Regimes of Prestige and Power: Transnational Authorship and International Acclaim in Rutu Modan's Exit Wounds

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Cover Page Footnote

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The machinations of international regimes of prestige and recognition of excellence, while important to the larger project of deterritorializing geographic cultural "margins and centers," are perhaps not as innocuous as they initially seem. In January of 2008, Rutu Modan's first graphic novel, *Exit Wounds* (Drawn & Quarterly 2007), became only the second comics album not published natively in French to win the esteemed *Les Essentiels d'Angoulême* ("The Essentials of Angoulême") award; the first, awarded in the prize's inaugural year of 2007, was American Charles Burns' *Black Hole* (Kitchen Sink 2005). In addition, Modan became the first female to win the award. Awarded annually by Europe's largest comics festival, the Angoulême International Comics Festival (AICF), "The Essentials" combines with AICF's "Best Album" award to form *le Palmarès Officiel du Festival international de la bande dessinée* ("The Official Awards of the International Comics Festival"). Ostensibly, these selections represent the six best international comics offerings in the year of the award. Not to be outdone by the French, in July of the same year, at Comic-Con International in San Diego, The Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards exalted *Exit Wounds* as "Best Graphic Album - New," making Modan the second woman to win that award (after Lynda Barry in 2003) and the first author not born to a native English-speaking nation (Israel); further, Modan became the first award winner not to publish with a US publisher (Drawn & Quarterly). The Eisner awards seek to represent the best in American comics, while SDCC International is an exposition of multifaceted forms and tangents, from author/artist meet-and-greets and cosplay (costume-play) competitions to academic roundtables, within and around comics production and consumption.

At first blush, these two incidents seem unremarkable but for their solidification of comics as an inherently international art form, an opportunity for peripheral writers like Modan to be recognized on the international comics stage. Indeed, here the elevation in the global comics centers of a peripheral-nations writer, publishing with peripheral Montreal-based publisher Drawn & Quarterly, seems a powerful assertion of Shane Denson's recent contention that "as a more or less natural extension of volatile core processes at work in the act of reading comics," graphic narratives have a "propensity toward various acts of border-crossing, adaptation, and reimagination."[1] Certainly, conferring these two awards to Modan realizes the "potential to be powerful" that Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven identify in graphic narrative's ability to "intervene against a culture of invisibility by taking the risk of representation."[2] It is, in fact, that very narrative of "giving voice" and visual presence to the subaltern that triumphs in the international heralding of *Exit Wounds*. Consider, for example, the following reviews that focus explicitly upon *Exit Wounds*' representation of foreign experiences and otherwise silenced narratives. First, from

comics scholar Eddie Campbell's personal blog:

> In *Exit Wounds* Rutu Modan gives me something that's getting harder to find in my 'graphic novel' reading. That is, she's telling me something I don't already know. It's set in an actual place I've never been to, and the characters are involved in plausible actions that are outside of my experience.[3]

Second, from Armando Celayo in *World Literature Today*:

> Modan is able to portray life in Israel as an ongoing effort to combat terrorism, and its potential to paralyze society, with an unrelenting spirit to survive. A shopkeeper at a train station where the explosion went off is chipper in his persistent petitioning for independent shops; a small cafe stays open in the same station, even after the owner loses her husband in the bombing. Terrorism seems to be a common (yet tragic) occurrence [...] Life never stops moving in Israel, but death is nevertheless remembered by the vigils placed at each bombing site.[4]

Exit Wounds is thus elevated into the upper echelons of comics prestige because of its ability to visually depict what scholar Aryn Bartley has termed, in his study of Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza*, "historical and present-day suffering, taking seriously events otherwise considered secondary 'footnotes' to official histories."[5] The core difference between Rutu Modan and *Exit Wounds* and comics journalist (and 2006 winner of the same Eisner Award as Modan) Joe Sacco is, of course, that Sacco's journalistic graphic novel acts as a remediation (footnoting) of history; Modan's work, entirely fictional even if inspired by reality, makes no such claims to verisimilitude.

It is good that these often neglected narratives come to light and are given credence by the traditionally central locations of cultural comics exchange in the West, the US and France. However, we must never ignore the fraught ideological position these prizes occupy in what James English calls the "economy of prestige," the larger context of global cultural capital exchange:

> Viewed on the one hand as a necessity for the postcolonial world and an ethical obligation on the part of the major powers (a matter of genuine respect and recognition, not merely symbolic philanthropy), the investment of foreign symbolic capital in emergent symbolic markets has been seen on the other hand as a means of sustaining less overtly and directly the old patterns of imperial control over symbolic economies and hence over cultural practice itself. It is not a problem from which the prizes can hope to extract themselves.[6]

Valorizing *Exit Wounds* solely for its work in bringing to the center a marginalized viewpoint on a time and of a place of bewildering and constant violent tension reaffirms those "old patterns of imperial control." Put more bluntly, affirming *Exit Wounds* as, to use Rutu Modan's own words, an "authentic" portrayal of "modern life in Israel"[7] authorizes its narrative to speak *as an Other*. Even as foreign acceptance has centralized a marginalized voice, it has reproduced the problems Gayatri Spivak outlines in "Can the Subaltern Speak?": namely, the assumption of cultural solidarity among a heterogeneous people ("authentic") even as the subaltern is depicted as unable to speak unless western intellectuals (comics critics and awards committees) authorize it to do so.[8] The same praise that rewards her creative efforts elevates her specifically for her ability to speak as a subaltern (thankfully female, luckily in the tongue of the British Empire) about a confirmative account of the barbarity and backwardness of what Tom Murphy has identified in his contemporary review of *Exit Wounds* as the "seemingly intractable state
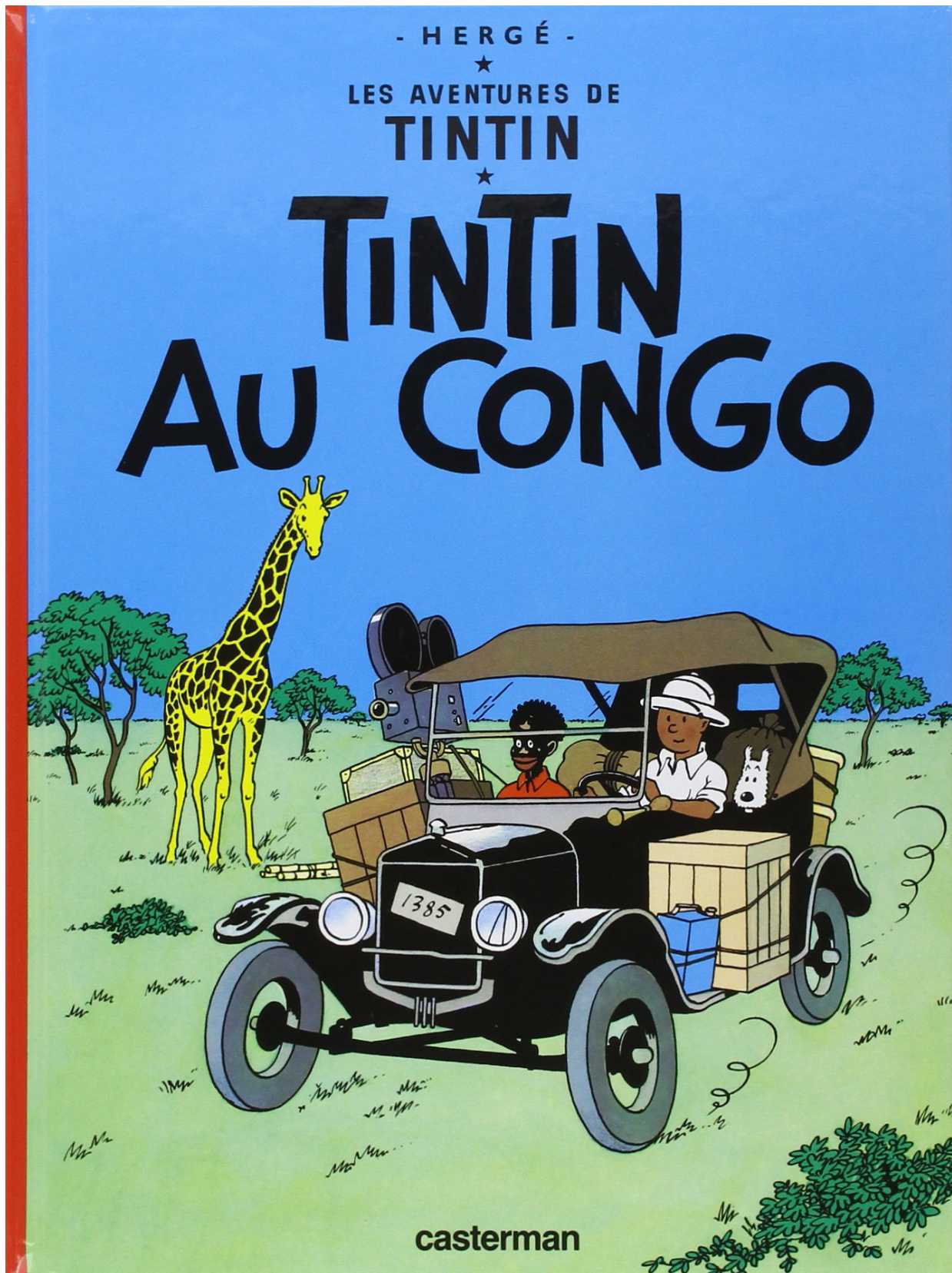
Figure 1. *Tintin in the Congo*, cover and inset. Note the blackface native sitting passenger to the extremely tanned Tintin in stereotypically-crafted "Africa."

of conflict in the Middle East."[9] Her account forms a facet of the overwhelmingly essentialist, ethnocentric mythology of subaltern collectivity: to Western award committees, Modan "speaks" for all Israelis. Thus, considering *Exit Wounds* within this framework reinforces traditional colonial conceptualizations of Israel as a land beset on all sides by barbaric Muslims—an island of civilization in a sea of incivility, so to speak—and thus deserving of attention, protection, and cultural uplift by the major cultural and geopolitical powers that be. It is unsurprising that *Exit Wounds* comes to international prominence through two of the primary United Nations members in the same year that the Gaza War erupts, and that it wins an award primarily set aside for American comics artists during a time in which many American citizens and politicians viewed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a quasi-national concern.

It should be noted here that I do not suggest reading *Exit Wounds* in a solely national context, against its undoubtable transnationality. As I will demonstrate later, Modan benefitted from systems of cultural exchange before writing *Exit Wounds* and has continued to benefit from them in the years after its prize-winning international run. Rather, I suggest reading *against* the grain of *Exit Wounds'* international acclaim as a graphic novel representative of the so-called "modern Israeli condition" that Tom Murphy identifies. That prevailing reading, I argue later, is not transnational but international in that it neither transcends nor redefines national boundaries but instead reifies them through subtle forms of oppression and Othering.[10] Instead I advocate, as Leela Fernandes does, reading transnationally as "both a category that captures particular kinds of processes and a perspective on the world that is embedded within relationships of power."[11] Rather than reproducing the "presumed parochialism of the territorial boundaries of the United States,"[12] I read *Exit Wounds* through a transnational lens in order to demonstrate the profound critiques of global flows of power inherent in *Exit Wounds'* subject matter and execution. To do this, I will first consider the work's subversive use of a visual style commonly understood in a nationalist context, the Franco-Belgian *ligne claire* style. Next, I consider its narrative resistance to serving as an "authentic" representation of midst-of-conflict Israel. Finally, I analyze cultural subversions in *Exit Wounds'* transnational flows leading up to and then surrounding its celebration as exemplary international comics phenomenon.

Clear Lines, Blurred

Rutu Modan's visual style in *Exit Wounds* fits four primary descriptions: 1.) its lines are clean and decisive with little shading or hatching; 2.) it uses bright, vibrant colors generally associated with comics that privilege fiction, rather than those that attempt to recreate a realistic reproduction of the world; 3.) it depicts objects more realistically than it does its characters, who are depicted more abstractly; 4.) and finally, depictions of buildings and locations often utilize common architectural perspectives rather than common expressive perspectives.[13] The first three characteristics have often been noted by critics as exemplifying the Franco-Belgian "clear line" (*ligne claire*) style, most often associated with French *bandes dessinées* in general and *Tintin* author Georges Remi, better known as Hergé, specifically. The last characteristic is common in American comics, starting most idetifiably with Winsor McCay. We should not take these influences as innocuous, however. Rather, it is my contention that Modan's use of these styles is tendentious in nature, that her use of the styles subverts the representational traditions from whence they originate.

To understand these subversive tendencies, it is important first to outline precisely what I mean by "representational traditions." No artistic style, as a method of mediation and representation, is without agenda or without influence. As French philosopher, linguistic, and literary critic Roland Barthes has argued, "all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a 'floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others."[14] A particular visual style grows out of a personal
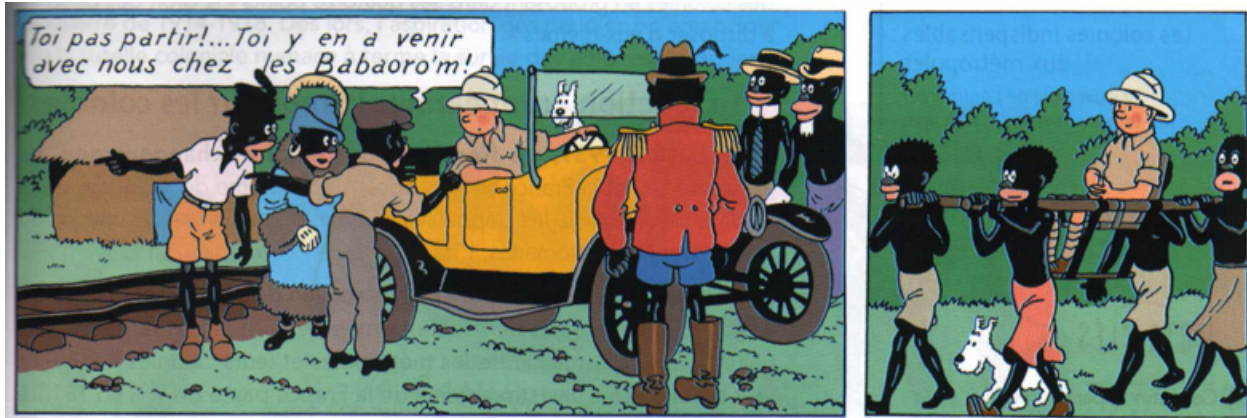
Figure 2. Natives in *Tintin in the Congo.*

evolution (see, for example, Modan's evolution from *Exit Wounds* to *The Property,* or Charles Schultz's slow polishing of Charlie Brown) as well as a historically and culturally-bounded set of influences and contexts that mold its growth dissemination. Moreover, recognizably "national" styles of visual artistry—such as "Japanese" manga style or "Franco-Belgian" *ligne claire*—are themselves shaped and formulated by complex negotiations between personal styles and by systems of privileging and dismissal at the local, national, and generic level. These stylistic turns and the assumptions about the world which mediate those alterations are an important starting point for understanding the ideological assumptions of an artistic style, or the image's representational method that interpellates the reader by way of its nuanced mediation of the world it "re-presents."[15, 16] Once this set of assumptions—the "representational traditions" I indicated above—is made clear, subversions of it may be delineated.

For Hergé and his disciples, clear line style was a method of conscious signification as much as an aesthetic: clear lines went with clear, easily understood stories, unequivocal divisions between moral good and bad, and often simplified ways of making sense of the world. *Tintin* tends often to follow the US precedent for coloration found in superhero comics, in which primary colors signify heroes and secondary colors signify villains—though whether this arrived before, after, or during the same time in which coloration significance was codified in the US comics scene is up for debate.[17] Regardless, there is little to no "bleeding"—color spilling over, color outside lines, colors being used in reference to two opposed individuals or objects—in *Tintin,* a conscious artistic choice that should be contrasted with other Franco-Belgian "realistic" style's use of color as a way of accurately representing the world.[18] *Tintin* plots are often as straightforward, crisp, and clean as the artistic style. Indeed, Hergé's representation of the world using such strong and clear differentiation has been the target of much criticism as it often relies on racist or essentialist stereotypes to typify its actors and its locations. A recent examination of Hergé's portrayal of mental illness concluded that the associated behaviors were portrayed as invariably "unwise or overtly impulsive, reflecting loss of control."[19] The portrayals often deploy stereotypes to depict mental illness unfavorably,[20] as well as stigmatize psychiatrists—"the only doctors with prominent roles in *Tintin*"[21]—as "repressive, greedy, or plainly evil."[22] The use of stereotypes to typify Othered characters in Hergé is not limited to those with mental deficiencies or who abuse alcohol; Jean-Marie Apostolidès has illustrated thoroughly that Hergé's depiction of natives in *Tintin in the Congo* is essentially colonial, casting Tintin as the quintessentially civilized European to which the savage natives should aspire (see figures 1-2).[23] Tom McCarthy goes a step further, explaining that Hergé portrays the natives as "good at heart but backwards and lazy, in need of European mastery."[24] This is, of course, to say nothing of the Blackface that Hergé uses extensively in this volume, a work Hergé would later call one of the sins of his
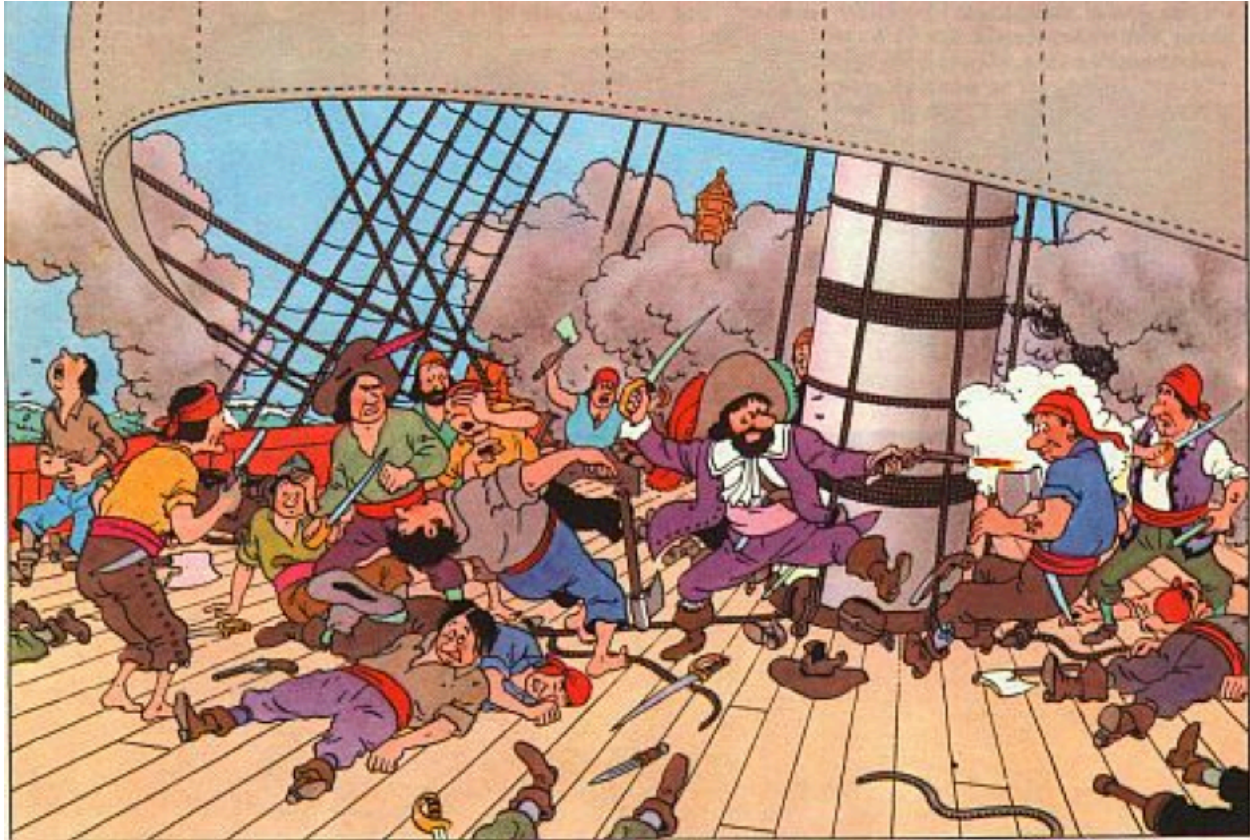
Figure 3. Hergé's "ligne claire" style as seen in *Tintin*. Note the cartoonish characters set against a more realistically-rendered ship, drawn in good perspective.

youth. Speaking to writer Numa Sadoul, Hergé noted that, at just twenty-three, he had never been to the Congo and instead "drew [the Africans] in the spirit of the pure paternalism which reigned at the time in Belgium [...] I admit that my early books were typical of the Belgian bourgeois mentality of the time."[25]

In a departure from these historically, culturally, nationally-bounded, and fundamentally essentialist applications, Modan's use of clear line maintains the same visual aesthetics while dispensing with the cultural baggage. Characters are drawn simply and clearly, closer on the comics arts spectrum to what Scott McCloud calls the "language" vertex: metaphorical representations of lived experience which are *perceived*, and thus require decoding to signify.[26] McCloud names this vertex of the iconographic triangle "language" because the most metaphorically-linked representation of the world is, in his conception, verbal language (specifically metonymic verbal language).[27] He argues that drawing characters in this metaphorically human fashion—that is, they are recognizably human in appearance but do not mimic reality with regards to wrinkles, shading, or proportions—enables increased identification of reader with character.[28] Conversely, Modan's realistically-drawn backgrounds, vehicles, and buildings are closer to the "reality" vertex of the art triangle, as they more accurately depict objects as they appear in lived experience. Just as they appear more real, McCloud argues that they are also objectified by the reader, drafted to make the reader "aware of the [object] as an *object*, something with *weight*, *texture*, and *physical complexity*."[29] While Hergé's use of clear line was motivated primarily by a need to simplify characters as types—that is, acting objects and not subjects—Modan's use asks readers to identify with the characters they portray. The story reinforces this technique in that it focuses less on the location (Tel-Aviv, Israel) and time (nominally 2002, though a lack of distinctive markers makes it difficult to temporally locate) and

more on the character drama at hand.

"Life Under Occupation"

Exit Wounds is primarily a story about modern alienation, particularly its destructive effect on human relationships. Protagonist Koby Franco is a cab driver, constantly separated from interaction with his clients by the imaginary (and, increasingly, real) barrier between driver's seat and back passenger seats. In a series of panels in the fourth chapter, Koby silently drives his clients to their destinations while they go on with their lives behind him: a mother taking her screaming baby on a cab ride to silence his cries, a businessman engaged in a heated cellphone exchange, and two lovers passionately embracing—all of these characters and interactions form the background of his life. The perspective here places Koby in the foreground, both as the focal point and as a separate entity from the lived experiences going on behind him, in the background. Perhaps more troublingly, Modan's artistic choices distance Koby from even his closest blood kin; he speaks to his sister Orly only via telephone conversations which are represented on the page by absolute divisions between panels, distanced by the gutters between them.[30] They speak to each other in this scene, but their dialogue is strangely unhinged:

> ORLY: Listen, I can't talk right now.
> KOBY: One question. Have you heard from Dad lately?
> ORLY: All of a sudden you're interested in Dad?
> KOBY: So you have heard from him.[31]

The indirect responses demonstrate Orly's mental distance from the conversation – she is busily painting her nails – while Koby's focus on the call removes him mentally from another family situation: dinner with his aunt and uncle.[32] All this hinges upon a grotesque characterization of the Franco family's dissolution: the two children have not spoken to their father in so long that they cannot know for certain if he is still alive.

The cartoonishness of characters afforded by clear line style allows Modan to further explore the flaws in her characters. Just as they are complex and flawed characters in personality, so too are they visually depicted as such. Characters often have lumpy bodies in places where lumps would not realistically appear; hands are drawn with little attention to anatomical correctness, in order to make obvious an emotive response. Faces, though drawn simply, are expressive by their departures from reality.[33] Simplicity of character design, used both as a way of enhancing reader identification and as a way of making characters easy to remember, here is used to efface identities: Numi, the female protagonist of *Exit Wounds*, goes through several character changes that make it sometimes difficult to know Koby is talking to the same woman. Drawn first as a soldier, she is "giraffe"-like and masculinized;[34] drawn later as Koby's love interest, she is graceful, vulnerable, and traditionally feminized. At the end of the book, as she becomes the redemptive force by which Koby can reconnect to human relationships, she finds herself somewhere between these two poles: her hips are gracefully curved in a pair of jeans while her torso is clothed unremarkably in a formless orange polo.[35] Koby too oscillates in his recognizability, gaining and losing weight in ways that both add to and detract from his superiority based solely upon the amount of space he takes up. As he loses confidence, for example, he shrinks;[36] when he is in control of his relationship with Numi, he grows in size, and his pudgy frame is accentuated by posture and framing.[37] These relations are interconnected by Numi's changing height in relation to Koby—we discover early on that she is taller than he,[38] but when he becomes enraged at her and takes control in a later chapter, they are the same height.[39]

These fluctuations in character size and stability coincide with an intriguing dis-location of *Exit Wounds'* "Tel-Aviv" from its real referent. As in Hergé's clear line style, backgrounds and objects are drafted as more realistic than the actors who inhabit them (figure 3). Unlike Hergé, however, few attempts are made to "authentically" reproduce the area represented. Where Hergé's depictions of the Congo relied on stereotypical concepts of sub-Saharan Africa (complete with the obligatory giraffe), Modan's Tel-Aviv is curiously devoid of recognizably "Israeli" cultural markers. Aside from a few obvious concessions drawn, as noted above, from Modan's personal experience (Hebrew and English on the taxis, some Hebrew on buildings), many of the locales in *Exit Wounds* are easily mistakable for any metropolitan area with palm trees and taxicabs. Nonetheless, the nonspecific "Tel-Aviv" is drawn vibrantly and meticulously in order to capture its more realistic objectivity. Buildings are given great care and attention; backgrounds are rich with signposts, foliage, and perspective-correct streets and curbs. Outside of the city, the text showcases farms in sweeping landscapes, complete with realistic swaths of sunset color. The ocean looks realistic, salty, as if it could be touched, tasted, floated in (figure 4). The same standard for realistic accuracy Modan sets on the cover continues throughout the book.

At first, this attention to detail is simultaneously comforting in its anchorage to "the real" even as it disturbs the otherwise cartoonish and melodramatic story. However, it combines with an attention to perspective reminiscent of early American comics author Winsor McCay. Just as McCay draws meticulously-drafted architectural wonders in *Little Nemo*, Modan in *Exit Wounds* crafts an accurate, if somewhat fantastic, depiction of "realist" buildings (see figures 5 and 6). Though McCay's drawings of architecture were technically brilliant masterpieces of analogue drafting (drawn with only compass, square, and straightedge) that influenced American comics for decades, they nonetheless contained flights of fancy that had referents existing only in McCay's mind. We mustn't forget, after all, that the sweeping cosmopolises that Nemo and Flip travel to are dreamscapes.[40] Modan's Israel, taken as it were from its artist's own nostalgic recollection, is no less imagined than McCay's. Unlike other works in which the primacy of place is apparent through the painstaking mapping of real-world geographies onto comics-world pages (such as Brian K. Vaughan and Niko Henrichon's *Pride of Baghdad* or Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza*), in *Exit Wounds* there are few and widely interspersed attempts to locate the reader in present-day Israel. Even Modan's depiction of travel between cities, which uses the familiar physical markers of space and travel time, takes on a different quality for the narrative of *Exit Wounds*—namely, that time and space are expanded or contracted to fit diegetic time, rather than extradiegetic time. The historical moment from which *Exit Wounds* originates—throughout 2002, from just months after the Hadera and Haifa bombings to nearly a year after—fades away from primary positioning in the narrative. Rather, it seems as though Modan has utilized McCay's architectural flights in good faith to the original context. Jeet Heer explains that "like Jonathan Swift's Lemuel Gulliver or Lewis Carroll's Alice, Nemo was a sober and innocent soul who traveled to a bizarre fantasyland which on closer inspection turned out to be a parody of the home that was left behind."[41] Reflected in the hyper-industrialized, "ultimate corporate dystopia" of Mars,[42] the parodic distinction of McCay's Slumberland's from the world from which it departs recasts it as the safe zone of satirical critique. The statements about society made in Slumberland, therefore, have meaningful weight in the real world only via metaphor.

But Modan, I think, is not so gentle with McCay's artistic endeavors. Though the Israel she depicts is clearly not a realistic representation, it nonetheless is not necessarily a parodic stand-in to enable spirited critique. Or rather, it appears initially to be such, but later, through the course of its narrative subversion, unravels this façade. Consider the exigency of the narrative: the motivating situation in the story is that Koby receives a call from Numi, his father's former lover, to explain that she thinks he was killed in the recent Palestinian suicide bombing in Hadera. Modan's inspiration comes from David Ofek's documentary of the incident, *No. 17,*[43] which recounts Ofek's journey to identify the unidenti-

Figure 4. Rutu Modan's take on "ligne claire" with similarly cartoonish characters on a realistic backdrop.
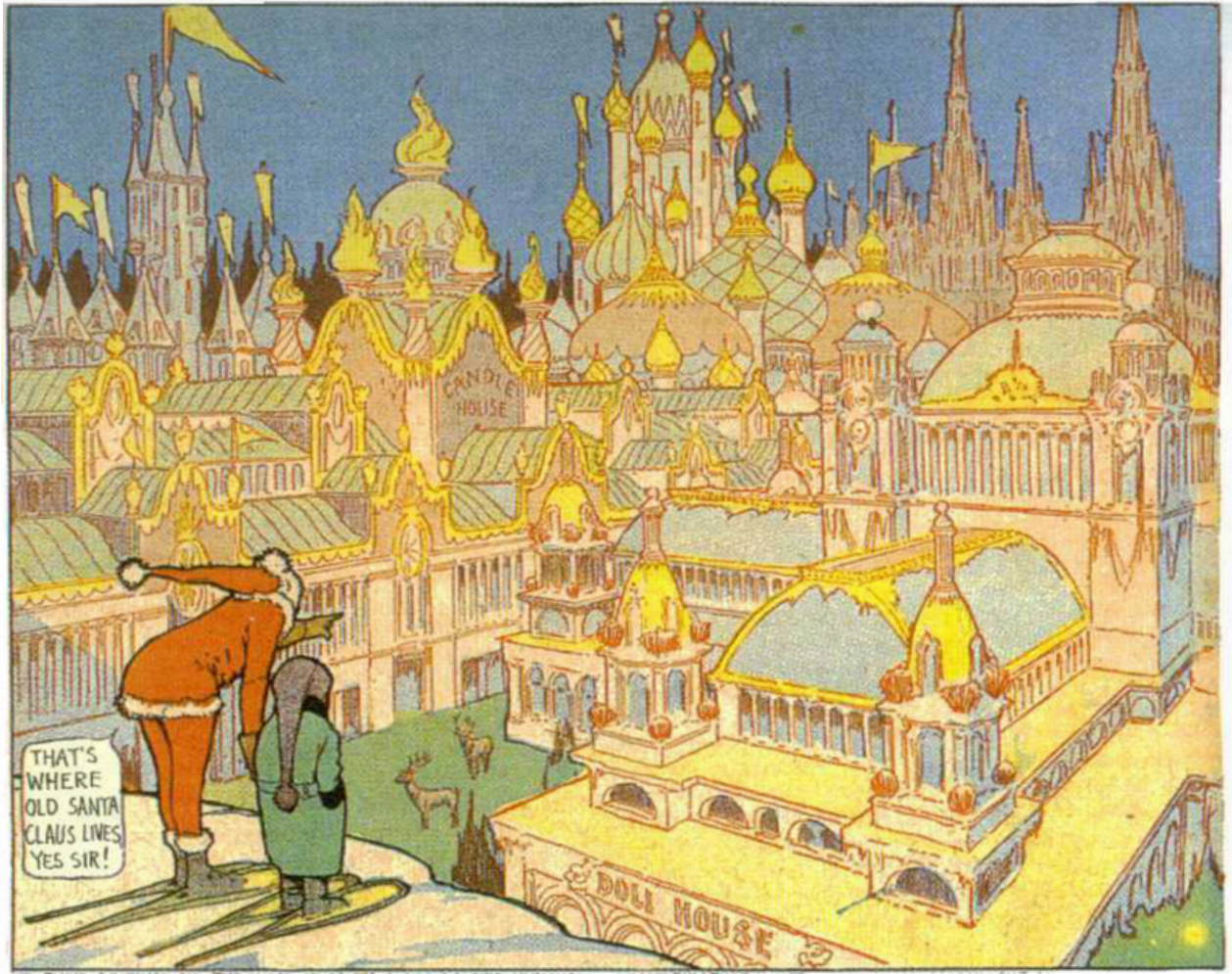
Figure 5. Example of Winsor McCay's mastery of perspective and architectural design.

fied, unreported seventeenth victim of the June 2002 explosion. From this story, Modan weaves a tale of loose ends needing to be tied up. But from this point on, bombings fade from view. Their remnants are left: shrapnel, blood on the bus, the survivors and families of survivors, but the explosions are conspicuously absent.

Consider this also alongside the historical context surrounding the creation of the work. Written between 2005 and 2006 and published in late 2006 to early 2007, *Exit Wounds'* genesis is bound up inseparably with a national identity that is, on an international level, largely considered mired in violence over an age-old land grab. The referent year, 2002, had the most documented suicide bombings in the post-2000 era (fifty-five), more than all the years of *Exit Wounds'* creation and maturation into international phenomenon combined (fourteen: seven in '05, four in '06, just one in '07; and two in '08).[44] As in *Exit Wounds*, there is a flurry of violence resulting in horrific deaths and shattered lives. Then, silence: a nation left waiting for the other explosions, going on with life as necessary. This emptiness, akin to the emptiness a family experiences after the death of one of its members, is treated with nothing more than the frustrated laughter of a worried spouse. Collective memory in and around the blast sites seems to have elided over the fact that the explosions ever happened, or agreed that they were so common they could easily be confused. When asked about the bomb that supposedly killed Koby's father, nobody can remember which one Koby and Numi are talking about. It becomes a running gag in the narrative that

Figure 6. Rutu Modan's take on McCay's perspective and architectural strengths.

the two explosions, separated by a matter of days but taking place 30 miles apart, cannot be extricated from each other. The two traumatic moments cannot be distinguished because to do so would mean addressing the moment of trauma, so instead life has gone on as if the bombs never went off. Life has comically – grotesquely – gone on: the market-stall owner continues seeking petitions for his causes after insisting that the dead can still sign,[45] the illegal immigrants remain invisible workers, unnoticed even when one is seriously wounded and replaced by another,[46] the diner at the bomb-site cafeteria expresses his displeasure when the owner does not continue her dead husband's generous portions.[47] The Israel in *Exit Wounds* is not a safe place, but rather exists as a place haunted by the ravages of war. The buildings, still drafted more cartoonishly than McCay ever made his Martian cityscapes, bear the blemishes of human error and atrocity. They speak from every panel of the horrors they've seen, sharing their longer and more correct memories that their residents have tried to forget. Thus is the national, local, and paro-chial content of *Exit Wounds* hidden slyly within the cosmopolitan artistry Modan utilizes, couched in a narrative that encourages readers to think of it not as an "Israeli problem," but rather a "human problem" that could—and has—happened anywhere else in the world.

Figure 7. A newspaper strip from 1993. Modan's style here is reminiscent of Art Spiegelman's comix work.

The World Stage

In her interview with the BBC, performed at Random House for the "International Edition" of *Exit Wounds,* Modan expresses disdain for the international pigeonhole into which she has been placed:

> People in Israel don't expect me to represent Israel. I feel it more abroad, that people are looking at me as an 'Israeli artist,' and I understand it. I *am* an Israeli artist, my stories *are* Israeli. This is what I came from, this is where I came from. [...] But what can be irritating, sometimes, is that people expect me to explain 'the Middle East Situation' clearly for them through my comics, which I think I cannot do. It's too complicated. I do refer to the situation, but the way I live in it, it's in the background. It's *my* life, so I can only show a very narrow vision of life in Israel.[48]

What these entities abroad do not realize, she argues, is that they have reproduced a common misconception, that the experience of one Other can speak for them all. Modan explains in the interview that in Israel her works are taken as she intends, as a slice of life from one perspective which cannot dream of representing the quintessential "Israeli" experience, largely because such an experience is a myth.[49] In fact, she explains that Israel is a "crowded place—many legs to step on, you know?"[50] The emotionally-charged reaction she relates in the interview—"why are you doing comics? Why are you publishing in English? Do you know what you're doing to Israeli culture?"—illustrates the kind of invective she faced as a result of international fame, in which she is considered largely a traitor to her own culture because of her publication in a foreign language with a foreign publisher.

Despite these troubles at home, Modan remains characterized abroad as a home-soil starlet and symbol of Israeli culture. This is not an unfair or erroneous characterization, as Modan is one of the most renowned contemporary artists in Israel today. On post-2008 editions of *Exit Wounds*, Modan is hailed for her work as an Israeli comics icon: winner of the Israeli Ministry of Culture's Young Artist award in 1997, four-time winner of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem's Best Illustrated Children's Book award (1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004), Chosen Artist of the Israeli Cultural Excellence Foundation.[51] That she garnered these awards (and others) prior to her publication of *Exit Wounds* is conveniently left out of the account.[52] In addition, the international systems of influence which allowed her to rise to prominence and which awarded her excellence long before Angoulême and the Eisners are largely uncredited. Modan worked as an illustrator and editor of the Israeli imprint of the American comedy magazine *Mad*, republishing "75% American material from Mad" and adding "original material to the other 25%."[53] During her stint with *Mad*, Modan published extensively as a newspaper artist before starting the Israeli
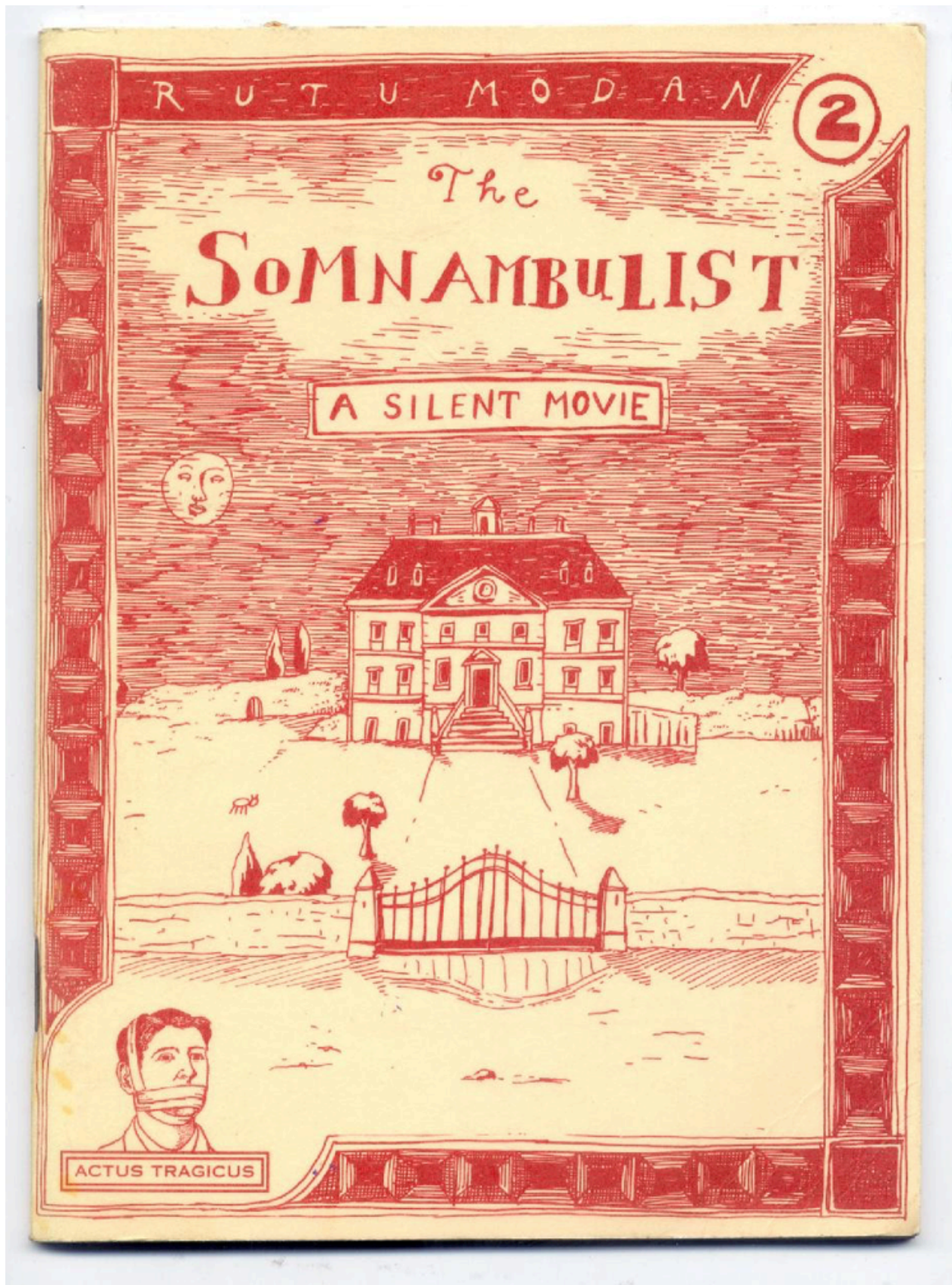
Figure 8. Rutu Modan's *The Somnambulist*, published with Actus Tragicus in 1995.

comics collective *Actus Tragicus* with Yirmi Pinkus. Several of the publications she made with *Actus* won international awards: in 2001, her illustration work in children's literature won a Hans Christian Andersen Award from the International Board on Books for Young People, and she was a finalist for the Ignatz Award for Best Story and Promising New Talent.[54]

During this time, Modan experimented with a number of different art styles. Her prolific publishing of independent graphic novels with *Actus* and her long career as an illustrator demonstrate the depth of her artistic skill. I do not want to underestimate this point: though some comics artists are known for a singular style that is honed over time (such as the aforementioned Hergé in France, Osamu Tezoka in Japan, or Will Eisner in the US), some (and increasingly more contemporary artists) are comfortable with a wide range of styles. This comfort and ability to publish in different styles (shown in figures 7-9) suggests that the artist's use of a particular style, especially one which departs from the artist's other work, should be taken as an intentional choice. Understood accordingly, Modan's hybridized Franco-Belgian-American renegotiation of *ligne claire* reflects a conscious choice of style on the part of the author.

Why write in English with a rich personal and cultural history of Hebrew comics? Why publish abroad in another marginalized comics market (Montreal, Canada) with a readily-available and supportive Israeli comics publishing network at hand? Why adopt styles explicitly linked to centrist comics powers, France and the US? The answer to these questions, I believe, lies somewhere between what world literature critics theorize and how *Exit Wounds* actually came to international prominence. David Damrosch argues in *What is World Literature?* that "the writer from a marginal culture is in a double bind. With little to go on at home, a young writer can only achieve greatness by emulating desirable foreign models."[55] The fact that one must attract the empire's attention by publishing in "tongue of the empire" rings true in Modan's use of Franco-Belgian and US comics aesthetics. Before publishing *Exit Wounds*, Modan's local prestige had not translated well to the larger world stage, even though she had published in French and English with her graphic novels. But Modan was not, at the release of *Exit Wounds*, a "young writer"—she was forty-one, with almost two decades of illustration work and more than a decade of graphic novel work behind her. Moreover, it seems that she has remained very true to her Israeli comics roots, as evidenced by her insistence upon the complexities of what the world calls quantifiable "Israeli" experience: she is not a representative of the subaltern whose voice may be taken as the voice of all, and she insists upon this in her interviews as well as in her work.

Regardless of her insistence upon a reading of her work as an individual, Modan seems to have been mistakenly read as an Israeli representative. Indeed, English points out that the festival structure, far from dislocating or translocating the works it exalts, may instead "offer recognition of a sort that assumes and affirms the (originally *national*, now *local*) situatedness of [...] production."[56] That is to say that, in championing *Exit Wounds* and Rutu Modan as an "Israeli graphic novel" by an "Israeli artist," the inherently transnational work *Exit Wounds* attempts is undermined by reaffirming *inter*national relations. Rather than shuffling off the "crushing weight" of the international stylistic traditions they must use to gain recognition,[57] these works are instead slotted back into a nationalistic system (albeit one that pits each nation comparatively against one another) which credentializes them based upon their adherence to traditional nationalistic narratives between countries. This is the "inter"national—that which reifies the difference between nation-states. In the case of *Exit Wounds*, becoming "that which gains or loses in translation" declaws the work, weakening its stinging critique of the world systems that enabled its creation, systems which ultimately reinstate nationalist narratives of hierarchization on a global scale.[58]

Rutu the Untranslatable

Jan Baetens has argued convincingly that Hergé's work is untranslatable. The thrust of that ar-

Figure 9. Etgar Keret's *Nobody Said It Was Going To Be Fun,* co-published with and illustrated by Rutu Modan in 1996. Note the significant differences in line style and coloration.

gument hinges upon the inherently nationalist tendencies expressed in *Tintin*—namely, the dismissal of Flemish dialect, which Hergé spoke, in favor of codified nationalist French as envisioned by Maurice Grevisse.[59] Baetens contends:

> Hergé would take great care to eliminate from his texts this popular mixing [the Flemish dialect] of two dialects, neither of which was the "official language," just as, in visual terms, his style arrived at the famous *"ligne claire"* only by taming what was joyously anarchic and disordered in his early endeavors, and just as the language his heroes speak became increasingly polished (and, at the end, perfectly aseptic, again like his graphic style, which quickly degenerate into academism from the sixties on).[60]

In addition to seeing a snapshot of the coagulation of a representational tradition, this passage illustrates a deeper tension in Hergé's work that appears again in *Exit Wounds*, but which is neutered by its international—rather than transnational—reception. In *Exit Wounds*, this "untranslatable" tension between home dialect and codified *"le bon usage"* appears along slightly different but equivalent lines: between Hebrew, Modan's native language, and English, the language of international comics. To be considered in the Angeloueme awards, *Exit Wounds* was translated into French by Arles-based publishing house *Actes Sud* (Southern Acts); after winning the Eisner, it was translated into Hebrew for resale in Israeli markets. Remarkably, it was *not* Modan who oversaw the translation and *not* Drawn & Quarterly who authorized the publication; rather, the publishing was handled by Israeli house Am-Oved, under the title *Karov Rahok*, "Close-Far." Indeed, this title is perhaps most illuminating of the situation in which *Exit Wounds* exists on the global stage. Rather than transcending the boundaries of its origin through its subversive use of the master's tools, *Exit Wounds* instead remains distanced from itself and from its home life: it is close, speaking of the same world, but far away, concentrating on the tensions that silently oversee the process of its exchange. Thus *Exit Wounds* made the untranslatable tensions of a Franco-Belgian aesthetic style, an American satirical mode, an international conflict of increasingly national interest to uninvolved parties, and the personal struggles of a well-known author to gain deserved prestige translatable onto the world stage. Unfortunately, more was lost in the translation than was gained.

Notes

0.   All images are used in strict compliance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107 of United States copyright law (commonly known as "fair use law"). This material is distributed without profit with the intent to provide commentary, review, education, and scholarly critique.

1.   Denson, Shane. "Afterword: Framing, Unframing, Reframing: Retconning the Transnational Work of Comics." *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives: Comics at the Crossroads.* Eds. Shane Denson, Christina Meyer, Daniel Stein. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013: 271-285.

2.   Chute, Hillary and Marianne DeKoven. "Introduction: Graphic Narrative." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 52.4 (2006): 767-782.

3.   Campbell, Eddie. "Exit Wounds." *Eddie Campbell's Blog.*

4.   Celayo, Armando. "Exit Wounds." *World Literature Today* (1 January 2008).

5.   Bartley, Aryn. "Staging Cosmopolitanism: The Transnational Encounter in Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza.*" *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives: Comics at the Crossroads.* Eds. Shane Denson, Christina Meyer, Daniel Stein. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013: 67-82.

6.   English, James. *The Economy of Prestige.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005: 298.

7.   Modan, Rutu. *Exit Wounds.* Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2010.

8. Troublingly, what little critical work that exists discussing *Exit Wounds* does so as a catalyst for introducing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to readers who are unfamiliar with the situation and, presumably, wouldn't understand it without "a cognitive and affective experience that allows students to access the subject matter" (see Thomas Juneau and Mira Sucharov, "Narratives in Pencil: Using Graphic Novels to Teach Israeli-Palestinian Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* 11.2 (May 2010): 172-183). Thus, in one fell swoop, both Israeli art and comics as a medium are struck mute.

9. Murphy, Tom. "Exit Wounds." *Full-Page Bleed*.

10. The concept of transnationalism as "borderless internationalism" has its roots in essayist Randolph S. Bourne's article in *The Atlantic*'s July 1916 issue, in which Bourne rejects the melting pot theory of cultural assimilation, which he contends "create[s] hordes of [...] cultural outlaws without taste, without standards but those of the mob," instead suggesting that America is "coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors." Later critics like Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Szanton Blanc in *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Ulf Hannerz in *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*, (London: Routledge, 1996) have picked up the term in anthropology and cultural studies.

11. Fernandes, Leela. *Transnational Feminism in the United States: Knowledge, Ethics, and Power*. New York: New York UP, 2013.

12. Fernandes, 10.

13. Architectural perspectives demonstrate draftsmanship (the ability to produce seemingly three-dimensional objects with realistic scaling and perspective), whereas expressive perspectives demonstrate narrative and character development in storytelling visual media. For example, in film the establishing shot of an urban skyline is akin to an architectural perspective, while a close-up on an actor's face is an expressive perspective. For more about verisimilitude versus expression in comics art, see Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, William Morrow, 1994).

14. Barthes, Roland. "Rhetoric of the Image." *Image, Music, Text.* Ed. and trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977: 151-163.

15. Interpellation is, according to French philosopher and linguist Louis Althusser, the process by which ideology, as it is embodied in major social and political institutions (such as schools, religions, and cultural institutions like marriage and familial linkage) constitutes the nature of individual subject identities by "hailing" at them in social interactions; when they are hailed as a component of their subject identity, the subject responds by affirming or denying their subjectivity. In comics, certain national traditions, like large eyes in Japanese *manga* and visuo-verbal sound bubbles in American super-hero comics "hail" to knowing readings such that they function even beyond the boundaries of the comic: a well-placed "BIFF!" or "POW!" on a poster "hails" the comics-reader-subject, forcing them to "own" their subjectivity and respond to it.

16. Barthes, 152.

17. For an examination of the interdependency of Franco-Belgian and American comics at the turn of the 20th century, see Giancarlo, Ascari. "*Fumetto belga, ovvero, seguendo una linea chiara/* Belgian comics: a clear line to follow." *Abitare* 428 (May 2003): 203-4.

18. See, for example, the art of Jean Giraud and Jije's *Jerry Spring* series.

19. Medrano, Juan, Pablo Malo, Jose J. Uriarte, and Ana-Pia Lopez. "Stigma and Prejudice in *Tintin*." *BMJ* 339 (19-26 December 2009): 1406-1407.

20. Ibid., 1407.

21.   Ibid.

22.   Ibid.

23.   Apostolidès, Jean-Marie. *The Metamorphoses of Tintin, or Tintin for Adults*. Trans. Jocelyn Hoy. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010: 10-15.

24.   McCarthy, Tom. *Tintin and the Secret of Literature*. London: Granta, 2006.

25.   Sadoul, Numa. *Tintin et Moi/ Entretiens avec Hergé*. Paris: Casterman, 2004.

26.   McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003: 49-51.

27.   Ibid., 49.

28.   Ibid., 44.

29.   Ibid., 44.

30.   *Exit Wounds,* 22.

31.   Ibid., 21-22.

32.   Ibid., 21-23.

33.   Koby's nose is something of a marvel, changing in size, shape, and location throughout the work to change the expressiveness of his eyes and mouth.

34.   *Exit Wounds*, 31.

35.   Ibid., 172.

36.   Ibid., 148-149.

37.   Ibid., 90-91.

38.   Ibid., 31.

39.   Ibid., 139-140.

40.   A "cosmopolis" is a city inhabited by many worlds' cultures.

41.   Heer, Jeet. "Little Nemo in Comicsland." *Virginia Quarterly Review: A National Journal of Literature & Discussion* 82.2 (Spring 2006): 104-121.

42.   Ibid., 106.

43.   BBC Collective. "Rutu Modan 'Exit Wounds' Interview." *Youtube* video, 5:39. August 8, 2007.

44.   All information from the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has tracked suicide bombing details since the Declaration of Principles in September 1993.

45.   *Exit Wounds*, 68-69.

46.   Ibid., 90-91.

47.   Ibid., 73.

48.   BBC, n.p.

49.   Ibid.

50.   Ibid.

51.   *Exit Wounds*, back cover.

52.   Department of Israeli Cultural Excellence. "Rutu Modan—Illustrator." *ICExcellence.com*.

53.   Sobel, Marc. "The Rutu Modan Interview." *The Comics Journal*, May 29, 2013.

54.   Israeli Cultural Excellence, n.p.

55.   Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003: 9.

56.   English, 291.

57.   Damrosch, 9.

58.   Ibid., 289.

59.   Baetens, Jan. "*Tintin* the Untranslatable." *Sites: The Journal of Twentieth-Century/Contemporary French Studies* 5.2 (2001): 363-371.

60.   Baetens, 365.

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