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Anne O'Neil-Henry, *Mastering the Marketplace: Popular Literature in Nineteenth-Century France*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. xii + 245 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$50.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN-13: 978-1-4962-0198-0.

Review by Whitney Walton, Purdue University.

This book opens with arresting quotations from Gustave Flaubert and Honoré de Balzac in which the authors accused themselves of writing like Paul de Kock and Eugène Sue. Flaubert's and Balzac's self-deprecating remarks suggested that their work bore traits of lowbrow commercialism characteristic of two of the most popular authors of the July Monarchy rather than the aesthetic quality to which they aspired. Anne O'Neil-Henry then proceeds to challenge this dichotomy of high and low literature that many scholars have reinforced since Flaubert's and Balzac's time. She does this by arguing persuasively that both commercially successful authors and canonical writers engaged in similar practices that accompanied a significant transformation of the literary marketplace in the 1830s and 1840s. These developments included new technologies of book production, affordable newspapers, wider accessibility of books through lending libraries, and publishing's adaptation to capitalism. Her sources are all printed, including literary texts, publishers' journals, and newspapers that contained advertising, serial novels, and critical reviews; she engages relevant secondary literature thoroughly. O'Neil-Henry offers a firmly grounded historical and literary analysis of the intersection of literate mass society, industrial and commercial capitalism, and literary culture in the July Monarchy.

O'Neil-Henry begins by analyzing the *physiologie* phenomenon that peaked in 1840-42, and that she also refers to as panoramic literature, a term coined by Walter Benjamin. The physiologies were urban ethnographies that participated in scientific observation and classification, as well as appealed to readers' delight in seeing their neighbors (not themselves) humorously examined. Publishers avidly sought and authors and artists gladly contributed to studies of Parisian types that spanned a broad range of social classes, occupations, and personalities. The book includes images of newspaper advertisements (that nicely enhance the text), including illustrations, for physiologies of the student, the *grisette*, the shopkeeper, the lawyer, the creditor, the salaried worker, the bluestocking, and many more. O'Neil-Henry's innovation is to analyze the physiologies as combining critical literary analysis and astute marketing practices, rather than seeing them as texts that simply catered to petty bourgeois tastes for entertainment and familiar reading. She supports her claim with evidence that bibliographies of the time classified the physiologies as a hybrid form: as both literary guidebooks and popular reading. Additionally, she shows how Paul de Kock created a new hybrid genre, adapting the physiology or guide to social types into fiction.

The second chapter focuses on de Kock, portraying him not as a commercially successful producer of middlebrow bestsellers, but rather as a knowledgeable manipulator of innovative mass marketing techniques. Through close reading of de Kock's texts, O'Neil-Henry reveals that his frequent digressions from the plot cannily addressed readers' expectations for urban ethnography. She also notes that critical reviews of de Kock's work in the 1820s were more sensitive to the stylistic innovation of his writings than were reviewers under the July Monarchy, who contributed to the current view that his work was bad, commercially successful literature. July Monarchy reviewers panned de Kock for recycling plots and basically writing the same book over and over again, but O'Neil-Henry notes that this practice revealed his understanding of readers' preferences for urban spectacle, bourgeois respectability, and salacious humor.

O'Neil-Henry next turns to Eugène Sue, best known for his serial novel *Les Mystères de Paris*, the publishing phenomenon of 1842-43. While many scholars have analyzed the reasons for the work's popularity, including its mix of urbanization and criminality and combination of romanticism and low price, O'Neil-Henry resists approaching Sue as a one-book wonder. Instead, she examines Sue's many works that preceded *Les Mystères* to assert his adaptability to changing tastes and genres. Capitalizing on popular interest in sea stories following James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot* (1824), Sue, who had served in the navy, published several maritime novels that found favor with readers and that critics deemed promising of future greatness. He then shifted to writing non-fiction, historical fiction, and novels of manners in the late 1830s, at a propitious moment, just when the popularity of maritime novels had run its course. According to O'Neil-Henry, Sue, like de Kock, recycled plots and characters, but he did so more subtly, by crossing into new sub-genres, through which he could reach new readers that came with serialization. O'Neil-Henry focuses, for example, on duplicitous, witch-like secondary female characters who appeared in the maritime novels, manners novels, and the social novel *Les Mystères*. This overview of Sue's work allows O'Neil-Henry to identify a similar pattern of literary recycling and marketplace intelligence in both Sue's and de Kock's works. However, Sue evinced more variety in genres and, rather than enjoying the steady popularity of de Kock, he experienced both modest and runaway success.

The fourth chapter asserts that while Balzac distanced himself from de Kock and Sue, claiming the high ground of art in contrast to his rivals' popular appeal, he nonetheless engaged in similar literary and commercial practices. For O'Neil-Henry, this insight provides strong support for her challenge to the high-low binary of literary analysis that Balzac himself espoused. She analyzes in depth two of Balzac's "more serious novels," *Histoire des Treize* and *Les Employés* to show Balzac's engagement with panoramic literature and the literary marketplace (p. 125). O'Neil-Henry makes a strong case that Balzac deliberately and successfully incorporated readers' expectation of social types into his fiction. As a side note, this analysis explains historians' frequent use of Balzac's fiction in undergraduate history courses. That is, Balzac's appreciation for July Monarchy readers' interest in social types also engages twenty-first-century readers. His scientific precision in describing and criticizing figures from across the social spectrum helps students understand social class and gender relations in early nineteenth-century France far more effectively than the information that most history textbooks can convey.

This interjection of contemporary consumption of century-old French fiction is not so far afield in light of O'Neil-Henry's intriguing final chapter that draws parallels between the dynamic literary marketplace of the July Monarchy and recent developments in publishing and readership

in the Fifth Republic. She notes that the internet has created new reader networks and book formats, and that literary publishing has increasingly consolidated into a few conglomerates, notably Hachette and the smaller, but more prestige-oriented Gallimard. O'Neil-Henry brings forward in time her argument about the dual and potentially conflicting publishing drives for aesthetic quality and commercial success with three recent and commercially profitable novels that Gallimard issued in 2006-2007. One, the French translation of the final volume of J. K. Rowling's blockbuster Harry Potter series, fits easily into the popular or lowbrow category, while another, Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes* was both commercially successful and critically acclaimed, winning the Prix Goncourt. O'Neil-Henry focuses particularly on the 2006 novel, *L'Élégance du hérisson* by Muriel Barbery, a philosophy professor, because the author and especially the text defy easy categorization and manifest the self-reflection on literary style and consumer demand that she found in texts from the July Monarchy. Citing Sharon Marcus's *Apartment Stories* [1], she indicates that Barbery's novel, similar to Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, combines social analysis within an urban domestic setting with characters' chance encounters and interactions to produce a work of fiction from elements of physiologies (p. 157). Interestingly, the unexpected popularity of *L'Élégance du hérisson* derived from "word-of-mouth publicity" (p. 155) among readers rather than from any technological or advertising innovation. It is not clear to what extent this "word-of-mouth publicity" occurred on the internet or through face-to-face interactions.

*Mastering the Marketplace* fulfills its intention to persuade readers that "Flaubert and de Kock, Balzac and Sue, were not opposite figures so much as rival players on the same stage" (p. 3). The book also raises a few questions. O'Neil-Henry acknowledges that George Sand would be appropriate for her analysis, but, citing existing scholarship on Sand and other popular women writers, she decided to focus on two less-studied authors, de Kock and Sue. This makes sense, and de Kock and Sue were clearly dominant figures in the literary marketplace of the July Monarchy. Yet, I would be interested in some attention to gender in literary practices and market strategies. And how might O'Neil-Henry's findings relate to literary realism, a topic addressed in a recent article by Jennifer Terni? This book is a welcome addition to a number of studies that provide new insights into the July Monarchy as a site of modernity, including works by Amy Wiese Forbes, Christine Haynes, and Jennifer Terni.[2]

## NOTES

[1] Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

[2] Amy Wiese Forbes, *The Satiric Decade: Satire and the Rise of Republicanism in France, 1830-1840* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010); Christine Haynes, *Lost Illusions: The Politics of Publishing in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jennifer Terni, "A Genre for Early Mass Culture: French Vaudeville and the City, 1830-1848," *Theatre Journal* 58, no. 2 (May 2006): 221-248; Jennifer Terni, "The Virtual Problem of Nineteenth-Century Culture: Methodological Considerations for Rethinking Realism," *Primerjalna književnost* 36, no. 3 (December 2013): 99-112.

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