

# INSPECTOR MAIGRET AND THE TELEROMANZO: A CASE STUDY OF EARLY ITALIAN TELEVISION

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## ABSTRACT

The *teleromanzo*, or *romanzo sceneggiato* (here translated as TV novel) is a most peculiar narrative genre of early RAI. It significantly shaped early Italian television, becoming a cornerstone of RAI's production from its mid-1950s inception. Broadcast from 1954, *teleromanzi* symbolized RAI's educational mission under Italy's state broadcasting monopoly, which lasted until 1972. Inspired by two of the three John Reith's public service broadcasting principles, *teleromanzi* aimed to educate and entertain, improving cultural literacy and public consensus aligned with the ruling party.

*Teleromanzi* are defined by three features: literary sources, theatrical staging, and installment structure. They adapted mainly 19th-century classics to entertain and teach Italian to a largely illiterate population. Early technical constraints necessitated theatrical staging, perpetrated by using stage actors known for clear diction

and cultural gravitas. The installment structure fostered a loyal audience, ensuring ongoing interest and value assimilation, particularly of Catholic values.

By the 1960s, RAI experimented with serial elements, also adapting works by authors like Georges Simenon into series such as *Le inchieste del Commissario Maigret* (1964-1972), directed by Mario Landi and starring Gino Cervi. This series hybridized *teleromanzo* and serial formats, maintaining installment narratives while introducing recurring characters and figurative stereotypes.

Its success underscored the effectiveness of *teleromanzo*'s blend of education and entertainment, influencing contemporary television narratives, while reflecting Italian television's evolution and societal changes, beyond demonstrating rare chronological progression and thematic coherence.

As a matter of fact, this Maigret series has much more in common with the *teleromanzo* and its cultural aura than with the rules of television seriality properly speaking, which were still unknown in Italy at that time. It testifies to an experimental phase of seriality, or a pre-serial seriality, whose most fertile aspect lies precisely in its capacity to integrate the formula of the *teleromanzo* and to enrich it with potentially serial elements, while retaining the auratic and humanist dimension imposed by the cultural educational project designed by early Rai of the monopoly.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *telero romanzo* – a word that we could literally translate as telenovel, or TV novel – is one of the most important cultural phenomena in the history of Italian television. Among other things, it is also the narrative genre that dominated the fictional production of the Rai - Radio Televisione Italiana, since its very beginning for almost twenty years. Also called *romanzo sceneggiato* (literally: scripted novel), it appeared very soon, in the mid-1950s, at the official start of television broadcasts, dating from 3 January 1954, and it developed so much that it came to occupy an important place in the Italian history of the 20th century. Indeed, the *telero romanzo*/TV novel soon became the very symbol of the cultural, humanist and educational project of early Rai, which, at the time, was a beneficiary of a state monopoly thanks to a concession from the Italian government. The state monopoly granted to Rai the exclusivity of television broadcasting throughout the national territory until 1972<sup>1</sup>; in exchange, it reserved to the government the full control of production and programming.

This cultural, humanist and educational project, which ruled all along the early years of Rai, was in tune with at least two of the three principles at the basis of the very idea of public service – to instruct, to inform, to entertain – as it had been conceived and formulated by John Reith<sup>2</sup>, the first director of BBC. More exactly, it was characterized by a conception of television as a means of cultural elevation of the audience to whom it was addressed, i.e., the Italian population, in conformity with the goals of any other public service of that time. Concurrently, it aimed to exercise the maximum control over the same Italian population, in order to guarantee itself, or better, to guarantee to the government party, the consensus of public opinion<sup>3</sup>.

The *telero romanzo*/TV novel has been rightly defined as “an installment narrative television work of literary origin”<sup>4</sup>, placing emphasis on its installment structure and its literary origin. On my opinion, however, its main distinctive features are three<sup>5</sup>.

The first one is, precisely, its installment structure, i.e., a narrative pattern which refers not to a serial component, totally foreign to the *telero romanzo*/TV novel, but rather to the need of creating a television audience through the formula of the weekly appointment and, consequently, to guarantee its continued interest, as well as a better assimilation of the values transmitted. These values are essentially the Catholic values dear to the ruling party in Italy at the time, the Christian Democracy party, at Rai as elsewhere. Any literary adaptation for television imposes its transmission thanks to a code of self-censorship, the so called “Guala code”<sup>6</sup>, as meticulous as the Hollywood Hays code, which on the one hand eliminates the “evil” and on the other injects “good” values. Whether elite or popular, no suitable fictional source escapes it.

The second one is its literary source, presupposing a humanist and educational vocation. Indeed, for years the *telero romanzo*/TV novel plays the role of a traveling home library, which must entertain and educate, as well as teach its audience to speak Italian correctly. The *telero romanzo*/TV novel, in fact, also plays a role in cultural literacy, teaching to speak Italian to a population that is still mostly illiterate. It must refer to a literary source to carry out the task of a library, initially specialized in 19th century classics, the adaptation of which multiplies sales. And, finally, it must make a compromise between elite culture and popular culture, selecting targeted titles ranging from *Oblomov* by Ivan Gončarov to *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas, without neglecting *The Betrothed* by Alessandro Manzoni.

1 On 26 January 1952, the Italian state renewed to EIAR (later become Rai - Radiotelevisione Italiana) the concession of radio broadcasting, and from 1954 also television broadcasting, throughout the national territory for a period of 20 years. The legitimacy of this monopoly, however, has been called into question and between 1972 and 1976 various judicial events put an end to it. On 28 July 1976, the Constitutional Court with ruling no. 202 liberalized local television broadcasts, maintaining the State's monopoly only on the national territory.

2 See Reith, 1924. On the specificity of the Italian path to public service see, among others, Monteleone (1992); Bourdon (2011); Scaglioni, Barra, Penati (2011); and Scaglioni (2015).

3 On the awareness of the importance of this topic in modern Western democracies, where public opinion can be better oriented through new media like radio and film – and, later, television –, see Lipmann (1922). In the mid-Fifties of the last century, Italy was a newborn Republic, resulting from a 1946 referendum through which Italians chose the end to the monarchy: a profound change in political and cultural Italian society.

4 In Italian: *opera televisiva narrativa a puntate di origine letteraria* (De Fornari 1990: 29).

5 In addition to the installment structure and the literary origin, also the theatricality of its staging, which De Fornari (1990) considers only as a peculiarity of the genre (like its Italianness), is a main structural and distinctive feature of the *telero romanzo*/TV novel, capable of affecting many aspects of its aesthetics and more. See Dagrada (2018).

6 See the *Norme di autodisciplina per le trasmissioni televisive* (literally: self-discipline rules for television broadcasts) adopted since 1954 and published for the first time by Arturo Gismondi in Gismondi (1958). These *Norme* (i.e., rules), drawn up by the newborn Centro Cattolico Televisivo (directed by Monsignor Alibno Galletto and designed on the model of the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, a direct emanation of the Italian episcopate), have long been associated with the name of Filiberto Guala, a convinced supporter of the educational mode and administrator of early Rai between 1954 and 1956, successively become a Trappist brother; see AAVV (2001).

The third one is the theatricality of its staging. This feature is certainly due to the technical constraints of the live broadcasting of the early years. Yet, it is also due to the use of actors and actresses of theatrical origin, whom the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel often recasts in the same roles usually represented on stage. In order to play a role of cultural literacy, the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel employs professional performers who speak Italian with an impeccable diction. It selects highly reputed prose performers as a means for the cultural elevation of its audience. And, whenever possible, it uses well-known professional performers, in order to contribute to the compromise between elite and popular culture already evoked.

All these traits also lay the foundation for the construction of an aesthetic of the genre *telero-**manzo*/TV novel, which is consistent and necessary for the realization of the humanist and educational cultural project of early Italian television. In addition, rather than distancing the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel from cinema, bringing it closer to literature and theater, this aesthetic brings it closer to early cinema (Dagrada 2018). In fact, as a primordial phenomenon of early Italian television, the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel has a lot in common with early cinema, namely with early Italian cinema, but not only.

## 2. EPISODE V. INSTALLMENT

The first distinctive feature of the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel is its installment structure. Far from being a marginal feature, it is on the contrary a characteristic which allows us to better understand the educational peculiarity of the literary adaptations carried out by early Italian television. In fact, although structured in parts, which could bring to mind a more or less primitive form of television seriality, the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel is a primordial narrative genre of the monopoly's Rai production which has yet nothing to do with the rules of television seriality; these rules, actually, at the time in Italy simply did not exist. More precisely, the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel belongs to an experimental phase of Italian television narration, located during the 1950s and 1960s, between the beginning and the apogee of the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel on the one hand and the massive advent of American serial television on the other, favored over time starting from the 1970s by the new rules of the duopoly and of commercial television (on this topic see Innocenti, Pescatore, 2008).

While the English language can consider installment (*puntata*) and episode (*episodio*) as synonyms, the Italian language distinguishes between installment narration and episode nar-

ration. The latter is made up of episodes each being the equivalent of a complete micro-story, with its beginning, its progress and especially its end, because the episode which follows is another micro-story which has its beginning, its progress and its end, without implying a chronological connection with the preceding and following episode. The installment, conversely, in Italian language is the part of a narration which begins where the previous part left off, without concluding, and stops in turn without exhausting the story which will continue in the next installment.

Episode narration necessarily presupposes a serial structure, since each episode is supposed to repropose the same narrative formula as the preceding and following episodes, as well as the same characters, the same iconographic models, the same situations, and in most cases the same type of prologue, progress, conclusion and epilogue – i.e., like in situation comedies.

Installment narration, on the contrary, can involve either a narration subdivided into non-repetitive parts, broken down chronologically; or it can involve a serial narration, specific for example to *telenovelas* or soap operas. The latter, in fact, organize their installment structure in a serial manner, since the progression of their plot is only a false progression which repropose, part after part (installment after installment), the same situations, as well as the same narrative formulas.

At the dawn of Italian television, this distinction was neither codified nor predictable. The only installments that the Rai production department designed corresponded to ideal chapters of novels, conceived like the publication units of a *feuilleton*. That is, a narration normally subdivided into non-repetitive parts, broken down chronologically.

However, towards the beginning of the 1960s, following the popular trend already successfully broadcast on the radio, and happily experimented on television between 1959 and 1961 with the programme *Giallo Club* (which had a “serial” protagonist, Lieutenant Sheridan, always played by the same actor, Ubaldo Lay)<sup>7</sup>, the Rai production service start-

7 The fictional character Lieutenant Sheridan also became the protagonist of a very successful series, which however cannot be assimilated to the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel as it is the result of an original screenplay (by Mario Casacci, Alberto Ciambricco and Giuseppe Aldo Rossi). At the time, an important distinction was made between original fictional production (called *originale televisivo*) and literary adaptation. According to a tradition which had already been specific to radio narration, early Rai favored the production of *telero-**manzi* / TV novels in relation to the *originale televisivo*. The latter is an installment narrative television work which is not based on a previously published literary labour. The *telero-**manzo*/TV novel, on the contrary, always features the adaptation of a previously published literary subject, in principle written by major writers. Only in this way, therefore, the *telero-**manzo*/

ed to adapt the novels of more or less serial writers such as Georges Simenon, Rex Stout, S. S. Van Dine or Gilbert Keith Chesterton. And this, always having Inspector Maigret interpreted by Gino Cervi, Nero Wolf embodied by Tino Buazzelli, Philo Vance played by Giorgio Albertazzi and Father Brown personified by Renato Rascel. In doing so, it designed the production of single novel adaptations divided into installments, as part of a series of adaptations by the same novelist, with the same main title and the same protagonist character. Thus, it came to transform each novel into the hybrid formula consisting of *episodes narrated by installments*.

This leads Italian television to create an original television narrative genre that is both specific and marginal, destined to disappear during the 1970s, namely after the invasion of American seriality. This genre testifies to an experimental phase of seriality, or a pre-serial seriality, whose most fertile aspect lies precisely in its capacity to integrate the formula of the *telromanzo*/TV novel and to enrich it with potentially serial elements, while retaining the auratic and humanist dimension imposed by the cultural educational project designed by early Rai of the monopoly.

The results are series which have very little that is serial and aim above all to constitute themselves, episode after episode (installment after installment), into a unique, auratic and authorial work: i.e., the work of an author novelist. Or, rather, they aim to constitute themselves in a performer work, thanks to the recognizable icon of the great theatrical actors and actress employed.

### 3. HYBRIDATION AND CULTURAL AURA

One of the most popular and long-lived productions of this peculiar kind of series is composed of adaptations of the novels written by the Belgian writer Georges Simenon, having Inspector Jules Maigret as its protagonist<sup>8</sup>. It was broadcast in black and white between the end of 1964 and 1972. To be precise, the series is made up of four cycles: the first was widespread between the end of 1964 and 1965; the second

TV novel is able to instruct, in addition to entertaining.

8 Of all the characters born from the imagination of Georges Simenon, Jules Maigret is the one who has undergone the most rewritings by numerous screenwriters, who made him the protagonist of one of the most popular television series on the planet. Better: of a series of television series, since many countries have adapted Maigret for their own television. Among others, it happened in England, Germany, France, Italy, Holland, the Soviet Union, even in Japan, where Maigret (Kinya Aikawa) does not fail to wear a hat and smoke a pipe as if he were French.

in 1966; the third in 1968; the fourth and final cycle in 1972. All the cycles were united under a unique and same title, *Le inchieste del Commissario Maigret* (literally: investigations of inspector Maigret)<sup>9</sup>. All were entirely directed by Mario Landi. All were adapted by Diego Fabbri and Romildo Craveri, with the uncredited collaboration of Andrea Camilleri<sup>10</sup>. And all were interpreted by Gino Cervi as inspector Maigret, and by Andreina Pagnani as his wife Louise.

At first glance, it is a series that cannot be included in the realm of the *telromanzo*/TV novel, according to its canonical definition as «installment narrative television work of literary origin»<sup>11</sup>. In fact, despite being of literary origin, these “investigations of Inspector Maigret” are not “a work”. They do not originate from a single book, but rather from numerous novels, which each tell a different investigation, being the source of each single episode of the series, with its own single title. Moreover, in each episode some main characters return identical from one episode to the next. This repetitive return implies a serial component, which is potentially incompatible with the *telromanzo*/TV novel. Nevertheless, early Italian television conceives these individual episodes as being divided in installments – as the *telromanzo*/TV novel would have it – and thus transforms the series into an interesting case of *episodes by installments* (*episodi a puntate*). In this way, it can create, maintain, entertain and educate television audiences; and it can conform the series to the rules of the *telromanzo*/TV novel, acquiring its cultural aura.

As a matter of fact, these “investigations of Inspector Maigret” have much more in common with the *telromanzo*/TV novel and its cultural aura, than with the rules of television seriality properly speaking, which were still unknown in Italy at that time.

To begin with, they *are* of literary origin. Right from the opening credits, they emphasize it reporting the title of the whole series *Le inchieste del commissario Maigret* followed by the addition *by Georges Simenon*. Just like in every *telromanzo*/TV novel, in fact, in the credits of the entire series we do not read «based on the novel by», but only «by». In this

9 Only the second cycle is also known as *Le nuove inchieste del commissario Maigret* (literally: new investigations of inspector Maigret).

10 The second cycle was also written in collaboration with Mario Landi; the fourth also with Amleto Micozzi.

11 See De Fornari (1990: 29), who excludes these Maigret adaptations from his study, as well as the other polar series produced by Rai at the time. Also, this series does not appear even in the catalog by Pinto, Barlozzetti, Salizzato (eds. 1988), which lists only the Rai fiction productions made entirely on film, including *sceneggiati* and series.

way, the novelist's authorship imposes itself as a distinctive signature prevailing over any other. This procedure, aiming to culturally legitimize the television medium, takes up a practice that already belonged to early cinema. For example, it happened in the filmic productions of the French Film d'Art or the Italian Film d'Arte Italiana (FAI), which at the dawn of the 20th Century were the first to promote and favor the masses' access to culture through its filmic adaptation, as well as through its installment distribution, thus also favoring the advent of the full-length film. At the very beginning of its history, early cinema had also already practiced both literary adaptation and the compromise between elite and popular culture, adapting literary masterpieces – in Italy, it should be remembered at least Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* or William Shakespeare's *Otello* – alongside popular melodramas<sup>12</sup>. To all this, early Italian television adds the information that Georges Simenon's novels are published in Italy by the publisher Arnoldo Mondadori.

Regarding the third main distinctive feature of the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel, i.e. the theatricality of its staging, this series conforms to it too, especially because, as already mentioned, it is more appropriate to the needs of the television studio, initially subjected to the constraints of live broadcasting.

The most obvious consequence consists of the nearly total absence of real exteriors, sometimes replaced by painted sets, while all sorts of conventions of filmed theater abound (predominance of interiors, real time, succinct *découpage*). A specificity of this series is in fact its slowness<sup>13</sup>, inherited from the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel and preserved until the end, despite the liberation from live broadcasts after 1962, thanks to the introduction of the Ampex magnetic tape which very soon allowed the planning and editing of the shots almost like in the cinema. On the one hand, at this point in its history, the slowness of the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel had become a specific trait of the genre and transmigrates directly into its derivatives, of which the Maigret series is one example. On the other, this same trait, together with the installment structure – i.e., the first main distinctive feature of the *telero-*

*manzo*/TV novel – proves to be consubstantial with the early Rai educational vocation and favours a better assimilation of the values transmitted.

As for the co-presence of real external locations and interior (but also exterior) painted sets, it once more brings this series close to early cinema, both in terms of the mixture of sets reconstructed in the studio, real interiors and locations in *plein air*, and for the merely contemplative function acquired by the rare real exteriors, exhibited as pure visual attractions. Although starting from the second cycle it is already possible to edit the exterior views on film onto tape, the intrigue normally takes place indoors and the rare exteriors still consist of sequences of pure spectacle, independent of the action. Their narrative integration is slow, similar to that of the optical attractions of early cinema<sup>14</sup>, which mix with the action very leisurely and function for a long time like a sort of special effect, exploited solely as *plein* entertainment. Actually, all the opening credits sequences made in Paris on film are exhibited as an attraction in themselves. More precisely, they are exhibited as a kind of soft attractions (Dagrada 2018), which stimulate in the viewer an attitude that is both contemplative and amazed.

Yet, the link with the theater, as in the *telero-**manzo*/TV novel, is also in the quality of the text recited and of the acting itself, guaranteed by the massive presence of theatrical performers<sup>15</sup>. Thus, in the adaptations of Maigret, alongside the conventions of filmed theater, we find the undisputed glories of the Italian stage. Namely, we find the couple made up of Gino Cervi and Andreina Pagnani. Together, Cervi and Pagnani represented a true institution on the Italian scene, with their own company which between 1949 and 1951 was a harbinger of success and was directed, among others, by the same Mario Landi who directs them here in this Italian television Maigret series.

It is the fortunate theatrical combination Cervi-Pagnani-Landi that the pedagogical early Rai recycles, with the mediation of Simenon's novels. And it does so by creating serial productions that are foreign to the rules of seriality, which nevertheless lay the foundations for it while also accentuating its own actorial dimension thanks to the repetitive return of more characters: Cervi and Pagnani for Jules and Louise Maigret, of course; but also Manlio Busoni, who always plays

12 See the two *Inferno*: Helios, 1911; Milano Films, 1911. See also, as other examples, *Otello* (Ugo Falena and Girolamo Lo Savio, FAI, 1909); *La signora delle camelie* (Ugo Falena, FAI, 1909), based on *La dame aux camélias* by Alexandre Dumas; *Il dottor Antonio* (Mario Caserini, 1910; and Eleuterio Ridolfi, 1914). *Il dottor Antonio*, based on Giovanni Ruffini's novel *Doctor Antonio*, became also a *telero-**manzo*/TV novel soon in 1954. On this topic see Galvagno (2015).

13 On this aspect, the Maigret series produced by French television, starring Jean Richard as inspector Maigret, differs from the Italian one. On French television serial productions between 1949 and 1974 see Papin, Tsikounas (eds. 2018).

14 On the concept of cinema of attractions see Gunning (1986); Gaudreault and Gunning (1989); Strauven (ed., 2006). Naturally, even in television series, as in cinema, the attractions never disappear, but become specialized and, in a sense, serialized.

15 On the importance of performance in serial television see Logan (2015).

the character of the trusty Torrence; Daniele Tedeschi, who embodies Janvier; Mario Maranzana in top form in the role of Lucas; Gianni Musy interpreting Lapointe; Fanco Bucceri and Gino Pernice in the guise of Dufour and Jérôme respectively.

Not only that: very often, in the *teloromanzi*/TV novels, also the true link between elite and popular culture is embodied by the figure of theatrical actors and actress. Actually, theatrical performers play a pivotal role, being the authentic fulcrum on which is based the compromise pursued by early Rai, i.e., the compromise between the cultured matrix of the story narrated and the mass audience to which it is addressed. Not just any actor or actress, however, but rather well-known stage professionals, whom the television of the time borrowed from the most important Italian theaters, once again re-proposing a scheme already practiced in the early years of silent cinema, when numerous theater performers migrated to the big screen also in order to give it greater prestige, obtaining in exchange higher earnings and a notable increase in popularity<sup>16</sup>.

Gino Cervi too became an actor in early Italian television by virtue of his previous career, primarily theatrical. But he was also already well known to the general public thanks to his participation in numerous successful films. When he takes on the role of Inspector Maigret, invented by Georges Simenon at the end of the 1920s, he is sixty-three years old and decidedly at ease in the serial interpretation of a character who returns film after film, as happened with his interpretations of Peppone in the fortunate *Don Camillo* cinema saga<sup>17</sup>. He is therefore perfect for combining elite and pop-

ular culture, fully embodying the pedagogical Rai project of those years. His performance is an immense success<sup>18</sup>, to the point that the series produced by Rai is broadcast on French television too and gives life to a cinematic clone which is also the only Italian *Maigret* destined for the big screen, entitled *Maigret a Pigalle* (1967), by the same Mario Landi who directed the Italian television adaptations of Simenon.

Cervi admirably lends his Italian body to the Parisian inspector. He gives him his full face, clear eyes with a severe look, deep voice, robust build, imposing and austere, but communicative and generous, capable of ranging from gruff tones to more nuanced ones. He provides him with his professional yet never rigidly set acting, his firm but not plastered diction, his great personal charisma dosed with sobriety in all the titles that make up the series. In this way, he wonderfully counteracts the Italianization of Simenon's literary source, in his physical appearance as well as in his gestures and behavior.

#### 4. ITALIANNESS

A peculiarity of the *teloromanzo*/TV novel, in fact, is its Italianness. Although its literary source is often foreign<sup>19</sup>, its adaptation is subjected to a process of Italianization, so that it can legitimately aspire to participate in the development of a shared national identity, based on a common language, on a common literary culture and library, and above all on common moral values<sup>20</sup>.

This Maigret series conforms to it and soon reduces Simenon's France to a simple background, often made of

16 Once again, this characteristic, which relates the *teloromanzo*/TV novel to early cinema, is entirely coherent with the educational project adopted by the Rai of the monopoly, aimed at culturally elevating its viewers in addition to directing their thinking. At the beginning of the Fifties of the last Century, cinema was not up to such a task, especially since it still had to ennoble itself by adopting more cultivated models. What's more, at the time the reputation of cinema was not the best among intellectuals who worked in television: it was considered too worldly and at the same time not sufficiently auratic, whereas theater is the subject of careful programming, based on an idea of television as a potential domestic stage. In early Italian television, under the direction (between 1952 and 1965) of the playwright and theater critic Sergio Pugliese (who had previously been an important manager of Eiar), Friday evening becomes a weekly meeting with prose theater. Furthermore, radio had already functioned extensively in this way and, all things considered, television is only continuing its mission. See, among others, Buonanno (2012).

17 The first film based on Giovanni Guareschi's novels, in which Cervi plays Peppone, the communist mayor of the Emilian village of Brescello, is *Don Camillo* (1952), directed by Julien Duvivier, with Fernandel in the role of the enterprising parish Don Camillo. The following year, Cervi and Fernandel are together again as mayor and parish in the film *Il ritorno di Don Camillo* (1953), always directed by Duvivier; then in *Don Camillo e l'onorevole Peppone* (1955), in *Don Camillo monsignore... ma non troppo* (1961), both directed by Carmine Gallone; and in *Il compagno Don Camillo* (1965), by Luigi Comencini.

18 The first cycle occupies ninth place among the top ten of 1965 and totals an average of 13.4 million viewers. Fourth was tenth in 1972, with an average of 18.5 million viewers (that year in eighth place was the original detective series, very popular since 1959, *Sheridan*, which averaged 19 million viewers). See, among others, G. (1965); V.B. (1965); and Tellini (2013).

19 In addition to pursuing a compromise between popular and elite culture, the *teloromanzi* / TV novels are often based on foreign novels, mostly French, English and Russian. On the reasons for this aspect see Buonanno (2012) and Dagrada (2018).

20 When the television broadcasts begin, Italy had been a unitary nation for less than a century, since national unification dates from 1861. Therefore, it was a nation still identity-disunited and culturally dishomogeneous. There was an enormous distance between the cultured part of the population, decidedly a minority, and its less cultured component, which not only was often illiterate, but also spoke only the local dialect. And, above all, despite the efforts made, including through cinema, the construction of a national identity was still *in fieri*. On the problematic nature of national identity for the Italian audience of early Italian cinema and television see, among others, Bettetini, Grasso (eds. 1985); Brunetta (1993); De Groot (2008); Scaglioni, Barra, Penati (2011); Galvagno (2015).

papier-mâché. In the first episode of the first cycle, taken from the novel *Cécile est morte* (translated in English as *Cecile is Dead*, or as *Maigret and the Spinster*) and divided into three installments united under the Italian title *Un'ombra su Maigret* (literally: a shadow on Maigret; the credits read "Novel in three installments", i.e., *romanzo in tre puntate*), the massive icon of Gino Cervi immediately appears in the opening credit sequence, armed with a pipe and hat, intent on climbing the Eiffel Tower to admire the view of Paris. Despite this very French beginning, though, we would look in vain for other traces of the Ville Lumière during the episode, since beyond a few matching shots filmed on location (Saint Michel and its art nouveau subway; the plaque of Boulevard Richard Lenoir, where Maigret lives at no. 130) everything else is shot entirely indoors and, above all, in Italy. Cycle after cycle, we witness the progressive Italianization of the rare facades of the buildings in which the action takes place, of the songs that accompany the opening credits sequences, or even of the romances sung by Maigret in the secret of his office. Only a few sporadic clues remind us from time to time that the intrigue takes place in France: the map of Paris behind the Inspector's desk, the names of the streets and of the characters, the newspaper headlines, the calvados... But, over the course of the cycles, episodes after episodes, installments after installments, these signs diminish drastically and the French ambitions of the first images of the series are decidedly contrasted, in the end, with the final credits of the last episode (*Maigret in pensione*, 1972, based on the novel *Maigret*, about Maigret's retirement), where our inspector, instead of a French *baguette*, bites into a plump and very Italian padded *rosetta*, the most typical Italian bread.

This Italianization process is not the only alteration from the literary source recurring here. Also, an important chronology reordering recurs. Looking at these episodes in their order of diffusion, in fact, we note that this Italian television series brings some order back to the messy chronology of Simenon's novels. The first episode evoked above, although taken from a 1942 novel, historically places the beginning of the fiction in 1938 (it is Inspector Maigret himself who indicates this date, one evening, while commenting on the vintage of a wine). The last one, in turn, based on a 1934 novel, but broadcast in 1972 with the title *Maigret in pensione* (literally: Maigret in retirement), is set in the early 1970s, like the entire last cycle. In other words, in the Italian television adaptation of the Simenon's novels an important chronological progression is systematically pursued, foreign to classical episode serial narratives. Also with regards to the furnishings

of the rooms and the clothing of the characters, who gradually abandon their initial 1940s appearance to adopt, towards the end, miniskirts and long hair; or in the sets, where the old telephones are replaced by newer devices, a television bursts into the living room of Maigret during the third cycle, while in the last cycle the furnishings of the Judicial Police offices become decidedly modern, just as that of Maigret apartment.

This alteration, like the previous one, transgresses the "fidelity to the original", a true watchword of the *teloromanzo*/TV novel, whose cultural aura depends also on the immediate recognition of its literary source. Yet, it is not a real betrayal, since, if in this way the episodes distance themselves from the source, they come closer to the formula of the *teloromanzo*/TV novel as a unitary and unique work, which narrates the investigations of Inspector Maigret in chronological order, suggesting its natural temporal progression. Thus, by way of this progression typical of installment narratives, these adaptations become through hybridization the subsequent chapters of a single and homogeneous work narrated in various parts, which testify to an evolution that has occurred in the meantime.

This evolution is also parallel to the liberalization of customs in Italian television (and, in a way, of customs in Italian history as well), where, for example, at the same time as the miniskirts, the first nudes also timidly appear. Also, it enriches it with a self-referential dimension, which rightfully belongs to seriality itself<sup>21</sup>. In the second episode of the first cycle (*L'affare Picpus*, based on *Signé Picpus*, translated as *Signed, Picpus*), during a boat ride Madame Maigret tells her husband that she has read the latest novel by Georges Simenon: a sly man, according to Maigret, who would have used the Inspector's collaborators to get to know closely his adventures and transcribe them in his books.

## 5. A PRE-SERIAL SERIALITY

Normally, seriality itself concerns the structure of a work and is based on the repetition of a fixed situation, on its identical

21 The self-referentiality of the media, in the form of intertextual dialogue (i.e., *dialogismo intertestuale*), is included by Umberto Eco in his study dedicated to a typology of seriality (see Eco, 1984a and 1984b). In this perspective, the feature film *Maigret a Pigalle* (also released in France with the title *Le commissaire Maigret à Pigalle*), made on film between the second and third cycle, acquires the weight of a true *mise en abîme*. Furthermore, in some episodes of the Maigret series, director Mario Landi (who had also directed the series *Ritorna il tenente Sheridan* in 1963) appears briefly as Alfred Hitchcock did in his films.

and reiterated return. In a narrative work, it consequently presupposes the immutability of its deep structure and its surface manifestations. The Italian adaptations of Maigret, however, do not possess these characteristics: despite the return of a certain number of characters and main roles, they do not present narrative functions that return identically episode after episode, on the model of those found by Vladimir Propp in the Russian fairy tale, or by Umberto Eco in his study of the narrative structures of Ian Fleming's novels (Propp, 1928; Eco, 1966). Here, each investigation is identical only to itself.

If seriality presupposes some form of regularity, here there is none. Neither in the narrative formulas, nor in the staging. The duration of the episodes is unequal, since their division into installments is variable. *Un'ombra su Maigret* is made up of three installments; *Non si uccidono i poveri diavoli* (from the novel *On ne tue pas les pauvres types*, translated in English as *Death of a Nobody*) of two; *L'ombra cinese* (taken from *L'ombre chinoise*, known in English as *The Shadow in the Courtyard*, *Maigret Mystified* or *The Shadow Puppet*) of four; *L'innamorato della signora Maigret* (based on *L'Amoureux de Madame Maigret*, translated as *Madame Maigret's Admirer*) of only one...<sup>22</sup> The length of the installments is also irregular, since at the time television programming was not yet rigidly regimented. Just as the setting of the action is variable, given that numerous episodes take place in different French provinces. Also, the opening credits sequences are constantly changing, while a strict rule of seriality requires them to always be identical to themselves, to allow the viewer to immediately recognize the series they inaugurate. Here, on the contrary, the opening credits of each cycle vary, as well as the images that accompany the opening credits of each individual episode and the song that accompanies them<sup>23</sup>.

The only serial signs that return are the figurative stereotypes entrusted to the character of the inspector, such as pipe and hat, the return of his tics and his way of acting, or of those embodied by his docile wife and his faithful collaborators. Therefore, the very form of seriality to which this series can possibly come close is what Umberto Eco calls "saga" (Eco, 1984a and 1984b), which refers to a succession of events re-

lating to the historical course of one or more characters, in a way, as in the 19th century *Comédie Humaine* by the French writer Honoré de Balzac<sup>24</sup>. That is, a 19th century seriality in its turn, where the characters grow old and die, putting an end to the series itself. The word "end", though, is nowadays a problematic one, since contemporary seriality is seen as inexhaustible, at least in principle, both in television and cinema (Dagrada 1993). On the contrary, the Italian Maigret ends, triumphantly, when the Inspector retires. Its admirable protagonist Gino Cervi, besides, dies about one year later, on 3 January 1974.

Is this why an educational, Catholic and humanist television, preferably oriented towards 19th century literature, chooses to adapt, among others, Simenon's novels?

There's no doubt that Inspector Maigret (not surprisingly like Nero Wolf and, in a way, Philo Vance) is much closer to the 19th century than his numerous colleagues, cinematographic and serial, who accompanied or preceded him, such as Zigomar, Juve, Nick Carter, or even Mabuse. The latter are perfectly at ease in the modernism that prolonged the positivist glories throughout the first half of the 20th century and could not exist outside a highly technological context. Maigret, on the contrary, although born after them, does not even know how to drive a car and has no relationship – if not negative – with technology<sup>25</sup>. He is therefore perfect for embodying the values of a television that is close, in its conception, to the 19th century (like early cinema was culturally close to the 19th century). He embodies the rebellion against the advent of a modernity that is as execrated as it is inevitable, for example by showing himself intolerant towards radio sets which spread Beatles and rock music starting from the third cycle of the series.

The fact is that, after all, Simenon is not a real serial author either (just as Rex Stout is not with his Nero Wolf, S. S. Van Dine with his Philo Vance, Gilbert Keith Chesterton with his Father Brown... and Raymond Chandler is not with his Philip Marlowe). His novels are not serial in their narrative structure, nor even in the deep ideological structure. They do not envisage any "consolatory" solution (Eco, 1978), just as their Italian television adaptations do not envisage one either.

22 Overall, the four cycles that make up the series are composed of sixteen episodes, irregularly subdivided into thirty-five installments. Only in 1972 the fourth and final cycle, significantly, is composed by three episodes of two installments each.

23 The songs not only vary, but progressively become Italian and are performed by popular Italian singers including Luigi Tenco, who interprets the song that accompanies the second cycle, *Un giorno dopo l'altro*; and Tony Renis, who interprets *Frin frin frin*, in the third cycle.

24 It is no coincidence, of course, that in his studies on the typology of repetition, Eco evokes Balzac and his *Comédie Humaine* in relation to the kind of seriality he calls "saga" (see Eco, 1984a and 1984b).

25 Throughout the whole series, the only sign of modernity is a gigantic electronic map of Paris (also used in the film *Maigret à Pigalle*), which allows to view calls; but it is exhibited solely as a special effect, i.e., as an attraction, and soon abandoned.



Naturally, these adaptations impose several moral adjustments, in tune with the Catholic values that early Italian television intends to transmit to its audience. For example, in *La chiusa* (1968), made up of three installments from *L'Ecluse numéro 1* (a novel translated in English as *Lock number 1*), the infidelity of the protagonist Mimile is minimised, the homosexuality of his son entirely silent, and an invented dialogue is added in which Maigret persuades Mimile's daughter to love her father despite everything (as the Fourth Commandment prescribes). But, in spite of these inevitable as significant moral adjustments, the outcomes of the police investigations are never modified<sup>26</sup>. Often, thus, the impotence of good against evil remains. In *Maigret in pensione* the murderer manages to escape and a prostitute character joins him; in *Il ladro solitario*, from *Maigret et le voleur paresseux* (known in English as *Maigret and the Lazy Burglar*, or *Maigret and the Idle Burglar*) the murderer is not punished; and in *L'affare Picpus* the culprit character is not even prosecuted...

It is also impossible to be interested solely in the police action, since the episodes cannot be reduced to their simple investigative mechanics. In *L'innamorato della signora Maigret*, for example, the detective intrigue does not even develop. And *Non si uccidono i poveri diavoli* is an example of *Comédie Humaine* in its pure state, without any suspense, any interest outside the psychology of the victims and the masterful acting of Gino Cervi. Often, and above all, the interest in the characters prevails over the simple investigative dynamics, sometimes inconsistent or uninteresting even for the Inspector himself, more inclined to delve into the dark sides of the human soul than to trigger action at all costs and snap the handcuffs.

These dark sides, in the daily lives of the characters, whether intense or miserable, overflow with cultural tensions and contradictions that make up an all-round *Comédie Humaine*, proving to be a perfect source of inspiration for inventing the hybrid and pre-serial formula of episodes by installments, consistent with the humanist and educational project of early Italian television.

26 Other examples could be given, but the aim of this study is not a detailed comparison between these adaptations and their literary source. Rather, it is to demonstrate that these adaptations tell much more about their "adapter" than about the adapted model – as very often adaptations do. Indeed, this peculiar series of adaptations conceived by RAI in the 1960s tells us about early Italian television, more than anything else.

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