

Different Shades of Crime in Jo Nesbo's *The Son*

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Abstract:

Scandinavian Crime Fiction is related with the portrayal of social criticism. The genre of crime fiction unfolds various strings of shock and surprises linked with a murder mystery or any unlawful act. Nordic Noir, that forms a major part of this genre, portrays a deftly plotted story with the description of brutality, vengeance, human trafficking and illegal trade of drugs in a socially welfare state of Norway. Jo Nesbo, a prolific author, has followed the convention by his sprawling, exuberant story detailing the intertwined lines of the gangsters of Norway in the novel *The Son* (2014). This paper mainly focuses upon the depiction of different types of crime in the novel *The Son*. The details of crimes and criminal schemers in the novel exhibit the hidden channel of the corrupt police officials who work for the mafia. The novel successfully depicts the 'whodunit' agenda through the story of a man who takes revenge for forcing his father towards corruption by killing them. He is on vendetta and his actions serve as redemption of his father's sins. The novel is therefore, a fantastic tale woven around

the themes of violence, love, betrayal, corruption and revenge.

Key words: Suspense, mystery, violence, crime, corruption and whodunit.

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A good crime novel has the capacity to present an accurate glimpse of society, as the crime fiction genre relates to and anatomises society's darkest sides. I believe that literature in general and crime fiction in particular can help animate a picture more acutely than the other arts.

Since last decades, Scandinavian crime fiction or Nordic Noir captivate the readers through best crime novels all over the Europe. The genre becomes popular among a wider range of audience with its complex narrative and critic of socially welfare paradigm. Millions of books have been translated into many languages and won the various literary prizes. The genre become a trademark for the in Scandinavian countries which formed on the premises that each and every person should be considered equal and “every person deserves a good, decent life, and [...] everybody should be cared for” in the best possible manner (qtd. in Bergman 34). But soon the conditions deteriorated and cracks appear in the so called welfare model. Nordic Noir debunks the shortcomings of democratic and welfare society with the wonderful depiction of mysteries along with the themes of violence, corruption and different shades crimes in a society.

Jo Nesbo, the Norwegian crime writer encountered the Scandinavian crime fiction with the entertaining and forceful thriller machinegun. With the deepest mysteries and terrific thrillers, Nesbo touches the heights and finally succeeded in snatching the crown of Larsson in

Nordic crime fiction. His novels stand out for the description of fluctuations and darkness present in Norwegian society. He has written a chronology about the investigations of Inspector Harry Hole and various crime novels like *The Devil's Star* (2005), *Nemesis* (2008) *The Redeemer* (2009), and *The Snowman* (2010). The present paper focuses on Nesbo's latest novel *The Son* that was published in 2015. Through this novel, Nesbo expresses his immense talent and his expertise in portraying a best thriller that relies upon the themes such as whodunit agenda, violence, vengeance, corruption in police department of Oslo and crimes like human trafficking and drug dealing in a socially welfare state.

The novel translated by Charlotte Barslund is about the boy Sonny Lofthus who “had been a star pupil, a talented wrestler, popular, always helpful . . . expressed a desire to become a police officer like his father” (Nesbo 13). At the age of 18, the suicidal death of his father, Ab Lofthus becomes the reason of his life's destruction. He was devastated after getting a suicide note from his father's table in which he confessed that he was a mole in the police department. After his father's death Sonny become a drug addict

and victim of ‘wicked world’ where “Evil spread like cancer, it made healthy cells sick, poisoned them with its vampire bite and recruited them to do its work of corruption. And once bitten no one ever escaped. No one” (14).

In order to fulfil his drugs’ requirements, Sonny confessed about those murders which he hadn’t committed. He served twelve years in the Oslo’s Staten Maximum Security Prison where the corrupt prison system preserved him with the supply of heroin. The central action of the novel takes place when one of the prisoner’s confessions revealed the reality behind his father’s death:

It’s not true that he shot himself, Sonny. . . . your father suspected who the mole was. I overheard Nestor talk on the phone to his boss about how they had to get rid of a policeman called Lofthus before he ruined everything for them. I told your father about that conversation, that he was in danger. . . but your father said that he couldn’t involve other people . . . so he got me to swear to keep

my mouth shut and never breath a word of it to a living soul. They forced your father to write that suicide note in order to spare you and your mother. Afterward they shoot him point-black with his own gun. (Nesbo 65-66)

After knowing the reality behind his father’s mysterious death, Sonny becomes the ‘avenging angel’ and decides to escape from the prison to take revenge from the people responsible for his and his father’s annihilation.

Successfully depicts the Whodunit agenda:

The novel successfully portrays the whodunit agenda which is the pivotal ingredient of crime fiction. It features a complex, plot driven story in which the central focus is on the puzzle and mystery elements. In these types of stories, the question mark hanging over the opening, the question of ‘who did it’ or ‘whodunit’ and the reader is provided with clues from which the identity of the perpetrator of the crime may be deduced before the solution is revealed at the end. Nesbo’s novel deals with the whodunit agenda as the question

marks “Who killed my father? And who was the mole who helped the Twin?” (444) are hanging over from beginning till the end. As it is from the very beginning of the novel that Sonny tries to solve the mystery and find out the real mole, when he comes to know about the truth behind his father’s mysterious death projected as a suicide which in reality was a planned murder. Nesbo hypnotizes the readers from the starting point to end by providing the effect of mystery and the suspense elements.

The mystery of Sonny’s father’s murder is resolved near the end of the novel where the real murderer is unmasked. Sonny finds a diary of his father that exposes the built up tension, secret and mystery revolving the death of Ab. Therefore, as per the element of whodunit, the questions regarding the death of Ab (Sonny’s father) are answered with the involvement of both Simon (Ab’s friend) and Ab as a mole in police department and as secret informers to the Twin. “Twin wanted his mole to rise up the ranks in the police force then there was no longer room for two” (641) and both understand the truth that now Twin needs only one amongst them and the other is no longer beneficial for him. So, both Ab and

Simon decide to kill each other to be at that position:

When Simon realised that Ab Lofthus was willing to kill him to take the only spot with the Twin, he contacted the Twin and said he had to eliminate Ab, that Ab was on to both of them, that it was urgent. He said that he and Ab were like identical twins who had the same nightmare, which was that each was trying to kill the other. So he beat Ab to it. Simon killed his best friend. (642)

Corruption in police department:

Simon, Ab Lofthus and Arild Franck are the corrupt police officials who work for the Twin under the garb of being the protectors of the social injustice. Instead of eliminating crimes from the social forefront they themselves are the law breakers. Nesbo exhibits the cases of police officials who are engulfed in different crimes like human trafficking, drug dealing, illegal supply of drugs in prison as they used to smuggle “a mobile phone, a gold-plated shaped like a pistol”

as well as “getting hold of drugs in there was easy, no problem. Botsen isn’t a maximum security prison The officers . . . were selling smuggled cigarettes on the cheap . . .” (10) in the enclosed boundaries of the prison acting like puppets in the hands of the master mind like the Twin. Arild Franck – an Assistant Prison Governor having a “bull neck, bulldog face” (20) was involved in convicting Sonny as “a professional scapegoat” (366) who was falsely charged with two murders – one of an unidentified Vietnamese girl and of Oliver Jovic, a drug dealer. The author unveils the complicated and entangled strings of the web of corruption that has spread like a cancer in the police department that if some police officer wants to get out of this dirty game he/she has to pay a heavy price for it, that is, his own life. For instance, as Per Vollan whose conscience no longer permits him to support the injustice meted out to Sonny and he reveals his dissatisfaction to Arild Franck and wants to back out from the group of corrupt police officials as he says “I’m saying that I can’t do it anymore As God is my witness I won’t breathe a word to anyone. . . . Tell them I’ll be as silent as the grave. I just want out. Please help me?” (22-23). But still the price for

this conscience ridden police officer is that he was found murdered under mysterious circumstances later in the novel.

Near the end, the diary exposes of Sonny’s father reveals the dark secrets of police officers – Ab Lofthus and Simon Kefas as it reads “We’re corrupt, thoroughly rotten police officers who have betrayed everything we believe in for a few measly pieces of silver. We’ve turned a blind eye to drug dealing, human trafficking, even murder” (566-67).

Crimes: Drug dealing and Human Trafficking

Crimes like drug trade and human trafficking are very much prevalent in Norway. Every year a lot of people die only because of drug overdose and a lot of people fall a prey to drug addiction that gives birth to criminal instincts in them so that they may arrange easy access to drugs for their consumption. The increasing number of drug addicts has strengthened the roots of drug mafia and they stretch their arena by taking government officials into their confidence that increases their victims thereby tightening their grip over the crime of drug dealing. The novel, *The Sun* portrays the predicament of the protagonist Sonny who spoils his life by

getting involved into the deadly grasp of drug overdose and near the end it has been indicated that various upper echelons of the society are also involved. Another crime that has been dealt in *The Son* is human trafficking. Human trafficking refers to the illegal trading of human beings for exploitation and harassment. Nesbo exposes such crimes prevalent not only in the society but rampant all over the world excellently through his characters like Nestor, an agent of Twin one of the masterminds behind both the crimes. As in the first chapter the author tells that Nestor has caged down nine girls in Enerhaugen, “East Europeans and Asians. Young. Teenagers”(4). Minsk, one of the captives, tries to escape from Nestor’s web but unfortunately is grabbed by Nestor’s dog who “had taken a chunk out of her face – you could see straight to the teeth” (5) and in this way she is brutally murdered. Near the end Sonny who is on Vendetta informs Simon Kefas the police officer, about the place where Nestor keeps the girls. Ultimately Simon and Kari his associate raids upon the address and expose the trade of human trafficking that was taking place in that apartment.

Violence and Vengeance:

Violence is an unwarranted exertion of force and power against rights and laws that plays a crucial role in crime fiction. It is not only related with the violation of law and social order but it also presents a critique of relationships between structures of society plus the violent disruptions embedded in the social structure itself. Also in crime fiction, violence therefore, “stages a struggle between collective norms and individual transgression” and especially the “basic link in between the social system and the individual” (...).

The novel clearly deals with the issues of violence and vengeance through the protagonist Sonny who in search for the answers about his father’s murder with his revengeful thoughts goes on a violent turmoil. He brutally killed the unpunished murderers in the manner of a serial killer. After the breakout from prison he rescued himself in Ila Centre which is “was a residential facility for the city’s most vulnerable addicts” (27). After he lands in Ila centre, he starts planning and committing murders of the people responsible for his father’s murder who are wandering scot-free in the society by fooling the police officials and law and order. He also planned to avenge himself

upon those people who forced him to confess the murders committed by them as the author states that “he has been a scapegoat and father confessor for criminals in this town for twelve years” (468). He killed Agnete Iversen who was the daughter of one of Oslo’s well known and rich property owner as she was responsible for one of the murders Sonny was accused of. During the investigation process carried out by Simon, he comes across the husband of Agnete Iverson, Iver Iverson, who had extra marital affair with the girl, Mai, put to death at the orders of Agnete Iverson. During the investigation Simon reveals the link of Iversons with the Twin and he enquires Iver Iverson to confess the same as Simon says, “Iverson Property did business with the Twin. You helped him launder money from his drugs and trafficking activities and in return he provided you with fictitious, tax-saving losses to the tune of hundreds of millions of Kroner” (471).

Nesbo excellently portrays the leitmotif of violence, atrocity and brutality with help of other characters also. It can be witnessed in the case of Kalle – the drug dealer and agent of drug mafia Hugo Nestor who was the second person killed by Sonny. Kalle, the real murderer of Mai,

was diabolically tortured by the ruthless tyrant Nestor for he falls asleep during the working hours. “Nestor pulled out his eyelids and sliced them off with his hideous, curved Arabic knife” (236). On the crusade of his revenge, Sonny’s next and third prey was Sylvester, another agent of the Twin. Sylvester was on his duty assigned by Twin to kill Sonny and reached Sonny’s house to carry out the command. But unfortunately, he himself falls a victim in the hands of Sonny who first shoots him and then locks him in the freezer that ends his life. Another such incident that depicts the level of brutality in crime fiction is the one when Nestor too is savagely murdered by Sonny in the same manner as he inflicts torture upon his captives by getting them murdered with the help of dreadful dogs. Sonny purchases the dogs of the same breed and throws Nestor in the cage to be killed by being eaten up by the brutal dogs that paints a ghastly sight as Sonny:

. . .unlocked the padlock and put his hand on Nestor’s head as if blessing him he said something. Then he gave Nestor’s head a little push. The plump men in the suit screamed

briefly, then he fell backwards and hit the gate, which opened inwards. The dogs stirred. The man quickly pushed Nestor's feet inside and closed the gate the white dogs . . . pounced on Nestor. Their movements were so silent that [Fidel] could clearly hear the chomping jaws, the sound of flesh being torn, the almost ecstatic growling and then Nestor's scream. (405)

Therefore, Jo Nesbo unfolds variegated perspectives as well as excellently stitches the patches of various themes and issues related with crime fiction into a beautiful garb of the novel *The Son*. The author also succeeds in creating an atmosphere of mystery, thrill, suspense and enigma embedded in crime fiction. The novel in this way is an entangled web of the nexus of intermingled themes of drug dealing, human trafficking, corruption prevalent in government institutions, lack of law and order, use of law and means, brutal atmosphere, the presence of crude elements, drug addiction, the use of savage

means to safeguard one's crimes, revenge, the grandeur of mystery, murder, illegal supply of drugs as well as the criminal elements, etc. Through his writings Nesbo proves that instead of developmental issues it is the criminal tendencies disguised as the progress form the backbone of so called an egalitarian, liberal and socially welfare state.

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