

Repositioning Jean-Patrick Manchette : *La position du tireur couché* and the Politics of Genre

- 1 Few phenomena invite speculation in the domain of literary studies quite like a forswearing of literature or a Rimbaldian silence. It is thus not terribly surprising that a good deal of the critical interest in Jean-Patrick Manchette's work has been focused on how to interpret the fourteen-year "silence" between his last published novel and his untimely death in 1995. If Manchette is frequently credited with reinvigorating the French noir novel in the 1970s, his sudden abandonment of crime fiction after the publication of *La position du tireur couché* (1981) has led many to conclude that his intellectual and artistic trajectory was one of progressive disenchantment. Although Manchette's own son has rejected this narrative, observing that his father continued to write criticism and to work on novels, the dominant critical approach—what I will call the *disillusionment hypothesis*—remains one which reads Manchette's late work as a kind of literary sepulcher in which he buried his (sub)artistic ambitions and his Marxist metanarrative. Manchette's silence is, for many of his readers, nothing less than an unwritten conclusion, a symbolic codicil that negates his early work.
- 2 My challenge to this interpretation emerges from a close reading of the distinction that Manchette drew between the classic noir novel and its "ersatz" offshoot, the hypermasculine thriller. An attention to this distinction allows us to read *La position du tireur couché* in relation to a broader denunciation of the competitive-individualist ideology of the thriller. Placing this critique of the thriller in dialogue with the novel's allusions to (post-)colonial violence reveals the multiple links that the text establishes between generic conventions and the politics of Western imperialism. While many have read *La position du tireur couché* as a sort of "adieu au politique," my conclusion is that this last novel was in fact a logical continuation of Manchette's lifelong effort to demarcate the ideological underpinnings and critical potential of different forms of crime fiction.
- 3 The reading that I will propose forecloses some common interpretations, but it also allows us to perceive overlooked aspects of *La position du tireur couché* that are of great relevance to current scholarship on the noir novel. Recent years have seen significant contributions to research focusing on the role of crime fiction in the constitution of social norms and fantasies concerning masculinity, on the connection between the noir novel and forms of radical political critique, and on the interrelation between masculine adventure fantasies and colonial-imperialist expansion.
- 4 Manchette's novels—which are understudied by scholars of French literature and ignored by the vast majority of scholars of the American noir tradition—have the potential to productively contribute to these discussions. Manchette was a committed intellectual with an encyclopedic knowledge of crime fiction, and he was clearly alive both to the critical potential of the "polar" and to the regressive allure of a particular type of violent fantasy. The revision of the disillusionment hypothesis therefore allows us not only to avoid a set of erroneous assumptions, but also to open a dialogue between Manchette's work and recent scholarship on the American noir novel, masculinity, adventure fiction and the systemic or ultra-objective violence of capitalism¹.

- 5 *La position du tireur couché* is, to borrow Manchette's expression, a "cocktail" that blends several classic plots: the story of a professional killer who tries to retire but is haunted by his past, the story of a working-class hero who fights to win the love of a woman of higher social status, and, to a lesser extent, the story of a man who sets out to avenge his partner's murder. Its central character is Martin Terrier, a former parachutist and mercenary who quits his job as a contract killer for the shadowy multinational "Compagnie" in order to win back his high-school sweetheart, Anne. Terrier's past catches up with him, and he is compelled to return to action as a killer, before finally being wounded and ending up disabled in an enforced "retirement." Terrier loses his voice, bleats like a lamb, and is transformed from a cold killing machine into an uncoordinated clown who can do no harm to anyone.
- 6 The entire novel is constructed so as to emphasize repetitions both minor (Terrier twice drinks beer that is too cold, twice has unsatisfying sexual encounters with women working at the local factory, etc.) and major (Terrier is twice betrayed by Anne, twice lives in poverty, twice kills a member of the Rossi family, twice performs a "last job," and, worst of all, repeats almost exactly the ignominious fate of his father). The most significant repetition, however, for the disillusionment hypothesis, concerns the parallelism between the opening and closing passages of the novel, which read, respectively:

C'était l'hiver et il faisait nuit. Arrivant directement de l'Arctique, un vent glacé s'engouffrait dans la mer d'Irlande, balayait Liverpool, filait à travers la plaine du Cheshire (où les chats couchaient frileusement les oreilles en l'entendant ronfler dans la cheminée) et, par-delà la glace baissée, venait frapper les yeux de l'homme assis dans le petit fourgon Bedford. L'homme ne cillait pas.

[...]

Et parfois il arrive ceci : c'est l'hiver et il fait nuit ; arrivant directement de l'Arctique, un vent glacé s'est engouffré dans la mer d'Irlande, a balayé Liverpool, filé à travers la plaine du Cheshire où les chats couchent les oreilles en l'entendant hurler et passer ; ce vent glacé a traversé l'Angleterre et franchi le Pas-de-Calais, il a survolé les plaines grises et vient frapper directement les vitres du petit logement de Martin Terrier, mais ces vitres ne vibrent pas et ce vent est sans force. Ces nuits-là Terrier dort en silence. Dans son sommeil il vient de prendre la position du tireur couché.²

- 7 Befitting the highly pessimistic tone that critics have long remarked, the major differences at the end of the novel bespeak decadence and degradation: Terrier is now lying down rather than semi-erect, protected from the wind but powerless, a lamb (the victim of a shooting) rather than a wolf (about to shoot someone)³. Terrier lies in a prone firing stance, but has no gun; and just as Terrier's capacity for violence has been eliminated, the metaphorically ambiguous arctic wind has become powerless. While there is an intriguing case to be made that Manchette's engagement with Hegelian thought should be taken into account when interpreting these repetitions, the dominant narrative has tended to read this novel as a pure expression of political pessimism.
- 8 In his article entitled "Manchette, ou le mutisme," Nicholas Paige argues for a reading of *La position du tireur couché* as a "précis de sabotage littéraire," as a violent and (he presumes) painful negation of its author's erstwhile revolutionary optimism. Paige notes that Manchette's earlier novels, though characterized by explosions of violence and troubling figures of repetition and circularity, nonetheless maintained a critical distance corresponding to a Marxist belief in the revolutionary overcoming of

capitalism. It is this critical distance which, Paige maintains, abruptly disappears in Manchette's last novel: "Chose significative, ces petites indications incongrues sur la domination capitaliste sont absentes de *La position du tireur couché*, et avec elles disparaît la position de maîtrise analytique qui permettait une distanciation par rapport aux personnages"⁴.

This passage, which quite naturally posits the interrelation of questions of critical distance, analytical mastery and political certainty, precisely encapsulates the major elements of the disillusionment hypothesis. Unsure of the possibility of dissociating himself from the (double) stupidity of his unintelligent and briefly aphonic hero, unable to persuade himself that his writing could genuinely serve as an instrument of emancipatory praxis, Manchette ended his brilliant career with an oblique but irrevocable admission of defeat. This interpretation has become more or less axiomatic, and subsequent iterations of the disillusionment hypothesis have remained remarkably faithful to the broad outlines of Paige's argument.

David Platten has read Manchette's literary trajectory as reflective of a broader thematics of the "politics of the gun," suggesting that Manchette began as a confident and masterful literary "gunman" writing of masterful gunmen, but then experienced a violent "recoil" in his last novel, where "the possibility of future political resistance appears to be ruled out"⁵. Likewise, Benoît Mouchart confidently says of Manchette: "cette vision du monde négative a sans doute fini par contaminer son rapport à la littérature"⁶. Franck Frommer also reads the downfall of Martin Terrier as a symbolic performance of Manchette's own defeat as an "engaged" writer: "L'agneau a remplacé le loup, le récit de la victime a supplanté le récit du héros, le désenchantement a exclu l'engagement,... et Jean-Patrick Manchette a arrêté d'écrire des romans"⁷.

- 9 An alternative to this narrative emerges from Manchette's critical writing, which repeatedly emphasized the distinction between the classic "polar" and the reactionary thriller⁸. One of the touchstones for Manchette's discussion of the politics of the thriller was George Orwell's unjustly forgotten essay, "Raffles and Miss Blandish" (1944)⁹. In that essay, Orwell analyzed the rise of a new type of "glamourized crime," exemplified by the violent, politically realist fiction of James Hadley Chase. For Orwell, the displacement of the gentlemanly ethos of classical mystery stories—embodied in the figure of the "amateur cracksman" Raffles—by the amoral, hard-boiled sadists of Chase's *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* was symptomatic of the sinister developments in political ideology that were being played to their tragic conclusion in 1944. Orwell's interpretation hinges on the assertion that this new manner of representing violence should be read historically with an attention to "the interconnection between sadism, masochism, success-worship, power-worship, nationalism and totalitarianism"¹⁰.

Like Orwell, Manchette saw the emergence of the noir novel as a literary consequence of the triumph of global capital ("La période la plus dégueulasse et meurtrière des temps modernes est l'âge d'or du polar")¹¹. Manchette insisted, however, that the noir novel was a descriptive form that contained a sharp critique of the society that it reflected symptomatically and representationally. What Manchette's crime fiction columns clearly demonstrate, in other words, is that he was invested in distinguishing the sadistic and politically regressive thriller, as practiced by the likes of James Hadley Chase, Mickey Spillane, and Peter Cheyney, from the "classic" noir novel, which he considered to be nothing less than the most important political literature of the twentieth century¹².

- 10 For Manchette, the noir novel was first and foremost the formal analog of the revolutionary critique of capitalism. It told the stories of the marginalized, of “la violence obligée des pauvres après la victoire du capital”; it favored description rather than linear resolution, and sought to inscribe subjective violence within the broader systemic violence of capitalism; it was characterized by an *insurgent* pessimism and was, above all, *moral*¹³. The key word that appears in almost all of Manchette’s denunciations of the thriller is “ersatz,” and the following passage makes clear that he viewed the hypermasculine thriller as a “pseudo-polar”¹⁴, an inferior derivative that distorted the politics of its more distinguished ancestor:

Ce qui rend méprisable le roman d’espionnage sadique, c’est que la protestation contre ce monde s’y est changée en acceptation vile, et bientôt en apologie abjecte. Le héros du genre, c’est le tueur garanti par l’État. Il est *licensed to kill* [...].¹⁵

- 11 As this pithy philippic suggests, Manchette’s definitions of the various currents or sub-genres of crime fiction insisted on the crucial identification of their *position* in relation to the politics of twentieth-century capitalism. The noir novel’s revolt against the systemic violence of the triumph of capital made it “la grande littérature morale de [son] époque”; the thriller was but the reactionary apology for that violence, its recasting in terms of deviant subjectivity or a quasi-mystical battle between Good and Evil¹⁶.

- 12 While Orwell speaks of glamourized crime and ideology, Christopher Breu’s analysis of American crime fiction has demonstrated that this contrast between two conceptions of crime is also very clearly a contrast between two conceptions of masculinity: Raffles represents the nineteenth-century genteel masculine ideal (masculinity as a moral quality of “civilized man”); Chase’s story belongs to the tradition of twentieth-century “hard-boiled masculinity” characterized by action, violence, physicality, emotional detachment and control¹⁷. These are precisely the qualities that Manchette attributed to Richard Stark’s highly marketable hero, Parker: “Quelles sont ses belles qualités ? L’insensibilité, la brutalité, l’obstination, la capacité professionnelle, la force. Parker est un sauvage”¹⁸. If the thriller hero is “savage,” primitive, uncivilized, and hypermasculine, he is not, strictly speaking, *barbaric*, for the thriller hero is but an expression of the dominant capitalist ideology of competitive individualism¹⁹. As George Orwell remarked in his discussion of Chase’s sadistic characters, “People worship power in the form in which they are able to understand it”²⁰.

It should come as little surprise then that among thriller heroes one finds not only the officially sanctioned detective or spy, “Le super-héros occidental paré des plumes du polar,” but also their private-sector counterpart, the contract killer, another man whose superiority is expressed in his perfect control of professional violence²¹. At the time when he was working on *La position du tireur couché*, Manchette wrote in his journal that he was thinking about rereading James Hadley Chase, “pour voir comment fonctionne un bon ersatz”²². This comment leaves little doubt that Manchette envisioned his novel as an engagement with the archetypes of the sadistic thriller. Indeed, *La position du tireur couché* is not even the first of Manchette’s novels that can be read in this light: already in *Fatale* (1977), Manchette had tried his hand at an intriguing reversal of the generic codes of the hypermasculine thriller, making the hero hyperfeminine, and making the novel’s morality explicitly Sadian rather than implicitly sadistic²³.

13 While we might, therefore, agree with Nicholas Paige that *La position du tireur couché* opens onto “une impuissance plus générale et diffuse, l’incapacité de tout un genre de soutenir le rêve de l’action,” we cannot fully draw out the conclusions of this statement if we do not ask *which* genre and *whose* dreams of action²⁴. What Manchette’s Marxist reading of the thriller ultimately brings to the fore is the violence of primitive accumulation, the famous “blood and dirt” hiding beneath two popular stories: the “nursery tale” of capitalist political-economic thought²⁵, and the celebration of “constructive violence” in traditions of adventure fiction²⁶.

14 The early chapters of *La position du tireur couché* leave little doubt as to Martin Terrier’s credentials as an embodiment of the competitive-individualistic ethos. In addition to highlighting his stoic insensitivity—which will later be reinforced in passages demonstrating his high tolerance for pain—the first description of Terrier notes that he maintains an erect posture while he waits for his target with his gun lying suggestively across his thighs²⁷. Every inch the hypermasculine professional of the popular thriller, the opening chapter sees him coldly murder his target as well as a woman who is a witness to the event.

In keeping with the novel’s behaviorist style, Terrier is, from the outset, a highly mechanistic character. Terrier’s feelings *are not there*, and it is surely not an incidental detail that after having completed in an efficient manner his “job,” he drives by dark stores containing “des centaines de costumes vides, des milliers de chaussures vides, des milliers d’étiquettes carrées en carton”²⁸. The emptiness of these clothes is at once the emptiness of Terrier’s professional violence—Terrier is himself a “suit” with a price tag and nothing inside—and an evocation of the victims of historical massacres, of greater forms of “professional” violence. From the outset, therefore, Terrier is associated with the powerful masculinity of the conventional thriller hero, but also with the insensateness and, significantly, lack of agency of a robot or a suit.

15 Control is the obsession of the variety of thriller that Manchette is parasitically appropriating and ironically undermining in his last novel, and Terrier in many respects appears to incarnate that ideal: he always has “les bonnes reactions,” his emotional range is limited to a tensing of his lips and to involuntary physical reflexes like vomiting or grunting, he shoots in the heart and the head, and, at least at first, he dictates the terms of his professional and sexual relationships²⁹. In Terrier’s encounters with others, and particularly with women, the dominant verb mood of his laconic discourse is the imperative. Terrier’s manner with Alex, his girlfriend in Paris, as well as his early interactions with Anne reinforce—before ultimately subverting—his control over women³⁰.

In his professional life, Terrier is portrayed as confident and unintimidated, with his mastery of violence ensuring his immunity from threats coming from both inside and outside his “company”³¹. The sadistic side of Terrier’s professionalism is made obvious early in the novel: after ambushing a young man who is tailing him, Terrier pistol-whips him, kicks him in the head until he is unconscious, throws him against a car, “rakes” his face against the door handle of the car, kicks him in the spleen, puts a gun to his throat, threatens to burn his eye out with the car’s cigarette lighter, and, finally, after getting all the information that he can out of him, shoots him in the heart³². The competitive individualist impulses of the traditional thriller find their purist expression in these confrontations between men, where the sadistic pleasure that the

- protagonist takes in killing is legitimized by the justifications that recast that violence as either professional necessity or heroism.
- 16 Very few readers of *La position du tireur couché* would balk at the suggestion that Terrier is modeled after the tough-guy heroes of the kind found in the Charles Bronson and Alain Delon thrillers that play in the novel's movie theaters, but the subtle links that the text establishes between these action heroes and the Western "heroes" of the colonial enterprise appear to have gone unnoticed³³. The first allusion to the (post-)colonial subtext of the novel comes in an analeptic passage describing the events that led to Terrier's recruitment into the Company. Operating as a mercenary in an unspecified war-torn African country, Terrier impresses a colleague by reacting quickly to kill a thirteen-year-old (communist) soldier who ambushes them. It is only later in the novel that this undoubtedly political, but ultimately rather vague scenario is associated with more concrete historical events. The name of Terrier's financial advisor—Faulques—holds the key to the political coordinates that subtend the critique of the hypermasculine thriller. Although the name Faulques now likely has little broad recognition, he was a relatively (in)famous soldier, whose commitment to the politics of torture in Algeria was documented by Henri Alleg and others, and who had a second career as a mercenary, notably in Katanga³⁴. At first glance, the choice to give the name of a decorated military figure to a repulsive financial advisor who, unable to face up to his responsibilities, is found hanging from the rafters and caked in his own feces, appears to be but a kind phantasmatic revenge, a fictional punishment of unpunished crimes.
- 17 We can go a step further, however, and, looking at the substantial commonalities between Terrier and Faulques, treat Faulques as a kind of generative symbolic figure, an ideological and actantial model that Manchette overlays onto the conventions of the hypermasculine thriller³⁵. After all, like Faulques, Terrier served as a parachutist and then as a mercenary in Africa; and, like Faulques, Terrier is someone who is willing to torture if he thinks it serves a purpose³⁶. By associating Faulques with both the financial planner and Terrier, Manchette links the putatively disinterested values of national service with the obsession with amassing capital. Time and again in *La position du tireur couché*, what seem like generic (if politically inflected) plot details—the financial advisor who loses Terrier's money, the story of Terrier's professionalization and recruitment as a killer—carry a subtle commentary on Western military intervention and (post-)colonial violence. Upon closer inspection, there are numerous references to Africa in this hyper-conventional story of a hit-man who wants to quit the profession. Terrier's cat is named *Soudan*, the site of another post-colonial civil war, while Terrier's best friend, Stanley, bears a name that associates him with a famous explorer and "developer" of the Congo region.
- 18 Another apparently innocent detail adds an unexpected layer to the critique of the Western hero as embodied by the archetypal thriller hero and by Roger Faulques. Upon returning to his home town, Terrier finds that the woman who impulsively promised to wait for him has opted to marry a young man, Félix, from her (bourgeois) milieu. Félix knew Martin Terrier in high school, and immediately adopts an emasculating tone of familiarity with him, calling him by the diminutive "Tintin." Just as in the novel's movie theaters Alain Delon and Charles Bronson thrillers play alongside the cartoons of the notoriously reactionary anti-communist Walt Disney, the chapter of Terrier's mercenary past juxtaposes two apparently distinct "adventures,"

Faulques au Katanga and *Tintin au Congo*. In our hero's adult life, he is someone like Roger Faulques, but in his adolescent days, his name was "Tintin" Terrier; in an unexpected but not illogical turn of events, this story of a "super-héros occidental" who kills for money opens onto the infamous image of the beloved terrier Milou insulting the Congolese. The constellation of references to Western violence in Africa thus overlays allusions to torture and mercenary activities in colonial and post-colonial conflicts with allusions to the transmission of racist stereotypes in popular children's books and in the "cartoons for adults" that are pulp fiction thrillers.

- 19 If at first glance this might look like an example of the kind of empty "private joke" that Manchette decried in the *néo-polar*, there is ultimately nothing frivolous about this grotesque ideological palimpsest that erases and reinscribes figures of violence and "cartoonish" adventure³⁷. Manchette's literary strategy is not one that merely demands an unveiling of the "real" beneath ideology, a stripping away of the fantasy to reveal the violence beneath. Rather, *La position du tireur couché* invites an Orwellian reading that explores the dynamic give-and-take or mutual interpenetration of fantasy and politics.

Manchette prepares this reading by condensing within the central figure of Martin Terrier a multiplicity of evocations of real and imagined "heroes." If I have chosen to describe this interplay of references in terms of erasure and reinscription rather than revelation, it is because I wish to avoid the immediate temptation to describe this dynamic in terms of degrees of (fictional) distance from "real" violence. In other words, while it would be easy to say that we need to look behind Tintin and Mickey Mouse to find the progressively more real and vicious violence of, first, the hyper-masculine thriller, and, second, anti-communist and imperialist politics, the point that Manchette is making is that Roger Faulques adopts the ideology of hypermasculine heroism, is a *racist cartoon*, that the "illusion" of these fictions does not just sublimate or surreptitiously reproduce the real, but rather has an active role in the construction of cultural fantasies that nourish real forms of violence³⁸.

- 20 In light of these details, it clearly makes sense to read the eventual downfall of Martin Terrier less as evidence of a narrative arc betokening disillusionment than as an essential element of a denunciation of the reciprocal relationship between an abusive form of power and the violent fictions of the hypermasculine thriller. Rather than a prefiguration of Manchette's coming "silence," we can read Terrier's muteness as a sly commentary on the ideal of laconic, hard-boiled masculinity; as Terrier finds his masculine authority undermined by professional and amorous betrayals, he retreats into an ever more savage, pre-verbal state. Hard-boiled masculinity is, thus, by means of this exaggeration, revealed to be what it always was: not the attitude of the superior man, but a defense mechanism, a posture of power with only an episodic correspondence to actual agency.

- 21 Paige makes much of the staging of various forms of loss of control in *La position du tireur couché*, but ultimately draws the conclusion that Manchette is calling into question his own control or intelligence. Does it not seem much more plausible, given the rhetoric of Manchette's fictional and critical writings, that Manchette is attacking, alongside the control-obsessed thriller, the control of a particular political order? Terrier's first victim, Dubofsky, does after all bear the name of a famous historian of labor³⁹. And what does the failure of Terrier's ghost-written tell-all book at the end of the novel signify, if not the obsolescence of a legitimizing discourse, the (overly

optimistic) notion that a particular ideology had become “complètement ridicule”⁴⁰? In this last development, we might read an echo of Fredric Jameson’s assertion that in a utopian future, “the stories of fierce market competition [...] will be read as children’s books, recapitulating the barely comprehensible memory of ancient dangers”⁴¹.

22 If we return to the aforementioned parallelism between the opening and closing paragraphs of *La position du tireur couché*, there is a persuasive case to be made that where critics have found the *negation* of the beginning (the wolf negated by the lamb, control negated by weakness, etc.), Manchette is in fact staging a more complex dialectic of power and weakness, of violence and victimization. Both poles of the dialectic are present in the opening and closing paragraphs: Terrier is awake and erect in the beginning of the novel, but the wind *snores* in the chimney and he is seated in a *Bedford* van; he is a sleeping lamb at the end of the novel, but the wind *howls* in the chimney. In properly dialectical fashion, here it is not a question of choosing the “correct” reading of the beginning, but rather of perceiving how it is only *after* choosing (incorrectly) to read Terrier’s strength as power—after choosing to read the novel as a hypermasculine thriller—that we can arrive at a situation in which, retroactively, that power becomes always-already marked as weakness.

Or, to use Slavoj Žižek’s formulation, “the true speculative meaning emerges only through the repeated reading, as the after-effect (or by-product) of the first, ‘wrong’ reading”⁴². In the end, Terrier is a lamb instead of a wolf, but (now) he was always a lamb; he is lying down rather than erect, but (now) he was always a “prone gunman”; the “violent” wind of the first chapter has become weak just as Terrier has become weak, but (now) that strength was *always-already* never power. The opening and closing paragraphs of the novel do not, therefore, merely present a repetition marked by degradation, they mutually inflect the apparent narrative of strength and decline, of power and weakness that the novel superficially performs.

23 Although this analysis suggests the problematic shortcomings of a reading that views Manchette as a failed “gunman” or disillusioned Marxist, it does not, significantly, foreclose an interpretation of *La position du tireur couché* as an auto-critique. It remains entirely justifiable to argue that the novel signals not “l’incapacité de tout un genre de soutenir le rêve de l’action,” but rather the impossibility of escaping *that very dream* in commercialized crime fiction, even in works with implicit or explicit Marxist leanings.

24 What a careful reading of *La position du tireur couché* does demand, however, is a revision of the critical narrative which, ignoring the distinctions that Manchette drew between sub-genres of crime fiction, reads Martin Terrier’s defeat as a symbolic refutation of Manchette’s Marxist metanarrative. Paige, once again, remains the most attentive to the potential contradictions of such a position, but he ultimately has to resort to somewhat convoluted rhetorical gymnastics in order to explain the disjunction between the overt Marxism of Manchette’s critical writing and his last novel’s supposed disillusionment with Marxism⁴³. Any disillusionment that we might find in *La position du tireur couché* would be with the capitalist culture industry and its recuperative strategies, and would thus emerge out of a particular set of Marxist convictions, not in opposition to them.

- 25 While many have found in *La position du tireur couché* an admission of defeat or an expression of radical pessimism, there is a case to be made that this last novel is the most fully realized expression of the political passion, the hatred of capitalist violence that fueled Manchette's creative work. It may leave behind the Marxist sloganeering that popped up in some of Manchette's earlier novels, but it contains a pointed critique of the Occidental "super hero," of the cultural fantasy that obliquely celebrates the violence of Roger Faulques and his ilk. At the present moment, when the legacy of colonialism and capitalist imperialism remains a subject of fierce debate, and when *La position du tireur couché* seems to be read primarily as an allegorical renunciation of political engagement or as a template for a franchise of Hollywood action movies (the forthcoming *The Gunman*), this critique of the politics of the thriller remains regrettably vital.

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NOTES

- 1 On systemic and objective violence, cf. Étienne Balibar, *Violence et civilité*, Paris, Galilée, 2010; and: Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, New York, Picador, 2008.
- 2 Jean Patrick Manchette, *Romans noirs*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005, p. 875, p. 978.
- 3 This formulation in terms of lamb and wolf is borrowed from Franck Frommer's analysis of *La position du tireur couché* (cf. *Jean-Patrick Manchette: le récit d'un engagement manqué*, Paris, Kimé, 2003, p. 123).
- 4 Nicholas Paige, "Manchette, ou le mutisme", *Poétique: Revue de théorie et d'analyse littéraires*, No. 120 (1999), p. 477-494 [p. 490-491]. Although Paige does not take into account theories of postmodernism, his argument echoes Fredric Jameson's assertion that traditional leftist cultural politics cannot function without some space of critical distance (cf. *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1991, p. 48).
- 5 David Platten, *The Pleasures of Crime: Reading Modern French Crime Fiction*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2011, p. 105.
- 6 Benoît Mouchart, *Manchette: le nouveau roman noir*, Biarritz, Atlantica-Séguier, 2006, p. 96.
- 7 Frommer, *Jean-Patrick Manchette*, p. 123.
- 8 The sub-genres of crime fiction are notoriously subject to terminological inconsistency. Manchette for the most part uses interchangeably the terms "polar" and "roman noir." Manchette is careful to specify, however, that "polar ne signifie nullement roman policier. Polar signifie roman noir violent" (*Chroniques*, Paris, Payot et Rivages, 1996, p. 53). It should also be noted that Manchette does at times use the word thriller with a positive connotation, but usually qualifies it ("le grand thriller classique," etc.).
- 9 Manchette references this essay numerous times in his crime-fiction columns (cf. *Chroniques*, p. 103, p. 235, p. 284, p. 329).
- 10 George Orwell, "Raffles and Miss Blandish", *All Art is Propaganda: Critical Essays*, New York, Harcourt, 2008 [1944], p. 232-247 [p. 232, 244].
- 11 *Chroniques*, p. 30.
- 12 For critiques of the reactionary thriller, cf. *Chroniques*, p. 65, p. 157-161, p. 179, p. 235, p. 352.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 75, p. 133. It should be specified that this "morality" is not a question of fixed moral axioms, but rather of an *idea* of social relations (cf. *ibid.*, p. 88). It is also not without interest that these remarks offer a political explanation for the thematic features that Tzvetan Todorov attributed to the noir novel in his seminal typological analysis of crime fiction (cf. "Typologie du roman policier", *Poétique de la prose*, Paris, Seuil, 1971). Manchette's point concerning the critique of capitalism in the noir novel has recently been developed in more detail by Christopher Breu, who argues that there is an affinity between *noir* pessimism and Marxian negativity (cf. *Hard-Boiled Masculinities*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p. 23-27).
- 14 *Chroniques*, p. 65.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- 17 *Hard-Boiled Masculinities*, p. 6.
- 18 *Chroniques*, p. 69.

- ¹⁹ This is the central argument of Jerry Palmer's *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre* (London, Edward Arnold, 1978). Regrettably, the larger question of the classic noir's own rather conflicted relationship to competitive individualist ideology, as well as the extent to which competitive individualism is characteristic of adventure fiction in general or even of the entire genre of the novel, is beyond the scope of the present analysis.
- ²⁰ "Raffles and Miss Blandish", p. 247.
- ²¹ *Chroniques*, p. 179. In his journal, Manchette speaks of "l'esprit d'entreprise et d'espérance bornée de Martin" (*Romans noirs*, p. 871).
- ²² *Romans noirs*, p. 893. Manchette repeatedly refers to Chase as a writer of "ersatz" noirs (cf. *Chroniques*, p. 69, p. 235).
- ²³ *Fatale*'s last sentence is an unattributed quotation from Sade's *Histoire de Juliette, ou les prospérités du vice*: "FEMMES VOLUPTUEUSES ET PHILOSOPHES, C'EST À VOUS QUE JE M'ADRESSE" (*Romans noirs*, p. 868).
- ²⁴ "Manchette, ou le mutisme", p. 478.
- ²⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes, London, Penguin Classics, 1990 [1867], p. 926, p. 874.
- ²⁶ Cf. Marilyn C. Wesley, *Violent Adventure: Contemporary Fiction by American Men*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2003, p. 1-10.
- ²⁷ *Romans noirs*, p. 875.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 877.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 948.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 921.
- ³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 884.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 889-892.
- ³³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 876, p. 945. An allusion to Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le samouraï* in the novel (cf. "Manchette, ou le mutisme", endnote 6, p. 493) suggests that Jef Costello is an important model for this critique of professional hard-boiled masculinity. It should also be observed that Alain Delon purchased the movie rights to *La position du tireur couché* while it was being written. Manchette was thus slyly writing against the Delon model of masculinity in anticipation of the novel's adaptation.
- ³⁴ Cf. Henri Alleg, *La question*, Paris, Minuit, 2008 [1958], p. 46, p. 69-72. Although criticism of Faulques did result in one notable trial where Faulques sued two journalists for defamation, Faulques' involvement in torture in Algeria has never been, to my knowledge, seriously disputed.
- ³⁵ There is a precedent for reading the names Manchette gave to financial advisors as ideological matrices for the interpretation of the politics of his novels. In *Fatale*, Aimée's financial planner, Queuille, bears the name of the politician Henri Queuille. *Fatale* could be said to represent a kind of perverse exemplification of Henri Queuille's famous dictum, "La politique n'est pas l'art de résoudre les problèmes, mais de faire taire ceux qui les posent."
- ³⁶ There is no textual evidence, however, to support David Platten's assertion that Terrier served in Algeria. For scenes of torture in the novel, cf. *Romans noirs*, p. 889-892, p. 918, p. 950, p. 966.
- ³⁷ *Chroniques*, p. 81.
- ³⁸ There is an abundant corpus of scholarship that conceives of the functioning of ideology in fiction in this manner. My account is influenced in particular by Slavoj Žižek, Fredric Jameson, and Christopher Breu.
- ³⁹ Melvyn Dubofsky, author of numerous academic studies on American labor issues.
- ⁴⁰ *Romans noirs*, p. 976. It should be noted that the explicit message of the this tell-all book is remarkably similar to the one that critics have ascribed to *La position du tireur couché*: "abjurant ses convictions politiques qui n'avaient pas résisté à l'épreuve des faits, il quittait ses maîtres" (*ibid.*, p. 975).
- ⁴¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, London, Routledge, 2002 [1981], p. 90.
- ⁴² Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey through a Concept*, London, Penguin Books, 2014, p. 97.
- ⁴³ Cf. "Manchette, ou le mutisme", p. 492.