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Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *The Metamorphoses of Tintin or Tintin for Adults*. Trans. By Jocelyn Hoy. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2010. xv + 295 pp. Tables, figures, and notes. \$75.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN-10: 0804760306; \$24.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN-10: 0804760314.

Review by Richard Ivan Jobs, Pacific University

At a young age I was introduced to the concept of psychiatric therapy by Lucy Van Pelt as she counseled poor Charlie Brown at her 5¢ sidewalk stand (a bargain!). Less a good listener than a pushy interventionist, Lucy nevertheless pursued the mid-twentieth century commerce of psychotherapy rather than that of, say, fruit juice. In doing so, she offered a rather blunt critique of Charlie Brown's life, offering commentary on his tortured existence void of any true psychoanalytic insight. Nevertheless, embedded here was a proposition that even comic-strip characters maintain a complex inner-life. Jean-Marie Apostolidès accepts this assertion as a challenge and has turned the table on Lucy, or rather her contemporary Tintin, by putting *The Adventures of Tintin* under an accomplished and sophisticated psychoanalytic critique. Specifically, Apostolidès' book *The Metamorphoses of Tintin or Tintin for Adults* is not a psychoanalytic portrait of the author Hergé, but of the series' characters themselves.

The book's American publication is timely as interest in Tintin builds in the United States. The twenty-three Tintin albums, translated into English, are now readily available in public libraries and featured in bookstores across the country. There is a much anticipated collaborative film trilogy on the way from Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson (which will no doubt be accompanied by a marketing onslaught--perhaps a Captain Haddock Filet-O-Fish Happy Meal is on the way). There is a new English-language edition of Pierre Assouline's biography of Hergé, and a new Hergé Museum designed to boost Belgian tourism.[1] The albums from *The Adventures of Tintin* have been translated into more than sixty languages and sold more than 200 million copies worldwide. Clearly the characters and world created by Georges Remi (Hergé) is of enduring interest, and not only for children. As Apostolidès' alternate title, *Tintin for Adults*, suggests, there are widespread fan and collector activities of blogs, conventions, and festivals (these folks often refer to themselves as Tintinologists or Tintinatics) as well as significant scholarly endeavors underway. Just what is it about the round-faced, tufted-hair, golf-pants-wearing boy do-gooder that is so compelling? More than a hundred books and many more scholarly articles have sought to solve this question in one aspect or another, but answering this particular query is not the driving impetus behind Apostolidès' book.

*The Metamorphoses of Tintin or Tintin for Adults* is a faithful English translation of Apostolidès' 2006 edition of *Les Métamorphoses de Tintin*, first published in 1984.[2] The translator, Jocelyn Hoy, has done an exceptional job of rendering conceptually difficult material clear and elegant without sacrificing the precision of Apostolidès' original text. And it is the origin of this text from 1984 that is most striking to this 2010 reader. Apostolidès' book has not been updated to account for the vast and relevant body of work on the subject since its original publication, an aspect that is perhaps most evident in its conceptual premise. In many ways, this book is a snapshot of theoretically based French cultural studies just before the field came to be dominated by the concerns of Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida. Instead of questions of

discourse, power, or authorship, we read of mimetic desire, fetishes, Oedipal impulses, the Ego, Superego and Id, anal and oral tendencies, mother and father figures, castration, repression and so on. Because of this, *The Metamorphoses of Tintin* can be considered a classic in three ways: to begin with, as the first critical study of Tintin, it influenced the Tintinologists who came after and expanded the field of scholarly inquiry in general; but also it is classic because its manner of inquiry is so clearly of its time. If Apostolidès' had sought to update his text in light of the scholarship of the last twenty-five years, it would have drastically altered the thrust and nature of his book and been altogether different. Apostolidès was right not to do so, and in the preface to the English edition, he asks our pardon if the style and vocabulary seem outdated, which they do, but there is value in this too. Still, an essay in the form of an afterword or epilogue that addressed this very issue would have been a very interesting and worthwhile addendum, I think.

*The Metamorphoses of Tintin or Tintin for Adults* is structurally divided into two disproportionate parts, "Tintin in History" and "The History of Tintin"; the former is merely two chapters, while the latter is fourteen. As a historian, I found book one quite compelling and persuasive and wished it had been pursued in greater length and detail as Apostolidès works to place Tintin within the historical context of his creator, Hergé. It is here we learn that in 1929 Tintin first appeared in a juvenile supplement to *Le Vingtième Siècle*, a Catholic publication in Belgium; that he was portrayed as a kind of idealized Boy Scout, bold, devout, adventurous, and patriotic; and that, ostensibly as a journalist, Tintin provided a conservative commentary on world politics from a Belgian Catholic nationalist point of view.

The original first three albums from the early 1930s, *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, *Tintin in the Congo*, and *Tintin in America*, were ripe with colonialism, racism, anti-communism, anti-semitism, nationalism, and Catholic religiosity and placed Tintin within very particular historical places and moments. What is most fascinating in book one is that Apostolidès analyzes these original volumes (not available commercially for quite a long time) on these terms but also contrasts them with the profound shift in tone of the albums produced after the Second World War. Furthermore, these original pre-war volumes were substantially altered by Hergé in the immediate postwar period to minimize, if not eliminate entirely, such objectionable elements; it was a kind of purge reflecting that of Nazi collaborationists, among whom many counted Hergé for his wartime work on the newspaper *Le Soir*. The Tintin that we know—open-hearted, welcoming, trustful, but seemingly stateless and free of ideology—was retroactively achieved. Or as Apostolidès puts it, "the Tintin from before the war gets credited with a liberalism acquired only later" (p. 2).

Apostolidès sees the turning point, however, taking place before the war, particularly with *The Blue Lotus*, where the narrative technique shifts and Tintin becomes a novelistic hero on his way to becoming self-critical. Tintin the journalist becomes Tintin the detective. Rather than address the great political questions of the day, Tintin is absorbed by adventure and setting wrongs right. Increasingly, the settings for his escapades are imaginary instead of real. Rather than being specifically Belgian, he becomes universally international—even his French is standardized to omit any idiomatic "Belgianisms." The outcome of the Second World War and the postwar liberal consensus accelerated this process, as Hergé actively sought to rewrite the earliest volumes, not only changing vocabulary but whole narrative threads, and inserting characters who had not been there before (such as the Thom(p)sons who retroactively appear in the first frame of the first album). *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* was so objectionable in the context of Europe's leftist shift that it was put out of print altogether.

But Apostolidès doesn't explain these changes so much as present them. Why such dramatic changes? Did urging from Hergé's publisher have anything to do with it? It seems plausible that these efforts were meant to improve the commercial appeal of what is, at base, a product.

After all, these changes enabled the audience of Tintin to expand immensely; it was only in the postwar period that Tintin became such a profound phenomenon. Or perhaps this change was due to a shift in Hergé's own politics, or maybe he sought to deflect criticism away from his wartime activities? As Apostolidès correctly argues, "The transformations of the first albums aim at extricating *The Adventures of Tintin* from their historical context" (p. 40), but more historical context on the part of Apostolidès may have gone some way to explaining the rationale behind these transformations. But Apostolidès is most concerned with the world internal to the texts, not the external world in which they were produced and consumed. So causality, which we historians are rather keen about, remains largely absent.

Apostolidès describes his two approaches to *The Adventures of Tintin* as diachronic and synchronic. Book one (two chapters) has diachronic analysis that follows the stories in the order in which they were produced and the context in which they appeared. The much longer and in-depth book two (fourteen chapters) is synchronic in that Apostolidès takes the body of work as a whole and analyzes it as a coherent and self-enclosed world, thus prioritizing the substance of Hergé's final revised editions rather than examining in detail how they were changed or why. In doing so, Apostolidès demonstrates a dazzling command of the albums' content as he leaps forward and backward to pursue his analytic themes through the development of characters and narrative threads. Though he does follow a rough chronology advancing through the albums, his method will be confusing to those unfamiliar with Tintin's world because he does not offer explanatory introductions nor, more problematically, does he ever explain the psychoanalytic terminology underpinning his analyses. Though Apostolidès warns us in the Preface that this is the case, unfortunately it makes his text a challenge for those lacking the appropriate expertise.

Book two is divided into three parts: "Tintin" (four chapters), "Haddock" (five chapters), and "Wagg" (five chapters). The bulk of Apostolidès' interpretation here focuses on Tintin and Haddock as oppositional archetypes, the "Foundling" and the "Bastard" respectively, with a panoply of psychoanalytic concepts applied throughout. On one hand, this is very entertaining stuff and Apostolidès is clearly having fun by suggesting a host of interpretations, none of them necessarily definitive but plausible (Tintin as foundling, Tintin as superman, Tintin as Christ, for example). On the other hand, there are moments of overreach where readers will likely maintain a healthy skepticism. For example, I am not convinced that Haddock repeatedly attempts to rape Tintin. Still, while each reader may question some or other of Apostolidès' assertions, he teaches us to notice all sorts of things that we hadn't before, such as the evolving relationship between Tintin and Snowy and the primordial role of animals more generally. Or how the introduction of the Haddock character lets Tintin's more roguish qualities be displaced onto the alternative protagonist. Or the drama of family romance inherent to the characters that eventually come to live together at Marlinspike Hall. I had never thought about the prevalence of dream sequences throughout *The Adventures of Tintin*, which Apostolidès deconstructs to great effect. In part, he is so convincing in these passages because the artwork itself has been reproduced, allowing him to carefully detail his interpretation for the reader. It is disappointing that in total there are so few panels reproduced here, in what is an analysis of a visual literature. Similarly, there is little consideration of Hergé's artistic style (with the exception of chapter ten which has some discussion of perspective) and its influence on his narrative. But again, Apostolidès wants to distance his analysis of the text from its creation.

Apostolidès makes no claims about Hergé's creative intentions nor does he make claims about Hergé's psychological state, though in a footnote he does point out that Hergé briefly underwent psychoanalysis. Yet for his literary criticism, Apostolidès' uses theoretical tools designed to explore and interpret the landscape of the human mind, which begs the question of authorship (though admittedly, Hergé left behind little to go on in this regard other than

occasional interviews). Apostolidès' focus on the interiority of the text renders *The Metamorphoses of Tintin or Tintin for Adults* a fascinating exercise in psychoanalytic literary criticism, one full of insight and the starting point for anyone interested in close readings of the albums, but it is also one limited to making a series of very interesting observations rather than advancing a compelling comprehensive argument. Still, on his own terms, Apostolidès very successfully traces the evolution of tone, narrative, and character through a psychoanalytic close reading. It is the capacity for change, the metamorphoses, inherent to Hergé's fictional masterpiece that Apostolidès so richly details thereby demonstrating that Tintin's world is not dead on the page, but vibrantly alive.

## NOTES

[1] Pierre Assouline, *Hergé: The Man Who Created Tintin*, trans. Charles Ruas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); for the new museum see [www.museeherge.com](http://www.museeherge.com).

[2] Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Les Métamorphoses de Tintin* (Paris: Champs-Flammarion, 2006); Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Les Métamorphoses de Tintin* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1984).

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