Dark Borealism: Why Arctic Noir is the New Black

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Abstract
The joint success of the stories of explorers in the Far North and the crime story, or Nordic Noir, gave rise to a new form of borealism that this article proposes to call Dark Borealism. The article explains what is black in Nordic Noir, and, more precisely, in Arctic Noir and aims to identify the modalities, functions and issues of this generic hybridization in examples of Nordic crime fiction by Peter Høeg and Monica Kristensen.

Keywords
Borealism; Nordic Noir, Arctic, Scandinavian Crime Fiction, exploration

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If borealism had to be associated with a colour it would undoubtedly be white. Explorers and authors have written quite enough about Arctic whiteness or the polar bear for us to return to such figures again, even though one could of course argue about the veracity of such preconceived images. On the other hand, faced with the power whiteness holds on our memories, *Nordic Noir* presents itself as a visually ideal counterpoint. Nordic crime fiction has, indeed, found its own colour, especially since it seems to be the perfect metaphorical echo of a sadness, melancholy, or darkness regularly attributed to the Nordic: Nordic noir as a label is indeed a question of borealism, which is a mental construction of what is projected onto the North.

What Scandinavian and Anglo-American critics have come to call *Arctic Noir* is, first and foremost, an exogenous phenomenon (Agger and Waade 2010) (see also Ballotti in the first issue of this volume). This subgenre has not originated with native Greenlandic writers, but is written by Danish (Peter Høeg), Norwegian (Monica Kristensen), and even French (Mo Malø, Sonja Delzongle) writers. It is Peter Høeg's novel *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* (1992) that founded the Arctic subgenre by setting part of its plot in Greenland (Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 139–69). In addition to the examination within Nordic Noir of the modalities and issues of this whiteness/blackness dialectic, I will see how the motif of darkness makes it possible to hybridize two subgenres that are *a priori* quite distinct: the exploration story and the crime story. What I call 'Dark Borealism' is the contemporary reappropriation of two motifs, the story of exploration in the Far North and the crime story. In addition to *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne*, I will also be interested in the crime stories of Monica Kristensen. This Norwegian author lived in Svalbard where her plots are also set; especially her novel *Ekspedisjonen* (2014; The expedition) is of interest here as it imagines the criminal drifts of an exploration in the Far North. Both writers have given their novels the characteristics central to, what I define as, Dark Borealism in the way they hybridize the forms of the exploration narrative and the patterns of the crime narrative. In this way, Dark Borealism can be defined by the characteristics of Høeg and Kristensen's novels.

The first 'cold case' of Dark Borealism

In *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* it is no coincidence that the narrator both investigates the death of a Greenlandic child living in

Denmark, Isaiah, and is also interested in past expeditions to the North Pole: the narrator recalls the difficult rescue operations of Peary, the inventory of Knud Rasmussen, and Buchwald's transport in 1965 of his 30-ton meteorite back to Denmark. The two narrative plots of the novel come together when Smilla recognises Isaiah's father (the victim) in a photo. This clue prompts her to embark on the Kronos (a name also predestined), a ship which is about to leave on a new Arctic expedition.

Smilla's investigation brings us closer to the ice cap and the North Pole. The navigation motif serves to introduce the issue of global warming scientifically. Smilla examines the map of ice formation and observes the effects of global warming on the ice sheet. The writer intertwines two discourses, which, taken from a crime novel, have explicit criminal resonances: Høeg anticipates an ecological criminality, associated with behavioural abuses, such as the construction of huge oil platforms. Today, we are struck by the accuracy of Høeg's observations and his sense of the danger of oil extraction from an ecological point of view. When he wrote his novel in the early 1990s, these warnings constituted *ecological foresight*, insofar as alarmist discourses on the consequences of anthropogenic climate change on the ice cap had, at that time, far from their current audience and resonance. He denounces the deleterious effects of the excessiveness of the project. The platform's enormity is a warning sign that explicitly echoes a human hubris presented as toxic for the planet. The relationship to arctic nature is presented as a criminogenic relationship.

The first challenge of Dark Borealism is to show that the glacial space cannot be tamed; it is the *smooth space* of which Deleuze and Guattari speak, the one that cannot be fixed like the geographical North Pole, which remains elusive (because it is moving). The glacial space makes visible the consequences of the dangerous behaviour of the great powers. It is an experimental space of the future and shows a new form of 'future dystopia', which can be called *futurotopia*.

Considered one of the first victims of global warming, Greenland has in recent years become an *ecocritical space* of environmental claims. The object of attention and ecological expectations, it is subjected to what Brandon Absher calls 'ecological violence': 'a new form of violence that operates in the interrelationships between human beings and the surrounding world' (Absher 2012: 35). This violence is called 'ecological' in that it is about environmental and civilizational practices. It arises from the way humans interact in their environment (Absher 201: 35). In this late period of geoclimatic awareness, guilt and focus, global warming and the melting of the ice reactivate a whole

climatophilic imaginary, making Greenland the territory of ecological projection and an area of choice for the future.

Greenland provides the spatial proof of the murderous behaviour of civilisations. Through a process that is both pandemic (because contagious) and metonymic (because it is the part which metaphorises the whole), it embodies the fate of the entire planet. Peter Høeg's fiction is a *bellwether alarm*, and its 'bellwether species' is giving an early warning about climatic problems to come, more specifically the focus in the novel on oil extraction in Greenland. Its alarm is twofold: it does not only concern Europe: global warming knows no borders. It is fundamentally pandemic. The end of the novel is a projection on the glacial future of the planet. The protagonists of the story land on a small island, Isla Gela Alta, which was discovered by Portuguese whalers in the last century: the only island so far from the coast before Ellesmere Island, it is a hostile island, an almost invisible point on the map, the place par excellence where human beings have no reason to be.

Or rather, yes, there is at least one reason – perhaps the best reason of all: this island is the space of human absence par excellence. The current discourse on global overpopulation values Greenland as a counterpoint, since human beings are identified as one of the main reasons for global warming (whether in terms of numbers or behaviour). An ice-covered country and the least populated country in the world, Greenland is a doubly significant space. This motif of icy desertion prefigures the image of the world as it will remain. It is the space of an extinction of life: in Greenland. Life is rare (and therefore valuable). And since it has a price, so does the texts that speak of it. Greenland is the space of this narrative craze. This craze responds to a well-known fictional explanation: that of the unexpected reversal of situations which, from the economic point of view, corresponds to the principle of supply and demand (by virtue of capitalist logic: what is rare is expensive and precious). Greenland metaphorises this particularity, both ecological and capitalist, to which it brings a double counterpoint as an ice country. However, this characteristic is the object of a symbolic over-investment (ice country) and a pragmatic under-investment (desert country).

The power of a colourful dialectic

It is no coincidence that the denunciation of what could be called climatic and geographical mistreatment focuses on the sea ice, the 'ice

sheet' or even the permafrost, in other words spaces that are all variations of Nordic whiteness. A whiteness that is both real and symbolic. Reversibly, it is both a *means* (it allows one to disappear, it metaphorises erasure and thus the invisibility that underlies all criminal narratives) and an *end* (in the end, everything will end up as this whiteness). Jean Malaurie, a famous French explorer and anthropologist who knows Greenland well as he lived there, was already aware of the deadly dimension of boreal whiteness: 'The white of the snow, of the ice, of the sky: it is neutral, empty. Worse: it is deadly' (Malaurie 1999: 17)[i]. If the deadly dimension is not so surprising (anyone who has experienced the extreme weather in the Arctic could be quoted saying that), nevertheless the fact that Malaurie points to both the erasure and death in this quotation must be noticed.

In a crime story white is both a sign and a symptom. This is why it is necessary to take measure of the symbolic violence of whiteness. I remember that this child who died in strange circumstances was called Isaiah (the name of an Old Testament prophet): he is the innocent victim responding to this 'fantasy of original purity' (Malaurie 1990: 19). attributed to Greenland. Jean Malaurie sensed the deceptive aspect of the Arctic and perceived the ambivalence of Hyperborea, which was the basis of the first of the northern myths: 'In the depths of Greek thought, there is a nostalgia for a virginal land that is uniformly white, a colour symbolic of purity and peace' (Malaurie 1990: 20). Despite 'the geographic and climatic evidence, despite all the information we currently have: cold, ice, polar night' (Malaurie 1990: 14). From this perspective, the first effect of crime fiction is to blacken this whiteness, thereby contradicting the myth of purity, of Ultima Thule as a 'place of happiness', of a North Pole 'the seat of a paradise and also a free sea', of our idyllic and conquering representations of the North Pole, of the Northern Lights and the 'Last Kings of Thule' (Malaurie 1990: 23). For Høeg also, ethnologists have projected their fantasy of original purity onto North Greenland.

Identifying Isaiah's murderer is a way of opposing this phantasmatic whiteness of the Nordic world by inscribing his name in black on white. The phantasmatic power of this polar whiteness should not be underestimated. Indeed, Peter Høeg mentions it several times. The symbolic potential of the title is obvious, and it is all the more attractive as it works in opposition to a presupposed Nordic darkness. Moreover, this whiteness has a symbolic and semantic power: like any white space, it can be blackened by discourse. As a semantically vicarious space, it can embody all future writings. Polar space metaphorises the whiteness of invention as signs of the future. Writers

are the privileged receivers of these coloured signs. For Høeg, writers anticipate events long before scientists.

The challenge of this Dark Borealism becomes clearer, it consists in anticipating the future (more precisely the dysfunctions due to human behavioural drifts). Dark Borealism intends less to entertain than to prevent and in so doing it assumes the function of Cassandra. It is now necessary to detail the modalities and functions of this anticipation. More recent and driven by other issues (the *touristification* of exploration in the Far North, the place or rather the absence of women in these expeditions, and the deleterious effects of global warming), the stories of Monica Kristensen are enlightening in that sense.

A criminal exploration?

In her crime novels, Monica Kristensen explicitly uses the dialectic of darkness and whiteness. She knows Svalbard well, having lived there for several years, and insists on the opposition between the darkness of the coal mines of Spitsbergen and the whiteness of the icy spaces. She also plays on the moral and social tension inherent in this northern space. While the generic choice of this kind of story has the effect of *criminalising* the space, Svalbard, by its geographical location, it takes up and heightens some of the climatic characteristics of Greenland. Even today, it remains the most unexpected space for crime. In this, the expression of Dark Borealism serves as a reminder that it is indeed about images, visually oriented constructions of what the North represents and embodies (Briens 2016: 45). Dark Borealism not only blackens the boreal imaginary but also intensifies it, in particular by showing the damage done by humans in this exact place on the planet.

Monica Kristensen's Svalbard novel *Ekspedisjonen* is a good example. She is one of the first women to lead expeditions to Antarctica and combines these two experiences by setting her crime plot in Svalbard and linking it to the motive of the expedition to the North Pole. It is tempting to think of the conquest of the North Pole as a spatial and geographical motif of anticipation (choosing a concordance of content and form). Especially since the North Pole has its own star (the star connoting a beneficent poetic symbolism): 'Rett over dem sto stjerna som definerte retningen nordover, Stella Polaris' (Kristensen 2014: 179) 'Directly above them stood the star that defined the direction north, Stella Polaris'[ii]. In reality, this reassuring image is

misleading (precisely as expected in a crime story), thus taking the form of a misleading image of the future.

In this story, four norwegian explorers decide to reach the North Pole from Svalbard (which has never been done). Ill-prepared, they find themselves in grave danger and send out distress signals. We learn that the dogs of the expedition die in strange circumstances (they are poisoned as is one of the members of the expedition, who dies a little later), while another of the explorers is in grave danger (suffering from gangrene, several toes will have to be amputated on site). The Svalbard police inspector, Knut Fjeld, is appointed by his superiors to help them. The criminal investigation forms a double thread: on the one hand, it transforms the expedition into a tale of survival, on the other hand, it shows the effects of a poorly prepared expedition, likening it to what Jared Diamond calls 'catastrophic decisions' (Diamond 2011: 113). The first of them consists in making this expedition a conquest against time without taking account present conditions and above all without trying to anticipate the future. However, in the Far North anticipation is vital (which explains and confirms the privileged articulation of the Nordic space as a laboratory of anticipation). The explorers of Kristensen's novel are particularly marked by the polar expeditions of the American explorer Robert Edwin Peary (who was the first to reach the North Pole from Greenland), of Frederick Cook or even of Roald Amundsen, making their own expedition a nostalgic retelling of past exploits. Kristensen's explorers' knowledge of past polar expeditions is above all based on books. It is by reading old books about polar expeditions and in particular Robert Peary's *The North Pole. Its Discovery in 1909 under the Auspices of the Peary Arctic Club* (1910) that they have decided to embark on this fateful adventure. Apart from the fact that the book is literally dated, it serves to show that the polar expedition has become a *topos* (in life as well as in literature). The challenge for Monica Kristensen consists in renewing the genre of the exploration narrative, which is why she resorts to the form of the crime story. However, Peary never reached the pole, 'Noen uker før avreise uttalte han at hvis det var slik at Peary ikke nådde helt frem til Nordpolen, og dessuten at Amundsens vellykkede luftskipsferd ikke kunne medregnes fordi de ikke hadde landet og stått på polpunktet, så var det slik at ingen hadde satt sine bein på Nordpolen etter å ha startet fra norsk land' (Kristensen 2014: 67) 'a few weeks before departure, he stated that if it was the case that Peary did not reach the North Pole, and furthermore that Amundsen's successful airship voyage could not be counted because they had no landed and stood at the pole, then it was the case that no one had set foot on the North

Pole after starting from Norwegian land'. This polar expedition can be read as a reflection on bad projections, or to put it differently, it shows what happens when we consider the future as the past:

> Hva var egentlig målsetningen med ekspedisjonen? Var de ten tur for å hedre innsatsen til gamle polfarere? Hadde reisen politiske understoner, siden Karsten så sterkt betonte viktigheten av at den startet fra norsk land, fra Svalbard? Eller var det innstamlingen av vitenskapelige data som var det vesentlige? (Kristensen 2014: 79)
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> What was the objective of the expedition? Were they ten trips to honor the efforts of old polar explorers? Did the journey have political undertones, since Karsten so strongly emphasized the importance of their departure from Norwegian territory, from Svalbard? Or was it the collection of scientific data that was important?

Instead of projecting themselves into the future, our contemporary explorers rehash the stories of old polar explorers and expeditions as a Norwegian tradition. Reading about past exploits prevents them from projecting themselves into their future role of polar explorer. They decide to take the same routes and bring the same equipment:

> Hvorfor hadde de valgt å bruke så umoderne utstyr, for eksempel vanlige, parafinfyrte primuser og pyramidetelt i bomull? Mads så stolt ut. De hadde med vilje valgt utstyr some er tett opp til det de gamle polfarerne brukte, sa han. (Kristensen 2014: 104)
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> Why did they choose to use such outdated equipment, such as ordinary, kerosene-fired primus and cotton pyramid tents? Mads looked proud. They had deliberately chosen equipment that is close to what the old polar explorers used, he said.

Because they undertake this expedition for the wrong reasons (that is, reasons that are not projective but retrospective), they are led to make the wrong decisions. While they know the mistakes made by the explorers of the past, they do not know how to learn from them for

their future. This is what Jared Diamond calls 'reasoning by bad analogy', and then a tendency to reproduce old situations, when the new ones are not of the same type and the 'similarities are only superficial' (Diamond 2011: 158). This identical reproduction is in itself a bad decision. The narrator recalls the misadventure of Bjørn Staib, 'en norsk polfarer fra sekstitallet. Han hadde startet fra Alert, en liten by nord i Canada, sa Karsten. Hadde gitt seg ute i isen ved 86-graden et sted' (Kristensen 2014: 89), 'a norwegian polar explorer from the sixties. He had started from Alert, a small town in northern Canada, said Karsten. Had given up on the ice at 86 degrees and something'. The writer recalls that Bjørn Staib wanted to reach the North Pole using equipment from another era. Thus, the explorers in Kristensen's novel do not learn from this failure, but instead decide to follow Bjørn Staib's advice by abruptly bringing forward their departure and leaving Svalbard in February. However, it is not enough to leave in advance to constitute a prospective expedition. This early departure is a misleading and even a counter-productive premature action. It accentuates their state of unpreparedness. The early departure confronts them with even more difficult (extreme) climatic conditions. Significantly, as this expedition heads for the North Pole, it is heading in the wrong direction, mis-interpreting spatial signs.

Yet, the most 'fatal error' of this expedition is undoubtedly due to its 'inability to anticipate a problem before it really occurs' (Diamond 2011: 124). The explorers lack fear which forces one to anticipate what will happen, and overconfidence undermines premature action. Because they are fearless, they make no attempt to anticipate the potential dangers of their expedition, or rather they downplay the real dangers by reducing them to conventional polar clichés: "Men skulle han først nevne noen farer, så matte det vel være sprengkulde, snøstormer og tap av utstyr. Og selvsagt den største faren av dem alle – isbjørn" (Kristensen 2014: 105). 'Nevertheless, if it was really necessary to cite a few dangers, there were of course extreme cold, snowstorms and possible loss of material. And then obviously, the greatest threat there is in these regions: the polar bear'. These *clichés* (for a reader who knows a little about this) have the opposite effect on the reader to that produced on the characters: they reinforce the impression that the explorers are unprepared and confirm that self-confidence is detrimental to anticipation. In a crime story, overconfidence is often a bad omen (regarding the fate of the characters) because the principle of tragic irony is frequently used by writers, and confidence does not invite premature action. This is quite unlike fear or presentiment, which make one suspicious and force one

to carefully observe the signs around oneself, to try and read the signs as symptoms (which is a way to plan for the future to prevent the worst from happening).

Symbolically, this fear (which they lack) is embodied in the presence of a polar bear that prowls around them and that the explorers fail to take seriously. Only the police inspector (who lives there and knows the area) is fearful. He knows that the bear could pounce at any time. This visceral fear is precisely what the explorers lack and what would have allowed them to succeed in their expedition. 'Isbjørner er verdens farligste rovdyr, om de gidder å angripe' (Kristensen 2014: 240) 'polar bears are the world's most dangerous predators, if they dare to attack'. The threat of the bear metaphorises what is at stake in the crime story: warning the reader to fear the worst. In a crime story, the reader's fear is mimetic of that of the characters. It comes from an imprecise anticipation – one of the conventional prerequisites of the thriller is to make the reader fear the worst without letting them guess. Defeated by too much pride and confidence, the characters ignore anticipation as a condition of survival, redoubling the reader's presentiment. The bear approaches dangerously: 'Nesten som om bjørnen var så I ett med landskapet rundt seg at den ble usynlig' (Kristensen 2014: 240) 'almost as if the bear was so at one with the landscape around it hat it became invisible'. Reactivating this connection between invisibility and crime, the reader expects the bear to attack the explorers, especially as they are in a bad way. Playing with narrative unpredictability, Kristensen thwarts her reader's expectation. The bear turns around and disappears, taking the form of invisibility. But in doing so, the bear disappears both as a narrative adventure and as an animal species. The same applies to the North Pole, confirming the proximity of polar space and the bear:

> Denne besettelsen med Nordpolen. Et fiktivt punkt i et landskap så likeartet at det var som en meditasjon over tomhet. Sjøisens mange sjatteringer i skygger og hvitt var fascinerende, men polpunktet kunne man ikke se (Kristensen 2014: 263)
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> This obsession with the North Pole. A fictional point in a landscape so uniform it was almost like meditating on the void. The shimmering of the sea ice and its multiple shades of white were certainly fascinating, but the North Pole was invisible.

Dark Borealism is characterised both by anticipatory pleasure (the reader expects specific images) and by surprise effects (the unpredictability of some scenes). A little later, another unexpected event puts the explorers in danger. Indeed, the expedition has failed to anticipate a fact that is far from minor: one of the specificities of the Arctic is precisely its *unpredictability*. Anticipating allows us to deal with this kind of situation. Good polar prospecting consists in anticipating the unpredictable (significantly, this crime narrative is constructed in the mode of the unpredictable). However, our explorers stop at an apparent paradox: 'Det gikk ikke an å forberede seg på det utventede" (Kristensen 2014: 110) 'It was not possible to prepare for what was expected' declares one of the characters, without realizing that it is by integrating the certainty of unpredictability that they will be able to prepare for it By considering the unforeseen as *unthinkable*, they make one of these 'catastrophic decisions' (Diamond 2011: 250): they show themselves incapable of considering the expedition as a projection into the future: 'all these decisions involve betting on the future, for want of the certainty that the perpetuation of some values will lead to failure and their preservation to success' (Diamond 2011: 251). Not only is the unpredictability a given of the Arctic (storms are sudden and impossible to predict, explaining in counterpoint why the polar narrative is so conducive to anticipation), but the criminal narrative gives the measure of the maximum cost of this error.

Above all, the catastrophic decisions of these explorers have a vital consequence for the expedition: one of the explorers is suffering from gangrene. It is worth noting how archaic and anachronistic this motif is in a twenty-first-century narrative – and anachrony is precisely opposed to prospecting. Unable to interpret the warning signs of gangrene, they are unable to prevent the danger of these symptoms. The explorers fail to detect danger and infection in time (they fail to read signs as symptoms). To be able to anticipate, one must not only be prepared for the dangers to come (storms, bears, cold, etc.), but also know how to decipher the signs and, more precisely, one must be able to distinguish between signs and symptoms, to take up the distinction introduced by Foucault in *Naissance de la clinique*: the sign announces what is going to happen, it indicates 'the farthest, the lowest, the latest' (Foucault 1975: 54), whereas the symptom serves to identify (the disease, the culprit). The symptom has a time delay when the sign has a time advance. It is the clinical equivalent of anticipation. Significantly, it is the autopsy (which is a device of the visible invisible) of the deceased explorer as well as that of the dogs that will reveal the criminal dimension of the expedition.

Unlike the members of the expedition, the police inspector immediately recognises the symptoms of gangrene and he knows the consequences. Kristensen then describes the scene of the amputation of two of the explorer's toes. This scene may seem excessive or not very believable, unnecessarily putting the reader through the pain suffered by the character (especially as it is an eminently empathetic type of pain). However, the fact that she herself has led expeditions in Antarctica confers authenticity (credibility) to the scene, and a usefulness that functions, if not as preventive measure, then at least as a warning (to potential readers in search of sensations tempted by these polar expeditions). Indeed, these explorers have deluded themselves about their own image. They have taken themselves for heroes when they are only badly prepared tourists: 'hvor livsfarlig en slags misforstått heroism var' (Kristensen 2014: 148) 'how deadly a kind of misunderstood heroism was'. Monica Kristensen ostensibly deploys what one might call all the stereotypes of an old-fashioned polar imaginary. This expedition is outdated and inappropriate: 'hvis noen hadde tatt ett svart-hvitt bilde av dem nå, hadde det ikke sett ut som en moderne ekspedisjon på begynelsen av det enogtjuende århundret' (Kristensen 2014: 150) 'If someone had taken a black and white photo of them at that moment, no one would have thought that it was a modern expedition at the beginning of the 21st century'. Caught in a storm, they flee their camp, forgetting the Iridium phone and radio, both contemporary objects invaluable in case of danger. This oversight is presented as a major mistake, a sign of their unpreparedness and their inability to use new technologies. The explorers take the wrong signs, mistake for heroism what is in reality recklessness, modelled on a nostalgic fascination:

> (…) sluttet den store epoken for den slags turer med Roald Amundsen. Etter ham burde folk ha gitt seg. Flyene hadde tatt over for hundespannene, snøscootere dro lasset bedre enn folk eller hunder. Likevel økte trafikken av ekspedisjonsturister på Svalbard for hvert år. Det burde kanskje Svalbard-beforkningen være glade for. Klart det var viktig med turisme. (Kristensen 2014: 40-41)
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> (…) ended the great era of polar expeditions with Roald Amundsen. After him, people should have given up. The planes had replaced the dog teams,

> snowmobiles pulled the load better than people or dogs. Nevertheless, the traffic of expedition tourists on Svalbard increased every year. Perhaps the Svalbard population should be happy. Of course tourism was important.

Monica Kristensen plays with her characters who already see themselves as the heroes of a polar exploit. She anticipates the future of these glacial expeditions, which have nothing scientific about them but are more the whim of novice amateurs. The phenomenon is not only Norwegian, it is international. 'For hver vellykket ekspedisjon hadde det vært minst ti andre som folk bare hadde ristet på hodet av' (Kristensen 2014: 66) 'For every successful expedition there had been at least ten others that people had just shook their heads at'. The North Pole will become the object of more and more massive tourism, which will be dangerous for the polar ecosystem.

The poison motif (significantly, the rat poison used is called 'Black Pearl') that forms the basis of the crime plot suggests the toxicity of these polar expeditions for wildlife. Environmental protection is an essential activity in Svalbard. Kristensen, in *Den døde i Barentsburg* (2011; The dead in Barentsburg), foreshadows the fact that the possession of the seabed of the icy Arctic Ocean is a political as well as a climatic and ecological issue. The action takes place in Barentsburg. This Russian enclave in Norwegian territory is an ambivalent space under the guise of international appearance:

> Russland hadde på ingen måte gitt opp kampen om deler av det veldige Polhavet – territorialkrav som det tidligere Sovjetunionen så standhaftig hadde hevdet gjennom hele den kalde krigen. Kartlegging av havbunnen var bare én av mange under*økelser som ble styrt fra disse anonyme, bortgjemte rommene I skipets indre* (Kristensen 2011: 125)
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> Russia had by no means given up the fight for parts of the vast Arctic Ocean – territorial claims that the former Soviet Union had so steadfastly asserted throughout the Cold War. Mapping the seabed was just one of many investigations that were controlled from these anonymous, hidden rooms in the ship's interior.

But these warning signals are exactly useful and even vital for humans. The researchers are there to anticipate the consequences for the planet of 'a difference of one tenth of a degree in the ocean surface compared to the previous measurements, or what a few centimetres less ice means, or a few more – or less – polar bears' (Diamond 2011: 45). These signs of global warming are not taken seriously, not only because they are covered by the political, economic, and ideological competition of the dominant countries, but also because they are not immediately legible. Diamond calls this phenomenon 'landscape amnesia' (Diamond 2011: 325). This landscape amnesia refers to minute (almost imperceptible) climatic changes from one year to the next, such as cooling or warming of the climate, so that by the time these gradual transformations are finally noticed, it is already too late. For example, the inhabitants of Greenland in the Middle Ages were slow to recognise that the climate was gradually cooling. Similarly, global warming is difficult to identify because the temperature does not rise regularly, but in a 'fluctuating and unpredictable' way, so it takes time to 'discern the upward trend of 0.01 degrees' (Diamond 2011: 130). Landscape amnesia leads to bad decisions because it is not explicitly visible/readable. The polar space, with its whiteness and its natural invisibility, is particularly conducive to this amnesia.

Multiplying disastrous presentiments and in accordance with the crime plot's procedures of making readers fear the worst, the female narrator assumes the role of Cassandra, repeatedly announcing the tragic future of this expedition. As a counterpoint to these unheroic male characters, Monica Kristensen questions the place of women in Arctic expeditions. Through a *mise en abyme* effect, the voice of a Norwegian woman writer seeking to make a literary place for herself within Dark Borealism (this effect is reinforced by the presence of a narrator speaking in the first person) is heard. As a writer and the first woman to lead an expedition to Antarctica, Monica Kristensen is doubly sensitive to this issue. The narrator returns several times to the fact that no woman accompanied the adventurers to the North Pole, because the physical hardship would be too hard for women. This female eviction (discrimination) is shown to be doubly counterproductive, because it would have given the expedition media visibility and because it would have been precisely a sign of changing attitudes, making this expedition an *avant-garde* conquest – precisely what it lacked.

Conclusion

'To imagine the future, to give oneself the capacity to think it is to be in a relationship with the world that begins to be less passive. It is to initiate the constitution of holds' (Rumpala 2018: 237)[iii]. In his essay, Rumpala wonders what the possible 'action levers' are. I want to suggest that Dark Borealism is one of them. This new genre, a hybrid of the exploration story and Nordic Noir, is characterised by its prospective power. It shows the new role assigned to the genres of popular narratives, the mass media genres. More than a criticism, be it social or behavioural, it is enriched with a 'warning and alerting function', but also with an 'emancipation function'. That human collectives are 'responsible for their common destiny and the contexts in which they live' (Rumpala 2018: 241) presupposes a radical change of mentality but also of reflective paradigm. It is not so easy to move from 'reactive behaviours' to 'proactive behaviours, when it is no longer a question of undergoing', nor is it easy to change the time scale, to move from 'short temporalities', where one remains in action or reaction to 'longer temporalities, where it becomes possible to project oneself' (Rumpala 2018: 242), because this implies conceiving the present not in relation to the past (a paradigm on which European culture builds) but according to the future.

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i All translations from French are by the author unless otherwise stated.
ii Translations from Norwegian to English are by the author unless otherwise stated.
iii Personal translation.