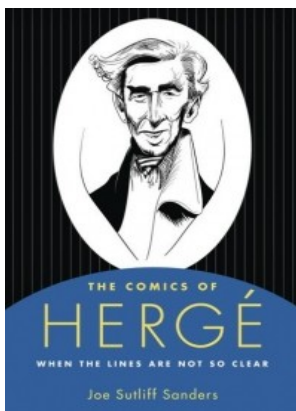




A Book Review:
The Comics of Hergé – When The Lines Are Not So Clear

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The Comics of Hergé – When The Lines Are Not So Clear, edited by Joe Sutliff Sanders, University Press of Mississippi, 2016. ISBN 9781496807267

University Press of Mississippi is a publisher that has released a substantial body of literature and research on comics, such as Donald Ault's and Thomas Andrae's books on Carl Barks as well as David Kunzle's works on Rodolphe Töpffer. A collection of articles edited by Joe Sutliff Sanders on Hergé (born Georges Remi, 1907–1983) is the second publication in the new series, *Critical Approaches to Comics Artists*.

The subtitle, *When The Lines Are Not So Clear*, refers to recent discussions on Hergé, someone who has distributed racial stereotypes of the 1930s and was aligned with Nazism in the Second World War. Thus, the life of the master of “the clear line” (*ligne claire* in French, *klaire lijn* in Dutch)¹ appears more “smudged” than his art.

Rather than providing a mere general overview, the Sutliff Sanders' collection draws on various approaches to Hergé research. The prologue grounds the collection within the European approach. For example, Benoit Peeters, Professor in Graphic Fiction and Comic Art at Lancaster University, as well Michael Farr and Tom McCarthy are mentioned.

The book is divided into three thematic sections. The first, “Absence and Presence”, begins with Jim Casey analysing the album *Tintin in Tibet*. Andrei Molotiu uncovers the musical forms of *The Castafiore Emerald*, and Vanessa Meikle Schulman traces the somewhat far-fetched connection between the wax museums of B-movies and the bizarre idea of moulding Tintin in plastic as was the case in the unfinished *Alph-Art*. Finally, Benjamin Picado and Jönathas Miranda de Araújo look at the connection between suspense and humour in *The Adventures of Tintin*. All

¹ *Ligne claire*, or the clear line, is a drawing style pioneered by Hergé. The style uses clear strong lines of same width and does not use hatching (Editors' comment).

three albums have been studied before and the articles of the first section are largely based on previous research. The albums that deviate from the Tintin norm reveal new aspects of the author and his method. Precision in timing, a feature in Hergé's work all along, is most evident in humour.

Section Two is titled “Changes In and After Hergé”. Here Sanders himself takes on the changes in the author. He revises Hergé's life during the Second World War and looks into Hergé's works in *Le Soir*, a Nazi newspaper. Sanders contends that, working with the Nazis, Hergé made a deal with the devil but nevertheless developed as a cartoon artist. The works published during the occupation (*The Secret of the Unicorn – Red Rackham's Treasure*) are by no means political and therefore the deal was void. Hergé was granted less and less space in the magazine, and in 1943 he realised that continuing his work there would have consequences. After the war Hergé was interrogated twice – first as Hergé, then as Georges Remi; the authorities failed to realise they were the same person.

Hergé was known to be a perfectionist. Pictures and models were used in his studios as reference material for detail. His comics are therefore an apt way to study how 20th century perceptions have changed. Guillaume de Syon writes about aviation and the impact of the increased speed. In Hergé's time air travel was a novelty.

Matthew Screech, Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey look into Hergé's legacy. Screech traces the development of the clear line after Hergé. Baetens and Frey write about the meaning of Tintin today. A character that has passed away can only live in reinterpretations and re-readings. This article refers mainly to North American cartoon culture.

The third section, containing three articles, is entitled “Talking Back to Hergé”, and it is the one that brings out new research in comparing Hergé's legacy to comics of the 21st century. Gwen Athene Tarbox writes that in *American Born Chinese*, Gene Luen Yang brings back the “clear line” to comment on world politics. There was a time when this art of drawing was seen as intended for children. Annick Pellegrin takes up Spirou, a rival of Tintin in the comics scene, who continues his adventures. With Spirou's history rewritten after the year 2000, it has become more evident how the two characters converge.

In the last article Kenan Koçak's discusses the pirate Tintin's of Turkey. This Tintin, who has now been granted legal status, has been around since 1949. The adventures of Tintin, a co-creation of Hergé and local artists, has become part of local culture. Hergé himself marveled at *Tintin in Istanbul* which had been made in 1960s by cutting and pasting his works into new compilations. “That guy took out pieces from 19 albums and then arranged them according to the script he wrote and created a totally new book”, says Hergé (Koçak 189).

The two first sections of *The Comics of Hergé – When The Lines Are Not So Clear* summarises the essentials of existing Hergé studies whilst referring to new research. Something is missing, however. I would have liked to see Nancy Rose Hunt's observations on how Congolese people read *Tintin in Congo*². The third section breaks new ground. The Turkish Tintin comics have been known for a long time, but it is Koçak who takes a closer look at them as a researcher. All in all, Sutliff Sanders' book offers the first comprehensive English language analysis of Tintin and Hergé research and what could be feasible future perspectives.

Works Cited

Koçak, Kenan. “Tintin's Journey in Turkey.” *The Comics of Hergé – When The Lines Are Not So Clear*, edited by Joe Sutliff Sanders, University Press of Mississippi, 2016, pp. 177-190.

² Hunt, Nancy Rose: “Tintin and the Interruptions of Congolese Comics”. In: P. S. Landau & D. D. Kaspin (eds.) *Images and Empires – Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press 2002, 90–123.