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## Moretti, Franco (ed.). *Il romanzo. Volume secondo. Le forme*. Einaudi. Torino, 2002.

The spirit of this series of volumes on the novel, edited by Franco Moretti, brings irresistibly to mind the globalizing tendencies of the nineteenth-century novel itself : the dream of a complete representation of society and of the world. Indeed, it would not be too far off the mark to say that the goals of this project remind the reader of the attempts by Balzac, Zola or Dumas to include in their work all discourses on all things, nothing excluded. In this case, of course, the « whole » that constitutes the aim of the exercise is the novel, as the dominant form of literary expression of the modern age. It should be noted that up until now, the somewhat atypical character of the project has not been an impediment to achieving excellent results. In fact, it has been quite the contrary. The main goal of this collection is to provide a multi-faceted picture of the many incarnations of the novel, including those that traditional criticism has always tried to marginalize on the basis of ideological value judgments, or on the basis of rigid and axiological aesthetic concepts. There is no such preconceived position behind these works. Instead, their objective is to attempt to identify the whole of the novel's sphere of influence, both in terms of genres and in terms of geographical origin. It should not be surprising, then, if students of popular culture will find this second volume of the series to be of particular interest.

This volume goes over the most important developments of what will eventually become "popular culture". Sections offering essentially historical analysis, often dealing with "canonical" literary examples, alternate with longer and more detailed studies comparing several works over a longer time-frame. In a section on "prototypes and genres", Ian Duncan offers a very valid outline of the aesthetics of the Gothic novel, through an analysis of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*. Following that, Paolo Tortonese presents Sue's *Mysteries of Paris*. Even though readers familiar with the reception of this particular novel may remember having read parts of this analysis in Stirner, in Marx or in Bory, this study has some undeniable qualities. First and foremost, it presents clearly and in a straight-forward manner some obvious points that have been generally eschewed by traditional academic criticism. Notably, concerning the structure of the novel, and the fact that the use of suspense predates the birth of the "*feuilleton*" and can be found in writings no one could possibly suspect of pandering to low-grade popular taste. This may seem like a self-evident statement, but too often novels published in instalments in daily papers have been considered a simple game, based on the deliberate frustration of the reader and entirely determined by the strictures of the publication. It is also somewhat refreshing to read that "Rodolphe, who is at the same time guilty and good, is the most moral of all of Sue's characters. Only a shocking carelessness could have got him confused with a close relative of Nietzsche's superman." (p. 149) Indeed, it is true that Rodolphe has one thing in common with the German philosopher's superman: his intrinsic superiority, acquired by birth. Otherwise, Eco's assimilation of the two, inspired by Gramsci, ends up resembling more a caricature than an analogy.

The article by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young on H.G. Wells' novel *The War of the worlds* is also worthy of notice. At the end of a well-rounded historical, as well as generic analysis, the reader can savour clear and challenging conclusions such as this one : "All literary genres are hybrids, but some are more hybrid than others. [...] One could say that the voracity typical of the novel proves to be particularly omnivore when it comes to science-fiction: it is indeed its capacity to borrow, to imitate, to assimilate, to surpass and to proliferate that makes it so difficult to find an exhaustive definition for it." (p. 177).

In the third section of the volume, characteristically entitled "High and low", figures a long essay by Beatriz Sarlo on the sentimental novel from 1700 to 2000, worthy of the previous studies by Ellen Constans or Julia Bettinotti. Daniel Couégnas offers a panoramic study of the evolution of forms and content in mass literature - "change and continuity" - entitled "From the Bibliothèque bleue to James Bond". Here as well, an essentially historical overview serves as pretext for some extremely pertinent judgments that seem to be made possible only by the deliberately international point of view of the project. Couégnas rightly states: "France's example shows uncontrovertibly how the inestimable good fortune of having a prestigious culture and literary past, may prove to be a handicap for the investigation of the whole panorama of the novel, since it creates a habit of expressing judgments based on an elitist outlook, and on institutional positions favouring *celebration* over *analysis*." (p. 438) The readers of *Belphégor* will also discover with interest Couégnas' closing statement. The critic declares that he prefers "to consider paraliterature as *a field of study on the border between High literature and media studies*" (p. 438), going against what he presents as the opinion of most North-American researchers, including Paul Bleton and the Montreal School, who deem the relation with the media to be more fruitful than that with literature from a critical standpoint.

We should still mention the article by Jeffrey Brooks on "The popular novel in Russia, from bandit tales to socialist realism". The author sketches a very interesting portrayal of the influence of foreign mass culture in Soviet Russia, particularly in the form of *dime novels*, as well as of the unsuccessful attempt by the state to create an authentic mass literature capable of attracting a large readership.

We remain convinced that contemporary literary criticism can only benefit from following the path indicated by this project, replacing the ineffective opposition between High literature and popular literature with an honest and open-minded attempt to identify the common characteristics that make the novel the primary form of literary creation of modern times.