The city and its representation in literature and the arts have been the focus of numerous publications in recent years¹. Such an interest speaks to our ever-growing sense of urbanity which in turn is itself intrinsically linked to our sense of modernity. This connection was pinpointed by Walter Benjamin in his collection of essays Arcades in which the German philosopher is struck by the relation between the city and the novel which he sees as the expression of the experience of modernity, or, to be more precise, of the shock (and the crisis) of modernity². In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution brought many a transformation amongst which a massive demographic movement from the countryside to urban spaces in European countries as well as in America. As the city was booming, so a new genre emerged, that of the novel as Ian Watts notes³. The novel and the city thus seem to have been linked from the start, the novel becoming the voice of the chaos reigning in the streets, forging what Robert Alter calls “an intimate relation”⁴. In the novel, the city is no longer merely a space but turns into a place. The distinction is borrowed from cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan for whom space denotes the environment that surrounds us while place is constructed as and is the centre of set values influenced by culture, society and memory⁵. For David Lodge, the birth of a sense of place in the representation of cities in the novel starts with Charles Dickens⁶. Dickens is perhaps the Victorian figure the most in tune with changes in the city: his works contributed to shape and map the city, so much so that his name was turned into an adjective to describe the uncanny yet sublime squalor of the transforming city. The following collection of essays not only wishes to address the representation of the city in novels, but questions the notion of a city in crisis related to a certain sense or experience of modernity.

Novelists and thinkers have been struck by the topos of the unintelligible city which, in the nineteenth century, gave rise to a sense of threat, as a sort of alienation. For Alexandra Warwick, by the end of the century the city has become its Other, dominantly figured as labyrinth, jungle, swamp and ruin, and described as blackened, rotten, shadowed and diseased. Most importantly perhaps, this city of dreadful night is populated by others who threaten to overrun or undermine the fabric of the imperial metropolis⁷.

A strong testimony to this alienation is the emergence and strength of an urban Gothic which displaces the uncanny and othering settings of Catholic Italy, Spain or Eastern Europe towards cities, London and Paris in particular. Another response gave birth to the detective novel which, as Carlo Salzani has it, plays on bourgeois anxieties while trying to make the city intelligible⁸. The evolution of these two urban genres reveals two ways of being in the city in the nineteenth century,
opposing two figures, Asmodeus and the flâneur. Asmodeus would be on the side of cartographers. The relation between the city and cartography has been the focus of numerous studies, the most noteworthy being Franco Moretti’s Atlas of the European Novel.

For a few decades, geography studies have been questioning the relation between representation and knowledge. Taking as a starting point Joanne Sharp’s drawing “Topographical Survey” (1993), James Duncan and David Ley underline the close relation uniting knowledge and power while reminding us of the importance of the dominating role of the gaze which is inherent to any act of representation. As their study suggests, the gap between geography, which we tend to include within the field of so-called “hard sciences”, and literature, this time part of so-called “soft sciences”, is not as wide as it might seem at first sight. Indeed, the “crisis of representation” that shook ethnography in the 1980s has led numerous geographers towards the side of hermeneutics as is the case of Duncan and Ley:

What this model of academic work suggests is not a mirroring of the extra-textual within the text, but rather re-presentation, the production of something which did not exist before outside the text. This process of academic production is essentially disruptive of the extra-textual world.

This model is of interest for literary studies since it interrogates the way the world is represented in texts thereby questioning the role of interpretation as a selective process: “Both the inter-textual and extra-textual fields [...] [play off and] define the possibilities of interpretation. As such, the world within the text is a partial truth, a transformation of the extra-textual world, rather than something wholly different from it.” Re-presenting a space thanks to a map or text therefore always entails a form of deciphe-
But it truly is in contemporary literature that the representation of the city in crisis becomes a ubiquitous topos hence its centrality in postmodern or postcolonial works: “[cities] may be unknowable, or construct specific forms of mood and subjectivity; they both break down communities or create the conditions for multi-culturalism; they are marked by a distinctive architecture which they nonetheless exceed, and they produce specific spaces.” Examples of these portrayals abound amongst which are Angela Carter’s neo-Gothic jungle of New York in *The Passion of the New Eve*, Peter Ackroyd’s generically hybrid biography of London, or Don DeLillo’s painting of New York after September 11, 2001. The city thus seems to locate the subject, an aspect which is at the centre of the second part of this collection of essays.

This issue is also of paramount importance for postcolonial studies. Indeed, postcolonial writers appropriate the Western city as illustrate the fragmented memories of Bombay in Salman Rushdie’s novels or the imaginary London of V. S. Naipaul in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987): “The London I knew or imaginatively possessed was the London I had got from Dickens. It was Dickens – and his illustrators – who gave me the illusion of knowing the city.” The Western city is thus mediated to former colonies and the encounter with the actual place comes as a shock because of a gap or a discrepancy that contradicts expectations. Postcolonial encounters with the city thus seem to point out an ontological and/or epistemological crisis in relation to the city: the city never is what it first seemed to be. The city is thus considered as a fascinating subject and is evidence of an ontological crisis of the subject who tries to reconstruct his/her identity thanks to pieces of maps, postcards, or other materials. The (post)colonial city is marked by the empire: Elizabeth Ho notes the haunting presence of Queen Victoria’s statues in the city-scape of Asian cities such as Hong-Kong, underlining the idea that the city may also be the locus of dominance in these ambivalent site of memory. Furthermore, postcolonial and postmodern representations of cities and, to be more accurate, of metropolises, beg the question of global cities, cities the size of which creates an uncanniness surpassing the Gothic feel of nineteenth-century London.

However, the city is as much shaped by writers as it is by politics, as can be seen through the effect of Thatcher on London which strengthened the gap between social classes and races or, more recently, the architectural changes resulting from the organization of Olympic games, creating new spaces and reinventing already existing ones which all echo, to a certain extent, the sanitation movements led by Chadwick in London and Haussmann in Paris in the nineteenth century. Recently, “Yellow Jacket” riots in the streets of Paris that started in 2018 have also changed the relation to the city and one can notice that a literature about these changes has already started to emerge. Today as in the late eighteenth century, the city seems to have always been the repository of social claims that it self-generated. Writers are prompt to react to such changes and policies as can be seen in the last section of this collection which focuses in part on the interrelation between politics and urban architectures.

Last, but not least, changes happening in the contemporary city will be questioned, be they the consequence of natural or human catastrophes (hurricanes, terrorism, wars, nuclear accidents, etc.). One of the first responses to catastrophe is often the reinforcement of surveillance (for example the *Patriot Act*, October 2001), with a colossal impact on the way people apprehend the city. For instance, one can question the changes linked to
the effects of the increase in surveillance following terrorist attacks (9.11 in New York, 7.7 in London), addressing among others the questions of the circulation in the city, or the importance of technology. At a time when the city is submitted to terrorist attacks and some of its inhabitant feel no longer safe, literature helps apprehend the phenomenon and reclaim the cityscape. The gaze of the Other and the gaze of the camera participate in reshaping the city, which has now to be apprehended as a new surveilled space. Regaining an apparent normality after the shock of the apocalypse, the city goes through different mutations that make it an unfamiliar and unwelcoming place. Recently the city has been marked by an eerie emptiness, due to the Covid19 pandemic and the decision of several countries to declare lockdown. Cities have first been emptied out before reimagining their circulation; the flâneur has become obsolete and replaced by queuers. This question will not be tackled in this issue, but it reminds us of the fragility of the city.

Thus, the global cities dealt with in this work are confronted with crises that take different shapes, going from a turning point to a catastrophe, or even the apocalypse. Crises are understood here not only as decisive moments, but also as a crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending. In the novels under study, crises are social or political, but they all focus on the city as global entity. Crises sometimes turn into catastrophes, in that they operate both as a beginning and an end, allowing a remapping of the city. For Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre and Chantal Thomas, “[w]riting about catastrophes […] interrogates the duration of civilisations, especially the one we live in […]. Writing can draw a link between past and present disasters which may prevent future ones from happening […].” And indeed, going from crises to catastrophe to the apocalypse, the authors of this collection explore new ways of reading the city in troubled times, in a timespan going from the 19th to the 21st century.

We are honoured to present the work of young researchers who focus their research on the city in crisis, a topos which has been present in novels from picaresque adventures in Molière’s *Moll Flanders* to the fragmented vision given by Zadie Smith in *NW*, without forgetting the representation of revolution in Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*. The papers of the following issue not only tackle the various ways in which the city is represented in fiction but also tap into issues linked to modernity and so-called progress which, in a domino effect, raises issues about identity and our being in the world.

In a first part, Flora Benkhodja and Julien Campagna offer ways of deciphering the city. The labyrinth is at the centre of Flora Benkhodja’s paper which offers an original take on one of Robert Louis Stevenson’s collaborative work, *The Wrecker* (1892), which tells of Loudon Dodd’s adventures in Paris. Benkhodja investigates the palimpsestic construction of the city as Dodd’s experience of the city is shaped by both his readings of Balzac and the slumming trope that emerges with prince al Rashid in the *Arabian Nights*. Benkhodja argues that Stevenson thus uses literary “lieux communs” to better debunk and parody them and thereby teasing the reader with a sense of anxiety. Indeed, as Dodd gets lost in his hotel, the central focus of Benkhodja’s argument, architecture turns into a claustrophobic and labyrinthic space, a nonsensical maze of stairs reminiscent of Dante and Piranesi.

Hellish images of the city pervade Derek Raymond’s last noir fiction series, *The Factory Series*, on which Julien Campagna focuses. Following from Jean-Pierre Manchette’s idea that noir fiction is “literature for times of crisis”, Campagna looks at London from the viewpoint of the Sergeant, the anonymous detective of the series.
Campagna’s main contention is that Raymond’s noir fiction responds to the social, economic and political crisis of the 1980s by giving birth to “a post-modern detective deprived of a name, an identification or characterisation" to parallel the way in which the city has become unfathomable. For Campagna, Thatcher’s politics led to a loss of solidarity and community which resulted in more racial and social segregation which in Raymond’s novel “doomed to eternally repeated destruction, violence and filth". The city thus turns into a “cemetery of hopes", an urban Hell from which the urban killer emerges, an “abject man” or “human reflection of an abandoned and internally destroyed and decadent city, revelling without any self-consciousness in its filth and monstrosity." "

In a second part, urban and identity crises are explored, and the city is depicted as the locus of a quest for identity. As Karolina Golimowska reminds us, “[t]here is [...] a strong relation of interdependence between an individual and the city which influences the construction and identification of the ‘self’.” Building one’s self is strongly linked to the geographical space and characteristics of the city where one grew up. This link is explored in Isabelle Le Pape’s paper. Taking an interest in Jeanette Winterson’s novels *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011), she shows how the city of Manchester, which played a huge part in the childhood of the author, embodies the quest for identity of the tortured teenager. The trauma experienced by the young woman has a powerful connection to the city, which appears through the remembering of the riots of the working class during the nineteenth century.

As identity builds itself through the changes of the city, it becomes clear that several authors choose to depict a malleable city, transforming and evolving through times which turns into a place of revelation in the biblical sense. This is what Maelle Jeanniard du Dot scrutinizes in her article “The Mutations of the City in Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West*”. Not only does she analyse how Mohsin Hamid’s narratives depict the city as a place of encounter, but also how the narratives interact with the city, not as a centre of power or a mere backdrop, but as a lens through which the contemporary world can be grasped. This leads her to discuss Hamid’s aesthetics of the shifting gaze, which unfolds through the perspective of migrant characters and playful narrative voices. Relying on the description of light and darkness in the city, the trope of anamorphosis calls upon the reader’s own understanding of what being a contemporary means, and questions Giorgio Agamben’s definition of the contemporary as “[...] struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time.” Like the unnamed city in which *Exit West* initially takes place, the contours of those cities can only temporarily be drawn and are always subject to transformation in narratives.

Finally, Charlotte Arnaoutou and Héloïse Thomas take us beyond the city, in that they deal with dystopic cities, post-apocalyptic cities, or cities as battlefields. As Christian Gutleben and Marie-Luise Kohlke observe: “Writing about cities, or rather writing cities, necessitates a figurative language and, inevitably, the resort to tropological discourse.” Such tropes are the city as labyrinth, Hell or palimpsest. The last part of this collection concerns the city as a destroyed place, engaging with these baffling labyrinths and loss of clear landmarks.

Héloïse Thomas argues that cities in twenty-first-century literature highlight the ways in which the apocalypse is embedded in North American spatial configurations. North American cities are perpetually in crisis: they stage grandeur and decay on a transna-
tional scale, and call for a redefinition of what it means to be human. They also contain archaeological layers of history, as with a palimpsest, and embody the need to narrativize the past into History: as such, they reveal that the apocalypse is not a final, future event, but one that has already happened and is integral to the national constructions to which those cities belong. In this perspective, Thomas offers close readings of Karen Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* (1997)⁴⁴, Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011)⁴⁵, Cathy Park Hong’s *Dance Dance Revolution and Engine Empire* (2007)⁴⁶, and Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* (2014)⁴⁷. These novels and narrative poem sequences, all anchored in the aftermath of the apocalypse, provide insight into how the modernity of the new millennium positions cities as prime sites to dismantle and reconfigure personal and national identities. The representation of cities in twenty-first-century literature in the US reflects broader concerns about the effectiveness of ‘apocalypse’ as a viable tool to think through the major transformations that historical consciousness has undergone over the past decades in the country. That is, cities, as heterogeneous and highly unstable spaces, that could even be characterized as monstrous, materialize our ever-evolving relationship to History. They materialize the evolution of inequalities based on race, gender, class, etc. through architecture and urban development policies, they materialize the process of turning the past into History. North American cities, and in particular US cities, are post-apocalyptic in the sense that they accumulate the material marks of previous apocalypses that have congealed into History.

Finally, Charlotte Arnautou offers to focus on a dystopic fable, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904)⁴⁸, a fiction written by G.K. Chesterton. Arnautou thus reminds us that Chesterton is, above all, one of London’s writers alongside Dickens and Peter Ackroyd. She argues that Chesterton offers an intimate commentary on modernity as Chesterton’s imagination is shaped by the city and its transformation in the late 19th century so that London is no mere setting but “un fabuleux organisme vivant” (“a fabulous living organism”)⁴⁹. What is at stake in her reading of Chesterton is the way in which the city turns into a battlefield opposing a kind of modernity that sets humanity aside to preserve order against a kind of modernity in which humans can resistdemise...
5 Tuan Yi-Fu, Sense and Place: The Perspective Experience, Minneapolis, Minnesota; London, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 4-5.
9 See on this Estelle Murail (On the one hand, there is the all-encompassing aerial viewpoint of the map-makers and city planners, which renders the city legible and comprehensible, which one might compare to the gaze of Asmodeus, the omniscient devil. On the other hand, there is the walker’s perception of space at ground-level which inevitably remains illegible and has to be apprehended through a rhetoric of walking. Many urban narratives of the period adopt both types of gazing, and the omnipresence of both Asmodeus and the flâneur in urban discourse seems to be a symptom of this ideal of transparency.) In ‘The Flâneur’s Scopic Power Or the Victorian Dream of Transparency’, Cahiers Victoriens et Édouardiens, n°77, 2013, [accessed 15 March 2018], http://journals.openedition.org/cve/252, p. 3.
11 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Op. cit. p.10: “The reader (by reordering the relationship between the text, the extra-textual and the intra-textual) will produce a different interpretation of the text than that which the author intends, thereby extending the hermeneutic cycle.”
17 Joyce James, Ulysses, Mineola, New York, Dover Publications, 2009 [1922].
26 On this, see for instance Lynda Nead's Victorian Babylon op. cit. as well as Louis Chevalier, Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses, Paris, Perrin, 2007, [1958].
28 Merriam Webster Dictionary.
35 Id. p.82.
36 Ibid., p.34.
37 Ibid., p.37.