Editorial

Perspectives on Authors, Perspectives from Authors

The Editors

Creation and criticism, in comics, as in all types of artistic expression, become intertwined, and all the more so as the form develops self-awareness and seeks definition. One of the main precursors of the tradition of graphic storytelling, William Hogarth (1697–1764), told of the social tribulations of the London in which he lived via multi-image series such as *A Rake's Progress* (c. 1735) and *A Harlot's Progress* (c. 1732), but was also known for his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753), in which he elaborates the notion of the central S shape as key to the visual expression of attractiveness; this serpentine 'line of beauty' can still be detected in the characters of comic books today.

Hogarth leads to Rodolphe Töpffer, a debt that the latter expresses in a letter to Sainte-Beuve dated 29 December 1840 as he analyses the key influences on his own artistic evolution.¹ But the Swiss schoolteacher so often accredited with the invention of comics through his *Histoire de M. Jabot*, *Les Amours de M. Vieux-bois* and other *récits en images* was also one of the first, and foremost, theoreticians of the genre. Töpffer's *Essai de physiognomie* (1845) lays out the basics of modern-day caricature. His more conservative 'De la Plaque Daguerre' (1852) also considers the role of expression through image, here with specific reference to the first stages of photography, although Töpffer, like Baudelaire, was to express reservations about a form that he saw as using science to eliminate art.

More recent examples of critical-creative overlap will be familiar to readers of *European Comic Art*. Benoît Peeters, known for his formal boundary pushing with the *Cités obscures* series, was one of the first to reflect upon those boundaries with his *Case, planche, récit: Comment lire*

1 Bibliothèque de Genève Ms suppl. 1641.

une bande dessinée [Frame, Plate, Narrative: How to Read a Comic], first published in 1991. Jean-Christophe Menu's *Livret de phamille* [Phamily Album] (1995) gives an autobiographical account of the world of 'alternative' French comics, before later publications – *Plate-bandes* (2005) and *La Bande dessinée et son double* (2011) – give a more formal analysis of the workings of the industry. Indeed, what appears to be a current vogue for autobiography in graphic novel form – from Fabrice Neaud and Alison Bechdel, through Nicola Streeton, to David B. – can be read as a sort of metafictional push to explore the medium via the medium itself. Here reference must be made to the works of Scott McLeod, whose *Understanding Comics* (1993), *Reinventing Comics* (2000) and *Making Comics* (2006) have allowed readers to reflect upon the specificity of comics whilst enjoying some of the finest examples of our text/image medium.

In this volume we will juxtapose two pieces by authors that give us insight into their creative process with two pieces by critics that open up the creative process of two specific authors. The contributions will ask similar key questions, but in very different ways: how comics express a range of emotions, transfer from different media, play into national concerns and traditions, and juggle pure aesthetics with practicalities. At the same time, there are contrasts: historically, as we go from the Victorian age, via a 1980s reenvisioning of a nineteenth-century novelist's take on the third century BC, to one of the works that brought comics to a new readership in the 1990s, to the creations of 2014; by genre, ranging from two adaptations of novels, through intense autobiography, to travel writing; stylistically, with examples of clear lines, psychedelic colour bursts and representational line drawing; and finally, geographically, as we travel from England to France, on to Quebec, and then explore Asia and the Middle East.

Simon Grennan, author and critic known for his Kartoon Kings artwork in collaboration with Christopher Serandio, is currently preparing a graphic novel version of Anthony Trollope's *John Caldigate* (1879), to be released by Leuven University Press in 2015 to mark the bicentenary of Trollope's birth. In this article Grennan overviews the challenges facing him as he transforms the Victorian novel into *Dispossession*: challenges of form, style and tone, as well as those regarding reader expectations and accessibility.

Sonia Lagerwall's discussion of Philippe Druillet's adaptation of Gustave Flaubert's 1862 novel *Salammbô* shows how the artist resolved the dilemma of rendering into images a work that its author steadfastly

refused to have illustrated, disdaining the banality of mere accuracy. Lagerwall details the strategies that Druillet employs in transposing the flamboyant, evocative visuality of Flaubert's prose, including intertextual references to his own previous comics; the insertion of photographs, autobiographically connoted but also recalling those taken by Flaubert's friend Maxime du Camp on their voyage to North Africa; and the exploitation of both the built-in multiplicity of comics to portray the heroine as protean, and its metaphorical potential to suggest more contemporary political readings.

David B.'s *Epileptic*, a work that chronicles the author's own development as an artist alongside the portrayal of the impact of his brother's illness, is used by Jörn Ahrens as a point of departure for a reflection on the capacities of the comics medium. He notes David B.'s virtuoso combination of restraint in the verbal text with excess at the visual level, and argues that, unlike certain other autobiographers, whose comics offer up a recognisable and reassuring world, David B. demonstrates that comics can be productive of meanings and so enable us to understand the complex workings of the imagination, in which the levels of fantasy and reality cannot be extricated.

Finally, Guy Delisle, known for his award-winning travel *récits* that give us the insider's view on China, North Korea, Burma and Israel, answers specific questions raised by Kenan Kocak, a specialist of Turkish comics, national identities and comics journalism. In this interview Delisle tells of his work methods, inspirations, chance encounters leading to creations and future plans.

'Future plans' is a fitting note with which to end this introduction. As the history of literature and the visual arts tells us, it is when a form becomes self-reflexive, autobiographical and aware of its own aspirations that it has reached maturity. The dialogue we see here between creators and critics bears witness to this maturity, and the exciting future comics is creating for itself.