

THE SWEDISH PROGRAM

Liberal Arts / Stockholm School of Economics

SYLLABUS

SWEDISH CRIME FICTION

Instructor: Erik Cardelús, erik.cardelus@swedishprogram.org

Time: Tuesdays 13:15-16:15

Locations: A975 (apart from the final exam)

Course description

The purpose of the course is to provide students with basic knowledge of the tradition of Swedish crime fiction and to stimulate interest and critical reflection in this field. The genre has been commercially successful worldwide since the 2000s, and the course offers an overview of this success story. A selection of acclaimed Swedish crime novels constitutes the main material of the course, but as a student, you will also become acquainted with selected film adaptations and the ongoing discussion of the crime genre in the literary marketplace.

The course takes its point of departure in the influential author duo Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, creators of the emblematic character Martin Beck. Their work will be used as a catalyst for understanding the success of Swedish crime fiction, and the inspiration for the many ways Swedish authors have used the genre to highlight societal problems and political issues. While the course approaches Swedish crime fiction from several perspectives, the primary analytical focus will be on the relationship between literature and society (e.g. issues of class, gender, ethnicity, power, and the (re)presentation of Sweden as a society and Swedes as a nation in these texts).

Learning outcomes

After completing the course, students will be able to:

- Describe the historical development and key characteristics of Swedish crime fiction from 1945 - 2025, with particular emphasis on its international breakthrough in the 1990s and 2000s.
- Explain the significance of Maj Sjöwall's and Per Wahlöö's authorship, including the Martin Beck series, for the development of Swedish crime fiction as a socially and politically engaged genre.
- Analyze and compare central themes, narrative strategies, and genre conventions in selected Swedish crime novels and some of their film adaptations.
- Critically examine how Swedish crime fiction represents societal issues such as class, gender, ethnicity, power, and national identity.
- Reflect on and discuss the cultural, commercial, and critical reception of Swedish crime fiction in the literary marketplace and public debate.

Literature

The books will be provided by the Swedish Program. In addition to the novels, which should constitute the main focus of your reading, the course uses Kerstin Bergman (2014) *Swedish Crime Fiction: The Making of Nordic Noir*, as the course book. This work provides essential background knowledge for much of the literature studied in this course.

You are also expected to read a number of scholarly articles related to the literary works discussed. These texts are intended to provide deeper insight into Swedish society, the conventions of Swedish crime fiction as a genre, and different analytical approaches. The articles will be available in a folder on the course's Google Classroom page.

In addition, you will be provided with *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* by J. A. Cuddon (5th ed., revised by M. A. R. Habib, Penguin, 2014). This compact volume is not intended to be read cover to cover, but to be used as a reference work for clarifying concepts of literary analysis relevant to seminar discussions. Specific entries to be read will be announced during the course.

A folder containing additional readings will also be available. These texts are not mandatory but are provided to offer further contextual enrichment, for example in connection with the midterm essay.

Class requirements

This is a discussion-based course. Regular attendance is therefore required, and active participation is expected. Please bring both primary and secondary readings to class. All regular classes, apart from the final exam take place on Tuesdays 13:15-16:15 in classroom A975a at the Stockholm School of Economics. However, minor changes may occur, so please check the exact details before each class. An unexcused absence may negatively affect your final grade. Your grade will not be affected if you miss a class due to illness or a documented emergency. If you have a personal or family commitment that conflicts with a class and cannot be rescheduled, you may request an excused absence from your instructor. Such requests should, if possible, be made at least one week prior to the class in question. Please complete all readings by the dates indicated in the syllabus and come to class prepared to engage fully with the materials. You are welcome to bring additional materials of relevance to the course.

Academic dishonesty

Any form of academic dishonesty constitutes a violation of the code of conduct and will result in disciplinary action. Plagiarism or other forms of cheating will result in an automatic F for the assignment and may also result in an F for the course as a whole, depending on the assessment of the Director of Studies and the Executive Director.

The use of AI tools is permitted only under the following conditions: AI-assisted writing must be properly documented and must not replace the student's own writing. For all written take-home assignments, students who use AI tools are required to submit a brief summary explaining how AI was used (e.g. drafting, proofreading, or locating sources). In addition, passages produced or assisted by AI must be clearly identified, for example in a footnote. Failure to acknowledge the use of AI will be treated as academic dishonesty and subject to the same penalties as plagiarism.

Exams:

Exams must be taken on the dates and at the times specified in the syllabus. If you are unable to take the midterm exam at the scheduled time, you must obtain permission from the instructor to reschedule before the exam date. For the final exam, rescheduling requests must be directed to the Head of Administration, who will coordinate with the instructor. No outside materials or electronic devices are permitted during exams unless explicitly authorized by the instructor. Any student found using unauthorized materials or devices will automatically fail the exam. No students will be admitted once the exam has begun. Late arrival may result in the student being required to take a make-up exam, subject to the instructor's assessment of the circumstances.

Late assignments

Assignments that are submitted after the deadline and without prior agreement will be marked down. The late penalty will be progressively more severe the later the assignment is submitted.

Laptops & phones

Electronic devices may be used only for note-taking and group assignments. Using devices for social media, internet browsing, or other unrelated activities is not permitted, as it disrupts both individual engagement and the learning environment. Mobile phone use is not allowed in class unless explicitly stated otherwise.

Grades are based on the following criteria:

- Active participation in class and preparatory reading-journal entries (quality and timely submission)
- Oral presentations
- A midterm essay (due in March; further instructions will be provided)
- A final written exam, during the late April exam period.

Calculation of the final grade:		
-	Active participation, oral presentations and reading-journal entries	25%
-	Mid-Term essay	25%
-	Final exam	50%

Schedule

20 January, A975a. Introduction. History of Swedish crime fiction. Course outline.
(Todorov 1977; Bergman 2014; Cuddon & Habib 2014; Erdmann 2009)

27 January, A975a. Analyze and discuss *The Abominable Man. The Welfare state and the Folkhemmet*. Sweden in 1960s and 1970s. (Berglund 2021a & 2021b; Bergman 2014)

3 February, A975a. Analyze and discuss *Faceless Killers. Sweden in the 1990s*.
(Stougaard-Nielsen 2017; Nestingen 2008; Messent 2010)

10 February, A975a. Analyze and discuss *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, first part. Stieg Larsson's work - a global success story. *Sweden in the early 2000s*. (Leffler 2015; Nilsson 2018)

17 February, A975a. Analyze and discuss *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, second part. Feminism in Crime Fiction. (Leffler 2015; Tapper 2014)

24 February, A975a. Analyze and discuss *Stolen. Sweden – ethnicity and the Sami culture and population*.

3 March, A975a. Analyze and discuss *Stolen* + an excerpt from *Blackwater*
(Forsås-Scott, H. 2014) Oral presentations.

10 March, A975a. Analyze and discuss *The Ice princess*. Return to the *whodunnit*. Feminism in Crime Fiction. The Literary Marketplace. (Nilsson 2018; Squires 2007)

17 March, A975a. Analyze and discuss *Easy Money*, part 1.
(Bergman 2014) Midterm essay due 22 March.

24 March, A975a. Analyze and discuss *Easy Money*, part 2.
(Bergman 2014)

14 April, A975a. Analyze and discuss *Let the right one in*.
(Bergman 2014; King & Gulddal 2020)

21 April, A975a. Analyze and discuss *Quicksand* (excerpts) Summary of readings.
(Bergman 2014)

28 April, A133. Final exam, 13-17

Literature

Reference works that will be used continuously during the course

Bergman, K. (2014). *Swedish crime fiction : the making of Nordic noir / Kerstin Bergman*.

Cuddon, J.A. (2014). *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 5th edn, revised by M.A.R. Habib. London: Penguin.

Novels

Ekman, K. (1996). *Blackwater / Kerstin Ekman ; translated from the Swedish by Joan Tate*. London: Vintage.

Laestadius, A.-H., & Willson-Broyles, R. (2023). *Stolen / Ann-Helen Laestadius ; translated from Swedish by Rachel Willson-Broyles*.

Lapidus, J., & Arbin Ahlander, A. von. (2012). *Easy Money / Jens Lapidus ; translated from the Swedish by Astri von Arbin Ahlander*.

Larsson, S. (2008). *The girl with the dragon tattoo* (R. Keeland, Trans.). Alfred A. Knopf. (Original work published 2005)

Lindqvist, J. A. (2008). *Let the right one in* (E. Segerberg, Trans.). St. Martin's Griffin.

Läckberg, C. (2011). *The Ice Princess: A novel* (S. T. Murray, Trans.). Free Press

Mankell, H. (2003). *Faceless killers : a mystery / Henning Mankell ; translated from the Swedish by Steven T. Murray*. (1st Vintage crime/Black Lizard).

Persson Giolito, M. (2018). *Quicksand* (R. Willson-Broyles, Trans.). Other Press.

Sjöwall, M., Wahlöö, P., & Teal, T. (2007). *The abominable man / Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö ; translated from the Swedish by Thomas Teal.*

Literary theory

Berglund, K (2021a). "Detectives in the Literary Market: Statistical Perspectives on the Boom in Swedish Crime Fiction." *Scandinavica: An International Journal of Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2021, pp. 38–57.

Berglund, K. (2021b). Genres at work: A holistic approach to genres in book publishing. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24(3), 757–776. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494211006097>

Bergman, K. (2014). *Swedish crime fiction: The making of Nordic noir*. Mimesis Edizioni.

Cuddon, J. A., & Habib, M. A. R. (2014). *The Penguin dictionary of literary terms and literary theory* (5th ed.). Penguin.

Erdmann, E. (2009). *Nationality international: Detective fiction in the late twentieth century*. In M. Krajenbrink & K. M. Quinn (Eds.), *Investigating identities: Questions of identity in contemporary international crime fiction* (pp. 11–26). Brill / Rodopi

Forsås-Scott, H. (2014). *Telling Tales. Testing Boundaries: The Radicalism of Kerstin Ekman's Norrland*. *Journal of Northern Studies*, 8(1), 67-89.

Hutcheon, L. (2012). *Beginning to theorize adaptation: What? Who? Why? How? Where? When?* In *A theory of adaptation* (2nd ed., pp. 1–32). Routledge

King, S., & Gulddal, J. (2020). Genre. In J. Allan, J. Gulddal, S. King, & A. Pepper (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction* (pp. 13-21). Routledge

Leffler, Y. (2015). *Lisbeth Salander as Pippi Longstocking*.

Post45. <https://post45.org/2015/06/lisbeth-salander-as-pippi-longstocking/>

Messent, P. (2010). *The police novel*. In C. J. Rzepka & L. Horsley (Eds.), *A companion to crime fiction* (pp. 175-186). Wiley-Blackwell.

Nestingen, A. K. (2008). *The burned-out policeman: Henning Mankell's transnational police procedural*. In *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia: Fiction, Film, and Social Change* (pp. 223-254). University of Washington Press.

Nilsson, L (2018). "A Cosmopolitan North in Nordic Noir: Turning Swedish Crime Fiction into World Literature." In: Helgesson, S. et al. (eds.), *World Literatures: Exploring the Cosmopolitan Vernacular Exchange*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2018, pp. 340–354.

Squires, C. (2007). "The Genre in the Marketplace." In *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 70–101.

Stougaard-Nielsen, J. (2017). Foreigners in the welfare state: Henning Mankell's *Faceless Killers*. In *Scandinavian crime fiction* (pp. 89–100). Bloomsbury.

Tapper, M. (2014). The 1960s and 1970s: Sjöwall and Wahlöö. In *Swedish cops: From Sjöwall and Wahlöö to Stieg Larsson* (pp. 61–106). University of Chicago Press.

Todorov, T. (1977). *The typology of detective fiction* (pp. 42-52). In *The Poetics of Prose*. Cornell University Press.

