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Belphégor's Motives

What is *Belphégor*? The answer to this question may vary depending upon the age of the reader. Older people of French culture will immediately think of Arthur Bernède's best-seller, one of the greatest successes of the "feuilleton", the new genre created by Alexandre Dumas and Eugène Sue for the enjoyment of the masses - the other invention of the nineteenth century. Other readers may find hidden in a corner of their memory the black-draped silhouette of the "phantom of the Louvre", from the 1965 TV adaptation by Claude Barma. Juliette Gréco's eyes kept all Europe enthralled for weeks on end in this revival of the, by then, almost forgotten novel. The youngest readers will probably think of last summer's movie by Jean-Paul Salomé, with Sophie Marceau, the latest proof of a myth's capacity for survival, in particular when it is supported by the entertainment industry's unsinkable story-making machine.



Belphégor (Claude Barma, 1965)

We have chosen *Belphégor* as the title of our new electronic journal, since it would seem quite difficult to find a more striking example of the capacity for transformation, disguise, adaptation and renewal of the "popular", as a category, than this sombre hero - a shadow among shadows, a repository for all urges, all fears, all possibilities. *Belphégor* seems like the ideal standard under which to gather studies devoted to popular literature and media culture, the twin fields this character has been successfully exploring for nearly a century. But let's not forget that there is another *Belphégor* as well, much older, Jean de La Fontaine's. A curious, nosy little devil:

Ce diable était tout yeux et tout oreilles,
Grand éplucheur, clairvoyant à merveilles,
Capable enfin de pénétrer dans tout,
Et de pousser l'examen jusqu'au bout.

He would seem to be a perfect protector, this "demon of discoveries and ingenious inventions" (as defined in Collin de Plancy's *Infernal Dictionary* of 1863) for a project that aspires first of all to be a work of discovery and of knowledge.

This journal is the joint creation of the members of the Coordination internationale des chercheurs en littérature populaire et culture médiatique, an organization dating from 1997. The need to create a permanent tool of exchange and discussion that could facilitate communication among colleagues from distant countries, emerged during the annual meetings of this group. The result is a "virtual" place open to all those who work towards a greater understanding of the mechanism and content of popular culture in its diverse shapes and forms.

A multidisciplinary and multilingual journal

The extent to which the study of popular culture is still divided among separate but contiguous fields is one of the facts that first struck the members of the "Coordination". This separation affects both the various forms of popular culture in its historical development (the press, radio, television, and newer information and communication technologies...) and their geographical origin. The various national cultures often remain cloistered within their own language and critical traditions.

To attempt to address this situation, *Belphégor* is intended as a multidisciplinary and multilingual journal. As a multidisciplinary enterprise, the journal will be open to critical works of diverse orientations: from social criticism to semiotics, reception theory and cultural studies, as well as information and communication science and literary history. Preference will be shown to innovative work capable of bringing together more than one of these disciplines. As a multilingual journal, *Belphégor* will publish articles in six languages: French, English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and German, followed whenever possible by abstracts in all of the journal's other languages. When the desired language is not presently available, the French version will appear on the screen. We will also attempt to present new publications in the field of popular culture in the various countries of our membership, in order to bring to our readers' attention some worthwhile initiatives that might otherwise remain exclusively restricted to the speakers of a specific language. Finally, we would like to stimulate interest for other cultures and to encourage the translation of articles and studies capable of advancing knowledge in our field.

The merits of electronic publishing

As an electronic journal, *Belphégor* escapes the limitations of print. However, if it escapes these limitations, it does not escape the obligations of print journals. In order to disarm, from the start, the likely criticism from those quarters still doubtful as to the value of electronic publishing, let us state straight away that among these obligations is the fact that this electronic publication functions as a refereed journal, precisely along the lines of more traditional academic journals. Among the limitations that our electronic format enables us to avoid, we can list the requirements of periodicity, the limits on the length of the articles and on the choice of illustrations. Depending on need, the journal will be able to integrate video or sound clips within articles. The elasticity of the electronic publishing medium will allow us as well to assemble issues around a specific theme over a certain period of time, and to propose articles to our readers as they are being received and accepted by the journal. An on-line publication is more likely to grow through accretion than following separate and identifiable steps. Thus, each issue of *Belphégor* will be considered complete only when the following issue starts appearing. An issue of the journal can therefore be considered not so much as a given object, complete in itself, but as an organism that grows and develops around a theme, a subject, a topic over a period of time.

We are presently anticipating the publication of two yearly issues at a minimum, but future periodicity will depend essentially on the availability of valuable material meriting publication, as opposed to the requirements of printing and distribution. Individuals and institutions that wish to be kept notified of the evolution of the

journal and of the appearance of new articles are asked kindly to contact the Editor.

The Archives

In addition to the articles appearing in the main section of the journal we would like to introduce our readers to the archives. That is where you will find the proceedings of the International Conference held in Louvain-la-Neuve on June 3rd and 4th, 1999, including several important contributions to the definition of our field of study. We hope to be able to extend and to diversify the archives in order to include hard-to-find critical works and to provide researchers with quick and easy access to highly useful research tools. In future, the archives will also become home of particularly representative works of popular writers of the past, as well as to a gallery of popular illustration.

The Links

One first tool the value of which will be immediately apparent to our readers is the "Webographie" (or "bibliography of the web") proposed in this issue by Paul Bleton. This is a conscientious and systematic work of exploration of what the Web has to offer in terms of popular culture (mostly but not by any means exclusively in French). This document has been organized so as to facilitate the exploration of various web pages according to their genre and nature, and to allow a rigorous critical approach to the material. This initial bibliography will be enriched with new links in the following issues. In particular, we look forward to extending its reach beyond the mostly French sphere. With this goal in mind we would also like to appeal to our readers to let us know of any interesting sites on popular literature in any one of *Belphégor's* languages.

On behalf of the Editorial Board as a whole, and of the other numerous colleagues who helped us in the preparation of this first issue, I would like to welcome you to *Belphégor's* domain.

Bonne lecture !