

Montalbano

Success and transformations of a media hero

Detective Montalbano is a series which has made a name for itself on Italian (and not only Italian) television as a program which is atypical in that it manages to combine artistic quality with mass popularity in a fashion which is as exemplary as it is rare. This unusually successful marriage of quality and popular acclaim has attracted the attention of television pundits and scholars alike. Moreover, when this happy union comes to be studied in greater depth, moving from first favourable impressions and intuitive evaluation to a more reasoned analysis, a number of questions arise.

The first is whether Montalbano can be seen purely and simply as a television character within a fictional series. From a synchronic standpoint, the character of Montalbano draws on the intermediality that is currently such a typical feature of the mass media communication system. The TV series thus only acquires its full meaning if it is considered as part of the complex network of textual, discursive, and above all mediatic worlds which Montalbano has come to inhabit. Montalbano's presence in so many different text types carried by various different media gives the detective cult status, taking him beyond his fictional universe to enter the world of our everyday experience.

This brings us to the second question, namely, how sure are we that a figure such as that of Montalbano can still be called, in the traditional narrative sense, a 'character'? In some ways, the detective lives and works in Vigàta, feeling various emotions and acquiring experience, all within a primarily narrative framework. In other ways, however, his figure can be seen as emerging from the narration as such, to enter and inhabit much broader and, at the same time, more rarefied imaginary universes. That is to say, he leads a nomadic existence, roaming back and forth between very different types of discourse, such as those of journalism, politics, advertising, and so on.

The book is therefore divided into two distinct sections. The first deals with the way the figure of Montalbano is presented in the constantly changing media contexts in which he appears. Consideration is also given to a theoretical redefinition of the notion of 'character' in the light of the problem posed by these continuous processes of 'translation'.

The second section offers a systematic analysis of the mainly television-related material, moving from superficial detail to increasingly profound generalisation. This part of the book is therefore further organised into three different subsections, one for each of the three levels at which a text is thought to be structured to give it meaning. Firstly, at the level of *text*, the plots of the ten episodes of the TV series are described and then compared with the literary sources from which they were drawn. Secondly, at the level of *discourse*, which is clearly more abstract than that of text, an examination is made of the work's main themes and the more significant relationships between them, the characters, the timeframe, and the organization of space and locations. The third level is that of the underlying *narrative structures* which, precisely because they are the same for all ten episodes, allow an analysis of the general intelligibility of the entire corpus of

work taken as a whole. This three-pronged approach ensures that variations between the texts can be fully analysed without ignoring their common semiotic roots.