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Jean-Patrick Manchette , Donald Nicholson-Smith (Translator) , Jean Echenoz (Introduction)

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A New York Review Books Original

Whether you call her a coldhearted grifter or the soul of modern capitalism, there's no question that Aimée is a killer and a more than professional one. Now she's set her eyes on a backwater burg—where, while posing as an innocent (albeit drop-dead gorgeous) newcomer to town, she means to sniff out old grudges and engineer new opportunities, deftly playing different people and different interests against each other the better, as always, to make a killing. But then something snaps: the master manipulator falls prey to a pure and wayward passion.

Aimée has become the avenging angel of her own nihilism, exacting the destruction of a whole society of destroyers. An unholy original, Jean-Patrick Manchette transformed the modern detective novel into a weapon of gleeful satire and anarchic fun. In *Fatale* he mixes equal measures of farce, mayhem, and madness to prepare a rare literary cocktail that packs a devastating punch.

Fatale Details

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From Reader Review *Fatale* for online ebook

Jeffrey Keeten says

”It was a genuine revelation, you see,’ said Aimée to the baron.’They can be killed. The real assholes can be killed.”

As deadly as she is beautiful.

Aimée arrives in Bléville with a distinct purpose. She is there to mingle and get to know the people of this town. She wants to observe their disagreements, their manners, and wiggle her way into their confidences. She wants to know what there is to know about everyone.

She wants to find out who deserves to die and turn a tidy profit in the process.

Aimée meets the Baron Jules, his male member in his hand gleefully pissing on the hallway wall of one of the more affluent members of this society. He is loathed and feared by the community because of his exuberant insanity, but also because he refuses to conform to being a productive member of society. As he is, very understandably, being sent from the premises, he yells out, “**You’re all done for.**”

Is it a curse? Is he foreseeing the demise of the capitalism which is worshipped like a deity by the more affluent members of this community? Or is he predicting the premature demise of those who have condemned him in the spirit of the last Templar Grand Master Jacque de Molay?

Does it matter? He is crazy after all. It doesn’t surprise me that, out of all the people Aimée has met in this town, the Baron is the one she appreciates the most. The question I kept asking myself, as I see her begin the process of blackmail which then leads to what can only be called a killing spree, is she is a sociopath or a psychopath? She can blend with society even with these homicidal tendencies, but something happens to her or awakens in her when she kills her first victim...her husband.

She’s done this before in other towns. Here we find her celebrating a victory over other wealthy men. *”She went on eating and drinking and progressively lost control of herself. She leaned over, still chewing, and opened the briefcase and pulled out fistfuls of banknotes and rubbed them against her sweat streaked belly and against her breasts and her armpits and between her legs and behind her knees. Tears rolled down her cheeks even as she shook with silent laughter and kept masticating. She bent over to sniff the lukewarm choucroute, and she rubbed banknotes against her lips and teeth and raised her glass and dipped the tip of her nose in the champagne. And here in this luxury compartment of this luxury train her nostrils were assailed at once by the luxurious scent of the champagne and the foul odor of the filthy banknotes and the foul odor of the choucroute, which smelt of piss and sperm.”*

So she declares her own war on men, men of means in particular, men who wield power indiscriminately to advance their own positions. Society perceives them to be successful men, certainly not criminals, but to Aimée that is exactly who they are. It is interesting reading this book against the backdrop of the recent flurry of accusations flying fast and furious against actors, politicians, and reporters for misusing their positions to force themselves on women/men who were under their power. Or in other words, they were being **DICKS**.

It is a good thing for men everywhere that Aimée is a fictional character or she might bring her show on the road to Washington D.C. or Hollywood or to your hometown.

The other interesting thing is the creativity that Aimée uses to kill. In fact, she rarely uses the same weapon twice. It made me think about all the weapons I have ready to hand right at my desk as I write this review. I have golfball, baseball, and even softball sized, round, polished rocks that would make formidable weapons. I have a heavy desk lamp perfect for bashing a skull. I have a Kraken clock with tentacles, crafted for gouging eyes. I have a ball point pen; don't laugh, remember that scene in the high school hallway in *Grosse Pointe Blank* when John Cusack stabs the contract killer in the neck with one? There is the three volume, slipcased edition of Vincent Van Gogh's letters, which, if I whirled properly, could become three heavy, concussion creating, flying projectiles. Potential weapons are everywhere around us and Aimée takes full advantage of their availability.

This book has been considered a French, noir classic ever since it was published in 1977. The body count rivals the famous body count in *Red Harvest*. Do the men deserve to die for their crimes against humanity, their greed, their arrogance? To my mind, no, but to Aimée's mind, yes, because the laws protect those with means so the only way to make them pay is through blood.

Jean-Patrick Manchette smoking a cig. Interesting enough Aimée changes brand of cigarettes frequently in this book almost as a deflection from people knowing anything about her with any certainty.

This book is stylishly written with a plot that is as shocking today as when it was first published. This book may have been trying to redefine moral issues with certain anti-capitalist overtones, but it was not as politically motivated as some of Jean-Patrick Manchette's other books. I couldn't put it down and nearly finished it in one sitting. One must, after all, walk their Scottish Terrier and think about a book for a bit before reading the grand finale.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Greg says

The other day someone asked for a french crime novel and he gave a bit of a plot synopsis that was just about the opposite of everything in this book, but it turned out that this was the book he was looking for. He wasn't my customer originally, but I was called in to help and I got it, because I'm sort of well read and have an idea of the books in the sections I work in (lets see one of your brain-dead drones trained on ISO do that corporate brainiacs, oh wait it doesn't matter that I did that because it can't be quantified in a report).

Anyway, the book. It's about a cold-hearted con-woman who gets into the lives of the upper-crust of small town society and then figures out a way to get their money and move on to another town. For the first 3/4's of the book it was just fine. I was thinking three stars, because as I've stated in other reviews goodreads has mediated my reading to think about the books I've read in terms of how many stars I'll be giving, and sometimes what kind of review I'll read (I'm sure there is more than one reviewer who spends some of their time while reading a book thinking of amusing pictures that will be used in a review), but then the book turns darker, or maybe it turns less political and it gets quite a bit better and the increase in quality in the last

quarter of the book seemed to make the whole book better, it's not like it illuminated the first part of the book in some way that made the narrative seem like it was coyly holding back something, I can't actually put my finger on what I mean here, I'll just say that it made the 'Frenchness' of the novel work and not just be a quirk, or like a crime novel version of *The Stranger* (which is a crime novel, technically. Actually this novel has quite a few affinities with the existential novel inspired by The Cure song, "Killing an Arab").

There isn't a thing said in this review so far that really applies to the book. Or it does apply, but that would make you, the reader of this review and possible future consumer of this book know if this book is for you. Well, it took me a couple of hours at most to read it, so does it matter what I say? Give it a whirl, you'll waste less time than you will if you watch a "Real Housewives" marathon (I've never watched an episode of any of those shows, but I imagine it relates in some way to this book, I could see the protagonist moving into the vapid lives of those women (I'm assuming vapidness, and in Vegas I'd bet heavily that the shows are vapid even though I haven't watched them) and figure out a way to rob them and possibly kill a husband or two) so you should just go for it. Try reading the book! It's probably better than at least one of the big summer blockbusters and it will be cheaper and take less time to get through!

All my cynicism aside, I liked this book. It didn't radically change my world or anything, and it wasn't my favorite crime novel ever, or my favorite French novel, but it was a solid good reading experience. No *BEST-EST!!!! EVERSSS!!!!* here but do you really expect every book you pick up to blow away all previous books in awesomeness?

And, thank you Ariel for getting a free copy of this for me from BEA!!!

Jacob says

The beautiful and dangerous Aimée Joubert comes to the seaport town of Bléville, looking to stir up trouble, open old wounds, and escape--leaving a few dead bodies and many empty pockets in her wake. But something goes wrong--something goes very, very wrong--and a dash of crime turns into a heap of trouble.

I'm always wary when NYRB Classics publishes slim novella-length books, wondering instead why they don't package a few shorter works together into a volume of more reasonable length. Leonardo Sciascia comes to mind. As for Jean-Patrick Manchette--well, I wondered at first, but changed my mind. At only 91 pages, *Fatale* packs a punch. Short, violent, packed with more story and character development than one might expect--and probably deeper and more meaningful than I realized (the afterword by Jean Echenoz caused me to go back and reread several passages). Manchette wrote ten novels, and only three have been translated into English. I hope the other seven soon follow.

William says

Fabulous start, wonderful descriptive prose, straightforward plot, charmingly ruthless femme fatale.

The first half of the book is superb, but then loses focus, and ends quite chaotically with a highly implausible climax. Too bad.

Bléville is, literally, Wheatville, but blé in a slang sense means money. The town's name is thus something like Doughville.

Notes:

1.0% "... from the foreword..."

"IN AUGUST 1980, in a homage to Dashiell Hammett entitled A Toast to Dash, Jean-Patrick Manchette declared Hammett "the best novelist in the world since 1920, and I can prove it". Well, I believe Jean-Patrick Manchette is one of the greatest writers since Dashiell Hammett, his only true son and heir, and I also believe I can prove it."

2.0% ".... skip the introduction. Very dull"

14.0% "... lovely, spare prose with flowing, detailed descriptions."

17.0% "... the translation from French is idiomatic and superb."

.

FotisK says

Ο Manchette έχει το μεγάλο προνόμιο στον χώρο του Noir, να μπορεί να χαρακτηριστεί... Αμερικανός. Ποιος έχει εντυφώσει στο έδος κατανοεί πως τιμητικός είναι ο εν λόγω "χαρακτηρισμός".

Ήσον αφορά το συγκεκριμένο έργο, η "Μοιραία" δεν με ενθουσίασε όσο το "Μελαγχολική κομμωτική" και η "Πρηνής θύση", τα οποία θεωρώ εξαιρετικά δείγματα neo-Noir γραφής και αισθητικής. Φρονώ πως κάτι λείπει από το βιβλίο που δεν μπορώ να προσδιορώ επακριβώς, ενώ μου φάνηκε κάπως βεβιασμένο ιδεολογικά, με συνείδηση η αφήγηση να μην είναι τόσο στιβαρή όσο θα έπρεπε. Σε κάθε περίπτωση, ο Manchette παραμυθώνει αγαπημένος μου συγγραφέας, καλύτερο από τους Δασκάλους του, Χάμετ και Τσντλερ.

Melki says

Much as I love it when bad things happen to rich people, I can only give this one three stars, and here's why . . .

Aimee has made a career of roaming from town to town, digging the dirt on the most illustrious citizens. She ingratiates herself into their inner circle, joining them at parties and picnics, becoming a friend and confidant, then using their dirty little secrets to take their money before heading on to the next venue. Her latest conquest, Bleville, seems ripe for the picking. As one resident proclaims, it is full of "**Corruption, influence peddling, swindles of every stripe, sexual turpitude . . .**" But, here, she may have met her match in Baron Jules. He's also longing to take down the rich and powerful. "**I can decapitate this town.**" he cries.

This has such a good premise and so much promise, but at ninety-two pages, the book is just too short. I

wanted more. More character development and more treachery. I wish that Aimee had gotten more of a thrill out of messing with the townsfolk, much like a cat playing with its prey, but she was really doing it only for the the money. Imagine how much better, how much juicier, this would have been had she played some games with *her* prey, perhaps pitting them against each other, before fleecing them. Also problematic was the fact that her wealthy adversaries seemed to have no distinct personalities. They sort of existed as one bulbous, money-scented entity.

All of this leads to a fast and violent ending that seemed rather implausible and overly dramatic. (view spoiler) Still, there are worse ways to spend two hours of your life than reading this book. Like watching some rich men arguing over who has the biggest penis, let's say . . .

Jessica says

Some crime novels read like film noir...with this one, rather than watching a movie, I felt like I was watching an oil painting: thick, dark paint in wild and colorful, angry splotches...

The novella is taut. The ride is fascinating and increasingly over-the-top. Aimee is a killer, who first enmeshes her targets, the fat wealthy corrupt petty merchants and capitalists of Bleville, in a nicely drawn net knitted of their own corrupt machinations, and you're not sorry to see them knocked off. She herself is fascinating: lean, self-sufficient, elegant and mysterious. And yet...there is a weak spot. Which of course makes her more likeable, less cinematic.

A wild and fascinating ride.
I recommend it.

Maybe play some Serge Gainsbourg afterward: Bonnie and Clyde...

Tfitoby says

He's received glowing recommendations, not least in comparison to my other recent discovery from 70's noirville Derek Raymond but perhaps I started in the wrong place to be as enamoured of this book by Manchette, the master of the French *roman noir* as I was hoping.

The pared now matter of fact prose means that at around 90 pages it's not as short as you might think, cramming a lot of the essentials in to as few words as possible. However I felt from the very beginning that there was something missing, intrigue and a little suspense perhaps, and another 30 pages to help with this wouldn't have gone amiss.

I couldn't help but be reminded of Delacorta's Alba & Gorodish novels, also from France in the late 70's but not very noir; the brevity of the books aside they both attack the bourgeois of small town France both in terms of insight but also physically using their protagonists to help them inflict mental and physical punishment for their 'evil' ways.

Fatale is more noir than just the title, 'the young woman' is as much a nihilist as it's possible for a killer for hire to be, the tone is bleak and matter of fact with the poetic soliloquies that are a staple of the genre finding

an outlet only through the mouth of the madman/poseur/Marxist/victim (a touch that supports the claim that Manchette subverts genre conventions wherever possible.)

I'm a firm believer that a small novel can still be an amazing novel but in this instance I am sad to say that it is merely an interesting yet slightly disappointing introduction to an author who I hope to become better acquainted (and on better terms too) with sooner rather than later. This was no *He Died with His Eyes Open*.

Hanneke says

Monsieur Manchette wrote a French version of a noir crime novel that certainly is reminiscent of 'Black Wings has my Angel' by Elliott Chaze, which the afterword mentioned was indeed an eye opener for him to the genre at a young age. Aimee, the ferocious killer of 'Fatale' gets her kicks by rubbing money notes all over her body just like the killer lady of 'Black Wings'. The image is powerful in an attractive way, I guess, leaving our dangerous protagonist somehow vulnerable when she is alone and unobserved. 'Fatale' is an outrageous story with more villains and dead bodies than is realistic for the small town in which it is situated, but who is talking about realistic situations here! In my opinion, it cannot match up to 'Black Wings' or any of the American noir novels, but it has definitely an appealing charm in its own absurd way.

the gift says

this is my favourite jean-patrick manchette. crime fiction at its best. why...?

this story is so short, sharp, cinematic i feel almost any critique is too long. i like this even more than his other two translated works i have read- three to kill, the prone gunman-, than the jacques tardi graphic novel. why do i favour such very short works over some generally regarded classics such as dfw or bolano or delillo, that if nothing else have the bulk to render big themes on a big canvas? perhaps i like short work purely in an instrumental way: something i can read, enjoy, read again, all in one afternoon at the coffeehouse. something that has a swift, simple, plot and characters. something that works in this way and does not ask to be thought too much. if i want to think, there are other works, there are many works of continental philosophy, waiting patiently to be read...

i keep thinking i will read those massive tomes some day, but then i come across something like this... and today is not some day. i like crime. i like roman noir. maybe i like french takes on crime...

so why am i delaying you from reading this work? it is short. it is there. read the first page and you will know if it is your sort, do not listen to me, i am just trying to justify my reading to myself if no one else... but then, there is no need for protesting this worthy, after all, i read for fun, i read a lot, i do not suggest to others they need read or admire my choices...

Nate D says

The back cover offers that Manchette considered crime novels "the great moral literature of our time", and so we get this bleak, perfect takedown of the terribly ordinary corruption and deficit of meaning of capitalist post-war society. As a kind of procedural of a passionless destroyer, it unfolds in succinct, crisp detail,

revealing only what is needed, avoiding excessive movements until all is in place for total collapse. Though clearly a crime novel of a sort, it's also clearly metaphysically something far beyond such easy categorization. The last fifteen pages are among the most astonishing I've encountered all year.

Joe Valdez says

Why did I read *Fatale*, a novella by Jean-Patrick Manchette? I feel like a dummy in a *film noir*, lured by the temptations of a sexy cover, an alluring premise and the premise that I could get away with a devilishly enthralling ride. Manchette was a French crime novelist and translator who got started in the '70s. This slim volume published in 1977 and translated here from French by Donald Nicholson-Smith concerns a young woman going by the name Aimée Joubert who arrives in the town of Bléville to unleash hell on some unsuspecting sucker with more libido than brains.

The redeeming factor for the story is that it does take place in France and there are superficial differences I appreciate. The title character gets around by train or bicycle, both niche modes of transportation in most parts of the U.S. Tea and bridge are things that bring people together. I suppose the American equivalents would be a football game on TV and buffalo wings. Aimée Joubert doesn't have a gym membership, but works out on the floor of her rented studio apartment and wrapped like a rope. I give her the nod in surviving a zombie apocalypse over her American counterpart.

Rather than lock her wiles on a male dupe and leaving him damaged, destitute and perhaps dead after screwing him silly, the plot involves food poisoning at a local fish processing plant and efforts by the town's business interests to keep it quiet. Murder for hire and blackmail ensue. While this story might have been something in the '70s, two subsequent decades of erotic thrillers, as well as action thrillers, have picked this clean. The climax devolves into Aimée running around a dock at night like Clint, Sly or Arnold and killing everyone one by one. The story has none of the intricate plotting or combustible sex of modern *film noir* like *Body Heat* or *The Last Seduction*.

I'd rather devote 3,000 words to *Body Heat*, the 1981 film written and directed by Lawrence Kasdan. The cast features William Hurt, Kathleen Turner, Richard Crenna, Ted Danson and Mickey Rourke. At a time when visual effects fantasies ruled the box office, Kasdan utilized modern moviemaking to reinvigorate a forgotten genre and make it specific to his generation. His script recalls the time worn pulp fiction of James Cain, yet the characters and dialogue are beautifully acute to modern times. And the screenwriting is so good.

EXT. THE BEACHFRONT WALKWAY - NIGHT

The Woman, MATTY, has walked to the rail. She stands there now lighting a cigarette. She presents her face to the ocean, hoping for a breeze. We move in on her, with Racine.

Racine lights a new cigarette and smiles at her. She looks at him and, for an instant, her eyes race over his body, then she looks back at the ocean.

RACINE: You can stand here with me if you want, but you'll have to agree not to talk about the heat.

She looks at him, and there is something startling about the directness of her gaze. When she speaks, she is cool without being hostile.

MATTY: I'm a married woman.

RACINE: Meaning what?

MATTY: Meaning I'm not looking for company.

She turns back toward the ocean.

RACINE: Then you should have said -- 'I'm a happily married woman.'

MATTY: That's my business.

RACINE: What?

MATTY: How happy I am.

RACINE: And how, happy is that?

She looks at him curiously. She begins walking slowly along the rail. He walks too.

MATTY: You're not too smart, are you?

Racine shakes his head "no."

MATTY: I like that in a man.

RACINE: What else you like -- Ugly? Lazy? Horny? I got 'em all.

MATTY: You don't look lazy.

Racine smiles.

David Carr says

WAIT, CRIED THE BARON

This book was among a stack of short novels I keep for travel and speed-reads. I picked it up as a kind of palate cleanser before attempting some heavier items. At 20 pages, I put it down; then I picked it up again this afternoon, just to be able to write this review.

First, the NYRB Press deserves great scorn for packaging this as a classic thriller. It is not. It is not thrilling, not mysterious, not enticing, not smart, not ingenious.

Second, but -- Mon Dieu!! -- it is French and that is probably why it got the classic noir misnomer. It is, in

fact, like those black & white French movies of the sixties where people mope about and say inexplicably emotional things while showing no emotion whatever, gazing off-screen at the crew, and behaving without perceptible rationality. Smoking unfiltered Gauloises, of course, while evoking not one teensy soupçon of care. But in French, with subtitles.

Third, "inauthentic" is the word. Well, maybe "inartistic" and "amateurish" are other words.

Fourth, the translator needed help, in order to avoid such passages as ...

"Wait!" cried the baron, plunging after her. "You are a terrifyingly negative and beautiful person." He tripped over one of the filthy rugs and fell to one knee. "Listen up!" he said. "Just what is your interest in all this?"

or ...

"Well, well, my little lady," said Commissioner Felloque when he saw Aimee. "You're going to break your neck. Where are you off to like that? Is something wrong?"

"I have just killed Baron Jules with a sporting gun," said Aimee.

"My God!"

Yes, my god, I said.

Fifth, at 97 pages it is probably 95-96 pages too long. But on a good note, everyone dies, fulfilling the reader's hopes in full. But not soon enough to make the reading a completely satisfying experience.

I know. I am a terrifyingly negative and beautiful person, but -- LISTEN UP! -- I really have to say I did not like this book.

Algernon says

Well, it's the same as ever, isn't it? It seems slow, but actually it is quite fast. Sex always comes up first. Then money questions. And, then, last, come the old crimes. You have seen other towns, my sweet, and you'll see others, knock on wood.[...] Come on, my sweet, the crimes come last, and you have to be patient.

A beautiful stranger going by the name of Aimee Joubert comes to the town of Bleville, a fictional fishing/industrial/tourist place by the Atlantic Ocean. Bleville, according to the introduction to the novel, can be translated as "Dough Town", a prosperous, thriving place, at least on the surface. For the cynical Aimee it is a den of thieves, like all the other places she has visited lately, in her personal crusade against society's ills. We get an inkling of her quest in the opening scenes of the novel, describing a hunting "accident" in another part of France, for which the girl was apparently well paid.

A "femme fatale" in the noir canon is usually a seductress, leading men into ruin by her ambition and

ruthlessness. Jean-Patrick Manchette is aiming a little higher than this basic definition when he sets out to revitalise the genre in the seventies. Aimee is not above using her physical charms to make her way in society, but her motivations transcend the personal and veer into the political and the universal questions of modern existentialist angst. Behind her cool as ice appearance she is burning with outrage and with unresolved family issues. We get an inkling of what turned this young woman into a dangerous vigilante:

"The first one, my husband, it was a revelation, you can have no idea. I was an idiot, you see. An engineer. I lived with the guy for seven years. A normal guy. In the suburbs, back there." Aimee gestured vaguely in the general direction of Paris metropolitan area, but perhaps she was referring to some other city. "Just a normal guy," she said again. "Six Ricards a day. He slapped me about. Normal. I didn't feel anything."

Is there any hope of redemption left for Aimee? Two scenes stand out for me in her defense as a moral character : a visit to her aging mother on a derelict farm in the countryside and her conversations with Baron Jules - another reject and rebel against the Bleville establishment.

For such a short novel, "Fatale" hits hard and straight to the gut of the genre. I came across a James Sallis essay on the author that opens up with : **Listen: Warn your children and the weak of heart. There is meat here. There is gristle. There is bone. .**

It's a stylish story, told in spare, emotionless short sentences, pared down to the essentials yet capturing the atmosphere and the key characters with razor sharp insight. The finale should satisfy the most exigent fans of action thrillers, with a set piece on a dark, empty dockyard worthy of Kurosawa or Sergio Leone (Aimee is training in martial arts and can kick a lot of ass despite her slight build). Even though, the final scenes aim for the metaphorical rather than for the usual unmasking of the criminal elements and their motivations, hinting at the alienation of the individual and at the widespread corruption of the modern world.

Whichever way you go, there is a big hill to climb before you get out of Bleville

Aimee climbs into the sunset (view spoiler) while the regular inhabitants of the town sleep peacefully, and the reader is left to decide for himself is she or us have a chance to escape from this French version of Sin City. (view spoiler)

"Fatale" is my first 'polar' by Manchette, although I have been a great fan of the French cinema for decades and I see its influence and its homage to the American standard noirs all over the place (Quai des Brumes, Pepe le Moko and Les Enfants du Paradis being the earliest examples I can think of). The author mentions the circular road, the back and forth across the Atlantic, in the long lasting impression made by an American classic on his becoming a 'polareux' : Elliott Chaze - "Black Wings Has My Angel". I hope I will make time for the rest of his novels being translated right now into English, and, why not, maybe even try a couple in the original French. As a conclusion of my review and an added blurb advertisement I have saved another line from the James Sallis essay:

For Manchette and for the generation of writers who followed him, the crime novel is no mere entertainment, but a means to strip bare the failures of society, ripping through veils of appearance, deceit and manipulation to the greed and violence that are the society's true engines.

Thanks go to the Pulp Fiction group here on Goodreads for picking this up as the monthly read.

Glenn Russell says

Femme Fatales of the world, unite! Read French author Jean-Patrick Manchette's ninety-page coolest of the cool noir novel *Fatale* to have a sense of what it would really be like to take control of your life.

The author gets right to the point, as in prose as sharp as a well-tempered stainless steel knife. And speaking of knives, here is the slim, athletic, fetching thirty-year-old main character Aimée Joubert on the topic of killing, reflecting back on how she plunged a knife into the liver of her first victim -- her abusive husband, "It was a genuine revelation, you see," said Aimée to the baron. "They can be killed. The real assholes can be killed. Anyway, I needed money but I didn't want to work."

Aimée, you're such a sweetie. I love you, babe.

As we learn very quickly, the real assholes of the world are those mustachioed, potbellied, moneygrubbing capitalists forever reading their newspapers, sloshing down their beer and cheating everyone in sight. In this respect, nothing much has changed in nearly 100 years: refined aesthete Des Esseintes in Joris-Karl Huysmans' 1884 novel *Against Nature* is similarly nauseated by all those mutton-chopped bourgeoisie.

But Aimée's response to these odious bastions of mediocrity is entirely opposite to Des Esseintes -- rather than retreating in isolation, she infiltrates their social circles; rather than becoming progressively weaker, she uses martial arts and exercise equipment to become progressively stronger; instead of reading Baudelaire's poetry, she reads crime novels (I imagine her reading Jean-Patrick Manchette crime novels!); and, most dramatically, instead of wishing her enemies dead, she shoots them dead.

This is noir crime fiction but none of that pandering to macho male readers, thank you. Any sensuality is not sexual or even in the presence of men. More to the point, Aimée is most sensual when she is by herself. For example, here's our hero (or anti-hero) in her own compartment on a train, "She went on eating and drinking and progressively lost control of herself. She leaned over, still chewing, and opened the briefcase and pulled out fistfuls of banknotes and rubbed them against her sweat-streaked belly and against her breasts and her armpits and between her legs and behind her knees. Tears rolled down her cheeks even as she shook with silent laughter and kept masticating."

Make no mistake, action drives plot; there is very little delving below the surface, after all, who has time for in-depth self-examination when you are, like Aimée, forever recording the patterns and habits of your future victims and calculating your next move. In this respect, *Fatale* is only one notch removed from cinema, cinema as in *Pulp Fiction* or *Kill Bill*, that is. Even relaxing in her bathroom, Aimée primes herself for action: "Lying in her hot bath, she opened the crime novel she has bought. She read ten pages. It took her six or seven minutes. She put the book down, masturbated, washed, and got out of the water. For a moment, in the bathroom mirror, she looked at her slim, seductive body. She dressed carefully; she aimed to please."

Although *Fatale* has the hard-boiled flavor of such American noir crime fiction as Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* and Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, there is also a decidedly political dimension. Recall how Jean-Patrick Manchette was an active Marxist in Paris but became frustrated when the revolution in the late sixties stalled out. One on level his novel is a cool, supercharged critique of corroded capitalism. With searing irony, the enamel plaque KEEP YOUR TOWN CLEAN! appears again and again in the story's small French town.

Since this is such a jazzy-cool novel, one last action from our sweet Aimée, this from the opening chapter, where she walks up to a fat pharmacist who is out hunting with his fat bourgeois buddies and has sauntered off by himself to take a rest under a tree. “He declared himself greatly astonished to see her here – first because she never went shooting and secondly because she had said her goodbyes to everyone the previous afternoon and taken a taxi to the station. “As surprises go, this beats all. And such a pleasant one too,” he exclaimed, and she unslung her 16-gauge shotgun, turned it on him, and before he had finished smiling emptied both barrels into his gut.”

Jean-Patrick Manchette (1942-1995) - French novelist of hyper-cool crime fiction with political overtones
