

London's Burning

Urban Crisis

in Derek Raymond's *Factory Series*

Julien Campagna (Université de Poitiers)

Abstract: In the 1980s, the English novelist Derek Raymond gave birth to the Sergeant in the *Factory Series*. Focusing on a marginal and disillusioned protagonist, typical of the genre of the noir novel, Raymond pushes the image of the detective as a disenchanting observer of a city in suffering to the extreme, in the midst of a city which is about to burst apart both architecturally and socially. London becomes the image of a modern Babylon, devoured by neo-liberal individualism and torn apart by chaotic and incohesive expansion that has given way to extreme precariousness and social tension. In his function as an investigator, the Sergeant goes from industrial wastelands to abandoned and decaying suburban neighbourhoods, witnessing the slow destruction of the London he knew. This article will aim at showing how the apocalyptic vision of the city in social crisis in Raymond's first four entries in the *Factory Series* gives way to an original portrayal of its central figure as an emblem and defender of the down-trodden.

Keywords: noir novel, contemporary literature, sociology, apocalypse, city, urban crisis, neo-liberalism, modernity, post-modernism, hard-boiled.

Résumé : Dans les années 1980, le romancier anglais Derek Raymond donne naissance dans la *Factory Series* au Sergent. Avec ce personnage marginal et désabusé caractéristique du roman noir, il pousse à l'extrême la posture du détective comme observateur désenchanté d'une ville en éclatement géographique comme social. Londres devient l'image d'une Babylone moderne, rongée par l'individualisme et décimée par une expansion chaotique et une obsession du renouvellement qui en bouleverse les contours sans cohérence. Le Sergent est conduit au fil de ses enquêtes de friches industrielles à l'abandon en banlieues déjà décrépites, et constate la lente déliquescence d'un Londres au bord de la destruction, rongée par une société trop contrastée, laissée à une prolifération anarchique révélatrice d'une crise morale et sociale autant qu'économique.

Mots clefs : roman noir, littérature contemporaine, sociologie, apocalypse, ville, crise urbaine, néo-libéralisme, modernité, post-modernisme, roman *hard-boiled*.

When noted French critic and author Jean-Patrick Manchette wrote about noir novels in his *Chronicles* in 1979, he defined the genre as a literature for times of crisis¹. And indeed, noir novels in their original form generally started to soar in a time of major economic and social crisis in their country of birth: the likes of Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler breathed life into the Private Eye (embodied by such mythical characters as Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe) in the wake of the 1929 Wall Street crash. Spade or Marlowe would therefore inhabit American cities, real or invented, learning to adapt to a new economic, social and structural paradigm. To paraphrase Chandler's famous claim about his inspiring elder D. Hammett, the hard-boiled detective novel is all about taking murder out of the Venetian vase (a thinly veiled allusion to the likes of Hercule Poirot or Sherlock Holmes) and dropping it into the alley². And thus the modern detective was born: a quintessential citizen for whom identification and familiarity with the city is everything, as a professional and ontological obligation, and yet for whom such identification is constantly threatened by the permanent changes and reinventions of a fast-evolving modern city. In the words of Jean-Patrick Manchette: "noir novels speak of an unbalanced, labile world, destined to fall and to pass. The noir novel is a literature of crisis. No wonder it's been springing back to life lately"³. Manchette saw the beginning of the 1980s as a particularly severe time of crisis, aggravated by the devastations of totalitarian regimes, the consecration of capitalism, and the slow failure and end of all forms of social and political alternatives, communism first and foremost. These were disillusioned times where the neo liberal rule had taken over, bringing in its wake more social injustice, more individualism and more apathy. In other words, the crisis was now as much social or economic as it was moral and political, and the aim of this article will partly lie in evaluating how this context of escalating liberalism shaped and transformed the form and the scope of noir novels, radicalizing its discourse on urban crisis in comparison to its early models.

Set in London in the 1980s, the originality of Derek Raymond's *Factory Series*⁴ would thus lie in his theatrical and apocalyptic vision of the city as a metaphor for the social violence and marginalization brought by neo-liberal politics as well as in the atypical detective he chose as a protagonist. In this series of five novels published between 1984 and 1993 (one year before the writer's passing), crime almost always springs from the ruthless and competitive race for profit and ambition, the chaotic expansion of the city, the racial and social tensions brought forth by precariousness and forced segregation, all shaping the city into a modern urban Hell, embodying a state of extreme crisis both geographically and materially. With the *Factory Series*, Derek Raymond not only updates the representation of the decaying city as depicted in Victorian novels, such as Charles Dickens's novels for instance, but he also uses elements of contemporary noir novels. Such elements include the political and social commentary on neo-liberalism found in French neo-noir writers like Manchette or Daeninckx, to show the failure of post-war urban politics in the UK, which, despite its best efforts, made the city almost as fragmented and dehumanized as in Victorian times.

To guide us into this infernal landscape, the writer created the ideal antihero for a noir novel set in such times of turmoil: a post-modern detective deprived of a name, an identity or usual characterization, an unfathomable character that would only be known, throughout the series, as the Sergeant. Evolving in a city that he doesn't seem to understand anymore, a city the geographical, architectural, social or moral rules of which he no longer identifies with, the Sergeant finds his own way of protesting against this modern urban setting. Consistent with his

anonymity, he has chosen to remain, for his whole career, at the lowest position in the worst police department of London: the Department of Unexplained Deaths (located in an old “factory” that gives the series its title), a service that focuses on the gloomy murders of outcasts and lowlifes in what were at the time notorious (Stoke Newington) or abandoned (Battersea Park) areas of the city, cases that more often than not swiftly ended up at the bottom of the unsolved pile. But in the Sergeant’s perspective, not only do these cases matter, they also provide him with the ideal position to closely document an urban crisis, as he strives to give back a name and an identity to those who have been devoured by the pitiless neo-liberal city. For Derek Raymond, as we shall see, noir novels offer us both a front-row seat to and a possible way out of individualism, social segregation and systemic violence, all plagues of neo-liberalism.

I The “Disgusting” City: Hyperbole and Allegory

The city wasn’t pretty. Most of its builders had gone in for gaudiness. Maybe they had been successful at first. Since then the smelters whose brick stacks stuck up tall against a gloomy mountain to the south had yellow-smoked everything into uniform dinginess. The result was an ugly city of forty thousand people, set in an ugly notch between two ugly mountains that had been all dirtied up by mining⁵.

The opening of D. Hammett’s seminal first novel *Red Harvest* (1929) could retrospectively be read as a rulebook for the noir novel’s function as a social commentary on urban transformation and crisis: using the private eye as a focal point, it depicts the American city as a decaying urban sprawl entering a process of self-destruction.

London in D. Raymond’s noir novels is also painted as a city in topographical and material crisis, and the novels use the character of the detective as the same monadic point of panoramic perception. But they push such aesthetic representation of the city to a new point of abstraction, thus signalling how the modern city has come to rationalize and systematize such processes of destruction, isolation and segregation. The *Factory Series* could be seen as a commentary on how neo-liberalism pushed to a new extreme the process, described in its early stages in *Red Harvest*, of urban disintegration, motivated by the obsession of productivity and profitability and the growing importance of real estate speculation. In that sense, *The Factory Series* is both a continuation and a culmination of noir novels as a vehicle for social commentary, as it stages the city’s violent separation of races and classes and urge of systematic destruction and abandonment in a transparent and hyperbolic fashion. The genre of the noir novel, in that regard, constitutes an ideal point of entry into this decadent setting, as the detective offers a panoramic perception of London, navigating, for the benefit of his investigations, all of its social and topographical layers, including the ones that are usually and carefully left out of sight. As an anonymous hero unbothered by the rules of hierarchy and not interested in social elevation, the Sergeant becomes a lucid and quietly empathetic witness of the many types of violence undergone by the inhabitants of the modern city. This dark and cynical vision of a city in crisis and disintegration is all at once social, moral, architectural and geographical: neoliberalism transforms the modern city into an incoherent, disharmonious, inhumane landscape, a landscape that has lost any sense of dignity to turn into a place of injustice, individualism and ridicule.

The city is described on the path to losing its rational cohesion and visual harmony in a delusional race for profitability and efficiency, causing the prolifera-

tion of waste lands, abandoned buildings and brownfield sites. Such discourse is highlighted by hyperbolic descriptions showing a city literally collapsing in front of our eyes, the western suburbs of London shown through solemn images of fire, darkness and ruins as in the following passage from *How the Dead Live* (1986):

Sickening errors, democratically arrived at of course, lay either side of the road as I drove west out of London. Blocks of semi-abandoned streets made dead ends of effort where people who had tried to start something – anything – had been crushed by the dull, triumphant logic of the state. I crossed the demarcation lines of two ethnic groups at Swallowtail Lane; the Regal cinema loomed up in my lights, its façade blackened by fire. I passed a series of streets that stood for political convictions. [...] In further sad, narrow streets, beyond my car lights, half hidden by groups of old bangers with their front wheels up on the pavement, lay ruined three-storey houses that the council neither had the money to restore, nor corruption interest in pulling down. These were all dark – the power, the water cut off in them, life itself cut off there at this wrong end of winter. Yet life still did cling in them, I knew. Uncivilized, mad life; these rank buildings that had housed self-respecting families once were now occupied by squatters of any kind – the desperate last fugitives of a beaten, abandoned army, their dignity, rights and occupations gone, their hope gone, tomorrow gone⁶.

London is shown decimated by inhumane and pitiless politics that leaves it and its occupants agonizing, but the heavy-handed and overtly solemn nature of such a description also seems to ironically push the vision of a decaying London to an almost absurd extreme, as if the destruction and abandonment of the city were so violent the language of the noir novel itself had reached its limit.

Such radical and hyperbolic representation of the urban crisis is also reflected through the spectacular and emphasized depiction of class and race segregation. The Quadrant Pub, for instance, in *He Died with His Eyes Open* (1984), is an allegorical representation of urban society as a racial and social ghetto, tangibly but also quite abstractly embodying the injustices of a two-tier London.

I surveyed the lunchtime mob in the Quadrant. The advertising people with their flannels, crew-cuts and executive briefcases stood at the more elegant bar; next to them, but not speaking to them, was the rag-trade contingent over from Great Portland Street. Both armies were attended by secretaries who wittered blondely away at each other across tepid gin and tonics. [...] They ordered democratic halves of lager and talked shop, using well-rehearsed gestures and smiles, aping “The Upper Classes”, a new series that was being run on television by the company in which Lord Boughtham, the Foreign Secretary, held a controlling interest. My side of the pub was the cheap side, where the fruit machines, jukeboxes and villains were. It was crammed just now with Planet drivers from over the road swilling down Guinness and eating sausage, mash and peas at the lunch counter⁷.

The Quadrant becomes the localized and emblematic embodiment of a city that had been hermetically severed in two, without any hope of reconciliation; it points out a lack of balance and an economic separation visibly recreated in the geographical partition of the city’s symbolical places. The schematic and striking nature of such a setting also seems to give the detective a function that goes beyond that of a mere witness to this social crisis: he becomes a monadic “surveyor”, acutely aware of the divided nature of his city. He is both an observer and an analyst⁸.

His analysis of the city’s architectural and topographical crisis is rooted in a sense of a loss of morality that, once again, echoes but also radicalizes the disenchanting nature of the hard-boiled detective into an ironical and almost farcical discourse on decadence. London is seen as a city where moral decline is rooted in the loss of a sense of national and historical unity. Visual allegories as well as the depiction of a devaluation of national myth are used both to illustrate and exaggerate this loss. Through the Sergeant’s occasional touches of morbid and tongue-in-cheek

humour, the use of irony and allegory is a way to theatrically highlight such a loss of morality, once again using hyperbole to illustrate in a farcical manner the spinelessness and moral amnesia of modern London. Mirroring the humiliation and oblivious vulgarity of its occupants, the Henry of Agincourt Pub in *He Died with His Eyes Open* sees Henry V becoming the grotesque sign of a shabby and decrepit pub.

The pub had painted medieval wooden beams at the front, and the sign displayed the monarch after whom it was named. He was wearing a large crown, a doubtful piece of armour and an expression of quiet, or possibly drunken confidence, and was peering up the road as if he had just seen a lot of Frenchmen. Someone very thin with a pointed iron hat on stood humbly beside him, trying to get his bow and arrow to fire, his metal foot planted on the word BEER⁹.

In D. Raymond's noir novels, which focus heavily on murder as a result of a systemic violence and the general loss of a moral compass, the crisis becomes rooted in a licentiousness that is stimulated in the context of an individualist and petty neo-liberal society. Londoners have no choice but to play their part in this moral decay, under penalty of ostracism and social exclusion, a plague one is very familiar with when working at the Department of Unexplained Deaths. As D. Raymond once put it in his memoirs *The Hidden Files*, "we have the unpleasant feeling of having to do disgusting things, so we might as well build a society where one simply has to be disgusting"¹⁰.

I Apocalyptic City: The Fall of London

I walked down a brick path from terrace to terrace, followed along inside the fence and so out of the gates to where I had left my car under a pepper tree on the street. Thunder was crackling in the foothills now and the sky above them was purple-black. It was going to rain hard. The air had the damp foretaste of rain. I put the top up on my convertible before I started downtown¹¹.

This description of Marlowe's descending path to a Los Angeles threatened by the imminent coming of a storm in Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939) is one of many passages evoking a descent into an urban Hell. The image of the detective plunging into a city on the verge of apocalypse is once again largely elaborated on and radicalized by D. Raymond, whose novels frequently materialize such an intertext by transparently conjuring an eschatological discourse.

The Factory Series thus could be seen as a commentary on modern decadence that reads like a take on apocalyptic literature and eschatology¹², pushing the idea of urban crisis to a visual extreme. London is depicted as a giant and all-consuming beast, conveying powerful and apocalyptical images of urban decay, in a city left to the despicable actions and loose morals of its occupants, plagued by the internal violence and unleashed vice of a neo-liberal society, consumed by fire and in an advanced state of decomposition, like a swollen and sick body ready to burst.

The first novel in the series, *He Died with His Eyes Open*, seems to dramatically announce an imminent urban apocalypse never quite coming to its completion, like a half fulfilling prophecy leaving London doomed to eternally repeated destruction, violence and filth. The city is on the verge of catastrophe, but it is already the desolated and wild wasteland that comes after the disaster, both a pre- and post-apocalyptic setting. When the Sergeant visits the victim's place in the notorious neighbourhood of Romilly Place, he finds an abandoned and decimated sight, a place that has been forgotten and lost, systematically and methodically cleansed and dismantled by its occupants.

Staniland's room was one of the most putrid I ever saw. Romilly Place was off the Lewisham end of the Old Kent Road near the clock-tower; the houses were three-storey tenements and filthy. It was a dangerous bloody district too – what we call mixed area, a third unemployed skinhead, and two-thirds unemployed black. It was a cul-de-sac, and in the warmth of the spring evening the air was filled with screams as kids and teenagers raced round the wrecked cars that littered the pavement. There were about twenty houses, mostly with broken windows and vandalized front doors. Some idiot on the council had had the idea of putting a public callbox on the corner; it now contained no telephone, no glass and no door – a directory leaf or two skittered miserably about in the breeze. The house I had parked by had been gutted by fire; the front had been shored up with timber and there were sheets of corrugated iron where the windows had been¹³.

The Biblical undertones of such a passage is not meant to make of Romilly Place the location for a second Judgment Day: the novel paints London as a modern Babylon at the edge of a fall of almost Biblical proportions, the product of a social and economic context of precariousness and deprivation, in a neighbourhood decimated by social misery, racial tension and architectural mayhem.

The hyperbolic nature of such an apocalyptic vision of the modern city gives the series' first novel a post-modern aesthetic, constantly oscillating between a quite solemn and desperate atmosphere and a cynical detachment from it, where the doom and gloom become the subject of farce and irony, where the very real and violent horror it depicts is spectacularized and made into a simulacrum. The filth and decadence of the 84 Club in the same novel seems for instance almost staged and artificial, a grotesque magnification of reality that shows a city revelling in its own decay, blurring the line between actual horror and its obscene spectacle.

It was called the 84 Club because that was its street number in Crispian Road, on the south side of London Bridge. Derelict or bankrupt warehouses fronted the river; the area was scheduled to be bulldozed one day for new development, and then it would become posh. But I wondered if that would ever happen. [...] The place was got up as a horror museum, with décor done on the cheap. Plastic cobwebs were sprayed around where no spider would ever have had the idea, devils and monsters glowed with twenty-five-watt bulbs inside them, long white bones dangled from the ceiling, etcetera. The only thing that wasn't simulated was the damp. The company was mixed in there – black and white, like the whisky. It was a powerful blend, and I wondered if the villainous management knew how to handle it. I had an idea it did. I stood at the entrance, watching. The floor was packed solid; I smelled the hard liquor and sweat, sex, and one or two other things, such as grass¹⁴.

London is theatrically represented in a state of impending doom. In fact, the catastrophe seems so near that the hero even subconsciously anticipates it in *How The Dead Live* through a recurrent dream that shows him and his wife Edie trying to escape “a foreign city” that has fallen prey to inexplicable and irrational chaos. This oneiric sequence shows an ostensibly capitalist city as the place where social coherence and order end, orchestrating a scene of panic, but one among a crowd robbed of all vitality or drive, aimlessly wandering among the multitude, indifferent to one another, without solidarity or even, it seems, humanity. In many ways, this passage could be read as a modern reenactment of the Biblical episode of Judgment Day, only set in a modern city where “men in business suits” collapse under the weight of their own possessions.

I had a dream sometime in the night. My mad wife Edie and I were walking through the outskirts of a foreign city, going away from it. There was an atmosphere of terror and sadness everywhere, also an ominous silence broken only by the sound of shuffling feet. [...] People, thousands of them, were hurrying down a boulevard, all going in the same direction as ourselves. At fifty-yard intervals bodies were lying against the walls. A man in a business suit had collapsed under

a sack of cabbages; further on an old man in rags sprawled on a toppled heap of garbage cans; he was dying. A monk in a brown habit stood beside him, holding a syringe; near them stood a shabby woman in her forties, wringing her hands as the crowd went past her, repeating the same unintelligible phrase over and over¹⁵.

The detective becomes a Pythia-like figure, cursed with the terrible gift of foresight: the apocalyptic tone of the novels makes him the seer and the unwilling teller of an impending catastrophe that he himself both fears and fantasizes.

I The City of the Dead: Dehumanization and Deprivation

1644 West 54th Place was a dried-out brown house with a dried-out brown lawn in front of it. There was a large bare patch around a tough-looking palm tree. On the porch stood one lonely wooden rocker, and the afternoon breeze made the unpruned shoots of last year's poinsettias tap-tap against the cracked stucco wall. A line of stiff yellowish half-washed clothes jittered on a rusty wire in the side yard¹⁶.

The original hard-boiled novel, here illustrated by R. Chandler's *Farewell My Lovely* (1940), often uses landscape descriptions as a means to visually represent material deprivation and how liberal society was engaged in the process of quite literally stripping bare its most precarious members¹⁷.

But D. Raymond's novels expand such a discourse to man himself: doubling down on the metaphor, the figuration of a state of deprivation in modern London is often echoed by the representation of a literal or symbolical bareness, to a point where deprivation equals, in the textual language, dehumanization. Background characters are either zombies, animals, or dead bodies, in a deadly and ruthless setting that systematically shreds any drive of revolt to the point of suppressing their sense of identity, subjectivity or self-awareness: material deprivation now leads to physical and/or spiritual annihilation. The victims are nameless nobodies rejected by society¹⁸, and the murderers are animals abiding only to their vilest and most bestial impulses. The narrator himself is an anonymous man struggling not to let the system eat away at him and whose right to lead a conventional life is taken from him¹⁹. Modern London is the place where men and women get their humanity and vitality slowly or brutally drained from them, either from trauma, murder or resignation.

With its telling title, *He Died with His Eyes Open* invites us from its opening lines to see the city as it should be seen – that is, quite literally through a dead man's eyes²⁰. The first eyes on which the narration chooses to focus are inert, swept away by the floods and unleashed elements, and yet they remain also painfully opened on the horror of an infernal London:

It was pelting with rain on an east wind when I got there. I found Bowman from Serious Crimes standing over the corpse with a torch, talking to the two coppers off the beat who had been called by the man who had stumbled on him. Water ran off the brim of Bowman's trilby, and dribbled down the helmets of the wooden tops to end up in their collars. Bowman handed me the torch without a word and I bent over the dead man. His eyes were open – one only just – the surfaces peppered with the grit that an east wind hurls at you off London streets²¹.

The series' second novel, *The Devil's Home on Leave* (1984), offers us a perfect example of this association between material deprivation, physical bareness and psychological distress, in a descriptive passage going from the depiction of an empty flat to the spectacle of a mad man baring his chest, both staging the city's same pitiless process of systematic devouring and devitalization.

I was interviewing Klara McGruder in her Stoke Newington flat. It was in a state of painful squalor. Through the kitchen doorway I saw piles of dead bottles; part of her unmade bed showed opposite and the floor beside it was littered with dog-ends. [...] On the lino-covered table between us a half-eaten plate of sardines wallowed in their oil; an empty whisky bottle towered above them. Outside it was raining bitterly across a barren park where the grass had been trampled away by the aimless feet of the unemployed until the ground was just mud. I got up and went to look through the rain. Below me a man spread his rags to show his chest as if it were a really fine day. His red lips gaped open inside his curly beard the mouth closed only when it encountered the neck of the bottle that he kept picking up from the bench beside him. Rain ran over him, sliding down his ribs, subtle as a blackmailer²².

The flat's description insists upon the extreme bareness of the place through images of systematic emptiness. But the decay of the inside is then extended to the outside exemplified both by the setting and the shell of a man at the centre of it, a man that is pure body over spirit, a mere physical presence only guided by his animal impulses, as chaotic and disorderly as the buildings surrounding him. No identity, no drive, no name, no humanity – he is the very image of an alienated man, insane and reduced solely to his bodily and biological functions.

The antagonist in the *Factory Series*' most famous novel, *I Was Dora Suarez* (1990) is a savage and axe-wielding psychopath who competes with the Sergeant, throughout the book, as its main narrative voice. This dissonant narrative voice is a way to penetrate the drives of an essentially marginalized man. The underlying idea behind this narrative device seems to allow us, finally, after three novels that danced around it, to penetrate the mind of a “left-behind”, to borrow a phrase dear to D. Raymond himself in his *memoirs*²³. The portrait of Dora Suarez's killer seizes at its term the process of dehumanization initiated by an inhumane society: a murderer no longer driven by love, vengeance, or even greed, but a wild and demented amalgam of physical urges and animal manifestations. The novelist extensively describes the insane wandering of his roaming serial killer, who is living in the dilapidated premises of a disused factory in an abandoned industrial area of London. Interestingly, his murderous insanity is not the result of a psychoanalytically analysed mental unbalance, or justified through a personal story of which he is deprived of anyway: without a past, without a name, without a real motive, schizophrenic and assuming several identities, he becomes the human reflection of an abandoned and internally destroyed and decadent city, revelling without any self-consciousness in its own filth and monstrosity, and swollen by its own wastes and dejections.

There was no light or water in the place but that didn't matter, he wasn't civilized. He very seldom needed water, and what he loathed above all was light. Where he could fold into himself and stay suspended like a bat during such little ease as he knew was in the dark, and there was plenty of that here. Only a far-off streetlight diffused some orange glow through a fog a hundred yards away where Lovelock Road joined College Hill, and the set of traffic lights there snapped regularly on and off. Yes, the squat would do till the council meddlers came round for a shuft, but that wouldn't be tomorrow [...]. As well as the blood and the seepage from last night's ejaculation he had shit himself lavishly in his sleep, a sloppy, yellow liquid. Having spent a while burying his face in them, he folded the knickers up and put them carefully to one side on top of a stack of others. [...] He wasn't a clean person in any sense of the word; he was absolutely connected to his bodily smells as though they alone proved to him, for want of other evidence, that he existed²⁴.

In a cruel, violent and vulgar modern city, the killer is the image of the abject man, the embodiment of the uncivilized creature, the personification of urban decadence: a man without dignity, self-consciousness or empathy, and without

anything to drive his actions but his most violent and animal impulses. His own filth and defilements are the only proof left of his own existence²⁵. Left on the side of the road by a society deprived of any sense of community or solidarity, violence and depravity are his only means to assert his own individuality.

I Repopulating London: the sacrificial detective

And yet among the faceless masses some names still surface as well as voices. In *I Was Dora Suarez*, a third narrative voice slowly unfolds: that of the victim, through the reading of her diary by the Sergeant²⁶. In *He Died with His Eyes Open*, the most resonant name is the victim's name, Staniland, whose life we discover thanks to the Sergeant's repeated listening to his diary tapes. These moments see the detective willingly give up his position as narrator to make way for other voices, voices that were used to being smothered and unheard, and that never got to say their piece before it was too late. In D. Raymond's work, the noir novel thus becomes a means, through the personal sacrifice of his hero's own name and social ambition, to give these silent and unknown victims the right to their own name and voice. In *He Died with His Eyes Open*, Staniland regains the right to a personal history and depth of character, and is offered empathy through the Sergeant's literal unearthing of his voice by way of the tapes he saved from oblivion. In this regard, D. Raymond's novels are consistent with Tzvetan Todorov's remarks: the story of the victim merges with the story of the investigation. D. Raymond intensifies this narrative device by occasionally merging the narrative voices of his novels together, creating a sense of confusion. The detective's purpose is not a fleeting sense of justice, but the unveiling and memorial preservation of one's hopes, fears and fragilities, of "the core" of what makes him, and million others, in spite of the dehumanizing process of urban life, "people".

That fragile sweetness at the core of people – if we allowed that to be kicked, smashed and splintered, then we had no society at all of the kind I felt I had to uphold. I had committed my own sins against it, out of transient weakness. But I hadn't deliberately murdered it for its pitiful membrane of a little borrowed money, its short-lived protective shell – and that was why, as I drank some more beer and picked up the next of Staniland's tapes, I knew I had to nail the killers²⁷.

In a context of permanent crisis, of moral, social and economic turmoil, the story of the Sergeant dares to ask how one could still positively inhabit a city. In the face of a ruthless society, the Sergeant nonetheless presents us with the faint possibility of rekindling a spark of altruism and vitality in the modern city. The Sergeant's recalling of a vocation call of sorts in *The Devil's Home on Leave* reminds the reader of the importance, more than ever in this urban context, to recreate a sense of community²⁸. By learning the name of the victim in one of the first cases he ever had to work on, he was granting someone who had been, quite literally, left on the side of the road (her corpse found by the highway on a rainy day) a right to be, at the very least, remembered as a woman who had been a part of the urban community, and whose personal story was accounted for.

Nobody was ever caught for her, and Mrs Mayhew made four lines in the Watford Observer. But that's why, when they started Unexplained Deaths, I was one of the first to join; and that's why I stayed on as a copper, just when I was thinking it was a dog's life and had considered jacking it in. Mrs Mayhew, I saw on her papers, had a pretty Christian name. I remember it: Jonquil²⁹.

Paradoxically, no one understands better than the Sergeant the necessity of possessing one's own name. Modern cities are places of ego that lead to a loss of identity, places of ambition that lead to self-destruction, places of individualism that lead to normalization. So the Sergeant chooses to confront the urban crisis by willingly giving up his identity and his self in the faint hope of helping the outcasts of his cases find theirs, by orchestrating his own disappearance to restore the memory of all who disappeared anonymously in the city, by accepting marginalization and damnation for the sake of an unlikely but possible salvation for all the nameless and faceless modern citizens. The price to pay for such a sacrifice is solitude and utter isolation, but at least it is one the protagonist decided for himself: the implication for positively representing the down-trodden is to become himself the ultimate outcast.

But I feel nearly alone now, though I stand for my sick and dead, I believe. There are times when I feel alone in the face of our society, its hatred and madness, its despair and violence. I feel the edge of the precipice with every step I take and have to be most particular how I tread; the path isn't solid, and under it is the mist and that vile slide towards a bottomless death. I am a minor figure for whom no god waits. The state that pays me laughs at me; my own people at work find me absurd³⁰.

Sixty years after D. Hammett's *Continental Op* (1923), the originality of the *Factory Series* is thus to stage, through the Sergeant's role as a nameless noir hero, not an iconoclast mythification of the detective in the face of urban crisis as a re-enactment of the figure of the conquering frontiersman facing the wild³¹, but a selfless sacrifice that becomes, in a neo-liberal society, the ethical condition of his attempt at success.

I Conclusion

Derek Raymond offers in his *Factory Series* an original take on the hard-boiled detective's critical observation of the modern city. Exacerbating its visual and symbolical representation of urban crisis to reset it in a neo-liberal London where individualism, segregation and precariousness are pushed to an extreme, he shows how a noir novel for modern times has to radicalize its discourse through hyperbole and allegory, using the hero's monadic and panoramic perspective to stage a decaying and apocalyptic city. London in the series is seen at the end of a dehumanizing capitalist process that leaves its inhabitants in utter destitution to the point where its numerous outcasts are either victims or murderers: the experience of the modern citizen is one of ostracism, of moral and physical depravation, that almost entirely erases the possibility of creating a sense of solidarity. In such a dire context, the author's uncharacteristic detective is forced to turn the cliché of his disenchanting solitude upside down: taking a stance opposite to an apparent misanthropic retreat, the Sergeant's refusal to play by society's rules of hierarchy and identification becomes the last hope for the persistence of an urban community, as he consents to sacrifice his name, his social ambitions and his personal history for the sake of the down-trodden, so that their lives and violent deaths would not go forever "unexplained". •

- ¹ See note 3: Manchette Jean-Patrick, *Chroniques*, Paris, Rivages Noir, 2003 [1996].
- ² The exact quote, found in Raymond Chandler's 1944 essay (originally published in *The Atlantic Monthly*) "*The Simple Art Of Murder*", is as follows: "Hammett took murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it into the alley."
- ³ Manchette Jean-Patrick, *Chroniques*, *op. cit.*, p. 57 : « Le polar cause d'un monde déséquilibré, donc labile, appelé donc à tomber et à passer. Le polar est la littérature de la crise. Pas étonnant qu'il reprenne vie ces temps derniers. »
- ⁴ Derek Raymond was born Robin William Arthur Cook in 1931, but in the beginning of the 1980's, the success of the American author of medical novels Robin Cook drove him to choose D. Raymond as his pen name. All of the editions referenced in this essay refer to the author as Derek Raymond, therefore this name will be used for all occurrences. In France, the collection Folio Policier, which is the sole French editor for the *Factory Series*, still refers to him as Robin Cook.
- ⁵ Hammett Dashiell, *Red Harvest*, London, Orion, 2012 [1929], pp. 1-2.
- ⁶ Raymond Derek, *How The Dead Live*, London, Serpent's Tail, 2007 [1986], pp. 24-25.
- ⁷ Raymond Derek, *He Died with His Eyes Open*, London, Abacus, 1984, p.126.
- ⁸ Thus, the Sergeant is part of a long tradition of detectives characterised by their scopic power, a notion that was mostly prevalent in the nineteenth century, where the detective was associated with the biblical figure of Asmodeus.
- ⁹ Raymond Derek, *He Died with His Eyes Open*, *op. cit.*, p.30.
- ¹⁰ Raymond Derek, *The Hidden Files*, London, Brown Little & Cie, 1992, p.87.
- ¹¹ Chandler Raymond, *The Big Sleep*, in *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*, London, Penguin Classics, 2000 [1939], p.16.
- ¹² See for instance in that regard Pike David L., *Metropolis On The Styx: The Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture*, 1800-2001, New York, Cornell University Press, 2007.
- ¹³ Raymond Derek, *He Died with His Eyes Open*, *op.cit.*, p. 60.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- ¹⁵ Raymond Derek, *How The Dead Live*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
- ¹⁶ Chandler Raymond, *Farewell My Lovely*, in *The Big Sleep and other novels*, *op.cit.*, p. 182.
- ¹⁷ On that subject, we could refer, among many others, to Jean-Pierre Deloux's study on Dashiell Hammett's work, and particularly his novel *Red Harvest*, which famously depicts an imaginary city named Poisonville: "Poisonville is an extreme case, the spectacular outcome of a rotten situation coupled with the political laxism of citizens who gave up on their democratic ideals". Deloux Jean-Pierre, *Dashiell Hammett: Underworld USA*, Paris, Éditions du Boucher, 1994.
- ¹⁸ In *He Died with His Eyes Open*, the victim Staniland was an unemployed alcoholic living in isolation. In *I Was Dora Suarez*, Dora was a young and dying prostitute who had AIDS.
- ¹⁹ The Sergeant frequently recalls throughout the Series his wife Edie's descent into madness, which ends with her killing their young son by throwing him under a bus. In *The Devil's Home On Leave* (Ch.7), the detective goes to an asylum out of town to visit Edie.
- ²⁰ On the importance of corpses and scopic power in detective novels, see Bell David F., "Reading Corpses: interpretative violence", *SubStance*, 27:2-86, "Reading Violence", 1998, pp. 92-105.
- ²¹ Raymond Derek, *He Died with His Eyes Open*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.
- ²² Raymond Derek, *The Devil's Home on Leave*, London, Serpent's Tail, 2007 [1984], p. 134.
- ²³ Raymond Derek, *The Hidden Files*, London, Brown, 1992, p. 87.
- ²⁴ Raymond Derek, *I Was Dora Suarez*, London, Serpent's Tail, 2008 [1990], pp. 26-27.
- ²⁵ This could be a play on the « trace » and the paradigm of the index as a key-element of the noir novel, as Carlo Ginzburg has analysed it, for instance in « Signes, traces, pistes : racine d'un paradigme de l'indice », *Débat*, 6, 1980, pp. 3-44.
- ²⁶ The motif of the voice of the victim has been identified as a key motif in detective fiction as early as in, for instance, Tzvetan Todorov's « Typologie du roman policier » in *Poétique de la Prose*, Paris, Seuil, 1980, pp. 9-19.
- ²⁷ Raymond Derek, *He Died with His Eyes Open*, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

²⁸ This aching for a renewed sense of urban community is actually a common trait of post-modern noir novel set in a neo-liberal city: in that sense, D. Raymond's work could be compared to the works of such major writers of the same period such as Leonardo Padura or Manuel Vasquez Montalban. It is one of the ways in which the urban noir novels of the latter 20th century distinguish themselves from the original hard-boiled novels and from the noir novels of the 19th century.

²⁹ Raymond Derek, *The Devil's Home on Leave*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³⁰ Raymond Derek, *How The Dead Live*, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

³¹ "In effect, the hardboiled hero reenacts an American mythos. Did not the first unhappy European-colonists and their descendants, the frontiersmen, depart their corrupt societies to attack and dominate men and nature? By so doing they hoped to purify themselves and establish a higher order of civilization. Alienation, violence, and redemption characterized their movements until the continent was settled. The tough detective hero in his claustrophobic urban setting ontologically rehearses the same pattern in his narration of events." Edward Margolies, *Which Way Did He Go: The Private Eye in Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Chester Himes and Ross MacDonald*, New York, Holmes & Meier, 1981, pp. 15-16.