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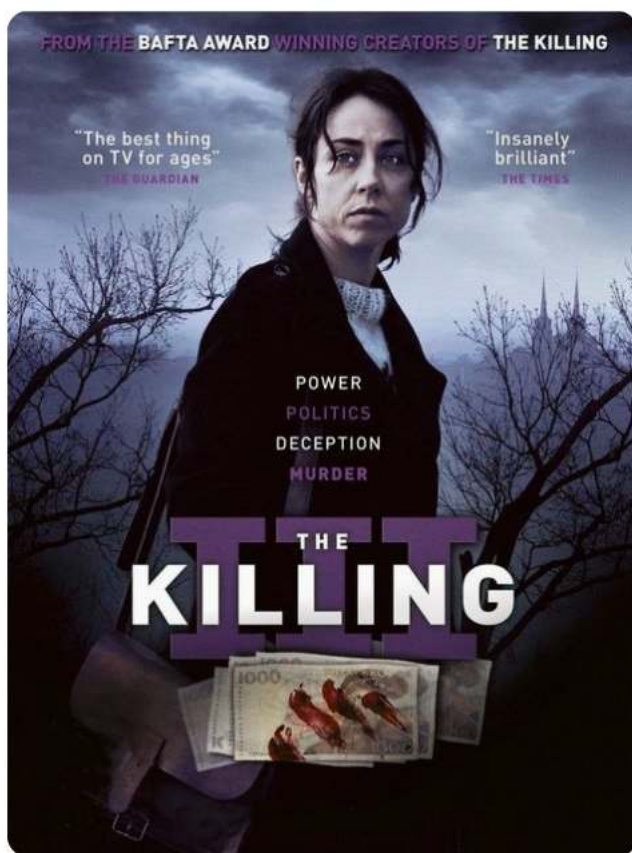
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Anne Marit Waade

## **Melancholy in Nordic Noir: Characters, Landscapes, Light and Music in *The Killing***



### **Abstract**

Nordic Noir on screen is characterised by a certain melancholy displayed in the plot, the imagery and the characters. These elements also characterise Scandinavian crime fiction, for example the troubled protagonists and the climate. Nordic Noir has attracted considerable interest among audiences and academics. However, none of the academic contributions reflect the connection to the historical Nordic Melancholy. In this article I relate Nordic Noir to Nordic Melancholy in art, philosophy and culture in which

melancholy as a romantic ideal was embedded in a particular landscape and climate aesthetic, and, hereby contribute to the study of emotions in television drama.

### **Keywords**

Nordic Noir, melancholy, *The Killing*, *The Bridge*, *Wallander*, Nordic Melancholy

Nordic Noir on screen can be characterised by a certain melancholy displayed in the plot and the imageries, as well as in the emotionally complex characters (Creeber, 2015; Redvall, 2013; Waade, 2013). These melancholic elements are also characteristic of Scandinavian crime fiction literature, for example the antihero and troubled protagonists, the places and the climate (Corristine, 2011; Tapper, 2014; Nestingen, 2009; Brodén, 2011; Jensen & Waade, 2013). Nordic Noir as a cultural phenomenon has attracted considerable interest among audiences and academics in the Western world in recent years, and a wide range of articles, books and posts<sup>i</sup> have been published on the topic by academics and critics as well as ordinary viewers (Agger, 2016; Bergman, 2014; Farshaw, 2013; Gamula & Mikos, 2014; Peacock, 2013; Solum, 2016; Turnbull, 2014). However, very little is said about the sound of Nordic Noir, and, none of these contributions reflect a connection to the historical Nordic Melancholy in art, philosophy and culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. As for Nordic Noir, melancholy in this historical context was embedded in a particular landscape and climate aesthetic which expressed romantic ideals. Without posing any essential idea about Nordic culture as melancholic, there are some interesting perspectives on Nordic Melancholy that bring new insights to the analyses of Nordic Noir. In general, by studying melancholy in crime series, this article contributes to the research field by focusing on emotions in television drama.

The Danish television drama series *Forbrydelsen* (The Killing, 3 seasons, DR, 2007-2012) has been emblematic for Nordic Noir. Every time we read about Nordic Noir, we see the main character Sofie Gråbøl's troubled face. The extremely dark lighting, the rainy, gloomy Nordic setting, the characteristic serial plot in which each character is suspected in turn of murdering a young girl, and the low-key acting and not least music all represent the Danish broadcaster's (DR) well-developed screen ideas (Redvall, 2014). The series was very popular in the UK (BBC4) among both critics and audiences, and was a stepping stone for Danish television drama series in the rest of the

world<sup>ii</sup>. Nevertheless, the success of the series internationally is linked to Scandinavian crime fiction as an international bestseller culture, as well as to Nordic food, design, architecture, ‘hygge’ and even the Nordic welfare system. In this article I will draw attention to a particular aspect of Nordic Noir which has not yet been studied in academic works on Danish television drama: melancholy, and in particular Nordic Melancholy. I will use the Danish crime series *Forbrydelsen* as the main example and briefly refer to other Nordic crime series such as *Bron/Broen* (The Bridge) and *Wallander*. The article thus brings a new perspective to Danish television drama and Nordic Noir and contributes to the study of emotions in television drama, and in contemporary culture in general.

### **Melancholy in art and history**

Melancholy is a broad concept that characterises societal, mental and creative conditions. The Oxford Dictionaries define it as ‘A feeling of pensive sadness, typically with no obvious cause’.<sup>iii</sup> Melancholy has been linked to artistic expressions and philosophy since ancient times, being celebrated and idealised in some contexts as a particularly creative and sensitive energy, for example characterising artistic genius, and in others regarded as a pathological and destructive power. The origin of the concept is related to the Greek *mélas* (black, dark, murky) combined with *kholé* (bile), and the term was known in Greek medicine from the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Hornbæk (2006) describes the way in which melancholy as a concept and phenomenon has inspired different scientists and artists throughout history, including mathematicians, alchemists, philosophers, hymn writers, doctors, nuns, church fathers, historians, painters and sociologists. Well-known artistic works such as Albrecht Dürer’s *Melencolia* (1514) and Virgil Solis’ *Melancolicus* (1514) illustrate the significance the term had in art history and philosophy. In these works we see the iconic elements which reflected melancholy as a visual motif and mythology: the swan, the wing, the head bowed down and resting in the hand, the eyes looking down or beyond the frame, as if his thoughts were far away. In general, the concept was considered a playground for interpretations:

The many different meanings of the concept are characteristic. Melancholy had a wide range of meanings from madness to genius, from fluid to dryness, from

disgust to lust, from laziness to spiritual ecstasy, from shame to virtue, from the feeling of being empty to being perfect. (Hornbæk, 2006: 123, my translation)

Related to the change during the Renaissance, when melancholy was regarded as a condition related to individuals, it was also considered to be an ideal condition for artistic work and an ideal medium for spiritual and religious elevation – thereby constituting the opposite of pathological melancholy and its lack of spirituality. Melancholy was seen as a particular talent, a gift generating creative energy and artistic genius (ibid.: 145).

Kjersti Bale, a Norwegian philosopher who has published on melancholy in literature and philosophy, argues that melancholy as a literary configuration is about *topos* and *longing* (Bale, 1997). The melancholic ambiguity involves being simultaneously part of something and yet outside it as well: out of place (displacement) and out of time (nostalgia). And both states are related to a sense of longing. For the melancholic figure, creativity and writing are one way to be conscious about one's own suffering (Bale, 1997). Melancholy is about transitions, a particular sensibility that captures loss and the unknown. The displacement and nostalgia linked to the individual's deep sense of self-consciousness characterise the existential conditions in Late Modernity. Melancholy is when life itself is empty.

In Nordic Melancholy as an art-historical trend and style within the Nordic region, the melancholic artistic genius and auteur played a significant role, as did the melancholic features in the music, the landscapes, the characters and the light. However, in Danish television drama and Nordic Noir the melancholic figure is a significant part of the detective and main protagonist in the stories, and not the artist that creates what lies behind them. I will come back to the drama series later. First, let us take a closer look at Nordic Melancholy.

### **Nordic Melancholy as an artistic trend**

'Nordic Melancholy' is a label used to characterise the work of a group of Nordic romantic artists in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century who displayed a particular form of melancholy in their work encompassing various art genres such as music, theatre, poetry, literature and painting. The 'Nordic Melancholy' label has been applied to the work of Edvard Munch, Vilhelm Hammershøi, the Skagen painters, Jean Sibelius, August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen, among others. Many of the Nordic artists included in this tradition

used melancholy as a creative energy, a particular style and form of aesthetics, for example Munch's painting *Melancholy* from 1892 (cf. Figure 2). Again we see the head bowed down and resting in the hand, the eyes looking down and beyond the frame, and a tense relation to the woman dressed in white in the background underlined in the composition and contrasts (left/right, upper/lower, white/black). A sense of melancholy is emphasised in the colours and the light. Furthermore, the blue colours, the Nordic midsummer night and its particular twilight, the coastal landscape and the white wooden house in the background, are all elements indicating the particular Nordic setting. The particular light, the landscape, the colours, the mood and the melancholic figure are present in other works by contemporaries of Munch and characterise Nordic Melancholy as an artistic trend in general.

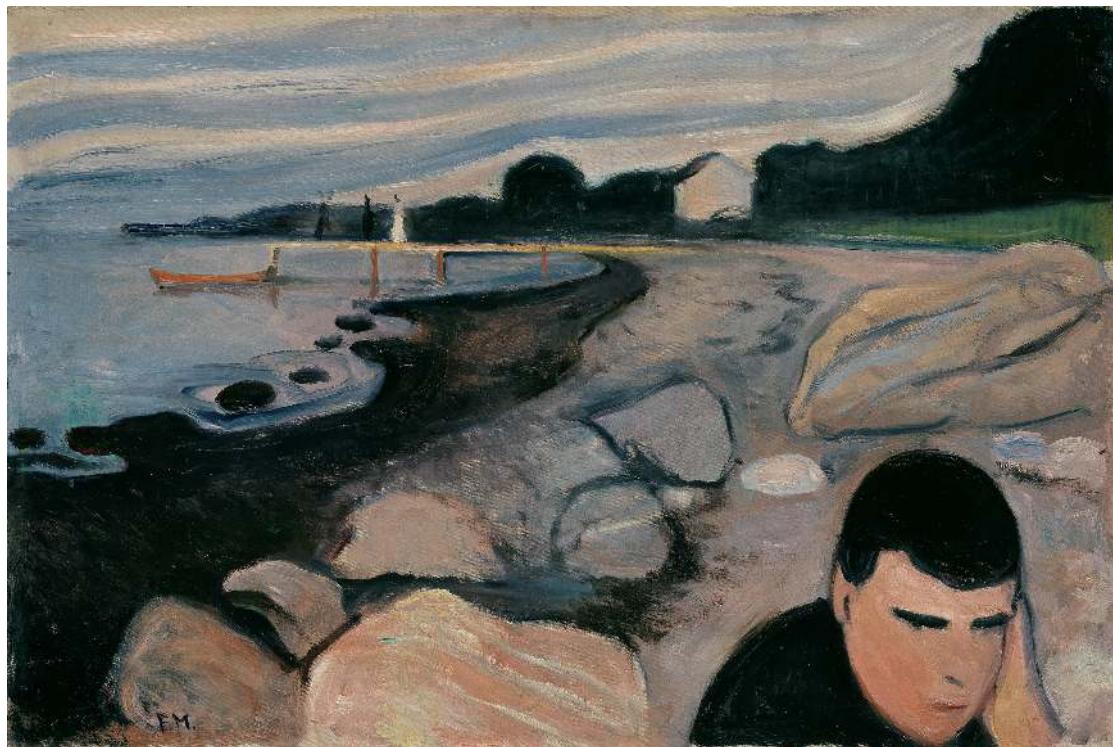


Figure 2: Edvard Munch: *Melancholy*, 1892 (Oil on canvas, 64 x 96 cm), National Gallery, Oslo.

For many of these artists, the region's nature, landscape, light and climate were significant inspirations and elements in their aesthetic expressions and artistic ideas, drawing on the romantic ideals of the century. Nordic Melancholy is not restricted to historical artworks in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also characterises more recent artworks by artists such as Ingmar Bergman, Lars Norén, Aki Kaurismäki and Lars von Trier. For these artists the darkness is reflected not only in the characters and settings but also in

the plots, which are characterised by melodramatic storylines, relational conflicts and intrigues, and most often tragic endings. Lars von Trier's feature film *Melancholia* actually builds upon the great historical, visual, philosophical and mythological treasure that is embedded in the very concept of melancholy. Trier deconstructs the wedding genre and turns the romantic plot into an apocalyptic, grotesque and tragic story in which the main character suffers from depression (Agger, 2014). In general, Nordic Melancholy is linked not only to these artists' artistic expressions and ideas, but also to the artistic geniuses themselves. The artists attracted both public and academic interest in their persona and their artistic ambitions, and were acknowledged as great artists and auteurs. Some of them suffered from personal and emotional disorders, and can therefore be regarded as belonging to the traditional artistic genius in which the very concept of melancholy was reflected (Nielsen, 2006).

However, what is significant for Nordic Melancholy (and Nordic Noir) in contrast to melancholy in art and drama in more general terms is the particular use of Nordic light and the region's climate conditions and landscapes in the artists' music, painting and stories. Löfgren & Ehn (2007) focus on the natural light and the liminal zones of twilight, dusk and dawn when they study daydreaming, which is another way of describing melancholic longing, as a productive and positive cultural practice in the Nordic region. The authors argue that melancholic longing is related to the region's landscape and the climate conditions and give examples on how melancholy is displayed in art works from the region:

Scandinavia has a latitudinal position that changes the length of daylight a lot during the year, from the intense summer days when it hardly gets dark at all at night, to the early afternoon dusk and intense darkness of winter (...) In the Nordic countries this condition has been nationalized into a special mood, as well as a touristic marketing resource (Löfgren & Ehn, 2007: 10).

Löfgren & Ehn describe how sitting together in silence and waiting in the dusk is a common Nordic tradition with a long history (ibid.: 11). Darkness has a special capacity for creating encompassing spaces: the world around us shrinks and gives thoughts a better chance to fly (ibid.: 17). The sunset panorama satisfies emotional, melancholic longings, a kind of ritual of longings (ibid.: 13). Dawn, called 'the hour of the wolf', is often a time of worrying about the future (ibid.: 15). For people suffering from

depression, the hour of the wolf can turn into a real torment as the level of anxiety rises. The twilight is – according to fairy tales and Nordic mythologies – a time when supernatural forces and beings are visible and powerful. Many Nordic artists have tried to capture the significant melancholy mood of the twilight zone. When looking at Nordic Noir it is interesting to see how the use of gloomy landscapes, light and climate in the crime dramas draws upon a long tradition of artistic practices, philosophy, mythologies and landscape ideals within the Nordic region in which melancholy plays a significant and productive role.

In fact, the term ‘Nordic Melancholy’ has no specific definitions and does not describe a particular period in art history. Instead, the term indicates some stylistic features and an artistic trend that is acknowledged internationally (Sørensen, 1991; Bale, 1997). Exactly like the label Nordic Noir. However, whereas melancholy in the Nordic melancholy trend was expressed both in artworks and in the artist’s personae, melancholy in Nordic Noir crime series is purely expressed in the characters, the setting and the audio-visual elements.

### **Melancholy in Nordic Noir**

In her book about *Melancholic Rooms* (‘Melankoliska rum’, 2009), Johannisson explains that the term melancholy includes three different meanings: respectively *atmosphere*, *emotion* and *diagnosis* (p. 29). In Nordic Noir crime series melancholy is first and foremost an atmosphere displayed in the story. Sometimes it is an emotion characterising some of the characters, and in some series melancholy is portrayed as a more general societal and existential condition (Hansen & Waade, 2017). In general, Scandinavian crime and Nordic Noir are characterised by a) complex characters and gender issues such as powerful women, feminised male antiheroes, and in some cases socially and emotionally dysfunctional main characters as well (Agger, 2011); b) a particular use of Nordic settings, including landscape, lighting, climate, design and architecture (Creeber, 2015; Stigsdotter, 2010; Jensen & Waade, 2013); and c) societal criticism such as the Nordic welfare system (Nestingen, 2011; Brodén, 2011). One can argue that melancholy is displayed in all three of these characteristics. In my analyses I will emphasise the first two of them, and will also include another significant aspect that is often forgotten when it comes to crime drama analyses, namely music. When focusing on melancholy in Nordic Noir and Danish crime series, music plays a predominant role. In my final discussion, I will come back to the last aspect (societal



criticism in Scandinavian crime series), and reflect on how melancholy can shed light on this issue as well.

### **1. Characters (melancholic emotions)**

Melancholy as a personal emotion in Nordic Noir is reflected in the characteristic antihero and complex characters which are well known in Scandinavian crime fiction traditions, for example Harry Hole, Martin Beck, Varg Veum (the name Varg means wolf), Carl Mørck (the surname means 'dark'), Annika Bengtzon and Lisbeth Salander. In general the Nordic Noir antihero is often a lonely investigator, but also a person who has a hard time trying to balance their private life with their working life. Their relationship with their partner is challenged by working relations, many of them fail as a parent (they forget appointments, get upset, lie and betray others) and they are characterised by emotional complexity including traumas, struggles and melancholic thoughts and emotions. Some of them also have bad health and eating habits.

In *Forbrydelsen* Sarah Lund (Sofie Gråbøl) never gets to Sweden to settle down with her fiancé because she is too engaged in a crime investigation. She has no real private life, she leaves her son with her mother, and she has to leave her mother's wedding party in the middle of dinner because her police colleague is calling. And Sarah Lund never smiles. She struggles with her close relationships, and she fails as a mother, daughter and partner. Her emotions are kept at a distance, from her colleagues, from the viewer and from herself. Her sadness and longing are suppressed, but the viewer can see her feelings in her eyes and her obstinate insistence on working to solve the crime.



Figure 3: *Forbrydelsen* (The Killing), 2007-2012, DR: Winter landscape, blue-brown-grey colour scale, eyes looking beyond the frame (Copyright, DR)

Kurt Wallander is another typical Scandinavian crime series antihero: melancholic, unable to form meaningful social relationships, suffers from bad health and drinking habits, and tries to suppress his emotions and guilty conscience. But despite these problems he is a brilliant investigator (McCorristine, 2011; Tapper, 2014). The different actors who have played Wallander have interpreted his emotional and complex character in quite different ways. Rolf Lassgård was a desperate, sad and angry person; while Krister Henriksson was much more downplayed and calm, with melancholic tendencies developing slowly over the seasons. Kenneth Branagh's *Wallander* was something in between these two.

In the Swedish-Danish series *Broen* the two main protagonists are the Swedish inspector Saga Norén (Sofia Helin) and the Danish Martin Rohde (Kim Bodnia). In the first season they are forced to collaborate on a sensational case in which the body of a dead woman placed on the border between the two countries turns out to be two halves of different people. Saga suffers from a mental health disorder that means she finds it difficult to empathise and show her feelings. She is also traumatised from her difficult childhood with a mentally ill mother. In this context, it is worth noting that her surname, Norén, is identical to that of Lars Norén, the internationally acknowledged Swedish contemporary dramatist, whose plays describe in critical ways modern, dysfunctional

families characterised by emotional conflicts, anger and melancholy. Martin is the emotional and soft family man who finds it difficult to nurture his close relationships and take responsibility as a father and husband. Martin is the more melancholic character of the two, and we recognise his mood, physical appearance and lifestyle in characters like Kurt Wallander, Michael Blomquist, Harry Hole and Carl Mørck. It is also interesting that in season three Martin is replaced as Saga's partner by a new character, Henrik Sabroe (Thure Lindhardt), who is not a melancholic figure, but rather loses track of reality, and therefore has psychotic tendencies. When Henrik appears he is suffering from the loss of his wife and his two daughters, something that makes him mentally unstable, and he sees his deceased family every night and talks to his dead wife. He has no close relationships except for one-night stands, and he tries to treat his angst and schizophrenia with heavy drugs. As a contrast to Henrik, Saga turns out to be the vulnerable and emotional part of the duo.

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard reflects on the policeman's melancholic condition in one of his essays where he explains the sadness of being an observer, like the investigator, and 'serving a higher purpose because the art of observation is to bring forth what is hidden' (Kierkegaard 1843: 6).<sup>iv</sup> This displacement and distance of the observer is exactly how Bale (1997) describes melancholic ambiguity. Thus, the troubled protagonists in Nordic Noir are not only individuals with a complex emotional life, but also melancholic observers with a particular sensibility that captures loss and the unknown (Hansen & Waade, 2017).

## **2. Landscapes, climate and light (melancholic atmosphere)**

Focusing on landscape and location constitutes a new approach to television drama research (Roberts, 2012; Hansen & Waade, 2017). Film scholars have been studying the aesthetic and cultural aspects of landscapes on the film screen for a couple of decades, linking it to the rich tradition and comprehensive literature on mediated landscapes in art history and tourism studies (Lefebvre, 2006). Since the film and television screens are currently converging, with new standards for quality television drama coming into focus, a new interest in landscape aesthetics in television has arisen. Martin Lefebvre (2006) makes a distinction between setting and cinematic landscapes, the *setting* being the place where the story takes place, while the *cinematic landscape* includes imageries and aesthetics that work as supplements to the diegetic world and draw attention to the landscapes themselves. In fact, landscape is a historical

construction, a particular way of gazing at and contemplating places, originating from the landscape ideals and paintings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Nordic crime series landscape imageries, panorama views and opening shots can be used to indicate emotional conditions and a melancholic atmosphere. Reijnder's (2009) notion of the guilty landscape is interesting in this context and emphasises not only the significant use of landscapes in crime series, but also the emotional qualities of setting and places. Contemplative cinematic landscapes set the mood for the characters, the place or the story. Nordic Noir uses Nordic landscapes not only to create this mood and ambience, but also as a visual characteristic; whereas Nordic nature (for example twilight, dusk, winter and Arctic landscapes) constitutes part of the aesthetic style and production value (Hansen & Waade, 20017).

The bleak, gloomy and dark settings of *Forbrydelsen* have created a trend within crime series, not only in Nordic crime series, but also outside the Nordic region, for example *Hinterland* and *Broadchurch* (Greeber, 2015; Roberts, 2016). The point in this context is that landscapes indicate mood and emotions, sometimes as an underscore of the characters' emotional state, and sometimes as a distinct feature and style in the series without any particular connection to the characters or the story. The emotional expression of the contemplative landscape panoramas is often emphasised in the soundtrack. In *Forbrydelsen* the Nordic setting is shown in a dark and rainy winter season and extremely dim lighting, thereby setting the standard and inspiring the very notion of 'Nordic Noir' (Agger, 2016). The visual concept of the series was based on a short poem written by the Danish poet Henrik Nordbrandt which states that the Danish year has fourteen months including 'November, November, November....' (Nielsen, 2012). This poem expresses Nordic Melancholy and the relation between the climate, the landscapes and the mood in a significant way. In each of the three seasons in the series the story takes place during three weeks in November, showing Copenhagen as a rainy, grey and dark place. Many of the scenes are shot during the night, the series uses extremely dark lighting with only a few striking light sources, sometimes backlight, sometimes red and green lights reflected in raindrops and water, and in many scenes it is hard for the viewer to see what is actually going on. In these scenes, the soundtrack is the main guidance for the viewer.

*Broen* picks up on the same landscape and climate aesthetics as *Forbrydelsen*, this time with a slightly different style, most often a grey-green-brownish colour scale using shabby houses and impoverished neighbourhoods. In contrast, *Wallander*

illustrates a different use of setting. The Swedish *Wallander* series portrays the Swedish provincial city of Ystad and the coastal surroundings in touristy and attractive ways with sunny, attractive coastal areas, typical Swedish cottages and Nordic architecture and design, as well as the lights of the midsummer night and the twilight (Waade, 2013; Stigsdotter, 2010). However, the landscape imageries create a dramaturgic contrast to the harsh crime stories, indicating a conflict between the picturesque landscape and the evil beneath the surface.

### **3. The sound of Nordic Noir (melancholic atmosphere)**

What is the sound of Nordic Noir? One might have a quite clear idea what the sound is like, but without being able to explain what the sound is. This is because music and sound work in a much more subtle and unconscious way than words and images. When considering mood and melancholy, music and sound play a significant role. In general, the relation between music and emotions has been an essential question within music theory, as have emotions in film music. In general, film music has been regarded as either an *expression* of emotions, or as having an *arousal effect* on the audience (Have, 2007). The expressive function can signify the character's emotional state or the overall mood or tone of a scene, or enhance the emotional response of the spectator, or work as a meta-communicative element in which the music comments on itself (ibid.: 243). In many ways, music works in the same way as landscapes in Nordic Noir series, either supporting the actions that take place, or supplying the action with extra layers of meaning. Furthermore, in television drama the music engages spectators and fans, and the soundtracks and musicians are often discussed and commented on in online fan communities<sup>v</sup>. In general, the sound of Nordic Noir is often muted, at a slow pace, with single voices or no lyrics at all, sometimes involving significant dissonance and a mixture of instruments from folk music and more contemporary rock ballads. Some of the lyrics reflect the light, the night, longing, emptiness, the distance between people, and subjective feelings and perceptions of an individual – which are often explained in poetic ways, expressing the very self-consciousness and distance to the outer world that melancholy implies.

The soundtrack of *Forbrydelsen* has no lyrics, and consists primarily of instrumental music, and sometimes a humming voice. The music is characterised by dissonance, electronic soundscape, tension, suspense and a steady rhythm despite a slow pace. The melancholic feature of the music is the downplayed melody and the

contrast between softly beating drums in the theme tune and the slow path of the main melody line. This contrast has the arousal effect on the audiences that Have (2007) mentions.

The Danish composer Frans Bak made the fascinating soundtrack for the series. The music attracted immediate interest among viewers and fans worldwide and was shared, distributed and commented on online. By 2012 the soundtrack was already being sold on CDs, and later the composer was asked to contribute to the US remake and also the Turkish remake because his music was such a significant part of the series, the mood and the experience. Based on worldwide interest in the music in *Forbrydelsen*, Bak has recently (2016) released a new album called *Sound of North* ‘with both new music and themes from various TV series – all arranged for piano, vocal and string quartet and wrapped up in electronic soundscapes’ (quoted from his website<sup>vi</sup>). Thomas Golubic, an internationally acknowledged music supervisor working on series such as *Breaking Bad*, *The Walking Dead* and *The Killing*, explains that Frans Bak ‘has a myriad of different approaches to creating tension and suspense. Some of the magic of his score is its ability to find lots of different ways to bring you to the edge of your seat while at the same time not wearing out its welcome’<sup>vii</sup>. In other words, Bak’s music manages not only to indicate the character’s melancholic and ambivalent feelings and the mood in the story, but also to have an arousal effect on the audience. In line with Bale’s (1997) understanding of the melancholic ambiguity and Golubic’s characteristics of Bak’s soundtrack in *Forbrydelsen*, the music manages to arouse the audience’s emotional ambiguity, displacement and longing: or to ‘bring you to the edge of your seat while at the same time not wearing out its welcome’.

Many of the same characteristics also apply to the sound of other Nordic crime series such as *Wallander* and *Broen*. In fact, one can argue that there is a particular sound of Nordic Noir. However, in *Wallander* and *Broen* they use voices and song to a larger extent, and in both cases the melancholic elements are reinforced in the poetry and the quality of the voices. In the Swedish *Wallander* series, Fläskkvartetten’s characteristic sound combines folk and rock music with a distinct dissonance that *expresses* the emotions of the characters as well as the dissonance between the picturesque landscape and the evil and turmoil beneath the surface. Furthermore, the dissonance has an unpleasant *arousal* effect on the audience. Combined with Anna Ternheim’s crisp voice in *Quiet night*, the music becomes full of longing, sadness and anxiety. In *Hollow Talk* by the Danish Choir of Young Believers in *Broen*, the text

poetically describes emptiness and broken relationships. In both cases there is an observing subject with a deep distance to the self, and perhaps to life itself. In the British *Wallander* (BBC) the composer Emily Barker & The Red Clay Halo's theme song *Nostalgia* actually underpin the melancholic mood in the series based on an accordion in a slow waltz, indicating a lost time, and perhaps a lost place.

### **Emotions in TV drama**

Emotion has not been reflected in television drama as much as it has in film and music. This fact is the starting point for the recent publication *Emotions in contemporary TV series* (Garcia, 2016), in which the authors discuss the 'emotional turn' in relation to television drama series and how theories from philosophy, psychology, sociology and aesthetics respectively can provide new perspectives on the understanding of why television drama has become so popular and how television series relate to the viewers' everyday culture. Martínéz and González (2016) explain the 'emotional turn' in contemporary culture as a reaction to modernisation and social differentiation throughout the twentieth century that resulted in 'a cultural ethos characterised by the prevalence of emotions not only in the public sphere, but also in self-understanding and in the expression of personal identity' (p. 15). Within media psychology and the sociology of emotions, popular media and television entertainment in general is seen as a mood regulator, a laboratory in which the individual can generate emotions and reactions as well as reflecting identity and values (Jantzen & Andersen, 2008; Martínéz and González, 2016: 19). In particular, owing to their sophisticated sensuous, aesthetic, emotional and mythological narrative, fiction and visual art have been regarded as privileged objects for the self-reflection and approach to life and society of individuals (Nielsen, 2001). Identification with actions, places and characters in fictional stories is crucial in understanding emotions in television drama, and each genre includes and emphasises certain emotions (Grodal, 2009). The crime genre, for example, includes an arousal and a release linked to the genre's action and suspense elements, often mixed with thrilling and melodramatic elements (Agger, 2011), engaging the viewer's excitement, sadness and romantic emotions. Affect is a particular kind of emotion characterised by its bodily reaction and action when faced with a specific situation, and is in essence a 'self-feeling of being alive' (Nelson, 2016: 29) and a textual disposition that enhances the event as a pre-representative, pre-cognitive effect. Affect studies have dealt with emotions in politics, art, culture and social relations, and this research field

has attracted significant interest recently, standing out as an essential part of the emotional turn within academia (Backmann-Medick, 2016). Robin Nelson (2016) draws upon affect theory when he suggests that the ‘moment of affect’ is an analytical approach dealing with emotions in contemporary television drama (p. 33). In long-form TV fiction, Nelson argues, it is not so much the linear narrative drive and whodunit element that attracts and engages the viewers. Instead, it is the moments of affect. Nelson concludes that ‘the new mode demands, not a disengaged passive listening or watching, but a full feeling-thinking engagement of the bodymind’, an approach that calls for further research (Nelson, 2016: 50). The affective moments are moments in which the viewer gets hooked and engages with the story and the characters. These moments can include different kinds of emotions, for example melancholy, anger, happiness or excitement. In relation to Nordic Noir, I will argue that melancholy does not particularly involve moments of affect, but also reflects emotions, atmospheres and an existential longing that deals with life itself, ‘the self-feeling of being alive’ and thus represents a laboratory for ‘full feeling-thinking engagement of the bodymind’. In Nordic Noir this is expressed in landscapes, characters, music and light, drawing upon the long tradition of Nordic Melancholy in art and philosophy as well as the region’s landscape imageries and mythologies.

Focusing on Nordic Noir and its significant use of melancholic elements and relations to the Nordic Melancholy style, an interesting paradox emerges. In a period during which depression has grown more common than ever before, becoming one of the societal challenges facing us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, why is melancholy worshipped within popular culture? Why are the melancholic landscapes, characters, light and stories of Nordic crime series and crime fiction appreciated worldwide? And why is this happening now? To be able to answer these questions in greater depth, we need a much more comprehensive empirical study than this article can provide. One way to approach these questions could be to look at the ambiguity of the media and fiction itself. The media have the ability to be close and remote at the same time. So crime series give us the chance to experience crime scenes up close without facing any risk, to feel sad and depressed and to feel sorrow for the main character without being vulnerable and exposed. Television drama series have become one of the main storytellers of our time. We learn about politics, families, relational work as well as emotional work through television drama series. We learn to live our life, and to cope with our own melancholy. And as Bale says, melancholy is a general condition in Late



Modernity.

### **TV series**

*Bron/Broen* [The Bridge] (2011-2018) DR1 and SVT 1, Filmlance/Nimbus Film for SVT/DR.

*Forbrydelsen* [The Killing] (2007-2012) DR1, DR.

*Wallander* (2005-2014) TV4, Yellow Bird/ARD Degeto/Svensk Filmindustri.

### **Artwork**

Munch E (1892) *Melancholy* [Oil on canvas, 64 x 96 cm]. Oslo: National Gallery.

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<sup>i</sup> For example, the UK-based Facebook fan group *Fans of Scandinavian Crime/Fiction*, with more than 8,000 fans and daily posts, comments and discussions.

<sup>ii</sup> This article is based on the research conducted as part of the research project *What Makes Danish Television Drama Series Travel?*, funded by the Danish Research Council. For further information, please see the website <http://danishtvdrama.au.dk>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/melancholy>

<sup>iv</sup> For further elaboration see Hansen & Waade *Locating Nordic Noir* (2017).

<sup>v</sup> For example *The Killing* on YouTube (accessed on 5 April 2017)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=112ik7ve2nw&list=PLfDcFZBsll7QJvi7tQ\\_0zh-c5gnprWYws](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=112ik7ve2nw&list=PLfDcFZBsll7QJvi7tQ_0zh-c5gnprWYws).

<sup>vi</sup> <http://fransbak.com>

<sup>vii</sup> The quote is from Frans Bak's website and presented on the front page: <http://fransbak.com> (accessed on 5 April 2017).

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