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The Best Romance Dime Novels on the (French-Canadian) Market: The Promotional Strategies of Police-Journal, 1944-1963

Jean-Philippe Warren and Marie-Pier Luneau

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Abstract: Largely overlooked by scholars, dime novels, especially romance, enjoyed spectacular popularity in French Canada in the 1940s and 1950s. Based on an analysis of the editorial peritexts of the 'Police-Journal' (P-J) series, the present paper seeks to understand the marketing strategies used to sell dime novels, deployed by the most important popular publisher in Quebec. In the first section, we show how P-J attempted to present itself as "the best in the business." It constantly heralded its success and extolled the global quality of its publications. In the second section, we demonstrate how the publication of separate series did not stop P-J from trying to attract readers to its entire catalog. The third section analyses how P-J navigated the troubled waters of a French-Canadian society torn between the more emancipated aspirations of an increasingly urbanized population and its elites' conservative ideology. P-J had to offer a product that was exciting enough to appeal to the crowd, yet sufficiently innocuous to avoid censorship. Overall, our paper underscores P-J's pioneering marketing practices in French Quebec.

About the Authors: Jean-Philippe Warren holds the Chair for the Study of Quebec at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. He has published extensively and was awarded the Canada Prize in 2019. A multidisciplinary scholar, his main research interests revolve around popular culture and social movements.

Marie-Pier Luneau is a Professor of Literature at the University of Sherbrooke in Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada. Her areas of specialization include Quebec literature and the history of books and publishing. She is the director of the Quebec Book History Group and the principal investigator of the project "Love for a Dime: Popular Romance in Québec (1940-1965)".

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Most work on dime novels has focused on their content, emphasizing how they convey as many stereotypes as subversive fantasies (Sullivan & Cushman Schurman; Milot, Deschamps & Godin; Bedore). Few studies, as Brown noted in 2006, have paid attention to the marketing strategies employed by the publishers. The present paper intends to fill that gap in the scholarly literature. Our corpus is drawn from French-Canadian romance dime novels, which were very popular, as elsewhere in North America, in the middle of the twentieth century.[1] From 1940 to 1965, around 66 French Quebec publishers created 238 series comprising more than 11,000 works of fiction (Hébert). Each series had a print-run of between 5,000 and 30,000 copies, an impressive number considering that the total population of French-speakers in Canada was roughly 4 million people in 1950.

To tackle this large-scale production, our analysis focuses on the marketing strategies employed in the romance series published by the Éditions Police-Journal (P-J). From 1944 on, P-J dominated the field in French Canada, overseeing the publication of eight series, totaling some 5,500 original detective, cowboy, spy, and romance tales. In the 1940s and 1950s, the bestselling series were all part of its catalog (Provost 141). Within this corpus, we chose to restrict our analysis to the "Le roman d'amour"[2] series, which comprised about 16% of P-J's entire catalog (or 878 titles).[3] This series, as we will underscore below, advertised for romance, as well as the other series sold by the publisher. It provides a stimulating window into understanding P-J's various marketing strategies to construct its image and boost its readership.

As we are not in a position to consult archival documents (all of Quebec's low-brow publishers' files were lost when they folded in the 1950s and 1960s), our analysis chiefly relies on a study of P-J's peritext, defined by Genette as those elements within the paratext that are exterior to a text and in which the editor formally signifies its presence (series, prefaces, epigraphs, notes, appendices, promotional blurbs, etc.). For Genette, peritext in particular, and paratext in general, constitute "a zone not only of transition but also transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception of the text" (2). While Genette restricted his analysis to books, Looby extended Genette's frame to serial publications, underpinning how "paratexts impinge influentially upon our reading experience, hailing us as bookstore browsers, soliciting our attention to particular texts (or portions or details of texts), preforming our horizon of expectations, guiding our reading as it transpires, and otherwise governing our understanding of the text in remarkably powerful, if often unnoticed, ways" (182). Setting aside study of the role of illustrations and titles for another article, we concentrate our attention here on P-J's messages to its readers and the advertisements used in its romance series, "Le roman d'amour" (1944-1963). Mostly appearing on covers, inside front covers, inside back covers, and back covers, the peritext provides important information on P-J's efforts to promote itself within the field of dime novels. Indeed, while early nineteenth-century dime novelists could make their voices heard in their stories, they gradually lost authority over their fiction in the twentieth century, as dime series publishers began "block[ing] authorial strategies by talking to the audience directly themselves" (Bold 30; Letourneux 302). P-J is no exception in this regard.

The present paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, we show how P-J attempted to present itself as "the best in the business." It constantly heralded its success and extolled the global quality of its publications. P-J was not interested in selling specific

single-title books; it was interested in establishing a brand. Its marketing strategy betrays a book merchandizing (West 103) approach that was relatively new to French Canada in the 1940s. The second section demonstrates how the publication of separate series did not stop P-J from trying to attract readers to its entire catalog. The peritext in "Le roman d'amour" isn't specific to romance. On the contrary, the peritext aims to introduce readers to all the other series published by P-J (Albert Brien, Le Domino Noir, Diane, la belle aventurière, Les aventures de cow-boys, Guy Verchères, and L'Agent IXE-13). The third section analyses how P-J navigated the troubled waters of a French-Canadian society torn between the more emancipated aspirations of an increasingly urbanized population and its elites' conservative ideology. P-J had to offer a product that was exciting enough to appeal to the larger public, yet sufficiently innocuous to avoid censorship. The peritext betrays this delicate balancing act. Overall, our paper underscores P-J's pioneering marketing practices in French Quebec.

The best in the business

Printed on low-quality paper (paperback) in a pocketbook format (13 x 17 cm), recognizable by their alluring covers and catchy titles, and initially sold for ten cents (hence the name "dime novels" or "romans à dix sous," in French), dime novels have a slightly different meaning in French and English. In French, the expression designates not only shorter stories of 32 to 36 pages (instead of 150 to 200 pages), but also booklets that were sold as part of a numbered series. Although they made some inroads in the interwar years (Michon 169-170), French Quebec-produced dime novels did not come to dominate the popular fiction market until the mid-1940s and early 1950s (Saint-Germain f. 51-52; Hébert 11). But when they did, they took the book market by storm. In 1951, a concerned citizen, who was appalled by the proliferation of so-called "unhealthy press," visited about twenty newspaper kiosks, train stations, restaurants and shops in different areas of Montreal, and found them selling comics by the thousands and detective stories and romance by the hundreds (Godbout 285). Indeed, there were 1,500 to 2,000 selling points in Montreal alone and French-Canadian booklets were read as far as New Brunswick, Ontario, and Manitoba (Nadeau & René, "Une littérature industrielle" 35, 40).

Among this rising tide of popular publications, P-J soon distinguished itself. Founded in 1944,[4] it came to dominate the market two years later when its owners, Edgar and Antonio Lespérance, acquired Les Éditions du Bavard from their main competitor, Eugène L'Archevêque, who essentially published the same type of material. It must be noted at the outset that the brothers regarded bookselling as a profit-making enterprise, not a project based on ideological or literary objectives. Sons of a businessman and part of an emerging self-conscious professional-managerial class (Ohmann), they bought a printing company in 1936 because they believed it to be a good investment. Their commercial attitude contributed to recasting publishers in the role of marketers, for whom books were items to be bought and sold like any other commodity (Nadeau & René, "Une littérature industrielle" 31). Lacking sufficient orders to maximize the use of their equipment, they ventured into fiction to keep their rotary press rolling. Their gamble paid off. In 1953, 60% of their printing company's total revenue came from dime novels and two low-brow

periodicals (*Police-Journal* and *Histoires vraies*), the rest being divided between various printing contracts (25%) and *The Courthouse Daily Report* (15%), the 4-page daily of Montreal's courthouse (Nadeau & René, "Une littérature industrielle" 42).

Low-brow publishers are known to copy one another. When designing its products, P-J borrowed ideas from other (American, Canadian, and French) companies but also had to fend off numerous local competitors, copycats seeking their own share of the growing paperback trade. Many series launched at the time closely resemble those of P-J. For example, "Le Roman d'amour" series finds an echo in the "Romances" series published by Éditions Irène, as well as the "Roman d'amour" series published by Éditions de l'Imprimerie Bernard, which did not hesitate to replicate P-J's cover template. These imitations testify to the intense rivalry that existed between publishers. For P-J, nurturing loyalty was a real challenge in a world where all products were sold at a fixed price (ten cents), had the same length (32 to 36 pages), and looked identical at first glance. To win this commercial struggle, it had to staunchly defend the higher quality of its publications.

Interestingly, like most of its French-Canadian and American counterparts, "[t]he most important space for advertising was the booklets themselves" (Huck & Bauernschmidt 117). P-J's products were advertised exclusively within its publications, whether in its booklet series or periodicals. Conversely, no other products (soap, beer, etc.) were ever advertised in P-J's booklets. P-J may have run advertising campaigns for its products on posters, postcards, leaflets, radio, etc., but, if so, they left no trace. The fact that dime novels were regarded with suspicion by the ruling class (Namaste) most probably marked its publications as unworthy platforms for more "respectable" commercial goods and impeded P-J's capacity to advertise outside.[5] All in all, P-J's marketing efforts were entirely self-contained; products unrelated to P-J are nowhere to be found in its dime novels, and P-J, as far as we can tell, did not exist outside of its own publications.

In the peritext of its romance series, P-J attempted to convince readers (who tended to buy dime novels in large quantities, i.e., on average three per month [Provost]) that its catalog was superior to others available on the French-Canadian market. It aimed to capture the attention and impulses of would-be buyers at the newsstand and prevent them from considering the products of any other publisher. The peritext of "Le roman d'amour" series continually insists on the superiority of P-J's products, emphasizing its "extraordinary," "sensational," "thrilling," "unique," and "great" stories. Countering the belief that excellence is not a priority for paraliterary publishers, it is precisely the high quality of P-J's stories that seems to have provided its most convincing sales pitch. P-J regularly precedes its advertisements with the imperative: "Read the best novels every week" or states that its novels are "the most compelling" or the "best on the market." "You can't go wrong," reads one ad, "if you choose the Police Journal Editions' love story at your newsstand" (Jeanne Zéphire, *Fille contre mère*, inside back cover).[6] An advertisement published in 1953 states that P-J's experience in the field gives it an edge over its competitors: "Friendly male reader, friendly female reader, […] You'll spend charming hours reading our romance novels written by the best French-Canadian authors, published by the best publishing house of the genre, established for more than ten years" (Roger inside front cover). The address to a male and female readership should not surprise. Men represented a third of the people reading French-Canadian romance series in the 1940s and 1950s (Provost 149).

The spectre of the fickle reader constituted a permanent threat to P-J, and it is no coincidence that its messages make constant appeals to its "loyal readers." To sustain the latter's loyalty, P-J positioned itself as a trustworthy brand. It wanted people browsing dime novels on the racks to base their purchases on its logo, not on the actual booklet itself: "Something better… For thousands of readers, that's what our 'Éditions PJ Montréal' label has meant on each of our novels for over 14 years. When you buy a novel, ask for this identifying mark, and you won't be disappointed" (Gilbert back cover). It is true that to "guarantee" the pleasure readers would experience from buying its products, P-J judiciously screened its writers, as evidenced by the hefty sums – corresponding to the weekly salary of a municipal employee – it was willing to pay for each manuscript. However, given that all the novels were unsigned or signed using pseudonyms (an issue we will come back to in the second part of this paper), the branding of actual authors played little role, if any, in P-J's sales pitch. Its advertisements focused instead on the publisher as the trustworthy intermediary between the buyer (the reader) and the merchandise (the book). In the advent of a mass book culture in French Canada, P-J defined its role as that of quality controller.

Given the lack of company archival documents, it is impossible to tell if P-J's peritext was effective in drawing readers to buy its booklets. Whether P-J's more commercially aggressive mindset constituted a factor, however modest, in its unparalleled success in French Quebec (Provost 141) is therefore open to debate. As William Gleason has shown for American mass-market romance fiction in the late 19th-century, the degree of correspondence between the series' content and the readers' expectations seems to be much more important in a popular publisher's prosperity than the sophistication of its promotional material. P-J commissioned the most professional cover illustrations (drawn by André L'Archevêque, who studied advertising creation at the Famous Artists School in Connecticut and later established himself as a distinguished painter) and hired some of the best writers (including Pierre Daignault, who was the highest-paid dime novel author in the field at the time). These collaborations, along with the publisher's impressive distribution network, undoubtedly played a key role in turning its romance series into bestsellers.

But beyond the question of the effectiveness of P-J's marketing skills, what stands out is the company's eagerness to embrace commercial strategies that treated literature as a commodity. More than P-J's real or overrated excellence, it was the borrowing of marketing techniques designed for ordinary commercial goods (like soap) that set it apart. Such an attitude was unprecedented in a French-Canadian society that was used to considering books as "sacred" objects (Mbarek). Definitely, P-J went a step further than all its competitors in claiming to be the "best in the business." None of the other French-Canadian publishing houses developed its peritext the way P-J did. The publisher Irène, for instance, did not include any promotional peritext within its booklets and sometimes did not even bother to advertise its next story on the back cover. Notwithstanding the question of the quality of its stories and distribution network, if P-J was clearly superior in one aspect compared to its competitors, one might argue that it was in claiming that it was the best.

A whole media imaginary

Janice Radway's pioneer study of romance established that readers expect certain characteristics, and thus certain satisfaction when buying mass-marketed paperback fiction. It is of vital commercial importance that the publisher respects the implicit reading contract with buyers. One way to respond to the buyers' specific demands is to publish series or lines that follow particular narrative profiles. P-J launched seven long-term series that addressed six different sub-genres:[7] detective (the private eyes Albert Brien [1944-1962, 850 issues] and Guy Verchères [1944-1965, 937 issues]), thriller ("Le Domino Noir," 1944-1964, 966 issues), sensual adventure ("Diane, la belle Aventurière," 1956-1962, 318 issues), cowboy ("Le Cow-Boy," 1948-1963, 632 issues), spy ("L'Agent IXE-13," 1947-1966, 970 issues) and, of course, romance ("Le Roman Amour," 1944-1963, 878 issues). Aligned with a long-standing practice in popular literature, this partitioning enabled the publisher to cater to the readers' more specific tastes, each series distinguishing itself from the others by a few key characteristics: "Although the lines may appear simplistic to the outside world, the finely-tuned differentiation between lines is very important within the genre's system, as the (commercial) viability of a line depends in part on the extent to which it can be differentiated from another line" (Goris; see also McWilliam).

Selling formula fiction, P-J attempted to provide readers with a highly predictable good, knowing that people buying dime novels were primarily looking for conventional, and thus generic, storytelling – by which we mean that buyers desired stories that satisfied genre expectations while still providing readers with the right amount of "thrills." To tease readers, P-J's advertisements follow a pattern of suggestive emotions observed by Anne-Marie Thiesse concerning French series at the turn of the twentieth century (98). As Thiesse notes, "far from indicating precisely the 'content' of each novel, the ads never present anything other than generic themes (love, struggle, death), more or less well related to the particular situations of the series they are advertising" (100). In P-J's booklets, the ads are very brief, not extending over a dozen lines. Set in a foreign country, spy stories' ads announce how the hero must prevent a heinous plot against the free world. For example, in an ad for one of special agent IXE-13's stories, we read: "Captured, IXE-13 is dragged to the port where, amid sarcasm and violence, a diabolical plan is revealed to him that will be carried out while, bound and bruised, he awaits his death…" (Saurel, *Le Yatch de la mort*, in Jeanne Zéphire, *Coureurs de filles*, inside front cover).

By launching collections dedicated to a particular genre, the publishing house seemed to be courting specific groups, each with its interests, tastes, and values. At the same time, P-J wanted its readers to take an interest in its entire collection and ideally buy issues from all its series. A 1982 survey of Quebecers who read dime novels during the war and post-war years tends to confirm that P-J's intuition in this regard was right, since the respondents acknowledged that they had simultaneously read different series in their youth (Provost 147-148). Therefore, P-J's challenge was to achieve a delicate balance between catering to readers' specific interest in one or some of its series and fuelling allegiance to the company's entire catalog.

An examination of romance's peritext in "Le roman d'amour" reveals the recurrence of ads for other P-J series. The publisher did not perceive the reading of romance as incompatible with that of detective, cowboy, thriller, or adventure novels. The editorial

peritext in "Le Roman Amour" series continuously redirects the readers to the publisher's other offers. For example, *Le plus beau cadeau*, by Paul Verchères, announces *Le Noël de Cow-boys*, from the "Les Aventures de Cow-boys" series, and *Les Deux bedeaux*, from the "Domino noir" (Black Mask) series. Whereas the back cover was almost always initially reserved for announcing the upcoming romance, it was moved to the inside back cover starting at the 450th issue to be replaced by a global announcement for all P-J series: "Read every week the best novels: Albert Brien, Le Domino Noir, Diane, la belle Aventurière, Mon Roman Amour, Le Cow-Boy, Guy Verchères, L'Agent IXE-13." The various ads for the other series within "Le roman d'amour" and the back cover ad announcing all series at once show how the publisher encouraged readers of romance to also buy detective or adventure series.

All other mid-century French-Canadian dime novel publishers followed P-J's strategy and began marketing each line as part of a larger catalogue.[8] However, P-J could do this more convincingly, simply because it boasted a greater number of series compared to its competitors. Already in 1949, it published eight different series, double that of its closest rival. Its series also lasted longer (some had a lifespan of 15 years and included more than 500 titles) and were more likely to be published weekly (and not bimonthly or monthly). Thanks to its more impressive editorial output, P-J could more easily convince readers that everything they wanted was to be found in its catalogue. In this regard, the use of some famous pen names to sign different series seems deliberate. A close examination of signatures indicates some differences between the sentimental series and the adventure series. Whereas the latter relied on recurrent pseudonyms for authors of one or more series over several years (Pierre Saurel, Paul Verchères, Hercule Valjean), the sentimental novels multiplied the use of pseudonyms. While the average number of novels per pseudonym is 5.5 in the romance series, it is 95.4 novels for each pseudonym in the adventure, crime, and spy series. The sudden inclusion in a sentimental series of a Paul Verchères or a Pierre Saurel, pseudonymous authors better known for their detective and spy stories, undoubtedly had the goal of attracting readers otherwise uninterested in buying romance novels.

This marketing approach is confirmed by the fact that the stories frequently betrayed the codes of their respective subgenres and broke the "reading pact" initially established by the peritext. Romance is sometimes permeated by aspects of crime or detective novels. For example, in the ad summarizing *L'infâme enjôleuse*, by Jeanne Zéphire, it is said that the rich Maurice is turned down by Fernande, who prefers to marry a "poor but brave farmer." "With hatred in his heart, Maurice attends […] the wedding of the two lovers. While offering his money to help the couple, he hatches an infernal plan to destroy their happiness and catch a disoriented woman in his net. Will he succeed?" (Saurel, *Fils illégitime*, back cover). It is not easy to discern, in this summary, what belongs to romance and what belongs to crime novel, in a probable attempt to generate interest from a wider female and male audience.

Reciprocally, the ads for detective or spy series include some of the codes of the sentimental novel. The relentless adventures of P-J's heroes leave some room for the affairs of the heart. The summary of *Est-ce un piège?*, a crime novel by Pierre Saurel, begins like this: "A beautiful young lady by the name of Paulette Richard shows up at Guy Verchères' office" (Marinier inside front cover). The rest of the summary insists on the beauty of the mysterious woman, who the private eye Guy Verchères will follow to Miami: "What

adventure is Verchères embarking on? Isn't it a bit too bold to follow this new client? What does she really want from him?" (Marinier inside front cover). Passion and adventure are also combined in "Diane, la belle aventurière." Already in its title, the series promises breathtaking adventures mixed with erotic underpinnings. The ad for the series states: "The thrilling adventures of a fearless young girl. Men are at her feet. Her great beauty makes her a formidable enemy" (Cazotte back cover). Sometimes, the correspondence between genres runs deep. The ad for the cowboy story *La main de fer* that announces how the hero must, in his next far-west adventure, save a saloon dancer from disgrace appears in the inside back cover of *La Vénus du Klondike*, a romance written by Jean Bretigny, which tells the story of a saloon singer who will find love.

It can therefore be hypothesized that, regardless of the subgenre (sentimental, detective, spy, thriller), it is a whole media imaginary (Letourneux) that the publisher promoted in the peritext of "Le roman d'amour." Indeed, what strikes anyone assessing P-J's peritext is how the publisher's catalog appears like a giant web in which everything is linked. The stories themselves seem less important than the larger popular culture in which they were immersed. P-J offered a fully packaged world of ambition, passion, and adventure that French Canadians could aspire to or at least fantasize about. The peritext that we find within the pages of "Le roman d'amour" series, therefore, confirms Gelder's conclusion that "The entire field of popular fiction is written for, marketed and consumed generically: it provides the primary logic for popular fiction's means of production, formal and industrial identification and critical evaluation" (Gelder 40; see also Cawelti). Here again, following in the footsteps of many earlier publishers of dime novels, P-J was not selling this or that story: it was selling a full-fledged vision of the world that reflected a rising American mass-culture (Morency).

A difficult balancing act

Unsurprisingly, two primary characteristics made P-J's products particularly appealing to the French-speaking population in the 1940s and 1950s: they were cheap and easily accessible. P-J's fictions were available not in regular bookstores but, as the old tagline goes (Grescoe), "wherever people shop," e.g. in newsstands, tobacco stands, grocery stores, convenient stores, stationary shops, bus and train stations, drugstores, and diners (Desrochers).[9] Yet, accessibility (viz. low price and efficient distribution) would not have sufficed to secure P-J's dominant status in Quebec's dime novel market. According to Provost's survey of Quebecers who read dime novels during the war and post-war years (Provost 140), 58% of respondents indicated that they turned to the consumption of dime novels in the 1940s and 1950s because of their low price, and 39% mentioned the fact that they were easily accessible where they then lived. But half of the poll respondents (48%) also emphasized that dime novels corresponded to what they wanted to read at the time.[10] P-J was able to feed them stories to which they could connect while adapting these narratives to the ideological and social constraints of a tightly knit French-Canadian society.

To maintain its prominent position, P-J had to respond to its readers' demands actively. It promised that, for ten cents, its readers would "live hours of passion, anguish,

and happiness with its male and female heroes" (Saurel, *La leçon d'amour* 32). Some of P-J's advertisements announced stories that would deeply move readers. As the ad that appeared in 1957 for *Le sombre passé*, by Jean D'Arles, puts it: "Line Béland has already served time in prison and this stain remains on her life and follows her step by step. When she meets love, will this dark past harm her happiness? Will the Bertrand who loves her so much be able to get over this stain or will their great love be broken?" And the ad continues: "The struggle against this dark past between Line and Bertrand is most exciting. We love and suffer with them throughout the novel" (Gilbert inside back cover).

In its attempt to catch readers' attention, P-J could not overly deviate from French-Canadian society's moral norms. Aiming to thrive in a very conservative environment, it had to achieve a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, it sought to reassure authorities that it was offering its readers a wholesome diet. Its stories were regarded with suspicion, if not downright disgust by the Roman Catholic clergy (Valois), which held sway over education, leisure, and culture (Namaste). Fear of a trial or censorship was never far from the publisher's mind. To avoid any trouble with the authorities, the covers, although eye-catching, stayed within the confines of the time's strict decency norms,[11] and the stories respected a Hays Code of sorts, banning sensitive content and favoring stories in which virtue was rewarded, and vice punished (Gagnon).[12] Some editorial peritexts of our corpus go so far as to present P-J's novels as safeguards that may prevent young girls in particular from falling into "the traps of love." In any event, the publisher touted strictly moral tales that could be safely left in the hands of anyone: "Our motto: clean novels, healthy love, reading for all audiences, all in a truly Canadian setting" (The Direction of Éditions Police-Journal, in Roger inside front cover).

On the other hand, like any popular publisher,[13] P-J needed to respond to the readers' appetite for sensational tales and nail-biting adventures. Interestingly, the attempt by Fides (a Montreal-based publisher owned by the Congregation of the Holy Cross) to impose romance and adventure dime novels respecting the Roman Catholic moral code of the time ended in a resounding failure (Luneau & Warren). P-J knew that readers would turn to other publishers if it did not provide the right level of excitement and fantasy. One strategy was to narrate situations in which the negative portrayal of deviant behaviors constituted as many occasions to depict shady and indecent actions. In spy, detective, thriller, and cowboy stories, the triumph of law and order authorized descriptions of crime and lust. People got robbed, raped, abducted, and killed, but authors were authorized to paint a dark and dangerous portrait because it was ultimately redeemed by the hero's intervention. Romance promised the same level of excitement by showing the desires of the flesh that would eventually be mastered by a pure and selfless heart. The summary of *Le Don Juan de la télé* tells the story of a philanderer TV star who eventually falls in love with a country girl he wanted to take advantage of (Jules André, *L'amour en forêt*, back cover). His past mistakes only heighten his virtuous turnabout.

In romance, the unequivocal condemnation of raunchy heroes and heroines titillated by the pleasures of the flesh serves as a gateway to an otherwise forbidden literary territory. The publicity for Lyette Maurais' novel *Avide de caresses* borrows this path, counterbalancing the sensuality if not the sexuality of the title (*Eager for caresses*) with a strict moralistic message. In the ad, the booklet seems to stand halfway between a novel and a self-help guide for inexperienced lovers, partly lifting the curtain on some

censored issues while presenting itself as a pedagogical tool to avoid unforgivable sentimental missteps, as the following excerpt from the ad shows:

> Is it necessary for the man to give tangible proof of his love in order to convince the woman, of course when it comes to dating and not marriage? [sic]
>
> This is a problem that many young girls cannot solve due to a lack of strong family education in the area of sex.
>
> All these issues make this novel a most interesting study for young people who are dating.
>
> We strongly recommend you to read this novel; you will be surprised by the turn of events in the life of a young girl who falls in love (de Saint-Lô inside back cover).

P-J heralded "vibrant love stories where the shock of passions, sometimes brutal, sometimes sentimental, will bewitch you" (Leclerc inside front cover). But in the end, in its peritext, it suggested more than it showed. Kisses systematically not only served as an ersatz of more intense foreplay but were severely scripted. In an ad for *Un baiser de trop*, by Jeanne Zéphire (Jeanne Zéphire, *Je veux être aimée*, no 126, back cover), Andrée is unhappily married to Robert but cannot resist the pleasure of seeing her friend, the seductive Luc: "Luc is very happy to entertain the newlywed, but the husband knows all about it and it is the first quarrel. For a forbidden kiss, will Andrée spoil her life?" Another ad, this time for *Mon oncle Georges*, by Monique Ferland, presents an excerpt from the novel in which the woman is almost suffocated by the kiss she had longed for: "I kept my husband-to-be's mouth on my mouth for as long as his embrace lasted. When George left me, I was his wife in my thoughts" (Leclair back cover). The implicit announcement of a white wedding ("I was his wife in my thoughts") further helped to defuse accusations of obscenity, even when describing a simple but already too passionate kiss.

Another way P-J was able to shield itself against the worst of the conservative elite's critiques was to appear as a "national" editor in a time of vibrant French-Canadian nationalism. P-J claimed to publish novels "written by local authors" (Leclerc inside front cover), and this simple fact seemed to guarantee some degree of legitimacy. Home-grown authors could be relied on to write decent stories, respectful of French-Canadian cultural norms. Moreover, all of P-J's heroes (but, conversely, not many of the villains) were explicitly rooted in French-Canadian identity, whether it be the spy IXE-13 ("the ace Canadian spy"), Guy Verchères ("the French-Canadian Arsène Lupin"), the cowboy Pit Verchères ("the king of the Canadian West"), or Albert Brien ("national private eye of French Canadians"). The heroines presented in the ads of "Le Roman d'amour" series are French Canadian, born in the Province of Quebec, with very few exceptions: what's more, they all marry men from the same nation (French Canada), the same religion (Roman Catholicism) and the same race (White), even if those men happen to come from Montreal's overwhelmingly anglophone and protestant city of Westmount. In the cowboy series, the heroes and his best friend who patrol the Canadian West have French names (Pit

Verchères, T. T. Couturier), and some villages they visit bear French names (Val-d'Amour). Some of the most surprising adventures of IXE-13 against evil Russian spies take place in Quebec City or Ottawa.

The celebration of virtue, the tepid description of vice, and the embeddedness in the fabric of French-Canadian society facilitated, for P-J, the import of American storytelling techniques[14] which would have otherwise been considered unassimilable.[15] An overview of the English-language production confirms that compared to the North American dime novels written in English for the American market, P-J publications were considerably less daring (Agnew).[16] As a case in point, the religious editors of *Lectures*, a periodical destined to assess the respectability of publications circulating in Quebec, were more prompt to condemn American dime novels (Vannucci). Always heterosexual, ending in a white wedding, rewarding good behaviors and sanctioning bad deeds, P-J's series was accepted to a larger degree because it framed its tales within the normative terms of French-Canadian society (Meunier & Warren). In particular, they did not follow the "sin-suffer-repent" formula popular in some English series and magazines (Gerbner 40). Those P-J's heroes and heroines who found happiness at the end of the stories (which was the quasi-totality of them) had pure and noble hearts; those who had fallen, even so briefly, never recovered and lived a wretched life (debauchery, prostitution) when they did not simply have the good taste of dying before the last page.

The question of its actual content aside, P-J's peritext attempted to offer a packaging of an Americanized popular culture that seemed innocuous enough, and sufficiently respectful of Roman Catholic and nationalist norms, to help avoid the censors' wrath. In counterbalancing sensationalist tales with a moralistic message, in keeping scandalous descriptions to a minimum, and in giving to its heroes a French-Canadian guise, P-J may not have escaped boycotting by morality leagues (such as the Sacred-Heart, which led a relentless effort to ban "noxious" publications in Quebec [Namaste]). Still, contrary to other publishers (such as Le Bavard),[17] it was able to circumvent overt censorship. Although Jean L'Archevêque recognized that he had to engage in "a continuous struggle" (Gagnon 115) with the authorities to keep his enterprise afloat, his series were never the explicit object of the Church's moral cleansing campaigns or the Act respecting publications and public morals that, in 1950, allowed for the prosecution of newsstands selling "morally corrupting" literature (Hébert, Lever & Landry).

Conclusion

In the field of publishing in Quebec, it is often assumed that Harlequin was a trailblazer in terms of gearing its products towards its readers.[18] Harlequin indeed was the first in the 1970s to constitute a research team entirely devoted to detailing readers' interests and tastes, multiplying surveys and focus groups. But previous popular publishers also had means of engaging with their readers. This close relationship between the publishers and their readerships has always been crucial in popular fiction, as P-J's peritext clearly shows. It is this marketing savvy that partly enabled P-J to enjoy tremendous financial success in the 1940 and 1950s. The inclusion of the bestselling series in its catalog

during this period (Provost 141) was not only due to the inherent quality of its stories. It can be assumed that its packaging also played an important role in propelling its sales.

In the history of literary publishing in French Quebec, P-J pioneered many promotional techniques. Indeed, it was the first to adopt marketing strategies explicitly based on book merchandizing, transforming, as Olivero has showed for similar French publishers, the publisher's "bibliothèque" into "a compiled package, using consumer-oriented marketing methods" and presenting "literary material not as individual works of art but rather as commodities" (Olivero 72). This novel packaging presented each issue of a series as "a part of a multipiece series to be collected, consumed and displayed as a unit" (Olivero 72). The paratext was an essential editorial strategy in this "paperback revolution." By providing specific reading instructions, it reshaped French Canadians' reading experience and helped the advent of a mass book culture in French Canada.

In 1959, on the eve of the Quiet Revolution (which saw the old conservative elite lose its grip on French-Canadian society), P-J boasted: "We have succeeded, and unlike most of our competitors, who have disappeared from the market, we have, through the good performance of our editions, our regularity in serving you, and the quality of our novels, rightly deserved to be proud, because we have kept the favor of all our readers" (Briand back cover). But, just as P-J sounded this triumphant note, the advent of the television age marked the end of the dime novel market in Quebec (des Rivières & Saint-Jacques; Nadeau & René, "Une littérature industrielle"). P-J was well aware that TV, which started broadcasting in French in 1952, was crushing its sales. Toward the end of the 1950s, it advertised romance, "For you Miss…, for you Misses…, and also for you… mister, the Éditions Police-Journal publishes every week a romance like you like to read in-between your preferred television programs" (Cazotte inside front cover). However, when they did read, French Quebecers preferred to consume paperback novels that saw a rapid rise in sales starting in the mid-1950s (in line with the progress of education, since schooling had been made compulsory from age 6 to 14 in 1943). French Quebec readers were increasingly associating reading with single-title books. P-J's advertisements show this shift towards the single-title book format. At the end of the period, the advertised novels within the pages of "Le roman d'amour" series were no longer booklets but books of a hundred pages and more, published by Éditions de l'Homme (owned by Edgar Lespérance and Jacques Hébert) and sold for $1.

At the beginning of the 1960s, P-J's sales plummeted. It stopped publishing altogether in 1963. The golden age of the French-Canadian dime novel was over. Yet, it must be underscored that never before, and never again in the history of the French Quebec press, would a publisher enjoy a level of popularity so great. P-J's total print-run of approximately 100 million copies is unsurpassed to this day. In 1940's and 1950's Quebec, P-J truly was, as it proclaimed, "the best in the business."

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[1] In the USA, the heyday of the dime novel was the last decades of the nineteenth century. In French Quebec, it was WW2 and its aftermath. The absence of American-style pulp magazines in French Quebec might explain this temporal lag.

[2] The series changed its name over time: Roman d'amour, Le roman d'amour, Mon roman d'amour, Nos romans d'amour, Romans d'amour populaires. For the sake of clarity, we will only refer to "Le roman d'amour," which was used most of the period.

[3] Despite the impressive size of this corpus, the dime novel romance has generated very little scholarly work in Quebec, with the exception of one (now quite old) Master's thesis (Barrett 1979).

[4] The periodical *Police-Journal* precedes by two years the creation of the publishing house of the same name.

[5] Roland Marchand attests that many companies did not want at first to buy space in *True Story*, deeming the magazine too vulgar. Only its astonishing readership (two million in 1926) made them change their mind (56). This disdain might have played a role in P-J's attempt to secure advertisement from different companies.

[6] All translations are ours. P-J publications are exclusively French.

[7] The attempt to launch a science fiction series in 1949 (*Les aventures futuristes de deux savants canadiens-français*) proved a failure. Fantasy was included in some stories of the Domino Noir, a man who battles vampires, werewolves, bio-engineered giant mosquitoes and voodoo priests, among other enemies.

[8] Major competing publishers of French-Canadian dime novels include Les éditions Bigalle, Éditions du Bavard Enrg, Les éditions Fleur de lys, and Les éditions Irène. For a full list, see Hébert.

[9] At the end of the 1950s, "at the request of many readers," as the ads for P-J's dime novels state, aficionados also had the choice of a mail subscription, which might have been a useful option for people living outside Montreal and in the rest of Canada, i.e. outside of the Province of Quebec (Marinier 1958).

[10] The two last answers mentioned by the respondents were that dime novels were read by people around them (28%) and were the only thing they were allowed to read (8%) (Provost 140).

[11] When Edgar Lespérance became the owner of P-J, he advised his cover illustrator, André L'Archevêque, to never overstretch the bounds of decency: "Edgar Lespérance never refuses his drawings, but he often discusses them with him and does not allow him to create "daring" or indecent covers. No too pronounced necklines, nothing that can scandalize" (Nadeau & René, "Une littérature industrielle" 46).

[12] For the situation of comics in the United States, which provide interesting comparisons, see Nyberg 11; Hajdu 287-288.

[13] "The industry remains perilously poised between the requirements and restraints of commerce and the responsibilities and obligations that it must bear as a prime guardian of the symbolic culture of the nation" (Coser, Kadushin & Powell 7).

[14] We know that Pierre Daignault, the most successful of P-J's writers, took distance learning courses in an American institution to perfect his storytelling techniques. He must not have been the only one.

[15] Translation of American comics, for instance, only began at the very end of the 1960s (Rioux).

[16] In 1952, an American paperback marketer announced this way the kind of novels he was looking for: "We don't want any subtle character studies. The story should be hard-hitting and socially realistic, with elements of violence and sex" (Anonyme, *New York Times Book Review* 153).

[17] Eugène L'Archevêque founded the publishing house Le Bavard with his brother Marcel, in 1940. In 1942, he was accused of publishing obscene literature and brought to

court to face charges. His run-ins with the law and the clergy led him to sell his business in 1944.

[18] Harlequin launched translated romance novels, adapted to the French-Canadian language and cultural context, in 1959. The initiative failed to meet its commercial objectives and was interrupted in 1962. In 1978, Harlequin entered again the French Quebec market, this time with tremendous success (Bettinotti).

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