Herring Noir/Sushi Noir Hardboiled Narrators in Dan Turèll and Haruki Murakami

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Abstract
This article discusses the parallel use of nameless narrators in the works of Dan Turèll and Haruki Murakami as variants on Raymond Chandler's hardboiled detectives. The two authors, both openly influenced by Chandler, create reluctant homodiegetic figures who would rather be heterodiegetic non-participants in their own lives. Turèll employs a journalist instead of a detective in his crime novels; Murakami's narrators are usually young men whose lives have been upended, often by a departure. The authors undermine conventional hardboiled notions by altering the standard crime-novel approach and subverting conventional depictions of 'self.' The article also focuses on reimagined urban environments and illustrates how re-envisioned landscapes surrounding these characters serve as surreal reflections of the characters' mental states. Employing noir literary devices, Turèll nevertheless tests the limits of what constitutes a crime novel, while Murakami transcends stereotypical notions of the 'postmodern' novel. In these efforts, the two authors resist easy classification.

Keywords
Turèll, Murakami, Chandler, Nordic Noir, Todorov

DOI
10.54432/scand/LHHE1327

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In the fiction of Dan Turèll and Haruki Murakami, nameless

narrators play a significant role as a tool to help the two authors—both heavily influenced by Raymond Chandler's hard-boiled fiction—construct a world in which narrators wander, geographically and mentally, dislocating the central character from having a distinct persona. Both Turèll and Murakami bend geographical locations to usher their narrators into change that impels them into new or at the very least altered states of existence. Several nameless narrators have appeared in literature, including such notable titles as Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca,* Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* and Dostoyevsky's *Underground Man*. Sam Sachs, in his article 'The Rise of the Nameless Narrator', points out the universalising effect of this approach: 'When modern writers wish to set their tales outside of time, they often employ this technique.'[1] The effect of the nameless narrator is often twofold: it erases individuality in the fictive character, resulting in a certain amount of effacement, while simultaneously allowing readers to project their own personalities onto the same unnamed character. In *The Distinction of Fiction,* Dorrit Cohn, while discussing narrators in Dickens, Nabokov, and Thomas Mann, describes an 'embodied self' that 'is brought to life by a discourse that mimes the language of the real speaker telling his past experiences' (Cohn 1999: 125).[2] That description also reflects the nameless homodiegetic narrators in both Turèll and Murakami. Although they are involved in the action surrounding them, these narrators tend to be reluctant participants, distortions of Chandler's notions about the hard-boiled 'hero'. Cohn refers to many homodiegetic narrators as 'equivocated' (Cohn 1999: 125), and this term applies readily to Turèll and Murakami's narrators: they are homodiegetic figures (participants) who would rather be heterodiegetic (non-participants) but are forced, nevertheless, by circumstance to become actively involved.

Turell's nameless wanderer

'No fucking way.'[3] Those were Turèll's words, in English no less, to Peder Bundgaard—his best friend and the illustrator of his twelve crime books—when Bundgaard, having read the manuscript of Turèll's first detective novel *Mord i mørket* [1981; Murder in the Dark, 2013], suggested that the nameless narrator must surely be based on Turèll. The author would have none of it, obviously, and became quite defensive.[4] The nameless journalist who narrates Turèll's detective novels and short stories is, according to the books, thirty-five years old: he describes himself as tall, thin, of dark complexion, with a moustache and a hook nose, and always wearing a threadbare suit, dark coat, and felt hat. In *Dan Turèll's København* [Dan Turèll's Copenhagen, 2005], Bundgaard tells us that Turèll—at the time his

first crime novel was published—was 34, 'høj, slank, mørk i nødden, mørkhåret, [med] overskæg og krum næse' (Bundgaard 2005: 157) [tall, thin, dark-skinned, dark-haired, (with a) moustache and hook nose]. In an age of jeans and down jackets, Turèll in his heyday traversed Copenhagen in a suit, leather jacket, and a felt hat. In his crime fiction 'Den Navnløse' [the Nameless One] is divorced, works as a freelance journalist, dreams of being a musician and lives at Istedgade 20, on the fourth floor, in Vesterbro. Turèll was divorced, dreamed of being a musician, worked as a freelancer for *Politiken* and *Ekstra-Bladet,* and lived at Istedgade 25 on—where else?—the fourth floor.

None of this, of course, proves any specific connection between the character of the nameless journalist and Turèll. Yet Turèll's is one of the few nameless narrators[5] in crime fiction, a difficult approach not only to pull off successfully in one novel but also to sustain throughout twelve books of novels and short stories. One wonders why Turèll set up such a demanding writing task for himself; however, as the books (ten novels and two short-story collections) indicate, it is a surprisingly successful tactic and one that raises speculation about the effect of the nameless narrator in fiction. Does it allow for more projection from reader to character? Does it make it easier for readers to reinterpret the character from their own perspective because an identifying specific is missing? Does it create a challenge to grasp fully the character's identity? Or shall we simply chalk it up to a postmodern approach to narration, breaking down the essentialist effect of the individualising name? [6]

For those who have never read any of Turèll's crime fiction: *Den Navnløse* is one of the most captivating creations of postmodern Danish literature. Despite his lack of any name, the character is painfully present, particularly in his dishevelled and seemingly directionless daily life. He is surrounded by objective correlatives of this dishevelment at every turn, the 'literal symbols of his life' as Cheever would say, including his sloppy apartment, with a refrigerator positioned smack in the middle of the kitchen, blocking all the cabinets from opening, and rooms occupied solely by piles of books. On this front, his ongoing love interest, the accomplished and self-possessed lawyer Gitte Bristol, functions as his rudder. In *Mord i Marts* [Murder in March, 1984], he says of her apartment: 'Man kunne sé hendes personlighed i dén måde hver eneste stol stod på, dén måde bøgerne i reolen var arrangeret på. Hendes ansigt stak frem alle steder' (Turèll 2006: 96) [You could see her personality in the placement of every single chair and the way her books were arranged on the shelves. Her face appeared at every turn].

As a narrator, the Nameless One has a cynical view of life coupled with a Hemingway-like sentimentality, a big heart, a strong anti-authoritarian streak, and a love for jazz music (the character is a former musician), referring to his brain at one point as 'en pladespiller' [a record player] *(Murder in March,* 86).[7] These traits reflect aspects of Turèll's own very public and Warhol-ish persona. The nameless narrator is also in possession of a sardonic wit evident in conversations like this one from *Mord i Marts,* with that most rare of bartenders—one he's never met:

> Narrator: Vil du have en whiskey med?
> Bartender: Jeg drikker kun med mine venner.
> Narrator: Hvordan får du sådan? (Turèll 2006: 52)
>
> ('Can I buy you a whisky?'
> 'I only drink with my friends.'
> 'Then how do you ever get any?')

Also, though the character would be loath to admit it, he is guilty of an occasionally poetic sensibility, as in this excerpt from *Mord ved Runddellen* [Murder at the Roundabout, 1983], reflecting the fact that he is a writer—though he seems to do very little actual writing in any of the books: '…den elektriske lys og den faldende og overaltliggende sne dannede tilsammen en eventyrverden, en grotesk uvirkelig verden hvor alt kunne ske' (Turèll 2006: 171) [the electric lights and the enveloping snow conspired to create a fairy-tale world, a grotesquely surreal world in which anything could happen]. Added together these are undeniably Chandleresque tendencies.

In his essay 'The Simple Art of Murder' (1950), Chandler took issue with self-conscious and contrived detective fiction with a 'complicated murder scheme [that] baffles the lazy reader.' Chandler laments that 'if the writers of this fiction wrote about the kind of murders that happen, they would also have to write about the authentic flavor of life as it is lived.' Along the way, he also lauds Hammet for taking murder 'out of the Venetian vase and dropping it into the alley' (an obvious swipe at mannered British mysteries). Chandler contends that Hammet was 'spare, frugal, and hardboiled' yet managed to write 'scenes that had never seemed to have been written before.'

These same qualities surface to varying degrees in Turèll's crime fiction. The murders the reader encounters are anything but complicated. Committed to capturing (if not constructing) the seamier side of Vesterbro, Turèll dropped his fictitious crimes into hidden courtyards, dusky bars, dumpsters, cemeteries, and various alleys throughout the city. Even crimes

orchestrated by the wealthy seem seedy in these works. His crime fiction is imbued with the 'authentic' flavour of Copenhagen's streets, from the highly frequented bars in 'the district' to the ritzy shops on Bredgade to the brothels near the Central Train station. His re-envisioned Copenhagen settings make plots appear new and different—plots that would seem familiar if not hackneyed in other writers' hands. More than this, the nameless narrator would have at least partially pleased Chandler: Turèll's journalist merges seamlessly into the nightlife, but he is never mean ('But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean…'). The Nameless One is also a 'common man' at home among the night denizens with whom he cavorts ('He is a common man or he could not go among common people'). However, unlike Chandler's fictive ideal, Turèll's narrator is not 'a hero,' mostly because Turèll has chosen to make his narrator a disillusioned writer, not a detective or private investigator.[8] Instead, the journalist possesses anti-heroic tendencies: he drinks too much, has trouble with his nerves, is occasionally guilty of adultery, refuses to take a full-time job, and dissembles with both his superiors and the police. Yet the influence of Chandler is undeniable. In an essay entitled 'Chandler's Blues,' Turèll once observed:

> Den der kommer til at holde af Raymond Chandler vil resten af sin tid være fanget af hans blues, for en blues er det, som man kan blive fanget af lyden af jazzens fedeste 30'er saxofoner. Chandler vil ligesom blive en skygge den lurer bag éns skuldre når man går på gaden. Og man vil være fordømt—eller måske befriet—til resten af sit liv at rotere i en karrusel af Chandlerske virkelighedsbilleder. (Turèll 1979: 3)
>
> (Those who grow to like Raymond Chandler will for the rest of their lives remain trapped by his blues—and a blues it is, just as you may be trapped by the sound of jazz's hottest saxophones from the 1930s. Similarly, Chandler will become a shadow lurking behind your shoulders as you walk the street. And you will be doomed —or maybe liberated—for the rest of your life to circle on a merry-go-round of Chandleresque images of reality.)

In *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction,* Stephen Knight alludes to Hemingway's influence on Chandler and the effort to find an 'objective style' (Knight 1980: 140), and many of the early hard-boiled writers cited Hemingway as a major influence. By making his narrator a journalist, Turèll

takes a characteristic step away from the standard fare of the hard-boiled genre and its flippant narrators and back to Hemingway. On this front, the nameless one is closer in character to Jake Barnes, the solipsistic writer-narrator of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). For decades critics have written about Hemingway's 'laconic' style: Knight notes that in *Farewell, My Lovely,* Chandler's Phillip Marlowe calls another character 'Hemingway' because of his 'repetitive laconic speech' (Knight 1980: 140). Throughout the *Murder Series,* Turèll's narrator uses the word laconic *(lakonisk)* to describe both his and other characters' terse responses.[9]

Despite the journalist's casual relationship with his work, there is one thing *Den Navnløse* does quite often throughout Turèll's novels and stories: he walks. He may well be the most peripatetic character in recent literature. At one point in *Mord i Mørket,* the narrator comments on his predilection for walking: 'Det var rart at gå. Jeg har altid været glad for det – i al uskyldighed har det været en af mit livs største opmuntringer siden barndommen' (Turèll 2006: 12) [It was nice to walk. I have always enjoyed it —in all its innocence, it has been one of my life's greatest joys since childhood]. The joy that others obtain from their commitment to swimming or running or flying airplanes, he observes, he gets from walking. And so, the Nameless One walks and walks. In fact, in *Murder at the Roundabout,* he begins the novel by physically stumbling into the dead body of the first victim while out on a late-night walk. Later, he enters Assistens Kirkegaard where he stumbles, yet again accidentally, onto the second corpse. In the second novel in the series, he becomes inebriated and walks right into the suspected murderer during a town festival in that crime capital of the world, Rodby. Considering how much he smokes and drinks throughout the books, walking may well be his only healthy counterpoint. Rhetorically, his peripatetic wanderings serve to unite him further in the reader's mind with his setting. Sachs connects the wanderings of unnamed narrators to their namelessness: 'The stories are invariably about that wandering—about statelessness as a state of being—and, because the narrator has no proper home, he can also have no proper name' (Sachs 2015).

In the first of Turèll's crime novels, *Murder in the Dark,* the narrator is awakened by a strange phone call in the middle of the night:

> Det er mig, gamle ven . . . Du kender da stemmen? Kom straks over i Saxogade . . . Number 28B, gamle dreng . . . (Turèll 2006: 8)

> (It's me, old friend . . . Don't you recognize my voice? Come immediately to Saxogade, number 28B, old friend . . .)

Convinced he is dreaming, he goes back to sleep. The disturbing dream the narrator returns to is driven by a sense of guilt: he is in a car, with inexplicable blood on his hands, running from the police who ultimately catch up with him. 'Jeg syntes selv det var fuldt ud retfærdigt' (Turèll 2006: 8) [Even I thought I deserved it], comments the narrator, who begins the scene by claiming he has 'krydset grænsen' [crossed the border] to 'den gale side' [the dark side] (Turèll 2006: 7). In his article 'Vid avgrundens rand – om Dan Turèlls kriminalberättelser' [At the Edge of the Abyss—on Dan Turèll's Crime Stories], Henrik Ljungberg observes:

> I det grå ingenmanslandet mellan dröm och verklighet kan det namnlösa jaget sätta ord både på de undflyende skuggorna från somnens surrealistiska men pågående universum och på verklighetens mycket konkreta och ändå vaga och flyktiga förnimmelser. (Ljungberg 1994: 22)
>
> (Within the grey no-man's-land between dream and reality, the nameless narrator can describe both the elusive shadows from the surreal yet persistent world of sleep and the very concrete and yet vague and fleeting sensations from reality.)

The next day, while drinking coffee in his favourite morning bar, the narrator discovers that a murder has taken place at the exact address proffered in his dream-call: a pensioner has been found shot to death in his own bed. The Nameless One is also swept into the events that have happened, both as a reporter and a peripheral 'witness.' Perhaps most importantly, it brings him into contact with Police Inspector Ehlers (his name, taken from a friend of Turèll's who was a jazz musician, a blatant pun in Danish for *ellers* [otherwise]), a solid family man and rationalist foil to our flippant, hash-smoking journalist/narrator. Their unlikely friendship becomes the true heart of these novels and short stories. In *Mord i September* [Murder in September, 1984], the narrator comments on their closeness: 'Den schizofrent skægstrittende politiinspektor og jeg havde efterhånden opdyrket noget i den menneskelige zoology så sjældent som et veritabelt venskab. Vi forstod hinanden. Vi kendte hinandens bevægelser' (Turèll 2006: 98) [Over time, the schizophrenic, bristly-bearded police inspector and I had cultivated

something quite rare in human zoology—an actual friendship. We understood each other. We knew each other's movements.] In *Mord i Myldretid* [Murder at Rush Hour, 1985], he adds: 'Ehlers er et af de mennesker jeg har holdt mest af, indså jeg' (Turèll 2006: 130) (I realised that Ehlers is one of the people I have cared most about). In the Nameless One and Ehlers, Turèll has split the classic responses of the hard-boiled narrator into two separate characters: cynicism into the nameless narrator and the drive to restore order into Ehlers, thus freeing his narrator from the genre's more heroic demands.

Todorov's typology

In his seminal essay 'The Typology of Detective Fiction,' Tzvetan Todorov, while categorising the genres and expectations of detective fiction, delineates two subtypes of the suspense novel: one involves the 'story of the vulnerable detective,' whereas the other concerns the 'story of suspect-as-detective' (Todorov 1977: 51). In the latter all the evidence points to a certain person: '… in this case, the character is at the same time the detective, the culprit (in the eyes of the police), and the victim' (Todorov 1977: 51). Turèll has taken the reader to a dark, unreliable beginning[10] with a narrator never defined by name and seemingly involved in a criminal act (having suspected him of drug-smuggling, Ehlers already has a file on the narrator when they first meet). Although he is not guilty of the crimes that ensue in the novel, the nameless narrator has, from the very outset with his disturbing dream, implicated himself in some kind of criminal activity with the visual image of blood on his hands. In *The Big Sleep* (1939), Chandler's Marlowe dreams of culpability, but the dream occurs *after* the crime and after Marlowe has discovered the body: 'I went to bed full of whiskey and frustration and dreamed about a man in a bloody Chinese coat who chases a naked girl with long jade earrings while I ran after them and tried to take a photograph with an empty camera' (Marlowe 1946: 42). Turèll follows this pattern more closely in *Mord ved Runddellen,* when the Nameless One dreams of murdering 'piger omkring midnat' (Turèll 2006: 136) [girls around midnight], following a string of Copenhagen murders with that pattern. Still, in the first novel in the series, the dream comes first.

Turèll's narrator's namelessness underscores this guilty association at the same time that it draws the reader closer to the novel's narrative voice and, through it, closer to the characters that inhabit Turèll's fictive Vesterbro. In *Crime Fiction* (2005) John Scaggs, writing about the hard-boiled approach, comments that 'the first-person narrator of the private eye story is easily identifiable with the private 'I' of the solitary reader' (Scaggs 2005: 74).

Turèll's expository move—to begin an entire series of detective fiction with a narrator's dream of criminality—functions as an initial step in uniting his narrator and the reader with the 'dark side' of life, with the city. The seamy depiction of Vesterbro that Turèll then constructs, the home base of the journalist narrator, seems more apt as each novel progresses; the nameless narrator is at home on dark streets and in seedy bars where he converses frequently with drunks and prostitutes. Todorov sees a 'vulnerable detective' in the novels of Hammett and Chandler: '… the detective loses his immunity, gets beaten up, badly hurt, constantly risks his life, in short, he is integrated into the universe of the other characters' (Todorov 1977: 51). By employing a journalist rather than a detective, Turèll has moved his narrator one step further from responsibility for solving any crimes, on one level making his involvement less professional and more personal. Although he pursues criminals, works with the police, gets knocked over the head a few times, and often finds himself in the middle of a crime scene, Turèll's narrator is still not a detective, thus thwarting one of the essential elements Todorov defines in his essay. Reading Turèll's *Mord-serie,* one can easily forget at times that the narrator is even a journalist: the character is as cagey with his avuncular editor Otzen as he is with the police. In addition, his professional existence as a freelancer, along with his refusal to work full-time, offers yet another correlative of his intentional detachment.

Within Todorov's typology, Turèll's crime novels possibly comprise a new classification. At the end of his essay, Todorov posits: '…what is to be done with the novels which do not fit our classification?' (Todorov 1977: 52). Earlier, Todorov affirms that, along the way, detective fiction has experienced an 'unjustified burden' (Todorov 1977: 52) because of the constraints placed upon it as a genre: each new form casts off some of those burdens (thrillers, for example, tossed the 'pretext' of mystery). Turèll's *kriminalromaner* test the limits of what constitutes a crime novel: there are crimes but none of the books is particularly driven by forensics, nor does the murder (or murderers) ever come closely into focus. Instead, the twelve books provide a character study of both the Nameless One and the district he inhabits. On this front Turèll's Vesterbro functions like Faulkner's Yaknapatawpha County: Faulkner based his fictional setting on a real place, Lafayette County, in Mississippi—but he used actual locations and peopled it with myriad characters of local colour who fade in and out of view, sometimes playing a major role, at others a minor one. The setting is just as much a character, ever-present. Also, rhetorically, Turèll's narrator makes meta-comments about crime fiction, implying that the genre is one unreal step removed from the events at hand. In *Mord i Marts,* he observes about one murder: 'Dén slags skete måske i gamle amerikanske 30'er-kriminalromaner af Craig Rice og Jonathan

Latimer, men ikke i København i en kølig sober marts måned' (Turèll 2006: 86-87) [Maybe that kind of thing happened in old American 1930s crime novels by Craig Rice and Jonathan Latimer but not in Copenhagen in the cold and sober month of March].

As journalists often do, Turèll's narrator becomes the reader's eyes and ears, crafting a *noir* travelogue that reflects both his and the district's distinct personalities.[11] These observations and ruminations are internalised, a filtering that presents itself as the 'truth.' Writing about Chandler's Marlowe, Knight observes a similar tendency to mediate events 'in private reverie to his silent and invisible audience' (Knight 2010: 143) and defines it as an 'intellectualising self-defence' (Knight 2010: 143). In Turèll, however, this internalized commentary plays a much greater role, usurping the crimes, investigation, and forensics commonly driving most crime fiction. Ljungberg notes that 'Det originellt turèllska i texterna sätter spår i läsarmedvetandet . . . Turèlls förmåga att kombinera en stadsdels topografi med precisa människoiakttagelser…' (Ljungberg 1994: 25) [What is original about Turèll's texts affects the reader's consciousness . . . Turèll's ability to combine a district's topography with precise human observations…]. Throughout the twelve books in the series, Turèll deftly hard-boils Copenhagen into a *noir* construct and then transcends the usual boundaries of the crime genre by elevating the district to a major player in each case. [12] In his introduction to *Copenhagen Noir* (2011), a collection of short stories with the city as their setting, Bo Tao Michaëlis defines the noir approach as 'a clear literary, late-modernist and existential sense that in the evil streets of the big city and dark suburbs is found the consummate experience of shock —the confrontation with the seamy side of modernism' (Michaëlis 2011: 15). In 'Chandler's Blues' Turèll lauds Chandler for building 'en myldrende mikrobverden, måske den første reele moderne storby-skildring med byen selv som hovedperson' (Turèll 1978: 6) [a teeming microcosm, possibly the first real depiction of a modern big city—with the city itself as the protagonist]. Yet Turèll had neither Los Angeles nor New York to work with: instead, he reimagined Vesterbro in the image of his reluctant, world-weary narrator.

On some level the Nameless One behaves like a reluctant participant in many of the cases he encounters. This trait also undercuts the 'hero' aspect of most detective fiction narrators/protagonists. Knight discusses Chandler's use of the first-person narrator who presents other characters 'externally' (Knight 2010: 145). In *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture,* John Cawelti, writing about the central character in detective fiction, claims: 'Since he becomes emotionally and morally committed to some of the persons involved, or

because the crime poses some basic challenge in his image of himself, the hard-boiled detective remains unfulfilled until he has taken a personal moral stance toward the criminal' (Cawelti 1976: 143). Inspector Ehlers cajoles the nameless journalist into involvement with decidedly mixed results throughout the series. This involvement begins in the first novel with Ehlers's casual suggestion that the narrator accompany him to the crime scene: 'Tag med mig derover' (Turèll 2006' 16-17) [Walk over there with me]. Whether this compels a moral response remains to be seen.

Murakami's moral ambiguity

The reluctant narrator, the wanderings, and a distinct moral ambiguity are traits that also apply to many of Murakami's narrators. Someone once asked Murakami why all of his narrators—both the nameless one who ushered in the Japanese author's international career in his first four novels and most of the others—are directionless young or middle-aged men. Murakami replied that many of his narrators reflect a vision of the disordered path of his own life if he had never met his wife (whom he met in college). The nameless character narrating his first four novels is—like Turèll's narrator—a sporadically working, uncommitted writer; he also frequents a favourite bar, J's Bar, an underground joint run by a wise old Chinese immigrant.[13] Reading Turèll's stories, one cannot help but think of Murakami's narrators, their cynical nature and sentimentality, and their seemingly directionless lives in which they become swept away into a journey that is at once surreal and demanding.

Other parallels surface, even in works with narrators who are named. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1997), the out-of-work narrator Toru Okada is making dinner and waiting for his wife to come home when he receives a strange phone call from a woman who seems to know quite a bit about his life. Afterwards, his life is turned upside down: like the narrator from Murakami's initial tetralogy, his wife has left and divorced him, mostly—as he admits—because he simply wasn't attentive (in *Murder on Malta,* Turèll's nameless narrator makes the same confession about Helle, the second wife who left him). Murakami's narrator then enters an oneiric, mind-altering world of danger and confusion. This mental journey begins with his peripatetic wanderings around his neighbourhood in search of his cat, starting down an alley that had neither entrance nor exit, wanderings that lead him both to the strange well where he retires repeatedly to enter an altered state and to the character of May Kasahara, a teenage girl with uncommonly keen insight, another motif running throughout Murakami's work.

In an e-mail interview, I asked Murakami about his use of the well image and altered states, and he wrote:

> When I write fiction, especially long novels, I am able to go to a different world, another world. The world that is totally different from this actual, present world. I live in that new world and write daily reports from there. I write about what I saw and what I experienced. It is quite exciting. How can we move to that world? The rule is simple: you should go through the stone walls which surround you. How can we go through the stone walls? I don't know. I have no exact idea. But that happens to me when the time is right, and I am ready to go. I call it Puff The Magic Dragon.[14]

One of Murakami's greatest accomplishments has been a seamless merging of the surreal with a hard-boiled sensibility toward characters and plot—the latter thanks to a lifelong affection for Chandler's writing. 'Sometimes I call my style Sushi Noir,' he has admitted, 'but it is, of course, a joke.'[15] This tone already surfaces in his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing* (1979), when the nameless narrator observes:

> For me, writing is extremely hard work. There are times when it takes me a whole month just to write one line. Other times I'll write three days and nights straight through, only to have it come out wrong. Nonetheless, writing can be fun. Compared to the sheer difficulty of living, the process of attaching meanings to life is altogether clear sailing. (9)

In a 1992 lecture given at the University of California-Berkeley, Murakami commented on his first international success, *A Wild Sheep Chase,* and drew a line between his own writing and the genre of crime fiction:

> The structure … was deeply influenced by Raymond Chandler. I am an avid reader of his books and have read some of them many times. I wanted to use his plot structure in my new novel. This meant, first of all, that the protagonist would be a lonely city dweller. He would be searching for something. In the course of his search, he would become entangled in various kinds of complicated situations. And when he found what he was looking for, it

> would already have been ruined or lost. This is obviously Chandler's method… But I am not trying to solve anything. What I wanted to write was a mystery without a solution. (Rubin 2005: 81)

Reading Murakami, we surrender to the magic realist elements: the psychic prostitutes, the hotel floors that do not really exist, the characters who are both young and old simultaneously, the murders occurring in dreams but manifesting themselves in reality, the emanations following characters through their lives. On this front, his novels and stories exist at the intersection of Chandler and Gabriel García Márquez. In an essay appearing in the *New York Times* (December 2, 2010), Murakami observed that, especially in Europe and America, readers have begun to accept his stories 'as is' instead of entering them 'through the doorways [of] 'post-modernism' or 'magic-realism' or 'Orientalism.'' He chalks their strangeness up to a prevailing sense of 'chaos'[16] and claims that, whereas Asian readers have always accepted their 'missing logicality' as 'natural,' this acceptance is a newer phenomenon in the West. He defines this process as one of realignment, following a loss of 'coordinate axes with which to form standards of evaluation.' As he asks: 'In an age when reality is insufficiently real, how much reality can a fictional story possess.'[17]

In his otherworldly mode, established from his earliest works such as his second novel *Pinball 1973* (1980), in which an old chicken-processing warehouse serves as a locale of throbbing sub-consciousness, Murakami has no problem crafting easily accessible alternative planes of existence: characters go down a well, take a hotel elevator, go to a cabin in the nonexistent woods. His transformation of Tokyo and the Japanese countryside into non-mimetic worlds always carries with it an ever-present trace of tension: we recognise the modern allusions (abetted by Murakami's use of Western cultural references, especially to popular music) but we are unnerved by what occurs there. In 'Realist Magic and the Invented Tokyos of Murakami,' Myles Chilton alludes to these urban landscapes as 'the everyday abstracted into intangible, imaginary forms.'[18] Yet we surrender willingly to these reimagined landscapes. On some level, we recognise them, mostly because they are anchored by modern cultural allusions. Still, for Murakami, mimetic disruption ensures no solid resolutions.

Copenhagen's Vesterbro in the 1980s seems worlds removed from a magic realist setting; yet, like Murakami, Turèll finds inventive ways to bring an otherworldly sense to the commonplace in his crime novels. In his essay Todorov alludes to S.S. Van Dine's twenty rules to which detective fiction

authors 'must conform' (Todorov 1977: 49). Number five tells us: 'Everything must be explained rationally; the fantastic is not admitted' (Todorov 1977: 49). In this endeavour Turèll, like Murakami, in defiance of the standard formulaic crime novel, seems to want to upend the banal *hyggelige* Danish state, to peel off the veneer of coziness and to use the approach of detective fiction to expose an underworld not simply of crime but also of mimetic and social disruption. Scaggs refers to the image of the modern city in hard-boiled fiction as 'a polluted wasteland' (Scaggs 2005: 70), and Cawelti describes the use of urban landscapes in popular detective fiction as 'a gleaming and deceptive façade [hiding] a world of exploitation and criminality in which enchantment and significance must be sought elsewhere' (Cawelti 1976: 141).

Perhaps Turèll (like Murakami) has not given up on the enchantment, nor does he (or Murakami) believe it needs to be sought elsewhere. This approach is the exact spot where both authors transcend the crime fiction genre. In fact, familiarity with Chandler's writing apparently led both authors toward a disturbing 'enchantment,' not away from it. Upsetting any sense of resolution, for example, readers never discover who made that phone call to the Nameless One at the beginning of Turèll's first novel. It remains lost in a dream. Turèll employed this device again in the series' seventh novel, *Mord i Myldretid* (Murder at Rush Hour, 1985). After learning that a former band mate from his jazz days has been poisoned, the nameless journalist dreams he is once again playing in his old band when they are suddenly riddled with bullets from a machine gun. He is awakened by the bedside phone, only to discover that another murder has taken place.

In both scenes he thanks his arm—calling it a 'wise' arm in the first instance—for realizing before his brain that a phone is ringing; later in *Mord i Mørket* he refers to his walking legs as 'flinke fyre' [nice guys] (Turèll 2006: 102), all examples of disassociation. Disassociation serves as the natural state for both Turèll's and Murakami's narrators. While the loner seems drawn directly from the hard-boiled tradition, both authors' narrators suffer from a more existential sense of alienation. For the nameless one, in the first novel, *Mord i Mørket,* the death of a friend propels him into a severe depression, a borderline breakdown, and then into action. The friend, Chef Ole, was also a musician who veered too far into the world of drugs. Ole is killed while the two are talking in a hotel room, where someone breaks in and shoots wildly into the room.[19] The nameless one is suddenly knocked out: when he comes to, he discovers that Ole has been shot and killed. This scene, followed by an intense interrogation by Ehlers, sends the narrator into a tailspin. The following morning he abruptly 'gik amok' (104) [went crazy]: he tears apart his cabinets, smashing plates and glasses all over the

kitchen floor. Afterwards, he collapses into a chair and cries uncontrollably. 'Jeg er ikke vant til at græde, jeg græder ikke, jeg har altid betragtet det som noget jeg bare *ikke gjorde,* ligesom andre ikke ryger eller spiser kød. End ikke ved mine skillsmisser græd jeg' (Turèll 2006: 105) [I'm not used to crying, I don't cry, I've always viewed it as something I just *didn't do,* just as others don't smoke or eat meat. I didn't even cry over my divorces.] This narration fairly drips with Hemingway's influence and recalls Jake Barnes's private moments of crying in *The Sun Also Rises.*

Following the Nameless One's long lament that his life has had no purpose and that he has wasted 35 years, this cathartic scene leads to his moment of freedom. He questions why he now wants to 'lege detektiv' (Turèll 2006: 106) [play detective]. It compels him, existentially, into action because 'en grænse' (Turèll 2006: 107) [a limit] in his life has been breached (echoing his response after his first prescient dream that he had crossed a border). The narrator compares his decision to those of many people under the German occupation in World War II:

> …næsten alle fortalte den samme historie: Der var sket ét eller andet , ét eller andet ganske bestemt og definitivt, som havde overbevist dem. Én kunne have mistet sin bror, en anden kunne have hørt hans gamle mester var under mistanke for sabatoge—og pludselig var hver enkelts grænse nået. (Turèll 2006: 106-07)
>
> (…almost everyone told the same story: Something had happened, something quite distinct and definitive, that had convinced them. One might have lost his brother, another might have heard that his old boss was suspected of sabotage—and suddenly every individual's limit had been reached.)

The narrator adds that 'Ole var *min* grænse' (Turèll 2006: 107) [Ole was my limit]. A calm comes over him once he makes this decision to become involved; finding out who killed Kok becomes his 'i mange år eneste klare mål' (Turèll 2006: 107) [clearest purpose in many years]. Kok's death also transforms Vesterbro into a new and dangerous landscape. Whereas he previously enjoyed the teeming people in the streets, 'nu forekom den fyldt af dirrende fortættet fare, som om hver eneste figur der passerede i halvmørket kunne være den der havde skudt Ole Kok for et par timer siden, som om enhver kunne være den der om et par timer—eller *nu*—ville skyde mig' (Turèll 2006: 93) [now it seemed full of quivering, intense danger, as if

every single figure passing in the twilight could be the one who shot Chef Ole a few hours ago, as if everyone could be the one who in a few hours—or *now*—would shoot me).

Hewing somewhat closer to actual crime fiction, Turèll's approach seems less illogical than Murakami's, but in addition to the prescient dreams he finds his own way of upsetting our narrative equilibrium throughout these works. In *Mord i Myldretid,* he describes certain characters as werewolves and comments that a murderer is 'en drøm, en nisse, en elverpige' (Turèll 2006: 172) [a dream, a *nisse*, an elf maiden]; in *Mord på Malta* one dead body is discovered beneath a strange, gigantic red statue of St. Francis, and a fight scene between two characters is depicted as flat indiscernible shadows struggling in the moonlight; the festival in *Mord i Rodby* has a kaleidoscopic Fellini-esque quality. In *Mord i Marts,* one dead victim appears to morph into another when a sheet is removed in a morgue. In *Mord i September,* the narrator comments that 'beboerne her i kvartetet er nært beslægtet med gengangere, vampyerer, varulve og andre lignende ekstreme eksistenser' (77) [the inhabitants in this part of town are closely related to ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and similar extremes of existence]. Like Murakami's, the landscape we encounter in Turèll's crime novels is often more mental than physical. Bundgaard observes:

> Dan's Distrikt er Københavns svar på Chinatown eller Soho. Et mentalt spillebræt, hvor feltene hedder: Druk og hor. Vold og stoffer. Penge og magt. Mennesker er brikker…. Sjælens skyggesider krænget ud til belysning i en neon-nat uden nåde. (Bundgaard 2005: 169)
>
> (Dan's District is Copenhagen's answer to Chinatown or Soho. A mental springboard, where the playing fields are called: Drinking and fornication. Violence and drugs. Money and power. People are pawns…. The soul's shadows illuminated in a merciless neon night.)

Although bound to Vesterbro in the 1980s, Turèll's nameless one has his own method for entering an altered state: alcohol (he also smokes hash at certain points in the series). A frequent bar-hopper, he drinks and drinks and drinks; instead of becoming incapacitated, however, his drinking usually leads to a revelation, if not to an actual murderer or a dead body, along with astute realizations about humanity and living, and especially about other bar denizens. Also, though a seemingly relentless loner, the nameless narrator maintains his relationship with Gitte Bristol throughout the series and even

fathers a child with her. For both Turèll and Murakami, women characters are not the *femme fatales* or hapless victims of most standard hard-boiled fiction. Instead, they are sources of information, insight, and strength—and they can be just as intelligent, sexual, noncommittal, and elusive as their male counterparts.

In another departure from standard crime fiction, Turèll's Nameless One often acts in defiance of Cawelti's claims of moral involvement. In the first novel he ultimately discovers that the Thin Man, the head of a neighbourhood drug ring, is the true source of the neighbourhood's murders, but he remains oddly removed from acting. In fact, the narrator learns the whole truth from an old book dealer who is terminally ill and does not want the Thin Man's crime syndicate to take over the neighbourhood after the antiquarian is gone. Toward the end of the book, in the penultimate chapter, the Nameless One drives the old book dealer to the Thin Man's villa on the Gold Coast north of Copenhagen and waits in the car while the old man goes into the house and shoots the Thin Man. Curiously, the main series character, in his first detective novel, seems undeniably inert in relation to the crimes, and even removed. This sense of peripheral involvement is reinforced in *Mord i Myldretid* when the nameless journalist, during a massive sting in Copenhagen's Hovedbanegård, sits above the action, in a mezzanine café, watching everything go down. Through his eyes, the entire scene appears choreographed: he even refers to it as 'a ballet' (168). Employing a part-time writer rather than a police detective as his narrator, Turèll has taken the predictability of the detective novel and turned it on its head. Though a journalist who shadows a police inspector and whose beat is a supposedly crime-infested neighborhood, the Nameless One at first seems surprisingly uninvolved (and yet paradoxically engaging as a character). Bundgaard, after reading the manuscript for *Mord i Mørket,* told Turèll: 'Lidt mere plot og action ville heller ikke være af vejen' (Bundgaard 2005: 157) [A little more plot and action wouldn't be a bad idea]. However, Turèll was aiming for something different.

One tends to think that there is something relentlessly Cartesian about the search for the truth in most crime fiction. Therefore it seems odd to find two authors who are basically writing crime fiction yet are determined to lead readers to some truth not through rationalist structures but through the surreal and the unknown—as Murakami says, through the chaos. In *Meditation I* Descartes derides the senses as 'deceptive' and warns: '… it is wiser not to trust entirely to any thing by which we once have been deceived' (Descartes 1993: 127). Yet Turèll's and Murakami's narrators return repeatedly to the scenes of deceiving senses to reach, however irrationally, some semblance of truth. In both cases an argument can be made that

neither writer has written mysteries or crime novels in any formulaic sense. Nothing is 'solved' in Murakami's novels; instead, life is changed permanently, even if a suicide, murder, or disappearance is explained along the way. For Turèll, the crime novels offer a study of character and place: the standard detective novel structure serves as a point of departure, more *noir* extracted from it than conventional mystery.

Dan Turèll once said that if someone were to cut open his heart, a pile of worn-out old detective novels would come tumbling out.[20] And that they did—twelve of them, to be exact, rendered in a bilious, Hopper-esque green light, reminding readers of a part of Copenhagen that once—and never—was.

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[1] Sachs 2015. Accessed: May 9, 2024.

[2] Cohn 1999: 125.

[3] Quoted in Bundgaard 2005: 157.

[4] Some of this article first appeared in the Introduction to my translation of *Mord i Mørket* as *Murder in the Dark* (Norvik Press, 2013).

[5] The most famous being Dashiell Hammet's nameless 'Op' for the Continental Detective Agency.

[6] Cf. Knight in *Crime Fiction Since 1800:* '…crime fiction can . . . become a medium to question certainties about the self, the mind and the ambient world' (Knight 2010: 205).

[7] In his essay 'Chandler's Blues,' Turèll notes that 'at læse Chandler er som at høre gamle plade-optagelser med Billie Holliday og Lester Young' (Turèll 1978: 3) [reading Chandler is like hearing old recordings of Billie Holliday and Lester Young].

[8] There is a long history of reporters as protagonists and narrators in crime fiction, including the works of Gaston Leroux, Geoffrey Homes, Fredric Brown, Karen E. Olson, Val McDermid, and Gregory Macdonald. In Scandinavia, Liza Marklund's crime reporter Annika Bengtzon also stands out.

[9] As in this example from *Mord i Myldretiden* [Murder at Rush Hour, 1984]: 'Du kunne, svarede jeg lakonisk' (Turèll 2006: 119) ['You could,' I answered laconically].

[10] In *Crime and Fiction Since 1800,* Knight indicates that postmodernist takes on the genre include 'coincidence, overlapping accounts and indeterminacy . . . to dislodge the classic novels' faith in a single subject' (Knight 2010: 205).

[11] Turèll's fictive Vesterbro includes intersections of streets that do not actually cross in reality, reminding readers that this is a non-mimetic landscape.

[12] For a good discussion of the noir thriller, see Scaggs.

[13] In *Novelist as a Vocation* (2015), Murakami addresses not naming his characters during the first eight years he wrote fiction: 'Why not? I don't know the answer. All I can say is that I felt embarrassed about assigning people names. I felt that somebody like me endowing others (even if they're fictional characters I made up) with names seemed kind of phony' (Murakami 2015: 157).

[14] Interview with the author, May 9, 2008.

[15] Interview with the author, May 9, 2008.

[16] In *Mord i Myldretid,* Turèll's narrator refers to the 'bundløse umulige kaos vi i mangel af bedre ord kalder 'livet'' (Turèll 2006: 130) [unfathomable, impossible chaos we call 'life,' for want of a better word].

[17] All quotes from Murakami, Haruki. 'Reality A and Reality B.' *The New York Times.* December 2, 2010. Accessed: 11 December 2010.

[18] Chilton, Myles. 'Realist Magic and the Invented Tokyos of Murakami.' *Journal of Narrative Theory.* Vol. 39. 3. Fall 2009: 391-415.

[19] Knight points out that 'when [Chandler] was in doubt, he had a man come through the door with a gun in his hand' (Knight 1980: 149).

[20] See Bundgaard: 'Han sagde selv, at hvis man skar hans hjerte op, ville det vælte ud med gamle, slidte kriminalromaner' (Bundgaard 2005: 169) [He said himself that if you were to cut open his heart, a pile of worn-out old detective novels would come tumbling out].