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Couégnas, Daniel. *Fictions, Enigmes, Images* PULIM. Limoges, 2001.

This book by Daniel Couégnas follows upon his important study *Introduction à la paralittérature* (Seuil, 1992) of which it is both a continuation and a completion. It is mostly made up of previously written articles, connected by brief new sections to ensure coherence and followed by a significant theoretical conclusion. In spite of this apparent patchwork nature, the internal logic of the book is impeccable and shows it is the result of a long-term study of the subject. Each chapter responds to a particular need and fulfils a specific role. The subject of popular literature is examined from all angles, starting with the *paratext* (titles, advertisements, covers) and continuing on to the main characteristics of what Couégnas calls the "formal frame" of popular novels, i.e. the unmistakable signs that say a novel really is "popular". The peculiarity of popular writing is to be difficult to pin down, but Couégnas finds his way around the subject through the analysis of composition techniques in the works of several authors, followed by the study of recurrent themes and a discussion of the notion of ironic distance. His "impressionist" method, if I may use this pictorial analogy, is quite effective and the resulting portrait of the genre more complete because of it. The global coherence of the whole is strengthened by the presence of studies on the same authors (for example, Gustave Le Rouge and Pierre Véry) in different sections.

In my view, the greatest merit of this book is how it succeeds in its stated goal of "underlining the close ties that bind indissolubly three complementary approaches: that of the novelist, that of the publisher and that of the reader." (116) There are frequent surprises and many clear and simple judgements, like the excellent definition of the nature of the cover illustrations by the painter Starace as "classicism of the visual *poncif*". (61)

Couégnas talks more than once of the surprisingly poetic aspect of the titles of popular novels, in particular when they are read in sequence, as he does for the titles of the adventures of Harry Dickson. It is undoubtedly this peculiar characteristic of popular writing that led Blaise Cendrars to draw from Le Rouge's astonishing novel, *Le Mystérieux docteur Cornélius*, the poems he published under the title *Kodak*. Couégnas also mentions this case. To get back to the Dickson novels, however, he states: "Up until now dicksonian specialists have been unable to identify the paternity of the titles. Are they simple translations from the German original, or have they been imagined by Jean Ray for the French edition's needs?" (47) Couégnas is quite right in saying shortly after that "the matter of the paternity of the Dickson titles is after all of secondary importance" (56). This type of periodicals probably do, indeed, create a general effect that is quite independent from the talent of any specific writer. However, even though this piece of trivia may be fairly useless, I would like to attempt to answer Couégnas' question. The Sherlock Holmes adventures written in Germany that became Harry Dickson adventures for the French market (through Jean Ray's adaptations), were also translated in other languages. In Italy, they became the adventures of Joe

Petrosino, "the great American-Italian detective". Two of the titles in the list featured in Couégnas' book are identical to titles of two of Petrosino's adventures. *Le Repaire aux bandits de Corfou* and *La prisonnière du clocher* become *Un covo di delinquenti a Corfù* and *La prigioniera del campanile*. These were reprinted a few years ago by the Florentine publisher Nerbini. Since the Italian publisher was getting its material directly from Germany, it would appear that the titles of the adventures of Harry Dickson are not, after all, a creation of Jean Ray's.

I would like to reserve part of this short review to respond to a response Couégnas is kind enough to offer me in the Conclusion of his volume. In an article dealing with the notion of "paraliterature" ("La paralittérature et la question des genres") where I discussed several critical approaches, I compared (maybe rather abruptly) Couégnas' position as presented in his book *Introduction à la paralittérature* to that of Todorov. This latter author clearly divided "literature" from "paraliterature" and sent some works to heaven and other ones to hell with enviable nonchalance. Couégnas indicates in his Conclusion that his aim has always been "to insist upon the constituent variety" of the novels and to focus on novels "of the third kind", i.e. those who "officially" belong to "paraliterature" but nonetheless show sufficient qualities to warrant critical attention.

I also do not subscribe to that brand of myopic egalitarianism that tends to consider all aesthetic judgment upon which to justify one's preferences to be, at best, purely optional. And I also am not one of those aficionados Couégnas talks about, who refuse "to admit that there are, in this field, novels that are less good than others." (219) To the contrary, I fully agree such differences exist (it would seem fairly obvious) but I am not convinced that the best way to identify them is to adopt the terminology "literature versus paraliterature", coming as it does from critics who are hostile - by definition - to any type of popular literature whatsoever. The debate, here, is not so much around content as around terminology. I remain of the opinion that the term "paraliterature", created by Tortel, is inappropriate, since it arbitrarily defines two contiguous but nonetheless sharply separated fields, whose nature is irreconcilable by definition. This, after all, was Tortel's explicit intention and derives from a precise ideological position. In a field divided between "literature" and "paraliterature" there is no room for novels of the "third kind" (sorry for Couégnas...). The etymology simply does not allow it. Indeed, I cannot help but consider that "paraliterature" is a "barbaric term" (as he says himself on page 81) and that even though it can prove practical, it has a tendency to create misunderstandings that it would be preferable to avoid. Otherwise, I wholeheartedly support the notion of "formal frame" the author presents and illustrates so clearly, to help identify those novels sufficiently charged with originality. I agree with the author's response to Charles Grivel when he says that specialists have a tendency to examine "only quality works (Dumas, Leroux, Leblanc...) as if they referred to the whole of this type of production" (220). I freely confess having also sinned in such manner... In spite of this, I still think it possible to propose an interesting (and possibly useful...) critical discourse even on novels with little or no "literary" quality whatsoever, such as (to provide a clear-cut example) the detective novels of Mickey Spillane. Personally, I admit I lack the courage to try. But this does not mean that these novels are outside of the field of literature. It just means they are unmistakably literature of the worst kind. No need to call them "paraliterature" because of that.

I would also like to point out that an article by Daniel Couégnas will appear in the second volume of the important collective work on the nature of the novel directed by Franco Moretti, for the Italian publisher Einaudi. A part of his contribution is already available on-line, in French, at the following address:
<http://www.einaudi.it/einaudi/ita/news/can4/98-343.jsp>