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Corresponding Author:
ayukusumaningrum.1810@gmail.com

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CRITICAL STYLISTICS STUDY OF SERIAL KILLER CHARACTERS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIONS IN THE FICTIONAL SERIES *CRIMINAL MINDS EVOLUTION*

Ayu Kusumaningrum¹,
Universitas Indraprasta PGRI
Jalan Nangka No. 58 Jakarta Selatan
Supeno²,
Universitas Indraprasta PGRI
Jalan Nangka No. 58 Jakarta Selatan
Nani Hanifah³,
Universitas Indraprasta PGRI
Jalan Nangka No. 58 Jakarta Selatan

e-mail: ayukusumaningrum.1810@gmail.com¹

e-mail: supeno@unindra.ac.id²

e-mail: hanifahnani@ymail.com³

Abstract: This research aims to analyze how the characters and representations of serial killers are depicted in the fictional series 'Criminal Minds Evolution'. The data source used in this research consists of dialogue transcripts from the fictional series 'Criminal Minds Evolution,' which includes ten episodes. The research was conducted using the observation method. Data analysis uses Critical Stylistics Analysis tools specifically for naming and describing, representing Actions/Events/States, and equating and contrasting. The research results led to the following conclusions: 1) The author tends to use Naming, Material Action Intentional, Mental Cognition, and Equating tools to depict the characters of serial killers. 2) The author represents serial killers as males, citizens of the United States, of various ages, who have families, exhibit psychopathic traits, are organized and methodical, possess a variety of social and occupational statuses, and have motives for revenge.

Keywords: Character; Representation; Serial Killer; Critical Stylistics Analysis, Fiction Series.

STUDI STILISTIKA KRITIS TERHADAP KARAKTER PEMBUNUH BERANTAI DAN REPRESENTASI MEREKA DALAM SERIAL FIKSI *CRIMINAL MINDS EVOLUTION*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana karakter dan representasi pembunuh berantai digambarkan dalam serial fiksi 'Criminal Minds Evolution'. Sumber data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini berupa transkrip dialog dari serial fiksi 'Criminal Minds Evolution' yang mencakup sepuluh episode. Penelitian dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode observasi. Analisis data menggunakan alat Analisis Stilistika Kritis khususnya untuk penamaan dan pendeskripsian, representasi Tindakan/Peristiwa/Keadaan, dan penyetaraan dan kontras. Hasil penelitian menghasilkan simpulan sebagai berikut: 1) Penulis cenderung menggunakan alat Penamaan, Tindakan Material yang Disengaja, Kognisi Mental, dan Penyetaraan untuk menggambarkan karakter pembunuh berantai. 2) Penulis menggambarkan pembunuh berantai sebagai laki-laki, warga negara Amerika



Serikat, dari berbagai usia, yang memiliki keluarga, menunjukkan sifat psikopat, terorganisasi dan metodis, memiliki berbagai status sosial dan pekerjaan, dan memiliki motif balas dendam.

Kata kunci: Karakter; Representasi; Pembunuh Berantai; Analisis Stilistika Kritis, Serial Fiksi.

INTRODUCTION

Robert Lesler was an FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) agent who first introduced the term 'serial killer' in 1970. FBI (2005) defines the official definition of serial killer as: "Serial murder: The unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s), in separate events." Serial killers are believed to kill for certain motives, such as sexual motives or pleasure. They generally have shortcomings, feel inferior, and sometimes experience humiliation or abuse during childhood. In many cases, serial killers commit crimes as compensation to gain a sense of power and control, both during the murder and afterward.

According to the FBI, serial killers are classified into two main categories: organized and disorganized. Organized killers commonly highly intelligent and tend to plan their actions methodically. They often kidnapping their victims, killing them in one place, then dumping their bodies in another place. They will lure victims in a way that attracts the victims' sympathy". Furthermore, FBI stated in Aksan (2008: 7), "These killers maintain a high degree of control over the circumstances of their crimes and usually has a deep knowledge of forensic science that allows them to cover their tracks. Organized killers usually have many friends, lovers, and sometimes families. In contrast, disorganized killers tend to have lower intelligence and commit their crimes impulsively. They will kill their victims every time they have the chance; they rarely have any attempt to dispose of bodies but simply leave them in the crime scene" (Aksan 2008: 8).

The term 'serial killer' may not be commonly recognized among Indonesian people, as there are only a few documented cases of serial killers. Caputi (1999: 150) believes that "In America, the serial killer has become a cultural icon around which considerable media industry has been involved. Serial killers who tend to be better known than their victims, are stereotypically featured in books, sensational films and TV shows as psychologically troubled single white males who are typically ordinary and indistinguishable from other people." Much of the general public's knowledge about serial killers comes from film productions. The storylines are created in such a way to increase the interest of the audience rather than depicting serial killers accurately. Professionals involved in serial killer cases, like investigators, prosecutors, and pathologists, may also have limited knowledge about serial killers. As a result, certain stereotypes and deep-rooted misunderstandings have emerged regarding the authenticity of serial killings and the characteristics of serial killers.

One of the fictional series created with the theme of serial killers is *Criminal Minds*. *Criminal Minds* is an American crime drama series on the CBS Network channel, created by Jeff Davis. This series tells the story of the investigative work of the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) in Quantico, Virginia. The unit itself is entirely based on the real-life BAU, which was formed by FBI profiler John Douglas. The personalities of the series' former main character, Jason Gideon, and current main character, David Rossi, are both largely based on John Douglas himself. The series eschews the typical procedural format of a drama by focusing on the crime and its victims rather than the main characters.

“In this fictional series, the identity of the killer is a mystery, and the police officer and/or psychological profilers attempt to solve the mystery through analysis of evidence left by the killer which is revealed through autopsies of victims. Sometimes, the identity of the killer is hidden until the end of the story and makes the audience surprised because the killer turns out to be someone unexpected” (Anonymous, 2008). *Criminal Minds Evolution* is the continuation of the *Criminal Minds* series which ended in 2020. This season’s evolution still tells the story of the lives of BAU agents with a new nuance where they have to face the serial killer network case during the COVID-19 era. One of the things that makes *Criminal Minds* the longest television series is because of its interesting story which is supported by characters who seem real so that the audience feels carried away by the story. This, of course, cannot be separated from how the author presents the characters with the characterizations they have.

The way the author presents the characters in the story and how those characters behave is called characterization. Nurgiyantoro (2017: 247) said “Between a character and its characterization is a cohesion” The naming of one certain character could interpret the characteristics it has.” According to Abrams in Nurgiyantoro (2017: 247), Characters are people featured in a narrative work or drama who are interpreted by the audience as having certain moral qualities and tendencies as expressed in what they say and what they do.” Based on these descriptions, this research was conducted in an attempt to analyze how the characters and the representations of serial killers are presented in the fiction series *Criminal Minds Evolution*.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted by analyzing data from a work of fiction in the form of television series. As such, it was not carried out in a specific location. This research was conducted descriptively and qualitatively using the tools of Critical Stylistics by Leslie Jeffries (2010) specifically in Naming and Describing, Representing Actions/Events/States, and Equating and Contrasting tools to investigate the depiction of serial killer characters and how the serial killer is represented in the fiction series. The observation technique, namely an activity of looking for data that can be used to provide a conclusion or diagnosis, was valued in this research. Direct observation of the dialogues in this fiction series of *Criminal Minds Evolution* was arranged to achieve accurate results. In addition, the document data collection technique was also adopted where the researcher collected data by examining and studying books, magazines, the internet, and other literature related to research analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Depiction of Serial Killer Characters

Naming and Describing

“Naming and Describing concerned with the part of the sentence that typically names an entity in the form of a noun phrase or nominal group. This noun phrase and nominal groups often function as the grammatical subject or object of a predicator. In other word, it is as an actor where it is a subject of an active verb or as the recipient of the action or object of an active verb” (Jeffries, 2010: 19). Naming is a broad descriptive term covering several linguistic practices, including the choice of a noun to indicate a referent, the construction of a noun phrase with modifiers to further determine the nature of the referent, nominalization process.

In this research, the Naming and Describing tool was used to depict the serial killer characters which was applied to the dialogues in each episode. The analysis identified, six serial killer characters who were described through the Naming and Describing tools using nouns, modified noun phrases, and nouns through the nominalization process. The six serial killer characters are Rory Gilcrest (RG), Robert Harris (RH), Gael dan Jude Bruneau (G&JB), Frank Scelsa (FS) dan Elias Voit (EV). The

results of the analysis revealed: Rory Gilcrest with 14 noun phrases, Robert Harris with 6 noun phrases, Gael and Jude Bruneau with 6 noun phrases, Benjamin Reeves with 2 noun phrases, Frank Scelsa with 4 noun phrases, and Elias Voit with 20 noun phrases.

The serial killer character of Elias Voit has the most findings compared to other serial killer characters with 20 noun phrases. This means that Elias Voit’s character has a role as a main serial killer character. Meanwhile, the percentage results of data analysis are presented in table 1.

According to the data in table 1, the use of noun phrases shows the highest percentage. This means that naming characters is more preferred than describing the nature. From this result, it can be seen that in describing serial killer characters, the author uses adequate nouns through the naming process either with head nouns or compound nouns. In this fiction series, the naming of the characters tends to use nouns with condescending meanings, such as 'monster,' 'cuckold,' and 'bull,' which convey hate and dehumanization. Apart from that, nouns that describe psychological conditions are also used to refer to the characters, like 'psychopath,' which the audience can easily interpret by the audience as someone with a psychological disorder. Quoting Nurgiyantoro’s statement (2017: 247) which stated that “certain naming of characters often immediately gives us an indication of his character”, the choice of nouns used in this fiction series describing the characteristics or the condition of the characters as inferior humans who are considered to have psychopathic disorders.

Table 1. Percentage of Naming and Describing Data Analysis

No.	Naming and Describing tool	serial killer characters						Total	Percentage
		RG	RH	G&JB	BR	FS	EV		
1.	Noun Phrases	4	4	4	1	0	7	20	38,46%
2.	Modified Noun Phrases	7	1	2	1	1	4	16	30,76%
3.	Nominalization	3	1	0	0	3	9	16	30,76%
	Total	14	6	6	2	4	20	52	

Representing Actions/Events/States

“Representing Actions/Events/States is a descriptive analysis based on the notion that the verbal element of a clause - also known as a predicator - is where the actions and processes that takes place between these entities are typically represented” (Jeffries, 2010: 37).

In this research, Representing Actions/Events/States tool is used to analyse the depiction of what actions have done by the serial killer character to their victims, what reactions do serial killer characters give to an action, the thoughts of serial killer characters and the possession relationship of serial killer characters. According to the data in table 2, The emergence of process with Material Action Intentional (MAI) has the highest percentage with 47,12%. This shows that the author wants to depict the actions carried out by the serial killer characters as actions that were carried out deliberately and had specific purpose. This process reveals the modus operandi and pattern of the murder carried out. MAI is applied to all serial killer characters which shows that this depiction is very important so that the audience can be more attached to those serial killer characters.

The second highest emergence of process is through the Mental Cognition process 26,43%. This shows that besides the deliberate actions, the author also wants to provide an overview of the cognition and mental condition of the characters. This also mean that the author wants to create a stronger emotional intercourse between the characters and the readers. As stated by Overman (2024), “showing your readers your character’s actions instead of telling them allows you to connect with them on a deeper level, it gives them insight into who they are beyond surface descriptions written in black-and-white proses”.

In describing characters through actions, the author uses many words that involve deliberate physical activity and contain violent meaning. Main verbs kill, abduct, punish, or stalk, could describe the modus operandi or motives behind the murders. Besides that, the author also uses actions that involve mental process that can describe the mindset of the serial killer characters.



Table 2. Percentage of Representing Actions/Events/States Data Analysis

No.	Representing Actions/Events/States tool	serial killer characters						Total	Percentage
		RG	RH	G&JB	BR	FS	EV		
1.	Material Action Intentional	7	7	2	6	7	12	41	47,12%
2.	Material Action Supervention	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
3.	Material Action Events	0	0	0	2	0	1	3	3,44%
4.	Verbalization	1	1	1	0	0	1	4	4,59%
5.	Mental Cognition	2	1	2	1	4	13	23	26,43%
6.	Mental Reaction	0	1	0	1	0	1	3	3,44%
7.	Mental Perception	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	2,29%
8.	Intensive Relation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
9.	Possessive Relation	0	0	1	2	1	5	9	10,34%
10.	Circumstantial relation	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	2,29%
Total		11	10	6	14	13	33	87	

Equating and Contrasting

Equating and Contrasting are used to describe what the author sees as equivalent or as contrasting, assuming that a text can build a context and how that context draws words into opposition or equivalence. To investigate the creation of equivalence and opposition in the text is done by considering the range of syntactic triggers in English words that create equivalence and opposition relationships.

In this research, several syntactic triggers with equivalence and opposition meanings in describing the serial killer characters were found. Table 3 presents the percentage of the result finding. The results of critical stylistics analysis using the Equating and Contrasting tool in the fiction series *Criminal Minds Evolution* show that in describing the serial killer characters, the author uses more comparison or equating the characters with something else than building contrast. These depictions were granted either by using adjectives or nouns appositionally or as metaphors. Words that consist of negative meaning like manipulative, rash, or violent are used to describe the nature of the characters or the actions they have done.

Table 3. Percentage of Equating and Contrasting Data Analysis

No.	Equating and Contrasting tool	serial killer characters						Total	Percentage
		RG	RH	G&JB	BR	FS	EV		
1.	Equating	3	2	2	3	2	5	17	73,91%
2.	Contrasting	1	0	0	4	0	1	6	26,08%
Total		4	2	2	7	2	6	23	

Representation of Serial Killer

Based on the analysis process that has been done to the dialogue transcripts which refers to the serial killer characters, can be concluded that the author was attempting to reflect the reality of the serial killer to the story by describing the characters with various characteristics, motives and killing methods. However, there are some ideologies that can be conveyed through the depiction of the serial killer characters. The representation of the serial killer that presented in this fiction series are:

Males

The serial killers featured in this fiction series are all male. This representation is presented by the frequent use of the pronoun *he* and noun phrase *this guy* in referring to serial killer characters through

the Naming and Describing tool. The author wants to create a belief in society that all serial killers are males.

The United States citizen

Serial killers are also represented as citizens of the United States which is expressed through Representing Actions/Events/States by mentioning the word *local* or the State of the United States as the place of birth. Through this depiction, the author wants to create a world where Americans, who are white, tend to become serial killers.

Have families

The next representation of serial killers is having a family, whether a daughter, a mother, brother, or a wife and children. This representation is expressed through Naming and Describing, Representing Actions/Events/States, or Equating and Contrasting tools with the finding of words *have, brothers, daughter, mother, wife, and kids*. Through this representation, the researcher assumes that the author wants to dispel the opinion in society about serial killers who only live alone and are anti-social, so the author tries to reflect reality in the characters he creates.

In various range of ages

The serial killers in this fiction series are represented in various ages, from their early twenties to middle age. This representation is expressed through Naming and Describing and also Equating and Contrasting tools with the finding of phrases *19 years old* and *middle-aged*. The researcher assumes that the author wants to illustrate that a serial killer's 'career' can start at any time and does not always start at a young age.

Have a motive for revenge

Every crime is never separated from the motive behind it. The serial killers in this series are depicted as having motives that are all about revenge or punishing the people who cause their pain. This representation is expressed through the Representing Actions/Events/States tool with the finding of verb words and phrases *punishes, taking his revenge, choosing to punish, and is judging*. Through this depiction, the author wants to create a nuance that there is only one motive that can be behind serial murders.

Have psychopathic traits

The next representation of serial killers is having psychopathic traits. According to Hare and Neumann (2009 in Khotimah and Retnowati, 2014: 111) "psychopathy is generally considered a personality disorder, which is defined as a collection of interpersonal, emotional, lifestyle and anti-social traits and behavior, including excessive self-esteem, egocentrism, full of deceit, shallow emotions, lack of empathy and remorse, irresponsible, impulsive and tend to violate social norms. This representation is expressed through the three tools used with the finding of a series of adjectives *manipulative, obsessed, impulsive, tricked, persuade, violent, loner* which indicates psychopathic characteristics. Through this depiction, researcher assumes that the author wants to present a dark and tense nuance to attract the audience's interest. Besides that, the author also wants to create the opinion that a serial killer must be a psychopath.

Organized and methodical modus operandi

Serial killers are represented in this series as organized and methodist killers. This representation is expressed through Representing Actions/Events/States and Equating and Contrasting tools with the finding of verb phrases *has pattern, was screening, gathered followers*, or adjective *organised*. They also have a very neat and orderly method of kidnapping their victims, killing them in one place, then dumping their bodies in another place which is expressed through the words *abducted, stalked, strangulation, killed, whipped*, or verb phrases *to obscure dan crosses border lines*. Through this depiction, the researcher assumes that the author wants to attract audiences by conveying that all serial killers plan their murders well to avoid revealing their identities.

Have a variety of social and occupational statuses

The next representation of serial killers is that they have a variety of social and occupational statuses. The serial killer characters in this series are described with a variety of social statuses like homeless

teenager, Senator's son, an employee, or sexual worker. This representation is revealed through the Naming and Describing tool with the finding of phrases *good worker*, *network security analyst*, *the bull*, and *the superintendent*. Through this depiction, the author attempts to reflect reality in the characters he creates to give the audience the impression that serial killers do not only have low social status or are marginalized people.

CONCLUSIONS

In this research, critical stylistics analysis tools are used to understand how the author creates a new world through his characters. The conclusions from this research are two folded. In the fiction series *Criminal Minds Evolution*, the author tends to use Naming, Material Action Intentional, Mental Cognition, and Equating tools in depicting the characters of serial killers. information about serial killers is presented through a number of predicative nouns, compound nouns, attributive and predicative adjectives, and apposition. Material processes that express deliberate violence are applied to all serial killer characters to reveal their modus operandi or motives. Secondly, serial killers in the fiction series *Criminal Minds Evolution* are represented as males, the United State citizens, have families, in various ringing in age have a motive for revenge, have psychopathic traits, have organized and methodical modus operandi, and have a variety of social occupational statuses.

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