

# FROM A LITERARY GENRE TO A TELEVISION GENRE: THE CIRCULATION OF “FINNISH WEIRD”

---

HEIDI KEINONEN

**Name** Heidi Keinonen

**Academic centre** University of Turku, Finland

**Email address** heidi.keinonen@utu.fi

## KEYWORDS

Genre; circulation; Nordic noir; television industry; brand.

## ABSTRACT

This article examines Finnish weird, a television genre that was established to promote Finnish television series abroad. Originally a literary genre blurring the boundaries of sci-fi, fantasy and realism, the concept of Finnish weird was adopted by the television industry in 2018 when

a number of series were branded as “Finnish weird” at an international industry event. In both production and reception, Finnish weird was mainly characterised by a comparison to Nordic noir. However, the genre failed to replicate the success of Swedish and Danish crime dramas and soon vanished from the industrial discourses. This article analyses the genre as cultural practice by examining the circulation of Finnish weird. Through investigating the origin of the concept, the practice of branding diverse television series as Finnish weird, and the generic discourses defining Finnish weird in relation to Nordic noir, this manuscript shows how the literary genre was appropriated and redefined for television.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In October 2018, a number of Finnish television industry organisations hosted a TV drama and cocktail event entitled “Finnish Weird” at the MIPCOM television festival in Cannes. The event showcased nine Finnish television series, diverse in terms of style, content, and target audience. By branding the shows as Finnish weird, the organisers aimed at establishing a new genre that would travel beyond Finnish borders. The concept has its origins in literature. Finnish weird, “suomikumma” in Finnish, was first identified by the internationally acknowledged sci-fi writer Johanna Sinisalo to describe her own works, but the concept was soon adopted for promoting Finnish literature abroad. As such, the concept was eligible also for the purposes of the television industry. Striving to find a domestic equivalent for the success story of Nordic noir, the Finnish television industry appropriated the concept in order to brand a diverse group of television series as Finnish weird. As a genre, Finnish weird was characterised by a comparison to Nordic noir: it was both similar to and different from the well-known Swedish and Danish crime dramas. The juxtaposition was particularly evident in the newspaper and magazine articles published before and after the MIPCOM event. However, the interest in Finnish weird faded quickly afterwards.

This article studies Finnish weird as a television genre by analysing the circulation of the concept. The main research question is how the concept of Finnish weird is used and defined, by whom, and for what purposes. I argue that the industry-led attempt to brand television series as Finnish weird failed because the genre lacked integrity and continuity. In addition to adopting the title of Finnish weird literature, the genre appropriated the popularity of Nordic noir television series.

Drawing from Jason Mittell (2004), the article addresses television genres as cultural categories that are subject to ongoing change and redefinition. While previous studies on screen genres mostly focused on film (e.g., Altman 1999; Neale 2000), Mittell (2004) provides a television-specific genre theory that pays attention to the key specificities of the medium. However, since the publication of Mittell’s book, television as a medium has gone through a major transformation. The emergence of video-on-demand services increased the production and consumption of television series and enabled new televisual practices, such as binge-watching. Although some of Mittell’s (2004: xiii–xiv) arguments, such as those concerning scheduling or television’s rare pretension toward high aesthetic value, may now seem outdated, there is even more need for a television-specific genre theory than

ever. In fact, with the surge of streaming services, both the number of television series produced and the ambitions toward high aesthetic value have reached new peaks.

Turning to Altman (1999), Mittell argues that there are no uniform criteria for defining a genre. Television genres may be identified by, for example, setting, profession, audience affect, or narrative form. Therefore, texts can be “*regenreified*” as the cultural contexts shift (Mittell 2004: 8; see also Altman 1999 and Neale 2000). Since there is nothing internal to television texts that would designate their categorisation, genres can only exist in intertextual relations in which texts are categorised through other texts. Thus, genres emerge from cultural practices, such as production and reception (Mittell 2004: 8).

This study is based on the assumption that genres are in a constant process of evolution and redefinition and, therefore, should be studied as discursive formations. As Mittell (2004: 11) states, “genres exist only through the creation, circulation, and consumption of texts within cultural contexts.” The way of thinking of genres as being in a constant process of circulation and evolution also changes the way we should study them. To analyse the generic discourses in which genres emerge, we need to shift our attention from the texts to culturally circulating generic practices that categorise those texts. Instead of aiming to interpret texts or discourses in depth and seeking their real meaning, we need to focus on the breadth of discursive enunciations by mapping out and contextualising as many diverse enunciations of the genre as possible. By collecting instances of generic discourses in historically specific moments, we can also trace the formation and change of a genre from a bottom-up perspective (Mittell 2004: 13–14).

Drawing from Mittell’s idea of studying genres as culturally circulating generic practices, this article maps out the circulation of Finnish weird. Valaskivi and Sumiala (2014) identify three main perspectives of circulation as a theoretical and methodological concept. First, circulation is a non-static and non-linear concept that is best analysed through tracking and tracing. Second, circulation is related to practice as action: it is a movement that brings ideas, items, and people together, and it should thus be studied by exploring the patterned forms of social action. Third, representations, such as texts, images, and symbols, are a material site of circulation. Therefore, the materiality of circulation can be explored by focussing on the characteristics and features of objects, ideas and actors contributing to circulation (Valaskivi and Sumiala 2014: 232–235).

This article is separated into three sections, each of which focusses on certain generic discourses and practices. First, it will examine the history of Finnish weird by tracing the emergence and evolution of the concept through various media outlets. Second, it will analyse Finnish weird as a practice of branding (how and by whom the concept of Finnish weird was appropriated for the promotion of Finnish television series). The third part of the study will take a closer look at generic categorisations surrounding Finnish weird by analysing how Finnish weird was defined and evaluated in newspaper, magazine and online articles. Here, a special emphasis will be placed on the comparison of Finnish weird and Nordic noir.

Research materials for the study include a collection of newspaper, magazine and online articles, websites, industry event programmes, press materials, blog postings, and advertisements that employ the concept of Finnish weird. The data collection aimed at mapping out as broad a range of discursive enunciations as possible. The sources thus range from the introduction of Finnish weird as a literary genre in 2011 to the most recent instances that appeared in early 2019 and thus enable the tracking of Finnish weird across medium boundaries. A close reading of the material provides detailed answers for the research questions.

## 2. THE ORIGIN AND EARLY CIRCULATION OF FINNISH WEIRD

The earliest appearance of the concept can be traced back to 2011 and a literary journal called *Books from Finland*. The English-language journal aimed at readers interested in Finnish literature and culture was published from 1967–2015 ([Booksfromfinland.fi](http://Booksfromfinland.fi) 2019). In an essay published 5 November 2011, Johanna Sinisalo, a Finnish author known for her fantasy books, introduced the concept of Finnish weird. Works representing this literary trend included, in Sinisalo’s words, “the blurring of the genre boundaries, the bringing together of different genres and the unbridled flight of imagination.” This definition leaves Finnish weird open to very diverse texts. Sinisalo also forecast the future of Finnish weird by stating that “Finnish weird could very well become the next Nordic literary phenomenon, concept and cultural export product” (Sinisalo 2011). Thus, by making a reference to Nordic crime fiction, Sinisalo laid a bridge between Nordic noir and Finnish weird.

Sinisalo’s statements were soon followed by a series of literary blogposts by author Jeff VanderMeer (2011).

VanderMeer’s texts were inspired by his visit to Finland, but instead of commenting on Finnish weird himself, VanderMeer (2011) quoted an unidentified source from Amazon and provided the reader with a list of related links. After being introduced to an international audience, the concept first surfaced in Finnish media in 2012, when YLE, the Finnish public broadcaster, published an article on Finnish weird (Sundqvist 2012). The text preceded Finncon 2012, the annual conference of science fiction and fantasy literature, which included a discussion on Finnish weird. The article presented Finnish weird as a new literary genre in which the elements of science fiction and fantasy were mixed with more traditional forms of narration in unexpected ways. Recently published works that fell into the category of Finnish weird were also described as “realifantasia” (real fantasy) and speculative fiction, with comparisons being made to magical realism and new weird. Finnish weird author Anne Leinonen stated that “Finnishness is now a brand that sells abroad. We should be open about producing stories from a northern, snowy, melancholic landscape” (Sundqvist 2012). The idea of using Finnish weird for promotional purposes was thus introduced. Again, a connection between Finnish weird and Nordic noir was made by asking whether “the next Millennium trilogy” would come from Finland (Sundqvist 2012).

A couple of years later, in 2014, the literary magazine *Granta* featured an interview with the editor of the newly launched *Granta Finland*. According to editor Aleksi Pöyry (Pöyry and Vilhena 2014), Finnish weird “portrays a realistic, palpable setting which gradually starts to acquire elements of fantasy.” While Finnish weird never represents “full-blown fantasy,” there is a constant tension between the real and the fantasy, Pöyry elaborated (Pöyry and Vilhena 2014). The interview anticipated the establishment of Finnish weird as a self-standing literary genre. The turn can be dated to the launch of *Finnish Weird*, an open access e-journal published once a year, as well as the introduction of the Finnish weird genre at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

The first issue of *Finnish Weird*, a journal showcasing current Finnish literature, was published in 2014. The website introduced *Finnish Weird* as a project of “weird” Finnish writers “producing memorable stories that blur and bend the genre boundaries” ([FinnishWeird.net](http://FinnishWeird.net) 2014). The issue opened with a text by Johanna Sinisalo, explaining the emergence of the concept. In her own words, she had been longing for a word to describe the work of writers “experimenting with elements of myth, magic and the fantastic.” After seeing the film *Rare Exports*, which is a dark but also slightly comical story of the

"grim origins of Santa Claus," she came up with the idea of "weird" and decided to call the genre of her works Finnish weird. As Sinisalo stated, with the absence of restricting historical references, Finnish literature had seen an outburst of highly original fiction, mixing the elements of sci-fi, fantasy, horror, surrealism and magic realism (Sinisalo 2014). While the journal *Finnish Weird* only published four issues, it played a crucial role in establishing a new literary genre and featuring upcoming authors, such as Emmi Itäranta, Tiina Raevaara and Maria Turtschaninoff.

Sinisalo's (2014) text summed up three features of Finnish weird, which were to characterise the genre also in the context of television: 1) internal diversity of the genre, 2) differentiation from Nordic noir and 3) genre as a brand. Even though Scandinavian countries did not invent crime stories, the international success of Swedish and Norwegian detective and crime fiction has made Nordic noir a label for certain quality. Similarly, Sinisalo argued, Finnish weird could be seen as a brand (Sinisalo 2014). Sinisalo's statement reveals that whereas Finnish weird might have emerged organically from the author's need to name her own works, she soon saw it as a brand that could be used to promote the sale of Finnish books. With a background in advertising, Sinisalo was, in fact, "consciously using the term as brand, aiming for the same effect that term 'Nordic Noir' evokes as a label for a certain quality of detective and crime fiction" (Samola and Roine 2018: 155).

The 2014 Frankfurt Book Fair, a major event for global publishing and media industries, designated Finland as a guest of honour. At the book fair, Finnish fantasy literature was presented under the label of "Finnish weird." In a press release, Maria Antas, the head of the literary programme "Finnland. Cool. Guest of Honour at Frankfurt Book Fair 2014," characterised Finnish weird as a combination of realistic environments, fantastic characters, Nordic mythology, legends and bizarre storytelling (Finnland. Cool. 2014). The concept of Finnish weird was thus adopted for promotional purposes.

After the book fair, Finnish weird surfaced in a few articles published in international journals and Finnish newspapers. In 2016, the concept appeared for the first time in relation to television, as YLE published an article entitled "Nordic Noir and Finnish Weird" (Forsman 2016). The author of the article, Liselott Forsman, then Executive Producer of International Drama at YLE, discussed Finnish weird as a literary genre and referred to Nordic noir. Her focus was, however, on the ongoing Gothenburg Film Festival, which featured a special theme, Finnish serial drama. Among the

shows introduced at the film festival was *Bordertown*, which was also showcased at the MIPCOM festival a couple of years later (Forsman 2016).

More recent appearances of Finnish weird as a literary genre included Worldcon75, the 75th World Science Fiction Convention, which was hosted in Helsinki in August 2017. Worldcon published an anthology of Finnish science fiction and fantasy stories entitled *Giants at the End of the World. A Showcase of Finnish Weird* (Sinisalo and Jerrman 2017). In addition, Institut für Fennistik und Skandinavistik at the Greifswald University in Germany organised an information forum entitled "Nordic Noir and Finnish Weird" at its yearly Nordischer Klang festival in 2018. The forum gathered authors and scientists to share their thoughts on Scandinavian, Icelandic and Estonian crime literature and television fiction, as well as speculative fiction from Finland (Nordischerklang.de 2018). The event thus brought the literary genre and the television genre together, but also marked the fading interest in Finnish weird literature, as Finnish weird has not featured as a title or a theme of a literary event since then.

### 3. BRANDING FINNISH WEIRD

While the literary genre seems to have emerged from an author's need to find a description for her own works, the television genre was solely an industrial initiative. Finnish weird was probably first used in reference to television by Ville Vilén, the Creative Director at YLE, at the Edinburgh TV Festival in August 2018 (see Bakare & Waterson 2018). Anticipating the forthcoming showcase at MIPCOM, Vilén stated that Finland would be delivering uniquely Finnish shows with a tonality and feel that are distinct from its Nordic neighbours. "It won't be all woolly jumpers, snow and murders: instead it is focusing on youth programming, taking cues from Norway's *Skam*, and hoping to make something that travels beyond its borders," Vilén said in an article published by *The Guardian* (Bakare and Waterson 2018). An association between the concept and the export of Finnish TV series was thus established by YLE, the Finnish public broadcaster.

The Finnish weird event at the MIPCOM festival in 2018 was hosted by Business Finland, Audiovisual Producers Finland—APFI ry, YLE, Elisa Viihde and the Finland Film Commission. While Business Finland is a governmental organisation, the Finland Film Commission operates on a regional basis in cooperation with communal and regional authorities, offering help for international film and television productions,

for instance, with location scouting, casting and finding production services. Audiovisual Producers Finland—APFI ry represents the interests of film and television producers, and Elisa Viihde is a subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) service.

The event showcased nine television series listed in Table 1. The table includes short descriptions of the shows, as well as information about production companies, broadcasters, release dates, and genres. The data is gathered from the APFI website (APFI.fi 2018) and from a handout entitled “Finnish Weird. Upcoming Finnish TV Drama 2018–2019” and published by Business Finland (2018) for the MIPCOM event. The sources thus represent industrial discourses.

As Table 1 indicates, the Finnish weird event showcased a heterogenous group of television series. The genres listed in the handout range from drama to spy thriller. Apart from one show, all the series deal with some sort of crime: smuggling, (bio)terrorism or spying. *Bordertown*, briefly described as “a unique take on Nordic Noir drama,” features a police detective investigating murders while trying to keep his family together. By appropriating a title of a literary genre and making a reference to Nordic noir, Finnish weird is presented as an upcoming drama genre with certain qualities. A comparison

to Nordic noir is employed to give possible buyers an idea of what the shows are about.

Nordic noir is a well-exploited brand in Denmark (Eichner and Waade 2015) and internationally. While the genre was born a crime drama, it now extends beyond procedurals. Due to the success of Scandinavian crime fiction, the concept of Nordic noir is now used to promote products that have very little in common with the original genre (Hansen and Waade 2017: 5–6). As Kääpä (2020) states, “Nordic-like” content refers to productions that aim at giving an impression of Nordic noirness while not really adapting to its parameters. Nordic noir has thus become a cultural brand—a “free-floating signifier for user engagement/marketing across different national and regional markets” (Kääpä 2020: 113–117).

The industrial practice of framing a generically unstable programme as a representative of an established genre is called generic placement (Murray 2004). Production companies and broadcasters may use both implicit and explicit generic enunciations in order to direct audience expectations (Keinonen 2013). At the MIPCOM event, an entire group of shows was framed with the title of Finnish weird literature and the references to Nordic noir drama to “activate the per-

Title	Broadcaster/ SVOD	Production company	First released	Genre (by the BF handout)	Description (by the Business Finland handout)
Welcome to Texas (Aallonmurtaja)	C More/ MTV	Warner Bros. Int. Television Production Finland	2017	Drama	An intense drama about a married couple who lead a smuggling operation
Arctic Circle (Ivalo)	Elisa Viihde (SVOD)	Yellow Film & TV	2018	Crime	An ensuing criminal investigation takes a grim twist when a deadly virus is found in Lapland
Bullets	Elisa Viihde, MTV, C More	Vertigo	2018	Drama thriller	An intelligence agency officer has to befriend an ex-terrorist
Bordertown (Sorjonen)	YLE	Fisher King Ltd	2016	Crime	A unique take on Nordic Noir drama
Hooked (Koukussa)	YLE	Moskito Television	2015	Drama	A drama series about addictions in relationships, in society, at work
Nerd: Dragon-slayer666 (Nörhti: Dragonslayer666)	YLE	Dionysos Films	2017	Youth drama/ comedy	A humorous series about a 19-year-old gamer whose mum destroys his computer
Secret Enemies (Ratamo)	C More /MTV	Moskito Television	2018	Thriller	A fast-paced thriller about a Russian oligarch spying on the Finnish government; both scarily realistic and incredible
Sherlock North	TBA	Snapper Films	TBA		Sherlock Holmes in subzero Northern Scandinavia, featuring a female Dr Watson from Finland and the coldest Moriarty ever
Shadow Lines (Nyrkki)	Elisa Viihde	Zodiak Finland	2019	Spy thriller	A secret service Finnish task force struggles to keep its homeland independent in 1950s Helsinki
All the Sins (Kaikki synnit) – only in the BF handout	Elisa Viihde	MRP Matila Röhr Productions	2019	Crime thriller	Crime thriller about complex relationships, small town prejudices and alternative lifestyles

TABLE 1. FINNISH WEIRD SERIES SHOWCASED AT THE MIPCOM EVENT

ceived values and implications that surround these categories” (Murray 2004: 78) and to build a brand. As the series showcased at the MIPCOM event are diverse, Finnish weird itself remains an empty concept. The idea of a “Nordic-like” crime drama genre is undermined by the inclusion of the youth drama/comedy *Nerd: Dragonslayer666*. The show is described as “a humorous series about a 19-year-old gamer whose mum destroys his computer.” The show obviously targets younger audiences both with its content and its form: with a length of 10 to 17 minutes, the episodes are remarkably shorter than the average drama or comedy series.

Although the country of origin appears to be an essential feature in Finnish weird, the Finnishness of the series can also be questioned. Most of the shows are internationally co-financed or co-produced—*Sherlock North* even exploits a story by a well-known Scottish author. The series presents “Sherlock Holmes in subzero Northern Scandinavia, featuring a female Dr. Watson from Finland and the coldest Moriarty ever.” While branded as Finnish weird, the story was written by Arthur Conan Doyle and developed in collaboration with the Conan Doyle Estate Limited (SnapperFilms.fi 2018). It thus differs from the rest of the shows, which either have original Finnish scripts or are adaptations of Finnish novels.

The study of the industrial discourses and practices circulating around Finnish weird confirms that the genre emerged as an attempt to promote Finnish television series abroad. By appropriating a literary concept and making references to Nordic noir, the organisers of the Finnish weird event employed the practice of generic placement. Despite the diversity of the shows, they were established as representing a new, “Nordic-like” genre. The generic features of Finnish weird literature, such as combining mythical, magical and fantastic elements with reality, are absent in the series’ descriptions. Understanding genre as circulation and, consequently, studying circulation as patterned forms of social action, thus draws our attention to those repetitive practices of inclusion and exclusion that define Finnish weird as a genre. The next chapter will take a closer look at how Finnish weird has been defined in relation to Nordic noir.

#### 4. FINNISH WEIRD—SIMILAR TO AND DIFFERENT FROM NORDIC NOIR

While the genre was created for industrial purposes, it also attracted audience attention. At the time of the MIPCOM event, a number of domestic and international newspapers,

magazines and websites published articles on the topic. The discussion of Finnish weird as a television genre was dominated by the discourse of defining Finnish weird through the comparison to Nordic noir—a feature which, again, can be traced back to Finnish weird literature.

As a literary genre, Finnish weird is characterised by the crossings of generic boundaries (Samola and Roine 2014: 28). As Samola and Roine (2014) state, as a genre, Finnish weird, as well as the new weird movement, have often been dubbed simply “speculative fiction,” which is mainly defined by a thought experiment, a “what if.” Johanna Sinisalo’s texts, for example, are linked to the tradition of science fiction (Samola and Roine 2014: 31). At the same time, however, the literary genre has been characterised by a constant comparison to Nordic noir, a far more realistic genre.

Nordic noir has its roots in the Scandinavian police procedurals introduced by Mai Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö in the 1960s. Gradually, Swedish crime fiction built a wide readership both within and outside the Nordic region. Since the 1990s, novels by Henning Mankell, Leif G. W. Persson and Stieg Larsson paved the way for the immense international success of the genre in film and television, and a few years ago, the genre was re-branded as Nordic noir. Examples of the Nordic noir genre in television include literary adaptations, such as *Wallander* (2005-) and *Millennium* (2009–2010), as well as Swedish and Danish crime series based on original scripts (*Forbrydelsen/The Killing*, 2007–2012; *Bron/The Bridge*, 2011–) (Hansen and Waade 2017: 1–2).

As a genre, Nordic noir both broadens the geographical scope of the concept “Scandinavian crime fiction” and blurs the thematic reference, thus merely indicating that the stories include something “dark/black” and take place in the Nordic region (Hansen and Waade 2017: 8). In fact, adaptation and appropriation have become constitutive features of Nordic noir (Badley et al 2020: 2). Hansen and Waade (2017: 9) even argue that “Nordic noir is not a clearly defined genre but a concept with genre affinities.” These affinities are able to travel over genres and media platforms (Badley et al 2020: 2). Thus, Nordic noir is a perfect example of a genre being in a constant process of evolution and only existing through the creation, circulation and consumption of texts (Mittell 2004).

Nordic noir in television is characterised by three main elements. First, traditional noir settings, like rainy, dark streets, industrial areas and harbours, are complemented with aerial shots of dawning cities and increasing light that reveals the crime. The second element includes extremely violent and possibly unmotivated murders. Third, the leading characters

in Nordic noir struggle with traumatic pasts and have unstable personalities (Ruohonen 2018). In a research article entitled “Nordic noir is a strong brand, how about Finnish noir?”, Ruohonen (2018) introduces three recent television series as examples of Finnish noir. The series (*Welcome to Texas*, *Deadwind* and *Bordertown*) were all showcased at MIPCOM. Among the series included in this analysis, *Bordertown* is the show that is most often described as Nordic noir. In the Business Finland handout, for example, *Bordertown* was described as “a unique take on Nordic Noir drama” (see Table 1), thus making an explicit connection to the preceding Swedish and Danish crime series. In the *New York Times* it was dubbed a “Nordic noir television series” (Aridi 2019), in the Finnish *Kauppalehti* as “the first Finnish Nordic noir series” (Erkko 2018) and in the British *Express* as “Scandi noir” (Mitchell 2019). Additionally, *Secret Enemies* is being described as a new show among other Nordic noir series by the Finnish tabloid *Ilta-lehti* (Huusela 2019).

As Hansen and Waade (2017) point out, television dramas are often classified as Nordic noir to “attract attention on a saturated television market.” At the same time, stakeholders around the Nordic region are hesitant to identify their works with the genre. Presenting *Bordertown* as an example, Hansen and Waade state that while producers and distributors are interested in attaching their dramas to Nordic noir, they also stress their original contribution to the brand (Hansen and Waade 2017: 230). Actually, most of the sources analysed for this study characterised new Finnish drama series through a differentiation from Nordic noir. In an article published by the Nordisk Film & TV Fund, the writer of *Bullets*, Antti Pesonen, described how he wanted the series to “break away from the Nordic noir.” This was done by abandoning the procedural form, letting the mood and emotions guide the series instead of the plot (Pham 2018). In the Finnish newspaper *Kaleva*, Mika Ronkainen, the director of *All the Sins*, said that Nordic noir is usually understood as dark colours, two cops in the leading roles being snappy for no reason and a lot of anxiety. Nordic noir also features the eroticised dead bodies of young women. “Well, our show is not like that,” he stated. Ronkainen himself categorised *All the Sins* as Finnish weird (Isojärvi 2018). *Variety* echoed a similar view: “*All the Sins’* begins in classic Nordic Noir with a body winched upside down in a barn as a shadowy assassin draws a knife seemingly to dispatch the victim. But, diverging from the Nordic Noir playbook, we never see the corpse” (Hopewell 2019).

Finnish weird is thus described as both similar to and different from Nordic noir. The binary discourse is most ob-

vious in the case of *Arctic Circle*. In a 2017 article, *Variety* reported that the cast had been assembled for the Nordic noir *Arctic Circle*. According to the article, the producers of the series said the show would “eschew the typical dark and brooding Nordic Noir tropes while remaining in the crime genre” (Clarke 2017). *The Location Guide* stated that the Finnish-German co-production was re-inventing Nordic noir: “The show’s location will play a major role in the series, separating it from the claustrophobic environments of other Nordic dramas and placing a greater emphasis on the expansive landscapes that you can find in Finland’s scarcely populated north” (Deehan 2018). The Finnish *Kauppalehti* gave voice to Emmanuelle Bouilhaguet, the CEO of Lagardère Studios Distribution, the international distributor of *Arctic Circle*. Bouilhaguet described *Arctic Circle* as “something else than traditional Nordic Noir, as crime investigation is mixed up with virus investigation” (Erkko 2018).

In the advent of MIPCOM 2018, *Deadline* featured an article about Finnish weird (White 2018). “Sherlock North’ & Sky-Backed ‘Bullets’ Help Finnish Weird Go Global—MIPCOM” stated that “Finnish local producers are hoping that high-profile projects [–] can replicate the success of its neighbours and travel the globe.” Citing Alan Sim, the executive producer at the SVOD platform Elisa Viihde, the article claimed that “Finnish drama feels different to series from other Nordic markets.” Additionally, Vilén from YLE emphasised, “We’re moving forward from that Nordic noir label” (White 2018). While these statements distance Finnish weird from Nordic noir, they do not specify the defining characteristics of Finnish weird. Nevertheless, Northern Irish writer Brendan Foley, who was working on *Sands of Sarasvati*, stated that “the emerging Finnish Nordic Noir, alongside its thriller core, has more dark humour and uses wild, wide landscapes to great effect” (White 2018).

Introducing three series showcased at MIPCOM (*Bullets*, *Arctic Circle* and *Sherlock North*) as well as eight new Finnish series, the *Deadline* article offered a different take on Finnish weird. The series (see Table 2) ranged from crime drama and thriller with similarities to Nordic noir (such as *Bullets* and *Arctic Circle*) to period dramas (*Invisible Heroes*), comedies (*Perfect Commando*) and even science fiction (*The White Wall*) (White 2018). *The White Wall* seemed to provide an intersection for two different generic discourses related to Finnish weird: first, the discourse of comparing or juxtaposing Finnish weird and Nordic noir, and second, the discourse of Finnish weird as a literary genre with connections to sci-fi and fantasy. In the Finnish newspaper *Kaleva*, producer of *The*

Title	Broadcaster/ SVOD	Local prod company	Release date	Description (by the <i>Deadline</i> article)
<i>Bullets</i>	Elisa Viihde/ MTV/ CMore	Vertigo	2018	A female-fronted, twist-laden thriller and political drama
<i>Arctic Circle (Ivalo)</i>	Elisa Viihde	Yellow Film & TV	2018	A crime drama centering around a weaponized sexual virus threatening a remote arctic town
<i>Perfect Commando</i>		Fire Monkey	TBA	A comedy about a young, spoiled hipster from California who was going on a five-star holiday but ends up training to be a commando
<i>The White Wall</i>	YLE	Fire Monkey	TBA	A sci-fi drama about a mysterious white wall found deep underground at a nuclear waste depository
<i>Invisible Heroes</i>	YLE	Kaiho Republic	2019	A story of an officer for the Finnish Embassy in Chile during the Pinochet coup in 1973
<i>The Peacemaker</i>	YLE	MRP Matila Röhr Productions	TBA	A drama centering around a team of peacemakers sent to resolve international conflicts
<i>Hard Diplomacy</i>	MTV3	Fire Monkey	TBA	A rogue US ambassador, a shady Finnish engineering genius and a bomb going off during the US president's visit to Helsinki
<i>The Emperor</i>		Vertigo	TBA	The rise and fall of most powerful and colourful narcotics cop in Finland
<i>Cold Courage</i>	Viaplay		TBA	A series following two young Finnish women in London, bound together by a clandestine operation
<i>Sherlock North</i>	TBA	Snapper Films	TBA	Based on A. C. Doyle's 1903 short story about Sherlock Holmes travelling to the Nordic region
<i>Sands of Sarasvati</i>	Viaplay	Luminoir	TBA	A Finnish Noir eco-thriller about a team aiming to halt a single climate change event that is about to change the world

TABLE 2. THE FINNISH WEIRD SERIES INTRODUCED BY *DEADLINE* (WHITE 2018).

*White Wall* Roope Lehtinen said that “*The White Wall* is not even close to Nordic noir.” The story does, however, include elements of science fiction (Kinnunen 2019).

As I have indicated in this section, Finnish weird has been most notably characterised by its juxtaposition to Nordic noir. While the concept and the brand of Finnish weird were adopted from the literary genre, the generic elements typical of Finnish weird literature, sci-fi and fantasy, are almost non-existent in the discourses on television. By making references to a well-known genre, Nordic noir, the comparative discourse adds to the recognisability of Finnish weird. Even the internal diversity of Finnish weird is also characteristic of Nordic noir.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This article addresses the ways in which Finnish television series have been branded as Finnish weird by establishing a new genre. The analysis traced the origin and circulation of the concept first in the context of literature and then in the context of television. While Finnish weird literature is known for its fantasy- and sci-fi-like features, they are not

employed in the generic discourses surrounding Finnish weird television series. The MIPCOM event showcased a diverse group of series ranging from a youth drama/comedy to a spy thriller. Most of the series, however, were presented as drama. Through generic placement, Finnish weird was framed by references to the literary genre as well as to Nordic noir drama. The generic discourses constantly paralleled the series to and differentiated them from Nordic noir. These discourses took advantage of the familiarity of Nordic noir, while also presenting Finnish weird as a completely new and unique genre. By appropriating a literary genre to promote Finnish television series abroad, the television industry aimed at replicating the success of Nordic noir.

Nordic noir works very well as an inclusive term for promoting new products under the same heading (Hansen and Waade 2017: 7). Finnish weird was not, however, able to become an established television genre and a well-known brand for Finnish series. At the time this writing, a few years after the MIPCOM event, the concept of Finnish weird has disappeared from the discourses concerning both Finnish literature and television. The most recent appearances of the concept in the sources date back to 2019. Therefore, it is safe to say that Finnish weird did not become the “new Nordic noir.”

In fact, it can be questioned if Finnish weird ever even existed as a television genre. The existence of Finnish weird as a literary genre has also been questioned by Samola and Roine (2018: 156) by asking if “Finnish weird [literature] really works out apart from being a marketing category.” Despite—or, rather, because of—their vagueness Finnish weird literature and Finnish weird television series manage to indicate that genres are culturally circuiting generic practices which emerge in historically specific moments.

While Finnish weird did not succeed in branding Finnish television abroad, a new attempt to promote the export of Finnish drama series has been launched. Focus on Finland is a joint project by industrial and governmental organisations, some of which were also involved in the organisation of the MIPCOM event (APFI.fi 2022). While the new project is not aiming to establish a new television genre, it remains to be seen whether it will be more successful than Finnish weird.

## REFERENCES

- Altman, Rick (1999). *Film/Genre*. London: BFI Publishing.
- APFI.fi (2018). MIPCOM 2018. <https://apfi.fi/tapahtuma/mipcom-2018/> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- APFI.fi (2022). ”Av-alan avaintoimijoiden yhteinen vientihanke Focus on Finland nostaa esiin suomalaista draama-ja dokumenttisisältöä”. <https://apfi.fi/ajankohtaista/av-alan-avaintoimijoiden-yhteinen-vientihanke-focus-on-finland-nostaa-esiin-suomalaista-draama-ja-dokumenttisisaltoa/> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Aridi, Sara (2019). “What’s on TV Saturday: ‘Pick of the Litter’ and ‘Bordertown.’” *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/02/arts/television/whats-on-tv-saturday-pick-of-the-litter-and-bordertown.html> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Badley, Linda, Nestingen, Andrew and Seppälä, Jaakko (2020). “Introduction. Nordic Noir as Adaptation.” In *Nordic Noir, Adaptation, Appropriation*, edited by Linda Badley, Andrew Nestingen, and Jaakko Seppälä, 1-14. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38658-0>
- Bakare, Larre and Waterson, Jim (2018). “Corbyn’s Reforms and ‘Finnish Weird’: What We Learned at Edinburgh TV Festival 2018.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/aug/24/edinburgh-tv-festival-2018-what-we-learned-jeremy-corbyn-michaela-coel-love-island> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- BooksfromFinland.fi (2022). “About us”. <http://www.booksfromfinland.fi/about/> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Business Finland (2018). “Finnish Weird. Upcoming Finnish TV Drama 2018–2019”. [https://issuu.com/audiovisual-finland/docs/finnish\\_weird\\_handout\\_web](https://issuu.com/audiovisual-finland/docs/finnish_weird_handout_web) (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Clarke, Stewart (2017). “Cast Assembled for Nordic Noir ‘Arctic Circle.’ ‘Casino Royale’ Star Clemens Schick Joins Bavaria Fiction Drama.” *Variety*. <https://variety.com/2017/tv/global/nordic-noir-arctic-circle-clemens-schick-1202608673/> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Deehan, Tom (2018). “Filming Arctic Circle in Finnish Lapland: How a Finnish/German Co-Production Is Reinventing Nordic Noir.” *The Location Guide*. <https://www.thelocationguide.com/2018/02/filming-arctic-circle-in-finnish-lapland-how-a-finnishgermanfrench-co-production-is-reinventing-nordic-noir/#> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Eichner, Susanne and Waade, Anne Marit (2015). “Local Colour in German and Danish Television Drama: Tatort and Bron//Broen.” *Global Media Journal* 5(1): 1-20.
- Erkko, Anni (2018). ”Kamera käy Lapissa—suomalainen tv-draama puskee mukaan eurooppalaiseen kilpailuun.” *Kauppalehti*. <https://www.kauppalehti.fi/uutiset/kamera-kay-lapissa-suomalainen-tv-draama-puskee-mukaan-eurooppalaiseen-kilpailuun/feecf93c-3ece-3d04-a988-0f755d143014> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- FinnishWeird.net (2014). “Finnish Weird”. <http://www.finnishweird.net/finnishweird1.html> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Finnland. Cool. (2014). “Finnish Weird: Extravaganza from Finland”. *Finland Cool*. <http://finnlandcool.fi/?p=1847> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Forsman, Liselott (2016). “Nordic Noir and Finnish Weird”. <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2016/02/01/nordic-noir-and-finnish-weird> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Hansen, Kim Toft and Waade, Anne Marit (2017). *Locating Nordic Noir. From Beck to The Bridge*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59815-4>.
- Hopewell, John (2019). “Mika Ronkainen, Merja Aakko Talk ‘All The Sins,’ Finland’s Bible Belt, Landscape.” *Variety*. <https://variety.com/2019/film/global/mika-ronkainen-merja-aakko-all-our-sins-finland-bible-belt-1203102383/> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Huusela, Jasmin (2019). ”Tänään se alkaa! Suurella tuotannolla tehty Ratamo-vakoiludraama haastaa nordic noir-sarjat—Samuli Vauramo ja Jukka Puotila Supo-miehinä.”

- Iltalehti.* <https://www.iltalehti.fi/tv-ja-leffat/a/76dda219-d63a-4688-bbcc-79f965b5ca19> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Isojärvi, Aino (2018). "Seuraava trendi maailmalla on Finnish weird—Oulussa kuvattava rikosdraama suuntaa kansainvälistille markkinoille." *Kaleva*. <https://www.kaleva.fi/uutiset/oulu/seuraava-trendi-maailmalla-on-finnish-weird-oulussa-kuvattava-rikosdraama-suuntaa-kansa-invalisille-markkinoille/799998/> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Keinonen, Heidi (2013). "'Tämä ei ole tosi-TV:tä, tämä on totta.' Geneerinen neuvottelu Iholla-sarjassa." *Lähikuva* 26(1): 32-47.
- Kinnunen, Kalle (2019). "Pyhäjärven kaivoksella kuvataan tv-sarjaa 700 metrin syvyydessä—Tuottaja: 'Tästä tulee erilainen kuin aiemmin nähdystä pohjoismaista sarjoista.'" *Kaleva*. <https://www.kaleva.fi/uutiset/kulttuuri/pyhajarven-kaivoksella-kuvataan-tv-sarjaa-700n-metrin-syvyydessä-tuottaja-tasta-tulee-erilainen-kuin-aiemmin-nahdyista-pohjoismaista-sarjoista/813709/> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Kääpä, Pietari (2020). "Why Don't We Do Television Like That in the UK?: Promotional and Paratextual Strategies in the Transnational Branding of Nordic Noir." In *Nordic Noir, Adaptation, Appropriation*, edited by Linda Badley, Andrew Nestingen, and Jaakko Seppälä, 113-133. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mittell, Jason (2004). *Genre and Television. From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. New York: Routledge. DOI <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203642139>.
- Mitchell, Molli (2019). "Bordertown Season 2 Location. Where is Bordertown Filmed? Where Is Its Set?" *Express*. <https://www.express.co.uk/showbiz/tv-radio/1080182/Bordertown-season-2-Netflix-Sorjonen-series-where-is-Bordertown-filmed-set-location> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Neale, Steve (2000). *Genre and Hollywood*. London: Routledge.
- Nordischerklang.de (2018). "Informationsforum: Nordic Noir & Finnish Weird". <http://nordischerklang.de/informationsforum-nordic-noir-finnish-weird/> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Pham, Annika A. (2018). "Bullets Series Creators on Targeting Mood and Emotions." *Nordisk Film og TV Fond*. [http://www.nordiskfilmogtvfond.com/news/interview/bullets-series-creators-on-targeting-mood-and-emotions?utm\\_campaign=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=newsletter&fbclid=IwAR1WWkjB7GJAvEvjCTT\\_BFpPpgLNz6yHol7s1vFGC6VmHUFNB9tNQl3dkwQ](http://www.nordiskfilmogtvfond.com/news/interview/bullets-series-creators-on-targeting-mood-and-emotions?utm_campaign=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&fbclid=IwAR1WWkjB7GJAvEvjCTT_BFpPpgLNz6yHol7s1vFGC6VmHUFNB9tNQl3dkwQ) (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Pöyry, Aleksi and Vilhena, Francisco (2014). "Granta Finland. Interview." *Granta* 25 March 2014. <https://granta.com/interview-granta-finland/> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Ruuhonen, Voitto (2018). "Nordic noir on vahva brändi, entä Suomi-noir?". *Avain* 2018(3): 130-139.
- Samola, Hanna and Roine, Hanna-Riikka (2014). "Discussions of Genre Interpretations in Johanna Sinisalo's *Auringon ydin* and Finnish Weird." *Fafnir—Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research* 1(3): 27-35. <http://journal.finfar.org/articles/discussions-of-genre-interpretations-in-johanna-sinisalos-auringon-ydin-and-finnish-weird/> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Samola, Hanna and Roine, Hanna-Riikka (2018). "Johanna Sinisalo and the New Weird: Genres and Myths." In *Lingua Cosmica. Science Fiction from Around the World*, edited by Dale Knickerbocker, 154-166. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. DOI <https://doi.org/10.5406/jctv19x5km.13>.
- Sinisalo, Johanna (2011). "Weird and proud of it". *BooksfromFinland.fi*. <https://www.booksfromfinland.fi/2011/09/weird-and-proud-of-it/> (last accessed 02-05-22).
- Sundqvist, Janne (2012). "Mitä kummaa? Suomikummaa!". *Yle.fi*. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-6224605> (last accessed 24-02-22).
- Valaskivi, Katja and Sumiala, Johanna (2014). "Circulating Social Imaginaries. Theoretical and Methodological Reflections." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 17(3): 229-243. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549413508741>.
- VanderMeer, Jeff (2011). "Finnish Weird—and Finnish SFF Links Round-Up". <http://www.jeffvandermeer.com/2011/05/13/finnish-weird-and-finnish-sff-links-round-up/> (accessed 24-02-22).
- White, Peter (2018). "Sherlock North' & Sky-Backed 'Bullets' Help Finnish Weird Go Global—MIPCOM." *Deadline*. <https://deadline.com/2018/10/finnish-weird-mipcom-sherlock-north-1202478488/> (last accessed 24-02-22).