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**AT THE ORIGINS OF THE NORWEGIAN DETECTIVE:
MURDER IN MAURITS CHRISTOPHER HANSEN'S PROSE**

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This article discusses the function of the murder motif in M. C. Hansen's prose. It shows that this motif is strongly related to the author's quest for novel ways to represent reality, his ambition to portray the private lives of everyday Norwegians, and his goal to illustrate the moral development — or, on the contrary, the degeneration — of his characters. A crucial plot-forming device, the motif of murder is frequently combined with the motif of insanity as retaliation for the committed crime. It is possible to see how a critical view of modernity gradually replaces the distinct religious pathos of Hansen's early prose (*Den gale Christian* (The Mad Christian), *Keadan, eller Klosterruinen* (Keadan, or the Abbey Ruins), *Novellen* (The Short Story), *Den myrdede brudgom* (The Murdered Groom)), inevitably leading to the emergence of a new kind of hero. The nature of this hero is determined by the surroundings and environment, the narrative becomes more psychologizing, and the interest in daily life takes the place of the theme of the moral revival (*Jutulskoppen* (The Troll Mountain) and *Mordet på Maskinbygger Roolfsen* (The Murder of Engine Maker Roolfsen)). Hansen's writings from this time period are distinguished by a tragic perspective. The notion of a moral revival of man loses its appeal to the author. He feels that profit and vanity have replaced love, and that true feelings are doomed to vanish. The themes of mistrust between close people, the corruption of the ruling class, the oppressed position of the people, and the inability to escape from social oppression take on a new significance. We discover that Hansen's interest in the everyday and private lives of regular people is linked to his search for artistic research tools, whereas the motifs of murder and crime investigation aid the writer in creating a vivid and accurate picture of contemporary Norwegian society while also making his narratives more entertaining.

Keywords: Maurits Christopher Hansen, detective story, murder motif, novella, novel.

Maurits Christopher Hansen (1794–1842) was the first notable Norwegian author of the 19th century who contributed to the development of modern Norwegian prose. Apart from writing fiction, he was actively involved in educational and pedagogical endeavors. In addition to a textbook on epistolary style for young ladies, he authored a variety of school textbooks on Latin school vocabulary, history, geography, and Norwegian, Latin, and French grammar.

Great changes occurred in Norway throughout the first part of the nineteenth century. Norway witnessed a surge in national consciousness after gaining partial sovereignty and a constitution in 1814. Literature had a significant part in Norway's fight for national and cultural independence. This cultural and historical context greatly contributed to Hansen's writing style, which also made it easier to comprehend the rich European cultural experience. His contributions to the development of Norwegian literature cannot be overstated. He became a sort of a bridge builder, enabling 'Norwegian literature to absorb the rich traditions of European literature after 1814' [Tysdahl, 1988, s. 26].

Long creative searches had shaped Hansen's writing style, which over time had produced a variety of authentic forms and themes leading to the establishment of innovative Norwegian prose. The author was able to organically melt contemporary romantic literary trends with the 18th century literary traditions, creating an original Norwegian prose based on European examples.

Hansen's high level of spirituality, curiosity in the private lives of ordinary people, desire to represent the inner world of his heroes, their moral evolution — or, on the contrary, the degeneration — had driven him to seek new ways of expressing reality. The themes of murder and criminal investigations are ideal for use as a “lens to see a divided society in which suspicion immediately falls on the poorer and weaker classes” [Agger, 2014, s. 37].

Thus, Hansen's sphere of interests included European literature related to various real and fictional crimes, such as the works by the German professor and criminal law reformer Paul Johann Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach (1775–1833), August Gottlieb Meissner (1753–1807), Laurids Kruse (1778–1840), as well as “heist novels” popular in France and Germany in the 18th century and the English Gothic novel of the same period. The Scandinavian sources that had a considerable impact on Hansen's development as a writer included *Præsten i Vejlbø*

(The Rector of Veilbye, 1829) by the Danish author Steen Steensen Blicher (1782–1848) and the works of the Swedish writer Carl Jonas Love Almqvist (1793–1866).

The priest Immanuel Christian Grave's 1811 publication of *Nationale fortællinger for den norske bondestand* (National Tales for the Norwegian Peasantry), which was later widely republished, also attests to Norwegians' interest in the topic of crime and punishment. *Snigmordet* (Murder), one of the novellas in this collection, stands out among the rest. It relates the tale of a farmer who employs his worker to assassinate a large farm's heir in order to take possession of the land. *Snigmordet* is regarded by some literary critics as the first Norwegian detective story [Dahl, 1993]. However, it should be emphasized that in this novella, the murder just serves as a backdrop for the narrative; there is no investigation as such, instead, the focus is on the criminal's pangs of conscience and his fear of being found out. In Hansen's writing, the representation of the enigmatic and incomprehensible is paired with a drive to uncover a logical explanation for things that appear mystical. This balance between the supernatural and the rational is the recurring theme in many of the writer's works [Omdal, 2010; Tysdahl, 1988].

Over twenty stories in Hansen's collection of writings center on the mystery surrounding a murder or an alleged murder, with the investigation progressively adding together the events, like pieces of a jigsaw. Actually, such patchiness and intermittence are characteristic of most Hansen's novels: 'His [Hansen's] stories are like Chinese boxes: you have to open one lid after another before you get to the bottom of it' [Elster, 1943, s. 20].

The novella *Den gale Christian* (The Mad Christian, 1821) is a vivid example of Hansen's storytelling style, since it employs various aesthetic methods typical of his work in general.

This is an epistolary novella. Traveling through Norway, Carl Møllmann is forced to spend the night at a stage station. To pass the evening, he invites an old madman living at the hotel to dinner, and accidentally hears the poor man's "confession." Impressed by what he hears, he writes a letter to his friend, telling him about what happened.

One of the major themes of Hansen's works is the formation of moral character. The characters created by Hansen have a deep-seated mental dualism. He believes that the formation of the spiritual and moral nature is filled with blunders, humiliation, and moral fall, so the criminal

in his writings is seldom a true “villain”, like, for instance, the demon Varlun in the novel *Othar av Bretagne* (Othar from Brittany). Criminals are typically weak and desperate personalities or those pushed to their breaking point. And this is also true of the mad Christian who becomes a murderer.

The heart of the conflict is the typical love triangle, and the crime (murder) occurs in the distant past. In Hansen’s prose, crime is frequently brought on by unreturned passion. Christian and his brother Hans battle for a girl’s affection; when the girl favors Hans, Christian murders his rival in a fit of wrath.

The motifs of sin and atonement, often associated with insanity, also take on a significant role. Christian succeeds in concealing his crime, but the guilt he feels makes him mad. He keeps seeing his deceased brother everywhere and, in the end, murders his beloved in a fit of madness. This novella features distinct Gothic elements: the gloomy atmosphere of the hotel at the stage station adds to the thrill, which is also complemented by the madman’s sudden bursts of laughter and his ominous look.

At first glance, the plot of the *Keadan, eller Klosterruinen* (Keadan, or the Abbey Ruins, 1825) resembles *Den gale Christian*. Brothers Wilhelm and Fritz are rivals in the struggle for the heart of young Louise. When Wilhelm travels to study in Copenhagen, Fritz pursues the favor of his sweetheart in the absence of the rival. Things become complicated when his brother unexpectedly arrives home. Shortly before the wedding, Fritz vanishes in the ancient ruins of an abbey, purportedly after slipping into an abandoned mine and dying. A few days later, however, when his body is discovered, it comes out that he was stabbed with a knife. But it is greed, not unreturned love, that drives the crime. A small land dealer and a renowned rascal feels that marrying Louise and receiving her dowry will help him better his financial situation, so he eliminates his opponent.

Unlike *Den gale Christian*, which focuses on the moral torments that cause insanity, *Keadan* features an actual investigation. Louise and Wilhelm suspect each other. Despite the fact that neither of them was involved in Fritz’s murder, they both feel guilty since the news of his death relieves them. They quickly find solace in one other’s arms. The investigation of Fritz’s death is presented as an exposure of immorality, sin, and humiliation as well as the atrocities committed by a specific character who has to be held accountable.

The motif of mystery — as the specifics of what happened remain unknown for a long time — is one of the book's major themes. The investigation, however, is not a plot-forming factor in this case. The murder is shrouded in mystery; one of the characters, a mad woman called Valborg who has spent eight years looking for her dead kid amid the abbey ruins, turns out to be clairvoyant and foretells Fritz's death as well as other significant events in the novel. It is mostly because to her gift that the true murderer is discovered and punished.

This novel introduces a new kind of hero: a narrator identified with the author who remains a passive spectator. The narrator can jump from one scene to another; interrupt the narrative to describe another significant incident; express his personal attitude to events and characters; reproduce peasant conversations that he did not observe; put the story on hold to qualify the characters and expose their feelings, as is the case with Louise in chapter seven; highlight that he did not witness the events, but that the story was restored based on the surviving records.

Maurits Christopher Hansen was a passionate supporter for the rights of women who were oppressed at the time. He thought it was unjust that a woman could only get elementary education, the main goal of which was marriage and her incapacity to decide her own fate autonomously. He believed that a big part of this process was education and literature. Together with his wife, Hansen established a school for girls in Kongsberg, which remained open until his death. He also frequently brought up this subject in his writings. In the *Den myrdede brudgom* (The Murdered Groom, 1828) and the *Novellen* (The Short Story, 1827) both, the perpetrator is a shattered and desperate woman who kills in the hopes of saving herself. The author, however, evaluates heroines' actions differently. In *Novellen*, to improve her financial situation, an impoverished girl agrees to become a mistress of an elderly and wealthy merchant named Rill, in whose house she works. The fear that her moral fall would be exposed drives her to commit a new crime — the murder of her patron. Malene, the heroine of *Den myrdede brudgom*, becomes a victim of her family's social ambitions. She is tricked into abandoning her fiancé and marrying a wealthy farmer. When the girl discovers this, she murders her husband and flees. In the first case, the woman is punished for her crime with insanity; in the second, the author only mentions that the crime weighs Malene down and prevents her from finding happiness in her new marriage.

Novellen's story is built around the reconstruction of the past. The narrator of the story is Maurits Christopher Hansen, who, among his friends, recalls a childhood story that left an indelible effect on him and to which he returns over and again in his recollections.

A terrible secret is revealed as a result of two young people's investigation of events from the distant past. Froken Sars's imprisonment in the cellar is not a tragic accident, but a cruel punishment for murder and betrayal: the groom avenges his beloved not only for becoming his father's mistress but also for murdering him. Thus, the desire to cover up the moral degradation turns into a motive for murder yet again.

The plot unfolds throughout three time periods:

1) 1827, a nice evening spent with friends at the home of grown-up Maurits Hansen;

2) a childhood experience that leaves an unforgettable imprint on the writer's memories;

3) the events from a very distant past — the tragedy that befalls Froken Sars.

Additionally, it should be highlighted that the first and second time periods both involved nice evenings spent with family and friends. An inexplicable anxiety suddenly bursts into the safe space, compelling the narrator to relive the horrific events of a long time ago over and over again.

The motif of Froken Sars's "terrible secret" of the past becomes the narrative's main driving force, while the desire to uncover this secret forces the narrator and his companions to delve into the past in search of truth.

The motifs typical of Gothic literature, such as burial alive and retribution for sins, are added into the story in this atmosphere of rising terror. This makes such a strong impression on Froken Sars that after singing a verse of an "ugly song," she passes out.

This song combines the motifs of physical confinement and the heroine's narrowed inner world. She makes a comparison: "There's a devil in the corner and a serpent in my heart!" [Hansen, 2012]. This suggests that her physical and her inner confinement have a similar character, and that the terrible occurrences the children have a sneaking suspicion about are the results of her own choices rather than a fatal accident. Having committed the murder in order to free herself from the oppres-

sion of the cruel homeowner, Froken Sars was not only imprisoned in the cellar, but she also endured constant worry that the real cause for her captivity would be revealed. The heroine dies after being unable to overcome skipper Johnsen's intimation that he knows her secret.

The motif of atonement for the crime both in this novella and in *Den gale Christian* is closely related to the main character's insanity. Froken Sars is driven to the point of insanity not only by physical tyranny but also by her moral suffering and her inability to atone for the crime, which forces her to again go through the horrible experience that drove her there. She deliberately prolongs her imprisonment by scarcely ever leaving her house. She finds peace she longs for only in death.

This novella's investigation serves only as a literary exercise and an illustration of how actual life may inspire art (thus the title).

Den myrdede brudgom also features a retrospective composition. The narrator recalls a story from his childhood, when the newspapers reported on the brazen murder of Hans Kopperud, who was stabbed to death by his own wife on the first night of their marriage.

It is known that Malene murdered her husband and fled, therefore the focus is not on the criminal investigation, but on determining what motivated the girl to do it. What happens is that Hans makes a deal with Malene's parents and deceives her into abandoning her sweetheart. When the girl discovers the truth, she stabs the rogue and reunites with her lover. They flee to another country and live there in love and peace.

The narrator sympathizes with Malene and justifies her act: that was *visse den Exemplet paa en Selvhevn, som den evige Dommer billiger vissere end manges Dødsdom, underskrevet af Fyrstehaand* 'self-revenge, which the Eternal Judge approves of more willingly than many a death sentence signed by the hand of a prince' [Hansen, 1969, s. 151].

However, Hansen feels that a crime is still a sin inevitably followed by retribution. Malene's punishment is an ongoing struggle with her conscience. The novella concludes with the narrator's reflections on moral: *Blodpletten, ak, du stakkels Malene! Blodpletten vaskes aldrig af; de ere ikke lykkelige* 'The bloodstain, alas, you poor Malene! The bloodstain never washes off. They are unhappy' [Hansen, 1969, s. 161].

A turning point in Hansen's worldview occurs in the 1830s as a result of the literary developments that take place in Scandinavia at the time [Tysdahl, 1988; Aarseth, 1976]. Folklore, mysticism, and Norway's

fabled past are becoming less popular, while subjects like daily living and social issues are becoming more widespread. The protagonist, who formerly had hypertrophied passions, is replaced by an average person as the author attempts to critically appreciate modernity. The surroundings and circumstances have a significant role in shaping the new hero; investigation comes to the fore. The narrative becomes more psychologizing, which aids the author in revealing the individual traits of his characters, whose conduct is explained not only by moral standards, but also their social rank. This creates a contrasting picture of Norwegian society and makes Hansen's writings more entertaining.

The plot of the epistolary novel *Jutulskoppen* (The Troll Mountain, 1836), which the author calls a crime story, establishes a particular system of characters, including the criminal, victim, false criminal (the person to whom the evidence points), investigator, and assistant.

Interestingly, the investigator in this novel is a woman, Petra Lanter, who works as a governess in the home of the merchant Reesen. Her inquisitive mind aids in the discovery of the body of a child who died six years ago, upsetting the peaceful lives of a faraway mountain community.

The primary suspect in the case is Kristine Skrubstad, the boy's aunt. All of the evidence leads to her, but Petra is skeptical and continues her inquiry. She eventually discovers that the culprit is Kristine's husband's elder brother, Halvard Skrubstad, who murdered his brother Jens Skrubstad and his own son.

Envy and greed drive him to murder his younger brother in order to take over his land, and then his brother's son Ivar. Then a series of unfortunate events leads Halvard to murder his own kid.

As in all the above cases, the murder in this novel dates back to a distant past (eleven years since the murder of Jens Skrubstad, and six years since the murder of Hans Skrubstad). The last letter by Froken Lanter explains the details that remained unclear.

The religious and ethical aspects of the crime recede into the background, but Hansen does not reject them altogether. Halvard Skrubstad is repeatedly compared to Cain (directly and indirectly) and Judas.

The scene of Kristine Skrubstad's trial discusses the circumstances of her husband's and nephew's deaths, presents the testimony of witnesses, and the lawyer and the prosecutor make repeated references to the defendant's moral character.

This work also heavily emphasizes the themes of sin and atonement that are typical of the author overall. Guilt over killing his son torments Halvard and undermines his health; an accusation made in the courtroom results in the character's death from a seizure. Hansen notes that although the murderer escapes the judgment of man, the judgment of God is inevitable.

Therefore, *Jutulskoppen* can be considered Hansen's first detective novel. The mystical aspect is still quite present; it shows itself in natural imagery, a string of unexpected reincarnations, ominous premonitions, and "non-random" accidents.

In *Mordet på Maskinbygger Roolfsen*, the writer completely rejects Gothic traditions and instead uses the motif of domestic homicide as the foundation for illustrating current societal issues. As soon as it was published, the novel became a literary and historical sensation and, according to W. Dahl, it is "one of the front-runners vying to be recognized as the first detective fiction ever written!" [Dahl, 1981, s. 42].

The author deceives the reader by effectively demonstrating that the Haitler family had both the motive and the opportunity to get rid of the engine maker. The innkeeper manages the money that his brother left to his minor daughter Karine. He and his wife mistreat the young girl, but when their son, a harsh and violent debaucher, falls in love with her, they plan to profit from the relationship. By marrying his cousin, Kjell would receive her money and the house where his family has resided for a decade, but the girl could not bring herself to marry. The arrival of Roolfsen, a handsome young man, severely devastates their plan, as Karine quickly becomes his fiancée. A year after the engagement, Roolfsen requests that the Haitlers return Karine's inheritance. This sparks a squabble between Roolfsen and Karine's guardians, and their son openly pledges to assassinate the opponent. However, soon after the argument, the engine maker is graciously asked to a family dinner, following which he disappears. Numerous witnesses claim to have seen Kjell follow his guest out of the house with a rifle in his hands.

The investigation gets complicated when Kjell confesses to the murder, but Judge Barth does not believe he is guilty, as there is reason to suspect the hauptmann of manipulating evidence and murder. He succeeded in having a commission of inquiry set up to investigate the crime. The scene of the trial of the city's head is a "false climax" of the story: the hauptmann offers evidence confirming his innocence. It is a letter from Roolfsen, in

which he says that he broke up with his fiancée and moved to Germany where he had been offered a good position. The letter is in poor condition, indicating that it was misplaced and delivered late. To the great regret of the commission, the first page of the letter is so badly spoiled that it has been rendered unreadable. The second letter, written in Swedish and attached to the first, states that the letter with the hauptmann's address was discovered during the property registration process in the dead innkeeper's residence and Halin's post office. According to the letter, its author, Roolfsen, stayed at the late innkeeper's last spring on his way to Germany. He reportedly left a letter for the owner the night before he departed, and the owner agreed to register and send it. However, being quite a careless elderly man, he forgot about the letter, which was found after his death in poor condition and dispatched right away to the designated address. The letter was thus delayed by ten months.

Hauptmann is unanimously found not guilty. Nevertheless, with the help of chemicals, Barth and his friend, pharmacist Lepin, manage to restore the spoiled part of the letter, and it is revealed that the hauptmann, Karine's secret lover, wanted to kill Roolfsen, so he beat him up and, considering him dead, threw him down a well. While the hauptmann was giving orders to fill the well, the engine maker, who survived the fall, escaped and hurriedly fled the city out of fear for his life.

This novel lacks the satisfying conclusion typical of detective fiction, though. Judge Barth does not reveal the offender's identity after discovering the truth. Instead, he strikes a deal with him. Contrary to the reader's expectations, the judge is not inspired by the surprise triumph; on the contrary, he is discouraged: "Steel bands appeared to be squeezing his chest" [Hansen, 1996, s. 72]. Barth and the hauptmann are rivals. The author demonstrates this as early as the first scene of the story, while presenting the characters and pitting them against one other. The noble detective is opposed to the wicked murderer, who will inevitably be exposed. This adds to the storyline, making it tenser and more thrilling. However, at a certain point, this confrontation ceases to be significant: although they battle for power in the city and have different views on how to use it, both heroes inhabit the same social niche. They both belong to the upper class and differ only in moral values. Judge Barth is aware that the hauptmann's crime will not be punished. Lepin, a pharmacist and a friend of Barth's, states unequivocally that the law is always loyal to a person of great social standing.

Barth, having solved the crime, does not accuse the offender, but withholds the truth from the commission. This not only enables him to maintain his position and safeguard himself from the hauptmann's retaliation, but also transforms him into a "gray eminence" by giving him the chance to manipulate the mayor and keep him under control using his terrible secret: the adviser attempted to kill Roolfsen, and only a stroke of luck kept the latter alive.

Thus, the judge actually pursues his own selfish goals, and his moral character is far from flawless. Barth's words addressed to the hauptmann: *måtte delta i neste servering* 'I had to take part', demonstrate an extreme rejection of the situation, but he still must correspond to his social group. The author emphasizes that the hero is not happy with the victory — in fact, he becomes an accomplice to the crime that breaks Kjell's life, Roolfsen barely survives, and Karine dies in agony. Judge Barth is fully aware that changing the existing way of life is impossible, but he can nevertheless benefit from this situation. The novel's finale is pessimistic: the criminal does not receive the punishment he deserves, and the seemingly noble hero exhibits character weakness and an unwillingness to defend his beliefs. The writer's tragical worldview becomes central to his perception of reality.

Thus, we have identified four primary criminal motives in Hansen's writings:

- 1) Greed and the desire to improve one's social standing (*Keadan, eller Klosterruinen, Jutulskoppen*).
- 2) Unreturned passion (*Den gale Christian*).
- 3) Need to conceal something, usually a moral decline (*Novellen, Mordet på Maskinbygger Roolfsen*).
- 4) Revenge for oneself (*Den myrdede brudgom*).

But in Hansen's writing, love and passion are frequently inextricably linked to social aspirations. One of the major themes of his works is the formation of moral character. The characters created by Hansen have a deep-seated mental dualism. He believes that the formation of the spiritual and moral nature is filled with blunders, humiliation, and moral fall. Hansen repeatedly demonstrates how crucial it is to consider the implications of your choices and behave responsibly in order to avoid reckoning in the future. The "mistake of youth" is frequently the focal point of the story and has a lasting impact on the protagonist as well as

the fate of their loved ones. The author avoids monotonous portrayal of criminals: Christian and Froken Sars, who are suffering the consequences of their crimes, but are too afraid to confess, go insane; Halvard Skrubstad becomes seriously ill because of remorse, and when he is publicly accused of murder, he cannot bear it and dies; Malene seems fine at first, yet she struggles to feel at ease.

The literary developments occurring in Scandinavia at the time have a considerable impact on Hansen's creative process. His representations of reality shift as a consequence, his interest in folklore and mysticism is replaced by one in current society's everyday lives, as well as severe social, moral, and ethical problems. The distinct religious pathos of his early works is replaced by a critical view of modernity, inevitably leading to the emergence of a new type of hero whose nature is determined by the surroundings and environment, while the narrative becomes more psychologizing. The themes of mistrust between close people, the corruption of the ruling class, the oppressed position of the people, and the inability to escape from social oppression take on a new significance. Hansen's fascination with the ordinary, private lives of common people and his explorations of the new sphere drive him to seek new artistic research tools. The motif of crime investigation aids the writer in creating a vivid and accurate picture of contemporary Norwegian society while also making his narratives more entertaining and highlighting inconsistencies, since crime serves as a lens that allows to clearly see the divided society.

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**У ИСТОКОВ НОРВЕЖСКОГО ДЕТЕКТИВА:
МОТИВ УБИЙСТВА В ПРОЗЕ М. К. ХАНСЕНА**

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В данной статье рассматривается функция мотива убийства в прозе М. К. Хансена. Показано, что он тесно связан с поисками писателем новых средств изображения действительности, с его желанием изобразить частную жизнь простых норвежцев и показать путь нравственного развития или, напротив, деградации героев. Мотив убийства выступает важным сюжетобразующим средством и нередко связан с мотивом безумия как расплаты за совершенное преступление. Прослеживается, как на смену ярко выраженному религиозному пафосу ранней прозы («Безумный Кристиан», «Кеадан, или Монастырские руины», «Новелла», «Убитый жених») приходит критическое осмысление современности, что неизбежно приводит к появлению нового типа героя, характер которого определен средой и окружением, усиливается психологизм повествования, а тема нравственного возрождения человека сменяется интересом к повседневности («Гора троллей» и «Убийство механика Рольфсена»). Для творчества Хансена этого периода характерно трагическое мировосприятие. Писатель больше не верит в возможность нравственного возрождения человека. Любовь, по его мнению, подменяется выгодой и тщеславными интересами, а подлинное чувство обречено на гибель. Новые звучания приобретают темы недоверия между близкими людьми, коррумпированности правящих классов, угнетенного положения народа и невозможности вырваться из-под социального гнета. Выявляется, что интерес к повседневности и частной жизни простого человека связаны у Хансена с поиском инструментов ее художественного исследования, а мотив убийства и расследования преступления помогает писателю создать колоритное и достоверное полотно современного норвежского общества и добавить повествованию занимательности.

Ключевые слова: М. К. Хансен, детектив, мотив убийства, новелла, роман.

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