

# The Forest as a Gendered Space: Female Characters in European Crime on Screen

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to investigate the relationship of the forest space with female characters, a recurring theme in recent detective stories. This article investigates the places with which female characters—appearing as police officers or victims in detective narratives—are shown to be in contact during their lives, as well as the locations in which deaths occur in these stories. Within the scope of the study, ten detective stories shot in Europe in recent years were examined using the content analysis method. The elements to be analyzed are both the images of TV series and movies and the dialogues accompanying the images about the selected locations. The results of this article show that forest is a common element in all productions of different genres, such as movies and TV series, shot in different countries and has been used as a crime location. In the productions examined, forests are generally places that inspire fear, but in some TV series the forest is on the side of women. The forest is also identified with mythological narratives and supernatural events. In contrast to the common focus on urban spaces and the built environment in studies on the relationship between architecture and media, this article uniquely examines the use of forest spaces in certain TV series and movies.

**Keywords:** Cinema, Gender, Forest, Architecture, Television.

## 1. Introduction

The detective genre has a plot in which the detective searches for the criminal after a certain crime is committed. Classically, all detective stories have a detective, a criminal, and a victim. Hirsch states that the earliest examples of detective fiction in English are Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), Poe's Dupin stories (*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, and *The Purloined Letter*), Dickens's *Bleak House* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Collins's *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, a *Recollections of a Detective Police Officer* by "Thomas Waters" (William Russell), and Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes book, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published in 1887 [1]. Later, different detective series were produced in many different countries, especially in English-speaking countries. Following the novels, movies and TV series in this genre have been shot since the 1950s. Detective series and movies are generally in close relations with detective literature. Many detective movies and TV series are adapted from detective novels. In addition, sometimes scenarios are created by adapting real-life stories to the screen. According to Çubukcu, the plots detective movies and TV series use six main phases [2]:

- a. introduction of the detective;
- b. crime and clues;

- c. investigation;
- d. announcement and solution;
- e. explanation of the solution;
- f. denouement.

But sometimes detective stories can focus on missing cases rather than murders. In such cases, there are also detective stories where the cases cannot be solved for example *42 Days of Darkness* and *The Lørenskog Disappearance*.

This study focuses on detective and mystery productions that center around female protagonists, drawing on common themes found in such stories. A frequent narrative device in these works is the dynamic between two detectives. Often, this involves a partnership between an experienced officer and a rookie, or between local law enforcement and an outsider from a larger city. In some cases, the focus is on the solidarity between two female detectives (as seen in *Rizzoli & Isles*, *Scott & Bailey*, and *Unbelievable*), while in others, the tension arises from conflicts between a male and a female officer (*The Bridge*), or even a romantic relationship (*Cardinal*). The central female figure solving the mystery is not always a police officer; she may instead be a prosecutor (*Sleeping Dog*), a journalist (*The Snow Girl* and *Inside Man*), or a housewife (*In for a Murder* and *Ultraviolet*). Additionally, in some stories, a relative of the victim, such as a sister, daughter, mother or wife, takes on the role of investigator (*Equinox*, *42 Days of Darkness*, *Hold Tight*, *Women of the Dead* and *Anthracite*). Among all these works, this study will focus on recent European productions featuring women who are actively serving as police officers.

In the first studies examining female police officers historically in the literature, especially in the 1930s-40s and 1970s, it was observed that female police characters had characteristics that repeated gender norms. These female police officers wear high heels and look perfect while working in the field, and when they go home, they become perfect mothers and wives [3]. Although these police officers are important because they work in a profession historically attributed to men, they are criticized for continuing the traditional roles of women.

The female police officers examined in the recent period in the literature are Dana Scully from *The X-Files* (TV Series 1993-2018), Clarice Starling from movies *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) and *Hannibal* (1999); and Marge Gunderson from the movie *Fargo* (1996). These characters, unlike the female police officers before them, are thought to have an empowering effect in terms of handling female identity. Moreover, there is a comprehensive study specifically about Dana Scully. The Scully Effect Report prepared by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, has proven that women who watch this series see the Scully character as a role model and that this has a great impact on their choosing a career in the STEM field [4]. Nowadays, new characters have been added to these strong characters, which do not reproduce gender norms and can sometimes be said to be approached from a feminist perspective. There are strong female police characters in TV series and movies, some of which will be discussed in the second part of this study. These can be listed by country or region as follows:

- Scandinavia: Sarah Lund from *The Killing* TV series (2007-2012), Saga Norén from *The Bridge* TV series (2011-2018), Tina from the movie *Border* (2018), Sofia Karppi from *Deadwind* TV series (2018-2021), Naia Thulin from *The Chestnut Man* TV series (2021), Kata from *The Valhalla Murders* TV series (2019), Hinrika from *Trapped* and *Entrapped* TV series (2015 & 2022) and Jorunn Lakke from *The Lørenskog Disappearance* TV series (2022).
- United Kingdom: Kate Fleming from *Line of Duty* TV Series (2012-2021), Stella Gibson from *The Fall* TV series (2013-2016), Marcella Backland from *Marcella* TV series (2016-2021), Ellie Miller

from *Broadchurch* TV series (2013-2017), Kip Glaspie from *Collateral* TV series (2018), Johanna Griffin from *The Stranger* TV series (2020) and Shahara Hasan and Iris Maplewood from *Bodies* TV series (2023).

- Germany: Nadja Simon from *Perfume* TV Series (2018), Elsie Garten from *The Defeated* (2020), Annalena Gottknecht from *Close to Home: Murder in the Coalfield* (2022) TV series and Aida Kurt from *Dear Child* (2023).
- France & Belgium: Laurène Weiss from *Black Spot* TV series (2017-2019), Virginie Musso from *The Forest* TV series (2017), Billie Vebber from *Unit 42* TV series (2017), Vicky Degraeve from *13 Commandments* TV series (2018) and Giovanna Deluca from *Anthracite* TV series (2024).
- Spain: Amaia Salazar from Baztán Trilogy including movies *The Invisible Guardian* (2017), *The Legacy of the Bones* (2019) and *Offering to the Storm* (2020); Rosa Vargas from *Bitter Daisies* TV series (2018) and Alicia Sierra from *Money Heist* TV series (2017-2021)
- Poland: Anna Jass from *The Mire* TV series (2018-2024), Helena Rus from the movie *The Plagues of Breslau* (2018)
- Luxemburg: Elsa Ley from TV series *Capitani* (2019-2022).

Apart from these productions, which are almost entirely shot from a realistic perspective, there are also productions that were shot in recent times but tell stories that take place in various periods in history. The first of these is the movie about *Enola Holmes* (2020), the sister of detective Sherlock Holmes, one of the first detective stories in history and perhaps the most famous. The movie tells the story of a young woman's detective adventures and her relationships with her brothers in 1884. Similarly, the TV series *The Law According to Lidia Poët* (2023) tells the events that took place in Italy in 1883 and is adapted from the true story of Italy's first female lawyer. The series is in the detective story genre, and Poët, the lead character, as a woman who is not allowed to practice law, works with her brother, who is a lawyer, and solves many murder mysteries. Another production similar to these two productions is the series *The Alienist* (2018-2020). In the series, Sara Howard plays the first woman to work in the New York Police Department. Howard, who investigated various mysteries with other characters in the series in the first season, opens her own detective agency in the second season. All three productions mentioned describe women's efforts to take part in crime-related professions traditionally occupied by men, such as police, detectives or lawyers. In these productions, women fight both criminals and the negative judgments of society. This theme is common to the female police officers described in all the chapters so far. Many women involved with crime and criminals are looked down upon by their often male colleagues, family, and male criminals. When these women are successful in their profession, they not only catch a criminal, they also win against negative thoughts about themselves.

The women described in this section have some common characteristics. These women are either largely portrayed as beautiful, stylish, and always flawless (like Stella Gibson, Dana Scully, and previous generations of cops), or, on the contrary, they have some "flaws." For example, Saga Norén is autistic or has Asperger syndrome. Although she looks physically beautiful, she does not go home for days and only changes her T-shirt in the open office at the police station, among dozens of male police officers. Although she is a very successful police officer, she has no knowledge of social relations and social norms. Similarly, Laurène Weiss does not sleep for several days in a row, does not go home, does not shower, and partially washes her body with the tap in her office and changes her shirt. Weiss also cut off two fingers on her left hand to escape handcuffs while she was incarcerated at the age of 18. She uses a leather accessory to hide her cut fingers on her left hand. Marcella Backland is experiencing serious

psychological problems due to the death of her baby, which she accidentally caused. Iris Maplewood uses a rechargeable prosthesis that is attached to her spine. Without this prosthesis, she cannot use her lower body and later it turns out that she is disabled. Vicky Degraeve also has a large scar on her back along her spine. Although Sofia Karppi and Naia Thulin are physically perfect, they have messy hair and different colors at the roots and ends of their hair. In addition, they are shown as characters who wear comfortable clothes such as tracksuits and tie their hair up with messy buns, in short, they do not care about their physical appearance even though they can look perfect, and they care more about their work. Sarah Lund is shown to be obsessively devoted to her job, and during a three-week investigation, she is shown cutting off contact with all her relatives and losing her son, her home, and her boyfriend. Because she is addicted to cigarettes, she is shown constantly chewing nicotine gum or, unable to resist, eventually smoking a cigarette. These women are often advised by their male colleagues to take a break from work and sleep or go home and take a shower.

Women are generally criticized for their commitment to their work in these detective stories. Although male police officers are tolerated by their families when they are busy with their work, women are blamed. Sarah Lund's son says she only cares about the dead. Sofia Karppi's little son says, "I wish my father had not died and you had died instead." [5]

Lastly, single, childless and queer women were also featured in the series. In this sense, the roles are not uniform but pluralistic.

As a result, in these series, family residences, small quiet towns and neighborhoods are shown as the source of great evil. When the location preferences of these TV series are examined, a recurring theme draws attention. It is understood that the forest setting has a special meaning in some of these series. Based on this, this study will focus on the relationship between female characters and the forest setting.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This article aims to explore how contemporary detective stories depict the relationship between women and space, particularly through the forest setting. For this purpose, some fictional TV series and movies produced in Europe and recently met with the audience were selected for the study. The contents of these TV series and movies were analyzed and the ways in which the female characters in the movies were shown in the forest within the scope of the scenario were discussed. When the literature was scanned, it was seen that the movies dealing with the relationship between cinema and architecture focused largely on cities and urban space. Considering the forest as a cinematic space is the most important original aspect of this work. In addition, no other example has been found in the literature in which the relationship between women and space is discussed through the forest setting in recent European detective stories.

Some criteria were used in the selection of the productions selected for the study. The first and most important of these is the use of forest space as an important element. Secondly, in the selected productions, female detectives or victims present a strong character in a crime that takes place in relation to the forest setting. Finally, it was decided to include only European productions in the selection and to limit the scope to productions after 2010. Ten of the more than thirty productions described in the previous section were selected for the study. Selected productions are listed below (Table 1).

**Table 1: TV series and movies featuring forest settings selected for this study**

The name of the TV series or movies		Genre	Strong female character	Country
Baztán Trilogy	<i>The Invisible Guardian</i> (2017)	Movie	Amaia Salazar	Spain
	<i>The Legacy of the Bones</i> (2019)	Movie		
	<i>Offering to the Storm</i> (2020)	Movie		
<i>Border</i> (2018)		Movie	Tina	Sweden
<i>Black Spot</i> (2017-2019)		TV series	Laurène Weiss	France & Belgium
<i>The Forest</i> (2017)		TV series	Virginie Musso and Eve Mendel	Belgium
<i>Close to Home: Murder in the Coalfield</i> (2022)		TV series	Annalena Gottknecht	Germany
<i>The Chestnut Man</i> (2021)		TV series	Naia Thulin	Denmark
<i>The Woods</i> (2020)		TV series	Kamila Kopinska	Poland
<i>Equinox</i> (2020)		TV series	Astrid	Denmark
<i>The Mire</i> (2018-2024)		TV series	Anna Jass	Poland
<i>Capitani</i> (2019-2022)		TV series	Elsa Ley	Luxemburg

### 3. Results

In this section, the movie and TV series productions listed in the previous section will be included and more detailed findings about them will be included. First of all, *Baztán Trilogy* (2017-2020) from Spain will be discussed. *The Baztán Trilogy* is used to describe a series of three books written by Dolores Redondo, named after the Baztán region of Spain. Three movies with the same name as the books, *The Invisible Guardian* (2017) [6], *The Legacy of the Bones* (2019) [7] and *Offering to the Storm* (2020) [8], tell about the murders investigated by a detective named Amaia Salazar. In the trilogy, the first victim was found in the forest. The corpses of young women placed by the stream in the forest are identified with purity. The killer removes the young women’s make-up, cleanses them by washing them in the river, and makes them pose like Virgin Mary. The murderer “does not want them to grow up and become corrupt and dirty.” [6] (00:38:15) The animal hair found on the corpses brings up a character from Basque mythology named Basajaun. *Basajaun* means “lord of the forests” in the Basque language, “It is a protective creature that ensures that the balance in the forest is not disturbed. It means harmony and cooperation. It is a mythological being that protects the forests.” [6] (00:26:50)

Another mythological element in the movie is witches, and witches sacrifice female babies in a cave in the forest. “Walnuts are the symbol of the power of witches.” [6] (00:41:45) In addition, figures from Basque mythology identified with evil such as Tartalo, Inguma, Aker are mentioned in the movie. The

most important element about the forest in the movie is that Basajaun helps the women. Basajaun carries a murderer hiding in the forest in his sleep and makes him find him by the police. Basajaun helps Amaia in multiple investigations, directing her to the murderers. In the second movie, Amaia learns that she has a twin sister and that her mother killed her sister in order to be offered as a sacrifice after birth. While her mother tries to kill Amaia, her father intervenes, but her mother's attempt to kill Amaia continues until she leaves home in her childhood. Years later, when Amaia returns home to investigate these murders, of which her mother was a part, Amaia's mother kidnaps Amaia's newborn baby and is about to kill her in the cave in the forest, but gives up when she realizes that he is a boy. At the end of the trilogy, it becomes clear that all the murders are related to a cult, whose members sacrifice girls under the age of two. Amaia's close relatives are among those who sacrificed and were sacrificed. The movie also deals with different stages of women's lives such as mother-daughter relationship, teenage girlhood, pregnancy and motherhood.

*Border* (2018) [9], a Swedish production, is a movie directed by Ali Abbasi, based on the novel of the same name by author John Ajvide Lindqvist. The leading role in the movie is Tina, who works as a customs officer and supports police investigations to catch some pedophiles. Tina has a special ability; she can smell people's hidden contraband or emotions such as shame. Tina's appearance is different from everyone else, including her father, and one day Tina meets Vore, who looks like her. Tina tells Vore that she has a genetic problem and cannot have children. Vore tells Tina that there is nothing wrong with her, that she is perfect and a troll, not a human, just like him. Vore and Tina make love in the forest. When Tina learns that she is a troll, she begins to discover her new identity, and these scenes always show Tina in the woods outside her home. She lives in the forest, sleeps in the forest, swims in the forest lake and feeds on the creatures in the forest. She tells Vore about the anomaly of pedophile criminals who appear to be an ordinary family living in an ordinary Ikea house. Tina's situation is completely different from them in terms of space. While Tina cannot be herself when shown among people in other places in the movie, she can be herself in the forest, at the lake, when alone in nature or in open spaces with Vore. Tina later learns that her troll parents were tortured and killed by humans in the 1970s. The family-child relationship becomes a discussed topic in the movie, as the criminals in the movie are pedophiles who appear to be an ordinary family, it is understood that Vore is trafficking in human babies by kidnapping them, and he sends a troll baby to Tina at the end of the movie; so she becomes a mother. As a result, the movie explains the contrast between a troll in a forest, and humans in ordinary houses using architecture.

*Black Spot* (2017-2019) [10], a co-production between France and Belgium, consists of a total of 16 episodes in two seasons. The leading role in the series is police officer Laurène Weiss, the Gendarmerie chief of a small and isolated settlement located among large forests. The series begins with the arrival of a prosecutor in the town, whose aim is to investigate why the murder rate in this small settlement is six times the national average. The first victim in the series is a woman, found hanged in the forest. In the series, there is a reference to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where those who commit suicide are turned into trees. In one of the episodes of the series, Weiss sees a white wolf in the forest and finds a baby next to the wolf. It is said that the last wolf in the forest was killed years ago and it is claimed that the wolf she saw was not real. The most important feature of the series for this study is the humanization of the forest by attributing human characteristics to the forest in the series. The forest is seen as one of the leading actors in the series. Trees are said to bleed when iron oxide in the soil causes red liquids to form on the bark of trees. When people get lost, they say "The forest takes what it wants when it wants, and

sometimes gives it back.” [10] According to the series, the forest is talking, the forest is killing people in front of people.

The female police character in this series is physically different from her perfect counterparts. She is missing two fingers on his left hand. She lives with her daughter. Like the victims who got lost in the forest, she too was lost in the same forest 20 years ago, was kidnapped, held captive and eventually escaped by cutting off her own fingers. In the series, tens of thousands of hectares of forest surround the settlement and cut it off from the world. The nearest settlement is 3 hours away. So much so that phone and GPS signals cannot be received in the town. Thus, the settlement gives the impression of being far from technology and the rest of the world. While references to the forest were the majority in the first season of the series, references to the Celts became more frequent at the end of the first season and in the second season. In the series, a group calling themselves Children of *Arduinna* (the Celtic goddess of animals and plants) organizes various actions to protest the exploitation of nature [10]. One of the group members says, “The forest gives the orders, our duty is to remind that the forest will defend itself.” [10] An old female character in the series says, “The forest always warmed us, fed us and protected us when necessary. We have an agreement with the forest. A delicate and sincere agreement. The forest conveys to us its life, its strength and sometimes even its violence. To break this bond would be to break away from ourselves.” [10] And people say “It is said that the forest is responsible for everything bad that happens here.” [10]

In the series, the main character Weiss and her daughter are protected by forest or forest creatures. Weiss reaches into a snake nest and finds evidence of one of the victims. When she is shot three times by the gendarmerie intern and thrown into the forest, the “Forest man” carries her, wraps her with soil and plants, and heals her. When Weiss’ daughter is captured by the bad guys with a protester from the Children of *Arduinna*, an invisible force in the forest kills the bad guy. The opposite is also true, snakes and ravens only attack evil characters. Being in the forest means losing the sense of direction or vision in the dark and dense tree texture. Since the ground is not flat, it becomes impossible to run, escape and chase. There is no phone reception in the forest, and the radio signal is lost in caves. Here, it is almost impossible to use technology or call for help with technological tools. The forest is shown capturing good and bad characters, neutralizing their powers, and then helping the good character, thus causing the good guys to win. In the series, the shadow of a large horned creature with a human body is sometimes shown. Issues such as quarries, sawmills, and the dumping of toxic waste into nature are also discussed in the series.

In the Belgian TV series *The Forest* (2017) [11], the police step in to search for a young high school girl who disappeared in the Ardennes Forest. Shortly after, the young girl’s body is found. During the investigation, local police Virginie Musso and Eve Mendel, a teacher at the high school where the young girl attended, work intensively to shed light on what happened to the young girl. In the series, Musso and Mendel are shown together in completely overlapping sequences to emphasize the difference between them. While Musso is shown as a happy mother with her husband and two children, Mendel is shown on her way to work, lying in the bed of a man she does not know very well. While Musso is intertwined with society, Musso lives alone at the edge of the forest. While Musso does not realize that her husband is cheating on her, Musso follows her instincts and advances the investigation significantly. Apart from all this, Eve sees a white wolf more than once in the series and finds clues by following the wolf into the forest. In this respect, the series reminds us of the *Black Spot* series. In addition, another detail about the

forest is that a 6-year-old girl, whose origins are unknown, is found in the forest and the character is named Eve.

In the German-produced TV series *Close to Home: Murder in the Coalfield* (2022) [12], the female police officer Annalena Gottknecht is sent to the region to search for the murderer of the murdered women. There is a huge coal deposit in the region, which is inactive today, and touristic trips are organized to the area today. The series focuses on the differences between different generations involvement in nature. In the town in the series, the elderly say that the stoves are their only source of income, and even though they are now retired, their loyalty to their old workplaces continues. On the contrary, the grandchildren of the townspeople who worked in the quarry are organizing protests against the exploitation of nature with various environmental groups. Protesters in the series hide in the forest, camp in the forest, and the final scene of the series is shot at the border of the forest. These scenes remind us of the environmental group and their protests in the TV series *Black Spot*. A frequently recurring symbol in the series is the image of a wolf. The murderer makes the women he kills wear wolf t-shirts. A police officer born and raised in the region has a wolf tattoo on his arm and his name is Wolf. Mythological information about wolves is also conveyed in the series: even if the entire race disappears, rebirth is possible from a single wolf.

*The Chestnut Man* (2021) [13] TV series is a Danish production and is adapted from Søren Svestrup's book of the same name. The series consists of 6 episodes in one season. The most important starting point in the series is the mother-child relationship. Naia Thulin, the lead character in the series, lives with her little daughter and is assigned to a case about the murders of some women. The common characteristics of the murdered women are that they are mothers, they live with their children, and they are kidnapped from the house where they live with their children and killed in open places with dense woodland, such as a children's playground or a forest nearby. In addition, the killer leaves a chestnut man at the scene of the murder. It has been observed that in this series, the connecting element about the murders is the chestnut man made by children, and the image of chestnut trees and forests near residential areas is frequently used in the series. This choice aims to create a spatial contrast by taking women to open areas and killing them, as opposed to the residential space that houses their families.

The Polish TV series *The Woods* (2020) [14] is adapted from the novel written by Harlan Coben. In the series, two generations of women from the same family come face to face with death as a result of events in the forest. First, while Kamila was at summer camp with her friends, she was shaken by the deaths of two of her friends in a forest next to the camp. Her mother hides her so she won't be accused of murder, and she plans to pack her things and join him. The two women will escape together. But Kamila's father constantly abuses her mother, and when he realizes that he will be abandoned, he kills Kamila's mother and buries her in the forest. It is not known what happened to young Kamila after this incident, and it was thought that she disappeared or died for 20 years. 20 years later, Kamila's brother became a prosecutor and finds her by following the clues. Kamila survived by hiding all these years.

*Equinox* (2020) [15], a Danish TV series, has a plot centered on sisters Ida and Astrid. The series both tells the events before Ida's disappearance in 1999 and shows the story of Ida's sister Astrid's search for her sister 21 years later. Nordic mythological figures are featured in the series. The series also shows a secret sect, as in the *Baztán Trilogy*, and a creature with a human body but large horns, as in the *Black Spot* series. In the series, the girls' mother made a deal with this creature and says that she will bring him a child because she cannot have a child. In the series, Astrid learns that she and Ida are adopted.

Moreover, their mother presented Ida to this creature and the cult on her 18th birthday, when she disappeared. This series, as in the *Baztán Trilogy*, is about the betrayal of the mother to her daughter.

Polish production *The Mire* (2018-2024) [16] consists of seventeen episodes in three seasons. In the series, a pair of journalists and the police investigate some murder cases. In the first episode of the series, a socialist leader and a prostitute are found dead in the forest. It tells about the emergence of dead people in the Gronty forest as a result of a landslide in connection with a flood in the later parts of the series. Anna Jass, who was appointed from Warsaw to investigate this issue, conducts an investigation. The dead found in the forest are associated with people who were held and tortured in camps in the forest during the Second World War. The series first tells the story of the German occupation of Poland, and then of the Soviet occupation of Poland, with the war crimes committed in the forest. The forest is shown here as the place where people lose their lives or their future. The lover of the series' main character, Witold Wanycz, who he lost during the Second World War and searched for for 50 years, was a painter in West Berlin who always drew self-portraits filled with tree figures. The woman lost her identity in that forest due to the attacks of the soldiers and turned into an object, a tree. The credits of the series show the body of a very old woman emerging from a tree trunk in the forest and then turning back into branches.

The series *Capitani* (2019-2022) [17], set in Luxemburg, has similar elements to the series *The Forest*, especially with its first season. In this series, there is a small town and a lost young girl. The dead body of the young girl is later found in the forest. The theme of this series is that the town, which seems very calm and peaceful, is actually in the grip of a drug network. In the series, women are shown as deceived and cheating women. The young girl who was thought to be dead in the series is actually alive; it turns out that one of the twins has taken the place of her sister, who accidentally caused her death. The twins' mother is cheating on their stepfather with their real father. The twins' own father organizes drug and swinger parties in the forest, secretly. Elsa Ley, the police officer in the lead role of the series, learns that her boyfriend in the military unit in the town is a part of the drug gang and left the missing young girl to die. The main idea here is that nothing is as it seems.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The forest in female-led crime fiction serves as a complex and multifaceted space, echoing its symbolic significance in fairy tales. In both genres, the forest is not merely a setting but an active participant in the narrative, shaping the characters' journeys and influencing the unfolding events. This parallel invites a deeper exploration of the thematic and symbolic roles forests play in storytelling across genres.

One of the most striking parallels is the shared motif of getting lost in the forest. This theme is central to all the TV series described earlier and is a recurring concept introduced to many in European cultures through fairy tales during childhood. For example, in *Little Red Riding Hood*, the protagonist is warned by her mother about staying on the path in the forest, yet she encounters a wolf and does not perceive its danger. Similarly, *Hansel and Gretel* are abandoned in the forest and must find their way through peril. *Alice in Wonderland* can be interpreted as a journey through a fantastical forest, while in *Snow White*, the queen orders the hunter to take Snow White into the forest to kill her, leading to her subsequent encounter with the seven dwarfs. Even in *Rapunzel*, the tower where she is imprisoned is hidden deep within the forest, emphasizing the forest's role as a space of isolation and confinement. These tales present the forest as a dangerous, enigmatic place, filled with unknowns that test the characters' resolve and resourcefulness.

The TV series and movies discussed earlier reflect this same perspective. In almost all of these narratives, the forest becomes a place of discovery, either for characters who are lost or those in search of answers. For female characters, however, the forest is often marked as a site of violence and murder. Yet, in some cases, the forest also harbors unknown creatures such as wolves, snakes, and ravens that act as guides or helpers to these women, adding a layer of complexity to its portrayal.

The physical attributes of the forest further reinforce its symbolic power. Its dense and dark environment renders navigation nearly impossible, especially at night, creating a sense of entrapment and disorientation. In some TV series, the forest serves as a hiding place, whether for cults or environmental protesters. In both cases, the forest functions as a realm apart from societal norms, where alternative rules and dynamics prevail.

In both fairy tales and female-led crime fiction, the forest's ambiguity allows it to embody themes of isolation, danger, and self-realization. On one hand, it is a threatening, untamed environment that mirrors the internal or external struggles of the protagonists. On the other hand, it offers a space of refuge or empowerment, enabling characters to confront societal expectations, fears, or adversities. This interplay between danger and opportunity underscores the forest's role as a transformative space, where characters undergo significant psychological or moral growth.

Moreover, the narrative use of forests in these genres reflects broader cultural and psychological themes. The forest often symbolizes the subconscious—a realm where hidden fears, desires, and truths surface. In fairy tales, this symbolism is tied to archetypal journeys of self-discovery and moral lessons, while in crime fiction, it intersects with contemporary concerns about gender, power, and agency. Female protagonists in both genres must navigate these layered meanings, engaging with the forest not only as a physical space but as a representation of deeper existential challenges.

Ultimately, by examining the representation of forests in female-led crime fiction alongside their portrayal in fairy tales, we can appreciate their enduring narrative power. The forest serves as a universal symbol of complexity, embodying both the threats and possibilities inherent in the human experience. It continues to evoke a sense of awe and challenge, compelling characters to confront their limitations, redefine their roles, and discover new paths forward. This enduring motif bridges past and present storytelling traditions, resonating with timeless themes of fear, survival, and transformation.

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