

# The internationalization of Sjöwall and Wahlöö.

## A quantitative study of Scandinavian Noir

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to illustrate the pattern of internationalization of Scandinavian Noir, the popular trend that succeeded in permeating popular culture in recent years. In doing this, we have chosen as starting point the now famous Swedish crime fiction duo Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. This paper attempts, on the one hand, to demonstrate that their popularity is not merely a matter of critical consensus, but that it can be backed up by empirical data, and on the other hand, that the recent revival of Scandinavian crime fiction pays homage to the two and acknowledges their contribution by critically reassessing them and retranslating them to other languages. The present quantitative research aims at showing that their internationalization also points to a shift in European cultural trends the likes of which has been noted by Pascale Casanova in her *World Republic of Letters*, but not empirically demonstrated.

### 1. Introduction

Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö are generally considered the first internationally renowned detective fiction authors from Scandinavia<sup>1</sup>. They have been invoked as such by many researchers and the model they helped shape has proven itself greatly influential for the way in which *Scandinavian Noir* has emerged and evolved. What we shall attempt to outline is the general path of their translation to other countries. Their case will constitute an attempt to test the long-held opinion that they represent the most exported authors of crime fiction from Scandinavia before the emergence of *Scandinavian Noir* in the 2000s and, regardless of whether or not we confirm this hypothesis, the test will be a success inasmuch as it will help us determine the languages to which they have been translated the most.

Why is that relevant? First of all, Scandinavia in the 1960s – as the Swedish couple began publishing their now famous *Roman om ett brott* – was relatively unknown on a global cultural scale. Peripheral both from the point of view of political influence (with a population of 7,48 million in 1960, relatively wealthy, but far from being the industrial Moloch that West Germany was soon to become during the *Wirtschaftswunder* fueled by Turkish-imported

<sup>1</sup> As claimed by nearly all researchers that have written about the phenomenon of crime fiction in Scandinavia, both before the more recent internationalization, as well as in the 80s. The list includes Andrew Nestingen, Kerstin Bergman, Andrew Pepper, Ellen Rees, Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, Michael Tapper, Barry Forshaw, David Geherin, Bo Lund, Jost Hindersmann, among others.

workforce), as well as under the aspect of cultural production, Scandinavia's only chance at international literary recognition was bound to take place through the highly competitive and demanding *center*. In the now famous yet extremely cynical words of Immanuel Wallerstein, "fierce intercapitalist rivalry is the name of the game. And only the strongest and the most agile survive." [Wallerstein 27] Politics and economics aside, however, Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti are the ones that most convincingly show that, in order for peripheral literature to exist beyond its borders, it must be validated by the center. Their contributions to the matter are already a question of academic consensus. Since the center has historically delegated itself as the sole entity capable of defining the concept of literary work (and, if we broaden our terms of reference, of defining entire genres and delimiting literary periods<sup>2</sup>) and has thus laid claim over the theoretical borders of literature as such, every translation from a peripheral language to a language of canonical literary circulation becomes an acknowledgement of innate potential or worth. Pascale Casanova:

Writers from languages that are not recognized (or are recognized only to a small degree) as literary are not immediately eligible for consecration. The condition of their works' being received into the literary world is translation into a major literary language. [Casanova 135]

The center thus accepts, through translation, a literature that is simultaneously exotic enough to be interesting and similar enough to be aesthetically comprehensible. Casanova again:

from the point of view of a major target language, [...] the importation of literary texts written in «small» languages or ones belonging to neglected literatures serves as a means of annexation, of diverting peripheral works and adding them to the stock of central resources. [Casanova 135]

Returning to the crime fiction duo and to the question we set out to answer, identifying the major languages to which Sjöwall and Wahlöö were translated can help us determine a series of dominant cultural spheres in the decades following the publication of *Roman om ett brott*. The patterns of internationalization the ten novels of the series have followed can accurately point to the European literary centers at that time and – presumably – up to recent times, thus making visible the cultural spheres that have imported and legitimized the periphery, transforming its cultural production into a universal good, valuable to the extent that it possessed recognizable traits and returned a slightly altered image of itself.

We have considered this element of self-recognition highly relevant. It arguably owes its presence to the fact that Sjöwall and Wahlöö drew inspiration from the classic police procedural, made famous by the likes of Ed McBain, by then already renowned and massively read in the English-speaking world and several of whose books the couple had by then translated to Swedish. And, as always when faced with very powerful foreign models of writing,

<sup>2</sup> Regarding this, see also Arjun Appadurai's concept of Eurochronology, mentioned in *Modernity at large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (University of Minnesota Press, London, 1996) and further discussed by Christopher Prendergast (Prendergast 6).

an author belonging to the periphery can either copy and utilize the former's formula to his own means or, starting from it, develop a whole new mode of writing. We invoke Casanova again:

On the one hand there is *assimilation*, or integration within a dominant literary space through a dilution or erasing of original differences; on the other, *differentiation*, which is to say the assertion of difference, typically on the basis of a claim to national identity. [Casanova 179]

Between these two poles, *Internationalization* takes place, which is nothing more than the *assimilation of difference*, the universalization of local materials, the 'glocalization' of literature, bizarre as the term may sound:

Even the most purely popular crime fiction shares important features with elite works of world literature, especially the characteristic of combining universal themes with local settings. At once highly stylized and intensely localized, crime fiction is a preeminently "glocal" mode of literary creation and circulation. [Damrosch, D'Haen, Nilsson 4]

With regard to commercial literature, this internationalization gains a totally different momentum, and it is interesting to see how the dynamic of literary life expresses itself in this case. While the reception of high literature is distorted firstly by preconceived ideas about the concept of *Literature* as such and by the inherent delays of aesthetic approval via institutionalized literary criticism, a literary work that seeks out and accepts the confines of a commercial genre is to be enjoyed and validated immediately. In other words, a masterpiece of high literature is the result of critical consensus, which may take years or decades to crystalize and which can be quantified in terms of sales only after a certain period of time has passed. More so, the so-called high literature is dependent on critical authority, which then influences the book market in the same way that art critics decide the value of a painting whose inherent worth is opaque to an outside viewer. In the case of commercial literature or genre literature, it is solely the book market – expressed through readers' preferences – that decides the value of a literary work.

Ideally, we could quantify the relative effect of a literary production in terms of its critical reception, its reviews, the immediate response that it generated within the cultural field or, as is the case with crime fiction, within its readership. Nevertheless, crime fiction occupies a whole different position in the hierarchy of literary production. A crime novel, irrespective of its intrinsic literary qualities, remains subdued to the logic and needs of the book market. As it is, it is rather a literary *product* than a literary *work of art*. Its aesthetic dimension lingers in the background and is brought into question barely as the works begin to gain appreciation within an increasing circle of connoisseurs. Whereas intentionally aesthetic and *literary* (in contrast to the *commercial*) works are validated through cultural institutions and by voices with critical authority, crime fiction goes through a process of *internal canonization*. It is the crime fiction

authors themselves who read other crime novelists, and their personal tastes, expressed in interviews or through intertextual referencing, bring the aforementioned authors to new light. This concept corresponds, in part, to David Damrosch's *shadow canon*<sup>3</sup>, a body of literary works which exist simultaneously with *hypercanonical* literary productions, yet who remain unknown despite their value, which is opaque to the general public.

The entire 20<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by an unseen and barely remembered canon, made up by the detective and the dime novel, a corpus of literary works that took no heed to the literary masterpieces hailed by highbrow literary criticism. The 20<sup>th</sup> century remembers two hundred books that have helped shape literary evolution. Let us say five hundred. Or let us concede to a thousand. It is all the same, since these books, however valuable, cannot possibly compete with the tens of highly popular weekly series of thriller and detective novels that appeared all throughout the century in nearly every European country. Millions of books were published, millions were read weekly, monthly, yearly. In contrast to the historically determined 'Great Unread', which is to say, books that have never come to the focus of contemporary literary critics, or that have mainly gone unnoticed even in the eyes of their contemporaries, crime fiction represents 'The Great Read': a resource so generally accessed that it became superfluous; a body of works encompassing hundreds of thousands of titles, an even greater number of translations and, more importantly, millions of sales. A resource spanning approximately a century, but that has yet to be fully indexed and researched. A transnational phenomenon unfolding parallel to the official canon reinforced by literary criticism, yet infinitely more successful.

The names that stuck? Dashiell Hemmett, Raymond Chandler, P.D. James, the American hardboiled tradition and, of course, Agatha Christie. Moving locally, each country has its Doyle. Friedrich Dürrenmatt in Germany, Georges Simenon in France, the British Agatha Christie, the Swedish Maria Lang and an incommensurable list of authors who were massively read and enjoyed, yet remain unknown. The German Desch-Verlag sold 1,5 million books in the three years between 1958 and 1961, in its *Midnight Books* series (*Mitternachtsbücher*). [Schmidt-Henkel 151]. An approximate number for the German book market in 1971 would point towards 15 million sold copies. [Schmidt-Henkel 151]. Even earlier, as the Luftwaffe was bombing London during the nightly raids of 1940, the capital's eight million inhabitants were forced to take shelter in the city's now legendary *Tube*, the underground metro system. Difficult at first, life shortly took on the face of normality. People exchanged goods, developed a strong sense of community and solidarity in the face of adversity,

<sup>3</sup> David Damrosch, *World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age*, in Haun Saussy (ed.), *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore (2006), 43-53.

but most importantly, they passed the time. What did they do for the long hours when they could neither sleep because of the noise nor move because of other people similarly trying to rest? They read detective novels. [Haycraft vii].

In case of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, employing text-mining tools on literary reviews assessing their reception in different parts of the world would be ideal, yet extremely difficult. Moreover, the effort of such an endeavor would most probably not outweigh the end-results. And that is because: 1. There was probably hardly anything written about Sjöwall and Wahlöö in the European (non-Swedish, that is) cultural press of that time, considering the fact that it represented such a narrow selection among other works of translated literature. More than that, book reviews dedicated to translations tend to occupy a rather small portion of national literary criticism, usually more prone to focus on autochthonous works of literature. 2. Secondly, not nearly all of the literary magazines that would have hosted such reviews have been meanwhile digitized in European countries, not to mention countries outside of Europe. If they have been, it would be difficult to hierarchize them in order of relevance within the respective cultural system and within their respective theme of interest (which are the most visible and relevant Czech literary magazines dedicated to crime fiction, for example?) 3. Thirdly and lastly, even if all this material would be digitized and open-access, the text-mining tool would require from our part at least a basic knowledge of the language in question for us to be able to rigorously and correctly assess whether or not the reviews were critical, appreciative or neutral. In light of this, the only real indicator of their overall success is the number of times they were reprinted, how many translations they enjoyed, how many languages they reached. We are dealing, as previously stated, with a literary genre with a profoundly mercantile character, whose only end-goal is revenue and whose quantifying agent is sales. The interest in Sjöwall and Wahlöö is directly proportional to the number of languages they reached and to the number of reprints they enjoyed internationally.

### **Hypotheses**

Sjöwall and Wahlöö's books are interesting and worthy of being put into perspective because of several reasons. First of all, the distribution of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's translations from 1962 to 1989 in a Europe deeply polarized and partly dominated by communist regimes has the potential of exposing key ideological positions both in regard to foreign crime fiction, as well as in regard to the literary export of a democratic country such as Sweden. Admittedly, in order to visualize the magnitude to which democratic countries managed to export their cultural production to countries belonging to the Communist East, or rather which enclaves of foreign

literature were deemed suitable for import in Communist states requires the study of a relevant control group, a literary corpus against which we could then compare the performance of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's series in Communist countries. Since that would constitute a project too ambitious for the confines of this paper, we will limit our ambitions to questioning whether a difference between performance in a communist vs. in a non-communist land truly exists. As pointed out by nearly all those who have discussed Sjöwall and Wahlöö in their contributions, the duo has consistently expressed a great deal of Marxist-Leninist critique in regard to both the welfare state and the increasingly growing Americanization of Swedish society. Did their ideological position and implicit anathematization of capitalism influence the way they were received by countries with communist regimes? This is a question that begs an answer, but that will sadly be addressed another day.

Secondly, once a cultural phenomenon starts to grow in popularity, a tendency to inquire and bring to light that what led to its emergence makes itself clear. Several of the popular Scandinavian crime fiction authors today have named Sjöwall and Wahlöö as a powerful influence on their writing and character creation. Is there an increase in recent translations of the two visible since *Scandinavian Noir* started to reach an international readership?

Thirdly and lastly, did other Nordic authors contemporary or prior to Sjöwall and Wahlöö enjoy such a great, if any, international success? Did the interest in their writing encounter a revival after the year 2000, such as presumably is the case with the two? If the answer is yes, it becomes clear that the two, albeit acknowledged as the most influential within the genre, are not the single inspiration for the new wave of crime fiction authors from Scandinavia. If, on the other hand, they have been the only ones to enjoy new editions and translations in recent times, the claim to their exceptionality holds true.

## 2. Steps

First of all, we shall create a list of autochthonous editions of the now famous 10-volume novel *Roman om ett brott*, as to see how the novel performed internally. Since the number of copies sold within the Swedish market corresponding to each of the ten books is hardly an available information, we shall be looking at the number of reprints each of them enjoyed in order to grossly quantify their success. We will then analyze this in comparison to other Swedish crime authors that made their debut prior or around 1965, the year the first Swedish edition of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's *Roseanna* was published, and see how their books performed over time. A second stage will then logically include an analysis of international performance. By looking at

how and where the novels were translated, we will put the general claim that the duo represents the most translated and internationally renowned Scandinavian crime fiction authors of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the test.

Secondly, what is the background against which we choose to compare the two? Which are the crime fiction authors whose works constituted a stable enough canon during the 1960s as to be reshaped by the two? We have identified these authors in the same way we have identified Sjöwall and Wahlöö as the most cited and invoked names in the genre, namely by consulting a series of researchers, scanning their bibliographies and observing the recurrent names on which they idled in their considerations.<sup>4</sup> For the Swedish history of crime fiction, the following authors have been most often named: **Prins Pierre** (pen name of Fredrik Lindholm, considered by Bo Lundin the first ever Swedish author of detection fiction), **Robinson Wilkins** (pen name of Harald Johnsson), **S. A. Duse, Jul Regis** (Julius Petterson), **Frank Heller, Maria Lang, Vic Suneson, H-K. Rönblom, Stieg Trenter** and several others. These authors are so-called classics, authors that have first of all written consistently within the genre's conventions and, secondly, which had come to be regarded as uncontested figures in Swedish crime fiction prior to the two. We concede to the fact that we have been unusually generous in choosing these authors, precisely so as to have the broadest control group possible, yet not so broad so that a comparison becomes redundant. We have included the classics – and a few more. We have refrained from including authors that have been only superficially discussed. This has proven to be a correct decision, since attempting to search after their books in the catalogues of the *Kungliga Biblioteket* (The National Library of Sweden) returned modest, if any, results.

Thirdly, what are the main lines along which we shall pursue the two research objects we aim to compare, the 'before S&W' and the 'S&W duo', as it were? The first one is inherent to any study on evolution, be it biological, historical or literary. Time. We shall refer to the yearly distribution of editions, regardless if they are first editions, first translations or reprints. The second axis is place. Now, regarding the second axis: in nearly every small or middle-sized country, the entire book publishing industry is dominated by a small number of book publishing houses, usually located in the country's capital. Does it matter if Sjöwall and Wahlöö were published more in Stockholm than in Göteborg? Hardly. Does it matter if the strongly politicized *Roman om ett brott* was reprinted more times in Leipzig than in Berlin? As we have previously mentioned, it most surely does, since Leipzig was then part of East Germany (The German Democratic Republic, to be exact), while Berlin aligned itself politically with the

<sup>4</sup> As they are to be found in the following books:

Skei, Hans. H.: *Blodig alvor. Om kriminallitteraturen*, Aschehoug, Oslo (2008).

Bergman, Kerstin: *Swedish Crime Fiction. The making of Nordic Noir*. Mimesis International, Milan (2014). Broberg, Jan: *Mord för ro skull. Deckarens debut och dilemma*. Bo Cavefors Bokförlag, Malmö (1964). Heggelund, Kjell, Nordberg, Nils (eds.), *Kriminallitteraturen*, Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, Oslo (1978).

K., Arne Blom (ed.): *Tankar om mord*. Zindermans, Göteborg (1978).

Broberg, Jan: *Mordisk Familiebok*. Zindermans. Göteborg (1972).

Western, truly democratic Federal Republic of Germany. As we can see, the matter is more complicated than simply assigning a number of editions and reprints to a certain cultural space, be it based on language or location.

### 3. Research methodology

In researching the Swedish crime fiction classics prior to Sjöwall and Wahlöö, we have relied on data provided by LIBRIS, the Swedish library search provider run by The National Library of Sweden.<sup>5</sup> LIBRIS is a joint catalogue covering all the Swedish academic and research libraries, updated daily and whose database covers 6.5 million titles. In researching the process of internationalization undergone by *Roman om ett brott*, we have chosen first to turn our attention to the Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog<sup>6</sup>. We have made several specialized searches using criteria such as country of publication and language and then followed the links to each and every national library indexed in the KVK catalogue, so as to obtain a more accurate search result. We have then mined the bibliographical data from the online catalogues of 32 countries (including Sweden) with the help of Zotero, as well as with the Zotero Chrome Plugin. Each book entry mined by Zotero included several information, only a few of which were of particular interest for this research: the original and the translated title, author number 1 and author number 2 (author 3 as translator in the particular case of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, otherwise the translator was listed as the second author), language, publication year, publication place, publishing house and the particular catalogue from where it was obtained. We have then exported the Zotero entries as CSV extensions and imported them in separate Excel worksheets where, after eliminating duplicate entries, we organized the tables based on city of publication. From then on, the process of generating graphs and visualizing the patterns of translation was fairly simple.

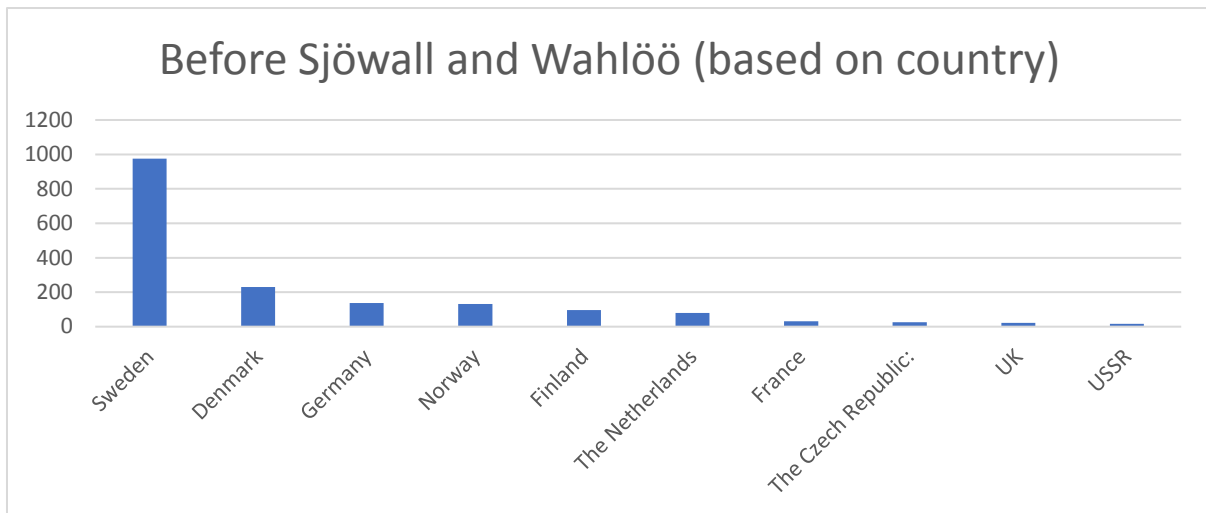
### 4. The graphs

We unsurprisingly begin by analyzing the market performance of the classical crime fiction authors of Scandinavia, the control group against which we shall then compare *Roman om ett brott*. The analysis returned the graph bellow:

<sup>5</sup> LIBRIS homepage, <http://libris.kb.se/>, last accessed 2018/09/20.

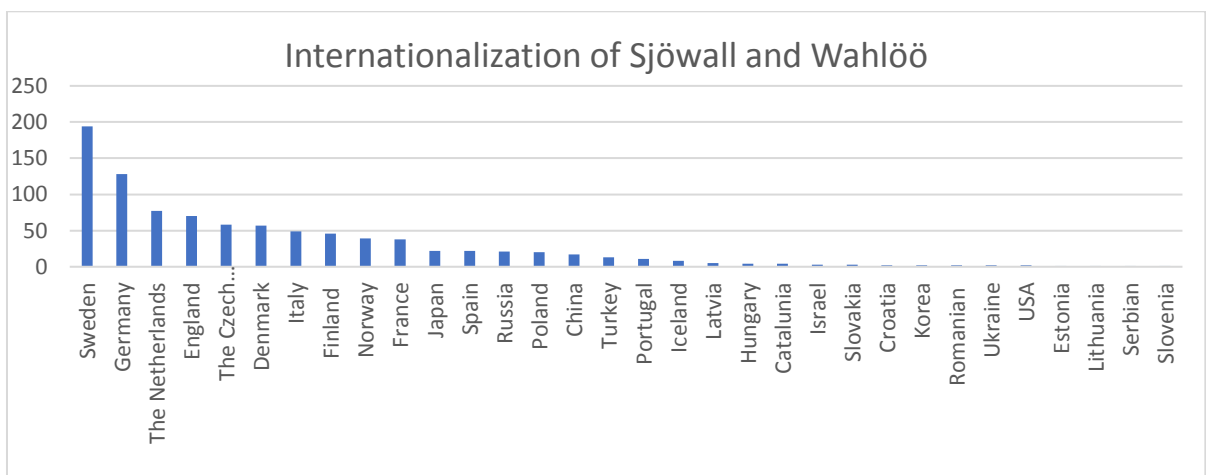
<sup>6</sup> The Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog homepage [https://kvk.bibliothek.kit.edu/?kataloge=NB\\_UNGARN&digitalOnly=0&embedFulltitle=0&newTab=0](https://kvk.bibliothek.kit.edu/?kataloge=NB_UNGARN&digitalOnly=0&embedFulltitle=0&newTab=0), last accessed 2018/10/02.





**Fig.2.** Distribution of translations of classic Swedish crime fiction authors based on land.

If we leave out Sweden entirely, since all the books we are currently taking into consideration are written by Swedish authors in Swedish, only Denmark, Germany, Norway, Finland, The Netherlands, France, the Czech Republic, the UK, the former USSR and a few others, which constitute a barely noticeable rest, remain. As for the internationalization of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, it can be visualized in the graph below:

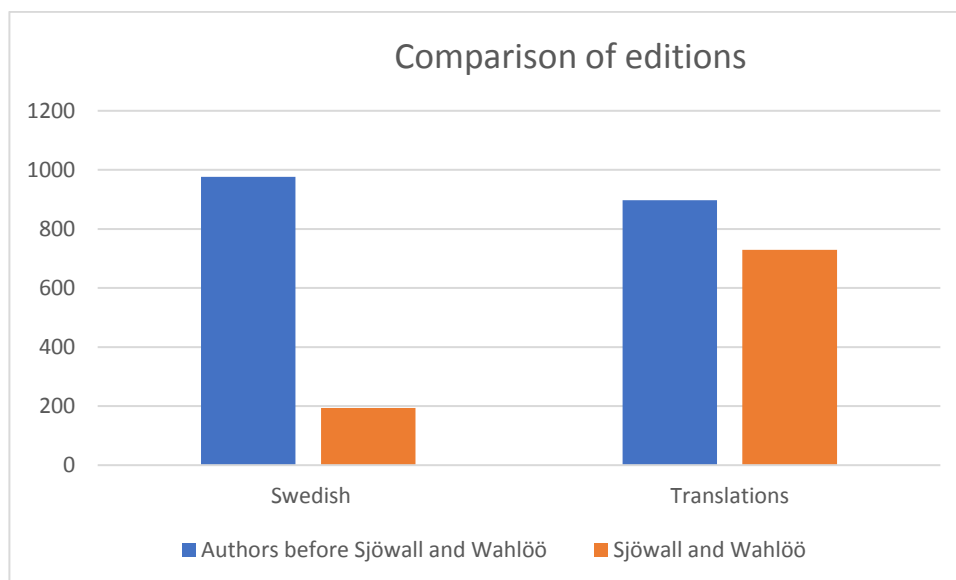


**Fig. 3.** Distribution of translations of Sjöwall and Wahlöö based on land.

For now, let us concentrate on whether or not there is a noticeable difference between authors preceding Sjöwall and Wahlöö and the particular success of the two. Authors preceding Sjöwall and Wahlöö had an input of 976 Swedish editions and an output of 897 translations. This gives us a 91,9% return rate. That means that, on average, for nearly every book published in Sweden there was *one* corresponding translation available to foreign readers. As for Sjöwall and Wahlöö themselves, their input surprises through its modesty. 194 Swedish editions spanning 1965 to 2018. The difference between this and the input corresponding to the authors preceding them

is easily explainable, firstly through the fact that in the latter case we are considering several authors, while the former is regarded as one single author, and secondly through the considerably wider time span across which the authors preceding Sjöwall and Wahlöö are distributed. The single most important fact that we must not forget is that the control group we have chosen had at the time of the duo's debut already amassed a considerable symbolic capital.

Nonetheless, the real surprise occurs when we take a look at the rest of the graph. Albeit having merely 194 Swedish editions, Sjöwall and Wahlöö's international output amounts to 729 editions, representing a 375% increase in number. This means that, for each edition of *Roman om ett brott* in the original Swedish, 3,75 translations were published. The graph speaks for itself:



**Fig.4.** Comparison of international performance.

What this tells us is that, first of all, authors preceding Sjöwall and Wahlöö performed quite poorly on an international level. Strictly speaking, their internationalization was not necessarily limited to European countries (Kerstin Ekman, for example, enjoyed a Japanese translation in 1998, and several of the books in question were published in New York), but in quantitative terms, the dominant areas of distribution are either Germany or the three other Scandinavian countries in Sweden's immediate vicinity, Denmark, Norway and Finland. France is situated further down the list, with 31 translated novels. In stark contrast to this, the duo owes its internationalization to several European countries, yet to none of the Scandinavian states so eager to translate the previous Swedish classics. Denmark occupies a mere fifth place in the hierarchy of translations, Finland seventh place and Norway eighth place.

In other words, whereas the classical crime fiction authors enjoyed a local distribution, proving to be significantly more popular in the Scandinavian world than in the rest of Europe, the countries where Sjöwall and Wahlöö were most translated are Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and England. Let us consider them step by step, beginning with the latter.

In England, Sjöwall and Wahlöö enjoyed 70 editions, whereas the classic authors preceding them only reached 22. In Czechoslovakia/The Czech Republic, the duo reached 58 editions, while the classic authors amassed merely 26. We must idle here for a second and make a few observations. The fact that Czechoslovakia, a land that between 1948 and 1993 was part of the Eastern Bloc, welcomed so many translations of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, is truly a surprise. We have previously casted a doubt over the importance of ideology in translating Sjöwall and Wahlöö to communist countries. We must however concede that the subject of translation in sensitive political contexts is too complex to be addressed here, albeit it would be very interesting to see whether or not the cliché of the fully self-sufficient communist literature holds true also in regard to commercial literature. Is the preconceived idea that countries belonging to the Soviet Bloc saturate all enclaves of national literature with translations from Russian actually true? The example set here by Czechoslovakia would lead us to think otherwise.

Regarding the Netherlands, the classic authors enjoyed 80 Dutch translations. Sjöwall and Wahlöö totaled 77. In Germany, the 10+ classic crime fiction authors, with translations distributed over the course of nearly a century, amassed a total of 137 editions. Comparatively, over a considerably shorter time span, the Sjöwall and Wahlöö duo has enjoyed 128 German translations. For a single author, that is indeed enormous. Albeit the British, the Dutch and the Czech editions together suffice in demonstrating without a doubt the fact that the two have surpassed all of the authors preceding them in terms of popularity and European distribution, it also shows that the main reason for this unprecedented success represents their entry on the German book market.

The following graph illustrates the yearly distribution of the duo's books, both internally as well as in translation:

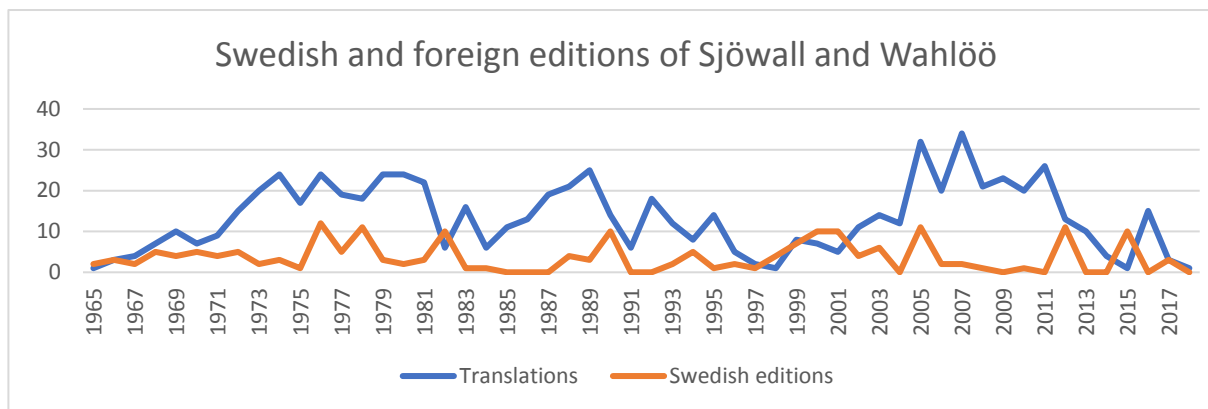


Fig. 5. Swedish and translated editions of Sjöwall and Wahlöö

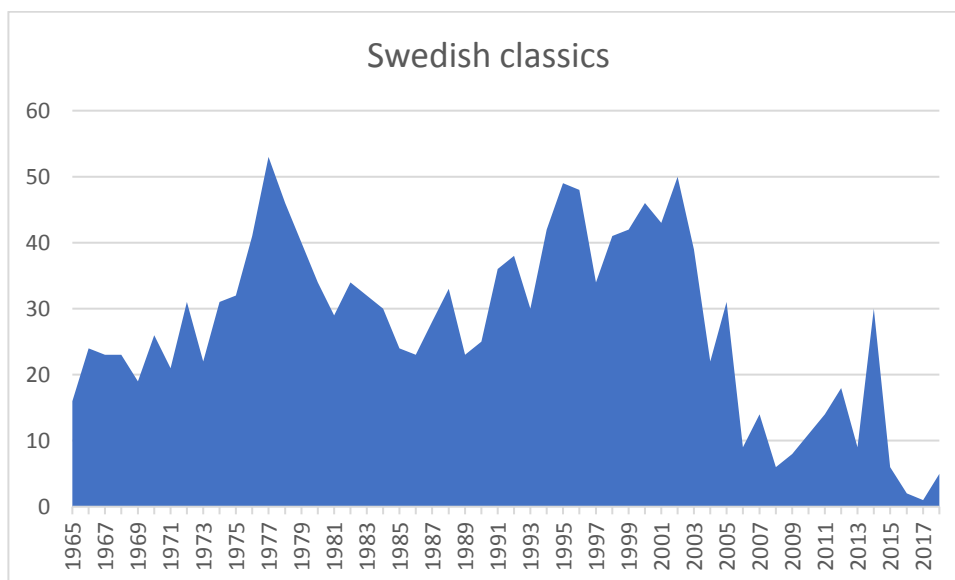
The two have unsurprisingly begun to enjoy significant popularity starting with 1976, when the last of the novels belonging to the series was finally published (*Terroristerna*, in the Swedish original). It had already enjoyed a significant number of translations during the 70s, as the graph suggests. The 80s saw a decrease in Swedish editions, but a surprising spike in translations in the decade's latter half. Yet by the beginning of the 1990s, it seems that both the Swedish readership, as well as international audiences had forgotten the two, since both Swedish, as well as translated titles fall behind. It is only starting with 2002 that the two enjoy new international retranslations, and the period between 2003 and 2012 proves to be the most fruitful. Yet, *nota bene*, this occurs only in regard to translations, since the number of Swedish editions does not change.

The reason for this spike has already been mentioned and does not come as a surprise. The period grossly corresponds to the birth of *Scandinavian Noir*, the transnational cultural phenomenon that has swept through Europe since the turn of the century and has in short time developed a cult following. One of the reasons for this cult – albeit we will not idle on the subject – is the existence of highly professional book markets that prompt immediate and quality translations of foreign literature, which in turn quickly make their way to the shelves, are expertly marketed and consequently sell at an incredible pace. This well-planned strategy for the dynamization of the book market is the reason behind the massive success of Stieg Larson in Germany, whose *Millenium* trilogy was translated and published as paperback between 2007 and 2009 and became an instant bestseller for a total of 482 weeks<sup>7</sup>. Moretti:

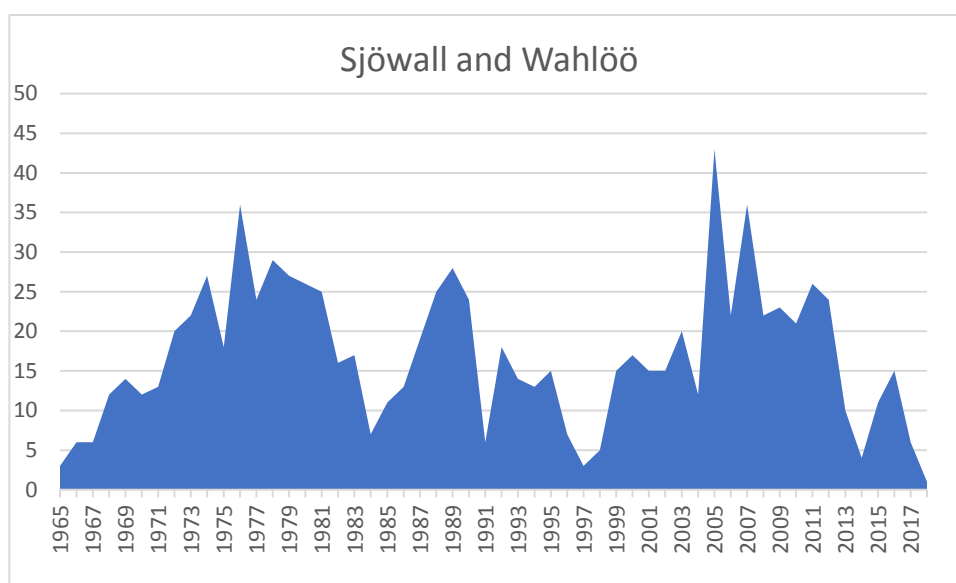
What more powerful agent of selection can there be than the choices of contemporary readers? Sure, there are publishing, and distribution, and their various appendices (reviewing, advertising, etc.); but even in the film industry, where their role is clearly much greater than in the book market of a century ago, genuine hits don't acquire their typical momentum when these external pressures are at their strongest (that is to say, right away), but only weeks later, when they have largely been replaced by a chain of informal exchanges. [Moretti 141]

<sup>7</sup> According to Buchreport Express, a weekly magazine that compiles general information about the German publishing industry, financial statistics and the bestseller lists featured in Der Spiegel, Spiegel Online and Literatur Spiegel, three of the most trustworthy German publications. <https://buchreport.de>, last accessed 2018/09/20.

Returning to the two authors in question, perhaps the most striking fact is that there have been more translations in recent years than there have been in the decade following the books' initial publication in Sweden, which serves to prove that the correlation between the rise of *Scandinavian noir* and the revisiting of *Roman om ett brott* cannot be treated as a fortunate coincidence or as a naturally random occurrence in the dynamic of translated literature. Indeed, as we have previously claimed, the success of a literary or cultural trend raises questions about its evolution, ultimately leading to a critical reassessment of its origins. The same cannot be said about the Swedish crime fiction classics, whose international performance do not enjoy a spike in recent years. The following two graphs illustrate the total performance of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, as well as that of their classic counterparts, both within the Swedish book market, as well as in translation.



**Fig. 6.** Yearly distribution of Swedish classic crime fiction authors' editions prior to Sjöwall and Wahlöö



**Fig. 6.** Yearly distribution of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's editions

We shall not be looking at the numbers, but at the abnormal mutations over time, and we shall be referring only at the period spanning 1965 and the present time, because of obvious reasons. Whereas the classics encounter a general increase in total published editions between 1989 and 2004, approximately, Sjöwall and Wahlöö encounter a spike precisely beginning with 2005, a spike that lasts for approximately ten years. Which is to say, as the classics succumb and cease to be reprinted, the two are reclaimed by contemporary readerships and their literary value is once again confirmed through critical consensus. In this way, our main hypothesis is now confirmed: the crime duo Sjöwall and Wahlöö is indeed the greatest influence on the authors belonging to the contemporary Scandinavian crime fiction scene.

It hardly comes as a surprise. However, to a certain extent, precisely this is the scope of Digital Humanities. Deconstructing or confirming preconceived ideas, correcting long-held claims once made by figures of critical authority, which have survived uncontested, have been quoted, repeated and soon became regarded as *fact*. Which brings us to another fact. At the very beginning of this paper, we have mentioned Pascale Casanova in regard to the different power plays that are enacted between the literary center and the periphery. In her book, *The World Republic of Letters*, France plays a crucial role as historical literary center for the entire world. French was the language that dethroned Latin as *lingua franca* of literary exchange and recognition, Paris soon afterwards became the symbolic center of cultural production. With time, argues Casanova very convincingly, French imposed itself as a literary language par

excellence, meaning that literature, in order to be regarded as such, need to pass through a process of *littérisation*:

Literary transmutation is achieved by crossing a magic frontier that allows a text composed in an unprestigious language – or even a nonliterary language, which is to say one that either does not exist or is unrecognized in the verbal marketplace – to pass into a literary language. Accordingly, I define *littérisation* as any operation – translation, self-translation, transcription, direct composition in the dominant language – by means of which a text from a literary deprived country comes to be regarded as literary by the legitimate authorities. [Casanova 136]

Yet both in the case of the Swedish classic crime fiction authors, as well as in the case of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, the French translations represented a very modest portion of the overall sum of the translations. That is to say, the duo's internationalization took place not through the French cultural sphere, as the pervasive idea of French cultural hegemony would make us think, but through the German one. Casanova's claim that "certain languages, by virtue of the prestige of the texts written in them, are reputed to be more literary than others, to embody literature" [Casanova 17] continues to hold true, yet the lacking French reception of the duo raises an important question.

A hypothetical counterargument regarding the proliferation of commercial literature is that different cultural spheres are more prone than others to cultivate certain enclaves of popular literature. Casanova's claim regarding the exceptionality of French Letters *sui generis* perhaps holds true also at a formal level, in the sense that French literature, for example, regards certain genres as trivial, or that the French everyman does not indulge in the guilty pleasure of reading detective novels. Yet, according to a report authored by Armelle Vincent Gerard and Natacha Chomet and commissioned by the Centre National Du Livre, titled *Les Français et la lecture* ([http://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/fichier/p\\_ressource/13913/ressource\\_fichier\\_fr\\_les.franais.et.la.lecture.2017.03.20.ok.pdf](http://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/fichier/p_ressource/13913/ressource_fichier_fr_les.franais.et.la.lecture.2017.03.20.ok.pdf)), 43% of all books read in France during 2015 were detective novels. According to the same study, 91% of French citizens had read at least one book during the previous year, and the detective/thriller novel was the second most popular genre after works of classical French and Universal literature. That is to say, crime fiction is the second most popular novelistic form in present-day France. Of course, this does not suffice in order to launch historical arguments regarding the proliferation of Swedish crime fiction within the French literary space during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it illustrates that the genre presently enjoys a popularity similar to that it enjoys in other countries. Yet this popularity did not excite a revival of translations the likes of which can be observed in Germany or Great Britain, for example.

Either the French book market should not be taken as indicator for the internationalization of so-called trivial literature (and indeed, Casanova does not once make the explicit claim that French exceptionality covers all categories of literary production), or it has indeed lost its hegemony in face of the more powerful and more efficient market strategies of Germany. Whether or not this is true remains to be further speculated, either by comparing the French performance of Sjöwall and Wahlöö with the performance of a selection of authors representative for other niches of commercial literature (such as Science-Fiction, for example, or Fantasy), or – what we intend to do in a further study – by adding new Scandinavian crime fiction authors to the equation and analyzing the resulting distributions and, most importantly, the processes that turn once uncontested centers into shadows of their former glory.

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