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Traces of Gothic Fiction in Scandinavian Crime Fiction: A Study of Jo Nesbø's *Oslo Trilogy*

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Introduction

In "Crime and the Gothic", Catherine Spooner affirms that:

> Gothic narratives are driven by crime, whether the misdeeds of earlier generations, the sins of the secret self, or the aesthetic murders of monstrous hero-villains. Crime can be presented as 'Gothic' through the themes of the returning past, the psychologically unstable protagonist, the celebration of excess, and the emphasis on surfaces (2010, p. 257).

This assertion prompted a critical reflection on whether the reverse may also hold true: Can crime narratives be shaped by Gothic aesthetics, and to what extent can crime fiction incorporate Gothic conventions, motifs, and tropes? To explore this hypothesis, I intend to examine the extent to which Gothic tradition can be identified within Scandinavian crime novels of Jo Nesbø, often acclaimed as "Norway's most popular crime author today" (Brunsdale, 2016, p. 243) and "today's king of Nordic crime writing" (p. 330). My analysis is going to focus on the *Oslo Trilogy – The Redbreast*, *Nemesis*, and *The Devil's Star* – and set forth to uncover, most probably, a marked presence of Gothic features throughout these three crime novels. This is motivated by the concept of a dynamic intertextual "mobility of genre", which, as Jesper Gulddal and Stewart King observe in *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*, emphasizes "the experimental and transgressive aspects of crime fiction and, in particular, locates the dynamism of the genre in a constant tension between the affirmation and negation of genre norms" (2020, p. 17). This understanding of an intertextual symbiosis between Gothic and crime fiction is further reinforced by Spooner's inquiry in *Contemporary Gothic*: "In what other ways can the contemporary Gothic revival be said to relate to those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?" (2006, p. 26). She argues that:

> inevitably, the form has changed over the course of the last 200 years. It has spawned other genres, like science fiction and the detective novel; it has interacted with literary movements, social pressures, and historical conditions to become a more diverse, loosely defined set of narrative conventions and literary tropes. ... Thus, Gothic motifs, narrative structures, or images may arise in a variety of contexts – from pop music to advertisement (p. 26),

including crime fiction. Spooner further posits that "the Gothic's dependence on the concept of revival may provide a means by which we can understand Gothic in its myriad contemporary forms" (p. 11). Encouraged by these insights as well as that one voiced by Maurizio Ascari in *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* that:

> Not only is the ever-changing profile of a genre defined by conventional lines which are produced by an encounter between differences and which are continuously renegotiated, but the 'land' that stretches on both sides of the border is also a fertile site of exchange. It is in these border-territories that processes of creative innovation often take place, thanks to acts of transgression and hybridisation (2007, xii),

in this monograph I intend to find and demonstrate the presence of Gothic conventions, motifs, and tropes in Nesbø's *Oslo Trilogy*, thereby both testifying to the above-mentioned hybridisation of literary modes and providing concrete evidence of the cross-pollination between Scandinavian crime fiction and Gothic fiction, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of genre hybridity.

For the sake of clarity, at the outset of this study I would like to state that I have chosen to employ the term Scandinavian crime fiction rather than the now more widely used designation Nordic noir. This decision arises both from the scope of the study, which concentrates exclusively on literary crime fiction rather than on film and television, and from broader conceptual considerations regarding the categorization and reception of crime narratives produced by Scandinavian writers. As Gunhild Agger observes, "The term [Nordic noir] originated as a British coinage of the Scandinavian Department [at] University College of London upon launching a 'Nordic noir' blog and book club in March 2010" (2016, p. 138). Since then, it has become a widely adopted umbrella term in both scholarly and popular discourse. Yet, as Christinna Hazzard argues, "drawing on a range of influences of Anglo-American noir to Scandinavian social realism, Nordic noir is best understood as a composite genre [that describe] the recent televized crime dramas from across the Nordic region [stretching] beyond the confines of the police procedural" (2020, p. 103). From its very inception, therefore, Nordic noir has been marked by its transmedial and transnational orientation, functioning less as a purely literary designation than as a cross-platform cultural category.

As recent scholarship has abundantly demonstrated, Nordic noir is best understood as a transmedial phenomenon encompassing literature, film, and television, with its international visibility deriving largely from its adaptability across media platforms. Kim Toft Hansen and Anne Marit Waade highlight how:

> Swedish novels by Henning Mankell, Leif G.W. Persson and Stieg Larsson have reached a very large audience and have paved the way for the immense international success of Nordic crime fiction in film and television that we have seen since the mid-1990s. This long-term crossmedia trend has recently been re-branded as Nordic Noir (2017, p. 1).

The label's success has thus depended not only on its descriptive power but also on its flexibility and circulation across multiple industries. As Anne Grydehøj notes, Nordic noir functions above all as "a catchy tagline proven to be very exploitable for marketing purposes" (2020, p. 121), one that focuses less on textual analysis than on "reception and cultural transfer (translation, cultural export, marketing, branding, readership/audience, fandom, mediatisation)" (p. 121). Furthermore, Grydehøj reminds us that "Scandinavian crime fiction [that] tends to be concerned with the literary representation of the dysfunctionality of societies undergoing transformation" (p. 121) is often reframed in international reception primarily through its marketability. Hazzard underscores this point when she claims that "Nordic noir, like *hygge*, is easily transformed and adapted to different markets, with different political interests, and the malleability of the term, both as a concept and category, points to its primary purpose as a marketing brand" (2022, p. 104).

The branding of Nordic noir has undoubtedly contributed to its global visibility but also raises questions concerning the homogenization of distinct national literatures. Scholars such as Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen (2017) and Kerstin Bergman (2014) have pointed out that the conflation of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland under a single heading unavoidably risks obscuring the specific historical and cultural conditions that have shaped the evolution of national crime fiction traditions. Bergman additionally emphasizes that while it is possible to speak of a regional phenomenon, national traditions within Scandinavian crime writing display distinctive preferences and trajectories that are frequently overlooked in international reception. From this perspective, the term Scandinavian crime fiction offers greater precision in my study. It highlights the shared literary frameworks of writers from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark – such as Jo Nesbø, Henning Mankell, and Jussi Adler-Olsen, to name only the most prominent – without artificially extending the scope to Icelandic or Finnish traditions, which lie beyond the parameters of the present study.

The growing dominance of the term Nordic noir has also been facilitated by its centrality within global media industries, particularly in relation to television drama and adaptation. As Linda Badley, Andrew Nestingen, and Jaakko Seppälä explain:

> Adaptation and appropriation have become a self-evidently constitutive feature of Nordic noir inasmuch as the translation and adaptation of the late Stieg Larsson's novel *Män som hatar kvinnor* (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, 2005) and the television series *Forbrydelsen* (*The Killing*, 2007-2012) in the late 2000s launched the 'rebranding' of Scandinavian crime fiction as Nordic noir (2020, p. 2).

They further argue that "adaptation and appropriation have been integral to the invention, sustenance, and rebranding of national and Nordic literary and television traditions as Nordic noir" (p. 4). Indeed, subtitled Scandinavian series such as *The Killing*, *The Bridge*, *Wallander* or *Borgen* have played a decisive role in consolidating the brand internationally, sometimes in parallel with or even overshadowing the literary texts from which the phenomenon partly derives (Hansen, Waade, 2017). While literature has long been central to the development of Scandinavian crime fiction – from the socially conscious police procedurals of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö in the 1960s to the global reach of Mankell and Stieg Larsson – today the term Nordic noir tends to evoke a transmedial constellation that exceeds the literary domain.

Therefore, to adopt the term Nordic noir in a monograph restricted to novels and literary traditions risks conceptual slippage. Although the term, as noted by Björn Nordfjörd, is "more attractive, practical and inclusive… than Scandinavian crime fiction or its stiff short-hands Scandi crime and Scandi noir" (2022, p. 165), it would remain imprecise for a study that seeks to analyze textual strategies, national traditions, and the interplay of narrative form and social critique. For these reasons, Scandinavian crime fiction constitutes the more appropriate designation in the present context. It emphasizes the primacy of the literary medium, situates the works firmly within their Scandinavian origins, and avoids the ambiguities and marketing-driven generalizations associated with Nordic noir. While acknowledging the cultural power and global influence of the Nordic noir brand, the analyses undertaken here aim rather to uncover

the specifically literary dynamics of Scandinavian crime writing, situating Nesbø's crime novels both within their national tradition and within the broader transnational contexts of crime fiction, including their interrelations with Gothic mode.

The first of several affirmations pointing to interconnections between the Gothic tradition and Scandinavian crime fiction comes from Jesper Gulddal, who argues that "crime fiction, far from being static and staid, must be seen as a genre constantly violating its own boundaries" (2019, p. 1). Similarly, Spooner maintains that "there are traces of Gothic in most crime narratives, just as there are crimes in most Gothic novels" (2010, p. 246). Ascari also observes that "crime fiction had actually never lost contact with the everyday brutality of street violence, as shown by the American hardboiled… nor had crime fiction lost contact with its Gothic roots… due to an accelerating process of cross-pollination between crime, the Gothic and horror" (2020, pp. 24, 26), noting elsewhere that "the genre has its roots, at least in English, in the Gothic or sensational fiction" (2007, p. xi). In a similar vein, Lucy Sussex describes Gothic fiction as "a Pangea of genre literatures, containing within it the future continents of horror, science fiction (as with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*), and crime writing" (2010, p. 18). Joel Black further emphasizes that "the artistry of criminal-centred crime fiction tends to lie in Gothic sensationalism and psychological analysis" (2010, p. 81). Duerre Humann asserts that "while it is true that genres are always in flux, storylines about crime and its consequences tend, particularly in the twenty-first century, to combine features of different genres to such an extent that they can best be understood as hybrid narratives" (2020, p. 57), concluding that "crime fiction has always been an elastic literary form… both malleable and responsive to changing times, thus ultimately contributing to the increasing hybridisation of the genre" (p. 58). Stougaard--Nielsen likewise contends that "crime fiction is arguably the most internationalised genre of popular literature; its basic conventions are recognisable across time, space and media, but also rich in local variations and cultural contexts", making it an ideal medium for exploring the "mobility of literary genres, cultural practices, and social values across national borders" (2020, p. 76). Brigid Maher and Susan Bassnett, reflecting on Nesbø's commission by Hogarth Press to reinterpret William Shakespeare's "Macbeth", argue that this appointment "is testament not only to Nesbø's popularity but also to the growing perception of crime fiction as a global genre that travels back and forth across international literary borders" (2022, pp. 46-47). Clive Bloom likewise asserts that "other genres owe much to Gothic concerns and neither detective fiction nor science fiction can be separated in their origins from such an association" (1998, p. 2). Ascari, while pointing to the mutual fascination with brutality and evil within the limits of those two literary modes, stresses that "contemporary crime fiction and films make abundant use of gothic and supernatural elements – sometimes to adorn with an additional frisson and formulas of mass culture, deepening out sense of awe and mystery" (2007, p. 11). And, finally, Michael Cook, while making observations upon the origins of detective fiction, affirms that:

> Looking back, it is easy now to recognize many of the stock constituents of detective fiction which emanated from Gothic literature; the remote and mysterious castle transformed into the country house milieu; secret passages and imprisoned victims which led to the idea of locked room

> mysteries; the murderous villain, the threatened heiress, the consequences of inheritance and crimes of every kind; all these and more eventually found their way into detective stories (2011, p. 3).

Against this theoretical and terminological backdrop, the present monograph sets out to examine the integration of Gothic aesthetics and conventions in Nesbø's *Oslo Trilogy*. This inquiry does not treat the trilogy as an end point, but rather as an entryway into a broader investigation of the convergence between Gothic mode and Scandinavian crime fiction. Building on the growing body of scholarship outlined above, it seeks to demonstrate how contemporary Scandinavian crime fiction increasingly incorporates Gothic elements, thereby affirming the subgenre's[1] capacity for transgression, formal experimentation, and global circulation. In doing so, the study is going to move beyond viewing Gothic mode and Scandinavian crime fiction as distinct or historically marginal traditions, instead reassessing their critical status through an exploration of their shared thematic preoccupations and structural affinities. These affinities, as the analysis will almost certainly show, are vividly articulated in Nesbø's novels, where crime and Gothic fiction intersect to produce a complex literary form that both reflects and reconfigures the cultural anxieties of the contemporary Scandinavian context.

Nesbø's literary world brims with darkness, both literal and psychological. His narratives draw upon the conventional tropes of crime fiction – the detective, the criminal, the mystery – while simultaneously incorporating hallmark features of Gothic: ominous, claustrophobic settings; fractured psyches; and the ever-present shadow of evil and revenge. In his crime novels, the persistent and pernicious influence of the past upon present events looms large, as do themes of psychological fragmentation, dissociative identity, and the uncanny. Crucially, Nesbø's fiction also confronts the exploitation of women and their subjugation within patriarchal structures, allowing moments of resistance and empowerment to emerge amid the violence and despair. These elements enrich the hybrid texture of his writing, blending the symbolic and narrative frameworks of both crime fiction and the Gothic tradition. In doing so, the Norwegian's literary work resonates with the long Gothic lineage, echoing the legacy of Ann Radcliffe – the "Great Enchantress" whose influence, as Liliana Sikorska (2007, p. 304) observes, was profound and widely imitated in her time.

This study therefore invites readers to follow those echoes through the fog-bound streets of Oslo, to trace how Gothic haunts the crime narrative, and to consider what this haunting reveals about fear, power, and the stories that refuse to remain buried. It proceeds from the conviction that Gothic and crime fiction, though often treated as distinct literary genres, exhibit substantial thematic and structural overlap, revealing a deeply interconnected relationship. Claire Lamont offers valuable insight here, noting that:

[1] For clarification, I would like to emphasize that, in terms of terminology, my study will refer to crime fiction as the genre of literature, while its regional manifestation, characterized by specific features – Scandinavian crime literature – will be treated as a subgenre. This distinction will help to avoid confusion and ensure a level of precision that is often lacking in other critical works where the terms genre and subgenre are used interchangeably. Naturally, in the sections of my monograph where I cite other researchers, their original terminology will be retained.

> although the clichés of the Gothic were looking somewhat outworn by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the vague turned out to have considerable powers of renewal. …As the Gothic occurs in later periods, the conventional trappings of castles, ghosts, and bleeding nuns came to be replaced by other settings and occasions for irrational emotions and dark fantasy (1993, pp. 314-315).

Both literary traditions interrogate the darker dimensions of human experience, exploring fear, transgression, suspense, and moral ambiguity. Accordingly, this monograph examines the shared characteristics and narrative strategies that unite Gothic and Scandinavian crime fiction, with particular attention to their mutual concern with the human psyche and collective anxieties. These anxieties – exacerbated by the erosion of traditional structures and the pressures of globalization – are central to both modes. By identifying points of convergence within the *Oslo Trilogy*, the study is going to demonstrate how crime fiction functions not only as a vehicle for social critique but also as a repository of Gothic legacies. This dual function parallels the role of Gothic narratives in the late 18th and 19th centuries, which similarly operated as outlets for cultural anxiety and critique. Before turning to detailed textual analyses, the following section outlines the structure and scope of the chapters that constitute this monograph.

Chapter 1 provides a general outline of Gothic fiction, situating its emergence in the mid-18th century with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and mapping its subsequent development through the literary works of Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Bram Stoker. It discusses Gothic's synthesis of supernatural terror, sublime aesthetics, and psychological intensity, and its negotiation between Enlightenment rationalism and the persistence of irrational forces. The chapter emphasises Gothic's evolution as a flexible narrative mode that reconfigures itself in response to shifting cultural and philosophical concerns. The discussion, in chapter 2, turns to the development of crime fiction as a distinct literary form during the 19th century. This chapter examines the emergence of detective and criminal archetypes, the genre's preoccupation with crime, justice, and moral order, and its diversification into various subgenres such as the detective story, police procedural, and noir. It further analyses how crime fiction inherits structural and thematic elements from the Gothic tradition, notably its concern with secrecy, surveillance, and the instability of moral boundaries. Chapter 3 addresses the rise of Scandinavian crime fiction, contextualizing its emergence in the 1960s with crime novels by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö and tracing its subsequent international prominence through writers including Mankell, Larsson, Nesbø, Arnaldur Indriðason, and Jussi Adler-Olsen. The chapter considers how Scandinavian crime fiction fuses investigative narrative with social and political critique, using crime as a diagnostic tool for exploring systemic injustice, institutional corruption, and ideological tension within the welfare state.

The analysis of Nesbø's *Oslo Trilogy* is incorporated in Chapter 4. This chapter situates the trilogy as a pivotal stage in Nesbø's oeuvre, examining its narrative construction, characterization, and thematic complexity. It considers how the trilogy expands the moral and psychological dimensions of Scandinavian crime fiction while incorporating various motifs derived from Gothic literature. The discussion then turns to the spatial and structural dimensions of the trilogy. The subchapter "Places" analyses the representation of Oslo as a dynamic, Gothic-inflected space that mirrors social, moral,

and psychological disintegration. The city's mutable atmospheres – its darkness, inclement weather, criminality, and silence – are interpreted as externalizations of instability and as narrative mechanisms linking the physical environment with ethical and emotional tension. Through this urban landscape, Nesbø constructs a setting that is simultaneously realistic and symbolic, situating crime within a geography marked by isolation and decay. Attention next shifts to the section "Criminals", which investigates the construction of figures such as Trond Grette, Raskol Baxhet, and Tom Waaler, situating them within Gothic discourse of duality, corruption, crime, and concealed evil. The subchapter examines how Nesbø's portrayal of these antagonists destabilizes conventional distinctions between law and transgression, foregrounding the intersections of personal pathology, institutional decay, and moral ambiguity. In Nesbø, the boundaries separating detective and criminal, order and chaos, become fluid, reflecting the broader Gothic preoccupation with divided selves and hidden corruption. The following part, "Victims", turns to the representation of female characters, tracing continuities between the portrayal of female victimhood in the 18th and 19th-century Gothic fiction and its re-articulation in contemporary Scandinavian crime narratives. This section analyses how Nesbø engages with questions of gender, power, and institutional complicity, framing female vulnerability and resistance within broader ethical and social structures. Female characters function not merely as objects of violence but, too, as sites where questions of justice, autonomy, and moral responsibility are negotiated, thereby linking Gothic conventions of persecution and entrapment to modern forms of systemic oppression.

The theme of monstrosity and its varied incarnations is developed in the following section of the monograph, which examines the representation of evil, madness, hatred, revenge, and crime in both Gothic and Scandinavian crime traditions. Here, Nesbø's characters embody psychological and moral extremity, revealing continuities between Gothic conception of inner corruption and the modern investigation of social and institutional pathology. The analyses consider how acts of violence, obsession, hatred, and revenge are rendered as expressions of both personal trauma and broader moral collapse, situating Nesbø's oeuvre within a continuum of Gothic psychological exploration. This section offers a comparative study of criminality in Gothic and Scandinavian crime fiction, focusing on the interrelation between personal transgression, historical trauma, and systemic dysfunction. Through detailed readings of the *Oslo Trilogy*, it is going to be shown how acts of crime are bound to questions of family, ideology, and collective memory, linking individual guilt with cultural and historical forces. In doing so, this section highlights the ways in which Nesbø reconfigures Gothic notions of inherited sin and moral decay within a contemporary social and political framework. The motif of the past is addressed in the subsequent part of the study, which explores the persistence of historical and personal memory. It considers how concealed histories, repressed traumas, and acts of betrayal re-emerge within the present, functioning as narrative catalysts that unite Gothic and Scandinavian crime fiction through their shared preoccupation with revelation, recurrence, and the haunting of modernity by unresolved history. Nesbø's interweaving of multiple temporalities and his use of buried secrets and historical documents align closely with Gothic narrative strategies, demonstrating the enduring significance of the past as a structuring force within the modern crime narrative.

The final section is going to examine the supernatural as a structural and thematic residue of Gothic within contemporary Scandinavian crime fiction. It analyses deployment of the uncanny and liminal motifs such as fog, ritual, spectral imagery, and mythic symbolism as narrative strategies that unsettle rational interpretation and sustain Gothic tension between the real and the unreal. These motifs, which blur the boundaries between psychological and supernatural causation, extend Gothic's capacity to interrogate the limits of human perception and rationality within the modern detective form. Collectively, sections in this chapter trace the evolution and intersection of two enduring literary modes. By mapping the movement from Gothic terror to modern crime and situating the *Oslo Trilogy* within this continuum, the study sets forth to delineate a framework for examining the perseverance and transformation of Gothic motifs within contemporary Scandinavian crime fiction.

1. General Outline of Gothic Fiction

While analysing Gothic fiction, Liliana Sikorska asserts that this peculiar literary mode:

> takes the fantastic, macabre and supernatural as the background for events, which are usually set in haunted castles, graveyards, ruins and wild, picturesque landscapes. The heyday of such novels was the end of the eighteenth century. The writers of Gothic novels were attracted to the romance formula, which unleashed imagination against the rigid forms of classicist decorum. The novels worked upon the supposition of infernal secret crimes committed in the past haunting future generations. Gothic writers used the conventions of representing their characters similar to those of romances. Thus, a heroine was an image of idealised beauty and innocence, the image of sublimated sexual fantasy, while Gothic villains were archetypal villain-heroes showing unrestrained, frequently sinful, passions (2007, pp. 298-299).

This literary tradition, which emphasizes the supernatural, the sublime, elements that evoke fear, mystery, and criminality, "often defined", as noted by Spooner, "through its concern with revenant history, whether personal (repressed memories) or collective (ghosts, curses, inheritances, returns from the dead)" (2015, p. 351), emerged as a distinct literary mode in the mid-18th century. While accentuating the supernatural aspect of Gothic fiction, Roger Lockhurst highlights that:

> The enduring icons of the Gothic are entities that breach the absolute distinctions between life and death [ghosts, vampires, mummies, zombies, Frankenstein's creature] or between human and beast [werewolves and other animalistic regressions, the creatures spliced together by Dr Moreau], or which threaten the integrity of the individual ego and the exercise of will by merging with another [Jekyll and Hyde, the persecuting double, the Mesmerist who holds victims in his and her power] (2005, p. 12).

The above-mentioned characteristics of this literary mode have been undoubtedly seen as integral to the rise of a popular literary craze for this form. George E. Haggerty argues that:

> to explain the sudden popularity of this bizarrely outrageous yet conventional form, which reached its apex in the 1790s, literary historians have cited aesthetic history, political unrest, literary experimentation, and personal obsession. [However], no single explanation has been able to account for the widespread appeal of Gothic writing (2005, p. 383).

Despite the ambiguity surrounding the precise origins of Gothic fiction, its enduring popularity is indisputable. As L. Andrew Cooper suggests, this phenomenon can be traced to the genre's foundations in "medieval romances, Renaissance tragedies,

and early novelistic experiments rooted in the romance tradition" (2010, p. 5). Furthermore, its integration of the concept of the sublime – extensively explored by Edmund Burke in the 1756 treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* – has significantly contributed to its appeal. The 18th-century notion of the sublime has its origins in the ancient treatise *Peri Hupsous* (*On the Sublime*) by Longinus, written in the first century AD. Longinus defined the poetical sublime as a grandeur or greatness of expression capable of inducing feelings of awe and wonder in the reader. Moreover, he asserted that the effect of the sublime in literature is akin to the exaltation evoked by certain magnificent natural phenomena, such as mighty torrents, raging seas, towering mountains, and erupting volcanoes. In this sense, the sublime serves to inspire reflection on the power of divinity manifested in nature. Burke, building upon Longinus' observations, conceptualized the sublime as:

> whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the idea of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is concerned with terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is the source of the sublime, that is, is productive of the strongest emotion that the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure (2015, pp. 33-34).

For an Anglo-Irish politician and philosopher, terror – conceived as the source of the sublime – is not merely a negative experience; rather, it functions as a pathway through which individuals can access the full spectrum of their emotional capacities. Furthermore, it plays a crucial role in engaging the readers emotionally, stimulating both sympathy and imagination and fostering a deeper identification with fictional characters. This concept of transcendence through fear resonates with central themes in Gothic fiction, in which the rejection of societal norms and the exploration of forbidden or taboo subjects frequently emerge as central motifs. The genre's emphasis on intense emotional experiences and its engagement with the unknown reflect a broader preoccupation with the limits of human experience and the pursuit of the sublime.

Gothic narratives, which draw upon medieval and Romantic elements and "wherein corruption, contagion, degeneration and infectious criminality have been thematically and rhetorically inscribed in the texts" (Crawford, 2015, p. 40) often evoke settings such as ancient ruins, isolated castles, abbeys, and foreboding landscapes. These settings create an emotional and psychological space where dread, fear, and the unknown take centre stage. In doing so, they offer a means for individuals disillusioned with the rationality and order of the Enlightenment to have their "deepest passions and fears ... literalised as other characters, supernatural phenomena, and even inanimate objects" (Hodson-Hirst, 1994, p. 2). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a Gothic novel that does not incorporate at least some of the archetypal motifs of this genre, beginning with depictions of the grandeur, vastness, power, and violence of nature in its most sublime and awe-inspiring form.

Chronologically, Gothic genre began with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, which is widely regarded as the first Gothic novel in which, as the author advocated, he implemented a "blend [of] the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern", the former "all imagination and improbability" and the

latter governed by the "rules of probability" connected with "common life" (2014, p. 9). As Black notes, Walpole's work "established many of the conventions that came to be associated with the genre – supernatural occurrences, a heightened sense of the dramatic, atmospheric castles with secret passages, and young heroines persecuted by villainous men" (2021, p. 148), but also, significantly, the motif of the past event, often of the criminal character, haunting the present. Perceiving the origins of the Gothic fiction from this perspective, Joanna Kokot asserts that:

> The very earliest works belonging to this genre have taken as one of their main motifs a mystery concerning a crime from the past. The interference of supernatural forces, if it occurs at all, is usually provoked by that crime. The violation of human laws causes a disturbance in the natural order of the world. Such is the case, for instance, in *The Castle of Otranto* by Walpole, or in *The Old English Baron* by Clara Reeve, where a murder committed in the past and the usurpation of the rightful heir lead to 'intervention from beyond the grave' (vengeance in Walpole's novel, or simply the conveying of information in Reeve's work). In the later Gothic romance of Ann Radcliffe, this took place without any disruption of the order of reality. Yet the figure of 'the Gothic villain' remained. He bore the mark of past crimes (as, for instance, the character of Schedoni from *The Italian* by Radcliffe – 1797). At the same time, he represented a source of danger to the protagonists, concealing his plots from others (the reader of the work was aware of them earlier than the other characters) (1999, p. 10)[2].

Walpole's innovation lay in his integration of supernatural events, such as a giant helmet falling from the sky and mysterious, unexplained deaths, set within a medieval Italian context that was, for 18th-century English readers, both outlandish and exotic, not least because it was Catholic. Kokot adds that:

> The novelty of the work is further emphasized by the use of a found manuscript. ... Thus, the originality of the work demanded a method that would make credible, if not the action itself, then at least the vision of the universe presented in the text, where every sort of wickedness brings about revenge from the afterlife and the final redress of wrongs by supernatural forces (2013, p. 7)[3].

[2] „Już najwcześniejsze utwory należące do tego gatunku przyjęły jako jeden z ważniejszych motywów zagadkę dotyczącą zbrodni z przeszłości. Ingerencja sił nadprzyrodzonych, jeżeli występuje w ogóle, jest zazwyczaj przez ową zbrodnię sprowokowana: pogwałcenie praw ludzkich powoduje zakłócenie w naturalnym porządku świata. Tak dzieje się choćby w *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) Walpol'a, czy w *The Old English Baron* (1777) Clary Reeve, gdzie morderstwo popełnione w przeszłości i wyzucie z praw legalnego dziedzica pociąga za sobą „interwencję za grobu" (czy to zemstę, jak w powieści Walpol'a, czy po prostu przekazanie informacji jak w utworze Reeve). W późniejszym romansie gotyckim (Ann Radcliffe), odbywało się to bez naruszenia porządku rzeczywistości, pozostała wszakże postać „łotra gotyckiego". Ciążyło na nim piętno przeszłych zbrodni (taką postacią był np. Shedoni z *The Italian* Radcliffe – 1797), a jednocześnie stanowił on źródło zagrożenia dla protagonistów. Swoje knowania skrywał zaś przed innymi (czytelnikowi utworu wiadomo było o nich wcześniej niż pozostałym postaciom)". (My translation of the Polish quote).

[3] „Nowatorstwo utworu podkreślone jest jeszcze za pomocą zabiegu znalezionego manuskryptu. ... Tak więc oryginalność utworu domagała się wyraźnie zabiegu uprawdopodobniającego jeśli nie samą akcję, to przynajmniej prezentowaną w tekście wizję uniwersum, gdzie każda niegodziwość pociąga za sobą zemstę z zaświatów i ostateczne wyrównanie krzywd przez nadprzyrodzone siły". (My translation of the Polish quote).

Walpole's depiction of a crumbling castle, subterranean dungeons, dark secrets, and supernatural forces laid the groundwork for many of the tropes – such as "a castle, a convent, a château, all Gothic in terror and gloomy secrets, with rooms hung with rotting tapestry or wainscoted with black larch-wood, with furniture dust-covered and dropping to pieces from age, with palls of black velvet waving in the gloomy wing" (Scarborough, 1967, p. 9) – that would come to define Gothic fiction. Walpole's personal interest in the Gothic architectural style is reflected in his residence, Strawberry Hill House, which he remodelled with towers, turrets, battlements, arched doors, and elaborate ornaments. These aesthetic concerns are mirrored in the setting of *The Castle of Otranto*, where the decaying and atmospheric environment contributes significantly to the novel's overall sense of Gothic horror, as asserted by Kokot who notes that:

> These places are full of dark corners, hidden passages, dark corridors, and crypts where terror lurks – and a twofold terror at that. On the one hand, the heroine faces a purely physical threat, stemming from the villain who pursues her; on the other, the castle is a place where the supernatural manifests itself (2013, p. 11)[4].

In his analysis of Poe and his influence on Gothic fiction, Benjamin Franklin Fisher suggests that Walpole's novel, "though crude and pioneering in fashion, exhibits hallmark elements that continue to inform Gothic literature up to the present day". He summarizes the basic Gothic plot as the "vicious pursuit of innocence/innocents for purposes of power, lust, or money, sometimes individually, at other times collectively" (2006, p. 72). He goes on to emphasize how issues of identity and power – often related to family lineage or marriage – became more central to the Gothic narrative, alongside the exploration of sexuality and gender. These themes, Fisher asserts, began to hold greater significance than the eerie settings that had once merely served as mysterious backdrops for suspenseful action and dialogue in earlier Gothic works.

The success of Walpole's novel cannot be overstated, as it is widely recognized as a key catalyst in the rise of Gothic fiction. As Christopher John Murray argues, "its popularity was closely connected with the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth--century vogue for antiquarianism and the growing enthusiasm for all things Gothic" (2004, p. 161). This cultural context contributed to the novel's widespread influence, sparking a wave of Gothic works – publications of Gothic fiction are believed to have grown significantly, from roughly one per year in the 1770s and 1780s to over twenty each year by the 1790s – that both expanded and refined the genre. It also aroused the apprehension of reviewers and readers, as noted by Thomas J. Mathias: "Otranto Ghosts have propagated their species with unequalled fecundity. The spawn is in every novel shop" (qtd. in Napier, 1987, viii). Among the most notable early authors influenced by Walpole's literary innovations was undeniably Radcliffe. Her novels, including *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) – in which "Udolpho is Mrs. Radcliffe's most impressive castle, vast, ruinous, and full of terrors both imaginary and real; and its tyrant master, Montoni, is a striking prefiguration of the Byronic hero" (Roper, 1987,

[4] „Miejsca te pełne są mrocznych zakamarków, ukrytych przejść, ciemnych korytarzy i krypt, gdzie czai się groza – i to groza dwojakiego rodzaju. Z jednej bowiem strony bohaterce zagraża czysto fizyczne niebezpieczeństwo, którego źródłem jest prześladujący ją łotr, z drugiej zaś zamek to miejsce, w którym objawia się nadprzyrodzone". (My translation of the Polish quote).

p. 135) – and *The Italian, or The Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797), became immensely popular and played a pivotal role in defining Gothic genre during its heyday. Notably, Radcliffe gained widespread recognition for her ability to craft suspenseful, atmospheric narratives that delved into the psychological impact of fear and terror. In contrast to Walpole – whose novel featured overtly supernatural events – Radcliffe employed more nuanced techniques to evoke a sense of dread. E.J. Clery captures this quality, describing "the ability to evoke supernatural dread" as "the ultimate test for a truly unbounded imagination" (2000, p. 66). Through such skill, Radcliffe often presented seemingly supernatural phenomena that were ultimately given rational explanations, a point Clery highlights in her introduction to *The Italian*:

> Radcliffe's achievement was to bring Gothic into the mainstream of literary production. In deference to the realist credo she retains merely the *suspicion* of the supernatural, making up for its absence by inventive use of effects of suspense and dread. In addition, she introduced to Gothic fiction a poetic sensibility which became her trade mark, exhibited in lengthy landscape descriptions and in characterization of her tender but indomitable heroines (2008, vii).

Importantly, her use of Gothic settings, such as dark forests, mysterious ruins, and haunted castles, invoked the sublime which manifests as the awe and terror experienced when confronted with the vastness and power of nature. As Derek Roper notes, Radcliffe's "deeper purpose is to capture the effects on the sensibility of Gothic architecture or of picturesque scenery" (1978, p. 132). She likewise introduced a psychological dimension to Gothic fiction, with characters frequently grappling with their own fears, doubts, and desires. This focus on the inner workings of the human psyche mirrored the growing interest in psychological exploration during this period. Her novels, therefore, not only contributed to Gothic's aesthetic development but also helped shape its engagement with the complexities of human emotion and mental states of protagonists, who, as noted by Hogle in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, are "haunted by a second 'unconscious' of deep-seated social and historical dilemmas, often of many types at once, that become more fearsome the more characters and readers attempt to cover them up or reconcile them symbolically without resolving them fundamentally" (2015, p. 3).

Another prominent figure in early Gothic fiction was Matthew Gregory Lewis, whose *The Monk* (1796) introduced darker, more explicit themes of violence, corruption, and sexual transgression and "where all the crimes are committed by people of the Church" (Sikorska, 2007, p. 308). Lewis' work that "shows the rebellion of passion against religion-imposed virtue" (p. 309) stood in stark contrast to Radcliffe's, embracing the more sensational and lurid aspects of Gothic fiction. In *The Monk*, the protagonist, the monk Ambrosio, is a morally ambiguous figure who succumbs to the temptations of sin and depravity, reflecting the genre's growing interest in exploring human corruption and moral decay as well as the concept of the secret sin that penance cannot cleanse. Lewis' novel, which, as noted by Kokot, "focuses on the reasons why he [Ambrosio] became a wicked person, [functioning thus as] a psychological study of the fall" (2013, p. 12)[5], was infamous for its explicitly vivid content, including incest, rape, and murder,

[5] „koncentruje się na przyczynach, dla których stał się on niegodziwcem, stanowi studium psychologiczne upadku" (My translation of the Polish quote).

which pushed the boundaries of decency in literature at the time and helped shape the more visceral and sensational direction in which Gothic fiction would evolve. As asserted by Robert Miles:

> Lewis revolutionized the Gothic by dwelling transgressively on what Radcliffe dismissively called 'horror', by which she meant a graphic poetic, rather than, as she preferred, a suggestive one. In his 'minute' description of libidinous and violent material, from Matilda's erotic body to Ambrosio's broken one, or from Agnes's clutching the worm-eaten corpse of her infant to Ambrosio's subterranean rape of his sister, he systematically broke the norms of what was permissible to depict in polite letters, to the extent that he was reviled in a press campaign, and forced by a legal one to expurgate his text. Lewis summarily dismissed Radcliffe's explained supernatural in favour of unrestrained supernatural mayhem, largely setting the agenda for future Gothic works (2015, p. 283).

At the turn of the 19th century, another significant work emerged: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), which, while often categorized as science fiction, is deeply rooted in the Gothic tradition. The novel examines the catastrophic consequences that unfold after Victor Frankenstein, a student of natural philosophy, unlocks the secrets of creation and, in an act of hubris, brings to life a monstrous being, thereby assuming the role of a deity. As Sikorska argues:

> *Frankenstein* mirrors the myth of Prometheus, in its pursuit of forbidden knowledge and its attempt to wield this knowledge for the benefit of humanity. However, in doing so, Frankenstein creates a creature whom he immediately deems monstrous. Although he rejects alchemy and sorcery, Frankenstein transgresses the divine laws of creation in the name of science and, like Prometheus, is ultimately punished as the creature he has brought to life destroys all that he holds dear (2007, p. 347).

Narrated from the first-person perspectives of both Victor Frankenstein and the Monster, the novel explores a range of themes, including the God complex, the sublime nature of the natural world, cycles of vengeance, and the nature of prejudice. Hogle argues that "By the time of *Frankenstein*, the many dilemmas for its hero stem from alterations in the anatomical, electrical, and chemical sciences *and* the acceleration of an industrial revolution that may lead to the greater mechanization of life" (2015, p. 5; emphasis in the original). The novel incorporates the characteristic elements of Gothic literature, such as horror, isolation, and the fear of the unknown, while also introducing new concerns related to scientific overreach, the ethics of creating life, and the moral responsibilities of the creator. The narrative of Victor, who creates a being beyond his control, engages with contemporary anxieties about the potential dangers of unchecked scientific ambition. Furthermore, the novel addresses profound questions regarding human nature, morality, and the boundaries between life and death – issues that would become central to subsequent Gothic literature. In *Contemporary Gothic*, Spooner suggests that:

> Perhaps the most intriguing thing about Shelley's novel, however, in terms of its contemporary influence, is the sympathy the monster elicits. The Creature – he has no name – tells his creator a story of ostracism, prejudice and withheld

> human contact. Articulate and well read, he is a powerful advocate of the human right to love and be loved. Unlike other nineteenth-century Gothic monsters – Quasimodo, Carmilla, Mr Hyde – Frankenstein's Creature elicits not only fascination or even sympathy, but also empathy (2006, p. 70).

The Monster's life begins with a disposition that is warm and open-hearted. However, after being abandoned and mistreated – first by Victor and later by the De Lacey family – he turns to revenge and violence. His actions, therefore, are presented as understandable, if not entirely justified. He has been devastated by the unjust rejection of those who cannot see past their own prejudices, and in turn, he seeks retribution against those who have wronged him. This desire for revenge is poignantly expressed when, after Felix attacks him and flees with the De Lacey family, the Monster reflects: "feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom [and] I bent my mind towards injury and death" (Shelley, 2003, p. 131). The novel's exploration of alienation, both literal and figurative, and its depiction of the monstrous, has extended Gothic into new territories. It has influenced later works in the subgenres of horror, science fiction, and psychological fiction.

As the 19th century progressed, Gothic fiction continued to evolve, with Edgar Allan Poe emerging as one of the most significant American writers specialising in this genre. Poe introduced a heightened focus on the psychological dimensions of terror, particularly in works such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). His tales often centre on themes of madness, guilt, and the fragility of the human mind, employing unreliable narrators and claustrophobic settings to cultivate an atmosphere of intense dread. In these stories, fear and terror are portrayed less as external, physical threats and more as psychological afflictions, with the protagonists' internal struggles taking precedence. In "The Tell-Tale Heart", often regarded as a "model of Gothic fiction [being] a psychological study of madness, stalking, and murder" (Snodgrass, 2005, p. 334), the protagonist's obsession with an old man's eye drives him to commit murder. This "visual detail [is] so engrossing that it inflames the stalker to throttle an aged man and inter his corpse at the scene of the crime under planked flooring" (p. 334). Through this chilling narrative, Poe explores the theme of guilt and the eventual disintegration of the mind under the overwhelming weight of conscience. The American's contributions to Gothic were pivotal in shifting the focus from external supernatural events to an exploration of internal, psychological horror. As noted by Allan Lloyd-Smith, the author of "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) "developed a new incisiveness in Gothic writing through his conception of 'unity of effect,' a concern for the reading experience that left a deep imprint on both American and European Gothic developments" (2004, p. 32). In this way, Poe not only shaped the trajectory of Gothic fiction but also transformed it into a medium for exploring the darker recesses of the human psyche.

Another key work in the Victorian Gothic tradition is Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), which is loosely based on "two famous French case studies of dual personality whose 'double lives' were widely discussed in French and British periodicals" (Stiles, 2012, p. 5) and which testifies to the an undeniable fact that, as noted by Linda Dryden, "The literary climate in which the works of Stevenson, Wilde and Wells were produces was thus very different from the of the earlier part of the century: naturalizm and the »new« realizm were giving way to experiments in narrative techniques, to new ways of presenting the world, ultimately,

to new fictional genres" (2003, p. 4). Stevenson's novella delves into the duality of human nature, exploring the idea that every individual harbours a sinister, repressed side that can be unleashed under certain conditions. The narrative also engages with contemporary theories about dual personality, which were sometimes attributed to imbalances in the asymmetry of the brain's hemispheres. According to this hypothesis, moral depravity and regression were believed to result from an oversized right hemisphere, which was thought to house primitive instincts and emotions. As the story progresses, Dr. Jekyll, a respected scientist, creates a potion that transforms him into the monstrous Mr. Hyde, and the novel raises significant questions about identity, morality, and the potential for wickedness within every human being. Through its exploration of the boundaries between good and evil, and its reflection on the duality of human nature, the book solidified its place in Gothic canon.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is widely regarded as one of the most famous Gothic novels, with a lasting influence on both literature and popular culture. Stoker's masterpiece blends traditional Gothic elements, such as an ancient, mysterious villain, a dark and isolated setting, and a confrontation between good and evil, with a deeper exploration of Victorian anxieties surrounding sexuality, immigration, and the breakdown of societal norms. As a vampire, Count Dracula embodies fears of the foreign 'Other' and his arrival in England symbolizes a direct threat to the established social order. At the same time, *Dracula* addresses concerns about sexual liberation and the erosion of moral boundaries, particularly through the character of Lucy Westenra. Lucy's transformation into a vampire represents a loss of innocence and a subversion of Victorian ideals of femininity. It is also important to note that, as Stiles argues in *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century*, "late-Victorian neurologists and authors of Gothic romances shared a fascination with boundaries and their transgression, especially the evanescent mind-body divide and the limits of human free will" (2012, p. 1). This shared fascination with the crossing of boundaries is a key theme in Stoker's masterpiece.

At the turn of the 20th century, Gothic fiction experienced resurgence in popular fiction, particularly within the horror and weird fiction subgenres[6]. Writers, such as H.P. Lovecraft, drew heavily on Gothic elements, merging them with new concepts of cosmic horror. Lovecraft's works, for instance, "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928), combine the sense of dread and unease central to Gothic fiction with a broader philosophical

[6] Weird fiction is a branch of speculative literature that arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, blending elements of horror, fantasy, and science fiction. Rather than relying on familiar Gothic figures such as ghosts or vampires, it evokes fear through encounters with the alien and incomprehensible. The concept of weird, as China Miéville notes (2009, pp. 510-516), replaces traditional monsters with amorphous, tentacled entities, perceived as symbols of the cosmic and the unrepresentable, found in the works of writers such as William Hope Hodgson (e.g. *The House on the Borderland*, 1908), Clark Ashton Smith (e.g. "The Hunters from Beyond", 1932), and Howard Philips Lovecraft (e.g. "The Call of Cthulhu", 1928). Significantly, as stated by Lovecraft, "The true weird tale has something more than murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule" (1973, p. 15). He adds that "A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplained dread of outer, unknown forces must be present" (p. 15). Moreover, weird fiction aims to elicit both awe and dread, evoking terror rooted not in evil or guilt but in humanity's confrontation with an indifferent universe. Although the term originally referred to works published around the 1930s, mostly in the magazines such as "Weird Tales" and "Strange Tales", the aesthetic experienced a revival in the late 20th century through the emergence of subgenre called new weird, practiced by authors like Miéville and Jeff VanderMeer, who fuse cosmic horror with urban, ecological, and postmodern themes. Critics describe weird fiction as a hybrid and transgressive mode rather than a fixed subgenre, a mixture of fantasy, supernatural fiction, and horror embodying transgressive material. Michael Cisco argues that "weird fiction is a way of writing fiction that arises out of the internal self-difference of religious, moralizing, and/or a certain strain of philosophizing fiction writing, when producing the bizarre becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to an end" (2021, p. 5).

perspective: that humanity is insignificant in the face of vast, indifferent cosmic forces. His contributions expanded the subgenre by introducing otherworldly, alien forces that defy human comprehension, thereby pushing the boundaries of traditional Gothic horror into the realm of the unknown and the incomprehensible. As Faye Ringel observes, "once scorned by academic critics, today Lovecraft is seen as central to the American Gothic canon" (2022, p. 66).

The mid-20th century witnessed a significant transformation of Gothic genre, particularly in the works of authors such as Shirley Jackson. Her novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) is a modern example of psychological Gothic horror. Jackson's work explores themes of isolation and the psychological toll that haunted spaces can exact on the human mind. In this context, the haunted house in *The Haunting of Hill House* is less concerned with supernatural events and more with the instability of perception and the fragility of the human psyche. Jackson's novel thus represents the continued evolution of Gothic genre, shifting from traditional supernatural occurrences toward more introspective, psychological forms of terror.

In contemporary times, Gothic fiction remains vibrant and adaptable, finding expression in new media and evolving cultural contexts. Authors, such as Neil Gaiman with *The Graveyard Book* (2008) and Sarah Waters with *The Little Stranger* (2009), continue to explore Gothic themes, blending them with modern concerns such as identity, sexuality, and societal anxieties. The influence of Gothic can also be observed in popular culture, especially in films, television series, and video games, where its characteristic tropes – decaying mansions, mysterious figures, and psychological tension – continue to be widely employed. Works, such as Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015) and the *Twilight* series (2005-2008), have revitalized interest in Gothic aesthetics, with modern adaptations incorporating elements of romance, fantasy, and suspense while retaining the essential qualities of Gothic horror.

It is essential to acknowledge that Gothic fiction has undergone substantial transformation since its inception in the mid-eighteenth century. What began with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* has developed into a rich and varied tradition that continues to resonate with contemporary readers. This observation aligns with the vision of the Gothic outlined by David Punter and Glennis Byron, "who define this notoriously difficult field of study in a broad way" (2016, p. 57), as noted by Pia Livia Hekanaho. She continues this line of thought by adding that Punter and Byron "underline how the Gothic makes visible otherwise repressed cultural fears and anxieties which are represented in textual form" (p. 57). The literary mode achieves this by incorporating "particular moments, tropes, repeated motifs that can be scattered, or disseminated, through the modern Western literary tradition" (p. 57). Hence, according to them, "the Gothic, thus, can be identified as a collection of various subgenres; above all it is perceived in terms of recurrent modes, themes, tropes, *topoi* and key motifs" (p. 57; emphasis in the original). While its earliest forms were rooted in supernatural horror and medieval revivalism, the genre has since evolved to encompass psychological terror, the exploration of moral and existential dilemmas, and reflections on the darker aspects of human nature. Nevertheless, despite its many incarnations, Gothic fiction has consistently been perceived as a reaction against the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason, science, and secular progress. As Thomas Lombardo observes:

> Strong, influential counter-reactions [against the Western Enlightenment] emerged in Romantic philosophy and Gothic literature (1750-1820). Fear and apprehension over a techno-industrial, rational future; a reassertion of the central values of emotion, intuition, art, subjectivity, and the senses; and a desire to "return to nature" and an idealized past all fuelled the Romantic and Gothic counter-reactions to the modern Western Enlightenment (2024, pp. 212-213).

Today, Gothic fiction continues to be a potent force in both literature and popular culture, constantly adapting to new forms and continually redefining the boundaries of fear, mystery, and the unknown. As Spooner notes in "Crime and Gothic":

> While the Gothic novel in its original form fell out of favour after about 1820, its distinctive tropes continued to influence other forms of nineteenth-century fiction, including the Newgate novel, Walter Scott's historical fiction, the realist fiction of Dickens and the Brontës, the sensational novel, the ghost story, the American Gothic of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and, crucially, the detective story. Although these texts did not necessarily follow the stock formulae set down by Radcliffe, Lewis, and their contemporaries, they found new ways of interpreting the Gothic, enabling the genre to shift with the tastes of the times (2020, p. 246).

Although Spooner refers to Gothic literature's influence on 19th-century fiction, I would argue that this influence has never ceased. It continues to shape modern narrative forms, particularly crime fiction and its subgenre, Scandinavian crime fiction.

1. General Outline of Crime Fiction

Crime fiction is a literary genre focused on the portrayal of criminal activities, the investigative processes, and the pursuit of justice. Stephen Knight in *Crime Fiction 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* presents a straightforward definition of this literary tradition:

> there are plenty of novels (including some of Christie) without a detective and nearly as many without even a mystery (like most of Patricia Highsmith's work). *There is, though, always a crime (or very occasionally just the appearance of one* (2004, xii; emphasis mine).

Hence, at its core, crime fiction delves into the nature of criminal acts, ranging from minor infractions to severe offenses, such as murder, while examining the individuals involved – both the perpetrators and those committed to uncovering the truth. Central to the narrative structure of crime fiction are characters such as detectives, investigators, sleuths, or even ordinary citizens, who work to solve crimes. Alongside these investigative elements, the genre often explores the psychological motivations behind criminal behaviour, the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by the characters, and the societal consequences of crime.

Furthermore, crime fiction frequently engages with broader social issues, such as justice, corruption, and the complexities of law enforcement. It highlights the tension between legal systems and moral questions, often posing intricate challenges to the characters' sense of right and wrong. Over time, the genre has expanded and diversified into various subgenres, each with distinct features and thematic emphases. Notable subgenres include detective fiction, which centers on a central investigator; police procedurals, which focus on the methods and practices of law enforcement and where "crime is seen from the official perspective of the police ... typically focus[ing] on members of the force, [and] show[ing] them in a benevolent light" (Nordfjörd, 2022, p. 168); legal thrillers, which examine the intricacies of legal proceedings and courtroom drama; and noir, which emphasizes moral ambiguity, cynicism, evil, and other darker aspects of human nature. These subgenres not only reflect the multifaceted nature of crime but also provide readers with a nuanced exploration of human behaviour, the impact of crime on individuals and communities, and the moral complexities inherent in the pursuit of justice. Through its varied forms, crime fiction remains a significant medium for grappling with issues of law, order, and human morality.

In *Crime Fiction* John Scaggs argues that "crime has ... been the foundation for an entire genre of fiction for over one hundred and fifty years. In fact, it is the centrality of crime to a genre that, otherwise, in its sheer diversity, defies any simple classification" (2005, p. 1). Similarly, Charles J. Rzepka contends that "to say that crime fiction is fiction about crime is not only tautological; it also raises a host of problems" (2020, p. 1). These observations highlight a fundamental challenge in categorizing the genre of crime fiction, given its expansive range of subgenres, many of which frequently overlap. Nevertheless, it remains imperative to provide a foundational understanding of this literary form, particularly given its enduring popularity and cultural significance.

The origins of crime fiction can be traced back to ancient storytelling traditions, where themes of crime, investigation, and justice were recurring motifs. From Greek tragedies to biblical narratives of retribution, the concept of wrongdoing and its consequences has long been central to the human experience, shaping early literary works. These early narratives often focused on the moral implications of crime, the pursuit of justice, and the complex relationships between transgressors, victims, and society. While the roots of crime fiction can be traced to ancient and medieval narratives, the genre began to coalesce in the 19th century. These early works laid the groundwork for the genre's enduring conventions, including the role of the detective, the structure of the investigation, and the moral resolution of crime. This literary mode flourished particularly during the Victorian era, where the growth of urban centers, the rise of the police force, and the increasing concerns over social order provided a fertile environment for crime narratives. In this context, crime fiction has often served as both a reflection of and a response to societal anxieties regarding crime, punishment, and the moral implications of law enforcement. In the 20th and 21st centuries, crime fiction underwent significant transformations, influenced by changing social, political, and technological landscapes. The advent of new media, including film and television, has further shaped the evolution of crime fiction, making it an increasingly interdisciplinary and global phenomenon. In order to fully appreciate the development of crime fiction, it is essential to consider both its historical origins and its ongoing transformations. By examining the genre's early roots, its maturation during the Victorian era, and its adaptation to the challenges and concerns of the modern world, we can gain deeper insights into how crime fiction reflects the complexities of human conduct, social norms, and the ever-evolving concept of justice.

Edgar Allan Poe is widely regarded as the founder of modern detective fiction, as testified by Howard Haycraft in the following words: "As the symphony began with Haydn, so did the detective fiction begin with Poe. Like everything else in the world, both had precursors" (1984, p. 6). Maurice S. Lee adds that "from the beginning to the end of his career in prose fiction [Poe was] obsessed with crime" (2020, p. 369). The American writer's narratives, preoccupied with the grotesque and the psychological depths of human nature, treat wrongdoing not merely as an external act but as a manifestation of inner turmoil and existential anxiety. The motif of transgression becomes in his fiction a means to examine guilt, depravity, and the limits of rationality. By blending logic with madness and intellect with obsession, Poe established the psychological and structural framework upon which later writers would build, transforming detective fiction into a distinct literary form. His contribution is therefore not only structural but also thematic. The emphasis on the interplay between crime and the psyche, coupled with an innovative approach to narrative and mystery, positioned the genre as a vehicle for exploring both intellectual puzzles and the darker recesses of human consciousness. Through his short stories, the American author introduced many of the genre's defining features, as noted by Kokot who argues that "Poe is not only the creator of the protagonist-detective, but also presents the investigation process from the perspective of a first-person narrator, who is not the main character of the work, but makes both the bachelor himself and his actions the

subject of his observation" (1999, p. 23)[7]. For instance, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), often regarded as the first modern detective story, presents C. Auguste Dupin – a brilliant investigator who solves a baffling murder through logical deduction (ratiocination) and acute observation. Dupin embodies not only the archetypal "armchair detective", whose analytical mind and capacity to discern connections among disparate clues became hallmarks of later fictional sleuths, but also "an uncanny creature of the night, like the predatory vampire, but also a super-hero like Batman, somebody who can pierce the darkness of the city streets as well as of human hearts" (Ascari, 2007, p. 49). As Lee asserts:

> Like one of Poe's corpses that will not stay dead, the presence of Dupin haunts modern culture – from the 'high' realm of academic literary criticism and poststructural theory to more popular forms such as comics, film, television, and song lyrics… no set of tales has had more impact on literature and culture in the English-speaking world and beyond (2020, p. 370).

Poe's influence extends beyond the invention of the detective figure. His stories probe the psychology of transgression, presenting murder not simply as a narrative device but as a lens through which to explore human motivation, moral decay, and the fragile boundaries of the mind.

Alongside the author of "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846), another seminal figure in the early development of crime fiction was William Wilkie Collins, a British writer whose contributions to the genre remain highly influential. Collins' novels, such as *The Woman in White* (1859) and *The Moonstone* (1868), are regarded as the most significant works not only of detective fiction but also of sensation fiction. *The Woman in White* is often considered the first true sensation novel, a subgenre that emerged in the mid-19th century and became known for its focus on psychological tension and complex narratives involving a variety of crimes. As Lyn Pykett notes, sensation fiction was "dealt in nervous, psychological, sexual and social shocks, and had complicated plots involving bigamy, adultery, seduction, fraud, forgery, blackmail, kidnapping and, sometimes, murder" (2013, p. 33). This subgenre, blending mystery, crime, and psychological suspense, served as a vehicle for exploring deep-seated societal anxieties related to class, gender, and morality.

In *The Moonstone,* Collins takes the conventions of a sensation novel a step further by introducing a more explicit focus on detective fiction, particularly through the character of Sergeant Richard Cuff, one of the first professional detectives in English literature. T.S. Eliot, in his praise of the novel, declared it to be "the first and greatest of English detective novels" (qtd. in Roy, 2020, p. 120), and Collins' work has since been lauded for shifting the emphasis from the misconduct to the process of enquiry, as noted by Martin Priestman who observes that *The Moonstone* "shifts the focus from the crime itself – which turns out barely to be one – to its investigation" (2013b, p. 4). This shift in focus is pivotal in the development of detective fiction, marking a move away from sensational depictions of criminal acts toward a more structured, methodical approach to crime-solving. The narrative structure of *The*

[7] „Co więcej, Poe nie tylko jest twórcą protagonisty-detektywa, ale i przedstawia proces śledztwa z perspektywy pierwszoosobowego narratora, który nie jest główną postacią utworu, lecz czyni przedmiotem swojej obserwacji zarówno samego kawalera, jak i jego poczynania". (My translation of the Polish quote).

Moonstone that, as asserted by Andrew Mangham, "gave a crucial turn to the shaping of crime fiction in England" (2020, p. 381), is notably complex, featuring multiple viewpoints and an intricate plot cantered around the search for a stolen jewel. This multi-perspective approach, which provides a range of different accounts and interpretations of events, can be seen as a precursor to the modern whodunit, a subgenre of detective fiction that emphasizes the gradual unveiling of clues and red herrings to reveal the perpetrator. Beyond its structural innovations, the novel also engages with broader social and cultural issues, incorporating themes of social class and colonialism. These themes, especially the tensions surrounding British imperialism and the racial and cultural dynamics involved in the theft of the Moonstone, would continue to resonate in crime fiction throughout its evolution. In this way, Collins' work not only contributed to the development of detective fiction as a distinct subgenre but also expanded the thematic scope of crime fiction, showing how the genre could be used to address complex social issues. His blending of crime, mystery, and psychological suspense helped lay the foundations for future crime writers to explore both the intellectual and social dimensions of criminal acts, shaping the genre's trajectory in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of crime fiction, establishing what would come to be recognized as the genre's definitive and enduring form. As Susan Bassnett observes, "the archetypal global detective figure is Sherlock Holmes, the creation of a young doctor, who went on to become Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and who acknowledged a debt to Wilkie Collins, Edgar Allan Poe, and Émile Gaboriau as his precursors to writing detective fiction" (2017, p. 143). Doyle's creation of Sherlock Holmes, a brilliant detective whose extraordinary skills in observation, deduction, and logical reasoning set him apart, undeniably revolutionized the crime fiction subgenre.

In this context, Richard Bradford underscores the significance of Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), noting that Holmes establishes his prominence not only by asserting the superiority of his methods but also by recognizing and dismissing the detectives of his literary predecessors. Bradford writes, "In Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* Holmes makes his claim to eminence by acknowledging the presence, and inferiority, of Poe's Dupin and the French novelist Gaboriau's Lecoq, with readers becoming addicted to him as something more than a literary creation" (2015, p. 14). This acknowledgment reflects Doyle's nuanced approach, blending innovation with respect for his predecessors, and helps situate Holmes as both a continuation and a transformation of earlier detective archetypes. Priestman, in *Crime Fiction: From Poe to the Present*, further elucidates the complexities of Holmes' character, challenging the perception of him as a uniquely exceptional detective by contending that:

> The notion of Holmes as a unique or superbly characterized personality is arguably a myth: what is far more interesting about him is the way in which he encapsulates some of the qualities of the series from itself within a fairly loose envelope of potentially contradictory traits. These traits are initially scraped together from Poe's dégagé intellectual joker Dupin, and from Gaboriau's melancholic bachelor Tabaret and ferret-eyed professional Lecoq. From the more energetic, animal-like elements of these characters emerges the brash, anti-intellectual Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet*, whose sneers at

> Dupin and Lecoq as detectives hold an honourable place in the oedipal predecessor-bashing which is one of the ritual pleasures of series detection (2013a, p. 15).

In this analysis, Priestman reveals that Holmes' character is not entirely original but rather an amalgamation of traits borrowed from earlier literary detectives, reassembled into a distinctive and provocative figure.

In addition to Holmes' intellectual prowess, the character of Dr. Watson, his loyal companion and narrator, played an essential role in making Holmes more relatable and accessible to readers. Through Watson's eyes, readers are able to witness the super sleuth's intellectual processes, making the detective's complex methods – relying on meticulous observation, forensic evidence, and logical deduction – intelligible and engaging. Watson's perspective also highlights the cultural significance of Holmes' methods which reflect the growing fascination with rationalism and scientific inquiry in the late 19th century. The intellectual ambience of the period, increasingly influenced by advancements in science and forensic techniques, is mirrored in Holmes' investigative approach, cementing his relevance in a rapidly changing world. Significantly, the *Sherlock Holmes* stories popularized the 'whodunit' structure – a narrative framework that became synonymous with the genre. In this structure, a crime is introduced, a series of clues is methodically uncovered, and a final resolution ties together the mystery, often with a twist or revelation that redefines the entire narrative. This formula, which Doyle perfected, became a model for subsequent generations of crime writers. Additionally, the character of Holmes – an intellectual detective operating on the fringes of society, with a sharp mind and an eccentric personality – helped to establish the enduring detective archetype that would dominate crime fiction for decades to come. The *Sherlock Holmes* stories not only reshaped the detective fiction but also captured the intellectual currents of their time. Through Doyle's innovative characterization and narrative structures, Holmes became both a symbol of rational inquiry and a model for future detectives, ensuring his place as one of the most iconic figures in the history of crime fiction.

At this point in the monograph, it is important to emphasize that there are certain "deviations" from the well-established conventions of crime fiction. One of the most significant examples is the literary oeuvre of Gilbert Keith Chesterton, particularly his *Father Brown* series. Chesterton's contribution to the genre represents not merely an alternative narrative form but a profound rethinking of the epistemological and moral assumptions that underpin the detective story. His work, often described as a theological or metaphysical counterpoint to the scientific rationalism of Doyle's Holmes, reorients the focus of detection from empirical observation to moral intuition and spiritual insight. This worthy successor to Doyle, as Lee Horsley observes, "challenged readers' assumptions about the efficacy and moral rightness of the 'scientific' investigation of crimes and put in its place the spiritual-intuitive knowledge of a Catholic priest" (2020, p. 30). In doing so, the author of *The Everlasting Man* (1925) disrupted the prevailing logic of early 20th-century detective fiction, which often celebrated reason, logic, and deduction as the sole means to uncover truth. Instead, he proposed that the understanding of crime – and, by extension, of human nature – requires an engagement with the mysteries of faith, sin, and redemption. Horsley further explains that "in over fifty stories published between 1911 and 1935, Father

Brown redefined the quest for 'the secret' as a 'religious exercise' that could in effect open up a deeply disturbing connection between the mind of the detective and that of the murderer" (p. 30). In this way, the act of detection becomes not only an intellectual pursuit but also a moral and spiritual one, blurring the boundaries between good and evil, sinner and saint.

The stories included in the following sub-series – *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911), *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914), *The Incredulity of Father Brown* (1926), *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927), and *The Scandal of Father Brown* (1935) – illustrate this complex interplay between crime and conscience. Throughout these collections, Father Brown's investigations are not motivated by the triumph of intellect but by the pursuit of moral clarity and compassion. His understanding of crime derives from his theological insight that sin is an inherent aspect of human nature, and therefore, the criminal mind cannot be comprehended through logic alone. The priest--detective's victories lie not in exposing criminal mechanisms, but in redeeming the fallen and illuminating the moral ambiguities that define human existence. As Bradford notes, Father Brown fights with iniquity and "injustice according to the maxims of his Roman Catholic vocation, …indicat[ing] that crime fiction had become a forum for the exchange of fundamental precepts of existence" (2015, p. 18). In Chesterton's hands, then, the detective genre becomes a philosophical inquiry into the nature of good and wickedness, guilt and forgiveness. The detective is transformed from a detached logician into a spiritual guide whose ultimate goal is not punishment but understanding. Consequently, the *Father Brown* stories represent a decisive moment in the evolution of crime fiction, bridging the gap between rationalist modernity and the enduring mysteries of faith, and paving the way for later writers who sought to integrate psychological, metaphysical, and moral dimensions into the detective narrative.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, detective stories were the dominant form of crime fiction. However, with the emergence of hardboiled detective fiction, the genre underwent profound changes. These changes were characterized by a shift toward darker, more realistic, and brutal depictions of crime, reflecting the evolving social landscape and the widespread disillusionment of the post-World War I era. As Gill Plain argues, this shift not only marks a departure from earlier conventions but also "challenges the conventions of masculine rationality, but with a very different aim" noting that "much like the traditional clue-puzzle formula, hardboiled detective fiction responds to the upheavals of modernity" (2020, p. 104). The emergence of hardboiled detective fiction is largely credited to writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, who defined the subgenre's distinctive voice and aesthetic. Jasmine Yong Hall notes that Hammett developed a style "quintessentially American and, in stark contrast to the English tradition, based on material from actual, lived experience" (2020, p. 450). Characterized by its gritty realism, moral ambiguity, and terse, colloquial prose, the hardboiled fiction replaced genteel puzzles with raw depictions of urban corruption and violence. As Chandler observed, Hammett's work appealed to:

> people with a sharp, aggressive attitude to life, readers unafraid to confront the sordid realities of existence. He further remarked that Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people who commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not with handwrought duelling pistols, curare, and tropical fish (1964, p. 195).

This shift toward authenticity and the portrayal of violence as an ordinary, almost inevitable aspect of human behaviour marked a decisive break from the more sanitized conventions of earlier detective fiction.

The archetype of the hardboiled detective, as depicted by Hammett and Chandler, is a solitary figure who navigates a morally complex and often hostile world. While analysing this literary mode, Kokot highlights that:

> In these works, the main emphasis falls not on the mystery itself, but on the sensational action and on the attitude of the protagonist – the private detective – as well as on the ethical dimension of the depicted reality. The detective, particularly Chandler's Marlowe, often turns out to be the sole guarantor of moral order in a world dominated by evil and chaos (1999, p. 136, the footnote 25)[8].

Moreover, these protagonists are typically cynical and disillusioned, embodying a sense of alienation from both society and its institutions. Chandler's Philip Marlowe, introduced in *The Big Sleep* (1939), exemplifies this new kind of detective. Marlowe is defined by a sense of moral integrity, despite the pervasive corruption and decay that surrounds him. Similarly, Hammett's Sam Spade, the protagonist of *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), is tough, morally compromised, and deeply sceptical of authority. Spade's character embodies the gritty realism that became a hallmark of American crime fiction, where the detective operates as both an outsider and a reluctant participant in the morally ambiguous world they inhabit.

Importantly, the hardboiled detective tradition helped to shape the subgenre of Noir, which is defined by its dark, fatalistic tone and its exploration of existential despair. In the realm of Noir fiction, the protagonist often finds oneself in a world that is both corrupt and indifferent to individual suffering. The stark realism and bleak view of human nature present in the works of Hammett and Chandler allowed crime fiction to evolve into a vehicle for exploring more profound psychological and philosophical questions. By emphasizing the moral ambiguities and internal struggles of their protagonists, these writers not only transformed the detective story but also contributed to the development of the subgenre that continues to influence crime fiction to this day. The rise of hardboiled detective fiction in the early 20th century marked a significant departure from the more traditional forms of crime fiction that preceded it. Hammett and Chandler introduced a more realistic and brutal portrayal of crime, which resonated with the disillusionment of the post-World War I era, and their works supported and enlivened the whole edifice of crime fiction whose vitality, as asserted by Plain can "be attributed to its capacity to interrogate the structural inequalities, cultural anxieties and psychic pressures of modernity" (2020, p. 109). The hardboiled detective, often a morally complex and disillusioned figure, became the central character of a subgenre that explored the darker aspects of human nature and society. This shift in narrative style, tone, and thematic concerns not only reshaped the detective story but also gave rise to the broader genre of Noir, cementing the hardboiled tradition as a foundational element of modern crime fiction.

[8] „Główny nacisk pada tam nie na zagadkę jako taką, ale na sensacyjną akcję i postać głównego bohatera (prywatny detektyw), a także na etyczny wymiar przedstawiony w rzeczywistości: detektyw (szczególnie Chandlerowski Marlowe) bywa nierzadko jedynym gwarantem etycznego porządku świata, zdominowanego przez zło i chaos" (My translation of the Polish quote).

During the interwar period, the Golden Age of Detective Fiction flourished in Britain, with Agatha Christie emerging as its most influential figure. As Knight observes, the fiction of this era was far from uniform: "the psychothriller and the procedural began to emerge, and there was a wide range of practices in mystery writing. Moreover, the stories often reflected social and personal unease, which contradicts the notion of an idyllic 'golden' period" (2013, p. 77). Christie's work exemplifies this complexity, combining the intellectual pleasure of puzzle-solving with a subtle engagement with the social tensions of her time. Rebecca Mills notes that Christie was "keenly aware of the generic conventions of role and structure" (2020, p. 151). Her novels invite readers to act as co-investigators, piecing together clues while navigating red herrings and false leads. This self-awareness of form, coupled with her command of narrative manipulation, made Christie's fiction both playful and psychologically astute. Her detectives, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, embody distinct yet complementary approaches to investigation. Poirot, guided by his "little grey cells", applies rational analysis and psychological insight to reveal the underlying motives behind crime. As Knight remarks, "his method and focus are primarily domestic" (2013, p. 82), emphasizing the everyday human emotions – jealousy, greed, revenge – that drive criminal behaviour. Miss Marple, by contrast, relies on acute observation and her intimate understanding of village life to expose hidden transgressions within seemingly innocent communities. These figures exemplify what Merja Makinen terms the 'cosy' or 'whodunit' subgenre, which "presents all the clues needed to solve the murder, alongside a plethora of 'red herrings' to confuse the issue, [typically involving] a closed community of suspects (a train, a girl's school, a village) most of whom could be a murderer, as revealed through the process of the detection" (2020, p. 415). In Christie's fiction, the emphasis lies on intellectual engagement rather than the gritty realism of hardboiled narratives. Works, such as *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) and *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), showcase her mastery of misdirection, intricate plotting, and psychological nuance. Through these narratives, Christie constructs self-contained worlds where social order is temporarily disrupted by crime and restored through the detective's reasoning. Her meticulous control of structure and motive transforms the act of detection into both an aesthetic and moral exercise, solidifying her position as the defining voice of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction.

The typical Golden Age detective novel unfolds within a confined setting – a remote country house, a luxury train, or a quiet village – where a limited circle of suspects creates an atmosphere of both intimacy and tension. Within this closed environment, the detective's task extends beyond identifying the culprit to methodically examining each individual's motives, opportunities, and alibis. The narrative advances through a sequence of twists and revelations, culminating in a climactic scene where the detective exposes the perpetrator in a manner that is both logical and unexpected. This familiar structure, though formulaic, offers readers the intellectual satisfaction of engaging in the puzzle themselves, testing their reasoning against that of the detective. At its core, the Golden Age detective novel celebrates order, rationality, and the restoration of moral balance, offering readers a sense of certainty amid wider social instability. Yet, as Knight observes, the era's fiction also reflected "social and personal unease" (2013, p. 77) suggesting that beneath the surface of logical deduction lay an awareness of deeper psychological and societal tensions. In this sense, while the

subgenre outwardly upheld clarity and justice, it simultaneously acknowledged the ambiguities of human behaviour and the fragility of the very order it sought to affirm.

Following World War II, crime fiction experienced significant transformations, marking a shift in its narrative focus and stylistic elements. One of the most notable developments was the rise of police procedurals which offered a new direction for the genre. Writers, such as Ed McBain (a pen name for Evan Hunter), "a founding father of the police procedurals [... who] chose the more realistic idea of a collective hero- his team of detectives – used by authors such as Chester Himes and Lawrence Treat over a single, hardboiled loner made popular by authors such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler" (MacDonald, 2012, p. 1) favoured a more realistic portrayal of crime-solving. Unlike the solitary, hardboiled detectives, the American writer introduced a collective approach to the detective story, focusing on teams of law enforcement officers working collaboratively to solve crimes. McBain's *87th Precinct* series exemplified this shift, with its emphasis on the collective hero – a team of detectives – over the lone detective that was central to earlier works, as observed by MacDonald who asserts that "the most enduring aspect of McBain's work is his contribution to popular culture's love of the detective squad – an ensemble cast of diverse characters that now forms the core of every TV police drama broadcast in North America" (p. 1). This narrative perspective and character dynamics were echoed by other authors, including Chester Himes and Lawrence Treat, who also adopted the ensemble detective model.

Another significant contribution to the evolution of crime fiction came from Patricia Highsmith whose novel *Strangers on a Train* (1950) furthered this trend by exploring psychological complexities and introducing a more intricate understanding of criminal behaviour. This focus on collaboration within law enforcement teams marked the rise of the police procedural as a prominent subgenre, drawing attention to the methods and organizational structures involved in solving crimes. Advancements in forensic science and criminal investigation techniques also played a pivotal role in shaping the subgenre during this period. The increasing integration of scientific and technical methods into real-world crime fighting found a natural reflection in crime fiction, further influencing the portrayal of investigative processes in novels. The growing emphasis on empirical methods, such as forensic analysis and criminal profiling, became integral components of police procedural narratives.

The latter half of the 20th century saw the emergence and development of psychological crime fiction, a subgenre that delves into the intricate motivations and emotional states of both criminals and investigators. Authors, such as Thomas Harris, with his *Hannibal* series[9], and John Grisham, known for his legal thrillers, for instance the *Mitchell Y. McDeere* series[10], exemplified this modification toward a more psychologically complex approach to crime narrative. As Horsley observes, in Harris' works, "forensic pathology and the process of psychological profiling have played an increasing role [and] the effect has been to reshape the investigative narrative, creating space for a Gothic fascination with psychological aberration and bodily

[9] The titles of novels are as follows: *Red Dragon* (1981), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), *Hannibal* (1999), *Hannibal Rising* (2006).
[10] The titles of novels are as follows: *The Firm* (1991) and *The Exchange* (2023).

violation" (2020, p. 35). Both Harris and Grisham, among others, changed their focus from the mechanical aspects of crime and investigation to the psychological motivations behind criminal performance. They explored the minds of not only the perpetrators but also the law enforcement personnel charged with solving these complex crimes. This evolution in crime fiction marked a notable departure from earlier, more straightforward portrayals of crime, introducing psychological depth and complexity that would become a defining feature of contemporary crime fiction.

Significantly, the post-World War II period witnessed a marked diversification of the crime fiction genre. There was a clear shift toward collective forms of detection, alongside a growing emphasis on scientific methods and psychological inquiry. These developments not only transformed the narrative structure and thematic focus of crime fiction but also reflected broader societal changes, particularly the rising influence of technology and psychology in understanding criminal conduct. As the genre evolved, it became increasingly attuned to contemporary concerns, engaging with the complexities of crime, morality, and the human mind in ways that resonated with modern readers. One of the most notable manifestations of this evolution is Scandinavian crime fiction, exemplified by, for instance, Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2005). Defined by its stark, atmospheric settings and morally ambiguous characters, this subgenre confronts themes of social decay, corruption, and psychological trauma. Its sustained attention to systemic injustice and the darker aspects of human nature has positioned it as a compelling and socially conscious strand of modern crime writing, reflecting both local realities and universal anxieties about power, ethics, and truth.

As Maher and Bassnett observe, "crime fiction in exotic and geographical or historical settings continues to sell well, but the genre now has a much stronger ideological strand, as crime writers from across the world draw attention to socio--economic failures, political corruption, and the destruction of the environment" (2022, p. 62). This ideological modification reflects a growing trend in crime fiction to engage with urgent contemporary concerns, highlighting the ways in which the genre can act as both a mirror to society and a critique of its failings. In addition to its ideological expansion, crime fiction has also become increasingly hybridized, merging with other literary subgenres such as historical fiction, fantasy, and science fiction. This blending has broadened the scope of the genre, resulting in works that offer unique and often unconventional perspectives on crime and justice. Authors, such as Gillian Flynn, with her novel *Gone Girl* (2012), have popularized psychological thrillers that blur the lines between crime fiction and domestic drama. These works explore themes of manipulation, deceit, and the fragility of truth, pushing the boundaries of the genre and challenging traditional notions of crime and morality.

It is essential to assert that crime fiction has undergone a remarkable evolution, transforming from its early origins in the works of Poe and Collins into a multifaceted and dynamic genre that continues to captivate readers and audiences today. Initially focused on puzzles and deductive reasoning in the detective stories of the 19th century, this literary tradition gradually evolved to embrace the gritty realism of hardboiled noir and the psychological depth of modern crime thrillers. This evolution mirrors broader societal changes, adapting to shifting social, cultural, and technological landscapes. Early crime fiction introduced the genre's foundational elements of mystery, investigation, and the logical unravelling of crime through intellectual prowess. In

contrast, the rise of hardboiled fiction in the mid-20th century, epitomized by authors like Chandler and Hammett, brought a darker, more cynical tone to the genre, characterized by morally ambiguous characters, complex social settings, and a focus on existential themes of alienation and corruption. This revolution reflected the growing disenchantment with societal norms during a time of rapid industrialization and political upheaval. The contemporary crime thriller, with its emphasis on psychological complexity, represents another significant phase in the genre's development. Authors, such as Flynn and Harris, explore not only the mechanics of crime but also the psychological motivations behind criminal deeds, adding layers of emotional and intellectual depth. In doing so, they have pushed the boundaries of crime fiction, blending it with elements of psychological drama, domestic fiction, and even horror. These developments underscore how crime fiction has become more than just a genre of mystery – it is now a vehicle for exploring the complexities of human nature, societal issues, and the darker facets of the psyche.

As Vladimir Trendafilov notes, crime fiction has evolved from "unfulfilled journeys to distant corners" toward more immediate and socially relevant concerns. These changes, he argues,

> embodied an unconscious rebellion against the impossibility, under the conditions of this place, of taking the initiative for your life in your hands. They gave an alternative to the mediocre life that people led. They offered a virtual risk, an approved version of the forbidden, a reverie of the luxury not only to live however and wherever you would like but also to do so in the name of your country, that is, at its expense (qtd. in Harper, 2017, p. 176).

Such developments illustrate the genre's capacity to engage with real-world events and social tensions, continually adapting to readers' shifting expectations and the complexities of a changing world. Today, crime fiction stands as one of the most dynamic and multifaceted literary genres that "focuses on detection as a search for meaning, turning it into a parable of life" (Ascari, 2007, p. 12). Its enduring appeal lies in its flexibility – its ability to reinvent itself through new forms, perspectives, and thematic concerns while maintaining a core focus on justice, morality, and the human condition. Reflecting ongoing societal transformations, it continues to resonate with audiences across cultures and generations, ensuring its place as a vital and relevant force in both literature and popular culture.

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2. General Outline of Scandinavian Crime Fiction

Scandinavian crime fiction denotes a distinct and globally influential subgenre of crime fiction originating from the Nordic nations. Over the past few decades, this literary tradition has garnered significant international attention, not merely for its compelling narratives and stark atmospheres, but for its unique interweaving of detective fiction with pointed sociopolitical critique, and, although, as argued by Sue Neale, "the genre is still dominated by Anglo-American writers, the shift has been evident, for example, in the degree to which translations [of the Scandinavian crime fiction novels] began to dominate the shortlists for awards" (2010, p. 296). As Glen Creeber aptly observes, while writing about Scandinavian noir on television, Nordic noir is "typified by its heavy mixture of bleak naturalism, disconsolate locations and morose detectives" (2015, p. 21) and, as such, it is distinct from more traditional versions of crime fiction subgenres. As highlighted by Nina Muždeka, it proves to be different in "that it explores, much more consistently and rigorously, a specific, geographically circumscribed, historical and cultural climate" (2022, p. 221). She continues her train of thoughts by highlighting that this "climate is characterized, in particular, by some of the premises shared by Scandinavian welfare states, that is, their assumptions about ethnic, social, and cultural homogeneity" (p. 221). Moreover, the subgenre's hallmark is its sombre tone and emotional gravitas, frequently reflected through its protagonists' psychological complexity and the hostile, often inhospitable physical environments in which their investigations unfold, implementing in fact a wealth of Gothic conventions:

> There is a Gothic tradition in Scandinavian literature, lasting from the early nineteenth century to the present day, where the stories are located in Scandinavia, and the Gothic castle or haunted house is replaced by the Nordic wilderness, the vast dark forest, the snow-covered Nordic mountains, or the icy stormy sea. Regional folklore and local traditions are used to enhance the Gothic atmosphere, and the protagonist's dark side is often bound to and triggered by the wilderness and the pagan past of the region (Leffler, 2016, p. 587).

Grydehøj, in her article "Nordic Noir", has aptly pointed out to the origins of this distinctive subgenre of crime fiction by asserting that:

> The origins of what was later to become known as Nordic Noir is undoubtedly to be found in the ten-novel series written by the Swedish writer couple Maj Sjöwall (1935-) and Per Wahlöö (1926-1975) between 1965 and 1975. This is not to say that crime fiction did not exist in the Nordic region before the 1960s – Sweden in particular had a thriving detective fiction industry with authors such as Stieg Trenter and Maria Lang in the 1940s and 1950s – but Sjöwall and Wahlöö conceived a modern template for the Scandinavian crime novel. This initial version took the form of police procedurals (crime narratives focusing on the investigative

> procedures of the police) with a strong element of social critique that radically broke with the earlier Swedish *pusseldeckar* tradition (whodunnits in the fashion of English golden-age detective fiction). This early tradition placed most of its crimes within the close confines of a bourgeois milieu to a large extent inhabited by characters oblivious to pressing societal issues (2022, p. 118).

Far from being formulaic or escapist, Scandinavian crime fiction is deeply invested in the interrogation of contemporary social conditions, opening "space for the investigation of a wider social, cultural and political reality of Norwegian society through the range of topics that suit the authors' socio-political agenda" (Muždeka, 2022, p. 222) and as such its specificity lies in "a crime narrative's response to local, national and regional conditions [that are] frequently subsumed with ease into apparently 'universal' and 'global' issues", as noted by Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir and Gerardine Meaney (2022, p. 12). In consequence, the subgenre frequently functions as a mode of cultural diagnosis, examining the disintegration of welfare-state ideals, the erosion of communal trust, and the ethical crises brought about by neoliberal globalization. As Stougaard-Nielsen argues, one of the most striking characteristics of the form is the:

> volatility of crime genre to respond to new and different pressures on individuals and collectives, to reflect the anxieties of a globalized age as it is absorbed into the specific geographic locations and generic traditions of a now much less stable Scandinavian imaginary (2017, p. 114).

This "volatility" is manifest in the subgenre's capacity to oscillate between the local and the global, the procedural and the philosophical, the personal and the systemic. The protagonists that populate these narratives, often emotionally damaged, ethically conflicted, and socially marginal, exemplify the tensions of modern existence in societies that are both materially affluent and morally uncertain. Their introspective journeys frequently parallel the broader dissolution of stable identities, collective solidarities, and shared moral frameworks. As Stougaard-Nielsen further elaborates, the Scandinavian crime fiction from the 1990s onward reveals:

> the rifts in the solid modernity of the welfare state [which] have become wide-open wounds that characterize, to use Bauman's metaphors again, a 'liquid modernity', wherein social life is fundamentally conditioned by decomposed traditions, restless mobility and changeable communities made up of fluid, anxious identities. This next generation of crime novels, however, also expresses a persistent lament for a better, more solidaristic, more authentic, perhaps more sentimental society of close and trusting relationships perceived to having been forgotten in the wake of modernization and globalization – though, importantly, such bygone values are often coded as inherent to particular national characteristics of the Scandinavian welfare states (2017, p. 116).

This sense of social fragmentation and cultural nostalgia is not merely thematic; it is embedded in the formal structures and narrative rhythms of the subgenre. Crime is often not merely a personal transgression but a symptom of broader institutional or societal dysfunction. The act of investigation itself becomes an allegory for both collective introspection and the interrogation of the human condition with special focus upon its dark, sinister and sometimes brutal side. And, keeping that in mind, it is important to quote Patrick Raynal who proclaims that:

> If we can broadly define noir writing and noir inspiration as a way of looking at the world, at the dark, opaque, criminal side of the world, shot through with the intense feelings of fatality we carry within us due to the fact that the only thing we can know for certain is that we will inevitably die, then it can indeed be said that Oedipus Rex was the first noir novel (qtd. by Gudmundsdottir and Meaney, 2022, p. 1).

Nevertheless, the ideological roots of the subgenre, as hinted above, can be traced back to the pioneering Swedish duo Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, whose *Martin Beck* series, beginning with *Roseanna* in 1965, established a foundational template for socially engaged crime fiction in the form of a police procedural[11]. Gudmundsdottir and Meaney in their introduction to *Noir in the North: Genre, Politics and Place* note that "Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö are usually considered to be the originators of a distinctively Scandinavian form of crime fiction that is rooted in Swedish politics and culture, and influenced by American hardboiled and noir" (2022, p. 5), mostly by Ed McBain's *87th Precinct* novels that present "a team's investigations, rather than a brilliant sleuth's ratiocinations or an individualistic private detective's bruising moral struggles" as noted by Paula Arvas and Andrew Nestingen in their introduction to *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (2011, p. 3). Published under the joint title *The Story of a Crime*, their ten-novel cycle marked a significant departure from the traditional detective narrative[12]. Writing from a Marxist perspective during a time of perceived social complacency in Sweden, Sjöwall and Wahlöö, who, as asserted by Neale, "regarded their crime stories not as entertainment but as social criticism that sees crime as a reflection of the society in which it occurs" (2010, p. 299), used their crime novels as a vehicle to critique the myth of the egalitarian welfare state, constructing at the same time the detective who becomes "sceptical not just about the actual meaning of crime but also about the justification (with exceptions such as those

[11] Many scholars have accentuated the importance of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's literary output for crime fiction genre functioning as a powerful voice in the social-political critique. For instance, Patrick Kent Russell notes that "Nordic noir's method of social-political critique did not begin with Larsson, however; this potential was inaugurated by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö ten-book Swedish *The Story of a Crime* (1965-1974), which the pair is generally credited with adapting from the police-procedural format so useful to Nordic noir's critique from American Ed McBain's *87th Precinct* series (1956-2005). Sjöwall and Wahlöö wanted their critique of the Swedish welfare state, the so-called 'People's Home' (*folkhemmet*), to reach as wide an audience as possible, realizing more people read police novels than political pamphlets, they decided to use a fictionalized version of the newly nationalized Swedish police force to draw attention to the state's failure" (2022, pp. 117-118).

[12] The titles of the series are as follows: *Roseanna* (*Roseanna*, 1965), *Mannen som gick upp i rök* (*The Man Who Went Up in Smoke*, 1966), *Mannen på balkongen* (*The Man on the Balcony*, 1967), *Den skrattande polisen* (*The Laughing Policeman*, 1968), *Brandbilen som försvann* (*The Fire Engine That Disappeared* , 1969), *Polis, polis, potatismos!* (*Murder at the Savoy*, 1970), *Den vedervärdige mannen från Säffle* (*The Abominable Man*, 1971), *Det slutna rummet* (*The Locked Room*, 1972), *Polismördaren* (*Cop Killer*, 1974), *Terroristerna* (*The Terrorists*, 1975).

extremely rare serial killers) for the pursuit of criminals" (Evans, 2009, p. 140). Nevertheless, their vision of crime was structural rather than individualistic, positioning it as a manifestation of political malaise and bureaucratic dehumanization, constructing that way, as highlighted by Richard Shephard:

> an incisive and realistic portrait of 1960s Sweden. Although it was a country then deemed to be alluringly liberal and enticing, from the cool and measured perspective of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, Sweden was actually a stifling place, corroded by the mute desire of its populace to not rock the boat, even if the vessel in question was leaky, directionless and, for some, ultimately hazardous (2006, p. 3).

Their legacy endures not only in the subgenre's political ambition but in its emphasis on institutional critique, flawed protagonists, and realism. Their objectives in writing such a form of socially-oriented fiction are as follows:

> We wanted to describe society from our left point of view. Per had written political books, but they'd only sold 300 copies. We realised that people read crime and through the stories we could show the reader that under the official image of welfare-state Sweden there was another layer of poverty, criminality and brutality. We wanted to show where Sweden was heading: towards a capitalistic, cold and inhuman society, where the rich got richer, the poor got poorer (qtd. by Gudmundsdottir and Meaney, 2022 p. 5).

Priestman in his study entitled *Crime Fiction: From Poe to the Present* asserts that:

> Following respectful receptions for the Swedish Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's Martin Beck series (from *Roseanna*, 1965) and the Danish Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (1992, translated 1996), the sense that a really significant deepening of the genre's range and potential was taking place in the north of Europe became widespread with the runaway popularity of the Swedish Henning Mankell's series featuring Kurt Wallander (2013a, p. 72).

Henning Mankell's *Kurt Wallander* series,[13] debuting with *Faceless Killers* (1991), extended and deepened this tradition by fusing political critique with psychological realism. Wallander, a fatigued and morally troubled detective, embodies the internalization of societal decline. Mankell's fiction, incorporating the portrayal of "the investigations [that] highlighted the fundamental virtue of the police: patience and represented murder investigators as ordinary human beings" (qtd. by Neale, 2010, p. 299), foregrounds the contradictions of late modernity: increasing immigration and cultural heterogeneity, the resurgence of nationalist ideologies, and the disintegration

[13] The titles of the series are as follows: *Mördare utan ansikte* (*Faceless Killers*, 1997), *Hundarna i Riga* (*The Dogs of Riga*, 2001), *Den vita lejoninnan* (*The White Lioness*, 1998), *Mannen som log* (*The Man Who Smiled*, 2005), *Villospår* (*Sidetracked*, 1999), *Den femte kvinnan* (*The Fifth Woman*, 2000), *Steget efter* (*One Step Behind*, 2002), *Brandvägg* (*Firewall*, 2002), *Pyramiden* (*The Pyramid*, 2008), *Handen* (*An Event in Autumn*, 2014), *Den orolige mannen* (*The Troubled Man*, 2011).

of collective moral certainties. The narratives dramatize Sweden caught between historical idealism and contemporary anxiety. Importantly, Mankell bridges the gap between the explicitly political noir of the 1960s and the more introspective, character--driven narratives that typify the contemporary Scandinavian crime fiction. His literary work, therefore, offers a melancholic critique of the present, revealing the cracks in the once-imagined seamless fabric of the welfare state, as stated by Stougaard-Nielsen who claims that:

> Mankell, who like Sjöwall and Wahlöö, espoused a strongly leftist orientation in his writing, intricately tied Wallander's fictional Skåne to the discursive geopolitical realities of the post-Cold War world by inserting 'foreign' elements into crimes that – at least initially – seemed hyper-local in origin. Over the course of more than ten novels published between 1991 and 2009, Mankell proved as an adept critic of the present and future of the Swedish welfare state as his predecessors. However, with a focus on new themes including race and xenophobia, he also tapped into everyday anxieties about that some Swedes feel as they see an 'increasingly unrecognisable country' outside their windows (qtd. by Saunders, 2021, p. 64).

The subgenre's global expansion reached a new zenith with the publication of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy* in the mid-2000s[14]. Beginning with *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Larsson's work combines elements of investigative journalism, techno-thriller, and psychological drama to explore themes of misogyny, corporate malfeasance, and state violence. While analysing the Swede's literary masterpiece, Neale asserts that:

> Published posthumously in 2008, it deals with international business intrigues, dark family secrets and characters whose lives have been based on past lies. Larsson's protagonist, Mikael Blomkvist, is a Swedish financial journalist who, with the help of a damaged young woman computer hacker, Lisbeth, uncovers murder, corruption, and intrigues in the highest echelons of Swedish society, which Larsson incisively dissects with compassion and discernment (2010, p. 304).

And Bergman, while highlighting the significance of Larsson's trilogy for Scandinavian crime fiction, affirms that:

> following Stieg Larsson's success ... the Swedish crime fiction scene fundamentally changed. Inspired by Larsson's success, authors realized that they could still be successful crime writers even if they were not writing traditional police novels, which had previously been the norm and had dominated the crime fiction genre in Sweden. The crime writers enjoyed their new-found 'freedom,' Larsson's elaborate playing with crime fiction sub-genres generated a veritable flood of new genre hybrids, as well as

[14] The titles of the series as follows: *Män som Hatar Kvinnor* (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, 2005), *Flickan Som Lekte med Elden* (*The Girl Who Played with Fire*, 2006), *Luftslottet som sprängdes* (*The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest*, 2007).

> crime novels emanating from sub-genres other than the police procedural, and his Salander creation inspired new types of detective characters (2022, p. 212)

Central to the trilogy is the above-mentioned Lisbeth Salander, a socially marginalized, a fiercely intelligent hacker, a survivor of institutional abuse and "the insider/outsider character whose role is both to solve the crime and allow the reader to the see the world of crime through her eyes" (Chandra, 2022, p. 206). She is, as voiced by Barry Forshaw, Larsson's:

> maverick security analyst and computer magician [who] is some distance from the drink-sodden detectives with chaotic private lives who haunt most contemporary crime fiction, though her own life is hardly admirable. She is a damaged, brutalised young woman, with an alienating carapace: her Goth death makeup, tattoos and piercing suggest – and forcefully at that – her pronounced sociopathic tendencies (2012, p. 65).

Salander's iconoclastic presence reconfigures traditional gender roles within the subgenre and embodies the intersection of personal trauma and systemic oppression, functioning as a character "whose connection to society is liminal, at odds with the structures and and forces that shape it" (Chandra, 2022, p. 206). Larsson's narratives foreground the permeability between private suffering and public failure, thereby transforming the subgenre into a powerful medium for exposing hidden abuses and legitimizing resistance. His success catalyzed an international surge of interest in Scandinavian crime narratives, resulting in widespread translations, film adaptations, and global readership. It is likewise important to highlight that Sweden stands out as one of the most influential centers of Scandinavian crime fiction. A notable example is Johan Theorin, whose Gothic crime novels, as the author himself explains, represent "a sort of combination of dark crime stories and Scandinavian folklore and ghost stories" (qtd. in Brunsdale, 2016, p. 513)[15]. Although Theorin's crime novels are difficult to categorize, it is evident that "each combines crime and mystery with supernatural elements" (p. 514). In these works where, as noted by Forshaw, "Theorin takes the reader on unsettling trips to the Swedish island of Öland, and the ambience of a blowy off-season Swedish island is handled with consummate skill" (2013, p. 63), police investigations often unfold in typically haunted settings, where the interplay of supernatural forces and concealed crimes awakens repressed memories of past atrocities. Notably, the Swede's books are "poetic, atmospheric pieces with a precise attention to the dark psychological state of the characters" (p. 63).

Jo Nesbø, the prominent Norwegian author, further broadened the aesthetic and thematic range of contemporary Scandinavian crime fiction, especially through the *Harry Hole* series[16], which presents the police officer as a deeply flawed, existentially burdened figure whose struggles with addiction, alienation, and self-doubt reflect the disorientation

[15] The titles of the Öland Quartet as as follows: *Skumtimmen* (*Echoes from the Dead*, 2007), *Nattfåk* (*The Drakest Room*, 2008), *Blodläge* (*The Quarry*, 2010), *Rörgast* (*The Voices Beyond*, 2013).

[16] The titles of the series are as follows: *Flaggermusmannen* (*The Bat*, 1997), *Kakerlakkene* (*Cockroaches*, 1998), *Rødstrupe* (*The Redbreast*, 2000), *Sorgenfri* (*Nemesis*, 2002), *Marekors* (*The Devil's Star*, 2003), *Frelseren* (*The Redeemer*, 2005), *Snømannen* (*The Snowman*, 2007), *Panserhjerte* (*The Leopard*, 2009), *Gjenferd* (*Phantom*, 2011), *Politi* (*Police*, 2013), *Tørst* (*The Thirst*, 2017), *Kniv* (*Knife*, 2019), *Blodmåne* (*Killing Moon*, 2023).

of late-modern Scandinavian life. As Gudmundsdottir and Meaney observe, the Norwegian writer's conception bridges two distinct traditions: "the European tradition, characterized by an intellectual and observant detective who interprets the mystery [and] the American hardboiled detective who characteristically intervenes and whose actions are a catalyst towards the resolution of the plot and revelation of the perpetrator" (2022, p. 13). Harry becomes a point of fusion between the cerebral and the interventionist, the detached interpreter and the reckless catalyst, carrying within himself both the analytical cool of Georges Simenon's Jules Maigret and the bruised, impulsive drive of Chandler's Philip Marlowe. Nesbø's fiction draws from a wide range of influences such as hardboiled American noir, the psychological depth of European crime traditions, the moral chiaroscuro of existential philosophy, and the lingering atmospherics of Gothic fiction, as argued by Nordfjörd who states that:

> Indeed, while the procedural soon became the norm in Scandinavian crime fiction, there also emerged dissenting voices that lay much closer to noir and hardboiled fiction. ..., these voices are more likely to be Norwegian, Finnish or Icelandic than Danish or Swedish and that may very well have something to do with their marginality in the Nordic region (2022, p. 177).

The result is Nesbø's prose where intricate plotting coexists with stylized violence, where the pursuit of truth is inseparable from a confrontation with personal and historical ghosts. In Harry's investigations, the procedural frame is frequently destabilized by Gothic incursions: the return of buried secrets, the transformation of urban space into a site of dread, and the presence of antagonists whose menace derives not only from their actions but from the symbolic weight of the past they carry.

As Maurizio Ascari (2020) has noted, this intersection of crime and the Gothic in Nesbø's work enlarges the subgenre's possibilities, enabling explorations of trauma, guilt, and redemption that resist closure and unsettle conventional notions of justice. In this sense, Harry's cases become less about the linear unmasking of the culprit than about an ongoing negotiation with darkness and criminality, both societal and personal, where each solution reveals further layers of moral ambiguity. The novels thus stand in continuity with a lineage that runs from the haunted abbeys of Radcliffe and the labyrinthine conspiracies of Lewis to the rain-slick streets and fractured psyches of post-war noir, all refracted through the lens of contemporary Norway's own uneasy modernity.

In Iceland, Arnaldur Indriðason's *Detective Erlendur* series[17] offers a quieter, more introspective variant of the subgenre. Set against the stark Icelandic landscape, the novels focus on themes of family estrangement, emotional repression, and historical trauma. Erlendur, the solitary and melancholic investigator, bearing many similarities to Nesbø's Harry, often engages with unresolved disappearances, suicides, and abuses rooted in the distant past. It is noted by Daisy Neijmann:

[17] The titles of the series are as follows: *Synir duftsins* (*Sons of Dust*, 1997), *Dauðarósir* (*Silent Kill*, 1998), *Mýrin* (*Jar City*, 2000), *Grafarþögn* (*Silence of the Grave*, 2001), *Röddin* (*Voices*, 2003), *Kleifarvatn* (*The Draining Lake*, 2004), *Vetrarborgin* (*Arctic Chill*, 2005), *Harðskafi* (*Hypothermia*, 2007), *Myrká* (*Outrage*, 2008), *Svörtuloft* (*Black Skies*, 2013), *Furðustrandir* (*Strange Shores*, 2014), *Einvígið* (*The Great Match*, 2011), *Reykjavíkurnætur* (*Reykjavik Nights*, 2012), *Kamp Knox* (*Oblivion*, 2014).

> Erlendur has a difficult relationship with modernity and the present. He is in many ways not just a man out of place, but out of time. In this respect, he embodies an important aspect of Icelandic twentieth-century history: he is representative of the generation that lived the sudden and profound change of a traditional rural society catapulted almost overnight into modernity. It has left him rootless (2022, pp. 90-91),

and Chandra:

> Erlendur has a peculiar fascination with stories of missing persons. His night-time reading consists of books about people who went missing as long as a few centuries ago. Perhaps this fascination has something to do with Iceland's uniquely inspiring geography, its landscape that are terrifying in both their beauty and their indifference to human life (2022, p. 203).

Importantly, the physical isolation and harshness of the Icelandic setting, its volcanic terrain, long winters, and sparse population, mirrors the emotional landscapes of its characters. Indriðason's minimalist prose style and focus on internal conflict contribute to a distinctively elegiac tone that differentiates his work from the more plot-driven thrillers of his Scandinavian contemporaries.

In Denmark, Jussi Adler-Olsen's *Department Q* series[18], starting with *Mercy* (2007), infuses the subgenre with elements of dark humour and bureaucratic satire. His protagonist, Carl Mørck, is a gruff and cynical detective assigned to a cold-case division that serves as a dumping ground for inconvenient investigations. Adler-Olsen's novels critique institutional inefficiency and social indifference while maintaining the subgenre's core commitment to justice and moral inquiry. The series expands the tonal possibilities of Scandinavian crime fiction, demonstrating its fluidity and capacity for innovation without sacrificing thematic depth.

Despite their national particularities, the above-mentioned authors collectively represent a cohesive literary formation grounded in shared concerns: the fragility of social trust, the persistence of inequality, the limits of legal institutions, and the existential crises of modern life. Mużdeka adds that what "all these authors have in common ... is the subtext of existential issues, reactions to major social changes, and the determinants of criminal, political and social justice" (2022, p. 222). Additionally, the subgenre's aesthetic power derives in part from its vivid evocation of physical setting such as snowbound towns, icy lakes, and austere cityscapes which operate as both atmosphere and allegory. As Anne Marit Waade explains, the subgenre's appeal rests on a "triple premise" that is "(a) a crime narrative set within a bleak yet recognizable landscape; (b) a societal or political undercurrent that critiques contemporary issues; and (c) a landscape that functions expressively and thematically" (2020, p. 38). In this regard, the environment becomes an active agent, amplifying themes of alienation, moral ambiguity, and emotional desolation.

18 The titles of the series are as follows: *Kvinden i buret* (*Mercy*, 2007), *Fasandræberne* (*Disgrace*, 2008), *Flaskepost fra P* (*Redemption*, 2009), *Journal 64* (*Guilty*, 2010), *Marco Effekten* (*Buried*, 2012), *Den Grænseløse* (*The Hanging Girl*, 2014), *Selfies* (*The Scared Woman*, 2016), *Offer 2117* (*Victim 2117*, 2019), *Natrium Chlorid* (*The Shadow Murders*, 2021), *Syv m2 med Lås* (*Locked In*, 2021).

Social critique is not incidental to the subgenre but lies at its core. Scholars such as Hansen, Waade, and Nestingen have emphasized that Scandinavian crime fiction is fundamentally concerned with the ethical and political implications of crime and justice. Indriðason, during his speech at Frankfurt Book Fair, asserts that "Crime novels offer a great way to examine all aspects of society and I think that's what Scandinavian writers are doing so well" (qtd. in Chandra, 2022, p. 206). The subgenre consistently grapples with questions of accountability, power, and collective memory. As Stougaard--Nielsen contends, "Scandinavian crime fiction at the turn of the millennium operates within a neoliberal post-welfare state, nostalgic about a utopian golden age and critical of the perceived dissolution of trust and social responsibility" (2019, p. 16). In this way, the subgenre becomes a vehicle for public mourning and political dissent, a literary space in which the broken promises of modernity are confronted and re-imagined.

Additionally, as Luis García-Mainar notes, much of the subgenre is structured around intimate, often domestic interactions. In series such as the *Wallander*, "everything boiled down to conversations between Kurt and relatives of suspects or victims" (2020, p. 169), foregrounding emotional resonance over procedural mechanics. Such narratives reflect a shift from classic detective fiction's emphasis on logical deduction to a more psychologically driven model focused on trauma, relational complexity, and subjective experience. This development aligns with what García-Mainar identifies as a "network of introspective realist crime" (p. 159), where storytelling becomes a vehicle for exploring interiority, memory, and moral tension.

Moreover, the transnational success of the subgenre has prompted scholars such as Christiana Gregoriou to articulate the concept of a "crime fiction migration effect" (2017, p. 2), whereby Scandinavian crime fiction travels across cultural and linguistic borders while maintaining its ideological core. Significantly, the subgenre's mobility enables it to adapt internationally recognizable literary and audio-visual forms to local circumstances. This adaptability, however, is not purely organic; it is mediated by paratextual strategies. Nilsson highlights how book covers, marketing campaigns, and media framing help shape a "cosmopolitan imaginary of the north", one that trades on familiar motifs such as "frozen lakes, barren forests", and emotionally restrained detectives (2016, pp. 542-543).

Ultimately, the enduring appeal of Scandinavian crime fiction lies in its fusion of emotional depth and critical inquiry. As Jakob Isak Nielsen (2016) observes, its purpose extends beyond entertainment to incorporate a reflective dimension that engages with social and ethical concerns, reaffirming the subgenre's dual commitment to narrative immersion and political awareness. Through this hybridization of form and function, Scandinavian crime fiction has established itself as a culturally significant and globally resonant mode of storytelling, one that continues to expose the fractures, anxieties, and aspirations of the modern world. As Indriðason notes, a Scandinavian crime novel "is an ideal setting for the criticism and examination and dissection of things that are unsatisfactory, not least because it's a genre that is more widely disseminated and more popular than many others" (qtd. in Chandra, 2022, p. 209).

4. Jo Nesbø and His *Oslo Trilogy*: Between Crime and Gothic Fiction

Nesbø stands as one of the most influential figures in contemporary Norwegian crime fiction, best known for his internationally acclaimed *Harry Hole* series. Born in Oslo in 1960 and raised in Molde, he studied economics at the Norwegian School of Economics in Bergen before working as a financial analyst and stockbroker. During the 1990s, he also achieved national recognition as the lead vocalist and songwriter of the pop-rock band Di Derre ("those guys" in English). His multifaceted background – spanning finance, music, and literature – informs his writing, which blends psychological insight, moral complexity, and fast-paced plotting.

Nesbø made his literary debut in 1997 with *The Bat* [*Flaggermusmannen*][19], the first instalment in the *Harry Hole* series. His fusion of crime fiction conventions with social commentary and psychological realism soon established him as a defining voice of Scandinavian crime fiction. In addition to this series, stand-alone novels such as *Headhunters* [*Hodejegerne*, 2008] and *The Son* [*Sønnen*, 2014] demonstrate the Norwegian writer's ability to combine suspense with ethical inquiry. His work for younger readers – the *Doctor Proctor's Fart Powder* [*Doktor Proktors Prompepulver*, 2007-2017] series, and his Shakespearean retelling of *Macbeth* [2018] – further illustrate his versatility.

As Forshaw observes, Nesbø's novels have elevated him "to stratospheric heights – and made him the most likely inheritor of the Larsson crown in Nordic crime fiction" (2012, p. 105). His writing merges the traditions of Scandinavian social realism with a distinctly noir sensibility, situating him within a transnational lineage that includes both Mankell and Chandler. At the heart of his literary oeuvre stands Harry – a morally conflicted, self-destructive police officer whose relentless pursuit of justice continually collides with his own demons. Brunsdale describes Harry as one of those detectives "beset with demons within and without themselves… having their hearts ripped out and subsiding with grim Viking smiles upon their lips" (2016, p. 262). Forshaw similarly defines him as "a lone wolf, a chronic alcoholic separated from his wife and child" (2012, p. 106). A thorough presentation of the police officer is offered by Muždeka who asserts that:

> Norwegian noir provides the range of characters consistent with the *néo-polar* novels typical protagonist description: broke, marginal, marginalized, unemployed, rejected by society, outraged, etc. Jo Nesbø's Harry Hole, for example, almost perfectly fits the bill. He is an obsessive yet vulnerable alcoholic and chain-smoker who does not have much experience of being happy. Both his professional and private life abound with demons he needs to confront, and both aspects of his life can be marked as dysfunctional – the first because of his tendency to defy authority and break the rules, the second because of his troubled relationship with Rakel.

[19] In square brackets, I provide the original title of Nesbø's novel along with its publication date.

> In Hole's life, with its intermittent episodes of drunken stupor, the only emotional constant is found in his relationship with his mentally challenged sister, Sis (2020, p. 223).

Through Harry, Nesbø transforms Scandinavian crime fiction into a psychological and moral study of alienation, guilt, and redemption. Forshaw remarks that the series serves as "a coolly objective guide to fluctuations in Norwegian society" (2012, p. 105), continuing "a long line of Scandinavian crime fiction exposing the dark side of a seemingly ideal society" (qtd. in Brunsdale, 2016, p. 33). His legacy, therefore, lies not only in commercial success but in his transformation of the subgenre into a form of cultural and philosophical inquiry. His fiction interrogates the structures of power and morality that shape contemporary society while inviting readers to reflect on the complexities of justice, identity, and human fallibility. By doing so, Nesbø has solidified his position as both a bestselling novelist and a significant literary voice whose impact on crime fiction, within and beyond Scandinavia, continues to resonate. According to Bassnett, the success of writers like Nesbø, who "write in minority languages in countries with small populations and advanced welfare systems", illustrates "the unpredictability of success" and highlights how translation has facilitated "global access" to Scandinavian crime fiction (2017, p. 149).

Nesbø, as Brunsdale notes, "feels himself more related to American hard-boiled crime writers like Raymond Chandler than to practitioners of the Scandinavian crime novel" (2016, p. 334). This transatlantic influence manifests most clearly in his Oslo--based detective series, where the Norwegian capital emerges not merely as setting but as a central, unifying force. Over the course of thirteen novels, Harry's battles with addiction, love, guilt, and despair – almost all, except for the first two instalments *The Bat* and *Cockroaches* [*Kakerlakkene*, 1998] – are intricately bound to Oslo's psychological and urban landscape. The city functions as both mirror and catalyst for Harry's inner conflicts. Its cold, rain-slicked streets, sharp contrasts between affluence and decay, and pervasive atmosphere of moral ambiguity form a symbolic counterpart to his internal struggles. Nesbø's Oslo is neither a picturesque Nordic capital nor a purely realist backdrop; it is a living organism, pulsating with corruption, isolation, and existential anxiety. Through it, the Norwegian writer captures the contradictions of modern Norway – prosperity shadowed by disillusionment, order undermined by moral decay. The *Oslo Trilogy – The Redbreast* [*Rødstrupe*, 2000], *Nemesis* [*Sorgenfri*, 2002], and *The Devil's Star* [*Marekors*, 2003] – marks a defining phase in Nesbø's literary career and the psychological evolution of his protagonist. These novels constitute a cohesive narrative arc in which Oslo serves as the connective and symbolic thread, linking individual trauma with collective memory and moral crisis.

The Redbreast is widely regarded as a defining entry in the series and marks a significant leap forward in Nesbø's literary ambition. As Mužděka notes, the novel "tackles Norway's problematic involvement with the Nazis in the past, but also the awakening of national-socialist ideas in contemporary Norwegian society" (2022, p. 227). Through its non-linear narrative structure, the novel "ingeniously counterpointed Norwegian present-day neo-Nazi activities with painful echoes of the Nazi occupation that the Norwegian national consciousness apparently has not yet completely resolved" (Brunsdale, 2016, p. 333). This temporal layering adds depth to the investigation,

transforming what initially appears to be a straightforward murder case into a meditation on national identity, generational guilt, and the long shadows cast by fascist ideology. In this novel, readers see Harry at one of his most introspective moments, confronting both external threats and his own internal fragility. *The Redbreast* solidified Harry who "has a tinge of American culture" (p. 332), as a detective of literary and cultural significance, operating within and against the boundaries of both Norwegian and international crime traditions. Significantly, the novel functions as a springboard for the writer to explore the true meaning of "crime". Nesbø attempts to define it through a plot in which, as underlined by Mary Evans, "the way in which questionable aspects of Norway's part in the Second World War is erased from the public memory" (2009, p. 143). This act is undeniably criminal for the author because it "denies and obscures what is true" (p. 143). It therefore constitutes a crime in itself, as it prevents the citizens of Norway from uncovering the truth about this phase of their national history.

In *Nemesis*, the fourth instalment in the *Harry Hole* series, Nesbø expands his thematic reach into the psychological terrain of revenge, deception, and moral ambiguity. The narrative centers around the murder of a woman shortly after she reconnects with Harry, which coincides with a string of meticulously planned bank robberies. As the investigation unfolds, Harry becomes both suspect and detective, forced to confront not only the case itself but also the manipulation of evidence, the distortion of memory, and his own ethical boundaries. As Brunsdale observes, the novel "individualizes the role of revenge in today's society" (2016, p. 334), presenting vengeance not as an abstract moral failing but as a personal and often institutionalized response to trauma. In this novel, the reader sees a more psychologically torn Harry, grappling with the implications of his past relationships, particularly with Rakel, whose safety and trust he struggles to maintain. *Nemesis* places the police officer in a morally compromised position, emphasizing the extent to which he is both shaped and damaged by the same systems he seeks to dismantle. This duality between justice and complicity, between investigator and target exemplifies Nesbø's interest in the porous boundaries between good and evil, hero and antihero.

The Devil's Star continues this trajectory, plunging Harry into the investigation of a series of ritualistic murders linked by the presence of tiny red diamonds shaped like pentagrams. These grotesque crime scenes, which suggest connections to black magic and occult symbolism, introduce a heightened sense of Gothic horror into the series. The novel further develops Harry's growing isolation, fuelled by his alcoholism and his increasing distrust of the institution he serves. As he is drawn deeper into the case, he uncovers links to police corruption, embodied by the police officer Tom Waaler, which strike at the core of his professional world. The antagonist's connection to Oslo's police force threatens to unravel the entire department, placing Harry in direct opposition to his own colleagues. This narrative arc reinforces the theme of institutional rot, a hallmark of Scandinavian crime fiction while exploring Harry's capacity for resilience amid personal collapse. His relationship with Rakel continues to deteriorate, and the emotional weight of the investigation takes a visible toll on his mental health. As the trilogy concludes, Harry is portrayed not only as a brilliant police officer but as a tragic figure whose commitment to justice has left him morally and emotionally scarred.

Taken together, the *Oslo Trilogy* forms a deeply cohesive sub-series within the *Harry Hole* series. They chart Harry's descent into disillusionment while positioning him as a modern, noir-inflected Gothic hero: haunted, flawed, and existentially adrift. Nesbø's work here is a masterful blending of crime fiction, historical reckoning, and psychological drama. Through the *Oslo Trilogy*, the author not only asserts the global relevance of Scandinavian crime fiction but also crafts a detective whose struggles reflect the fractured and morally complex world he inhabits.

4.1. Oslo

One of the most notable parallels between Gothic and crime fiction is their shared emphasis on setting. Jerrold E. Hogle asserts that Gothic fiction, defined by its eerie and foreboding atmosphere:

> usually takes place (at least some of the time) in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island, a large house or theatre, an aging city or urban underworld, a decaying storehouse, factory, laboratory, public building, or some new recreation of an older venue, such as an office with old filing cabinets, an overworked spaceship, or a computer memory. Within this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story (2015, p. 2).

John Paul Riquelme likewise observes that "Gothic fiction is structurally and implicitly a negative version of pastoral because of its turn to foreign locales that are threatening and bizarre" (2008, p. 5). In Gothic fiction, setting plays a pivotal role in establishing atmospheres of mystery, dread, and sublimity. Locations often serve as psychological and symbolic mirrors of characters' inner states, representing moral and supernatural forces that shape the narrative. Radcliffe used setting to construct the oppressive atmosphere that defines her works. Through vivid depictions of landscapes, architecture, and nature, she intensified emotional tension while engaging with the sublime – a concept merging awe and terror. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), settings are not merely fearful spaces but integral to plot and psychological realism. The remote castles, dark forests, and desolate ruins in these novels reflect the protagonists' emotional turmoil, mirroring entrapment, fear, and existential dread. Radcliffe's portrayal of the sublime – through vast, powerful landscapes evoking both beauty and terror – underscores the emotional and psychological depth of her characters. Her settings thus function as dynamic narrative agents that shape the story's trajectory and thematic complexity.

Similarly, crime fiction frequently employs bleak urban environments and isolated rural landscapes to construct tension and suspense. These spaces act not as static backgrounds but as central arenas where crimes unfold and justice is pursued. Ascari argues that "in nineteenth-century crime fiction this panoptical view of the urban space is associated not only with the valiant knights of modernity, but also with the forces of darkness" (2007, p. 52). Furthermore, Henry Sutton observes that "crime series are dependent on place and identity ... Crime writers and their series characters become

synonymous with certain cities, territories, and terrain" (2023, p. 101). Stewart King further argues that "place is arguably the most important feature in crime fiction. While it is not the defining feature – that, of course, is the presence of a crime – place gives the crime meaning. For in crime fiction, nothing makes sense without place". He continues, "crimes are place-specific in the sense that they are rooted in the particular physical, cultural, political, economic, environmental, social, and, of course, legal circumstances of the place where the crime is committed" (2020, p. 211). Agger similarly emphasizes the genre's urban focus, noting that:

> the typical setting is the city with its diverse criminal organizations, its mean streets, and modest households – and their opposites in wealthy suburbs, large penthouse flats, and imposing official buildings. Stockholm, Oslo, Malmö, or Copenhagen is ideal as locations for this tradition for which Beck may be considered a prototype (2020, p. 18).

In both Gothic and crime fiction, setting operates as an active and generative narrative element that heightens emotional intensity, fosters unease, and shapes the actions of both virtuous and villainous characters. Eva Erdmann highlights this centrality, suggesting that:

> The surroundings where the investigations take place are portrayed with increasing inventiveness, to the extent that the crime itself appears to be at best merely a successful stunt. It almost seems as if the inventories of criminal motives and case histories have been exhausted, so that crime fiction's primary distinguishing characteristic has become the locus criminalis (2009, p. 12).

Don Bartlett, translator of Jo Nesbø's works, likewise affirms the importance of location, noting that he "sees location as just one factor that has contributed to the success of the Norwegian writer" (Maher, Bassnett, 2022, p. 52).

Setting in Scandinavian crime fiction thus shapes both narrative structure and character development, imbuing the works with thematic resonance and emotional depth. Stougaard-Nielsen contends that the subgenre "has since the early nineties been a product of and contributors to the ongoing negotiation of the welfare state with its generic predilection for investigating dependent individual and societal conflicts located in specific yet mutable social and geographical environments" (2017, p. 120). As Waade notes, such settings "not only bring depth and complexity to the story and the characters but also bring narratives, imageries, and associations as layers of meaning beyond the diegetic world" (2020, p. 49). These stark environments often mirror the protagonists' inner struggles, engaging with both aesthetic and political dimensions of space, as evident in Mankell's *Wallander* series, where the unforgiving Scandinavian landscape becomes essential to mood and meaning. Settings in Scandinavian crime fiction frequently evoke isolation and moral ambiguity and have even fostered "crime tourism". According to Stougaard-Nielsen:

> crime tourism is attached to the very phenomenon of reading hyperlocal Scandinavian crime fiction itself, as this genre is at times read and marketed as nostalgic guides to idyllic and nondescript rural regions that only become interesting and meaningful to tourists when turned into violent crime scenes (2017, p. 161).

This juxtaposition of idyllic rural landscapes with scenes of brutal violence creates a compelling tension that captivates readers and tourists alike, transforming space into both aesthetic construct and cultural commodity.

Gothic fiction likewise foregrounds setting as a fundamental narrative device. Decaying mansions, haunted landscapes, and atmospheric gloom evoke dread and suspense while symbolizing the uncanny. In a wealth of Gothic works, setting functions as a character in its own right: oppressive, mysterious, and essential to the protagonists' emotional and psychological arcs. In both Gothic and Scandinavian crime fiction, setting is vital to exploring alienation, trauma, and the human psyche, though each genre approaches these themes through distinct cultural and aesthetic lenses.

The melancholic atmosphere that pervades Scandinavian crime fiction constitutes a defining characteristic that closely aligns it with the Gothic tradition. Waade argues that the subgenre's affective world-building is central to its appeal, enabling readers to immerse themselves in the emotional landscapes of the characters. These "melancholic elements are also characteristic of Scandinavian crime fiction literature, for example the antihero and troubled protagonists, the places and the climate" (2017, p. 380). The morose tone is further intensified by the harsh Nordic climate, which serves as a metaphor for inner conflict. The interplay between setting and emotion parallels Gothic fiction's engagement with the sublime, wherein the natural world mirrors psychological states. The stark, often chilling landscapes evoke existential dread comparable to that generated by Gothic settings. Waade's scholarly contributions, together with those of Hansen, elucidate how geographical and cultural landscapes shape Scandinavian crime fiction's narrative and atmospheric dimensions. Irina Souch notes that:

> the ability to solicit viewers' contemplation constitutes the hallmark of the Nordic Noir genre, known for its consistent figuration of atmospheric or, as Kim Toft Hansen and Anne Marit Waade (2017) call them, 'evocative' landscapes associated with a particular sense of displacement, nostalgia, and melancholic ambiguity (2020, p. 116).

Creeber similarly observes that Scandinavian crime fiction's desolate landscapes contribute to a distinctive "mood of eerie melancholy" (2015, p. 22), symbolizing the bleak isolation of the characters and implying that the systems shaping human life "may sometimes work on a level beyond all human rationality" (p. 29). This association with the fantastic and the horrific recalls Yvonne Leffler's assertion that horror "revolves ... around a certain type of landscape or Gothic topography, the Nordic wilderness, weaving the landscape into the story rather than using it as backdrop for the action on stage" (2013, p. 141). Waade (2017) also underscores that melancholy is deeply embedded in the subgenre's landscapes, arising from depictions of bleak and isolated environments. Harsh weather and austere natural beauty foster displacement and nostalgia, heightening both emotional resonance and socio-political commentary. She likewise highlights the significance of Arctic regions as unique narrative environments. The aesthetic distinctiveness of these landscapes has given rise to 'Arctic Noir,' which "makes the Arctic setting and climate significant to the plotline of the crime narrative as well as in the visual aesthetic" (Waade, 2020, p. 39). Such branding demonstrates how spatial environments inform character motivation, atmosphere, and ideology.

Urban environments in Scandinavian crime fiction also warrant attention. The intricate streets of Oslo in Nesbø's novels, for instance, symbolize the contradictions of modern life, where personal and political narratives converge. Although these spaces contrast with the rural Gothic landscape, both literary traditions utilize setting to challenge societal norms and explore the darker facets of human nature. The juxtaposition of urban and rural settings in Scandinavian crime fiction mirrors the Gothic's interrogation of the boundary between civilization and wilderness.

Themes of isolation and alienation are further accentuated by the subgenre's social realism. Scandinavian crime fiction often critiques the welfare state and its institutions, using setting to reveal systemic inequality and moral tension. Stougaard--Nielsen identifies it as "a privileged genre through which to detect the symptoms of the 'shattered illusion of comfort' in order to reveal the 'systemic violence'" (2017, p. 4) underpinning the welfare state. Referring to Sjöwall and Wahlöö's *The Story of a Crime*, he notes that

> from a clear ideological standpoint on the radical new left, they [ten novels comprising the series] went behind the façade of an idyllic Stockholm to depict a dystopian and totalitarian Swedish welfare state where innocent individuals were pushed into criminal activities by a corrupt, alienating and consumerist welfare state that had sold out to capitalist interests (p. 4).

He further explains that "the familial conflicts and alienation of detectives, victims and criminals in an inauthentic, urban consumer society [are] presented as intricately connected to the welfare state's rational and amnesic obsession with progress and social engineering" (p. 5). Crimes thus become symptomatic of broader societal decay, echoing the Gothic's exploration of moral collapse through its settings. Temporal dimensions also contribute to the subgenre's affective tone. The prolonged darkness of Nordic winters reinforces its sombre mood, recalling Gothic fiction's use of time to evoke nostalgia, loss, and dread. Both literary traditions employ setting and temporality to deepen narrative complexity and social critique.

Gothic influences are equally evident in characterization. Protagonists in Scandinavian crime fiction often embody the Gothic antihero: haunted, morally uncertain, and psychologically complex. Their surroundings externalize these conflicts, reinforcing the subgenre's existential concerns. Structurally, too, Scandinavian crime fiction reflects Gothic conventions of suspense, ambiguity, and revelation. Bergman (2014) notes in *Swedish Crime Fiction: The Making of Nordic Noir* that the subgenre's power lies in its fusion of crime and social critique, much as the Gothic melds horror with moral inquiry. The cultural and historical contexts embedded within Scandinavian crime fiction further enrich its thematic complexity. Contemporary issues such as immigration, gender inequality, and environmental degradation are explored through the prism of location, echoing the Gothic's tendency to embed historical anxieties within symbolic landscapes.

Thus, setting in Scandinavian crime fiction constitutes a complex narrative agent that shapes character, theme, and reader engagement. Both Scandinavian crime and Gothic fiction use setting to interrogate isolation, trauma, and moral ambiguity, producing narratives of profound psychological and emotional depth. The bleak, unyielding landscapes of Scandinavian crime fiction, coupled with its commitment to social realism,

resonate with the Gothic's evocation of the uncanny and the sublime. As the subgenre evolves, setting remains central to its narrative strategies, offering fertile ground for continued exploration of the interplay among place, identity, and human experience. As Hansen and Waade conclude in *Locating Nordic Noir: From Beck to the Bridge*:

> But what is striking about such titles, as well as numerous Nordic Noir titles, is the specific spatial references that are included. There would be no *The Wire* without Baltimore; there would be no *True Detective* (at least the first season) without the US state of Louisiana; there would be no *The Bridge* without Copenhagen and Malmö; and there would be no *Wallander* without Ystad ... The entire genre revolves around crime scene investigations ... places, themes and characters are closely tied in crime fiction–and this clearly applies to Nordic Noir as well (2017, p. 8).

It is therefore essential to recognize that there would be no Harry Hole without Oslo and the various locations in which his investigative expertise proves indispensable.

4.1.1. Oslo: A City of Chaos, Emptiness, and Unsettling Silence

In *The Redbreast*, Oslo emerges as a mutable and uncanny urban organism, shifting between the overstimulating chaos of its public spaces and the hollowed silence of its deserted streets. At times the city is rendered as an environment of overwhelming sensory saturation, where the "cacophony of cars, trams [and] the beeping sounds" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 20) creates a relentless auditory pressure[20]. Visual imagery compounds this disorientation: "taxis shooting back and forth under neon lights" and crowds "drifting up and down the pavements" (p. 111), giving the streets an almost dreamlike instability. Within this flux, individuals appear grotesquely estranged from themselves, their faces "distorted, bizarre… like in crazy mirrors at the fair" (p. 96), as if the city were warping its inhabitants into caricatures of urban life. This sense of restless movement reaches its apotheosis in the National Day celebrations, when Oslo's public spaces are swallowed by human density: "The Palace Gardens were right in front of him [Harry] and the path up to the Palace was black with people" (p. 583). Yet Nesbø counterpoints this civic spectacle with glimpses of the city's nocturnal underbelly, as in the scene where "The woman still stood by the wall; she had pulled her skirt back into place and lit a cigarette which glowed in the dark when she inhaled" (p. 496), a moment of illicit transaction lingering in the shadows beyond the glare of the national stage.

[20] Charles Dickens in the chapter 15 of *Dombey and Son* (1846/1848) offers a similar presentation of the huge city: "To and from the heart of this great change, all day and night, throbbing currents rushed and returned incessantly like its life's blood. Crowds of people and mountains of goods, departing and arriving scores upon scores of times in every four-and-twenty hours, produced a fermentation in the place that was always in action. The very houses seemed disposed to pack up and take trips. Wonderful Members of Parliament, who, little more than twenty years before, had made themselves merry with the wild railroad theories of engineers, and given them the liveliest rubs in cross-examination, went down into the north with their watches in their hands, and sent on messages before by the electric telegraph, to say that they were coming. Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or, advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet achieved" (2002, p. 137).

While on the surface these depictions might seem to merely chronicle the city's contradictions, they in fact align with a broader pattern in Scandinavian crime fiction, wherein urban environments become catalysts for crime through ritualized gatherings[21]. As Gudmundsdottir and Meaney observe, the subgenre often depends on "an event or ritual that brings together people from a wider world, who have a shared past, objective or hidden connection [perceived as] the concatenation of significant events and self-contained communities and setting to create the ideal crime scene" (2022, p. 13). The 17th May celebrations thus serve as more than civic festivity; they create a dense web of presence, memory, and opportunity, within which the attempted assassination of the Crown Prince by Gudbrand could unfold with both symbolic precision and maximal dramatic impact.

The atmosphere of relentless activity and pervasive tension persists in *Nemesis*, wherein the urban environment is once again portrayed as a site of chaotic motion and overwhelming noise. The cityscape is rendered as a hostile, nearly impenetrable force, exemplified by the image of cars that "formed an apparently impenetrable wall" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 178). This depiction not only conveys physical congestion but also symbolically underscores the emotional and psychological barriers confronting the characters. In a particularly poignant funeral scene, the solemn tolling of church bells is overpowered by the intrusion of city noise: "the noise of the traffic in Kirkeveien drowned the peeling of the bells" (p. 185), suggesting a world in which private grief is continually subsumed by the city's indifference and sensory aggression. Even moments of potential intimacy are disrupted by the relentless rhythms of urban life, as indicated by the mention that "the afternoon rush-hour traffic had started" (p. 469), a detail that intrudes upon scenes otherwise marked by introspection. The city's infrastructure is metaphorically depicted as a "polluted, traffic-congested twisted bowel" (p. 553), evoking a visceral sense of entrapment and disorder, and reinforcing the sense of existential suffocation that pervades the narrative.

For Harry, the relentless urban soundscape is not merely background noise but a defining feature of his lived experience. The intensifying roar of traffic – "the roar of the traffic in Finnmarkgata seemed to increase" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 623) – and the gradual fading of emergency sirens – "the distant ambulance siren slowly fading in the rumble of noise from the urban cauldron" (p. 638) – highlight the city's transformation into a sensory vortex from which there is no escape. These auditory elements function both as metaphors for and manifestations of the internal turmoil and moral ambiguity that characterize the police officer's psychological landscape. Paradoxically, however, there exists a degree of comfort and familiarity within this auditory chaos. Harry reflects on

[21] It is important to note that Nesbø is not the only crime writer to employ festivals or other large-scale social gatherings as the backdrop for criminal acts. Agatha Christie and Maria Lang were particularly adept at situating their plots within the framework of holidays, public ceremonies, and communal festivities, occasions that, by their very nature, draw together a cross-section of characters with pre-existing or concealed connections. This narrative strategy not only heightens dramatic tension by concentrating suspects, motives, and opportunities in a confined temporal and spatial setting, but also provides a plausible rationale for the detective's presence at the scene of the crime. In Christie's work, village fêtes, Christmas gatherings, and even celebratory dinners often become crucibles in which latent hostilities erupt into violence, while Lang's Swedish crime novels similarly exploit midsummer festivals, traditional dances, and other culturally significant events to create atmospheres of conviviality laced with unease. In all these cases, the festive occasion becomes a structural device that transforms a moment of collective celebration into the stage for betrayal, revelation, and the unmasking of hidden transgressions.

the city's constant hum through a lens of nostalgia: "The noise of the cars in Finnmarkgata reminded Harry of his childhood in Oppsal ... the only thing he longed for: to return to the regular, soporific drone of cars, only broken by a motorbike, a noisy exhaust and a distant police siren" (pp. 533-534). This passage reveals a complex psychological dynamic wherein urban noise, typically associated with stress, alienation, and overstimulation, becomes for Harry a source of emotional grounding and continuity. The mechanical rhythm of the city emerges as a surrogate for emotional stability, illustrating how inextricably his identity is entwined with the very urban environment that simultaneously offers both familiarity and existential threat. Thus, *Nemesis* extends and deepens the depiction of Oslo as a turbulent, noise-saturated metropolis that mirrors the psychological fragmentation of its inhabitants, which is compatible with the presentation of cities (on the example of London) as "grotesque or distorted, as if in a distorting mirror, provoking horror or surprise in readers", as stated by Kokot (2013, p. 34)[22]. The dynamic interplay between sound, space, and character is central to the novel's atmosphere, rendering the city a quasi-organic entity whose ceaseless activity simultaneously sustains and destabilizes those who dwell within it.

Significantly, in contrast to the frenetic energy and constant motion that dominate the first two novels of the *Oslo Trilogy*, *The Devil's Star* presents a markedly different depiction of the Norwegian capital. Here, the city is portrayed as a spatial entity marked by lethargy, sluggishness, and a conspicuous absence of movement, qualities that paradoxically accentuate the persistent undercurrent of criminality lurking beneath the capital's seemingly dormant surface. Instead of rush-hour chaos or the relentless cacophony of urban life, Oslo is depicted during the languid summer months, when heat and holiday departures appear to slow its tempo: "Even the cars – despite zilch rush-hour traffic – were moving more slowly" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 16), a detail that suggests not only physical deceleration but, too, a deeper atmospheric inertia. This subdued urban rhythm does not evoke safety or repose; rather, it hints at a city whose threat lies in concealment and stillness, rather than in overt motion. The theme of stasis is further exemplified in a passage where Harry accompanies Vibeke Knutsen home: "They glided slowly down Ullevålsveien as cars and unoccupied taxis cruised past and the evening air caressed their skins as it does in Oslo in July, but only then" (p. 115). The calm, tactile imagery evokes a sense of fleeting tranquillity, a moment suspended in time. Yet this apparent serenity is subtly undermined by a latent tension, as the stillness of the city veils the simmering threat of violence that permeates the narrative where Oslo emerges as a duplicitous space, outwardly peaceful, yet harbouring concealed layers of criminality and moral ambiguity beneath its placid surface.

Despite this daytime inertia, Nesbø subtly reminds the readers that the capital of Norway is far from lifeless. Oslo comes alive at night, revealing a different kind of vitality, one marked by hedonism, unpredictability, and moments of eerie beauty. This nocturnal energy is vividly captured in the following passage:

[22] „groteskowy czy zniekształcony sposób niczym w krzywym zwierciadle, prowokując grozę lub zdziwienie czytelników" (My translation of the Polish quote).

> In flooded the sounds of city life on a summer's night: the desperate life cycle of the mayfly, music from a cruising cabriolet, exaggerated laughter, high heels clicking frenetically against tarmac. People enjoying themselves. ... Harry and Aune stayed where they were, listening to the distant sounds of a party, the indistinct shouting and the Strokes, broken by a call to prayer which for some reason or other suddenly reverberated metallically and probably blasphemously, yet in a strangely beautiful way, from the open window (Nesbø, 2022, pp. 288-289).

This moment encapsulates the city's complex auditory landscape, simultaneously mundane and surreal, celebratory and haunting. The juxtaposition of secular indulgence with the unexpected intrusion of religious ritual produces a layered soundscape that underscores the dissonant yet compelling nature of the urban night.

Returning to the first instalment, in *The Redbreast* Nesbø constructs Oslo as both dynamic and stagnant, its physical landscape oscillating between bustling vitality and oppressive emptiness. This unsettling duality is encapsulated, for instance in the reference to "the toxic March Oslo air" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 320), a phrase that conveys not only environmental bleakness but also a deeper moral and psychological malaise. Consequently, the city's atmosphere becomes a metaphor for the existential disquiet that haunts its inhabitants.

One of the most striking manifestations of Oslo's alienating topography emerges through the narrative arc of the police officer Ellen Gjelten. In the hours leading up to her death, her journey through the city marks a gradual descent into isolation, despite moving through areas that ought to be densely populated and, therefore, safe. As she follows procedural instructions and tries to maintain composure, she passes through streets described as unnervingly empty. As noted in the following passages, although it is a Saturday evening, "the streets in this part of town were practically deserted" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 316), and "Jens Bjelkes gate was still deserted as she hurried towards Thorvald Meyers gate, which she knew would be teeming with people at this time" (p. 332). The absence of human activity is underscored repeatedly by descriptions denoting emptiness: "The lighting here was frugal and the pavements deserted" (p. 319), creating an atmosphere charged with vulnerability and foreboding. The contrast between the anticipated urban vibrancy and the actual desolation is crucial. When Ellen exits her apartment, the city remains mysteriously silent and lifeless. This spatial juxtaposition evokes a chilling realization: "It struck her how little distance there was between a seething mass of people and total desolation in a large city" (p. 333). This thought encapsulates one of the novel's central tensions, how modern urban life can oscillate between presence and absence, connection and abandonment, with terrifying ease. Ellen's murder, which occurs shortly thereafter on a deserted street, serves as the grim culmination of this pervasive atmosphere of isolation. Her killer, Sverre Olsen, is able to strike precisely because the city permits it, its emptiness providing both cover and silent complicity. Rather than offering protection through proximity and surveillance, the urban space of Oslo becomes a void that facilitates violence. As Sverre finally reaches her "in the dark street" (p. 337), the novel's themes of abandonment, urban invisibility, and the fragile boundary between safety and exposure are chillingly realized.

In *Nemesis*, the city once again emerges as a site of temporal dissonance and existential paradox. Oslo is marked by moments of profound solitude and eerie silence that interrupt, and at times completely eclipse, the city's habitual noise and chaos. This juxtaposition of calm and commotion reveals a deeper psychological tension embedded in the urban experience, mirroring the fractured interior states of its characters. Harry, along with his investigative team, encounters this uncanny stillness repeatedly throughout their investigations. These moments of unexpected silence underscore the fragile boundary between order and disorder in the urban environment. One such moment occurs when the police officer surveys a crime scene and notices the almost surreal absence of activity: "Harry looked up at the house. No barking to be heard. A dark blue BMW drove slowly past them and parked further down the street. Otherwise everything was quiet" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 434). This subdued atmosphere momentarily suspends the usual rhythm of the city, evoking a sense of disquiet rather than calm. The silence is not restorative but ominous, foreshadowing violence or signalling its aftermath. This effect is heightened in a subsequent scene on Sofies gate, where the stillness takes on an explicitly unnatural quality. He observes the street with growing unease:

> Where was everyone? Sofies gate was a quiet street, but Harry had never seen it as deserted as now. ... It struck him how everything had happened in silence, no shouts, no barking, just the sound of flesh against flesh and flesh being torn. ... The street was empty. Deserted (pp. 368-369).

Here, silence is not merely the absence of noise but a tangible presence, heavy with menace. The horror of the scene is intensified precisely because it unfolds in such profound quiet, a stark contrast to the expected cacophony of urban violence. The environment, normally alive with the sounds of the city, is rendered sterile and detached, amplifying the brutality through its very negation. This auditory void recurs at critical investigative moments. For example, when Harry ascends a stairwell, the urgency is intensified by the internalization of sound when he seems to hear nothing but his own heartbeat: "The hum of a refrigerator and sitcom laughter from a neighbour's TV. Harry tried to breathe deeply and evenly as he listened to the total darkness. He could hear cars outside and felt a cold draught, indicating that the windows in the flat were old. But most important: no noise to suggest anyone was at home" (p. 555). The absence of external noise creates a psychological tunnel, narrowing his focus and heightening suspense. Similarly, the desolation encountered during police canvassing – "you can see for yourself how deserted it is here" (p. 458) – reinforces the recurring motif of urban emptiness. Even in communal spaces, the expected presence of people vanishes, revealing a city that is simultaneously inhabited and inaccessible. Significantly, Nesbø's use of silence extends beyond scenes of male camaraderie or formal police work. It also punctuates emotionally intimate moments, particularly between Harry and his close colleague Beate Lonn. During their attempt to apprehend the suspect Trond, the stillness is so acute that they "could hear the refrigerator motor on the other side of the corridor switch itself on" (p. 659). The domestic banality of this sound, normally drowned out by ambient noise, becomes amplified and surreal, underscoring the heightened tension of the moment and illustrating the fragility of human perception in such charged spaces.

In *The Devil's Star*, the portrayal of Oslo continues to oscillate between visibility and obscurity, vitality and vacuity. The city is permeated by persistent imagery of desertedness and spatial seclusion, as indicated, for instance, in this image: "But now everyone was on holiday and the town was almost deserted" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 7), which serve both narrative and psychological purposes. The depictions of urban emptiness frame the criminal landscape within which Harry operates, while also functioning as a device that lulls characters and readers alike into a false sense of calm, one that conceals an escalating undercurrent of violence. Throughout the novel, quietude and absence become symbolic markers of the city's moral and structural disintegration, reinforcing the fragile boundary between public order and private disorder. The motif of spatial emptiness is introduced early through the character of Harry's superior, Møller, who observes that "the park in front of the police station was almost deserted" (p. 16). Traditionally a symbol of civic openness and public life, the park here is reduced to a lifeless zone, foreshadowing the concealment of crime within seemingly secure urban environments. This scene establishes a cityscape defined less by bustling activity than by ominous absences. The trope of empty, silent spaces recurs in delineations of car parks, which, instead of serving as hubs of urban movement, become bleak, motionless zones. In one key scene, Møller and Harry stand alone under dim lighting, enveloped by the oppressive stillness of a functional yet desolate structure: "Here they were, standing in the middle of a deserted car park one summer's night in Oslo, under the light of the moon and a lamp full of dead insects" (p. 133). This image conveys not only physical desolation but also symbolic weight – evoking decay, abandonment, entrapment, and death. Similarly, later in the novel, the car park outside the custody block is described as nearly empty and silent: "There was no-one behind the reception desk and there was total silence in the room" (p. 365). These scenes reinforce the theme of institutional absence, portraying civic spaces as hollowed out, unguarded, and vulnerable to corruption. Importantly, the atmosphere of emptiness extends to panoramic views of Oslo from above. A bird's-eye perspective reveals that "off the tourists' beaten track it was quiet, and what little life there was moved in slow motion. Roadworkers ... peered down over deserted streets and taxi drivers found places to park in the shade" (p. 65). Workers drift languidly through a sun-drenched yet spiritually stagnant landscape, their stillness mirroring the psychological inertia permeating the city. The image suggests not only silence but paralysis of the metropolis suspended in time, while violence simmers beneath its surface.

Even residential and urban districts, spaces typically associated with activity, normalcy, security, and surveillance, are depicted as eerily empty. Streets appear abandoned despite daylight hours, heightening the sense of mysteriousness and vulnerability. One chilling instance during the holiday season involves the kidnapping of a female victim: "the streets are almost deserted, so the lady could easily have been dragged into a car without anyone noticing a thing" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 89). This stark image underscores how urban emptiness facilitates invisibility and danger. In another scene, characters divert from the bustling Bygdøy allé onto a "silent road", marked by a jarring architectural contrast between "misshapen detached timber houses" and "fashionable brick apartment buildings" (p. 424). This aesthetic dissonance reflects the novel's broader thematic preoccupation with urban unease and spatial disorientation. Importantly, the motif of emptiness extends beyond public thoroughfares to interior

spaces linked to law enforcement and civic order, which are similarly abandoned. Forensics Department is described as "deserted except for Beate's office where a light still burned" (p. 168), while the police canteen, ordinarily a communal and institutional hub, is "totally empty" save for "a person sitting with his back to one of the tables" (p. 229). These visual and auditory voids highlight the erosion of collective structures and the encroachment of seclusion, implying that even the supposed bastions of justice are not immune to the pervasive atmosphere of desolation.

On a psychological level, the pervasive emptiness of Oslo mirrors Harry's deteriorating mental state, compounded by his ongoing struggle with multiple addictions, particularly to alcohol. In a particularly introspective moment, he experiences the unsettling ambiguity of being watched, only to be confronted by an eerie void: "the street was deserted, and all he saw in the windows ... was a dark sky and sun. And alkie's paranoia" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 94). Here, Oslo transcends its physicality to become a fractured mental landscape, a space where external reality blurs with subjective projection, and silence morphs into a manifestation of internal psychological torment. This Gothic undertone intensifies in scenes that frame the policeman against a hostile, desolate environment. As he steps out into a deserted Carl Berners plass, "he lit a cigarette and raised a hand in defence to one of the newspaper vultures approaching him" (p. 166). The surrounding desolation, stripped of vitality, isolates him both physically and existentially, accentuating his role as a tragic, haunted figure. Harry emerges as a symbol of the fracturing relationship between individual and city, a detective ensnared not only by Oslo's criminal labyrinth but also by the echoing silence of its spiritual decay.

Consequently, the city of Oslo, as depicted in the *Oslo Trilogy*, emerges as a space perpetually vulnerable to criminal activity due to its paradoxical spatial dynamics. On the one hand, its intrinsic atmosphere of seclusion enables criminals to operate with relative impunity, exploiting the void left by absent witnesses and inactive civic structures. On the other hand, the city's periodic influxes of people offer a contrasting form of concealment: the anonymity provided by urban crowds allows perpetrators to vanish effortlessly, blending into the faceless multitude. This uneasy coexistence of desertedness and overcrowding cultivates an environment in which crime flourishes, hidden either by stark absence or by overwhelming presence, revealing Oslo as a city whose very rhythms and spaces facilitate and mask violence.

This duality is vividly illustrated throughout the trilogy. In *The Redbreast*, the shocking murder of police officer Ellen exemplifies how physical isolation can transform even ostensibly public spaces into sites of profound danger. Another striking case concerns the discovery of a corpse in a public yet neglected area. According to a police report, one of the cooks at Herbert's Pizza found Dale lying in the back alley between large rubbish bins, his throat cut. The crime scene investigators found nothing of value, and the autopsy doctor remarked on the surgical precision of the wound: "The cut around the throat was just fantastic" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 277). The chilling juxtaposition of clinical violence against the filth and neglect of the crime scene underscores the ease with which brutality is concealed within Oslo's disregarded spaces. Further commentary on the choice of location highlights the calculated yet flawed nature of the act: "The killing was efficient and there were no clues left behind, but the scene of the crime was a poor choice. He could easily have been seen from the street or in the back alley" (p. 282). This observation illuminates the paradox inherent in Oslo's topography,

wherein spaces that appear exposed can, in fact, remain functionally invisible amid urban neglect and social disengagement. These examples reinforce Nesbø's portrayal of Oslo as a city whose physical and social structures inadvertently facilitate criminality. The interplay between visible and invisible spaces, between public exposure and private seclusion, generates an atmosphere where violence not only occurs but thrives quietly, surgically, and often unobserved.

In *Nemesis*, the pervasive nature of criminality within Oslo is brought sharply into focus through the reflections and dialogue of various police officers. These perspectives illuminate different facets of the city's entanglement with violence, disorder, and social fragmentation. The recurring emphasis on crime's normalization in both public and private spheres suggests that Oslo, despite its modern facade, operates under conditions where deviance is not merely frequent but structurally ingrained and often predictable. Harry's colleague, an officer Rune Ivarsson, articulates this dynamic with a blend of cynicism and weary pragmatism. When Harry inquires about patterns of bank robbery, Ivarsson offers a pointed explanation:

> 'Dear murder expert,' Ivarsson said, still in jocular mood. 'If you look around you, you'll see that most people are smiling in their beards at what you just asked. That's because a bank robber who has pulled off a successful raid will always – always – strike again. There's a law of gravity with bank robbers' (Nesbø, 2008, p. 74).

His remark frames criminal behaviour not as a series of isolated incidents but as a predictable, almost deterministic force, akin to a natural law, woven into the very rhythm of the city. The depiction demystifies crime as chaos or an act of passion and instead presents it as an expected element of urban life, requiring careful anticipation by law enforcement. Later in the novel, Ivarsson deepens this insight, emphasizing the mechanistic repetition underlying criminal conduct:

> 'Your average bank robber these days is not so sophisticated, Hole. ... He always – with painful precision – repeats what he did on the previously successful occasion. It is only when he fails ... that he changes the pattern' (p. 111).

This observation reinforces the systemic nature of crime in Oslo, the city governed by ritualistic repetition rather than erratic conduct. The police are thus locked in a cyclical struggle, forced to decode and pre-empt criminal routines embedded within the city's social fabric.

Despite the city being governed by ritualistic repetition of criminal deeds, the perception of Oslo as a chaotic and ungovernable space is reinforced by Halvorsen, who likens the city – and, by extension, other urban centers – to a metaphorical jungle. Reflecting on the challenges of tracking perpetrators involved in underground pornography networks, the police officer remarks: "'We mere mortals won't find people who don't want to be found in that jungle. You'll have to get hold of a bloodhound, a real specialist'" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 222). The metaphor of the jungle conjures an environment rife with disorder, hidden threats, and an absence of clear moral boundaries. It underscores the notion that traditional policing tactics prove inadequate within the murky underworld

of both digital and physical crime. Oslo here is not simply a modern city but a labyrinthine space where danger lurks beneath the surface, defying straightforward control or comprehension. Complementing this metaphor is the visceral testimony of a policeman Stein Thommesen, whose work brings him face-to-face with the often invisible and intimate sorts of violence pervading private households. Thommesen's portrayal of everyday police work reveals a grim and relentless reality:

> spending your working hours driving teenagers with an overdose to A&E, telling kids that he has to arrest their father because he's been beating up their mother, and taking all the shit from people who hate the uniform you're wearing (p. 569).

Through Thommesen's eyes, Oslo emerges as a city where abuse, addiction, and trauma are woven into the fabric of everyday life. The shift in focus from public spectacle to private suffering emphasizes the endemic and normalized nature of violence within the urban environment. These perspectives paint a multifaceted portrait of the city simultaneously teeming with hidden menace and visible chaos, where crime is systemic, complex, and often intimately connected to the social realities of its inhabitants. Complementing these accounts is the mention of the city's informal intelligence networks:

> [police officers'] volunteer slum rats, zealous undercover boys ... who take pride in their daily dealings with the worst scum in Oslo, who in nine out of ten cases hear rumblings about the gateway driver, the man carrying the swag, the lookout (p. 76).

These unofficial informants operate on the fringes of legality, suggesting that Oslo's crime-fighting apparatus itself depends on the blurred lines between law enforcement and the criminal underworld.

The portrayal of Oslo as a city permeated by criminality and social decay persists and even intensifies in *The Devil's Star*. Here, the Norwegian capital is depicted as a city fundamentally transformed and haunted by its own moral deterioration. This bleak metamorphosis is poignantly encapsulated by Vibeke's lament: "Oslo isn't what it was" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 36). Her words evoke a broader narrative of decline, signalling a shift from a once-functioning civic order toward an urban environment increasingly defined by brutality, neglect, and disorder. The label of the city as a "refuge for junkies" (p. 229) highlights its role as a sanctuary for marginalized and addicted populations, symbolizing both social exclusion and the erosion of public control and accountability. This characterization reinforces the recurring theme of Oslo as a liminal, decaying urban landscape where the traditional boundaries between safety and threat, order and chaos, are blurred and destabilized. The city's pervasive desolation and moral stagnation are further underscored through hyperbolic descriptions, such as the claim that Oslo has become "the deadest town in Northern Europe" (p. 97). While exaggerated, this statement powerfully conveys a sense of lifelessness and existential despair, a figurative death that aligns with Gothic atmosphere saturating the narrative. Throughout the novel, Nesbø draws on imagery of obscurity: "It was well past midnight, and the moon was reflected in the windows of Police HQ" (p. 130), enclosure, and spectral presence: "Olaug

gazed out of the windows. The silhouette of the dead pear tree looked like fingers grasping the moon, which hung low over the garden and the station building" (p. 394) in order to render Oslo as a hellish space marked by alienation, danger, and a disquieting absence of safety: "there was the atmosphere of the gutter and ruined lives" (p. 131). Oslo is thus portrayed as a city where criminals roam with increasing impunity, largely unhindered by effective law enforcement or social cohesion. The porous boundary between the visible and the hidden, between public façade and private menace, reflects the novel's broader interrogation of urban decay, moral collapse, and the precariousness of civic life. Through such imagery and character reflections, Nesbø constructs a version of Oslo that functions almost as a character in its own right, ominous, transformed, and corrupted. Far from being a neutral setting, the city actively shapes and reflects the violence it contains, becoming a symbolic and material site of persistent criminal entropy. Taken together, these depictions reinforce Nesbø's portrayal of Oslo as a city overrun by both overt and insidious forms of criminality. Whether through the calculated repetition of bank robberies, the clandestine nature of digital exploitation, or the systemic violence embedded in domestic life, Oslo emerges as a site of moral erosion, one where legality and deviance often coexist in uneasy proximity.

4.1.2. The Gothic Weather of Oslo: Nature, Snow, Wind, Clouds, Fog, and Rain as Narrative Agents

In *The Redbreast*, the significance of setting is revealed through references to and depictions of three distinct spatial dimensions: nature, the city of Oslo, and the interplay between these two environments. The natural landscape surrounding the city is frequently characterized not only by its enchanting mystery and sublimity – as illustrated, for instance, in the following passage: "The blocks of flats gave way to half-timbered houses, vineyards and finally the garden deciduous forest, with the afternoon sun playing on the leaves and creating a magical atmosphere as they sped along avenues lined with beech and chestnut trees" (Nesbø, 2006, pp. 512-513) – but also by its darkness, hostility, filth, muddiness, cold, and inaccessibility. These qualities reinforce its resemblance to the representations of nature commonly found in Gothic fiction. At the beginning of the narrative, readers learn that the primary antagonist, Gudbrand, originates from a region where "the dales [which] were broad and some were deep, deserted and dark" (p. 53). This reference to his birthplace, imbued with an ominous aura, plays a significant role in the novel, as it subtly foreshadows the character's personality – fully revealed at the conclusion of the story – to align with the sinister and murky qualities suggested by the spatial description. The mysterious and shadowy nature of this place thus symbolically anticipates Gudbrand's dark psychological makeup. Moreover, the novel's portrayal of nature, especially in the sections depicting events from the Second World War, is marked by the absence of sunlight and its life-giving warmth. This is exemplified in the depiction of another character, Sindre Fauke, whose birthplace is described as follows: "His face was almost merged with his camouflage uniform and the small, close-set eyes stared out into the dark. He came from a remote farm high up in the Gudbrandsdalen region, probably some narrow enclave where the sun didn't shine since he was so pale" (p. 54).

Nature in *The Redbreast* is frequently depicted through its harsh, freezing conditions, which contribute to its Gothic and sinister aura. This is vividly illustrated in the following scene:

> It was cold in the machine-gun post. Gudbrand was wearing all the clothes he possessed. Nevertheless, his teeth were still chattering and he had lost the sensation in his fingers and toes. The worst was his legs. He had bound new rags around his feet, but that didn't help much. ... The thermometer showed minus twenty-five. Last winter they'd had minus forty-five several nights in a row. Gudbrand consoled himself with the thought that the lice were less active in this cold (Nesbø, 2006, pp. 63-64).

Nature, marked by its mystery, silence, darkness, and isolation, thus functions as both a silent witness and an active presence during wartime. It stands in stark contrast to the horrors faced by the soldiers, creating a Gothic tension between internal psychological terror and external physical suffering:

> Gudbrand awoke with a start. He blinked a couple of times and saw only the outline of the row of planks in the bunk above him. There was a smell of sour wood and earth. Had he screamed? The other men insisted they were no longer kept awake by his screams. He lay there, feeling his pulse slowly calm down. He scratched his side – the lice never slept (p. 78).

Furthermore, echoing the protective qualities of forests in classic Gothic literature, such as Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*[23], nature in *The Redbreast* occasionally serves as a sanctuary for those fleeing violence or trauma. This is reflected, for instance, in Helena's experience: "Some days Helena found it incomprehensible that a war was raging outside. Perhaps it was because the forest, the tight rows of spruce trees, closed out all the things they didn't want to see" (p. 146).

[23] In *The Romance of the Forest*, the story begins with Pierre de la Motte, a once-wealthy nobleman who has fallen into severe financial ruin. Alongside his devoted wife Constance and the mysterious young woman Adeline, whom they have taken under their protection, Pierre is relentlessly pursued not only by creditors seeking to claim what little remains of his estate but also by dangerous bandits and hostile forces determined to capture or harm them. Fearing for their lives and desperate to escape their relentless pursuers, the small group flees Paris, seeking refuge in the remote and dense Forest of Fontanville. The forest itself is depicted as vast, shadowy, and filled with a mixture of natural beauty and ominous gloom, a classic Gothic setting that symbolizes both sanctuary and peril. Their flight is abruptly interrupted when their carriage breaks down deep within the forest, leaving them vulnerable and exposed. Stranded and pressed by both the elements and the threat of capture, they stumble upon an ancient, abandoned abbey nestled amidst the towering trees and thick undergrowth. This ruined abbey, long deserted and slowly succumbing to decay, offers a mysterious and eerie refuge, its crumbling walls and deserted chambers casting a haunting atmosphere, but also providing shelter and concealment from the outside world. Despite the haunting desolation of the abbey, Pierre, Constance, and Adeline take up residence within its shadowed halls. For months, they live in hiding, their days marked by constant vigilance and anxiety. The forest and the abbey together serve as a natural fortress, shielding them from the dangers of their pursuers. Though they find a temporary sanctuary in this isolation, their safety is fragile, underscored by the ever-present threat of discovery. The wilderness around them offers a paradoxical comfort, both a protective cloak and a reminder of their precarious existence on the run. During this period, the forest's dense foliage, the echoing silence of the ruined abbey, and the wild beauty of the natural landscape intertwine to create a setting that is both a refuge and a Gothic prison. It is within this liminal space that the characters grapple with their fears, secrets, and hopes, making the forest more than just a physical shelter; it becomes a crucial backdrop to their emotional and psychological struggles.

Eric Sandberg, in *Crime Fiction and the City*, emphasizes the centrality of urban environments within crime fiction, observing that "the significance of urban spaces in crime writing may seem inevitable, given the demands of the literary form and the conditions that prevail in the urban environment" (2020, p. 335). Sandberg further notes that cities embody "contradictory notions – extreme poverty and economic opportunity, freedom from traditional social relations and the confinement of close spaces, personal anonymity and the presence of the crowd" (p. 355). Yet these contradictions are often accompanied by an underlying sense of danger. This persistent menace, inherent to the urban environment, serves as a thematic bridge between the Gothic mode and Nesbø's crime fiction, generating a continuous atmospheric tension in the Norwegian writer's depiction of Oslo. Beyond its portrayal as a hub of endemic criminality, the city in the *Oslo Trilogy* is consistently rendered through atmospheric and environmental cues that align it with Gothic tropes. This alignment is far from incidental; rather, the recurring depiction of Oslo as a city shrouded in darkness, inclement weather, and sensory obscurity deepens its function as both a psychological and moral landscape. The city mirrors not only the characters' inner turmoil but also the pervasive social decay that festers beneath its modern surface. Nesbø frequently employs imagery of clouded skies, chilling winds, and abrupt atmospheric shifts to evoke moods of uncertainty, dread, and existential unease. These environmental elements operate almost as active agents within the narrative, participating in the crimes and anxieties that define urban life.

The weather and natural conditions become narrative tools that foreshadow violence or intensify emotional disquiet not of the setting itself but also of the protagonists, and as such they "hint at something hidden, a mystery, even ghosts" (Gudmundsdottir, Meaney, 2022, p. 7), and, as asserted by Peter Davidson, "the revenant narrative is essentially of the north, and is a product of occluded weather and broodings upon the fate of the dead" (2016, p. 156). For instance, during a tense police investigation in *Nemesis*, it is described how "the low sun disappeared behind a cloud and the large rectangle of light on the wall behind them faded away. There was a deafening silence in the room" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 73). This sudden loss of light and the immediate descent into oppressive silence conjure an atmosphere thick with dread and anticipation. In this moment, the environment itself appears complicit in the unfolding violence, as if the city harbours a latent malevolence, cloaked in its shifting shadows and veiled skies.

Clouds, in particular, are repeatedly invoked throughout *Nemesis* as harbingers of mystery and turmoil. The sky is often described as overcast or in rapid, unsettling motion: "ominous clouds" loom above, "grey clouds scurry" across the skyline, and "clouds chase the moon", painting a cityscape caught in perpetual flux (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 135, 260, 314). This ceaseless meteorological movement parallels the instability of the narrative world, where notions of safety are fragile and appearances frequently deceive. Even moments that might seem calm are unsettled by the restless atmosphere. In one haunting scene, Harry looks up at a "cloudy night sky arching over the town like a yellow dome" (p. 552), an image both surreal and oppressive that cloaks the city in an unnatural, almost claustrophobic light. Such visual disruptions generate a sensory environment steeped in Gothic's characteristic themes of psychological dislocation and epistemological uncertainty, reflecting the characters' fractured perceptions of reality. Moonlight and shadow further amplify this Gothic sensibility by imbuing

the city's objects and surroundings with an eerie vitality. For example, during a nocturnal moment, "the moon protruded from between two clouds, and like a fictional beast the bronze hart stepped out of the shadows in the garden" (p. 316). Here, the uncanny animation of a static garden statue into a vaguely living creature evokes Gothic tendency to blur the lines between reality and the supernatural, between the animate and the inanimate. The garden, a space traditionally associated with peace, order and idyllic connotations, is transformed into a site charged with menace and instability, reinforcing the narrative's ongoing destabilization of familiar, ostensibly safe spaces. Even when the weather appears calm, it remains imbued with an ominous quality. In a particularly symbolic passage, Nesbø describes how "leaden clouds heavy with rain swept across the city without releasing a drop", while "gusts of wind tugged at the newspapers" (p. 575). The withholding of rain suggests a suspension of resolution, a tension left unresolved and therefore intensified. The city appears caught in a state of arrested motion, both meteorologically and morally, where anticipation and anxiety persist without relief.

In addition to being shrouded in clouds and permeated by darkness, Oslo is frequently depicted as enveloped in fog and rain, two environmental elements that not only reinforce the city's Gothic atmosphere but also reflect the psychological and moral obscurity afflicting its inhabitants. These meteorological phenomena actively contribute to the novel's pervasive mood of dread, confusion, and entrapment. Echoing the mists of classic Gothic landscapes, the fog in the Norwegian capital operates as a metaphor for blurred perception, concealed truths, and the permeable boundary between reality and nightmare. A particularly evocative passage from *Nemesis* highlights this sinister and almost sentient quality of the fog:

> The fog was back. It seeped in through the streets, from the cracks around the closed windows behind the trees in the avenue, out of the blue door which opened after they had heard Weber's abrupt bark over the intercom, and out through the keyholes in the doors they passed on the way upstairs (Nesbø, 2008, p. 120).

Here, the fog transcends its meteorological function to become a creeping presence, infiltrating both physical and psychic spaces. It transforms the environment into something surreal and disembodied, mirroring Harry's own dissociation from the horrific events unfolding around him. This description foregrounds the Gothic symbolism of fog as an agent of mental and spatial distortion, a veil that obscures reality and amplifies uncertainty.

Equally prominent is the recurring motif of rain, which saturates the narrative of the three novels and serves as an emotional and narrative intensifier. In numerous scenes, rain is presented not simply as a climatic condition, but as an agent of tension and dread. It is described in violent, almost punitive terms: "it had started to piss down with rain again" (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 152-153); "the rain beat down on the roof" (p. 342); "the rain was drumming on the roof" and "drops of water were hanging from [the man's] eyebrows" (pp. 495-496); "rainbows in the streetlamps at the bottom of the narrow one-way section of Sofies gate" created by the torrential downpour (p. 515); and in one of the climactic scenes, "large, heavy drops hammered down" as a storm violently descends over the city (p. 678). These descriptions are not simply meteorological

details; they are loaded with affective resonance. The pounding rain – a significant element in both Gothic and crime fiction[24] – amplifies moments of crisis, intensifies the characters' emotional states, and symbolically cleanses or reveals, while at other times it drowns and conceals. Rain emerges as a particularly potent Gothic device during the high-stakes chase sequence in *Nemesis*, where Harry flees from Tom Waaler, the corrupt police officer who falsely accuses him of murder. This passage encapsulates several key Gothic features such as darkness, pursuit, sensory distortion, and psychological intensity:

> Harry ran. Gregor's staccato barking was like an angry metronome in the background, otherwise everything around him was still. His naked feet slapped against wet grass. ... The rain fell into his eyes, and houses, apple trees and bushes blurred in front of him. ... A trim lawn rose and hit him in the face. He stayed down, listening (pp. 504-505).

[24] For instance, in Chandler's fiction, and particularly in a short story "Killer in the Rain" (1935), the motif of rain carries both atmospheric and symbolic weight, shaping the tone and moral landscape of the narrative. From its opening scenes, the story immerses the reader in a world drenched by a relentless downpour, as indicated in the following quotes: "Rain beat very hard against the windows", "I stared at the window, watched the rain hit it, flatten out, and slide down in a thick wave, liked melted gelatin. It was too early in the fall for that kind of rain", "I got off the bed, threw a window up and let the rain hit my face for a minute" or "It rained all the next day". The rain blurs the city's outlines, distorting vision and transforming Los Angeles into a space of uncertainty, danger, and moral ambiguity: "The rain splashed knee-high off the sidewalks, filled the gutters, and big cops in slickers that shone like gun barrels had a lot of fun carrying little girls in silk stockings and cute little rubber boots across the bad places, with a lot of squeezing. The rain drummed on the hood of the Chrysler, beat and tore at the taut material of the top, leaked in at the buttoned places, and made a pool on the floorboards for me to keep my feet in" (Chandler, 2011, pp. 34-36). This atmospheric use of weather situates the story within the emerging hard-boiled aesthetic, where clarity – both visual and ethical – is perpetually obscured. The rain, like the fog or darkness of Gothic fiction, dissolves the boundaries between safety and threat, visibility and concealment, creating an urban landscape that feels real and dreamlike, oppressive and strangely alluring. Perceiving Chandler's fiction from this perspective, Rzepka argues that "twentieth-century writers of 'hard-boiled' detective fiction like Raymond Chandler and Ross MacDonald assign Gothic vestigiality a particularly significant thematic and structural role" (2005, p. 221).

On a psychological level, the constant rain mirrors the inner state of Chandler's detective protagonist. His wet trench coat and rain-slicked hat brim become emblems of exhaustion and contamination, suggesting a man perpetually drenched in the moral grime of the world he inhabits. Rain, which traditionally symbolizes renewal and purification, is rendered ironic in Chandler's universe. It does not cleanse the city but merely redistributes its filth. The detective's attempts to find truth or justice are as futile as trying to stay dry in the storm. In this sense, the motif of rain expresses the existential fatigue and quiet despair that lie beneath the brisk cynicism of Chandler's prose.

The rain also plays a structural and symbolic role within the narrative. Key moments of revelation and violence often occur in the midst of storms, as though the weather itself participates in the drama of concealment and exposure. The rain veils and distorts reality, allowing both characters and readers to perceive the truth only in fragments, through reflections on wet pavement, the blur of headlights, and the haze of smoke and water. This motif reinforces Chandler's vision of modern life as one of partial perception, where truth is elusive and moral certainty impossible.

"Killer in the Rain" later provided the foundation for *The Big Sleep* (1939), and the persistence of the rain motif in that novel demonstrates its centrality to Chandler's imaginative world. The damp, heavy atmosphere of Los Angeles becomes the external expression of the inner corruption of the Sternwood family, as well as of the broader social decay hidden beneath the glamour of the modern city. In both works, the city itself seems to sweat and weep, its rain-slicked surfaces reflecting a civilization that cannot wash away its sins. Significantly, the motif of rain in Chandler's fiction fuses the conventions of Gothic with the realism of modern crime writing. It turns the contemporary metropolis into a haunted space where morality is as slippery as the rain-soaked streets, and where every attempt at clarity is undone by the next downpour. The rain in "Killer in the Rain" is the medium through which Chandler reveals the beauty, corruption, and melancholy of his noir world.

The scene is saturated with Gothic imagery and diction. Terms such as "ran", "angry", "naked feet", "wet grass", "thorns tearing at his palms", "whining", "blurred", "out of the dark", and "hit him in the face" collectively construct a sensory tableau imbued with vulnerability and imminent violence. The natural environment assumes a hostile and disorienting quality, evoking the Gothic tradition of persecuted protagonists pursued through treacherous and threatening landscapes.

Moreover, this moment subverts a canonical Gothic convention: instead of a female heroine pursued through darkness by a male antagonist, it is the male protagonist who is hunted, while the female figure, Vigdis Albu, assumes a role marked by ambiguity and entrapment:

> Vigdis put down the receiver. She had been forced to improvise, although she hated improvising. It made her feel physically ill when things didn't go according to plan. Right from the time she was small, she had realised that nothing happened of its own accord. Planning was everything. ... She sat in the hallway. Hole had gone to sleep in the bath, she hoped. Another look at her watch. Listened to the music. Fortunately the stressful Police songs were finished and now Sting was signing songs off his solo album with his wonderful, soothing voice. About rain ... like tears from a star (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 501-503).

Her involvement in concealing Harry's clothing and delaying his escape introduces a disquieting inversion of gendered Gothic tropes, whereby the female character participates in the protagonist's vulnerability rather than merely embodying it. This reversal complicates traditional power dynamics and illustrates Nesbø's reconfiguration of Gothic motifs within a contemporary, morally complex urban setting. Consequently, through its sustained deployment of fog and rain, the *Oslo Trilogy* positions Oslo as a liminal Gothic space, permeated by sensory confusion and haunted by both manifest and latent threats. These environmental elements extend beyond mere setting, functioning as a psychologically charged landscape that manifests the fears, illusions, and traumas of its inhabitants.

Moreover, Oslo is not only shrouded in fog and rain but is also persistently characterized by the presence of wind, which functions as a further atmospheric device enhancing the city's Gothic sensibility. In classic Gothic literature, wind frequently operates as a narrative element that intensifies feelings of unrest, menace, and psychological turmoil. Nesbø appropriates this motif to underscore the volatile emotional landscape inhabited by his literary characters, most notably Harry, whose internal instability resonates with the external turbulence of the urban environment. The city is represented as being buffeted by biting, intrusive gusts that affect both the physical surroundings and their inhabitants. In one illustrative passage, "a biting wind" is described as swirling "leaves which had dried on the pavement", compelling passers-by to withdraw inwardly, walking "with their hands buried in their pockets and their heads drawn in between their shoulders" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 209). This imagery not only conveys a sense of corporeal discomfort but also gestures toward a collective defensive posture, implying that the city's population is in a constant state of vigilance against invisible and potentially existential, threats.

In *Nemesis*, wind functions as a portent of volatility, encompassing both meteorological disturbance and psychological unrest. As evening descends, the narrator notes that "the wind picked up", while weather forecasts ominously predict storms and squalls across the region (Nesbø, 2008, p. 241). These atmospheric fluctuations contribute to an overarching sense of latent danger, intensifying the suspense and instability that permeate the unfolding plot. The symbolic link between wind and elevated perspective is especially evident in the scene where Halvorsen and Harry ascend to Ekeberg, a promontory overlooking Oslo. As they survey the city below, Halvorsen comments: "'Why here?' Halvorsen asked, peering down at the Oslo fjord beneath them. The wind tossed his fringe hither and thither" (p. 245). Here, the wind transcends mere sensory description, acquiring symbolic significance that reinforces Oslo as a space governed by both literal and metaphorical turbulence. Significantly, many of the most vivid depictions of wind are filtered through the perceptual lens of Harry, whose solemn and reflective consciousness transforms meteorological detail into psychological insight. In one passage, Harry encounters a collapsed newspaper stand: the police officer "shrugged and stepped over a newspaper stand which had been blown down. In the street a newspaper was flicking through its own pages at a furious tempo" (p. 253). This moment functions as a metaphor for the chaotic, uncontrollable flow of information and narrative that mirrors both the nature of the crime genre and the protagonist's fragmented mental state and his thoughts. Elsewhere, while the wind is scarcely perceptible at ground level, the movement of clouds high above conveys an eerie sense of suppressed turmoil: "Harry could hardly feel a breath of wind although higher up it was clearly gusting. Clouds were chasing across the sky and occasionally covering the moon" (p. 314). This disjunction between surface calm and concealed unrest mirrors Harry's emotional repression, beneath which lie persistent trauma and anxiety. Wind also functions as a marker of transitions between urban and natural spaces, most poignantly illustrated in a scene where Harry approaches the Oslofjord. There, he is depicted as physically vulnerable, "huddled up", shivering as a raw wind seems to pass through his body "as if he were a ghost" (pp. 452-453). This description renders Harry insubstantial, evoking his emotional fragility and profound alienation. The sounds of wind whistling against granite and waves crashing below amplify the existential void that surrounds him. His shouted words are swallowed by the wind and surf, underscoring the futility of communication in a world where noise overwhelms meaning.

These moments of windy desolation exemplify how the capital of Norway functions as a dynamic, living entity in Nesbø's crime fiction, one that embodies emotional turbulence, existential threat, criminality, brutality, and Gothic alienation which is a clear proof of the statement voiced by Stougaard-Nielsen who asserts that "Scandinavian crime novels are ripe with 'overdetermined' eccentric locations, which are constantly refracted through a wider world of crime and insecurity" (2017, p. 114). The wind, whether slicing through crowded streets or roaring along the fjord's granite cliffs, acts as a conduit of dread, shaping the city as a psychologically and morally charged landscape in which both characters and readers are made to confront the instability of truth, identity, and safety.

To further intensify the atmosphere of desolation and impassability, Nesbø frequently depicts Oslo as a city engulfed by persistent snow. The recurring snow coverage not only situates the narrative firmly within the northern European climatic

context but also functions symbolically, reinforcing themes of isolation, entrapment, and the corruption of purity, motifs that are central to Gothic fiction. Snow in Nesbø's novels transcends mere meteorological phenomenon, becoming a visual and physical metaphor for the psychological and moral bleakness permeating the urban landscape. The accumulation of snow across Oslo contributes to the city's physical inaccessibility and visual obscurity. In the closing scenes of *Nemesis*, the narrator describes snow lying "in deep drifts as the snow ploughs shuttled to and fro down the streets of Oslo city centre" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 683). This image of a city buried and immobilized beneath thick layers of snow evokes a profound sense of paralysis and claustrophobia, emotional states that resonate strongly within Gothic narrative tradition. The arduousness of movement is further emphasized in another scene where Halvorsen and Beate "trudged eastwards in the snow" for over an hour (p. 690), reflecting the emotional and moral burdens that the characters bear as they navigate an increasingly dark and complex world.

Snowfall is repeatedly observed and remarked upon by various characters, underscoring its narrative significance as more than mere environmental detail. Harry is particularly attuned to these meteorological cues. He notes, for example, "the first snowflakes swirling in the wind" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 592), an observation that subtly signals the onset of winter, both in its literal sense and as a metaphor for decline and foreboding. Later, he gazes out the window and can "barely see the outline of Ekeberg Ridge through the snow showers" (p. 687), suggesting a landscape increasingly obscured and indecipherable, much like the narrative's entangled and opaque events. The whiteness of snow, conventionally associated with innocence or renewal, here assumes an ironic dimension: its dense presence conceals rather than reveals, isolates rather than connects. This sensory motif is echoed by other characters, such as the young boy Ali, who exclaims "Winter!" with excitement while pointing at the sky (p. 593). His innocent wonder contrasts with the broader narrative context, wherein the seasonal change signals the city's descent into deeper moral and environmental bleakness. This sense of transformation is made starkly explicit in one of the novel's most evocative images: "Snow was beginning to fall again. Large, wet snowflakes, which were grey and dirty before they landed on the brown earth between Police HQ and Botsen" (p. 602). This image subverts the traditional symbolism of snow as pure or cleansing; instead, the snowflakes are described as "grey and dirty" even before touching the ground, signifying a space already tainted both physically by urban grime and metaphorically by pervasive criminality.

Through atmospheric imagery, Nesbø draws explicitly on Gothic tropes, reconfiguring weather as an active atmospheric agent that contaminates, conceals, and psychologically destabilizes. Here, meteorological phenomena do not offer clarity or catharsis; rather, they deepen the moral ambiguity of Oslo's urban environment. Snow, for instance, is not depicted as pristine or cleansing but becomes sullied as it descends, implying that even the natural world is tainted by the city's underlying spiritual and moral decay. This symbolic pollution reflects a broader Gothic tradition in which the external environment mirrors internal corruption. Consequently, Oslo emerges as a liminal Gothic space, cold, veiled, and spiritually barren and tainted.

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Importantly, the persistent presence of snow, fog, wind, sleet, and rain does not merely evoke mood; it constructs a claustrophobic psychological and spatial labyrinth in which Nesbø's characters find themselves trapped. These meteorological conditions function as externalized expressions of fear, anxiety, and alienation, effectively aligning Nesbø with the Gothic legacy pioneered by writers such as Ann Radcliffe. In traditional Gothic fiction, weather is rarely passive; it is an aesthetic and narrative force, shaping perception and emotion, as well as amplifying suspense and dread. Nesbø's portrayal of Oslo's climate, perpetually obscured, wind-lashed, and darkened by precipitation, extends this legacy by transforming the city into a haunted, unstable site where the boundaries between perception and illusion blur.

Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* offers a salient precursor to this tradition. Her frequent deployment of fog and mist renders landscapes both mysterious and emotionally charged. In one particularly evocative passage, the narrator describes Emily's gaze upon the distant castle of Montoni:

> Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's; for though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper, as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From these too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening (2008, pp. 226-227).

Radcliffe further develops the interplay between natural elements and psychological tension through her use of moonlight, wind, and mist, as indicated in the following description:

> And now the moon was high over the woods, touching their summits with yellow light, and darting between the foliage long level beams; while on the rapid Garonne below the trembling radiance was faintly obscured by the lightest vapour ... As her eyes wandered over the landscape she thought she perceived a person emerge from the groves, and pass slowly along a moon-light alley that led between them; but the distance, and the imperfect light would not suffer her to judge with any degree of certainty whether this was fancy or reality (pp. 114-115).

In these passages, natural phenomena generate a profound sense of epistemological uncertainty characteristic of Gothic fiction. The landscape functions as an active, emotionally charged force shaping perception and meaning. Light and mist cooperate to destabilize vision, producing moments where clarity and illusion merge. In Nesbø's crime fiction, this instability of perception is conveyed through striking visual contrasts: "The morning light stood like a white pillar through a tear in the sky" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 457) suggests a brief, almost supernatural rupture in the gloom, while "Beneath the gulls lay Oslo fjord, which had gone an ominous green-black hue" (p. 530) transforms

the familiar landscape into something foreboding and alien. The city itself is rendered as both luminous and decaying: "The city lights twinkled beneath them in an early--afternoon gloom" (p. 603) captures the paradox of illumination amid encroaching darkness, and "Oslo was pale grey, like the face of a tired old man, but today in the sun the few colors still remaining shone. Like a final smile before saying goodbye, Harry mused" (p. 676) imbues the urban setting with an elegiac, almost human frailty. Together, these images reveal a world in which light is transient and perception unreliable. Illumination offers no certainty; rather, it exposes the fragility of vision and the melancholy of decline. In Nesbø's urban Gothic, as in classic Gothic landscapes, truth is only ever glimpsed through shifting veils of shadow and reflection.

Wind, too, is elevated beyond its meteorological function to serve as a psychic agent. In Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*, the wind takes on a violent, spectral quality that disturbs both the environment and Adeline's sense of reality:

> The wind was high, and as it whistled through the desolate apartment, and shook the feeble doors, she often started, and sometimes even thought she heard sighs between the pauses of the gust; but she checked these illusions, which the hour of the night and her own melancholy imagination conspired to raise. As she sat musing, her eyes fixed on the opposite wall, she perceived the arras, with which the room was hung, wave backwards and forwards ... curiosity prompted her to examine still farther ... she lifted the arras, and discovered a small door, whose loosened hinges admitted the wind, and occasioned the noise she had heard (2009, p. 130).

Here, the wind is not just atmospheric; it is animate, almost sentient, inducing fear, triggering memory, and initiating discovery. It becomes both a herald of danger and a narrative device of revelation. Similarly, in Nesbø's Oslo, wind slices through alleyways and rattles windows, interrupting silence and invading privacy. Characters respond with physical recoil, their vulnerability heightened by the sense that the environment itself is malevolent. This anthropomorphic wind, howling, sighing, whispering, acts as an agent of Gothic terror, an external reflection of inner chaos. Ultimately, in both Radcliffe and Nesbø, weather functions as a narrative force, shaping plot, mood, and character psychology. Radcliffe's natural landscapes, charged with wind, mist, and moonlight, are not passive scenic flourishes but active participants in the Gothic drama. Likewise, Nesbø's urban environments, with their oppressive snowfall, slicing winds, and unrelenting fog, reproduce this tradition in modern noir form. In both cases, weather is atmosphere in the fullest sense: a living, breathing presence that sustains unease, heightens suspense, and renders the familiar uncanny. Gothic fiction, as exemplified by Radcliffe and as seen in Nesbø's crime fiction, both make clear: in these worlds, weather is never just weather – it is dread made tangible, fear given form, and the architecture of the uncanny.

4.1.3. The Gothic Topography of Oslo: A City of Tight Alleys and Towering Edifices

Significantly, Nesbø's portrayal of Oslo constructs the city as a spatial entity resembling a labyrinthine jungle, characterized by dense, narrow, isolated, and frequently silent streets and alleyways that facilitate the concealment and proliferation of criminal activity. This motif of spatial complexity and claustrophobia evokes a distinctly Gothic sensibility, transforming the urban environment into a site of psychological entrapment and moral decay.

In *The Redbreast*, this spatial entanglement is subtly introduced when Harry "walked up Holbergs gate and turned left into Sofies gate", a route lined with "workers' flats dating back to the turn of the century and not in the best condition" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 156). The reference to dilapidated historical buildings situated along narrow streets conjures a setting that is simultaneously historically charged and physically constricted, thereby mirroring the city's deteriorating moral infrastructure. These aged, neglected edifices function as urban Gothic ruins, symbolizing the persistence of the past and the erosion of civic order within a contemporary milieu. This motif is further developed in *Nemesis*, where spatial navigation becomes increasingly entangled with themes of surveillance, menace, and the psychological pressures of modern urban existence. Harry is described as taking "the narrow path across the lawn" without looking "at the grey prison building on the left" (p. 472). The immediate proximity of such oppressive institutional architecture to everyday pedestrian routes fosters a pervasive sense of inescapable oversight. Moreover, the mention of the prison amplifies Gothic atmosphere, connoting latent violence and authoritarian control embedded within the city's physical fabric. Later in the novel, the sinister quality of these confined spaces is reinforced as "Waaler drove slowly along the dark, filthy little street where the Knave lived" (p. 557). The diminutives "little" and "filthy" emphasize both the physical constriction and moral degradation of the locale, evoking a Dickensian underworld where crime festers in the shadows of urban neglect.

This complex configuration of Oslo's urban geography reaches a heightened stage in *The Devil's Star*, where characters traverse a zone that subverts conventional city planning: "They parked down a small one-way street where a few detached houses had strayed into a zone of high-rise flats" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 378). The notion of residential houses having "strayed" into an incongruous urban zone suggests a city in disarray, with spatial boundaries blending into one another and producing disorientation for both inhabitants and law enforcement. The spatial incoherence undermines any sense of order or predictability, aligning closely with Gothic conventions of unsettling architecture, spaces that confuse, entrap, and obscure.

Significantly, those spatial descriptions construct a vision of Oslo not as a rational, modern metropolis, but as a fragmented, shadowy labyrinth conducive to criminality. The frequent references to narrow passageways, deteriorating edifices, and architectural incongruities do more than set the scene; they form a symbolic extension of the psychological and moral instability that defines Nesbø's protagonists, particularly Harry. The darkened streets, much like the fog, snow, and wind that shroud them, transform Oslo into a quintessentially Gothic cityscape: a place where danger lurks behind every corner, and where the urban environment itself becomes complicit in the unfolding of violence and transgression.

Importantly, Nesbø's Oslo extends beyond meteorological gloom to encompass architectural elements that intensify the city's Gothic atmosphere. The urban landscape is not only saturated with shadows, rain, snow, and fog but is also dominated by monumental, fortress-like structures that evoke the grandeur and menace associated with medieval Gothic architecture. These edifices, frequently linked to state power, incarceration, and death, contribute to an ambience of anxiety and spatial oppression consonant with key tropes of Gothic fiction.

Among the most symbolically charged of these architectural features is Akershus Fortress, a historical site that recurs across the trilogy's first two novels. In *The Redbreast*, the fortress is identified as the former "WWII Wehrmacht prison" containing "The internal section of the fortress area" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 494), thereby anchoring it firmly within a historical context of occupation, confinement, and military violence. In *Nemesis*, it assumes the role of a locus for existential contemplation, as "Harry lit a cigarette, but it didn't have any taste and he threw it away with a growl. The sun glinted off a window in Akershus fortress and the sea was so calm there seemed to be a thin layer of clear ice on top" (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 199-200). The sun's glint upon the fortress, coupled with the metaphorical image of a frozen sea, evokes themes of isolation and stasis, aligning the site with Gothic notions of detachment and containment. In *The Devil's Star*, a modern Gothic inflection emerges when the Police Headquarters is described as "sparkling like a crystal" under the early morning sun (Nesbø, 2022, pp. 100-101), imbuing the institution with cathedral-like grandeur that paradoxically conceals its entanglement in corruption and violence, thus suggesting the deceptive purity of state power.

Contrasting with these state-sanctioned bastions of authority, contemporary buildings such as the Radisson SAS Hotel at Holbergs Plass project an illusion of comfort and modernity. Yet even this sleek modern tower becomes a locus of horror when Gudbrand, in *The Redbreast*, a veteran with regicidal intentions, surveys the cityscape below and perceives the natural world as complicit in violence: "In front of the balcony, out of focus, the dead oak pointed its black witches' fingers to the sky" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 598). The grotesque anthropomorphism of the tree as a witch reinforces the uncanny mood and contaminates the otherwise polished modern facade with Gothic symbolism, merging the natural and the supernatural in a haunting urban tableau. Apart from Akershus Fortress, Botsen Prison emerges as the second explicitly Gothic architectural site, featured prominently in *Nemesis*. This institution recalls the torture chambers, dungeons, and incarceration sites of traditional Gothic fiction, such as the Inquisition prison in Radcliffe's *The Italian*. However, whereas Radcliffe's Gothic often centres on the unjust suffering of innocent victims, Nesbø's inmates are hardened criminals like Raskol, a notorious crime boss. Yet the atmosphere of psychological horror remains equally potent. Viewed through Harry's perspective, Botsen stands as a grotesque monument to state-sanctioned retribution and the mechanisms of societal control:

> Harry had been here many times before, but it always seemed absurd to him to think that behind all these doors were the people whom society thought fit to keep locked up against their will. ... In the ensuing silence Harry's attention was caught by the low intermittent hum of a neon tube and the plastic flowers on the wall, which cast pale shadows across the washed-out watercolours (Nesbø, 2008, p. 395).

The diction: "pale shadows", "washed-out", and the sterile ambiance evokes a space drained of vitality, reflecting the dehumanization and bleak sterility characteristic of Gothic prisons. This architectural setting becomes a locus of existential despair, where institutional power manifests in cold, mechanized forms of punishment rather than overt terror. Another Gothic-like space is the Culvert: a three-hundred-metre underground tunnel linking Botsen prison to the Police Headquarters. The Culvert functions as a modern crypt or catacomb, its subterranean, claustrophobic nature drawing heavily on Gothic iconography of shadowed passageways and sites of hidden violence. Its portrayal is suffused with atmosphere and dread:

> Weber was racing along; he wanted to get out of the cold, damp tunnel. ... many were the rumours circulating about what had happened down here [to the transported prisoners]. ... Ivarsson let out a terrified scream and fell to his knees in a pool of water, holding his chest. ... 'I'm bleeding,' he groaned, 'I'm dying.' ... 'What is it?' Ivarsson asked, his voice tremulous with fear (pp. 219-220).

The pervasive physical coldness, the echoes of unspoken violence, and the palpable sense of fear collectively transform Oslo's underground passages into haunted liminal zones, spaces where memory, secrecy, and suffering converge. These subterranean corridors not only facilitate the literal movement of bodies but also symbolically channel the novel's anxieties about surveillance, mortality, and the hidden brutality embedded within the urban landscape.

Even residential architecture in the *Oslo Trilogy* is permeated with Gothic overtones. In *Nemesis*, the discovery of a mysterious cellar beneath Harry's apartment is described in claustrophobic, deathly terms. As the police officers descend "through a low door and down a crooked staircase", the scene is charged with oppressive imagery: "The harsh light from the naked bulb gave their faces the same deathly pale colour as the whitewashed walls and Møller had the feeling he was in a burial vault. 'I have to get out,' he murmured" (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 516-519). The confined space, low ceilings, and suffocating atmosphere evoke Gothic trope of entrapment within the domestic sphere, an inversion of the home as a place of safety and stability. Thus, Oslo is not simply a city marked by meteorological gloom, but a deeply architectural Gothic space, riddled with fortresses, prisons, tunnels, and shadowy interiors that mirror the psychological labyrinths inhabited by its characters. These physical structures become active narrative agents shaping fears, disorienting control, and embedding Gothic horror into the city's very fabric.

It is important to note that Oslo, though grounded in contemporary reality, is populated by urban forms that mirror profound psychological and moral disintegration. The cityscape is imbued with an unsettling mixture of shapeless, surreal cars – evoking a psychedelic film aesthetic – and black, dilapidated houses marked by decay, vulnerability, and neglect. As the narrator observes in *The Redbreast*, such imagery surfaces even within ostensibly mundane residential settings: "They strolled down the road. It was an area with small houses, small gardens and blocks of flats at the end" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 394). Yet beneath this suburban veneer lies insidious symbolism, particularly in the depiction of the Olsen family home, described as "smaller than the other house and it didn't have the same high hedge around it". This absence of a protective enclosure renders it exposed and unwelcome: "The other hedges made

this ugly, Eternit-cladded home seem unprotected. The neighbouring houses seemed to be cold-shouldering it" (p. 396). Here, architecture functions as an index of social alienation and moral decay. The connection between physical deterioration and human corruption is further reinforced by the grotesque aftermath of murder: "One of the people on your list, Hallgrim Dale, was murdered last autumn. In the alley where he was found there were also, among other things, the remains of vomit" (p. 407). This corporeal pollution of the urban environment reflects the pervasive moral disorder at the heart of the capital of Norway.

The portrayal of emptiness and isolation is intensified by recurring images of hollow domestic spaces that serve as metaphors for psychological desolation. In *Nemesis*, the home of Vigdis Albu, whose husband has been murdered, is depicted as utterly devoid of warmth or presence: "The glass in front of her was empty, the house was empty, everything was empty. That wasn't how she had planned things" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 495). This literal and figurative emptiness transforms the domestic sphere from sanctuary into a tomb of lost hopes and broken lives. This theme resonates even within institutional architecture, such as the austerity of Raskol's cell in Botsen prison: "A bed, a desk, two cupboards, a few books. No radio, no magazines, no personal effects, bare walls" (p. 513). The starkness not only dehumanizes the inmate but symbolizes a society stripped of empathy and individuality.

Even when external settings appear tranquil, they are marked by uncanny stillness rather than peace. In *The Devil's Star*, the quiet of the city is haunting: "Harry lay there quiet still, staring out between the curtains, up at the shimmering sun over the streets and back yards of Bislett. Only the tram broke the summer stillness" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 19). The oppressive silence and emptiness of this residential zone reflect a broader existential void. Ultimately, Nesbø's Oslo is a city haunted by absence of community, warmth, and meaning. Its houses and streets act as psychological landscapes reflecting the moral and spiritual fragmentation of modern society[25].

[25] Significantly, Gothic atmosphere of criminality, brutality, and psychological unease in the *Oslo Trilogy* extends far beyond the Norwegian capital. The spatial manifestations of Gothicness, marked by corruption, violence, and alienation, also permeate other global locales visited by Harry and his counterparts. In *The Redbreast*, Johannesburg, South Africa, emerges as a striking example of this transnational Gothicism. Isaiah, the local policeman aiding Harry, encapsulates the city's descent into chaos: "We're losing the fight against criminality, and particularly here in Jo'burg where everything is completely out of control (...). Everyone remembers the killings in 1994. Everyone is following the case in the papers now" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 212). Johannesburg is presented as a space where lawlessness is systemic, evoking a sense of urban dread and collapse. Closer to home, parts of Sweden also resonate with this atmosphere of menace and ideological extremity. Harry is sent to investigate neo-Nazism in a town described by his superior Meirik with alarm:

> 'A little place three miles east of Helsingborg. Sixteen thousand inhabitants and the worst Nazi nest in Sweden. You'll find families there who have been Nazis in unbroken lineage since the thirties. Some Norwegian neo-Nazis go on pilgrimages there to see and learn. I want you to pack a big bag, Harry' (p. 377).

This location is marked by the eerie resilience of extremist ideology, recalling Gothic fiction's preoccupation with inherited curses and haunted legacies. Further afield, *Nemesis* situates the Brazilian village of d'Ajuda near Porto Seguro as a liminal Gothic space, a tropical refuge for global criminals, masked by natural beauty but governed by corruption:

> Until recently [it] had housed the Continent's largest collection of wanted individuals south of Bogotá. ... A blind eye was turned to the smoking of marijuana on the beach, in cafés, ... in the streets and anywhere at all. ... Soon d'Ajuda was full of wanted criminals from all corners of the world who could be sure of a relatively safe existence for a price (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 389-391).

This portrayal epitomizes societal decay and moral ambiguity, where clandestine criminal economies supplant traditional justice. The population of d'Ajuda is rendered through a grotesque kaleidoscope of faces: "Faces flickered by in the heat. Black, white, young, old, beautiful, ugly, stoned, abstemious, smiling, scowling faces" (p. 398).

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In the *Oslo Trilogy*, the Norwegian capital emerges as far more than a neutral backdrop for crime. It is a mutable, psychologically charged space, meteorologically volatile and architecturally oppressive. The city functions simultaneously as a geographical site, a repository of historical trauma, and a projection of its protagonists' inner landscapes. What begins as a recognizable Northern European cityscape transforms into a neo-Gothic labyrinth steeped in fog, rain, and shadow, punctuated by tunnels, prisons, and fortress-like buildings that exude unease and decay. Nesbø's vision thus extends a long literary tradition of urban space as a participant in the drama of crime, recalling, for instance, Arthur Conan Doyle's London in the *Sherlock Holmes* stories. As Peter Ackroyd observes in his introduction to *The Sign of Four*:

> The urban fog has become part of the mystery of the Holmes adventures; it represents the impenetrability of the city, its viscous materiality as well as its pallid obscurity. ... It is a city of fitful illumination by gas and naphtha, where flickering light faces pass by as if in a procession of lost souls. It is a world of strange citizens, quixotic or malformed, and of cold out-of-the--way places (2001, viii).

This vision of London finds a close parallel in Nesbø's Oslo in that sense that, as argued by Dryden, "This modern metropolitan Gothic shifts the scene of terror from the rural landscape to the inner city, imagines horrible human mutations taking place in the heart of the city" (2003, p. 30). Hence, like London, the Norwegian capital seems to be populated by grotesque figures, Gothic-inflected locales, and relentless, inhospitable weather. In both cases, atmosphere functions as a narrative force, signalling alienation, concealing crime, and imbuing the city with complicity in human corruption.

Weather in Nesbø's Oslo is never incidental. Storms, gusts of wind, and abrupt shifts in atmosphere act as narrative codes, aligning outer turbulence with psychological unrest. Fog obscures vision, wind unsettles speech, and snow transforms familiar streets into ghostly terrains. These meteorological motifs cultivate a mood of latent threat, reinforcing the porous boundary between environment and emotion.

The city's architecture deepens this Gothic sensibility. State institutions such as Akershus Fortress, Botsen Prison, and the Police Headquarters are rendered with medieval gravitas and emotional sterility, while subterranean structures like the Culvert evoke crypts or catacombs, haunted conduits of memory and suppressed violence. Even domestic interiors, ostensibly spaces of safety, appear uncanny and airless, filled with flickering light and hollow silence. Nor is Oslo's unease confined to its institutions: its side streets and residential quarters echo the same disquiet. Abandoned alleyways, decaying houses, and isolated apartments become stages for brutality and psychological fracture. Places of comfort are transformed into zones of alienation and decay, mirroring the spiritual emptiness of their inhabitants.

Nesbø's Gothic imagination also extends beyond Norway. His characters encounter comparable unease in Johannesburg, rural Sweden, and along the Brazilian coast. Yet Oslo remains the epicentre of dread with its fog, shadows, and spectral quiet forming a city that is not merely noir but profoundly, enduringly Gothic in both texture and tone.

Nesbø's crime fiction, however, remains firmly rooted in the Gothic fiction's architectural tradition, wherein built space is never neutral and functions as a psychological and moral agent, intricately tied to the affective terrain of the text. Castles, prisons, tunnels, and ruins embody fear, repression, memory, and trauma. Nesbø's Oslo, with its decaying facades, oppressive interiors, and shadow-laced infrastructure, inherits and reconfigures this tradition.

The architectural dimension of Gothic can be traced to its literary origins in Walpole and Radcliffe. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* exemplifies how architecture operates as a sentient, destabilizing force. The titular castle, with its "subterraneous passages" and "intricate cloisters" (Walpole, 2014, p. 23), is not a passive setting but an active participant in the drama. Its labyrinthine structure mirrors the moral confusion of its inhabitants, while supernatural upheavals, such as the moment when the ghost of Alfonso shatters the castle's walls, literalize the return of repressed guilt and buried history:

> A clap of thunder at that instant shook the castle to its foundations; the earth rocked, and the clank of more than mortal armour was heard behind ... The moment Theodore appeared, the walls of the castle behind Manfred were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins (p. 104).

Here, architecture becomes the medium through which moral retribution is enacted. The collapse of the building signifies both the downfall of a corrupt lineage and the resurgence of a haunted past. Similarly, Nesbø's Oslo stages its own forms of collapse – psychological, social, and spatial – through its institutional settings. Edifices such as Botsen Prison and the Culvert function as modern ruins, haunted not by ghosts but by histories of abuse, secrecy, and repressed violence. They are uncanny spaces where the past refuses to remain buried and justice is perpetually deferred.

Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* further refines the relationship between architecture and interiority by emphasizing the emotional resonance of space. The castle of Udolpho, rendered in sublime and mournful detail, becomes not only a site of confinement and terror but an externalization of the protagonist's inner turmoil, as presented in the following quotes:

> Emily, when she looked at the snow-capt Apennines, ascending in the distance, thought of Montoni's castle, and suffered some terror, lest he should convey her thither, for the purpose of enforcing her obedience (2008, p. 215).

> From the deep solitudes, into which she was immerging, and from the gloomy castle, of which she had heard some mysterious hints, her sick heart recoiled in despair ... why else did she shudder at the idea of this desolate castle? (p. 225).

> The sun had just sunk below the top of the mountains ... the sloping rays, shooting through an opening of the cliffs, touched with a yellow gleam the summits of the forest ... and streamed in full splendour upon the towers and battlements of a castle ... heightened by the contrasted shade, which involved the valley below (p. 226).

These descriptions, rich in chiaroscuro and spatial tension, align the castle with emotional entrapment and existential dread. The edifice becomes a monument to personal and historical sorrow. Nesbø's Oslo operates with a similar logic: sites like Akershus Fortress, layered with military, penal, and political history, echo the Gothic trope of architecture--as-memory, where buildings serve as palimpsests of trauma. In both writers, space dramatizes the collision between institutional authority and personal anguish.

This dynamic is especially evident in *Nemesis*, where Nesbø relocates Gothic horror from remote castles to the everyday spaces of modern urban life – corridors, hospital basements, suburban homes, and tunnels – each saturated with menace and metaphor. The Culvert, linking Botsen Prison to Oslo's Police Headquarters, functions as a contemporary counterpart to Radcliffe's fog-filled corridors or Walpole's haunted halls. It becomes a liminal zone of rumour and psychological dissolution, blurring the lines between justice and conspiracy, reality and illusion. As in Radcliffe, where fog and shifting light reflect the heroine's uncertainty, Nesbø's tunnel sequences externalize the characters' loss of control and immersion in a world governed by unseen forces.

Ultimately, the architectural Gothic in Nesbø's fiction emerges as both inheritance and transformation of its classical forebears. Just as Walpole's collapsing castle signals dynastic ruin and Radcliffe's fortresses mirror inner distress, Nesbø's Oslo becomes, similarly to London, a modern Gothic city, whose "terrors derive from situations peculiar to, and firmly located within, the urban experience" (2003, p. 46), as Robert Mighall states, while analysing the Gothicness of the capital of England, the city shaped by alienating modernity, institutional decay, and psychological fragmentation. These spaces are not mere settings but metaphors for corruption, trauma, and the erosion of ethical order. From Walpole's medieval towers to Radcliffe's sublime ruins and finally to Nesbø's urban labyrinths, Gothic architecture persists as a narrative device through which guilt, repression, and existential fear are made visible. In Nesbø's work, as in that of his Gothic predecessors, architecture becomes destiny, an enclosing structure, both literal and symbolic, from which escape may be impossible.

4.2. Criminals

The figure of the criminal in both Scandinavian crime fiction and Gothic fiction embodies a complex interplay of psychological depth, societal critique, and moral ambiguity. While Scandinavian crime fiction emphasizes realistic depictions of crime intertwined with social commentary, Gothic fiction explores the supernatural and psychological dimensions of criminal deeds. In Scandinavian crime narratives, criminals are often portrayed as products of their environment, shaped by socio-economic conditions, cultural tensions, and personal traumas, often taking its origin in childhood. While analysing the difference between noir and Scandinavian crime fiction as far as the presentation of criminals are concerned, Nordfjörd observes that those two subgenres:

> perceive society and the individual in fundamentally different ways. In the former, crimes are committed out of greed, desire, sadism, and outright evil. The fault is the inner nature of the criminal, and not that of society. This is the exact opposite of the Scandinavian tradition that typically approaches the criminal from a sociological perspective. ... The other side of the coin is the view of society itself, which in the noir world is either

> non-existent or lacking most of the qualities that would aid its members. People are ultimately alone, cannot rely on their fellow citizens, and certainly not social institutions – least of all the police. Again, we find the exact opposite in the Scandinavian tradition (2022, p. 176).

This aligns with Louise Wattis' argument that crime fiction illuminates the psychosocial dimensions of criminality. As she observes, "both true crime and crime fiction reveal the complexity and nuance of the human experience, fostering enhanced understandings of offending and victimization, which contrast with the often simplistic and narrow retellings of crime demanded by crime news values" (2021, p. 41). Thus, the criminal becomes not only a villain but also acts as a reflection of broader societal issues such as inequality, corruption, and moral decay.

Scandinavian crime fiction underscores the intersection of individual psychology and social influence, depicting the criminal as someone caught between personal desires, mental disorders, and external pressures. This portrayal challenges simplistic notions of inherent evil, suggesting instead that criminality emerges from a convergence of internal and external forces. By contrast, Gothic fiction heightens the dark and grotesque aspects of criminality, introducing supernatural or psychologically distorted forces that blur the line between reality and the uncanny. In this tradition, crime is often linked to repressed desires, trauma, or the perverse exercise of power, hallmarks of the Gothic fascination with the human psyche's darker recesses. The portrayal of criminals in both literary modes serves a broader social function, offering a means to interrogate justice, morality, and social order. By engaging with the complexities of criminality, both crime and Gothic fiction prompt readers to question the power structures that define good and evil. Ultimately, the criminal figure functions as a lens through which tensions between the individual and society, the known and the unknown, and the rational and the irrational are explored.

Gregoriou identifies three prominent incarnations of the archetype of the criminal in crime fiction: the 'monster,' the 'vampire,' and the 'spoiled child' (2020, p. 169). The 'monster' embodies innate evil and is portrayed as "the embodiment of a cold, calculating evil", (2006, p. 156) as articulated by Linden Peach. The 'vampire' represents those whose criminality arises from life experiences, particularly childhood trauma; their crimes are interpreted as by-products of their victimization. The 'spoiled child,' by contrast, commits crimes for pleasure and out of entitlement, showing little guilt or responsibility, assuming the shape of a psychopath. Through these archetypes, Gregoriou illustrates how crime fiction constructs varied interpretations of criminal identity, exploring the relationship between crime, personality, and social context. In the context of differentiation between diverse embodiments of the criminal, it is worth adding here that also Chandler made such delineation. In *The Literature of Roguery*, the author of *The Big Sleep* "distinguished the 'villain', whose typical crime is murder, from the 'rogue', whose typical crime is theft" (Ascari, 2007, p. 31).

The psychological complexity of Scandinavian crime fiction is further illuminated through the lens of trauma. Novels in the subgenre tend to focus on the emotional and psychological motivations behind criminal acts within broader contexts of personal and societal suffering. This emphasis produces characters who evoke both fear and empathy, flawed individuals grappling with moral ambiguity and internal conflict. By probing the roots of trauma, Scandinavian crime fiction transcends simplistic

portrayals of wickedness, revealing how experiences such as childhood abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence shape perception and behaviour. Many of these characters wrestle with alienation, guilt, or repressed memories that manifest in their misdeeds, emphasizing the continuity between psychological pain and moral failure. This exploration of trauma extends to the social environment. Socioeconomic inequality, systemic injustice, and cultural upheaval are often shown as catalysts for individual and collective trauma. The criminal thus becomes a mirror reflecting societal fractures rather than an isolated wrongdoer. This layered portrayal invites readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the social and emotional foundations of crime. Ultimately, Scandinavian crime fiction examines the tension between personal agency and external influence, fostering a multifaceted view of crime that blurs distinctions between victim and perpetrator, innocence and guilt. The criminal emerges as a tragic figure, shaped by forces beyond control, yet still accountable, and embodying the ethical and moral dilemmas central to the subgenre.

In contrast, Gothic fiction intertwines horror, the supernatural, and psychological extremes in its depiction of the criminal. The Gothic tradition explores madness, obsession, and moral decay, positioning the criminal as both a figure of revulsion and fascination, as presented by Edith Birkhead who, while comparing Radcliffe's Schedoni with such complex arch-criminals as John Milton's Satan from *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, notes that this genre tends to outline "the romantic villain, stained with the darkest crimes, yet dignified and impressive withal" (2005, p. 34). This duality imbues the criminal with eerie complexity, where the boundaries between victim and perpetrator, sanity and madness, become increasingly blurred. Kokot argues that the Gothic roots of English detective fiction are evident in the ways these narratives often dissolve the distinction between detective and criminal. She notes that:

> Already in the pre-Romantic Gothic romances the intrusion of ghosts and spectres into the world of the living was most often provoked by some crimes committed in the past – one may say that the objective was exactly the same as in detective fiction: to unmask the culprit and bring them to justice. Also the nineteenth century penny dreadfuls commonly combined criminal plots with horror resulting both from the intervention of the supernatural and from the macabre aspect of the crimes themselves. The slums of London were modelled there after the conventions of Gothic fiction, where the dark and labyrinthine streets in forbidden districts performed the function of a Gothic castle, and their degenerated inhabitants – that of ghosts and Gothic villains (2019, pp. 61-62).

By creating characters that embody both virtue and corruption, Gothic narratives engage deeply with moral ambiguity and psychological fragmentation. Kokot suggests that such figures are torn between good and malevolence, mirroring the narrative's larger moral struggles. Hence, the detective, like the criminal, becomes a multifaceted figure whose ethical uncertainties complicate justice itself. The Gothic criminal tends to reflect the genre's fascination with the human psyche's darker dimensions. Often driven by obsession, repression, or trauma, they are simultaneously pitiable and terrifying. The supernatural elements surrounding them amplify this complexity, suggesting that their actions may transcend rational explanation. Gothic fiction frequently situates these

criminals in decaying mansions, fog-shrouded landscapes, or labyrinthine spaces that mirror their psychological disintegration. These settings heighten the sense of moral and existential entrapment, implying that the criminal is as much a product of corruption as its perpetrator. The Gothic criminal thus symbolizes both personal and societal crisis, embodying the breakdown of moral order.

In this tradition, the wrongdoer represents the tension between the rational and the irrational, the natural and the supernatural. Their fascination lies not only in their crimes but in their embodiment of the human mind's shadowy recesses, where sanity and madness, virtue and vice, intertwine. Gothic fiction thus presents a profoundly unsettling vision of criminality that compels readers to confront the complexities of human nature and the forces that drive individuals to the margins of society. This duality defines the Gothic criminal, who is not merely a villain but a reflection of humanity's darker impulses. Supernatural elements often serve as metaphors for societal fears, anxieties, and moral uncertainty. Characters in Gothic literature – exemplified by those in the works of, for instance, Mary Shelley and Bram Stoker – embody this duality, blurring distinctions between victim and perpetrator. Their transgressions evoke both horror and empathy, revealing the interplay between desire and repression. Such ambivalence extends into contemporary literature exploring identity, morality, and the human psyche. Therefore, the Gothic criminal manifests forbidden desires and repressed impulses, acting as resistance to moral codes and exposing the contradictions of social norms.

Gothic fiction also critiques these norms by positioning the criminal as a figure of rebellion, especially in works addressing sexuality, gender, and identity. Characters who defy traditional roles or desires are often cast as criminals or outcasts, highlighting tensions between individuality and conformity. The Gothic criminal thus becomes a symbol of resistance to cultural constraint and a reflection of collective anxiety surrounding identity, autonomy, and morality. By transcending the role of the villain, this figure reveals the social and cultural forces shaping human behaviour and challenges readers to confront the fragility of moral codes. Ultimately, the Gothic criminal's duality and transgression offer a powerful commentary on both oppressive social structures and the repressed dimensions of human existence.

The portrayal of criminals in both literary modes also critiques justice and its institutions. Scandinavian crime fiction exposes the fragility of legal systems, questioning their capacity to deliver true justice or address social inequities. These narratives depict the justice system as necessary yet flawed, reflecting the moral complexity of crime in modern society. In the Gothic tradition, the failure of justice leads to moral and social decay. The absence of lawful resolution breeds obsession, madness, and violence, highlighting the tension between societal order and individual transgression. The Gothic criminal, as a symbol of moral disintegration, embodies the ethical contradictions of punishment and retribution.

As both literary traditions evolve, the figure of the criminal remains central, mirroring societal concerns and moral uncertainty. In contemporary Scandinavian fiction, emphasis falls on psychological motivation, socio-economic context, and the ethical dilemmas faced by law enforcement. Gothic fiction continues to portray the criminal as a transgressive figure who challenges social structures, often through the supernatural or grotesque. Together, these traditions offer a nuanced understanding of crime, compelling readers to reconsider assumptions about justice, morality, and

human nature. Ultimately, the criminal in both Scandinavian crime fiction and Gothic fiction functions as a mirror to society, revealing the complexities of human behaviour and moral conflict. As Waade asserts, characters in crime fiction belong to "complex main characters ... not only regarding cultural and ethnic origin, but also when it comes to mental and emotional challenges as well as social and professional relations" (2020, p. 43). The criminal is thus a multifaceted figure shaped by both personal psychology and social context. While crime fiction emphasizes realism and societal critique, Gothic fiction delves into the supernatural and moral abyss. Together, they offer a profound exploration of criminality, justice, and identity, illuminating the darker facets of human experience and the cultural structures that define it.

4.2.1. Gudbrand Johansen in *The Redbreast*

The *Oslo Trilogy* presents a densely layered panorama of criminality, populated by figures whose actions are shaped as much by personal trauma as by sociopolitical disillusionment. The trilogy's characters span various social echelons, yet many share a proclivity for violence and moral transgression rooted in turbulent pasts, often shaped by traumatic childhoods or ideological betrayals. Among them, Gudbrand, in *The Redbreast*, emerges as a central embodiment of vengeance and psychological complexity. His narrative arc not only anchors the plot but also serves as a conduit for exploring themes of national memory, post-war identity, and the lingering effects of historical violence.

Gudbrand's ideological formation is rooted in the tumultuous historical context of World War II, particularly his service on the Eastern Front as a volunteer in the Waffen-SS. Nesbø illustrates this formative experience with visceral immediacy: "Then, a high-pitched, screaming whistle, a warning scream, and Gudbrand threw himself into the ice-covered bottom of the trench, with both his hands over the head" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 55), or "Gudbrand already lay at the bottom of the trench with his hands over his head, but the whole thing was over as quickly as it had begun" (p. 67). His alignment with Nazi Germany, driven by vehement anti-communism and a belief in defending Norway from Soviet encroachment, ultimately placed him on the condemned side of historical judgment. Through Gudbrand's retrospective narrative, Nesbø confronts the uncomfortable reality that not all Norwegians resisted the occupation, some, like Gudbrand, supported the Axis cause out of ideological conviction. This rationale is exemplified in the words of a fellow soldier:

> There are only two people strong enough to stop Europe's nosedive into chaos now: Hitler and Stalin. That's the choice we have. A sister nation or barbarians. There's almost no one at home who seems to have understood what good luck it was for us that the Germans came first and not Stalin's butchers (p. 67).

Such declarations reveal a worldview shaped by fear, propaganda, and moral dichotomies, wherein Nazi Germany is cast as a preferable bulwark against Soviet brutality. Gudbrand's recollections are infused with a deep sense of disenchantment, perceived betrayal, and nostalgic idealism, sentiments that resonate with the broader post-war Norwegian struggle to negotiate the moral complexities of collaboration, resistance, and national identity in the aftermath of occupation, as, for instance, shown in the following quotation:

"He had appealed to the young neo-Nazi's sense of loyalty by divulging that he had fought at the Eastern Front, but he wasn't sure if he had believed him. Or if it made any difference" (p. 124).

The Redbreast also draws attention to the unjust treatment endured by many Norwegian soldiers upon their return from the war, men who had believed they would be "hailed as heroes in [their] beloved Norway" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 68). Contrary to their expectations, those who had fought for the German side, particularly on the Eastern Front, were frequently branded as traitors. Upon their return, they were stripped of civil rights, subjected to legal penalties, and faced intense public condemnation. Edvard Mosken, one such veteran, articulates this betrayal, stating: "What smarted was being labeled a traitor. But I console myself with the fact that we know that we defended our country with our lives" (p. 296). Hence, upon the war's conclusion, rather than returning as a decorated soldier, Gudbrand was reviled and ostracized. Like many Norwegians who volunteered for the German cause, he was criminalized, imprisoned, and excluded from the national narrative of post-war heroism. This institutional rejection became profoundly personal. His fixation on King Haakon VII whom he perceives as having abandoned the nation by fleeing during the German occupation, exemplifies his sense of betrayal:

> He leaned against the tree. A royal birch, the symbol of occupation. Government and King flee to England. *German bombers are overhead*, a line from a poem written by Nordahl Grieg, made him feel nauseous. It presented the King's betrayal as an honourable retreat, as if leaving his people in their hour of need were a moral act (p. 509).

In Gudbrand's view, the King's flight stands as a symbolic rupture of national duty and integrity, transforming the veteran's post-war life into a protracted ideological crusade. His campaign is not the random act of violence of an embittered man, but a calculated attempt to exact justice for what he views as a historical and moral betrayal. His targets include wartime collaborators who escaped prosecution, profiteers who benefited from the occupation, and fellow soldiers who, in his view, abandoned or betrayed him and the country. In this way, Gudbrand performs a violent and unofficial reckoning, addressing moral failures that the post-war Norwegian state had largely chosen to suppress in the pursuit of national unity. The psychological and moral reasoning behind his actions is gradually revealed through a series of dialogues between him – who assumed the name of Sindre Fauke, after having murdered him – and Harry.

> I was obsessed by the thought of revenge, you see. I was young, and when you're young you tend to think it is something we humans are born with. I was a young man with internal conflicts when I was at the Eastern Front, and I behaved like a shit to many of my comrades. Despite that, or precisely because of it, I swore I would avenge all those who who had sacrificed their lives for the lies they had fed us back home. And I would take revenge for my own ruined life which I thought would never be whole again. All I wanted was to settle a score with all those who had really betrayed our country (p. 268).

Unlike other veterans who attempted to reintegrate into civilian society, Gudbrand remains mentally tethered to the war. He does not experience peace but rather a continuity of combat, with post-war society reinterpreted through the lens of battlefield ethics. His moral framework – rigid, absolutist, and retributive – fuels a calculated campaign of violence against those he identifies as traitors or moral degenerates. This transformation renders him both a compelling figure in crime fiction and an archetype drawn from Gothic tradition: a revenant haunted by – and haunting – the past, driven by an unyielding sense of justice warped into fanaticism. Hence, Nesbø portrays this societal rejection as an additional trauma that compounded the psychological scars these veterans carried from the battlefield. Their bitterness and alienation endure throughout their lives, as captured by Juul's observation that they are "the old incorrigibles" who continue "pouring out their bitterness against the great betrayal, the Nygaardsvold government and the general state of things in the world" (Nesbø, p. 303). These men, cast out from the national memory, find solace only in their shared resentment and in the belief that history has misjudged them.

Significantly, Gudbrand's acts of murder are not impulsive but ritualized. The slitting of his co-soldiers' throats, and the execution-style killing of Brandhaug all serve symbolic functions within his distorted cosmology. Each death is not merely an act of vengeance, but a form of punishment intended to reassert a forgotten moral code. His methods – precise, efficient, and laden with symbolic weight – recall both his military training and a darker, more ritualistic dimension rooted in Gothic fiction. In this regard, Nesbø positions Gudbrand as a hybrid figure: simultaneously a tactician of modern crime and a spectral agent of moral reckoning. The Gothic elements in Gudbrand's portrayal are reinforced by the physical and psychological environments that frame his actions. He operates within a decaying urban landscape – Oslo rendered as a city besieged by corruption, moral decay, and systemic failure. His killings unfold in dim corridors, shadowed alleyways, and forgotten buildings, spaces that evoke absence, entropy, and death. These atmospheric details serve as active components of the narrative's tone, aligning the city's degradation with the psychological collapse of its inhabitants. In Gudbrand's perception, Oslo is no longer a functioning society but a den of decadence, awaiting purgation. His envisioned assassination of the Crown Prince during Norway's National Day celebrations is not only a political act, but a symbolic execution, an effort to deliver what he sees as divine judgment upon a nation that has betrayed its own soul.

Nesbø uses Gudbrand not only to escalate narrative tension, but to interrogate broader questions about the nature of justice, the transmission of historical trauma, and the blurred boundary between patriotism and extremism. In crime fiction terms, Gudbrand is a formidable antagonist: manipulative, calculating, and remorseless. He eliminates obstacles with surgical precision and carefully selects victims according to an internal doctrine. What makes him especially terrifying is the fusion of ideological purpose with emotional detachment. His violence is never chaotic; it is systematic and purposeful. Even his demeanour – at times charming and disarmingly courteous – conceals a profound inner violence, a duality characteristic of Gothic villains who seduce before they destroy. Moreover, his worldview extends beyond Norway, linking domestic crime to a wider, global network of moral decay. References to war crimes in Eastern Europe, extrajudicial executions in Africa, and havens for criminals in South America frame Gudbrand not

only as a local threat but as a figure shaped by – and operating within – a transnational landscape of impunity and brutality. This broader scope strengthens his symbolic function: he is not only a remnant of Norway's troubled past, but a spectre of global violence and unresolved historical reckoning.

What is perhaps most chilling about Gudbrand is his own understanding of killing. He openly reflects on the ease with which one becomes desensitized to murder, suggesting psychological erosion that renders subsequent acts of violence increasingly effortless. His lack of remorse and his belief in the moral necessity of his mission render him a figure devoid of empathy but rich in ideological fervour. Nesbø uses this portrayal to probe the psychological mechanisms through which violence becomes normalized and how the extraordinary can be internalized as routine, and how personal vendetta can masquerade as moral duty.

Hence, Gudbrand emerges as a multifaceted and thematically rich antagonist who occupies a liminal space between the conventions of crime fiction and the symbolic register of Gothic literature. As a war veteran turned ideological executioner, Gudbrand encapsulates the enduring psychological scars of conflict, the dangers inherent in historical revisionism, and the corrosive consequences of moral absolutism. His role in *The Redbreast* transcends that of a conventional serial killer; he becomes a spectral embodiment of vengeance, a self-appointed arbiter of national betrayal, and a revenant from a war that has left deep, unhealed fissures in Norway's collective memory. Through this figure, Nesbø constructs not only a gripping narrative of crime and investigation but also a sobering reflection on the persistence of historical trauma and the ethical complexities surrounding justice.

Notably, Gudbrand's transformation into a Gothic spectre is reinforced by the institutional decision to suppress the truth about his crimes. Rather than exposing his actions, the Police authorities choose to obscure them, a choice articulated by Inspector Møller, who asserts: "The only thing we'll achieve by stirring up things now is ripping open old wounds for the next of kin, and there's a risk someone will poke around and dig up the whole story. The cases were closed" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 613). This calculated act of concealment reflects a broader societal inclination to preserve a sanitized and heroic national narrative at the expense of historical transparency. Nesbø's critique is clear: post-war Norway's reluctance to confront the moral ambiguities of its past enables a culture of silence that allows justice to be subordinated to political expediency and collective amnesia.

Finally, through the multifaceted figure of Gudbrand, Nesbø presents a disquieting vision of national historical consciousness, one that resists the comfort of clear moral binaries and simplistic resolutions. By interweaving personal trauma, ideological fanaticism, and the suppression of inconvenient truths, *The Redbreast* interrogates how the unresolved legacies of war continue to shape the ethical landscape of the present. Positioned within the broader framework of Scandinavian crime fiction, the novel transcends subgenre conventions to offer a profound meditation on the burdens of memory, the fragility of national identity, and the enduring power of unacknowledged guilt.

4.2.2. Trond Grette, Raskol Baxhet, and Tom Waaler in *Nemesis*

Nemesis operates at the intersection of crime and Gothic fiction, using the conventions of both literary traditions to construct a layered exploration of criminality, identity, institutional corruption, and psychological trauma. The novel's central antagonists – Trond Grette, the bank robber; the ideologically embittered Raskol Baxhet; and the duplicitous police officer Tom Waaler – are not merely narrative devices within a detective plot. Rather, they serve as gothicised emblems of social anxiety, moral collapse, and the fractured psyche of postmodern Norway. Each character represents a distinct dimension of transgression while simultaneously resonating with broader literary modes, particularly the blending of realism and psychological horror that defines both Scandinavian crime fiction and Gothic literature.

Grette embodies a form of faceless, modern criminality typical of Scandinavian crime fiction, where the perpetrator's figure is more abstract than personal. This is vividly captured in the following passage from the beginning of the novel:

> The man who had come in had already pulled down the zip of his boiler suit and whipped out a black-and-olive-green AG3. A navy blue balaclava completely covered his face, apart from his eyes. ... The balaclava began to move where the mouth would have been, like a Bigfoot doll: 'This is a hold-up. Nobody move!' He hadn't raised his voice, but in the small, compact bank building it was as if a cannon had gone off. Harry studied Stine. Above the distant drone of traffic he could hear the smooth click of greased metal as the man cocked the gun. Her left shoulder sank, almost imperceptibly (Nesbø, 2008, p. 10).

His anonymity, precision, and lack of emotive motivation recall the criminals of classic hard-boiled fiction, calculating figures who commit crimes not out of passion but from a cold, dispassionate detachment. Yet Nesbø also imbues this figure with Gothic overtones. Grette's robberies and the murder of his wife are executed with ghostlike invisibility and surgical efficiency, evoking the image of a spectral presence moving through the urban fabric of Oslo and disrupting the apparent stability of civil society. As Harry's superior, Møller, observes: "However, this Expeditor seems to be of a different caliber from what we're used to. The Chief Superintendent thinks that conventional methods may not be enough this time" (p. 252). The robber's ability to remain unseen and unidentified transforms him into a Gothic phantom haunting the very institutions meant to protect the public, instilling fear through his assumed invisibility. Like traditional Gothic villains whose identities were often concealed or misrepresented, this criminal emerges as a symbol of the uncanny, a reminder that the boundaries between order and chaos are fragile and easily undone. Moreover, he is a skilled impostor capable of fabricating stories and misleading authorities, as demonstrated in his exchange with police officers: "'I saw someone walk past me into the changing room. He was wearing baggy, black clothes. Like overalls'" (p. 236).

Raskol Baxhet, depicted as "the king of the sewer rats", "a kind of mythical figure", and "the infamous prisoner" (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 150, 159, 214), represents a particularly ideologically charged embodiment of criminality. His characterization intersects with the socio-political critique inherent in crime fiction while simultaneously evoking the thematic motifs central to Gothic literature. As a former Romani bank

robber turned incarcerated mastermind, Raskol occupies a liminal position within the moral and narrative framework of the novel. Simultaneously marginalized and mythologized, he exerts influence beyond the physical confines of his imprisonment. Harry observes that, despite his incarceration, Raskol may still orchestrate major robberies from within Botsen Prison:

> They say you're still the brains behind the most of the big bank robberies in Norway, that this is your base and your part of the proceeds is paid into a foreign account. Is that why you made sure you were put in A-Wing in Botsen? Because you can meet the short-termers who are soon out and can execute the plans you hatch here? And how do you communicate with them on the outside? Have you got mobile phones here, too? Computers? (p. 297).

Viewed through this lens, Raskol emerges as a distinctly Gothic figure whose continued transgressions from within the penal system critique the ineffectiveness of institutional incarceration. Rather than serving its intended function of rehabilitation, the prison becomes a site of continued criminal enterprise, exposing the failures of the Norwegian legal and judicial systems. This thematic concern recalls a long-standing literary tradition that questions the efficacy of the penal system, as exemplified in Oliver Goldsmith's sentimental novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). In a strikingly similar critique, Goldsmith writes: "our present prisons, which find or make men guilty, which enclose wretches for the commission of one crime, and return them, if returned alive, fitted for the perpetration of thousands" (1982, pp. 228-229). Both texts underscore the paradox of the modern prison: conceived as a mechanism of reform, it often functions instead as a catalyst for deeper criminal entrenchment. In this respect, Raskol serves not only as a narrative antagonist but also as a symbolic indictment of systemic judicial inadequacies within contemporary Norwegian society.

The prison setting in which Raskol resides – claustrophobic, dilapidated, and steeped in psychological deterioration – functions as a modern Gothic space, recalling the ruined castles and asylums of classic Gothic fiction. Such spaces are emblematic of internal decay and repressed histories, and in Raskol's case, they mirror both a personal and collective legacy of exclusion, trauma, and unresolved violence. These buried histories are unearthed during his conversation with Harry:

> 'In 1589, Denmark introduced the death penalty for gypsy ringleaders", he said. "Fifty years later the Swedes decided all male gypsies should be hanged. In Moravia they cut the left ear off gypsy women, in Bohemia the right. The Archbishop of Mainz proclaimed that all gypsies should be executed without a conviction as their way of life was outlawed. In 1725, a law was passed in Prussia that all gypsies over eighteen should be executed without a trial, but later this law was repealed – the age limit was put down to fourteen. Four of my father's brothers died in captivity. Only one of them during the War. Shall I continue?' (Nesbø, 2008, p. 327).

As with Gothic villains, Raskol's identity is shaped not only by his own transgressions but also by the hostility of a morally compromised society. His Romani heritage marks him as an outsider from the outset, reinforcing his function as a subversive

presence within a system that has persistently denied him legitimacy and belonging: "We have been persecuted by every single regime in Europe. ... Gypsies make no particular fuss about the Holocaust because the difference from the persecution we were used to was not that great" (p. 327). Raskol's criminality thus operates as a form of ideological resistance. His deep mistrust of institutional authority and fatalistic worldview transform his actions into a sustained, if doomed, revenge against a state he perceives as fundamentally unjust.

Like the brooding antiheroes of Gothic literature, Raskol is both monstrous and sympathetic: a figure whose violence arises not solely from malice but from a lifetime of alienation and loss. In this regard, he resembles the Romantic villains of the Gothic tradition – Byronic figures whose defiance of moral order serves as both a critique of societal failure and a manifestation of personal flaw. His obsession with control and vengeance, though ultimately self-destructive, becomes a tragic expression of agency in a world where power is unequally distributed and justice elusive. Through Raskol, Nesbø deepens the novel's exploration of systemic failure and moral ambiguity, employing the conventions of both Scandinavian crime fiction and Gothic fiction to interrogate the fragile boundaries between justice and retribution, criminality and victimhood. The character becomes not merely a plot device but a vessel through which the novel examines the psychological and structural legacies of exclusion in contemporary Norway.

Tom Waaler, perhaps the most unsettling of the three central antagonists in *Nemesis*, exemplifies a form of corruption that is not external to society but embedded within its core institutions. A high-ranking officer in the Oslo police force who simultaneously operates as a weapons trafficker, criminal mastermind, and murderer, Waaler embodies the profound moral duality central to both crime fiction and Gothic literature. This duplicity is revealed by the narrator:

> Over the year since Officer Ellen Gjelten – thanks to one of Sverre Olsen's blunders – had discovered that Tom Waaler was the main man behind the organised arms smuggling in Oslo. When he gave Olsen the order to execute her before she passed on what she knew, he had been all too aware that Hole would never give up until he had found who killed her. So he had made sure Olsen's cap was found at the crime scene, so that he could shoot the murder suspect 'in self-defence' while arresting him. There was nothing to incriminate him, yet Waaler had the strangely unpleasant sensation that Hole was closing in. and he could be dangerous (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 465-466).

Within the framework of Scandinavian crime fiction, Waaler functions as the archetype of institutional betrayal, a figure who manipulates the system from within rather than opposing it from without. As far as the Gothic tradition is concerned, he assumes the role of the *double*: the respectable public figure who conceals a monstrous inner reality. The dissonance between his polished exterior and his clandestine criminality encapsulates the genre's fascination with the hidden, the repressed, and the uncanny. This duality is sharply illustrated in Harry's internal monologue, where he reflects on Waaler's overt hostility and ideological extremism:

> There were many at Police HQ who disliked Harry, but as far as he knew there was only one person who actually nourished a hatred of him. In Waaler's eyes, Harry knew he was an unworthy representative of the police force and therefore a personal affront. On several occasions, Harry had made it clear he didn't share Waaler's and some other colleagues' crypto-fascists views on homos, commies, dole cheats, Pakis, chinks, niggers, gyppos and dagos (p. 117).

Waaler's animosity is singular. He regards Harry not merely as a professional rival but as a moral threat, an affront to his conception of order and authority. Harry's rejection of Waaler's xenophobic, homophobic, and racially charged worldview isolates him within a police culture complicit in quiet prejudice. This ideological clash establishes Waaler as Harry's dark mirror, a moral inversion of the detective's flawed integrity. In this sense, Waaler's character embodies both the Gothic *double* and the archetype of the corrupt official, representing the collapse of moral certainty within systems meant to uphold justice. His presence within the police force transforms the institution itself into a Gothic space, an ostensibly rational and orderly environment haunted by secrecy, deceit, and moral decay. Beneath the surface of law and order lies a world of violence and conspiracy, exposing the instability of social structures and the dangers of unchecked power.

More disturbingly, Waaler's deeds demonstrate the extent of his criminality and moral depravity. His psychological manipulation and eventual sexual assault of policewoman Beate – a scene rendered in disturbing detail – exemplifies his ability to weaponize intimate knowledge for domination. By exploiting classified information about Beate's father's unsolved death, Waaler coerces her into submission, using both psychological pressure and physical violence to assert control:

> Two evenings later he had let her have the whole show. And she hadn't liked what she had been forced to see. Or hear. Or feel. ... 'I have sources which are – how shall I put it? – inaccessible to the regular police officer, meaning I know what happened to your father when he was shot that time in Ryen. And I know who shot him' (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 541-542).

The episode is emblematic of Gothic fiction: a narrative of violation, entrapment, and power enacted in the shadows of the very institution meant to ensure justice. Waaler's violence is not impulsive but calculated, a systemic exertion of power designed to eliminate opposition and preserve his dual identity.

In this way, Waaler becomes a personification of the Gothic theme of the corrupted fortress, a trope in which institutions, homes, or castles, ostensibly spaces of safety and order, are revealed to be sites of oppression and terror. He is not merely a criminal hiding within the police but the manifestation of its most repressed and violent tendencies. His presence in the novel challenges the reader to reconsider the boundaries between order and chaos, justice and criminality. As such, Waaler's character extends the critique embedded in both Scandinavian crime fiction and Gothic traditions: that evil is not only external and visible but often internal, disguised, and institutionalized. posed when Through Waaler, Nesbø underscores the fragility of moral authority and the danger those entrusted with upholding the law become its most insidious violators.

4.2.3. Tom Waaler and His Criminal Underworld in *The Devil's Star*

Waaler in *The Devil's Star* stands as one of the most disturbing and complex figures in Nesbø's crime fiction. Seemingly, he presents an image of discipline, ambition, and physical authority. Early in the novel, he appears as a hard-working and respected officer with an ostensibly impeccable record – attributes that earn him considerable esteem within Oslo police force. He is described as "possibly the youngest ever Chief Inspector in the Crime Squad" and "one of the best marksmen in the police corps" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 14), underscoring both his rapid professional ascent and technical proficiency. His official record, filled with commendations and references to multiple shooting incidents, ostensibly confirms his professionalism. Yet these encounters, though formally justified within police procedures, are later revealed to involve the elimination of subordinates who threatened to expose his criminal activities. Waaler's athletic build and self-assured demeanour further consolidate the impression of an exemplary law enforcement officer, the one who exudes competence, authority, and trustworthiness. However, this carefully constructed façade conceals his deeply entrenched corruption and his dual existence as both protector and perpetrator:

> Despite the dark suit he was wearing, there was not so much as a bead of sweat under the dark, thick hairline. Tom Waaler was a good-looking man. Not a charmer perhaps, but he had uniform, symmetrical features. He was not as tall as Harry, but many would have perceived him to be. Perhaps because of Waaler's upright bearing. Or the effortless self-confidence he exuded. Most people working around him were not only impressed, they also felt that his composure rubbed off on them, so they relaxed and found their natural place. The impression of good looks could also emanate from his physical presence – no suit could hide five workouts a week doing karate and weights (p. 26).

Beneath this polished surface lies a far more sinister reality: Waaler, under the pseudonym Prince[26], orchestrates a weapons-smuggling network from within the very institution charged with protecting Norwegian society. His criminal enterprise is vast, calculated, and meticulously insulated by his own authority, as revealed by Sven Sivertsen, one of Waaler's gun and diamond smugglers:

[26] There are three points in the narrative where Waaler is explicitly referred to by his criminal alias, Prince. The first occurs early in the novel, when Harry recalls the message left by his murdered colleague Ellen: "The same evening she was killed she left a message on Harry's answerphone that she knew who Prince was" (p. 47). This revelation establishes Prince as a key link between Ellen's death and the wider criminal network operating within the police force. The second reference appears later in the narrative, when the diamond smuggler Sven Sivertsen directly identifies Waaler as the figure behind the arms trade: "'The gun-running went through someone called Prince, who I've known for a little while now is the same person as Inspector Tom Waaler. And even more interesting, I can prove that it's Tom Waaler'" (p. 381). Finally, in a further confession, Sivertsen recounts his direct dealings with Waaler, providing crucial corroborative evidence: "I persuaded Eva [his wife] to act the photo-snapping tourist, and the table where Prince and I were sitting happened to come up on the majority of the photos. ... Prince was promptitude personified, though, and I've never had any trouble with him. I only found out that he was a policeman some time later" (p. 389). Together, these references construct a gradual unmasking of Waaler's dual identity. The repetition of the name Prince throughout the novel reinforces his role as a shadowy alter ego – an embodiment of hidden corruption concealed beneath institutional respectability. The revelation of this alias not only confirms Waaler's complicity in organized crime but also deepens his status as a Gothic *double*, a man whose criminal persona thrives within the very structures meant to uphold justice.

> "'No, no, I'm not murderer. I thought I'd been arrested for smuggling arms. And the diamonds. I knew that Waaler was in charge of all of this and that was why everything was going so smoothly. And that was why he was trying to let me get away'" (p. 373).

Within the conventions of Scandinavian crime fiction, Waaler epitomizes the trope of the corrupt insider, a figure who does not simply bend the law but rewrites it in his own image. The subgenre has long been preoccupied with moral ambiguity and the erosion of public trust in institutions. Waaler is not a criminal operating at society's margins but a man entrenched at its core, cloaked in legitimacy while manipulating the mechanisms of justice for personal gain. As Harry eventually discovers, he is "a leading policeman ... involved in a network of arms smuggling that has been operating in Norway for several years" (p. 424). His connections to the underworld, particularly through intermediaries like Sven, expose the unsettling symbiosis between law enforcement and organized crime.

At a pivotal moment in *The Devil's Star*, Waaler attempts to recruit Harry into his illicit operation, offering him the illusion of power, protection, and renewed purpose. This offer functions as more than a pragmatic proposition – it carries symbolic weight, echoing the satanic temptation in John Milton's epic *Paradise Lost* but also preceding crime fiction narratives[27]:

> 'I've just interrogated Sven Sivertsen, Harry. You can read the report later, but all I can tell you now is what's going to happen. He's a cold, calculating devil. He's going to play insane. He's going to fool the jury and create so much doubt for the psychologists that they won't dare to send him to prison. In short, he'll end up in a psychiatric department where he'll be released after a few years. That's what it's like now, Harry. That's how we deal with the human detritus we're surrounded by. We don't clean it up, we don't throw it away; we just move it around a little. And we don't see that when the house is a stinking, rat-infested hole, it's too late. Just look at other countries where criminality has a firm foothold. Unfortunately we live in a country that is so rich at the moment that the politicians compete with each other to be the most open-handed. We've become so soft and nice that no-one dares to take the responsibility for doing unpleasant things any more. Do you understand?' (Nesbø, 2022, p. 350).

Here, Waaler emerges not as a conventional antagonist offering material incentives but as a distinctly Gothic figure, a corrupter of souls who seeks to undermine the protagonist's moral integrity from within. His manipulation evokes the Gothic tradition in which evil

[27] It is significant to underline that this vision of Norway, stated by the criminal police officer, finds an echo in, for instance, *The Terrorists* (1975) by Sjöwall and Wahlöö when they voice, through a lawyer, their views about Sweden:

> Recently ... large and powerful nations within the capitalist bloc been ruled by people who according to accepted legal norms are simply criminals, who from a lust for power and financial gain have led their people's into an abyss of egoism, self-indulgence and ruthlessness towards their fellow human beings. ... Someone once said that our country is a small but hungry capitalist state. Their judgment is correct (2007, p. 266).

is rendered not through physical monstrosity but through seduction, moral decay, and psychological persuasion. Waaler's rhetoric appeals to Harry's disillusionment with institutional hypocrisy, as reflected in Harry's own frustrated outburst: "'If you all Tom Waaler to talk you into handling in another report on me, I'll make sure that you work on patrol cars for the rest of your career, Is this understood, Constable?'" (p. 90). By exploiting Harry's vulnerability and cynicism, Waaler positions himself as tempter and reflection, a dark character embodying the moral corruption Harry fights to resist. Significantly, Waaler's temptation for Harry – to carry out this killing under the guise of police duty – functions on multiple levels: as a test of loyalty, a mechanism of control, and a symbolic inversion of justice. In this moment, he transcends the role of a corrupt officer and assumes that of a Gothic anti-Christ figure, one who cloaks evil in rationalism and authority. His calm willingness to murder subordinates and manipulate investigations demonstrates a terrifying efficiency. As Harry discovers, Waaler is not just one bad actor within the system – he is the system's shadow self.

This dynamic becomes even more apparent in Waaler's treatment of Sven, a key intermediary in his weapons smuggling network. Rather than reacting with panic when Sven becomes a liability, Waaler operates with surgical precision, attempting to orchestrate his elimination, preferably with Harry's complicity. His approach reveals not the desperation of a man on the brink, but the clinical ruthlessness of a strategist intent on preserving the integrity of his criminal enterprise. The police officer's strategy is divulged by Harry:

> 'Do you know what, Sivertsen? It didn't occur to me until a colleague told me about the way Waaler arrested you. Then I remembered how Waaler reacted when I said that Beate Lønn had found out who you were. Normally, he's a cold sod, but he went ashen and for a while seemed almost stunned. At that time I thought it was because he realised we'd been outmanoeuvered and we might get landed with another dead body. But when Lønn told me about Waaler's two guns and said that he's shouted out that you shouldn't shoot him, it all clicked into place. It wasn't the fear of another murder that had given him the shakes. It was my mentioning your name. He knew you. In fact, you're one of his couriers. And Waaler appreciated of course that if you were accused of murder everything would come out into the open. All about the guns you used, the reason for your frequent trips to Oslo, all your contracts. A judge might even mitigate the sentence if you were willing to work with the police. That was why he planned to shoot you.' (p. 369).

Through Waaler's character, Nesbø explores the permeability of institutional boundaries, revealing how crime can flourish not despite the system, but from within it. The Gothic undertones – the theme of moral inversion, the seduction of the protagonist, and the collapse of the boundary between law and criminality – underscore the novel's central critique: that the most insidious forms of evil are often those that wear the mask of legitimacy. Waaler's efforts to track Harry through illegal wiretapping, his psychological manipulation of colleagues, and his willingness to use threats and violence to silence dissent are not the acts of a rogue criminal but of someone who understands and exploits every weakness in the institutional framework around him. His ability to project power and control while concealing his true intentions recalls

the archetypal Gothic villain, whose respectability masks horror. This duality is not only structural but psychological. Waaler is deeply aware of how he is perceived and uses that perception to manipulate those around him, especially Harry.

The Gothic dimensions of Waaler's character are further deepened by the disclosure of his traumatic personal history at the end of the novel: "'Yes, indeed I do remember him. Poor lad. Was beaten by his dad at home. His father was an unemployed brickie. Drank'" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 521). The revelation that he suffered physical abuse at home does not function to elicit sympathy, as might be the case in realist psychological fiction. Instead, this formative trauma operates within a distinctly Gothic framework, emphasizing how the wounds of the past resurface as present monstrosity, but also testifies to a psychological mechanism of cause and effect which is typical of Gothic and crime fiction traditions that iniquity is rooted in previous wickedness, as accurately observed by Doyle in *A Study in Scarlet*:

> The victims of persecution had now turned persecutors on their own account, and persecutors of the most terrible description. Not the Inquisition of Seville, nor the German Vehmgericht, nor the Secret Societies of Italy, were ever able to put a more formidable machinery in motion than that which cast a cloud over the State of Utah (1987, p. 73).

Like many archetypal figures of Gothic literature, Waaler is shaped by a repressed and tormented childhood, which festers into pathological behaviour in adulthood. His sadism, control, and capacity for emotional manipulation reflect a psyche that has internalized violence and now projects it outward with calculated cruelty.

Waaler's predatory nature is perhaps most clearly illustrated in his uncanny ability to access the most intimate and guarded details of others' lives. As Sven terrifyingly observes:

> I've no idea how he managed to get hold of my telephone number. He seemed to know all about me. It was almost creepy. No, it was creepy. He knew who my mother was, about the prison sentences I had had, and about the pentagram-shaped blood diamonds I had specialised in for years. Worst of all though: he knew I had started smuggling guns (Nesbø, 2022, pp. 389-90).

This near-omniscient surveillance mirrors the Gothic trope of the villain who haunts his victims not merely physically, but psychologically, infiltrating their most private spaces. Waaler's knowledge – extending to familial ties, criminal records, and illicit operations – renders him not only powerful but terrifyingly spectral, a figure who exists at the intersection of corporeal threat and intangible dread. This mastery over personal information, as for instance, shown in the dialogue between Harry and Waaler, during which the latter reveals the detail only known to Harry and his love, Rakel: "'The best thing,' Waaler continued, 'would undoubtedly be to treat yourself to a few extras over and above purely basic needs, providing you had earned sufficient money, that is. Such as the occasional holiday trip with your family to Normandy, for example'" (p. 104), is not wielded as a means to justice, but as a tool of domination. His lack of empathy, combined with a calculated capacity for coercion, positions Waaler as

a quintessential Gothic antagonist: a figure who thrives on fear, secrecy, and the exploitation of vulnerability. In the broader context of *The Devil's Star*, his character exemplifies the convergence of Scandinavian crime fiction's thematic concern with systemic corruption and Gothic fiction's fascination with psychological decay, moral inversion, and the return of the repressed. Through Waaler, Nesbø constructs not merely a criminal adversary, but a Gothic villain whose authority is both institutional and spectral, and whose evil originates in trauma but metastasizes into something far more destructive.

Moreover, Waaler's ability to move undetected within the police hierarchy contributes to a central Gothic motif: the idea that evil resides within the house, not outside of it. The haunted castle of Gothic fiction is here replaced by Police HQ, a place where the very walls seem to conceal secrets and where justice is twisted into a tool of oppression. Waaler's presence within the institution functions like rot within a decaying structure, hidden from view but steadily corroding everything around it. His charisma, like that of the vampire or demonic nobleman, masks a predatory core. This inversion of expectations – where the protector is in fact the predator – instils a deep sense of unease, one of the hallmarks of Gothic literature.

Nesbø's portrayal of Waaler thus transcends the conventional boundaries of Scandinavian crime fiction to delve into the psychological and symbolic territory of Gothic. Waaler is not simply a man who commits crimes; he is "a shark" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 370), a manifestation of the anxieties that surround institutional authority, the fear that those entrusted with power are themselves the architects of disorder. His violence is methodical, his evil systemic, and his presence destabilizing in ways that echo the most enduring tropes of Gothic fiction. In *The Devil's Star*, Waaler is a criminal boss and a spectre of the system's own failures, a figure whose monstrosity lies not only in what he does but in what he reveals about the fragility of justice itself.

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These three criminals – each in their own way – contribute to the novel's atmosphere of dread and moral instability. The criminality represented by Trond, Raskol, and Tom becomes a mirror to the society that produces and enables it. Their differing relationships to violence – strategic, ideological, and institutional – map a spectrum of moral breakdown that implicates not only individuals but entire systems of governance and memory. *Nemesis* thus functions as both a gripping Scandinavian crime novel and a philosophical meditation on the lingering spectres of guilt, corruption, and retribution that haunt contemporary societies. It shows that Gothic is not confined to castles and ghosts, but is very much alive in the modern urban landscape, where history festers in silence and the real monsters wear uniforms or fade into anonymity.

The *Oslo Trilogy*, alongside Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, articulates a powerful meditation on Gothic theme of the divided self, placing fractured identity, criminal transgression, and the corruption of institutional and personal morality at the centre of their narratives. Through morally ambiguous and criminal figures these works reveal that criminality is not simply a deviation from social order but often an expression of inner conflict or ideological trauma,

externalized through Gothic tropes of doubling, secrecy, and decay. Both Nesbø's crime fiction and Stevenson's novella engage profoundly with Gothic mode through their exploration of duality, violence, and the moral instability of authority. Waaler and Hyde function as Gothic doubles, embodiments of repressed aggression and moral disintegration concealed beneath respectability. Yet while Stevenson's wicked mastermind manifests as a literal physical transformation into a monstrous self, Waaler internalizes this duality within the institution of policing, exposing contemporary anxieties about corruption hidden within systems of order.

In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Hyde embodies Jekyll's darkest impulses. The transformation is explicit and horrifying: "I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man" (Stevenson, 1994, p. 70), Jekyll confesses, foregrounding Gothic notion of humanity's divided nature. Hyde's brutality, "pure evil", expresses the primal chaos beneath Victorian civility. His crimes are not random acts but symbolic eruptions of the repressed, dramatizing the fragility of moral restraint in the face of desire. Waaler's criminality, by contrast, is grounded in realism and institutional power. As a high-ranking officer in the Oslo police force, he hides behind the mask of legitimacy while smuggling weapons, manipulating colleagues, and committing acts of violence, including the sexual assault of a colleague. His hatred of Harry stems not only from professional rivalry but from the latter's refusal to submit to his ideological views. Waaler thus personifies institutional betrayal: a man who embodies the corruption he is charged with eradicating. He is a modern incarnation of Gothic *double*, not an outcast monster, but a predator operating at the system's core.

The settings in both texts serve as symbolic Gothic spaces of concealment and decay. In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the divided architecture of Jekyll's home mirrors his split identity: the respectable façade conceals the hidden laboratory of transgression: "I resolved in my future conduct to redeem the past ... but I was still cursed with my duality of purpose" (Stevenson, 1994, p. 82), Jekyll laments, underscoring the inescapable nature of his fragmentation. Likewise, Nesbø situates Waaler's crimes within Oslo Police Headquarters, a supposed bastion of justice revealed as a corrupted fortress. His capacity to exploit this institution exposes systemic moral collapse, updating Gothic concern with haunted spaces to the bureaucratic structures of modern governance.

Importantly, brutality in both characters exposes different facets of Gothic evil. Hyde's violence is raw and unstoppable: "It sounds nothing to hear, but it was hellish to see. It wasn't like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut" (Stevenson, 1994, p. 12). This evokes a monstrous vitality that shatters social order. Waaler's aggression, conversely, is deliberate and sadistic, a calculated assertion of power: "She gasped and resisted him, but he knew she could feel his erection … he took a moment to enjoy the feeling before grabbing her" (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 541-542). Hence, Nesbø translates Gothic terror of physical monstrosity into a psychological and institutional one, the horror of authority corrupted from within.

Both narratives unfold through concealment and revelation, hallmarks of the Gothic. In Stevenson's novella, the truth of Hyde's identity emerges through confession: "Man is not truly one, but truly two" (Stevenson, 1994, p. 70). In *Nemesis*, Waaler's exposure depends not on self-revelation but on forensic investigation, shifting Gothic from spiritual introspection to procedural logic. Yet in both cases, the process of

uncovering truth reveals the instability of moral authority and the proximity of order to chaos. Waaler and Hyde thus demonstrate how Gothic evolves across historical contexts while preserving its central fascination with concealed iniquity. Hyde's supernatural metamorphosis externalizes repression, whereas, Waaler's duplicity internalizes it within systems of justice. Therefore, both confront the readers with the unsettling possibility that monstrosity is not aberrant but systemic, that the 'monsters are those who embody the values they secretly destroy.

Parallel to Waaler's institutional corruption is Gudbrand in *The Redbreast*, whose fracture is psychological and ideological. His transformation is not physical but existential: he murders Fauke, assumes his identity, and forms a supernatural bond with the dead soldier Daniel, enacting a campaign of revenge rooted in historical grievance. Moreover, Gudbrand's awareness of his madness, couched in clinical terms, renders his evil deliberate rather than compulsive – a self-justified pathology born from history itself. This rationalization of evil parallels Jekyll's moral evasion: "It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty ... And thus his conscience slumbered" (Stevenson, 1994, p. 76). Both men externalize guilt to preserve a sense of integrity. Yet while Hyde embodies the unleashed id, Gudbrand represents the perversion of reason – malevolence that cloaks itself in ideology. If Hyde is "pure evil" (p. 73), Gudbrand is wickedness rendered through the prism of logic, history, and patriotism. Stevenson's novella remains foundational because it dramatizes the conflict between the rational self and the primal other. Hyde's "damned Juggernaut" (p. 28) embodies the destructive power of the repressed. Nesbø's villains, however, relocate this Gothic anxiety into a world of institutions, ideology, and inherited trauma. Gudbrand's violence arises from collective memory and national guilt; Waaler's from bureaucratic decay. Both transform Gothic *double* from an inner psychological split into a systemic pathology.

Significantly, urban space becomes the external mirror of divided consciousness. Stevenson's London, "a city of fog, shadow, and spatial duality" (Stevenson, 1994, p. 10), mirrors Jekyll's secret life. Nesbø's Oslo, likewise, is a moral labyrinth, a city where justice and corruption coexist, where institutions conceal rot beneath glass façades. The modern metropolis, like Jekyll's laboratory, becomes a site of repression and revelation, where the boundaries between law and crime dissolve. Both authors confront the dangers of repression, whether personal or institutional. Jekyll's failure to reconcile his dual nature ends in self-destruction: "I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end" (p. 88). Nesbø turns this inward collapse outward: institutions, rather than individuals, repress and conceal their guilt. This institutional silence embodies a distinctly Gothic fear that truth itself is intolerable, and the structures of justice too compromised to face it.

In conclusion, Nesbø's portrayals of evil and criminality, alongside Stevenson's depiction of Hyde, collectively embody the enduring Gothic fascination with duality, guilt, and the blurred boundary between legality and transgression. Stevenson's Victorian vision of repressed sin finds new resonance in Nesbø's landscapes of historical reckoning and systemic corruption. Both writers demonstrate that Gothic remains a vital mode for exploring the darkness within modernity. Whether through Hyde's monstrous alter ego, Gudbrand's ideological vengeance, Tom's concealed criminality, Trond's consuming jealousy, or Raskol's intricate schemes, these figures remind us that iniquity is not an external aberration but, more often, an intrinsic element of the very structures that claim to resist it.

4.3. Victims

In her article "Victims", Mills argues that:

> Nineteenth-century Gothic and sensation fictions are preoccupied with the vulnerability of the virgin and the threat of the sexually active woman; this focus on women's bodies and behavior persists in the victimization of both virgins and sexually active women in twentieth- and twenty-first-century crime and horror fictions (2020, p. 154).

This assertion identifies a recurrent and enduring thematic preoccupation within Gothic and Scandinavian crime literature: the depiction of women's vulnerability, particularly in relation to sexuality. Mills's observation reveals how the legacy of Gothic fiction continues to inform contemporary crime narratives, with the female body remaining a site of contestation, fear, and violence. The victimization of women, especially in contexts where sexuality becomes the axis of moral judgment, serves as a powerful narrative tool to critique both historical and modern systems of patriarchal control[28]. Although this motif is deeply entrenched in Scandinavian crime fiction, Adrienne E. Gavin indicates that within the Gothic tradition, female protagonists, despite being routinely victimized or imprisoned, are not devoid of agency. Indeed, many of these heroines demonstrate a capacity for resistance through methods that may be considered "proto-detective". Gavin adds that they frequently employ "proto-detective methods" involving rational and commonsense strategies that enable them to "resist and, at times, overcome the tyrannical and irrational behaviour of male antagonists" (2010, p. 259). This framing recasts the victim not as a mere object of violence or pity, but as an individual capable of critical thinking and strategic survival, even within overwhelmingly hostile environments. Roy Shampa, expanding on the socio-political role of the crime fiction genre, contends that:

> Crime fiction has become one of the most pertinent forms for engaging with contemporary issues, with many authors using the genre to conduct a searing analysis and critique of the decay in inherited institutions like the police, judiciary, and state bureaucracy (2020, p. 123).

This critical function of Scandinavian crime fiction reveals a convergence between Gothic tropes and contemporary political commentary. Within these narratives, institutions that are ostensibly designed to provide protection and justice, such as the police, courts, and government bodies, are increasingly depicted as complicit in sustaining the very violence and exploitation they claim to oppose. For female characters, especially, these institutions often act as vectors of harm rather than sources of safety.

This dynamic is notably present in the representation of, for instance, Lisbeth Salander in Larsson's *Millennium* series, where institutional neglect and abuse play a central role in the narrative. Similarly, Nesbø's crime novels offer a particularly stark portrayal of the horrific treatment of women, which can be categorized into two broad

[28] As a clarification, I would like to note that this subchapter focuses exclusively on the female victims in the *Oslo Trilogy*. This does not imply that male victims are absent from the three novels. One of the most significant, of course, is Harry, who is repeatedly depicted as being beaten, attacked, and victimized in various ways.

forms. The first encompasses the emotional and physical intimidation of women by men, an exertion of patriarchal power that is sustained through mechanisms of fear and coercion. The second type is more extreme, representing the full manifestation of male violence, often culminating in the suffering or death of female victims. In both cases, the aggression directed at women is not incidental but emblematic of a broader system of gendered domination.

The Gothic tradition has long articulated such tensions through the theme of female submission under male tyranny. In the works of Radcliffe, for instance, female protagonists are frequently placed under the control of authoritarian male figures who symbolize patriarchal power. These antagonists employ manipulation and cruelty, functioning as avatars of systemic oppression. However, Radcliffe's heroines are rarely portrayed as passive or inert. Instead, her narratives are often structured around moments of resistance, intellectual, emotional, or strategic, against male dominance. While complete liberation may not always be attained, their struggles underscore the tension between autonomy and social constraint, reflecting the nuanced negotiation of power that defines Gothic heroine. In Scandinavian crime fiction, this same dynamic is translated into a modern socio-political register. The depiction of victims, particularly women, is not monolithic but multifaceted. These characters often reflect broader social issues, such as systemic neglect, trauma, marginalization, and the failure of institutions. Scandinavian crime novels place victims within complex social and psychological matrices, presenting them not as isolated cases but as symptomatic of larger societal dysfunctions. The emphasis on trauma, both psychological and structural, serves to humanize victims while also foregrounding the pervasive impact of violence in society.

One of the defining characteristics of the subgenre is its willingness to critique the institutions that enable or fail to prevent such victimization. As Creeber astutely observes:

> The central crime at the heart of each narrative is simply a motor that enables the whole narrative world to revolve. … Although the crimes will eventually be solved, the moral, political, and social problems that produced them are not. These are issues that audiences are left to consider long after the final climatic episode has come to an end (2015, p. 32).

His insight points to a core tension in Scandinavian crime fiction: the contrast between the resolution of the narrative and the irresolution of the real-world conditions it critiques. While the perpetrator may be apprehended or punished, the social structures that allowed the crime to occur remain unchanged. In this sense, the subgenre challenges its readers to look beyond the plot's resolution and interrogate the systems that continuously produce and normalize violence, especially gender-based violence. The intersectionality of identity further complicates the representation of victims. Research conducted by Eileen Bjornstrom et al. (2010) reveals that media portrayals often marginalize racial and ethnic minorities, suggesting that public attention and sympathy are unevenly distributed along racial and class lines. While Scandinavian crime fiction has traditionally cantered on white protagonists and victims, recent works increasingly foreground the vulnerabilities of immigrant and marginalized communities. These shifts offer a more expansive critique of how intersecting forms of oppression shape experiences of victimization.

Moreover, the subgenre resists simplistic moral binaries by frequently portraying victims whose backgrounds or actions complicate traditional notions of innocence. These figures may have committed crimes themselves, been complicit in unethical practices, or possess personal histories that challenge the audience's expectations of victimhood. This moral complexity is intrinsic to the subgenre's philosophical engagement with justice. Rather than offering closure, it prompts reflection on the ethics of retribution and the blurred boundaries between victim and perpetrator. Klaus Dodds and Tobias Hochscherf articulate this dynamic as a hallmark of Scandinavian crime fiction:

> One particular trademark of Nordic Noir is the way it coalesces different public and private spheres. By linking the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural with the private lives of the protagonists, the audiovisual dramas exemplify how the key concerns of today can have an impact on everyday life (2020, p. 45)[29].

This convergence between the public and private, the systemic and the intimate, allows Scandinavian crime fiction to address both macro-level injustices and the personal suffering they engender. It is the subgenre that, through its narrative structure and thematic focus, consistently urges its audience to think about how political, economic, and cultural conditions shape the experiences of its most vulnerable subjects.

In sum, both Gothic fiction and Scandinavian crime fiction provide incisive critiques of the mechanisms of victimization and the structures that perpetuate them. The depiction of female suffering, whether at the hands of oppressive patriarchal figures in Radcliffe's novels or corrupt institutions in Nesbø's Oslo, functions not only as a narrative element but as a lens through which to interrogate broader cultural and political realities. These literary modes, through their complex characters, thematic depth, and formal innovations, invite readers to critically engage with questions of power, justice, and resistance. They remind us that victimhood is never merely personal but is always situated within, and shaped by, the social and institutional forces of its time.

4.3.1. Helena Lang, Rakel Fauke, and Ellen Gjelten in *The Redbreast*

In *The Redbreast*, Nesbø presents a disturbing tapestry of gendered power imbalances, where women are subjected to various forms of male domination. These instances are not isolated but structurally embedded within a broader system of exploitation, coercion, and sexual submission. The novel reveals how patriarchal power operates under the guise of medical, political, or institutional authority and aligns itself with Gothic and crime fiction traditions by creating psychological and physical enclosures where women are trapped, watched, manipulated, and ultimately destroyed.

The first woman in the chronological narrative of the novel, Helena Lang, functions as an archetypal figure of wartime vulnerability. A nurse working in a hospital in Vienna during the Second World War, she becomes the object of desire for Dr. Christopher Brockhard. His interest in her, however, is not limited to personal affection but is entwined with strategic social climbing; his father views her as a convenient asset, someone who might advance his son's status. Moreover, her own mother is likewise focused upon unification of two people:

[29] It is important to acknowledge that critics discussing Nordic Noir often focus on television series – many of which are, after all, adaptations of novels. Consequently, such critical perspectives are equally relevant to the study of crime fiction in its literary form.

> Her mother would probably have had respiratory problems if she had seen the way in which Helena avoided the promising young doctor, especially as Brockhard came from a particularly distinguished Viennese family. However, Helena liked neither Brockhard nor his family, nor her mother's attempts to *use* her as a ticket back into the upper echelons of society (Nesbo, 2006, pp. 145-146; emphasis mine).

Despite Helena's own romantic attachment to Gudbrand who, at the time goes by the alias Uriah, her autonomy is systematically eroded by Brockhard's institutional authority. The doctor wields his power over her by leveraging his ability to influence Uriah's fate at the Front:

> 'My dear Helena,' Brockhard wore an expression of concern, 'don't you understand that this is up to you?' 'Up to me?' ... 'I could provide him with a medical certificate for another three months, and who knows if there will be any Eastern Front in three months' time?' ... 'I wouldn't dream of sending your heart's desire to the front if he was not fit enough'. ... She could hardly believe her ears: he wanted to use Uriah to force his way into her bed. How long had he spent working this one out? Had he been waiting for weeks for just the right moment? And how did he actually want her? As a wife or a lover? ... Her head was racing as she tried to find a way out of the labyrinth. But all the exits were closed. Naturally. Brockhard wasn't a stupid man. As long as he had a certificate for Uriah, as a favour to her, she would have to obey his every whim (pp. 152-153).

The doctor can either issue a medical certificate that would spare the soldier from immediate redeployment or deny him this protection, essentially placing Helena in a position of impossible moral compromise. Her poverty and desperate need for money to care for her ailing mother further exacerbate her dependence. A nurse realizes she has entered Gothic labyrinth from which there is no ethical escape:

> She wanted to continue, wanted to say what she knew she had to say to break free, but something *stopped her*. It took her a second to understand what it was. It was the lies. It was a lie that she wanted to be free, a lie that she didn't know what Uriah felt for her, a lie that we always *had to submit and to degrade ourselves to survive*, it was all lies. She bit her lower lip as she felt it begin to tremble (p. 154; emphasis mine).

This moment is emblematic of the Gothic tradition, particularly its preoccupation with female entrapment, moral coercion, and power wielded under the cover of benevolence. Brockhard resembles the archetypal Gothic villain, civilized in appearance, yet cruelly manipulative behind the mask of paternalism. His medical authority becomes the modern equivalent of the ancestral curse, binding her in a psychological and material prison.

This pattern of exploitation remerges decades later through the character of Rakel Fauke, a woman whose autonomy is systematically compromised by male figures in positions of authority. A former interpreter at the Norwegian embassy in Moscow, Rakel – who "married a Russian, a young professor of gene technology who *had taken her by storm* and had immediately converted theory into practice by

making her pregnant" and who was "born with a gene that predisposed him to alcoholism, combined with *a predilection for physical discussion*" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 366; emphasis mine) – is caught in a transnational custody dispute after escaping an abusive spouse. Upon returning to Norway with her son, Oleg, she finds herself ensnared in a legal and political system that replicates the structures of patriarchal dominance she attempted to flee. The narrative focalizes this oppression through the character of Bernt Brandhaug, a corrupt senior official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who, while ostensibly assisting her case, leverages his institutional power to fulfil his personal and sexual desires.

Brandhaug's manipulation of state mechanisms exemplifies a recurring feature of Scandinavian crime fiction, its critical engagement with social institutions and systemic abuses of power. His offer of assistance quickly morphs into coercion:

> The next call, to Rakel, was an invitation to dinner, no pretext this time, and upon her friendly but firm refusal he dictated a letter addressed to her, signed by the head of the legal department. The letter, in brief outline, told her that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since the business had dragged on, was now attempting to reach a compromise solution with the Russian authorities on custody 'out of humane consideration for Oleg's Russian family'. That would require Rakel and Oleg to appear before a Russian court and comply with the court's ruling (Nesbø, 2006, p. 367).

This scenario illustrates how the language of diplomacy and legal objectivity is weaponized to cloak exploitation of the woman. Brandhaug, like Brockhard, embodies the archetype of the powerful predator who cloaks personal vice in bureaucratic procedure. His character aligns with Tzvetan Todorov's observation that "the contemporary thriller has been constituted not around a method of presentation but around the milieu represented; its constitutive character is in its themes" (1978, p. 48). In this case, the theme is unmistakably the abuse of institutional power. Rakel's situation illustrates how private trauma becomes public through systems that enable, rather than restrain, the overexploitation of power.

As David Cowart suggests, "every detective story concerns an encounter with vice, inherent or otherwise. The more inherent the vice, the more noir the fiction" (p. 124). Nesbø's novel goes even further, locating vice not only in individual malefactors but in the very architecture of the state. As Muždeka argues, Scandinavian crime fiction is uniquely positioned to expose how crimes at the micro level, such as, for instance, sexual coercion, are intimately connected to macro-level institutional failures:

> Vice is present both in the conspiracy and plotting at the highest levels of society and the state, and in the actual graphic representations of it, in the form of murders and violence, and that the narrative depicting this vice acts as a vehicle for authors' socio-political commentary … by resolving the conundrum of the actual initial crime at a micro level of their investigation, the detectives also expose the perpetrators of crimes that have significantly greater consequences for the society and state as a whole (2022, p. 231).

Within this framework, Brandhaug is not simply a corrupt individual but a manifestation of the state's complicity in patriarchal control. His calculated legal entrapment of Rakel resonates with Gothic motifs of architectural and legal imprisonment, where the ancestral castle has been replaced by the sterile offices of government ministries, and monsters no longer wear cloaks, but tailored suits. Rakel's ultimate capitulation to his demands marks both a personal tragedy and a broader indictment of institutional failure. The scene of her submission is loaded with psychological horror and physical vulnerability:

> She was leaning against the wall with her coat unbuttoned. She was wearing a red woollen dress underneath. He had asked her to wear something red. Her eyelids were heavy and she gave him a wry smirk. 'A drink?' he asked. 'Yes, please,' she said, her speech slurred. 'Or would you rather I stripped off immediately?' … But the most important thing was that she succumbed to his desires. He was too old to believe in humanity's romantic motives. The only thing that separated them was what they were both after: power, career or custody of a son. … 'I apologise, but I have to have you' (Nesbø, 2006, pp. 430-431).

This depiction echoes the classic Gothic scenario in which the heroine is cornered by a powerful, morally bankrupt man. Yet Nesbø's rendering, grounded in realism and institutional critique, shifts Gothic from the supernatural to the bureaucratic, from the dungeon to the government office. The horror here lies not in ghosts or curses, but in the mundane mechanisms of systemic abuse. Rakel's degradation is not an isolated event, but part of a pattern that exposes the latent misogyny of legal and diplomatic institutions.

The novel culminates with the figure of Ellen Gjelten, a police officer who becomes the target of violence within her own institution. Her partner, Waaler, is a criminal disguised as a law enforcement official. She is not only subjected to his toxic masculinity – manifested through racism, misogyny, and authoritarianism – but is eventually silenced for uncovering the truth. Her murder, carried out by the obedient Sverre Olsen under Waaler's orders, is depicted with chilling brutality:

> Suddenly all she could hear was the gurgle of the river and the sound of snow groaning beneath her boots. And it was late to rue taking the short cut when she became aware that it was not only her own steps she could hear. Now she could hear breathing too, heavy, panting. Frightened and angry, Ellen thought that, no, she knew, at that moment her life was in danger. She didn't turn, she simply started to run. ... She was directly under the light when the first blow hit her shoulder and knocked her sideways into the snowdrift. The second blow paralysed her arm and the gas spray slipped out of her unfeeling hand. The third smashed her left kneecap; the pain obstructed the scream muted deep in her throat and caused her veins to bulge out in the winter-pale skin of her neck. She saw him raise the wooden baseball bat in the yellow street light. ... The first blow to the head destroyed the optic nerve and now all she saw was the pitch black night (Nesbø, 2006, pp. 333-334).

Here, Nesbø fuses the forensic realism of crime fiction with the visceral horror of Gothic violence. Ellen's death is not merely a plot device but a representation of the lethal consequences of institutional betrayal. Her arc reflects Agatha Christie's insight in *Evil Under the Sun* (1941): "There is no such thing as a plain fact of murder. Murder springs, nine times out of ten, out of the character and circumstances of the murdered person" (2008, pp. 111-112). Ellen's fate, sealed by her knowledge and moral clarity, positions her as Gothic heroine who is punished not for her flaws but for her integrity. She enters a figurative labyrinth of surveillance and entrapment, akin to those found in classic Gothic narratives, and meets her end at the hands of men who embody both bureaucratic evil and criminal depravity: "She saw him raise the wooden baseball bat in the yellow street light. She recognised him now, the same man she had seen turn round outside Fru Hagen. ... The first blow to the head destroyed the optic nerve and now all she saw was the pitch black night" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 334).

Nesbø's *The Redbreast* masterfully combines elements of Scandinavian crime fiction, such as procedural investigation, forensic detail, and institutional critique with Gothic tropes of moral decay, entrapment, and sexual menace. Through the stories of Helena, Rakel, and Ellen, the novel foregrounds how systemic misogyny and personal exploitation intersect. These female figures are not simply victims but conduits through which Nesbø interrogates the darker structures of contemporary society, structures that are both modern and mythic, rational and monstrous, in the tradition of both Gothic and crime fiction.

4.3.2. Stine Grette and Anna Bethsen in *Nemesis*

In *Nemesis*, the ostensibly peripheral figure of Stine Grette – murdered in the opening bank robbery – functions as a pivotal structural and thematic nexus. Her death not only initiates the plot but also articulates the novel's central concerns with gendered violence, criminal psychology, and Gothic affect. Far from a passive casualty, Stine epitomizes the silenced woman, whose behaviour, even in crisis, reflects societal conditioning:

> Brave girl, Harry thought. Or maybe just frightened out of her wits. Aune, the psychology lecturer at Oslo Police College, had told them that when people are frightened enough they stop thinking and act the way they had been programmed. Most bank employees press the silent robbery alarm almost in shock ... They had been on autopilot. In just the same way as a bank robber has programmed himself to shoot anyone trying to stop him (Nesbø, 2008, p. 10).

This framing situates Stine within a discourse of gendered automatism, revealing how patriarchal structures shape female agency even at the threshold of death. Her murder, while initially framed as an act of random violence, is later exposed as a manifestation of intimate patriarchal aggression, committed by her husband, Trond Grette. The investigative dialogue renders this revelation explicit: "'I understand. You think that's why Stine was shot. You think she knew the robber. And when he had finished using her, he shot her to remove any possible leads. Isn't that right?'" (p. 234). The crime is not impulsive but premeditated, grounded in Trond's jealousy over Stine's emotional attachment to his brother, Lev. Within this fraternal rivalry, Stine becomes an object

through which male possessiveness and insecurity are violently negotiated. As Harry ultimately declares: "'We've made a mistake,' Harry said, turning away from the window and addressing the assembled detectives. 'Stine Grette was not killed by Lev but by her own husband, Trond Grette'" (p. 655). This dynamic culminates in the final confrontation, which crystallizes patriarchal ownership as both motive and ideology:

> 'Drop the gun I know you are holding.'
> 'Or what?' Harry asked, pulling out his gun.
> Trond gave a low chuckle. 'Elementary. I'll shoot your colleague.'
> 'Like you shot your wife?'
> 'She deserved it.'
> 'Oh? Because she liked Lev more than you?'
> 'Because she was my wife!' (p. 656).

Here, Trond's declaration – "Because she was my wife!" – condenses the logic of patriarchal possession into a lethal form of entitlement. Stine's murder thus constitutes an assertion of absolute control over female autonomy; she is punished not for transgression per se but for desiring outside the sanctioned boundaries of male dominance. The novel's Gothic subtext intensifies the symbolic charge of Stine's death. Her "grotesque grin" as her "faceless tormentor" aims the gun (p. 15) exemplifies the Gothic's fascination with the uncanny body, where terror and desire converge in distortion. The modern, sterile space of the bank is transformed into a Gothic vault, "House of Pain" – where rational order collapses under the force of primal jealousy and death.

Although Stine does not reappear as a literal spectre, her absence acquires a spectral quality: her murder haunts both narrative and consciousness. This haunting aligns with Gothic's insistence that the past remains unresolved, that unacknowledged trauma perpetually infiltrates the present. Stine's death also recalls the Gothic archetype of the punished or "mad" woman, figures whose deviation from patriarchal norms invites violence and erasure. In loving Lev, a man criminalized and morally ambiguous, the woman embodies a female desire that transgresses acceptable codes of conduct and is consequently obliterated.

Stine thus occupies a structural and symbolic fulcrum within the narrative. Her death inaugurates a continuum of female victimization – Ellen's murder, Rakel's sexual coercion, and Anna's suicide – each reflecting iterations of male domination. Through Stine, Nesbø exposes crime as both juridical violation and emotional pathology, a convergence of social control and psychological repression. The Gothic mode extends this critique by reconfiguring trauma as affective contagion. Beate, whose pallor early in the novel marks her as spectral – "Her most prominent feature was her pallor. Her skin and hair were so colourless that she reminded Harry of a corpse of Ellen" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 28) – becomes a living conduit for the novel's traumatic memory. Her visceral reaction at the crime scene underscores the embodiment of psychological horror: "Beate couldn't stand the stench for more than a couple of minutes and had to dash out. She was bent double as Harry strolled out and sat down on the steps for a cigarette. ... Beate retched again" (p. 414). This scene externalizes internal trauma, situating Beate as both witness and inheritor of patriarchal violence. Her physical reaction parallels the novel's structural repetition of female suffering, where Stine's murder becomes a template for subsequent victimizations.

Significantly, Stine Grette's death constitutes more than narrative impetus; it anchors *Nemesis*'s interrogation of masculine power and the gendered logic of violence. Through Gothic aesthetics and psychological realism, Nesbø renders her murder a site where desire, ownership, and annihilation intersect. Stine's silencing exposes the persistence of patriarchal terror within modernity, confirming her as the novel's central haunting presence both thematically and structurally indispensable.

Another female victim is Anna Bethsen whose suicide is far more than an individual act of despair, it is a complex act of symbolic revenge against the men and patriarchal structures that used, abused, and neglected her. Her demise cannot be viewed in isolation; rather, it ought to be understood through the layered frameworks of crime and Gothic fiction, both of which reveal how Anna transforms victimhood into a final, strategic act of resistance. From the outset, she is presented as psychologically fragile, even depressive:

> However ...' The doctor paused for effect. 'The scars on the wrists suggest that she has tried this before. A purely speculative but educated guess is that she was manic depressive, or simply depressive, and suicidal. I wouldn't mind betting we will find a psychologist's case file on her' (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 124-125),

emotionally volatile, and addicted, as indicated by the content of the letter sent by the killer, and Anna's lover, to Harry: "*Did you know she was a pedigree junkie?*" (2008, p. 485; emphasis in the original). Hence, her descent into darkness is not an accident, but the result of sustained emotional violence and manipulation. Anna's mental collapse is embedded in a world where men dominate the narrative and women are relegated to the margins. Her death, however, is no passive exit. It is a meticulously orchestrated retaliation and revenge upon men. Therefore, Anna implements death as her weapon and her suicide is less an escape than it is a message; it is a manifestation of Nemesis:

> 'You solved the code ages ago, I know,' Harry said. 'Her signature was S^2MN. The two stands for a second S and there are three vowels missing. From left to right it reads S-S-M-N, but in the mirror it becomes N-M-S-S, or with the vowels NeMeSiS. The goddess of vengeance. *She* told me. It was her masterpiece. What she wanted to be remembered for' (pp. 623-624; emphasis in the original).

Nevertheless, by framing her death to appear as murder, Anna ensures that Harry, and the justice system that failed her, have to bear the psychological and ethical consequences. Her revenge is not physical violence, but emotional devastation. She reshapes the plot of the novel even after her death, haunting the male protagonists like a Gothic revenant. Her room is filled with grotesque images, symbols of death, and "open-mouthed demons snarling from the carvings on the bedhead" (p. 62), all contributing to a space of Gothic fiction. Her bed becomes an altar of torment, and her belongings function like relics of a disturbed mind. Significantly, these elements mark her as a Gothic heroine, not in the traditional romantic sense, but as a woman overwhelmed by psychological, supernatural, and social forces.

This Gothic aesthetic intensifies after her death. Anna's lingering presence, her photo, her empty room, her disturbing belongings, they all contribute to the macabre atmosphere of the novel. The stillness in her empty home is bereft of sound and it was "quiet as a grave" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 123). Moreover, the world around her gradually becomes increasingly unearthly: there is mist over the city: "The fog was back. It seeped in through the streets, from the cracks around the closed windows behind the trees in the avenue" (p. 120), bizarre furniture at her home: "The large bed in the middle of the room imposed like a Roman galley" (p. 633), and the outlandish figure and the lamps: "Harry mentioned towards the female figure holding the three lamps. 'Nemesis, the goddess of justice and vengeance'" (p. 634)[30].

In the context of Scandinavian crime fiction, Anna's act is also revolutionary. Traditionally, the subgenre relies on external violence, murders committed by criminals, and solved by detectives. But her suicide reconfigures this model. She is both the victim and the avenger, both the corpse and the one who orchestrates guilt. Her death becomes the inciting crime, but also the moral puzzle. Harry is not simply trying to identify the killer; he is forced to unravel the truth about himself, his past with Anna, and his failures. Her death reveals the deeper continuity of crime that threads through the narrative: the murder, bank robberies: "*Bank clerk shot in raid. Raiders shot a cashier at the Grensen branch of DnB in Oslo this afternoon. Bank clerk's condition is critical*" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 482; emphasis in the original), car thefts: "'Bank robbers tend to steal cars as near the time to the robbery as possible so they don't appear on patrol-car lists'" (p. 72), and contract killings: "'the contract killer also did good work. It really did look as if Lev had hanged himself" (p. 669) all orbit around themes of male violence, dominance, and a justice system that on one hand serves male power structures, but, on the other, subjugates, diminishes, and attacks women.

Therefore, it is of importance to highlight that Anna's suicide is not an isolated case. It joins a pattern of women being assaulted and murdered at the hands of men. In the narrative the readers are presented with, for instance, a flashback to Ellen being murdered: "'Good,' Aune said. 'It's not your fault Ellen was killed'" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 88) and "'I know,' she said in a rush. 'She was killed next to the rover'" (p. 145). Within this web of crime, Anna's decision to commit a suicide becomes a unique form of counter-violence. While others are killed by men, Anna chooses to deny men that power over her. Instead, she manipulates her own death as a narrative device. In doing so, she becomes the female strategist that the novel alludes to: "Women always plan" (p. 324), and women are strategists who "don't have the vanity men have. They don't need to make power visible, they only want the power to give them the other things they want. ... They are rational, power-seeking planners, who think beyond the battle, beyond the victory celebrations" (p. 325), invoking an ancient Chinese military treatise *The Art of War* (5th century BC) attributed to Sun Tzu: "'Sun Tzu is absolutely clear on love and hatred", asserts Raskol (p. 629). Her suicide is therefore not spontaneous –

[30] This image of the goddess is similar to the figure of the woman presented by Joseph Conrad in "Heart of Darkness" (1899): "Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blind-folded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre–almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torch-light on the face was sinister" (2023, p. 27). Both images merge the sacred with the sinister, female embodiments of justice transformed into omens of darkness. In this way, Nesbø's description of Anna's room resonates with Conrad's Gothic symbolism, where the feminine divine becomes a vessel for both illumination and dread.

it is tactical despite the fact that her uncle Raskol does not believe in that: "'My Anna would never have chosen death.' His voice quivered. 'She loved life'" (p. 629). Nevertheless, she uses knowledge as power, turning herself into a weapon aimed at a male-dominated world.

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Anna's suicide operates as both a psychological and symbolic culmination of the novel's exploration of trauma and revenge. Her depressive state, pervasive fear: "*PS She was frightened. I just wanted you to know that*" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 282; emphasis in the original), and resistance to help exemplify the long-term effects of emotional violence. Her death, simultaneously self-destructive and retributive, becomes the ultimate expression of agency within a world where institutional and moral justice have collapsed. The act functions through the psychology of crime: trauma transforms into vengeance, and vengeance becomes the only remaining form of control in a corrupt moral order where, as the novel insists, "only the revengeful survive" (p. 533). In this context Harry articulates the novel's meditation on revenge and catharsis:

> Look around you. Humanity can't survive without it. Revenge and retribution. That's the driving force for the midget who was bullied at school and later became a multi-millionaire, and the bank robber who thinks he has been short-changed by society. And look at us, Society's burning revenge disguised as cold, rational retribution – that's our profession, isn't it? ... Catharsis. Revenge cleanses. Aristotle wrote that the human soul is purged by the fear and compassion that tragedy evokes. It's a frightening thought that we fulfil the soul's innermost desire through the tragedy of revenge (p. 275).

Here, revenge functions as both psychological necessity and moral paradox: it restores agency through destruction. Anna's suicide thus becomes a tragic synthesis of these forces, an act of psychological reclamation disguised as self-annihilation.

While figures such as Raskol, Tom, and Trond embody externalized power through manipulation and murder, Anna's revenge operates internally, destabilizing the narrative from within. Her self-destruction transforms her into Harry's psychological Nemesis; her death reverberates as a haunting presence that induces guilt, paralysis, and existential introspection. In death, Anna attains a form of dominance denied to her in life, becoming an instrument of moral reckoning.

From a Gothic perspective, Anna's trajectory is marked by fear, madness, and death. Her suicide scene evokes Gothic intertextuality through the allusion to the Bard's play: "There was no sign of a fight in the room. More a hasty departure. A book lay open on the table. Harry lifted it up. Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. One line of the text had been ringed with a blue pen. *I have no words; my voice is in my sword*" (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 448-449; emphasis in the original). This reference encapsulates her transformation from victim to avenger, her "voice" expressed through the violent act of self-destruction. Anna's story recalls the Gothic tradition of the punished or silenced woman whose death becomes a form of protest. Her existence was surveilled, her suffering disregarded; thus, her suicide functions as both resistance and indictment. Even in death, she endures – through memory, photographs, and Harry's nightmares – assuming the spectral role of the Gothic revenant, a haunting emblem of guilt and repression.

Anna's death should therefore not be read as weakness but as strategy. She converts silence into expression, powerlessness into judgment, and despair into the final assertion of control. Her suicide articulates the intersection of gender, trauma, and agency, exposing the psychological consequences of systemic violence. Within the dual frameworks of crime and Gothic fiction, her death becomes both an act of self-determination and a critique of a patriarchal world that denies women justice.

As for Stine's murder, within the broader conventions of Scandinavian crime fiction, her death functions as the narrative catalyst, initiating investigation and revelation. It exposes buried secrets and entangles Harry in both criminal and emotional complexities. Nesbø subverts the procedural formula by emphasizing emotional intimacy between victim and perpetrator; murder arises not from financial or strategic calculation but from jealousy and personal grievance. Such intimacy redefines criminality as a psychological condition rather than a social anomaly. The police psychologist Aune articulates this view:

> 'Drugs will only emphasise or weaken latent tendencies. A drunk who kills his wife also has a propensity to beat her when sober. Willful murders like this one are almost always committed by people with a particular predisposition' (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 89-90).

Through Aune's perspective, violence is revealed as the expression of ingrained psychological and emotional predispositions, not mere circumstantial deviation.

Significantly, the pervasive criminality of *Nemesis* – spanning serial murders, bank robberies, institutional corruption, and sexual exploitation – creates an atmosphere of moral entropy, a defining feature of Gothic mode. Boundaries between law and crime, justice and vengeance, sanity and madness, blur continuously. Stine's murder, Anna's suicide, and the numerous acts of violence that follow form an interlinked chain of obsession, betrayal, and control. Each crime reverberates within a shared psychological economy of fear, guilt, and retribution, where every act becomes both cause and consequence, echoing the Gothic notion that trauma, once unleashed, can never be contained.

4.3.3 Female Victims of Wilhelm Barli in *The Devil's Star*

In *The Devil's Star*, the narrative surrounding Camilla Loen, Lisbeth Barli, and Barbara reveals a chilling portrait of women destroyed within structures of jealousy, possession, and patriarchal control. Their deaths are not incidental or random, but part of a deliberate and ritualized pattern of violence. Each woman, distinct in background and circumstance, becomes linked by a shared fate: to be selected, not for personal actions or moral failings, but for spatial and symbolic reasons beyond their control. Their homes and workplaces are mapped onto Oslo's geography to form the five points of a pentagram, a symbol historically tied to mysticism, sacrifice, and domination. In this configuration, the women are transformed into unwilling participants in a ritual of power, their lives reduced to coordinates in geometry of subjugation.

Lisbeth Barli, the first and most central of the victims, is punished within the boundaries of her marriage. Her body is discovered encased in a waterbed, where love and death are grotesquely fused:

> Harry struggled to his feet and stared at the blue mattress. He felt as if something was crawling inside his clothes. In the light from the bedside table he could see the contours of a human body inside the waterbed. The face had floated up and formed a mould like a plaster cast (Nesbø, 2022, p. 485).

The marital bed, traditionally a site of intimacy, is converted into a tomb. Domestic space, often feminized and idealized, becomes the scene of her entrapment and annihilation. Lisbeth's death thus exemplifies Gothic inversion of home into crypt, of affection into possession. Her mutilation, revealed in a nightmarish atmosphere at Police Headquarters, reinforces this theme of silenced agency:

> Møller opened his hand and studied Harry's reaction. The moon and the lamp shone on the palms of Møller's and one of the Forensics department's plastic bags. ... In the plastic bag was a long, slim finger with a red-lacquered nail. The finger was wearing a ring. The jewel set in the ring was in the shape of a star with five points (p. 133).

The removal of Lisbeth's finger, a gesture that severs the hand's capacity for touch and expression, becomes a metaphor for her erasure. Through this mutilation, her individuality is extinguished, her voice rendered permanently absent. The same violence is inflicted upon the other women – Barbara and Camilla – each bearing the same mark of control. Barbara's left ring finger is found missing: "'Look underneath her, her left hand. Her ring finger has been cut off'" (p. 164), while Camilla's body is discovered with her index finger removed, "black threads of coagulated blood and glistening tendon ends" exposed (p. 31). The repetition of this act transforms personal murder into ritual. The women's bodies are made to signify obedience and silence through fragmentation; their humanity is rewritten as evidence of domination.

Camilla's death is the first to emerge in the narrative, framed as the continuation of a grim pattern of female mutilation stretching back years. Introduced through the description in the newspaper, dated July 11, 1898, of "a young nurse who had been found dead from stab wounds in a bathroom" and "a girl mutilated and killed in a similar way ... near the River Akerselva" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 6), her story echoes older forms of Gothic terror in which women's bodies bear the weight of social and psychological corruption. Her murder, like Lisbeth's and Barbara's, is carried out with precision, not rage; it is the calculated dismemberment of a woman whose existence has been reduced to a symbol: "Camilla Loen probably had her finger cut off while her heart was still beating. In other words, before she was shot" (p. 32). Here, pain is weaponized as a performance; the victim's suffering becoming part of a perverse choreography of power. Before being killed, Camilla may have been manipulated or coerced, suggesting that control was first enacted psychologically before being completed physically.

Barbara's death continues this sequence of erasures. Her murder, staged according to the geometry of the pentagram, demonstrates the full descent of the narrative into ritualized annihilation. This calculated act is driven not by personal animosity, but by the symbolic significance of her place of employment, which happens to be situated at one of the vertices of the pentagram Wilhelm has meticulously inscribed onto the map of Oslo. The description of it, although longish, is worth being given here since it also enhances the Gothicness of the novel:

> The room was surprisingly big, roughly four metres by five, with two white lavatory cubicles and three white basins placed below a long mirror. The neon lights in the ceiling cast a harsh glare on the white walls and white floor tiles. *The absence of colour* was almost conspicuous. Perhaps it was this background that made *the body look like a small work of art, a carefully arranged exhibition*. The woman was young and slim. *She was kneeling with her forehead on the ground*, like a Muslim at prayers, except that her arms were beneath her body. Her suit 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 head and the drain. It looked almost painted on to achieve maximum effect. *The body was in balance, supported at five points: the two feet, the knees and the forehead*. The suit, *the bizarre position* and the bared posterior made Harry think of a secretary preparing herself to be penetrated by the boss (Nesbø, 2022, p. 160; emphasis mine).

What distinguishes Barbara's killing, however, is not the novelty of the act, but its repetition: by now, the pattern is complete, the women fully subsumed within a structure that denies individuality. Each victim is transformed into a symbol, her body used to articulate a male obsession with order, symmetry, and possession, indicated by the shape of pentagram. The women's deaths thus become a collective inscription of patriarchal fear, the trepidation of female autonomy, intimacy, and independence.

Within the framework of Scandinavian crime fiction, this chain of murders exposes how violence against women often hides behind social respectability. The crimes occur within domestic interiors, workplaces, and familiar urban spaces, environments presumed safe. In each, the boundaries of the private sphere are violated, turning everyday life into the site of horror. The women's vulnerability is amplified by the killer's social privilege: as a respected figure in the cultural elite, he is shielded by reputation and proximity to power. The failure of justice to protect these women, or to see them as more than extensions of a man's pathology, underscores the genre's critique of institutional blindness. Significantly, real-world references within the novel, such as Norway's serial killers Arnfinn Nesset and Belle Gunness, extend this critique beyond fiction. Both operated within intimate or domestic contexts, echoing how the most monstrous acts often occur under the guise of care or normalcy: "We haven't had a serial killer in Norway – as far as we know at least – since Arnfinn Nesset went berserk in the 80s", "Serial killers are rare, so rare that this is going to attract attention beyond the borders of Norway. We're already the subject of a lot of interest, folks" (p. 174), "Our most famous national contribution to the list is not Arnfinn Nesset ... but Belle Gunness, who was that rare thing: a female serial killer" (p. 176). These intertextual echoes situate the women of *The Devil's Star* within a continuum of real and fictional victims whose deaths mark the intersection of gender, violence, and control.

The novel renders Camilla, Lisbeth, and Barbara not as secondary casualties in the killer's descent into madness, but as central figures in a meditation on the systematic silencing of women. Their bodies become the canvases upon which male power inscribes its anxieties; their suffering, though narrated through the lens of

investigation, speaks of a larger cultural malaise. Through Gothic fusion of love, death, and ritual, Nesbø exposes how patriarchal violence transforms women from subjects into symbols, and how their destruction, though unseen or unacknowledged, structures the entire architecture of the narrative.

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In the *Oslo Trilogy* the female victims – Helena, Rakel, Stine, Camilla, Lisbeth, Barbara, Ellen, Anna – and their Gothic predecessors, for instance, Elizabeth Frankenstein, Justine Moritz, and Lucy Westenra, form a continuum of silenced, punished, and erased women whose fates illuminate the persistent structures of gendered violence. Their stories, though separated by centuries and subgenres, share a single thematic pulse: the reduction of female autonomy to spectacle, symbol, or silence. Within Nesbø's crime fiction, the women's affliction is rendered through motifs of mutilation and entrapment. The presence of a dead wife in a waterbed evokes the Gothic tradition where intimacy becomes imprisonment. The mutilation of hands and fingers becomes a motif of fragmentation and silence, as the severed digits resemble relics or talismans for the killer, the objects of ritual violence meant to silence the voice of the women who are not granted speech or agency; instead, their bodies are transformed into symbolic canvases for patriarchal anxiety. Each finger removed signifies the erasure of touch, connection, and power. Those female victims, therefore, become unwilling participants in a ritual of control, where love, jealousy, and domination converge. Their deaths form a pattern of Gothic martyrdom, in which every act of violence reinforces the message that female independence, affection, or defiance must be disciplined through annihilation. Each of them is punished for daring to exist beyond the boundaries of male ownership; their autonomy is quite literally dismembered.

This dynamic extends across the *Oslo Trilogy*. For instance Rakel, threatened by bureaucratic predators and state corruption, is drawn into a system that consumes rather than protects her. Her body and autonomy are mercilessly crashed beneath the machinations of a corrupt state apparatus. Ellen, in *The Redbreast*, embodies moral courage and professional integrity, yet her pursuit of truth leads to her murder and the subsequent concealment of identity of her killer, done within police bureaucracy, mirrors the Gothic trope of the buried secret, the woman silenced within the very institution sworn to uphold justice. Nevertheless, her absence haunts the narrative like an unacknowledged ghost, a spectral reminder of institutional complicity. Anna's fate in *Nemesis* continues this thread of repression and self-destruction. Once an assertive and intelligent woman, she is consumed by isolation and apprehension. Denied emotional refuge or moral vindication, Anna's suicide becomes a devastating form of agency reclaimed through despair. In her final moments, vengeance and trauma merge: she acts not from weakness, but from a refusal to remain powerless in a world where, as Beate observes, "only the most vengeful" survive (Nesbø, 2008, p. 533). Anna's death denies her even the tragic spectacle afforded to Gothic heroines like Lucy Westenra. Unlike Lucy, Anna receives no ritualistic redemption, no spectacle, no purification, only administrative dismissal. She vanishes into silence, her story reduced to a procedural footnote, a haunting testament to how modern institutions perpetuate Gothic erasure through bureaucracy rather than blood.

Nesbø's female victims echo the archetypal women of Gothic fiction, whose suffering exposes the hypocrisies of their societies. For instance, in *Frankenstein*, Elizabeth Lavenza embodies the "saintly soul ... shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home" (Shelley, 2003, p. 36), a figure of idealized passivity and her brutal death: "She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair" (p. 189), renders visible the cost of her silence. She dies while Victor remains consumed by his own ambition, a victim not only of the monster's violence but of male negligence. Like Ellen or Lisbeth, Elizabeth perishes because male self-interest eclipses empathy. Justine Moritz, condemned for a crime she did not commit, exposes how patriarchal systems transform innocence into guilt. Her coerced confession:

> I did confess, but I confessed a lie. I confessed, that I might obtain absolution; but now that falsehood lies heavier at my heart than all my other sins ... my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was. He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments if I continued obdurate (Shelley, 2003, p. 83),

reveals the terror of moral coercion and the ease with which women are made to internalize their own condemnation. Justine's forced compliance mirrors Ellen's silencing by institutional authority: both are punished for truth-telling, both erased by the very systems meant to protect them. Lucy Westenra, by contrast, embodies the Gothic punishment of female desire. Her openness: "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her?" (Stoker, 1994, p. 76), invites not freedom but destruction. Her metamorphosis into the vampire is depicted with cruel fascination:

> The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness ... Lucy's face we could see that the lips were crimson with fresh blood, ... Lucy's eyes unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew, ... As she looked, her eyes blazed with unholy light, and the face became wreathed with a voluptuous smile. ... She still advanced, however, and with a languorous, voluptuous grace, said: 'Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you' (Stoker, 1994, pp. 252-253).

Her execution by the men who once adored her restores patriarchal order, transforming her death into a moral spectacle. The "purification" of Lucy's body parallels the ritualized mutilations of Barli's victims: both acts reassert male control through the destruction of female transgression.

Across these texts, female suffering becomes the narrative axis through which Gothic and crime fiction interrogate patriarchal power. The female victims are not passive casualties but mirrors reflecting society's deepest moral decay. Their bodies bear the marks of jealousy, bureaucracy, and institutional hypocrisy; their silencing exposes the violence inherent in systems built on male authority. As Mills observes,

> Nineteenth-century Gothic and sensation fictions are preoccupied with the vulnerability of the virgin and the threat of the sexually active woman; this focus on women's bodies and behavior persists in the victimization of both virgins and sexually active women in twentieth- and twenty-first-century crime and horror fictions (2020, p. 154).

This continuity unites Shelley's and Stoker's heroines with Nesbø's female victims, showing that Gothic anxieties persist within Scandinavian crime fiction, the spaces have changed, but the punishment remains. Whether confined within Victor Frankenstein's domestic idyll, the shadowed streets of Stoker's London, or the bureaucratic corridors of Oslo's police force, these women suffer for transgressing prescribed roles. Their deaths are not isolated tragedies but cumulative testimonies of structural oppression. Through them, Nesbø's fiction revives Gothic as a modern moral archive, a literature of haunting where every silenced woman speaks through the echo of her absence.

4.4. Monstrosity: Evil, Madness, Hatred, Revenge, and Crime

Spooner in "Crime and the Gothic" claims that Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* establishes a lasting model for Gothic fiction, in which

> crime is the preserve of charismatic and powerful men; crime has peculiar resonances within the family; crime takes place at one remove, in the past, but has continuing and visceral effects within the present. The criminal is tormented by self-reflection, which eventually leads to his undoing; the legacy of the crime disrupts the proper social order and shadows the onward march of progress and modernity" (2010, p. 245).

This configuration of crime, its familial entanglements, its moral echoes across time, and its eventual exposure, has profoundly shaped the narrative logic of later crime fiction traditions. Within the modern context, Scandinavian crime fiction inherits and reconfigures these Gothic foundations. The subgenre's characteristic concern with uncovering transgressive acts, restoring order, and confronting psychological trauma demonstrates its sustained engagement with offense as both moral and social inquiry. Heta Pyrhönen highlights that crime fiction novel typically follows a "chronological and linear plot" that begins with a violation of order, progresses through investigation, and culminates in restoration (2010, p. 50). This linearity mirrors the deductive method of the detective, whose reasoning and analytical capacity brings coherence to the fragmented world of the story. Closure, therefore, is not only a narrative device but also a moral resolution, the uncovering of the connections between events and characters through which readers experience both intellectual and ethical satisfaction.

Both Gothic and Scandinavian crime fiction disclose and examine the intricacies of the human psyche and the moral ambiguities that underpin human behaviour, with a particular focus on the darker aspects of human nature and conduct. Gothic fiction, in particular, frequently explores themes of madness, obsession, revenge, and evil, interrogating the boundaries between sanity and insanity. Characters in Gothic narratives often contend with inner demons and profound moral dilemmas, reflecting the genre's preoccupation with the more sinister dimensions of human existence. As asserted by Hogle:

> the Gothic has also come to deal, as one of its principle subjects, with how the middle class dissociates from itself, and then fears, the extremes of what surrounds it; the very high or the decadently aristocratic and the very low or the animalistic, working-class, underfinanced, sexually deviant, childish, or carnivalesque, all sides of which have been abjected at once into figures ranging from Lewis's monk Ambrosio and Radcliffe's class-climbing villains to the title character in C.R. Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (2015, p. 9).

This exploration of psychological and moral tension is central to the Gothic tradition, where protagonists' struggles often symbolize broader existential questions about identity, guilt, and the nature of malevolence. The genre's emphasis on atmosphere – decaying structures, supernatural occurrences, and heightened emotional states – accentuates the psychological depth of its characters and their internal conflicts. Moreover, Radcliffe's novels offer a compelling lens through which this sinister aspect of humanity is examined. Her works, defined by mystery and suspense, interrogate the tension between reason and imagination, morality and temptation. Radcliffe's treatment of evil often underscores the fragility of human virtue, portraying it not as an inherent trait but as something that emerges in response to fear, trauma, or moral weakness. In this sense, her Gothic vision aligns with a broader psychological exploration of iniquity, perceived as both an external and internal force, and of crime, which Godwin regarded "as a social evil, not as an offence against God" (Ascari, 2007, p. 37).

Scandinavian crime fiction similarly engages with the complexities of the human mind, focusing on the motivations behind criminal behaviour and the ethical dilemmas that accompany acts of transgression. As Gregoriou observes, although the criminal "is most often defined solely on the basis of their criminality and social deviance" (2020, p. 168), they are also "assumed to be physically powerful, unrepentant and entirely blame for their actions" (p. 168) and, importantly, wicked. At one of its deepest levels, Scandinavian crime fiction examines the ethical grey areas and psychological states that lead individuals to commit crimes, often featuring protagonists who are morally flawed or even anti-heroic. In this respect, the subgenre intersects with Gothic fiction's fascination with the darker recesses of the human psyche. As Agnieszka Kotwasińska notes:

> the Male Gothic, perhaps best exemplified by Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), relies heavily on the figure of a male villain, whose expulsion from the warm hearth forms the center of the narrative, and whose violent tale rarely provides the readers with a resolution in the form of a happy ending. ... Sussex suggests that the Male Gothic could be seen as a link between the picaresque and the Newgate model, and in a way it prefigures the twentieth-century psycho-thriller, with Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) being the best-known example, with a monstrous male anti-hero usurping the main stage (2014, p. 93).

This continuity between the Gothic villain and the modern anti-hero underscores a shared fascination with transgression, guilt, and the limits of redemption. Both literary modes dwell on the psychology of crime and the tension between moral decay and self-reflection, suggesting that the roots of wickedness often lie within the human condition itself.

Scandinavian crime fiction, however, tends to extend these psychological explorations into the sociopolitical realm and demonstrate that iniquity and misdemeanour are not confined to individuals but manifests through systemic failure and collective disillusionment. The focus on institutional corruption and societal decay highlights the subgenre's critical engagement with the Scandinavian welfare state, exposing the contradictions between its idealized image and its underlying moral crises. Characters frequently confront moral ambiguities that blur the line between justice and vengeance, reflecting the psychological toll of living in societies marked by alienation and distrust.

Madness and obsession, hallmarks of Gothic fiction, also permeate Scandinavian crime narratives. The depiction of disturbed or emotionally fractured protagonists – detectives and criminals alike – invites readers to engage with the psychological dimensions of crime. The serial killer, in particular, is often rendered as a complex, even at times sympathetic figure, whose actions can stem from trauma or existential despair. This humanization of the 'other' challenges conventional moral binaries and mirrors Gothic fascination with the monstrous as a reflection of the self.

Themes of hatred and revenge further link the two literary modes, functioning as responses to perceived injustice or moral violation. In Scandinavian crime fiction, these emotions often arise within broader contexts of social inequality, xenophobia, and cultural conflict. The desire for vengeance, whether personal or societal, reveals the fragility of moral boundaries and the persistence of violence as a means of reclaiming power. Significantly, its exploration of evil, madness, hatred, and revenge resonates far beyond the Nordic world, offering a commentary on the universal anxieties of modernity. Both Gothic and Scandinavian crime fiction thus operate as mirrors of human experience, probing the boundaries between morality and corruption, reason and madness, order and chaos. Through their psychological depth and moral complexity, they reveal that the true locus of evil lies not in the supernatural or the criminal act alone, but rather within the fractured human soul and the imperfect societies it inhabits.

4.4.1. Gudbrand's Revenge-ridden Crimes in *The Redbreast*

In *The Redbreast*, crime is explored through two interlaced temporal and spatial frameworks, each underscoring the persistent presence of violence and moral decay across time. The first temporal level situates criminality within the historical context of the Second World War, specifically at the Eastern Front and in Vienna. Here, crime is inextricably linked to war, portraying hostility not as an anomaly but as a by-product of systemic brutality and psychological conditioning. This is captured in Helena's harrowing reflection on the wounded soldiers returning from the front:

> The wounded soldiers with their mutilated bodies and their battered psyches brought war home to them. To begin with, she listened to their stories, practically convinced that with her strength of mind and her faith she could help to lead them out of their misery. Yet they all seemed to tell more of the same nightmare story about how much man can and has to endure on earth, and about the degradation involved in simply wanting to live. Only the dead escape unscathed. ... She could read suffering in the pale, boyish faces, brutality in the hardened, closed faces and a longing for death in the pain-contorted features of one man who had just found out that his foot would have to be amputated (Nesbø, 2006, pp. 146-147).

This portrayal echoes Gothic fiction's preoccupation with the grotesque and the psychologically tormented, revealing how the horrors of war deform not only the soldiers' bodies but also their minds. Such psychological degradation resonates with the Gothic tradition of fractured selfhood and moral ambivalence.

The novel's second narrative layer shifts to contemporary Oslo, more than half a century later, depicting a seemingly peaceful society that is nonetheless riddled with systemic aggression. The continuity between these two timelines is embodied in the figure of Gudbrand, a spectral, shape-shifting figure who seems to traverse eras and places, functioning as a connective tissue between past atrocities and present crimes. His assumption of another man's identity – after having murdered fellow soldier Sindre – exemplifies a quintessential Gothic motif: the doppelgänger. Sindre's earlier observation: "Who would have thought that nice, gentle Gudbrand had such ferocity in him?" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 59), foreshadows the revelation of a hidden, monstrous self in Gudbrand – a duality central to both Gothic and crime fiction. The soldier's dexterity in killing, often executed with surgical precision, as, for instance, divulged in the following quote: "Gudbrand had only seen the silhouette, but knew instantly it was an enemy when he saw the outline of a Mosin-Nagant rifle being raised. With just the blunt bayonet Gudbrand had sliced the Russian's neck so expertly that he was drained of blood when they carried him out into the snow afterwards" (pp. 59-60), further cements his position as a Gothic villain operating within a crime fiction structure. His battlefield efficiency is disturbingly transposed onto the streets of modern Oslo, as shown in the dialogue between Harry and Ellen: "he's a pro. It isn't a passion killing. And despite the fact that I said the murder seemed neat and tidy, I don't believe that it was carefully planned in advance.' ... 'The killing was efficient and there were no clues left behind" (p. 282). The methodology of the soldier's murdering prompts Harry to inquire: "*Who would be capable of cutting someone's throat so quickly and efficiently that he could do it in broad daylight in a back alley in the centre of Oslo?*" (p. 313; emphasis in the original), later confirmed by forensic analysis: "it was a perfect surgical cut, which only someone who knew what he was doing could have carried out" (p. 408). Such repetition of the method of slaying reinforces the novel's Gothic sense of recurrence and the inescapability of the past.

The full extent of Gudbrand's criminality is revealed retrospectively through a discovered manuscript – a classic Gothic device – confessing to the murder of Sindre and the annihilation of his entire family:

> *I took a swift pace back, so that I was behind him, seized his forehead and swung the bayonet. You have to be fairly deft to get a deep, clean cut. I let go as soon as I had sliced him for I knew the job was done. He turned round slowly and stared at me with those small piggy eyes of his; he seemed to want to scream but the bayonet had severed his windpipe and only a whistling sound came from the gaping wound. And blood* (Nesbø, 2006, p. 558; emphasis in the original).

This act of domestic eradication is later corroborated by Resistance members, who recount how Gudbrand completed his orders with calculated brutality:

> 'We hid him in a hut, away from both us and the Germans. Someone suggested that we should order him to eliminate one of his brothers in the *Nsjonal Samling.* The main idea was to see how he would react. He didn't say a word when we gave him the orders, but the next day he was gone when we went down to his hut. We were sure he had backed out, but two days later he reappeared. He said he had been to the family farm in Gudbrandsdalen. A few days later we received reports from our people up there. One brother had been found in the cowshed, the other in the barn. The parents on the sitting-room floor' (2006, pp. 253-254; emphasis in the original).

Despite the atrocities associated with these murders, Gudbrand later attempts to justify his actions in a conversation with Harry by appealing to his role as a soldier conditioned to follow commands without any protest. The veteran tries to justify his deeds in such a manner:

> 'I know what you're thinking,' ... 'But I was a soldier who had been given orders to kill. If I hadn't been given the orders, I wouldn't have done it. But this I do know: my family were among the ranks of those who cheated our country' (p. 269).

Harry is so traumatized by this revelation that he seeks confirmation from the historian Even Juul, asking for his opinion on the matter. During their conversation, Harry learns that "'He killed them. … They were shot. Through the head.' (pp. 302-303). Still uncertain, the police officer presses further: "'All four?'" to which the historian replies, "'Yes'" (p. 303). Gudbrand thus positions himself as a tiny, and even insignificant, cog in a broader machinery of violence – a system that sanctioned and legitimized killing during wartime. His revelation reflects the moral displacement often found in Gothic fiction, where agency is diffused and responsibility obscured.

Most notably, Gudbrand embodies the archetypal Gothic serial killer – a modern Sweeney Todd or Jack the Ripper – whose murders are both ideologically and vengefully driven, yet meticulously executed. The use of a message left at one of the crime scenes aligns with the Gothic tradition of the theatrical villain. As Aune observes, "'The only thing I have to work on is the message on the mirror. It's reminiscent of a calling card ... they begin to feel secure enough to want to up the ante by provoking the police'" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 475). Moreover, the veteran's criminal activity does not revolve solely around killing – or attempting to kill – those he perceives as traitors; for him, murder becomes an act of revenge. For instance, he murders Dr. Brockhard, whom Gudbrand sees as a romantic rival: "The police said Johansen smashed the glass in the outside door and killed him as he was sleeping in his own bed" (p. 510). The criminal likewise targets those he deems traitors to the nation, such as the Crown Prince at the end of the novel. His intention to assassinate the monarch is revealed in the manuscript Harry discovers, which records the veteran's innermost thoughts: "*Betrayal – betrayal – betrayal!*" (p. 572; emphasis in the original). The entry about his intention of killing the Crown Prince is as follows:

> *This morning. A range of four-hundred metres. I have managed that before. The gardens will be fresh and green, so full of life, so devoid of death. But I have cleared the way for the bullet. A dead tree without foliage. The*

> *bullet will come from the sky, like God's finger it will point out the offspring of the traitor, and everyone will see what He does to those who are not pure of heart. The traitor said he loved his country, but he left it, he left us to save it from the intruders from the east and then branded us traitors afterwards* (p. 594: emphasis in the original).

Significantly, the killer is also prone to murder random people in order to deceive the police: "Bernt Brandhaug had not been part of the original plan, and the old man realised that the killing had confused the police" (p. 508). In order to achieve his objective, the veteran shot the corrupted politician at his home:

> the killer had been hiding in the forest since early in the day, so at most a few hours after *Dagbladet* had hit the stands. This was not a spontaneous action; it was a well-planned attack. The killer had known he was going to shoot Brandhaug for some days. He had been out to recce the area; he knew about Brandhaug's comings and goings; he had found the best place to fire from, with the least risk of being seen; he knew how he was going to get in and out, hundreds of tiny details (p. 461).

His criminality is eventually proven by Harry: "It may help us to clear up the murder of Bernt Brandhaug, whom we are fairly positive was shot with precisely this weapon" (p. 480) that is the Märklin rifle that was smuggled to the criminal / avenger.

4.4.2. Crimes in the World of the Bank Robbers in *Nemesis*

In *Nemesis*, Nesbø constructs a labyrinthine narrative of crime that not only exposes the dark underbelly of Oslo's urban landscape but also aligns the tropes of crime fiction with the motifs and psychological atmosphere of Gothic fiction. From its opening scene – a bank robbery staged in central Oslo – Nesbø destabilizes the perceived safety of Scandinavian life and instead paints the city as a Gothic space of shadows, secrets, and psychological disintegration, as vividly disclosed in this image: "The Expeditor and his victim. The gun is pointed at her throat and a small golden heart hanging from a thin chain. Harry cannot see, but nevertheless he can sense her pulse pounding beneath the thin skin" (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 15-16). Crime is not merely an episodic disturbance here; it is an ever-present undercurrent, manifesting across individuals, institutions, and even international borders.

The novel opens with a chilling act of violence: Trond, masked and anonymous, fatally shoots the female bank clerk during a meticulously planned bank robbery. This act is revealed later to be deeply personal since the victim is his own wife, Stine, and her death is not a random casualty but the result of Trond's jealousy and emotional unravelling upon discovering her affair with his own brother, Lev Grette: "the robber spun Stine's chair round until she was facing him. ... She was focused on her faceless tormentor" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 15). Hence, the scene transforms what initially appears to be a heist into a Gothic revenge drama. The bank – a space symbolic of capitalism and order – becomes the site of intimate betrayal, suppressed rage, and bloodshed. Trond's descent mirrors a classic Gothic protagonist: a man undone by jealousy and familial fracture, compelled towards murder under the burden of repressed trauma and shame:

> 'We've made a mistake,' Harry said, turning away from the window and addressing the assembled detectives. 'Stine Grette was not killed by Lev but by her own husband, Trond Grette' (p. 655).
> 'But you didn't do what she asked,' Harry said. 'You didn't spare your brother.'
> 'Of course not,' Trond said.
> 'Did he know you had killed her?'
> 'I had the pleasure of telling him myself. On the mobile. He was waiting in Gardermoen airport. I told him if he didn't get on the plane. I would go after him too' (p. 668).

Importantly, this domestic tragedy is not isolated. The Oslo in *Nemesis* is a breeding ground for various layers of criminality, all interconnected through cycles of violence, retribution, and secrecy. The psychological dimension of these crimes is foregrounded throughout the novel. Nesbø delves into the internal landscapes of his criminals, suggesting that beneath each act lies a fractured psyche, often shaped by trauma, abandonment, or systemic marginalization. After the initial robbery, the distress experienced by survivors is palpable:

> 'Hope he gets proper post-trauma treatment,' Beate said sotto voce and shook her head. 'I've seen people become psychological wrecks after being exposed to robberies like this one' (p. 37),

reinforcing Gothic theme of the lingering past and its inescapable influence on the present.

At the centre of Oslo's criminal underworld is Raskol, a Romani crime boss who reigns with brutal efficiency and strategic cunning. As analysed in more detail in the subchapter 4.2. focusing upon the portrayal of criminals in Nesbø's literary universe, Raskol, introduced as "the king of crime", embodies a Gothic villain par excellence – charismatic yet cruel, enigmatic yet deeply violent. His influence stretches beyond national borders, tying Oslo's criminal landscape to broader international networks, and his personal history (Nesbø, 2008, pp. 332-333) is steeped in abuse, discrimination, and persecution, echoing Gothic fiction's concern with the monstrous as a product of societal exclusion. For instance, the vicious attack Raskol initiates against Aune in prison:

> 'The next moment I was held in a vice-like grip with my head forced backwards so that I was looking up at the ceiling, and a voice whispered into my ear: *Can you feel the blade, Gadjo?* Of course I could feel it, the sharp, razor-thin steel pressed against my larynx, straining to cut through the skin.' (p. 92; emphasis in the original),

along with his murder of Beate's father, the revelation of which is passed on the police woman by Tom:

> 'Who could the bank raiders be? Who knows the name of your father, who knows the whole bank scene, who knows that of the two police officers standing outside, Inspector Lønn is the one to pose a threat? Who is so cold and calculating that he can place your father in a dilemma and know which choice he will make? So he can shoot him and do what he likes with the scared young officer? Who's that? Beate?' ...
> 'I didn't hear, Beate.'
> 'Raskol.'
> 'Raskol, yes. And only him' (p. 546),

accentuates his role as a force of chaos and vengeance, one that disrupts familial bonds and institutional stability alike.

Lev, Trond's brother and Steine's lover, emerges as a similarly complex figure. Like Gudbrand, Lev is presented as "a polite, well-brought up boy" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 421) whose later involvement in a series of bank robberies marks him as both a criminal and a tragic character caught in a web of desire, betrayal, and loss. His theoretical participation in a wealth of bank robberies is hinted at by Beate during the investigation:

> 'Lev Grette,' Beate said, and her gaze wandered into the distance. 'He was such a wonder boy. I remember my father talking about him. I've read reports of robberies he was suspected of having been involved in when he was just sixteen. He was a legend because the police never caught him, and when he disappeared for good, we didn't even have his fingerprints' (p. 337).

Seen from this perspective, Lev, as a criminal prodigy, emerges similar to Raskol and they both function not only as incarnations of the archetype of evil and crime but, too, as people fractured by emotional and existential pressures. Despite Lev's criminality, described by his brother Trond in the section of the novel focusing upon his childhood struggles and ensuing brutality:

> When I peered around the corner of the house I could see Roger lying on the ground with Lev on top. Lev had his knees on Roger's arms and was holding a stick. I went closer to see. Apart from the heavy breathing, not a sound came from either of them. That was when I saw that Lev had put the stick in Roger's eye socket (p. 347),

> Lev had a screwdriver and a pencil with him, and cycled down to one of the footbridges over Ringveien. ... He loosened the screws of one of the grids and left two screws on one side and the pencil in the corner under the grid. Then he waited. ... Then the man came. ... 'As he put his foot down, the grid opened like a trapdoor. You know, like the ones they used in hangings. The man broke two legs as he hit the tarmac (pp. 348-349),

> 'Wild child?' She shaded her eyes. 'I wouldn't exactly say that. He was a polite, well brought-up boy. That was what so shocking' (p. 421),

the bank robber is described as rather decorous, as noted by Beate, who doubts Lev's involvement in the atrocious killing of Stine. The police officer argues that:

> he never used violence in any of the raids where he was a suspect. And because she was his sister-in-law. Murdering because you might be recognised – isn't that a rather feeble motive for murder? (p. 340).

Nevertheless, he bears similarities to Gudbrand / Daniel, another morally ambiguous figure, which is an echo of the Gothic trope of the villain with a dual nature. His crimes, therefore, seem to stem from a deeper emotional void rather than mere greed, reinforcing Gothic concern with psychological fragmentation.

4.4.3. The Mystically-ritualistic Serial Killings of Wilhelm Barli in *The Devil's Star*

In *The Devil's Star*, Oslo emerges as a city marked by ritualistic violence, hidden desires, and moral disintegration; it is an urban Gothic labyrinth where crimes are not merely acts of deviance, but symbols of emotional collapse and psychological torment, as shown, for instance, in the appeal of Anders Nygård, Vibeke's husband, directed towards Harry, immediately after discovery of the first corpse: "'those of us who live here would like to know if this looks like a personal matter or if we may have an insane killer running round the neighbourhood" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 34). Central to this haunting narrative is the figure of Wilhelm Barli, whose series of ritualistic murders unfold not only as a meticulously staged crime spree but also as the grotesque embodiment of Gothic pathology: jealousy, betrayal, repressed rage, and obsession with purity and punishment. Nesbø blends the forensic logic of crime fiction with the affective intensity of Gothic fiction, constructing a world in which modern Oslo becomes a site of spectral repetition, psychological horror, dark ritual, and atrocious activities of the serial killer, as indicated in this quote: "Waaler switched on the overhead projector. The front page of *Dagbladet* appeared on the screen behind him. SERIAL KILLER ON THE LOOSE? No pictures, just this screaming headline in block capitals" (p. 174; capital letters in the original).

Wilhelm's descent into madness, revenge and crime is set in motion by the discovery of his wife Lisbeth's infidelity – her secret affair with Sven, a smuggler of weapons and blood diamonds. The process is triggered by the discovery of his wife's letters to the smuggler. The killer discloses this fact to Harry:

> one day, when she was out, I examined the wall. I didn't find anything I shoved her desk to one side. ... I poked at each of the cricks. One moved just a little. I pulled, and it came away. ... Inside I found two letters. The name of Lisbeth Harang was on the envelope and a *poste restante* address I had no idea she had. ... '*Liebling,* you are always in my thoughts. I can still feel your lips against mine, your skin against mine' – that's how the letter begins' ... 'The words smarted like lashes form a whip, but I kept on reading (Nesbø, 2022, p. 466; emphasis in the original).

While analysing the intricacies of the criminal's behaviour, Harry asks him: "'The only thing I don't understand ... is why you waited so many years to take your revenge" (p. 465).

Significantly, the murders Wilhelm commits bear the unmistakable marks of Gothic obsession tinged with vengeance: three women and one man are killed in a fashion that merges personal retaliation with ritualistic precision. Each of these murders is accompanied by the removal of fingers – symbols of identity and agency – suggesting the killer's urge to dismember not only bodies but narratives of betrayal and desire. Camilla's index finger, Lisbeth's severed digits, Barbara's mutilation – analysed in detail in the preceding subchapter – and the severed thumb of Marius:

> Harry looked at Iggy Pop, the lean, bare body stripped to the waist, the self-inflicted scars, the intense gaze from the deep eye sockets, a man who must have been through a Calvary or two of his own. Harry touched the thumb on the shelf. Too soft to be plaster or plastic, it almost felt like a real finger. Cold, but real. He thought of the dildo he had seen at Barli's while sniffing the white thumb. It smelled of a mixture of formalin and paint. He held it between two fingers and squeezed. The paint cracked. Harry recoiled as he caught the pungent smell (Nesbø, 2022, pp. 332-333),

all underscore a pattern of symbolic erasure: the victims are not merely eliminated, but marked, their bodies overwritten with the killer's psychic trauma.

Notably, the obsession with punishment mixed with revenge is made brutally literal in the novel's opening where a coachman, in a grim echo of Gothic tradition, bricks his wife alive:

> A coachman from Grüneløkka had married his cousin from Värmland and together they moved into a one-room flat plus kitchen in one of the apartment blocks in Seilduksgata that Andersen had helped to build. The couple's first child was unlucky enough to be born with dark, curly hair and brown eyes – and the man was jealous by nature as well – late one night he tied his wife's hands behind her, took her down to the cellar and bricked her in. Her screams were effectively muffled by the thick walls where she stood bound and squeezed between the two brick surfaces (Nesbø, 2022, pp. 4-5).

This image recalls Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, hidden away in the attic by her husband, Mr. Rochester, and therefore rendered a monstrous Other. In Nesbø's novel, however, the victim is not locked away, but buried – silenced forever. This act inaugurates a series of murders that, although carefully planned, are driven by deep emotional disarray and covetousness. Oslo thus becomes a city haunted not by ghosts in the traditional sense, but by past wrongs, forbidden passions, and buried truths.

The broader pattern of killings reveals a psychosexual logic often associated with Gothic horror. The young nurse stabbed to death, the girl drowned in the River Akerselva, and the brutalized corpse of the policewoman Ellen, all point toward the serial killer who enacts a private mythology of punishment. As the investigation unfolds, Harry begins to uncover the psychodynamics of the murderer:

> When detectives are confronted with a premeditated, and in this case carefully planned, murder, they know that the perpetrator has a number of clear advantages. He may have removed all the forensic evidence, established an apparently solid alibi for the time of the death, disposed of the weapon and so on. But there is one thing that killer can, so to speak, never hide from the investigation. And what is that? .... 'The motive,' Harry said. 'Basic stuff, isn't it? The motive, that's where we start our investigation. It's so fundamental that sometimes we forget it' (p. 140)

Wilhelm's jealousy toward his wife and her lover transforms into a purifying rage. He kills not only to punish Lisbeth, but to ritually excise all traces of her betrayal – hence his fixation with dismemberment and ritualistic staging. These murders are not spontaneous; they are calculated spectacles, intended to externalize the inner collapse of a man consumed by humiliation.

This Gothic inflection is compounded by the killer's desire to be caught, being in fact a classic feature of Gothic villains whose crimes are both a cry for recognition and a final act of self-destruction:

> 'It's not unusual for a serial killer to court and assist the police because he wants, deep down, to be stopped. There's a psychologist called Sam Vaknin who maintains that serial killers want to be caught and punished to satisfy their sadistic superego. I incline more to the theory that they need help to stop the monster in them. I put their desire to be caught down to a degree of objective understanding of their illness.' (Nesbø, 2022, pp. 288-289).

Like Jack the Ripper, referenced two times in the novel: "The murderer killed five women before vanishing into thin air" (p. 176), Wilhelm chooses specific locations and methods that not only create fear, but also form a kind of perverse authorship. His crimes are messages in the shape of narratives of power, loss, and punishment carved literally into the flesh of his victims.

The Gothic character of the novel is further reinforced by the physical locations where Wilhelm's victims' bodies are discovered. Marius is found in the "loft [which] was high and airy without any windows [and which was turned] into a veritable sauna" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 338): "Glazed eyes stared back at him from behind a grey plastic membrane. They had found Marius Veland" (p. 341). The loft, a space symbolically associated with secrecy, embodies a quintessential Gothic setting. These sites are not mere backdrops but active agents in the narrative's atmosphere of dread, aligning with Gothic fiction's emphasis on sinister spaces – attics, basements, rivers, and sealed rooms – that conceal monstrous truths about the hidden activity of the serial killer.

It is significant to note that the serial killer motif – developed through comparisons with Arnfinn Nesset and Belle Gunness (Nesbø, 2022, pp. 174-181) – positions Wilhelm within a Gothic lineage of madness masked by normalcy. As Harry observes, "there was something unemotional about the killings, an almost conspicuous lack of hatred, desire or passion. They had been carried out too perfectly, almost mechanically, according to the book" (p. 306). Despite this apparent detachment, Wilhelm embodies the return of suppressed cultural violence, and the pentagram he employs functions as

a fitting emblem of this hidden order: a symbol at once arcane and precise, evoking occultism, symmetry, and secrecy. The Gothic, therefore, is not merely an aesthetic overlay but a structural principle of the narrative, governing its spatial, psychological, and symbolic architecture.

Ultimately, *The Devil's Star* presents Oslo not as a sanctuary of Nordic rationalism and social order, but as a space infected by the very elements that Gothic fiction has long illuminated: secrecy, repression, obsession, and the return of the repressed. Wilhelm, the jealous husband turned ritualistic killer, is at once a figure of intense personal pain and broader cultural anxieties. His crimes, while seemingly isolated acts of madness, resonate with a deeper narrative about betrayal, loss, and the breakdown of identity. Nesbø's integration of Gothic tropes, such as dismemberment, haunted domestic spaces, obsessive vengeance, and symbolic staging, with the procedural framework of Scandinavian crime fiction reveals that beneath the subgenre's logic lies an irrational, shadowy core. The modern detective story, in Nesbø's hands, becomes a vehicle not only for justice, but for uncovering the spectral truths that cities and people try desperately to bury.

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The construction of criminals in the *Oslo Trilogy* resonates with the emotional complexity and symbolic intensity of classic Gothic literature. The descent of Nesbø's antagonists into violence parallels that of Gothic figures such as Ambrosio in Lewis's *The Monk*, Montoni in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Manfred in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Like these earlier figures, Wilhelm, Gudbrand, Trond, Lev, and Raskol commit acts of horror that dissolve boundaries between justice, madness, and moral collapse.

Wilhelm exemplifies the synthesis of rational control and Gothic excess. Outwardly refined and disciplined, he conceals beneath his cultivated exterior a series of grotesque murders driven by jealousy and emotional devastation following his wife's affair. His psychological disintegration is manifested in ritualistic crimes structured around a pentagram traced on a map of Oslo, each murder meticulously planned and symbolically charged. The concealment of his wife Lisbeth's body within a shared waterbed becomes a macabre expression of denial and possession, transforming intimacy into confinement and love into a form of domination. This act of concealment embodies a quintessential Gothic logic, where repression and desire culminate in violence. His obsessive need to preserve and control the memory of Lisbeth in death mirrors Ambrosio's descent into criminal passion in *The Monk*, whose religious guise conceals repressed eroticism and moral corruption. Ambrosio's depravity becomes explicit in his address to Antonia:

> Compose yourself, Antonia. Resistance is unavailing, and I need disavow my passion for you no longer. You are imagined dead: society is for ever lost to you. I possess you here alone; you are absolutely in my power, and I burn with desires which I must either gratify or die (Lewis, 2009, p. 280).

Like Ambrosio, Wilhelm confuses love with domination and turns emotional suffering into a ritualized assertion of power.

Gudbrand continues Gothic pattern of the villain who mistakes vengeance for justice. His crimes emerge from fractured identity, war trauma, and emotional loss. The idealization of Helena and the obsession with national betrayal transform his sense of duty into compulsion. The figure of Daniel, his symbolic double, serves as the haunting reminder of loyalty and guilt. Gudbrand's deluded moral righteousness recalls the tragic ambition of Manfred in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, whose response to his son's death propels him into tyranny: "'Villain! monster! sorcerer! 'tis thou has slain my son!'" (2014, p. 17). Manfred's justification of his crimes through necessity parallels Gudbrand's belief that moral corruption can be rectified through violence. Both men enact a perverse logic of justice that leads to self-destruction. Nesbø's portrayal of Gudbrand's confession adopts the tone of a Gothic soliloquy – haunted, obsessive, and morally incoherent. His sense of righteousness transforms him into what he most condemns, perpetuating the cycle of guilt and punishment that defines Gothic villainy.

Trond complicates this pattern by performing madness rather than succumbing to it. After murdering his wife, he feigns psychosis and commits himself to an asylum, consciously manipulating perceptions of guilt and innocence. His performance echoes the duplicity of Ambrosio, who is described as "known through all the city by the name of the 'man of holiness'" (Lewis, 2009, p. 14). Trond's calculated composure, his blank stare and measured gestures, evoke the Gothic motif of the villain whose civility masks moral decay. Although his madness is artifice, it ultimately dissolves the distinction between appearance and reality. His simulation becomes so convincing that it transforms into a form of truth, blurring the line between deception and identity.

While Wilhelm's violence is motivated by obsessive jealousy and grief, and Gudbrand's by patriotic vengeance, Trond's actions arise from self-interest and control. Yet all three articulate their crimes through ritual and concealment, elevating murder into a symbolic act. Their violence is never impulsive but meticulously choreographed, reflecting an aesthetic of order imposed upon chaos. Each killer transforms emotion into system, guilt into ritual, and loss into justification. Their actions expose Gothic truth that evil often arises not from chaos but from the obsessive pursuit of meaning and control.

The recurrence and continuity of crime in the *Oslo Trilogy* are further emphasized through the criminals' need for confession and textual self-expression. Nesbø's use of letters, diaries, and testimonies aligns with the Gothic convention of the fragmented narrative, in which truth is reconstructed from haunted voices. Trond's letter captures this fusion of guilt and fatalism:

> The shot I fired into her. Her pupils which widened slowly like a black rose; the blood trickling out, falling and landing with a weary sigh; the breaking of her neck and her head tipping back. And now the woman I love is dead. As simple as that (Nesbø, 2008, p. 288).

This confessional mode transforms crime into narrative ritual, allowing murderers to narrate their own destruction. Their written words, like their actions, seek coherence in chaos but instead expose the psychological fractures that drive them.

Across the *Oslo Trilogy*, Nesbø redefines the Gothic criminal as both victim and perpetrator, driven by compulsion, repression, and the longing for meaning. Wilhelm's crimes stem from the collapse of love into possession, Gudbrand's from the corruption of duty into vengeance, and Trond's from the performance of madness as mastery. Each believes himself justified, and each becomes ensnared in the moral logic that destroys him. Nesbø's criminals, like their Gothic predecessors, do not kill merely for gain or pleasure but as part of a desperate struggle against loss, guilt, and the awareness of their own disintegration. Their violence, ritualized and symbolic, exposes the enduring Gothic insight that monstrosity is not external, it is the inevitable consequence of humanity's refusal to confront its own darkness.

4.5. Past

Spooner contends that "In fact, the two forms, detective fiction and the Gothic, share a similar structure in their preoccupation with the return of the past upon the present" (2010, p. 248), further asserting that this principle:

> whereby the present is overdetermined by past events, and where the detective's activities inevitably function to reveal the secrets of the past even when he or she has been hired to preserve them, is a fundamental feature of noir. However, it is also a determining feature of all detective fiction (p. 248).

This position is reinforced by Paul Skenazy, who observes that both Gothic and detective fiction:

> share common assumptions: that there is an undisclosed event, a secret from the past; ... that to know the secret is to understand the inexplicable and seemingly irrational events that occur in the present. Both forms bring hidden experiences from shadow to light (1995, p. 114).

Moreover, Spooner underlines the extent to which the boundaries between these two literary forms are porous, claiming that "the generic boundaries between Gothic and detective fiction are irrevocably blurred" (2010, p. 248). This blurring rests on a shared thematic concern with the past, particularly with the unresolved or mysterious elements that intrude upon and disrupt the present. She likewise emphasizes their mutual preoccupation with "revenants and returns from the dead" (2006, p. 10), noting that "Gothic is inherently concerned with the incursions of the past into the present" (p. 12). In Gothic narratives, "the past returns with sickening force: the dead rise from the grave or lay their cold hands upon the shoulders of the living" (p. 18), while the past itself becomes "a site of terror, of an injustice that must be resolved, an evil that must be exorcised" (p. 18). Kotwasińska extends this argument by identifying a commonality in the protagonists' "fixation on the mystery" (2014, p. 91), which compels them to search for clues, investigate familial histories, and ultimately resolve the enigmas they confront. Both literary modes therefore hinge upon an investigative journey into the past that is fraught with danger yet essential for unravelling hidden truths.

Significantly, the return of the haunting past functions in both Gothic and Scandinavian crime fiction not as a benevolent memory, but rather as a unsettling force. It compels characters to confront buried histories and to seek resolution for long--suppressed injustices. Closure is very often achieved only when the enigma of the past is brought into light, yet this process often exposes deeper fissures in the present. For instance, in Radcliffe's novels, the haunting of the present by the past is intricately bound to the persistence of traumatic histories and concealed family secrets. For Radcliffe, the past is not a passive background but an active, destabilising agent that shapes the emotional and psychological states of her characters. It often emerges through hidden crimes, repressed memories, and unresolved mysteries, which force the protagonists into confrontation, with resolution possible only after the shadows have been dispersed.

This Gothic structure, where the past relentlessly imposes itself on the present, is equally central to Scandinavian crime fiction, a subgenre that frequently interweaves personal trauma with collective memory. Here, history is not static but rather a living force that permeates the narrative fabric, shaping characters' identities and influencing societal dynamics. Nilsson observes that Scandinavian crime fiction "embraces the narratives of fear, as well as elements of the supernatural and fantastic, political dimensions, or specific topographies" (2016, p. 538). In this context, the past operates not merely as a narrative device but as an active participant in the drama, dictating choices and driving events forward. The haunting is both personal, in the form of unresolved grief or guilt, and collective, reflecting historical traumas embedded in the social consciousness.

Alfian Maulana and Faruk Faruk (2022) conceptualize haunting as the persistence of unfinished tasks or desires obstructed by entrenched power structures, a notion that resonates strongly within Scandinavian crime fiction's engagement with historical injustices. Gunnar Iversen similarly argues that "Noir always figures current anxieties as springing from the traumas and political sins of the past, showing that abuses of power and anxieties are anything but new" (2020, p. 68). The crimes under investigation in Scandinavian crime fiction often operate on two levels: the immediate offence and the deeper, systemic wrongs that have lingered unresolved, their echoes felt decades later. The socio-political specificity of the Nordic region heightens this haunting quality. As Dodds and Hochscherf (2020) demonstrate, geopolitical themes such as migration, terrorism, and political conflict are often rooted in historical precedents. Dramas like *Occupied* weave together past political tensions and contemporary crises, underscoring how unresolved conflicts can re-emerge in altered but equally destabilising forms. The international circulation of Scandinavian crime fiction amplifies its commentary on the universality of historical haunting. Transnational adaptations highlight that these narratives speak beyond Scandinavian borders, engaging audiences in a shared recognition of how identity, power, and social order remain shaped by past events. In this way, the haunting in Scandinavian crime fiction functions both as a regional marker and as a global thematic, tapping into a cross-cultural understanding of how the past's unresolved tensions continue to shape human lives.

Ultimately, both Gothic fiction and Scandinavian crime fiction reveal the same essential truth: that the past cannot be wholly buried, and that its return, whether in the form of spectral presences, political unrest, familial quarrels or psychological trauma,

demands confrontation. This persistent return collapses temporal boundaries, blurring distinctions between historical and contemporary crises, and affirms that no resolution in either literary mode is possible without an unflinching reckoning with what has come before. It is advisable to conclude those theoretical assumptions about the significance of the past in Scandinavian crime fiction by the assertion of Gudmundsdottir and Meaney who claim that:

> If noir in the North is deeply concerned with social and geopolitical change, it is also an important transmitter of cultural memory and a site to interrogate social change, not least because of the continued exploration of the past. The influence of historical events and large-scale social movements is mediated in many of these narratives through the personal, and especially the family histories of the protagonists. The family is where the consequences of the past are most immediately and powerfully experienced. This is evident in hugely popular crime fiction, like Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* trilogy and Jo Nesbø's *Rødstrupe* ... where resolution of mysteries in the present demand simultaneous confrontation with hidden, shameful histories and traumatic family secrets (2022, p. 15).

4.5.1. Haunted by Betrayal: Gothic Revenants and Historical Memory in *The Redbreast*

Building upon the theoretical framework that articulates the deep interrelationship between Scandinavian crime fiction and Gothic narratives, Gudbrand in *The Redbreast* emerges as a figure emblematic of the past's persistent and destabilising return in Scandinavian crime fiction. He is constantly perceived as being driven by historical injustice, national trauma, and personal betrayal. His trajectory therefore illustrates Spooner's assertion that both Gothic and Scandinavian crime fiction are often structured around unresolved incursions of the past into the present, whether in the form of haunting revelations, retributive justice, or re-enacted trauma. In Gudbrand's case, present-day criminal activity takes root in the unresolved legacy of wartime betrayal, a dynamic that affirms Leslie J. Moran's observation that the Gothic mode demonstrates how "the present might be haunted by a specific past and a chain of associations: evil acts, corruption, monstrosity, dread and terror" (2001, p. 95).

Gudbrand is not only a criminal but a revenant figure as well, one whose life is defined by an inability to let the past die. His memoirs, discovered and decoded by Harry, become a textual space in which memory, trauma, and historical grievance are narrated into being. Nesbø stages their discovery in an atmosphere of deliberate uncanniness:

> The papers that had been strewn over the floor, the books on the slanting book shelves and the half-full coffee cups were gone. The furniture had been shoved into a corner and draped with white sheets. A stripe of sunlight through the window fell on a pile of papers bound together with string, lying in the middle of the cleared sitting-room floor. *When you read this, I hope I will be dead. I hope we will all be dead.* Harry crouched down beside the pile of papers. On the top of sheet was typed *The Great Betrayal: A Soldier's Memoirs* (Nesbø, 2006, p. 555; emphasis in the original).

This scene draws on a classic Gothic device: the lost or hidden document,[31] as for instance in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) where the readers encounter Adeline who discovers a hidden letter while exploring the abandoned Saint Clair's abbey:

> It was a small roll of paper, tied with a string, and covered with dust. Adeline took it up, and on opening it perceived an handwriting. She attempted to read it, but the part of the manuscript she looked at was so much obliterated, that she found this difficult, though what few words were legible impressed her with curiosity and terror, and induced her to return with it immediately to her chamber (2009, p. 131).

This discovery is a pivotal moment, as the letter reveals crucial information about her family's past and the circumstances surrounding her birth that, when found, reanimate the past and reconfigure the present. Bridget M. Marshall, in her discussion of William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), notes that "crimes, confessions and imprisonment as well as lost, missing or forged documents … are all typical fare in traditional Gothic novels" (2016, p. 43). In *The Redbreast*, the memoir performs precisely this function, becoming both a plot catalyst and a symbolic intrusion of the repressed into the realm of the living.

Within these memoirs, Gudbrand recounts his service as a soldier during the Second World War and articulates a profound sense of betrayal, directed particularly at the Norwegian monarchy, which fled during the German occupation. For him, this abdication is not an abstract political failure but a deeply personal wound, one that festers over decades and mutates into an irresistible motive for revenge. This aligns with Nilsson's identification of Scandinavian crime fiction's "narratives of fear" as being inseparably tied to collective memory and unresolved political histories (2016, p. 538).

[31] It is important to add that the discovered manuscript trope resurfaces towards the end of the Romantic period in one of the most striking episodes in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). While Radcliffe's manuscript produces only a fleeting presence and Austen's invokes the materiality of domestic labour, Brontë's novel calls forth a visceral and uncanny encounter with the ghost of its writer. In an enclosed bed inside a long-disused room at Wuthering Heights, the seemingly insipid narrator, Lockwood, stumbles upon the manuscript diary of the late Catherine Earnshaw: "I discovered my candle wick reclining on one of the antique volumes, and perfuming the place with an odour of roasted calf-skin. I snuffed it off, and, very ill at ease under the influence of cold and lingering nausea, sat up and spread open the injured tome on my knee. It was a Testament, in lean type, and smelling dreadfully musty: a fly-leaf bore the inscription-'Catherine Earnshaw, her book,' and a date some quarter of a century back" (1994, p. 32). This diary is not a neat record but a palimpsest of disorder: it is scribbled in the margins of religious tracts, and Catherine has even scratched her name repeatedly into the paint of the ledge: "This writing, however, was nothing but a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small – *Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and then again to *Catherine Linton*" (p. 32). This irregular script continues in the manuscript annotations, which consist of a chaotic mixture of "detached sentences …, a regular diary, scrawled in an unformed, childish hand" (p. 32). The lack of uniformity that propels Lockwood to "decipher her faded hieroglyphics" (p. 32) seems to evoke her wild, hungry, and untameable character. As Lockwood puzzles over her 'faded hieroglyphics,' he gradually succumbs to drowsiness, only to be jolted awake, in his dream, by the sound of a tree branch tapping against the window. Still uncertain whether he is dreaming or awake, he reaches out to grasp the branch. Instead, his "fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand!" (p. 36). What follows is described with spine-tingling terror: "The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but, the hand clung to it" (p. 36). In this moment, the ghost of the manuscript's writer quite literally returns to haunt the scene of reading. Crucially, it is Catherine's hand that first appears, and her manifestation as a ghostly child ties her even more forcibly to the manuscript Lockwood has discovered. The act of writing, her hungry, relentless scrawling across the pages, has now taken material form in her grasping, ghostly hand. In this convergence of script and specter, Brontë dramatizes the uncanny power of the manuscript to blur the boundaries between the textual and the corporeal, between memory and haunting.

His grievances extend beyond the personal, entwining with a broader cultural trauma that challenges the myth of Scandinavian moral exceptionalism. His own justification of his actions underscores the personal immediacy of this historical wound:

> I am writing this so that whosoever finds it shall know a little about why I have taken the decisions I have. The decisions in my life have often been between two or more evils, and I have to be judged on the basis of that. But I should also be judged on the fact that I have never run away from decisions. I have risked taking the wrong decision rather than living like a coward as part of a silent majority, as someone seeking security in the crowd, someone who allows others to take decisions for them. I have taken this final decision so that I will be ready when I meet the Lord and my Helena (Nesbø, 2006, p. 553).

Stougaard-Nielsen's insights sharpen this reading, framing Scandinavian crime fiction as "virtually obsessed with the past, with national histories, personal and familial traumas" (2017, p. 117). Gudbrand's memoir thus functions not merely as retrospective confession but as a counter-history, an attempt to impose his own meaning on a life marked by betrayal, systemic disillusionment, and moral fracture. His criminal acts are executed with deliberate precision, confirming his role as a revenant whose return is premeditated rather than impulsive. Such meticulous violence underscores the ideological dimension of his vengeance. It is not chaos but calculated retribution, directed at individuals tied to the political and historical structures he believes have betrayed Norway. This is made explicit in his admission to Harry:

> I swore I would revenge all those who had sacrificed their lives for the lies they had fed us back home. And I would take revenge for my own ruined life which I thought would never be whole again. All I wanted was to settle the score with all those who had really betrayed our country (Nesbø, 2006, p. 268).

In Maulana and Faruk's terms (2022), this is the work of a haunting that embodies unfinished tasks or desires obstructed by prevailing power structures. For Gudbrand, the war has never ended; his killings are the continuation of an ideological conflict obscured by post-war narratives of unity and progress. In this way, his criminality becomes as much political act as personal pathology. Ultimately, Gudbrand's memoir positions him as an anti-historian: a man whose narrative rejects official accounts in favour of a testimony shaped by personal and collective wounds. In doing so, he resists what Stougaard-Nielsen describes as a Scandinavian tendency to "consume their way out of the past" (2017, p. 116), insisting instead that the past be remembered, even if such remembrance is accusatory and destabilising. His arc, from war veteran to haunted criminal, embodies the Gothic dimension of Scandinavian crime fiction, revealing a society unable to sever itself from its own betrayals and silences. In Nesbø's hands, crime fiction becomes not merely entertainment but an instrument of historical interrogation, demanding that the ghosts of the nation's past be confronted, their stories unearthed, and their accusations heard.

The structure of *The Redbreast* reinforces this Gothic logic of return of the past. Its alternating timelines, wartime flashbacks, and present-day investigation mimic the process of excavation, as if each layer of the case peels back to reveal an older and more corrosive layer beneath. Harry's role, as Spooner notes of the Gothic detective, is to "reveal the secrets of the past even when he or she has been hired to preserve them"

(2010, p. 248). His pursuit of Gudbrand is as much a confrontation with buried history as it is a criminal investigation, aligning with Kotwasińska's observation that both Gothic and crime fiction protagonists are "fixated on the mystery" (2014, p. 91).

Therefore, Nesbø extends and reanimates the Gothic tradition through the architecture of his criminal characters, crafting figures whose descent into violence is tethered to intimate betrayals, deep-seated obsessions, and the lure of self-justifying logic. In *The Redbreast*, Gudbrand emerges not as a mere functional antagonist, but as a figure whose acts of violence are freighted with symbolic meaning, serving as ritualized responses to personal humiliation and national history. Like Ambrosio in Lewis's *The Monk*, Manfred in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, or Montoni in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Gudbrand is seduced by the illusion of moral necessity, a self--fashioned narrative of retribution that ultimately leads to ethical collapse. His crimes are less arbitrary than they are emblematic: they are performed reckonings with a world perceived as corrupt or unjust, a distorted attempt to restore order by force.

4.5.2. Spectres of Betrayal and Marginalization: Gothic Criminality in *Nemesis*

Nemesis operates at the liminal threshold between Scandinavian crime fiction and Gothic literature, using the structural logic of both to expose the unsettling persistence of the past and the fragility of social and moral order. It refuses to confine its antagonists to the flat functionality of a procedural frame; instead, it renders both Trond and Raskol as haunted characters, their transgressions rooted not in impulsive malice but in deep emotional, historical, and systemic wounds that refuse closure. Trond's trajectory into violence emerges from intimate betrayal and fraternal rivalry, while Raskol's criminal career is inextricable from the generational dispossession and marginalization of the Romani people. Both occupy a liminal position between the personal and the structural, their lives embodying a hybrid Gothic–crime mode in which the private collapse of identity intersects with the slow decay of institutions. And, in a departure from the assumption voiced by Muždeka that the "position of the Other is frequently literalized on the physical level and manifested through one or several distinguishing physical traits" (2022, p. 225), the otherness of Trond and Raskol does not rest upon bodily deformity or visible stigma. Rather, it stems from their position on the margins of Norwegian society: Raskol as a member of a people historically stigmatized and brutalized and Trond as a man marked by his own criminal history and personal disgrace. Their alienation is not inscribed on the body but on the biography, in the sedimented weight of betrayal, exclusion, and institutional abandonment.

Trond's entrance into the narrative bears the hallmarks of a familiar crime-fiction antagonist: meticulous, detached, and apparently ordinary. Yet his anonymity, his refusal to betray emotional cues, and his precise control over the scene imbue him with the eerie stillness of a Gothic spectre. His bank robbery is staged less as an act of theft than as a ritual of psychological possession:

> Instead of running, the robber spun Stine's chair round until she was facing him. He leaned forward and whispered something to her. Harry squinted. He would have to go and get his eyes checked one of these days. But he saw what he saw. She was focused on her faceless tormentor; her own face went through a slow, gradual transformation as the significance of the words he whispered to her appeared to sink in (Nesbø, 2008, p. 15).

The balaclava that obscures his face annihilates his visible identity, turning him into an uncanny apparition whose presence erodes the safety of the everyday. Like the Gothic villain who moves through ruined abbeys unseen, Trond glides through modern, ordered spaces, such as banks and city streets, infusing them with the spectral charge of unresolved domestic agony. Beneath the cold exterior lies a psychic terrain fractured by two central ruptures having their origin in his past: his wife's infidelity with his brother, Lev, and a childhood shaped by living in Lev's shadow:

> We grew up here in Disengreda, in this house. Lev was a legend in the area, but I was just Lev's little brother. ... Lev was the only one who stood up to the Gausten brothers from the flats in Traverveien, even though they were at least two years older and had been in a youth detention centre. Lev took Dad's car when he was fourteen, drove to Lillestrøm and came back with a bag of Twist which he'd nicked from the station kiosk. Dad didn't know anything about it. Lev gave me the sweets (p. 345).

The admiration, envy, and resentment embedded in this memory form a Gothic knot that cannot be undone. The bank robbery becomes not an economic act but a displaced performance of revenge, the financial institution transformed into a symbolic chamber where the past wounds of fraternal betrayal are replayed in ritualized form.

If Trond's violence arises from the implosion of intimate bonds, Raskol's criminality grows out of a longer, collective history of loss. Once a notorious bank robber, now a prisoner who orchestrates crimes from behind bars, Raskol is a figure shaped by systemic exclusion, racialized poverty, and the centuries-old persecution of the Romani, presented in more detail in the preceding subchapter focusing upon the presentation of the criminals. He is repeatedly described in mythical terms, marking him as a liminal presence whose influence extends far beyond the cell walls. His lair in the dilapidated A-Wing of Oslo Prison evokes the ruined abbeys and madhouses of Radcliffe or Lewis, spaces where decay and secrecy fester rather than dissipate. Harry's own reflection captures this Gothic inversion of penal authority:

> Harry had been here many times before, but it always seemed absurd to him to think that behind all these doors were the people whom society thought fit to keep locked up against their will. He didn't quite know why he found the thought so monstrous, but it was something to do with seeing the physical manifestation of publicly institutionalized retribution for crime. The scales and the sword (Nesbø, 2008, p. 295).

The prison, intended as a space of containment and correction, becomes a Gothic structure of failure, its bars and walls incapable of truly restraining Raskol, whose influence seeps outward through the bodies of short-term inmates, enlisted as proxies in his schemes. In this light, Raskol functions as a spectral indictment of the justice system itself, exposing its inability to reckon with the historical injustices that shape crime in the first place. Importantly, both men, Trond with his mysterious vengeance and Raskol with his stigmatized past and subterranean control, embody forms of haunting. Trond is the revenant of domestic collapse, a betrayed husband moving through the world as if already dead; Raskol is the living memory of racialized exclusion, an avenger

whose reach is not curtailed by stone or steel. Their narratives converge in a vision of contemporary Norway as a society shadowed by its own unresolved histories, where neither personal revenge nor institutional punishment can exorcise the ghosts that the past has left behind.

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Through these figures, the *Oslo Trilogy* pushes beyond the mechanics of plot resolution to inhabit the Gothic truth that violence is rarely isolated; it is the echo of deeper fractures, historical and emotional, that persist in the present like a stain. The law may close its cases, but the Gothic undercurrent reminds us that the past never stays buried; it simply waits for the moment to return. In Gudbrand, Trond, and Raskol, Nesbø constructs villains who function as modern counterparts to the Gothic antagonists of Radcliffe, Walpole, and Lewis. They haunt not castles but city streets; they stalk not candlelit corridors but the bureaucratic corridors of police stations, prisons, and banks. Yet their narratives are still governed by Gothic law: the past is never truly past, the architecture of power is riddled with hidden chambers, and violence is the return of wounds that the present cannot heal. In their different ways, each criminal is both an agent of their own downfall and a mirror held up to the failures of the society that made them. Ultimately, Nesbø portrays contemporary Norway as a landscape haunted by its betrayals and silences, suggesting that history cannot be consumed or forgotten but continually returns to demand recognition and reckoning.

4.6. The Supernatural

The presence of supernatural elements in Scandinavian crime fiction constitutes a compelling field of academic inquiry, particularly when examined through the subgenre's engagement with identity, landscape, and cultural mythology. While Scandinavian crime fiction is typically defined by psychological depth, moral ambiguity, and socio--political critique, the incorporation of supernatural motifs opens a liminal narrative space where Gothic and crime fiction intersect. Gudmundsdottir and Meaney stress that:

> The positioning of crime noir fiction ... in opposition to old-fashioned, socially and formally conservative detective fiction is reductive and obscures both the continuity within the genre and its hybridity. Some of the distinctive elements of noir in the North derive from the modernization of elements from the gothic tradition (2022, p. 7).

This convergence is more than stylistic; it reveals a shared thematic preoccupation. Both literary modes employ supernatural incursions, perceived, in Bloom's words, as "all those areas above and beyond the material realm" (1998, p. 16) so as to test the limits of reason, evoke existential unease, and give form to repressed cultural anxieties. Moreover, Ascari argues that:

> the supernatural plays a central role in postmodern crime fiction, where it fulfills a variety of roles, including, of course, parody and deconstruction. This persistence of gothic and supernatural elements invites us to reassess the binary opposition between scientific detection and revelation as well as

> that between human and divine justice, for it is in the interstices of these dimensions that the appeal of much contemporary crime fiction still resides (2007, p. 13).

Within Scandinavian crime fiction, the supernatural is never merely decorative. It functions as a critical device for exposing the anxieties of modernity: fractured identity, spatial and moral liminality, and estrangement from both nature and tradition. Agger captures this development by asserting that

> The other main trend in the development of Nordic noir hinges on mythological or supernatural layers combined with elements from thrillers, science fiction, or horror genres, often connected to an eco-critical, peripheral perspective. The mythological layers may refer to ancient, ethnic, or modern mythology. Supernatural layers have to do primarily with folktales, popular beliefs, and ghost or horror stories. When analyzing the functions of these elements, Tzvetan Todorov's ... definition of the fantastic as a moment of hesitation between belief and disbelief, and his distinctions between the uncanny (where strange events are explained psychologically) and the marvelous (where supernatural events simply occur) is illuminating (2020, p. 19).

Agger's remarks underscore the complexity of the supernatural in the Nordic context: it is both a continuation of folk tradition and a modern narrative strategy. Drawing on Todorov's framework, the supernatural in Scandinavian crime fiction often occupies the "fantastic" zone, where events resist classification as either rationally explicable or wholly magical. The focus on liminal zones – geographical, psychological, and metaphysical – brings Scandinavian crime fiction close to the Gothic tradition. As Gudmundsdottir and Meaney observe,

> The preoccupation with liminal spaces ... is one of the characteristics which aligns noir in the North with gothic traditions. Sometimes these liminal spaces challenge not just the boundaries of realism, but of reality itself. In contrast to its social-realist origins, supernatural elements are widespread. This is particularly evident in crime narratives deriving from national traditions influenced by gothic fiction. ... This would seem to indicate that the 'Nordic noir' brand is more restrictive in television than in fiction, where a thriving sub-genre at the intersection of crime and supernatural fiction has developed (2022, p. 11).

Here, the supernatural functions as aesthetic marker and thematic pressure point, an allegorical register through which cultural memory, historical trauma, and existential disquiet are addressed. Whether embodied as ancestral ghosts, mythological beings, or inexplicable natural forces, supernatural elements manifest a society's suppressed past.

This resonance is intensified by landscape, a key Gothic inheritance. In Scandinavian crime fiction, the remote, icy, and desolate settings are not passive elements of the story but active agents shaping the narrative's supernatural charge. Forests appear sentient, lakes conceal ancient secrets, and snowstorms blur the boundaries between the living and the dead. This fusion of environment and the supernatural has deep folkloric roots.

Nilsson (2016) notes that the subgenre's allure lies in a culturally forged idea of the North as an elsewhere filled with both fear and fascination. Just as Gothic fiction invests castles and moors with uncanny significance, Scandinavian crime fiction imbues its wild landscapes with mythic weight. Besides, Souch's (2020) eco-critical reading of *Jordskott* reveals how supernatural forces in nature articulate contemporary anxieties about environmental collapse while invoking ancient mythological themes. Here, the aggressive powers of nature are reinterpreted through a contemporary lens that acknowledges environmental devastation while simultaneously invoking ancient mythological themes.

The supernatural also reframes questions of identity in post-secular modernity. Hansen observes a growing openness in Scandinavian crime fiction toward spiritual and supernatural concerns:

> Generally, this increased focus on religion and spirituality in Scandinavian media seems to rub off on popular genre fiction. Genres dealing with the supernatural – such as horror or fantasy – are exceptionally popular at the moment, while crime fiction seems to open up. The irrational, the supernatural, the divine seems to attract more and more attention in crime fiction – the genre appears to transgress an otherwise noted boundary between rationality and supernaturality … This means that if crime fiction is, at first, connected to modernity, and modernity, secondly, becomes self-constrained, the genre must as well open up towards religion and spirituality (2011, pp. 239-240).

This post-secular turn aligns Scandinavian crime fiction with Gothic's oscillation between skepticism and belief. In both, the supernatural does not merely shock but exposes the insufficiency of rationalism to contain human complexity. Therefore, it is significant to highlight that the supernatural in Scandinavian crime fiction operates at the intersection of narrative suspense, cultural memory, and philosophical inquiry. It allows the subgenre to transcend the procedural, moving into realms where myth, morality, and identity converge. In doing so, it reaffirms the deep kinship between Scandinavian and Gothic fiction, both of which find their richest material in spaces where certainty falters and the unknown takes hold.

One of the most compelling intersections between Gothic and crime fiction lies in their shared preoccupation with unstable subjectivity. This convergence – where fractured identity, psychological disturbance, and moral ambiguity dominate – forms a key axis of alignment between the two literary traditions. The psychological instability of the protagonist is not merely decorative; it interrogates the foundations of rational inquiry and moral certainty. As Spooner asserts:

> If the return of past upon present is the narrative feature that most closely links Gothic and crime fiction, then the unstable protagonist is another, particularly in noir. When Gothic and crime fiction coincide, the protagonist is often racked by guilt, obsession, paranoia, or other psychological disturbances, or his or her identity is misplaced or disguised. The protagonist's instability places the pursuit of knowledge enacted by the detective narrative under question, often surrounding the process of rational and moral judgment with doubt (2010, p. 250).

Here, Spooner identifies a central feature uniting the two literary modes: epistemological instability introduced by the fractured protagonist. In both Gothic and crime fiction, the detective or central figure is not a paragon of reason but a compromised subject, torn between opposing impulses and often indistinguishable from the criminal they pursue. This ambiguity destabilizes notions of justice and truth while challenging Enlightenment ideals of the coherent self. Spooner further observes that this duality is often explored through the motif of the double life, a concept deeply embedded in both traditions:

> The myth of an outwardly respectable scientist who discovers a means of unleashing the criminal part of his self has provided a convenient narrative for popular accounts of criminal psychology, from Jack the Ripper to suburban killer Fred West. Similar models of a double life proliferate through fin-de--siècle Gothic crime fictions (pp. 250-251).

This motif recurs in both classical and modern narratives, where protagonists oscillate between respectable public identities and hidden monstrous selves. Its enduring power lies in the way it dramatizes the permeability of moral and psychological boundaries. As Sienkiewicz-Charlish notes of Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), "It contains elements of the gothic novel, psychological mystery and religious satire. It can also be seen as an early example of a crime thriller" (2018, p. 85). In Hogg's novel, Gil-Martin – later revealed as the devil – manipulates the Calvinist Wringhim into believing he is divinely justified in committing murder, claiming that "by looking at a person attentively, I by degrees assume his likeness, and by assuming his likeness I attain to the possession of his most secret thoughts" (1990, p. 89). This chilling capacity for mimicry encapsulates the Gothic fascination with possession, doppelgängers, and loss of self. It reinforces the idea of the double not merely as a symbolic mirror but as a psychological force capable of destabilizing identity and morality.

Scandinavian crime fiction continues this thread through depictions of dissociative identity disorder (DID), a narrative device that probes trauma, guilt, and moral ambiguity. Such representations blur the binaries of criminality and innocence, sanity and madness. While Gothic fiction externalizes fragmentation through supernatural means, crime fiction grounds it in psychology and behavioural science, though the horror remains profound in both literary traditions. For instance, in works such as Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon* (1981) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), the fractured psyche becomes an object of fascination and dread, challenging the detective to comprehend the divided human mind. This process exposes the limits of rationality and transforms detection itself into a critique of knowledge. Both literary modes reveal cynicism toward reason, showing its inability to contain the full range of human experience. Historical antecedents further illuminate this convergence. Radcliffe's Gothic fiction, though preceding modern psychology, anticipates later explorations of dissociation and emotional fragmentation. Her characters, often women under duress, experience hallucinations and altered states that blur the line between the psychological and the supernatural. Even when rationalized, these experiences expose the instability of perception and the porous boundary between mind and world.

Importantly, in both Gothic and Scandinavian crime fiction, fractured identity disrupts narrative stability. Unreliable narration, split consciousness, and distorted perception render storytelling itself uncertain, compelling readers to question truth,

selfhood, and morality. The convergence of Gothic and crime fiction thus lies not only in theme but also in form: both seek to unsettle certainties and illuminate the hidden recesses of the mind. Ultimately, the psychological instability of the protagonist, manifested through guilt, paranoia, dual identities, or dissociative disorders, serves as a unifying thread between those two literary traditions. It reflects their shared investment in exploring the complexities of identity, the consequences of trauma, and the blurred boundary between sanity and madness. Whether expressed through supernatural horror or forensic realism, the fractured self emerges as their central motif, destabilizing traditional narratives of justice, truth, and rationality.

4.6.1. Dissociative Disorder as the Visualization of the Supernatural in *The Redbreast*

The Redbreast employs Gothic conventions through the ambiguous and uncanny portrayal of the symbiotic and criminal partnership between Gudbrand and Daniel Gudeson. This supernatural undercurrent permeates the entire narrative and is thematically represented at multiple points. As in Radcliffe's Gothic fiction, the seemingly inexplicable elements are eventually rationalized in the closing chapters of the novel, particularly when Harry gains access to Gudbrand's memoirs, thanks to which he obtains insight into the complexities of the criminal's psychology, encompassing both conscious and unconscious motives and desires. The readers, invited to actively participate in decoding these intricacies, occupy a privileged interpretive position parallel to that of the police officer himself. In highlighting this distinctive position afforded to readers of crime fiction, Pyrhönen observes:

> This emphasis on suspicion as a guiding principle of reading is inscribed in the genre, because by inviting readers to solve the crime, it encourages them, not only to think like a detective, but also think like a criminal. If readers are able to think like a criminal, then they may be able to imagine committing crimes under certain circumstances. The genre asks that readers pry and peep into matters related to crime under the guise of detection. This attitude endows the investigation with a voyeuristic quality, rendering this activity guilt-free and making reading pleasurable (2020, p. 129).

This overarching Gothic motif, suffused with psychological complexity and the uncanny, is introduced at the very beginning of the novel. The initial allusion to Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) appears when Ellen refers to an extraordinary claim about the President of the United States:

> 'I read that a well-known American psychologist thinks that the President has an MPD,' Ellen said. 'MPD?' 'Multiple Personality Disorder. Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. The psychologist thought his normal personality was not aware that the other one, the sex beast, was having relations with all these women. And that was why a Court of Impeachment couldn't accuse him of having lied under oath about it' (Nesbø, 2006, p. 4).

However, it is Gudbrand's experience with MPD that proves central to the narrative. Throughout the novel, he is portrayed as possessing a deep and complex connection with the deceased Daniel, who functions both as an accomplice in crime and as an "idol

and big-brother surrogate" (p. 271). Daniel is frequently perceived as the instigator of Gudbrand's criminality, while also serving as a scapegoat upon whom the moral weight of their crimes can be eventually displaced. According to Aune, this disorder may result from "extremely traumatic experiences later in life. Another personality is created to flee from problems" (p. 522). Aune also explains this dynamic as "the existence of two or more personalities in an individual which take turns in being the dominant partner. As with Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" (p. 519), emphasizing the dual nature of Gudbrand's psyche. Despite inherent internal conflict – "there can be bitter clashes between the personalities because they have different goals, perception of morality, sympathies and antipathies with respect to the people around them" (p. 521) – the symbiosis between Gudbrand and Daniel remains unbroken and intensely unified.

The revelation of Gudbrand's dual personality and criminality is deepened through the above-mentioned discovery of his memoirs which appear to serve a cathartic function for the criminal:

> I needn't have told you about it, but I did so because I cannot afford to duck the issue. That is also why I'm writing this book. I have to go through it every time the topic is brought up, explicitly or implicitly. To be absolutely sure that I am not hiding from it. The day I hide, fear will have won its first battle. I don't know why it's like this. A psychologist could probably explain it (Nesbø, 2006, p. 270).

Significantly, in this personal document, Harry learns of the genesis and continuity of the supernatural bond between Gudbrand and Daniel and the memoirs recount the exhumation of Daniel's body in such a Gothic-like manner:

> *But the last night when I was on watch I had to undertake the boldest operation so far. Gradually I had come to realise that I couldn't leave Daniel's body buried in the snow. ... I decided to dig up the body and have it put in the mass grave ... I felt that Daniel was with me, yes, that he was in me. And when I had finally manoeuvred the corpse on to the ammunition boxes and was about to tie the sack around the head, he smiled. I know that lack of sleep and hunger can play tricks with your mind, but I did see his rigid death-mask change in front of my very eyes. The extraordinary thing was that instead of frightening me, it made me feel secure and happy* (p. 560; emphasis in the original).

This surreal scene solidifies the Gothic overtones of the narrative and the first documented act of Gudbrand and Daniel's joint criminal endeavour is the murder of Christopher Brockhead, a romantic rival:

> *The thoughts raced through my mind as I sped along roads which were as tortuous as life itself. But Daniel was in command of my hands and feet. ... discovered I was sitting on the edge of his bed and gave me a look of disbelief.*
> *'What are you doing here?' he asked.*
> *'Christopher Brockhard, you are a traitor,' I whispered. 'And I sentence you to death. Are you ready?'* (pp. 563-564; emphasis in the original).

The narrative breaks here, indicating a loss of consciousness and underscoring the total control Daniel exercises over Gudbrand's body and mind as well, perceived as an echo of the dynamic between Mr Hyde and Dr Jekyll. Another example of this unnatural partnership occurs when Gudbrand is ordered to kill Sindre's family:

> *I walk around chewing on these things, and my surprise was therefore immense when today they gave me orders to liquidate one of my own (Fauke's)* Nasjonal Samling *brothers. ... Daniel and I almost burst out laughing – it is as if we had discovered the idea ourselves. They actually asked me to get rid of the people who could blow the whistle on me!* (p. 569; emphasis in the original).

This pattern of murder continues decades later in modern Oslo. In one particularly disturbing scene, Gudbrand and Daniel murder a man's dog and then compel him to commit suicide:

> *When the policeman left, I set to work immediately. ... I held a knife to his throat and assured him that if he made one false move I could slice him up as easily as I had done his dog. ... We went upstairs to his bedroom where he readily allowed me to place him on the chair. He tied the dog lead to the ceiling hook. ... Afterwards, I wiped off my fingertips and put the bin bag containing the dog in the freezer and the knives in the cellar. Everything was in place and I was just giving the bedroom a last check when I heard the crunch of gravel and saw a police car in the road. It was parked, as if it was waiting for something. I knew I was in a tight corner. Gudbrand panicked of course, but fortunately Daniel acted swiftly* (pp. 591-592; emphasis in the original).

Their final collaboration is the attempted assassination of the Crown Prince: "*I can see him*, Daniel whispered. *One o'clock, on the balcony right behind the dead tree*" (p. 596; emphasis in the original).

Beyond the symbiotic relationship between Gudbrand and Daniel, other supernatural or uncanny elements pervade the novel. Gudbrand is frequently associated with being a ghost: "'Our job is to chase ghosts after all'" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 198), "'You're looking for a ghost, Inspector Hole'" (p. 479), and "chasing wartime ghosts" (p. 290). These references underscore the novel's Gothic dimension. Chandler's observation in *The Literature of Roguery* is pertinent here:

> There has been a constant tendency to rise from the sensational to the analytical; and from a combination of the two a third type has resulted. Its purpose is to gratify the reader's taste for the ghastly, the tragic, or the criminal, and at the same time to propose a mystery whose solution shall exercise all his intellectual ingenuity (1958, p. 532).

This is likewise echoed by Ascari, who, in his discussion of 19th-century and contemporary crime fiction, notes:

> The enjoyment of readers depended precisely on the interplay between natural and supernatural elements, which engendered a fruitful tension between the domain of the intellect and that of the emotions (2007, p. 10)

Nesbø also infuses the narrative with surreal, nightmarish imagery. Random citizens in Oslo are described in phantasmagorical terms: "They had distorted, bizarre features ... like in crazy mirrors at the fair" (Nesbø, 2006, p. 96), and they drive "shapeless cars [that] slip by, as in a psychedelic film" (p. 98). Some of Gudbrand's victims are similarly reduced to spectral figures. For example, Signe is described in such a manner during her murder:

> The old man turned towards the back seat where the gagged woman stared at him with the same petrified eyes he had seen when she became conscious after being given diethyl ether. ... He rolled the window half-down and rested the gun on it. When he looked up he could see her gigantic shadow dancing on the yellowish brown sixteenth-century wall. The shadow had to be visible all the way across the bay from Nesoden. Beautiful (p. 497).

Even the elderly veterans are rendered ghostlike:

> 'Do I look dead?'...
> 'No, you don't look dead. Sick, yes, but not dead.'
> He stretched out an enormous, grimy hand and the old man recognized the sweet stench of sweat, urine and vomit.
> 'What's up? Don't you want to shake an old comrade's hand?' His voice sounded like a death rattle (pp. 125-126).

The most chilling, however, is the infernal lamentation of Sverre's mother:

> When I got out of my car I heard a terrible howling noise. At first I thought there was a dog somewhere in the neighbourhood. As I walked up the gravel path, however, I knew it was coming from the inside the house and that it wasn't a dog. It was human (p. 392).

Ultimately, Gothic and crime fiction, through their mutual exploration of MPD and the fractured self, reflect a shared interest in the dualities of human nature. They both examine the tensions between reason and madness, order and chaos. By portraying characters whose identities are fragmented, they interrogate the very concept of selfhood. As noted by Sussex, the Gothic tradition endowed crime fiction with its sense of the uncanny and the mysterious: "by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries ... [the mystery] connoted the Gothic" (2010, p. 18).

4.6.2. The Elements of the Supernatural and Gothic in *Nemesis*

In *Nemesis*, Nesbø artfully integrates supernatural and Gothic motifs into the fabric of his crime narrative, often blurring the boundaries between reality and the uncanny. Echoing the tradition of Gothic fiction, the novel evokes a pervasive atmosphere of dread, uncertainty, and psychological disturbance, amplified by recurring references to the grotesque, the spectral, and the inexplicable. Drawing from both classic Gothic literature and its intersections with crime fiction, Nesbø constructs a narrative where the supernatural does not merely function as an aesthetic embellishment but becomes central to the exploration of identity, trauma, and moral ambiguity.

One of the earliest instances of the grotesque appears at the beginning of the narrative, where the smile of the frightened Stine, while being confronted with the masked bank robber, is described in the following manner: "her top lip twisted upwards and the corners of her mouth were drawn down into a grotesque grin" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 15). This disturbing image immediately evokes the Gothic convention of distorted corporeality, recalling the uncanny deformations found in the portraits of a Swiss painter, Henry Fuseli, or the misshapen creature of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Similarly, the notion of pursuing the intangible is raised, for instance, in the context of Halvorsen's declaration directed towards unwavering Harry who sat "alone all weekend chasing ghosts" (p. 24), a phrase that, while colloquial, reverberates with Gothic preoccupation with spectral remnants of the past intruding upon the present. This motif echoes throughout the novel as characters navigate a haunted psychological and physical landscape.

The appearances of other characters are similarly imbued with Gothic qualities and associations with death. A particularly striking example is the description of Harry's police colleague, Beate, whose physical traits evoke strong imagery of the macabre:

> Her most prominent feature was her pallor. Her skin and hair were so colourless that she reminded Harry of a corpse Ellen and he had once fished out of Bunnefjord. Unlike with the woman's body, however, Harry had a feeling that if he just turned away for a second he would forget what Beate Lønn looked like (Nesbø, 2008, p. 28).

This comparison not only aligns Beate with the imagery of death but also imbues her character with an eerie, spectral quality. Notably, this portrayal is immediately followed by a depiction of the workplace environment shared by Harry and Beate, further reinforcing the Gothic atmosphere: "At the top of the iron door in front of them a sign said, in Gothic letters: THE HOUSE OF PAIN" (p. 28; the capital letters in the original). The use of Gothic lettering of this ominous label clearly reference Gothic aesthetics, which often merge death symbolism with arcane or ritualistic elements. The setting is likened to a Gothic vault, anchoring the narrative space within the architecture of horror, repression, and psychological unease. Further manifestations of the Gothic appear in Anna's bedroom, which is marked by disturbing and otherworldly imagery. The room contains peculiar illustrations, and more notably, "open-mouthed demons snarling from the carvings on the bedhead" (p. 62). Such depictions of supernatural beings suggest the intrusion of the irrational into the domestic sphere and serve to externalize Anna's psychological fragmentation. These elements reflect a central feature of Gothic fiction: the projection of internal turmoil onto the external environment, thereby blending the boundaries between the real and the uncanny.

Arguably the most complex supernatural figure in *Nemesis* is Raskol, whose character is introduced through associations with Romani mystical tradition. Early in the narrative, Raskol is enveloped in mystery and folklore:

> There were rumours going round about this mysterious figure for a number of years. He was supposed to be the real brains behind all the major robberies of security vans and financial institutions in Oslo in the eighties. It took a number of years for the police to accept that he actually existed and even then they never managed to produce any evidence against him (Nesbø, 2008, p. 90).

Shrouded in exoticism and elusiveness, the criminal is constructed as a supernatural presence, drawing on folkloric representations of the Romani as both societal outsiders and keepers of esoteric, arcane knowledge. Moreover, a few passages later he is described as "a man with all the outward appearance of a monk" (p. 91), a portrayal that invokes religious asceticism and mysticism. However, this image quickly evolves: Raskol becomes increasingly associated with manipulation and psychological control, akin to a demonic puppeteer operating behind the scenes. As the narrative unfolds, he accrues progressively mythic attributes, transcending his initial identity as a criminal figure to become a near-symbolic embodiment of malevolent power. This transformation culminates at the latter section of the novel, where he is directly identified with the ultimate Gothic antagonist: "he's Satan himself" (p. 400). Through this gradual process of mythologization and dehumanization, Raskol is refigured from a shadowy mastermind into a symbolic incarnation of evil. His character reflects the archetypal Gothic villain – charismatic, elusive, and diabolically influential – who threatens not only societal order but also the psychological stability of those who encounter him.

Environmental settings play a crucial role in reinforcing the Gothic atmosphere, imbuing the narrative with a pervasive sense of unease and spectral presence. The city of Oslo is repeatedly depicted as shrouded in fog, perceived as a metaphorical veil between the living and the dead. In a particularly evocative passage, the mist pervades the urban landscape, evoking a macabre and dreamlike tableau:

> The fog was back. ... It lay like a duvet of cotton wool around Harry, and as they entered the flat, Harry had the sensation of walking on clouds. Everything around him – the people, the voices, the crackle of the walkie-talkies, the light from the camera flashes – had taken on a dreamlike sheen, a coating of detachment because this was not, could not be, real (Nesbø, 2008, p. 120).

This portrayal of an environment suffused with mist and unreality resonates with Radcliffean conventions, wherein the landscape reflects internal states of psychological disturbance. The dreamlike detachment described here blurs the boundaries between reality and illusion, heightening the novel's Gothic tenor. Further contributing to this atmosphere is the suffocating silence and palpable emptiness, likened to that of a tomb, reinforcing the omnipresence of death and the impossibility of escaping its grip:

> But, standing in front of the bed where *the deceased lay* with a pistol in her right hand and a black hole in her temple, he found himself unable to look at the blood on the pillow or meet her *vacant*, accusatory gaze. Instead he focused on the bedhead, on *the horse with the bitten-off head*, hoping the fog would soon lift and he would wake up (p. 120; emphasis mine).

Significantly, visual disturbances continue to haunt the narrative space, such as the peculiar artwork noted later in the text: "I don't know, perhaps the light from the three individual lamps falls perfectly on its own picture?" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 140). This enigmatic observation underscores the surreal and uncanny qualities that pervade the visual field of the novel. However, the Gothic reaches a more overtly spectral register in the portrayal of Astrid, the neighbour of the deceased Anna. Described explicitly as a "ghastly neighbour" (p. 167), the woman is imbued with ghostly qualities, her presence

evoking the literal and symbolic return of the dead. This interplay between death and the supernatural is further emphasized in a conversation between Harry and the police officer Ivarsson, following Anna's funeral. Reflecting on his childhood memories, the latter recounts his experience with his Romani gardener named Josef:

> 'When I was growing up, we had a gypsy gardener. Ursari, they travelled round with dancing bears, you know. Josef he was called. Music and pranks all the time. But death, you see ... These people have an even more strained relationship with death than we have. They are scared of mule – spirits of the dead. They believe they return. Josef used to go to a woman who could chase them away. Only women can do that apparently. Come on' (pp. 184-185).

This recollection draws directly upon folkloric imagery, particularly Romani beliefs about spirits of the dead, thereby infusing the narrative with an enduring sense of the uncanny. The notion of the dead returning – not only metaphorically, through grief and memory, but also literally, as spectral presences – serves to anchor the novel in the Gothic tradition, where death is not an end, but a lingering, active force.

In addition to the previously discussed supernatural motifs, *Nemesis* incorporates further Gothic elements that reinforce its spectral atmosphere. Notably, photographic evidence – traditionally understood within crime fiction as a medium of objective truth – assumes an unsettling, almost mystical dimension. In one instance, Harry refers to a "dead woman with a photo in a shoe" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 204), a detail that suggests ritualistic or talismanic significance. This bizarre placement transforms the photograph into a symbol of memory and unresolved presence, destabilizing the expected rational framework of the criminal investigation. The theme of madness, a cornerstone of Gothic fiction, surfaces with the mention of a "madhouse" (p. 228), evoking that way spaces historically associated with both psychological confinement and the metaphorical loss of reason. Within the Gothic tradition, such institutions function not only as physical sites of horror but also as manifestations of societal anxieties regarding sanity, repression, and the unknowable depths of the human mind. The novel also repeatedly draws upon imagery of spectral reflection to suggest permeability between the material world and the supernatural. In one scene, as Harry, Beate, and Trond converse, the boundary between interior and exterior worlds becomes indistinct:

> Grette had turned to face the window again and didn't see Harry holding out his card, so he left it on the table. Outside, it was becoming darker and they were seeing semi-transparent reflections in the windows, like ghosts (p. 235).

This moment exemplifies the Gothic fascination with visual ambiguity and the uncanny, where reflective surfaces reveal more than mere physical surroundings and hint at spectral presences lurking just beyond perception. Such moments accumulate throughout the narrative, reaching a climax the moment Harry observes "a woman's face staring at [him] from one of the windows. She looked like a ghost" (p. 331). Similarly, Trond is described in ghostly terms, possessing "a pale face with two bluish-black bags beneath unresponsive eyes" (p. 344), his visage evoking that of the dead rather than the living. These descriptions collectively dissolve the boundary between the corporeal and the incorporeal, reinforcing Gothic motif of liminality, where characters exist on the threshold of the real and the supernatural, the rational and the irrational.

The novel likewise interrogates religious and cultural ideologies through a distinctly Gothic framework. In particular, Romani people – referred to as "descendants of Cain and doomed to eternal perdition" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 328) – are portrayed as liminal, cursed figures steeped in myth and social marginality. This attribution not only reinforces their status as Gothic outsiders but also draws upon longstanding folkloric tropes that cast such groups as bearers of ancestral guilt and supernatural affiliation. The thematic motif of spiritual inversion reaches its most poignant articulation in the passage where the Romani conception of God is equated with the Devil, thereby destabilizing conventional theological binaries:

> 'I'm a gypsy. My world can be an inverted world. Do you know what God is in Romany?'
> 'No.'
> '*Devel*. Devil. Strange, isn't it? When you sell your soul, it's good to know who you're selling it to, *Spiuni*' (p. 360; emphasis in the original).

This inversion serves not only as a critique of organized religion but also as a manifestation of Gothic's preoccupation with ambiguity, moral disorientation, and the uncanny double. Equally striking is the return of the grotesque, rendered with visceral intensity in scenes of bodily decay where the narration confronts the readers with graphic images of ants and flies consuming a decomposing corpse of Lev, accompanied by vivid descriptions of the stench emanating from his dead body. This Gothic-like scene is worth being cited at length:

> The narrow path of light found the column of ants along the wall. Harry could feel from the heat beneath the bandage that he was bleeding again. He followed the glistening bodies of the ants across a filthy carpet into the next room. There the column took a sharp turn to the left and continued up the wall. The light of the torch caught a *Kama Sutra* picture on the way up. The caravan of ants forked off and continued across the ceiling. Harry leaned back. His neck hurt like never before. Now they were directly above him. He had to turn. The torch beam wandered around until it found the ants again. Was this really the shortest way for them? That was Harry's final thought before he stared into Lev Grette's face. Lev's body loomed over Harry, who dropped the torch and reeled backwards. ... Beate couldn't stand the stench for more than a couple of minutes and had to dash out. ... 'I apologise,' she groaned. 'It was the ants. I mean why do the disgusting creatures have to use the *nostrils* as a kind of two-lane highway? (pp. 412-415; emphasis in the original).

These portrayals evoke the Gothic obsession with physical degeneration as a symbolic mirror for psychological and ethical deterioration. Such scenes do not merely depict death; they dwell on its corruptive and revolting materiality, underscoring the inescapable proximity of the abject within the modern world. The theme of spectral identity further permeates the narrative through the figure of Harry himself, who at one point is likened to a spectre: "Harry huddled up. The cold, raw wind blew right through him as if he were a ghost" (p. 452). This characterization aligns him with the archetype of Gothic wanderer

– an alienated, liminal figure caught between life and death, presence and absence. The boundary between the real and the supernatural is further destabilized in a later scene set in the cellar of the police headquarters, where the environment and its inhabitants assume a macabre, otherworldly quality: "The harsh light from the naked bulb gave their faces the same deadly pale colour as the whitewashed walls and Møller had the feeling he was in a burial vault" (pp. 518-519). This moment, suffused with the uncanny, reconfigures a space of bureaucratic order into one of spectral horror, thereby subverting rational expectations and reaffirming the novel's Gothic undertones.

The novel's closing scenes further consolidate its Gothic undercurrents through potent visual and atmospheric symbolism. A particularly striking moment involves a surreal image of "the female figure holding the three lamps. 'Nemesis, the goddess of justice and vengeance'" (Nesbø, 2008, p. 634). This spectral image not only evokes themes of divine retribution but also recalls the symbolic chiaroscuro of the above--mentioned *Heart of Darkness*, where a feminine figure holding the lamp is similarly charged with allegorical significance. The allusion reinforces the novel's alignment with literary traditions that interrogate justice, morality, and the darkness inherent in human nature. Equally emblematic is the novel's final invocation of nature as an animate, supernatural force. The wind is rendered with uncanny vitality, no longer a mere element of weather but a spectral presence imbued with agency and malice: "The next blast of wind was so strong it caught hold of the grey coat on the bench and for a moment it seemed as if an invisible man clad only in a coat was running across the tennis court (p. 678). This image encapsulates Gothic convention of an external environment that mirrors inner psychological turmoil, a world where even the natural elements participate in the narrative's disquieting atmosphere.

4.6.3. The Elements of the Supernatural and Gothic in *The Devil's Star*

In *The Devil's Star*, Gothic and supernatural elements permeate the narrative, lending the novel a profound psychological depth and an atmosphere of pervasive dread. Nesbø adeptly incorporates conventional Gothic motifs such as death, decay, dreams, doubles, and demonic associations, into the scaffolding of contemporary crime fiction, producing a hybrid text in which rational investigation is continually disrupted by horror, superstition, and the uncanny. Much like classic Gothic literature, the novel engages themes of moral corruption, psychological repression, and metaphysical ambiguity, often articulated through visual and symbolic language steeped in religious and occult imagery.

From the outset, Nesbø signals his alignment with the Gothic tradition through sacrilegious materiality and infernal symbolism. Early in the narrative, the readers are introduced to a grotesque story involving Jacob Andersen, a master bricklayer, who is said to have used a special mixture of mortar and wall plaster containing "horsehair and pig's blood" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 4). This disturbing concoction – suggestive of a pact with Satan: "Some of the bricklayers considered it immoral, some thought he was in league with the Devil" (p. 4) – functions as a macabre prefiguration of the occult elements that later surface in the narrative. The transformation of building materials into sacrificial components imbues the act of construction with ritualistic and demonic undertones. Such imagery not only echoes Gothic preoccupations with bodily violation and infernal alliance but also thematically aligns the architectural with the arcane, suggesting that evil can be literally built into the foundations of modern life. Gothic aesthetics continue with

the unsettling figure of a dead woman, murdered and walled in by her jealous husband, who imagines herself to still be alive. The mythic account of her spectral reanimation via pig's blood evokes the figure of the vampire – an undead creature suspended between worlds – symbolizing both physical entrapment and metaphysical unrest:

> Her face turned blue, her heartbeat slowed and then she stopped breathing. She was what most people would call dead. According to the myth, however, the taste of pig's blood had the effect of making the unfortunate woman believe she was still alive. And with that she immediately broke free of the ropes that bound her, passed through the wall and began to walk again. A few old people from Grüneløkka still remember the story from their childhood, about the woman with the pig's head, walking around with a knife to cut off the heads of small children who were out late. She had to have the taste of blood in her mouth so that she didn't vanish into the thin air (p. 5).

Here, Gothic conflation of death and desire, body and spirit, becomes evident. The figure operates as both folkloric terror and allegory for the repression of female agency and rage. Her grotesque resurrection also exemplifies the permeability between life and death that characterizes much of the novel's symbolic landscape.

Blood, a central motif in both Gothic and crime fiction, recurs as a powerful signifier of violence, ritual, and corporeal vulnerability. It serves not merely as forensic evidence but as an aesthetic and symbolic marker of moral degradation, brutality, and psychological horror. In a moment of extreme violence and religious parody, the narrator states:

> The man turned round and gaped at him. A triangular fragment of glass was protruding from his forehead. Blood ran down from it in a tiny stream and forked at the ridge of his nose. ... Then he began to beat the wrought-iron Star of Bethlehem in a circular window, she thought she heard the sound of ripping skin as the splatter of blood began to discolour the white door (Nesbø, 2002, p. 129).

The desecration of the "Star of Bethlehem" – a sacred Christian symbol – with human blood powerfully enacts the novel's motif of spiritual inversion, where divine imagery becomes the site of mutilation and sacrilege. Likewise, another crime scene is described with almost ritualistic precision, imbuing the victim's body with both aesthetic and sacrificial qualities:

> The room was surprisingly big, roughly four metres by five, with two white lavatory cubicles and three white basins placed below a long mirror. The neon lights in the ceiling cast a harsh glare on the white walls and white floor tiles. The absence of colour was almost conspicuous. Perhaps it was this background that made the body look like a small work of art, a carefully arranged exhibition. The woman was young and slim. She was kneeling with her forehead on the ground, like a Muslim at prayer, except that her arms were beneath her body. Her suit 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 head and the drain. It looked almost painted on to achieve maximum effect (p. 160).

Here, the scene's sterile whiteness underscores the visceral red of the blood, transforming the bathroom into a clinical stage for a grotesque spectacle. The contrast between purity and corruption, spiritual posture and sexualized exposure, functions as a visual metaphor for the collapse of sacred and profane boundaries–a core concern of Gothic fiction.

Significantly, Harry himself becomes increasingly marked by this Gothic atmosphere. His physical deterioration and psychological instability are continually emphasized throughout the narrative, to the extent that he is repeatedly described in cadaverous terms. At one point, his colleague remarks that he may have had "a near-death experience one day and the very next ... strolling around like some red-eyed Lazarus" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 73), a comparison that directly invokes the Biblical figure of Lazarus of Bethany resurrected from death presented in the 11th chapter of the Gospel of John. Harry emerges as a liminal subject, suspended between reason and madness, life and death, a modern Gothic wanderer haunted by the trauma of personal loss, addiction, and unrelenting violence. Through such descriptions, Nesbø reanimates the Gothic trope of the disintegrating male hero, torn between rationality and the seductive pull of self--destruction. Harry becomes not only a detective navigating the criminal underworld of Oslo, but also a symbolic figure grappling with metaphysical and psychological demons. His bodily decline mirrors the moral rot he investigates, fusing character and setting into a single, haunted organism.

Moreover, the recurring motif of flies throughout *The Devil's Star* functions as a potent Gothic symbol, drawing upon biblical and folkloric associations with decay, pestilence, and demonic presence. In various cultures and religious traditions, flies are emblematic of corruption and spiritual desecration, most famously associated with Beelzebub, "Lord of the Flies". Their appearance in the novel, for instance here: "Here they were, ... under the light of the moon and a lamp full of dead insects" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 133), often in close proximity to death, serves to heighten the atmosphere of visceral unease and to underscore the physical consequences of violence. Symbolically, the presence of flies reinforces the idea that beneath the surface of rational investigation lies a deeper moral and spiritual rot, seeping into the very fabric of the world Harry inhabits.

In addition to these corporeal symbols, the novel also introduces explicitly Gothic psychological elements, particularly through Harry's recurring dreams and nightmares in which only female figures appear. At the beginning of the narrative, the readers are presented with the following scene:

> She *screamed* again and Harry Hole opened his eyes. ... It had been *the same old nightmare*. Rooted to the spot, unable to move, in vain he had tried closing his eyes to avoid seeing *her mouth, distorted and opened in a silent scream*. The large, blankly staring eyes with *the mute accusation*. When he was young, it had been his little sister, Sis. Now it was Ellen Gjelten. At first *the screams were silent*, now they sounded like *squealing steel brakes*. He didn't know which was worse (Nesbø, 2022, pp. 18-19; emphasis mine).

And, in the middle of the story, there is another one in which the police officer, after having fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion in the bed of one of Wilhelm's female victims, has the sensation that he is bringing the dead woman – his beloved Rakel (who is reality is alive) – back to life:

> The gleam came slowly black. He placed his other hand on her stomach. Her eyes became alive and he could feel her body stir beneath his fingers. He knew that it was touch that brought her back to life, that without touch she would disappear, die. He rested his forehead against her forehead. The water rand down the inside of his clothing, soaked his skin and lay like a warm filter between them. It was then that he noticed that her eyes were not blue, but brown. And her lips were no longer pale, but red and full of life. Rakel. He put his lips against hers. He recoiled when he discovered that they were ice cold (p. 213).

These visions, presented with spectral vividness, possess exaggerated and distorted features that transform them into nightmarish embodiments of repressed trauma, guilt, and desire. The apparitions merge eroticism with dread – a classic hallmark of Gothic femininity. Harry's dream sequences expose multiple Gothic dimensions. For instance, the image of the paralyzed dreamer confronted by a ghostly woman whose scream is at once silent and mechanical reflects a profound psychological paralysis, revealing his inability to escape the past or absolve himself of guilt. The transformation of the female figure, from his sister Sis to Ellen Gjelten, a murdered colleague, suggests a continuity of loss and a blurring of emotional boundaries, reinforcing the theme of the uncanny double. The women in his dream embody both accusation and victimhood, projecting Harry's internal conflict between responsibility and helplessness. What is more, the silent scream that morphs into the shriek of "squealing steel brakes" introduces a jarring aural dissonance, intensifying the horror and signaling the intrusion of mechanized violence into the unconscious. These dream-women function as Gothic *femme fatales* and ghostly revenants, embodying both the erotic and the abject. They emerge not as fully individuated characters but as symbolic projections of Harry's repressed anxieties and unresolved grief. In this sense, the dreams align with Freudian conceptions of the uncanny – *das Unheimliche* – in which the familiar becomes terrifying, and repressed psychic material returns in distorted, threatening forms. Through these nightmarish visions, Nesbø reaffirms the novel's Gothic sensibility, wherein the supernatural is not necessarily external but deeply embedded in the psyche of the protagonist.

It is important to underscore that the spectral figure of Ellen recurs throughout *The Devil's Star* with increasing vividness and emotional intensity, arguably overshadowing even the living Rakel in Harry's psychological world. Her lingering presence serves as a manifestation of both grief and guilt, emblematic of the Gothic tradition in which the dead refuse to remain silent, returning instead to haunt the living. The most striking instance of this occurs during a seemingly supernatural episode, wherein Ellen's photograph appears to respond to Harry's mental state and spoken words:

> Ellen was smiling at him from her photo. Was he going mad or had her mouth just moved?
> 'What are you looking at, you bitch?' he mumbled, and the very next moment the picture fell from the wall, hitting the floor and smashing the glass to smithereens. Harry stared at Ellen who was smiling imperturbably up at him from the broken frame (Nesbø, 2022, p. 146).

This moment blurs the boundary between psychological delusion and supernatural occurrence, illustrating the Gothic theme of a collapsing distinction between reality and hallucination. Ellen's photograph, animated with spectral vitality, becomes a symbol of Harry's fractured psyche, serving as both a trigger and a mirror for his emotional disintegration. The destruction of the frame–glass shattering across the floor–reinforces the sense of psychic rupture, as if Harry's tenuous grasp on reality is likewise splintering. Ellen's posthumous "smile" and the question of whether her mouth moved – posed with unnerving ambiguity – reinvokes Gothic motif of the portrait that comes to life, an uncanny device used to convey the persistence of the past and the instability of perception. Her image does not offer comfort but accusation, an imperturbable reminder of Harry's failure to save her and the unresolved nature of her death. His hostile response, calling her a "bitch", is both jarring and revealing, suggesting a complex entanglement of affection, resentment, and guilt. This emotional ambivalence is a hallmark of Gothic hauntings, where the ghost is not merely a figure of fear but one that embodies the repressed or unassimilated aspects of the protagonist's own identity. Furthermore, Harry's psychological descent is increasingly portrayed in terms of spectrality. His role becomes that of a "restless soul", a familiar Gothic archetype, neither fully alive nor entirely dead, caught in a liminal space where identity, morality, and sanity are all in flux. This portrayal of Harry aligns with the Gothic tradition of the cursed or wandering protagonist, haunted not only by external figures but by his own fractured self. In this context, Ellen's spectral presence functions not merely as a symbol of mourning but as an active agent of destabilization, calling attention to the unresolved traumas and suppressed truths that lie beneath the veneer of investigative logic.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to underscore that the most vivid and sustained embodiment of the supernatural and Gothic aesthetics in *The Devil's Star* emerges through the ritualistic modus operandi of the serial killer, whose repeated use of a symbolically charged object – the red diamond fashioned in the shape of a five-pointed star – infuses the crimes with a sense of occult ritualism and infernal purpose. The first appearance of this motif is unsettlingly intimate: a small gem discovered beneath the eyelid of the murdered Camilla:

> 'The pathologist pressed the lump. It was rock hard. So he pulled up her eyelid and do you know what he found on the top of her eyelid?'
> 'Well, no,' Harry said.
> 'A small, reddish precious stone cut in the shape of a star. We think it's a diamond' (Nesbø, 2002, p. 49).

The red diamond reappears on the finger of the second victim, Lisbeth, where its identical shape further suggests a deliberate symbolic pattern rather than random placement:

> 'We found this precious stone under Camilla's eyelid, a red diamond in the shape of a five-pointed star. This ring on the right was on Lisbeth's finger. As you can see, the diamond on the ring is paler, but the shape is identical' (p. 139).

This motif resurfaces once again with the third victim, Barbara, this time concealed within an earring, a detail that underscores the killer's increasingly elaborate symbolic staging:

> So the killer put this earring in her ear. The funny thing is that you can open it. Like this. Unusual contents or what?
> Beate nodded.
> 'A red diamond in the shape of a five-pointed star,' she said (p. 165).

The recurrence of these red star-shaped diamonds points not only to the killer's ritualistic methodology but also to the Gothic tradition of the talismanic object, an item that carries within it a symbolic or metaphysical weight, often associated with occultism, fate, or the supernatural. These diamonds, far from being mere forensic evidence, are rendered as charged emblems of esoteric meaning and menace. Their omnipresence in the investigation – reiterated in numerous dialogues among the police officers – is indicative of their symbolic centrality, particularly during a conversation between Harry and his superior, Møller:

> 'Just one more little thing,' Harry said. 'The diamonds that the murderer has placed on the victims ...'
> 'Yes?'
> 'They've got five points. Almost like a pentagram.'
> 'Almost? As far as I know, it's exactly like a pentagram.'
> 'A pentagram is drawn with one unbroken line which intersects itself' (p. 205).

The red diamond's five-pointed configuration, formally evoking the shape of pentagram – functions as an occult signifier whose implications move the narrative beyond rational detection and into the domain of black magic and demonology. This is explicitly confirmed in a key conversation between Harry and Nikolai, who links the pentagram to ancient conceptions of evil and demon worship: "'One of the most important symbols in demonology'" and traces its roots to antiquity when "'people thought that evil emanated from the existence of demons'" (p. 194). The symbolic weight of the number five is additionally elaborated in a passage: "'Five is the most important figure in black magic'" (p. 216), marking it not merely as an arbitrary numerical pattern but as a metaphysical code woven into the killer's ritualistic logic.

Notably, the pentagram, in both its geometric form and numerological value, becomes a key cipher for the murderer's worldview, one that aligns violence with a cosmological system of belief rooted in evil, mysticism, and structured malevolence. The pentagram is not only present in symbolic objects but also figuratively embedded in the positioning of one of the victims' bodies. One particular female corpse is arranged with deliberate precision (analysed at length in the preceding section focusing on victims), her limbs aligned to evoke a star-like figure resting on five points. This grotesque mise--en-scène dramatizes the convergence of the physical and symbolic, reinforcing the presence of a ritualistic aesthetic grounded in Gothic fascination with death as both a literal and metaphysical construct. The victim's body, transformed into an occult diagram, echoes the Gothic tradition in which the human form becomes a site of sacrificial meaning, spiritual transgression, and cosmic horror. Significantly, Nesbø's integration of the five-pointed diamond and the pentagram is not merely an aesthetic embellishment, but a structurally embedded Gothic device that aligns murder with occult ritual, infuses the narrative with symbolic density, and radically destabilizes the rational foundations

of detective fiction. By doing so, the novel blurs the boundary between crime and the supernatural, logic and mysticism, offering a hybrid subgenre that probes the darkness not only of the city of Oslo but of the human psyche itself.

In addition to the recurring motif of red diamonds shaped in the form of a pentagram, arguably one of the most potent emblems of the serial killer's ritualistic practice, the novel draws extensively upon folkloric and mythological frameworks to intensify its Gothic and symbolic resonance. These references embed the narrative within a broader cultural history of death, evil, and supernatural belief systems. One such instance is the motif of coins placed upon the eyes of the dead, a gesture rooted in ancient funerary rites meant to secure safe passage to the afterlife. The allusion evokes the classical myth of Charon, the ferryman who transports souls across the river Styx, and by extension emphasizes the spiritual and metaphysical stakes that underlie the novel's criminal events. This is elucidated in a conversation between Harry and Beate:

> 'I'm not quite sure, but did you know that in the past they used to place a coin on the eyes of a corpse before it was buried?'
> 'No.'
> 'It was payment for the ferryman to deliver the soul into the kingdom of the dead. If the soul wasn't delivered, it would never find peace' (Nesbø, 2022, p. 70).

This reference reinforces Gothic preoccupation with death as not merely a biological event but a ritualized passage fraught with spiritual uncertainty. In *The Devil's Star*, death becomes a liminal state, one in which victims are transformed into symbolic vessels within a mythologically coded system. The coin, like the red diamond, is not merely a physical object but a ritual marker and a token of transition, signifying the soul's vulnerability and the thin veil between the material and immaterial worlds.

Furthermore, Nesbø introduces an overtly Faustian dimension to the narrative when Tom assumes the role of a Mephistophelean tempter. In a morally charged exchange, he offers Harry an opportunity to "sell his soul" in exchange for professional advancement and power, an offer that metaphorically echoes the archetypal diabolical pact. Tom, functioning as a charismatic yet sinister figure, invites Harry to betray his ethical principles and align himself with corruption and criminality, thereby internalizing the novel's central theme of moral disintegration. While the deal of murdering Sven: "'Human detritus. You have to get rid of him'" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 351) is framed in the language of career opportunity and economic benefit: "'you thought there were things that money couldn't buy'" (p. 352), its underlying Gothic resonance is unmistakable: it is a pact made not merely in the realm of crime but in the symbolic realm of the soul's integrity and damnation.

Complementing these mythic and diabolical layers are additional folkloric references, particularly the invocation of ancient pagan symbols such as the mare's cross, a protective sigil historically carved into wood or walls to ward off nocturnal spirits. As explained in the narrative, it was: "a pagan symbol [people] used to carve ... over beds or doorways to keep away the mare" (Nesbø, 2022, p. 217) and such symbols gesture towards pre-Christian traditions of spiritual protection and magical thinking, further destabilizing the rational foundations of police investigation. These occult references also serve to heighten the novel's atmosphere of supernatural dread, suggesting

that the crimes committed may be governed by more than forensic logic; they may be following a metaphysical script encoded in ancient symbols and rituals. Indeed, the title symbol itself – the devil's star – becomes a unifying emblem of this convergence between myth, geometry, and calculated violence. It is not merely a decorative or metaphorical allusion, but rather a part of the killer's orchestrated spatial logic, as Harry ultimately deciphers in a key moment of revelation:

> 'Of the five appointed victims only three were randomly chosen. You made the crime scenes look as if they had been determined by a randomly placed devil's star, but in reality you designed the star from two of the points: your own address and the house belonging to Sven Sivertsen's mother. Cunning, but simple geometry' (p. 465).

Here, the supposed randomness of the killings is exposed as a deliberate symbolic geometry, a star that doubles as both an occult motif and a tool of misdirection. The narrative thus conflates mathematical precision with diabolical intent, blurring the lines between rational detection and supernatural design. In this way, the devil's star becomes a palimpsest: a symbol layered with meanings that span from the mythic to the mathematical, the infernal to the empirical.

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Through the strategic deployment of symbolic and mythological references, Nesbø not only amplifies the Gothic texture of *The Devil's Star* but also reconfigures the crime novel as a vehicle for existential inquiry. The narrative transcends conventional procedural logic to become a meditation on evil as systemic, ritualized, and metaphysically encoded, where even the most corporeal and brutal acts are haunted by archaic, archetypal forces. By persistently engaging with motifs of death, the diabolic, and the uncanny, Nesbø demonstrates his mastery in fusing the detective subgenre with the Gothic tradition. The novel's atmosphere is saturated with dread, moral ambiguity, and ontological instability; the supernatural functions not as an explanatory device but as a metaphorical lens through which guilt, obsession, and psychic fragmentation are explored. Like the most enduring Gothic crime narratives, *The Devil's Star* systematically destabilizes notions of rationality and empirical order, revealing a world in which the past returns with spectral force and reason is perpetually shadowed by the irrational. Nesbø's narrative is not merely dark in tone but structurally attuned to Gothic convention, employing blood symbolism, mythological allusion, architectural claustrophobia, and corporeal decay not as gratuitous embellishments but as integral semiotic instruments. These elements serve to evoke horror, ethical disorientation, and the inextinguishable presence of the irrational within the rational world. Ultimately, *The Devil's Star* exemplifies a sophisticated reworking of Gothic convention within the contours of contemporary Scandinavian crime fiction. Nesbø revitalizes Gothic for a postmodern readership, transforming Oslo's modern cityscape into a haunted urban labyrinth and reimagining his Harry as a spectral figure, caught between justice and damnation, reason and madness, the living and the dead. In doing so, Nesbø not only expands the expressive potential of crime fiction but also underscores the subgenre's capacity to engage with deeper metaphysical and psychological terrains.

Conclusions

The affinities between Gothic fiction and Scandinavian crime fiction, as many scholars have observed, are far from incidental. Both literary modes emerged as intertwined cultural responses to the disruptive forces of modernity – industrialization, urbanization, migration, and globalization. These processes unsettled traditional social orders and created landscapes marked by uncertainty, danger, and alienation. Within these liminal spaces, Gothic and Scandinavian crime narratives explore the anxieties of rapid social change and the erosion of certainties. While Gothic fiction traditionally inhabits the realms of the supernatural, the uncanny, and the psychological labyrinth, and Scandinavian crime fiction focuses on rational investigation, justice, and societal order, the *Oslo Trilogy* reveals how these seemingly divergent modes share profound thematic and structural kinships. Jo Nesbø's work blurs the boundaries between them, showing that the Gothic and the crime novel are close literary relatives, united by a fascination with the fragility of truth, the persistence of the past, and the fraught dynamics of family and memory.

In Nesbø's trilogy, the urban landscape is more than a backdrop; it is a neo-Gothic labyrinth where architecture, weather, and social dynamics converge to create an atmosphere of psychological and moral tension. The past haunts the present through intergenerational trauma, unresolved histories, and secrets that refuse to remain buried. Familial conflicts emerge as microcosms of societal fractures, exposing the moral darkness that complicates notions of good and evil. The trilogy thereby becomes a meditation on contemporary uncertainty, where the rational pursuit of justice is continually shadowed by irrational fears, psychological disintegration, and existential doubt. In this way, Nesbø revitalizes both Gothic and crime traditions, demonstrating their enduring power to articulate the complexities of human experience.

In Nesbø's crime novels, setting becomes an active participant in the drama. Oslo is far from a neutral backdrop; it is a mutable, living presence, geographically tangible yet psychologically charged. The cityscape is rendered through a Gothic chiaroscuro, where stark contrasts of light and shadow animate fortress-like buildings, shadowed alleys, and turbulent weather. These elements externalize the characters' inner turmoil, mirroring their fractured psyches while intensifying a pervasive sense of unease. Much like Ackroyd's depiction of Conan Doyle's London, a city shrouded in fog which, as Ackroyd observes, "is the greatest character in nineteenth-century fiction" (2001, p. 434), Nesbø's Oslo is an impenetrable entity inhabited by strange and distorted figures. Similarly, Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852–53) presents London as a vast, labyrinthine space enveloped in fog, a symbol of moral and social opacity memorably introduced in the novel's opening scene:

> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog

> in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds (1986, p. 49).

Hence, Nesbø's Oslo emerges as a labyrinthine urban environment, a place where the familiar teeters on the edge of the uncanny, where every street corner and tunnel harbors secrets, and where the boundary between reality and dread remains perilously thin. This Gothic transformation underscores the novels' preoccupation with uncertainty, alienation, and the shadows cast by history and human nature. It is, therefore, a spatial entity in which individuals are spiritually, and at times literarily, destroyed, much like the inhabitants of Dickensian London. As Jonathan Raban observes, "for the Victorian writer, the industrial fog which hung over London ... was the supreme symbol of the city's capacity to make people disappear inside it" (1988, p. 132).

The protagonists and criminals in Nesbø's trilogy are equally Gothic in conception. His characters' moral and psychological landscapes are as fraught and shadowed as the settings they inhabit. Nesbø avoids simplistic moral binaries; his antagonists are complex figures scarred by trauma, betrayal, and historical injustice. This psychological depth recalls the Gothic concern with guilt, suffering, and madness, exposing the fractures of selfhood and the blurring of reality and perception. The antagonists' haunted psyches mirror the protagonists' vulnerabilities, emphasizing that evil is not an external force but a latent potential within all human beings.

Nesbø further interrogates the cyclical nature of trauma and violence, illustrating how historical wounds – either personal or collective – continue to shape the present. This echoes the Gothic motif of the return of the repressed, where buried horrors resurface to haunt the living. The antagonists thus embody unresolved cultural and familial conflicts, while the trilogy's psychological fragmentation evokes the uncanny and destabilizes notions of identity and sanity. The *Oslo Trilogy* is profoundly preoccupied with the persistence of history, a thematic core that resonates with Gothic fiction's fascination with the past's spectral hold on the present. In *The Redbreast*, the shadows of the Second World War shape both individual destinies and national consciousness. History in Nesbø's work is not static but dynamic; it is a haunting force that intrudes upon the present through violence, betrayal, and guilt. The idea of "unquiet graves" metaphorically captures how historical wounds remain open, shaping contemporary identities and moral choices. This haunting functions both as a psychological burden and as a cultural commentary on Norway's unresolved narratives, particularly surrounding wartime collaboration.

Equally significant is the trilogy's engagement with gender, which aligns with the Gothic tradition's exposure of patriarchal oppression. Nesbø's female characters confront constraints of male dominance – manifested through exploitation, manipulation, and violence – revealing systemic inequalities that extend into the most intimate spheres of life. Yet these women are not merely victims; they embody resilience and agency, resisting forces that seek to diminish them. Their struggles mirror the Gothic fascination with women navigating hostile, confining spaces, whether literal or social. Nesbø's

nuanced portrayal of female endurance and resistance underscores his critique of patriarchal power and situates his work within the Gothic's legacy of confronting social injustice.

Even without overt supernatural elements, the trilogy's tonal register frequently slips into the uncanny, evoking disquiet that resonates with Scandinavian folklore, liminality, and post-secular doubt. These moments open a space where the boundaries between the rational and the irrational, the known and the unknown, become porous. The result is a metaphysical unease that reflects not only fractured psychology but also the cultural anxieties of a secular yet spiritually restless modernity. This post-secular dimension acknowledges that existential and moral questions persist even within rational societies. Nesbø's subtle invocation of mystery and transcendence positions the trilogy at the crossroads of crime fiction's empirical search for truth and Gothic fiction's fascination with the ineffable. It is precisely in these liminal spaces – between light and darkness, certainty and suspicion, reason and faith – that Nesbø's crime fiction attains its most distinctly Gothic vitality. In bringing these strands together, Nesbø's trilogy enacts a synthesis in which the procedural logic of crime fiction intertwines with the emotional depth and symbolic resonance of the Gothic. On one level, it delivers the momentum and clarity of classic detective fiction; on another, it becomes a meditation on the psychological and moral costs of violence. This layered complexity elevates the *Oslo Trilogy* beyond conventional genre fiction, transforming it into a commentary on evil, truth, and the enduring power of myth and fear in the modern world.

Thus, Nesbø demonstrates that the Gothic is far from a relic of the 18th or 19th centuries, and Scandinavian crime fiction is far more than procedural realism or social critique. When these traditions fuse, they amplify one another, producing narratives that are both socially incisive and atmospherically immersive. The *Oslo Trilogy* exemplifies this dynamic interplay, where Gothic fascination with the uncanny, the haunted past, and the fragility of identity deepens the moral and philosophical scope of crime fiction. As Jean Anderson observes, such fiction provides "a suitable arena for exploring and confronting some of the tensions of globalized living in an increasingly multicultural society" (2012, p. 5). Scandinavian crime fiction, like Gothic fiction before it, is a cultural expression shaped by its era's anxieties. As Katrin Jakobsdóttir notes, it "forms a microcosm of broader social reality through which readers can sharpen their understanding of society" (2011, p. 47). Mužděka adds that "Norwegian noir exhibits yet another dimension, though. Its world is the one in which everything is connected and in which individual actions, both criminal and otherwise, have irreparable consequences for the community as a whole" (2022, p. 233). Waade similarly observes that Scandinavian crime fiction is characterized by "a particular double plotline: besides the crime narrative, there is also a political and critical 'plot' dealing with challenging societal conditions" (2020, p. 46).

In depicting the police apparatus and social structures of Oslo, Nesbø, as Darko M. Kovačević writes, "breaks to pieces the popular image of Norway as a perfectly organized Nordic country ... without crimes, without political and media sensations and modern world problems such as drug abuse, unemployment, homelessness and corruption" (2020, p. 56). By employing Gothic motifs – decaying settings, monstrous figures, haunting histories, and moral ambiguity – Nesbø constructs what Yi-fu Tuan calls "landscapes of fear", "shelters built by the mind in which human beings can rest, at least

temporarily, from the siege of inchoate experience and of doubt" (1979, p. 6). As Stougaard-Nielsen notes, "Crime novels are narrative landscapes of fear much like the old legends and tales, 'shelters built by the mind,' to withstand the pressures of violent social upheavals and the anxieties they produce" (2017, p. 169). Through this fusion of Gothic and crime conventions, Nesbø's *Oslo Trilogy* becomes more than a narrative about crime; it evolves into a meditation on fear, justice, and the fragile boundaries of identity. The trilogy stands as a powerful example of how contemporary crime fiction can mirror societal anxieties while offering a space for emotional catharsis and intellectual reflection.

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