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## **In/between Places: Connection and Isolation in *The Bridge***

### **ABSTRACT**

*Over recent years Scandinavian detective stories, both in print and on screen, have captivated audiences the world over. This phenomenon is known broadly as “Nordic Noir” and is characterised by bleak, gothic landscapes, twisting plotlines and obsessive and socially isolated protagonists who push themselves to solve the cases that no one else can. This paper will illustrate how Nordic Noir texts generally and *The Bridge* specifically deploy Gothic narrative tropes such as the uncanny, negative aesthetics and liminality. In particular I explore how the themes of connection and isolation are addressed within *The Bridge*. I argue that these themes are represented through the exploration of three literal and allegorical bridges: The Öresund Bridge connecting Sweden and Denmark, a bookend to the story arc of the series, an in/between place and the key visual image throughout the show; the Danish detective Martin Rohde as a bridge between his socially awkward Swedish colleague, Saga Norén, and the world; and the show’s villain, known as both the Bridge Killer and the Truth Terrorist as the bridge between Martin Rohde and his son, August. Through using the notion of “the bridge” as an in/between space, *The Bridge* explores and (re)imagines connections in/between nations, estranged families and the isolated within the social world.*

Nordic Noir, for the unfamiliar, is a fairly recent phenomenon. It encompasses print media through the novels of (amongst others) Arnaldur Indridason, Steig Larsson, Henning Mankell, and Jo Nesbø; cinema through the Swedish and American

adaptations of Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy*; and through television through the Swedish and British adaptations of Mankell's *Wallander*, Danish crime dramas *The Eagle: a crime odyssey* (*Ørnen: En krimi-odyssé*), *Unit One* (*Rejseholdet*) and *The Killing* (*Forbrydelsen*); Danish political thriller *Borgen* and the Swedish/Danish crime drama *The Bridge* (*Bron/Broen*).

Nordic Noir has enjoyed international critical acclaim and is enjoyed by millions across the globe. Its popularity in Britain has been particularly feverish and a recent *Radio Times* article stated that Nordic Noir is "all over [British] screens like gothic fungus" (Armstrong 2013). *The Killing* in particular sparked British interest in everything Danish (Jensen and Waade 2013) and in particular changed British women's winter fashions forever as the Sara Lund Faroe knit sweater phenomenon took hold like a gothic comfort blanket.

Thematically, Nordic Noir has been said to represent the decline of the utopian welfare states of the nations of Scandinavia (Forshaw 2012), as well as political lurches to the right in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Forshaw (2012) argues that Nordic noir also represents the continuing influences of the great Viking sagas in Scandinavian cultural outputs, particularly the *volsung saga* and its population of powerful gods, resilient heroes, warrior women and unspeakable monsters. Like its American cousin *film noir*, Nordic Noir is a mysterious non-genre that hybridises the crime thriller, horror and the political drama and is held together by heavy dose of social commentary. In addition, like *film noir*, Nordic Noir is characterised by the use of the Gothic narrative tropes of negative aesthetics and liminality, wielding a mysterious and seductive power that deploys anaemic light, juxtaposing the shadowy underworld of its cities with stylishly furnished interiors, offering a "potent, even magical articulation of death-in-motion" (Krutnik 1991).

Liminality, as a key feature of Gothic texts, is characterised by narrative devices that cross thresholds and explore the notion of in/between spaces such as the possibilities for existing in/between fantasy and reality, life and death, being and unbeing (Whisker 2007). This paper offers a reading of the Nordic Noir television series *The Bridge* (*Bron/Broen*). I argue that the show explores liminality through the literal and allegorical bridges: the Öresund Bridge that gives the show its title and is the setting of much of the action; the relationship between protagonists Martin Rohde and Saga Norén with Martin attempting to act as a bridge between the socially awkward Saga and the world; and finally through the show's villain, the Bridge Killer/Truth Terrorist/Jens Hansen who acts as bridge between Martin Rohde and his estranged son, August.

In addition the paper will make links between *film noir*, Nordic Noir and the Gothic, demonstrating how the Gothic narrative devices deployed within *The Bridge* are generic conventions that characterise Nordic Noir texts. Finally, I argue that although

*The Bridge* and other Nordic Noir texts are not explicitly Gothic, they nevertheless explore Gothic themes and deploy Gothic narrative and metaphorical devices. Therefore, Nordic Noir texts make a valuable contribution to both a consideration of the historical trajectory of the Gothic, as well as to contemporary Gothic scholarship.

### **Nordic Noir and the Gothic (re)imaginary**

As a mode of expression, Gothic texts draw upon the notion of the uncanny, the things that make us fearful and uneasy. Freud's (1919) conceptualisation of the uncanny as encompassing the unfamiliar and the hidden dangers lurking under the surface of the familiar are evident within classic Gothic texts such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which reflected contemporary fears about the rise of technology and a new mechanised era of production for mankind (Back 1995). Maria Beville (2009) argues that Gothic texts continue this tradition and offer a conduit through which to voice our anxieties about current fears such as global terrorism (ibid.). The Gothic, then, through its exploration of the dark and unfamiliar, but ever-present threats to our existence, gives us a way to (re)imagine the social, political and scientific worlds that we inhabit.

Like the Gothic, the *film noir* movies of the nineteen forties, fifties and beyond gave audiences an opportunity to (re)imagine the American dream (Krutnik 1991; Strinati 2000). The post war world represented within many early *film noir* texts was dark and unfamiliar and scarred by the horrors of a mechanised war that took place on land, sea and in air and also saw the systematic, production-line destruction of over six million humans within the Nazi death camps<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, Nordic Noir offers audiences an opportunity to (re)imagine Scandinavia from a left-wing utopia to a society full of cracks through which oozes darkness.

Similarities between *film noir*, Nordic Noir and the Gothic are easy to observe and I will spend some time here fleshing out some of these similarities. I will focus, within this section, upon how negative aesthetics are used metaphorically within the three genres under discussion within this paper. As I am arguing that Nordic Noir has a place within Gothic scholarship, it is necessary to draw comparisons between both the Gothic and Nordic Noir's predecessor, *film noir*.

Place and setting are important within the Gothic and physical location within Gothic texts often represents the inner worlds of protagonists through the use of negative aesthetics. "Negative aesthetics" is described by Botting (2014) as "informing Gothic texts". For Botting, darkness saturates the Gothic with exterior darkness mirroring the psyche of protagonists and "landscapes stress isolation and wilderness, evoking vulnerability, exposure and insecurity" (4). Human feelings and interiority

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the early *film noir* directors were Jewish émigré's to the USA who had escaped Nazi Germany. See Brook (2009)

exist liminally within the Gothic, and are expressed and belong both within and without. Similarly *film noir* is characterised by a neutral, deadpan narrative style where dramatic moments and visual set pieces are deployed to convey the effects of “extreme violence, perverse or corrupt sexuality or moments of psychic breakdown” (Krutnik 1991, 20) often using music or setting to convey such emotional events. Place and context are therefore ‘often tempered with decay: deserted, haunted and in ruins’ (Botting 2014, 4). The influence of the Gothic can be clearly seen in the early film noir movies of the 1940’a and 1950’s, particularly in Orson Wells’ (1949) *The Third Man*, filmed in a Vienna ruined by the bombs of World War II, the city resembles a ruined castle, its shadows and decay mirroring the inner world of Wells’ Harry Lime. Krutnik (1991) argues that the crime film lends itself to such a style because it allows for narratively generated stylistic excess. Murder, the ultimate act of human excess provides context, scene and aesthetic motivation for the crime drama, where human nature in all its bloody darkness becomes narrative subject matter.

Both Gothic and *film noir* texts then represent the inner worlds of their characters through the use of negative aesthetics to depict ‘disturbances of sanity and security (including) displays of uncontrolled passion, violent emotion (and) portrayals of perversion and obsession’ (Botting 2014, 1) and are concerned with the dark spaces of the human psyche: obsession, perverse sexualities, insanity and violence. Identity, place and context are (re)imagined and are made hostile, untamed and threatening (Botting 2014).

Nordic Noir, like *film noir*, reflects the Gothic narrative trope of negative aesthetics to represent the inner world of protagonists. Troubled, unsmiling and with little bodily affect, Nordic Noir detectives attend to their cases with obsessive fever. Musical soundtrack is often used to indicate the thought processes of the protagonists rather than dramatic interaction. In addition Nordic Noir, like *film noir*, pays particular attention to the effects of crime. Season one of *The Killing* in particular offered an unflinching portrait of the impact their daughter’s murder had upon Theis and Pernile Birk Larsen. Nordic Noir also uses negative aesthetics to (re)imagine sunny streets of Malmö, Copenhagen or Stockholm and to transform them into bleak, shadowy and rainy cityscapes where killers lurk and no one can be trusted. *The Eagle: A crime odyssey* exemplifies this technique and uses the geographical features of Iceland as a metaphor for Hallgrim Hallgrimson’s complex character (Agger 2013), the jagged rocks and treeless landscape mirroring his troubled state of mind. Nature within the Gothic ‘stresses isolation and wilderness’ (Botting 2014, 4) and such a visual style characterises Scandinavian produced Nordic Noir. Indeed, one of the most striking differences between the Swedish and British adaptations of *Wallander* was in the representation of the Swedish town of Ystad. In the Swedish version flat, characterless cities were dominated by anonymous factories and unwelcoming housing estates (Forshaw 2012), the skies were always cloudy and Wallander’s beachside home backed onto a flat, grey

Baltic Sea. The British version of *Wallander* by contrast, offered sunny skies, a picturesque town and a rural idyll, a British (re)imagining of Sweden (Waade 2011).

In Nordic Noir, the bleak landscapes provoke in the viewer “feelings of melancholic gloom, loneliness and loss” (Botting 2014, 6). For example in both *The Killing* and *The Bridge*, the Streets of Copenhagen and Malmö become dystopian labyrinths of despair where it is often raining, always autumn or winter and more often than not, night-time. The viewer is drawn in to the gloomy worlds that are inhabited by the Nordic Noir protagonists and see their inner worlds reflected within the murky underworlds that they inhabit. The streets of Copenhagen in *The Killing* were lit so dimly that Danish viewers allegedly attempted to adjust their sets when the series first aired in 2007. Elsewhere Agger (2013) has outlined the surprise registered by the Danish tourist board that foreign visitors found the “sombre, noir-inspired” (Agger 2013, 236) image of Copenhagen presented in *The Killing* more attractive than the glossy friendly city presented by tourist brochures. Agger argues that this is because *The Killing* offered a new topography of Copenhagen; it turned “sites” into “sights” (Hospers cited Agger 2013) and put “traditional and modern locations into a contemporary moral and visual perspective” (Agger 2013, 236). As with the Gothic and *film noir*, Nordic Noir deploys shadow, darkness and location as allegorical devices that illustrate the moral, political and psychological darkness that accompany the murders under investigation and the protagonists take us with them on a journey to the murkiest depths of the human psyche.

Finally, it is worth outlining the way in which the heroic figures within Nordic Noir (re)imagine the characteristics of the detective. Typically, protagonists in both classic Gothic and film noir texts are male. Within many Gothic texts, women are represented (even by female authors) as being in danger from stepping outside of heteronormative structures such as marriage, the family and the domestic sphere (Botting 2014). Those that do may find themselves in need of rescue from a man. Similarly, and drawing from ‘hard-boiled’ crime fiction, the *film noir* hero is typically male, masculine, unhappy, cynical and bitter who becomes sexually, and often fatally attracted to a woman with a similar outlook – the femme fatale (Strinati 2000). Within Nordic Noir texts, protagonists simultaneously interrupt and reinforce the characteristics *noir* hero(ine). There is something of a gender reversal in Nordic Noir and male detectives are (re)imagined and represented as emotionally dependent upon women. Kurt Wallander for example leans upon his daughter Linda for emotional support, later turning to his boss and neighbour Katarina. In *The Eagle: A crime odyssey*, Hallgrim Hallgrimson is shown to have deep emotional issues stemming from childhood trauma, complete with panic attacks. Such men are a far cry from the hyper masculine *film noir* protagonists, described in 1947 by John Houseman as the

Tough crime hero [...] male, unkempt, unloved and socially isolated whose primary goal in life is the 'unravelling of obscure crimes, the final solution of which offers him little or no satisfaction (Houseman cited Krutnik 1991, 56).

Within many Nordic Noir texts female protagonists lead investigations and are "unloved and social isolated" (ibid.), perhaps these characteristics reflect Gothic narratives around the dangers of non-conformity for women. Both *The Killing's* Sarah Lund and *The Bridge's* Saga Norén struggle to maintain relationships of both familial and romantic kinds. Lund and Norén are emotionally muted, self-reliant and psychologically driven by their desire to solve their cases, they exist within a liminal space - outside of society and yet within it, living with lives filled with death. The social isolation of Lund and Norén is further increased by their position as marked minorities in the male dominated world of the police force. Although Saga Norén displays many behaviours that viewers may read as consistent with Asperger Syndrome, the writer of *The Bridge*, Hans Rosenfeld and the actress who plays her, Sofia Helin deliberately omitted a diagnosis when creating Saga (Forshaw 2014), this adds to her mystery. Saga's isolation is double sided, as a woman in the police force and as someone with a different way of being. Saga exists within a liminal space, neither truly belonging or completely outside of society. We might think of Saga as a Gothic protagonist because of her psychic liminality; she is a gifted detective who cannot, because of her way of being, belong to the social world that she investigates.

The remainder of this paper examines season one of the Nordic Noir TV show *The Bridge* and explores the way in which the show deploys the Gothic tropes of negative aesthetics and liminality to drive its narrative and to as well as how it is tied to its *film noir* predecessors.

### **The Bridge (Bron/Broen)**

Co-Produced by Danmarks Radio and Sveriges Television with the German television company ZDF, *The Bridge* or *Bron/Broen* is a cross-cultural collaboration between Sweden and Denmark. Season one was first broadcast in 2011 and was comprised of ten hour-long episodes, the story starts when the power that lights the Öresund Bridge that connects the Swedish town of Malmö to the Danish capital, Copenhagen is cut. When the lights are restored a body is found with its midriff exactly in line with the border of Sweden and Denmark. The body is in fact two halves of two people - a Swedish politician and a Danish prostitute. Detectives from both countries are assigned to the case, Martin Rohde from Copenhagen and Saga Norén of Malmö. The killer contacts a Malmö-based journalist and becomes known interchangeably as The Bridge Killer and the Truth Terrorist. The killer has five lessons to teach about various social problems including: politically sanctioned Islamophobia; the plight of the homeless; and the deaths of children in non-Western conflicts. However during the latter episodes of the show the killer is revealed to be Jens Hansen, a former college and friend of Martin's.

Jens' real mission objective is revealed not to be the five lessons but personal revenge against Martin whom he blames for the death of his wife and son who died some years earlier in an accident that saw their car plunge from the Öresund Bridge.

*The Bridge* picks up on some of the major Nordic Noir themes and offers as (re)imagining of Swedish and Danish society that is consistent with the genre. The show picks up on contemporary Scandinavian fears around the decline of the utopian welfare state and the rise of the political right wing as the Bridge Killer/Truth Terrorist/Jens sets out to demonstrate where Scandinavian society is going wrong. Stylistically it deploys negative aesthetics particularly successfully, draining the colour from the sea and the sky and using the shadow, flat light and bleak inner urban cityscapes as both backdrop to the action and as reflection of the negative affect that Bridge Killer/Truth Terrorist/Jens' crimes provoke both within individual and collective psyche's. The cities of Copenhagen and Malmö appear to be as troubled by the show's events as the detectives working on the case.

*The Bridge* also offers a particularly interesting version of the hard-boiled noir hero(ine) and in terms of the male noir hero as driving the real noir agenda, "the affirmation of the hero as an idealised and undivided figure of masculine potency and invulnerability" (Krutnik 1991, 93), the figure of Martin Rohde acts to undo such a trope. In the first episode we learn that he has had a vasectomy - a deliberate ploy to curb his 'masculine potency' - he has fathered five children. He also reveals his vulnerability as he has an affair with a witness that results in his wife throwing him out of their home to Martin's distress. The denouement of the story sees his eldest son, August, kidnapped by the Bridge Killer/truth Terrorist, and it is Saga, not Martin who holds together emotionally and solves the case. Saga proves to be physically invulnerable as she does this despite several gunshot wounds. Saga herself is an interruption to the traditional noir hero. Neither male nor unkempt she takes the socially isolated characteristic of the noir hero to the extreme. Displaying behaviours consistent with what the viewer might recognise as consistent with Asperger Syndrome. She is understood by her colleagues as 'odd' and loved only it seems, by her boss, Hans. We see Saga enjoy casual sexual encounters, she picks up a man in a club, takes him home for sex and then encourages him to leave by looking at gruesome crime scene photographs after the coupling is over. She is not undone by love or lust and is driven to solve the case and believes that she is the only person who can. She is, in effect, a gendered inversion of the hard-boiled hero of *noir* yore.

I will now discuss the ways in which *The Bridge* draws upon the Gothic narrative devices of negative aesthetics and liminality in order to illustrate the themes of connection and isolation through the use of three literal and allegorical bridges.



## The Öresund Bridge: Liminality and death in motion

The Öresund Bridge that connects Malmö in southwestern Sweden to the Danish capital Copenhagen acts both a literal and allegorical bridge in *The Bridge*. It is a place of isolation, without allegiance or nationality whilst simultaneously connecting the two countries for the first time since the last Ice Age. The Öresund Bridge serves many narrative purposes throughout the show: it is why the Bridge Killer/Truth Terrorist/Jens kills; it is where the first bodies are found; it is how Saga and Martin travel to each other; and it is the scene of the show's climax, with Saga revealing to Martin that his son is dead, murdered by Jens in an act of revenge.

The action in *The Bridge* is often interspersed with stills of the Öresund Bridge and, as such, it is a constant presence in the show, a more significant landmark than anywhere else in Malmö or Copenhagen whose tourist attractions are thrown over for "backstage" city squalor. The bridge is used as a negative aesthetic, its purpose is ambiguous and the sea underneath is flat and grey. The bridge haunts us like a lonely ghost, where the spectres of Jens' lost family and the dismembered corpses of his first victims are restless within a swirl of sea mist from the Öresund strait. More importantly, the liminality of the bridge, reflected by its neutrality and in/betweenness, enables a Gothic reading of *The Bridge* to flourish. The loss of his wife and son upon the bridge transforms Jens into something monstrous, he becomes the death drive in physical form, faking his own death and physically transforming into The Bridge Killer/Truth Terrorist by surgically changing his face. Jens, like the bridge itself, exists within a liminal space, "hovering between being and unbeing, dead and undead" (Whisker 2007, 411)

It is the intention of Gothic texts to engage with the uncanny, that which makes us uneasy or afraid. The inevitability of death haunts humanity, for Freud, death is the aim of life (Royle 2003). In many ways the Gothic troubles the inevitability of death and is characterised by those who cheat death, like vampires reborn from blood or the zombie who is animated in death, both monsters who are neither dead nor living but somewhere in/between. The Gothic is concerned with death and with what drives us to seek a return from death, or to take life from another. This latter point Freud termed the "death drive" (Freud cited Royle 2003).

Royle argues that "the death drive manifests itself in a compulsion to repeat" (2003, 89) and the compulsion to repeat characterises death in *The Bridge*. Jens's motive is to get Martin's (and the world's) attention by murdering everyday citizens (the homeless, police officers, children), repeating and mirroring the previous human harms of homeless deaths in winter, Muslim deaths in custody and child deaths in non-Western conflicts. Once Martin has been entranced by the case, Jens reveals his true motive - to kill Martin's oldest son, August, as revenge for the deaths of his wife and son. Jens then wishes for Martin to kill him in a final act of revenge and repetition - this

ultimate drive to death taking place upon the underside of the Öresund Bridge. The Öresund Bridge is a liminal gateway to the narrative trajectory of *The Bridge*. Its function within the series is to do much more than to connect characters and countries, it is a catalyst for the articulation of death in motion (Krutnik 1991) in the form of Jens's grotesque drive towards revenge and annihilation. The Öresund Bridge constitutes an uncanny presence, mysterious and with uncertain purpose (Royle 2003). The events that unfold on or because of the bridge expose the everyday darkness that lurks underneath the surface of our lives and the places within which our lives are lived, darkness that we may brush up against but never see. A landmark reimaged and refigured The Öresund Bridge destabilizes the "calm complacency" (Whisker 2007) of many contemporary understandings of Scandinavian societies to reveal the darkness that lurks underneath.

### **Martin and Saga: bridging social worlds**

With a name that alludes to epic Viking mythology, Saga Norén is a complex character. The viewer may first understand Saga as displaying behaviours consistent with Asperger Syndrome, although we never know for sure because Saga does not understand herself in terms of medical diagnosis. We might say that Saga herself exists within a liminal space; somewhere in/between her obsessive and literal mind and the world inhabited by her laid back, adaptable and humorous Danish counterpart, Martin Rohde.

The characters of Saga and Martin and the relationship between them can also be read as including Gothic tropes. Firstly there is the refusal to name Saga's disposition, her colleagues call her "odd" and Martin spends much of their interactions trying to understand her, to respect her as a professional whilst trying to guide her towards some of the social graces many of us take for granted: to praise her colleagues, to tell white lies. We are privy to Martin's private life, we see him cheating on his wife, and we know that he was married previously and that he also cheated on his former wife. We know that he had an affair with Jens's wife and that this destroyed their friendship and is the reason why Jens revenge is played out upon Martin. Conversely we know very little about Saga. We know that she had a sister who died by suicide but the reasons for this along with any other details about Saga's family and private life remain hidden. Botting states that, within the Gothic,

Reasons and explanations, if they come at all, arrive late and only after a range of apprehensive or expectant projections have been elicited: fear and anxiety about the balance of human faculties and borders of everyday life are provoked in the process of making what is perceived and what is understood, is suspended, often to the point of total loss of [...] self control or sanity (2014, 6)

That we are given no reason or explanation for Saga's "odd" behaviour, for her solitude or her sister's death is reflective of the first part of Botting's assertion. Martin's attempts to engage Saga about her family are met with a kind of direct evasiveness. For example in one scene Martin asks Saga where she has been to which she replies, "The cemetery", when he asks her why she states, "my sister lives there" and then closes the conversation by continuing with her work. Saga's positioning of her sister as inhabiting the cemetery is jarring and reveals something about the way in which Saga understands the world. Parallels to Gothic narratives can also be drawn here as Saga's refusal to name either the reasons for her social awkwardness or the nature of her sister's death reflect Botting's assertion that, within the Gothic, "narratives [...] delimit the scope of reason and knowledge by framing events from partial perspectives". Our curiosity is, however, not satisfied within this moment and we are left to project our own imaginings of events into Saga's sister's death or to make assumptions about her psychic condition.

The relationship between Martin and Saga and the way that it drives the plot of *The Bridge* inevitably leads to a loss of self-control as articulated by Botting. A pivotal moment in the show occurs when Martin and Saga are talking to the mother of a missing teenager who is feared to have been taken by the Bridge Killer/Truth Terrorist/Jens. Martin's attempt to reassure the woman that they will find her daughter are undone by Saga who bluntly states that they will do their best but can't make any promises. The woman leaves and Martin chastises Saga, berating her for being unaware of the impact of her speech and telling her that, "Sometimes people need to be told something, even if it's not true". Saga argues that doing so is wrong, that she would be caught out in a lie if the girl turns out to be dead and would not then know what to say to the victim's mother. This moment presents a thought provoking moral dilemma: is it better to say to a worried parent of a runaway child that there might not be a happy ending or to lull them into momentary false hope. This moment also reflects Saga's peculiar position as neither truly belonging to or being completely outside of the social world. She does not know what the correct social cues are in this, and many other interactions. Saga expresses surprise when Martin berates her as though she didn't know what white lies are, as though she has been hidden from the world that we recognise.

However, the interaction also serves another purpose. That Saga cannot lie is pivotal to the climax of the series. Jens kidnaps Martin's son, August, and buries him alive behind a wall. During the show's denouement, a scene that unfolds the underside of the Öresund Bridge, it is revealed that Saga has found August, she tries to lie to Martin, telling him that his son is still alive. However Martin refers back to his previous advice to her and asks her, "Are you telling me what I want to hear?" When she replies that she is, and that August is dead, Martin loses both psychological and moral control. Again however, Saga fulfils her role as a hard-boiled heroine and prevents him from

killing Jens thus interrupting the classic Gothic narrative of woman as in need of rescue from man.

The way in which Saga balances her human faculties act as a perfect counter position to Martin, who loses control sexually and emotionally throughout the series. Reasons and explanations are then used in *The Bridge* in tune with Gothic sensibilities, they are narrative devices that act to reveal the inner psyche of characters rather than plot drivers *sui generis*.

### **The Bridge Killer/Truth Terrorist as Martin's bridge to his son**

Earlier, I discussed how Martin Rohde represents a failed hard-boiled hero. Like Saga and her relationship to the social world, Martin also occupies a liminal space with regards to his masculinity. He is somewhere in between being a good man and a scoundrel and is depicted as both a loyal and absent father. He has an affair with a witness but is riddled by guilt and desperate to make amends with his wife. The classic *noir* hero's relationship with the femme fatale is seen by Kaplan (1991) as a rejection of the heteronormative family imposed upon men and women of the time. For Martin Rohde, infidelity only reinforces his desire to be part of his family. At the beginning of the series we learn that Martins eldest son, August lives with him and his second wife, Mette and their three young sons. The relationship between Martin and August is strained and the two initially seem to have very little time for each other. As the show progresses, we see August having frequent instant message chats with his ex girlfriend, Frida. Frida convinces August that his father is not such a bad guy, to give him a chance and August does. The relationship between father and son softens and the two plan a camping trip together. However, in the penultimate episode, it is revealed that Frida is not who she seems. She is, in fact, the Bridge Killer/Truth Terrorist/Jens who has been chatting to August. The Bridge Killer/Truth Terrorist/Jens has done this bridgework between father and son deliberately, so that it will hurt Martin more when he takes August away from him. This clever plot twist sets the remainder of the show up for the final showdown that takes place on the Öresund Bridge, the bridge becoming a bookend for the show and reinforcing the notion of the in/between place within which the show is located.

Images of liminal spaces are common to the Gothic (Whisker 2007) and so it interesting that the relationship between Martin and his son is built within a liminal space of existence (*ibid.*), the Internet. Such a space allows August to reveal his inner world, inadvertently to a monster. Such a plot device reflects Gothic modes of expression because it troubles our relationship to a familiar space - most of us use the Internet on a daily basis, and communication is one of the key reasons for doing so. That August's ex-girlfriend turns out to be Jens reminds us of the dangers the Internet poses. It taps into our fears about the harms that can come from technologies and as such reflects concerns located within the postmodern Gothic.

## Conclusion

This paper has illustrated some of the ways in which Nordic Noir texts generally, and *The Bridge* specifically, draws upon Gothic narrative tropes, particularly those of negative aesthetics and liminality. I have demonstrated how the themes of connection and isolation are addressed within *The Bridge* through the exploration of liminal spaces of existence. Such spaces are represented by three literal and allegorical bridges: The Öresund Bridge, Martin Rohde as a bridge between Saga Norén the social world; and The Bridge Killer/Truth Terrorist/Jens as bridge between Martin and his estranged son, August. I have also traced the origins of both Nordic Noir and film noir to the Gothic and shown how the plot, characters and setting of Nordic Noir and *film noir* draw from Gothic notions of the uncanny, negative aesthetic and liminality. Analyses of Nordic Noir texts therefore offer a contribution to a study of the historical trajectory of the Gothic as well as the genre's evolution and contemporary manifestations.

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