



# Application of Personality Theory of Criminal Psychology to Nordic Noir: A Study

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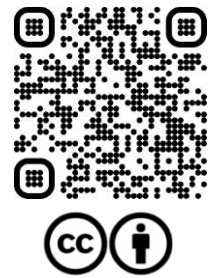
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**Abstract**— *Crime fiction is a genre in literature that is mainly focused on crime, its detection, its solution, the criminal and his motives. Similar to the genre of crime fiction is the sub- genre within it called 'Nordic Noir' which is also known as 'Scandinavian Noir'. It is a term given to the literature coming from the Nordic or Scandinavian countries like Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland etc. It is mainly known for its dark and bleak settings, description of its landscape and strong female characters. There have been various approaches that have tried to understand criminal mind and behaviour. Relating crime fiction and criminal psychology and its various theories will yield new insight as psychology and literature share a very close bond. The Personality Theory argues that there are a number of personality traits which are associated with an act of crime or violent behaviour. Eysenck in his book Crime and Personality published in 1964 established a relationship between criminal behaviour and personality. According to him, personality traits play a key role in criminality. He was of the view that some genetic traits along with certain environmental forces lead to criminal behaviour or conduct. The three super factors about which Eysenck talks about and upon which the PEN model is based are psychoticism (P), extraversion (E) and neuroticism (N). This paper aims at the application of Personality Theory as given by Hans Eysenck to the new emerging sub-genre of Nordic noir. As the genre deals with crime and criminals, therefore it would be highly insightful to study it in the light of criminal psychology.*



**Keywords**— *Crime, Criminal psychology, Nordic noir, Personality theory, Traits*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Crime, its detection, its resolution, the criminal and his motivations are the fundamental subjects of the literary genre known as "crime fiction." It has taken on the shape of the most widely favoured genre. It is well known for its storyline, cast of characters, and suspense in particular. The phrase "crime fiction" serves as a catch-all for a variety of other subgenres, including murder mysteries, police procedurals, suspense thrillers, and detective fiction. The effect that these crimes have on society is what all these crime fiction subgenres have in common. It is a stereotypical plot in which a criminal act has an impact on the entire society and upsets the entire social and legal system.

Similar to the genre of crime fiction is the sub- genre within it called 'Nordic Noir' which is also known as 'Scandinavian Noir' or 'Scandinavian crime fiction'. It is a term given to the literature coming from the Nordic or Scandinavian countries like Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland etc. The inhabitants of Scandinavian nations have long attempted to share their stories. Their older tales were based on prehistoric Icelandic sagas. Scandinavian crime fiction started to develop in the 20th century, and the tales that emerged were grounded in reality and portrayed crime as the outcome of a wounded and broken society. The authors of these books aimed to dispel the myth that Scandinavian countries were exclusively valued for their stunning scenery. They aimed

to highlight the gloom and emptiness that pervaded these civilizations.

Lars Kepler is a pseudonym used by husband-and-wife team of Alexander and Alexandra Coelho Ahndroil. They both chose the name Lars Kepler as attribute to writer Stieg Larsson and scientist Johannes Kepler. They published their first novel *The Hypnotist* under the name Lars Kepler in 2009. The novel *Stalker* opens when a link to a YouTube video featuring a young woman getting dressed in her house while being unaware that she is being watched is provided to the Swedish National Crime Unit in Stockholm. Detective Margot Silverman immediately makes the connection between this and the subsequent murder of a woman, who is discovered dead in her home with her face hacked to pieces. As a result, she seeks the help of Detective Joonas Linna, an incredibly skilled detective, in an effort to stop further killings. The unlucky Susanna, who is alone in her home and excitedly anticipating the return of her husband Björn from an overseas vacation, becomes the unavoidable sacrifice on the altar of such a plot as the second victim in those subsequent crimes. She has been berating herself for having an overactive imagination after hearing a faint scratching sound against one of the dining room windows. The husband returns home and discovers the body, which has been similarly cut and stabbed, with the face completely disfigured and mutilated beyond recognition. Erik Maria Bark, a well-known hypnotist who has aided Linna in the past, is also brought in by Linna. The group strives to track down the creator of the videos despite the fact that they are powerless to save a life from being lost with each new video. Later, it is discovered that the killer is none other than Nelly, the psychologist helping with the cases. She grows an unhealthy obsession with her coworker Erik, and in an effort to obtain his undivided attention, she ruthlessly murders anybody who poses a threat.

In an effort to comprehend the criminal mind and behaviour, numerous approaches have been used. Understanding one or more aspects of crime and criminal activity is a benefit of each strategy. Given how closely psychology and literature are related, relating crime fiction to criminal psychology and its numerous theories will provide fresh perspectives. Criminology is the in-depth study of crime and criminals, according to its definition. It examines crime from a non-legal perspective, putting more of an emphasis on crime's causes, preventions, and other factors. An interdisciplinary field, criminology draws from a wide range of academic fields, including psychology, philosophy, social sciences, biology, and psychiatry. The concept of 'criminology' emerged in 1885 when an Italian

law professor named Raffaele Garofalo introduced it for the very first time.

There are several important theories of crime that offer various perspectives on the psychology of crime in the field of psychological theories of crime. The Personality Theory contends that a variety of personality qualities are connected to criminal activity or violent behaviour. Egoistic, self-centered, narcissistic, jealous, uncaring, etc. people frequently behave more aggressively and violently than other people. People with severe personality problems, such as psychoses or antisocial behaviour, are viewed as being more violent.

One of the most popular theories of personality that studied criminal behaviour was given by German- British psychologist Hans Jurgen Eysenck. Eysenck in his book *Crime and Personality* published in 1964 established a relationship between criminal behaviour and personality. According to him, personality traits play a key role in criminality. He was of the view that some genetic traits along with certain environmental forces lead to criminal behaviour or conduct. His studies show that delinquent behaviour can be demonstrated or predicted if the personality traits are analysed from an early age. Eysenck defines personality as:

*Personality is "the sum total of the actual or potential behavior patterns of the organism, as determined by heredity and environment. It originates and develops through the functional interactions of the four main sectors into which these behavior patterns are organized - The cognitive sectors (Intelligence), conative sector (character) affective sector (temperament) and the somatic sector (constitution). (Eysenck 43)*

He gave three dimensions of personality which are famously known as the PEN model which propagates a hierarchical classification of personality levels. At the bottom of this model are common behaviours such a talking with a friend on an occasion. At the second level in the hierarchy are the recurring behaviours of an individual and at the third levels are the traits of sociability which are comprised of correlated sets of habits. At top in this hierarchy are the super factors or dimensions of personality such as extraversion which is an inter-related set of traits and factors. The three super factors about which Eysenck talks about and upon which the PEN model is based are psychoticism (P), extraversion (E) and neuroticism (N). Eysenck says, "In the PEN model, these dimensions or super factors are based on "constitutional, genetic, or inborn factors, which are to be discovered in the physiological, neurological, and biochemical structure of the individual" (43).

Neuroticism is a dimension of personality which is characterised by low emotional and self-control, depression, nervous breakdowns, and irrationality. Eysenck in his personality theory also said that when traits of neuroticism are combined with extraversion then they reveal an ample amount of information about criminal conduct. Eysenck was of the view that these three dimensions of personality can overlap with one another but there will only be a persistent trait of one dimension only. An individual can be high on neuroticism, mild on extraversion and low on psychoticism. Eysenck defines a person with extraversion as:

*Sociable, likes parties, has many friends, needs to have people to talk to and does not like reading or studying by himself. He craves excitement, takes chances, acts on the spur of the moment and is generally an impulsive individual. He is fond of practical jokes, always has a ready answer, and generally likes change; he is carefree, easy going, optimistic, and likes to 'laugh and be merry'. He prefers to keep moving and doing things, tends to be aggressive and loses his temper quickly; his feelings are not kept under tight control and he is not always a reliable person. (Eysenck50-51)*

An individual who suffers from any form of neuroticism can also be extroverted. Eysenck was of the view that the traits of extraversion or introversion can be observed in connection to other dimensions of personality as well. This analysis can also be used to study Nelly's personality. She appears to be happy and upbeat, works as a psychologist, has a spouse and a large circle of friends, but she also brutally murders women because she was unable to watch them speaking to the man, she was interested in. Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) define a neurotic person as:

*an anxious, worrying individual, moody and frequently depressed. He is likely to sleep badly, and to suffer from various psychosomatic disorders. He is overly emotional, reacting too strongly to all sorts of stimuli, and finds it difficult to get back on an even keel after each emotionally arousing experience. His strong emotional reactions interfere with his proper adjustment, making him react in irrational, sometimes rigid ways. If the highly neurotic individual has to be described in one word, one might say he was a worrier; his main characteristic is a constant preoccupation with things that might go wrong, and a strong emotional reaction to these thoughts.*

Nelly is a psychologist employed with Sweden's National Crime Division. She works with traumatised witnesses and is regarded as being highly competent at her job. She is a psychologist; therefore, she is aware of human psychology and is skilled at deceiving people. She was so lost in her

fantasy world where she and Erik were married that she cruelly murdered four ladies by entirely removing their faces with a knife. Because she is so filled with rage and envy, whenever she kills someone, she first focuses on destroying their face. As Margot sees the body of Susanna Kern, "Her face is nothing but a dark-red, deformed pulp. He's hacked, cut, stabbed, and carved away at it. She goes closer and sees a single eye staring crookedly up at the ceiling" (53).

The circumstances in which the women's bodies were discovered indicate that the crime was either perpetrated out of hatred or jealousy. The killings were carried out with such violence that they alluded to the victim's pre-murder situation. As Adam also says when examining the body of the victims, "The degree of violence is aggressive, fueled by hatred...probably jealousy" (129). After every murder Nelly places the body of the victim in a strange manner. After the first murder she tucked the body in the bed, second was found sitting on a chair and the third was found sitting on the floor. According to Eysenck a neurotic individual is aggressive, irrational, has a strong aversion for strange stimulus and likes to make fool of other people. Nelly arranged the female figures in a way that gave the impression that either they were pleading for mercy or were defenseless. She feels a sense of accomplishment when she sees their injured face and body since it will prevent them from looking at Erik in the future. As it is evident from the description of crime scene of Sandra Lundgren:

*On the linoleum floor sits a woman with an utterly ravaged face, her chest split open. Her glasses have fallen off into the pool of blood beside the table. [...] She has evidently been placed in that position after death, but it doesn't look particularly sexual. Margot stands there for a few moments, looking at the devastating scene, at the display of brutality, the blood sprayed out by a stabbing knife, the arterial spatter on the smooth door of a kitchen cupboard, and the smeared blood left by the victim's struggle and the spasmodic jerking of her body. [...] The level of brutality is inconceivable, and appears to extend far beyond the moment of death. Once the fury of the attack subsided, the body was arranged slightly before being left at the scene of the murder (Kepler 210).*

Since she is unable to witness the person, she likes with someone else, Nelly struggles with low emotional stability and self-control. She feels a sense of hostility that manifests itself in a very severe way at the mere sight of Erik with someone else. As Gudjonsson and Eysenck say, "E and P are linked to criminality through low cortical arousal, poor condition ability, and the failure to develop the conditioned response conscience. N, in contrast, is associated with emotional instability and strong autonomic

arousal, which can lead to impulsive and antisocial behavior by virtue of its drive propensities” (142). Nelly constantly worries that Erik is drawn to other women since they are all attractive. Because she isn't as attractive as other women, she believes Erik will never give her a second glance. The faces of the women she kills are altered in order to make them feel less beautiful, helping her to overcome her inferiority complex. To allay her inferiority complex, she takes away something or another from each victim. She steals Susanna's rings, Maria's earrings, and Sandra's artificial fingernails.

In his attempt to define neuroticism in a more specific way, Eysenck says that a neurotic person tends to suffer more from nervous breakdowns or neurosis. Eysenck (1978) says, “Neurosis is a term we often use for behaviour which is associated with strong emotion, which is maladaptive, and which the person giving rise to it realizes is nonsensical, absurd or irrelevant, but which he is powerless to change” (16). Nelly's ardour and fascination for Erik have a strong grip on her. She had everything planned out from the start, and she was the one who had evidence against Erik hidden at the crime site so that he would be forced to confide in her at some point. Nelly's condition can also be studied under the light of personality being influenced by mental illness. She has a major mental and personality condition in addition to having neuroticism as her primary personality trait. She has obsessive fixation problem, which causes her to be fixated on one person and want them to think the world of her. As Jonna Linna explains:

*Nelly has stalked Erik for years, mapping the lives of any women he showed an interest in, trying to understand what they had she couldn't offer. She saw them flashing their jewellery, their painted lips, beautiful nails, and wanted to take that away from them, punish them, and the emphasize their bare ears or ugly hands.*

*But when that wasn't enough, she tried to take the whole world away from him. Like Artemis with her hounds, she organised a hunt, Joona thinks. She's a skilful huntress; she isolates her prey, wounds it, and harries it towards capture until there's only one way out. Her intention was for Erik to realise that everything pointed at him, and go on the run before police caught him. Everyone would shun him, until in the end he turned to the only person who was still prepared to let him in. (Kepler 503).*

This is how Nelly has always been. She has a propensity to seize control over a person once she becomes fixated on them. She wants the individual to exclusively look at her, so when she senses that they are drawn to someone else, she takes a different route. Eysenck in his theory mentions that some mental disorders start manifesting themselves

since the childhood. If they are observed and analysed correctly then delinquent behaviour can be predicted for the future. But if such traits are left unobserved and unsupervised then they start to manifest themselves in an extreme manner. Nelly desired complete control over her father since she had an unhealthy affinity to him. When she saw her father was ignoring her approaches, she killed her own mother. When she realised that Rocky was not showing any signs of being serious about Rebecca Hanson, she did the same with Rebecca. To keep both men under her control, she locked them both in a cage and fed them various narcotics. When extraversion and neuroticism are combined, behaviour is often better understood. Even if someone has psychotic or neurotic tendencies, they can nevertheless be outgoing. As Erik says, “Nelly was funny and easy going, talkative, in a charming, self-deprecating way. But Nelly has an insatiable emotional hunger, she's desperately needy and can switch from devoted love to an impassioned hatred in an instant” (525).

Nelly has a severe mental illness along with neuroticism. She lacks emotional stability and self-control and is irritable, hostile, unreasonable, concerned, and cranky. She believes that after falling in love, a person should depend entirely on her. She desired ownership and control over Erik. She feels as like she owns Erik when she drags him into her home to be caged. Jackie, the current lady Erik was seeing, is the one thing that irritates her. She believes that as long as Jackie is alive, she will never be able to own Erik. Erik attempts to comfort her by telling her that he wants to be with her when she tells him that Jackie must be put aside. As evident from their conversation:

*'It isn't your fault', she mutters, and scratches her neck with the knife-blade. 'I don't blame you.'*

*She takes a few steps back and the shadows close around her pale face, painting big, black holes where her eyes should be, and drawing, dark shapes across her neck.*

*'But you'll see what mortality looks like, Erik', she says, and turns towards the stairs. 'Don't do anything silly now.' Erik calls to her.*

*'I really can't accept that you're going to carry on thinking about her,' Nelly says in a steady voice. 'If you are going to think about her, then it should be a face without eyes and lips.' (Kepler 531)*

Nelly clearly indicates the traits of being a neurotic individual in terms of Eysenck's theory. Despite being highly competent at her job she lets her emotions and envy get the best of her and mercilessly murders four women in the process.

## II. CONCLUSION

By connecting a psychological theory to a literary work, a new framework was provided in the analysis of the works that were chosen for the study. It was understood through the study that there are a number of factors which can contribute to the formation of criminal behaviour. There are psychological factors that deal with mental illness and problems, sociological factors which deal with the environment by which a person is surrounded with and economic factors which determine the standard of living of a human being. Eysenck's Theory of Personality takes all these factors into account that shape the personality of an individual. When Personality Theory of criminal psychology is applied to the study of literature it gives a scientific as well as psychological methodology and dimension to the analysis. A writer's inclination to introduce murder and then a murderer reflects a lot about the writer as well. Also, it removes a number of misconceptions about criminal behaviour such as the ones which put forward the view that some people are born criminal because of their genetics. The huge misconception is clarified when criminal conduct is studied and analysed through the lens of a psychological theory. Blending of sociological and psychological perspectives brings to light the fact that society plays a key role in the development of an individual's personality.

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