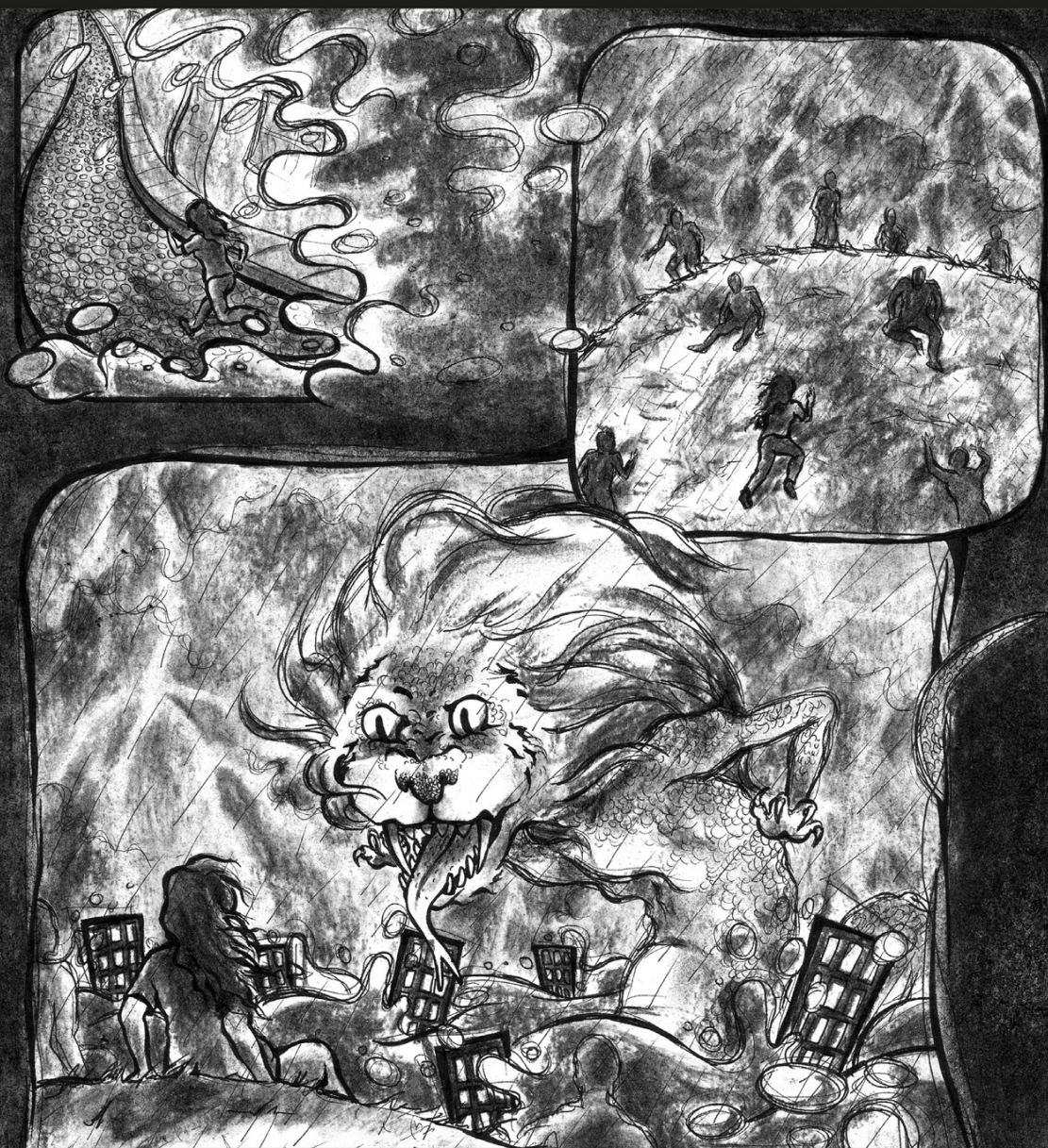


Identity and History in Non-Anglophone Comics

Edited by HARRIET E.H. EARLE and MARTIN LUND



GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES IN COMICS STUDIES

ROUTLEDGE

IDENTITY AND HISTORY IN NON-ANGLOPHONE COMICS

This book explores the historical and cultural significance of comics in languages other than English, examining the geographic and linguistic spheres which these comics inhabit and their contributions to comic studies and academia.

The volume brings together texts across a wide range of genres, styles, and geographic locations, including the Netherlands, Colombia, Greece, Mexico, Poland, Finland, Portugal, Ireland, and the Czech Republic, among others. These works have remained out of reach for speakers of languages other than the original and do not receive the scholarly attention they deserve due to their lack of English translations. This book highlights the richness and diversity these works add to the corpus of comic art and comic studies that Anglophone comics scholars can access to broaden the collective perspective of the field and forge links across regions, genres, and comic traditions.

Part of the *Global Perspectives in Comics Studies* series, this volume spans continents and languages. It will be of interest to researchers and students of comics studies, literature, cultural studies, popular culture, art and design, illustration, history, film studies, and sociology.

Harriet E.H. Earle is a senior lecturer in English at Sheffield Hallam University and research fellow at the Centre for War, Atrocity, and Genocide at the University of Nipissing. She is the author of *Comics, Trauma, and the New Art of War* (2017) and *Comics: An Introduction* (2020) and the series editor of *Global Perspectives in Comics Studies*. She also sits on the editorial board of the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*.

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Global Perspectives in Comics Studies

Series editor: **Harriet E.H. Earle**, *Sheffield Hallam University, UK*

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INTRODUCTION

Harriet E.H. Earle and Martin Lund

Comics are not fruits; they are more akin to vegetables. ‘Fruit’ has a clear definition in botany. It is an ‘edible product of a plant or tree, consisting of the seed and its envelope’ (‘Fruit’, 2021, n.p.). ‘Vegetable’ is far more vaguely defined: ‘Any living organism that is not an animal’ (‘Vegetable’, 2021, n.p.). There is, of course, a massive difference between a lettuce and a durian so as a term for classification, ‘vegetable’ is not particularly helpful. It is more often than not used as a ‘folk category’ with boundaries established in a particular context. Another common usage of the category ‘vegetable’, after all, is ‘the fresh edible portions of certain herbaceous plants’. What is counted as a vegetable in one kitchen might be considered a weed in another’s garden (and let us not forget the much-maligned tomato). It often seems to be the same with ‘comics’. There is no single, generally accepted definition of the term, and many extant definitions centre on aspects that make them mutually exclusive.

Among the most commonly cited definitions of comics, as far as Anglophone comics studies are concerned, is the one proposed by the comics creator and theorist Scott McCloud in the mid-1990s. To McCloud, comics are ‘[j]uxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer’ (1994, p. 9). In this definition, comics must necessarily be sequential and multiple. The comics scholar and critic Fredrik Strömberg, on the other hand, after discussing several possible ways of constructing comics definitions and proposing a few examples, offers the following additional suggestion: ‘Ett orörligt bildmedium som ska upplevas kronologiskt och/eller temporalt’ [A static pictorial medium meant to be experienced chronologically and/or temporally] (2003, p. 133). Strömberg explicitly positions this definition against the nowadays ‘self-evident’ criterion that comics must necessarily consist of images in sequence. The comics scholar Maheen Ahmed, in turn, notes that, while sequentiality is a characteristic of

comics that sets it apart from painting, for example, it is not always present and thus not a necessity for something to be created or conceived of as a comic (2016, p. 8). None of these views is ‘right’, but neither are they ‘wrong’. To suggest that they are would be to suggest that comics is *sui generis*, something that is entirely of its own kind and exists independent of the ways human actors in history try to understand, name, and claim comics as either Art, Literature, or trash, for example.

Rather, each of the above approaches allows for different ways of studying, analyzing, and understanding comics. A whole book could (and should) be written on the topic of how scholars and others have sought to define comics, why they have done so, and what the consequences of those attempts have been. This is not that book; here, it is more important to note that the very idea of comics is itself multiple, protean, and unstable. This is important because it reminds us that choosing a definition is not a matter of capturing the ‘thing itself’, that is to have arrived at the final word of what comics ‘really’ is, has been, and will be. It is rather a matter of bracketing certain things off for further study and of clarifying one’s thinking for oneself and one’s interlocutors or readers.

Even if it were possible to arrive at a universally agreed-upon definition that truly captures comics in all its diversity with finality – a definition that functions like the definition of fruits rather than vegetables – we would still be faced with a simple, stark, and unavoidable fact: even though there are things out there, all over the world that conform to any given definition of comics, they have different histories, different contexts, and different concerns. Apples and oranges are both fruits, but as the old saying reminds us, we should at least be careful when we compare them. A definition, no matter how concrete or grounded, does not do away with difference. If anything, it allows both similarities and differences to stand out even more clearly and be constructively compared.

To further complicate the matter, language, culture, geography, and history impact what can be credibly compared and how. Instead of apples and oranges, Swedes caution against comparing apples with pears while in Brazil – but not in Portugal – the caution is against *comparar alhos com bugalhos* (garlic and wasp nests). What in English is called ‘comics’ has other names in other languages. The English word has undoubtedly left an impression around the world: in German, they speak of *Comics*, in Russian of *КОМИКС* (*komiks*), in Hebrew of קומיקס – ‘comics’ transcribed phonetically. But we can also speak of Japanese 漫画 (*manga*), Korean 만화 (*manhwa*), Francophone *bandes dessinées*, Swedish *tecknade serier*, Danish or Norwegian *tegneserier*, Portuguese *bandas desenhadas*, Italian *fumetti*, Spanish *historietas*, and so on. While definitions of comics speak to the medium or form, the names given to local traditions further suggest that we need to think about differences as much as we need to think about similarities.

There is significance in these names, beyond denoting national origins. They all carry different emphases and assumptions. The English ‘comics’ is a case in point: originally a name attached to certain kinds of cultural production because of its perceived use in mainly humorous ways, the word has stuck but recent

decades have seen debates about whether or not it is time to ‘retire’ it. After all, not all comics are humorous. ‘Comics’ is a word with historical roots that generalizes from a perception about given texts’ qualities to give name to a growing number of similar-looking and related practices, tropes, conventions, forms, formats, labour relations, and more. When transposed to other languages and cultural geographies, the connotations change as the term settles over different histories.

The Japanese word *manga* comes instead from the combination of two kanji, 漫 (*man*) and 画 (*ga*). The same roots make up the Korean *manhwa* and Chinese *manhua*. Various English translations of *manga* have been offered, including Fredrik Schodt’s 1983 rendition of the word as ‘irresponsible pictures’ (quoted in Gravett, 2010, p. 9). Other translations instead render *man* as ‘aimless’, ‘whimsical’, or in similar terms. The translation issues surrounding the word *manga* make it more difficult for an informed discussion in English of the cultural connotations and understandings surrounding the form, but it seems clear that *manga* has been understood in relation to their visual form and as comparatively light in cultural terms.

The Francophone term *bande dessinée*, on the other hand, says little about content or cultural weight. It is, on the face of it, a descriptive term that translates roughly into ‘drawn strip (or band)’. Comics scholar Mark McKinney notes that the term has an advantage over the Anglophone ‘comics’ ‘insofar as the French-language term contains no suggestion that the material is comic or funny’. It highlights that what some of us call comics are (generally) drawn and (often) sequential but that it can also be misleading: ‘for decades the overall *page* layout (as opposed to the strip) has been an essential aspect of the art of many cartoonists and comics’ (McKinney, 2008, p. xiii, emphasis in original). The Swedish *tecknade serier*, as well as the Danish and Norwegian *tegneserier*, is close in meaning to *bande dessinée*. ‘Tecknad’ means ‘drawn’ in Swedish, and ‘serie’ can be translated into ‘series’ or ‘sequence’. With a minor difference in spelling and accounting for the fact that the words are compounded, the Danish and Norwegian words translate the same. In all three languages, the emphasis is on drawing and sequentiality. The Italian *fumetti* – ‘little puff of smoke’ – emphasizes one element of comics, the speech bubble, and turns it into a synecdoche for the whole medium while also perhaps suggesting the perceived ‘lightness’ or ephemerality of the form.

These and many other terms carry historical significance that can easily be ‘lost in translation’ when they are glossed simply as non-English words for comics or as catch-alls for comics produced within a certain geographic or linguistic sphere. While the debate rages within comics studies about what we should call our objects of study and how we should classify them, these debates are largely contained within Anglophone scholarship. Anglophone comics scholars may be divided on the use of ‘comic’ or ‘graphic novel’, but, for the most part, a geographic or linguistic demarcation is not questioned. Japanese comics are often labelled ‘*manga*’, from the new-born kitten adventures of Konami Kanata to the

horror stories of Junji Ito, regardless of what else they may have in common – or how they may differ. So too is often the case with Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées*, Italian *fumetti*, and Spanish-language *historietas*. The geographic or linguistic distinction is, by this reckoning, flawed. But Anglophone scholarship and categorization lacks nuance in this respect. Minute categorizing of comics appears largely to be the remit of Anglophone comics.

But the fact remains there are nuances attached to all the ways ‘comics’ are named, claimed, negotiated, and disclaimed. No matter what sub-category of comics one chooses to study in an Anglophone context, it is extremely unlikely that it can be discussed exhaustively with reference to only comics originally published in English. *Historietas* is one Spanish name given to the cultural artefacts and medium called ‘comics’ in English, but there are others. Some call them *còmics* and others still *tebeos*, after a particularly influential magazine containing comics. Bangla uses ‘comics’ (written in Bengali script) for most comics, but a common differentiation is made for the so-called *choti*, sensual, and often erotic comics.¹ And similar struggles over cultural consecration that are often noted in discussions of the US or UK context have been common elsewhere, up to and including mid-twentieth-century moral panics about comics’ effects on young readers in places such as Sweden and Finland.

The types of things we call ‘comics’ in English exist around the world, named and discussed in sometimes-similar terms to Anglophone contexts, sometimes in radically different terms. That there are similarities is not surprising. Art and literature have long crossed borders and influenced people far afield from their productive context. Comics are no different in that respect. Looking at any comics culture as a closed system will only lead to a blinkered understanding of its output and conditions. US American comics have been exported around the world through means connected to both soft and hard power. They have, undoubtedly, left their mark in palpable ways across the world. But their influence has not been uncontested. In France or Mexico, for example, the arrival of US American comics did not lead automatically to the wholesale adaptation of US-formed tropes and conventions. French publishers, artists, and institutions resisted US hegemony and produced or promoted comics with more ‘local’ flair. And in Mexico, Armando Bartra and Juan Manuel Aurrecochea note that the ‘foundation of our modern comic book [*historieta*] results from the insistent combination of two divergent compulsions: the imitation of North American models and extreme Mexicanism; the new comics arose from the tension between irresistible mimetic will and deeply felt national vocation’ (quoted in Campbell, 2011, pp. 3–4).

Nor has the flow been unidirectional. Decades before the late 1890s, when many date the ‘birth’ of US American comics, sequential art from all over the world influenced the cultural landscape. One example that has recently been given much attention is the work of the Swiss teacher, writer, and artist Rodolphe Töpffer, whose 1837 story *Histoire de M. Vieux Bois* was published (likely in pirated form) in English around 1840 as *The Adventures of Obadiah*

Oldbuck. Töppfer's work has made him the most recent person to earn the designation 'father of the comic book' (Kunzle, 2007). The designation is understandable: Töppfer's work fits many definitions of 'comics', predates many other supposed 'first comics' by decades, and was, undoubtedly, influential. Nostalgic, critical, or appreciative references to *Obadiah Oldbuck* persist in US American magazines and art history until at least 1965 (Lund, 2014). In Sweden, Fritz von Dardel's, who some view as one of Sweden's first comics creators, 1849 '*Gubben med skåpet*' ('The Old Man with the Cupboard') was likely inspired by Töppfer, with whom von Dardel shared a social circle (Dardel, 2003). von Dardel was also acquainted with the French artist known as Cham, who is similarly viewed by some as another important early European comics creator.

As this last example suggests, many flows of influence and inspiration sidestep the Anglosphere entirely. Visiting European comics shops or publisher websites, a series of networks begin to appear in which various European comics traditions flow via translation between countries and cross-pollinate in productive ways. Some large comics shops or comics shop chains even have their own publishing wings that help stock a multinational selection of titles for their customers, all in a local language. Examples include the Danish chain Faraos cigarer that has its own publishing arm and the Danish publisher Zoom forlag that publishes in multiple languages and collaborates with the Norwegian comics shop chain Outland for its Norwegian business.

There is also a bustling, sprawling, and dynamic world of comics in the parts of the world that are collectively designated with the geopolitical descriptor 'Asia'. Writing with the express intention of 'plugging' a gaping hole in Anglophone comics studies, 'the absence of study of Asian comic art', John Lent has offered the most comprehensive guide to the subject for English-language readers to date (Lent, 2015, p. 3). In chapters of about 20 pages each, Lent's *Asian Comics* introduces readers to comics from China, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Although long, the list of chapter headings is worth reproducing in whole because it shows how much of the map Anglophone comics studies has yet to critically explore. Lent's book provides capsule histories and overviews of major actors, trends, and tendencies and charts some important local networks and areas of cross-pollination.² Similarly, Frederick Luis Aldama, working with several co-editors and co-authors, has been at the foreground of making Latine comics from Latin America and North America more accessible to Anglophone readerships, showing in the process a rich variety of comics production that represents an even richer archive as yet unknown to many who study comics within the Anglosphere (e. g. Aldama, 2017, 2009; Aldama & González, 2016).

The most glaring omission from this collection is comics from – and about – Africa and the Middle East; only one chapter considers this geographic area at all, and it is within the context of a Czech comic. Similarly, there is no detailed discussion about the smaller comics communities based in North America and

Oceania, which produce and publish comics in both English and other languages. For these reasons, we cannot say that this collection is global in its research reach. This is a limitation common to scholarly work such as this, which rely on interest and initiative (and a response to a call for submissions), but this does not change the fact that large chunks of the global comics field are not represented here. This is not to suggest that these areas should immediately be given scholarly attention as islands of production, cast adrift from the wider global issues of comics (though that's certainly what appears to have happened in – and to be happening to – many other national or local traditions).

Rather, there are many research questions that remain unprobed when it relates to these areas and their comics traditions. For example, we may ask how African bandes dessinées are cross-pollinating with French Algerian – or, following the lead of Véronique Bragard, who has traced a transnational genealogy of Belgo-Congolese comics aesthetics, try to better understand how new voices emerge by mixing and resisting existing conventions. Bragard writes that the 'new esthetics emerging from Congolese comics alternative production [sic] share visual and postcolonial features that pay homage to ligne claire and more conventional adventure comics but which move beyond them to include African voices and imagery, countercultural and historical dimensions' (Bragard, 2016, p. 339). Similarly, Michelle Bumatay has studied how sub-Saharan autobiographical and journalistic bandes dessinées have worked to challenge colonial stereotypes of Africa and to reconfigure European imperialist discourses to produce new ways of thinking about and representing sub-Saharan Africa (Bumatay, 2013). Postcolonial and autoethnographic work is becoming more common across the globe, from Lee Francis 4, Weshoyot Alvitre, and Will Fenton's *Ghost River: The Fall and Rise of the Conestoga* (2019), about the 1763 Paxton massacres of Conestoga Indians to foreground Indigenous victims and survivors in ways colonial sources have never done, or Mats Jonsson's *När vi var samer* [When we were Sámi] (2021), which recounts Jonsson's discovery of a lost heritage and simultaneous realization that what the Swedish state, church, and people did to the forest Sámi must be screamed: 'KULTURELLT FOLKMORD' [CULTURAL GENOCIDE] (pp. 236–237). More and more voices are speaking about marginalization, silencing, oppression, and destruction, using the languages of what some of us call comics to show that there are more sides to stories that have long been presented as finished and over.

Frantz Fanon wrote: 'The Tarzan stories, the tales of young explorers, the adventures of Mickey Mouse, and all the illustrated comics aim at releasing a collective aggressiveness. They are written by white men for white children', but also 'devoured' by readers racialized as non-white. Thus, colonial representations could in Fanon's time – and arguably into our own – influence colonized or formerly colonized consumers as well, encouraging them to identify with colonizers (2008, pp. 124–126). On the other hand, Edward Said has reflected on how, to him, in his youth,

comics in their relentless foregrounding ... seemed to say what couldn't otherwise be said, perhaps what wasn't permitted to be said or imagined, defying the ordinary processes of thought, which are policed, shaped and re-shaped by all sorts of pedagogical as well as ideological pressures.

(2001, p. ii)

Comics, then, are neither inherently revolutionary or regressive, liberating or oppressive. But they can be any of this or more, depending on who is telling the story and how and how it is read and understood. The cultural exports of colonialism have wrought untold destruction on massive amounts of Indigenous art and cultural production, but comics is an international form and has been from its inceptions. It is likely that many of these communities had an extant comics tradition – or an image-based storytelling tradition of some kind – that has grown and developed in relation to that of the larger colonial presence. In order to start growing the scholarship on these areas, engaging with the commonalities already existing between other, more rigorously studied, texts and traditions would provide a framework from which their study can develop. And this says nothing about the variety and diversity within those more broadly defined traditions.

There is much for Anglophone comics scholars to learn from moving outside of our own personal libraries, from other works on comics published in languages other than English, and from looking beyond the language barrier where there are still no guides. This is not to say that we should set out to 'discover' comics as yet unknown to Anglophone readers and scholars. There's nothing to 'discover'. These texts are already there. What is absent is intellectual curiosity and openness to broadening a collective field of vision. Scholarship that introduces, discusses, and analyses comics that were not written for an Anglophone readership is essential reading even for a scholar who has never felt a reason to discuss such comics and who is likely to never do so (e. g. Callison & Rifkind, 2019; Douglas & Malt-Douglas, 1994; Kutch, 2016; Miller, 2007; Repetti, 2007; Strömberg, 2010). Perhaps it is especially important for those of us who fit this description. It shows, in no uncertain terms, that comics is more than what is right in front of our eyes. And acknowledging that is of utmost importance if the field of Anglophone comics studies is ever to outgrow and remedy the lopsided way it has developed.³

There can be no doubt that Anglophone comics studies is lopsided in its overall perspective. When John Lent conceived of his book on Asian comics in the early 1990s, 'the parochialism of the field did not sanction much in the way of studying other countries' comics. The thinking in many quarters was that comics are an American idiom, and that's that' (Lent, 2015, p. 3). When his book came out, 22 years later, the landscape had changed but not by much. Writing this introduction, a further seven years later, the picture is not much different. Benjamin Woo and Bart Beaty (2016, pp. 6–7) illustrate this in a striking way, when they present the results of a survey of the field's most-studied texts:

not only do a very small number of names dominate (Art Spiegelman, Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, and Chris Ware), but the majority of candidates included are white, male, and US American or British.

It is way past time for Anglophone comics studies to broaden. We would do well to dispose of the still-prevalent ethnocentric idea that comics are a US American art and to put aside the teleological pursuit of the ‘first’ comic. The more one reads about comics from outside the USA, the stranger the claim that comics are ‘an American idiom’ becomes. The way comics have developed as comics in the USA is, undeniably, US American (with all the variety, multiplicity, and contradiction that both labels entail). By the same token, Chinese 漫画 (*manhua*) are a Chinese idiom, French *bandes dessinées* are a French idiom, Arabic قصص مصورة (*qisas musawara*, ‘illustrated stories’) or رواية مصورة (*riwayat musawara*, ‘illustrated dramas’, commonly translated as ‘graphic novel’) an Arabic idiom, and so on. But tautological reasoning adds little of value to scholarly discussion. Affirming differences and citing specific identifiers should be a starting point, not a conclusion. It should invite questions, not sidestep them. How have these separate developments played out? That is, what makes an Egyptian comic specifically Egyptian and so on? On what historical models and in relation to what local and global aesthetic forms, values, and preferences in the past and present have they taken shape?

To better ask those questions, we should also stop looking for the ‘first’ comic. Comics is not ‘finished’ and it never will be – but rather has been and remains a changing, shifting way of communication with many different means of expression – so whatever text we deem the ‘first’ will by necessity be judged against a standard that is rooted in a historical, contingent understanding of what comics is. But if we take seriously the proposition that comics is not singular but rather plural, not universal but simultaneously global and local, there can be no true ‘first’, because there is not a single point of origin, only times of emergence and decisive shifts brought on by development and interplay between different forms, cultures, aesthetics, and so on. It is possible to study the kinds of sequential art that tends to be called ‘comics’ in English with many of the same tools, theories, and methods no matter where they come from. For all their differences, there are enough similarities for that. But even the most doggedly formalist analysis ought conversely to remain sensitive to the very real differences that exist between comics traditions and networks from across the world. The drawn line is not without connotations, and images are not read the same way by all human beings (cf. Kelp-Stebbins, 2018).

In conflating ‘non-Anglophone comics’ under singular geographical designators or under an unexamined, generalized ‘comics’ rubric, nuance is lost and thematic connections across linguistic and national borders are erased. Such erasure weakens our scholarly field by diluting and distorting the corpus of texts that we choose from in our analyses. But what is the solution? We cannot insist that scholars be both multi-lingual and aware of the entire international corpus of what some of us call comics that fits their specific research theme or aspect.

Similarly, it is unfair and unfeasible to declare a *lingua franca* for comics studies, as is already in place for academic disciplines such as computer science. Ensuring there are good translations of both primary material and scholarship is similarly unfeasible and insufficient. At present, there is no sensible and satisfactory answer to these questions, but we must continue to ask them: How can we position ourselves as an international field of study when we so regularly exclude and ignore huge swathes of material?

Our mission in this edited collection of essays is not to remedy the myriad issues of classification; we mention them above as it is one of the most pressing issues for this area of study. What we present in these pages is the very small tip of a proverbial iceberg. We demonstrate a small proportion of the scholarship that is being developed from non-Anglophone comics and by multi-lingual scholars. The chapters we present herein offer suggestions for the integration of international comics scholarship into the Anglosphere. Though it can be said that this collection aims at a decisive turn in comics studies to this transnationalism⁴ – and inevitably fails to fully achieve this goal – we see this collection as a way of integrating otherwise under-studied comics with themes that are prevalent in contemporary Anglophone comics scholarship.

Before we outline the structure and contents of this collection, we turn briefly to the wider issues of comics translation. Translation is more an art than a science; translators and translation theorists widely debate the different approaches that can be taken in the translation of any text. Most agree, however, that the aim of translation is to move beyond words and into the realm of cultural signs and understanding. Weissbort and Eysteinnsson write that one understands other places and cultures, ‘by building linguistic bridges across the channels that divide language spheres and cultural regions, whether by the rewriting of messages and works in another tongue, or through other interventions by individuals who possess knowledge in more than one language’ (2006, p. 1). Comics demands further consideration – that of the image. It is important to remember, as Altenberg and Owen write, that there is ‘no single history of comics translation, but rather many national and formal and thematic histories’ (2015, p. iv). As such, we cannot create a holistic history of translation but ‘need to begin with small clusters of individual translations’ (2015, p. iv).

There are two components to comics translation: textual and image. It is not enough to simply translate the textual components of the comic (the speech bubbles and captions), but the images themselves are part of a system that needs to be considered within its cultural, national, and linguistic contexts. In some cases, the translation is a simple case of the text component moving from one language to another. For example, onomatopoeia such as ‘crash’: dropping a rock in French will lead to ‘patatras’, while in Czech it is ‘*bum*’. Conversely, English cows ‘moo’, Dutch cows prefer ‘boeh’, and Korean cows opt for ‘eum-mae’. Zanettin writes:

Most ‘grammatical devices’ such as speech balloons, onomatopoeia and visual metaphors are used in comics produced in many different cultures

and can be seen as central to comics as an art form, while other features are perhaps less salient. However, there is not one single ‘language’ of comics, as each regional tradition has developed its own set of conventions and stylemes, as regards reading pace, drawing style, subject matter and themes. Each of these regional varieties of comics can thus be seen as a ‘dialect’ of the language of comics.

(Zanettin, 2008, p. 18)

He suggests that the ‘study of translated comics may provide useful insights into an understanding of translation as a complex process of intercultural communication, involving much more than simply the replacement of written text in speech balloons’ (Zanettin, 2008, p. 98). Thinking in a similar way, Altenberg and Owen write that ‘the linguistic translation of comics has some distinct practical issues: spatial issues akin to those in subtitling, to do with fitting the new language into the extant text boxes and speech balloons’ (2015, p. i). However, it is in the translation of meaning that complexities occur:

Undertaking to translate that meaning can entail: rewriting text with no redrawing, rewriting text with partial redrawing, rewriting text with complete redrawing, or retaining the text with complete redrawing.

(2015, p. i)

There are many arguments that can be made for and against image translation beyond the linguistic component; these topics form the basis of much work being done in comics and translation studies, by scholars including Federico Zanettin, Tilmann Altenberg, and Klaus Kaindl. Kaindl writes: ‘If we do not translate languages but cultures, what is the role of the non-verbal dimension in translation: do we have to redefine the concept of translation in order to also include forms of transfer which do not involve language?’ (2004, p. 174). It is difficult to deny that the translation of comics at the level of the image and sign is beneficial to the cross-cultural transmission and understanding of comics. If, as Berman writes, ‘a translator without historical consciousness is a crippled [sic] translator, a prisoner of his representation of translation and of those carried by the social discourses of the moment’, it is not a stretch to take this further and to say that, in comics, a translator who does not consider the non-verbal and the visual is similarly hindered in their enterprise (Berman qtd in Venuti, 2012, p. 2).

From the above, it should be clear that translation is not merely a matter of taking a text and transposing it, unchanged, into another language. Translation is also a form of interpretation. For the purposes of comics studies, it also provides an incomplete and stunted record. Anglophone comics readers and researchers have access to a constantly growing number of texts to read and consider, but comics from many cultures still fail to find their way into a translator’s hands. The same applies for readers of any other language. It is essential to understand that how comics reach us – as readers and as researchers – and *what* comics end

up reaching audiences outside their original publication area can have a deep and long-running effect on how we read and research comics. While reading and studying comics in translation can help broaden and inform us as readers and as scholars, and expand the cultural and academic archive in different contexts, important questions that are outside the scope of this volume to be asked and answered, among the most pressing ones being: what gets translated, how does it get translated and for what audience, and how does the act of translation and reception influence the way meaning is made with the translated comics? Even if those questions can ever be asked with any degree of satisfaction, translated texts are still a poor substitute for a sensitive, contextual reading of the text in its original language, such as the ones offered in these pages.

Overview of This Collection

In the title of the collection, we emphasize two particular themes in relation to non-Anglophone comics: identity and history. These themes emerged as the most prevalent within the chapters we received for this collection. The comics we are discussing here are nearly all ones that have (thus far) not been translated – by resistance or by lack of Anglophone interest; we are struck by the common themes that similarly resist translation. Much of the comics themselves speak to social, historical, and cultural identities and knowledges that are particular to the language and geography of their homes. It follows that this would be a difficult if not impossible task to accurately and appropriately translate, not only linguistically but also culturally.

We begin with a series of chapters on identities; authors are considering what this term means in relation to their chosen comics corpus. In the first chapter of this part, Michel De Dobbeleer centres his analysis of Willy Vandersteen's 'Het Spaanse spook' ['The Spanish Phantom'] on the creator's fascination with Flemish history and heroism. He discusses the representation of siege warfare in comics and argues that it is in sieges, rather than battles, that some of the most incisive representations of Flemish and Brabant identity can be found. In their chapter, Felipe Gómez and Gabi Maier bring together two geographically remote comics traditions – Germany and Colombia – united in their themes of displacement and refuge. They discuss several comics from both countries in the wider context of comics about migration and displacement, focusing on the points of difference and convergence within the texts and also the place of comics more broadly in debates on this topic.

Ioanna Papaki constructs a single-creator case study in modern Greek identity in her chapter on the works of Giannis Kalaitzis. She argues that, though Kalaitzis' work is largely unknown outside of Greece, analysis of it contributes to a better understanding of the beginning of the 'graphic novel' format in the European framework. The chapter also discusses the representation of Greece post-Junta (1967–1974), suggesting that the comics form engages with the construction of cultural identities. The final chapter of this part, by Annick

Pellegrin, considers the comics corpus of Rius and his critical history of Mexico's economic, political, and cultural dependence from the Spanish conquest to the present day. His work returns repeatedly to themes of Mexico's lack of effective economic, political, and cultural independence as well as the uneven distribution of wealth within the country. Pellegrin's decolonial lens provides incisive analysis of this creator's works in relation to questions of national identity in a country that, despite independence, cannot fully shake off the colonial power relationship with the colonizer.

In the second section, we examine radicalisms and political narratives, with the first two both based on Nordic comics. The first chapter, by Robert Aman, takes the Swedish comics *Johan Vilde* and *Fantomen* [The Phantom], two of the most commercially successful examples of 1970s comics. Aman positions these two titles as prominent examples of the ways in which New Left ideology was filtered through comics. He suggests that they offer a window into the ideological climate in Sweden during the birth of the New Left, student revolts, solidarity movements, and other events associated with the leftist radicalization in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s. In the second chapter, though the Finnish Communist party is among the lesser known within Europe, the origins of the party have been rendered in a fictionalized historical comic: Jesse Matilainen's *Suomen suurin kommunisti* [The Greatest Communist of Finland]. Oskari Rantala interrogates this graphic novel, offering a clear analysis of the narrative and artistic strategies at play in his chapter. He positions the story as one of personal and political transformation for all involved, ultimately seeing the story as one of disillusionment.

Wojciech Lewandowski presents the graphic novel *Osiedle Swoboda* [The Swoboda District], by Michał Śledziński, as an example of images of Polish political, social, and economic transformation that took place after 1989. This chapter presents a picture of Polish transformation as shown in the graphic novel's multi-perspectival structure. In its portrait of a young generation of Poles experiencing a difficult time of social changes, the comic can be seen as a critical voice against the excesses of capitalism enforcing a certain style of life and work. In the final chapter of this part, Pedro Moura introduces the Portuguese comics industry which, until recently, was not commercially strong but has an outstanding output of engaged and experimental artists. This chapter offers a context for understanding the convergence of comics creation and political activism, how comics can interrogate power, authority, socioeconomic 'inevitability', and institutionalized, conformed discourses. With contemporary Portuguese case studies as its focus, it mirrors potentialities in larger, international practices.

Part 3 shifts the focus of the chapters to gender, sexuality, and the myriad questions of representation that these themes invite. Mario Faust-Scalisi's chapter on the work of Chilean artist Katherine Supnem brings to the fore an underground artist whose work, despite having limited circulation, brings a new perspective on Chilean society. Supnem's feminist stance on money, homelessness, and, more strikingly, sexuality and gender-based violence demonstrates

the importance of small-scale, ‘underground’ comics to discuss those topics considered ‘too hot’ to be handled in the comics of the general market. Mikel Bermello Isusi’s chapter considers a pair of comics that exist in dialogue with each other: *El arte de volar* [The Art of Flying] and *El ala rota* [The Broken Wing], both by Antonio Altarriba Jr and Kim, which tell the story of Altarriba’s father and mother, respectively. The two comics narrativize individual experiences and problems faced by the generation that lived through the Civil War and the Dictatorship, showing that memories (and lives) such as these, of the Francoist Regime, are both private and collective, since they appeal to contemporary Spanish culture and society.

In a chapter on possibly the youngest comics market discussed in this volume, Christina M. Knopf turns to Irish Gaelic comics and *Gráinne Mhaol* [*Grace O’Malley*] by Gisela Pizzato and Bruno Büll. A legendary pirate queen of sixteenth-century Ireland, O’Malley’s story is found mostly in English annals. *Gráinne Mhaol* can thus be read as a reclamation of Ireland’s heritage through its Irish language, women’s history through its subject matter, and improved gender representation in comics through its heroine and lead creator.

In the last part, there are two chapters which focus on historiographical comics and the ways in which talking about historical events is culturally and visually remediated. Paloma Domínguez Jeria and Mariana Muñoz address this issue in relation to Chilean autobiographical comics, an emerging field that gives space to approach individual subjective viewings of historical events. The chapter focuses on the newness of the genre and asks which events have received particular interest and why? How are creators weaving their personal history into the history of their country? The final chapter of this volume, by Lucie Kořínková and Pavel Kořínek, spotlights Czech children’s comic *Punt’a* [Spotty] and its protagonist’s escapades in the Second Italo–Ethiopian War (1935–1936). This is a landmark series, depicting a war as it was happening, which raised several moral questions for the creators regarding how to interpret (and visually represent) war-time situations. Is it appropriate to show war brutality to children? Is it acceptable to let them know that international aggression has, in the end, paid off? The chapter analyses the strategies used by the creators of *Punt’a* in solving these dilemmas.

Notes

- 1 Thanks to Amreen Bashir for telling Martin about this distinction.
- 2 See also Lent & Xu, 2017.
- 3 We are indebted to one of the book proposal’s anonymous reviewers for the word choice ‘lopsided’.
- 4 As one of the anonymous reviewers characterized the project.

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