Robin Walz. ***Pulp Surrealism: Insolent Popular Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Paris***. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. 206p.

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Cultural historian Robin Walz focuses on mass print culture as one of the harbingers of modernity and modernism and as one environment for the emergence of surrealism. In an academic field such as mine (Basque studies) where post-modernism has dominated the conversation for the last few years and thinkers such as Manuel Castells and Joseba Zulaika have shaped the overarching rhetoric, this retrospective on pre-modernist French culture is a welcome respite. It also serves as a reminder that modes of thinking evolve within a physical milieu, and that thinkers are responding to stimuli as mundane as road construction and the closure of a favorite coffee shop. The "isms" may define mentalities, but the mentalities are shaped by physical realities. In literature, it is easy to lose sight of this seminal fact as the text, or a text or any text, becomes the point of departure for further layers of thought and rhetoric.

Students of literature (at whatever stage) can always benefit from a visit to the specific geography and culture against which a work is foregrounded. Walz provides those reading the Surrealists with a time machine in which they may travel back to the Paris that surrounded, if not inspired, their works. One cannot appreciate the surrealist touches in Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris*, notes Walz, without having knowledge of the reality of the Opera Passageway that he describes.

Pulp Surrealism began as a dissertation and was rewritten into a book. It helps to know this as the reader enters each chapter, because it explains why the meat of the text is marbled with occasional dissertational backpedalling as the author attempts to examine every possible angle of an event or topic. This does not make the information or the thinking less valuable, but there are a few pages that are a chore to read.

Walz's fondness for French language, culture and literature are evident throughout the book, and his viewpoint as a historian allows him to make statements that few literary specialists would dare make for fear of sounding simplistic. Nevertheless, such statements often ring true, and they are an expression of Walz's joy of French.

> The conversations in Fantômas are highly theatrical, continually stating and restating the obvious in stilted and overdrawn terms. When Fantômas asks Juve's assistance in escaping from prison in return for revealing Fandor's whereabouts, the detective responds, "Help you, Fantômas? No! You are the Genius of Evil. Everything you do yields terrifying results. Never, not for any price, not even the

> life of Fandor, would I become an instrument of your nefarious work…." *Such dialog creates its own sense of enjoyment, beyond the literal meaning of the words themselves.* (49; emphasis added)

Chapters two and three, "The Lament of Fantômas" and "Murder, Mirth and Misogyny," may be of special interest to detective and crime buffs. They appear sandwiched between two chapters ("The Baedeker of Hives" and "Is Suicide a Solution?") that deal in depth with the topic heralded on the title page, like the creme filling of an Oreo™ cookie and just as yummie. They are the "pulp" of "pulp surrealism" and offer an excellent excuse for eating the filling first.

Overall, the book is valuable for its glimpses of early twentieth-century Paris and the influence of that scene on the emerging surrealist movement. However, different parts of the book will appeal to different readers. A journey from cover to cover may leave you wishing the author had included a *Guide Bleu* to the interior of each chapter. ❋