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Fred in Wonderland: Carrollian Nonsense Effects in *Philémon*

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Introduction

THE COMIC STRIP ARTIST ARISTIDES OTHON (1931–2013), BETTER known as Fred, is a big seller in France. Fred's magnum opus, an adventure series titled *Philémon,* appeared intermittently in the Paris-based magazine *Pilote* from 1965, and it was republished in hardback albums.[1] The hero Philémon has fantasmagorical escapades on an archipelago, whose islands form the letters spelling "Atlantique", in the Atlantic Ocean. Fred began his career drawing cartoons for *Punch* and *The New Yorker*, and he collaborated on a one-off strip with Terry Gilliam (Fred, qtd. in Guillaume 14; Fred and Gilliam 12–17). Nevertheless, *Philémon* was not translated into English, and it remains virtually unknown to Anglophones.

Bernard Toussaint wrote an influential study on Fred in collaboration with Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle. Toussaint and Fresnault-Deruelle allude to similarities between *Philémon* and Lewis Carroll's Alice stories, as well as to Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (9, 58). Carroll and McCay were praised frequently by Fred, as in his interview with Glénat-Gottin (6). Toussaint and Fresnault-Deruelle also make further comparisons with Dante, André Breton and Gérard de Nerval amongst others. Their wide-ranging study discusses Fred's scenarios, characters, graphic style, and dialogues, as well as offering some psychological and socio-political interpretations. Toussaint and Fresnault-Deruelle also demonstrate how Fred, defying convention,

integrates the narrative characteristics of comics into his strips: Protagonists swing on panel frames or fall into panels below (59, 94). Toussaint and Fresnault-Deruelle show too how Fred divides large pictures up into several smaller vignettes, each one showing the hero at a different point in the action. In particular, the two critics examine a famous page where Philémon clambers over a huge boxer dog (74–75): Readers perceive the animal as a whole, but can also follow Philémon's movements across and down it frame by frame (Fred, "Simbabbad de Batbad"; *Philémon* 2: 27).

Later critics follow the pattern set by Toussaint and Fresnault-Deruelle. They allude to similarities between Fred, Carroll and McCay, sometimes citing Carrollian nonsense but without giving details (Renard 121; Lecigne 93; Peeters 153; Groensteen, *La BD* 108, 110). Critics also note Fred's unconventional page layouts, enlarging upon how he interrupts normal left/right and top/bottom reading (Pierre 140–41; Renard 161; Deyzieux, Marcel et al. 16; Peeters 71–73, 94–96). Fred's incorporating the narrative characteristics of comics into his stories provokes further comment, as does Philémon's stepping into the white spaces (or "gutters") between panels (Lecigne 87; Masson 58; Tisseron 74–75). Two Anglophone critics briefly mention Fred. Miller argues that Philémon exemplifies postmodernism's loss of a referent in external reality: his adventures "can take him not into a realist fictional world but only onto the other letters: his voyage is confined to the signifier" (127); Grove reconsiders Fred's famous page (26).

Fred's recent death, coupled with the approaching 50th anniversary of Philémon's birth, makes the time exceptionally right to look at him anew. The present article examines the association between Fred and Carroll more closely than has yet been undertaken. Concentrating on pages from *Philémon* not hitherto analysed, I investigate instances where Fred produces effects akin to Carroll's purely verbal nonsense. I also expand upon differences and similarities between Fred and McCay.[2] The prime focus is on a device peculiar to comics: sequenced panels. My conclusion evaluates to what extent Fred's passing left French-language comics with a legacy. Alice's and Nemo's adventures are familiar to many English speakers, but a brief summary of *Philémon* may be required. My theoretical approach must also be outlined before we consider specific examples. Let us begin with the plot.

A difference among Philémon, Alice, and Nemo is immediately apparent: Alice's adventures are evidently fiction; nevertheless, the Victorian milieu she leaves to start them, and where she returns to at the end, exists beyond reasonable doubt. Similarly, Nemo's Slumberland is fictitious; even so, the American suburbia where he awakes is deemed to exist in reality. Fred, on the other hand, suggests that the place Philémon inhabits before and after each adventure is pure make-believe. As a result, the hero's other world becomes one fiction embedded within another. In the early albums, the impression that Fred has imagined the framing narrative is created primarily by depicting Philémon's rustic, vaguely meridional locale in flagrantly unrealistic colors. For example, trees may be orange, blue, yellow, or pink. The impression is strengthened in later albums as, after Philémon returns home, the final panel curls up like a sheet of artist's drawing paper.

Inserting fiction within yet more fiction is an ancient practise dating back to Homer's *Odyssey* and to the Arabian Nights, both of which Fred read (qtd. in Guillaume 26, 109). Fred uses the structure to create a species of what Lucien Dällenbach termed the "fictional *mise en abyme*": Fred's stories within stories "aim to affirm themselves as *narrative*," by sending out the powerful signal that "*I am literature, and so is the narrative that embeds me*"(57; Dällenbach's italics). The *mise en abyme* locates the main protagonist inside an overtly fictitious universe. Toussaint and Fresnault-Deruelle also mention Fred's unusually overt fictitiousness, but with reference to his artwork rather than to his plot structure: 'Contrairement à nombre de ses confrères, Fred n'oublie jamais que ses dessins ne sont que des dessins. . ..' ("Unlike many of his colleagues, Fred never forgets that his drawings are only drawings. . ..") (55).[3]

Once Philémon, Alice and Nemo enter their respective other worlds, they undergo broadly similar experiences. All three meet anthropomorphic animals, regal figures, and mythological creatures, along with bizarre hybrids, which combine the animate with the inanimate. Examples from *Philémon* include a palace that grows like a plant and a lighthouse-cum-owl. Philémon, Alice and Nemo (unlike conventional adventure heroes) are frequently bewildered by adult authorities (such as courts and armies), who enforce arbitrary laws. Yet, even the most threatening characters are perplexing and unpredictable rather than villainous. Extravagant costumes, uniforms and

liveries lend a theatrical quality, with Fred and McCay heightening the spectacle: *Philémon* has a traveling circus, a floating theater, and a bullfight with *pianos sauvages* ("wild pianos"); *Little Nemo in Slumberland* has parades, fanfares, acrobats, clowns, and jugglers. Philémon enters his other world more histrionically than Alice or Nemo: he requires, amongst other things, a circus hoop, an inflatable shell, and a giant zip in the earth.

Fred and McCay, by virtue of their form, conjure up the other world with pictures. As Richard Marschall remarks when introducing McCay, Slumberland has finely detailed evocations combining elegant, slender lines with geometrically precise shapes reminiscent of art nouveau; delicate pastel shades are offset by fresher hues and by bolder, thicker strokes comparable to Post-Impressionism or to *Belle Époque* posters (McCay introd. 2:8, introd. 3:7). McCay also employed panels of different shape and size, varying the layouts according to the narrative's demands.

Fred said, he never came across *Little Nemo in Slumberland* as a youngster, although he did read Walt Disney's *Journal de Mickey,* whose bright colors and innocent lines appear in early *Philémon* (qtd. in Guillaume 32). By the mid/late 1960s Fred's artwork was growing more flamboyant and elaborate. Philémon ventures into ornate, labyrinthine edifices; he travels on gratuitously decorated sea-going vessels and outlandish flying machines; there is an abundance of blues, pinks, yellows, violets, greens, and oranges. The fresh, somewhat naïve palette, quirky contraptions, foppish regalia, and immoderate facial hair, all recall the Beatles' whimsically psychedelic *Yellow Submarine,* a film praised by Fred (qtd. in Glénat-Gottin 6).

As Hugh Haughton demonstrates, Alice's adventures have elicited various interpretations: biographical, psychoanalytical, social, and more (Carroll introd. xi–xiv). Likewise, Philémon and Nemo may reveal truths about their creators, allegorize Freudian complexes, comment on society, or mean something else. Nevertheless, I neither look for hidden meanings in *Philémon,* nor speculate about why Fred dreamed up his other world. Exegetic approaches do not suit the present discussion. As the purpose of my article is to investigate how Fred produces nonsense, the theoretical approach is informed rather by research into the way the genre functions: in particular Elizabeth Sewell's landmark study of nonsense logic *The Field of Nonsense*; and Jean-Jacques Lecercle's *Philosophy of Nonsense,* which analyses the gen-

re's linguistic/meta-linguistic aspects. My definition of nonsense in the coming pages is based on those two works.

Producing Nonsense with Panels 1: Going Outside Frames

Alice's other world is peopled by characters who employ carefully constructed arguments, but to put forward ludicrous notions. For example, the Duchess asserts: "Maybe it's always pepper that makes people hot-tempered... and vinegar that makes them sour—and camomile that makes them bitter—and—barley-sugar and such things that make children sweet-tempered" (*Wonderland* 78, ch. 9). The Duchess's reasoning is coherent and syntactically correct. However, by exaggerating literal meanings at the expense of metaphors, she posits that foodstuffs hold sway over peoples' temperament. Her surfeit of logic, going beyond anything sensible, establishes connections between terms which are not equivalent.

Carroll's use of language has too many subtleties to be fully recounted here, but, as Lecercle states: "Literalism...is a notorious characteristic of nonsense" (148). Examples abound. The Mad Hatter and the White King relate pronouns and abstract nouns ("nobody" and "time") to people who literally exist in flesh and blood (*Wonderland* 63, ch. 7, *Looking-Glass* 197, ch. 7). Metaphorical idioms are understood strictly literally: for instance, Alice's "I beg your pardon" provokes the White King's response that "it isn't respectable to beg" (*Looking-Glass* 196, ch. 7). Puns provide opportunities for inappropriately applying a literal meaning when the mouse tells a dry story after everyone gets soaked (*Wonderland* 25, ch. 3). Homonyms perform a similar function when the Mock Turtle explains that a tortoise taught us and that lessons lessen daily (*Wonderland* 83, 85, ch. 9). Recognizable grammatical structures (e.g., prefixes and suffixes) can create neologisms if applied with excessively literal correctness: thus Humpty Dumpty gets "un-birthday" presents, and if "beautify" exists then why not "uglify" (*Looking-Glass* 185, ch.6, *Wonderland* 85, ch. 9).

Carrollian nonsense relishes paradox. The characters' assertions, far from being gibberish, are systematic and consciously worked out; however, the logical connections they establish support preposterous claims. In consequence nonsense, despite its numerous transgressions, ultimately sides with law and order (Sewell 44–54, 122; Lecercle 2,

24–25, 50, 68). The genre even draws attention to the generally unstated rules governing common usage, precisely by flouting them so blatantly; those rules are momentarily broken but they are not abolished; they predate their temporary subversion, and they remain in force afterwards; that is why the characters' discourse lacks any lasting currency in the real world.

Philémon and Nemo never get embroiled in such nonsense conversations, wordplay being uncharacteristic of McCay. Toussaint and Fresnault-Deruelle, who discuss Fred's use of words in detail, point out that Fred does share Carroll's taste for punning and for taking metaphors literally (104–08). Yet despite such jesting, my focus remains on the language of comic strip panels rather than on written words. Let us now consider panels more closely.

Comic strip panels are pictures arranged in a deliberate sequence. Fresnault-Deruelle recognizes the importance of their frames when he describes panels thus: "Nous avons sous les yeux une succession d'images séparées par des blancs et entourées d'une ligne noire continue, fermée, de forme rectangulaire." ("We have in front of us a series of pictures separated by white spaces and surrounded by a continuous, closed, rectangular black line" [*La BD* 19]). Fresnault-Deruelle elaborates that each panel evokes the reality wherein the diagesis unfolds: "Le contenu du rectangle se présente donc comme un résumé, ou plutôt comme une synthèse cohérente et représentative de la 'réalité' à tel ou tel moment donné." "Thus the content of the rectangle is presented as a summary, or rather as a coherent, representative synthesis of 'reality' at any given moment" Panels give artists almost infinite means to conjure up that diagetic reality: graphic styles, colors, angled shots, close ups and much more.

A page from 1973 shows how Fred can generate nonsense with panels ("A l'heure du second T" 32; *Philémon* 2: 153. See Fig. 1). As dawn breaks over the archipelago, Philémon remarks to his friend Barthélemy "Le jour se lève." Philémon is employing a metaphorical expression meaning "It is getting light" (literally "The day is rising"). As in Carroll, the idiom is taken literally. Philémon is corrected by a passing workman who says: "Erreur . . .Ce n'est pas le jour qui se lève, c'est la nuit" ("You're wrong. . .It's not the day that's rising, it's the night.") In the bottom panel, a gang of men haul the starry sky up as though it were a theater backdrop. They pull on a rope which runs through a Heath-Robinsonesque contraption, out of the panel frame,

and on to a pulley in the margin at the bottom of the page. The rope then runs up the page's left hand margin to the top, where the night is being wound up on a roller like a piece of fabric.

Fred complies with the rules of draftsmanship, just as Carroll complied with those of logic and syntax. Everything is composed strictly in accordance with best practise as recommended by the drawing manuals (e.g., Duc 1: 146–56; Masson 31–35). Fred carefully avoids
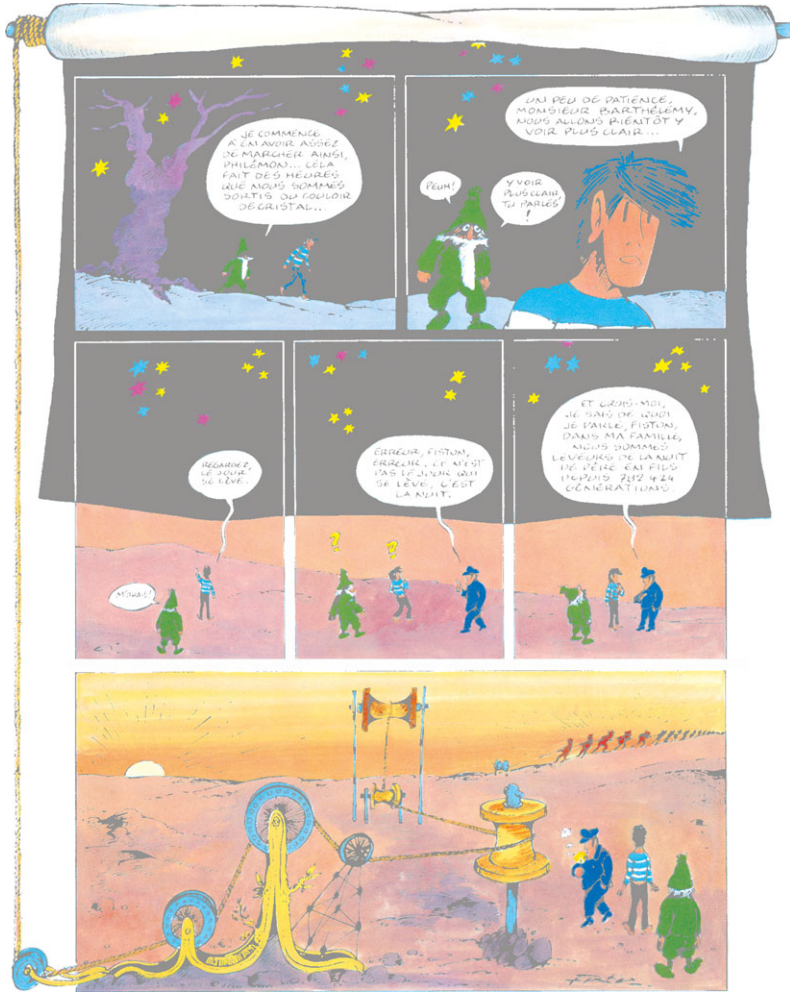

FIG. 1. The night rises. Philémon. L'intégrale: vol. 2. ©DARGAUD 2011 by Fred.

exact symmetry by dividing the last panel into two roughly unequal parts: the workman's contraption lies slightly left of the vertical axis, while the horizon runs along above the horizontal axis. Fred also locates key points of interest on the diagonal axes: Philémon and company stand on one such axis; in visual counterpoint, the line of men haul up the night along another; they stretch away into the distance, respecting the rules of perspective and proportion.

However, for all Fred's punctiliousness, he is subverting comic strip language. The night rises not only because of the workmen inside the panel frames, but also because of the pulley, rope, and roller on the outside. As noted, panels normally conjure up the narrative's spatio-temporal reality (i.e., its diagesis). Yet here the pulley, rope, and roller are indispensable. Their key contribution from outside the panels lends them an equivalent diagetic status to what is happening inside. Fred, like many characters Alice meets, is bringing literalism to bear on the language of the form: Speaking strictly literally, the equivalence he establishes is indisputably true. Everything on the page does indeed have an equal status in diagetic reality: Fred's overtly fictitious universe is pure make-believe, wherever it may be drawn. As with Carroll the infringement is brazen but ephemeral, and the rule of law prevails. The proposition that the night rises has no abiding validity, and the sequence ends up reminding us of the generally unwritten rule about staying within panels; on the next page the pulley, rope, and roller vanish without a trace.

Fred's use of panels was extremely rare before *Philémon*. Nemo stayed within his frames, although McCay did touch on the fact that the hero was literally just a drawing: at one point, the frame collapses around Nemo while he complains about what is going on (McCay 3: 26; *NYH* 8 Nov. 1908). A little-known strip by Desclez and Noiret titled "Yvan Leteigneux Phylactèrophobe" is Fred's close forerunner, because the frontier between the worlds inside and outside the frames fleetingly becomes porous. Yvan stands on a panel frame pouring ink over the characters below. He steps down into the picture to wreak havoc, until the editor chases him away and the status quo is restored.

"A l'heure du second T" is not the only occasion Fred takes the story beyond frames. Philémon flies out on a witch's broomstick, but they go back in again once she has granted his wish ("Cases tout risques"; *Philémon* 2: 45–54). Philémon and his uncle are tipped out

when a panel lists over; they sit on the upper frame of the panel below until a hot sun makes them jump down into the picture ("Le secret de Félicien"; *Philémon* 3: 145–47). Philémon climbs out for a third time; he wanders through a labyrinthine house of cards comprising still more panels, only to find himself back inside his frames ("L'enfer des épouvantails"; *Philémon* 3: 185–89).

Philémon's venturings outside panels, like Carroll's characters, subversively posit literal connections; only here, the connections are between the diagetic and nondiagetic realities on either side of the frame. By linking up the two, Fred underlines the literally inescapable truism that Philémon's adventures are only drawings, be they inside or outside. Yet the breach with common usage, for all its logical justifications, is short-lived and, paradoxically, the law is upheld. Philémon is a fictional comic strip character, and the very idea of him existing outside his panels is preposterous, so he goes back where he belongs.

Producing Nonsense with Panels II: Over-running the Gutters

Characters in Philémon's Alice's and Nemo's other worlds share features which we have not yet discussed: they execute impossible movements through space and they abruptly change size. *Through the Looking-Glass* has several impossible movements: when Alice jumps across the chessboard, the scene changes from a railway carriage to woodland and then to a shop (148, 174; ch. 3, 5). In *Alice in Wonderland,* the heroine repeatedly grows and shrinks (14–17, 32–36; ch. 1, 4). Carroll relates those narrative developments by breaking up the text with rows of asterisks, by concise descriptions, by Alice's internal monologues and/or by her dialogues with other characters.

Philémon, with its greater emphasis on action, has more movements and changes in size than the Alice books. Those occurrences are often evoked by sequences where images, defying convention, overrun from one panel into another. Characters, objects, and décor do not always stop at the edge of the frame as they should; instead, they bridge the intervening gutters and they extend on into neighboring panels. Toussaint and Fresnault-Deruelle point out that the technique was pioneered by McCay before becoming a Fred trademark (61).

McCay had already used overrunning décor to depict dreamlike vistas with palatial architecture, and Fred did likewise. Less frequently, McCay employed overruns to evoke impossible movements through space. For example, a sequence has six panels arranged in two columns, three down by two across (2: 51; *NYH* 1 Dec. 1907). A pillar spans the three adjacent panels of each column across the central gutter. In every panel Nemo and friends converse. As a result, whenever the columns are read from left to right, the characters shift their position in relation to the central pillar: in the first column they are on the left of it, but in the second column they are on the right. McCay was, however, more inclined to evoke impossible movements and changes of size by other means, which Fred also occasionally employed. These include abrupt changes of scene, repeating similar actions in different décor, characters growing or shrinking from one picture to the next, and shortening or elongating panels.

Fred's most innovative sequences of overruns between panels generate a graphic form of nonsense. The effect can be powerful in combat scenes. These are of course staples of adventure comics, but they are less prevalent in Carroll where battles tend to be verbal: the duel between the knight and the Jabberwocky lasts a mere two lines; the fight between the lion and the unicorn is obscured by dust, and it ceases soon after Alice arrives (*Looking-Glass* 132, 198–200; ch.1, 7). During one-five-panel sequence taking up three quarters of a page, Philémon, riding on a centaur, is attacked by animate/inanimate Buffet-Carnivores; those bizarre hybrids extend from the two upper panels down into the three lower panels ("L'arche du A" 31; *Philémon* 2: 186. See Fig. 2). Philémon is thrown off the centaur behind the Buffet-Carnivores in the upper panels, but he hits the ground in front of them in the lower panels. He thus executes a physically impossible movement through space. Moreover, through the paradoxical nature of nonsense, Fred conjures up Philémon's unrealistic trajectory by imitating reality too literally.

The question of imitating reality deserves further consideration. In western art, the preoccupation with mimesis dates back to antiquity. Already in the fourth century BC, Aristotle's *Poetics* had postulated that art was mimetic by nature. For example: "The poet is engaged in imitation, just like the painter or anyone else who produces visual images. . .." (42; bk. 11.1 ch. 25). Almost one thousand five hundred years later, the Renaissance theorist Alberti's *De Pictura* (1435) sys-

FIG. 2. Philémon's impossible trajectory. Philémon. L'intégrale: vol. 2. © DARGAUD 2011 by Fred.

tematized the rules of perspective and proportion. Alberti urged artists still more explicitly to imitate visible reality: "As painting aims to represent things seen, let us note how in fact things are seen" (64; bk 2 par. 30). Many artists still respect the injunctions to imitate, by depicting external reality according to the traditional rules. Over centuries, exceptionally rigorous adherence to the long-standing

mimetic orthodoxy has come to be viewed as artistic literalism: Webster defines literalism pertaining to art as: "Fidelity to observable fact. REALISM" (3: 1320). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines literalism in fine art thus: "The disposition to represent objects (occas. to interpret representations) faithfully, without any idealisation" (8: 1027).

Of course, even the most faithful mimetists only ever imitate their subjects within reasonable limits. The everyday life depicted in realist masterpieces like Jean-François Millet's *Glaneuses* is assumed to exist beyond the artist's frame; nevertheless, the scene itself stays within the confines of the canvas. The same is true of comics. Hergé used overrunning background décor to make Tintin's party of climbers look dwarfed by the Himalyas (35). Yet aside from that notable exception, Hergé's accurately documented pictures of real places do not exceed their panel borders. Fred's Buffets-Carnivores, on the other hand, fail to stop at the edge of the picture as one might expect. Quite exceptionally, they run on over into contiguous panels, while still remaining in compliance with perspective and proportion.

Fred's overruns treat the Buffets-Carnivores as though they are material entities which literally exist rather than as drawn simulacra —after all, the real world (unlike the comic strip diagesis) is not held neatly within frames. The artist is depicting his subject with the exactitude of too literal a copyist: in exaggeratedly rigorous accordance with "fidelity to observable fact," his Buffets-Carnivores continue beyond the frame as they would do in real life. Of course, Fred's fastidious correctness exceeds anything remotely sensible. He is drawing a comic and so whatever he depicts does not continue in external reality, but creates overruns between panels instead.

Benoît Peeters shows why comic strip panels are not equivalent to one another: their whole raison d'être is to divide the narrative up into separate, sequenced actions. When explaining why panels are so vital to comics, Peeters is specific: "En dehors du format général de la page...l'unique impératif est de partager la planche en un certain nombre de segments, afin de séparer les actions qui dans le récit se succèdent." ("Apart from the general format of the page...the only requirement is to divide up the strip into a certain number of segments, so as to separate the actions which follow one another in the narra-tive." [20]). Fred, like characters speaking nonsense, is putting forward an impossible notion by forging literal connections between nonequivalent terms: but here, the connections are between the pan-

els of a comic. Fred's overrunning Buffet-Carnivores, by connecting separate panels, let the reader compare where Philémon falls off with where he lands; their presence at those two different moments prompts us visualize the hero's unrealistic flightpath.

Other sequences are less elaborate. After the night has risen, Philémon, Barthélemy, and the workman stand on the horizon to the left of the contraption ("A l'heure du second T" 33; *Philémon* 2: 154). A pulley on the machine extends into the following panel, almost completing a circle. Very little time passes between the two panels, as the dialogue in the second panel carries on directly from the first. Yet that second panel shows the same three characters standing in the foreground and to the right of the pulley, rather than in the background and to its left. Philémon, Barthélemy, and the workmen have suddenly drawn closer in inordinately little time. Here, the overrunning pulley provides the requisite element of comparability: its presence in two panels permits readers to see where the characters are before and after they move.

Fred also employs overruns connecting panels to convey physically impossible changes in size. In "L'île des Brigadiers," Philémon is captured by characters resembling wooden marionettes called Brigadiers. A four-panel sequence shows a Brigadier advancing up a staircase and then going round behind a pillar (26; *Philémon* 2: 67. See Fig. 3). The pillar spans the gutter between the second and third panels, while its circular base extends down into the fourth panel below. During the first three panels the nearer the Brigadier draws the bigger he gets, in accordance with the rules of perspective and proportion. In the fourth panel the Brigadier, having gone round behind the pillar, passes in front of its base, but something strange has happened: the Brigadier has suddenly shrunk. The sheer impossibility of that notion puts dramatic emphasis on the abruptly flouted rules. As if to heighten the absurdity, a corner of the Brigadier's cloak protrudes from the third panel down into the fourth.

The overrunning pillar plays a role in creating nonsense analogous to the Buffet-Carnivores and to the pulley: it exceeds the limits of the frame as though it literally existed in physical reality as a material entity, rather than just being drawn in a comic. Yet paradoxically that overrunning element, by enabling comparability between panels, simultaneously produces a profoundly unrealistic illusion; in this case, that the Brigadier has got smaller. "Le secret
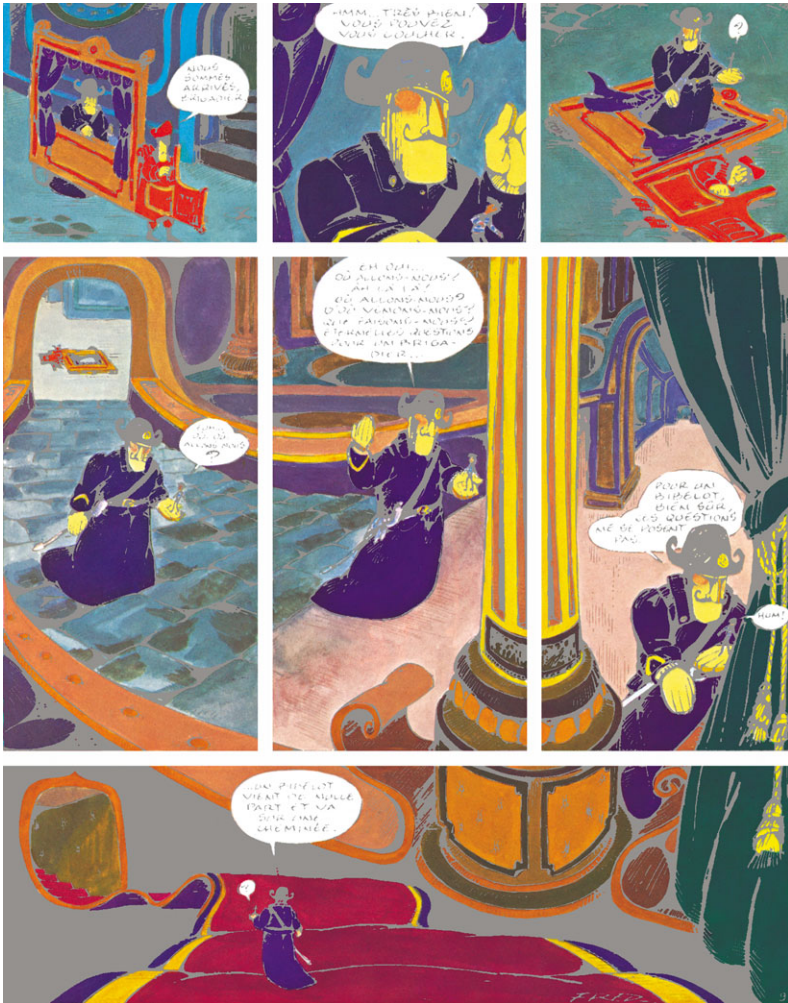
FIG. 3. The shrinking Brigadier. Philémon. L'intégrale: vol. 2. © DAR-GAUD 2011 by Fred.

de Félicien" achieves a similar effect: Philémon and his uncle go behind a haystack spanning the gutter between two panels; they subsequently emerge in front of it, having inexplicably shrunk (63; *Philémon* 3: 121).

Some of Fred's more complex layouts use overruns connecting panels to convey impossible movements through space and impossible

changes in size at the same time. A desert sequence has six rectangular panels arranged in two columns taking up the top third of the page ("Simbabbad de Batbad" 35; *Philémon* 3: 26. See Fig. 4). Philémon's internal monologue flows on without stopping from one panel to another, and his words make equal sense whether they are read from top to bottom or from left to right. In the left hand column Philémon's head is in the top panel, his body is in the middle panel and his feet are at the bottom; the desert in the background remains the same in each case. As a result, whenever the column is read from top to bottom, Philémon seems to spurt upwards compared to his surroundings. Then Philémon reverts to normality when the right hand column is read. He has wandered off into the distance, becoming commensurately small.

However, the columns can just as well be read across from left to right row by row and downwards. When read like that, the desert background runs on over the gutter between columns, as does a red sun. Yet read thus, Philémon's movements are equally preposterous. In the left hand column Philémon is to the left of the overrunning red sun, but in the right column he is suddenly on its right. Moreover, Philémon stands in the foreground of the left hand column, whereas in the right hand column he is on the horizon; consequently, readers come and go between Philémon growing larger on the left and shrinking back to normal size again on the right. As in our earlier example from McCay, the artist creates the illusion of a character repeatedly altering position relative to overrunning décor. Yet with *Philémon,* the character's left/right movements are supplemented by changes in distance and in size. Moreover, whichever way the columns are read, the pink sun makes impossible movements through the sky. In the left hand column the pink sun is to the left of the red sun; in the right hand column it is to the right, having rotated 180 degrees.

Fred's sequence, like many a Carrollian argument, is a model of coherence and precision. In compliance with best practise, Fred studiously avoids symmetry: the red sun is approximately two-thirds to the right of the central gutter between columns; Philémon is slightly to the left of every panel's vertical axis of symmetry; the horizon runs along just below every panel's horizontal axis; the two pink suns on the diagonals are equidistant from the horizon and from the panel's edge; the red sun (like the
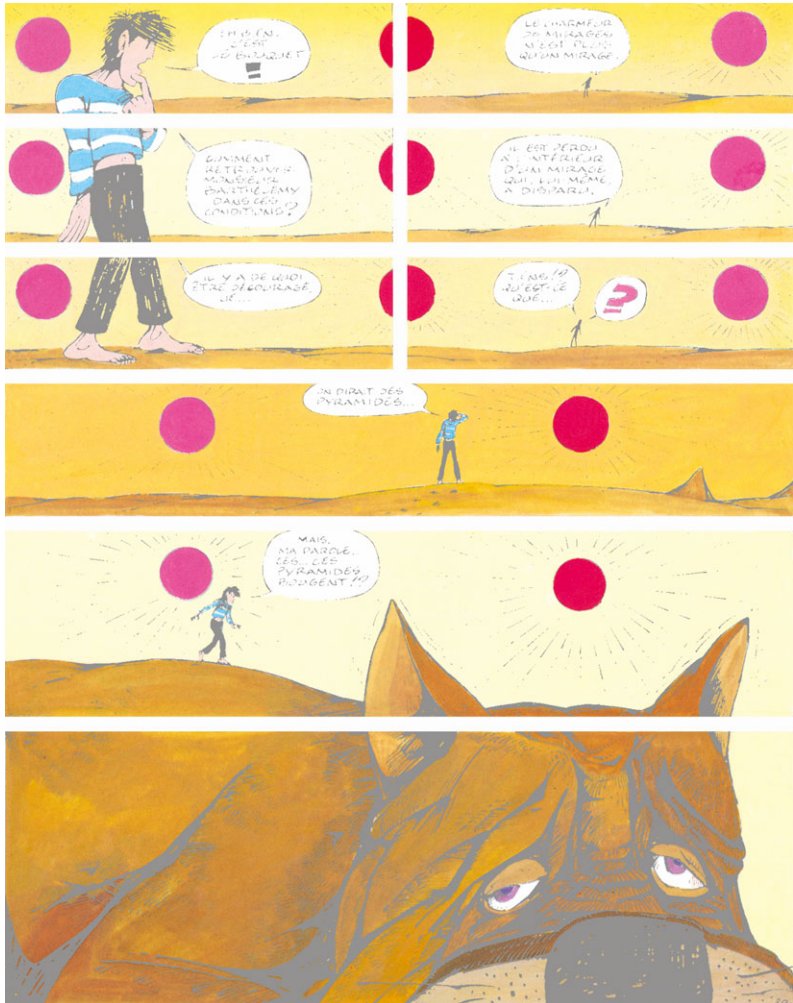
FIG. 4. Strange occurrences in the desert. Philémon. L'intégrale: vol. 3. ©
DARGAUD 2011 by Fred.

overrunning pulley and the pillar's base) not only connects panels,
but also pleasingly brings a circle nearer to completion. Yet Fred's
construction, again like Carrollian arguments, is deliberately calcu-
lated to convey ludicrous propositions.

We could enumerate further examples. However, those studied are
sufficient to shed some light on the way Fred produces nonsense with

panels. Despite certain similarities, Fred and Carroll are more inclined than McCay to structure their other worlds by a peculiar form of literalism. Carroll's effects are produced chiefly through characters conversing with Alice. Fred, using comic strip language, takes the role of Alice's interlocutors upon himself; like characters talking nonsense, he breaks with common usage, by cleverly constructing logical connections between non-equivalent terms. Firstly we saw Fred briefly connecting the diagetic and nondiagetic realities by placing elements outside panel frames. By that means Fred highlights the undeniable, literal truth that everything on the page is imaginary wherever it is drawn. Next we saw how Fred, expanding upon McCay's earlier experiments, connects unattached panels which separate the actions. Fred explores the possibilities of elements overrunning between panels more extensively than previous artists: he makes characters as well as décor overrun; his overruns reach both down into the panels below and up into the panels above; he depicts impossible movements and changes of size not found in McCay, or indeed in Carroll. When Philémon, Buffet-Carnivores, the pulley, the pillar and the desert overrun, Fred takes "fidelity to observable fact" (i.e. for literalism in art) well beyond his call of duty. Our literally minded artist displays undue reverence toward the time- honored precepts about being "engaged in imitation" and noting "how in fact things are seen:" he extends his obviously fictitious universe beyond each panel, depicting it as though it literally existed in the material world as a physical reality, rather than just being drawn inside frames.

Finally Fred, like Carroll, paradoxically sides with law and order against disorder. The ingenious breaches with standard practise are legion, but they are short-lived and untenable. Philémon inevitably goes back inside his sequenced images. Fred's visually arresting assemblages of overruns focus attention on the still prevailing rule that pictures belong within panel frames. His unorthodox constructions barely last one page, and his connections between panels put forward ideas which lack any currency in the real world.

Fred's Legacy

Philémon defied existing genres for mid-1960s adventure comics: it was neither realist, caricatural, historical, science fiction nor a

western, and it was not immediately popular (Guillaume 102). However, by the early 1970s, *Pilote*'s younger artists, turning away from conventional genres, were depicting whimsical other worlds reminiscent of *Philémon*. In an occasional series by Anquetil and Cohen, a hero named Antonin wanders through a colorful dreamscape where he encounters improbable contraptions, a strange-looking ship, and an animate/inanimate sphinx built of bricks. Verli employs Fred-like theatrical spectacle and more animate/inanimate hybrids. Lesueur combines circus décor with uniformed regalia, although to convey an overtly antimilitarist message. Dionnet's and Solé's hero Jean Cyriaque walks down a banal city street and happens across some strange buildings straight out of *Philémon*. Massonnat's floating bed and armchair look borrowed from Philémon's adventures "Le piano sauvage" and "Le voyage de l'incrédule" (Fred 15, 35. *Philémon* 1: 49, 268).

Fred's influence soon spread to *Pilote*'s rival publications. Renard remarks that *Olivier Rameau,* inspired by *Philémon* and published by *Le Journal de Tintin* (1968)*,* is set in countries where a nonsense worthy of Lewis Carroll reigns (95). One could also cite *Isabelle* from *Le Journal de Spirou* (1968) where a young girl enters a fantastical other world (Gaumer 438). *Philémon* no doubt also encouraged a more general interest in Carroll both at *Pilote* and beyond. Antonin encounters Alice in "Antonin a des maux d'amour"; Alice accompanies her uncle Charles to another world (Truchot and Gasquet 20–27); Ache makes Alice's adventures pastiche Dali, Magritte, and de Chirico amongst others; Forest's heroine reads Alice's adventures (30); and Mandryka drew an adaptation of Carroll. By the 1980s, nonsense had evolved into a *bande dessinée* genre. Even so, artists made little attempt to emulate Fred's nonsense effects with panels. The genre's later purveyors cited by Groensteen (notably F'Murr, Masse and Pétillon) placed greater emphasis on humorously philosophical dialogues than Fred (*La BD depuis 1975* 126–27).

Fresnault-Deruelle chronicles how *Pilote*'s rebellious young artists, including Fred, integrated the narrative characteristics of comics into their strips from the mid-1960s onwards; in so doing, they mocked the established conventions of the form (*Récits* 30–1). Nevertheless, Fred's fellow artists remained reluctant to take stories outside panel frames, while his distinctive use of overruns to convey impossible movements and changes of size was not widely

imitated. Making elements overrun did become popular, but with different results than in *Philémon*. In Gotlib's "Rubrique-à-brac," a giraffe's neck sticks up into the panels above for comic effect. "Thorkael: La Porte de Tai-Matsu" is set in a world of deserts, seascapes and bizarre edifices, rather like *Philémon* although with more violence; at one point a combat spills dramatically over into adjacent panels (Beketch and Loro 31). In Tardi's "Knock out," a World War I pilot's head overlaps two sequences of panels; the upper sequence recounts his past while the lower sequence recounts his present (28). In Franc's "Un dimanche d'été," towering cliffs flow on uninterruptedly between panels, while tiny characters on the beach below make contrastingly trivial small talk. By the 1980s, overruns between panels had become a lasting feature of French-language comics.

Fred was awarded the Grand Prix at Angoulême (1980) and he was knighted Chevalier des Arts et Lettres (1985). However, from the mid-1980s, Fred withdrew from comics, and his gentle whimsy began looking quaintly anachronistic beside the harder-edged heroic fantasies of the day. The renewed interest in fantasy, mentioned by the contemporary critic de Cortanze amongst others, was more prevalent in tales of the supernatural than in Carrollian nonsense. The closure of *Pilote* in 1989, with which Fred was closely associated, reinforced the perception that his era had ended.

Yet since the millennium, Fred has been rediscovered by a new generation. Sfar, one of the most significant artists to have emerged, is dithyrambic. He even says Fred taught him that stories were told panel after panel (qtd. in Guillaume 54). Mathieu, another noteworthy contemporary talent, thanks both Fred and McCay in a recent album (55); Mathieu also redeploys the *mise en abyme*, which Fred pioneered in comics (Miller 139–41). Fred now has three generations of French fans, and his legacy is assured. When he died, articles appeared in the press from across the socio-political spectrum. To the West of the English Channel, by contrast, Fred's passing went almost unnoticed. The situation may change, as there is talk of an English-language *Philémon* film (McNary). Nevertheless Fred, despite his affinity with Carroll and McCay, still deserves greater recognition than he currently receives. I hope this article enables a wider public to appreciate him better.

Notes

1. Following references to *Philémon* give bibliographical information from first publications in *Pilote* and also from the definitive three-volume edition *Philémon. L'Intégrale* (2011).
2. Following references to *Little Nemo in Slumberland* give bibliographical information from first publications in *New York Herald* and also from the definitive three-volume edition *The Complete Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1989–1990).
3. All translation are by the author unless otherwise stated.

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