

**THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS:
DEFEATS OF DETECTION IN SÉBASTIEN JAPRISOT'S
*L'ÉTÉ MEURTRIER***

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This chapter explores the inversions and subversions of detective and crime fiction underpinning much of Japrisot's literary *oeuvre*. It begins by considering the significance of the work of Lewis Carroll as a privileged intertext for Japrisot's criminal intrigues, above all the nonsense worlds of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). It then proceeds to analyse the textual dynamics of *L'Été meurtrier* (1977) and specifically the 'defeats of detection' that generate and sustain narrative momentum. With reference to Shoshana Felaman's illuminating analysis of Japrisot's work, this chapter will contend that *L'Été meurtrier*, and Japrisot's crime fictions more generally, expose the narrative indeterminacies and protean possibilities of a popular cultural form often relegated to the margins of the French literary establishment.

Sébastien Japrisot's reputation resides largely on the innovation and ingenuity of his prose fiction. Novels such as *Piège pour Cendrillon* and *L'Été meurtrier* have been fêted for their unsettling reworkings of the now familiar conventions of detective and crime fiction. In the words of Jacques Dubois, 'tout le propos de Sébastien Japrisot semble être de "dérégler de façon réglée" le genre policier'.¹ This chapter will explore the inversions and subversions of detective and crime fiction that underpin much of Japrisot's literary *œuvre*. Beginning with Japrisot's professed admiration for the work of Lewis Carroll, the chapter will discuss the significance of Carroll's work as a privileged intertext for Japrisot's criminal intrigues. The nonsense worlds of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) provide a suggestive and troubling locus of motifs, metaphors and narrative models for Japrisot's prose fiction, particularly *L'Été meurtrier*. For *L'Été meurtrier* subverts reader expectations of the narrative logic and order of classic detective fiction, resisting the comfort of closure and resolution in favour of fractured identities, 'defeats of detection' and the multiplication of

¹ Jacques Dubois, *Le Roman policier ou la modernité*, (Paris: Nathan, 1992), p. 189.

interpretative outcomes. In a final section, this chapter will focus on the illuminating analysis of Japrisot's work provided by Shoshana Felman, and will posit the notion that *L'Été meurtrier*, and Japrisot's crime fictions more generally, expose the narrative indeterminacies and protean possibilities of a popular cultural form often relegated to the margins of the French literary establishment.

Pretexts and Intertexts

Japrisot's intricately constructed novels play not only with a range of generic conventions but draw also on a colourful number of pretexts and intertexts – from Flaubert and Stendhal to classic Greek tragedy and Shakespeare. However, one of the most intriguing intertexts for Japrisot's novels is the work of Lewis Carroll. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* haunt Japrisot's fictional universe. This is evident in the use of the texts as a rich source of material for the epigraphs that frame Japrisot's work. Quotations from Carroll's works preface the novels *L'Été meurtrier*, *La Passion des femmes* and *Un long dimanche de fiançailles*, and act as on-screen epigraphs for the films *Le Passager de la pluie* and *La Course du lièvre à travers les champs*.² Such quotations gesture at the partial visions of the main protagonists and their inability to master the

² The epigraphs used are the following: *La Passion des femmes*: 'Et s'il cessait de rêver à vous, où pensez-vous que vous serez? Là où je suis en ce moment, bien sûr, dit Alice. Pas du tout! répliqua Tweedledee avec dédain. Vous ne seriez nulle part, car vous n'êtes rien qu'une espèce de chose dans son rêve', from Chapter Four of *Through the Looking-Glass*. *Un long dimanche de fiançailles*: 'Je vois personne sur la route, dit Alice. Comme je voudrais avoir d'aussi bons yeux, remarqua le Roi d'un ton amer. Voir Personne! Et à cette distance encore! Moi, tout ce que je suis capable de voir sous cette lumière, c'est des gens!', from Chapter Seven of *Through the Looking-Glass*. *Le Passager de la pluie*: 'Il fallait que le puits fût très profond ou que sa chute fût très lente, car elle eut tout le temps de regarder autour d'elle et de s'inquiéter de ce qui allait lui arriver', from Chapter One of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *La Course du lièvre à travers les champs*: 'Nous ne sommes, mon amour, que des enfants vieillissants qui s'agitent avant de trouver le repos', from the introductory poem to *Through the Looking-Glass*. I will be discussing the use of a Carroll epigraph to *L'Été meurtrier* later on in the chapter. I would like to thank the editors of this volume for suggesting these and further instances of references and allusions to Carroll's work in Japrisot's fiction and film, thereby enriching my analysis of the intertextual relations at play.

events that surround and confound them. The influence of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the *Through the Looking-Glass* can also be detected in a series of intertextual allusions wherein figures, objects and tales from Carroll's fiction are adapted to suit the very different settings of Japrisot's contemporary novels. The tale of the three sisters, Elsie, Lacie, and Tillie, recounted by the dormouse in chapter seven, 'A Mad Tea-Party', of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* bears comparison with the three female characters Mi, Do, and La whose intersecting destinies form the kernel of *Piège pour Cendrillon*, whilst in *La Course du lièvre à travers les champs*, the first shot of the film moves from a looking glass on a mirrored wardrobe carried by removal men to the Cheshire Cat on a poster in a shop window behind it. This image reappears at the very end of the film as the two protagonists, Tony and Charlie, take pot shots at the *fermé* (closed) sign outside their hideout until it falls off to reveal another sign beneath: a picture of the Cat over the words, 'The Cheshire Cat Inn', a palimpsest-like image that evokes Japrisot's own reinscriptions of Carroll's creations. However, Lewis Carroll's texts are more than a repository of artful references for the informed reader. As a literary model, they provide evocative formulations of hermeneutic mayhem and fractured identities when read against the fictional universes of Japrisot's criminal intrigues.

Lewis Carroll's texts can be interpreted as providing Japrisot with the archetype of the young female protagonist in search of knowledge and identity, a figure who is central to such novels as *Piège pour Cendrillon*, *La Dame dans l'auto avec des lunettes et un fusil*, *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* and *L'Été meurtrier*. Like the heroines of these novels, Alice's quest transposes her to a world of narrative disorder and confusion that is both of her own creation (in Alice's case, crafted from her dreams) but also ultimately indecipherable. In Alice's nonsense worlds, the boundaries between fantasy and reality have either collapsed or are temporarily suspended. Figures from 'real life' metamorphose into fantastical beings (kittens into queens); nursery rhyme characters, such as Humpty Dumpty, materialize as key interlocutors and verse is played out literally as the knave who stole the tarts is put on trial for his crimes. Time runs backwards and, in what now reads as a parodic re-enactment of the detective story, normative orders are inverted so that punishment is

followed by sentence and then by the crime.³ Like a hall of mirrors, the worlds of *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* magnify and distort a semblance of reality. They provide ‘clues’ that gesture towards an order and pattern of meaning but one that the young Alice only half-comprehends.

Such narrative inversions and word play have a disturbing impact upon Alice’s sense of self. For, as Hugh Haughton comments in an introduction to a recent re-edition of Carroll’s texts, his work speculates on ‘problems of identity, of establishing a coherent selfhood in the face of the violent change inherent in human life and the disorder at the heart of that order’.⁴ Whilst these nonsense worlds are fashioned from Alice’s imagination, she appears irremediably alien and other to them, unable to comprehend the shifting ‘rules’ of conduct and convention. Changing size or form at unpredictable moments, Alice cannot reconcile her everyday self with the transformations wrought in *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, doubting who or what she is: ‘but if I am not the same, the next question is “Who in the world am I?” Ah, *that’s* the great puzzle!’ (*Wonderland*, pp. 17–18, italics author’s own), or ‘I can’t explain *myself* [...] because I am not myself, you see’ (*Wonderland*, p. 41, italics author’s own). Indeed, by the end of *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice comes to interrogate her own agency in the creation of such a dream world, asking ‘let’s consider who it was that dreamed it all’ (p. 239), and suggesting that she is but a character in the dreams of another slumbering figure whom she meets on her journeys, the Red King. The final adjudication is left to the reader who, in the last line of the text, is directly addressed and asked ‘Which do *you* think it was?’ (p. 240), leaving the ending open to two competing but not mutually exclusive interpretations.

L’Été meurtrier is richly saturated in the narrative conundrums and subversions of literary norms that make up Carroll’s nonsense worlds: from the young female protagonist embarked on a disturbing and disorientating quest for knowledge and selfhood to the proliferation of interpretative possibilities that generate and sustain narrative momentum. Indeed, as noted above, Japrisot’s use of a

³ See Chapter Five of *Through the Looking-Glass*.

⁴ Hugh Haughton, ‘Introduction’ to Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 1. Further references to Carroll’s two texts refer to this edition.

quotation from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as an epigraph to the novel should alert the reader to the disturbance of generic conventions to follow: 'je serai le juge et je serai le jury, dit Fury, le rusé compère. J'instruirai seul toute l'affaire et je vous condamnerai à mort'. Taken from chapter three, 'A Caucus Race and a Very Long Tale', the tale of Fury and the mouse undermines the strict separation of subject positions that structure conventional detective and crime fiction. Here Fury acts as judge, jury and executioner. For, as the reader will discover, the fictional universe of *L'Été meurtrier* is one where the roles of perpetrator, victim and witness are fractured, shifting and interchangeable. In this novel, Japrisot constructs a 'nonsense' world predicated on 'defeats of detection' and the inability of key protagonists to read the clues laid out for them. In common with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, *L'Été meurtrier* will challenge the reader to act as a textual detective and to make sense of the interpretative disorder that engulfs both Japrisot's protagonists and the narrative enterprise itself.

Defeats of Detection

Set in rural France, *L'Été meurtrier* is a retrospective narration of the events that have led to the arrest of Pin-Pon for the cold-blooded murder of two men. Divided into six sections relayed by four different intradiegetic narrators, the novel retraces the events of 'one deadly summer' culminating in Pin-Pon's murderous spree. The section headings construct a familiar frame for a detective novel: *le bourreau*, *la victime*, *le témoin*, *l'acte d'accusation*, *la sentence* and *l'exécution*, a narrative template that will be slowly but ineluctably dismantled as the intrigue unravels in unexpected ways. The central character, and the trigger for the tragic and violent killings, is Éliane, also known as Elle or Celle-là. As the novel unfolds, the reader learns that she is on a quest to track down the men who raped her mother twenty years earlier, one of whom is her biological father, in the illusory hope of recapturing a lost idyll, a prelapsarian world of childhood happiness destroyed, at age ten, by knowledge of her origins. Yet, like Alice in her fantasy worlds, Éliane is a 'displaced' person in the adult world of

the novel.⁵ As Marina Kundu cleverly notes, she is, in a *tour de force* of word play, literally alienated, her name an anagram of the word ‘aliené’, suggesting not only displacement but also madness.⁶

The radical otherness of Éliane/Elle is signalled from the beginning of the narrative by her chameleon-like ability to adopt the subject positions and identities that others ascribe her. For her putative husband Pin-Pon Montecciari, she is alternately infantilized (‘sa main humide était celle d’un bébé qui a chaud’) and fetishized (‘c’était ma poupée de merde, c’était ma poupée’).⁷ Éliane carefully exploits such gender stereotypes to inveigle her way into the Montecciari household as part of her quest to avenge her mother’s rape, and is dismissive of the ways in which Pin-Pon is so easily duped into interpreting her provocative behaviour in the light of his own fantasies: ‘il avale tout. Je crois même que ça lui donne plaisir que je le prenne pour un con. Il n’a pas envie de me voir autrement qu’il m’imagine’ (p. 93). Yet her mood-swings and increasingly erratic behaviour – from violent assault to a desire to be nursed like a baby – betray a more fundamental sense of internal division, even schizophrenia, which leads eventually to a complete collapse of identity and selfhood.

If Alice in *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* inhabits a waking dream, for Éliane, reality is figured more as a living nightmare that undermines narrative cohesion and order. As Susan Jordan Myers emphasizes, in Japrisot’s fiction ‘heroines suffer from cognitive and emotional problems which distort the basic premise of the detective novel, namely that absolute truth can be uncovered’.⁸ In *L’Été meurtrier*, such a psychopathology permeates all aspects of the

⁵ One interesting intertextual connection between Éliane and Alice can be read into an episode related in Chapter Three, ‘Looking-Glass Insects’, of *Through the Looking-Glass*. When in the wood where things have no names, the answer to Alice’s question ‘and now who am I?’ is that it begins with an ‘L’ (elle), a clue to the meaning of which is signalled earlier on, when Alice is counselled by the Red Queen to ‘speak in French when you can’t think of the English for a thing [...] and remember who you are!’ (p. 144).

⁶ Marina Kundu, ‘Sébastien Japrisot’, *Yale French Studies*, 75 (1988), (Special Issue: *After the Age of Suspicion: The French Novel Today*), 133–37 (p. 135).

⁷ Sébastien Japrisot, *L’Été meurtrier* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1977), p. 46 and p. 74. All subsequent references to this text will be placed in parentheses in the main body of the chapter.

⁸ Susan Jordan Myers, ‘Sébastien Japrisot: It’s a Crazy Game, The Search for Truth’ in *French Prose in 2000*, ed. by M. Bishop and C. Elson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 201–207 (p. 201).

novel: from the thematic preoccupation with questions of identity to the disturbed temporal frames, duplicitous meanings and the narrative indeterminacies that destabilize the crime intrigue. For Éliane/Elle's divided and schismatic self precludes any hope of narrative resolution. The transition from a 'fractional being', a non-person manifest in the third-person singular pronoun, to a fully assumed identity, symbolized by the lost patronymic, will never come to pass.⁹ As the novel progresses, the competing identities of Éliane and Elle, the adult self and the child self, erupt into displays of self-harming as Éliane is assailed by Elle who takes on an almost physical presence: 'Elle me griffe avec ses ongles encore longs, elle me serre le coeur, et j'ai cette sensation que l'air me manque et mal derrière la tête' (p. 237). With the oscillation and eventual dissolution of the boundaries between sanity and psychosis, Éliane suffers a mental breakdown, described by her doctor as an inward collapse, obliterating her fragile sense of adult identity: ' "Avez-vous déjà vu une construction dont le toit s'est effondré à l'intérieur? C'est un peu ça" ' (p. 384).¹⁰ At the level of narrative structures and conventions, it is a similar seismic implosion that detonates to spectacular effect, releasing intersecting, multi-layered and conflictual tales of detection. It is to these 'defeats of detection' that this chapter will now turn.

Éliane is the first in a series of detecting figures in *L'Été meurtrier* who parallel and to some extent parody the reader's own interpretative act. Her first section of narrative places her under the sign of *la victime*; the wronged party on a quest to discover the identity of the three men who raped her mother. However, it is soon evident that she is a troubling narrative figure who inverts and perverts such facile categorizations. Fired by a desire to exact revenge for such suffering, Éliane can equally be interpreted as a form of avenging angel, a perpetrator, whose mission will unleash violent and unforeseen consequences. When she first hears the tale of a mechanical piano languishing in the Montecciari barn, Éliane recognizes it as the singular object that identifies her mother's attackers. Transporting it back to the village one night in November 1955, they lose their way, ask her mother for directions and then return to rape her in her isolated mountain home. In her retelling of

⁹ For an insightful analysis of the multiple resonances of Éliane's naming in *L'Été meurtrier*, see Dubois, *Le Roman policier ou la modernité*, p. 193.

¹⁰ Italics author's own.

this crime story in the section entitled *l'acte d'accusation*, Éliane's mother, Pauline Wieck, gives clues that identify the three men and point to Pin-Pon's Italian father as one of the aggressors. It is the connection between the piano and the Italian origins of his family that lead Éliane to seek out her association with Pin-Pon. Following a hesitant and clandestine quest, she accumulates evidence that appears to implicate Pin-Pon's now deceased father, Lello Montecchiari, and two removals men, Leballech and Touret, as her mother's rapists. Yet Éliane's quest for knowledge ends in failure. The 'clues' that had seemed to point so conclusively to Lello Montecchiari, Leballech and Touret as the rapists crumble. Other evidence is produced to implicate a second set of men and this precipitates Éliane's breakdown and her regression to a state of child-like innocence untainted by the dark family secret of her origins. It is at this point of the greatest narrative confusion that another tale of detection is triggered, that of Pin-Pon himself.

Éliane, like Ariadne, leaves in her wake a narrative thread for Pin-Pon to follow. However, it will lead to the same erroneous conclusions about guilt and responsibility. For whilst Éliane carries with her a bottle of poison, as a possible means of murdering the two men, she constructs another series of narratives, an insurance against failure, that are intended to dupe Pin-Pon into enacting her revenge for her should she be unable to achieve her ends. In this alternative version of reality, Éliane has been raped herself by Leballech and Touret and is being forced to act as a prostitute for their personal needs and those of select clients. This story, a distorted recasting of her mother's own brutal rape, is told to Pin-Pon by two seemingly impeccable witnesses, his younger brother Boubou and Éliane's former schoolmistress Mlle Dieu, herself a flagrant example of a deeply implicated and compromised witness who can never aspire to the omniscience suggested by her name. Following in Éliane's footsteps, Pin-Pon visits the supposed scene of the crime, the flat used for her rendez-vous with Leballech and Touret, and discovers evidence that indicts the two men. Yet once he has carried out the murders, he discovers that he too has misinterpreted the clues. What appeared to be a case of sexual exploitation is in fact a case of mistaken identity.

The never-ending cycle of detection in *L'Été meurtrier* does not end there. For as Éliane and Pin-Pon learn, revenge for such

crimes had been executed almost fifteen years earlier by her adoptive father, Gabriel. The three men guilty of her mother's rape were in fact acquaintances of Leballech and Touret whom the latter had paid to act as substitutes and transport the mechanical piano to its destination on the fateful night in November 1955. Tracked down and murdered in 1962 by an unknown assailant, the clue to the killer's identity is given when Pin-Pon realizes that the weapon used is the ex-army gun still in Éliane's mother's possession. Whilst it is never proven, Gabriel's act of revenge provides an ironic coda to the narrative twists and turns of the text. Not only was Éliane's quest for vengeance redundant before it had begun but her search for knowledge illustrates the dangers of what Shoshana Felman calls a 'naive reading'.¹¹

Suspicion and Suspense

Via a close textual analysis of Japrisot's *Piège pour Cendrillon* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Shoshana Felman explores the structures of crime fiction and their relationship to psychoanalytic practice. In her article, she examines the ways in which *le récit policier*, as evidenced in Japrisot's work, interrogates not only the processes of reading but the interpretative act itself via a play of substitutions that challenge any claim to univocal or definitive textual resolution. Felman formulates the notion that 'le roman policier constitue donc, en quelque sorte, une école de soupçon, dont l'instruction est un avertissement contre la lecture naïve'.¹² In the dazzling narrative contortions of Japrisot's novels, the model of *le récit policier* and its narrative indeterminacies counsel the reader to mistrust and query all textual production and to adopt a suspicious reading stance. For all discourse is open to multiple interpretations and conjecture and those readers who remain wedded to a search for a unitary truth are destined to fail. The narrative twists and turns that flummox both characters and readers in Japrisot's novels operate therefore as a deliberate strategy. In such crime fictions, suspense can be understood, not only as a textual effect, but as the suspension of the interpretative act itself: 'la suspense, en d'autres termes, comme la suspension radicale de la

¹¹ Shoshana Felman, 'De Sophocle à Japrisot (via Freud) ou pourquoi le policier?', *Littérature*, 49 (1983), 23–42 (p. 32).

¹² Felman, 'De Sophocle à Japrisot (via Freud) ou pourquoi le policier?', p. 32.

possibilité théorique (et non simplement empirique) de la *totalisation de savoir* narratif et interprétatif.¹³

Felman's insightful analysis of text, interpretation, and genre in Japrisot's fiction enriches an understanding of the various and competing permutations on which *L'Été meurtrier* ends. In the last pages of the novel, the reader learns that Pin-Pon's testimony, narrated in the opening and closing sections of the novel under the sign of *le bourreau* and *l'exécution*, has in fact been directed at a privileged interlocutor, M^e Dominique Janvier, his defence counsel and, by profession, another detecting figure. A silent witness, Janvier's presence can be traced at various points in Pin-Pon's testimony as the text shifts back and forth between past event and present narration but he is not explicitly identified until the penultimate page.¹⁴ This extra framing mechanism emphasizes yet further the selective silences and justifications of Pin-Pon's narrative and establishes a communicative context that causes the reader to reconsider the textual dynamics of the preceding sections.

As the silent addressee of the text, Janvier can be construed as the reader's double, a textual self who is solicited to make sense of what has proceeded. Like the reader, Janvier will have to navigate his way through a labyrinth of evidence which points to multiple crime narratives - assault, rape, and murder - and multiple interpretations and outcomes, all of which must be unravelled if Pin-Pon's actions are to be defended in court. Pinpon may indeed be guilty of murder but to what extent is he not also the unwitting victim of a revenge scenario carefully prepared by Éliane? How far are we to credit his misreadings, or 'lecture naïve', of characters, events and motivations as attenuating circumstances for his homicidal spree? Is Pin-Pon a stark illustration of Felman's concept of the 'tragédie de l'interprète' the detecting figure trapped by a flawed narrative logic?¹⁵ Equally, are we to view Éliane as the villainess of the tragedy? Does she metamorphose from victim to perpetrator or is she instead

¹³ Felman, 'De Sophocle à Japrisot (via Freud) ou pourquoi le policier?', p. 41 (italics author's own).

¹⁴ For example Japrisot, *L'Été meurtrier*, pp. 353, 365, 403 and 409. In each instance, Janvier is addressed as a source of authority, able to confirm Pin-Pon's testimony as the one protagonist external to the events narrated.

¹⁵ Felman, 'De Sophocle à Japrisot (via Freud) ou pourquoi le policier?', p. 38.

representative of the interchangeability of the narrative roles that function as the building blocks of much classic detective fiction? Her literary trajectory highlights the impossibility of establishing a singular truth in a fictional universe of imploding narrative structures and identities. Lastly, how are we to approach the testimonies of a succession of witnesses? To what extent, do they function as unreliable narrators, only ever able to provide a partial reading of events that suit their interests and needs and all, to varying degrees, tainted by ‘un raisonnement rigoureusement policier, un raisonnement pour lequel tous les *discours*, quels qu’ils soient, sont suspects’?¹⁶ The suspicious reading stance that Felman identifies as an inherent feature of *le récit policier* works in *L’Été meurtrier* to subvert any clear sense of resolution, leaving Janvier, and by extension the reader, to wrestle with multiple interpretative outcomes. For, like Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*, *L’Été meurtrier* throws down a gauntlet to the reader to enter the narrative maze of the text and determine ‘Which do *you* think it was?’.

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that the skill and inventiveness of Japrisot as a writer is to dramatize the interpretative possibilities of a narrative form that is often associated with a formulaic and stultifying diet of rules and conventions. The classic detective novel is perforce a text in search of interpretation, a narrative built upon shifting sands. In Japrisot’s fictional universe, this play of interpretative possibilities is not suspended in favour of resolution; the enigma continues to haunt the reader beyond the ending in virtuoso displays of the near-implosion of genre. Such subversions and inversions of the conventions of detective and crime fiction owe much to the literary intertexts that inspire Japrisot’s fiction, none more so than Lewis Carroll’s ‘Alice’ texts whose influence has been noted by reviewers of Japrisot’s fiction and film and is resolutely affirmed by the author himself: ‘celui [le livre] que j’aime le plus est *Alice aux pays des merveilles* de Lewis Carroll. C’est le seul que je regretterai toujours de n’avoir pas écrit’.¹⁷ For like Alice in her adventures in

¹⁶ Felman, ‘De Sophocle à Japrisot (via Freud) ou pourquoi le policier?’, p. 36 (italics author’s own).

¹⁷ For example, François-Guillaume Lorrain describes the main female protagonist of René Clement’s *Le Passager de la pluie*, scripted by Japrisot, as ‘une Alice moderne qui traverse le miroir et découvre un monde peuplé de criminels’, ‘L’Été en suspense: Japrisot l’ami’, *Le Point*, 25 July 2003, pp. 74–75 (p. 75). Japrisot’s comments are

Wonderland and *Through the Looking-Glass*, the reader of Japrisot's fiction is confronted with narrative puzzles and conundrums that shake our faith in stable reference points, sure meanings and the resolution of mystery. Richly evoked through much of Japrisot's fiction and film, the nonsense worlds of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* signal to the reader just how wary they should be of any textual production that purports to tell the truth. And it is this experimental manipulation of genre that underpins Japrisot's hybrid status in French literary culture, both crime writer and avant-garde stylist.¹⁸ Japrisot's *oeuvre* defies the neat categorizations of 'high' and 'popular' culture and draws attention to the productive exchanges that characterize relations between crime fiction and the literary mainstream in France. His *oeuvre* offers both the dark pleasures of murder and investigation and the postmodern play of perspective and identity that, for Simon Kemp, 'puts the telling firmly at the front of the tale'.¹⁹ Ultimately, Japrisot's dazzling narrative feats encapsulate the multi-faceted and variegated possibilities of the contemporary *polar* as narrative form and fiction.

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taken from an interview given to Jean-Marie David for his official website, <http://www.figuresdestyle.com/japrisot/jardin/inter.htm>. His appreciation for Carroll's work was offered in response to the question: 'pour en finir, quels sont vos écrivains préférés, ceux que vous aimez et ceux dont le prolongement desquels vous aimeriez vous situer?'

¹⁸ This interplay is nicely summarized by a reviewer's comment that 'Japrisot est un Simenon corrigé par Robbe-Grillet', quoted on Japrisot's official website: <http://www.figuresdestyle.com/japrisot/jardin/inter.htm>.

¹⁹ Simon Kemp, 'Postmodern Detectives and the French Tradition', in *French Crime Fiction: an Introduction*, ed. by C. Gorrara (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008).

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