
News and Reviews

Rewriting Tintin

Daniel Couvreur, Frédéric Soumois and Philippe Goddin, *Les Vrais Secrets de la Licorne* [‘The True Secrets of the Unicorn’] (Brussels/Tournai: Moulinsart/Casterman, 2006). 127 pp., ISBN 978-2-87424-118-5 (hardback, €15.00)

Daniel Couvreur and Frédéric Soumois, with a preface by **Dominique Maricq**, *À la Recherche du Trésor de Rackham le Rouge* [‘In Search of Red Rackham’s Treasure’] (Brussels/Tournai: Moulinsart/Casterman, 2007). 135 pp., ISBN 978-2-87424-160-4 (paperback, €15.00)

During an interview broadcast by Radio-Bruxelles on 5 March 1942, Hergé describes in some detail the making of a Tintin adventure. Following the choice of a guiding concept, the principal stages of the writing process are characterised throughout by a sense of movement.

Early sketching is improvisational: ‘Je jette les idées à la suite, comme elles me viennent [...] Tout cela est naturellement pensé directement en dessins [...] et remanié très souvent’ [‘I throw down the ideas one after the other as they come to me [...] Naturally all of this is directly thought out in drawings [...] and revised very often’].

Fitting the story to the constraints of the serial form calls for reshaping of material: ‘opérer la soudure avec le dessin du jour précédent [...] faire ensuite en sorte qu’il se passe quelque chose [...] terminer sur une scène qui prépare les dessins du lendemain’ [‘linking up with the drawing of the previous day [...] then ensuring that something happens [...] ending with a scene which sets up the drawings of the next day’].

Pencil underdrawings for the fair copy evolve upon the sheet: ‘D’après mes brouillons, j’effectue la mise en place par de petits croquis très sommaires. Chacun de ces croquis est alors poussé, travaillé au maximum, jusqu’au moment où chaque personnage prend forme et vie’ [‘Proceeding from my drafts I carry out the *mise en place* [transposition of story material to a new large-format sheet] with highly abbreviated sketches. Each of these sketches is then developed, worked up continuously, until each

character takes form and comes to life’].¹

Inking-over – the ‘fixing’ of the work – is not addressed in the interview. Its importance, however, cannot be overestimated: Hergé’s fluent pen work captures in a final compositional layer the dynamism of the entire creative process. Moreover, it yields the only pictorial marks to be reproduced in print (the pale blue wash applied to indicate areas later printed in grey should be considered separately from his draughtsmanship).

Whilst the genetic evolution of the work was open to change at every moment, publication followed an established and relatively straightforward procedure.² From 1929 onwards the first Tintin narratives appeared as weekly instalments, consisting of two three-strip pages in the newspaper supplements *Le Petit Vingtième* (January 1929 to May 1940) and *Le Soir-Jeunesse* (from October 1940). The subsequent black-and-white books were compiled directly from the photographic plates for these pages.

As a consequence of wartime paper shortages, however, matters were to become more complicated. First of all *Le Soir-Jeunesse* was transferred to a half-page within *Le Soir* (from May 1941) and the space devoted to the Tintin serial was reduced to two-thirds of the usual two-page instalment. This was soon followed by a change of format to daily strips of four frames (from September 1941).³ Although each of these reductions necessitated a different approach to the treatment of suspense, Hergé was nevertheless able to continue working towards the same book page layout: in the first instance, three new instalments were equivalent to two of the old; in the second instance, three individual daily strips (usually three times four frames) were equivalent in content to the original standard double page (usually six times two frames).⁴

This pattern was about to change, however. For the next few years, book production requirements would invest the Tintin stories and Hergé’s practice of storytelling with an additional form of mutability. Only a month before the interview, and at his publisher’s urging, Hergé had agreed that all future Tintin books would be produced in colour and in a different format: four 16-page gatherings (title page and 62 pages of narrative) bound in ‘pellior’-backed pictorial boards. With four smaller strips to a page, this format used half as much paper as the black-and-white books yet transmitted near-equivalent content. The first colour book to be published would be the current serial in progress (soon to bear the title *L’Étoile mystérieuse* [‘The Shooting Star’]) and Hergé would shortly begin adapting the previous black-and-white books to the new format also.

Therefore, two-thirds of the way through the serial version of *L’Étoile*, he started to reconsider the frame proportions of current and future daily strips in view of the forth-

1 For a full transcription see ‘Hergé à Radio Bruxelles’, *Les Amis de Hergé* 6 (December 1987), 14–19 (here, page 17). The context is discussed in Pierre Assouline, *Hergé* (Paris: Gallimard, rev. ed. 1998), 280–283.

2 On changes to the outward appearance of the books and the introduction of colour inserts see Marcel Wilmet, *Tintin noir sur blanc: L’Aventure des aventures, 1930–1942* [‘Tintin Black on White: The Adventure of the Adventures, 1930–1942’] (Tournai: Casterman, 2004).

3 The most accurate chronology for *Le Soir-Jeunesse* is to be found in Stéphane Steeman, *Tout Hergé: Itinéraire d’un collectionneur chanceux* [‘The Complete Hergé: The Itinerary of a Collector Favoured by Fortune’] (Tournai: Casterman, 1991), 31.

4 For more details see Philippe Goddin, ‘Le Soir sous la loupe’ [‘Le Soir Close-Up’], *Les Amis de Hergé* 28 (December 1998), 40.

coming new book page format. At the same time he devised a new procedure for the conversion of the existing strip material to book form, which would avoid the onerous task of comprehensive redrawing (and could be applied also to the pre-war books).

Following a trial layout using newspaper strips, which Hergé had pasted into an exercise book as publication proceeded, the original artwork was cut into pieces and reassembled. All frames were also systematically expanded upwards (since the new four-strips-to-a-page format, although reproduced on a smaller scale, required proportionally taller frames).⁵ Examination of the artwork from this period reveals not only the usual evidence of the work's genesis (remnants of pencil underdrawing exhibiting frequent pentimenti, traces of perspective lines, retouching and white gouache corrections), but now also the very prominent cutting lines where drawings were trimmed and mounted onto a new sheet.⁶ Yet, for all its appearance as an artisanal practice, Hergé's montage technique turned out to be a crucial extension of the compositional process, as we shall see below.

The two books here under review reproduce the original black-and-white serial versions of *Le Secret de la Licorne* ['The Secret of the Unicorn'] (*Le Soir*, 11 June 1942 to 14 January 1943) and *Le Trésor de Rackham le Rouge* ['Red Rackham's Treasure'] (*Le Soir*, 19 February to 23 September 1943).⁷ They make possible a side-by-side comparison with the definitive colour versions, from which we can infer much about the nature and scope of Hergé's editorial procedure of the early 1940s. Moreover, as *Licorne* and *Rackham* were the second and third stories to be published entirely in daily strips, and the first to be conceived from the outset as future colour books, they make for a particularly interesting case study. My remarks in this essay will therefore concentrate on the invaluable opportunity that these two publications from Moulinsart afford to extend Hergé's own description of his working method.

From a close inspection of the *Licorne* and *Rackham* strips it is evident that Hergé simultaneously conceived of these stories both in parts (self-contained strips) and as a whole (the continuous narrative). His basic compositional premise seems to have been that, after minimal adjustment, the material from three daily strips would correspond to a future book page. In practice, however, the conversion to book form was surprisingly labour-intensive, as previously unplanned deletions and insertions disrupted the gridwork of the projected layout.⁸ Here it is well to remember that Hergé was now for

5 This technique was doubtless influenced by Hergé's use of tracings and partial redrawing beginning in 1940 when reworking *Tintin au Congo* (and then other texts) for Flemish language newspapers. There is not room here to treat this period's intricate chronology of overlapping work projects. A concise account is provided in Philippe Goddin, *Hergé: Lignes de vie* ['Hergé: Lines of Life'] (Brussels: Moulinsart, 2007).

6 For a representative sample see Philippe Goddin, *Hergé: Chronologie d'une œuvre. Tome 4: 1939–1943* (Brussels: Moulinsart, 2003), and *Hergé: Chronologie d'une œuvre. Tome 5: 1943–1949* (Brussels: Moulinsart, 2004).

7 The first volume reproduces the original transparencies for the *Licorne* strips. The second volume reproduces the newspaper strips from *Le Soir* for *Rackham*, for which the transparencies have been lost.

8 Following an examination of the original strips from all of the stories published in *Le Soir*, it appears to me that Hergé had early on developed a standard operating procedure when organising the layout of his three-strip groupings for efficient conversion to four-strip book pages. Each strip in the set of three was divided into two blocks according to fixed proportional divisions (approximate ratios: strip one, 3:1; strip two, 2:2; strip three: 1:3). This allowed for reassembly of the six

the first time reconsidering in a completed state a work originally published while still in progress. Revision, in these circumstances, is akin to a critical reading of the text by its author. It is therefore all the more instructive to consider the full range of Hergé's acts of revision, enumerated below in order of frequency:⁹

1. Editorial reframing: (a) expanding all frames upwards or downwards in accordance with new book strip proportions and filling in content where necessary; (b) lateral expansion or cropping of selected frames on one or both sides.
2. Adjustment of punctuation: (a) removing exclamation marks and ellipses; (b) adding in punctuation; (c) converting one form of punctuation into another.
3. Textual changes: (a) basic emendations, polishing of language and various changes of wording; (b) more extensive rewriting of dialogue; (c) importing text from one frame to another; (d) reshaping of speech bubbles (in *Rackham* they are also detached from the edges of the frame in what was to become the standard manner).¹⁰
4. Addition (and occasional deletion) of component elements: (a) embellishment of décor and props; (b) expression marks or movement lines around characters and objects; (c) filling in absent backdrops and rectifying continuity errors; (d) insertion of a character; (e) corrections to technical content and redrawing of unrealistic actions; (f) creation of new associative links (meaningful lexical repetitions, insertion of private allusions, etc.).
5. Modifications involving entire frames: (a) deletion of single or multiple frames; (b) insertion of single or multiple frames; (c) relocating existing frames; (d) replacing a frame with a redrawn or significantly enlarged version; (e) combining two frames into one; (f) contraction of a frame by excising a central portion; (g) reorganisation and redrawing of structurally important sequences.

By my count, well over a thousand changes were introduced into each text during the transfer to book form.¹¹ And this already considerable figure excludes the ubiquitous

blocks into four sections of equal length (3; 1+2; 2+1; 3) which went on to form the four strips of a book page. To ensure variety, the blocks of invariable size could themselves contain frames of variable size. The actual conversion process for each book, however, tended to deviate from this convenient pre-established norm, giving rise to significant differences in the number of frames subjected to lateral cropping and expansion: one frame in two for *L'Étoile* (essentially on account of its hybrid status), one in three for *Licorne*, one in ten for *Rackham*, one in five for *Les 7 Boules de cristal* ['The 7 Crystal Balls'].

- 9 The data presented here emerges from my own comparative reading, using as my reference the first editions of the colour books: *Le Secret de la Licorne* (Tournai: Casterman, 1943) and *Le Trésor de Rackham le Rouge* (Tournai: Casterman, 1944). Book page and frame references will be presented as follows: R54.1 [*Rackham*, p. 54 frame 1]; L12.9 [*Licorne*, p. 12 frame 9]. To distinguish between the two serial versions, citations of an individual daily strip (e.g. H-181) will be preceded by the initials L[*licorne*] or R[*ackham*] (e.g. RH-181).
- 10 Hergé's rounded capitals were replaced by the work of a professional letterer entered on a separate sheet (with some lettering and onomatopoeic sound effects outside speech bubbles also redrawn). The colourists (Alice Devos for *Licorne* and Edgar Jacobs for *Rackham*) applied gouache and water-colour on separate printed sheets (*bleus de coloriage*).
- 11 This revision and colouring was carried out relatively quickly on *Licorne* (taking approximately two months), but for *Rackham* the process was lengthier due to external circumstances. It is interesting

modification of frame height and the reconfigured speech bubbles of *Rackham*. To be sure, the sensuous impact of the added colour and the near-continuous succession of frames provided by the book format will be noticed first. They give rise to a far more powerful sense of reader immersion (and the effect of the cover illustration on the reader's expectations should not be overlooked).

And yet, even the least obtrusive of the changes from the list above make a significant contribution to the experience of reading. Punctuation, for instance, regulates the flow of the text, contributing to suspenseful effects and to the story's emotional register: the mere presence or absence of an exclamation mark can alter mood or characterisation. Similarly, a well-judged positional alteration of only a few millimetres can create a powerfully different atmosphere. For example, notice how Hergé converts the first image of the Sirius at sea (RH-36) into a page-wide strip (R12.10). He tilts the original frame by around five degrees and inserts a new horizon-line, thereby transforming an almost static scene into that of a dynamic craft rising on an ocean roll. This sense of tension between the boat and its environment confirms that Tintin, Haddock and their crew have embarked upon an adventure and not a pleasure cruise.

As to refinements introduced, note that the kleptomaniac Aristide Filoselle – who properly enters *Licorne* more than halfway through and is only unmasked three pages before the end – in fact makes a fleeting appearance in a crowd scene on the book's very first page. Departing from the edge of frame 6, he looks back in a manner designed to arouse our suspicions, the implication being that he has just made off with the Dupondts' wallets. Comparison with the original strip version reveals that Filoselle was in fact inserted there 'after the event'. Hergé has taken advantage of the need to enlarge a frame during the revision process to reinforce a pattern specific to this story, in which mysterious objects, messages or gestures acquire meaning in retrospect.

It seems indeed that during composition Hergé always had in mind the possibility a book affords for rereading, checking and comparing. Consider the following example from *Rackham*, which requires the joining of three pieces of information from strips originally spaced several days apart. In a manner reminiscent of the superposition technique used to decode the three parchments in *Licorne*, the reader might detect carefully placed evidence of the maker's hand: the day chosen by Tintin for the cessation of the treasure hunt ('le 15', month unspecified) happens to fall upon the anniversary of the gift of Moulinsart to Hadoque by Louis XIV ('le quinzième juillet' ['fifteenth day of July'], as revealed in a document later reconstituted by Tournesol). From an intervening clue the re-reader can deduce that Tintin's initial reference was indeed to the same month ('23 Juillet' ['23 July'], the date displayed by the calendar on the newspaper editor's desk).¹² What could be more fitting than abandoning the treasure and turning homewards on the very day when, centuries before, their future abode (which in fact contains the treasure) was first transferred to Haddock's ancestor.¹³ Moreover, Hergé

to note that the book version of *Licorne* was completed months before the serial version of *Rackham* had been drawn out in full.

12 For different examples of Hergé's coded play with dates see Albert Algoud, *Tintinolatric* (Tournai: Casterman, 1987), in particular page 81.

13 Similarly, the scene in *Licorne* where Tintin is startled by a cuckoo clock (L42; LH-116-117) only reveals its full meaning to the re-reader. The little yellow bird popping out of the clock is a forward-reaching allusion to the as yet unknown name of the villains chasing Tintin (this name will be

subtly points out the artifice of the story's construction at the very moment when we are most likely to have surrendered to its illusion.

Hergé takes advantage also of the impact of the richly coloured half-page tableaux added to both books, one that is not merely local: they lend a certain éclat to the narrative as a whole. The view of the undersea wreck in *Rackham*, for example – besides being the only full sighting of the ship in the second episode – serves as an important visual point of reference for the reader. All related smaller frames are improved by the mere fact that they can be perceived as details of a larger reality. The use of colour is by no means restricted to decorative effects alone. When the Dupondts seek rest on a farm to recover from their pumping duties on the ship, they find that they have merely transferred themselves from one wheel-driven mechanism (the air pump) to another (an oat crusher). This ironic similitude is underlined by the identical red colouring given to both machines in the book, an unquestionable improvement on the original version, where the first machine was white and the second grey.¹⁴

Even a single-frame interpolation can significantly influence our reception of the entire narrative. Witness Tintin's comment about the location of the treasure from a newly inserted frame at the close of *Rackham*: 'Et dire que nous avons été le chercher, là-bas, au bout du monde, alors qu'il se trouvait ici, à portée de notre main...' ['And to think we were looking for it half across the world, when all the time it was lying here, right under our very noses...'] (R61.6).¹⁵ Through its main character, this briefest of self-interpretations foregrounds the text's function as moral allegory: we must often travel far afield to comprehend or gain access to what lies near at hand. And, in the broader context of the adventure, we are encouraged to ponder a basic lesson in developmental psychology: success is rarely immediate (and it is in the order of things that disappointment usually comes before fulfilment). Indeed, the characters almost seem to have been rewarded for coming to terms with the apparent failure of their quest.

While the black-and-white strips of *Licorne* and *Rackham* enhance our understanding of the colour books, they can of course be read as independent works, with each daily strip admired for its finely achieved compositional balance. Notwithstanding the many gains resulting from the transfer to book format, several notable losses must be acknowledged. First, the deletion of some agreeable sequences from *Rackham*, the longer of the two texts: Milou's encounter with the shark submersible (RH-21), Milou's burnt tail (RH-36), a false-explosion gag (RH-53), the Dupondts discovering a button from the Chevalier de Hadoque's jacket in lieu of treasure (RH-151-152). The other losses mostly involve visual effects sacrificed as the result of broken syntactic linkages or of the fact that a strip ending, presented in mid-page, can no longer play on incompleteness – any tension it generates being immediately dissipated. And even where a final frame is advantageously placed, a line break or page end or page turn cannot have the same

revealed seven strips further on: 'frères Loiseau' ['Bird brothers']). We may understand this visual pun as a humorous complement to Barnabé's cryptic gesturing towards the sparrows in the earlier street scene (L31; LH-84).

14 The reconfigured close of *Licorne* involves another amplified sight gag. In the original version, when Haddock's arm is knocked and he splashes himself with whisky, Milou responds with laughter and promptly has whisky poured over him. This reversal is turned around again in the definitive version as Haddock gets knocked and splashed for a second time, allowing Milou to have the last laugh.

15 Trans. by Leslie Lonsdale-Cooper and Michael Turner.

effect as a 24-hour time-lag.

There are also occasions where the original text thematises the mechanics of the strip. In LH-32, for instance, Tintin recovers a mysterious scroll from under his side-board but drops it after bumping his head just as he was about to reveal the contents. This exemplification of deferred resolution (the strip as ‘exercise in postponement’) is clearly designed to tease the reader. Furthermore, when the parchment is unrolled before our eyes in LH-33, it appears very clearly as a ‘strip-within-the-strip’ (and the same applies later with all three parchments in LH-173). In this way, the physical object that preoccupies hero and reader throughout the story is presented as a miniature version of the very newspaper strip which contains it. It is a pity that this pleasing *mise en abyme* should not stand out so clearly in the book.

Erasures of inscriptions within frames deprive us of other neat reflexive touches too. See, for instance, the newspaper *Le Soir* appearing (and being read) within *Le Soir* (LH-85). And, more playfully, articles from *Le Soir* reporting on Filoselle’s activities are cut out, labelled and pasted into his own notebook (LH-167). By virtue of their appearance in the strip, these articles are effectively ‘reduplicated’ within *Le Soir*. To cap it all, Hergé’s fiction was actually drawing upon the content of the paper in which it was being published: similar robberies were at the time being reported by *Le Soir*.

This last piece of information comes from the succinct running commentaries provided on every left-hand page of both books by Daniel Couvreur and Frédéric Soumois (the latter known for his well-regarded book on Tintin from the late 1980s).¹⁶ The tone is humorous but they transmit substantive information, being particularly strong on the elucidation of historical and topical references (among others, the origins of the pickpocketing plot, Sakharine’s name, naval terminology, the Dupondts’ tram-stop wait, and even the hat of the lady emerging from a telephone box). In addition, some interesting biographical anecdotes are offered along with examples of documentary source material, figure studies and side-sketches.

Perhaps the most important lesson provided by a close reading of these newly republished strips is that the definitive versions of these two *bande dessinée* masterworks did not come into being fully formed. Although the treasure hunt diptych was more carefully planned out than any of the previous stories, the finished product is the result of a creative process unfolding through many stages, and only properly completed by a subtle reorientation of existing material. Indeed, from this crucial period onwards, the existence of multiple authorial versions would become a defining characteristic of Hergé’s oeuvre.¹⁷ His revision process is a mode of creative activity that deserves attention in its own right. Whilst most readers are very familiar with the stories in their definitive forms, much still remains to be learnt in each instance about the complex and equally fascinating ‘story behind the story’.

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16 Frédéric Soumois, *Dossier Tintin: Sources, versions, thèmes, structures* (Bruxelles: Jacques Antoine, 1987).

17 The serial narratives from the later ‘Journal Tintin’ period (September 1946 onwards) were often modified on conversion to book form – and sometimes with far-reaching consequences (most notably in the case of the extended serials *Le Temple du Soleil* [‘Prisoners of the Sun’] and the double episode published under the title *On a marché sur la Lune* [‘Explorers on the Moon’]).

Angoulême, 2009

It is possible that, years from now, we will look back on the 2009 iteration of the Festival International de la Bande Dessinée in Angoulême as the launch of an important direction in moving comics off the page. So much of what was compelling about this year's version of the festival had little to do with traditional conceptions of comics as a print-based or literary form, that it is not out of line to suggest a change might be in the air for the art form as a whole.

Significantly, among the highlights of Europe's largest and grandest annual comics event were the live performances that introduced cartoonists to contemporary musicians and performers. Angoulême has been featuring *concerts de dessins* for several years now, during which comics are drawn live on stage to musical accompaniment. This year, in addition to those performances, two notable events (each co-sponsored by *Les Inrockuptibles*) took place in the town's theatre: Arthur H. performed with artist Christophe Blain, and Rodolphe Burger worked with Festival co-presidents Philippe Dupuy and Charles Berberian.

Similarly, two of the most talked-about exhibitions of the Festival defied the easy traditions of comics display. Winchluss, who would be rewarded on the last day of the Festival with the Fauve d'Or for his book *Pinocchio* (Albi: Requins Marteaux, 2008), was the subject of a major retrospective. Several years ago, Winchluss was one of the driving forces behind the *Musée ferraille* ['Scrap-Metal Museum'] exhibition, a tour de force of imaginary history that was a high-water mark for innovation in the presentation of comics art. This year, he went a very different route. Having co-directed, with Marjane Satrapi, the Oscar-nominated animated film *Persepolis*, Winchluss turned his eye once again towards film, spending the money allotted to the exhibition on a full-length live-action feature zombie film, entitled *Ville molle* ['Droopy Town'], starring the likes of Jean-Christophe Menu and Blutch. A selection of his original art was then presented in conjunction with some of the sets and props from the film.

Another, more controversial, exhibition was included in the Dupuy-Berberian retrospective at the recently re-named Cité Internationale de la Bande Dessinée et de l'Image (CIBDI). Florent Ruppert and Jérôme Mulot organised a *maison close*, or brothel, in a single red-velvet-walled room. Visitors were invited to peep through small holes in the wall, where collaboratively produced comics by a host of important female (depicting themselves as prostitutes) and male (as johns) cartoonists were projected. The entire work was posted on the Festival's website. The piece itself drew a hostile reaction from several members of the feminist comics organisation Artémisia, including Catherine Beaunez, Chantal Montellier and Jeanne Puchol, and many visitors were simply confounded by its presentation, given that the bulk of the material was only available online.

Of course, Angoulême also had more than its fair share of traditional comics displays to occupy its hundreds of thousands of visitors. The Dupuy-Berberian show was almost overwhelming in its depth and featured a lovely side room offering objects from their personal collections of comics art and other collectibles. The Flemish comics exhibition was short on original art, but lavishly displayed and well-rounded by an incredible collection of books for sale (in an elaborately designed bar setting) in one of the main tents. The comics collective Bitterkomix was the pole around which a collection of

South African works was exhibited, in a show that tested the boundaries of what was permissible for the CIBDI to put on display (several pieces were apparently censored, though given the graphic depictions of explicit sex that were to be seen, it is difficult to imagine what they might have been). Frank Margerin's *Lucien* was the subject of a robust retrospective, as was Shigeru Mizuki, the 2007 winner of the Fauve d'Or and a winner again this year in the category 'Essentiel patrimoine'.

Overall, this was a strong edition of the Festival, and one that passed with very little apparent drama. Under the presidency of Dupuy-Berberian it was clear that the Festival was pushed more in the direction of art than commerce, with international guest stars like Chris Ware, Adrian Tomine, Dan Clowes and Posy Simmonds stressing storytelling sophistication rather than escapist fantasy. It is likely that this trend will continue through 2010, when Blutch, who shared an atelier with Philippe Dupuy for many years, will take over the reins of the presidency.

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Musée du Louvre, Paris, *Le Petit dessin: Le Louvre s'ouvre au neuvième art* ['Modest Plans: The Louvre Opens up to the Ninth Art'], 22 January to 13 April 2009.

There should be benefits for all sides when the world's best-known art museum mounts an exhibition of original comics art. As Fabrice Douar, director of the Louvre's publishing unit, indicated to reporters, each can place the other in a new light: 'Just as comics are not only fun or for entertainment, the Louvre equally is not dusty and boring'.

Unfortunately, *Le Petit dessin: Le Louvre s'ouvre au neuvième art* did little to enhance the reputation of comics nor to dispel the dusty perception of France's most important national museum. Held, quite literally, in a dark corner in the basement, the exhibition featured the work of only five cartoonists. In so doing, it came across as what it most assuredly was: an effort to promote the books published by the Louvre in conjunction with French comics publisher Futuropolis since 2005.

Since October 2005, the Louvre has released a small trickle of comic books whose actions unfold at the museum. It was a selection of pages from these works that were presented in a single dimly-lit room. Only three of the books had been published by the time of the exhibition.

The first, *Période glaciaire* by Nicolas de Crécy (translated by NBM in 2007 as *Glacial Period*), is the most visually striking. It was represented by a small number of original painted pages that ably displayed the artist's mastery. De Crécy's originals are quite small but almost immaculate, betraying absolutely no hesitancy on the artist's part. Similarly, Marc-Antoine Mathieu's 2006 book, *Les Sous-sols du révolu* (translated by NBM in 2008 as *The Museum Vaults*), which is printed in two colours, was shown here as a sampling of black-and-white images that stressed his strong linework. Mathieu's is the most interesting of the Louvre books published to date, but there was little way to discern that from the short excerpt of the work shown here. The third book, Éric Liberge's *Aux Heures impaires* ['On Odd Hours'], is neither smart nor visually pleasing.

Liberge presented rough sketches and finished pages, and the pleasing looseness of the former was in stark contrast to the overworked and overwrought computer-enhanced imagery of the finished product.

The small show also included samples of two works in progress. Bernar Yslaire's *Le Ciel au-dessus du Louvre* ['The Sky above the Louvre'] is produced digitally by the artist on computer and drawing tablets, resulting in no original pages. The work was presented on computer screens, possibly a first for the museum. Manga-ka Hirohiko Araki's *Rohan au Louvre* was represented only by some provisional drawings, as the book is scheduled for release in 2010.

Overall, the show was a resounding disappointment, offering few real insights into either comics or the Louvre itself, and sadly reaffirming dominant cultural hierarchies rather than challenging them.

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Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005). 182 pp. ISBN 978-1578067190 (paperback, \$22.00)

The growing significance of comics and graphic novels within academe has led to an increasing number of critical interventions and attempts to think through both formal and socio-political aspects of the genre. Charles Hatfield's study might be said to belong to the 'emerging literature' of comics criticism, keen to emphasise both the importance of the economic and logistical basis of comics' production and distribution, on the one hand, and the medium's capacity for sophisticated and serious artistic expression, on the other. The book's often casual prose, its author's obvious expertise concerning underground comics (or 'comix', as he terms them) and, indeed, the study's title all signal the desire to situate the award-laden, commercially successful and academically respectable graphic novel within a tradition of the 'alternative comic' going back to the late 1960s and the work of Robert Crumb and his contemporaries. The early chapters explore the tradition of comic book publishing and post-1968 developments towards more adult-oriented and idiosyncratic work. They also consider the formal qualities specific to comics that shape reading protocols and interpretation in general. Subsequent chapters offer readings of key alternative comics, including Gilbert Hernandez's *Heartbreak Soup*, which appeared in *Love and Rockets*, Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor* and of course Art Spiegelman's *Maus*.

Hatfield offers much that is useful in his consideration of the rise of alternative comics from a point of view that is both materialist and formalist. The main contention is that more recent acclaimed graphic novels should be approached with careful attention to their special mix of text and image and their origin, usually in serialised form, in low-circulation comics, rather than being seen as literature *per se*. The first two chapters build generally convincing arguments for the importance of these features. Hatfield's assured technical discussion of composition and temporal sequencing, including 'uncued closure' (the comic equivalent of film's 'jump cuts'), in comics is particularly valuable, drawing as it does on a wide range of relevant examples with plenty of illustrations from sources. This technical sophistication is often in evidence in the explorations

of community in Hernandez's work, and of problems of self-representation in Pekar and Spiegelman, and Hatfield is clearly a fervent admirer and enthusiastic defender of each of them. That said, given the importance of attempting to theorise different kinds of reading experience, and Hatfield's keenness to contribute to the development of new ways of talking about comics, the analysis of these graphic novels (a term Hatfield reluctantly adopts) is sometimes surprisingly traditional in literary terms in its emphasis on authorial intention. It also struggles occasionally to balance the need to outline the narratives of less well-known works with the requirement to avoid an overly descriptive method.

This book is a helpful corrective to some forms of criticism that might treat graphic novels simply as novels, with little regard for the important differences that structure them. Certainly, Hatfield works towards the emergence of a more widely accepted vocabulary, set of critical tools and historical awareness to be used when we write about comics. One wonders, however, if his 'alternative comics' nomenclature and subsequent literary comparisons, apparently stemming from antipathy to the 'novel' part of 'graphic novel', tend to oversimplify the notoriously baggy-monster genre of the novel and strike a pose that is a little too defensive in its warnings about 'importing aesthetic standards'. Policing such generic borders can often lead to sterile and circular arguments and, in relation to the hybrid form of comics, seems a little perverse. As often happens in the construction of genealogies, much depends on the selection of the source material. In this case the author's thesis concerning the enduring importance of late-1960s alternative comics for contemporary graphic novels rests on what is perhaps a narrow range of material by American men with clear links to serial publication and an 'underground' tradition. The appreciation of exciting and distinctive graphic novels being produced outside this group around the world, by writers such as Guy Delisle, Rutu Modan, Andrzej Klimowski and Alison Bechdel, requires a broader sense of where alternative comics have come from and, more importantly, where they might go. In this regard, the virtual absence of Joe Sacco, author of *Palestine*, and the complete absence of Marjane Satrapi, author of *Persepolis*, from Hatfield's study suggests the need to open the critical doors a little wider to greet the emergence of this globally burgeoning cultural form.

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Jeff McLaughlin, *Comics as Philosophy* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005). 246 pp. ISBN 1-57806-794-4 (paperback, £12.50)

Comics as Philosophy compiles 11 essays with the task of revealing 'how the issues and questions that philosophers deal with can be found not just in some remote branch of academia but in unassuming and easily accessible places' (xi) – such 'places' here, as the title implies, taking the specific form of comic strips. Throughout the 11 chapters, a number of philosophical theories are expounded, their various elements illustrated in the content of a range of American mainstream strips. The title *Comics as Philosophy* perhaps slightly underestimates the scope of this collection, as in addition to discussions of existentialism, environmental and political philosophy and the Platonic dialogues,

the work also contains essays connecting issues of censorship, literary theory and social commentary to the comics genre.

The introduction to the work, written by editor Jeff McLaughlin, briefly notes the content of each of the 11 essays which are to follow and whilst not stated explicitly, immediately one thing is very clear: the work is plainly aimed at an American reading audience. Six of the 11 essays connect their philosophical themes directly to the superhero comics produced by US publishing giants Marvel and DC, most doing so with a certain presupposition of the reader's general familiarity with the characters, their connections to each other and their histories. One essay of the 11 provides a nod towards the Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée* market in the shape of Pierre Skilling's analysis of the political philosophy identifiable in Hergé's *Tintin* series. Excepting this, however, only one small paragraph throughout the rest of the work makes reference to other nationalities' production of sequential art. As such, on one level this volume can be read as a source of information on the United States' mainstream comics industry, particularly the importance of the superhero strip, the history and creation of the Comics Code and the production-line creative processes of the Marvel and DC publishing houses.

Nonetheless, with the host of writers included in this collection stemming mostly from academic philosophical backgrounds, it is unsurprising that the wider focus for the work is the explanation of the philosophical theories, with discussion of the comics generally secondary, a vehicle to highlight and render more accessible certain theoretical notions. In Kevin de LaPlante's presentation of the basics of environmental philosophy, for example, only specific panels of one issue of Paul Chadwick's *Concrete* series, in which the characters discuss and imagine issues directly connected to environmental philosophy, are described; the bulk of the essay is devoted to a thorough and comprehensive introduction to the philosophical theories, whilst the main storyline, artistic style and form of *Concrete* are never fully examined. The remaining essays in *Comics as Philosophy* vary to a certain extent in their comic-to-philosophy ratio, however LaPlante's contribution is representative of the work as a whole. When the comic strips are discussed in greater detail, their connection to the philosophical perspectives expounded is mostly focused on their narrative content. Little focus is placed on style, *mise-en-page* or the use of artistic devices specific to the comic genre when discussing philosophical concepts. In certain cases, that the stories applied against the theories happen to be drawn into a comic strip seems merely circumstantial – their form is rarely pivotal to the article's thesis. Perhaps correspondingly, there are no visual reproductions of the strips noted in essays throughout the book.

However, whilst comic scholars may be disappointed by the concentration of philosophical systems over artistic analysis, for the novice student of philosophy, this work is very useful. Throughout each of the 11 essays, without exception, the theories applied are explained in a comprehensive and accessible manner, with no expectation of prior familiarity with the concepts implied. The connection between the philosophies discussed and the comic strips chosen is more transparent in some essays than others – the similarities between the 'character' of Socrates and Spiderman's human incarnation, Peter Parker, perhaps seem little more than circumstantial; however the elucidation of Sartre's existentialism as recognisable in Daniel Clowes's cult strip *Ghost World*, and the comparison between Nietzsche's thesis of society's need for heroes and the very deconstruction of the heroic figure in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*

provide both illuminating and accessible explanations of what are traditionally fairly dense, complex philosophies.

Perhaps the greatest criticism to be levelled at this work is its insistent application of its philosophical concepts to the over-obvious symbolism of the exaggerated, larger-than-life comic superhero and, hence, failing to take advantage of the wealth of choice present in the field of worldwide comic art, both past and present. Where it succeeds, however, is in largely fulfilling the difficult promise of its front cover – it presents a very convincing case for a philosophical reading of comic books. Whilst its focus throughout remains almost exclusively on the American sequential art tradition, *Comics as Philosophy* provides a model for the application of philosophical theory to the comic strip of any origin – the variety of form and content of the Franco-Belgian market perhaps particularly suited to such theoretical considerations. A comparison of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* and René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's cunning but diminutive contribution to the French 'superhero' *bande dessinée* would provide new angles of possible analysis to the already oft-discussed *Astérix* series, whilst the temporal and spatial manipulations of postmodern strips such as Marc-Antoine Mathieu's *Julius Corentin Acquefacques: Prisonnier des rêves* ['Julius Corentin Acquefacques: Prisoner of Dreams'] might lend themselves to formal metaphysical analysis. McLaughlin's collection provides us with an example of how to undertake such considerations predominantly for use as a pedagogical tool, but also simply as a further dimension of the understanding of drawn strips.

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Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, *Images à mi-mots* ['Images Halfway to Words'] (Brussels: Impressions nouvelles, 2008). 191 pp. ISBN 978-2-87449-048-4 (€20.00)

Any book by the semiologist Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle must be of interest to students of comic strip, given his key role in opening up the medium to academic study in France in the 1970s. After a long period in which his output was concerned with other areas of the visual arts, he has returned in the last decade to comic strip, with a number of books on Hergé, and now with this collection. The first section of *Images à mi-mots* is a series of chapters on selected artists, both American (Winsor McCay, Milton Caniff, Art Spiegelman) and Franco-Belgian (E. P. Jacobs, Francis Masse, Emmanuel Guibert, David B., Marc-Antoine Mathieu, Moebius, Philippe Geluck); this section also includes a piece by Jean Arrouye on the Baltus, Schuiten and Peeters collaboration, *Dolorès*. The second section of the book offers a series of semiological analyses of single-image cartoons. The book is copiously illustrated with black-and-white plates.

Fresnault-Deruelle begins by considering the tension between image and storyline in a narrative-driven medium: does the artist draw in order to tell a story, or can the opposite be true? It would seem, he suggests, that the 'défilement' (13), the running, scrolling effect inherent to the reading process, means that a single image is not meant to be lingered over, but must be subject to the iron law of narrative progression. There may, though, be resistance to this: Fresnault-Deruelle argues that some images manage

to free themselves from the dictates of the scenario, citing McCay's series of exuberant variations on positions and colours, whose function is actually to delay the inevitable *chute*, the moment where Little Nemo, like the reader, must exit from the fantasy. Elsewhere, in the work of Moebius, for example, or Muñoz, the reader's eye may be arrested, and tempted to explore the world that opens up within a single panel. But Fresnault-Deruelle is particularly concerned to point to instances where it is the tension itself that is productive. He offers the example from an album by Jacques Martin of a drawing which exists only to be 'entrevu' (14), literally 'seen between' its surrounding panels. The panel in question is small in size. It contains a partial, high-angled view of a palace and allows a glimpse of the rituals and routines that make up the daily life of its inhabitants, an evocation of a much greater whole which the reader must defer completing. This 'tableau nié' ['negated picture'] (14) nonetheless escapes, Fresnault-Deruelle claims, mere narrative functionality.

He then turns to a comparison with painting: according to the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, classical painting has no 'coulisses' ['wings in a theatre'], since everything is offered up to the viewer.¹ Such images may occur in comic strip: the opening image of a Winsor McCay cartoon, for example, is 'centripetal': it displays a cityscape that seems complete in itself. But the remaining panels are 'centrifugal', projected onward by the energy of the narrative (38–39). Fresnault-Deruelle's use of these terms inevitably recalls Bazin's article on 'Painting and Cinema'. In this, Bazin describes the frame of a painting, which serves to cut it off from the surrounding reality, as 'centripetal'. The edge of a film screen can be better likened to a 'cache', or mask, and works centrifugally, implying that what is shown on the film screen continues on indefinitely into its setting.² The 'centrifugal' élan of the comic strip panel, however, offers a considerably less smooth transition, given that the *hors-champ* in this medium is not the prolongation of the world cut off by the frame, but the surrounding panels on the page, and the narrative flow must traverse the gutter between those panels. Fresnault-Deruelle quotes Pierre Sterckx's characterisation of the medium as 'l'art de la rupture, la science du saut' ['the art of breaking off, the science of jumping'].³ What is given in one panel, says Fresnault-Deruelle, may be annihilated in the next: the gutter is the space in which a 'jeu de passe-passe' ['conjuring trick'] can happen (26). The world into which the reader had thought s/he was invited is suddenly revealed to be a dream or a fantasy. The image that is 'proposed' cannot be differentiated from the image that has been 'transposed': the deceptively wide-awake Little Nemo, threatened by a giant hand, turns out, after all, to have been inside a nightmare (40).

The book includes a chapter entitled 'La Beauté adhérente' ['Beauty Belonging to a Particular Art Form'], and poses the question as to whether comic strip can aspire to be 'beautiful'. The response is that beauty necessarily involves 'justesse d'expression' ['appropriateness of expression'] (110). This is not to be confused with decorativeness: the single panels of artists such as Joost Swarte or Ted Benoit, reproduced as lithographs,

1 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image* ['In Front of the Image'], (Paris: Minuit, 1990), here page 273, quoted in Fresnault-Deruelle, 38.

2 André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* ['What is Cinema?'], (Paris: Cerf, 1985). 'Peinture et cinéma' is on pages 187–192.

3 Pierre Sterckx, 'Images d'un passeur' ['Images of a Ferryman'], *9^{ème} Art* 5 (2000), 90–99, quoted in Fresnault-Deruelle, 32.

are triumphs of design, Fresnault-Deruelle maintains, but not of comic strip. For this medium, appropriateness lies in the very capacity to be ‘productivement lacunaire’ [‘productively incomplete’] (111) that he has discussed in relation to Martin and McCay. He points to the work undertaken by the reader in orienting him/herself through a sequence from Jacques Tardi’s *Brouillard au Pont de Tolbiac* [‘Fog on Tolbiac Bridge’], in which Burma and his female companion transport a corpse in their van: their route has to be reconstructed from the fragmentary evidence offered by the artist. Moebius’s *Arzach* has ‘zones de nonchalance narrative’ [‘zones of narrative casualness’] (116), where nothing seems to happen: the transitions have a mythologising, not a narrative function. In the plate chosen to exemplify the point, Arzach looks through an opening that illuminates his face, first in profile and, in the next panel, from the front. Only in the third panel do we see the woman who is the object of his gaze. The light that floods in, suggests Fresnault-Deruelle, symbolises illustration itself: the casting of lustre onto the hero by the desired object, in this case the woman. Here, he argues, the mechanism of the transition has enabled Moebius to reference images fundamental to the cultural imaginary (such as, presumably, the Holy Grail or Christ Child as light source) and so to remain at a distance, both from the action-packed adventure story and the abandonment of plot in favour of virtuosity for its own sake (119).

Fresnault-Deruelle’s analyses of single texts continue the investigation of the relationship between image and narrative trajectory. Guibert’s *La Guerre d’Alain* [‘Alan’s War’] extends to a whole album the principle of the ‘entrevu’ and the ‘lacunaire’, by concentrating on the texture of a reality that has usually passed unnoticed and been regarded as insignificant. The non-heroic characters are depicted marking time: Fresnault-Deruelle is moved to compare Guibert to other painters of ‘interstices’, such as Degas, Vermeer, Hopper (81). The ‘remplissages’ [‘filling’] (81) are the story, and the temporality is not that of a linear narrative but rather that of memory with its gaps, fast forwards and flashbacks (82–86). In a chapter devoted to Geluck’s *Le Chat* [‘The Cat’], he draws attention to the deconstruction, by the eponymous character and his begetter, of the very codes that allow for spatio-temporal transitions: the cat attempts to foil the inexorability of the left-to-right progression of the narrative by walking from right to left, or standing still, only to discover that the result is the same: he ends up in the right-hand panel. Fresnault-Deruelle coins the term ‘Ourebouros’ (a play on words with ‘au rebours’, backwards) to emphasise the affinity between Geluck’s hugely popular work and the experiments of the *avant-garde* Oubapo group.

A number of the studies betray Fresnault-Deruelle’s fascination with the architectonics of the medium. He notes that many comic strips involve travel from one room to another: every panel is a space of infraction (16). A page from E. P. Jacobs’s *La Marque jaune* [‘The Yellow Mark’] depicts Olrik’s stealthy progress through Blake and Mortimer’s house, breaking in at the top left and moving down to the ground floor, a descent which, Fresnault-Deruelle points out, corresponds to the journey of the eye down the page itself. The reading process is more explicitly rendered into metaphor on the cover of David B.’s *Les Complots nocturnes* [‘Nocturnal Plottings’], he argues, but in greater complexity: the downward-leading staircase within the table around which the dream-protagonists sit represents the ever deeper burrowing and hollowing-out, as each panel invalidates the previous one in favour of one that is more detailed and intricate (98). Still greater is the narrative and topological density of Mathieu’s *Les Sous-sols du révolu*

['The Basements of Bygone Days'], in which the hero attempts to survey the crypts of the Louvre. Here, again, pages are constructed to make the characters' trajectory the equivalent of that of the reader, whether they are being whisked by strange theatrical machinery across orthogonally sectioned pages or advancing through corridor-strips and entering panel-rooms.

Fresnault-Deruelle's analytical take on his chosen texts is highly acute. Curiously, though, the least interesting aspect of the book, for this reader, is the focus on the 'contamination sémiotique de l'image par les expressions de la langue' ['semiotic contamination of the image by linguistic expressions'] (57) that is the justification for the title. The play on words that underlies some images has, of course, long been a resource of comic strip. Hergé uses it to notable effect, and there is a brilliant example by Geluck on the cover of the book: as the cat drives past a road sign with a 'Z' on it, indicating a bend, none other than Zorro, suitably masked and moustachioed, can be seen lurking in the bushes. However, the semiological analyses of individual images that Fresnault-Deruelle proposes occasionally seem to take away the pleasure of a visual joke by weighing it down with a laboured pun. A *Télérama* cover during the week of the 'fête du livre' (the national book festival) channels *The Seven-Year Itch* by portraying a Monroe-figure whose wind-blown skirt is made up of the pages of a giant book. Is it necessary to overburden this playful eroticisation of the reading (or marketing) process by verbalising around the theme of a 'Marguerite' who 's'effeuille' ['a Daisy who sheds her petals'] (the French equivalent of 'he loves me, he loves me not') or to refer to the 'dessous de la littérature' ['the underwear/shady side of literature']?

In Fresnault-Deruelle's conclusion, he says that his aim in the book has been to account for the 'bonheurs d'expression' ['felicities of expression'] achieved by comic strip artists. This he undoubtedly achieves, and his gift for striking phrase-making (for example, comic strip is described as a 'machinerie labyrinthique' ['a machine for producing labyrinths'] (19)), offers pleasures of its own. Fresnault-Deruelle's abandonment of step-by-step reasoning in favour of a more writerly approach can be challenging (this reader was run a little ragged at times), but the book rewards perseverance by yielding some very rewarding insights.

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