

2017

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Recommended Citation

Hynynen, Andrea (2017) "Queer, Gender and Crime Fiction in French Studies: a Hazardous Scientific Endeavour," *CALL: Irish Journal for Culture, Arts, Literature and Language*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 4.

doi:10.21427/D7HT38

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/priamls/vol2/iss1/4>

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Queer, Gender and Crime Fiction in French Studies: a Hazardous Scientific Endeavour

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Abstract

This article focuses on the multifaceted challenge faced by academics doing queer and gender studies of French crime fiction. It argues that the French literary arena still entertains a sharp divide between literature and commercialist mass fiction, which hinders the establishment of popular fiction studies. It further discusses the reasons for and the effect of queer theory's late arrival to France, arguing that France's strong republican ideal entails a fear of ghettoization that has undermined the development of gender and queer analysis, especially of literature. These phenomena, in combination with France's centralized, traditionalist academic institutions and linguistic franco-centrism, contribute to the fact that there are no queer studies of French crime fiction to date. The article concludes by suggesting some possible approaches within the very diverse and elusive field of queer studies that would be suitable for crime fiction analysis and highlights the importance of paying attention to geographical and temporal contexts in such analyses.

Keywords: Crime Fiction; France; gender; Queer Studies

The focus of this article is the multifaceted challenge faced by researchers who study gender and sexuality in French crime fiction, in particular if they are inspired by queer theory and Judith Butler's definition of gender as performative. In her ground-breaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler defined gender as the *stylized repetition of acts*, meaning that gender is performed through the constant reiteration of gendered norms. Hence, far from being something that we possess, gender is something that we do, and no original gender exists prior to the performative repetition.¹

Popular culture is instrumental in the construction of gender identities; the ways in which gender is produced, represented, and consumed in popular culture interact with and strongly influence notions of gender, as Katie Milestone and Anne Meyer remark.² However, the multiple connections that exist between popular culture and gender incite diverse approaches,

¹ Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999 [1990], p. 178-179.

² Katie Milestone and Anne Meyer: *Gender & Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, p. 1.

and attitudes toward such research differ considerably depending on the context and scholarly traditions. In this article, I will draw on a series of issues and reflections encountered in my own research in order to discuss some elements that have a notable impact on researchers interested in this particular topic in a French context. These are, on the one hand, the enduring French tradition of contempt for genre literature, and on the other hand, the late arrival of gender and queer studies in France, which will be dealt with in the first and second part of the article. I wish to point out that many of the impeding factors arising from the traditional academic landscape in France apply both to studies in crime fiction and to gender studies. To avoid unnecessary repetition, I will discuss them when it seems most appropriate in view of the rest of the argument. After a few brief comments about language and disciplinary barriers, the last part then turns to the specific challenges posed by the crime genre in an attempt to present some preliminary ideas as to what a queer reading of French crime fiction might look like.

1. Growing respectability of a ‘paraliterary’ genre

Crime fiction was for a long time assigned to the pejorative category of *paralittérature*, which is deemed to lack literary qualities because of its status as formulaic genre literature. In his approach to the fantastic genre, Tzvetan Todorov formulated the separation of genre literature from literature by suggesting that the notion of genre is only applicable to mass (popular) literature, such as crime fiction, *romans-feuilletons*, or science fiction; it does not apply to *truly literary texts* (my emphasis).³ Todorov notoriously stated, in his typology of crime fiction, that the literary *chef-d’œuvre* does not fit into any pre-existing genre, whereas the work that adheres the most strictly to the rules of a given genre constitutes the “best” exemplar of that genre. In short, crime novelists who aim to go beyond the formula, to “improve” it, are not writing crime novels but literature.⁴ It could be argued that Todorov abstained from degrading the crime genre since his use of quotation marks in the text

³ “[S]eule la littérature de masse (histoires policières, romans-feuilletons, science-fiction, etc.) devrait appeler la notion de genre; celle-ci serait inapplicable aux textes proprement littéraires”. Tzvetan Todorov: *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*. Paris: Seuil, 1971, p. 10. For a discussion of the notions of popular and mass literature, see e.g. Diana Holmes and David Loseley (eds.): *Imagining the Popular in Contemporary French Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

⁴ “Le chef-d’œuvre littéraire habituel n’entre dans aucun genre si ce n’est le sien propre, mais le chef-d’œuvre de la littérature de masses est précisément le livres qui s’inscrit le mieux dans son genre. Les roman policier a ses normes; faire ‘mieux’ qu’elles ne le demandent, c’est en même temps faire moins bien: qui veut ‘embellir’ le roman policier, fait de la littérature, non du roman policier”. Tzvetan Todorov: ‘Typologie du roman policier’. In: *Poétique de la prose*. Paris: Seuil, 1971, p. 55-65, p. 56.

seemingly questions the meaning of the words “better” (*mieux*) and “improve” (*embellir*), but even so, he clearly set crime fiction in opposition to literature.

The clear-cut separation of literary fiction from repetitive, non-literary formula fiction has since been put into question, as new approaches to literary genres have developed.⁵ Jean-Marie Schaeffer took an important step in this direction when he proposed to replace ontological conceptualisations of genre by the more dynamic notion of “genericity” (*généricité*). Schaeffer also rejected the conventional definition of high literature as not belonging to any genre and argued that fine literary texts are, on the contrary, characterized by an extreme abundance of generic traits.⁶ Charles Forsdick observes that to focus on genericity instead of genre brings notice to the provisional nature of genre markers and the fact that assigning texts to genres is a process undergoing constant changes.⁷ Indeed, various experts on crime fiction emphasize that suspense and surprise are part of the reading contract, which means that renewal and change are, in fact, intrinsic to the crime genre.⁸ Yves Reuter maintains that crime fiction stands at the crossroads of two literary paradigms pointing in opposite directions: on the one hand, the crime genre is influenced by a traditional rhetoric which functions according to the principle that a fixed set of stable elements are reorganized and manipulated continuously while producing only surface level variations; on the other hand, the crime novel also belongs to literary modernity which transgresses narrative codes and alters established models.⁹ Because crime novels ought to be neither too predictable nor too unique, the genre is characterized by constant negotiations between repetition and innovation, to which the genre’s history and its numerous sub-categories testify.

Lately, the respectability of the crime genre has increased considerably in France. This change has been noted by Claire Gorrara in an article entitled ‘French Crime Fiction: From Genre Mineur to Patrimoine Culturel.’¹⁰ Gorrara underlines the increasing market for crime fiction in France, the boom in related cultural activities, and the growing number of scholarly

⁵ See Charles Forsdick: ‘Travel literature and/as genre’. In: Charles Forsdick, Feroza Basu and Siobhán Shilton: *New Approaches to Twentieth-century Travel Literature in French: Genre, History, Theory*. New York: Peter Lang, 2006, p. 13-58.

⁶ Jean-Marie Schaeffer: ‘Du texte au genre. Notes sur la problématique générique’. In: Gérard Genette et al.: *Théorie des genres*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1986, p. 178-205, p. 204.

⁷ Forsdick explains that genericity “does not imply any prescriptive reduction of the text to a pre-ordained, reduplicated set of markers; it suggests instead that those markers are always only provisional, and that it is for authors and readers to position texts in relation to them in a process of constant transformation”. Charles Forsdick: ‘Travel literature and/as genre’, p. 14.

⁸ Marc Lits: *Le roman policier: introduction à la théorie et à l’histoire d’un genre littéraire*. Liège: Éditions du CEFAL, 1999, p. 24.

⁹ Yves Reuter: *Le roman policier*. Paris: Armand Colin, collection 128, 2005, p. 108.

¹⁰ Claire Gorrara: French Crime Fiction: From Genre Mineur to Patrimoine Culturel. In: *French Studies* 61/2 (2007), p. 209-214.

publications and seminars about crime fiction. Undeniably, the writings on crime fiction in France are proliferating: dissertations, books, articles, and conferences dealing with crime fiction have appeared, not to mention the numerous festivals, prizes, book fairs, special issues and magazines, websites, and media coverage, as well as the unique crime fiction library in Paris, the Bilipo.¹¹ The turn toward crime fiction proceeds from a combination of various factors, some of which are internal to the crime genre whereas others depend on broader trends in the literary field. Gorrara underlines the transformation of crime writing wrought by a new generation of writers in the wake of the debates surrounding the events of May 1968. Simultaneously, the return of story-telling and of the *récit* has reshaped French fiction in recent decades.¹² To this we can add the increasing manifestations of generic hybridity and generic dissolution which emerged in the *roman noir* in the 1990s.¹³ Among other things, a persistent endeavour to challenge generic boundaries, undertaken by authors and amateurs, lies behind these advances. Véronique Rohrbach demonstrates, in a study on the *polar* and politics, that campaigning for the legitimacy of the *noir* genre is an important part of its political stance: engagement in the literary field runs parallel to engagement in politics.¹⁴ Writers of *romans noirs* have consciously opted for generic hybridity and they experiment with the rules and tropes of the genre in order to break with the discrediting image attached to genre literature, their specific aim being to augment the legitimacy of the *noir* genre.¹⁵ Nonetheless, crime fiction does not yet seem to be entirely accepted as a serious object of study by literary scholars at French universities, which are heavily influenced by what Diana Holmes and David Looseley label France's "canon-making traditions".¹⁶ Gérard Genette acknowledges, in the 2004 postscript to his *Fiction et diction*, that the French literary *doxa* is haunted by a somewhat fetishist glorification of Literature with a capital "L", and he suggests that it might perhaps be time to abandon this fixation on 'great Literature'.¹⁷ Holmes also

¹¹ The Bibliothèque de Littératures Policières is located at 50, rue du Cardinal Lemoine in the 5th arrondissement in Paris.

¹² Gorrara, *French Crime Fiction*, p. 209. See also Hanna Meretoja: *The Narrative Turn in Fiction and Theory: The Crisis and Return of Storytelling from Robbe-Grillet to Tournier*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

¹³ Natacha Levet: 'Le roman noir contemporain. Dissolution et hybridité génériques'. In: Gilles Menegaldo and Maryse Petit (eds.): *Manières de noir. La Fiction policière contemporaine*. Rennes: PUR, 2010, p. 81-82.

¹⁴ Véronique Rohrbach: *Politique du polar. Jean-Bernard Pouy*. Lausanne: Antipodes, 2007, p. 46-82. See also Elfriede Müller and Alexander Ruoff: *Le polar français: crime et histoire*. Paris: La fabrique, 2002, p. 69-74.

¹⁵ Natacha Levet: 'Le roman noir contemporain. Dissolution et hybridité génériques', p. 81.

¹⁶ Diana Holmes and David Looseley: 'Introduction. Imagining the popular: lowbrow, highbrow, middlebrow'. In: Diana Holmes and David Looseley (eds.): *Imagining the Popular in Contemporary French Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013, p. 3.

¹⁷ "La (trop) fameuse distinction entre 'écrivains' et simple 'écrivants' [...], cette distinction qui hante toujours notre *doxa* littéraire me semble illustrer et entretenir une valorisation quelque peu fétichiste de la Littérature dont il ne serait trop malvenu de se défaire". Gérard Genette: *Fiction et diction* précédé de *Introduction à l'architexte*. Paris: Seuil, 2004, p. 231. The postscript was originally published separately in 2003 in *Poétique*,

finds that French literature is “more radically divided than elsewhere between ‘high’ and ‘low’ brows.” One reason for this is the literary critics’ and the literary establishment’s patronizing attitude towards easy and entertaining literature.¹⁸ Holmes and Looseley neatly summarize this aspect of the French cultural exception as follows:

“Another of these factors, encountered throughout this book, is French Republicanism’s powerful ideal of an inclusive, uplifting high-culture-for-all that resists any social levelling ‘down’ of language as of any other form of culture, viewing respect for the popular (in the sense of majority cultural practice) as mere populism and as undemocratic in that it fosters the incapacity of most citizens to participate fully in a valuable national culture.”¹⁹

An enduring insistence on the literary as the expression of authorial excellence in opposition to cheap commercial fiction has produced a tradition of hierarchical thinking that pervades the crime genre itself.²⁰ We can detect a distinctively hierarchical differentiation between sub-categories of the crime genre reflecting the idea that entertainment and commercialisation are contemptible and degrading to literature, as if literary worth and commercial success were incompatible.²¹ This way of thinking has influenced the crime genre throughout its history. When American hard-boiled fiction started to be imported to France in great numbers immediately after the end of WWII, its detractors condemned this new kind of writing mainly on account of its alleged sensationalism and crass commercialist nature.²² Rohrbach’s study on the politics of the *polar* provides another, more recent, illustration of this phenomenon in its identification and ranking of three different groups of crime novels. Rohrbach refers to the literary qualities of the *roman noir*, or the *polar*, and situates it at the top, halfway between the *littérature noire* and the *littérature blanche*, and high above the two other types of crime fiction: the “popular” (mass) crime novel which is determined by commercial interests, and “traditional” crime fiction composed of detective

no. 134. Genette refers to the distinction established by Roland Barthes between *écrivains* and simple *écrivants*, which in his opinion, has played a crucial role in perpetuating the consecration of Literature even though Barthes himself remarked that all contemporary writers represent a hybrid form of *écrivain-écrivant*. Roland Barthes: ‘Écrivains et écrivants’. In: *Œuvres complètes. Tome I 1942-1965*. Paris: Seuil, 1993, pp. 1277-1282.

¹⁸ Diana Holmes: ‘The mimetic prejudice: the popular novel in France’. In: Diana Holmes and David Looseley (eds.), *Imagining the Popular in Contemporary French Culture*, p. 86.

¹⁹ Holmes and Looseley, *Imagining the Popular*, p. 13. See also Armand Mattelart and Érik Neveu: *Introduction aux Cultural Studies*. Nouvelle édition. Paris: La Découverte, 2008, p. 3.

²⁰ France’s sacralisation of the myth of fine writing and of the author, this clerical figure who is appointed guardian of the sanctuary of the great French language, is concisely summed up in Roland Barthes’ essay ‘Écrivains et écrivants’, p. 1280. “[L]’écrivain est un prêtre appointé, il est le gardien, mi-respectable, mi-dérisoire, du sanctuaire de la grande Parole française, sorte de Bien national, marchandise sacrée, produite, enseignée, consommée et exportée dans le cadre d’une économie sublime des valeurs”.

²¹ See Genette, *Fiction et diction*, p. 231-232.

²² Claire Gorrara: Cultural Intersections: The American Hard-Boiled Detective Novel and Early French roman noir. In: *The Modern Language Review* 98/3 (July 2003), p. 590-601, p. 596.

novels and suspense novels.²³ In her study on the reception of the *polar féminin*, Nicola Barfoot uncovers similar indexes of taste informed by perspectives on gender:

If the whodunit cannot be dismissed as effeminate, the last resort is to declare it popular, and therefore lacking in literary quality. Woe betide anyone who accuses the ‘Série Noire’ of producing entertainment for the masses; it sees itself instead as providing a high-quality alternative to the tedium and verbosity of ‘serious’ literature.²⁴

Thus, the same arguments and values that were, or still are, used to debase genre fiction in comparison to literature seem to be at work when (female) writers’ supposedly entertaining, commercialist, and/or apolitical crime novels are deemed inferior to the serious *roman noir*. The battle for legitimacy takes place both inside the crime genre and outside of it, and gender plays an important role in these struggles.

Today, important research on French crime fiction is taking place at the Université Paris III and the Université Paris IV and in connection with the Centre for studies in Popular Literature and Media Studies at the Limoges University.²⁵ Nevertheless, the *academic* scholarship on crime fiction is not very large in France, and it is particularly scarce with regards to gender and sexuality. Given that “the notion of popular culture is necessarily ideological and ethical in that it is bound up with cultural democracy,” as Holmes and Looseley clarify, it is hardly surprising that France’s hierarchical and universalist research ideology remains sceptical of it.²⁶ Recognizing that one’s research activities are linked to an ideological position is contrary to the axiomatic neutrality and objectivity postulated by universalism. I will return to this question in more detail below. In the meantime, it is interesting to note that literary scholar Andrea Oberhuer proposes, in line with Christine Planté, that French literary scholars are especially disposed toward universalism.²⁷ Despite

²³ Rorbach, *Politique du polar*, p. 24-45. See also Müller and Ruoff, *Le polar français*, p. 73-74.

²⁴ Nicola Barfoot: *Frauenkrimi/polar féminin. Generic Expectations and the Reception of Recent French and German Crime Novels by Women*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 31.

²⁵ For instance, Natacha Levet defended in 2006 a thesis on the French *roman noir* genre at the Université de Limoges, where she now works as Maître de Conférences. Natacha Levet: *Le genre, entre pratique textuelle et pratique sociale: le cas du roman noir français (1990-2000)*. PhD thesis in French literature, Université de Limoges, 2006. Accessed on 11 November 2014 on <http://epublications.unilim.fr/theses/2006/levet-natacha/html/index-frames.html>.

²⁶ Holmes and Looseley, *Imagining the popular*, p. 2.

²⁷ Andrea Oberhuer: ‘Postface: *Gender Politics* et genre de questions littéraires’. In: Patrick Farges et al. (eds.): *Le lieu du genre. La narration comme espace performatif du genre*. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2011, p. 9-20, p. 198-199. See also Christine Planté: ‘Genre, un concept intraduisible?’. In: Dominique Fougeyrollas-Schwebel et al. (eds.): *Le genre comme catégorie d’analyse: sociologie, histoire, littérature*. Paris: L’Harmattan, p. 127-136.

the recent transformations that Gorrara brings to light, the interest in crime fiction in the field of French literature remains relatively limited in French academia.²⁸

The lack of a recognized research field inevitably raises various problems for the scholar, for instance with funding and institutional support for research projects, but I will here concentrate on one particular aspect, namely the challenges regarding the dissemination of research results. In contrast to Britain and to the United States, where journals publishing different kinds of ‘studies’ (cultural studies, popular culture studies, women’s studies, gender studies, French studies, media studies, and so on) abound, there does not seem to be any established French academic periodicals that would readily invite work on crime fiction or on other types of popular fiction, though a few relatively new multidisciplinary journals, like *Belphégor* or *Itinéraires. Littérature, Texte, Cultures*, promote such scholarship. In 2014, the *Itinéraires* journal published a special issue on contemporary European crime fiction. Certainly, even prestigious journals or reviews may occasionally publish special issues devoted to crime fiction, such as the 1997 issue entitled *Roman noir. Pas d’orchidées pour les T.M.* published by *Les Temps Modernes*.²⁹ Still, no obvious French forum for scholarly articles on such topics springs to mind. The divide that exists between academic and amateur specialists complicates matters further. As is often the case with popular culture, many of the activities and the writings concerning crime fiction are done by amateurs, critics and writers. Claude Mesplède – editor of the indispensable *Dictionnaire des littératures policières*, former president of the distinguished society for crime fiction *813: les amis de la littérature policière*, and founder of the association Toulouse Polars du Sud with its annual international crime fiction festival – exemplifies this tendency perfectly.³⁰ My intention is not to question the quality of these studies, merely to point to the questions such a divide raises for the academic researcher. Should one target one’s articles at academic journals, and which ones, or publish in specialist magazines? In the case of books, with which publishing houses? Marie-Hélène Bourcier suggests that the publishing and translation politics of the major academic publishing houses in France are ostensibly traditionalist, which contributes to the

²⁸ The formal aspects of crime fiction have, indeed, for a long time attracted the attention of many illustrious authors as well as scholars interested in genre studies, literary theory, and narratology, but these are not primarily identified as crime fiction scholars. See e.g. Todorov, ‘Typologie’; Gérard Genette’s discussion of point of view in *Figures III*, Paris: Seuil, 1972; Roland Barthes’s discussion of “the hermeneutic code” in *S/Z*, Paris: Seuil, 1973; and Roger Caillois: ‘Puissances du roman’ (part II: ‘Le roman policier’) in *Approches de l’imaginaire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, p. 177-205.

²⁹ *Les Temps modernes* 595 (1997).

³⁰ Claude Mesplède (ed.): *Dictionnaire des littératures policières*. Volumes I-II. Nantes: Éditions Joseph K., 2003. A second updated edition was published in 2007.

blocking of unconventional and foreign ideas and scholarship.³¹ This means, on the one hand, that distinguished publishers tend to be reluctant to publish unordinary work on crime fiction, while on the other hand, publications in other, scientifically less-respectable forums run the risk of not being taken seriously by the academic establishment.

2. The late arrival of gender and queer studies in France

Queer studies only reached France approximately fifteen years after its inception and astonishingly extensive international progression, as Bruno Perreau remarks.³² Judith Butler's 1990 book *Gender Trouble* was translated into French in its entirety only in 2005, and Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, also originally published in 1990, as late as in 2008.³³ Gender and queer studies are at this moment booming in several locations in France, but queer studies in literature are still quite unusual, queer studies in popular literature even more so, perhaps because literary history still predominates in departments of literature in France, as Michal Kryzkawski and Suzanna Szatanik propose.³⁴ The ongoing development of gender and queer studies in a number of well-known French universities and other higher education institutions, such as the Université Denis Diderot Paris 7, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, the Université Saint-Denis Paris 8, the Université la Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3, the Université Louis Lumière Lyon 2, and the Université Toulouse II – Le Mirail, mainly takes place in philosophy, feminist theory, sociology, political sciences, and linguistics.³⁵ Still, we must not forget that the Centre for Women's and Gender Studies, founded by Hélène Cixous at the Saint-Denis Paris 8 University in 1974, maintains a partly literary profile despite its present multidisciplinary character. On this occasion, I wish to draw attention to a research project named "Queer Theory in France" that was run at the University of Warwick in collaboration with King's College, London from 2012 to 2015. The project was funded by the UK Arts & Humanities Research Council. It is symptomatic that this three-year project, which aimed to investigate the appropriation of French thought by

³¹ Marie-Hélène Bourcier: *Queer zones 3: Identités, cultures, politiques*. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2011, p. 111.

³² Bruno Perreau: 'La reception du geste queer en France'. In: Natacha Chetcuti and Luca Greco (eds.): *La face cachée du genre*. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2012, p. 123-142.

³³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.

³⁴ Michal Kryzkawski and Suzanna Szatanik: Autour d'une confusion franco-américaine: les *Gender Studies* dans le context français. In: *Romanica Silesiana. Constructions genrées/Gendered Constructions*, 8/1 (2013), p. 11-21, p. 14.

³⁵ Patrick Farges, Cécile Chamayou-Kuhn and Emel Yavuz: 'Introduction: Agencement/arrangement des genres'. In: Patrick Farges et al. (eds.): *Le lieu du genre. La narration comme espace performatif du genre*. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2011, p. 9-20.

queer theorists in Britain and in the United States as well as the re-adaptation of these ideas on their return to France, paid no attention to the field of literature.³⁶ The French particularity is striking given that queer studies originally proliferated in literary and arts departments in the United States before spreading from there.

One of the main reasons for the abovementioned delay is the emphasis placed in France on rationalism, republicanism, and on a universalism which, “while supposedly inclusive, egalitarian and neutral, effectively excludes minorities,” as queer scholar and activist Marie-Hélène Bourcier phrases it.³⁷ When trying to explain why their subjects of study have not been developed in France to the same extent as in many other places, queer scholars and popular culture studies scholars alike insist upon French resistance to minority studies and the correlative fear of “ghettoization”.³⁸ One of the biggest obstacles to activism and political change in France is that many members of minority groups, like queers, have incorporated the idea of French universalism and republicanism to such an extent that they reject minority identities and “communities”. As a consequence, they lose much of their political power and of the potential for change, Bourcier explains.³⁹ Therefore, the early French queer movements explicitly targeted republicanism, universalism, and invisibility while developing a “post-identitarian identity politics” that was exclusive to France.⁴⁰ Naturally, many researchers abide by the same republican ideology. Furthermore, as I already mentioned, a universalist understanding of research is inevitably at odds with the epistemological and/or political commitment always present, in one form or another, in gender and queer studies, as in studies of popular culture (cf. above).⁴¹

Another explanation for the delay may be different forms of anti-Americanism, in addition to France’s very different academic traditions compared to the United Kingdom and the United States.⁴² François Cusset demonstrates how France actively isolated itself from the rest of the

³⁶ The project website is available on

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/research/french/currentprojects/queertheory/>.

³⁷ Marie-Hélène Bourcier: Cultural translation, politics of disempowerment and the reinvention of queer power and politics. In: *Sexualities* 15/1 (2012), p. 93-109, p. 96.

³⁸ Marie-Hélène Bourcier: *Sexpolitiques. Queer Zones 2*. Paris: La fabrique éditions, 2005, p. 26, 29, 41-43, *passim*. See also Marie-Hélène Bourcier, *Queer Zones 3*, p. 111-113; Armand Mattelart and Érik Neveu: *Introduction aux Cultural Studies*, p. 74; Patrick Farges and Anne Isabelle François: L’Institutionnalisation des *Gender Studies* en France: un processus à plusieurs niveaux. In: *Romanica Silesiana. Constructions genrées/Gendered Constructions* 8/1, (2013), p. 33-48.

³⁹ Bourcier, *Queer zones 3*, p. 151.

⁴⁰ Marie-Hélène Bourcier, Cultural translation, politics of disempowerment, p. 96. See also Didier Eribon: ‘Introduction. Traverser les frontières’. In: Didier Eribon (ed.): *les études gay et lesbiennes. Colloque du Centre Georges Pompidou les 23 et 27 juin 1997*. Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1998, p. 11-25.

⁴¹ Elsa Dorlin: *Sexe, genre et sexualités*. Paris: Puf, 2008, p. 9-31.

⁴² François Cusset: *French Theory. Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis*. Paris: La Découverte, 2005 (2003), p.15, *passim*.

academic world, indulging in its cultural exceptionalism and promoting republicanism at the beginning of the 1980s.⁴³ There is, for instance, no tradition of Cultural Studies, which has been crucial for the development of academic studies of popular culture elsewhere.⁴⁴ Perreau points to an orthodox view on academic disciplines: it remains difficult to question disciplinary boundaries and recognized scientific corpora, whereas recruitment policies and practices effectively encourage researchers to abide by traditional expectations.⁴⁵ This relates to Bourcier's claim about traditionalist publishing policies that was evoked earlier; it also aligns with Éric Fassin's assertion that France's remarkably centralized higher education system does not make allowances for doctoral students' and young scholars' innovative aspirations.⁴⁶ Judging by the present proliferation of gender studies in numerous departments, it is possible that some things will improve in the not too distant future. However, given that popular culture currently remains a minor field of study, Perreau's and Fassin's arguments regarding the obstacles to cultural, gender and queer studies seem to suggest that a specialization in crime fiction may in some cases jeopardize a scholar's chances of pursuing a university career after the degree.⁴⁷

3. Language and disciplinary barriers

Holmes and Looseley suggest that one of the reasons why studies of French popular culture are relatively undeveloped also outside of France is that French Studies in English-speaking universities usually models itself on France's traditions.⁴⁸ The same is true of French Studies in the Nordic countries. As far as studies of gender and crime fiction are concerned, I still find that there are noteworthy differences between the research done in France and what is happening in French studies elsewhere. Although the crime genre is in many respects a

⁴³Cusset, *French Theory*, p. 323.

⁴⁴ Holmes and Looseley, *Imagining the Popular*, p. 3. See also Bourcier, *Queer zones 3*, section II. 'Ready for the cultural turn?'; Armand Mattelart and Érik Neveu: *Introduction aux Cultural Studies*, p. 74-75.

⁴⁵ Perreau, 'La réception du geste queer', p. 124.

⁴⁶ Éric Fassin: *Le sexe politique. Genre et sexualité au miroir transatlantique*. Paris: Éditions EHESS, 2009, p. 236. Similar arguments were put forward by Didier Eribon already in connection with the first international conference on gay and lesbian studies organized in France, *Les études gay et lesbiennes*, hosted by the Centre Georges Pompidou on 23 and 27 June 1997. Eribon: 'Introduction. Traverser les frontières', p. 19-21.

⁴⁷ Some recent examples suggest that it may be hard to obtain a position at a French university with a PhD on popular or crime fiction. Laurence Sudret holds a PhD in French literature on Jules Verne (2000) from the University of Nantes, but she has worked in primary and secondary education for many years. Stéphanie Delestré defended her thesis on the roman noir (*Le roman noir: littérature contre, contre-littérature*) at Université Paris 10 in 2005. She now works in the publishing industry. In 2012, Meryem Belkaïd defended a PhD thesis entitled *L'Effacement du réel dans la fiction policière contemporaine* (Fading Reality in French Modern Crime Fiction) at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris 3. Belkaïd is currently working at Bates College in Maine, USA. Naturally, one must not infer too much of these isolated cases, since the employment situation for young PhDs is very difficult at large. Other researchers have found a place in academia. See footnotes 25 and 51.

⁴⁸ Holmes and Looseley, *Imagining the Popular*, p. 4.

transnational type of literature, Anglophone and French scholarship on crime fiction only seem to meet occasionally.⁴⁹ This becomes evident when we look at the programmes of two international crime fiction conferences organized in 2013, the first at NUI Galway (Ireland) in June, and the second at the University of Leeds (UK) in September. The Galway conference hosted a session on French crime, but none of those delivering a paper represented a French university except for a visiting scholar temporarily based at the Université Paris 13.⁵⁰ Likewise, none of the presenters at the conference in Leeds came from France, although some of the topics were about French crime or French reception. This is presumably, at least in part, a result of what Bernard Dassart has called France's "linguistic franco-centrism".⁵¹

France's francocentric language policy in combination with the rigid academic disciplines announced by Perreau and others (see above) gives rise to a related phenomenon that also affects queer research on crime fiction, namely a shortage of interdisciplinary collaboration. Patrick Farges and Anne Isabelle François argue that much of queer theory's strength and vitality spring from its syncretic hermeneutics that incites scholars to combine and cross methodologies, theories and disciplines.⁵² However, François Cusset emphasizes that methodological homogeneity and a unitary corpus are cultivated in studies of literature (and philosophy) in French universities, which repel eclectic epistemologies and the combination of heterogeneous references.⁵³ A number of French academics in comparative literature and in American or English studies work with crime fiction, but these studies rarely address French crime novels. *Manières de noir: La fiction policière contemporaine*, the proceedings from the crime fiction conference *Fiction policière* organized in 2007 at Cerisy la Halle, France, illustrates this tendency.⁵⁴ Even though this was an almost exclusively French conference, only four of the twenty-two presentations were about French crime and delivered by specialists working with French literature at a French university: Anissa Belhadjin, Natacha Levet, Dominique Meyer-Bolzinger and Laurence Sudret.⁵⁵ The other delegates

⁴⁹ Eva Erdmann: 'Nationality International: Detective Fiction in the Late Twentieth Century'. In: Marieke Krajenbrink and Kate M. Quinn (eds.): *Investigating Identities. Questions of Identity in Contemporary International Crime Fiction*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009, p. 11-26.

⁵⁰ I was a visiting researcher in Paris during the academic year 2012-2013. Still, my research activities primarily fall within the category of Scandinavian or Nordic French studies.

⁵¹ Dassart uses the concept *franco-centrisme linguistique*. Cited in Bourcier, *Queer zones* 3, p. 111.

⁵² Patrick Farges and Anne Isabelle François: 'L'Institutionnalisation des *Gender Studies*', p. 43.

⁵³ François Cusset: *French Theory*, p. 335.

⁵⁴ Gilles Menegaldo and Maryse Petit (eds.): *Manières de noir. La Fiction policière contemporaine*. Rennes: PUR, 2010.

⁵⁵ For Natacha Levet and Laurence Sudret, see footnotes 13 and 25. Anissa Belhadjin is Maître de Conférences in French language and literature at Université de Cergy-Pontoise. She defended a doctoral thesis on narration in

represented either a different discipline (mostly English or American Studies, but also philosophy and Italian etc.) or a foreign institution, or they talked about non-French authors and works. My expression “almost exclusively French” refers here to the language used at the conference, and to the fact that the majority of the delegates represented a French organization. A follow-up conference in 2013, *Le Goût du noir*, presented a similar profile with only two presentations on French crime fiction, one by Dominique Meyer-Bolzinger and another by Roger Bozzetto, as well as three papers engaging with *bandes dessinées* in relation to the *noir* genre. None of the authors of the latter papers specializes in crime novels; for example, Bozzetto’s main expertise lies in science fiction and the fantastic genre.⁵⁶ This is indicative of how rare French studies on crime fiction are among literary scholars in France. Also, if we link this to what was previously said about the lack of delegates from France at international crime fiction conferences, it becomes clear that scholarship in popular culture studies is strongly affected by existing disciplinary and language barriers.

Accordingly, crime fiction researchers in French or Francophone studies outside of France tend to refer to each other and build upon each other’s work, while French crime fiction scholars have their own established authorities and widely accepted notions. Todorov’s classical typology of crime fiction is, for instance, still frequently cited in works on crime fiction published in French, despite the fact that this short text hardly reflects the contemporary situation.⁵⁷ Angela Kimyongür’s excellent article on Dominique Manotti and the *roman noir*, published in the journal *Contemporary Women’s Writing*, is a case in point.⁵⁸ Except for the studied author’s own essays, an essay written by another French female crime author (Maud Tabachnik), and Todorov’s typology, all of the sources used by Kimyongür are either written by non-French scholars or published in English outside of France. Barfoot’s comparative study on the reception of crime fiction written by women in France and Germany pinpoints the divide between international French (Francophone) Studies and research in France, as it asserts that a discussion of subversive intentions is only found in Anglophone research on gender in French crime fiction, not in France.⁵⁹ This brings me to

French *roman noir* at Université Paris III in 2006. A specialist on Sherlock Holmes, Maigret, and on the structure of the investigation in detective stories, Dominique Meyer-Bolzinger works as Maître de Conférences at Université de Haute-Alsace. Laurence Sudret holds a PhD in French literature on Jules Verne (2000) from the University of Nantes, but she has worked in primary and secondary education for many years.

⁵⁶ These papers were delivered by Lilian Cheilan, Jean-Paul Meyer and Philip Wurm. The conference program is available online: <http://www.ccic-cerisy.asso.fr/noir13.html>.

⁵⁷ Todorov, ‘Typologie’.

⁵⁸ Angela Kimyongür: Dominique Manotti and the Roman Noir. In: *Contemporary Women’s Writing* 7/3 (2013), p. 235-252, accessed on 5 December 2013 on <http://cww.oxfordjournals.org/content/7/3/235.full.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Nicola Barfoot, *Frauenkrimi/polar féminin*.

my last point, namely the specific question of queer readings of crime, in particular French crime.

4. Feminist and queer readings of crime fiction

Before looking more closely at queer studies in relation to crime fiction, I wish to point out that a limited number of gender (feminist) studies of French crime exist; however, these tend to focus on women crime fiction writers either as a group or as isolated case studies, or on female characters.⁶⁰ First of all, there are essays criticizing the masculinist crime fiction tradition. Typical arguments involve the pejorative representations of women in crime novels and the neglect of female writers. Maud Tabachnik's polemical essay on the no-place for women in the *roman noir* offers a perfect example of this.⁶¹ Apart from these, there appear to be two opposite kinds of writings: on the one side, we find critics – mostly male – who either deplore or celebrate the recent advent of female crime writers that are lumped together under the notion of *polar féminin*, female crime; on the opposite side, writers, critics and scholars – mostly female – reject this simplistic notion and try to prove that women authors are individuals with their own particular style and themes, just like men. This is the explicit aim of Natacha Levet's article on "écriture féminine" and the roman noir.⁶² Whatever the approach, all studies subscribe to a binary notion of sexual difference that is incompatible with a queer approach, given that queer theory originates from an opposition against heterocentrist feminist thinking, on the one hand, and against a certain kind of essentialist gay

⁶⁰ The most significant French feminist or gender studies on crime fiction are: Nicole Décuré: Pleins feux sur les lumières anglo-américaines: 30 ans de féminisme, 15 ans de polar. In: *Les Temps Modernes* 595, 1997, p. 35-52; Maud Tabachnik: Remarques sur la non-place des femmes dans le roman noir. In: *Les Temps Modernes* 595, 1997, p. 122-129; Danielle Charest: *Littérature policière et rapports sociaux de sexe*. Unpublished MA thesis, EHESS, 1997; Dominique Loiseau: 'Noir de femme: conformité de transgressions'. In: *Les œuvres noires de l'art et de la littérature*, tome II. Paris: Harmattan, 2002, p. 143-156; Natacha Levet: "Les 'chéries noires': écriture féminine et roman noir. In: *Belphegor* 7/2 (2008), accessed on 10 December 2013 on http://etc.dal.ca/belphegor/vol7_no2/fr/main_fr.html; Michèle Soriano: 'Violence, érotisme, pornographie: technologies du genre dans les genres policier et érotique'. In: *Lectures du genre: Lectures théoriques, approches de la fiction* 5 (2008), p. 27-39 and; Stéphanie Delestré: 'Place et figures de femmes dans le roman noir: La jambe interminable du polar'. In: *Mouvements des idées et des luttes. Du polar à l'écran: normes et subversion* 67 (2011), p. 66-70. In English, at least the following are essential: Deborah Hamilton: *The French Detective Fiction Novel from 1920s to 1990s: Gendering a Genre*. Doctoral dissertation, 1994; Véronique Desnain: "'La femelle de l'espèce': women in contemporary French crime fiction". In: *French Cultural Studies*, XII (2001), p. 175-192; Nicola Barfoot, *Frauenkrimi/polar féminin*; Véronique Desnain: 'Gender and Genre: Women in French Crime Writing'. In: Claire Gorrara (ed.): *French Crime Fiction*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009, p. 86-106; Marina López Martínez: Real and Rebel Women in Maud Tabachnik's Crime Writing. In: *Clues. A Journal of Detection* 27/2 (2009): 45-54.

⁶¹ Maud Tabachnik, Remarques sur la non-place des femmes.

⁶² Natacha Levet, Les 'chéries noires'. See also Desnain, 'La femelle de l'espèce', and Angela Kimyongür: Dominique Manotti and the Roman Noir.

and lesbian studies, on the other hand.⁶³ While Butler's *Gender Trouble* denounced the heterosexual matrix that produces the gender binary, Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* questioned the homosexual/heterosexual divide.⁶⁴

Another interesting point concerns the existing studies' exclusive focus on women, either as characters or as writers, as if gender and sexual norms only concern women. In 2011, the journal *Mouvements des idées et des luttes* published a special issue on norms and subversion in the crime genre, where Stéfanie Delestré discusses, once again, the position of women in the crime genre in France. She notes that some changes in gender roles are under way, and suggests that the best indicators of these changes are to be found in crime novels written by men.⁶⁵ To my knowledge, no study has hitherto taken up the challenge with the exception of my own recent work on Pierre Lemaitre.⁶⁶ This state of affairs implicitly reiterates the traditional notion of men as universal and neutral in opposition to the gendered category of women. The English sources mentioned before follow the same pattern, but Anglophone scholarship on crime fiction does present studies on masculinity, lesbian and gay crime and so on, albeit rarely about French fiction.⁶⁷ Queer studies of French crime fiction are virtually non-existent.⁶⁸

So what would a queer reading of crime novels look like? Queer is a diffuse term used in numerous ways. Queer often functions as an umbrella term for all kinds of people who manifest a non-normative gender or sexuality: gays, lesbians, transgender, transsexuals, intersexed people, bisexuals, etc. Based on such a definition, a queer reading might focus on texts that are *about* queers, as Alexander Doty puts it, or study how such characters are represented in crime novels.⁶⁹ Since any cultural product can be subjected to a queer analysis, another option is to study the *queerness* of texts by revealing queer elements that are not openly displayed. Such queer elements are instances of ruptures, fissures, queer moments and inconsistencies which disturb the ordered surface of the text, as when apparently heterosexual

⁶³ Anne Tomiche and Pierre Zoberman: 'Introduction'. In: Anne Tomiche and Pierre Zoberman (eds.): *Littérature et identités sexuelles*. Paris: Société Française de Littérature Générale et Comparée, 2007, p. 14.

⁶⁴ See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 194, note 6, and Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, p. 9-13, *passim*.

⁶⁵ Delestré, *Place et figures de femmes*, p. 70.

⁶⁶ See Andrea Hynnen: *Corps déviants dans le roman policier français: transgressions et/ou réitérations de normes genrées*. In: *Itinéraires. Littérature, Textes, Cultures* 3 (2014), accessed on 20 May 2017 on <https://itineraires.revues.org/2553>.

⁶⁷ See for instance Derek Longhurst (ed.): *Gender, Genre and Narrative Pleasure*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1989; Pamela Bedore: *Queer Investigations: Foxy Ladies and Dandy Detectives in American Dime Novels*. In: *Studies of Popular Culture* 31/1 (2008), p. 19-38.

⁶⁸ Michèle Soriano's article 'Violence, érotisme pornographie' is an exception to this rule.

⁶⁹ Alexander Doty: *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. xi.

characters momentarily manifest homosexual or lesbian desires.⁷⁰ Gender, and hence queerness, can also be studied on the level of production and reception/consumption, instead of focusing on what is in the text itself.⁷¹ Thus, a possible approach is to focus on overtly queer authors. Another interesting line of enquiry is to study queer receptions and consumptions of seemingly straight texts.

In 1993, Alexander Doty's described his usage of queer as "a flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception".⁷² Over time, queerness has partly lost its explicit connection to gender and sexuality and denotes more or less anything that is non-normative or anti-normative. Faye Stewart writes in one of the first explicitly queer studies on crime fiction, *German Feminist Queer Crime Fiction: Politics, Justice and Desire*: "The term *queer* has been used and understood in many ways, and in recent years scholars have argued that the proliferation of its connotations and its resulting indeterminacy have rendered it theoretically useless".⁷³ Still, I agree with Stewart when she argues that the concept's versatility also attests to its power to open up new and interesting perspectives.⁷⁴ The main ambition of queer analyses is to formulate new questions and to challenge seemingly self-evident ideas and perceptions which are taken for granted, and hence, never properly scrutinized, not to provide definite answers.⁷⁵ In her own analysis, Stewart pays attention to queer spaces, to codes and clues that point to fissures in constructions of identities, and to "the forms and functions of suggestion, ambiguity, and openness in the novels."⁷⁶

What I find most interesting and most challenging about the definition of queer as "anti-normative" with respect to crime fiction is the issue of subversion, norm and anti-norm. Subversion and transgression are central elements of the crime genre because of the transgression of the social order that is inherent in crime. Gill Plain asserts that "gender transgression and the disruption of 'normative' sexuality have always been an integral part of

⁷⁰ Sanna Karkulehto: 'Litteraturforskning och queerpolitisk läsning'. In: *Queera läsningar. Litteraturvetenskap möter queerteori*. Halmstad: Rosenlarv förlag, 2012, p. 18-41, p. 26.

⁷¹ See e.g. Milestone and Meyer, *Gender & Popular Culture*.

⁷² Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, p. 3.

⁷³ Faye Stewart: *German Feminist Queer Crime Fiction: Politics, Justice and Desire*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2014, p. 11.

⁷⁴ See also Jamie Bernthal: *Queering Agatha Christie. Revisiting the Golden Age of Detective Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

⁷⁵ Pierre Zoberman: 'Queer (au) XVII^e siècle?'. In: Pierre Zoberman (ed.): *Queer: Écritures de la différence? Représentations: artistes et créations*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008, p. 17-33, p. 32.

⁷⁶ Stewart, *German Feminist Queer Crime Fiction*, p. 11.

crime narrative.⁷⁷ Most feminist scholarship on crime fiction has primarily dealt with female detectives and other characters. By comparing female detectives to the long-established masculine role models presented by the genre, the aim is often either to demonstrate or to negate the subversive potential of these characters. The structure of the typical detective story with its final closure, restoration of the order and the criminal's punishment is by many scholars seen as conformist, since the threat is ultimately limited. Kimyongür's study on Dominique Manotti demonstrates that this view is still common among contemporary writers: Manotti defines her own books as *roman noirs* in contrast to such conformist detective fiction.⁷⁸ Plain consequently asserts that the transgressive 'potential' of detective stories is to be sought in the text before the closure.⁷⁹ Hence, discussions about transgression, norms and social order need to pay attention to the structure and to the narration alongside the characters.

Different categories of crime fiction have different traditions concerning social criticism. Manotti's remark that she writes *roman noirs*, not detective stories, echoes the widely accepted view that the French roman noir is characterized by social criticism. According to Anissa Belhadjin, social criticism is, in fact, the only common feature of this extremely diverse category.⁸⁰ This raises several questions including the following: if a text is recognized as subversive by its very nature, how does this fit with a critical approach whose explicit aim is to be non-normative? Can the analysis profit from such a theoretical approach and what does non-normative mean in this context? What norms, if any, are being contested, and how? The issue is further complicated by the fact that crime fiction today is becoming more and more diverse, as Natacha Levet's research on generic hybridity and generic dissolution demonstrates.⁸¹

While there do not seem to be any limits to possible approaches, contextualisation is a crucial piece of criteria. Queer scholar Sanna Karkulehto contends that a queer reading requires that the analyst be familiar with previous scholarship, with the context of the studied cultural product and the history from which it emerges, and also that s/he recognize the spatial and temporal contexts of the existing research.⁸² The scholar must refrain from uncritically

⁷⁷ Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction, Gender, Sexuality and the Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Kimyongür, Dominique Manotti, p. 237.

⁷⁹ Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Anissa Belhadjin: 'Le roman noir, le discontinu et la lecture noire'. In: Gilles Menegaldo and Maryse Petit (eds.): *Manières de noir. La Fiction policière contemporaine*. Rennes: PUR, 2010, p. 67-80.

⁸¹ Natacha Levet, 'Le roman noir contemporain. Dissolution et hybridité génériques'.

⁸² Karkulehto, 'Litteraturforskning', p. 28.

transposing his or her personal ideas about what constitutes queerness or straightness onto other periods or geographically distant cultures.

Concluding remarks

Throughout this article, I have addressed the shortage of research on queer, gender and crime fiction in France and illustrated various reasons behind this situation. France's republicanism and rigid, centralised academic system, its adversity to minority studies, and its sacralisation of high literature and the French language intertwine and contribute to French cultural exceptionalism. That a particular research topic has not been extensively explored previously is not a problem in and of itself. Still, the multidisciplinary approach called for when combining queer studies with crime fiction studies makes it more difficult than usual for French scholars to find an appropriate forum for the research and suitable disseminating channels. A marked divide between research in France and research in French studies raises the issue of where to publish and in what language. Because of the considerable gap between French and Anglo-American scholarship with regards to crime fiction studies and queer studies in literature, the kind of research which combines these two runs the risk of being considered either too bold and progressive or outdated, depending on the forum where it is presented.

In an American, a British or even a Scandinavian context, studying gender and sexuality in crime fiction may appear out-of-date. "The sexual politics of criminal fictions have been put under the microscope by critics such as Maureen Reddy (1988), Sally Munt (1994), and, most recently, Priscilla Walton and Manina Jones (1999)", Plain declared more than a decade ago in her *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction. Gender, Sexuality and the Body*.⁸³ These references are but a few of the best known early ones. To use Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and other references belonging to the so called classical queer theory to analyse literary texts is also something that has been done since the early or mid-1990s. In a French literary context such research may, on the contrary, seem marginal, highly innovative or even inappropriate. In addition to potential obstacles stemming from the academic landscape in France and its traditions, a different set of challenges are posed by the object of study in combination with this specific theoretical approach. The fluidity of the concept, "queer," and the great diversity

⁸³ Gill Plain: *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, p. 8. Plain refers, on this occasion, to the following publications: Maureen Reddy: *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel*. New York: Continuum, 1988; Sally R. Munt: *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the crime novel*. London: Routledge, 1994; and Priscilla L. Walton and Manina Jones: *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999.

of crime fiction enhance the need for particularly careful terminological and methodological deliberation. At the same time, this amorphousness in terms of material and theory affords great liberty to the scholar, as they allow for numerous approaches and methodologies. Queer studies of French crime fiction does indeed appear to be a hazardous scientific endeavour, but such research also promises to open up many stimulating lines of questioning and fruitful international collaboration.