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## Nordic fiction

Posted by Lyra - 02-04-2008 12:04

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I seem to read quite a lot of Nordic fiction these days; I've loved almost everything I've tried from that region.

I wonder if it's because getting translated is a selection process in itself - that books we get are likely to be not only "good" etc, but also to fit with a kind of perception of what Nordic literature should be? Or maybe that perception is really true, that the peculiarities of language and landscapes give a certain form or cast to the writing? Thinking Ibsen or Laxness, I can't help but think this is true, but it's quite a suspect notion really of course. Maybe I just overlay it all with rose tinted romance because that's how I view the Nordic countries. Probably a bit of everything really.

There's certainly especially now a fashion for crime writing in translation, and I guess this success leads to publishers looking for the next Henning Mankell or Karin Fossum all the time, but I've not noticed a drop in quality. And luckily we're getting a lot of other stuff too, like Grondahl, Kjaerstad, Fosnes Hansen, Jungersen, etc, etc.

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 02-04-2008 12:35

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Have you read Erland Loe's Naive. Super? I haven't read but I've had it raved about to me and it's going to pbe picked up next time I'm in Waterstones.

I have a similar thing, by the way, with Balkan fiction (not that I've actually read that much beyond Andric and Kadare and Pavich). I think I like the fractured landscapes and fractured cultures, the fact that it's such a fucked up place that most stories set in the region have to be infused with that fucked up-ness which tends to mean you end up with more interesting plotlines.

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## subject scmbject

Posted by Otto Katz - 02-04-2008 12:48

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I don't really read any crime novels, but some tips for you if you haven't read them are Per Petterson's Out Stealing Horses and basically anything by Dag Solstad.

I do like Erlend Loe's writing (brush with fame: I played against him and won at basketball right before he first got published) but Naive.Super was very much a product of it's time. Massive among students/young people in the mid 90s, that's not to say it's not a good piece of writing. I'd be interested to hear how it's received.

I read a great little Finish book a while ago, by Arto Paasilinna. The title translates as "collective suicide", but I don't know if it's available in English. It's really funny and plays on all the cultural stereotypes we attribute to the Finns. But in a loving way. Highly recommended.

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Lyra - 02-04-2008 12:53

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Out Stealing Horses is on my pile to read, I might take it away with me this weekend. Thanks for the Loe recommendation...

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by 1890 - 02-04-2008 15:28

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My wife recommends this Lyra:

Link

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Lyra - 02-04-2008 15:31

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Oh thank you. I've got a copy of Blackwater by her that I found in a charity shop recently so it's good to hear that she's good.

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Otto Katz - 03-04-2008 08:42

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Have you read anything by Knut Hamsun, Lyra? He's The Man as far as I'm concerned.

He was Bukowski's favourite writer, you know.

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Lyra - 03-04-2008 08:57

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Only Hunger, Otto, and I wonder if that's that representative? I do want to read more of his at some point. Hunger for me suffered because I don't feel I could see it as something beyond a kind of I don't know Dostoevskyan exercise, almost.

As for Bukowski,  
Woke up this morning and it seemed to me  
that every night turns out to be  
A little more like Bukowski  
And yeah, I know he's a pretty good read  
But God who'd wanna be  
God who'd wanna be such an asshole?

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Otto Katz - 03-04-2008 09:48

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Hunger is not really representative at all, being a fan of the Nordic nature I'm sure you'll like his later, more epic stuff.

My personal favorite is Growth of the Soil, which won him the Nobel Prize. Man goes into the wild, man works his arse off, man conquers nature. That sort of thing. You kind of see why the Nazis took him to heart, but don't let that put you off. (Hamsun's nazi allegiance is still quite a natural trauma, btw)

Mysteries is also very good, and Victoria and Pan are more romantic if that's your thing.

Our Turkish based poster Spock/David Oh, who hasn't been around lately, is also a fan if I remember correctly.

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Belhavka - 03-04-2008 12:18

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Among Norwegian classics I recommend Johan Borgen's trilogy Lillelord. No idea if it translated into English, though.

As far as Hamsun is concerned, I find his later work a whole lot less interesting than his early efforts.

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Etienne - 03-04-2008 12:27

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I've not read much (if any) contemporary Nordic fiction, but I've enjoyed reading short stories by both Björnsterne Björnson and Selma Lagerlöf (though more for her writing style than the rather too obvious presence of God in her work).

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Salty Sweet - 03-04-2008 19:15

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I've just finished Arnaldur Indridason's Silence of the Grave, a bleak (no, really!) but acute examination of domestic violence and collapsed families in the format of a crime novel. Recommended but it makes Henning Mankell seem like Alexander McCall Smith.

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Pan Tau - 03-04-2008 22:00

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Nordic fiction for me begins and ends with Astrid Lindgren, I'm afraid.

Though I have a couple of 100-years-old Ibsen books in old German type on my shelves.

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Etienne - 03-04-2008 22:53

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Heh, I do wonder if it's possible to do a light humorous treatment of domestic violence. Even Alexander McCall Smith hasn't managed it yet.

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by erwin - 04-04-2008 01:05

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Nordic fiction for me begins and ends with Astrid Lindgren, I'm afraid.

For me, it begins with my best mate in Las Palmas, where I worked for a couple of years, using (invariably without success) the fact that he'd read the Norse Sagas at Uni as a chat-up line with the Scandinavian beldades who had chosen Gran Canaria for their hols.

And ends with Noggin the Nog.

(Apologies for any lowering of tone that has just occurred).

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by erwin - 04-04-2008 01:07

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Oh, and I once played Dr. Rank in an Am Dram production of 'The Doll's House'.

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**Re:Nordic fiction**

Posted by Belhavka - 04-04-2008 09:05

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Etienne, if you've read one short-story by Björnsterne Björnson then you've read exactly one short-story more by him than 99% of all Norwegians. He was a contemporary of Ibsen and a significant person at the time in Norway, both intellectually and politically. As a writer, however, he is largely forgotten today.

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**Re:Nordic fiction**

Posted by Etienne - 04-04-2008 15:22

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Heh. When I visited Norway, the tourist guides made him out to be a major figure in Norwegian history, but obviously that doesn't necessarily correspond with people wanting to read his work.

I imagine Norwegian schoolkids probably do study Ibsen (for their sins) but do they read much other historical Nordic stuff - or do they get stuff from the global historical canon?

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**Re:Nordic fiction**

Posted by Bombanero - 04-04-2008 19:42

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I asked the mrs for suggestions for this thread, but she says most Finnish stuff isn't translated. There's Tove Jansson's adult stuff, and Vaino Linna's war trilogy. The latter is pretty good, if you like that kind of thing, although I've only read the middle one about the Continuation War, the Unknown Soldier. I should read Under the North Star, hiw work on the civil war, but I've not got around to it yet.

If you read Swedish the choice expands considerably, although the only recommendation I can make there is for Kjell Westö's Where we Once Walked, another civil war novel. GF recommends Anja Snellman as her favourite contemporary writer.

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**Re:Nordic fiction**

Posted by Etienne - 04-04-2008 21:55

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Ooh yeah, I read The Summer Book, by Tove Jansson, which is wonderful. Touching without becoming overly sentimental.

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**Re:Nordic fiction**

Posted by Lyra - 10-04-2008 10:19

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Thanks BAN. What about Mikael Niemi, or is he more like a kind of Nick Hornby type figure?

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I put this on the other thread but I'm reading The Conqueror, the second in Jan Kjaerstad's trilogy about modern Norway and it's immensely good.

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## Re:Nordic fiction

Posted by Bombanero - 10-04-2008 15:08

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GF loves Niemi's Popular Music book, but says it probably doesn't translate as it has a lot of Mäenkieli in it. I can testify that it is a bitch to try and read in Finnish if you're not family with the dialect, but I haven't tried the English version. I should.

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