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[Screech, Matthew](#) (2020) Book review: Fabrice Boumahdi, Hergé. Le passager du XXe siècle. H-France, 20 (17).

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**Version:** Accepted Version

**Publisher:** Society for French Historical Studies

Please cite the published version

<https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk>

H-France Review Vol. 20 (January 2020), No. 17

Fabrice Boumahdi, *Hergé. Le passager du XXe siècle*. Paris: Editions Honoré Champion, 2017. 247 pages. Figures, notes, bibliography, and indices. £15.00. (pb). ISBN 978-2-7453-4814-2.

Review by Matthew Screech, Manchester Metropolitan University.

*Hergé. Le passager du XXe siècle* proposes a study of Hergé's *Adventures of Tintin* plus an album by album summary. The book argues that Tintin's adventures manifest the twentieth century's major historical and social developments from the 1920s to the late 1970s/early 1980s. A preliminary question arises about the content. An introduction makes clear that *Hergé. Le passager du XXe siècle* is aimed at readers who grew up with Tintin, still read him in adulthood, and collect his albums. Consequently, one wonders why bother with the summary. Couldn't the target audience be expected to know the individual works already? That said, a reminder of Hergé's lesser known creations beyond *The Adventures of Tintin* (for example, *Le testament de monsieur Pump*) is useful.

Boumahdi is strongest when setting Tintin's adventures within a historical framework: a discussion about the prevailing attitudes towards martial arts contextualises Tintin's handiness with his fists; a portrait of a fragile inter-war Belgium caught between opposing ideological forces is convincing; the growing importance of oil coincides with Tintin's Middle Eastern escapades; Tintin's profession reflects the vogue for journalist-explorer heroes in the style of Jack London; Castafiore evinces the burgeoning jet set celebrity and paparazzi culture; the Dupondts draw on the French Guignol as well as on Chaplin. Other insights are given: Abdullah recalls a young Iraqi king; the oft-debated weakening of Tintin's position began in *Objectif lune* when Tournesol takes the initiative; *Tintin au Congo* can be read as critiquing those who would hold Africa back, rather than being simply racist. However, several of Boumahdi's contextualisations require enlarging, including the following: Kipling's racism (as per "the white man's burden") deserves a mention given the colonial context; what is the connection between Ben Kalish Ezab, *The Coran* and *The Arabian Nights*? *Les bijoux de la Castafiore* may well be inspired by "la plus pure tradition du vaudeville français" although we need to know more about how (p. 100); more on the differences and similarities with *Madame Butterfly* would also be welcome; what is postmodern about *Tintin et les Picaros*?

Over the course of the book, Boumahdi makes a number of questionable assertions about *The Adventures of Tintin*. I shall provide some examples but there are others. Tintin does not atone for his fault ("réparer sa faute") in *Tintin au Congo* (p. 30): having caused a derailment, he bosses the Congolese into putting the train back on the tracks. Dawson, the Shanghai police chief in *Le lotus bleu*, is probably British rather than American: the British held the senior ranks in Shanghai

during the 1930s, the soldiers in the album have British colonial uniforms, and Dawson has a Sikh army at his disposal; besides, the Mosquito aircraft Dawson sells in *L'affaire Tournesol* are British made. Contrary to Boumahdi's assertion, the fact that no British or Russian (let alone American) scientists travel on the expedition in the wartime album *L'étoile mystérieuse* can hardly be dismissed as a detail. With regard to the same album, how can *L'étoile mystérieuse* be "la seule incursion de l'auteur belge dans le domaine du fantastique", when *Les sept boules de cristal* and *Le temple du soleil* hinge on an Inca mummy's curse? Several debateable points are made about the wider world beyond Tintin's adventures too. Here are just two instances: saying that South American leaders have always had an inferiority complex towards Europe is a sweeping generalisation, not least given their sometimes fierce nationalism; Boumahdi applauds Lawrence of Arabia's courage and heroism, but he passes over the supremacist assumptions underpinning this "White Saviour" in silence.

More serious is Boumahdi's reluctance to engage with Tintin scholarship. Again, I restrict myself to some representative examples. Tintin is said to be a latter-day medieval knight; that point was made sixty years ago when Vandromme called Tintin "l'incarnation parfaite du preux moderne, le Roland de la société contemporaine".[1] Vandromme's book has an entry in the bibliography, but it is not sourced in the main body of the text. Somewhat confusingly, Nimier does get a textual reference, although readers are not told that Nimier wrote the preface to Vandromme, and he is not in the bibliography. Moreover, the comparison between Haddock and Baudelaire's lost sailor neglects to mention Campario's work on the parallels between Hergé and that nineteenth century poet.[2] Not acknowledging Vandromme and Campario could conceivably be oversights, but other lacunae are downright glaring. We hear that few critics define Hergé's graphic style, which is known as *ligne claire*; yet Sterckx, Lecigne, Fresnault-Deruelle and Gravett discuss that very question in detail;[3] one wonders why none of them are entered in the bibliography. Furthermore, how could anyone devote entire chapters to the media age, or to sex and psychology in *The Adventures of Tintin*, without mentioning the vitally important research done by Sterckx, Apostolidès and Tisseron?[4] Ditto for the chapter on humour in Tintin, which ignores Groensteen's book on the subject.[5] Speaking of baffling omissions, why does the chapter on humour remain silent about Tournesol, and why do neither Tournesol nor the Dupondts appear in the index of Hergé's characters?

The conclusion to *Hergé. Le passager du XXe siècle* contains more unsubstantiated statements. We are told that only a few artists continued *ligne claire* after Hergé. Unfortunately, that claim is wrong. Lecigne's aforementioned landmark study *Les héritiers d'Hergé* proves that, after falling out of fashion in the late 1960s and early 1970s in France (though not in the Netherlands), *ligne claire* flourished from the mid-1970s until the early 1980s (for example in works by Tardi, a major talent who gets no mention); what is more, *ligne claire* gave rise to a genre dubbed *neo-classicisme*. More recently, a chapter by the present reviewer has demonstrated that *ligne claire* persists up to 2013.[6] Boumahdi also declares that, when Hergé gradually withdrew from comics during the 1970s, sex, eroticism and derision became the new mainstays of the form; but what about the *nouveau réaliste* innovations detailed by Lecigne and Tamine, or the numerous other developments chronicled by Groensteen?[7] The argument flirts with self-contradiction when we hear two pages later that youth culture at the time became intellectualised.

The above criticisms notwithstanding, *Hergé. Le passager du XXe siècle* is quite readable. It is written in a friendly and even chatty register, which frequently draws (ironically one hopes) on well-worn national tropes: Mexico is "le pays du sombrero" (p. 18), Australia is "le pays des

Kangourous” (p. 48), Switzerland is “le pays du chocolat et des banques” (p. 138), and so on. As a result, reading the book is rather like listening to a talkative enthusiast at a fan convention. However, *Hergé. Le passager du XXe siècle* is neither the most original, nor the most thoroughly researched study to be written about Hergé.

## NOTES

- [1] Pol Vandromme, *Le monde de Tintin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 109.
- [2] Jean-François Campario, *Baudelaire/Hergé. Penser la création* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).
- [3] Pierre Sterckx, “Les silences du dessinateur,” in Pierre Sterckx and Benoît Peeters eds., *Hergé dessinateur: 60 ans d'aventures de Tintin* (Tournai: Casterman, 1988), pp. 4–18. Bruno Lecigne, *Les héritiers d'Hergé* (Brussels: Magic Strip, 1983). Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, *Hergé ou le secret de l'image* (Brussels: Moulinsart, 1999), pp. 13–24. Paul Gravett, “Hergé & the Clear Line. Part 1”, *Paul Gravett*, 20 Apr.2008, [http://www.paulgravett.com/articles/article/herge\\_the\\_clear\\_line](http://www.paulgravett.com/articles/article/herge_the_clear_line) date cited 10/07/19. Gravett, “Hergé & the Clear Line. Part 2”, *Paul Gravett*, 11 May 2008, [http://www.paulgravett.com/articles/article/herge\\_the\\_clearline](http://www.paulgravett.com/articles/article/herge_the_clearline) date cited 10/07/19
- [4] Pierre Sterckx, *Tintin et les médias* (Modave: Le Hêtre Pourpre, 1997). Serge Tisseron, *Tintin chez le psychanalyste* (Paris: Aubier Archimbaud, 1985). Tisseron, *Tintin et les secrets de famille* (Paris: Segquier, 1990); Tisseron, *Tintin et le secret d'Hergé* (Paris: Presse de la Cité, 1993). Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Dans la peau de Tintin* (Paris: Impressions Nouvelles, 2010).
- [5] Thierry Groensteen, *Le rire de Tintin* (Brussels: Moulinsart, 2006).
- [6] Matthew Screech, “Continuing Clear Line 1983–2013,” in Joe Sutcliff Sanders ed., *The Comics of Hergé. When the Lines are not so Clear* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), pp. 79–97.
- [7] Bruno Lecigne and Jean Tamine, *Fac-Similé* (Paris: Futuropolis, 1983). Thierry Groensteen, *La bande dessinée depuis 1975* (Paris: MA Éditions, 1985).

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ISSN 1553-9172