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Margaret-Anne Hutton, *French Crime Fiction 1945-2005: Investigating World War II.* Surrey and Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013. 222 pp. Bibliography and index. $89.96 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-7546-6869-5.

Review by Andrea Goulet, University of Pennsylvania.

The nineteenth rule in S. S. Van Dine's "Twenty rules for writing detective stories," published in 1928, stipulates that the motives of crimes in the genre should be personal, not political: "International plottings and war politics belong in a different category of fiction--in secret-service tales, for instance. But a murder story must be kept *gemütlich*, so to speak."[1] This use of the German term for comfortable and pleasant may seem absurdly paradoxical when applied to representations of murder, but it is consistent with Van Dine's narrow definition of the *roman policier* as a purified game of intellection and rational investigation. To our eyes, however, such whitewashing of the violence at the heart of crime fiction seems hopelessly naive, reflecting as it does an interwar desire for genre literature to provide a cozy respite from the horrors of political violence. How could Van Dine have predicted that the *roman noir* of the 1940s would intersect with the events of World War II to reconfigure the contours of crime fiction?

It is now pointless to try to disentangle any "pure"--if ever such a thing existed--thread of investigative whodunnit from the many sub-categories of the hybrid crime genre: *noir*, neo-*polar*, thriller, cybercrime drama, and police procedural. Nor should one need to; Margaret-Anne Hutton is right to choose the umbrella term "crime fiction" for the title of her study, for it allows her to broach the unsettling questions that Van Dine tried to keep at bay. How *do* war politics intersect and interact with the private crimes that had been the purview of classic detective fiction? How can crime novels register shifting moral and legal systems in times of complex governmentality, such as that of Vichy France? What happens to fictional categories of villain and hero in an age of transitional justice? And how, in the post-war years through today, does the memory of France's violent national past make its mark on the collective consciousness of its present?

The first thing to appreciate in Hutton's exploration of these themes is the scope of her corpus. *French Crime Fiction 1945-2005* does justice to the historical range of its title by including a bibliography of nearly one hundred and sixty primary texts, by authors from Abécassis to Zufferey. As our guide to this daunting assemblage, Hutton has had to make decisions regarding order of presentation, balance of plot summary/analysis, and criteria of selection. With the exception of an initial chapter dedicated entirely to Simenon, her solution is generally to begin each chapter with a classificatory or typological section that lays out a thematic or generic range (from self-reflexive war thriller to cyber-sleuth novel, for example), followed by a "zooming in" for closer analysis of a few novels chosen to exemplify that range. Though the particular selection criteria at work for the latter are not always made explicit (why jump in chapter four from Blond's 1946 *L'Ange de la rivière morte* to Daeninckx's 1989 *La Mort n'oublie personne*?), Hutton does state with clarity each chapter's contribution to her broader goal of identifying "diachronically shifting patterns of representation" (p. 5).

The book's resulting organization allows her to take into account the genre's wide variety of approaches to World War II and its after-effects. That variety means that most of Hutton's conclusions are locally circumscribed by her chapter topics--as when she proposes that investigations by "historian-detectives" are more open-ended in Abécassis and Modiano than in the generically self-conscious novels of Rio or Vargas, or as when she states that "[n]o grand revelation, no definitive 'solution' regarding the generic status of Simenon's not-Maigret texts is offered here, partly because I do not believe that such clear-cut definition exists" (p. 18). Faced with such statements, some readers of Hutton's book might yearn for a bolder, over-arching thesis or polemic that would tie the chapters together; but others will applaud her careful and measured attention to the wide spectrum of responses--thematic, generic, and ideological--that have emerged in WWII-related crime fictions over the span of sixty years.

In her second chapter, Hutton tracks changing attitudes toward the war years by homing in on four novelists (we will count the classic pairing of Boileau and Narcejac as one) who use first-person narration to varying ideological effect. Underlying her analysis is Henry Rousso's famous "Vichy syndrome" hypothesis that France's memory-relation to WWII evolved through four phases: "unfinished mourning" (1944-1954); "repression" (1954-1971); a "broken mirror" phase in which the heroic Resistance narrative is fractured by darker Collaboration memories (1971-1974); and "obsession" with Jewish memory and France's complicity with the Holocaust (1975-1987).[2] Hutton tests that hypothesis against exemplary literary production from each period. Thus Raymond Troye's *Meurtre dans un oflag*, published in 1946 but written during the war years of 1942 and 1943, conforms to Rousso's first phase while nuancing its chronology: "Read as a narrative symptomatic of repressed shame or guilt which can be extended to a national level, [Troye's novel] suggests that the psychological malaise diagnosed by Rousso may in fact predate his post-Liberation start-date" (p. 53). In the second phase of the 1950s, San-Antonio (aka Frédéric Dard) uses thriller conventions of light-hearted and politically incorrect banter to downplay ideology for the sake of post-war populism. Then Boileau-Narcejac's *romans à suspense* of the 1970s introduce existentialist themes of freedom and a growing ambivalence toward France's wartime past that maps, again, onto Rousso's psychoanalytical grid but not his dates: "Although *La Lèpre* (published in 1976) belongs in purely chronological terms to the final post-1974 'obsessive' phase of Rousso's Vichy syndrome, it in fact illustrates perfectly the preceding 1971-74 'return of the repressed' category of cultural vectors" (p. 71). Finally, Maurice Dantec's cyber-thriller *Les Racines du mal* uses the cultural memory of collaboration to critique the dystopic realities of contemporary France.

This historicizing impulse undergirds Hutton's entire book. In chapter three, for example, Hutton aims to problematize an overarching definition of crime as that which disrupts social order or, as the author calls it, "the law." How, she asks, could that binary obtain during wartime socio-legal deregulation and the postwar period of transitional justice? Beginning with Léo Malet's *120 rue de la Gare* and ending with Patrick Modiano's *La ronde de nuit*, Hutton analyzes crime novels that problematize ethical categories of criminal vs. hero by embroiling their characters in the complex and conflicting systems of jurisprudence that arose from the German occupation of France. Chapter four moves from crimes to *enquêtes*, with an emphasis on three categories of post-war investigators: journalists, historians, and "investigative sons." In her discussion of the first category, Harris makes brief mention of Rouletabille, Gaston Leroux's journalist-detective of the early twentieth century, but Dominique Kalifa's recent work on the rise of non-police investigators might have rounded out that pre-history to the investigative "avatar" of the era that concerns her.[3]

Perhaps even more relevant, especially in regard to the epistemological and ethical stakes raised by her second two categories of "historian-detective" and "investigative sons," would be Michael Rothberg's notion of "multidirectional memory" (which Harris cites in her bibliography but not in the body of her book).[4] Still, Harris does get at these issues through her nicely synthetic literary analyses of the archivist spirit at work in books like Modiano's *Dora Bruder* and Abécassis's *L'or et la cendre* and the

Oedipal underpinnings of novels of transgenerational memory like Fred Vargas's *Un peu plus loin sur la droite* and Pascale Fonteneau's *Otto*.

In a strong final chapter, Hutton draws on Andreas Huyssen's theorization of the politics of memory to study war-related crime fiction's constructions of time. Discontinuities between traumatic past and ambivalent present are certainly evident throughout the genre, but Hutton also discusses the future, through analysis of cautionary tales "which expose and denounce the dangers represented by the extreme political right and Holocaust deniers in contemporary France" (p. 158). Of particular interest is the crossover between real and fictional worlds at play in Daeninckx's writings--both his public interventions on the 1990s Garaudy and Plantin affairs and his typically punning episode for the Poulpe series, *Nazis dans le métro*. Harris connects the ethical and epistemological stakes of Daeninckx's engagement to the 2001-2002 debates on Holocaust denial between Stanley Fish and Richard Weisberg.

The chapter's discussion of crime fiction's interaction with negationist history is nuanced and intelligent, so its conclusion that novelistic representations of Holocaust deniers as murderers "makes both aesthetic and ethical sense" falls a bit flat (p. 195). I would have liked an explicit return to the larger question of how the doubling of violence in war-related crime fiction functions: do private crimes serve as screens--or mirrors--for political violence? At a broader level: does the crime genre distract from--or mimic--communal investigations into national history? Hutton concludes rather wanly that crime fiction "merits the same degree of attention as other discursive representations of World War II," but I would say that her well-researched and carefully argued book implicitly makes the much stronger case that crime novels, as opposed to other genre fictions like sci-fi and romance, in fact deserve privileged status for their ability to explore the troubled epistemologies at work in dealing with the traumas of the past (p. 196).

If I have skipped over Hutton's first chapter on Simenon, it is because I find it a bit mired in taxonomic minutiae and therefore of interest primarily to readers devoted to the Belgian author's œuvre. Hutton seems to have hit her stride in the following chapters, with their impressive range of analyses, useful publication history of a sub-genre spanning sixty years, and thought-provoking discussions of the ethical and epistemological stakes in literary representations of World War II's violent legacies.

NOTES

[1] S. S. Van Dine was a pseudonym for the art critic and detective novelist, Willard Huntington Wright. For the *Rules*, see http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/vandine.htm.

[2] Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1991). Rousso's model also serves as a template for discussion in Claire Gorrara's French crime fiction, see Claire Gorrara, *French crime fiction and the Second World War: Past crimes, present memories* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 8. In the "Introduction" to her own book, Harris laments that Gorrara's study of the topic was published too late to be included in her discussion. The fact that both are devoted to the fruitful intersections of the crime genre and World War II testifies to the vibrancy of this field and to the fact that we have gotten beyond a *paralittérature* model of crime fiction as frivolous or peripheral. Certainly, anyone interested in trauma studies, memory, violence, and crime fiction should not fail to read Gorrara's expert book as well.

[3] Dominique Kalifa. *Naissance de la police privée* (Paris: Plon, 2000); *L'Enquête judiciaire en Europe au XIX siècle* (Paris: Creaphis, 2007).

[4] Michael Rothberg. *Multidirectional Memory: Rembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2009).

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