiating a European Turn").

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