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A READER'S JOURNAL

The Thirst
A Novel
by
Jo Nesbø

ARJ2 Chapter: Reading for Enjoyment
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2017

An old adage says, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer." Something that nearly costs Harry Hole his life, in the end, in

the second ending actually, something you'll have to read about yourself. But long before that we get to find out how the Oslo police will coax Harry out of retirement, his second or third attempt to retire. He would probably prefer to play music, write songs, or study economics, but duty calls what with his famous novel *The Snowman* due to hit the big screens in a few weeks from now. Yes, I've switched to talking about the author, Jo Nesbø, who has written a character that makes Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry* look like *Snow White* by comparison. But the Oslo police, faced with a serial murderer at large need Harry Hole and gives into his demands for a hand-picked team of three working with him, separate from the police department. As usual, Harry has murders happening while he's trying to solve the ones that have already happened.

For myself, I rarely buy murder mysteries, and received this one from my son-in-law for my birthday. He first introduced me to Nesbø's novels, and I've read a few of them since. This one will help get me ready to watch the first movie of a Nesbø work, *The Snowman*, so I welcomed a chance to read it. Downside to reading Nesbø is he shows us the seamy underbelly of Oslo, making it a place one would not want to visit, especially if, like me, all your information about the city comes from Nesbø's dark novels.

The first murder victim was found with the front of her neck eaten away and her blood drained away with apparently some of the blood removed from the scene, possibly by the killer drinking her blood. The police are on the case looking for someone the victim had used a social app to meet at a bar. While they search for clues, the killer muses over his counselors who deemed him mad.

[page 44] Mad? They were incompetent idiots, the whole lot of them. He had read the definition of personality disorder in a dictionary, that it was a mental illness that leads to "discomfort and difficulties for the individual concerned and those around them." Fine. In his case that merely applied to those around him. He had just the personality he wanted. Because when you have access to drink, what could be more pleasant, more rational and more normal than feeling thirsty?

We are introduced to the title by the killer and the theme of the search for him which involved looking for vampirists, humans who had a thirst for blood. Before this book will be over our hero Harry will come to know the taste of human blood.

Katrine Bratt was heading the team early on.

[page 46] She could feel how tired she was. And thrust her weariness aside. Because she had a nagging sense that this was only the beginning. Iron dentures and no DNA. Half a liter of missing blood.

Police Chief Bellman knew it was time for Harry Hole to be brought in: a serial killer who chews open the neck of victims with sharpened iron dentures and leaves no evidence.

Harry was waking up and musing over the three kinds of waking: 1) to go to work, 2) waking up alone, and 3) full of angst after three days of being drunk. In the second kind, Harry experiences a materialistic view of life.

[page 60] The second sort was waking up alone. That was characterized by an awareness that he was alone in bed, alone in life, alone in the world, and it could sometimes fill him with a sweet sensation of freedom, and at other times with a melancholy that could perhaps be called loneliness, by which was perhaps just a glimpse of what anyone's life really is: a journey from the attachment of the umbilical cord to a death where we are finally separated from everything and everyone. A brief glimpse at the moment of awakening before all our defense mechanisms and comforting illusions slot into place again and we can face life in all its unreal glory.

This was Harry Hole's philosophy in a nutshell, and the man deals with a lot of nuts! On this one morning he woke up feeling content, knowing that Rakel, his wife, was near him in bed, but even then, his metaphor waxed dark, "Her hair lay spread out on the pillow, like the rays of a raven-black sun." (Page 60) Naturally he turned down Bellman's attempt to blackmail him into investigating the serial killer.

But Bellman made Harry another offer he couldn't refuse. One question came up, "Are you still dry, Harry?" meaning was he off the booze and sober dependably. Harry's answer was direct.

[page 78, 79] "As a Norwegian oil well, boss."

"Hm. You do know that Norwegian oil wells aren't dry, don't you? They've just been shut down until the price of oil rises again."

"That was the image I was trying to convey, yes."

Hagan shook his head. "And there was me thinking that you'd get more mature with age."

"Disappointing, isn't it? We don't get wiser, just older."

One morning he and Rakel are about to have sex by the windowsill when the buzz from his cell killed the moment. It was another vampirist murder. Harry was needed immediately. Rakel knew the drill.

[page 107] He walked quickly past Rakel without looking at her, without a word of farewell. She was already sidelined, pushed from his consciousness by one of his two lovers. Alcohol and murder. And this was the one she feared the most.

When Harry arrives at the scene with the newbie detective Wyller, Harry explains his method to him, cheaper than answering all his questions later.

[page 110] "OK," Harry said, "everyone has their own method. Mine is to try to get in touch with the thoughts that go through your brain the first time you enter a crime scene. All the apparently insignificant connections the brain makes automatically when we absorb impressions for first time we visit a place. Thoughts that we forget so quickly because we don't have time to attach meaning to them before our attention is grabbed by something else, like a dream that vanishes when you wake up and start to take in all the other things around you. Nine times out of ten those thoughts are useless. But you always

hope that the tenth one might mean something."

Reminds me of Father Brown who similarly placed himself in a scene with all his intuition and senses working intensely. What Harry picked up from this crime scene was that the murderer had a thing about cleanliness. The other thing was that he didn't like blood. Why? Because he put lemon juice in it to paralyze his taste buds, one of the reasons they sold cod liver oil better when they added lemon juice.

Harry Hole loves to give advice, and this one about following the habits of old men tickled me.

[page 157, 158] He was wearing a thin woollen sweater and leaning against the door frame as he pulled on a pair of thin woollen socks. She had teased him about that, saying that only old men insisted on wearing wool all year round. He had replied that the best survival strategy was always to copy old men, because they, after all, were the winners, the survivors.

When Harry runs off to his other love, murder cases, Rakel teases him, saying she'll 3-D print herself a husband to replace him. This gives Harry the key to the keys which the murderer seemed to have to the victims's apartments even though he did not seem to have met the victims before. How else could Elise's safety chain have been on except that the murderer was already in her apartment when she came home?

Why did Harry want a team of four independent from the police department? Well, it's like his choice of office in the cellar of the department that no one else wanted. Since it wasn't officially a police office, Harry could smoke in there without breaking the rules, and he smoked about as often as he broke rules anyway. Here's the why of the independence as Harry explains to his new team, not the whole of the reasons, but enough to convince them:

[page 190] "And that's why we're here," Harry said, leaning forward on his chair. "We're supposed to think differently, look at possibilities that Katrine's investigative team don't touch. Because they've created a scenario of what happened, and the bigger the group is, the harder it is to break free from prevailing ideas and assumptions. They work a bit like a religion, because you automatically think that so many other people around you can't be wrong. Well." Harry raised his unnamed mug. "They can. And they are. All the time."

Harry has a conversation with Steffens which reveals Harry's view of his job. Steffens speaks first then Harry replies,

**[page 242] "And the lie is that there's a reward for someone who follows a calling."
"Perhaps sometimes the work in itself is reward enough."**

Mikael Bellman offers a bit of insight into the drinking of high-priced Voss water and the wearing of high-priced Omega wristwatches.

[page 300] He drank from his glass of water. Grimaced and looked at it. Voss. Why were people prepared to pay good money for something that tasted no better than what they could get from the tap? Not because they thought it tasted better, but because they thought *other* people thought it tasted better. So they ordered Voss when they were out at restaurants with their far-too-boring trophy wives and far-too-heavy Omega Seamaster watches.

The vampirist gives Harry a lecture with several prescient predictions during the middle of a hurricane passing over them.

[page 335] "You've been waiting for your turn to be a vampire. You recognize the thirst — just admit it, Harry. And one day you too will drink."

"I'm not you," Harry said, and swallowed. He heard the roaring in his head. Felt a fresh gust of wind. A new, shattered raindrop against the hand that was holding the pistol. That was that. They would soon be out of the calm eye.

"You're like me," he said. "And that why you're also being fooled. You and me, we think we're clever bastards, but we all get fooled in the end, Harry."

He pulls his gun and aims at Harry, but before he can pull the trigger, Harry had gotten off two well-placed rounds with his Glock. The villain was truly dead, but there was a problem which any reader will be aware of: there were over 130 pages left in the novel. Apparently Harry will be fooled in another ending, because he thought he had ended the case with his Glock.

Thereupon hangs another tale which will tie up a couple of loose ends and imperil Harry's life. Harry told us the story early in this book of the lion and the water buffalo. A lion cannot outright kill a water buffalo, so the lion clamps his jaws on the buffalo's neck so it cannot breathe and must hold on till it suffocates. Like the letter on the desk in any detective story: Readers know that if it gets mentioned, it will be important later. Need I mention there are no water buffalos or lions in Norway?

