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Abstract

Maurice Dantec is "a prophet, a mystic, a Christian soldier, Zionist and pro-American, anti-secular and militantly counter-revolutionary. In short, the last scandal of French literature," according to his editor David Kersan. Dantec's brand of punk neo-Christian literary activism may feel somehow out of place in a literary milieu still beholden to the existentialism of Sartre and the revolutionary ethos of the 1960s. But Dantec's "disgust" (of Old Europe, the creeping menace of Islam and the rampant march of secularization) bears witness to a larger malaise. Along with Michel Houellebecq and Peter Sloterdijk, he testifies to the opening of a new chapter in the culture wars, to the rise of a new group of "écrivains maudits" who have decided to vehemently question postmodern nihilism and economic globalization. Finally, Dantec's fiction makes a case for the need for faith in a Godless world. This essay is concerned with Dantec's paranoid politics as they appear in his fiction, and most notably in his latest Christian futuristic trilogy. It is also concerned with the relevance of conservative Christian dogma in his work, both formally and rhetorically.

Keywords

David Kersan, Maurice Dantec, Zionist, pro-American, Christian, Christianity, Michel Houellebecq, Peter Sloterdijk, culture wars, écrivains maudits, postmodern nihilism, economic globalization, Christian dogma

Paranoia and Christianity in Maurice Dantec's Crime Fiction

Jean-Louis Hippolyte
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Maurice Dantec is “a prophet, a mystic, a Christian soldier, Zionist and pro-American, anti-secular and militantly counter-revolutionary. In short, the last scandal of French literature,” according to his editor David Kersan.¹ Without a doubt, Dantec has ruffled more than a few feathers over the past few years, and his brand of punk neo-Christian literary activism may feel somehow out of place in a literary milieu still beholden to the existentialism of Sartre and the revolutionary ethos of the 1960s. But Dantec's disgust for Old Europe, for the creeping menace of Islam, and for the rampant march of secularization bears witness to a larger malaise. Along with Michel Houellebecq and Peter Sloterdijk, he testifies to the opening of a new chapter in the culture wars, to the rise of a new group of “écrivains maudits” who have decided to vehemently question post-modern nihilism, economic globalization, and what they see as the concomitant animalization of man by the entertainment industry. Finally, and most importantly, Dantec's fiction makes a case for the need for faith in a godless world. This essay is concerned with Dantec's paranoid politics as they appear in his fiction, and most notably in his latest Christian futuristic trilogy. It is also concerned with the relevance of conservative Christian dogma in his work, both formally and rhetorically.

Early in his years, it became clear to Dantec that the times were ominous. His decision to drop out of University to play in a conceptual rock band named “Etats d'urgence” ‘State of Urgency’ must be understood as an initial reaction against the postmodern age. After a stint in the ad industry, in 1993 he completed his first novel,

apocalyptic neo-noir thriller *La Sirène rouge*, ‘The Red Siren,’ which was adapted for the screen in 2002. The story recounts a young girl’s attempt to escape the clutches of a psychopathic mother, and the alliance that the young girl makes with a reclusive hit-man, who will sacrifice and thereby redeem himself in order to save her from harm and reunite her with her father. The themes explored in this first novel (social and cultural corruption, the need for salvation, the search for the father) will metastasize in the rest of Dantec’s work.

With his 1995 hit *Les Racines du mal*, ‘The Roots of Evil,’ Dantec started revamping noir fiction in earnest and began to revivify the old genre by infusing it with a blend of alarmist science fiction and philosophy.² In 1998, he left France and Europe for Canada, judging the Old World too complacent and soft on what he saw as a rising wave of “minority” crime, a clear sign for him of the cultural decadence of the West and its foreordained defeat in the much ballyhooed clash of civilizations.³ His novels as well as his personal journals—*Le Théâtre des opérations*, ‘The Operating Theatre: A Metaphysical and Polemical Journal,’ and *Laboratoire de catastrophe générale*, ‘Laboratory of General Catastrophes’—relate the story of a degenerate world, where (Western) man fights for his right to exist, against the social and cultural forces (many of them machine-driven, and often global) that threaten to overtake him. The titles of his novels leave no ambiguity as to where his fears lie. Consider for instance: *Les Racines du mal*, *Babylon Babies* and *Villa Vortex*, which, for the latter, inscribes the novelistic project in the shadow of the Twin Towers, September 11 and pan-Muslim fundamentalism. Together, they constitute a paranoid tapestry of a dissolute nihilistic world, of a fallen humanity that has lost the ability to decide its destiny. This dystopian world owes much to the cyberpunk genre, which itself shares many of the themes and visual motifs of *noir*.

While writers like William Gibson (who coined the term “cyberpunk”) do manage to find solace in anti-utopian tomorrows where cybernetic outlaws ultimately succeed in finding a pattern in the global chaos (see for instance Gibson’s *Pattern Recognition*), Dantec prefers catastrophic parables where chaos engulfs humanity, and where only a chosen few survive the apocalypse. In that sense, novels like *Cosmos Incorporated* are not that dissimilar from more overtly commercial fluff, like Steven King’s *The Stand* or Tim La-

Haye and Jerry B. Jenkins's *Left Behind* series, which describe the end of the world and the final fight between good and evil. Deeply paranoid, these end-of-day novels liberally borrow their structure and themes from Christian eschatology, and find their sustenance in the battle and pre-ordained triumph of good over evil, and the salvation of the elect. Like these novels, the works of Dantec reject the changeover from modernity to postmodernity and the transition from an epistemological appraisal of things (what can I know of the world?) to an ontological one (what is the world?). Clearly, in the work of Dantec, as well as in the texts of Houellebecq and others, it is the notion of uncertainty, of uncontrollable variability, that looms as the greatest threat.

Naturally, the appearance of crime fiction as a genre is directly tied to the birth of modernity. It correlates the growth of a paranoia that grew increasingly pervasive during the modern period when vast numbers were affected by rapid industrialization. Displacement, lack, and social anxieties formed the crux of that paranoia, which was echoed in the literature of the time, from Flaubert to the Decadents. "It has long been believed," writes John Farrell in *Paranoia and Modernity*, "both by the opponents of modernity and by its advocates, that a fragmentation of the human identity and an uprooting of human values came as the inevitable result of the findings of science and the progress of modern technology" (309). A similar claim can be made about many high modern or postmodern cultural productions, which often bespeak a deeply paranoid ethos. Indeed the disintegration of the self remains a staple of postmodern fiction, from Antoine Volodine and Emmanuel Carrère to Eric Chevillard. As a reaction to this, postmodern skeptics like Houellebecq and Dantec have taken to refuting, pell-mell, alternative religions, feminism, mind and body-altering drugs, and everything that smacks of postmodernism's hedonistic and heterogeneous tendencies. This is a recurring fear, rooted in two centuries of anti-modern paranoia.

Paranoia is a disturbed yet deeply organized mental condition characterized by an obsessive anxiety or fear. Paranoiacs feel persecuted and singled out, often by forces beyond their control, whether political, social or metaphysical. What distinguishes paranoia from phobia is that paranoia interprets an intentional threat which, unlike phobia, remains exogenous to the individual. Paranoiac behav-

ior need not be related to a feeling of persecution, but merely to the sentiment that one has been chosen, singled out, by an outside entity or person. As a rule of thumb, the paranoid feels alone against the world, and seeks to solve what he or she perceives as an imbalance. Paranoia is a modern pathology, of the individual facing intractable odds, endeavoring to right a wrong that is innate to the world and that affects his or her position in society. In short, paranoia testifies to a sense of loss of balance, meaning, and order. What the paranoid personality attempts to do is restore that balance, and locate order in chaos. Following upon Farrell's seminal work in *Paranoia and Modernity*, I am also struck by "the dominance of the paranoid character in modern Western culture" and its affect on "portrayals of agency—freedom and responsibility, power and control" (2). Because paranoia is articulated according to a strong binary model, it provides literature with a compelling template for drama and oppositional dynamics. Summing up George Orwell's dystopic masterpiece, *1984*, Aaron Rosenfeld notes that "[the] hallmarks of paranoia—its insistence on reading into a random, indifferent world a motivated, coherent narrative; its claim of grandiosity for the object of aggression; its reduction of the world to a stable binary in which all signs take their meaning through their relation to the paranoid—are quite explicitly rendered as the basis of the novel's 'plot'" (339).

A key feature of Dantec's own paranoid leanings can be located in his passionately antagonistic stand on the "posthuman" views defended by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and N. Katherine Hayles, since Dantec has categorically rejected the focus put by these authors on heterogeneity and variance. For posthumanists, fuzziness and fluidity are keys to understanding reality, and keys to shaping an "emergent" ontology rather than a permanent one. In their views, having recognized the imperfectability and disunity within him, the posthuman recognizes the world through transformative and heterogeneous perspectives. However, for Dantec, the possibility and desirability of achieving a posthuman future opens a treacherous path.

In order to map out more precisely Dantec's paranoia politics, I will focus on two of his later fantasy crime novels: *Cosmos Incorporated* and *Grande Jonction* 'Grand Junction,' which form the first two tomes of a Christian futuristic trilogy and nearly perfectly bring to-

gether the author's obsessions and anxieties. Both texts manifest the author's underlying concern with social decadence, cultural variance as exemplified by the various brands of political correctness pilloried in the two novels, the end of reason, and the concurrent need for a renewal of traditional values which Dantec locates in traditionalist Catholic dogma. *Cosmos Incorporated* (CI) opens onto a world where everything is undifferentiated, in flux, and where identities have merged beyond recognition. It tells the story of a hit-man whose original mission (the killing of a political figure, the Mayor of Grand Junction, who broke his agreement with a Russian-American crime conglomerate) will soon deviate, and become a quest for redemption.⁴

It is worth underscoring that the hit-man of CI is a recurrent figure, not only across Dantec's novels, but also in neo-noir fiction in general, from Jean-Christophe Grangé to Gwen Orval. The omnipresence of the figure of the mercenary or of one of its alter egos, the military contractor or the terrorist, testifies to two capital shifts. The first involves the postmodern reinvention of the hard-boiled detective of noir fiction, caught in the existential dilemma of social exclusion and moral engagement. The second refers to the increased militarization of society and the growing role of the military-industrial complex, both at the geo-strategic level and with regards to literary characterization. More importantly, the recurrence of the hit-man as hero testifies to a paradigm shift and the dehumanization of the hero, since the hit-man is for all intents and purposes a pre-programmed "killing machine," even the hard-boiled detectives and gangsters of classic noir like Jules Dassin's *Rififi* (1955) or Jacques Becker's *Touchez pas au grisbi* (1954) operate along indelible moral principles—and testify to an unremitting sense of humanity.

Beyond modern malaise, there is an abiding sense of skepticism here, a self-directed irony, an appreciation of the subjective nature of truth-building, and an ongoing deconstruction of identity markers, as Dantec's protagonist must permanently reinvent himself. And yet, in the chaotic economy of the text, the protagonist, though barely human, has come to occupy a singularly vital position, functioning as strange attractor in an open-ended narrative environment which is permanently recomposing itself. It should come as no surprise then that Dantec has taken on the roman noir as a ge-

neric platform. Noir is not only resolutely narrative, story-driven, but because it deals with issues of consumption and exhaustion, it also allows readers unreservedly to measure the attrition of self in a post-human environment. As such, it allows the text and the author to sustain a difficult balancing act between the description of an entropic environment beset by social neuroses and environmental anxieties and the need to sustain it in narrative form.

Early in *CI*, we find out that the killer has been put by fate and the author in the path of a fallen angel. Both the angel and the killer go on to give birth to a child who, in the second tome of the trilogy, becomes the new Messiah who lifts humanity from its shackles and brings about the apocalypse. But first, the child in question, Gabriel Link de Nova, must face a series of trials, notably the emergence of the demonic antagonist, a virus-like infection born of a global network which gains awareness and decides to undo God's creation and remake the world to its own desires. If the overall plot bears many resemblances to movies such as *The Matrix*, *Terminator*, *Blade Runner*, or Godard's *Alphaville*, as well as cyberpunk novels like Gibson's *Neuromancer*, it is because all these works first share the same existential sensibilities and an attachment to the absurdist mood and themes of noir fiction. Accordingly, all these fictions also engage the notion of self-inquiry as truth-building, as truth can only be mediated here through an examination of the self. Like the proto-human Terminator or the "replicant" cop in *Blade Runner*, the Christ-like Gabriel (like his father Plotkine) must build himself anew, and undergo a baptism through trial before turning into what he was meant to be. Only then can he bring justice and truth to all and wage destruction unto a sick and fallen world "in spiritu sancto et igni" 'with the Holy Ghost and with fire' (*GJ 7*).⁵

The action of the trilogy takes place in the near future, after several wars and ethnic conflicts have plunged the planet into chaos, and control has been assumed by a loose coalition of mafias, Islamic terror groups and supranational Orwellian administrations, like the UMHU—*UniMonde Humain* 'the Human Uni-World'. All facets of human life come within the purview of world-wide establishments, and even the weather is now controlled by a global concern. Most importantly, beyond the loss of political and economic freedom, it is the loss of collective transcendence that puts mankind at risk,

for the Earth has once again turned into a Babel, where each individual now seeks his or her own God “Un Monde pour Tous—Un Dieu pour Chacun” ‘A World for All—A God for Each’ (18). The undoing of the world’s primordial grand narrative or the belief in a single god who bestows upon mankind a singular set of values and commandments is what most threatens Dantec’s protagonists. Without monotheism, Dantec argues, human life can only evolve into a simulacrum of itself (*CI* 49), not simply a copy of the original but, to borrow from Baudrillard, something that has become truth in its own right and that masks the real truth, the point of origin, as memory and the text become lost in a maze of possibilities.

The notion that the past is under erasure plays a crucial part for the protagonist of *CI*, whose memory has been erased by his employers so he may travel past the mind-reading sensors that guard the approach to the city of Grand Junction. To be sure, the recurrence of the figure of “the man without a past” in neo noir fiction should not be lost on us. Examples include the character of Deckard in *Blade Runner*, who does not remember being a *replicant* ‘a cloned human,’ even though he hunts *replicants* for a living. Another instance can be found in the crime thriller *Memento*, in which the protagonist is incapable of forming new memories, and must tattoo information onto himself before he forgets it. In the same way, other amnesiacs appear in works as stylistically different as Robert Ludlum’s *The Bourne Identity* and Sébastien Japrisot’s *A Very Long Engagement*. Here, amnesia bespeaks something crucial: the loss of origin, not only personal history, but History with a capital “H.”

As memory goes, so do identity and narrative voice. “nous, il, vous, je, peu importe, sa personnalité est factice ... une bonne partie de son corps est factice” ‘we, he, you, I, no matter, his personality is fictitious ... and a good part of his body is too,’ states the narrator of *CI* (17), as Plotkine strives to establish a stable narrative voice, and as the struggle for speech reveals the deeper, more critical partition of the self. But the fragmentation of the id is not only the result of an outside attack, the attempt of the machine-driven global concern to subsume the individual. In order to escape global control, a control that extends not only to bodies but also to minds, the protagonist himself chooses to shed his identity, symbolically divesting himself of any past so he may reinvent himself and cheat

the Meta-Machine.

Only by replacing the real world with a false one can Plotkine then evade the suspicions and control of the global network, and offer a fictitious narrative of self, that of an innocent traveler with no suspicious memories, in place of the real one, that of a killer on a mission. But this strategy of psychological self-scarring carries significant risks, as the protagonist must now embark on a quest to reconstitute his own self, without any assurance that he ever will entirely manage to do so. More importantly, Plotkine now finds himself mired in paranoid doubts as he attempts to restore a sense of agency, and struggles over how much he is actually free to act and responsible for his own actions. As the plot proceeds and Plotkine makes the final preparation to kill his mark, he realizes that freedom from control and predestination may only come at a very high price. He must willingly sacrifice himself, not through an act of destruction (a killing) but through devolution of self unto a new life (paternity) and sacrifice to a higher cause: “il restait un instrument ... au service des anges” ‘he remained an instrument ... at the service of angels’ (*CI* 300). This further explains why Dantec would choose *noir* as the genre to tell his story, since noir fictions construct stories of loss where people and objects go missing and must be found, stories that wallow in existential malaise, absence, inadequacy, and moral ambiguity.

As the investigation proceeds and Plotkine struggles to piece together his own self and the reason for his presence in Grand Junction, the reader begins to realize that the fuzziness that takes hold of the individual is also distressing the ecosystem at the macroscopic level. Taking his cue from chapter 11 of *Genesis*, the narrator of *CI* describes the world as a “Babel” and a cosmopolitan mess where individuals have turned into a polymorphous mass (“pieuvre humaine” ‘human octopus’), which lives in a decadent world that is reminiscent of Nero’s Rome and also evokes the licentiousness of Hollywood. As in *Genesis*, the world’s unity has shattered into a neo-Byzantine constellation, into a baroque symphony of individuals lost in a sea of religious and political beliefs (*CI* 50).

However, against the peril of Neronian decadence stands its archetypal obverse, in this case, Julius Caesar. The figure of Caesar may well be one of the most conventional tropes of popular fic-

tion and conservative politics, that of the strong man, of the fearless leader who saves the masses from harm and danger and carves a future for himself and others through strength, cunning, and an unshakable belief in his destiny. In the two novels, this figure replicates itself across several characters, who in turn, depending on the needs of the plot, fight, sacrifice themselves, and die to ensure the success of their collective mission and the advent of a new world order under one God. Such is the case of the hit-man Plotkine in *CI*, but also the sheriff Wilbur Langlois in *GJ*, and a clique of assorted lawmen, servants of the Church, and former special force commandos. Such is the case too of the soldier-monk Friedrich Ostermann, who, in one of the most grand-guignolesque episodes of the series, bravely dies at the hands of a pack of “neo-Islamist irregulars” on camelback, following the order of a zombie dressed in a Nazi uniform—superimposing the political discourse on “Islamic fascism” on the figure of the zombie (*GJ* 406).

The zombie looks like a human and walks like a human, but contradicts Occam's razor by belittling the obvious. It is a grotesque masquerade of a human because it has lost everything that made it so, like the god-given attributes of compassion and reason. As for the Nazis, they stand as Modernity's ultimate boogeymen, as the conflation of the loss of individuality and the forsaking of the most elementary forms of morality (which can be seen, again, as a repudiation of God's commandments). The grotesque figure of the Nazi zombie can therefore be seen as the ultimate rejection of God's gift to mankind.

Though the martial hero does act as a strange attractor in the chaotic economy of Dantec's text, and though the process of characterization may ultimately appear exceedingly explicit, with its stringent binary oppositions (good/evil, human/mechanical, individuation/globalization), character redundancy must be understood dialectically. In other words, there are no hazards, no accidents, in the elaboration of the plot as well as in the characters. Both follow an eschatological arc, both plot and character point toward a pre-ordained closure. But neither textual element appears to do so at first, as both plot and character development first seem to be wide open. The investigation that takes place, notably in the first tome of the trilogy, thus develops both textually and meta-textually, making the

reader a complicit investigator. In effect, one must see the use of the archetypal hero as a way to buoy the protagonist's overriding paranoid tendencies, his feeling of persecution by hostile global crime conglomerates and his morbid preoccupation with autonomy and control. The length of these novels (569 pages for *CI*, 776 for *GJ*), the formal games played by the author, and the investigation of genre all signal a deliberate attempt on Dantec's part to co-opt the reader into his project, and unmask the threat to the reader and the text.

Victory-at-all-costs may well be a hallmark of martial ideology, from Caesar's account of the Gallic war to more contemporary clichés on the War on Terror, but what is more significant here is that the heroic quest must play itself out against a background of growing entropy. Against nothingness, only war, says Dantec, sustains the latter-day humans with the will to go on. It is as if, at the end of days, only fear and constant warfare were keeping the world from total collapse. As the world falls, cities and people experience a technological regression, as if modernity itself was unraveling. In light of this, the remanence of the heroic quest as literary trope must be decoded as another way to counterbalance the effects of paranoia in the text. For the paranoid in general and Dantec's hero in particular, nothing is accidental and everything has purpose. Against the chaotic devolution of the new world order, its post-human vagueness, its pandemic ambiguity, only the singular purpose of the heroic quest can allow both reader and protagonist to construct meaning out of chaos and see past what Farrell calls "[the] vast and anonymous agencies deploying images and information—partial information, misinformation—with the aim of shaping our political and economic behavior" (3).

In Dantec's dying world, one last hope remains, in the town of Grand Junction, the last surviving "spaceport" on the planet, the last link with the beyond. That sanctum is coveted by all, but is held by a community of Christian survivalists under the iron command of sheriff Wilbur Langlois, the man of "la loi d'airain" 'the Law' (*GJ* 165). It is there that the final battle is fought. As Dantec needles paranoid doom-saying to the extreme, not only civilization but the natural order too fall prey to entropy. Reverting to pre-evolutionary ecologies, the environment gradually disappears and leaves a desert of sand, ice, and mud in its place, buffeted by huge storms and rav-

aged by catastrophic weather phenomena. In the new barren wasteland, humanity must now face its demons (physical and literal), as Armageddon engulfs the remnants of humanity.

Like war, desire plays a significant part in this theatre of horrors, and like war, desire, or rather the reification of desire (prostitution, greed), proves to be a volatile and destructive force, turning the world into a bordello where bodies, living and dead, are converted into commodities (*CI* 58, 160). As entropy gains, only certain economic sectors continue to strive, converting the world to a “camp de concentration du putanat” ‘concentration camp for whoring’ where the Adversary lures fallen souls (*CI* 160). Bringing together prostitution and globalization, the narrator of *GJ* states that “le commerce est la continuation de la prostitution par d’autres moyens” ‘commerce is in actual fact nothing more than the continuation of prostitution through other means’ (*GJ* 183). Dead bodies, like the living, are bought, sold and desecrated by an ever-growing number of recycling syndicates. As they are taken apart and used for recyclable parts, which other humans purchase and integrate into their own spliced bodies, the human soul, Dantec warns, finds itself splintered and divided. Here lies the second trap set by the Adversary for mankind: endless division without unity, rhizomatic sundering without individuation, life without transcendence.

“Les paranoïaques ont toujours raison” ‘Paranoiacs are always right,’ warns the narrator of *GJ*. “French ...” ‘Murphy’s Law is made for them, the world, and what destroys it, are made for them: if the worst is possible, then it will most likely happen. To which one may add, if the worst seems impossible, don’t believe it, it’s a trap.’⁶ So what is the worst that could happen? As our investigative protagonists find out, there is a conspiracy at the heart of the two novels, a code hidden within the text and within the world. The secret, to which Dantec alludes, touches upon a paradigm underlying Western civilization, the notion that the creation is logocentric. If the word was in the beginning, undoing the word (and language) seems the Devil’s best bet to reverse God’s creation.

As Logos becomes flesh, the threat to Man, God’s favored creation, turns out to be a menace on language, a targeted attack on the link that ties him to the divine. In this future dystopia, the final plague turns out to be an assault on creation and the Word. This is

one of the most arresting innovations of these two novels, the manner in which Dantec is re-envisioning Armageddon for the post-modern age, as a battle for the control of meaning, more so than a battle for land and/or power. Even though war does rage in the physical world as well in these stories, the assault on the common house of language plays the paramount role in Dantec's eschatology.

Admittedly, the notion that language, and through it, culture and humanity, are under threat, is neither entirely novel nor specific to Dantec's prophetic novels. Orwell's *1984* took a similar approach, half a century earlier. There are in fact numerous echoes of Orwellian Newspeak in Dantec's works, but rather than being a political machination, as with Orwell's Big Brother, the attack on language in Dantec's novels takes the form of a dual biological and ontological offensive. More specifically, here, language finds itself assailed by a virus that attacks the human ability to speak and transforms him into a modem, that is to say a machine that spews out random series of sounds. In Dantec's view, bodies and mind are bound as one, in the last stage of the disease, the body itself loses coherence and the intimate structure of human DNA becomes unbound, turning humans into fuzzy matter and untrammelled code, that is to say into boundless biological and semantic data. As a result, beings, like properties and relations, become beset by vagueness. While the borders between human beings dissolve and commingle, individuals fall, literally and metaphorically, from grace. They devolve from subjects to objects, and even lose all form, to simply degenerate into a primordial soup, a collection of nucleotides and terabits floating into space. In the end, their diminution resonates with two different meanings, semantic and metaphysical. Having lost the ability to think, cognition, they no longer have the will to choose, bequeathed to them in *Genesis*. Having undone God's work and stricken God's favored creation, one may think, up to the very end of *GJ*, that the Devil has finally won.

Both novels map out a topology of disaster for the postmodern age, as humanity has lost its sense of self and has become nothing else but the prosthetic extension of the city. If the virus that ravages the world in the two novels can be read as a metaphor for social decadence and the toxic influence of globalization, as a testimony

to the treacherous transition between pre-modern "episteme" and postmodern "techné," it also provides both the reader and the narrative with a radical solution. In a world where man devolves into a machine, only a machine-like man, an instrument of death, can truly fight fire with fire and work against the "rhizomes mafieux" 'rhizomatic crime syndicates' (GJ 346) that plague us, and against the body-tuning pleomorphic monstrosities that people Dantec's post-human hell. In this gallery of freaks, one stands above all, the *eminence grise* of the global criminal concern (the aptly named Jade Uber Silverskin), who is only introduced in the second tome of the saga in a chapter entitled "Venus as a Boy" (coined from a song by Icelandic artist Bjork). Jade Uber Silverskin ends up being the final foil of the protagonist and humanity, one in a long list of evolving and metamorphic monstrosities. Among other things, Silverskin embodies the deconstruction of self, the undoing of the principle of individuation. In short, he is both more (Uber), and less (skin), a hermaphrodite (Venus as a boy) that trumps gender boundaries, an assemblage of body parts that fails to amount to a human being, the silver-skin serpent in the garden.

Dantec's apocalyptic fiction evokes the radical rhetoric of Mil-lenarianism, which he shares with Nostradamus and al-Qaeda. Like those groups, Dantec considers our current social order as corrupt, and change as inevitable. In the end however, the overlap between noir fiction and Christian prophetic fiction is only partially successful, because both genres constantly pull the plot in opposite directions. Noir fiction assumes that the truth must be found, teased out, deduced, while prophetic fiction proceeds from a truth that is already known. Still, that balancing act works for the most part, with the exception of the most openly didactic sections of the saga. In those moments, Dantec attempts fruitlessly to match up suspense on the one hand with essay-length segments on Christian prophetic philosophy on the other. This structural flaw is not unique to Dantec and often appears in fantasy literature (and Dantec's novels certainly belong to that genre as well), notably in the more edifying texts of authors like A.C. Clarke and Jules Verne. Like them, Dantec tends to pull his fictions toward philosophical treatises, which overburden the action and strain the plot to the point of breaking the narrative tension, a cardinal sin for any noir fiction.

In the end, Dantec's prose remains maddeningly provoking. If sentences and passages sometimes collapse under the weight of philosophy and didactics, turning long stretches of the text into tedious anti-postmodernist tirades, the overall project still must command our undivided attention. Ultimately, Dantec depicts humanity's struggle with God's gifts against the Godless (who rejected them or embraced something false in their stead), a struggle which is deployed and symbolically amplified through the device of the virus that undoes God's creation. All the evils of Dantec's novels stem from man's rejection of God, and in that context the turn to variance and uncertainty must be read as an unmistakable affront to the Word of God. As the world collapses into a vague and ever-shifting simulacrum of itself, self-replicating and self-devouring, only a hero who has divested himself of all human trappings, from name to identity, can fight fire with fire and begin to turn the tide against evil. It is that hero, half-warrior, half-prophet, who can reclaim our collective voice, our claim to transcendence, our path to the divine, says Dantec. Of course, a cynical critic may see here nothing but a collection of well-worn religious clichés and post-Millenarist fantasies. As always with authors as provocative and polemical as Maurice Dantec, it is often hard to see the verdant forest for the burning trees.

Notes

1 "un écrivain, un prophète, un mystique, un combattant chrétien, sioniste et pro-américain, un anti-laïque et un contre-révolutionnaire militant. En somme, le dernier scandale de la littérature française" in (Marina Valensise "Il Foglio") (translated in French by Daniella Bailly). See: http://www.mauricedantec.com/sites/dantec/article/redacteur.php/redacteur/maurice_g_dantec.

All English translations are mine.

2 Other principal post-68 neo-noir authors include José-Louis Bocquet (see notably *Zarmageddon*) and Jean-Hugues Opper (see *Ambernave*).

3 See "Islam Dunk," by Tom Cowell. (*Philadelphia Weekly*, Sept. 5-11, 36) in which Cowell shows how the "Islamic panic genre" now ranks high among other modern conspiracy theories. Among the classics of the Islamic panic genre, Cowell mentions Bruce Waver's *While Europe Slept: How radical Islam Is Destroying From Within* (2007), Paul L. Williams's *The Day of Islam: The Annihilation of America and The Western World* (2007), Bat Ye'or's *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (2005), Tony Blankley's *The West's Last Chance: Winning The Clash of Civilizations* (2005), and finally, Yelena Chudinova's *Notre Dame Mosque: 2048*

(which tells of the last-ditch effort of a group of Catholic defenders who turn Notre-Dame into a Massada, against the Muslim hordes). Of course, the notion of the “clash of civilizations” pre-dates the modern period, and crops up during the Renaissance and the classical period (see *The Song of Roland* or Corneille's *The Cid*). The term “Clash of Civilizations” was coined by Bernard Lewis in a 1990 article in the *Atlantic Monthly Magazine*.

4 For the sake of brevity, I will abridge *Cosmos Incorporated* as *CI*, and *Grande Jonction* as *GJ*.

5 The translation is mine. The Latin quote can be found in Luke 3:16.

6 “Les paranoïaques ont toujours raison. La loi de Murphy est faite pour eux, le monde, et même ce qui le détruit, sont faits pour eux: si le pire est possible, alors il a toutes les chances d'advenir. Ce à quoi on pouvait ajouter: si le pire paraît impossible, ne le croyez pas, c'est une ruse.” (174)

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