



Les Polarophiles Tranquilles



BULLETIN DE LIAISON N°11

décembre 2007

REGARDING THE USE OF MASK IN LITERATURE

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« All names, you know, are pseudonyms. » E. Ajar, *Pseudo*, p. 75

Other than getting family members to identify a pseudonym, finding evidence that F. Dard used a pen name presents several issues: First, why does such a search merit attention at all? The correspondence between Thierry Cazon, a literary detective, and those who knew Dard well suggests that the subject is interesting and even inspiring. In most instances, a Dard pseudonym is discovered inadvertently, starting with a book that is well received, and which prompts the search for more works by the same author.

What do pseudonyms conceal? In Dard's case, he acknowledged some while refusing, along with his family, to recognize others.

Continual use of pseudonyms leads to question the personality of the writer.

In Dard's case, it appears that he constructed his life like a novel. An overview of his work reflects various episodes of his life: "C'est Mourir Un Peu", Plon 1967 (Dying a Little) relates his suicide attempt. The next year, he published "A San Pedro Ou Ailleurs" (In San Pedro or Anywhere) which is based on his marital difficulties and his encounter with Françoise, who was to become his next wife. His 1984 publication under the name San Antonio "Faut-Il Tuer Les Petits Garçons Qui Gardent Les Mains Sur les Hanches?" (Should We Kill the little Boys Who Keep Their Hands on Their Hips?), suggests an attempt to simplify his life and discard the past.

The same year, Dard announced that his future novels also would be published under the name San-Antonio. This decision appears to coincide with the disappearance from the editorial scene of three authors at Fleuve Noir, F. Valmain, James Carter, and Paul Sala.

The Various Pseudonyms

The first difficulty is identifying the pseudonyms.

Dard's full name is Frédéric Charles Antoine Dard. At eighteen, just before the Second World War and at the beginning of his career, he chose as his *nom de plume* Frédéric Dard, the name he would retain until 1984 for all work he considered of sufficient merit and worthy of a reputation.

By the late 1940's, however, he had already used several pseudonyms to produce works of lesser quality but necessary to make a living: San Antonio, Frédéric Charles, F.D. Ricard, Max Beeting etc...

It seems each pseudonym had a particular role. Frédéric Charles was for horror and spy stories; Max Beeting for *romans à l'anglaise* (in which the mystery element was not especially persuasive); and San-Antonio for riddles that are derivative of those by Peter Cheney.

The use of multiple pseudonyms implies a variety of styles intended to arrive at something that suited the public taste. San-Antonio is the name that would become famous.

Certain pseudonyms—Verne Goody, Cornel Milk and even Max Beeting—were soon abandoned, probably because their books were not successful. Whatever the affection we have for Dard, we must admit that we did not lose much with the disappearance of these works.

Novels published under Frédéric Charles, the pseudonym closest to his real name, are of better quality and more successful to the point that, shortly before his death, Dard had Fleuve Noir reissued these extraordinary tales and spy stories.

Simultaneously, he also reissued the series attributed to "Ange Noir" (Dark Angel) and "Kaput", each consisting of 4 volumes, which are thought to be rough drafts by San Antonio.

Meanwhile, Dard used his real name in connection with some black novels and plays, and with the work he did for the cinema (mainly with Robert Hossein, the French movie maker) at the time he became talked about.

His publisher, Fleuve Noir, introduced him as the new Simenon, as the supplier of numerous stories

with an ambiance fit for the cinema. Workaholic that he was, Dard published so many works that he came close to a nervous break-down. Nonetheless, he continued to be proud of the work that he produced at that time.

The unexpected success of the work published under San-Antonio's name brought Dard financial success. The effect was that Dard's preoccupation with pseudonyms resulted in one of his creations' surpassing Dard himself in terms of fame and glory. Of course, San-Antonio's success and celebrity are inextricably linked to, and signs of, Dard's originality in language and expression of feeling.

There is a theory that Dard continued to use pseudonyms after 1966 either as counterpoint to San Antonio, or as an alternative moneymaker that would enable Dard to remove him from the scene without interrupting the revenue stream.

The real story remains more elusive. Dard used Frédéric Valmain, which is also the pseudonym for Frédéric Baulat while the name James Carter is also used in place of F. Valmain.

Some 50 novels and other works in the form of plays and movie adaptations appeared under the names of Valmain and James Carter. These works are of poor quality, and if we are to accept that Dard wrote them, we also have to admit that Dard's use of pseudonyms is a real tangle.

There is an additional body of work consisting of about 30 spy stories that appear to have been written by Dard in the 1960's. These appeared under the names Georges Langelaan and Alain Moury, two writers published in their own right.

Moury published spy novels at the same time that Dard was using new pseudonyms, Michael Maltravers and Francois Chabrey to sign espionage tales. Moury who also worked with Jean-Pierre Mocky (another French movie maker) continued to do so even after Dard's death.

Complicating matters further are books appearing under the name Marcel G. Prêtre. Dard's family acknowledged these as being Dard's work. Prêtre is a real person whose name was used to reshape two of Dard's previously published works, "La Crève" (The Hell with Them) and "Batailles Sur la Route" (Battles Along the Way), as well as some 30 other works.

Prêtre himself was using the pseudonym François Chabrey. Surprisingly, we find a relationship between the book signed Chabrey and those, mainly the spy stories, signed with some Dard 'pseudonyms.

All above does not prove anything but aren't we entitled to ask questions and pursue our investigations?

The Evidence

An investigation into the use of pseudonyms—be they real persons, dead or alive, or inventions—is an exercise requiring detective methods. In general, any author who hides behind pseudonyms for a substantial part of his *oeuvre* is, to say the least, an unusual personality. In Dard's case, fitting together the pieces of an intricate puzzle has required remarkable persistence on the part of Thierry Cazon, the literary critic who tried to understand the Dard/Valmain production. Here is what he found

At the beginning of his career, Valmain adapted to the stage three novels: "Liberty Bar" (after Simenon), "La corde pour te pendre" (The Rope to Hang You) after Mac Orlan, and "Traquenard" (The Trap) after J.H. Chase.

It is hardly coincidence that, a few years earlier, Dard had adapted for the stage Simenon's "La neige était sale" (Dirty Snow), "L'Homme Traqué" (The Hunted Man) by Francis Carco with a foreword by Pierre Mac Orlan and "La Chair de l'Orchidée" (Flesh of the Orchid) by J.H. Chase.

One can admit that for his first play, Valmain had the idea of a Simenon's adaptation but it seems quite impossible that he could continue to adapt other and same authors already adapted by Dard.

Thierry Cazon has discovered that Dard adapted in 1951 Simenon's "La neige etait sale" (Dirty Snow) followed by "Liberty Bar". Nonetheless, although he admired Simenon, Dard admitted that his relationship with Maigret's originator failed to fulfill his (Dard's) expectations in moral as well as, with respect to the sharing of royalties, financial respects.

It should be noted that although young and inexperienced, Valmain succeeded in negotiating a better deal for himself with Simenon Dirty Snow was published in the names of Simenon and Dard, but with copy and translation rights belonging to Simenon alone. But when "Liberty Bar" was published in 1955, it was in Valmain's name, with all copyright and translation rights belonging solely to him. It appears, then, that Dard used Valmain to mislead Simenon and to give him a taste of his own medicine.

Valmain would go on to publish a novel, "Les Pires Extremités" (The Worst Extremes), which had the following strange preface, probably by Armand Lanoux: "[This work] is an excellent detective

novel by F. Valmain. But who is the more amazing, the hero or the novelist, for Valmain is the Fregoliⁱ of French literature. Popular author of detective novels, father of San Antonio's hilarious "Bérurier," historian, successful playwright, at times Valmain, at others Dard or San Antonio (though most of the time Frédéric), he certainly is the most picaresque of all his characters."

The expression "the Fregoli of French literature" pleased Dard, who used it with irony to discuss his multi-faceted work. Valmain, on the other hand, asserted that this preface was a blunder. In any case, it is most likely that he who has the game away did not fully appreciate the use of pseudonyms which, for Dard, were a serious matter.

3. The Pseudonym Game

Dard probably had several reasons for using pseudonyms, ranging from the straightforward to the complex.

First, there is the distinction between officially attributed works and secondary ones. Through the mid-1960's, San-Antonio was the pseudonym used to conceal Dard's more serious work. The public, though, did not know that San-Antonio and Dard were one and the same, even though the use of pseudonyms was common practice at the time: Vernon Sullivan for Boris Vian, Frank Harding or Omer Refreger for Léo Malet in connection with mediocre work before the success of Malet's "Nestor Burma" stories.

The motive was primarily financial, both in terms of earning money quickly and hiding the resulting income from tax authorities. (The latter moved Graham Greene to publish some of his books under the name James Hadley Chase.) There also was the concern with not boring the public.

Second, pseudonyms permit authors to experiment with different writing styles. Dard grew up with and enjoyed detective novels, gothic fantasies, and adventure stories such as "Fantomas" and "Nick Carter." These later came to influence his work. Though talented but rarely satisfied with his work, Dard used pseudonyms as a way to develop and improve his writing style

Third, pseudonyms catered to Dard's preference for building his life in a way that is similar to how one constructs a novel.

Between 1956 and 1966, in books published under the name F. Dard, the protagonists are cowardly, their spinelessness culminating in violence. The relationship between Dard and Valmain seems reflect the ambiguity articulated by Dard in "Une Gueule Comme La Mienne" (A Face Like Mine) and "Rendez-Vous Chez Un Lâche" (Rendezvous With A Coward). The first is about the relationship between a poor journalist without talent and a gifted writer with a shady past. The second, a reflection of Valmain, is about a famous painter's fascination for a young hoodlum without scruples.

There is no clear answer as to know who is manipulated.

Dard's skill in drawing weak and sly characters hiding who they really are is not unrelated to the relationship between Valmain and Dard, their use of pseudonyms, and their troubled financial dealings, a relationship that highlights life as a novel.

People like Robert Hossein or Jean-Pierre Mocky who are well acquainted with Dard, his relationship with Valmain and the theatrical environment, are peculiarly reticent to speak and clarify the imbroglio.

Valmain had the bad reputation of a crook and certainly not of a writer. Although we cannot be certain, there is a sense that he has not spent much time at the typewriter, and has used "ready-made" texts to build a modest career.

May be could we better understand a piece of Dard's work if we could have collected some testimonies on his relationship with Valmain.

F. Dard admitted that too much work led to nervous breakdown, and that excessive eating and drinking caused him to put on a great deal of weight. His first wife, Odette Damaisin, believed that his focus on work contributed to the failure of their marriage. And he readily spoke of the fact that San-Antonio "killed" him, that he (Dard) became rich and famous to the detriment of more serious work.

At one point after his suicide attempt, Dard thought of abandoning use of the San-Antonio name. His own life reflected the drama of a novel, burdened as he was by the double life he was leading. In Les Mureaux, a Paris suburb, he had his conventional family life, while on the Ile Saint-Louis in the city he was renting a flat for his mistress, Françoise de Caro, the daughter of his publisher.

Never reticent about his conjugal life, he explained—and accepted with equanimity—his cowardice and lack of personal courage, which contributed to its complexity. We know what cowardice has been an obsession of his, reflected in his books from "La Crève" (The Hell With Them) to "Le Mari de Léon" (*Leon's Husband*) as well as in "Rendez-Vous Chez Un Lâche" (*Rendezvous With a Coward*). That he never managed to relieve himself of San-Antonio, the source of his fortune, may have been the greatest cowardice of all.

Dard's giving up his own name and use of the pseudonym, San-Antonio became a frequent feature of television. Some argue that it was financial difficulties that compelled him to continue to produce the San-Antonio stories to the extent that it became a literary subject to study. His existing wealth, however, suggested a different motive.

In 1966, after a suicide attempt and subsequent divorce, Dard embarked on a cruise with the woman

who was to become his last wife. This marriage also would result in his becoming son-in-law to his editor, Armand de Caro, who pushed him to mass-produce San-Antonio novels. Dard essentially faced a choice: write novels (in his own name), and do work for the cinema and television, or devote himself obsessively to churning out San-Antonio novels for the money. He chose the latter.

In sum, the elements that led Dard to act contrary to his nature include: (1) the burden associated with the introduction of his new family into high society (only a study of his relationship with his father-in-law will permit an understanding of how Dard came to accept being tyrannized by his relatives); (2) his addiction to money and the corresponding willingness to hide it from both his family and the tax authorities "Je Le Jure" (*I Swear*) explains the character's pathetic and uncontrollable need for money; and (3) his workaholic nature, which prevented his taking a single vacation day, but which enabled him to produce a conventional crime story in a few days (a fact in which he took pride).

At Heart, Dard despised his cowardice. When he came out of his nightmare fifteen years later, he gave up all pseudonyms except San-Antonio and managed to produce under his own name quality novels such as "Faut-il Tuer Les Petits Garçons Qui Gardent Les Mains Sur Les Hanches ?" (Should we kill the little boys who keep their hands on their waist?), "Mari De Léon" (Leon's Husband) and "Les soupers Du Prince" (The Prince's supper).

Dard presented himself as a person trying to cure his sadness and nervous breakdown by writing superficial novels. But even if depression was a feature of Dard's character, there is the fact that, when faced with the choice of being a "great writer" or standing behind San-Antonio's lucrative popularity, he chose the latter. It was as if San-Antonio's gold had bought the writer's soul.

Dard fought a running battle with San-Antonio. The use of multiple pseudonyms was one of the weapons Dard used to escape from and counterbalance the San-Antonio's intrusive nature. That said, it was not his only weapon. Although San-Antonio is a character with humanity and a sense of morality, Dard put him in increasingly ludicrous situations and made to appear a stupid person trumped by the vulgar Bérurier. Why did Dard deliberately humiliate San-Antonio? Because he was relegated to his character's shadow and resentful of the fact that he was financially dependent on him.

Similarity & Resemblance

There is the sense that Dard was a mass-producer of fiction who, against his best intentions, was unable to control his prose sufficiently so as to permit that of the Valmains, Carters, and others to be different from his own.

A careful reading suggests certain similarities. Do the same expressions and turns of phrase show up among the various pseudonyms? For instance, in "Larrons En Foire" (Thick As Thieves), published under Valmain, one finds the same irony-laced description of a striking but meddlesome woman as appears in a San-Antonio novel.

Do the physical attributes of a character in one novel appear in another? Dard, who suffered from an atrophied left arm, was known to be fascinated by the handicapped. A heroine confined to a wheelchair appears in "C'est Toi Le Venin" (You Are the Venom) by Dard, "Larrons En Foire" (Thick As Thieves) by Valmain as well as "Le Serpent d'Hippocrate" (The Hippocratic Snake, word for word but pun untranslatable in English) by Carter.

Frequently, the titles themselves are a clue. For instance, "Ma Cavale Au Canada" (On the Run in Canada) is used by San-Antonio and Carter. Dard's "Le Pain Des Fossoyeurs" (The Bread of the Gravediggers) matches Valmain's "Les Fossoyeurs" (The Gravediggers). And Dard wrote "Les Dames Du Palais Rizzi" (The Ladies of the Palazzo Rizzi), and "La Dame Qu'on Allait Voir Chez Elle" (The Lady We Used to Visit at Home), neither of which is dissimilar to Carter's "La Dame De PortoBello" (The Lady of Portobello). "Doctor Jekyll and Lady Hyde" is by Carter but Dard had previously a stage adaptation of R.L. Stevenson's novel.

This attraction for Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde could be the simplistic image of the numerous Dard's dual personalities.

Literary critics ignore Carter and Valmain, deeming them to second-rate. This may explain why it is difficult to accept the idea that Dard wrote those works, for even the most mediocre work by Dard is superior to the best that Carter and Valmain can offer. However, connections are obvious and visible given the fact that Dard who was writing enormously, used many pseudonyms essentially to dispose of the surplus of his production.

"Les Dames Du Palais Rizzi" (The Ladies of the Palazzo Rizzi) was acknowledged by Dard himself to be a poor piece of writing. In addition, it looks like something that Valmain would have produced.

A number of Carter's works bring to mind other Dard pseudonyms like Beeting and Milk as well as Valmain. The facile plots, general slapdash nature, and bombastic style recall a time before the success of San-Antonio, when Dard saw himself as a great writer because he knew how to use the imperfect subjunctive.

Conclusion

Although individual assertions by Cazon can be challenged, the cumulative effect of the facts and the general conclusion he draws are persuasive.

Hence, the investigation has to be carried out and I suggest the following:

First, it may be true to authors of crime novels imitate one another, but the extent of the recurring stylistic similarities Dard's case suggest one and the same author.

Second, a chronological summary of the works published by Dard, San Antonio, Charles, Valmain, Carter, Sala, Langelaan, and Prêtre shows a constant rate of production—between 12 and 20 books per year over three decades—as well as those periods in which the work of a pseudonym could have appeared.

It is virtually certain that books under the names Valmain and Carter were written entirely by Dard, as is the case with Moury but less so for M.G. Prêtre, Paul Sala, François Chabrey. Possibly, P. Sala supplied Dard with a certain number of stories that the latter put only in form.

There is the interesting case of Agnes Laurent, who was a well-known Parisian actress in B-movies of the 1950's. She likely met Dard in the film milieu of the time.

She shows up in the Fleuve Noir Editions of the 1970's as a writer of horror novels that drew inspiration similar to Dard's Special Police, and which appeared in a collection entitled "Angoisse" (*Anguish*).

Overall, understanding the relationship between Dard and his pseudonyms is a laborious process. The most useful starting point remains Dard's work between 1956 and 1966.

Postscript: In numerous interviews in the 1980's and 90's, Dard complained that San- Antonio gave him the greatest difficulty because he compelled Dard to forego the formulaic for the creative.

² Leopoldo Fregoli 1867-1936, Stage star & Italian actor.

