
Introduction

Matthew Screech, guest editor

The present edition of *European Comic Art* is our somewhat belated tribute to the eightieth anniversary of Hergé's *Adventures of Tintin*. Hergé's roaming reporter first appeared in the Brussels-based children's magazine *Le Petit Vingtième* on 10 January 1929, but he still bestrides the world of Francophone comics like a colossus in plus fours. The 24 Tintin albums, which appeared from 1929 to 1986, have sold millions of copies. Without *The Adventures of Tintin* the *bande dessinée* would not exist as we know it and neither, very probably, would *European Comic Art*.

Within the context of European comics, Hergé immediately stands out as the artist who first gave *bandes dessinées* an identity distinct from that of the American strips. At the outset, Tintin's adventures were humorous, but they conveyed a moral message. Like his superhero counterparts from across the Atlantic, Tintin was a bold righter of wrongs, fighting against oppressors, criminals and wrongdoers. Yet Tintin's morality, unlike that of superheroes, was originally grounded in a colonialist, Euro-centric Roman Catholicism, laced with scepticism about the American superpower. Tintin never ceased to be strong, brave, clever and agile. However, by the mid-1950s Tintin was increasingly ideologically unaligned. As a post-war European, Tintin did not exist at superhero level. *L'Affaire Tournesol* ['The Calculus Affair'], for example, posited an unusual moral equivalence between capitalist West and communist East.¹ Over the 1960s and 1970s Tintin's evolution away from superheroes accelerated. In *Les Bijoux de la Castafiore* ['The Castafiore Emerald']² Tintin resembled a fallible human being, misled by false clues and easily frightened. In *Tintin et les Picaros*, Tintin finally became ethically ambivalent when he sided with a morally dubious Latin American dictator.³

Hergé also developed a distinctive graphic style, known as 'clear line', which

1 Hergé, *L'Affaire Tournesol* (Tournai: Casterman, 1956).

2 Hergé, *Les Bijoux de la Castafiore* (Tournai: Casterman, 1963).

3 Hergé, *Tintin et les Picaros* (Tournai: Casterman, 1976).

had no exact equivalent in America. ‘Clear line’ had carefully selected, meticulously researched and scrupulously copied details drawn in precise, well-defined lines, which lack of shadow emphasised. Everything was arranged according to the rules of perspective and proportion. Hergé’s graphics set standards of visual realism unequalled outside Francophone comics. ‘Clear line’ became a dominant model for depicting perceptible reality in *bandes dessinées*. Its influence persisted in works by Joost Swarte, Jean-Claude Floc’h and Ted Benoît. Furthermore, Hergé initiated the peculiarly Franco-Belgian process of raising comic strips to an art form. His masterful storytelling and flawless graphics, packaged in high quality hardback albums, transformed infantile ephemera into lasting, aesthetic objects. After *The Adventures of Tintin*, the Franco-Belgian cultural landscape would never look the same.

Before launching into the articles we publish in our current edition of *European Comic Art*, it is instructive to revise the history of Tintin scholarship. Hergé has now spawned an entire critical industry. Indeed, so many studies on the Tintin phenomenon have appeared that they cannot possibly all be considered here. We therefore restrict ourselves to some salient works by Francophone critics.

The earliest monograph about Tintin was by Pol Vandromme, who confirmed Tintin’s entry into popular mythology.⁴ Letters from Hergé’s postbag revealed Tintin’s growing adult readership. Eleven years later, the philosopher Michel Serres paid Tintin as yet unaccustomed critical attention in an article on *Les Bijoux de la Castafiore*.⁵ According to Serres, the comic strength of the album derived from an inability to communicate: the central connecting staircase is broken; Haddock is immobilised in a wheelchair; wrong telephone numbers proliferate; Castafiore diffirms names and listens to nobody. Even Tintin fails to grasp what is going on until the very end.

Two years later, a rigorous critical apparatus, semiology, was applied to Tintin for the first time.⁶ Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle examines *bandes dessinées* by Jacques Martin and Edgard P. Jacobs as well as by Hergé, in order to determine the laws by which sequenced text/image combinations work together to produce meaning. The theoretical approach is said to be ‘poetic’, as understood by Tzvetan Todorov: the critic, eschewing any attempt at interpretation, establishes the presence of certain elements in the work and enumerates their possibilities. Fresnault-Deruelle has continued to write extensively, focusing particularly on the visual aspect of BDs. We are pleased to carry an article by him in our present edition of *European Comic Art*. One example of Fresnault-Deruelle’s later work dealing specifically with Tintin is *Hergé ou la Profondeur*

4 Pol Vandromme, *Le Monde de Tintin* [‘The World of Tintin’] (Paris: Gallimard, 1959).

5 Michel Serres, ‘Les Bijoux distraits ou la cantatrice sauve’ [‘The Distracted Jewels or the Opera-Singer Spared’], *Critique* 277 (June 1970), 485–497. Serre’s writings on Tintin have been grouped in an anthology: *Hergé. Mon Ami* [‘Hergé. My Friend’] (Brussels: Moulinsart, 2000).

6 Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, *La Bande dessinée* (Paris: Hachette, 1972).

des images plates ['Hergé or the Depth of Flat Images'].⁷ Fresnault-Deruelle discusses 43 panels, showing them to be charged with a subtle, frequently metaphorical power of suggestion. This power is generated by (amongst other things) aesthetic effects of symmetry, contrast, incongruity, understatement and duplication.

During the 1980s, Tintin scholarship spread. A generation who had grown up reading Tintin found themselves still fascinated with him in adulthood. Benoît Peeters offered the first comprehensive Tintin bibliography.⁸ He studies each album in turn, highlighting images which Hergé, ever the perfectionist, had drawn and re-drawn. A useful section on pastiches, plagiaries and imitations of Tintin is included. Peeters also wrote a biography of Hergé, drawing on letters between the artist, his first wife and his personal assistant.⁹ *Lire Tintin* ['Reading Tintin'] arose from Peeters' thesis, written under the guidance of structuralist philosopher Roland Barthes and inspired by the latter's *S/Z*.¹⁰ Peeters' book is a panel-by-panel dissection of *Les Bijoux de la Castafiore*, which analyses how one of Hergé's masterpieces perfected the artist's peculiar combination of dramatic effects and humorous gags. As well as looking at the overt plot, Peeters engages with the subconscious of the text.

Philippe Goddin, ex-general secretary of the Hergé Foundation (1989–99), delved into Hergé's artistic evolution and working practices. Drawing upon archive material, he put together a profusely illustrated study, tracing Tintin's evolution from the *scoutiste Petit Vingtième* to the more sophisticated *Journal de Tintin*.¹¹ Turning to *Tintin et les Picaros*, Goddin took readers through the succeeding stages of Hergé's creative process, from the earliest drafts up to the finished album, including gags, dialogues and sequences of events which were later omitted.¹² Goddin's ongoing magnum opus is his minutely documented chronological study of Hergé's oeuvre from the very beginning currently up to 1957.¹³ This ever-expanding work contains a wealth of preliminary sketches and little-known drawings.

Serge Tisseron put aside historico-biography and semiology to view Hergé's life and work through the prism of Freudian psychoanalysis.¹⁴ Tisseron interprets *The Adventures of Tintin* as a subconscious quest to establish a genealogical identity: that of Hergé's mysterious, unknown grandfather. Tisseron's

7 Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, *Hergé ou la profondeur des images plates* (Brussels: Moulinsart, 2002).

8 Benoît Peeters, *Le Monde d'Hergé* ['The World of Hergé'] (Tournai: Casterman, 1983).

9 Benoît Peeters, *Hergé. Fils de Tintin* ['Hergé. Tintin's Son'] (Paris: Flammarion, 2002).

10 Benoît Peeters, *Lire Tintin* (Brussels: Impressions Nouvelles, 2007). Originally published as a slightly different version under the title *Les Bijoux ravis* ['The Ravished Jewels'] (Brussels: Magic Strip, 1984). Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

11 Philippe Goddin, *Hergé et Tintin reporters* (Brussels: Lombard, 1986).

12 Philippe Goddin, *Hergé et les Bigotudos* (Tournai: Casterman, 1990).

13 Philippe Goddin, *Hergé. Chronologie d'une oeuvre*, 6 vols. (Brussels: Moulinsart, 2000-2009).

14 Serge Tisseron, *Tintin chez le psychanaliste* (Paris: Auber, 1985). *Tintin et le Secret d'Hergé* (Paris: Hors Collection, 1993).

ingenious, convincing arguments even explain why Tintin spends so much time with such unlikely friends: the alcoholic Captain Haddock, the deaf old Professor Tournesol; the literally-minded twins Dupont and Dupond.

Jean-Marie Apostolidès' study is also influenced by psychoanalysis, although Tintin's adventures are construed as a search for a father-figure, not for a grandfather.¹⁵ A later work by Apostolidès elaborates upon Tintin as a hero of myth: Tintin's adventures (like those of Superman, as Umberto Eco noted), propel the hero to mythological status by reiterating his triumph over adversity.¹⁶ Tintin is a distinctly European figure of myth. He brings together opposing aspects of human existence, childhood and adulthood. In so doing he restores trust between two generations which had been shattered by the trauma of World War I.

Pierre Sterckx co-wrote the first biography of Hergé with Thierry Smolderen, interviewing numerous contacts from his earliest childhood up to the end of his life.¹⁷ Since this work, Assouline's biography of Hergé has come out.¹⁸ Assouline draws upon previously unreleased Belgian legal documents, as well as on testimonies from people close to Hergé. Hergé's biographies shed valuable light upon the anxieties, political allegiances and complex personal evolution of the shy, courteous, somewhat elusive individual behind our world-famous hero.

Sterckx later studies take less orthodox perspectives. *Tintin et les Médias* draws up a careful inventory of Tintin's encounters with various media.¹⁹ Following Marshall McLuhan, 'media' is defined as any machine capable of totally altering our relationship with the environment, including means of transport. Sterckx thinks about cars, aeroplanes, photography (e.g. the trick camera in *Le Sceptre d'Ottokar* ['King Ottokar's Sceptre']), disembodied voices (e.g. the phonograph in *Tintin au Pays des Soviets* ['Tintin in the Land of the Soviets']),²⁰ recorded music (Castafiore, like a 45/78 rpm vinyl record, always sings the same song). Tintin emerges as very much a child of the media age and Hergé as an artist acutely sensitive to the narrative possibilities it offered. *Tintin Schizo* is a still more original take on *The Adventures of Tintin*.²¹ Sterckx postulates that Tintin, the obsessive decrypter of codes, is schizoid in the sense understood by philosopher Gilles Deleuze: Tintin operates outside the network of normal social communication. Thus liberated, he can challenge pre-existing

15 Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Les Métamorphoses de Tintin* (Paris: Seghers, 1984).

16 Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Tintin et le mythe du surenfant* ['Tintin and the Myth of the Superchild'] (Brussels: Moulinsart, 2003). Umberto Eco, 'The Myth of Superman', in *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), 107–124.

17 Pierre Sterckx and Thierry Smolderen, *Hergé. Portrait biographique* (Tournai: Casterman, 1988).

18 Pierre Assouline, *Hergé* (Paris: Plon, 1996).

19 Pierre Sterckx, *Tintin et les Médias* (Brussels: Le Hêtre pourpre, 1997).

20 Hergé, *Le Sceptre d'Ottokar* (Tournai: Casterman, 1939). *Tintin au Pays des Soviets* (Brussels: Editions du Petit Vingtième, 1930; repr. Tournai: Casterman, 1991).

21 Pierre Sterckx, *Tintin Schizo* (Liège: Impressions Nouvelles, 2007).

codes and discover new ones by establishing hidden, unforeseen connections between heterogeneous phenomena.

Also essential is Jan Baetens' study, which reasserts the verbal aspect of *The Adventures of Tintin*.²² As Baetens demonstrates, the sound of words, resonances between them, characters' verbal idiosyncrasies and repetitions build up a dense, textual network. Consequently, Tintin's adventures achieve a tight, carefully constructed internal coherence. If earlier albums like *Les 7 Boules de cristal* ['The Seven Crystal Balls'] perfected Hergé's graphic style, an interest in words comes to the fore in later albums, such as *Tintin au Tibet*.²³ Baetens also stands as a timely reminder that verbal elements (e.g. symbolic and/or comical names, foreigners speaking implausibly good French, even speech-balloons themselves) counteract notions of mimetic, Hergéen realism.

Since the turn of the millennium Hergé has continued to attract critical attention. Thierry Groensteen, who directed the Musée de la bande dessinée at Angoulême (1993–2001) and who had already written and published extensively about BDs, devoted a study to Hergé's comedy.²⁴ Devices analysed include comedy of repetition, the ludicrous Dupondts, conflictual relationships with objects, facial expressions and the role of alcohol, particularly for Haddock. Hergé's comedy mostly derives from characters and situations, but Groensteen does not neglect verbal elements, such as Haddock's comical insults.

A new generation of Tintin scholars have interpreted his adventures with astonishing results. Bernard Portevin suggests that Hergé, keen on astrology, mythology and alchemy, constructed *The Adventures of Tintin* on the basis of mystical freemasonry, the kabbalah and the tarot.²⁵ Portevin's second book mines a similar vein, with greater emphasis on decrypting Hergé in the light of Taoism.²⁶ The arguments Portevin advances are somewhat arcane to the un-initiated. Yet, whether or not one subscribes to what is said in these books and in others like them (e.g. Pierre-Louis Augereau's earlier publication),²⁷ Portevin undeniably attests to the inexhaustible thematic richness of Hergé's oeuvre.

Jean-François Campario's highly detailed study pays considerable attention to the literary dimension of Tintin's adventures.²⁸ Campario establishes parallels between Hergé and the nineteenth century poet, Charles Baudelaire. Despite working in very different areas, Hergé and Baudelaire each sought inspiration

22 Jan Baetens, *Hergé Ecrivain* ['Hergé the Writer'] (Brussels: Labor, 1989).

23 Hergé, *Les 7 Boules de cristal* (Tournai: Casterman, 1948). *Tintin au Tibet* (Tournai: Casterman, 1960).

24 Thierry Groensteen, *Le Rire de Tintin* ['Tintin's Laughter'] (Brussels: Casterman, 2006).

25 Bernard Portevin, *Le Démon inconnu d'Hergé* ['Hergé's Unknown Demon'] (Paris: Dervy, 2004).

26 Bernard Portevin, *Le Monde inconnu d'Hergé* ['Hergé's Unknown World'] (Paris: Dervy, 2008).

27 Pierre-Louis Augereau, *Hergé au Pays des Tarots* ['Hergé in the Land of the Tarot'] (Paris: Cheminements, 1999).

28 Jean-François Campario, *Baudelaire/Hergé: penser la Création* ['Baudelaire/Hergé: Thinking Creation'] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

in art forms deemed minor at the time: popular songs and children's comics. Likewise, both creators refashioned their chosen forms into a highly unique, aesthetic means of expression. The unexpected rapprochement between Hergé and Baudelaire is particularly pertinent if one concurs with Fresnault-Deruelle that Hergé poeticised the form.

No less surprisingly, Emile Brami established parallels between Haddock's diatribes and an anti-Semitic pamphlet by the author Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Bagatelles pour un Massacre* ['Trivialities for a Massacre'].²⁹ This pamphlet was published in 1938, just prior to the Nazi invasion of Belgium and indeed to Haddock's entry into *The Adventures of Tintin*. As Brami admits, his hypothesis is speculation: no proof exists that Hergé read *Bagatelles pour un Massacre*. Nevertheless, Brami does point out enough odd coincidences to make one ponder whether the similarities are mere chance.

The analogies Bob Garcia establishes between Tintin and Sherlock Holmes are far less speculative.³⁰ After all, Tintin is explicitly likened to Holmes during his adventures. Both heroes are endowed with unusually sharp perceptions; they both solve complex mysteries and decipher riddling clues. Tintin and Holmes also share non-existent family backgrounds and a complete lack of interest in sex. Garcia combs through each of Conan Doyle's canonical texts, painstakingly documenting the resonances with Hergé. The similarities he indicates between Hergé's vignettes and the illustrations from Sherlock Holmes are striking.

Following celebrations to mark the centenary of Hergé's birth in 2007, a purpose-built museum was devoted to him in the Belgian town of Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009. For the first time, Tintinophiles can see for themselves hundreds of exhibits associated with Hergé, from preliminary drawings and intermediate drafts to scale models and memorabilia. Other attractions include examples of Hergé's lesser-known work outside *The Adventures of Tintin* and a temporary exhibition space where younger artists can display.

The fascination Tintin exerts over intellectuals continues to this day. *Philosophie magazine* has just published a special number on Tintin, containing 25 articles by distinguished writers from a variety of disciplines: history, ethnology, psychology, literature and modern art. Fresnault-Deruelle and Apostolidès participate alongside less famous commentators. Michel Serres views *Tintin au Tibet* as a latter-day parable of the Good Samaritan.³¹ Tintin's brush with the surprisingly kind, compassionate Yeti shows we should recognise goodness even in what popular wisdom holds to be evil. To Elizabeth de Fontenay, Snowy refutes Descartes because of his *logos endiathetos*: the dog has the ability to

29 Emile Brami, *Céline, Hergé et l'Affaire Haddock* (Paris: Ecriture, 2004).

30 Bob Garcia, *Tintin à Baker Street* (Paris: Mac Guffin, 2005).

31 Michel Serres, 'Une Leçon de morale' ['A Lesson in Morality'], *Philosophie magazine* (hors série), August/September 2010, 10–11.

communicate through an inner language.³² Gaelle Jeanmart suggests Haddock embodies the Homeric archetype as he is brave but also quick-tempered.³³ One is tempted to cite other articles from *Philosophie magazine*. Given the dictates of space and time, interested readers will alas have to buy the magazine for themselves.

The current edition of *European Comic Art*, as befits a collection of studies about a globe-trotting hero, contains work by scholars from four different countries: France, the UK, the USA and Australia. New visual, literary and political facets are considered by our contributors. As is often the case with Tintin studies nowadays, we are unfortunately unable to provide illustrations, except in the case of Raphael Taylor. Readers should have no trouble obtaining copies of the albums we cite and perusing the illustrations to which we refer.

We open with an article by that pioneer of Hergéographie, Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, who is now emeritus professor in Semiotics at the Sorbonne. He has kindly offered us his first publication about BDs in English, which our editor Ann Miller has translated. Fresnault-Deruelle, extending his close analyses of Hergé's panels, minutely dissects the artist's famously detailed décor, chiefly concentrating on the apparently meaningless jumbles of bric à brac in the flea market, the curiosity shop and especially the crypt at Marlinspike Hall (*Le Secret de la licorne* ['The Secret of the Unicorn'], *Le Trésor de Rackham le rouge* ['Red Rackham's Treasure']).³⁴ Fresnault-Deruelle shows how, through Hergé's storytelling craft, apparently insignificant objects, some so discreet as to pass virtually unnoticed, are in fact anything but meaningless. They draw readers into the image, producing (usually subliminal) narrative effects. The perfect fit between the story and the manner in which it is recounted (principally by suggested symbolism and visual metaphor) confers a poetic force on Hergé's panels.

We are also pleased to include work by the rising generation of Tintin scholars. Rod Cooke and Annick Pellegrin both invite us to reconsider albums which critical opinion traditionally deems inferior to Hergé's masterpieces: *Vol 714 pour Sydney* ['Flight 714 for Sydney']³⁵ and *Tintin et les Picaros*. Cooke, like Campario, establishes previously unnoticed parallels between Hergé and writers of literature from previous generations. His article demonstrates how Hergé's last completed albums, repeating a pattern visible among later naturalist novelists like Léon Hennique and Henry Céard, operate a corrosion of the canon. Hergé, Hennique and Céard were all aware that they were working under the

32 Elizabeth de Fontenay, 'Milou contre Descartes' ['Snowy versus Descartes'], *Philosophie magazine* (hors série), August/September 2010, 11–15.

33 Gaelle Jeanmart, 'Le Courage selon Tintin' ['Courage according to Tintin'], *Philosophie magazine* (hors série), August/September 2010, 18–22.

34 Hergé, *Le Secret de la licorne* (Tournai: Casterman, 1943). *Le Trésor de Rackham le rouge* (Tournai: Casterman, 1944).

35 Hergé, *Vol 714 pour Sydney* (Tournai: Casterman, 1968).

shadow of canonical works by illustrious predecessors (or in Hergé's case by their younger selves). With Hergé, Hennique and Céard a shared disaffection with canonical convention, engendered by excessive familiarity, gave rise to a desire for differentiation. This desire manifested itself in misleading titling, a weakening of the hero and rising moral equivalence between good and evil.

Pellegrin looks further into the philosophical underpinnings of Tintin by applying Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the carnival as a spectacle. Her study shows how *Tintin et les Picaros* parodies upheavals in developing countries by systematically pairing politics with the carnivalesque. Thematic, textual and visual elements in the album all indicate that a revolution in the fictitious South American republic of San Theodorus is nothing but a spectacle, designed to reinforce a repressive status quo. A climax is reached towards the end, when the carnival turns into self-parody. Yet despite the humour this entails, the conclusion to *Tintin et les Picaros* is bitterly pessimistic: unlike in Tintin's other adventures, goodness does not triumph. There is no possibility for change in San Theodorus or indeed in the wider world.

Raphael Taylor, like Fresnault-Deruelle, closely analyses Hergé's individual panels although from a different angle. Visiting the Hergé museum encourages Taylor to view the original artwork as a physical entity. Adopting an approach influenced by *la critique génétique* ['genetic criticism'], Taylor reconstructs the linked stages of Hergé's creative process, by studying documentary evidence left behind on the page before publication. Concentrating on *Tintin au Tibet*, he puts together a 'biography of the work' by scrutinising in the minutest detail half-erased pencil lines, changes to underdrawings and page-breaks. Thus we see how Hergé, up to the moment of publication, constantly adjusted his text/image combinations to maximum effect. Probing the materiality of the page both provides fresh insights into Hergé's complex artistic practices and fosters an unusual intimacy with our enigmatic draughtsman.

We conclude with an interview, which the Dutch artist Joost Swarte has kindly given to Ann Miller. Swarte coined the term 'clear line' and his drawing has a strong Hergéen influence. He was involved in the early stages of planning and designing the Hergé museum with Nick and Fanny Rodwell, Philippe Goddin and Thierry Groensteen. Swarte shares his thoughts about various aspects of the project, including display layouts, lighting, the museum's consecrating function and Hergé's abiding legacy.

What we are publishing here continues an already long line of research into Hergé's *Adventures of Tintin*. However, the critical seam they represent is far from exhausted. In the words of Pierre Sterckx:

L'œuvre d'Hergé est inépuisable. On la relit toute sa vie, y découvrant et retrouvant sans cesse des détails piquants ou des éléments plus complexes, faisant sens. Les commentaires et critiques de tous bords n'en toucheront jamais le fond. *Les Aventures de Tintin* constituent un monde trop riche pour se laisser clôturer par le discours.

[‘Hergé’s work is inexhaustible. You keep re-reading it all your life, constantly discovering and recognising striking details or more complex elements which have meaning. Commentaries and critiques of every kind will never get to the bottom of it. *The Adventures of Tintin* make up a world too rich to be enclosed in words.’³⁶]

Like every great work of art, *The Adventures of Tintin* elicit numerous, varied responses and no doubt they will continue to do so for generations to come. We look forward to reading more publications on Hergé and Tintin in the future.