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**McKinney, Mark (ed.). *History and Politics in French Language Comics and Graphic Novels*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008. 300 p. ISBN: 978-1-60473-004-3**

This collection of essays, in the words of the Editor, "addresses the following basic questions: what were the importance of history and politics to French-language comics in the past, and what do those older representations mean to us, as readers and cartoonists working today? How have French-language cartoonists engaged with history and politics in recent years? What artistic possibilities offered by the medium have they used to do so? How might one view colonialism, Nazism, and racism in past works, some of it produced by the acknowledged masters of the medium?" (4). The volume is divided in four parts, the first one of which is entitled "History, Politics, and the *Bande dessinée* Tradition". Any discussion of politics in *bande dessinée* cannot but start from its best-known and most controversial case: that of Tintin. The ideological leanings of his creator, Hergé, and recurrent charges of racism and anti-Semitism leveled against various albums - most notably *Tintin au Congo* and *L'étoile mystérieuse* - have already caused much ink to flow. The general agreement would seem to hold that while Hergé's stories certainly did bear, in their first version at least, the unfortunate stigmata of his time's attitudes toward racial minorities, his work had progressively evolved, becoming more conscious and appreciative of cultural diversity. In his article "Trapped in the Past. Anti-Semitism in Hergé's *Flight 714*", Hugo Frey makes a strong statement against any such notion. He reads *Vol 714 pour Sidney* as a nostalgic reaffirmation of old, reactionary and anti-Semitic beliefs - a "revisionist fantasy" (37) that shows how, deep down, the pre-war and post-war Hergé has remained the same person. His analysis is pertinent, clearly argued and quite convincing, as regards this particular story at least. As Frey concludes rightly: "It is time to engage in an open debate over the meaning and value of these books" (42).

Claire Tufts ("Re-imaging Heroes / Rewriting History. The Pictures and Texts in Children's Newspapers in France, 1939-1945") chooses to review some of the most significant publications of the World War II period: the American-inspired *Journal de Mickey*, *Jumbo*, and the staunchly catholic *Coeurs Vaillant*, all of which migrated south during the Occupation, the latter one finding it easy to adapt its faith-based content to Vichy ideology. Next is a presentation of the short-lived *Gavroche* (15 months), issued under the Occupation, and the even more ephemeral *Fanfan la tulipe* (10 months), strongly pétainiste, but apparently not enough to allow it to curry the favour necessary for survival in those hard times. Much different was the fate of *Le Téméraire*, a nazi-inspired weekly that printed on good paper and in vivid colour all through the Occupation, with fairly large print runs. 1945 sees the creation of *Vaillant*, a left-leaning resistance-inspired publication, in spite of a name very similar to that of its catholic and collaborationist counterpart. Amongst others, *Vaillant* featured Poivet's seminal SF series "Les pionniers de l'espérance". Tufts

convincingly shows how the representation of the Resistance in this latter paper contributed to the creation of a new mythology, opposed to the one supported by the army that had just crossed the Rhine in defeat, but essentially just as unrelated to verifiable reality.

Bart Beatty explores "The Concept of 'Patrimoine' in Contemporary Franco-Belgian Comics Production" and recounts "a simmering battle over the future - and the past - of French comic book production" (70). He retraces the efforts of small-press comics publishers (L'Association, Cornélius, Frémok) to rewrite the history of the genre by proposing, beside original work, reprints of "classics" of the past intended to create an ideal canon, opposed to "the commercial realities of the present" (71). Beatty criticizes the circular logic that builds comic's histories around sales numbers ("the most popular books are the most important because they are the most popular" [75]), and points out how a new "aesthetic legitimacy" (91) is created through the republishing/rewriting of the past spearheaded by these small presses.

Part Two ("Political Reportage and Globalism in *Bandes dessinées*") features an article by Ann Miller addressing "Citizenship and City Spaces. *Bande dessinée* as Reportage". The author explores the rise of reportage as a genre, mostly through the efforts of "alternative" publishers and under the influence of such works as Joe Sacco's *Palestine*. Dupuy and Berbérien, Loustal, Delisle, all illustrate the growing importance and acceptance of this sub-genre. A discussion of *La Présidente*, a story by Blutch and Menu, serves as an illustration of the ways in which *bande dessinée*, through its own peculiar graphic and narrative means, serves "to reestablish meaningful spatial connections and to combat the erasure of the past by giving expression to the intensity of personal memory" (111). BD, Miller argues, is especially suited to reportage, in particular thanks to its capacity for plurivocality.

Fabrice Leroy's article, entitled "Games Without Frontiers. The Representation of Politics and the Politics of Representation in Schuiten and Peeter's *La frontière invisible*", offers a close reading of its subject based on Marin, Heidegger, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and quite a few others, which shows how certain contemporary BDs are indeed, as McKinnon stated in his introduction, very closely allied with literary theory. Leroy interprets and deconstructs the story by highlighting its numerous and constitutive cultural references, literary as well as pictorial, with an abundance of citations. Only Borges and Bioy Casares seem to be missing, even though Fig. 6 (p. 125), representing characters walking on a map that covers the world, appears to evoke their famous short story "Del rigor en la ciencia". Leroy shows how Schuiten and Peeter's approach revolves around a system "referential illusion and meta-discursive validation" (126) that creates a veritable maze of meanings and interpretation.

Part 3 ("Facing Colonialism and Imperialism in *Bandes dessinées*") starts with an article by Mark McKinney on "The Algerian War in *Road to America* (Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran)", an allegorical representation of the complexity of identity politics in the former French colony. McKinney retraces the subtle representations of colonialist violence interspersed in Baru's work, a work marked by a "characteristic, elliptical style" (144). Colour codes and mirror sequences suggest meaning rather than impose it, in this tale of a boxing, "working-class male utopia that to some extent and for a while escapes nationalist conflict" (148). Ambiguity reigns until historical reality catches up with the character and shatters his dreams of success

during the massacre of October 17, 1961, in Paris. Baru's work, argues Mckinney, is a prime example of how popular culture can bring to the attention of the readers events ignored or hidden by official history and its narratives.

Pascal Lefèvre ("The Congo Drawn in Belgium") goes back on the history of the representation of Africa in Belgian comics. He starts by offering a short summary of the history of Belgian involvement in its former colonies of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. He then divides comic representations of these in three periods: 1880s to World War II, WW II to the 1970s, and 1978 to the present. The first is essentially a time of straight-forward propaganda. The second sees a regular recourse to clichéd situations and characters (wild animals, cannibals, evil sorcerers, foreign adventurers) in an often fictionalized Africa, and some attempts at a more realistic, but depoliticized, portrayal. The last period is marked by more complex and realistic representations by artists and writers who often have had an actual experience of the countries they depict, where criticism of the colonial myth and of post-colonial dictatorships go hand in hand. Finally, Lefèvre offers a close reading of Jijé's "Blondin et Cirage" series as a classic example of "the ambivalences of some colonial-era representations of the Belgian Congo" (176). Lefèvre concludes his study with a statement that remains valid for all research into popular culture: "I believe that one should avoid easy generalizations and instead pay close attention to individual comics and their contexts" (184).

The article by Amanda Macdonald ("Distractions from History. Redrawing Ethnic Trajectories in New Caledonia") is concerned with "what we can call 'facialization' - the representation of human-ness through the face - which, as drawings, establish human character through 'line-work'" (188). The critic discusses the representation of the seminal events of 1878 (the first anti-colonial revolt by the indigenous population of New Caledonia) as a "redrawing of race relations" (195). Laden with puns and lengthy theoretical references, the article leaves its object - Berger-JAR's *bande dessinée* "Le Sentier des Hommes" - somewhat in the background.

Cécile Vernier Danehy ("Textual Absence, Textual Color. A Journey through Memory - Cosey's *Saigon-Hanoi*") discusses the work of Swiss artist Cosey, well-known for his spiritual quests and his sensitive representations of foreign and exotic lands - in this case, Vietnam. Cosey, whose works are imbued with pacifism and a great curiosity for other cultures, contributed to a renewal of the figure of the adventurer in francophone BD. Vernier Danehy shows the importance of colour, composition and deliberate narrative gaps in building atmosphere and advancing a complex storyline that can be read at various levels. Her careful and perceptive reading highlights the poetic qualities of Cosey's BD through an analysis of the technical aspects of the layout, the relations between the frames, and even the lettering, showing how the author manages to convey feeling and emotion while allowing the reader to create his personal interpretative space in the narration.

Part 4 ("A French Cartoonist's Perspective on the Working Class and *Bandes dessinées*") is composed of a single chapter, Baru's "The Working Class and Comics. A French Cartoonist's Perspective". The author starts off by declaring: "Instead of asserting some definitive truths about comics in general, I will attempt to describe to you my own experience as an author who pays attention to what his stories tell. I am therefore going to relate to you my ideas about content, rather than form" (239). Baru evokes his working-class, immigrant origins, his conflicted relationship

with official bourgeois culture and his decision to teach himself to draw as a means of expressing freely what he felt he had to say, using a medium whose possibilities, at the end of the 70s and thanks to authors like Reiser, seemed endless. Baru's desire was to escape the straight-jacket of the "hero" and "introduce the needs of an ordinary humanity into the universe of comics" (242).

This volume represents a valid and highly useful addition to a growing body of critical essays in English on the Franco-Belgian BD. Well-structured, abundantly illustrated and carefully produced, it should be particularly recommended to teachers of *bande dessinée* working in the Anglophone world.