Conventions of Detective Fiction in Jo Nesbo's Crime Novels

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Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti

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Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

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Bachelor's Thesis

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the most important conventions of detective fiction, which originates from Edgar Allan Poe and his first detective story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". Ever since then, the genre has been very popular in American and British literature. However, the detective genre has only recently become very popular in Scandinavian literature, which "has become a familiar brand in North America and Europe in 1990s" (Arvas and Nestingen 1). The Swedish detective and crime novels were highly popularized by late Stieg Larsson and Henning Mankell, who very quickly drew attention to their novels. Their "inheritor" Norwegian Jo Nesbø shares a similar style, topics and popularity. The three of them are highly responsible for huge success and interest in Scandinavian detective fiction and have "made the Scandinavian crime novel a brand name for antiheroic police inspectors, social criticism, and compelling examples of the genre" (Nestingen 14). This paper deals with conventions of detective fiction in general, and explains some of the novelties and originalities presented by Scandinavian writers of the same genre. It concentrates on Nesbø's detective novels describing detective Harry Hole and his adventures. The main aim of this paper is to analyze and elaborate Nesbø's novels and to show which standard conventions of detective fiction are present in his work, and which innovations does he have to offer.

Key words: Jo Nesbø, crime fiction conventions, detectives

Introduction

The popularity of detective and crime fiction seems to increase over time. People have always been attracted to mysteries, and the number of interested readers is growing every day. In a way, this might be uncommon since everyone agrees that "crime is quite often ugly, crime is deviant, crime is heinous, crime is transgressive, crime is unpleasant, [and] crime is undesirable" (Jacobsen 1). However, it appears that "topics of crime, deviance, norm-breaking behavior, punishment, evil, murder, violence, victimhood, law and order" (Jacobsen 1) attract readers like a magnet. When reading detective and crime fiction, the readers have to be extremely focused and observe much more than in any other literary genre. Each event has to be connected to others, and everything that happens has a potential effect on all that comes later. Furthermore, detective fiction is usually written in a very direct, simple language and focuses on solving the mystery, so there are not many other problems that might take the readers' attention away and hinder them. The main point of these kinds of stories is finding out the truth, therefore they might appear less demanding, and easier to consume. In this way, it is paradoxical how reading about such dim subjects can actually be quite relaxing to readers. The aim of the first chapter of this paper is to list the most important conventions of detective fiction, its historical development, and the most important writers of the genre. Secondly, the paper explicates conventions of Scandinavian crime novels and writers, who brought some changes into the genre. Final chapters analyze the conventions of several Jo Nesbø's detective novels (*The Snowman, Nemesis, The Devil's Star, The Redbreast*, *The Thirst*) with the aim to highlight in what way Nesbø deviates from the prescribed set of rules and how this enriches the genre.

1. Conventions of Detective Fiction

The detective novel originates from Edgar Allan Poe, who wrote the first detective tales and called them the tales of ratiocination. Authors of the same genre always go back to Poe and follow very similar patterns. The detective story always revolves around an unsolved crime or mystery. The main protagonist is usually a detective, but sometimes it may be just a regular person (an amateur) who has a great sense for noticing things and gift to solve mysteries. Poe created the detective C. Auguste Dupin, an intellectual person with a very creative imagination and interesting methods, who became an inspiration for many other fictional detective protagonists. It is important that every detective story "contains an interpretant, someone engaged in decoding signs" (Malmgren 28). In order to be successful, the detective has to be the one "who listens, who moves through his morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all of these things together and make sense of them" (Malmgren 2). Detectives are mostly described as very diligent, original, intellectual, and hard working, which portrays them as one-dimensional characters. They do not deal with any personal issues and emotions, but rather have only one goal – to solve the mystery.

The authors of detective stories must be very careful and meticulous about the plot of detective story and its details. The crime must seem perfect, strange, and confusing to both protagonists and to readers. Even though some detective stories show the case of robbery, or some minor crime problem, such novels are usually not too intriguing to readers. The genre requires a dead body, because it arouses much more fear and excitement. The murder is "at once source and cause and end of the narrative that follows" (Malmgren 19). The murdered person is usually an innocent, unexpected one, because the author wants to create confusion in readers' minds. The mystery mostly happens in a very isolated place, such as a train, or an island, etc., with a quite limited number of suspects. This arouses readers' interest because of the fearful feeling that the murderer is one of the main protagonists, but also that the others do not have enough chance to run away since they are isolated and seemingly helpless. Furthermore, the setting "is never obtrusive; it is not mere decoration or filler, which is allowed to distract from the central action of mystification-detection" (Bargainnier 21). Another common and traditional element in almost every detective story is the wrongly accused suspect, someone who seems to be the guilty one, but in fact did not do anything wrong. It is up to the detective and readers to realize which of the other "suspects has motive, means and opportunity" (Dove 21) for murder, because "the most obvious, and the central

question in mystery fiction is *who*?" (Malmgren 19). The only way to discover the truth is to go through investigation, which is the main preoccupation of the detective and the reader because even the smallest clue and detail must be noticed and given into consideration to solve the mystery. In short, to satisfy the readers, every detective story must contain certain elements: "the hero must be a detective; the book must be mainly about detection, the mystery must be a difficult one, and it must be solved" (Dove 98). The ending has to offer an innovative and startling turnover, because a whole story may lose its charm and quality if the ending does not perfectly fit to everything previously written.

The reader always expects the mystery to be solved by the end of the novel and explained in as many details as possible. The ending and solving of a mystery is extremely important in detective fiction and if it does not fulfill readers' expectations, they can perceive the novel as lamentable. The readers have a desire for ending because the approach to it makes the story even more "urgent and exciting" (Rzepka 25), as they are running out of time to solve the mystery and as the ending will define their "powers of imaginative invention" (Rzepka 25). The readers of popular detective fiction often fail in finding a murderer, even though writers usually provide them with straightforward clues that can lead to the solution of each case if they use logic, intuition, and ingenuity. However, it seems that it does not bother the readers because they enjoy "the opportunity to exercise their analeptic imaginations by inventing plot arrays" (Rzepka 30). The main goal and "one of the prime interests in detective fiction is the solution of the mystery and why it happened" (Hilfer 2). Furthermore, "granting the reader access to information essential to solving the mystery, is thought by many readers and critics, at least nowadays, to be crucial to stories of detection" (Rzepka 11). The detective stories that have many "puzzle elements" and engage reader's ability for detection "have a special relationship to the act of reading" (Rzepka 12). Even though the author usually knows more than readers do, she or he should try to provide all the necessary evidence and information for them before the solution for the mystery is announced. When being "faced with the evidence he or she has thus far accumulated" (Rzepka 26), the reader can connect characters to events and try to reach the final solution.

They are many famous names in history of detective and crime fiction, but Agatha Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle left the greatest impact on this literary genre. Christie gave to literary world her most famous detective Hercule Poirot and an amateur Miss Marple, while Doyle created the character of Sherlock Holmes. Holmes is the prototypical example of the modern detective, based on Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, and is also the most enduring detective

in literature. According to Moore, Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series serve as an "interpretative model for both development and divergence in the hard-boiled detective tradition" (8). On the other hand, Christie's Poirot is an ingenious, funny little man who does not resemble a typical detective in appearance. He is quirky and obsessed with things being always neat and in order. However, these "flaws" of his actually help him notice things that others do not see. Furthermore, Christie brought an interesting innovation to the genre – a female amateur detective. Despite the fact that Miss Marple is not a professional detective, she still manages to solve crimes as equally successful as her male colleagues. Even though Arthur Conan Doyle's detective stories are older than Christie's, and his detective Sherlock Holmes became an international by-word for the detection, Christie is the one who wears the crown and is considered the queen of the detective genre. However, it should not be forgotten that both of them had a base on which they built their intriguing plots since "it all began with Poe" (Panek 32). Poe created the main conventions of the genre and they have mostly remained unaltered, being the crucial part to develop a reputable detective story. The reason for that is because "the mystery novel, like the theatrical play or the sonnet, is contained within a prescribed pattern, [and] the writer may wander a bit but not far, and stay within the form" (Bargainnier 5).

2. Scandinavian Detective Fiction

Even though detective fiction originates in the 19th century when Edgar Allan Poe started writing detective stories, the wave of Scandinavian detective fiction is rather contemporary and new. It has been "jostling for pole position with (often resentful) British and American practitioners in the field" (Forshaw 1), ever since it "initiated in the 1990s and intensified in the first decades of the twenty-first century" (Stougaard-Nielsen 15). Scandinavian crime fiction is also known by the nickname "Nordic Noir" and its phenomenon "demonstrates that crime fiction is a particularly mobile and adaptable genre, able to spread and take root throughout the world of literature" (Stougaard-Nielsen 15). Nowadays, Scandinavia is a leading region when it comes to writing of detective and crime fiction. The most acclaimed writers of the genre are Swedes Stieg Larsson, Henning Mankell, and Norwegian Jo Nesbø, who are all "comparatively well known, having sold millions of books, having had their works translated into many languages and having also made an impact through influential reviews of their work and receipt of literary prizes" (Arvas and Nestingen 1). All of these writers share a similar way of writing and their novels contain many recognizable elements, such as "soggy weather, social restraint, overworked detectives, moments of interpersonal explosion, social and political criticism" (Arvas and Nestingen 14).

Scandinavian crime fiction offers readers much more than simply fast-moving plots and quick pace to follow. Its gloomy, depressed, dark places create the perfect atmosphere for murders and mystery. According to Forshaw, it appears that there is "something exotic about the inhospitable climate and the darkness in Scandinavia" (91). In addition, Scandinavian crime fiction has become very popular and recognizable for its "melancholy detectives who are silent, depressed, diligent, [and] thirsty" (Arvas and Nestingen 9). It seems that most of the Scandinavian writers of crime fiction rely on male anti-hero tradition, as their detectives are usually very inattentive and distant characters. The "disheveled and careworn" (Forshaw 102) detectives with their own problems often have trouble to concentrate on work due to their personal issues and sometimes spend more time than expected on their investigations. They are not represented as superheroes, but rather portray real-world people and readers actually believe in them as characters. It seems that the readers nowadays prefer them to the "American detective formula [where] the hero is typically a 'tough guy'" (Rzepka 12).

Next, the language of Scandinavian writers of crime fiction is generally simple, precise and straightforward, since the authors usually avoid the usage of metaphors, symbols, allegories, and any other words that may be considered unnecessary. This is best exemplified in the following quote:

> As he unlocked his apartment he noticed that something was different. Something about the sound. Or perhaps it was a smell. He pulled up sharp at the threshold to the kitchen. The whole of one wall was gone . . . On the floor was the mold man's toolbox and on the countertop a note saying he would be back the following day. (*The Snowman,* Nesbø 21)

Similarly, the dialogues and sentences are very short, clear and simple, and, in a way, shed light on a detective's personality:

> "Mm. I hope expectations were fulfilled."
>
> "Nothing fulfills expectations."
>
> "No," Harry said, wondering what they were talking about.
>
> "What's happening this evening?" Rakel asked. (*The Snowman,* Nesbø 17)

Furthermore, the writers of traditional detective fiction do not describe dead body as bloody, mutilated or mangled, but rather as simply dead and cold. The body is merely a prop, so that the readers do not develop any emotional connection with the murdered person. The intellect in detective stories is more important than the emotions, as they can easily blur detective's and readers' mind. Scandinavian writers break this rule and usually describe very brutal murders, often connected with rape, and other wicked and cruel misdeeds. This seems logical, since these topics are nowadays nothing new; readers are exposed to them on a daily basis in newspapers, on Internet etc. It can be concluded that the cold-blooded and unpleasant murders, dark sceneries and death in a cold climate attract and appeal to every fan of contemporary crime and detective fiction.

2.1.The New King of Scandinavian Crime Fiction: Jo Nesbø

The popularity of Norwegian Jo Nesbø has enormously increased in the last decade and many believe that he is the next Henrik Ibsen or Edvard Munch. His enormous success is what lead to his "snatching of Stieg Larsson's crown" (Forshaw 81). Since they are both Scandinavian crime writers, their works contain many similar elements, which were previously explained.

However, it seems that the main reason why Nesbø enjoys more success and popularity is because of his most famous detective Harry Hole, whose private life and original character provide each Nesbø's novel with the rush of emotions. Nesbø's novels "produce subtle shades of deeply hidden horror" (Brunsdale 244), but "are also profoundly moving" (Forshaw 91). Emotions, love, and romance almost do not exist in traditional detective stories, so this original addition successfully attracts the readers, who seem to be fond of it. Nesbø' series of Harry Hole novels began in 1997 with publishing of a first book named *The Bat*. Ever since then, the readers have been following Hole's "alternatingly brilliant and shambolic career through a series of books" (Forshaw 86). The novels have been translated into more than fifty languages and each sold in more than thirty million copies. Nesbø has written twelve Harry Hole novels, and their quality is always on the highest level, based on the opinion of critics and readers from the entire world. However, it seems that the seventh book *The Snowman* "established [him] as one of the most trenchant and idiosyncratic writers of modern crime fiction" (Forshaw 83). According to Forshaw, it shows "a noticeable finessing of aspects of strategies: a more ambitious reach and a more obvious relationship with the commercial blockbuster thriller" (90).

Nesbø's popularity and "fan base continue to grow as readers delve into his world of tightly plotted thriller set (mostly) in wintry Oslo, and what they discover along the way is the essential humanity of the protagonist Harry" (Forshaw 91). Nesbø takes his readers on mysterious journeys, full of complex plotting and challenging investigations that are filled with growing tension and suspense. The following chapters deal with the analysis of several crime fiction conventions (detective, the murder, the murderer, social criticism, symbolism, place, ending) in order to investigate which novelties Nesbø introduces into the genre.

3. Conventions of Detective Fiction in Nesbø's Crime Novels

Detective fiction has certain rules that need to be followed, and it was already established that authors should not vary too much because readers are used to the certain formulas and have certain expectations when reading detective novels. Nesbø uses some of the familiar troops and folds them into his crime novels, but he is also "taking on clichés, ruthlessly tearing [them] apart, and reinventing them" (Forshaw 86). He offers many novelties in description of his detective, involves more violence and horror in murder, and deeply delves into psychology and emotions of a killer. Furthermore, he provides a wider commentary on a social situation, represents evil as a part of everyday life, and describes it using many symbols, dark details, and direct, uncensored language.

3.1. The Detective: Harry Hole

It is interesting that the protagonist of a crime story usually does not go through any emotional or psychological change, because the emphasis is in the ration, rather than emotion. The readers are much more interested in detective's way of trying to solve the case, rather than seeing the detective solving his personal issues. This is one of the main reasons why crime fiction is often considered to be of poorer quality than some other literary genres.

However, Nesbø "refuses to neglect the importance of characterization" (Forshaw 90) and breaks this rule. His most famous detective is tall, athletic, and lean middle-aged Harry Hole. Nesbø describes Hole as "a big man- a man who took up room physically and also mentally, a typical Norwegian male, a hard drinker, a hard worker, a loner" (Brunsdale 331). Unlike in traditional crime novels, the readers follow Harry Hole dealing with his personal issues, and not just his detective work. He is a brilliant detective with unorthodox methods, but he does not succeed in making his personal life successful. Hole is a heavy drinker and smoker, incapable to leave alcohol, and often gets into conflicts with his colleagues. This problem of his is mostly described in *Nemesis:*

> Nowadays, alcoholism is not in itself grounds for dismissing a civil servant, but to be drunk during working hours is. The last time Harry had a relapse, there were people higher up in the building who had advocated for having him removed from the force. (18)

Harry has a lot of trouble in maintaining long-lasting love relationships with women. He is tormented with complicated love relationship he has with his girlfriend Rakel. It is not very common for authors of detective genre to talk about personal issues of a detective, especially if there is romance involved. However, *The Snowman* and *The Thirst* focus on Harry's gentle side, and his emotions are exposed more than in other novels. Harry shows deep emotions for Rakel, who eventually becomes his wife. Her son Oleg thinks of Harry as his real dad and Harry shows much affection towards him. He even stays away from the alcohol, and tries to be a better person for them. This all adds a very warm and touching element to the story, and allows the readers to explore Harry's psychology and emotional side in *The Snowman*:

> The boy with the closed, wary nature whom Harry had reached, the boy with whom he had gradually developed that in many ways were stronger than those Oleg had with his own father. And when Rakel had, in the end, been unable to tolerate any more and had left, he didn't know whose loss had been greater. (29)

According to Stougaard-Nielsen, it appears that the readers "sympathize with the confused 'everyman' police inspector who, in several ways, is unable to integrate his personal and collective pasts into the present" (136). His personal problems make him a typical anti-hero character who is a most believable protagonist because he has both virtues and flaws, and not just silly quirks like those that Poirot is obsessed by (his moustache, impeccable clothes and manner).

However, Harry also has characteristics of a typical detective of traditional detective fiction. He never fails in solving the case and does not give up until he finds every piece of the puzzle. His colleagues believe him to be an extremely competent detective with high moral standards that always lead him in the right direction to crack the case that others cannot:

> The murder statistics for Norway were very clear: in eighty percent of cases the murderer knew the victim, and in over ninety percent if the victim was a woman killed in her own home. Even so, Katrine didn't expect to find him in that statistic. Because Harry was right. This wasn't that sort of murder. (*The Thirst*, Nesbø 115)

As Harry deals with evil misdeeds in his everyday life, and his own personal problems, his most unfulfilled ambition is to finally grasp and understand what evil is, and what love is. Despite the emotional moments in the novels, they remain eerie thrillers, which shock and attract the readers. Description of Harry's personal issues fits perfectly into the novels, and does not take the attention away from the murder, which stays the most important matter.

3.2. The Murder

Traditional detective fiction often censors murders, turning them into taboo, as something deviant and out of ordinary. Hence, the dead body is never bloody, mutilated or described in much detail. The detective is "chasing crooks, tackling puzzles, and solving riddles" (Rzepka 191) as if the solving of a mystery is some kind of a sport or a hobby, and as the murder is actually not a horrible deed. On the other hand, Nesbø's novels describe quite brutal murders. The best illustration of that is *The Snowman,* which in detail describes the most wicked killings:

> The body lying in the snow had been cut into so many pieces that it was only thanks to a naked breast that they had been able to determine the gender. The rest reminded Rafto of a traffic accident in Eidsvagneset the year before, when a truck coming around a bent too fast had lost its load of aluminum sheeting and had literary sliced up an oncoming car. (51)

Nesbø does not like to procrastinate, so he describes the murder in the first pages of his novels because "without the murder there would be no story" (Malmgren 04). There is always a lengthy investigation which follows the tragedy or more of them, and a huge amount of details which must be fit into the story. The novels are filled with suspense and incertitude about what will happen next, so in terms of this, Nesbø stays faithful to the most important convention of traditional crime fiction:

> Harry could feel the adrenaline rush, the trembling that always came when he got first scent of the brute. And after the rush came to Great Obsession. Which was everything at once: love and intoxication, blindness and clear-sightedness, meaning and madness. . . . it helped him, drove him, fuelled the job he was appointed to perform. (*The Snowman,* Nesbø 135)

Nesbø's novels are multi-layered, and most of them are very aggressive and violent. He is obviously familiar with the fact that public nowadays very well receives novels about brutal murders, so he uses this knowledge in all of his detective novels, and in this way breaks one of the most important rules of traditional detective fiction.

3.3. The Murderer

Traditional detective fiction still serves as an inspiration when it comes to certain elements about the murderer. One typical element that always appears in detective genre is the false culprit – the character who appears to be guilty because all pieces of evidence point to him, but is in fact innocent and serves to confuse the readers and move the suspicion from the real murderer. Nesbø never leaves out this element, since it gives his novels a certain dose of suspense. The murderer has to be "the least likely suspect" (Malmgren 20), and should not be discovered until the very end. However, Nesbø also offers some important innovations.

One of the most common topics present in Nesbø's novels is the phenomenon of a serial killer. It has been very popular in American crime fiction, but pattern killings in Norway are much scarcer, leaving Nesbø's fictional detectives in shock and even being afraid of uttering the words aloud. When they become aware of the danger, they become scared of the "scenario [in which they] are about to witness a bloodbath" (Nesbø 160). However, Nesbø talks about a specific type of serial killer, and in this way introduces an uncommon topic in traditional detective and crime fiction. Namely, he introduces the theme of femicide, which implies "the killing of women and girls simply because of their gender" (Bandelli 62), and the theme becomes almost inevitable part of his novels. However, it later turns out that the murderer has a deeper reason for killing, and he does not kill just any women. For example, in *The Snowman,* all of the victims have three things in common: they are married, they have children, and they cheat on their husbands. The murderer appears to be the man who caught his mother cheating on his father when he was a boy. That memory from his childhood sticks with him forever, and he chooses to punish every woman in the same situation. He even sends a threatening letter to Harry's ex-girlfriend Rakel saying: "We're going to die, whore" (Nesbø 261). Next, *The Thirst* talks about an unusual case of a serial killer- a "vampire" who enjoys sucking women's blood, while touching and raping their bodies. *The Devil's Star* also introduces the atypical case of serial killer. By trying to hide and conceal the real motive for killing one person, the murderer kills random people in order to distract and confuse

detectives, and it makes the plot very complex. However, fans of the crime fiction might observe that the same type of plot was already introduced in Agatha *Christie's The A.B.C. Murders*. There she includes "the random murder of innocents" (Malmgren 66), and the suspense continues as the murderer produces new victims. This proves that even a crime "magician" like Nesbø could not entirely escape the influence of previous detective works. Nevertheless, Nesbø's serial killings differ from traditional crime fiction in ways already mentioned, but there is another thing that is very rare in this genre. The fact is that not many authors use psychology to explain the reasons and motives which move the killer to commit a crime. Even though Agatha Christie explains certain parts of it, Nesbø actually includes the characters of psychologists who help Harry and give the comprehensive explanation of the human psychology:

> The serial killer goes through a mental process involving six phases with each killing. The first is called the aura phase where the person gradually loses their grip on reality. The totem phases, the fifth phase, is the killing itself, the serial killer's climax, or, to be more precise, the anti-climax, because the killing is never able to fulfil the hopes and expectations of catharsis and purification that the killer associates with the taking of life. That is why the killer goes straight into the sixth phase, the depressed phase. This in turn leads into a new aura phase in which he builds himself up, ready for the next killing. (*The Devil's Star*, Nesbø 158)

Nesbø's murderers are always very original and interesting characters. Most of them have certain psychological issues which originate from their past, fetter them in their present, and disable them from a normal future. There are usually not led by money, status, and jealousy, as they are with their personal problems and failures, or some higher motive (religion, revenge, belief that they can heal and erase the past, etc.). In this way, Nesbø offers a wide range of different personalities, and tries to avoid prototypical murderers described in the traditional detective fiction.

3.4. The Ending

The readers of detective fiction always take "pleasure in the sheer act of solving, or attempting to solve, the puzzle of detection (Rzepka 25). The desire for the end is what holds the readers' attention, so Nesbø does not reveal the murderer until the last pages of the book, and in this case does not differ from traditional detective fiction. However, most of the traditional detective stories end very peacefully. The culprit is usually sent to jail, the detective is satisfied with his work, and everyone's life continues as if nothing had happened, and as the evil does not have any effect on people and their lives. This is not the case with Nesbø, who takes more realistic approach. Harry Hole usually has many issues even when the culprit is revealed, because he either tries to escape the law and police or wants to take revenge on Harry. Harry gets involved into a serious fight for his life when the accused in *The Thirst* attacks him:

> With a quick movement Smith released his seat belt with his left hand, and leaned over Harry, putting his hand in his lap as he reached down to the floor. His hand fumbled over the rubber mat, but could not find his revolver. He leaned further, then turned his head towards Harry as he pushed his arm deeper under the seat. (514)

Furthermore, Nesbø's novels rarely end peacefully, and they announce that the new danger is soon approaching. For example, *The Thirst* ends with an ex-rapist coming out of the prison, saying that he feels an extreme thirst and need to do the things he had done before:

> And then there was something else in the envelope, something that was stuck. He ripped the envelope apart. Looked at the object. Black. And beautiful in its brutal simplicity. He put it in his mouth, clenched his jaws. Felt the taste of salt and bitter iron. Felt the thirst. (535)

Nesbø's endings are equally appealing and dissatisfying at the same time. The readers should certainly enjoy the dangerous and thrilling ending, since it gives them the announcement for the next novel. On the other hand, the readers yearn for the ending and disclosure of the case, and expect it to bring certain peace and calming of the whole situation. Even though the intense ending may bother some of the readers, it seems that this is Nesbø's way to connect fiction with reality – because in reality, evil never sleeps.

3.5.The Criticism of Society

Nesbø offers a very significant novelty to the genre, which was never a part of a traditional detective fiction. Anyone who reads Nesbø's novels carefully, should also realize that he is "throwing a spotlight on the dangerous, conflicted world of contemporary society, and [that] his books address unpalatable truths about aspects of society that are not being tackled in anything but crime fiction" (Forshaw 83). He does not discuss just temporary situation, but also interferes into the past. For example, the novel *The Redbreast* "evokes the eruption of an uncomfortable past in an uncertain and violent present in an extensive parallel narrative of Norwegian's fighting on the German side on the Eastern front" (Stougaard-Nielsen 136) and a contemporary situation in 2000s in Oslo. The readers can learn a lot about "Norwegians fighting on the German side during the Second World War and contemporary neo-Nazi groups" (Stougaard- Nielsen 136):

> Neo-Nazis are planning to kick up a fuss outside mosques in Oslo on 17 May. There is some movable Muslim feast which falls on the seventeenth this year, and a great many foreign parents are refusing to allow their children to take part in the children's Independence Day parade because they want them to go to the mosque. (*The Redbreast,* Nesbø 155)

Furthermore, Nesbø also deals with contemporary illegal issues, and criticizes corruption, censorship, lies, and scams of the government, influential media, and criminals:

> At the same time, though, we're losing the fight against criminality . . . and everything is completely out of control. We're a young, vulnerable nation, Harry, and if we want to make any progress we have to show that law and order means something, that chaos can be used as a pretext for crime. (*The Redbreast,* Nesbø 193)

> Mona had written about this, about the fact that the media no longer demanded professional qualifications from its journalists, with the result that aspiring reporters no longer made the effort to acquire them. The new media environment, with its increasingly banal focus on celebrity, had reduced the role of journalists to that of the town gossip. Mona had used her own newspaper, the biggest in Norway, as an example. (*The Thirst,* Nesbø 162)

> Harry answered that Ellen was in possession of dangerous information. The same evening she was killed she left a message on Harry's answer phone that she knew who Prince was. She knew the name of the ringleader behind the illegal importing of weapons and the person responsible for arming Oslo's criminal community to the teeth with service handguns. (*The Devil's Star,* Nesbø 41)

It is clear that Nesbø is aware of the fact that evil is present in real life, so he even talks about accurate historical facts and includes them into the fictional world of his novels. Traditional crime novels present the crime as something removed from the normal world, and as some kind of a deviant state, whereas Nesbo portrays the world as a corrupted, violent place where the detectives fight on more levels (against alcohol, drugs, violence, but also against their own personal demons). Nesbø's "appeal may also be attributed to the fact that his books appear to communicate salient, caustic facts about modern society, giving them a kind of added value alongside their considerable expertise as pieces of literary entertainment" (Forshaw 83), unlike traditional detective novels. It seems that Nesbø's main reason for choosing such dark, and brutal murders is because he wants to show how the real-world can be disturbing and scary, and actually serves as the base on which novels are built.

3.6. Symbolism

Traditional crime fiction tries to avoid talking about dark taboo topics, and usage of satanic, dark, demonic, sexual, and religious symbols. Money, jealousy, and love are used as the main motives for murders, and they do not go beyond physical. However, Nesbø breaks those rules repeatedly. The sexual motives, rape, and red color are not scarce elements of his novels, and he talks openly about them, not censoring the language:

> She slapped him hard with her other hand. He looked at her in amazement as a red flush spread across his cheek. She smiled, grabbed his thick black hair and pulled his face down to her. "You can go," she hissed. "But first you have to fuck me. Is that understood?" She felt his breath against her face. It was coming in hefty gasps now. Again, she slapped him with her free hand, and his dick was growing in her other. (*The Snowman,* Nesbø 5)

> She was kneeling with her forehead on the ground, like a Muslim at prayer, except that her arms were beneath her body. Her skirt had ridden up over her underwear, revealing a cream-yellow G-string. A narrow, dark red stream of blood ran in the grouting between the woman's had and the drain. It looked almost painted on to achieve maximum effect. (*The Devil's Star,* Nesbø 141)

The Devil's Star is the fifth novel of the series, and offers the widest range of sexual and demonic symbols. It features series of murders that all seem connected to each other. The murdered people are all left without one finger on their hand, which is cut off by a murderer, and a tiny diamond shaped like a five pointed star – pentagram. Pentagrams are today "universally recognized [as] symbol of Satan" (Barner- Barry 61), and the number five has a special significance in the novel:

> Five is a familiar number in a variety of rituals. In black magic. Witchcraft. And in devil worship. Also in Christianity. Five is the number of wounds Christ had on the cross. And there are the five pillars and the five calls to prayer in Islam. In several writings, five is referred to as the human number, as we have five sense and go through five stages of life. (*The Devil's Star,* Nesbø 236)

The usage of a lot of dark, demonic symbols, and uncensored language to describe very brutal and dark murders is certainly one of the most obvious novelties that Nesbø brings into the genre. Nowadays, the readers are familiar and accustomed to such topics, but the traditional detective fiction avoided it completely. The main reason for that is because Nesbø's murderers usually have motives which go beyond materialistic and physical, and some of them even interfere into occult.

3.7. Place

The traditional detective fiction describes murders on an isolated place because they want to represent it as something that is only part of a made-up parallel universe, and part of fiction which does not have anything to do with reality. Unlike the writers of traditional crime fiction, Nesbø does not put his victim, murderer, and other protagonists in an isolated place and proves how he realizes that fiction is not any different from reality. The killings usually take place in Oslo or any other modern and urban place, and horrors happen during both day and night:

> He said that there are under a hundred bank robbers in Oslo. Fifty of them are so stupid, doped and up or mental that we nail them almost every time. Half of them are in prison, so we can ignore them. Forty are skilled craftsmen who manage to slip through so long as someone helps them with the planning. (*Nemesis,* Nesbø 16)

Furthermore, traditional crime fiction is known for the usage of a small number of characters, who are usually very close, being related or in a love relationship. The murder mostly happens inside a small circle of people. Therefore, it is no surprise that the topics and motives for murder are very limited. Nesbø breaks another rule and introduces a large number of characters. He provides a description of each character, connects them and makes them substantial to the plot. For example, he introduces the character of Hole's friend, psychologist Stale Aune, who helps Harry to understand the motive of the murder. Aune and his family get endangered when his daughter Aurora becomes a rape victim in *The Thirst.* In this way, Nesbø shows that he does not restrict to just few characters or few places, because he realizes that people in real life have to be able to work outside their personal boundaries and comfort zone. He does not spare Harry and other characters from effects of the world outside of the police station, and they have to deal with everything that life serves them, whether it is or is not connected to the case.

Conclusion

Even though the detective and crime fiction has been extremely popular in America and Britain, it seems that the Nordic crime fiction was for a long time "dismissed in their home countries as popular entertainment not worthy of the attention that mainstream works received" (Brunsdale 3). However, the number of sold novels, positive comments and reviews all around the world prove that the Scandinavian crime fiction nowadays deserves and enjoys much more attention. Ever since the massive success of late Henning Mankell and Stieg Larsson, the other "Nordic noir crime authors are still writing and developing" (Brunsdale 5). There are many popular and reputable authors, but the Norwegian Jo Nesbø undoubtedly wears the crown. He does not own his success only to his talent to create great mysterious thriller stories, but also to his creation of an incredibly interesting and tortured detective Harry Hole. Even though the detective and crime fiction are not very flexible, and authors have to follow a certain pattern, Nesbø offers many innovative elements. He successfully combines them with traditional ones, remains faithful to history of the genre, but moves it to another, higher level of quality. His deeply psychological, highly individualistic portraits of characters give the readers comprehensive explanation of the murderer and his motive to kill. His detective novels stay extremely thrilling investigations for a clever murderer, but the main innovation is in his commentary on the wider society. He excels because of the wider view that he has to offer, and brilliantly succeeds in entertaining the readers, while at the same time gives them an insight into real-world issues. He criticizes society, government, but also very often interferes in his national history. It seems that Nesbø does so because the citizens of Norway are very interested in their own national pasts and very often seek cause and effect in their historical influences. Furthermore, Nesbø does not have a word "taboo" in his vocabulary because he is ready to talk openly about any dark and horrific topic, and he does it with incredible knowledge, wit, and mental inventiveness. His murderers are regular people with jobs and families, and Nesbø seems to be aware that evil, crime and violence are part of everyday life, happening in most common places and by regular people. His incredible ability to keep the main conventions of detective fiction in his novels, and to combine them with much originality, earns him a rightful title of the new king of crime fiction.

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