



## **Bakalářská práce**

# **Nordic noir: Phenomenon of Lars Kepler and character of the detective in novels *Stalker* and *Hypnotist***

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## Zadání bakalářské práce

# Nordic noir: Phenomenon of Lars Kepler and character of the detective in novels Stalker and Hypnotist

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### Zásady pro vypracování:

Práce se zabývá změnami v koncepci role detektiva v současném detektivním románu. Teoretická část nejprve předkládá přehled vývoje postavy v detektivním románu. Následně poskytuje definici a hodnocení "nordic noir" (tzv. severské detektivky), a zajímá se o příčiny popularity právě tohoto specifického sub-žánru. Pozornost je věnována také fenoménu Larse Keplera, autorské dvojice, která se v současné době těší velké popularitě. Praktická část se zabývá vývojem postavy Erika Barka, který vystupuje v knihách Larse Keplera: Stalker a Hypnotist. Tato část sleduje, jak se jeho postava skrže oba romány mění a utváří. Také obsahuje odůvodnění, proč je tak důležité studovat vývoj zrovna této postavy, jelikož Erik Bark není běžným detektivem, ale je odborníkem na léčbu traumat u obětí. Z hlediska celkového významu práce budou vyzdvihnuty důvody, proč je důležité a zajímavé studovat a zabývat se tímto žánrem "nordic noir", či celkově žánrem detektivním.

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## **Anotace**

V této bakalářské práci se zaměřím na analýzu a porovnání dvou detektivních románů napsané autorskou dvojicí, Larse Keplera. Zmiňované romány jsou *Stalker* (2009) a *Hypnotist* (2014), které jsou propojeny postavou Erika Maria Barka, který se podílí na vyšetřování v obou knihách. Práce se také zaměřuje na obecnou definici moderního detektivního románu, žánru Nordic noir, odůvodnění jeho popularity a významu role detektiva v detektivních románech. Práce se v druhé části zabývá analýzou románů a vývojem postavou Erika Maria Barka v průběhu obou knih. V druhé části se také nachází porovnání vývoje detektivní postavy v průběhu obou ze zmiňovaných románů.

## **Klíčová slova**

Detektivní román, žánr, zločiny, beletrie, detektiv, role, *Stalker*, *Hypnotist*, Lars Kepler, hypnotizér, policie, román

## **Annotation**

This Bachelor Thesis focuses on the analysis and comparison of two individual detective novels written by the author's duo of Lars Kepler. The novels are *Stalker* (2009) and *Hypnotist* (2014) which are connected through the character of Erika Maria Bark who participates in the investigation in both novels. This thesis is further connected with the general definition of contemporary detective fiction, the genre Nordic noir, the justification of the genre's popularity and the role of the detective in detective novels. The second part focuses mainly on the analysis of the character's development throughout the two individual detective novels. There is also a comparison of his development between the two books.

## **Keywords**

Detective novel, genre, crime, fiction, detective, character, Stalker, Hypnotist, Lars Kepler, hypnotist, police, novel

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## Introduction

In the present day, readers are surrounded by many forms of crime fiction and its subgenres. There are a number of options and forms of adaptations of this genre where we can find crime/detective fiction or at least its elements such as a similar plot, characters, or atmosphere. There are TV shows, movies, documentaries, podcasts, and a lot more that are related to detective fiction. The detective genre is still relevant and popular among readers, and people still show interest in it despite the fact that it is over a hundred years old. The adaptations, stories or TV shows that portray the subject of detective fiction, do not have to be entirely fiction. There are document series about real-life situations and killers. For example, on Netflix, we can find a great deal of documentary series, for instance: *Making a Murderer*, *The Night Stalker*, *Dhamer Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story*, and many more.

Throughout the thesis, I answer the question of why the crime fiction genre and detective novels are so popular and what attributes contributed to their popularity above the population of readers to answering this question I use many different resources and to verify the question I do that throughout the analysis of the Kepler's novels and the character in practical part. This thesis seeks to provide insight into the genre of crime fiction, one of its subgenres in particular, that is Nordic noir. The aim is to demonstrate why this genre is still relevant and popular even though it has existed for more than a hundred years. The aim is to discuss the genre's popularity and find the aspects that contribute to it. These aspects are found through all the resources used in this thesis. The elements that contribute to the genre's ongoing popularity are confirmed and analysed in the practical part where they are applied to the two novels *Stalker* (2009) and *Hypnotist* (2014). And finally, the elements are also verified and applied to the role of the detective for the purpose of finding out if the detective has a significant role that contributes to the genre's success.

This bachelor's thesis needs to be divided into specific chapters (that will be mentioned and further presented in the next paragraph). These chapters follow one another chronologically and systematically from the most general to the most specific.

The bachelor thesis is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. In the theoretical part, several themes related to the topic of detective fiction are discussed. The contemporary detective novel is presented first as a result of it being the most essential topic of all the topics in this thesis. This chapter functions as an introduction to the whole thesis aim. Modern



detective novel needs to be discussed because later in this thesis, specifically in the practical part for the description and analysis of two books from this genre. As mentioned earlier it is the one topic that unfolds all the other ones. Stated before, this section is the most general one and helps with confirmation of the whole thesis aim and also the reader's perception of the single chapters following this prefatory one. Another just as important topic is the role of a detective in crime fiction. I present this topic to the reader because there are several changes in the character of detective characters in novels through the years but also it depends on the genre, in which the stories are written. This fact is important because the quality of character description or development affects the plot and the whole novel in general.

Furthermore, follows a chapter about Nordic noir, which introduces the genre and discusses the reasons for its ongoing popularity.

This genre's popularity is an essential aspect to consider to understand why the genre is still perceived as relevant. Besides that, the reasons why this specific sub-genre is different and why it is essential to acknowledge such a fact are outlined. After a brief introduction to Nordic noir, its origin is described.

Afterwards comes a detailed discussion of its sub-genres which are the subject of this thesis: the police procedural and the noir police procedural. These genres are discussed in two individual chapters dedicated to them. Through these chapters, the overview of the history and also the development of these two specific topics is outlined.

The remainder of the theoretical part is devoted to the discussion of the crime-writing phenomenon Lars Kepler, the author duo behind the two novels that are analysed in the practical part. Along with the essential introductory information about the authors, their full bibliography is listed. More importantly, however, Kepler's writing style and their specific process behind creating a detective novel are discussed in detail to provide context for the close reading of the two novels that follow in the practical part.

The practical part offers a close reading of Kepler's two novels, *Hypnotist* (2009) and *Stalker* (2014). Besides the genre, the books have in common the character of Erik Maria Bark. He is a hypnotist, a specialist in the treatment of traumas, and is asked to help the police to resolve the committed crimes. His behaviour, personal and work life, and an overall study of Erik's whole personality are questioned in order to verify those changes and elements and if they somehow contribute to the genre's popularity and success among the population of readers.

## Theoretical part

### 1. Contemporary detective novel

The topic of modern crime fiction needs to be mentioned first because everything unfolds from this chapter. The whole thesis revolves around the subject of a detective fiction novel and its significance. Every following topic has its roots in this first one. The whole thesis should be built onto this chapter.

The modern detective novel chapter connects every section and subsection and it does the same with the theoretical and practical parts. The reason behind studying contemporary detective fiction is based on the choice of novels that are analysed in the practical part, *Hypnotist* (2014) and *Stalker* (2009).

“The detective novel is kind of a paradox. Even though it discusses/questions evil and vicious acts/behaviour such as murders in the worst form, the detective story is considered as entertainment and a form of anxiety relief or escape from everyday life problems (James, 1985, 640)”.

“Detective fiction, particularly of the classical formula, seems to be unique among narrative genres in that it thematizes narrativity itself as a problem, a procedure, and an achievement. In fact, its very constitution as a genre is based on the complicated employment of certain narrative strategies: the point of a classical detective novel typically consists in reconstructing a hidden or lost story (that is, the crime); and the process of reconstruction (that is, the detection) (Hühn, 1987, 451).” Most of the time the detective novel has two parallel stories at once that are intertwined. The first is the crime, which is more on the action side. The story following the crime takes place in the past and it is hidden from the present. That means the truth about who committed the crime stays concealed in the past and the investigators will figure it out later in the present. The investigation, “which consists of knowledge (Hühn, 1987, 452),” is the opposite of the crime story. It unfolds in the present and it is trying to uncover and solve the story (the crime) from the past (Hühn, 1987, 452).

Most of the detective novels are based on the story where a community of a specific city or a village is for now in a stable order. Early after, an act of violence happens, most commonly a murder, and the police are helpless with providing answers and solutions. At this point the community state of order, norms and rules has been disturbed and proven powerless. “In

other words, the narrative incapability on the part of society's official agents, their inability to discover and tell the story of the crime, thus threatens the validity of the established order (Hühn, 1987, 452).” At this part of the novel comes the detective and takes the case into his own hands, then provides solutions, answers throughout a detailed and thorough investigation process (Hühn, 1987, 452).

As the most critical part of a detective novel is considered to be the middle phase of the plot. This is the part of the book where the murder or another kind of crime already happened and the detective is searching for clues and signs. This is the process of searching, rearranging the situations and evidentiary material, speculating on what might have happened, and roleplaying the situations that might have occurred. The reader follows the detective breaking through the automatized process of investigating and finding another better unconventional way of hunting for evidence (Hühn, 1987).

The novel is also a process of delusion and being deceived. This process is shown through the author's writing, the characters, and also through the reader himself. The author writes characters that are very hard to figure out, he makes the reader think that the innocent are guilty and the other way around so in the end he is confused and has no clue at all who the culprit is. And just like that, the reader is deceived. This process also applies to the book characters, because the killer in the books is also deceiving the investigators and the whole police department. The better the authors write the more outstanding detective novels (James, 1985).

## **1.2 Popularity of detective fiction**

In the matter of this thesis, it is essential also to discuss the popularity of crime fiction and where it comes from, and what it is based on. Because there is the question of why it is so popular among the population if it is almost the same story, plot, and type of crime every time but re-written and set in different regions and locations. Why do the readers obsess over it as they do?

This section deals with the matter of crime fiction's popularity and the reasons behind it. I concisely provide some of the reasons and the answer to the question of why it is so popular.

“In literature, the most widely read genre for more than a century has been the mystery or detective novel (Goldman, 2011, 261).”

As we can foresee, many aspects contribute to the genre’s popularity. The continuous popularity among our society of crime fiction is based on many factors such as its awareness and recognition of social issues, taboo topics, and crimes. What is also appealing to the reader is its stylistic and thematic complexity. Also, crime fiction functions as a mirror to our modern society by showing and acknowledging these significant issues that we come face to face daily. The range of the essential topics is wide, it goes from environmental crime, and political and social abuse of power to murders and sexual assault. As was mentioned earlier the spectrum of topics that are being discussed is wide and consists of almost every hard and controversial topic that we can think of (Beyer, 2021). “In so doing, they show how crime fiction confronts the brutal realities of contemporary social and political cultures as well as the hidden and unspoken aspects of human psychology (Beyer, 2021, 6).” The choice of these brutal topics is determined by the region and overall by the country and the culture that the story is set in because every region has its own set of problems and issues (Conelly, 2019).

Another factor that affects the popularity of detective stories is the fact that people repeatedly come back to them. It is believed that they come back to these novels because of their ending. The novels provide the reader with a satisfying ending. A satisfactory ending means that at the end of the novel, everything is “wrapped up tidily (Conelly, 2019, 9).” The ending is full of satisfaction because the author provides the reader with answers, and conclusions, the culprit is finally caught and found guilty, and in general, justice is back and everybody is safe. “The subject matter of crime fiction does not easily facilitate fairy-tale finishes, yet, people continue to read the genre because, generally, the concluding chapter will show that justice, of some form, will be done (Conelly, 2019, 9).” Detective stories also give a sense of affirmation to the readers' preset ideas and opinions on what is morally and ethically acceptable and what is not.

The next element that is very common is the prominent main character, the detective. A well-written main protagonist is very needed in every good novel, story, movie, and many more pieces and it does not matter on the genre that these characters are written into. A good detective character should make us feel the emotions with him and let us experience the action of the novel through him, if he does not have certain qualities and is poorly written the emotional effect that it should have on us will never be there. “A connection between reader and character is essential for the story to be able to make some kind of emotional impact

(Conelly, 2019, 9).” This connection is something that these detective novels have based on their popularity. Take for example the character Sherlock Holmes, everybody remembers him and knows him, because the author made him so memorable. Also through the first-person narration readers can learn a lot about the main protagonist's life, relationships, political stands, and many more of his personality traits and that makes the connection even deeper (Conelly, 2019).

### **1.3 The role of a detective**

This chapter discusses the deeper meaning of the detective's role in detective novels. Why? The character of the detective in crime fiction is significant to my thesis as you may figure out from its name. Later on in the practical part, there is an elaboration on the topic of a specific detective or someone who is closely related to the investigative process of the novels.

The main and the most crucial character in detective fiction is the detective, without him, there would be no detective novel at all. The detective has the role of the building stone that is the base for a crime novel. He is the one, besides the author, who is helping us to reveal the story and the plot. Through him, we can see the crucial clues, evidence, situations, and everything that is happening around him. Through this process, there is trust between the reader and the persona that will help the reader further in the books to understand even more deeply what is going through the detective's mind (Conelly, 2019). Another significant aspect of a good detective is the way they treat others throughout the novel. As was mentioned in the first lines of this chapter the reader can experience things through the character and it includes communication, how he/she speaks (if they have an accent, the tone of voice, in what way they communicate), actions (how they behave in specific situations, how they face hard challenges, how they act towards other people), with whom he/she has good/bad relationships and so on. Through all these aspects of their character and behaviour the reader can assume a lot about the plot and also about the side characters as well (Conelly, 2019).

And why is the detective so important? Let's take a look at a few examples: the Sherlock Holmes stories (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) and the Hercule Poirot stories (Agatha Christie). What do these novels have in common? Both of these stories present the character of the detective before the whole plot and the crime itself. They make you hook on to the detective's personality and make you sympathise with them, and that makes them remarkable. The good quality

of the detective persona will make the reader look back and remember him weeks after reading the novel (Conelly, 2019).

Now we move on to the question: who even is the detective? The author's choice of the detective's character is vital for further writing of the novel. Every little detail in his personality and also gender can affect how the story will evolve. Later the author was limited to one specific group that he could choose from. That group being middle-aged men, but nowadays there are many novels with female detective characters.

### **1.3.1 The male detective**

The authors choose between three main characteristics that will, later on, define the detective's character. That being if the main protagonist will be a private eye, a detective amateur, or a professional. Despite the first three classifications, the lead character is constantly described as a middle-aged man who loves his alone time. He also has a lack of respect for the higher power and his superiors.

Another of his features is that the main protagonist does not follow the classical pattern of investigation, that is the process of just blindly following the clues and looking for evidence, and then putting it all together. His framework goes beyond the classical process of detection, he asks insightful questions, by insightful it is meant that the questions being asked go further than the crime. The effort that he puts into the investigation often gets him into trouble with his superiors who do not authorise these methods. They want the crime to be solved as quickly as possible, and they especially do not want the crime to be impacted by any social or political means (Macelod, 2014).

### **1.3.2 The female detective**

“Female detectives or investigators occupy a lawful and visible position within the hegemonic patriarchal system (Binder, 2021, 133).” Most of the time the female detective is hired by a publishing company or police department, but these are mainly still male-dominant establishments.

“They have insider knowledge of how civilian women who report rape, sexual assault and domestic violence are treated by police. They fear a backflash, particularly by male

colleagues, who make up the vast majority of their co-workers. There are few women in leadership positions to whom they can report abuse. The grievance process itself is flawed: the chance of disciplinary action against an abuser is low, the process lacks confidentiality and is very lengthy. Finally, as some women have discovered by reporting sexual harassment, standing up for your rights can result in other forms of harassment and negative work environment (Binder, 2021, 143).”

The ongoing and systematic male dominance in these institutions makes the women develop “protective strategies of acceptance and denial (Binder, 2021, 133).” Most of the time the policewoman's coworkers are carefree, they have almost no responsibility for their wrong actions (Binder, 2021).

For example in the police procedural, the main protagonist has almost the same characteristics every time and it does not matter if he/she is a male or a female, the characteristics stay the same. But still, this genre is mainly dominated by male characters and detectives (Macelod, 2014).

These features and truths mentioned above are also applicable to Scandinavian crime stories. The female detective's story faces almost the same challenges as the other policewoman's stories mentioned before. The female lead character deals with the ingrained male-dominant hierarchy at her workplace. Their personal life is completely different from her professional life; these two lives are incompatible. In many cases the male protagonist is as important as the plot of the novel itself because the characters face the brutality of the crime and on the other hand they face the brutality of their own lives and their issues, for example, food problems, relationship issues...(Schmidt, 2015) Novels with these important female protagonists can be considered and read as “a critical gender-political toll since it focuses on the societal inequalities based on ingrown cultural perceptions of femininity and masculinity (Schmidt, 2015, 427).”

“The women in contemporary crime fiction typically face demands that bring out their inherent guilt feelings. They do not feel competent and capable, and they feel that they never perform satisfactorily or live up to the expectations of their surroundings (Schmidt, 2015, 432).” These feelings of being “not good enough” of the female character come from our society’s structures that are portrayed through the imbalance of power between men and women (Schmidt, 2015).

## **2. Nordic Noir**

It is a subgenre of crime fiction that comes from the Nordic countries: Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland. It is also commonly thought about as a specific genre of TV series, literature, and film production, and it even expanded to design, music, and eventually to fashion style (Grydehøj, 2020).

This genre is distinguished by several specific features that are fundamental for it. Every feature is as crucial as the others because they work best together. Starting with the vicious, wicked, and barbaric crimes that are being solved throughout the books. They frequently take place in quiet or safe communities. Another important attribute of Nordic Noir is the bleak setting, it is the location where the story takes place. Usually, it means a distant fjord or city street (Life in Norway, 2023). Then there is the tortured or abused protagonist that mostly represents a detective with a dark, puzzling, and mystifying past. The protagonist – the investigator – also has difficulties with maintaining any type of relationship in his/her personal life (Grydehøj, 2020). And finally, the last element is the novel's plot. A strong plot is full of complicated events and some twists (Life in Norway, 2023).

### **2.1 The Origin of Nordic Noir**

The origin of this genre is listed between the years 1965 and 1975. Two authors working as a duo are responsible for the birth of Nordic Noir. Its first appearance was in a novel series containing 10 books in total. These novels cannot function separately, but they work as one long story of events. These series are written by the author duo (Grydehøj, 2020).

Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, Swedish journalists are behind the birth of innovative detective fiction. Their series emphasize stories spinning around crime cases that are being solved by the character of Martin Beck and his coworkers at the Central Bureau of Investigation in Stockholm. These novels were translated into many languages and also into English as well. The couple used the detective story as a medium to project social criticism through it, and that set them apart from any other novels in this genre. For instance, they portrayed and criticise problems such as the use of propaganda, abusing higher power in our society, pedophilia, suicide, drug smuggling, and many more (Grydehøj, 2020). Sjöwall and Wahlöö did this by focusing on normal people's lives and their criminal cases. Showing the reader just how



the world functions. Besides the entertaining part of the books they also frequently pose as a mirror to our real world (CrimeReads, 2023).

All of this information does not mean that crime fiction as we know it did not exist in the Nordic region before the novels by Sjöwall and Wahlöö were published. Particularly Sweden had successful detective fiction production in the 1940s and 1950s. The couple's versions just opened the door for the modern guide to the Scandinavian crime novel. Their sort of novels change form in a new genre called police procedural (Grydehøj, 2020).

## **2.2 The police procedural**

The genre of police procedural appeared after World War II. It exhibits the easiness of the investigation and also the legal crime-solving techniques and methods of the police. The main characteristic of the police procedural is utopia. Utopia here means the idealistic partnership between the public/society and the police (Macleod, 2014).

Crime fiction in general may seem like it has its aim of informing us about security and safety. Its sociopolitical basis is easy. The current order and peace have been disrupted by a certain crime that is exceptionally serious. In general, these criminal acts are often murders or series of them. Murders like this are solved by a police detective, private investigator, or last but not least by amateur or non-professional police detective. Everything in the end comes to normal and the precedent order is restored. This ideal and traditional detective genre conflicts with the new neo-noir (Macleod, 2014). These stories are set in metropolitan settings to help with the aspect of making it more realistic for the reader (Scaggs 2005, 88).

The police procedural faced a lot of criticism. This specific genre is reckoned as concentric on the male gaze. This critique is shown through many aspects of crime fiction. The most evident one is the protagonist. The masculine concentration is portrayed in the protagonist of films, novels, or TV shows. The male one is depicted as the one who dedicated his life to his career. On the contrary, the female lead character is generally pictured as someone highly sexual. Also, women in police procedural fiction are commonly involved in investigating

sexual crimes more than men (Feasey, 2008). If we take a look at the female victims, for example of sexual assault, they are portrayed as “bad girls” and frequently as liars. The reason behind the two names liars and “bad girls” is simple, because the police procedural fiction constantly shows them as people who make up those rape or assault allegations (Merken, James 2020). Another aspect being criticised is the distortion of reality, especially the crime itself. Subjects like terrorism and manslaughter are portrayed in a manner that makes them look like something commonplace. People then feel like these types of criminal actions are more frequent and ordinary than those revolving around substance abuse, smuggling, or domestic violence. Also by highlighting terrorism as much as police procedurals do, it may lead to ethnic profiling (Tasker, 2012)

### **2.2.3 The noir police procedural**

This new subgenre of detective fiction emphasises the sociopolitical character in which the stories take place, instead of the crime itself. These types of novels are intentionally disturbing and provide the reader with almost no hope at all and no reassurance or comfort. The reader is brought into a tragic, dishonourable suburban world, which is remotely different from their reality. A reality where the motives behind the crimes are crucial and their social environment is not taken into mind like the main reason that leads to the crime being committed. Through those scenarios, the books manifest a social critique of the persistent societal order. As stated above the police procedural also spins around personas that are on the edge of the community and the ones that society turned away from (Macleod, 2014).

The main character is without exception a middle-aged male or female outsider who has no real sense of authority towards the higher power that’s in command. These protagonists frequently do not solve crimes normally and utopically like the ones in the original police procedural. The utopic method of crime solving is based also on the utopian idea of a perfect relationship between the policeman and the society and ordinary citizens. They tend to put aside the hunt for clues and hints and focus on placing the violent crimes in a wider perspective. It implies going beyond the crime and asking questions that are way more extensive. Usually, their effort goes to the point where their superiors are irritated with their attitude and work. The annoyance comes from the fact that their superiors want to solve the crime with minimal effort or minimal social or else political impact. Like it is done in the original police procedural (Macleod, 2014).

“These detective stories often take place outside the usual power centres – for example, Burke’s David Robichaex novels take place in New Iberia, Louisiana and New Orleans; Rankin’s in Edinburgh; Hurley’s in Portsmouth, in the south of England; Abasolo’s in Bilbao; Izzo’s in Marseilles; Meyer’s in Cape Town – reminding us that the conditions favouring the development of crime are not restricted to the metropolis. They emphasize the fact that the social and political transformations brought about by the end of the Cold War and globalization affect everyone. As Slavoj Žižek (n.d.) puts it, the main effect of globalization on the detective fiction is discernible in its dialectical counterpart: the powerful reemergence of specific locale as the story’s setting – a particular provincial environment. In a global world, a detective can take place almost ANYWHERE (Macelod 2014, 519).”

This whole paragraph above carries the message that these stories can practically happen anywhere in the world. And that the most important part about that is the fact that it is an individual place with its own unique set of problems that affect this place on the day-to-day basis. These places react to those issues and circumstances in their own way as well (Macelod 2014, 519).

### **3. The Phenomenon of Lars Kepler**

This chapter is dedicated to the phenomenon of Lars Kepler and everything connected to this topic that is essential for understanding the relationship between this author and the thesis. The choice of picking Kepler as a representative writer for Nordic Noir was easy. He is the one that introduced me to this genre and made me thrilled about it. I discovered his books in 2016 and since then I have been reading everything new that was released. And what is so compelling about his novels? The fundamental aspect that hooked me on it was the style in which all the novels are written in. As was mentioned earlier the books are written in Nordic noir and that is closely related to the style. That means that the elements that will be named are going to be presumably identical to the Nordic noir characteristics but also the detective fiction elements.

All of Kepler's novels share the same dynamics, the type of crime, the investigative style of the police, generally the police work, the slow pacing of the novel's plot, and the atmosphere that follows the story throughout the whole book. The crimes in the

novels are in most cases a series of murders done by one individual. Almost every time one's identity is revealed in the end and a plot twist is following this revelation. The slow pacing of the stories is something that adds up to the dark atmosphere surrounding the storyline. The plot is revealed slowly and in small details and pieces that the reader puts together with the detectives throughout the book. As was mentioned before, everything is described and expressed into the smallest detail. The details help the reader to focus, understand and put themselves into the character's shoes. Through that, they can easily imagine what the characters are feeling and experiencing. And the last necessary aspect is the atmosphere. The author sets the stories in a dark background filled with everyday situations and ordinary people's problems.

In conclusion, Lars Kepler is primarily crucial to this thesis due to the genre that he writes in and also for the character of Erik Maria Bark, which is analysed in detail in the practical part. And in the end, he was my first choice and the reason behind the subject of my bachelor's thesis.

### **3. 1 The origin of Lars Kepler**

The author of the internationally best-selling detective series, the detective Joona Linna, “Lars Kepler” is not one person as some may think. The name is a pseudonym for the authors and married couple Alexandra Coelho Ahndoril and Alexander Ahndoril (Lars Kepler 2020). The first name is a tribute to the Swedish journalist and author of the famous Millenium series of crime novels called Steig Larsson. The last name was inspired by the German scientist Johannes Kepler (The Authors Behind The Author of 'The Hypnotist' : NPR Breaking News, Analysis, Music, Arts & Podcasts 2011).

Both of the writers were raised in similar backgrounds and conditions. “Despite the fact that they grew up 650 kilometres away from each other, there is an impressive resemblance between them” (Lars Kepler 2020). The couple comes from illiterate and working-class families. However, both stood out with the life paths that they chose. Instead of looking for employment, they attended university. This educational institution is where they first met. It was well known that the pair had a passion for arts from a young age, and thanks to it they connected instantly. Ever since they first met, they started to share ideas and later they began writing together (Lars Kepler 2020).

One of their first shared projects was a children's book. But shortly after the beginning of writing, they realised that it was not going to work. It appeared unworkable to do this project due to their incompatibility with their specific style of writing. As is mentioned on their website, they „ *just couldn't get our styles into harmony,*“ since their „ *individual literary voices were too defined*“ (Lars Kepler 2020). After this failed attempt, they came up with the idea that they would write a play. Again, this did not happen to be a feasible project. Not long after these unsuccessful events, they invented their literary alter ego, Lars Kepler.

The two came up with his own life story, which consists of being a lonely retired teacher affected by some unknown tragedy, and now he focuses on writing crime novels. And finally, their collaboration started making sense through this made-up person in which they both found themselves. Thanks to this fake persona of Lars Kepler everything was working well and Alexandra and Alexander felt the need to keep his real identity private and never let out who was hiding behind this name.

When they completed *The Hypnotist* in 2009 and sent the manuscript to their publisher, everything changed. The novel became a huge sensation among the editors. Once they had sent part of the manuscript translated to the London Book Fair the same month the book happened to be „The Book of The Fair“.

In an attempt to keep Lars Kepler's identity secret, the Ahndorils and their children had hidden in a tiny home on the west coast of Sweden. The couple made this radical decision because of the severe hunt. This chase to discover the identity of the author started much earlier before the book was even published to the public. Everybody was influenced by the media, which were making theories and speculating who it could be. The whole search became even more serious when there was a 24-hour hotline set up by the biggest tabloid in Sweden. The purpose of the hotline was to collect hints and clues that would later help them to make a profile of Lars Kepler.

For some time, their strategy was successful until one summer night. On one August evening, everything changed. When two reporters discovered their hiding home with the words: „ *Admit it, you're Lars Kepler,*“ (Lars Kepler, 2020) the couple thought that everything was over and ruined. The morning after the incident with the journalists Ahndorils went to Stockholm where their publisher set up a press conference. Undeniably they did not have any other choice apart from telling the truth, which they did. Them telling

the truth became a significant moment of that summer. Everyone was interested in this phenomenon, including radio stations, TV channels, and the press, of course.

Looking back the couple agreed that the true identity of Lars Kepler being revealed was good for them. One of the advantages of them being uncovered is the relationship that they can create with readers. They can meet them in person and not even just the readers but the public in general. They can go on television, meet journalists and also participate in book-related events.

After this, many readers got in touch with them and shared their opinions and feelings about the novels. Numerous people who read Kepler say that they cannot read the books alone, because of how frightened they are. Actually, the authors themselves say something similar: „*We write about things that also fill us with fear, it has to be the real thing, our hearts have to beat very hard*“ (Lars Kepler, 2020).

To give the novels an authentic feeling they do detailed research. This research includes going through post-mortem reports which are documents known as autopsy. These files describe the examination of a deceased person's body and the cause of their death (The NHS website – NHS 2023). The couple also visits prisons together and talks to police departments and also to doctors. Visiting psychiatric wards, crime scenes, and even visiting a shooting range is common for them. Another intriguing fact about all their research before writing the novels is the way of learning about the fighting scenes that will make an appearance in the books. They act out those action scenes together.

The pair tries to reach the highest level of credibility and be able to capture extreme situations in small details, so the reader can imagine it better and understand that these situations happen in real life. They say that legitimacy means everything. On the other hand, their aim for the books is not to be unduly brutal or blood-soaked but the novel has to feel real and legit. They have also mentioned that through these stories they can manage fears of people's capability of being violent (Lars Kepler, 2020).

### **3. 2 Bibliography**

Kepler's universe as it is named on their website, is constructed from many books. All of these books follow the same main character Joonas Luoma who is the detective working on these crimes. Their books mainly focus on murders of different types and different levels of brutality. Due to their research and study of forensics, they describe these vicious crimes legitimately.

These detective books are *The Hypnotist*, *The Stalker*, *The Sandman*, *The Spider*, *The Mirror Man*, *Lazarus*, *The Rabbit Hunter*, *The Fire Witness* and *The Nightmare*.

In this thesis the focus is transferred just to the first two: *The Stalker* and *The Hypnotist*, because the practical part deals with one of the main characters that are contained just in those novels (Lars Kepler, 2020).

## Practical part

The second part of this bachelor thesis is the practical part. This part works with, discusses and verifies the information mentioned above in the theory part and uses them for further research. The most essential part and chapter from the theoretical part that helps with the construction of the practical one is the section called The role of a detective and Popularity of detective fiction.

This second half of my thesis introduces the reader closer to the two individual novels that are being compared and contrasted further through this section. The section also focuses on verifying the reasons and aspects that contribute to the books popularity. The Nordic detective novels are *Hypnotist* (2014) and *Stalker* (2009) by Lars Kepler. At first, the novels and their plot are briefly introduced and then follows the detailed analysis.

After analysis of the two individual novels the attention is directed to the component that is another essential part for this thesis: the chapter dedicated to Erik Maia Bark and his development. This chapter portrays the character of E. M. Bark, his personality traits, details about his life, and the role that he plays in the novels. Explanation how this character is distinct and unlike the others is provided. This section consists of the comparison of the reasons and opinions of other crime fiction readers about detective characters with mine. These answers and facts are found in my resources. This chapter combines, compares those answers and verifies the information from the theoretical part in which is a chapter dedicated to the character of the detective and the reason behind his importance, the essential part that he has in those books and stories and what makes him the most essential and necessary character.

Right after the introduction of the novels and the chosen character the thesis moves on to the analysis of his character's development throughout those novels. For this analysis, I use the comparative method – “Comparative method is about looking at an object of study in relation to another. The object of study is normally compared across space and/or time. Comparative methods can be qualitative and quantitative. Often, there is a trade-off: the more cases to compare, the less comparable variables available and vice versa. The comparative method is often applied when looking for patterns of similarities and differences, explaining continuity and change,” according to the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.



This method is used to analyse the differences, distinction, and contrast between the behaviour, change in personality, and overall change in Erik Maria Bark's character throughout the novels mentioned earlier. His character development is shown through life, work-associated, and mental and physical health challenges that he faces and overcomes. These changes and life turnovers that he struggles with affect him but also the novel's plot itself. As stated before all of these changes and characteristics that make him stand out from the rest are what makes him memorable for the reader and that is one of the aspects that makes the genre successful due to Jordan Conelly (2019).

And finally comes the last part of this bachelor's thesis and that is the conclusion. The conclusion provides a brief summary of everything mentioned and stated earlier in the progress of the thesis. The conclusion consists of the answer to my research question and the aim of the full thesis as well. This part is based on the verification of the research question and also provides suggestions for further research and how this thesis could be improved.

#### **4. *The Stalker* (2009)**

A detective novel written by the married duo called Lars Kepler was published in 2014. The story follows the detective Joonas Luoma who is in all of Kepler's novels. He needs to find an anonymous killer who is sending the police and also the publishing companies videos of his victims second before their death.

It all starts with the first video of a young woman in her own home. The culprit videotapes her in a normal calm setting and then strikes. Right after the police received those videos they found the woman dead and mutilated. This went on with a few other victims. The main suspect of the police was a pastor with a previous criminal history. Joonas Luoma who is in charge of this investigation, as always, needs the help of the hypnotist himself. And that is where Erik Maria Bark enters the story and gets involved with this case. This book has a profoundly shocking ending which is linked with an immense plot twist (Kepler, 2014).

#### **5. *The Hypnotist* (2014)**

The second book is carried in the same spirit as the first one. And how it is common for crime fiction novels to in most cases revolving around a murder, there has been a murder in this one as well. And not just one, but a triple homicide. As was already mentioned the story begins with a murder, a whole family was murdered with just one survivor and also a witness – a young boy. His family was killed right in front of him.

This is where detective Joonas Luoma, again, comes into the picture. The police need to find this vicious killer before he finds the last victim. But they cannot find him without the help of the young boy who must have seen him before, but the boy suffered severe trauma and is in a very deep shock. And now comes the part where the help of the hypnotist, Erik Maria Bark, is needed.

In the end, the cooperation between him and the police pays off and they successfully find the person behind these brutal crimes. This novel's ending and also some parts of the plot comprise little plot twists that some may not see coming (Kepler, 2009).

## 5. 1. How do these novels differ from the rest?

There are many great crime fiction stories and books that I have read throughout the years but there were none that made me so hooked on like these ones. I read a few books from Czech authors. For example, novels were written by Robert Bryndza and Michaela Klevisová but also many other authors that were not Czech. The most recent novel that caught my attention is *Kaštánek* (2018) by Soren Sveistrup. My all-time favourite is the novel *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn that also shares some of the elements of detective fiction.

And now let's get to the question: why did I choose those two novels when there are plenty of detective fiction stories to choose from? This genre in general followed me through my reading journey since I started actively reading in 2015. Detective fiction prevails in the spectrum of genres that I have read.

In the clarification of my reasons why I chose these books, this chapter verifies the aspects from the theoretical part. My choice was unquestionably easy and obvious. Kepler's books are my all-time favourite ones except *Gone Girl* mentioned above. I have read the whole series of Joonas Lina that the couple duo wrote.

And why are these novels my favourite? How are they different from the others that I have read? The fundamental factor that made me want to read every single book from this series is the author's writing style. The way they describe things that you can imagine them with such ease and they can make you feel like you are a part of the story as well. The writing makes you feel and go through every emotion that is portrayed in the books. It necessarily does not have to be any emotion from the specific characters, it can be just the overall atmosphere of the situation or the collective feeling of everyone in the room. From my perspective, influencing the reader's emotions and feelings is what makes a good story and it does not have to be a crime story, it can be any story. This matches with the chapter above called Popularity of detective fiction, where it describes why many people come back again and again to those detective novels. And one of those reasons is the emotions that they can feel through the main character and also the emotions that they can feel with him and that creates a connection between the character and the reader (Connelly, 2019). Also, the emotions are connected with the main protagonist, the detective. Readers of crime fiction, including me, come back to this genre thanks to the high quality of the detective characters, as in this case is Joonas Lina and Erik Maria Bark who is not entirely a detective, but shares a substantial part in the investigation.

But Conelly says that the quality of characters do not have to be just in detective fiction, and that this aspect applies to almost every book and genre (Conelly, 2019).

But the preeminent factor that attributes to the book's quality is the author's research on forensics, police work, and the psychology of those criminal characters. As is already mentioned in the chapter about Lars Kepler, the couple precisely studies those things to make their books sound more credible for the readers, because as they have said on their website the credibility of those crime stories is everything to them (Lars Kepler 2020). This is what adds up to the story's quality and enjoyability. Also the choice and range of topics and the overall atmosphere of the novel is what makes it feel more credible and the reader can apply those problematic topics to his everyday life (Beyer, 2021).

Last but not least the last feature that makes the reader hooked on the book is its slow pacing and the gratifying ending. The plot unravels slowly throughout small details. The reader cannot expect who the murderer in the end is gonna be. Every essential page is followed by many more developing pages that help you with a better understanding. As have been already said, the pacing is extraordinary. It makes the reader feel like he is the one that has to solve this case and also it forces him to not leave the book alone because every page unravels some new information that is crucial to the crime solving.

All of these specified elements above helped with the choice of these two books and also what makes them distinct from the rest. Almost all of these mentioned aspects apply to most readers of crime fiction due to the resources mentioned above, an essay from Jordan Conelly, where he summarizes all of those factors that make detective fiction novels successful.

## **6. Erik Maria Bark**

The character from novels written by Lars Kepler. This section is used as a succinct introduction to this character. This set of information is deeply crucial for the next chapter where his behavioural and personality changes are analysed and discussed. This specific section and its subsections are lined up systematically, this one chapter has to be first because it is the most crucial one. Here is provided the introduction into the character of Erik Maria Bark and his background and nature. This chapter serves as the foundation and basis of the following subsections.

### **Appearance**

“Erik is of medium height, his hair is thick and greying, and he has a friendly face with laugh lines. He dresses casually in trousers and shirts, his sleeves rolled up. He’s charming, passionate but at the same time vain, something which has often put him in big trouble (Lars Kepler, 2020).”

### **Biography**

“Erik grew up in Sollentuna, north of Stockholm. His mother worked half-time as a school nurse while his father was an employee of the Social Insurance Agency, and enjoyed doing magic in his spare time. Erik went on to study medicine right after high school, specializing in psychology. For five years he worked for the Red Cross in Uganda, where he met with traumatized patients. It was there that he first began to practice hypnosis to help the patients cope with their memories. When Erik returned to Stockholm, he applied for funding from the Medical Research Council, wanting to deepen his understanding of hypnosis and trauma treatment. Shortly after, he met Simone at a big party at the university and they fell in instant love. After a series of miscarriages, they finally had a son, Benjamin. He has von Willebrand's disease and needs regular injections of clotting factor concentrates for his blood to coagulate. Erik is passionate about hypnosis, and after his pioneering research on deep hypnotic group-therapy was stopped, he developed a pill addiction (Lars Kepler, 2020).”

The most essential information about his life is summarized in the first paragraph. On the contrary, this paragraph is based on describing and discussing his work life and the role

that he plays in the novels *Stalker* (2009) and *Hypnotist* (2014). As it is conspicuous from the earlier description he is a hypnotist. This makes him an extraordinary detective-like character because he is not quite a detective but he has a crucial part in the investigative process. Without his professional those crimes described in the two novels would not have been solved in the end. He even goes beyond his job and throughout those books he goes on a private investigations. This is what makes him differ from normal detective character who is only a detective nothing more.

This is the most necessary information about Erik Maria Bark collected from Lars Kepler's official website and from the two individual novels where he makes an appearance. The more comprehensive and voluminous information is shared in the next chapter, which studies the whole character of Erik Maria Bark and examines changes in his behavior and personality that I found throughout reading the two novels: *The Hypnotist* and *Stalker*.

## **6. 1. The character choice**

Now it is time to move on and clarify my choice of this specific character. In these books, there is a great number of impressive and very readable characters to choose from. But why this specific one? How is he special and any different from the rest?

The main aspect that makes him so unique and makes him stand out from the rest of other characters is the profession that he does. He is as stated earlier a hypnotist, but not only that he is closely connected to the police and the investigative process itself. His medical knowledge is what helps the police department in those novels the most. Without his experience in psychology and experience with practicing hypnosis is essential for solving the crimes in the two individual novels. Everyone else in this series is either connected with the police or is a retired police officer. And those that aren't associated with the police department in any way have their own special category and that is the ordinary citizen category. But his career is not the only element that makes him protrude.

Another element is his personal life and life challenges that follow him around the plot of these two novels. In these specific two books, he is the one that is written in immense depth. By depth I mean every little detail that is mentioned and described, every tiny emotion that he

feels. The authors gave it their best because you can feel with him, you feel like you are him in the moment and you are experiencing these troubles as him. It is the power and intensity of these feelings, wonderful or awful ones, that the authors can make you go through with his character.

Furthermore, what makes the reader emphasise with Erik Maria Bark is the ordinariness of his life struggles. Besides the insane things and experiences that he has to go through in his professional life. These shocking encounters are what contribute to him not being like normal people or ordinary psychiatrists. The everyday life struggles as I mentioned above in the paragraph are the same situations that almost every other human being in the world goes through at some point in their life. These human adventures and incidents that follow everyone at least one time in their lifetime are the following ones. This is what makes the reader connect with the character because he can see himself in those situations (Conelly, 2019).

In the novels Erik goes through mid-life crisis and relationship troubles with his wife, these troubles are associated with a previous love affair that he had with a significantly younger woman. Another of his struggles is the pill addiction that he adopted through the years of working in such a vicious and stressful environment – helping with murder cases and hypnotising complicated, aggressive, and very dangerous patients. This might be a struggle for many people in medical or police-oriented areas. They have to witness such things that ordinary people could not even imagine. Additionally, the relationship with his son is sometimes complicated like it is in reality where parents have trouble with understanding their adolescent children (Stalker 2009, *The Hypnotist* 2014).

The choice of Erik Maria Bark was a very quick one. It was conspicuous from the beginning when I chose the two novels. This character always draws attention to himself from the first time that I have read these novels. As it was stated above the elements of his character and the overall elaboration of him is just something that makes the reader feel like he has been swallowed up by the story. All the information about Erik Maria Bark's characteristics is either resourced from Lars Kepler's official website or mainly from the two novels (Stalker 2009, *The Hypnotist* 2014).

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that the majority of those reasons that are stated earlier in this chapter can be found in the essay from Jordan Conelly (2019). I refer to this essay in my thesis frequently because Conelly states very helpful information for answering the research question. One of those information is the description of outstanding detective characters

or ordinary characters in novels in general and what draws the reader to them. As mentioned in this part I agree with Conelly that the connection between the character and the reader is to most important aspect that makes novels successful.

## **6. 2 The development of Erik Maria Bark throughout the novels**

This chapter is one of the last ones. As was mentioned in the previous section, in these upcoming paragraphs is the description and analysis of the evolution and development of the character of Erik Maria Bark, the hypnotist.

Let's recap the information that are already known. Erik is a doctor that specialises in psychotraumatology. In these novels, he is the most skilled and qualified expert in the world on clinical hypnosis. He has a long experience in this field and also has the most experience. Apart from his profession he also participates in the investigations and solving crimes. He helps with hypnosis of the victims or witnesses. He goes even beyond the limits of his profession and undertakes a private investigations himself which mist of the time behind the back of the police. He lives with his wife Simone and his son Benjamin who is ill and needs to take a regular dose of medicine, which his parents are very careful about. Without his medicine, he would not survive for long. Their son is very precious to the couple, he is a miracle for them because after many miscarriages Erik's wife Simone finally got pregnant with their firstborn child. As was stated before Erik has a lengthy history with the clinical hypnosis practices and has some secrets that he tried to leave behind (Stalker 2009, The Hypnotist 2014).

It is strategical to start in chronological order. In the interest of the book's plots the story that happens first in real time is the story of The Hypnotist. This upcoming chapters will follow the character of Erik Maria Bark throughout the whole book from the beginning to the end. The same process is applied to the second book, Stalker, as well. And after the analysis of the character in both novels the collected information is assembled and put together. All the information meaning the collected materials about Erik's character development and make a final statement on how he changed and evolved throughout those stories. The first step of the analysis is the detailed description of events and battles that he goes through and that attribute to the shaping of his character.



After finding and depicting all of these small details from the novels this section move on to the comparative method. This part promptly sums up the collected elements and move on to the comparison. Also it compares the change and development between the two novels: Stalker and The Hypnotist. After the comparison, the reader can see if the character changes in a good way or the bad way, if he changed as a person, or if he changed at all. As is indicated at the beginning of this chapter he exact same procedure will be done with both of Kepler's books.

### **6. 2. 1 Erik Maria Bark in *Hypnotist* (2014)**

Starting with the novel *Hypnotist*. The novel's plot is summarised at the very beginning of the practical part. It is just an abbreviated version of the whole plot because further characterization is not needed. For the examination of Erik Maria Barks' character is adequate just the short introduction that is already provided. Primarily this chapter focuses just on the parts where he makes an appearance in the books due to the reason that the other parts are mostly irrelevant to his development.

Erik's character is introduced to the reader at the beginning of the book as the one who promised himself that he will never do hypnosis ever again. But at this point, the reader does not know the reason behind his radical decision. Other information following the first one is that the reader can already see him in the opening pages taking some pills that do not seem to be needed. He seems to be taking those pills when he is exposed to a big amount of pressure and in stressful situations. In the first forty pages, readers are shown the strength of those mysterious pills that he is taking. In chapter four reader sees him falling asleep without even remembering it, thanks to those tablets. Later on in this chapter, his relationship problems take a turn. As was mentioned in the introduction to those novels Erik and his wife Simone had some previous marriage issues and that was Erik's affair with a younger woman. So this chapter opens up those old wounds again when his wife starts to suspect him of it happening over again. These allegations made by her and speculations that he is involved with another woman deepen his doses of pills.

While all of these pill problems and relationship problems are happening he is being persuaded to do hypnosis on a young boy that survived a traumatic homicide, where all of his family members were brutally murdered (except his oldest sister). In the process of taking the medication, he starts to realize that it might lead up to an addiction.

Later on in the novel, the reader gets a deeper view of his perspective on hypnosis. He is constantly persuaded to do it by the detective, Joona Lina. But he is solidly standing behind his decision not to practice hypnosis ever again. For now. But later in chapter eight he finally consents to hypnotising the young patient. Chapter 10 brings an insight into what those pills are, they are codeine tablets. This chapter also mentioned the reason behind his choice of profession and his journey to being on top and having an exceptional reputation in his field.

He remembers that the choice of becoming a doctor was always the only one and that he did not even think of anything else. Erik tells the reader story about his first hypnosis experience when he hypnotized a traumatized teenage girl. And after that, he continued with his research and practices.

Going back to the pill addiction. This is something that follows him throughout the whole novel. It is something unpredictable. In some chapters, he is trying his best to not let his desire to take more get to him but in other parts of the book, he is completely devoted to it. The same case is with problems in his marriage, the struggles are what follow him around all day and all night at any given moment.

As he had agreed on practicing hypnosis again he is actively present on the set of the investigation of the murders that happened at the begging of the book. Afterward, these practices get him involved in a big scandal in the news where they portray him as someone who abused his patient throughout the hypnosis and they claimed that he practices hypnosis on the young boy without his permission. This also adds up to his addiction. All of his problems seem to be revolving around hypnosis. But yet the biggest one is just coming his way.

By breaking his promise that he will never practice hypnosis ever again he opens a door to his past. His former patient kidnaps his son due to the articles in the news where they wrote that he is back to his old practices. That makes her angry and wants to take revenge because she thinks he ruined her life through hypnosis. All those traumatic events go hand in hand with the issues that he has (marriage problems, pill addiction).

At the end of this novel, he gets his son back and helps to solve the vicious murders with the help of hypnosis. But neither of his personal problems are solved, they just have been delayed for later.

## 6. 2. 2 Erik Maria Bark in *Stalker* (2009)

As stated before this novel comes second because of the chronological order of the plot. A brief summary of the novel *Stalker* is a few chapters above. And again I just mainly focused on the parts, actions, and conversations that include Erik's character because everything else is not necessary for this part.

This novel takes place after the first book *The Hypnotist*. In the beginning, Erik is introduced to the reader as an established man who is back at his old beloved profession. He is back at the institute where he used to practice hypnosis. Erik is also already divorced from his wife Simone and seeks a new romantic relationship with his piano teacher, Jackie.

Later on in the book as the first murder happens Erik is actively helping with hypnotizing one police officer that was present at the crime scene and found the mutilated victim. The reader can see Erik back with confidence and that he has stability in his profession again. He is not portrayed as the man he was in the first novel, the man that took pills whenever anything slightly stressful occurred.

During the first few chapters, he gets involved in the investigation details that remind him of an old patient that used to be convicted of the same type of crime in the past. As he learns more and more about the case he finds out that the details of the murder are exactly the same as they were many years ago. This was an old patient of his that he used to hypnotize to help the investigation and him as well. As those memories flood his mind he is becoming a little paranoid. What if the patient escaped and committed these crimes? For his peace, he calls into the jail that the patient is in to check if he is still there. He is.

But even though the reader does not see him taking any pills or any medication he has other problems. In the process of remembering the former patient, he remembers that at one of his sessions with him, the patient mentioned some potential alibi for the night of the murders. But Erik dismissed the alibi because he thought it was irrelevant and that his patient was out of his mind in the hypnosis. The fact that he kept the alibi a secret and did not tell anyone about it haunts him. The thought of him being innocent and being in jail just because Erik did not believe his credibility scares him and makes him feel guilty. This issue follows him almost to the very end of the book.

Further throughout the novel's plot new character is introduced. It is the character of Erik's colleague Nelly. It is needed to mention her as well because she plays an important

role in this novel and Erik's life. She is also a doctor and they share a romantic history, they spent one night together in the past but she seems still a little interested.

The worst imaginable happens and his darkest thoughts catch him up and become reality when police start to investigate Erik's former patient and look into his old sessions with him. He is later assigned to hypnotise the patient again to get further information such as if he had an accomplice. The reader is provided an insight into those sessions where Erik practice hypnosis on his patient and tries to figure out if he had someone helping him to perpetrate those murders in the past. Slowly in chapter sixty-one, Erik finds out that he in fact has an alibi for the night of the murders and tells the police. And here comes into the picture his colleague Nelly, that urges him to confess to the police about the concealment of his patient's alibi in the past.

In the meantime when all of this is coming to light, another three murders are committed. In chapter sixty-nine, Erik is brought up for interrogation about the murders that happened in the past weeks. The police found out that all of these murdered women have a connection with Erik. When they show him pictures of the women to identify them and he sees all of his three acquaintances. All of this does not make sense to him because he saw all of these women a few times but a long time ago. It seems like someone is trying to frame him up for the murders. But who would do such a thing?

In the process of hypnosis sessions with his old patient he founds out that the alibi that he talked about was real. Everything that he said in the past was true and he is innocent. Erik is feeling guilty for not believing his patient in the first place but bigger problems are coming. Just as this information comes to the surface Erik is wanted for the murders because of his connection to those deceased women. He is in complete shock and does not understand who would want him to be convicted of something that he did not commit.

The police are searching for him everywhere and they do not seem like they want to negotiate with him about his innocence. They are convinced that Erik murdered those women and that he is the stalker and murderer that they have been looking for all along. They want him alive or dead at this point they stand firmly by their decision and there seems to be no one to convince them otherwise. Erik feels lost, confused, and betrayed. It must have been someone that knows him who is doing all those things to him. He starts to hide in the forests, dark streets, and almost everywhere where they cannot find him. At some point, he even ends up at one of his former patient's house for a while.

Nelly, his colleague that was from the beginning strangely attracted to Erik and seemed to seek his attention more than his other colleague turned out to be the stalker that was behind those vile murders. She was also the one that set Erik up for those murders that she committed. At the end of the novel, we found out that she did all those unimaginable things out of jealousy to those women that Erik had a connection with. She even kidnapped and tried to murder his new partner, Jackie.

Almost at the end, the readers find out at the same time as Erik that his stalker, Nelly, has been stalking him from the very beginning. Since his divorce, she was actively stalking him everywhere. She even learned and went to medical school to be near him, and married his other colleague so she could be as close to him as possible. These shocking truths scared Erik through the core. It was an unexpected betrayal from the person that he would suspect the least.

And finally in the end everything again ends up in justice. Erik saves his lover and the police catch Nelly. He is acquitted of guilt and is free. He does not have to hide anymore. But even though everything came to a happy end the psychological damage has already been done. It will take a long time to recover from those brutal things that everyone had experienced. But after all, Erik is happy with Jackie and is just simply grateful to be alive and that is enough.

### **6. 2. 3 Comparison of the development in both novels**

The last two chapters deal with the development of the hypnotist in the two novels, *Stalker* (2009) and *Hypnotist* (2014). Both of them describe the evolution of Erik Maria Bark in detail. The previous chapters follow Erik's story throughout those novels and comment on his character changes.

This last section of this thesis demonstrates and compares those two sections above. Rewinds all of the information from the two preceding chapters and combines them into one final piece of information, compares the changes, and systematically puts them together.

And now let's look at the comparison of the changes in the character of Erik Maria Bark. A detailed analysis of his character in both novels is already in the chapters above. So there is

no use to mention and describe them again separately. This paragraph will proceed in chronological order based on the novels.

Starting with the changes throughout the *Hypnotist* (2014). In this novel, the readers can follow Erik suffering from his pill addiction which is getting rapidly worse and worse. The addiction is affecting his personal and work life. The author portrays him in some parts of the book as an unstable and very stressed-out individual. He is controlled by these stressful situations and is controlled by his medicine. Readers can see him losing consciousness, not remembering doing certain things and not being able to concentrate.

Despite all those attributes mentioned above, the novel describes him as someone highly intelligent, caring, and self-aware. But in the end, the readers can see some oncoming improvements in his lifestyle, habits, and overall personality. Those changes come in *Stalker* (2009) where Erik seems to have improved and changed for the better. The author did very well in writing this specific character because he made him look very human. In the second book, Erik is portrayed as clean of pills and stable in his job, and has his confidence back. Even though he faces more terrific and shocking crimes he is doing better.

In conclusion, this is what Jordan Conelly meant in his essay *What Makes Detective Character: Character in Detective Fiction*. Throughout those changes that Erik suffers the reader feels a deep connection with him because he is facing the problems that come up in the everyday life of normal people. Issues at work, relationship and marriage problems, not understanding his children at a certain age, and more. Those are ordinary people's problems and seeing those problems in their favourite characters helps to deepen the connection (Conelly, 2019). Also the range of problematic topics that are discussed in these novels are what helps with the success of those novels. The topics of marriage issues, relationships, psychological problems and finally the subject of addiction that is portrayed in the *Hypnotist* (2014) are what makes those stories more credible and the readers can identify and find themselves in them. Additionally, through these hard and controversial topics the author shows the problematic situations of our modern society (Beyer, 2021).

## Conclusion

This bachelor's thesis aimed to answer the question of why the genre of crime fiction and its subgenres are still popular despite its more than a hundred years of existence and how is the role of a detective character important. Based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of resources that successfully collected the essential information that was needed for finding the answer to this research question. The resources consist of essays, articles, books, websites, and finally one speech. All of these resources were like a puzzle that helped me put this thesis together in one connected piece.

In the theoretical part, my main focus was on detective fiction and the importance of the role of detective characters in the novels written in this genre. These were not the only two topics in the theoretical part, they were accompanied by several other subjects, but these were the most crucial ones. Those topics are what made the whole thesis complete and it made every section connect to one another. No chapter was completely left alone and did not fit in with others because the topic of detective and crime fiction and its popularity made everything blend together easily. The theoretical part also consists of one section that answers one part of the research question, why is the genre popular and successful? This chapter was also significantly helpful in further research and also helped with the writing of the practical part. That part was principally focused on specific examples of crime fiction novels. More specifically, Nordic noir novels which is the crime fiction subgenre but that is already known from the theoretical part.

In the practical part, I stated my reasons behind the choice of the Lars Kepler books in detail and then compared them with the answers that were found in the articles and studies mentioned in the theoretical. Based on those resources and the information that was discovered in them I verified and acknowledged the reasons of other readers of this specific genre.

As was found the most essential attribute that makes crime fiction novels popular is the connection between the reader and the detective character. This one element is also connected with another one that says that the quality of the detective character makes good detective fiction instantly. Those facts are based mainly on Connelly and Beyer. Beyer says that another contributing factor is a wide range of hard topics that can be introduced and discussed through those novels and put into a wider perspective.



To better understand the reason behind the success of crime fiction the thesis could address and analyse more novels and detective characters in those books. By the inclusion of more characters and novels, the readers could enhance their understanding of why this genre is still relevant and people are actively reading it. The whole thesis could be enhanced even more if I did a questionnaire based on this subject. Through this questionnaire, I could collect answers from other students and readers in general and find out why they think crime novels are famous and still being read by many.

This topic was not an easy one because there are many subgenres and old genres that fall into the category of crime fiction so it was sometimes during the research problematic to figure out which topic is still relevant to this thesis and which is not. Because every subgenre has a little bit of those other relevant genres. Overall I am glad I chose this topic for my thesis because it is something that is very appealing to me and I have read many books written in this genre and over time I will read even more of them. As was mentioned throughout the thesis the topic of crime, true crime, and detective novels is something that follows me my whole life and the questionnaire would be helpful to find out if other people my age are interested or if they just simply know about the genre's existence.

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