



Les Polarophiles Tranquilles



BULLETIN DE LIAISON N°5

MARS 2005

FREDERIC DARD, ONCE MORE !

By Thierry Cazon

Traduction Henri Krasnopolski

For the theater, Frédéric Dard has adapted some successful authors of police stories to demonstrate his capacities as an adapter but also his easiness in all writing fields. (The mishaps of his strategy were the subject of previous Bulletins des Polarophiles)

This author with such a complex personality, could not have concluded his career without having, at least one time, published a book with "Serie Noire" which, at this time, was the ultimate recognition for the authors of the kind.

You should read or re-read "*La Maladie De Chooz*" (Chooz's Sickness) published in 1966, signed Michael Maltravers and re-edited in 1983 by Edition Carré Noir.

A close examination of the text leads to, without doubt, credit it to Frédéric Dard: his lively little music resounds in our heads while the release of endorphin is activated by his easy and dazzling writing.

Our author is definitively a great writer: his frame of mind, his style, his peculiar way to tackle the spy stories are found there.

We are quite lucky to have available for comparison seven novels published under Frédéric Charles' signature but acknowledged by Frédéric Dard and re-edited as "*My Spy Stories*"

"*La Maladie de Chooz*" went unnoticed when issued by "Série Noire" (mainly devoted to police stories) because it was classified "Espionage". For this reason, the critic, probably confused by the sub-category of this publication, remained silent. (Are spy stories too popular to be criticized ?)

This title is a political fiction. Dard is more preoccupied by the description of the terror mechanism caused by a nuclear blackmail than the fate of his main character who, by a narrow margin, avoids many hardly credible adventures but the author does not care..

This book is the fourth and last one featuring Merry Pontus. The first three, "*Allo, la Bombe*"

(Hello, the Bomb), “*Merry Pontus trouve un cheveu*” (Merry Pontus finds a hair) and “*On a Bonne Mine*” (We look well) were part of Robert Laffont 's collection “Agent Secret” (Secret Agent). “*La Maladie de Chooz*” had been announced to be also published in this collection

How all this happened ?

Dard had been in contact with Marcel Duhamel (1900-1977, founder of « Serie Noire » collection) and J.H. Chase (American, London born 1906-1985) to adapt « *No Orchid For Miss Blandish* » to the theater (See Bulletins des Polarophiles N° 1, 2, 3 and 4). The human relations between these persons were made of complicity, absolute confidence and a necessary discretion.

I have sought to interview Madame Marcel Duhamel but unfortunately she refused and the thread is now definitely lost since she passed away.

A polarophile friend, amateur and connoisseur of Dard's oeuvre, draw my attention on Alain Moury published also by Robert Laffont.

He sent me the following text that I reveal here in full: 1959 Alain Moury: “ *L’Affaire d’ Une Nuit*”, Robert Laffont

“For more than two years, “L’Affaire d’Une Nuit” (the Business of a Night) gave troubles to many minds mainly because it has a depressive and existentialist flavor. Published as a first work (was the author aimed for a literary reward?), it portrays three characters : Zagli, Mommessin and Odette. The latter and her husband Zagli are going through some kind of crisis when they meet a Zagli's old friend, Mommessin who will wander in the night with Odette before going to bed with her.

Curiously, the characters' names will undergo some changes... 1960, a year later, the book is re-edited with a cover illustrated with the photographs extracted from the film adaptation. Then, Zagli becomes Darau, Mommessin is now Mommezain and Odette is renamed Yvone (In 1960, the Information Technology was inexistent and page 65, Yvonne remains Odette). We can wonder why the names are not those used in the film released simultaneously in which Zagli/Darau becomes Antoine (played by Pierre Mondy), Mommessin/Mommezain is Michel interpreted by Roger Hanin and Odette or Yvonne in the re-edition is renamed Christine (Pascale Petit. obtained the part)

*I took the liberty to play with words as follows: in the 50's, the slang word for young lady was “**môme**” (my girl).*

*When she get married, the “**môme**” becomes a “**dame**” (lady). If we substitute the first syllable, **Mommezain** becomes **Damaisin**. Add Odette as a first name and we obtain the maiden name of Frédéric Dard's first wife.*

After this psychological but non police story, from 1964 to 1966, Alain Moury gave Robert Laffont six finely spy stories that, except the last one, were published with a new collection directed by George Langelaan (British, Paris born 1908-1972), a former special secret agent and Graham Greene 's friend.

Alain Moury will have the honor tp be the first published in this collection..

The last spy story, “Le Mexicain Roux” (the red-haired Mexican) was released with the collection “Week-End” dedicated to bestsellers.

Is that not paradoxical to see a beginner like Alain Moury to show an absolute mastery along seven novels when fifteen years of hard work will have been necessary to Dard to arrive at the same result ?

The case Alain Moury becomes even more stranger(or clearer depending on the point of view) if we find out that starting 1966, the novelist disappears to the only profit of the screenwriter.

As a matter of fact, the coincidences are numerous. Let me remind you that excepting Jacques Pointreud's movie "Strip-Tease", Jean-Pierre Mocky (Jean-Paul Moriejewski's pseudonym, 1933-), very close to Dard,, will be curiously the only movie-maker to obtain Alain Moury's screen-plays . This is quite unusual considering that, contrary to the books, a certain number of scenarios belong to the humorous category of the merry novels from the team working with Marcel Granger (1897-1976).

End of quotation

Following this information, I read "*L'Affaire d'Une Nuit*". It is a novel *à la Jean-Paul Sartre*, pretty well phrased which is perfectly according to Dard's line.

To confirm my impression, I devoured the six other books signed Alain Moury with an unexpected pleasure. I was captivated. The first of the series, "*L'Espion Va à Dame*" (the spy crowns the king) is a very original intrigue with a burning issue. At first, compared to the books signed Frédéric Charles (Dard's acknowledged pseudonym), I found out that the text was too much civilized and too well written to be attributed to Dard. However, during a second and more attentive reading, I recognized him: he had been more careful than usual.

I had the same pleasure with all the other books that I found very interesting.

From there, I went from surprise to surprise when I took interest to all the series including Maltravers and Langelaan's works.

Walking along the Seine embankment in Paris, I found at a second hand bookseller shop a book by Maltravers published by "Serie Noire" although it had been announced to be released by Robert Laffont..

I, of course, bought it, read it immediately and found it excellent. Although the genre is outdated, I recommend it not only to the Dard's lovers but also to all nostalgic readers of the 60's or to the compulsive and inquiring minds.

"*La Maladie de Chooz*", a nuclear blackmail story is a burning terrorist actuality. It is definitely worthwhile to spend some time to find the book and have the pleasure to read it.

After the Moury, I read the Maltravers then the Langelaan and that is how I discovered something abnormal: having in hand the complete series, the analysis of all the texts revealed that although the signatures, the sets up and the characters are different, they are all from the same author with recurrent writing habits and peculiarities that point to Frédéric Dard.

These novels published under three different signatures resemble to the Frédéric Charles and the cleverness of the plots brings them close to the top of the spy stories.

Two isolated titles also by Dard, can be added to the impressive list of sixteen titles (five Moury, three Maltravers and eight Langelaan): "*La Guêpe Prend La Mouche*" (the wasp flies off the handle) and "*Elomire Se Marre*" (Elomire has a good laugh).

"*La Guêpe Prend La Mouche*", signed Ivan Hoé (Ivanhoe !), is the story of an heroine. The novel, not convincing and probably a flop, let me perplexed until I saw a parallel with two books signed Valmain published two years later by Fayard : "*Mao Sait Tout*" (1967, Mao knows everything) and "*Cherchez L'Infâme*"(1968, Look for the odious guy). They are both a weak attempt to create the character of an heroine, probably written at the same period but remained unpublished, lying in the

bottom of a drawer.

"*Elomire Se Marre*" signed Paul Brauca is a spy story full of humor, a happy novel somewhat reminiscent of the period Dard spent in Lyon with Marcel Grancher and easily recognizable by the amateur of Dard/San Antonio.

(Here, as examples found in the texts, Thierry Cazon gives a series of cynical remarks on Humanity and picturesque descriptions that are all stuffed with neologisms that I am unable to translate.)

When Robert Laffont stopped the spy collection, two additional titles were revealed, the first one published with the collection "Week-End" signed Alain Moury, "*Le Mexicain Roux*" (the red-haired Mexican) included a description of an atomic havoc whilst the other one, with a similar concern, "*La Maladie de Chooz*" (the Chooz' s sickness) handled by "Serie Noire" directed by Marcel Duhamel (1900-1977) won recognition.

It is after a complete reading and a thorough analysis that I was utterly convinced that these twenty titles could be attributed to Frédéric Dard.

These spy stories are the missing link between the books signed Frédéric Charles (last published novel: "*La Mort En Laisse*" - Keep Death on the leash) and those signed F...C..."*La Vingt Cinquième Image*" (The twenty fifth image), that will be followed by eighty six high quality titles in seven years, several of which are probably the result of a team work with the same theme.

While Robert Laffont continued to publish a series of spy stories, we can wonder why Frédéric Charles stopped cooperating to Fleuve Noir Editions in 1963. Speculating on that, I suspect that Frédéric was pushing up the bidding to get a better remunerative position considering that Jean Bruce (Jean Brochet' s pseudonym), his all time competitor, had left Fleuve Noir to join "Les Presses De La Cité".

Armand De Caro (Fleuve Noir creator in 1949) put in a weak position, could not allow himself to loose also Dard who hold out on him to obtain a golden contract. Stimulated by the new agreement, it resulted numerous novels signed with different pseudonyms such as Frédéric Valmain, James Carter, F...C... and many others.

But let's go back to the "Agent Secret" Collection edited by Robert Laffont.

I do believe that Graham Greene (British, 1904-1991) had the upper hand on the series and all the keys to throw himself into the venture dragging with him Robert Laffont (1916), George Langelaan (British, Paris born, 1908-1972)and Frédéric Dard.

Graham Greene and Robert Laffont formed a very solid Author/Editor couple, Greene being a pillar of the publishing house. In his memoirs, Robert Laffont declares: it was an essential step forward to cooperate with him.

George Langelaan and Raymond Brabazon (alias James Hadley Chase, British,1906-1985) are both close to Greene (See "The Quest for Graham Greene" by W..J. West).

George Langelaan is an ex journalist and a spy, special agent SOE. (read his autobiography: One Named Langdon, Memories of a Secret Agent or Un Nommé Langdon – 1950 published by Laffont). He seems to be a laborious writer but is probably an inexhaustible supplier of stories.

The “Espionage” collection launched by Laffont in 1964, was directed by George Langelaan alias Langdon who brought in Frédéric Dard as the best specialist of the time to furnish the library with top of the range titles.

Between the first quarter of 1964 and the second of 1966, Dard supplied twenty titles additionally to his usual production to Fleuve Noir signed San Antonio (which is probably the best facet of his output).

Consulting “*Les Auteurs De La Série Noire*” (The Série Noire's Authors) by Mesplède and Schleret (Edition Joseph K. 1996), we read: Michael Maltravers: French, Roland Bouvard' s pseudonym, author of several spy stories and translations.

“*La Maladie de Chooz*” (Chooz's sickness) is a political fiction capitalizing on the fright of an atomic threat.

Some French dissident communist members irradiate the water system and spread pamphlets to prompt a huge chaos propitious to a proletarian revolution. In this far-fetched scenario, for the first time, we find the secret agent Merry Pontus who will appear in the other books of this author. Michael Maltravers died in the 70's.

Of course, in Dard's circle, it was not the first time that an author died to cut the research short about the titles signed Frédéric Valmain. The secret has come out. Besides, the author of these four titles is too good and professional to disappear without getting himself talked about.

Our curiosity goes to the pseudonym itself: we know how important it is for an author to select a name with a meaning.

Maltravers sounds British. Internet gives Ernest Maltravers, 1st Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton, the most popular English writer of the 19th century before being completely eclipsed by Charles Dickens.

Graham Greene quotes Maltravers , Lord Lytton's hero, as an archetype of a character in “Saki, ses meilleures nouvelles” 's preface (Edition R. Laffont, 1962). The name “Maltravers” was then an integral part of Greene's literary memory. Is this not an interesting coincidence ?

These new titles credited to Dard, illustrate his phenomenal writing capacity. He is definitely the 20th century prodigy.

In 1984, an external event, the serious traumatism caused by his daughter's abduction led him to sign San Antonio all his production, brand that he did not need to register to become his corporate name and the slogan of his success.