

Cutchin on O'Neil-Henry (2017)

O'Neil-Henry, Anne. *Mastering the Marketplace: Popular Literature in Nineteenth-Century France*. U of Nebraska P, 2017, pp. xii + 279, ISBN 978-1-4962-0198-0

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Anne O'Neil-Henry's new book draws on an extraordinarily diverse corpus of novels, catalogues, newspapers, advertisements, reviews, and correspondence from the early to mid-nineteenth century to illustrate the influences on, and responses to, the changing literary market. With a corpus made up of panoramic literature of the July Monarchy and the fiction of Paul de Kock, Eugène Sue, and Honoré de Balzac, set against a backdrop of the contemporary advertisements and reviews used to promote and evaluate these works, she identifies the formal and promotional tactics that authors and their publishers explored and used to capitalize (in every sense of the word) on the tastes of their readers, popular and critical alike (26). These business-savvy authors evolved with, within, and in response to a new type of literary market such that the directional flow of creation-to-market relationships must be rethought, according to O'Neil-Henry, as should received ideas about high/low distinctions and generic boundaries.

In the first, finely crafted half of the study, O'Neil-Henry considers less canonical authors. The first chapter on panoramic literature serves as an extended introduction, preparing her readers for ensuing analyses of the works of de Kock, Sue, and Balzac. Taking multi-author works such as *Paris, ou le livre des cent-et-un* and *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, and De Kock's *La Grande Ville: nouveau tableau de Paris* alongside various physiologies (including the anonymous *Physiologie des physiologies*, a parody of parodies), O'Neil-Henry shows how these texts, understood as a profit-oriented genre, demonstrate a self-consciousness about their twofold value, both literary and commercial. Their meta-commentary on their own mediocrity and commercial intent, according to O'Neil-Henry (following Denis Saint-Amand and Valérie Stiénon) must be considered as part of the "contemporary debate about the literary value of commercialized literature" (35). Opposing the hybridity of the "tableaux de Paris" to the "formulas" for the physiologies, these texts "betray the instability of literary categories [...] even as they were being formed" (55).

O'Neil-Henry then delves deeper into the works of Paul de Kock, taking into account their reception alongside their content. The "de Kock paradox" coined in the chapter's title refers to the complicated relationships between his name as a signifier for lowbrow literature and his varied reception as an author well attuned to readers' taste for novelistic explorations of contemporary urban life in the feuilleton. Taking the examples of *Un Homme à marier* (1837) and *Le Cocu* (1831), O'Neil-Henry suggests (as does Judith Lyon-Caen) that de Kock's characteristic digressions are designed to target a specific, urban audience; much like the *physiologies* and *tableaux* examined in the first chapter, the texts advertise themselves, by means of these digressions, to a specific, contemporary market. This practice, along with his oft-critiqued penchant for "recycling" his own work, were not unique to de Kock but in fact common among July Monarchy authors; therefore, O'Neil-Henry concludes, these methods should be treated as commercial strategies, thus complicating the totalizing, high/low binary applied to de Kock by his contemporaries and modern critics alike.

With this in mind, O'Neil-Henry turns successively to Sue and Balzac. She notes that Sue's career is often simply, or too quickly conflated with *Les Mystères de Paris*, so it is gratifying that she devotes her critical attention to *Kernok le pirate* (1830), *Mathilde* (1841), and *Paula Monti* (1842), showing that Sue attained his celebrity status a decade before the novel for which he is most often remembered. In her readings of these novels, she endeavors "to reconstruct Sue as an author who understood and capitalized on the developing literary field" (91). Moving from the maritime novel to the historical novel to the urban mystery, Sue proves to be "a well-connected author savvy about adapting his skills for marketable projects" (99). Just as he moved on from maritime novels at about the same moment that demand for them waned, he also abandoned social novels at the start of the Second Empire (116–17).

In her fourth chapter, O'Neil-Henry circles back to the opening one, noting that despite Balzac's disdain for his contemporaries' engagement with so-called industrial literature, he actually used many of the same strategies, including publishing works serially, borrowing from and recycling his own work, and contributing to the genre of panoramic literature (120). In a particularly fine section, O'Neil-Henry admirably traces three different versions of the same material by Balzac. By adapting material from his *Physiologie de l'employé*, Balzac makes *Les Employés* a much more hybrid text than its earlier version as *La Femme supérieure*; Balzac does this just at the height of the *physiologie* trend, showing that he became "more dependent on the style of the *physiologie* in his novel over its several versions, not surprisingly as the short texts became more commercially viable" (142–43). This hybridity recalls that of both panoramic literature and de Kock's works, as O'Neil-

Henry shows in earlier chapters.

This patient, readable, even-keeled study inscribes itself in the wake of scholarship on *paralittérature* (Marc Angenot), the *roman populaire* (Anne-Marie Thiesse), the *bas-fonds* and crime fiction (Dominique Kalifa), literature and the popular press (Marie-Ève Thérenty and Guillaume Pinson), and literary and cultural studies (Judith Lyon-Caen). O'Neil-Henry's work makes valuable contributions on several fronts, and it would be of greatest interest to scholars studying the intersections of cultural studies and popular literature of the early to mid-nineteenth century. To a somewhat lesser degree, it will interest those studying the relationships between literature and the press, although this is not the author's focus.

In writing about her authors' mastery of the marketplace, O'Neil-Henry in turn demonstrates her own mastery of detail, distilling material from a variety of sources and marshaling it into the service of her focused argument with admirable lucidity. Mastery of the literary marketplace, O'Neil-Henry argues, consists not in following trends or dictating tastes, but in deft negotiations between practice, literary quality, and commercial viability.

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