
Reviews

Pierre Assouline, *Hergé: The Man Who Created Tintin*, trans. Charles Ruas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). 288 pp. ISBN: 978-0195397598 (hardback, £16.99); and **Jean-Marie Apostolidès**, *The Metamorphoses of Tintin, or, Tintin for Adults*, trans. Jocelyn Hoy (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford UP, 2009). 312 pp. ISBN: 978-0804760317 (paperback, £22.50)

At first glance, the recent translation of these two French studies would seem to represent distinct forms of critical interest in Tintin. Assouline's biography (first published in 1996) mines archival materials and private documents for insightful gems, in order to shine a light on the mind and temperament of Tintin's enigmatic creator, Hergé; while alternatively, Apostolidès (whose study first appeared in 1984) ostensibly focuses on the works themselves, scouring the canon of *The Adventures of Tintin* with a tireless psychoanalytic gaze. While the two books are undeniably different in their aims, when considered together, they are indicative of just how intertwined the lives of Hergé and Tintin have become (or, better yet, have always been).

When it comes to critical inquiry, Hergé and Tintin tend to function as mutually-powering engines of interpretation: surely, the thinking goes, details of Hergé's life – his experiences, his hopes, fears and desires – must contain key sparks of insight to understanding the enduring appeal of Tintin, a character that is irrefutably 'abstract and imaginary' (Apostolidès 10), 'in terms of graphics, there is nothing simpler' (Assouline 20). Inversely, when confronted with the relatively unremarkable happenings and self-effacements that fill large stretches of Hergé's life, one cannot help but turn to the work itself to understand its creator – it must be possible to reconstruct Hergé the man, as with a puzzle, from pieces of himself that he knowingly and unknowingly hid amongst the thousands of panels detailing the boy reporter and his exciting world. Studying Tintin is an inherently circular task: to pluck out the heart of Tintin's mystery means going through the body of Hergé, and vice versa. That artist and hero are fundamentally bound to one another is a point succinctly captured in the epigraph to Assouline's book, a 1982 quotation in which Hergé makes the tantalising and haunting remark, 'What if I told you that I put my whole life into Tintin?'

Assouline's biography is translated into English by Charles Ruas; curiously, this

English version is much abbreviated – a 1998 edition of the original French biography ballooned to over 800 pages, while the Oxford text is just under 300, including notes and index – though there is no explanation for the reduction in page count, other than the cryptic note amidst the publication information that ‘This first English-language edition retains the core but not the totality of the original French edition’ (iv). Fittingly, then, the Oxford text of Assouline’s *Hergé* is itself a kind of Tintinesque fragment, riddle, or code hiding in plain sight: the ‘totality’ of Hergé’s life is implicitly figured as somehow beyond our reach even before we begin.

For the purposes of this review, I think it best to consider the Oxford text on its own terms, independent of the original French version. Assouline breaks Hergé’s life into short temporal periods that together constitute the arc of the artist’s life. This is not a biography that is interested in crafting a detailed historical context as a narrative backdrop; rather, this is a study that shines an intense light on its subject, beginning at his birth, and ending abruptly with his death. What Assouline offers is a prolonged examination of Hergé’s navigations through a world more complicated and unforgiving than what makes its way into the Tintin books. In cleverly shifting between ‘Georges’, ‘Remi’ and ‘Hergé’ throughout the book, Assouline subtly reinforces the slipperiness of his subject’s identity, the extent to which even in his final chapter the biographer can concede that ‘Hergé remains an elusive figure’ (212).

This elusiveness, Assouline suggests, is the product of at least two, related, factors. One of these is Hergé’s concern for his legacy and his burgeoning understanding that his legacy would be inseparable from the afterlife of Tintin. Hergé’s compulsion to update, modernise and recast previously published adventures (first on his own and then through the contributions of Hergé Studios), in order to confer uniformity and stability on his works, coincides with a public persona that Hergé was very careful to manage as his celebrity grew. Assouline writes of a Hergé who ‘always presented himself as someone who savored life’ (209), even as he was wracked by depression and insecurity. One of the most striking instances of Hergé’s self-fashioning and self-effacement is detailed by Assouline towards the end of the book: after being given the ‘Proust Questionnaire’ in advance of an interview and completing it spontaneously, Hergé later goes back and rewrites a number of his responses. Assouline’s comparisons of Hergé’s answers are revealing: when asked about his ‘dominant characteristic’, for instance, Hergé’s first answer is ‘Anxiety’; he returns to the question later to add ‘curiosity and perfectionism’ (209).

The other major factor that obscures the figure of Hergé is his persistent refusal or inability to confront seriously the shadows that haunted him for most of his professional life. Assouline wrestles with the most controversial aspects of Hergé’s life – ‘Questions about World War II, colonialism, and misogyny’ – though he is determined not to make these controversies the central, dominating aspect of the biography: ‘These skeletons in the closet could no more be dismissed than allowed to take over as the focus of this work’ (x). What Assouline captures most effectively is Hergé’s often staggering naïveté and passivity. After being branded an *incivique* after WWII (a stigma that was later removed), Hergé was mostly astounded that such a charge could be brought against him. Remarkably, he ‘never grasped what he was being accused of’ (114); more troubling still, ‘Hergé never seemed to learn from his experience’ (119), as evidenced by his recommendation of convicted collaborators for positions at his new *Tintin*

magazine in 1946. Assouline's criticisms of Hergé are subtle rather than explicit, but they nevertheless reverberate with great insight into Hergé's personality: 'Neutrality is not a passive attitude. True neutrals proclaim themselves as such. Yet nothing was more alien to Georges Remi than an act of commitment' (64). One might wish for more of this sort of critical engagement from Assouline, but his writing is clearly guided by his prefatory caveat that 'Sensationalism obliterates the major trajectories of a life' (x).

The trajectories of a life are also what Apostolidès seeks to trace, though his sights are set on the fictional lives of Tintin and his circle of friends and adversaries. Apostolidès's methodology involves bringing together two otherwise distinct approaches to studying the Tintin books:

the first is diachronic: It consists of following the stories in order of appearance and situating them in the concrete context in which they appeared. From this point of view, the first versions . . . are of particular interest. The second method is synchronistic: It consists in taking the adventures as a whole in order to examine the internal development of this fictional universe. (2–3)

The appeal of this approach, Apostolidès suggests, is that it facilitates a consideration of 'both the genesis of the work [which forms the basis of Book One – *Tintin in History*] and the metamorphoses of its hero [which is found in Book Two – *The History of Tintin*]' (3). What soon becomes apparent is that Apostolidès is overwhelmingly interested in the synchronistic approach to Tintin and the internal metamorphoses that can be located in the works: Book One – *Tintin in History*, is just over 30 pages in length; Book Two – *The History of Tintin*, runs for over 200. Part of this disparity can be explained by shifts in the adventures themselves: Book One focuses on the more conservative, politically-engaged adventures that were produced in advance of WWII (*Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*); Book Two focuses on Tintin after WWII, a Tintin who is more politically inert, more private, more of a cerebral detective-figure than reporter, and thus more apt for Apostolidès's psychoanalytic analyses.

The interpretive payoff of combining diachronic and synchronic approaches is difficult to assess because they are so conspicuously out of balance in Apostolidès's book. It is hard to fault Apostolidès for this, though, since Hergé's continual refinement of his existing works makes a comprehensive methodological approach to the Tintin canon difficult to conceive. How does one attempt a study of the complete adventures? By highlighting the original versions, as first published? By studying the 'final' versions that have undergone significant revision? By tracking the changes that Hergé made? Ultimately, Apostolidès has written a book that, at various junctures and in varying amounts of detail, does all of these things – although it must be said that his primary focus is on 'the most recent versions since they more readily exhibit Hergé's overall vision for his work' (3). While one could quibble with any blueprint for imposing an overarching structure on a series of books that span half a century and were published in a multitude of different formats and versions, it is admirable that the formal structure of Apostolidès's book is intended to reflect, and find some sense of unity in, the protean nature of Hergé's Tintin.

Unity is discovered in the canon by way of Apostolidès's psychoanalytic readings of the adventures' characters, themes, plots, visual effects and gags. The theoretical abandon with which Apostolidès grapples with Tintin dates the book somewhat, despite

Jocelyn Hoy's crisp translation (which does its best to aid readers by footnoting French puns that are lost in translation). Readers must weigh Apostolidès's keen readings of subtle details, like his observation that rope has a symbolic value for understanding Tintin and Haddock, signifying 'their indestructible relationship' (115), against more unwieldy claims of questionable utility, such as this statement on The T(h)ompson's struggles with uncontrollable hair growth in *The Land of Black Gold* and moon albums: 'Since they don't know how to use their brains, their exploding heads assume the anal function' (66). That the tenor of the study might be perceived as outmoded is a point that Apostolidès himself acknowledges in a retrospective preface:

Although today a majority of readers may have assimilated these psychoanalytic notions, the vocabulary might seem heavy or outdated. If that is the case, I ask your pardon. However, in a study I intended to be entertaining, I was still very much concerned with showing that a domain typically consigned to children is indeed amenable to legitimate scholarly interests. (xiii)

The divide between the scholarly and the juvenile is one that the book never quite manages to bridge completely. Apostolidès's firmest claims relate to large-scale changes in Tintin's evolutionary history: the adventures' slow transition from the epic to the novelistic; the movement from the public to the private sphere; the thematic shift from Good vs. Evil to Truth vs. Error. Inevitably though, there are instances where the incompatibility of the theoretical tools and the primary materials becomes apparent, and the strangeness of psychoanalysing Tintin becomes hard to ignore. Early on, for instance, Apostolidès writes that 'Tintin barely seems like a creature of flesh and blood: he has few needs, no personal problems, and no financial difficulties, even though he doesn't handle money' (10). On one hand, Apostolidès is establishing the hero's largely abstract existence, the extent to which Tintin invites readers to identify with him and project their values onto his essential blankness; it must also be said, however, that it is an odd claim to make, one that implicitly acknowledges the *critical* metamorphoses that Tintin will be subjected to: Tintin, of course, is *not* a creature of flesh and blood, with personal (read: psychological) problems in his unconscious being, but Apostolidès, for better and for worse, will be treating him as such. Or consider this argument from much later in the book:

Tintin lives within the mystery of the Oedipal relations among characters, but he does not know how to understand it. [...] Tintin's understanding is limited in a way he just cannot get around. If in the adventure of *The Unicorn* he shows that he can decipher the language of the Father, in *The Emerald* he cannot perfectly master that language. If he could manage it, he would understand the secrets of the adult world, of sexual difference, and the logic of desire – but then he would cease being the childhood hero. (250)

Such a claim registers a breakdown or fissure between Apostolidès's interpretive procedures and the psychological interiority that he assigns to fictional characters. In this instance, Apostolidès has just finished scrutinising *The Castafiore Emerald*, drawing out the significance of Tintin's *lack* of sexual knowledge and desire; and yet, even as a lack of understanding is put forth as meaningful, Apostolidès is, at the same time, stepping back to concede that if this lack of understanding was *not* there, Tintin would cease to be, or would become something else entirely. The observation is rendered inconse-

quential when pushed to its logical extreme, and Apostolidès walks this tightrope for much of his book.

Apostolidès ends by highlighting the inherent contradictions to be found in the world of Tintin: 'It coils back on itself in ways that are humorous and pessimistic, often simplistic and yet complex' (275). This is not unlike the conclusion of Assouline's biography: 'Most people expect [Hergé's] life to be as straightforward as the lines of his drawings. But it was full of complexity and contradictions, conflicts and paradoxes, of jagged peaks and crevasses' (212). In the end, then, both books come full circle to conclude where they began, with a gesture meant to account for the intractable paradoxes of their subject matter. Hergé and Tintin: undeniably simple, but somehow, surely, this makes seeking out and understanding their intricacies all the more worthwhile.

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Archi & BD, La ville dessinée, an exhibition on view at the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Paris, from 9 June, 2010 to 28 November, 2010.

The geometrically severe Hergé museum in Louvain-la-Neuve opened in June last year. Christian de Portcamparc's architectural tribute to the great comics artist has been described as boat-like, to reflect Tintin's many naval adventures. But its large bay windows are also, undeniably, a nod to the comic form: the comic strip made real. An architectural model features in the exhibition, *Archi & BD – la ville dessinée* ('Architecture and Comics – the City Illustrated'), at the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine in Paris. This ambitious exhibition, curated by Jean-Marc Thévenet, head of Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d'Angoulême and Francis Rambert, head of the Institut Français d'Architecture, explores the interactions between architecture and comic strips.

The Hergé museum does feature in this exhibition, and in 3D form, but the exhibition deals more with the illustrated city – or even the imagined city – be it as a backdrop to a cartoon or an architect's work in progress. The point, occasionally over-laboured, is that both comic strips and architecture begin at the drawing board.

Other basic visual comparisons are made in the show, including the fact that a comic strip can be like a building's facade, divided into square or rectangular, self-contained compartments. Aside from aesthetic similarities, ideological comparisons abound: both architects and comic strip authors can be seen as grappling with modern societal dreams and demands, seeking to create urban utopias, fictions and narratives in architectural space.

The show begins with the founder of the modern comic strip, Winsor McCay, and his adventures of *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. Although the plate on display depicts a generic city, is it strikingly similar to the skyscrapers of Manhattan. *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, published in the *New York Herald* and later in the *New York American*, was amongst the first comic strips to appear in the press. In the early years of the twentieth century, American comic strips prospered on the back of the circulation war between Joseph Pulitzer and Randolph Hearst, a notorious episode in New York publishing.

It is not surprising then that New York is the first city to be immortalised in the comic strip. In the exhibition New York features in *Bringing up Father*, as backdrop to the story of an Irish man named Jiggs who makes his fortune in the city. Modern art

deco details and skyscrapers speak volumes of the aspiring *nouveaux riches* in 1930s New York and the American Dream. Early European comic strips also looked across the pond, with Alain Saint Ogan's *Zig & Puce à New York* and Raymond Macherot's *Clifton à New York* published in *Le Journal de Tintin*. The aesthetic qualities of New York are easily recognisable in Gotham City, and also inspired Metropolis – the mythical cities of Batman and Superman, respectively.

Used as background and location in comics, the city takes centre stage and (sometimes literally) comes to life in architects' ambitious concepts. Rem Koolhaas' manifesto, *Delirious New York*, is included in the show, along with Madelon Vriesendorp's illustrations animated in the film *Caught in the Act*, in which a couple of New York skyscrapers get intimate in a frighteningly human way under the watchful lights of the Statue of Liberty and other Manhattan edifices. The city is also seen coming to life in Ron Herron's *Walking City*. *The Walking City*, which appeared in the avant garde journal *Archigram* in 1964, is made up of mobile urban units which can get up and walk around in a sci-fi-esque fashion. Also on show is a model of sea-obsessed architect, Jacques Rougerie's underwater city and Auguste Perret's designs for *Villes-Tours* from the 1920s, which consisted of enormous interlinked tower blocks which would surround the city and provide an alternative suburban experience.

These more outlandish architectural concoctions resonate with the comic strip's tendency, from the 1950s onwards, to look to the future. Herron's and Perret's designs find similarities in the dystopic futures imagined in the sci-fi adventures of French comic strip artists Philippe Druillet and Enki Bilal.

The exhibition also touches on the impact of World's Fairs as vehicles for utopic architectural innovation. The 1958 Brussels Expo is used as a hook on which to hang a section on the Belgian school of comic strip authors and the *ligne claire* technique pioneered by Hergé. The Atomium, one of the Expo's highlights, appeared on the cover of the *Tintin* journal for the occasion. The *ligne claire*, which abandons shading and focuses on strong line drawing, draws on Winsor McCay's legacy and depicts a stark, stylised city. Edgar P. Jacob's duo, *Blake and Mortimer*, are dramatised against a barren industrial backdrop and Tintin stands out against a silhouette of a city skyline.

A section of the exhibition deals with the suburbs, including work by French comics artists Frank Margerin, Jano and Stanislas. The inclusion of the suburbs is interesting from the French point of view. Recent unrest in the suburbs of Grenoble is reminiscent of the riots that flared up in the Paris suburbs in 2005 and is just one manifestation of the seething malaise in the contemporary French suburbs. Although the artists here use the suburbs more as a way of inviting their audiences to identify with the quotidian of their characters, the state of France's suburbs – an unfortunate result of the modernist dream – could be further explored in terms of architectural utopias and gloomy realities.

The final part of the exhibition breaks the dominance of the comic strip and collapses the boundaries between fiction, aspiration and reality. This section includes interactive drawings produced for Jean Nouvel's 2005 'Louisiana Manifesto' exhibition in Denmark. His development plans for Lisbon and Les Halles, in central Paris, are presented as blown up comic strips, in which graphic characters are set in the urban space. Also on show are various aspects of comics artist Winshluss' fictional attempt at town planning in the project 'Villemolle', illustrations of Pierre Chareau and Bernard Bijvoet's 'Maison de Verre' and, of course, the new Hergé museum.

With over 350 pieces on show, the curators' attempts to condense such a variety of material into a few categories can be confusing. Running a loose chronological approach alongside more thematic choices is a conscious choice of the exhibition, but what it gains in explanatory power, it loses in clarity. Ultimately, however, the commonalities of the two disciplines, comic art and architecture, are brought together: the intimacy of creating the real and fictional space in which, and through which, humans live.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue, *Archi & BD, la ville dessinée*, which takes the form of a comic strip album, following the exhibition structure and raising the issues covered. It is published by the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine and Éditions Monografik (256 pages, 250 illustrations, 39 €).

CAROLINE ROSSITER

Stephen E. Tabachnick, ed., *Teaching the Graphic Novel* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009). 352 pp. ISBN: 978-1-60329-061-6 (paperback, £16.95)

With the appearance of this book, in the 'Teaching ...' series published by the MLA, the graphic novel takes up its place in an illustrious academic line-up which includes Shakespeare, Life Writing, the African Novel and Film Study. This indicator of recognition is highly welcome, even if the choice of term used in the title, more restrictive than 'comics' or 'comic art', could be taken to imply a disavowal of some of the less respectable manifestations of the medium; and it is undoubtedly the case that the choice of artists here, in which Spiegelman, Sacco and Ware loom large, has a certain canon-forming effect. This may very well be helpful, and is probably inevitable, when an art form is still establishing its academic credentials. The artists featured are mostly, but far from exclusively, American: there are two chapters, by Jan Baetens and Michael D. Picone, which focus on teaching Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*, one chapter by Ana Merino on Hispanic Graphic Novels and two chapters, by Rachael Hutchinson and Pamela Gossin, on manga and anime.

The introduction to the book offers a justification for studying the graphic novel, followed by a brief historical survey from Töpffer to the present day. Sections then cover Theoretical and Aesthetic Issues; Social Issues; Individual Creators; Courses and Contexts; Resources. The contributors vary somewhat in their interpretation of what a textbook on 'Teaching the Graphic Novel' should do. Some pieces offer a mini-lecture on the contents of their course, but are less enlightening about the methods that they employ. Others are generous in sharing expertise and experience. Joseph Witek's chapter on 'Seven Ways I Don't Teach Comics', for example, is a superb distillation of years of reflective pedagogy, and Picone's chapter offers a useful survey of tendencies and key authors for French teachers thinking of beginning a *bande dessinée* course, followed by a series of practical and detailed suggestions for maximising student involvement. Throughout the book, there are many examples of assessment questions being listed, and a plethora of ideas that have worked.

Teachers embarking on teaching graphic novels have perhaps three major anxieties: how to convince students (and colleagues) that this is a legitimate area of academic study, how to handle potentially offensive material, and how to provide appropriate

theoretical frameworks for study of the medium. All of these are addressed. The scepticism that can be aroused in students who have conservative views about what should be included in their syllabus is tackled in various ways, none more inventive than those proposed by Anne N. Thalheimer and by Jan Baetens.

For their first assignment, Thalheimer's students have to display their copy of Roberta Gregory's *A Bitch is Born* in a public place, and write about the response that they provoke. Baetens's students have to curate an exhibition in their university library, featuring Olivier Deprez's *Le Château de Kafka* ['Kafka's Castle'], a graphic novel which has little text, and so can be perceived as an object worthy of art-historical consideration, and which, as an adaptation, brings an air of literary prestige. The project involves dealing with institutional aspects of the book publishing industry, and making a direct intervention into the reception of the work by the choices that students have to make about its presentation to the public.

The potential difficulties raised by material that may upset students' sensibilities is tackled head on by several contributors, including Witek, who warns his students 'not that the course may contain offensive material but that (he) can practically guarantee it' (221). Edward Brunner writes about teaching a course on Robert Crumb and underground comics. He brings in popular cultural material which enables students to consider Crumb's images of women and black characters in the context of the evolving stereotypes of a racialised and sexualised national imaginary. This opens up for discussion the possibility that Crumb may be caricaturing these stereotypes, rather than exploiting them. Thalheimer does not shrink from using highly explicit material in the classroom. She encourages her students to consider whether, on the one hand, they are more shocked by the representation of violence perpetrated by women (bringing impeccably high-cultural examples of violence by men to bear on the argument), and, on the other hand, whether their objections are related to the unfamiliarity of the medium itself. She allows them to ask questions anonymously by handing them in on paper, and responds to the questions in front of the whole class.

A number of contributors describe how they have expected students to apply theoretical apparatuses of some sophistication to their study of comics. Brian Tucker has his students reading Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoön* to promote reflection about spatial and temporal forms of representation. Christine Ferguson demonstrates how familiarity with Fredric Jameson's work on postmodernism enables students to understand the complexities of two retro-Victorian works scripted by Alan Moore and to read them as interventions into the politics of visual representation, rather than as sensationalising or misogynist, or as mere pastiche. Moreover, Ferguson gives a convincing flavour of the direction of classroom discussion, and shows how this theoretical input can refocus it and avoid impasse. Anthony D. Baker also draws on Jameson and other theorists of postmodernity in his course on Chris Ware. He employs various methods to help students get to grips with the conceptual apparatus and, at the same time, with the complexities of Ware's work: students are asked to investigate notions of pastiche, intertextuality and disjointed image/text relations by doing some creative scissor and paste work on existing graphic novels, and then analysing the results.

The volume makes it clear that there is much imaginative teaching of comics, and highly productive use of theoretical work from various sources. However, in a volume which offers such a compendium of exemplary practice, it is puzzling to find few

references by the contributors to theoretical work on the medium itself, other than Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, which clocks up no less than 41 mentions, including passages of several pages.¹ Charles Hatfield contributes a chapter, but his essential book (published in 2005) is mentioned only three times (including once in the introduction).² Of course, a collection like this takes a long time to put together and to emerge from the editing process, which may explain the single reference (in the introduction) to Douglas Wolk's *Reading Comics*, published in 2007.³ On the other hand, Bradford Wright's *Comic Book Nation* (admittedly primarily a social historical work, but surely a key reference), published in 2001, gets no mention at all, other than in the bibliography.⁴ Roger Sabin's groundbreaking work is mentioned only four times (including twice in the introduction),⁵ and Will Eisner gets eight mentions, six of them for his theoretical writing, out of which two amount to no more than name-checking.⁶ David Kunzle⁷ and David Carrier⁸ get a dismayingly meagre two mentions each. The absence of Jan Baetens (apart from the chapter that he contributes), and the appearance of Benoît Peeters⁹ only in the chapter by Michael D. Picone on Franco-Belgian comics and in one other (albeit a key one by Jesse Cohn on *mise en page*, where Peeters's work is shown to be highly illuminating) is perhaps understandable, given the absence of English translations; and the omission of Thierry Groensteen (again, other than in Cohn's chapter) can be put down to the fact that the formidable, readable and insightful *System of Comics* only appeared in English in 2007.¹⁰

Now let me declare my admiration for McCloud's brilliant work in *Understanding Comics*, and for the wit with which he uses the medium to make his points, even if his arguments can seem a little over-didactic in places, an effect amplified by the use of bold lettering on words to which he wants us to pay special attention.¹¹ Of course I put McCloud on my reading list for students, and of course they find his book accessible, enjoyable and very useful. Hatfield, whose chapter follows the introduction, puts forward his own way of using *Understanding Comics*. He pays tribute to McCloud's work

1 Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

2 Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005).

3 Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2007).

4 Bradford Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001).

5 Roger Sabin, *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art* (London: Phaidon, 1996).

6 Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac: Poorhouse, 1985); and *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (Tamarac: Poorhouse, 1995).

7 David Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip: Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet from c. 1450 to 1825* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1973); and *The Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990).

8 David Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics* (University Park: Penn State UP, 2000).

9 Benoît Peeters, *Case, planche, récit: Lire la bande dessinée* ['Panel, Page, Narrative: Reading Comic Art'] (Tournai: Casterman, 1998).

10 Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2007).

11 Just a thought: Matt Madden's virtuoso comics take on Raymond Queneau, 99 *Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style* (New York: Chamberlain Brothers, 2005), in both book and web versions (see <http://www.artbabe.com/exercises/index.html>) is arguably as effective as McCloud's book, if less systematic, in demonstrating the resources of the medium, and dispenses entirely with the pedagogic bombardment, leaving readers to get there on their own.

and emphasises its value in the classroom. He goes on, though, to say that he encourages his students to see McCloud's book as a polemical work, rather than a primer, and to come to understand the limits of its definition of comics as 'juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence' (19–22, quoting McCloud 9). Hatfield himself presents the case against settling on a fixed definition of the comics medium. Elsewhere in the volume, his lead is followed, as most contributors avoid getting embroiled in definitions or do so in the open-ended way that he proposes. Claudia Goldstein, for example, asks her students to contrast McCloud's definition with those of other theorists, such as David Carrier, who has a greater concern for the role of text (257, quoting Carrier 4). It is therefore disconcerting to discover that, whilst agnostic about definitions, a number of contributors write as if other McCloudian pronouncements, most notably those on identification and 'closure', were immovable foundation stones of comics theory. Let us take the focus off the Tabachnick volume for a couple of paragraphs, in order to take a detour through McCloud, and work up a little indignation. (If you wish, you may rejoin this review at the conclusion, when things will have calmed down again.)

As all readers of this journal will know, McCloud juxtaposes five versions of the drawing of a man, varying in levels of iconicity from near-photographic to entirely schematic (45), an oft-quoted illustration which does not fail to turn up in the Tabachnick volume (227). This progression, explains McCloud, runs from complex to simple, realistic to iconic, objective to subjective and specific to universal (46). The conflation of these categories is odd, and the last two are especially problematic. Of the five drawings, only the final one (a circle with two dots for eyes and a line for a mouth) is not immediately recognisable as a white male, and so only that one has any claims to approach universality. And why a more detailed drawing should be more 'objective' than a less detailed one is not clear: one could argue, on the contrary, that 'objectivity' is more often connoted by diagrammatic than by realist illustrations. Moreover, in the case of comics, a narrative art, the notions of objectivity and subjectivity surely need to be used within some framework of narrative perspective. The distinction is, though, treated by McCloud as equivalent to the 'realistic/iconic' opposition, and gets co-opted into his well-known argument about 'identification'. The more cartoony the drawing, we are informed, the more the reader will identify with it, a phenomenon apparently related to the very sketchy awareness that we have of our own faces (36). Is this claim as incontrovertible as McCloud alleges it to be? I'm not so sure. In answer to his own question, 'Would you have **listened** to me if I looked like **this**??' (36), in a speech balloon given to a more photo-realist version of his habitual conventionalised textual self, the majority of my students respond that sorry, Scott, but yes, they would indeed have found the more detailed image more engaging.

But, in any case, identification is a far more complex matter. Even if we accept that a blobby face with pinpoint eyes has some correspondence to the 'mask' (43) that we suppose ourselves to be wearing, other mechanisms must surely come into play. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's checklist of the different factors involved in spectator identification with film provide a point of departure for thinking about the same process in relation to comic art.¹² They begin by looking at how far the spectator is fashioned by the text itself: considerations here include point-of-view shots, focalisation, narra-

12 Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (London: Routledge, 1994).

tive structuring and mise en scene, all of which can be applied to comics. If, then, I am moved to identify with Tintin rather than with Bianca Castafiore (in spite of my strong temperamental similarity to the haughty and insensitive diva), this is less because Tintin's blankness of feature enables me to take up his place than because the knowledge, and quest for knowledge, in the story is focalised through him, and because I am frequently given access to scenes from his optical point of view. (And, one might add, although Shohat and Stam do not include the question of humour on their list, I may be less inclined to identify with characters like Castafiore or Haddock, who are the butt of jokes.) This is still not the whole story. As Shohat and Stam go on to elaborate, identification is also a function of technological apparatuses, institutional contexts, ambient discourses and ideologies, and takes account of the actual spectator, embodied, raced, gendered and historically situated (350). To return to comic art, if we restrict ourselves to McCloud's schematic/detailed dimension, we would have to suppose that the reader of *Maus* could identify as readily with the Nazi cats as with the Jewish mice. The fact that they do not testifies to the importance of taking a wider view of 'identification'.

The difficulties of trying to work with McCloud's logic (and the possibility of turning those difficulties to advantage) are illustrated by an interesting piece in the Tabachnick volume, a chapter on graphic travel narratives by M. G. Aune. Having glossed McCloud's argument as 'less detailed images allow readers to project themselves into the image' (226), Aune sets out to apply it. His first example is a panel from Craig Thompson's *Carnet de Voyage*, in which the artist draws himself being photographed as a stylish and self-confident young man who fits easily into his Parisian surroundings. On his back, however, fainter and (slightly) less detailed, is a version of himself as a hick farm boy driving a tractor. Aune asks whether the simpler image is more universal, and claims that his students have no difficulty in seeing themselves in it. This seems to miss the point of Thompson's self-doubling: surely his students may identify not solely with the more exaggerated 'country bumpkin' persona, but with the more complex idea that an external appearance offered for public consumption cannot altogether displace the fear that a less acceptable self could re-emerge and reveal itself. McCloud's 'projection' argument seems not only unnecessary here, but positively misleading. Significantly, Aune then goes on to consider a number of other cases where, he acknowledges, students find the argument difficult to apply. They fail to identify with women wearing burkas, for example, no matter how simply Thompson draws them, and this generates discussion as to the usefulness of McCloud's theory. The theory similarly runs into trouble in relation to Aune's example of Joe Sacco's *Safê Area Goražde*, where the brutish Serbian soldiers are drawn as 'more iconic and subjective' (228) than the Bosnian Muslims, allowing, again, for dialogue to open up amongst the students.

As Hatfield indicates, in relation to the question of definitions of the medium, McCloud's views can be far more valuable if taken as debating points rather than as articles of faith. This is also the case for his theory of 'closure' across gutters, according to which:

Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality. (67)

McCloud is insisting, then, that comic art, a medium founded on discontinuity, enlists the reader's complicity the better to operate according to the rules of Hollywood-style continuity editing, with 'ideas flowing into one another **seamlessly**' (90), although he does, admittedly, add the reservation that this is less true of realistic images, since their more 'visual' and less 'conceptual' nature hinders this seamless flow, or for highly abstract images (confusingly described as being closer to the 'picture plane'), which, we are told, make the reader more aware of the page as a whole (91). However, in McCloud's taxonomy of types of transition between panels, the only type which would disrupt the 'continuous, unified reality' is number six, the 'non-sequitur', which, according to his survey of US, European and Japanese comics, is not actually attested anywhere (75–80), and which is probably unattestable, since connections can always be made between seemingly disparate images (73).

McCloud does not envisage the possibility that artists (or readers) might be more interested in exploiting discontinuity than in maintaining the illusion of continuity. A few of the contributors to the Tabachnick volume are happy simply to refer to McCloud and 'closure' as if his argument were incontestable. Others are less so. John G. Nichols, in a useful chapter about using film and graphic novels as the basis for a discussion of violence in the media, makes allusion to McCloud's observation about the reader's role in filling the interpretive gap between images, but goes on to contrast the film version of Daniel Clowes's *Ghost World* with its original. The 'seamless cuts between shots' of the film, he argues, attenuate the emotional turmoil of its teenage protagonist, Enid. In the graphic novel, on the other hand, the 'use of gutters presents readers with Enid's fractured sense of adolescence before she enters adulthood' (233). Other contributors invite their students to put the 'closure' theory to the test: Alison Mandaville and J. P. Avila ask them to draw two panels that illustrate it, and Claudia Goldstein asks them to investigate it by applying it to some examples of early visual narratives, such as the Egyptian Book of the Dead or the Bayeux Tapestry.

This is, then, a volume which has much to offer anyone who has thought about teaching comics but is unsure how to go about it, and for anyone who is already doing so, but would like to try out a few different methodological approaches. As comics and graphic novels increasingly take up their place on university syllabuses, it is important that all of us should participate in a debate about the highly complex process of turning primary texts into objects of academic scrutiny. Tabachnick's volume makes a vigorous contribution to that debate, and this reviewer's at times cantankerous response should be taken as testimony to that.

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Philippe Delisle, *Spirou, Tintin et Cie, une littérature catholique? Années 1930 / Années 1980* ['Spirou, Tintin and Company, a Catholic Literature? 1930s / 1980s'] (Paris: Karthala, 2010). 184 pp. ISBN: 978-2-8111-0305-7 (paperback, €19.00)

This second volume by historian and university professor Philippe Delisle on comics, published by Karthala, focuses on the impact of Catholicism on comics. The topic is an important one, as Delisle's volume demonstrates, and his contribution is very useful. His primary research specialisation is in the history of religion, especially in (former) French colonies, so he brings considerable expertise in those areas to his study of comics. Key aspects of his framework and method resemble those of his first volume on comics, reviewed in a previous issue of *European Comic Art*:¹ he focuses extensively on 'Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées*', mostly from the 1930s through the 1950s, which he then more briefly contrasts with comics from the 1980s (especially by French cartoonist Yves Chaland) and the 1990s. Delisle analyses many of the same cartoonists and even the same comics in his two books, but from different angles (here religion; colonialism there), although there is significant overlap in this respect too, especially in works where both themes intersect (e.g., comics depicting Catholic missionaries in the Belgian Congo).

Delisle begins his introductory chapter with an attempt to define the notion of 'Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*', a term that is both commonly used and very slippery. Ironically, whereas the term typically elides the Belgian specificity in French-language comics (and Flemish specificity in Belgian ones), here its French specificity appears to be slighted or discounted, because it appears to refer essentially to French-language *Belgian* comics (cf. 159). As Delisle himself explains, Catholicism was far less of an influence on French comics and cartoonists than on Belgian ones. For example, although a prominent French cartoonist such as Alain Saint-Ogan, best-known today for his 'Zig et Puce' ['Guy and Flea'] series, was politically conservative, his comics were almost completely devoid of religious influence, as Delisle points out (22-23). He (22) also underlines the lack of Christian influence in the comics of Louis Forton, remembered especially for his 'Pieds Nickelés' ['Lazybones'] series (a.k.a. 'The Leadfoot Gang'), who generally tended towards a left-wing anarchist position (with significant exceptions) that was completely antithetical to Christian values: his eponymous trio of criminals habitually and lustily indulge in lying, theft, laziness and gluttony – all unmistakably sinful, from a Christian perspective! Nonetheless, Delisle appears to use the term 'Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*' to apply generally here to French comics too, because of: the impact of the clear-line style on French cartoonists, including Jacques Martin, and later, neo-clear-line cartoonists, such as Ted Benoît and Chaland; the importance of the French market for Belgian comics (e.g., the Catholic French periodical *Coeurs Vaillants* ['Valliant Hearts'] for the Belgian cartoonist Hergé [Georges Remi]); and the fact that French cartoonists have also often placed their works with Belgian publishers and in Belgian periodicals. Delisle's dilemma is a significant and recurring one for scholars of *bande dessinée*: it is often difficult or even impossible to separate out the French and

1 Catriona MacLeod, rev. of Philippe Delisle, *Bande dessinée franco-belge et imaginaire coloniale: Des Années 1930 aux années 1980* ['Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée* and the Colonial Imaginary: From the 1930s to the 1980s'] (Paris: Karthala, 2008), in *European Comic Art* 2.2 (2009), 281–282.

Belgian strands of 'Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*'. However, his own analysis makes a strong case for underscoring the Belgian specificity of the comics that he analyses, and even for avoiding the term altogether in certain studies, such as this one.

In his introduction, Delisle also raises the issue of how to circumscribe his field of investigation: should he focus only on those comics that, after serialisation, were republished in book form, or also on the content of the periodicals where the comics were initially serialised? The issue is important for a couple of reasons. First, many comics never made the jump from serial to book form – for example, because of economic or contractual constraints. Neglecting them can mean missing a great deal of material that could be useful from a historical or artistic point of view. Second, the initial publication context of many comics, in periodicals that also contained much non-comics material, can provide useful information on the nature of the comics themselves (e.g., intended readership; or editorial policy). However, there are significant obstacles to studying old serialised comics in their original, serial context (expense of the originals; other difficulties of access; multiplication of source material). Delisle opts for a middle ground: he mostly analyses comics that passed the hurdle and quickly made it into book form, but he is also able to include analysis of interesting material not immediately published after initial serialisation. He does this by relying on anthologised versions of the complete works of key authors he studies (e.g., the Belgian cartoonist Jijé [Joseph Gillain]), which have appeared in print from the 1980s to the present. Nonetheless, this leaves much that could be explored in future studies: for example, an in-depth investigation of Catholicism in and around comics within individual periodicals, such as *Ames Vaillantes* ['Valliant Souls'], *Coeurs Vaillants* ['Valliant Hearts'], *Le Pèlerin* ['The Pilgrim'], *Les Petits Belges* ['The Little Belgians'], *Spirou* and *Tintin*. Through this, one might discover or confirm significant differences or similarities between French and Belgian comics and their publishing contexts, specifically in relationship to Catholicism.

Delisle's first chapter usefully synthesises and interprets a great deal of material gleaned from a variety of sources – including published interviews of cartoonists, and introductory material in comics anthologies – on the influence of Catholicism on cartoonists and comics publishers. He makes a strong case for viewing Catholicism as having been well-positioned to significantly influence the creation, publication and reception of Belgian comics in a variety of ways: the Catholic schooling of cartoonists such as Hergé, André Franquin, Jijé, Mitacq (Michel Tacq) and Peyo (Pierre Culliford); the importance of the Scout movement – especially its Catholic branches, which were especially strong in Belgium – in the education of cartoonists, and Scout publications as an outlet for their work; and the pressure that Catholic readers and, especially, publishers brought to bear on cartoonists – the Belgian comics publishers Casterman and Dupuis were very much aligned with Catholicism during the time period that is Delisle's main focus in this volume.

The second chapter shifts from cartoonists and publishers to the comics, ranging from those most obviously and strongly marked by Catholicism to ones where a religious influence can only be detected as a general moral atmosphere or tone. Delisle begins by analysing comics that retell the life of Jesus, most notably *Emmanuel*, drawn by Jijé and scripted by a Catholic priest. He then moves on to comics about the lives of Catholic saints. Here again, Jijé is a key figure, with his *Don Bosco* (serialised from

1941), but Delisle also analyses other comics hagiographies, including ones published in the famous series of short stories, ‘Les Belles histoires de l’oncle Paul’ [‘The Beautiful Stories of Uncle Paul’], in *Spirou* magazine. He then teases out the Catholic references in a variety of other comics that (he posits) are not primarily religious in theme, including many classic comics and ones by prominent cartoonists, such as: Hergé’s *Tintin in the Congo* (serialised in 1930), with its colonial priest in the Belgian Congo; Jijé’s *Blanc casque* [‘White Hat’] (serialised in 1954), set in Canada at the end of the nineteenth century and in which a Jesuit priest figures prominently in a positive role; and the first episode of the ‘Michel Vaillant’ series (1958), by French cartoonist Jean Graton, where the race car driver protagonist participates in a mass held at the race track. Delisle ends this chapter with a look at comics and series that one might not normally associate with Catholicism, including Jijé’s ‘Blondin et Cirage’ [‘Blondy and Shoe-Black’], about a black and white boy duo, whose fraternal bond may owe something to Jijé’s fervent Catholicism. He reminds us that Jijé first created the series in 1939 for a Catholic weekly, *Les Petits Belges* [‘The Little Belgians’], published by an abbey. He contrasts such works with those of Franquin, who – despite his Catholic education – was less likely to include Christian references in his comics (34–35; cf. 160).

Delisle’s third chapter contains his longest and most in-depth analysis of his subject. He returns to some of the works examined earlier (lives of Christ and hagiographies of Catholic saints), to flesh out his analysis of how Catholicism influenced their representation: for example, did they have recourse to a more traditional iconography, marked by the marvellous and miraculous, as in a comic-strip life of Christ drawn in a lively style by a (then) young French cartoonist, Pilamm (Pierre Lamblot; 48–50)? Or did they show signs of a purified and sober Catholicism, as in Jijé’s *Emmanuel*? Purged of popular religious influences, *Emmanuel*’s imagery is suffocated by speech balloons over-filled with Biblical text (46–48). Delisle then goes on to explore key genres of comics that bear the imprint of Catholicism: historical and fictional stories about a Christian Middle Ages – for example, the life of Godefroid de Bouillon (Godfrey of Bouillon), who has long held a spot among the ‘great myths of the history of Belgium’.² Curiously, Delisle (88–91, 128–130, 169) fails to interrogate the mythical, nationalist (Belgian) aspect of this crusader’s story, or how it interfaces with the religious aspect of his representation in comics (his subsequent analysis of Roland, the nephew of Charlemagne, from the French epic tradition, seems more critically informed, in this respect [93]). Delisle also discusses at length the significance of the Scouting movement, especially in its Catholic versions, for comics. The last section of this chapter analyses the ‘faible ouverture aux autres religions’ [‘limited openness towards other religions’] of Catholic-inspired comics: Protestantism, so-called traditional African religions, Hinduism and Islam. Delisle’s analysis quickly demonstrates that his sub-heading is a euphemism; in fact, it would be more accurate to describe much of this comic-book imagery as the racist and rabidly aggressive denigration of other religions. Delisle is right, therefore, to speak of a ‘spirit of conquest’, for example in comics that revisit the Crusades. He also describes a ‘missionary romanticism’ that elides all types of issues, for example ones related to colonial encroachment.

2 Isabelle Wanson, ‘Godefroid de Bouillon’, in Anne Morelli, ed., *Les Grands Mythes de l’histoire de Belgique, de Flandre et de Wallonie* [‘The Great Myths of the History of Belgium, Flanders and Wallonia’] (Brussels: Vie Ouvrière, 1995), 47–54.

However, there is a huge, unacknowledged gap in this chapter, because Delisle nowhere mentions the depiction of Judaism and the antisemitism that one finds in many comics from this era, including by the authors whose works he analyses – indeed, in some of the very comics on which he focuses: for example, Hergé's *The Shooting Star*, especially the initial version, serialised in the (then) collaborationist Brussels daily *Le Soir*, followed by the still clearly antisemitic first album version (Delisle discusses Hergé, but does not mention this Tintin episode); or the depiction of Moroccan Jews in Jijé's *Charles de Foucauld* (Delisle does analyse other aspects of this story here; 132–134). Surely this was both a significant feature of the depiction of other religions in these comics and elsewhere, by cartoonists of the time, and one that has particularly problematic connections to Belgian (and French) history, as well as to the Catholic Church. If comics from this period were 'a mirror of Catholic culture', as Delisle argues, then they were also reflecting Catholic views of Jews and Judaism, in both positive and – sadly – often very negative ways. Surely there were important things to say about how Jews and Judaism were depicted in, or omitted from, comics about the life of Christ and about the Crusades (for example, with respect to Godfrey of Bouillon).

It is also difficult to understand why, in this same section of his analysis, Delisle describes Jijé's biography *Charles de Foucauld* as a continuation of the cartoonist's 'déconstruction des vieux stéréotypes' ['deconstruction of the old stereotypes'] (132). One could debate the accuracy of a statement such as '[o]n est bien loin [ici] du discours triomphaliste de *Tintin au Congo* ou encore du *Nègre blanc!*' ['This is a far cry from the triumphalist discourse of *Tintin in the Congo* or even of *The White Negro!*'] (132). However, it is perfectly clear that the historical context of Jijé's creation and first publication of the work (serialised beginning in April 1959) should be crucial to any historical analysis of it. The French were then in the midst of a bloody eight-year-long rearguard war to maintain their colonial presence in Algeria, so Jijé's hagiography was in fact profoundly reactionary, in political, cultural and historical terms. Although in an earlier, separate article on the European 'missionary in Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*',³ Delisle mentions the Algerian War as a context for Jijé's hagiographic story, he does not do so in this book version of his analysis.

Chapter 4 is titled 'Les années 1960: Une rupture radicale?' ['The 1960s: A Radical Break?'], but it is in fact a quickish survey of Catholicism in comics from the 1960s through the 1990s. Delisle shows that there is a partial secularisation of comics from the 1960s on, but that certain cartoonists and comics continued to include pious Catholic references. Here, as in his preceding volume on comics, Delisle singles out Chaland as a watershed figure from the 1980s, who returned to the classic Belgian and French comics from the 1930s through the 1950s, rewriting them in ways both nostalgic and parodic: for example, his iconoclastic reworking of the story of Godfrey of Bouillon, and of colonial clichés in comics. However, Delisle also points to an interesting and less-known fact that might inflect our vision of Chaland's work as parodic: in 1990 he drew a completely unparodic comic-strip hagiography of Saint Blandine for a Catholic magazine published by Bayard, a Catholic publisher, and even buckled to editorial censorship in his – too erotic (S/M style)? – depiction of the saint. This, Delisle

3 Philippe Delisle, 'Le Missionnaire dans la bande dessinée franco-belge: Une figure imposée?' ['The Missionary in Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*: A Mandatory Figure?'], *Histoire et missions chrétiennes* ['History and Christian Missions'], 1 (2007) 131–147.

argues, is an example of the kind of constraints that preceding generations of Belgian cartoonists, so admired by Chaland, often had to work within, to be published. He also analyses comics by Serge Clerc, a stalwart contributor to the 1980s magazine *Métal Hurlant* [‘Heavy Metal’], where Chaland also published. Delisle focuses on a very interesting example, in 1990s comics, of another parody of Catholic and colonial clichés, in the first volume of the ‘Odilon Verjus’ series, by French cartoonists Yann le Pennetier and Laurent Verron.

In his concluding chapter, Delisle argues that ‘la bande dessinée franco-belge, faite d’allers et retours entre Bruxelles, la Wallonie et la France, trace les contours d’un imaginaire chrétien “belgo-français”’ [‘Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*, made of comings and goings between Brussels, Wallonia and France, traces the outline of a “Belgo-French” Christian imaginary’] (162). Nonetheless, he then immediately acknowledges the Belgian specificity of portions of his corpus, which again raises the question of how useful the notion of ‘Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*’ really is. In the final pages, Delisle turns to the ‘thorny question of the reception’ of these comics, which he answers mainly through reference to (re-)publication dates of comics and to statistics about print runs, indicating degrees of popularity. Here too, letters to the editor published in periodicals might be useful, as would access to the archives of the Catholic publishers that he studies. One wonders, for example, what they might reveal, in terms of both reader responses and censorship, and one can only hope that publishers might (soon?) be willing to let scholars tap such archival resources, which could be invaluable, if they have been maintained.

However, this raises another important question that Delisle never addresses: to what extent do comics publishers such as Dupuis and Casterman remain attached to the Catholic and colonial values that they espoused for so long? The fact that much of the material that Delisle analyses comes from the recently published volumes of complete works by prominent cartoonists suggests that their publishers may in fact still have an investment in those conservative Christian values, which, Delisle points out, have nonetheless greatly diminished among Belgian youths, and have all but disappeared from French young people (there still is a significant difference between the two groups in this respect, as he notes: 137, 165, 169–170). The investment by publishers is at least economic, but it may as well still be ideological. Along these lines, it is also curious that Delisle does not even mention the ongoing republication of Catholic and colonialist works by French publisher Les Editions du Triomphe [‘Triumph Publishers;] (cf. the Catholic ‘spirit of conquest,’ analysed by Delisle), which has ties to the cultural agenda of the traditionalist Catholic faction of the far-right French National Front (FN), although he relied on one such comic – a republished hagiography of Bernadette of Lourdes, by Jijé (86–88). Nor does he mention their commissioning of brand new Catholic comics. On the Belgian side, Delisle could have analysed the Catholic evangelical efforts, through *bande dessinée*, of Coccinelle BD (mentioned on 167), or of the Centre Religieux d’Information et d’Analyse de la BD [‘Religious Centre of Information and Analysis of *Bande dessinée*’] (CRIABD), in Brussels. After all, he refers repeatedly to a book on Christianity in comics written by the director of CRIABD, the Jesuit priest Roland Francart. Delisle’s study might also have been inflected in interesting ways through the analysis of Christian comics created by European missionaries or others, in Africa or for Africans.

Other fascinating issues are suggested by Delisle's observation (31) about a Catholic art or aesthetics of scouting, 'qui mettent en scène des adolescents au corps parfait, archétypes d'une jeunesse idéale sur le plan physique comme moral' ['which display (all male?) adolescents with a perfect body, archetypes of a youth that is ideal in physical and moral terms']. For example, might such imagery be homo-erotic in certain cases, and if so, would that not undermine some of the very values (e.g., heterosexual marriage; chastity) that the art is overtly supporting? And then there is the question of how the comics that Delisle studies figure the place of girls and women, specifically with respect to Catholicism. This is something that Delisle does raise in insightful ways (e.g., 80–88, 138), but here again, much remains to be explored. Of course no scholarly study can provide an in-depth investigation of all the issues that it raises in one way or another. Delisle's new volume makes a very useful contribution to the field.

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