

TRANSLATION FROM FRENCH

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DALLAS: REFLECTIONS ON A TRIAL

(2) An Interview of Georges Simenon

By Christian Millau,

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Christian Millau followed the hearings at the Ruby trial in Dallas for the weekly, "Le Nouveau Candide." Upon his return to Europe he went to ask novelist Georges Simenon what he thought of the American justice. We are reprinting here, with the permission of "Le Nouveau Candide," the interview of this great specialist in criminal matters, whom Christian Millau found at home. He said he was irritated by a televised debate among French journalists which was rebroadcast from Dallas.

Georges Simenon. - Nevertheless, this parochialism is strange! Were you, who returned from Dallas, also shocked by the manner in which Americans dispensed justice?

Christian Millau. - Not shocked, but struck. One cannot imagine President Dechezelles eating during the hearings or sticking a finger in his nose

G. S. - Suppose you were a journalist in Dallas and your newspaper sent you to attend a trial in Paris. Don't you think that you would feel as though you were standing on your head? A courtroom which resembles a cathedral; gentlemen dressed as for a carnival, in red robes and furs, with

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funny little hats on their heads; attorneys with their big sleeves who, in order to ask a question of a witness, have to ask it first of a presiding judge who then repeats it. And when you learned that these three gentlemen in robes are going to closet themselves with the jury, to decide the fate of the fellow in the dock, would it not make your American blood boil?

"But these three gentlemen," you are going to ask "by whom are they paid?" "By the government," they will reply. "What!" you would say. "They are paid by the government and they render justice! But this is scandalous! Why, in our country" And one can go on like this for a long time.

C. M. - All joking aside, what in your opinion, is the big difference between the French and American justice?

G. S. - Instead of being, as in Europe, hieratic, almost religious, justice in a city like Dallas is essentially tribal.

Dallas was founded by some thirty people, whose families still exist. For them, a trial is a family affair, somewhat like the Mafia. . . Do you know that in Connecticut, when there is a sign, "Trespassing is Prohibited," in front of a property, the mistress of the house still has the right to shoot on sight?

In Arizona, where I had my ranch, it is far more serious to steal a horse than to hold up a bank. The explanation is very simple: in Arizona, not so long ago, a man without a horse was a dead man. There was a great gentleman in Tucson who said to his friend one evening: "I bet that if I stole a horse you would not dare to hang me!" Sobbing, they hung him.

This happened in 1880, at the time of Anatole France, Paul Bourget, Cezanne!

C. M. - Do you find it normal that a judge, Judge Brown, for example, is elected like an ordinary city councilman?

G. S. - Even in the United States this is a much debated principle. But there also, the election of a judge stems from the idea of tribal justice. Pioneers named the most honest man among them.

Yes, an election is an affair of bistros and handshakes. But do you believe that Clemenceau or Poincare decreased in stature because they were elected? And that it will lower de Gaulle to shake hands and to make election speeches?

C. M. - You have attended numerous trials, both in France and in the United States. Do the two procedures appear very different to you?

G. S. - In France, a trial is almost finished before it has begun. Everything is in the file and witnesses are merely going to repeat what they have already told the examining magistrate. It only remains for the attorneys to make their speeches.

In the United States, the trial is an action. The entire procedure unfolds under the eyes of the public and everything may change for the slightest cause. That is why in America great trial lawyers are formidable actors: they stage their trial like a play, with sham exits, sensational developments, etc.

And this is always done with unparalleled violence, for everything is permitted. I assure you that it is not fun to be a witness in the United States! Defense attorneys terrorize you.

But then, while in France, the hearings go over the head of the accused who has no right except to keep quiet and whom his attorney forces to sit back, in America, he is obliged to understand what is taking place; he really participates in his trial.

C. M. - If I understand you right, it is more difficult to fake a trial in the United States where it unfolds itself "in the open" than in France where it is secret.

G. S. - It is practically impossible to fake a trial in the United States. But, instead, they can resort to some legal tricks. Thus, when the prosecutor - the district attorney - feels that he has insufficient proof to send the defendant to the electric chair, he proposes a deal to the defense attorney: "I will not ask for capital punishment, but you, on your part, plead unpremeditated murder (ten years in prison, maximum)." If the attorney is not quite sure of his cards, he accepts the trade.

C. M. - Does American justice commit as many or fewer errors than French justice?

G. S. - American justice has more loopholes. If I were guilty, I would prefer to be tried in America If I were innocent, I would like to be tried in England.

C. M. - And France?

G. S. - Hm! France, I don't know. Laws change too often. One has to keep track of them every three months.

C. M. - There is something else which makes Frenchmen smile; it is the use Americans make in trials, and particularly in the trial of Ruby, of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. In the case of Ruby, people who believe the conspiracy theory are convinced that medicine is going to be a good means for stifling the so-called scandal. What is your opinion?

G. S. - Americans take the psychological study of the defendant very seriously, and this is all to their credit. But Texas is not among the fourteen States which, a short time ago, instituted a very searching examination in prison hospitals for individuals who plead insanity. Thus, there will be questions for a long time regarding Ruby's sanity.

No psychiatrist in the world would ever be able to tell if Ruby killed or did not kill Oswald in a moment of temporary insanity, which Americans call an "impulse."

Perhaps they will demonstrate that he was weak, that he had epileptic tendencies, but how can they prove - or, a contrario, deny - that on such a day and at such an hour it was impossible for him to resist the "impulse?"

C. M. - If they think that the Ruby case was rigged, the Dallas police would be implicated. You, who know American police; is it or is it not possible?

G. S. - The corruption dates back to Prohibition. Today there are two kinds of cities in America; open cities and closed cities. The former are those where, for reasons of hospitality and tourism, the police close their eyes to prostitution, gambling, strip-tease, or closing hours for liquor stores. This is the case of Chicago and Dallas. This is the case of New York at present. Who gets paid? How much does one get paid? I do not know. But, the police are bound to know.

Furthermore, when the American fleet disembarks at Cote d'Azur and 1,000 girls arrive by train from Paris, police also know about it. That is exactly the same thing. But to fake a police investigation, really, I don't believe it.

If Ruby did have contacts with the Dallas police, what is more natural? Ruby, an owner of a cabaret, is necessarily a stool pigeon or an informer for police. If you are not convinced, go and ask the tenants of night clubs in the Pigalle But I do not think that this could go much farther.

C. M. - Could the Mafia use a man like Ruby?

G. S. - Unthinkable. When an organization has some "work" to do, it sends a killer to New York from California, a killer from Chicago to Las Vegas, etc. It covers up its tracks; this is the ABC of the trade.

C. M. - And if he acted for a political group?

G. S. - I would think they would take a foreigner. A German, an Italian; at any rate, someone unknown, who would not have identity documents.

C. M. - I see that like 90% of Americans, you do not believe in a conspiracy theory.

G. S. - I did not say that. I do not have in my hands the evidence from the files which would permit me to reject this theory. I know only that, first of all, if there was a conspiracy, it would begin to come out, since a conspiracy profits someone and really, we do not see today, who would profit from it. And then, every time a President of the Republic is assassinated, they talk about a political plot.

Today again, there are people who are convinced that Gorguloff had political reasons for killing Doumer, while it was established that he was simply an insane man. Moreover, plots almost always fail. Too many people are in the know and there is always one who spills the beans. But one lunatic could have killed de Gaulle. A lunatic is unpredictable. Nothing can be done.

C. M. - You did not find anything strange in the investigation conducted after the assassination of Kennedy?

G. S. - I repeat, I do not have the evidence. But, actually, there is no certainty that the investigation was well conducted technically. For example, since they did not find the traces of powder on the fingers or on the cheek of Oswald, it seems impossible to me that he was the one who took the shot. But we must not forget that the investigation was made by the local police, completely stunned by the event. Imagine what would happen in France if de Gaulle were killed at a capital of a canton and a (local) gendarmerie would be in charge of everything.

C. M. - If they would show you the report of the FBI establishing that there was no connection between Oswald and Ruby, would you believe it?

G. S. - Without a shadow of hesitation.

C. M. - This report was not made public, but it exists and it actually affirms that there was no connection between the two cases. It does not matter, say the partisans of the "conspiracy" theory - - the FBI doctored its report.

G. S. - This is impossible. The FBI cannot be bought. No president has been able to make it say anything contrary to its findings. The FBI is completely independent. It does not have the Minister of the Interior on its back. The same people say that the Warren Commission of the Supreme Court (sic) is in the process of shuffling the cards. They do not have any idea of what the Supreme Court represents. The Supreme Court does not care a rap for the President, the Senate or public opinion. It is indeed "supreme." I would not doubt the Warren report for a second.

C. M. - Oswald was hardly slain when France started to talk about a conspiracy. And what was your reaction?

G. S. - I was stunned but I did not think at all about the "settlement of accounts." The French reaction is explained by the fact that, since Louis XIV, this country has had a political police which interferes in everything, even elections.

Why did I put Maigret in the *quai des Orfèvres* and not in *rue des Saussaies*? Because when I went to the office of the Chief of Police, *rue des Saussaies*, I saw that his door communicated with that of the Minister of the Interior Frenchmen are traumatized by the ties existing between the police and politics. That is why they reject the idea that Kennedy's murder was not a political affair. Today we still have new theories published on the murder of Lincoln! One hundred years from now there will still be men of good faith and mild cranks who will be retrying the Ruby case.