



“Let’s have a cup of tea” – Scandinavian crime fiction through Hungarian eyes

Zoltán Kőhalmi’s practical guide to crime
writers

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Abstract

In recent decades, a wide range of Scandinavian crime novels have conquered Hungarian readers, providing a more sophisticated perspective on the existing image of Scandinavian cultures and societies, with their intriguing social content and appealing landscapes. This wave of crime fiction has not only contributed to a better understanding of Scandinavia, but also drawn attention to the genre itself, which culminated in a parody written by a Hungarian stand-up comedian, Zoltán Kőhalmi. In his incorporation of all the obligatory ingredients of Scandinavian crime novels, the comedian not only reuses the self-image that Scandinavian crime narratives convey, he pillories the genre requirements by exaggerating the use of the most well-known characteristics. The analysis of Kőhalmi’s satirical use of Scandinavian crime narratives serves as a case study for a closer understanding of conceptions of Scandinavia in contemporary Hungary.

Keywords: Scandinavian crime fiction, perceptions of Scandinavia, crime parody, stereotypes, Zoltán Kőhalmi



1. PLACING HUNGARY ON THE MENTAL MAP OF EUROPE

In 2020, in his article *Literature and Geography* Przemysław Czapliński discusses the prevailing uncertainty concerning Poland's future and investigates the internal and external causes leading to it. He mentions both efforts to undermine democracy within Poland and certain broader tendencies and processes in European politics. He ascribes particular importance to changes that have occurred on the physical and mental map of Europe, as a result of which "Poland is not where it used to be" (Czapliński 2020:144). Czapliński explains the historical determination of the country from four geographical directions, its impact on Poland's cultural identity and orientation; furthermore, he presents literary reflections on these issues in Polish literature of the last quarter century.

Hungary's development both before and after the fall of the Iron Curtain shares many common features with the situation in Poland described by Czapliński. It is not the aim of this article to make a detailed comparison, but Czapliński's approach can also help shed light on Hungary's position on European mental maps. Historian Larry Wolff interprets the Iron Curtain as having been a mental border marked on the geographical map (Wolff 1994:1), while arguing that the distinction between Eastern and Western Europe dates back to the Age of Enlightenment. The history of Hungary suggests that it can be traced even further back. Hungary's location on the mental map for many centuries has been determined by the country's geographical position between *West* and *East*, which led to a constant struggle for self-determination and a desire to belong to the West. This ambition was emphasized in the concept of Central Europe in Hungarian historical discourse in the 1970s (see, for example, Szűcs 1983). Hungary's geopolitical situation has not only influenced its social processes, but also determined how the country defined itself in literary and cultural terms. In this self-determination the German/Austrian (i.e., Western) orientation played the most important role before the fall of the Iron Curtain. During the Cold War, the official cultural policy was characterized by an orientation towards the East, which ended in 1989. Dismantling the physical borders separating Eastern and Western Europe created new opportunities not only from a social but also from a cultural point of view. In addition to a specific canon of Western literature that was far from unknown to the wider reading public in the country before 1989, following that caesura new areas of literature became available for Hungarian readers. Due to the relatively large geographical and cultural distance between the Nordic countries and Hungary, contemporary Scandinavian literature had an exotic appeal to the public and, at the same time, suggested an opening towards a particular alternative within the greater frame of Western European mentalities. In this respect, Scandinavian crime fiction became a mediator of some distinguished Scandinavian values in Hungary.

The aim of this article is to discuss the Hungarian reception of the genre itself and the image of the Northern countries depicted in Scandinavian crime fiction as represented and parodied in a novel by a Hungarian stand-up comedian. The analysis of Zoltán Kóhalmi's parody serves as a case study for a closer understanding of conceptions of Scandinavia in contemporary Hungary.

2. REDEFINING THE MENTAL MAP – CRIME FICTION AS A WINDOW ON NORTHERN EUROPE

Throughout the world, Scandinavian crime fiction has received increased attention in the last few decades and, in line with this trend, become one of the Nordic region's most important brands in Hungary. A large number of Scandinavian crime fiction novels has appeared on the Hungarian book market, including works by well-known crime writers such as Stieg Larsson, Henning Mankell, Gunnar Staalesen, Jo Nesbø, Karin Fossum, Anne Holt, Arne Dahl, Ane Riel, Jussi Adler-Olsen, Jens Henrik Jensen and Jesper Stein, just to mention the most important figures. In short, a genre that focuses on Scandinavian society enjoys great popularity in a country whose social structure and cultural traditions not only differ significantly from the prevailing image of Scandinavia,¹ but also from the image conveyed by the crime stories themselves. It is indeed a challenging task to explain why Scandinavian crime fiction is so popular. No one will question the fact that, on the one hand, these novels provide insight into the Nordic welfare state while, on the other hand, they also shed light on the dilemmas Scandinavian society faces, although these problems do not seem to be so relevant abroad. The attractiveness of Scandinavian crime literature is perhaps increased by the fact that they discuss societal problems very openly, which is not a preferred practice in Hungary. Ignoring issues instead of confronting them is a typical Hungarian attitude, so the Scandinavian way of tackling these problems increases the curiosity of the Hungarian reader. Scandinavian crime novels open a window to current but sensitive issues. It can therefore be stated that Nordic crime fiction contributes toward a more nuanced understanding of the region as a social and cultural entity. At the same time, it contributes to broadening the horizons for Hungarian readers in terms of understanding what is happening in their home country.²

3. IS IT POSSIBLE TO WRITE SCANDINAVIAN CRIME FICTION IN HUNGARY?

3.1. SCANDINAVIAN CRIME FICTION THROUGH HUNGARIAN EYES

The popularity of Scandinavian crime fiction in Hungary has not only influenced the perception and comprehension of the Nordic states but has also drawn attention to the genre of crime fiction itself. This attention culminated into a 2019 parody entitled *A férfi, aki megölte a férfit, aki megölt egy férfit* (*The man who killed the man who killed a man*), written by the Hungarian stand-up comedian Zoltán Köhalmi. In his book Köhalmi does not spoof a concrete literary work or author, but rather targets the entire genre of crime fiction, with a particular emphasis on Scandinavian murder mysteries. The literary scholar, Simon Dentith defines parody as “any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice” (Dentith 2000:9).

¹ After the turn of the millennium, a notable rethinking of the concept of Northern can be observed in Hungary. The region-building approach manifests itself in a new, expanded territorial perception of the Nordic region, which is based on cultural, linguistic and historical cohesion. This new approach of the Nordic region not only includes Denmark, Norway and Sweden, but also entails interest in the North Atlantic Islands, as well as Finland and the Baltic countries. Although this new view is noticeable both in the political, economic and cultural relations, I use the term Scandinavia to denote the three central Scandinavian countries in my article, thereby conveying the notion that an average Hungarian reader still has when he/she hears the phrase Northern and thinks of these countries as an organic entity. This perspective corresponds with Amitai Etzioni's view of Scandinavians, formulated during the Cold War in 1965: “There is no region in Europe and few exist in the world where culture, tradition, language, ethnic origin, political structure, and religion – all ‘background’ and identitive elements – are as similar as they are in the Nordic region” (cited in Neumann 1994:53).

² In a more comprehensive study, it would be interesting to make further investigations concerning the reasons for the genre's popularity in Hungary and to put the development in a broader context by comparing the Hungarian situation with the reception of Scandinavian crime literature in other Eastern European countries.

It is thus such a polemical attitude that is at the forefront when Kóhalmi endeavours to write something which – according to his stated intention – is meant to be a Scandinavian crime novel.

By following the narrative structure of the crime novel in general and incorporating all the obligatory ingredients of Scandinavian crime novels, Kóhalmi not only reconstructs most of the self-image that Scandinavian crime narratives convey, but also generates a restated, yet modified, heteroimage of Scandinavian countries that emerges from both exaggerating the use of the well-known characteristics and combining them with the Hungarian literary tradition of parody.³ Given the fact that it is a parody, it can be expected that one of the basic elements of the novel will be the constant use of humorous scenes, techniques and surprising ideas, which in this case includes the author's deliberate use of the Scandinavian letter *ø* instead of the Hungarian *ö*, or caricature-like illustrations drawn by the author himself and inspired by common clichés about Scandinavians. Through his parodic adaptation of Scandinavian crime fiction Kóhalmi not only raises awareness about characteristic features of the Scandinavian subgenre of the detective novel, but also challenges the genre. Beyond its humour, Kóhalmi's work also represents a type of benevolently critical approach to the Scandinavian region, as well.

Before analysing Kóhalmi's hilarious adaptation of Scandinavian crime narratives, it is necessary to give a brief summary of how the Hungarian reader defines Scandinavian crime fiction and formulates a set of rules for this subgenre. Their view is not necessarily unlike readers from either within or beyond Scandinavia, but at certain points it is worth emphasizing that it is a view "from the outside", therefore the contrastive aspect plays a significant role.

Crime fiction in general and its Scandinavian subgenre in particular have been attracting the interest of researchers and have become a popular subject of conferences,⁴ articles, university studies and even dissertations⁵ in Hungary since the middle of the first decade of the new millennium. These studies emphasize that, with their realistic approach, socio-critical aspects and discussion of social problems, Scandinavian crime novels are practically the only subgenre of contemporary crime fiction that can be taken seriously.⁶ It is undeniable that the boundaries between high and popular literature are often blurred in the case of Scandinavian crime fiction, which can be perceived as today's social novel.⁷ Nordic noir depicts self-destructive detectives, deadbeats, and petty criminals, and does not hesitate to present violent murders or shatter taboos. Together with discussion of social issues that meld with the detective's private situation or personal crisis, this approach undeniably conveys

³ The best-known Hungarian author who made a name for himself in this genre is Frigyes Karinthy (1887–1938). In his book *Így írtok ti* (*The way, you write*, 1912) he draws literary caricatures of famous personalities of Hungarian literature, such as Sándor Petőfi (1923–1949), Endre Ady (1877–1919), Mihály Babits (1883–1941), Dezső Kosztolányi (1885–1936), Milán Füst (1888–1967), etc. He imitates both the individual authors' way of writing and caricatures the genres in which they write. In popular literature, it is Jenő Rejtő (1905–1943) who became renowned and acclaimed for his social parodies. More details: Veres András' article *Rejtő és Karinthy* (2019). In his crime parody, Kóhalmi compounds Karinthy's style parody with Rejtő's genre parody.

⁴ For example, *Tetthelyek/Scenes of Crime/Tatorite. Tetten ért német nyelvű, magyar és skandináv krimik*. ELTE Germanisztikai Intézet, Budapest, 25–27 April 2017.

⁵ See, e.g., Krisztián Benyovszky's (2001) and Tamás Bényei's (2000) articles and books on this issue, as well as studies by Miklós Ágnes Kata (2014; 2018), Magdolna Jákfalvi and András Kappanyos (1990), Betti Varga (2008), and Sándor Klapcsik (2005). In these studies the authors, among others, concern genre theory and narratological aspects and deal with the relationship of the crime genre to postmodern contemporary literature.

⁶ About Jo Nesbø's crime novels, Tibor Babiczky said in an interview that although the crime structure works perfectly in his novels, you can notice that he wants to live up to high literary standards when it comes to dealing with societal problems (cited in Rékai 2019).

⁷ Something similar is formulated by several Scandinavian researchers, such as Gunhild Agger and Anne Marit Waade, when they claim that "[t]he modern, contemporary crime fiction has to a certain extent been given the status of a replacement for or supplement to the generally literary contemporary portrayal" (Agger & Waade 2010:14).

a pessimistic attitude to life. When combined with a characteristic Scandinavian landscape as a backdrop, the aforementioned elements create a specific Scandinavian type of crime genre.

Anne Grydehøj emphasizes the genre's commitment to portraying socio-political realities and its engagement with contemporary issues. She argues that Scandinavian crime fiction often employs a form of critical realism, which serves as a platform for "a reflection on and critique of the cultural, social and political environment in the region" (Grydehøj 2020:129). This approach allows the genre to tackle pressing issues within the framework of engaging narratives. Jakob Stougaard Nielsen (2017)⁸ offers some insightful perspectives on realism in Scandinavian Crime Fiction. He has argued against the claim that Scandinavian crime literature has a realistic approach, as commonly emphasized in Hungarian literary discourse. He agrees that Scandinavian crime fiction has a realistic style, but according to him it can be considered realistic in a mimetic sense only to a limited extent. Crime novels act at best as a distorting mirror and convey a distorted image of the societies they depict. Therefore, an almost one-to-one relationship between fiction and reality cannot be postulated. On the contrary, it seems as if the authors of Scandinavian crime fiction almost fetishistically seek neuralgic points in culture and pathologically inflict trauma by means of the genre, using its impact and affect as a way to break through the monotony and security of the welfare state. In this sense the Scandinavian crime genre, from a socio-psychological point of view, says more about the subdued Scandinavian consciousness than it does with its themes and narratives about the societies in which it takes place. By overexposing disintegrative features of the Scandinavian welfare state and overdramatizing disintegrative tendencies in individual characters, the representations of Scandinavian crime literature almost hyperbolically present a counter-narrative that by its fictionality is captivating, but in reality gives a distorted picture of the societies described. This argumentation does not necessarily contradict my reasoning, as in this case we have to deal with an interpretation of a native Scandinavian, which can be contrasted with the approach of a foreign reader. The distorted image presented in crime literature is not necessarily experienced by Hungarian readers as distortion, but based on their concept of Scandinavia, it rather comes across as a misunderstanding. Following the abovementioned train of thought, Kóhalmi's parody presents an exaggeration of the exaggeration, a reverse of a reverse, as the Scandinavian crime tradition already features an overemphasis on the dark sides of Scandinavian societies. The exaggeration of disintegration in crime literature seems to be satirically serious, whereas the stand-up comedian's exaggeration of this crime fiction's exaggeration functions exponentially by the power of two, becoming downright comical.

3.2. SCANDINAVIAN CRIME FICTION À LA KÓHALMI – INGREDIENTS AND PROCEDURE

In the following I will outline how Kóhalmi rewrites a Scandinavian crime novel in his parody of the genre. By using metafictional elements, Kóhalmi's 'transcription' is more than a simple parody, in that the text not only contributes to the awareness of certain social and cultural differences between Scandinavia and Hungary, but also turns into a metafictional postmodern text.

⁸ "While crime fiction does employ realistic descriptions of everyday lives, urban and natural locations in Scandinavia, and while crime writers, who in many cases are trained journalists (e.g., Per Wahlöö, Anders Bodelsen, Jan Guillou, Stieg Larsson, Liza Marklund, Sara Blädel and Mari Jungstedt) may present statistics or provide, as many of them do, postscripts in which they thank their well-placed sources and informers for their help in the authors' research for the novels, crime fiction does not, of course, represent Scandinavian societies realistically, least of all when it comes to their inflated levels of crime" (Stougaard-Nielsen 2017:9).

According to the Hungarian view, Scandinavia is an exotic region with high mountains and deep fjords:⁹ it is thus not surprising that Kóhalmi's parody does not take place in a globalized, big city, like Copenhagen, Oslo or Stockholm. Instead, the plot is located in a rural small town, Dramfjord, even though the problems discussed in the novel question the globalized world and are therefore not at all characteristic of small town life. It is therefore not entirely surprising that the novel's lonely detective struggles with serious alcohol-related problems, or that paedophilia, drug abuse, drug trade, organ trafficking and the most imaginative forms of organized criminality, such as mafia activity and terrorism, appear in the background of the murders. Up-to-date debates on immigration, unemployment, extremist political movements, domestic violence, molestation or negligence of children are put on display in an absurd way, in scenes that greatly overexaggerate. Unprocessed traumatic memories are explained in a casual, yet at the same time incredible way. Despite this fact, the author provides a realistic view of the everyday problems in a welfare society.

Kóhalmi presents an image of Scandinavia that overstates the actual Scandinavian self-image rendering a special fictional space, thereby holding up a distorting mirror towards the Scandinavian society. Through his interpretation, Kóhalmi is actually confronting the genre itself. At this point a distinction should be made between a Scandinavian and a non-Scandinavian reader's image of the region. As formulated by Keith J. Hayward and Steve Hall: "while many perceive Scandinavia as a 'near-perfect society' characterized by cultural homogeneity, political trust and a 'cradle-to-grave' welfare system, the reality is more complex, oppressive, darker even" (Hayward & Hall 2021:6). For a Scandinavian reader, it is obvious that crime fiction is a kind of social criticism that highlights certain hidden problems and exposes the more complicated, darker reality. In contrast, the Hungarian reader does not primarily appreciate crime fiction's realistic and critical approach, but rather its fictionality, because a Hungarian reader's interpretation of Scandinavian crime stories is based on a utopic image of a 'near-perfect' Scandinavian society that emphasizes societal equality, promotes the economic and social welfare of its citizens, and protects the rights of women, to mention just a few of the most important features, a list displaying the happiest countries in the world, also published in Hungary, shows the high position held by Scandinavian countries, a fact that only confirms the previously mentioned utopic image. In contrast to this highly publicized, positive image, Hungarians are also aware of statistics relaying the frequent consumption of antidepressants, and the significant level of alcohol consumption in the Nordic countries. World Happiness Reports do not necessarily reflect the mental state of Scandinavians. The 'happiness' offered by the well-functioning Scandinavian welfare state does not necessarily translate into individuals who are happy in their everyday lives.¹⁰ As if Kóhalmi's fiction would like to react to this dichotomy by creating a parody from the position of an external observer, yet still employing the tools of Scandinavian crime fiction. The parody emphasizes that we are reading a fiction that, despite its similarities with reality, never in fact matches reality and from a perspective of an almost-perfect society can hardly be imagined as compatible to it, while at the same time breaking down the utopic images of the region.

⁹ The Hungarian reader considers Scandinavia a homogeneous unity in spite of the obvious differences concerning landscapes, topography and natural phenomena between the countries, and emphasizes the closeness to nature, the rural character, and the attachment to the roots. While the Scandinavian readers – as Gunhild Agger points out in her article *Nordic Noir – Location, Identity and Emotion* – differentiate themselves from each other even along these categories (Agger 2016:142).

¹⁰ Elisabeth Oxfeldt, Andrew Nestingen and Peter Simonsen in their article *The Happiest People on Earth? Scandinavian Narratives of Guilt and Discontent* use the terms evaluative and affective happiness to distinguish between these two forms of happiness, and define evaluative happiness as "overall contentment with life and its possibilities" (provided by a social structure) and affective happiness as "a feeling of joy at a particular moment" (Oxfeldt et al. 2017:429).

The discrepancy between the reader's image of Scandinavia and the depictions presented in Scandinavian crime novels is obvious. The locations are recognisable, but the murders, the crimes are more brutal and vicious than in reality. The role of parody, in turn, is to depict characteristic features, such as typical Nordic landscapes and habits, or particular types of figures, in an exaggerated manner, which in a Scandinavian crime story, ensures the reader will be treated to a grotesque view of the Norden.

In the first pages of the novel, Detective Bjørnsen is driving on the rocky roads of a fjord in heavy snowfall, penetrating a dense fog and surrounded by the screams of frightened seagulls. Similar images¹¹ are repeated several times throughout the novel, usually in connection with additional murders. Bjørnsen arrives at the first murder scene: a lonely wooden house illuminated by the flashing lights of the crime scene investigators. Here he finds the celebrated crime writer Jord Jørgensen dead in his study, where he was brutally murdered while working on a script based on his most successful book.

While inspecting the corpse at the scene, the pages of a dissertation on *the role of poetic images and landscape descriptions in Scandinavian crime novels* appear in the victim's stomach. This can be understood as an indirect reference to Ronald Knox's *Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction* from 1929,¹² which delineates the ten most important criteria for a classic detective novel, some of which are systematically caricatured in Kóhalmi's parody. As Kóhalmi engages in a dialogue with Knox, he violates several of these ten points. For example, among the suspects are a pair of Siamese twins, in contradiction with Knox's rule number ten. Detective Bjørnsen and his assistant, Anadylm, are suspected of being involved in the crime, in defiance of Knox's rule number seven. Anadylm's intelligence far surpasses her superior's in violation of Knox's rule number nine. By referring to Knox, Kóhalmi is parodying crime fiction as a genre in general while pointing towards a broader perspective.

Kóhalmi raises questions, for example, regarding the distinction between high and popular literature. As mentioned before, the parody employs conventions and structures specific to crime fiction, which definitely relegates his novel to popular literature. But what else can the author of a parody work with other than the genre conventions at which he wants to poke fun. In this way, the parody genre is the author's entry ticket to high literature. Accordingly, Kóhalmi fulfils the expectations of readers of light fiction and, at the same time, undermines them incorporating destructive elements into his text. Moreover, a traditional motif analysis of his work would be pointless, as some of the characteristic motifs of Scandinavian crime fiction are parodied by turning meaning-bearing elements into mere recurring gags. One illustrative example is detective Bjørnsen's addiction to coffee and alcohol. Whenever he has to make an important decision or tries to solve a murder mystery,

¹¹ See, for example, "Like steel cutting through flesh, the car penetrated through the fog, and like the last moan of a dying man, the engine snorted in abject, blind terror. The detective drove up on the winding mountain road, hundreds of lonely seagulls fled from the crazy noise. He reached the top of the bare mountain amid gloomy clouds." (Kóhalmi 2019:41, my translation)

¹² 1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow. 2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course. 3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable. 4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end. 5. No Chinaman must figure in the story. 6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right. 7. The detective must not himself commit the crime. 8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader. 9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader. 10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them (retrieved from <https://www.writingclasses.com/toolbox/tips-masters/ronald-knox-10-commandments-of-detective-fiction>, accessed 11 September 2023).

he needs to have a cup of coffee or a glass of aqua lichen to become stronger and more effective. In this way, his drinking turns into a leitmotif, a visual and dramaturgical tool that symbolizes the detective's weakness and paralysis in terms of action.¹³

Each time Bjørnsen undertakes a systematic investigation of a crime, he employs the traditional methods of a detective. But instead of solving the murder mystery, he encounters the next crime, one murder seems to inevitably and uncontrollably beget another. This fact both demonstrates the existence of a logical system where everything is connected to everything and also demolishes it, as the detective's conclusions seem random and unnatural. The aim of the one hundred and one murders and the following investigations is to create a framework for listing and satirically explaining the thematic references, which sheds light on a number of socio-cultural phenomena that might seem unusual to a non-Scandinavian reader. The Hungarian reader is – though in a caricatured way – introduced to typical elements of Scandinavian society and culture, such as associations for nature conservation, child welfare, organic farming, the Viking way of life, runes, Norwegian black metal, and interventions for such subcultural groups as drug addicts and prostitutes, etc. With a focus on these phenomena, the approach of the author is satirical. He manages to capture and transform a well-known set of rules upon which crime fiction is constructed and topics that the Scandinavian subgenre takes up for discussion, to enter into a critical dialogue with both its form and content.

Incidentally, the author does not refrain from saying a few words about the aforementioned *Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction*, just as it is no coincidence that, during his investigation, Detective Bjørnsen later reverts to the *Twelve Laws of The Crime Writers' Association*, five of which are quoted as,

- (1) There is no character without trauma.
- (2) Nobody can die a painless death.
- (3) Only a burnt-out detective can reveal the mystery.
- (4) There is no ending without a depressing aftertaste.
- (5) There can be no perpetrator who has not appeared earlier in the novel [...]

In this way, Kóhalmi gives a concise, but slightly distorted formulation of the most significant and often cited rules of Scandinavian crime fiction, which are then complemented with the regular inclusion of a typical Scandinavian landscape, which functions to create a gloomy atmosphere. In the following, I will demonstrate how the author in concrete terms tries to fulfil these demands in his parody.

There is no character without trauma. There are so many perplexing and weird characters in the novel that their traumatic experiences could be listed at length. Detective Bjørnsen, for example, struggles with a number of unprocessed devastating memories: he spent his childhood in constant fear of his drunken father, and before being taken to a children's home, he was constantly exposed to domestic violence. His adult life has been considerably affected by an unsolved murder, in which he lost his right arm. In the course of the same murder case, he gained a companion, the now fifteen-year-old Anadylm, whose full name is Anadylm Klassik, just like a piece of furniture from IKEA. As she is the only survivor of the crime, Bjørnsen takes the girl with him. Well aware of the inadequacies of the Norwegian guardianship authority, he raises her in secret by locking her in a filing cabinet.

¹³ When Kóhalmi came up with the idea for the book, he made a conscious effort to explore the characteristics of the genre. He had read a great number of Scandinavian authors, Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy was a particular influence, however, Jo Nesbø became his favourite. In addition to his reading experiences, TV-series like *Broen* [*The Bridge*, 2011–2018] had an impact on him, and he was confronted with the fact that in Scandinavian crime fiction, the detectives never actually drink. They are all recovering alcoholics with an incessant thirst for drink. Kóhalmi has decided to create a distorted Scandinavian world of parody, where the detective is drinking all the time (see, for example, Sarkadi & Herczeg 2019).

Traumatic experiences also appear as motives for murder suspects. The Strøm twins, for example, invoke their miserable childhood, as their foster mother had put them on display in a traveling circus, every time one or another of their misdeeds had been revealed.

No one can die a painless death. The celebrated author of crime stories is an excellent example of this. His skull was split in two with one of his prizes, the Golden Axe, then the pages of his own book were stuffed into his open mouth. This brutal act was not only directed against the writer as a human being, but also against his activities as a writer, since the murderer additionally destroyed the manuscript the victim had been working on (with this, Kóhalmi anticipates the metafictional thread of the parody, which he will make use of later on). Brutality can, of course, be enhanced: the second victim, the producer of the crime film being made, was skewered with an old camera tripod. We could go on to list all one hundred and one murders that occur in the novel.

Only a burnt-out detective can reveal the mystery. Bjørnsen is a perfect prototype of this figure as a detective who is familiar with unhealed traumas and adult failures; he also has a disastrous private life and is addicted to coffee and alcohol. It is worth keeping in mind that Kóhalmi somewhat violates the rules in fulfilling this third requirement, because Bjørnsen does not solve the crimes alone. Without Anadyln, who from time to time takes the lead, he certainly would not have succeeded. The girl corresponds to a parody of Dr. Watson, Sherlock Holmes' assistant in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic detective novels. Yet instead of being a feeble-minded companion, she moves to the forefront in the first pages of the parody and, like the right hand (or arm) the detective is missing, investigates more than one on her own.

Parodying the third point introduces the next theme of my presentation, in that Kóhalmi's burnt-out detective is easily recognized as the main protagonist from Jo Nesbø's Harry Hole series. To add another layer, Kóhalmi refers to crime fiction as whole, Scandinavian crime fiction being a subgenre of it, and to a concrete author, Jo Nesbø, and some of Nesbø's texts. There is no doubt that Kóhalmi's attempts to compose a Scandinavian crime story is an allusion to Nesbø,¹⁴ although the parody can be read in relation to a few crime novels by Norwegian writers. As was previously mentioned, Harry Hole serves as a model for detective Birk Bjørnsen, the self-tormented drinker. Like Hole, during the investigation Bjørnsen does not respect any authority and is contemptuous of all kinds of rules. Yet, due to his incapacity and exaggerated weakness, he is also the ultimate antihero, who only keeps himself alive with an overdose of coffee and aqua lichen which means a distilled form of tree-dwelling lichen. The strong drink in the fiction which got the appropriate name "kéregzuzmópárlat" (*bark lichen distillation* in a word by word translation) is intended to evoke the Nordic atmosphere in a single expression.

Kóhalmi not only borrows characters from Nesbø's crime stories, but also rewrites some of his themes more or less directly. In Nesbø's 2019 thriller *Knife*, for example, Harry Hole awakes from a drunken stupor, his hands covered in blood and with no idea of what happened. Based on a newscast, he learns that a female corpse has been found, and it turns out that the detective had a close relationship to the victim. Moreover, he discovers that he visited the woman at the time of the murder, but does not remember anything from their meeting. Although he has no motive for committing murder, he is not able to present an alibi for that particular evening. Nesbø himself does not eliminate the readers' uncertainty. Kóhalmi outlines a similar situation when Detective Bjørnsen reports on the murder of the police psychologist, Dr. Hagen, and the ensuing investigation. The detective had a personal relationship with the psychologist and an eyewitness claimed that he had visited him

¹⁴ In an interview, Kóhalmi confirms that he is an avid fan of the Norwegian crime writer (Sarkadi & Herczeg 2019).

at the time of the murder. Based on some incriminating evidence, Bjørnsen is accused of the murder. Waking up after a blackout, he cannot dismiss the accusation. The more he wants to discover what happened, the more strongly he suspects that he committed the crime.

Such a situation would be inconceivable in classical detective stories. In a classic murder mystery, the detective cannot even be accidentally linked to a crime given that the reader is informed of the protagonist's every step. In a way, it can be said that the reader here provides an alibi for the detective. Although in hard-boiled crime fiction we may come across episodes in which references are made to the inspector's possible guilt, this only arouses the reader's suspicion, but does not supply sufficient evidence to justify it.

The Scandinavian crime fiction provides novelty in the ambiguities surrounding the detective's innocence. The style of narration leaves the reader uncertain about the detective's person and role. This approach is also used in Köhalmi's parody. Bjørnsen's assistant Anadylm is first suspected of one of the murders, then the detective himself falls under suspicion. This may not be completely coincidental, as the detective in Scandinavian crime fiction is often on the wrong track as a private person, yet remains absolutely unquestionable as an authority representing the police force. In Köhalmi's parody, however, the secret service's presence in the investigation reveals the corruption underlying this idealized system.

4. CONCLUSION – PARODY AS IRONY IN A COUNTER-NARRATIVE

In summary, it can be said that due to the existing idealized image of the Nordic countries in Hungary, Scandinavia rarely appears as a crime scene in Hungarian crime fiction. If Scandinavia nevertheless appears as a setting for a crime parody written by a Hungarian stand-up comedian, this can be understood as a response to the popularity of Scandinavian crime fiction and a display of the author's critical attitude towards this genre. Due to Köhalmi's use of genre parody as a critical approach, the Hungarian reader receives a differentiated image of the region. Consequently, the previously mentioned well-known negative statistics about Scandinavia nuance the unequivocally positive, even utopic, stereotypes surrounding Hungarians' perception of the region. By articulating a critique of both Scandinavian fiction and reality from an "outsider" position, Köhalmi creates a parody that participates in the discourse on nordic crime fiction while simultaneously adding new – potentially critical – perspectives to the existing stereotypes about the Nordic countries. By using a local subgenre (Scandinavian crime fiction) of a globalized genre (crime fiction) and recreating it from another local (Hungarian) point of view, the author crosses the borders between the two local cultures. At the same time, the author directs the attention of the Hungarian reader to the critical voice that is a recurrent feature of Scandinavian crime fiction. In doing so and by scratching beneath the surface of the tidy Nordic welfare state, this gesture exposes the brutality and decay of the welfare state — in Köhalmi's case by means of a satirical-ironic counter-narrative.

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