EUROPEAN CULTURAL IDENTITY AND OTHERNESS IN THE CONTEXT OF NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONS*

THE SENSATIONAL LITERATURE OF SCANDINAVIAN EUROPE

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Abstract:
An interesting phenomenon is noticeable in world literature: apart from the emergence of the odd/some writer of genius in various parts of the world, it is quite common to see a sizeable group of writers from a certain geographic area take the literary scene by storm, with books emanating the same atmosphere, which would serve to justify, by way of example, the so-called "theory of cultural rifts", advanced by the studies on world history.

Keywords:
Sensational literature, Scandinavian culture, cultural rifts.

1. Literature as a manifest element of cultural rifts

Almost half a century ago, the reading public from all over the world discovered the fabulous South-American literature. Writers such as Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Juan Rulfo, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Ernesto Sabato, Julio Cortazar, Adolfo Bioy Casares and others won international renown between 1965 and 2010.

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Of course, the books which we are going to discuss in the following pages are of a totally different nature and quality from the South-American ones. But the phenomenon of the overwhelming emergence of a literary genre in a certain, well delimited cultural space and time evokes such a comparison, which might seem disproportionate.

They wrote ample novels of great epic sweep, revealing a multifarious world, with exhilarating, pulsing life rhythms, with strong characters, with beliefs and superstitions permeating that "magic realism", which essentially constituted the narrative perspective of this considerable group of writers[1]. Their volumes of poetry, drama, their collected essays and (auto)biographies were no less valuable.

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2. The Stieg Larsson phenomenon

This miraculous phenomenon seems to be repeating itself now, at the dawn of the third millennium, in the case of Scandinavian literature, albeit in what is considered to be a rather minor genre – the detective thriller. The first signs appeared right at the beginning of our century, with a few names hardly known in Europe at the time. Then, in 2004, there came the sensation produced by Stieg Larsson's (1954 – 2004) trilogy *Millennium*. The journalist, still in his prime, submitted from the very first, to the Norstendts Publishing House in Stockholm, all the 1935 pages of the volumes 1. *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*; 2. *The Girl Who Played with Fire*; 3. *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest*. Its impact was overwhelming. The two million copies of the first edition were sold very quickly in the country of origin. In Norway, the first 100,000 copies were sold in only two days. Before long, the *Millennium* trilogy had become a "best-selling phenomenon" in the Nordic countries, with sales which placed the book

[1] Cf. Rodica Grigore, *Realismul magic în proza latino-americană a secolului XX. (Re)configurări formale şi de conţinut*, Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2015.

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immediately after the selling record of the *Bible*[2]. Soon after it had been translated in scores of modern languages, the novel enjoyed a popularity which continued the series of its record sales: in the countries of Western Europe (France, Italy, Spain) it sold 3000-4000 copies a day in the first weeks after the respective translated versions came out, while in the USA and Great Britain "the purchase of the copyright generated fabulous auctioning".

The reactions on the part of professional literary critics and of all categories of readers measured up to its distribution, without precedent in Nordic literature. The renowned man of culture Pascal Bruckner stated that S. Larsson's *Millennium* "dethroned the Anglo-Saxon thriller", being an "extraordinary book from all points of view"[3].

Stieg Larsson's success seems to have unleashed a torrent of creative energies which had lain latent, as if dammed up, deep in the cultural being of Nordic peoples.

There were writers who had already published several books but who, after the publication of this trilogy, decided to change their themes and style and follow the "Larsson model". It is the case of the married couple Alexander Ahndoril and Alexandra Coelho Ahndoril, who, until 2004, had written successful books in their own particular style, rewarded with formidable reviews and important prizes. After the "Larsson phenomenon", the two adopted the *Millennium* manner of writing in the novel series known as "Inspector Joona Linna". The change did not end here: the two wrote *together* the novels in this series, which they signed by a common pseudonym – Lars Kepler. The fact that they did not publicly declare these changes caused a wave of speculations in the literary space of Northern Europe, thus contributing, obviously, to publicising the books. The appearance of the first volume in the series, *The Hypnotist*, in 2010, was an immense success. The book was at the top of the sales in Sweden, staying on top throughout the year.

On the other hand, a tradition of the detective novel had already existed in the Scandinavian countries ever since the 19th and especially the 29th century. The couple Maj Sjöwall (1935-1975) and Per Wahlöö (1926-

[2] We have used the information presented in the postscript to the Romanian version of Stieg Larsson's trilogy, *Millennium*, 2, [p. 579].
[3] *Loc. cit.*

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1975) are considered to be the "founders of the Swedish detective novel". There followed Henning Mankell, Jo Nesbo, Gunar Staalesen and others, widely translated in Western Europe, USA and elsewhere during the second half of the century.

3. The social and economic context of the upsurge of the boreal-detective novel

How can we explain this cultural phenomenon represented by the upsurge, in the countries of Northern Europe, of the "sensational" literature, as we are going to call it, for the time being? Of course, the explanation has to do with the economic and social infrastructure of the Scandinavian countries. Evidently, we speak of a high standard of living, which guarantees both the authors' independence (in terms of economic stability, physical and mental health services and well-being, etc.) and the disposition of the reading public for buying books. This latter aspect has several nuances – there is a public cultured and wealthy enough to buy and enjoy these books[4]. It is, therefore, the well-known "Nordic social system", which means, in essence, two things – universal social security and education.

With reference to the latter component, everyone knows the data about the coherence of the educational strategies in Sweden, the system of evaluating the competences of students in Island and especially the modern approach to educational policies in Finland. After spreading all over the world the concept of "learner-/student-centred education" (with results still debatable today), at present it is provoking heated debate over the project of school instruction structured not according to distinct subjects of study, but focused on themes approached from an interdisciplinary perspective. The new orientation, which is already being experimented in a few schools in Helsinki, is also aimed at developing the practical component of education, as well as another change in the teacher-pupil relationship. We should also add that the problem of education itself has become a subject for present-day literature[5].

[4] In general, book rankings observe the sales figures, and these are huge, as we have shown. Still, in some countries, such as Norway or Iceland, they the criterion of loans from the big libraries was also taken into consideration.

[5] See, among others, Allan Bennett's play *The History Boys*, known especially for the film adaptation of Nicholas Hytner (2006), with Richard Griffiths, in the role of professor Hector. In Romania, the play was translated and put on by the director Vlad Cristache, at the "Excelsior" Theatre in Bucharest. Practically, the play dramatizes the confrontation between the spirit of the Renaissance, about the interconnectedness of the elements in the universe (Prof. Hector), and the pragmatic spirit of confrontation in a world in permanent competition (Prof. Irwin). One vision is that of humanism, of the cultural needs of the superior being, the other one – of postmodernity, of work market competitiveness, material success. Bennet's thesis is that the two visions need to be associated.

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Danish and Nordic identity in general is characterized by the search for contentment and inner comfort, which, ignoring luxury and elitism, encouraging communitarianism and an interest in lifelong learning. Even today, the Danes can enrol at the well-known "open universities" several times during their lifetime, a custom dating back to the heyday of the illuminist ideas of the writer, pedagogue, theologian and philosopher Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872).

The final result is of a profoundly human nature: the respect for work, high professional conscientiousness, manifested by responsibility for what the professional writer does, the attachment to the human values discussed in these books and, not least, the incredible potential for work which we have already mentioned. Cycles of up to 14 volumes (massive as well, some amounting to 600-800 pages each), different series or entire work series of 30-40 books in the case of relatively young and very young authors illustrate the creative force of this "New wave" of Nordic literature.

4. Does the crime novel represent literature?

It is true that these conditions, only very briefly outlined here, should have generated another kind of literature – philosophical, psychological, social and historical, etc. – more suited to the high standard of living and level of education of the peoples of Northern Europe. However, the fast pace of contemporary life and the transformation of the taste for reading into a mass phenomenon did not allow for such an evolution. Writers chose to satisfy the demand on the book market: a middle-brow prose, aimed at accommodating all tastes and levels of intellectual reception. Is this part of authentic literature? Opinions are divided. Even mainstream readers used to contest, not very long ago, the "literary value" status of detective stories*. Critics and literary historians still hold on to this position, in many cases: great literature, literature as authentic art is not likely to provoke commercial effects of such proportions; it remains an attribute of intellectual elitism. Unfortunately, great writers able to excel in the truly grand genres – poetry (especially lyrical verse of philosophical reflection), highly aesthetic prose, drama of ideas – emerge only rarely, anywhere in the world. Whereas the commercially successful novels which combine aesthetic quality with social and political argument and topicality,

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sophisticated narrative structures with intellectual debate have appealed to an incredibly high number of authors.

5. The representatives of the new wave of sensational books

Statistical figures differ widely in their numerical and nominal representation of the authors in this trend of writing, maybe precisely because the genre eschews easy categorisation. Anyway, in comparison with other literatures in Europe and in the entire world[6], the figures are impressive:

Country	**Scandinavianbook ranking**	**Truc ranking**
Iceland	5	13
Norway	9	28
Finland	5	10
Denmark	8	26
Sweden	38	79

The figures above only concern the "new wave" of writers, with some differences of time-framing, broader in the case of Olivier Truc.

Like any statistics[7], this one, too, is debatable, and when it comes to spiritual products, figures so much less significant. Still, as we are concerned with a phenomenon which has drawn the attention of the whole word to the writers in Northern European countries, we have to conform, at least partially, to the system of evaluation imposed by the "book market": number of authors, of copies (which amounted to 50-60 million worldwide, for a single author, such as S. Larsson); translations (in scores of languages); novel series or cycles, respectively (between 3 and 14 volumes per series), number pages, film adaptations and so on.

As far as we are concerned, we confined ourselves to a limited number of writers, selected subjectively, with one criterion being their

[6] In present-day Romanian literature, for example, the genre is almost absent. The books of Rodica Ojog Brașoveanu and of other two or three writers in this category belong to the last decades of the last century.

[7] The sources used are *Scandinavianbooks.com*, which employs the bookshop statistics, as well as Olivier Truc, 2014.

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publication in Romanian, combined with a more subjective and restrictive one, that of our own reading.

It would have been proper that our presentation should observe, even in this avowedly subjective context, a certain value ranking of the names selected here. But is this possible in art – if we insist, however, that the respective novel represent literary art? And then, can a single reader presume to operate such classifications? Not even the professionals of literary criticism and literary history (book history) attempt to make such appreciations in a synchronic perspective. Only after a long time has passed will the diachronic perspective allow a certain sifting of values. On the other hand, we could synthesise the resulting figures, titles, series, volumes, editions, number of copies, translations, prizes, thus obtaining an S Index, where S would mean "Success on the market". We all know, however, that we would be faced with at least two impediments:

a) a historical one, showing that Al. Dumas, with *The Three Musketeers*, or Jules Verne, with *Around the World in 80 Days* and others had a greater success than Shakespeare, Molière, V. Hugo, Balzac, Tolstoy and so on);

b) a contemporary one, indicating that a writer's success depends very much on marketing, on the talent of the literary agent and so on.

Consequently, we resorted to an external criterion, also utilized by makers of numerical classifications, rankings and lists of writers – that of geographical and cultural distribution.

● ***In Iceland***, the island between the oceans (Atlantic and Arctic), with one of the smallest density of population in the world (326,000 inhabitants, about the population of Cluj), the activity under discussion is extremely impressive. This phenomenon is justified by an exceptional economic and social development and o literary tradition of distinguished by numerous *sagas* and a Nobel Prize (Halldőr Laxnes, 1955).

a) *Arnadul INDRIÐASON*, born in 1961, a writer's son, himself a journalist and film critic, won renown with the series "Chief Inspector/Detective Erlendur Sveinsson", in which he proposed to write 10 volumes. He managed to finish 14 volumes until 2014, breaking the records of his congeners. He began in 1997, with *Synir derftsius* "*Sons of Dust/Fiii lui Dust*", but the best known in our country is the volume translated by

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from Swedish (?!?) by Monica Vlad, with the title *Orașul borcanelor/Jar City*, about sinister genetic experiments carried out in secret. Its protagonist is still indebted to the old model – the morose detective in his fifties, typical of the Icelandic and Nordic crime novel in general.

b) *Yrsa SIGURÐARDÓTTIR*, born in 1963, a practising engineer specialised in a seemingly men's domain – hydro-technical engineering (in Northern lands!) – has such great creative energy that in the daytime she builds hydroelectric works and at night she writes books. She made her debut at 26, having written no less than five children's books between 1998 and 2003. In 2006 she played havoc with the hierarchy of the *Scandinavian noir* novel, with *Suflete damnate*/*My Soul to Take*, which came after the first book in the series, *Ultimele ritualuri*/*Last Rituals* (2005) and continued with *Aska/Ashes to Dust* (2007), *Auðnin/Veins of Ice*, "Zâna Întunericului", 2008; *Horfðu á mig/Someone To Watch Over Me*, 2009; *Ég man þig/I Remember You*, "Știu cine ești", 2010, some of them translated into Romanian for Editura Trei by Laurențiu Damian. The six-volume series can be named after the two investigators – the lawyer Thora Gudmundsdóttir and the German ex-inspector Mattew Reich.

The two writers' names are illustrative of the Icelandic patronymic and matronymic system, common to the other Nordic languages and cultures: the family names actually mean "son of..." – cf. *Indridas**son***, and "daughter of…" respectively, cf. *Sigurðar**dóttir***.

● ***In Norway***, the "new wave" of the "crime novel" genre started earlier and with the same powerful impact.

a) *Anne BIRKEFELDT RAGDE*, born in 1957, a professor of Communication at the University of Trondheim, also specialised in advertising, made her debut at 19 with children's books such as *Hallo! Her er Jo!/Hello, Jo speaking!/Alo, aici e Jo*, 1986, alongside several others. In 1990 she starts writing books for adults, such as *En tiger for en engel/A Tiger for an Angel/Un tigru pentru un înger* (1990); *Zona Frigida* (1995), in which serious themes are treated humorously – a less known facet of Nordic literature. A scandal about her becoming a victim of *e-book* piracy broke out in 2010, during the writing of her first 12 books, an occurrence otherwise beneficial in terms of marketing. But her well-deserved success was assured by the first volume of the *Neshov Trilogy*, more exactly by

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Berlinerpiplene/Berlin Poplars, 2004, „Plopii din Berlin", translated by Aurora Kambar and Erling Schøller in 2009 for Editura Univers, Bucharest. Of relatively small dimensions, somewhat atypical for the Nordic style, the book is so dense, so profoundly human, and yet, so surprising that the gripping effect remains impressed on one's mind long afterwards[8]. The measured, minute reconstruction of a family chronicle reveals secret love affairs, homosexuality, tense familial relations, the conflict between old and new mentalities and especially an incest, whose discovery resolves the problem of the inheritance for the descendants of a family of freaks. The faultless craftsmanship in the intertwining narrative threads, in the placement of the details which create and resolve the suspense, as well as the immense warmth in the treatment of the characters and their problems constitute the book's main strengths. The scene in the first paragraphs is explained by the one in the last pages, in a coherent, dense account, with no detectives, but with strong and weak people, joined together in life and death, but also tied together by an incest – which proves to be the key of the novel. The other two volumes of the trilogy, *Hermit Crabs* and *Pastures Green*, have not been translated into Romanian, as far as we know. Anyway, at the age of 58, Anne Ragde has written 47 books, all of them radiating energy, understanding and humour.

b) *Kjell DAHL*, born in 1958, is a psychologist and jurist by training, a pre-university teacher and agricultural worker in his everyday life, turned a writer and screenplay writer in his mature years. He is known particularly for the "Gunnarstranda & Frølich Series", with eight volumes written between 1993 and 2012. The detective and his assistant investigate the dark histories of the underworld in Oslo and in all over the country, with relations up to the highest levels, but also in relation to their own feelings. It was translated into Romanian by Maria Melania Goja, with the title "*Al patrulea...*"/*The Fourth Man*, the fifth volume of the series, characterized in the specialised press as "a Norwegian crime mix: a murder, a fatal woman, black metal and gangsters" (cf. K.O. Dahl, *Al patrulea,* Bucureşti: Trei,

[8] Relating to the commentaries of a professional and impassioned reader, known in the online medium, we might say that after reading this book you begin to see all sorts of strange things happening: you spill your coffee over the computer keyboard, forget that you have lectures to give, talk to yourself in the room or the street and so on.

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inside cover). Another series, *Lindemans*, in two volumes, was published between 2006 and 2008. In addition to the ten volumes of the two series, we should mention other novels, short stories, biographies, essays, travelogues, travel guides – 25 titles in total.

c) *Anne HOLT*, born in 1958, belongs to the same generation. A lawyer specialised in child protection, she served as Minister of Justice for a few months in 1996-1997, but resigned from office to devote herself to her political militancy, also concerned with all kinds of minority rights. She, too, wrote several book series, being known especially for the five-volume cycle *Stubø & Vik*. In Romania, she became known for the first volume in the series, *Det som er mitt/What is Mine/Punishment/*"*Eroare judiciară*", 2001/2007. Chief-inspector Jngvar Stubø and the ex-policeman Jnger Johanne Vik investigate crimes well hidden in the administrative and juridical welters of a society in which everything seems to be going very well...

● ***In Finland***, writers, critics and literary historians claim that their literature "rather different", maybe also due to the ethnic and linguistic differences between them and the other Scandinavian countries.

a) *Antti TUMAINEN*, born in 1971, is a copywriter, highly appreciated in the book industry, in a country with writings in three languages – Finnish, Swedish and Sómi – and with about 1,400 books published every year, of which 450 are new titles. He made his debut in 2006, with the novel "*Ultima ploaie*"/*Last Rain/Toppaja, toivoakseni*. In 2009, *Veljeni vartija*/ "*Păzitorul fratelui meu*"/*My Brother's Keeper*, came out to critical acclaim, being followed in 2011 by *Parantaja/The Healer/* "*Tămăduitorul*", which won the Clue Award for 'Best Finnish Crime Novel 2011'.

Worth mentioning would also be the crime fiction authors Matti Yrjänä Joenswe and Leena Lehtolainen, Jlkka Remes, a writer of thrillers, Loila Hietamies – an author of *saga* novels. Katja Kollio also portrays characters of *chick-lit* inspiration. A. Tuomainen represents a blend of all these. Of course, one can detect here rather pale traces of the national epic *Kalevala*, compiled from Elias Lőnrat as late as 1835 and of the novel *Cei șapte frați/The Seven Brothers*, written in 1850 by the Nobel Prize winner Alexis Kovi.

b) *Salla SIMUKKA*, born in 1981, is one of the youngest representatives of the "new wave" of Scandinavian thriller authors. She

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started writing at the age of 17 and soon went straight to the top with the "Snow White Trilogy", an intelligent and delicate remake of the famous fairy tale selected by the Grimm Brothers, albeit set at the height of modern realism. The three volumes, *Roşu ca sângele/As Red as Blood* (2013/2013), *Albă ca Zăpada/As White as Snow* (2013/2015), translated into Romanian by Sigrid Crăsnean, and *Negru ca abanosul/As Black as Ebony* (2014/-) bring an absolute novelty into the Nordic novelistic genre. If other writers moved on from children's books to adults' books, S. Simukka blends the two approaches, since the detective investigation is conducted by a teenage girl and, in general, the world in these books concerns adolescence. Intelligent, sarcastic, tough, quiet young people hide in their past – not very distant, evidently – a secret which marks the shaping of their personality. What is striking to readers from other cultures is the almost complete independence of these youngsters, still in school in the majority of cases. Indeed, the writer stated, in an interview occasioned by her presence at the Gaudeamus Book Fair in Bucharest (2013), that independence at an early age is characteristic of Finnish society. A young person who has not become independent from his family before the age of 20 is considered rather odd[9], in contrast with what happens elsewhere in Europe, where the marsupial, phenomenon, prolonged till the age of 35-40, is a cause of concern, as well as a subject for sociological and anthropological studies, for literary and cinematographic works of art. Lumikki Andersson, the 17-year-old protagonist of the trilogy, is intelligent, in charge of her life, lives in a flat of her own, feels like going for a nocturnal swim in in the frozen waters of the ocean, dislikes social life, where people talk without communicating and is not willing to interfere with other people's business. She is a kind of teenage Lizbeth Salander, therefore the Salla Simukka's trilogy has been considered a "*Millennium* for youngsters".

At only 37, Simukka also wrote a two-volume sequence in the genre *light science fiction – Jäljellä* ("*Fără urme*"/*Without a Trace)*, 2012; *Toisaalla* ("*Stânga*"/*Elsewhere*), 2012, as well as translations, literary criticism, etc.

● ***In Denmark***, the genre is represented by two frequently invoked authors, Peter HØEG and Jussi ADLER-OLSEN, though always with the

[9] Cf. Ionuț Bărnuță, 2014.

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observation that the true Danish literature is represented by the classic writers H. Cr. Andersen, Martin Andersen Nexö, the Nobel Prize winner Johannes Jensen and the much loved traditionalist writer Karen Blixen.

Peter HØEG, born in 1957, studied art and literature at the University of Copenhagen, his hometown. He worked as a sailor, teacher, ballet dancer and actor, before making a name for himself in literature, with the novel *Frk: Smillas fornemmelse for sne*, 1992, translated by Valeriu Munteanu for Editura Univers, with the title "*Cum simte domnișoara Smilla zăpada*"*/Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, 1997. The book was soon translated into 33 languages, staying on top for 26 weeks in *Top New York Times*. There followed *Marginalii/Borderliners*, 1993; *Kninden og aben*, 1996, translated by the same V. Munteanu under the title *Femeia și maimuța/The Woman and the Ape*, 1996, Univers; *Den stille pige/The Quiet Girl*, 2006, and *Elefantpassernes børn/The Elephant Keepers' Children*, 2010, translated by Grete Tartler under the title *Copiii paznicilor de elefanți*, 2012, Univers.

As in many of the books belonging to the new wave of Nordic thrillers, we find in Høeg's novels that sophisticated mixture of twilit atmosphere, police investigation, horror scenes, as well as psychological analysis and philosophical commentary.

● ***In Sweden***, we have already seen the origination of the wave which swept all the Nordic countries. Of course, the "Larsson phenomenon" did not appear *ex nihilo*. The thematic and formal particularities of the fonder had already been successfully tested by other authors of the genre.

a) *Liza MARKLUND*, born in 1962, in Pålmark, Sweden, at the North Polar Circle, is a journalist and UNICEF ambassador.

She became known for the "Maria Eriksson" series, in two volumes, based on the true story of a battered woman, and especially for the "Annika Bengtzon" series, comprising 8 volumes (1998-2013). In Romanian translation we have *Sprängaren* (1998), under the title *Explozii în Stockholm/Bomber* (....), *Studio sex* (1999), under the quite inspired Romanian title *Studio 69* (...), by Laurențiu Dulman for Editura Trei in Bucharest.

Liza Marklung's books treat of power and of what people are capable of in order to accede to power and keep it. A very interesting example in this sense is *Nobels testamente/ Testamentul lui Nobel/Last Will*, translated into Romanian by Dina Litzica for Editura Trei, 2013.

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b) *Camilla LÄCKBERG*, born in 1974 in the little town Fjällbacka, a historical Swedish tourist resort like our Băile Herculane, studied economics and worked as a marketing director and production manager before devoting herself to writing professionally. Being one of the youngest exponents of the great group of Nordic *noir* writers (a little older, however, than the Finn Simukka), she reinforces the phenomenon by her creative vigour. She became known for her "Fjällbacka" Series, the name of the little resort town of her birth and by a first nine-volume cycle, Erika Falck & Patrick Hedström (2003-2014). There followed the two-volume series "Martin Molin" (2006-2013) and the "Super Charlie" series for children (2011-2013). In fact, one cannot establish a linear succession, as the publication dates clearly show that the novels from different cycles were written in parallel, in an entwining, overlapping chronology of prodigious restlessness.

Naturally, this haste does not produce masterpieces of genuine literature. In 2009, she wrote three books, coming out 6th in the ranking of best-selling modern writers, with the books she had already published, but after authors of the same category – adventure, humour, intrigue, etc. – the first three on the list being Larsson, Meyer and Brawn (cf. *The Books seller*, 25.01.2010). Like the Norwegian Kjell Dahl, the Swede Läckberg tried everything in her writing, including cookery books. But it was not only these that won her success, but also genuine literature, such as the excellent *Cafeneaua văduvelor/The Widows' Café*, in the volume of short stories *Întâlnirea/Snowstorm and the Scent of Almonds* (....). On the other hand, the two investigators in the Fjällbacka Series – a writer and a professional detective – dissect not only the secrets of a society, but also those of book writing.

She is one of the writers massively translated into Romanian at Editura Trei: *Prințesa ghețurilor/The Ice Princess*, 2010, translated by Simona Țențea and Asa Apelkivist; *Predicatorul/The Preacher*, 2010 – translation by Simona Țențea; *Cioplitorul în piatră/The Stonecutter*, 2011 – translation by Simona Țențea; *Piaza rea/The Stranger*, 2011 – Simona Țențea; *Copilul german/The Hidden Child*, 2012 – Simona Țențea; *Sireana/The Mermaid*, 2013 – Simona Țențea; *Paznicul farului/The Lighthouse Keeper*, 2013 – Gabriela Eftemie; *Făuritoarea de îngeri/The Angel Maker's Wife*, 2014 – Gabriela Eftimie.

● ***In Greenland***, an autonomous country in the Kingdom of Denmark, there is Kim KLEINE, of Norwegian origin, who won renown, while in the ***Faroe Islands***, the best known are the writers from earlier generations, such as William HEINESSEN (b. 1900) or Rói PATURSSON (b. 1947), better known as a philosopher and anthropologist. We have ignored, from the boreal region, the writers from ***Estonia***, ***Latvia and***

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Lithuania, although there are also notable contributions from the Baltic region of Northern Europe.

6. Is there a success "recipe" in the "Millenium" phenomenon?

After reading the first three or four writers of the Nordic "new wave thriller", one begins to think that they all took the same course in CW (*creative writing*), especially because they belong to the same age group – some were born around 1954-1957, others around 1961-1963 and son on. Evidently, they could not be classmates, as they grew up in different countries. They might have read the same speciality treatises. They are more certain to have followed the same models, old or especially contemporary ones. None of these possibilities would equate to disqualifying the authors, as long as each author and each volume is a page turner. In fact, nowadays there is a growing conviction that the writer's craft does not only involve an inborn gift, but also craftsmanship, which means not only self-teaching, experience acquired through persistent exercise, through failure and renewed attempts, but also systematic learning, with adequate models of composition, narrative voice, characters, dialogue, etc.[10] Just like in plastic arts or in music, literature means *art*, in the Latin etymological sense – *genium et ingenium*, inspiration and perspiration, talent and craft[11].

Therefore, without resembling one another, not even within the same series in a writer's body of work, without creating even a momentary sensation of *déjà vu* or of satiety, without diminishing in any way their

[10] About such courses and especially about such books, cf. Marius Chivu, 2015, p. 16. The Romanian writer, journalist and critic comments on the book *Cum să scrii un roman/How to Write a Novel*, by Howard Mittelmark and Sandra Newman, translated into Romanian by Bogdan Alexandru Stănescu, București: Editura Baroque Books & Arts, 2014. The author of the article also refers to books such as Anne Lamott's *Cum să înveți să scrii ficțiune pas cu pas.../Learning to Write Fiction Step by Step*, Pitești: Paralela 45, 2013, and others.

[11] In Romania and other ex-Soviet countries, the rejection of the CW courses is due to the negative model of the "Schools of literature" of Stalinist type, organized according to Moscow's indications. In fact, those yielded poor results only because of the selection of the candidates (from healthy, proletarian milieus, irrespective of any signs of an innate vocation), as well as of the attempts to impose "inborn realism", the idea of literature with Marxist theses in literature. Otherwise, some of the students emerged as authentic values, such as N. Labiș, in Romanian literature. On the other hand, the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare reveals that, beyond the ideological limitations of the "Maxim Gorki" Institute of literature in Moscow, where he had a scholarship for two years, he has the opportunity to learn good things and meet professional writers of distinction. Today, the prose writer and academic Alexandru Mușina is trying to introduce such courses, at least with an optional status, in the curriculum of philological faculties in Romania.

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narrative force, *all Nordic noir crime novels have a common air*, a kind of "familiar" atmosphere.

● ***Composition*** is always very sophisticatedly elaborate, without impeding the flow of reading. A very good alternation past/present interlinks chapters and paragraphs in a cadenced pattern of temporal correspondences, with unexpectedly interweaving planes or sudden twists in the plot, with a subtle scattering of significant details, with episodic developments and abrupt breaks – which create the suspense specific to the genre. At a certain moment, the investigator realises that he/she is utterly helpless, isolated and all alone in his/her confrontation with unbreakable walls of mystery, but right then the phone rings just in the nick of time, like a veridical *deus ex machina* credibly integrated into the context.

Many novels have a preamble of a few italicised paragraphs, which seem to have nothing in common with the beginning proper or with the rest of the narrative, either. At the end of the book, there are other paragraphs, which clarify the meaning of the initial ones, in the light of the whole story they had framed. This is the well-known technique of compositional symmetry, practiced in innumerable variants. Anne B. Ragde used it shortly before Stieg Larsson, and many other representatives of the genre followed suit.

● ***The extremely complex plot*** is generated by approaching the subject from several perspectives, which complete each other perfectly. There are always three or four distinct planes which can be identified in the irresistibly captivating unfolding of the narrative.

a) At the surface level unfolds the *detective type of plot*. The death or disappearance of some people, inexplicable explosions trigger tenacious investigations, which lead to the discovery of chains of terrifying murders, incredible secrets, webs of complicities, sordid details in the life of some characters, families, communities, corporations or whole state entities.

b) From hence, there emerges the image of a society functioning almost perfectly, according to the economic, social and cultural standards of the modern world, which hides, however, human abjection manifested in all its possible forms. *Social critique*, more or less obvious, is the first ingredient elevating these novels above the narrow and dispraised sphere of the detective genre. The detective enquiry reveals old deficiencies and new peccadillos in family relations and community organization, national and international conspiracies, onerous business dealings in the big companies which sustain the country's economy, cu implications reaching the highest administrative and political spheres, state secrets, details about journalism regimented in the service of clique interests and son on. Sometimes there are more or less direct allusions to elections, presidents of states, plots at the highest level. Financial and diplomatic scandals, the trafficking of women,

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children, drugs, the selling of classified information, the traffic of influence, are elements of a social panorama in which the writer's sincere patriotism manifests itself as openly as his/her critical spirit and moral and civic rectitude[12].

The family saga, such as the Vangers – in S. Larsson; the Neshovs – in A. Ragde; detective Erlendur's family – in Arnaldur Indriðason and others, exploits an old Nordic literary tradition, offering the background for an ample social and political fresco.

c) *Psychological introspection* is the third narrative level in the novels under discussion. The families at the centre of the plot, as well as the individuals living in isolation, but trapped in the web of complicated social relations, are actually samples of eccentrics, freaks, obsessed people, perverts, but also of lucid, balanced, intelligent, honest individuals, replete with the customary in-between category, of people both good and bad at the same time, with an admirable avoidance of character Manichaeism. The childhood traumas with devastating effects in the becoming of the adults, but also with the notable triumphs of personal growth, the examples of psychic manipulation, the unleashing of instinctual drives and states of paroxysm are analysed systematically, but in a literary key, not only in the novels with declaredly psychological themes, such as the Keplers' *Sub hipnoză/The Hypnotist* or Yrsa Sigurðardóttir's *Suflete damnate/ My Soul to Take*, but in absolutely all the novels of the "Nordic new wave".

d) Finally, somewhat unexpectedly, many of these books contain the *elements of a romance novel*. Of course, one might say that this is an indispensable ingredient of any successful book. The time-honoured recipe – in literature, as well as in film – "a little bit of everything", seems to be functioning here, as well. However, whenever they used it, the writers evoked here applied it masterfully. Ravaging hatred and abominable violence intersect with delicate feelings of love, with the need for protection and communication, with romance flowering in the most unexpected circumstances. We notice that investigation partners fall in love, after the model Mikael Blomkvist (endeared as "Kalle", after a sympathetic character) and Lisbeth Salander, but there is also love between the

[12] It is said that Stieg Larsson's sudden death at only 50 years of age, after submitting the manuscript of the *Millenium* trilogy to the publisher, may have been directly connected to the revelations made in the novel, with the means of literary fiction. In fact, the writer is evidently the prototype of the *freelance* journalist, the investigator Blomkvist of the book, and the story of the economic magazine suspended after a famous trial, is based on the *Expo* case in the real life of the journalist and writer, which he renamed *Millenium* in the novel. Larsson actually suffered a condemnation after the uncomfortable revelations made in his magazine.

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investigator Frölich and the strange Elisabeth Faremo, the ice princess, the sister of a feared criminal in real life, and so on. There is filial love, fraternal love, warm friendship and affinities, just as there are homosexual and bisexual relations, presented with deep understanding, in the spirit of a very tolerant society, in this sense. All these grow, like water-lilies, out of the muddy depths of a quagmire of lies, misogyny, greed, blackmail, hatred, misanthropy, manifested against the background of extreme tensions, hidden in the basements of the high society of the shining, septic, prosperous, modern cities, cu flaunted preoccupations for access to instruction, social protection and healthcare.

●***Other common elements*** – of those typical of the personality of this kind of Scandinavian literature.

The characters are usually strong, irrespective of their direct or secret manifestation, be they victims or victimisers, Eccentricity is equally characteristic of criminals, spies, corrupt officials and of young pupils and undergraduates, journalists, writers (as characters), detectives, psychologists and so on. The female hacker Lisbeth Salander – in Larsson's books, as well as her younger counterpart, Snow white, in Simukka's books, act ostentatiously, having piercings, tattoos nonconformist haircuts, weird clothes, but they are fair to society and to themselves. They are cold and ruthless, like Nordic winters, when they have to be so, but they can also be in love, protective or helpless, in other circumstances. At the same time, they resist until the end, making tough decisions; they bathe at night in the freezing ocean, speak to no one for days on end, suffer from hunger and thirst, resist terrible blows and inflict equally terrible physical, psychic or financial blows, and, despite all these, they manage to be credible characters and profoundly human figures.

Investigators are as weird as they are human, as are the ones under investigation. The classic detective type, the taciturn man in his fifties, solitary and morose is only kept by Arnaldur Indriðason, in the Erlendur series, and by a few other writers. The other investigators are younger and not necessarily professionals. They can be journalists, lawyers, psychologists, profilers and even writers. As a rule, two characters associate in unravelling the intricacies of an affair, because it would not even be humanly possible to deal singlehandedly with the extremely thick plots and complicated ramifications of the respective stories: a chief detective and his rather scatterbrain assistant; a journalist and a female hacker; a police inspector and a psychologist and so on. They have great family problems themselves – they are divorced, in conflict with cu their rebellious children or senile parents, with bosses, neighbours, the system. It rarely happens that

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the secret comes to light without the help of investigators, only out of the writer's stroke of the, cf. Anna Ragde's *Plopii din Berlin/Berlin Poplars*.

● ***External characteristics*** of the Nordic adventure novel.

- They are, for the most cases, novel sequences. Not only have these writers the power to project and write whole series of two to fourteen volumes, as well as several series, but also bulky volumes of an impressive number of pages – between 600 and 800 each. S. Larsson had projected 10 volumes, submitted three of 2,000 pages in total, and he seems to have written some more before he died. Only Anne Ragde, S. Simukka and a few others write somewhat shorter novels, about 250 pages long. But all of them – big or small – are extremely dense and are part of series or cycles, beside other diverse volumes.

- All these writers won national and international prizes and all their books sold astronomical numbers of copies, being translated in scores of languages, adapted for the screen, sometimes in several versions, much commented upon or reworked. The blurbs accompanying them on the book market are always superlatively formulated: "breath-taking"; "unputdownable"; "is the king of crime fiction"; "is the best". But the absolute superlative cannot be attributed to several representatives of the same group.

- They all mirror, indirectly, the specific Nordic identity: frosty winters, stoically endured, long nights, the (exterior) cleanliness of places, etc. People are not poor, but administer their money with care; they drink a lot of coffee in these novels, at any time of day or night, they all call each other by their first name, irrespective of their position in the social or biological hierarchy – a particularity of the Scandinavian community spirit.

7. Conclusions

The overlapping levels of reception pose difficulty in categorising the novel in a certain class: *thriller, mystery, detective/crime, noir, saga, psi, love story*; then, *boreal, Nordic, Scandinavian* – these are terms used interchangeably. The theme seems to be the same: "the skeleton in the cupboard", in a society with a high level of civilization. All the other threads originate from here and the prevalence of one or the other supports the categorisation in a certain subspecies. Specialists hold different opinions. We are told that a writer cultivated adventure and not a detective plot, that another stands out as more philosophical and psychological than others, that some address the innocence of children and adolescents, others deal with high-technology and state-of-the-art devices. Certain reservations about this kind of books have always existed and still exist today. The distinguished

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translator from Romanian into Norwegian, Steinar Lone[13], is not very sure that this kind of books in his country, crime, suspense novels or whatever else they may be called, very popular nowadays, deserves to be called "literature"[14].

Of course, we could have discussed other kinds of valuable books, already published in Romanian as well, such as the novel of the Norwegian Carl Frode Tiller, *Încercuire* (rewarded with the Prize for Literature of the European Union for 2009), translated by Simona Schouten, for Editura "Casa Cărții de Știință", 2015, or of the Swede Per Olov Enquist, *Cartea parabolelor. Un roman de dragoste*, translated by Daniela Ionescu for the same Editura "Casa Cărții de Știință", 2015. But these represent an identity phenomenon only at an individual level.

As far as we are concerned, we believe that all of them create literature. *A certain kind of literature*, which will disappear as a successful genre, as Al. Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* once did. They are not going to endure like Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, even if some of them are chronicle novels and family *sagas*. For now, however, they represent a cultural rift, a particular identity.

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[13] Well-known as a translator into Norwegian of other literatures – French, Italian, English, Dutch, Steinar Lone translated from Mircea Eliade, *Pe strada Mântuleasa*; Mihail Sadoveanu, *Baltagul*; Camil Petrescu, *Patul lui Procust*; Gellu Naum, *Zenobia* și *Poeme* (?); Mircea Cărtărescu, *Orbitor*, I-III. For *Orbitor. Aripa stângă* he received the Award of Norwegian Critics in 2008, and for his entire activity as a translator he was decorated with the Order of "Cultural Merit" in 2007, by the president of Romania.

[14] Vitalie Ciobanu, "Steinar Lone – We, Translators, are the agents of Romanian literature in the World", in *Contrafort. Revista de literature și dialog intelectual*, nr. 9-10 (215-216), 2012, pp. 16-17.

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