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CHAPTER 9

Didier Daeninckx, *Le roman noir de l'Histoire* (2019): Dismantling the Tale of French History through Disseminated Micro-Histories

Alice Jacquelin

After the failure of the demonstrations and the aborted cultural revolution of May 1968 in France, many left-wing activists turned to writing political crime novels (Collovald and Neveu 77). Daeninckx's detective novels are part of this tradition of left-wing *neo-polar* initiated in the 1970s: "After 1968, Jean-Patrick Manchette had inaugurated the neo-polar or *polar d'intervention sociale*, and this tradition was continued by, among others, Didier Daeninckx, Frédéric Fajardie, Jean-Claude Izzo, Sébastien Japrisot, Thierry Jonquet, Jean-Bernard Pouy, and Jean-François Vilar" (Forsdick 337).

Didier Daeninckx is the author of a series of noir novels—the series of Inspector Cadin—whose most famous investigation, *Meurtres pour mémoire* ("Murder in Memoriam"), was published in the Série Noire in

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1984. In this novel, Daeninckx denounces, through a double police and historical investigation, both the bloody repression of the FLN demonstration of 17 October 1961¹ and the French collaboration of 1940: “Didier Daeninckx occupies an important place in the heart of the French noir genre, consolidated by a good number of novels and short stories. Most of his works are situated at the intersection of History and politics, taking as subjects the sensitive moments of French History: the Second World War, colonization, etc” (Belhadjin 64).

In the detective novels of the Inspector Cadin series, but also in the stand-alone novels such as *La mort n’oublie personne* (1989), *Cannibale* (1998) and *Le Retour d’Ataï* (2002), Didier Daeninckx endeavours to reveal state exactions, to reactivate memorial traumas and to restore the shortcomings of the *roman national* (“national tale”). Unveiling the secrets of the past is at the heart of Daeninckx’s literary approach, whether it is thanks to the police, or a journalistic or historical investigation. In addition to his detective novels, Daeninckx wrote numerous historical novels and short stories. This novelistic production moves between the historical archive, the particular story and the dismantling of the official narrative: this literary practice allows Dominique Viart to classify Daeninckx’s work in the category of the “archaeological novel²” (12).

From 1989 to 2019, Daeninckx has written no fewer than 18 collections of short stories, nine of which have been published by Verdier, a publishing house known for its experimental and avant-garde texts. His latest work *Le roman noir de l’Histoire*, published in 2019, is the last and undoubtedly the most imposing of these books, since it is a collection of 77 short stories written over the years, collected and republished according to a new structure. In this short story collection, Daeninckx seems to find an ideal literary form: the very form of History itself, broken up and fragmented into a multitude of micro-narratives. From one macro-narrative to multiple micro-narratives, Daeninckx has shifted from being a “raconteur of History” (Reid 2010) to a storyteller. Between a short story collection and a novel, how can we understand the formal contradiction contained in the very title of the book? In what way does this assembly and chronological montage of short stories constitute a noir novel?

This chapter shows how the journalistic counter-investigation carried out in the course of the short stories allows Didier Daeninckx to denounce the abuses committed by the French state, bringing this collection closer to a historical crime novel. In doing so, the author reconstructs a new fragmented History, moving away from the narrative form of the great

national tale. For the first time, he proceeds to a *remontage* of short stories and facts that navigates between factual and fictional. Undermining the French national narrative, Daeninckx thus relies on a “political memory” to rewrite a History which is more broadly part of a History of European internationalist lefts in resistance against state oppression.

NOIR NOVEL, CRIME FICTION AND JOURNALISTIC COUNTER-INQUIRY

The programmatic title of the book, *Le roman noir de l'Histoire* (“The Noir Novel of History”), contains several ambiguities. First, the announced novelistic dimension is contradicted by the multitude of stories and profusion of characters within the book. The double reference to the novel and to History in the same expression also evokes, in the case of Daeninckx, the concept of *roman national* (“national tale”). Even more than medieval hagiography, the French national tale assumed a linear, patriotic, teleological reading of History with the aim of justifying the nation-state as it was constructed in France under the Third Republic (in particular through the textbooks of the historian Ernest Lavisse). As for the term *roman noir* (“noir novel”), it obviously contains a reference to the detective story that emerged from the American noir novel: the hardboiled stories.³ Therefore, how can we understand this reference to the noir novel in the context of a collection of short stories that do not necessarily describe a criminal action or a real police investigation? What crime(s) do these short stories investigate? If the crime novel is meant to restore the social order that has been damaged by the occurrence of crime, what “order” does Didier Daeninckx seek to reinstate in his book *Le roman noir de l'Histoire*?

Some of the events recounted seem to involve trivial news items (*fait divers*) more than proper historical facts. Daeninckx’s short stories often begin with an apparently minor, negligible or anecdotal fact. For example, the short story *Yvonne, la Madone de la Plaine* (“Yvonne, Madonna of the Plaine”) begins with the death of a woman named Yvonne in a road accident at the Plaine Saint-Denis, a popular suburb to the north of Paris. The intradiegetic narrator is a local journalist who is sent to the Plaine Saint-Denis to do a *micro-trottoir* (“street interview”) on the rigours of winter. The narrator quickly shifts his focus from this assignment to investigate the life of Yvonne, nicknamed La Madone (“Madonna”). Although Yvonne has lived in Saint-Denis for more than ten years, no one seems to

know her story. The journalist moves from testimony to testimony—from the local bistro owner to the parish abbot and to a homeless man famous in the neighborhood—but without learning more about Yvonne. No one knows about Yvonne’s origins and “the mystery is all the thicker” (Daeninckx 2019: 491). The mystery at the origin of the traditional detective novel is here diverted to the benefit of the biographical investigation which also works backward, in search of the traces of the past:

It is perhaps the archetypal narrative structures of detective fiction—and the explicitly teleological unfolding of events on which these depend—that lend themselves to such historical explorations. Such a narrative paradigm reflects, as the initial mystery is solved and the criminal brought to justice, a shift from ignorance to knowledge, opacity to transparency, darkness to light. And associated to these is another structural device and recurrent figure: that of uncovering the past. (Fordsick 337–338)

In the course of the story *Yvonne, La Madone de la Plaine*, the narrator draws a portrait of this poor and anonymous woman who died suddenly, as well as a portrait of the Parisian department of Seine-Saint-Denis during the 1980s. The journalist’s journey takes him from the subway station Porte de la Chapelle in Paris to the Basilica of Saint-Denis and to the gasometers of Aubervilliers, another city in the North Parisian suburbs. This short story is representative of Daeninckx’s approach and of the posture of local journalist that he adopts in many of the short stories of the collection, as he explained in an interview:

My experience as a local journalist was quite useful, even essential. From 1977 to 1982, I had made investigations, I had written hundreds of articles on the most diverse and prosaic subjects. So, I accumulated. Being in the streets, following the *fait divers*, fascinated me. On the most everyday facts that seem unimportant, one must always find an angle that allows one to say that this story is worth telling.⁴ (Collovald 11–12)

The short stories that make up the collection are thus similar to journalistic briefs enriched with fictional details and put back into their historical context to reveal their deep meaning. Véronique Desnain, who has been interested in the relationship between *neo-polar* authors and the *fait divers*—and in particular through the analysis of texts by Dominique Manotti and Didier Daeninckx—writes:

Our authors, using this journalistic ‘brief’ as a starting point, emphasize the place of the anonymous individual in a story more traditionally considered from its event-based angle, while making the case that the news story is ultimately a truncated, manipulated, and misleading narrative, which actually conceals the real issues raised by the facts evoked.⁵ (Desnain 11)

In Manotti’s and Daeninckx’s literary works, the starting point of the *fait divers* is used as a pretext to explore a broader historical context and a corrupt political system: “In this text, the crime against the individual (the *fait divers* therefore) is only a pretext for the unveiling of crimes against humanity. Similarly, the crime perpetrated by the individual is only a symptom of the failure of a whole society [...]”⁶ (Desnain 4). The case of Yvonne is not isolated: in another short story, *Fatima pour mémoire* (“Fatima for the Record”), Daeninckx demonstrates that the pseudo-suicide of a young Algerian woman in 1961 actually masks the bloody police repression of an FLN demonstration during which Fatima was killed. Daeninckx’s narrative technique, which works by linking historical events separated in History and time, through crime fiction, is doubled in this book: if the temporal strata can be confronted at the level of the short story, the jolts of a criminal History are replayed between the short stories at the level of the overall organization of the book. The short stories respond to each other as if by echoes; memories overlap, narrative and historical threads are connected, “for in Daeninckx’s fictional universe, memories [...] are generated and circulate in symbiosis with crimes from other distinct historical periods” (Gorrara 76).

Some of the stories in the collection *Le roman noir de l’Histoire* aim to obtain justice and reparation for the crimes perpetrated in the name of the French state—the deportation of the Communards after 1871, the summary trials of Tonkinese immigrants in New Caledonia during the colonization, the forced conscription of Kanaks to the front line during the First World War, the bloody repression of Algerians in 1961, the deportation of Tunisian and Algerian immigrants who fought for France, and so on. In this sense, *Le roman noir de l’Histoire* follows the path of previous novels such as *La Mort n’oublie personne* (1989) which rehabilitated the figure of a resistance fighter tried for murder after the Second World War, or the Kanak novels *Cannibale* (1998) and *Le Retour d’Atai* which denounced the ill treatment of the Kanak people by the French state. The short stories in this collection thus make explicit, through the recurrence of processes, the guilt of the French state in the application of these authoritarian and

imperialist policies: “[...] fiction thus makes it possible to relate events separated in time and space in order to reveal their true scope, the way in which they are linked in a system which, although invisible, is no less all-powerful” (Desnain 6). The final aim of this Daeninckxian literary enterprise is to offer multiple counter-narratives in order to reorganize collective memory. By filing the gaps of collective memory, Daeninckx is actually repairing the crimes committed by the historically dominant states of the economic, imperialist and colonial North. However, other short stories do not immediately correspond to this definition of the crime short story insofar as they do not reveal hidden aspects of History and do not denounce crimes against humanity committed in the name of the French state. So what crimes do these other news stories report on? Since *noir* in French means both criminal—as in noir novel—and black, as in the colour, we can argue that Daeninckx is filing the *blackouts* of History. The biggest crime of all, according to Daeninckx, would be to forget the details and the failures of History. He is then rehabilitating anonymous figures who participated in History, but who are evacuated from the great national tale, such as the worker and prisoner Eliéser Eckert whose letters are found by a fictional narrator in *Réservé à la correspondance* and many others.

The form of the multitude of micro-narratives, at the same time fragmented and integrated into historical time by the chronological periodization, seems to propose a new form of History that is no longer the great linear narrative of the lives of famous men and great events, but on the contrary a narrative of events that could appear infra-historical or that contradict the official version of History.

(RE)MONTAGE, *MILLEFEUILLE* AND REJECTS: A NEW FORM OF FRAGMENTED HISTORY

The 77 short stories are arranged in chronological order, from a not so faraway past to a near future, from 1855 to 2030, and organized into 11 periodic chapters. Didier Daeninckx explains that his literary project consisted in “putting back in order” his previously published short stories: “I gathered a hundred of them, the result is incredible”, he says (in Boucheron 10). The device of chronological *remontage* clearly situates Daeninckx’s approach in a historical perspective. Each of the short stories is associated, in the table of contents, with a precise date, which allows its integration within one of the 11 periodized chapters that punctuate *Le roman noir de*

l'Histoire. The titles of *Le roman noir de l'Histoire*'s chapters shed light on Didier Daeninckx's intellectual and political framework: the title of the first chapter *Commun. Commune. 1855–1912* echoes the communist Jean Ferrat's song and the Paris Commune, the title of chapter 5, *Morceaux d'empires. 1948–1961* ("Bits of Empires. 1948–1961"), denounces the colonialist policy of the imperialist states during the twentieth century, while chapter 8, entitled *Changer de bases. 1986–1990* ("Changing Basis. 1986–1990"), refers directly to the Communist International song. The finished product thus proposes a historical fresco, from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first century, through a multitude of individual stories and subjective points of view, that proposes a "multi-directional memory" (Gorrara 6) and builds an eminently committed form of History. This type of History is more interested in forgotten characters and in constructing a History of the (international) Lefts which would emancipate itself from the limits of the national History.

The last short story, *Les boueux de l'espace* ("The Muddy Ones of Space") is associated with the date 2030 and closes chapter 11, *Troisième Millénaire. 1998–2030* ("Third Millennium. 1998–2030") by a projection in a spatial near future. For Daeninckx, modern History begins with the premises of the Paris Commune of 1871 and ends in space. This projection makes *Le roman noir de l'Histoire* lean towards the site of speculative fiction. This last story describes a team of space garbage collectors in charge of cleaning space of intergalactic ships' debris and scraps. The story allows the reader to trace the great moments of the twenty-first century. Each one of these space wrecks reveals the traces of this historical past. The team of cleaners, for example, makes a discovery that will call into question the events of September 11th 2001. Daeninckx's storytelling observes the minute facts and the rubbish of space, shedding light on hidden sides of History. The briefness of the short story and the tragic irony of the ending allows Daeninckx to reveal the salient features of History and its feedback effects. Through this micro-narrative kaleidoscope, Daeninckx revives his training as a local journalist to tell the minuscule, the bizarre and the anecdotal while linking these to larger historical crimes.

The preface by the famous French historian of the Middle Ages, Patrick Boucheron, also supports Daeninckx's historical approach. This preface text by Boucheron, entitled *L'art de la chute* ("The Art of the Outcome"), illuminates the text with its famous author's aura and with considerations on the functioning of memory and History. Boucheron here legitimizes the approach of the writer: "A short story comes to us, which informs on

something distant, hidden, ignored, and this matt and dry crackling electrifies our present without illuminating it completely, tearing furtively the black night of History⁷” (Boucheron 9). The briefness of the short story form makes it possible to capture the precise moment in the form of an account, contrary to the novel, which registers a longer narrative frame. Like a photographic flash, the short story shines a spotlight on a precise moment and reveals, as if in negative, the very logic of History, which functions, for Daeninckx, by recurrences of violence and the return of collective traumas. Because of the syllepsis contained in the French word *nouvelle* meaning both “short story” and “news”, the short story (*nouvelle*) of the book can be oxymoronically qualified as *anciennes nouvelles* (“old news”). These short stories are indeed unactual on at least two levels: first, because they were written by Daeninckx during the last 40 years and second, because they do not constitute a chronicle of current events; they are not *news items*. On the contrary, they are immersed in different historical periods, which they recontextualize and relate to the present. We are far from the Mallarmean *éternel reportage* (“eternal news report”): “News events are like this, which attract and fix our attention on events that we believe to be ephemeral or born of circumstances, whereas they come from the depths of our society⁸” (Daeninckx 2019: 568). Instead, Daeninckx’s ambition is to show the persistence of historical phenomena and eventually their cyclical return.

The short story *Fatima pour mémoire* (“Fatima for the record”), set in 1961 and echoing Daeninckx’s novel *Meurtres pour mémoire*, is symptomatic of this layering of historical time. In the story, Daeninckx portrays himself as a journalist-investigator revealing the tragic end of the young Fatima Bedar and other Algerian demonstrators by undergoing historical research: “These names I had found by consulting the archives of the newspapers, at the National Library or at Beaubourg⁹” (Daeninckx 2019: 404). The writer also collaborates with a historian, Jean-Luc Einaudi, whose investigation makes it possible to identify and name the anonymous corpse of Fatima Bedar. Whereas Fatima Bedar’s family always believed her to have committed suicide, Daeninckx reveals that she was actually killed during the FLN demonstration of 17 October 1961. The short story accumulates temporal layers: the time period of the 1960s (childhood memories of the narrator and narration of the FLN demonstration of 17 October 1961 and the assassination of Fatima Bedar), the time period of the 1980s (publication of *Meurtres pour mémoire*, writing an article in the Algerian press and *L’Humanité* and testimony of Louisa Bedar, Fatima’s

sister) and finally the time period of the 2000s (return of Fatima's body to Algeria following the publication of the novel, writing of a short story in *Médiapart* about these events and republication of the short story in the collection *Le roman noir de l'Histoire*). The story also accumulates textual layers: the short story we are reading (originally written for *Médiapart*) also includes entire passages from a previous article written by Daeninckx for *L'Humanité* and written extracts from Louisa Bedar's testimony. The historical narrative is thus composed of several diverse journalistic, fictional and memorial materials assembled and cobbled together. The short story, by its briefness and its instantaneous frame, makes it possible to create a temporal *millefeuille* that is much closer to discontinuous historical time¹⁰ than linear narrative.

Didier Daeninckx's work has always been situated at the intersection of crime fiction, the writing of History and political literature. Many commentators have emphasized the slippage between historical fact and literary fiction that lies at the heart of Daeninckx's literary work: Donald Reid—using a variation on the title of a collection of Daeninckx's short stories published by Gallimard (*Raconteur d'histoires*)—calls this author a “Raconteur of History” in an eminently oxymoronic phrase (Reid 2010). About *Meurtres pour mémoire*, David Platten underlines that “this balancing-cat between the duty of the historian to the truth and the recourse of the novelist to the imagination is palpable in the writing” (129). For Claire Gorrara, meanwhile, “[...] fictional forms can extend the scope and range of historical investigation providing source material (records of opinion, attitudes and values) that can supplement more quantitative methods” (6). I understand from these various comments that History informs Daeninckx's literary production as much as Daeninckx's fictional work informs History, and can even compete with historical discourse. At the end of the Preface, historian Patrick Boucheron loops back to the subtle alliance between fact and fiction at the heart of Daeninckx's writing: “[...] the fraternity he establishes between fictional imagination and historiographical operation is anything but anecdotal¹¹” (19). As he aptly puts it: “As if History were nothing more than a set of well-composed fictions. This hypothesis, as we understand it, is so breath-taking, that it deserves to be explored¹²” (10). *Le roman noir de l'Histoire* would thus propose a new reading of the History, fragmented and broken into a multitude of brief texts, of counter-narratives, of events a priori minor, of portraits of anonymous characters and of testimonies organized according to a committed reading of the History.

A “POLITICAL MEMORY” TO UNDERMINE THE NATIONAL TALE

Several critics, such as Charles Fordsick (337) and Véronique Desnain (8), have compared this Daeninckxian literary technique of attention to anonymous characters to the discipline of micro-history as practiced, for example, by Carlo Ginzburg, who focused on the life of a miller in Friuli in the sixteenth century in *Le Fromage et les vers* (1980), or the work of the social historian Alain Corbin in *Le Monde retrouvé de Louis-François Pinagot, sur les traces d'un inconnu, 1798–1876* (1998). Desnain takes up Koenraad Geldof's analysis of Didier Daeninckx's use of micro-History:

As Geldof points out: ‘Thus the detective story becomes a critical genealogy of modernity which, implicitly and explicitly, demystifies the myths and emblems of official History and whose main actors are those who usually do not appear in the great narratives.’ (Geldof 141)¹³ (Desnain 9)

The very imposing external aspect of this book, which counts more than 800 pages, suggests a linear and excessive narrative (Samoyault 1999) and not an assembly of a multitude of brief texts. Contrary to the traditional detective story or the classic historical account, the interpretation is not given here by the one who tells the story. The elucidation is not obvious, and it is up to the reader to interpret this assembly of *petits faits vrais* (“small true facts”) in order to understand the overall meaning of the work: the subtle and progressive dismantling of official History. The fragmented form of a multitude of micro-narratives thus proposes a new form of History which is no longer a great linear narrative (*roman national*) but rather a narrative of events which might appear sub-historical or in contradiction with official History.

This way of debunking the national narrative by going through the small history allows Daeninckx to dwell on characters *a priori* perceived as minor or forgotten in History books. The characters the narrator investigates or gives a voice to are often communist or anarchist political activists, such as the communards Henry Bauër and Maxime Lisbonne, but also the journalist and communist activist John Reed, the Spanish internationalist Francisco Asensi, or Rino Della Negra of the Manouchian group and winger of the Red Star de Saint-Ouen football club, or the communist resistance fighter Émile Jansen, to name but a few. Through this gallery of

characters, one can read Didier Daeninckx's commitment to the Left. He paints a fresco of an anarchist and internationalist left, which extends far beyond national borders and which participates in building an alternative European History. Daeninckx brings to light events or struggles perceived as minor or forgotten in the collective memory, thus putting into practice what Anissa Belhadjin calls a form of "political memory" (Belhadjin 61). Daeninckx also celebrates the workers whose community organizations and trade union struggles helped to obtain rights for workers, such as Ginette Tiercelin, an activist in women's sports associations during the Popular Front. Here again, the political commitment of Didier Daeninckx, who was a member of the PCF and now defines himself as a libertarian communist, to the side of an international organization of workers is perceptible.

Finally, the author gives an account of anonymous people crushed by History: Thai Hoc and his compatriots from Tonkin who were executed in New Caledonia following a judicial error, and Jacques Benzara, a Jewish player of Tunisian origin of the Red Star of Saint-Ouen football club, who was deported during the Second World War. Without worrying about the nationality of his protagonists, Daeninckx denounces the injustices of history, insisting particularly on the crimes linked to the colonialism of the French state. This denunciation aims to question, more widely, the colonial History and the imperialist ambitions of European nations. It questions the very notion of "national narrative" to show its criminal sides. The literary practice of reconstructing minor trajectories allows Didier Daeninckx to propose a plurality of historical counter-narratives in order "to undermine national fictions" (Fordsick 349).

My argument is that it is precisely to distance himself from a rigid and often criminal historical framework that Didier Daeninckx makes recourse to fiction. Moreover, the double-page spread at the end of the book entitled *Sources* clarifies this position. The "Sources" section enables the reader to determine the origin of the short stories and the format of their original publication, whether in short story collections (at diverse publishing houses such as Gallimard, Verdier, Le Cherche-Midi, Denoël, Hoëbeke, Ska éditions, Arcanes 17, Le Temps des noyaux and Parigramme), leftist newspapers and media (*L'Humanité*, *L'Humanité Dimanche*, *Médiapart*, *Arte*, and *L'Équipe magazine*) and even academic (*Siècle 21*) and institutional (Kunststiftung NRW) journals. Indeed, all the short stories have been carefully selected and gathered in the same collection and under the common theme of the writing of History. As such, this object resembles

an anthology, bringing together pieces chosen by the author himself and his editor, with a view to collecting Daeninckx's best short texts and reorganizing them according to a coherent reading grid. *Le roman noir de l'Histoire* is paradoxically made up of chronologically republished short stories, like ancient chronicles. The literary device of the "Sources" section resembles a historical approach, but the latter are solely self-referential, that is, they only refer to the author's fictional works. In Daeninckx's oeuvre, the collective memory and the memory of the personal work merge to become a single literary monument.

There are also five unpublished short stories scattered throughout the collection: *L'arbre de Dumas* in chapter 1 ("Dumas's Tree"), *Le cowboy de Pétrograd* in chapter 2 ("The Cowboy of Petrograd"), "No More" also in chapter 2, *Les silences du patriarche* in chapter 7 ("The Silences of the Patriarch") and *Le mausolée de Tsoï* in chapter 8 ("The Mausoleum of Tsoï"). These five short stories, all written in the first person, are not all on the same level, since some of them feature an external narrator (in *L'arbre de Dumas* and *Le cow-boy de Pétrograd*), while others feature an autobiographical "I" referring to Didier Daeninckx as the narrator (in "No More", *Les silences du patriarche* and *Le mausolée de Tsoï*). *Les silences du patriarche*, set in 1978, operates according to a regressive scheme that goes back to the childhood memories of Didier Daeninckx himself via the anaphoric device of an "I remember" repeated thirty-seven times. Also following an autobiographic structure, the short story *Le mausolée de Tsoï* takes place in 1990 when Didier Daeninckx was sent as a reporter to Moscow after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Four of the unpublished stories, *L'arbre de Dumas* (1889), *Le cowboy de Pétrograd* (1917), *Les silences du patriarche* (1978) and *Le mausolée de Tsoï* (1990), function as a chiasm: those of 1889 and 1978 evoking a genealogical regression and a return to the roots of various family "branches", and the stories of 1917 and 1990 reporting on the beginning and fall of the USSR. The last unpublished short story, "No More" (1922), has a median chronological position. It shows an anonymous and almost omniscient narrator whose *ethos* suggests a historian's posture by listing various "pacifist" war memorials that dot the French territory. The historical mausoleums and *lieux de mémoire* ("sites of memory") (Nora 1984–1992) are scattered throughout the collection, but Daeninckx actually constructs, at the same time, a literary monument to the memory of his own work.

CONCLUSION

In addition to the double-page spread of *Sources*, the self-memorializing dimension of the book is further reinforced by an additional page at the end of the collection: a section entitled *Romans de l'auteur faisant écho aux chapitres de l'ouvrage* (“The author’s novels echoing the chapters of the book”). For each chronological chapter of *Le roman noir de l'Histoire*—grouping together several stories—the section cites a few of Daeninckx’s novels, published or not by Verdier, referring to the historical period addressed in the specific chapter. For example, the first chapter of short stories *Commun, Commune. 1855–1912* echoes Daeninckx’s novel *Le Banquet des Affamés*, which takes place in the 1880s and 1890s, and the novel *Le Retour d'Ataiï*, which focuses on the Kanak revolt of 1878. This bibliographic insert thus makes it possible to link the work of the short story writer to that of the novelist and thus to create a global and coherent Daeninckxian literary universe.

It is astonishing to observe the constancy of the Daeninckxian literary project throughout the pages that comprise this anthology. His perspective on the writing of History seems to have almost never drifted or changed its course: the literary processes of the gallery of portraits of anonymous people who made History, the method of journalistic investigation and the re-transcription of testimonies are reiterated from one short story to the next. The autobiographical narrator sometimes becomes himself the witness of History and then becomes a reporter on a mission or a historian digging into the archives. The internal focus never imposes an omniscient vision and leaves room for interpretation by the readers. It gives an image of the author as a detective investigating his own history mingling with those of others. The blending of anonymous characters and historical figures also underlines Daeninckx’s vision of History that mixes the factual and the fictional, undermining the French national tale by focusing on links between European figures and events linking the Internationalist left.

Didier Daeninckx is a media and polemical figure, whose denunciatory verve and political choices have tarnished him in the eyes of many comrades in struggle. His literary activity is nonetheless as abundant as ever: from the denunciation of clientelism in the fictional town of Courvilliers—a symbol of the towns of the former communist suburbs of Paris—in his novel *Artana! Artana!* published by Gallimard in 2018, to this collection of historical short stories *Le roman noir de l'Histoire*, which proposes a

new form of historical narrative, Didier Daeninckx's literary practice is one that actually "does something", as Patrick Boucheron writes. Literature, according to Daeninckx, is a combat sport that gives a right to follow up on unfinished business, that denounces collective memory and modifies the course of the present through an incisive and hard-hitting rereading of the past. For, as he had already written in the epigraph of *Meurtres pour mémoire*: "By forgetting the past, we condemn ourselves to relive it". Daeninckx proposes a monument to the memory of his own work by composing an anthology of his own short texts. But the author himself has become a monument of European and detective literature of the end of the start of the twenty-first century, as proven by the place he occupies (alongside Dominique Manotti) in the "History and Politics" MOOC created by the DETECT research collective and entitled "Euro Noir: Cultural Identity in European Popular Crime Narratives".

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NOTES

1. The FLN, Front de Libération Nationale, was an Algerian nationalist movement that was active from the 1950s to the 1990s and that campaigned, sometimes violently, for Algerian independence and an end to the colonial yoke. On 17 October 1961, the French federation of the FLN organized a peaceful demonstration in Paris against the curfew imposed only on "French Muslims". It was put down in blood by the CRS police force led by the infamous Paris police prefect Maurice Papon.
2. "Roman archéologique", Viart, 2009: 12, our translation. All translations are ours unless stated otherwise.
3. This crime fiction vein appeared in France after the Second World War, and particularly in France thanks to Gallimard's *Série Noire* book collection founded by Marcel Duhamel. For a full definition of *hardboiled*, see Tadié (2006: 3 and 165).
4. « Mon expérience de journaliste localier m'a été tout à fait utile, voire essentielle. De 1977 à 1982, j'avais fait des enquêtes, j'avais écrit des centaines d'articles sur les sujets les plus divers et les plus prosaïques. J'ai ainsi accumulé. Être dans les rues, suivre les faits divers me passionnait. Sur les faits les plus quotidiens qui paraissent sans importance, il faut toujours

trouver un angle qui permette de dire que cette histoire-là vaut la peine d'être racontée ». (Daeninckx, in Collovald and Neveu, 2001: 11-12)

5. « Nos auteurs, en utilisant cette 'brève' journalistique comme point de départ, insistent sur la place de l'individu anonyme dans une histoire plus traditionnellement considérée sous son angle événementiel, tout en faisant la démonstration que le fait divers est en fin de compte un récit tronqué, manipulé et trompeur, qui dissimule en réalité les véritables enjeux soulevés par les faits évoqués » (Desnain 2015: 11).
6. « Dans ce texte, le crime contre l'individu (le fait divers donc) n'est qu'un prétexte au dévoilement de crimes contre l'humanité. De même, le crime perpétré par l'individu n'est qu'un symptôme de la défaillance de toute une société [...] » (Desnain 2015: 4).
7. « Une nouvelle nous vient, qui renseigne sur quelque chose de lointain, de caché, d'ignoré, et ce crépitement mat et sec électrise notre présent sans l'illuminer tout à fait, déchirant furtivement la nuit noire de l'histoire », (Boucheron, 2019: 9).
8. « L'actualité est ainsi faite, qui attire et fixe notre attention sur des événements que l'on croit éphémères ou nés de circonstances, alors qu'ils viennent du fond de notre société » (Daeninckx 2019: 568).
9. « Ces noms je les avais trouvés en consultant les archives des journaux, à la Bibliothèque nationale ou à Beaubourg », (Daeninckx, 2019: 404) .
10. Michel Foucault is probably the most virulent critic of an idea of historical time as continuous (see Revel 2004). For him, on the contrary, historical time is made of discontinuities and ruptures. Contemporary thoughts on History, including that of Daeninckx, are largely inspired by this Foucauldian reference.
11. « [...] la fraternité qu'il installe entre imagination fictionnelle et opération historiographique est tout sauf anecdotique » (Boucheron 2019: 19).
12. « Comme si l'histoire n'était rien d'autre en somme qu'un ensemble de fictions bien composées. L'hypothèse, on le comprend, est si ébouriffante, qu'elle mérite d'être explorée » (Boucheron 2019: 10).
13. « Comme le souligne Geldof: « Ainsi le récit policier devient-il une généalogie critique de la modernité qui, implicitement et explicitement, démystifie les mythes et les emblèmes de l'Histoire officielle et dont les acteurs principaux sont ceux ou celles qui, d'habitude, ne figurent pas dans les grands récits » (Geldof 2000: 141) » (Desnain 2015: 9).

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