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Abstract

Review of Wendy Michallat. *French Cartoon Art in the 1960s and 1970s: Pilote hebdomadaire and the Teenager Bande Dessinée*. Leuven UP, 2018. 268 pp.

Keywords

French cartoon art, comics, Bande Dessinée

Wendy Michallat. *French Cartoon Art in the 1960s and 1970s: Pilote hebdomadaire and the Teenager Bande Dessinée*. Leuven UP, 2018. 268 pp.

This book deploys a rich, interdisciplinary inquiry into the political, social, economic, and cultural realities out of which a new sub-genre, teenager comic strips, emerged in France in the second half of the twentieth century. Wendy Michallat is an accomplished cultural critic who deftly analyzes the wide range of societal forces that contributed to the rise and fall of *Pilote hebdomadaire* (*Weekly Pilot*), a magazine whose editors sought to shift from a younger set of readers to an adolescent market as societal upheaval of the 1960s gave birth to a more clearly-defined teenage demographic. This broad lens allows Michallat to track a single publication as a way of understanding youth culture writ large during these tumultuous decades of French intergenerational history. The book is part of Leuven University Press's Studies in European Comics and Graphic Novels, an impressive series that offers important contributions to this growing field of study.

Continuing and expanding upon her previous scholarly work, in this book Michallat combines in-depth research with a strong narrative that holds the reader's attention and a style that is marked by clarity and elegance. She weaves together the story of the growing influence of American popular culture with the broader narrative of post-war France. In this way, she demonstrates the increasing globalization of youth culture and yet still highlights the specificity of French phenomena such as *yé-yé* (French pop music), culture, comic albums like *Astérix*, adult interest in the pedagogical potential of the youth press, and governmental censorship of the youth press influenced from both the left (Communists) and the right (the Catholic church).

At the same time, Michallat narrates a compelling history of the magazine and its key figures: the powerful publisher Georges Dargaud, editors René Goscinny and Jean-Michel Charlier, and now-famous artists like Cabu, Gotlib, and Greg. She exposes how the early days of the magazine continued the type of comics that were popular during the war years before ceding to new formats influenced by publications (like *Mad* magazine in the US and *It* and *Oz* in the UK) as well as the rise of music radio embodied by stations, such as *Radio Luxembourg*, which served as a media partner for the magazine for a time. Michallat details the impact of the comic strip album in addition to the *livre de poche* 'mass-market paperback' as democratizing phenomena within the publishing industry. Her description of how editors desperately sought to capitalize on the emerging youth market clearly delineates the fault lines between the generations that were at the core of young peoples' discontent at the time. *Pilote* underwent numerous re-launches as it attempted to respond to quickly evolving market forces, the rise of both radio and television, and new societal mores.

This book has so much to offer that one hesitates to put forth the following critique: the volume is short on images that would have enhanced its ability to reach non-specialists. Having read more than two hundred pages of finely-documented research on *Pilote*, the reader might still be unable to picture what the magazine looked like. That being said, Michallat provides an extensive bibliography which includes the citation of a website *BD oubliées (Forgotten Comics)* that is a database of all *Pilote* content. There are numerous digitized images available on the internet, so many that one wonders why the press did not opt to launch a parallel website with the publication of this excellent book. While publication costs likely limited the inclusion of images in the book, a companion website would have been a welcome addition, but perhaps copyright issues made this option impossible. In any case, a few more images would have given readers a clearer sense of how the publication morphed visually over time and appealed to young readers over more than two decades.

Those unfamiliar with *Pilote*, even if thoroughly acquainted with a number of its featured artists and their comics, *Astérix* being the most well-known, will likely be interested to learn about this publication and relieved to find that this study is not so hyper-focused on a single magazine that its interest lies primarily in specialists of *bande dessinées* ‘comics.’ This text’s appeal is strong for anyone interested in the social and cultural history of France during this period. Michallat addresses issues related to education, economic development, media expansion, politics, and intergenerational conflict that reach far beyond their expression in comics. Michallat’s exploration of the uniquely French role of high school students in the student demonstrations of the late 1960s and early 1970s is especially interesting. Her scholarship embodies the best of academic writing in that it satisfies the specialist’s need for documentation and deep analysis, while remaining accessible for students and non-specialist readers.

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