

## Hergean Tract

### Rereading the Adventures of the Little Reporter in Times of Confinement ?

or

### How to escape infantilization in front of a major work of the 20th century ?

It has often been heard and repeated: "It is a work for readers from 7 to 77 years. "But in fact, well before the age of 14, if you are a teenager today, you don't read Tintin anymore. So in the best case, if we count 77 minus 14 and you are still a Tintin reader, you have 63 years left to cure yourself of Tintinism<sup>1</sup>, to eventually leave the nostalgic bracket that mourns their childhood or to go beyond the category of collectors, or even speculators...to really read the Adventures of the Little Reporter.

So if as an adult you happen to reread your Tintins, then you should wish to reread them differently.

The first and most frequent option is to re-read the Adventures of the Little Reporter in relation to the history of the 20th century by comparing the work to the documentary or iconographic sources consulted by the artist. These pictorial sources were often supplemented by reading a book of reports describing the future terrain of the little reporter. Thus, for *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, it is Joseph Douillet's *Moscow without Sails* (1928); for *Tintin in the Congo*, it is Chalux's *Un an au Congo belge*<sup>2</sup> (1925) ; for *Tintin in America*, it is G. Duhamel's *Scènes de la vie future* (1930), etc.

There is another option of reading that is more delicate to engage. This option takes into consideration, without excluding the first one, the life of the artist, his childhood, his family, his adhesion to scouting, his loves and his socio-political roots.

This second approach presupposes the reading of at least one of the three great biographies devoted to Hergé. In chronological order of publication, we have the one by Pierre Assouline (1996), the versions of the one by Benoît Peeters (2002, 2006 and 2016<sup>3</sup>) and the latest one by Philippe Goddin (2007). These three biographies navigate between two major orientations that they integrate to very different degrees, the one by Goddin being the most hagiographic, which is not a coincidence, and therefore the least interesting.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of tintinism can be defined as a typical behavior, "a pre-oedipal approach, an approach specific to the young adolescent, who, faced with a weak, failing paternal authority, takes it upon himself to restore it, to make it do justice, because it is a matter of his own (re)construction and of a minimal faith in a sensible or, at least, "re-enchanted" world. " in . Spee B. (2004), *Tintin or the nostalgia of a lost love*, La Revue Nouvelle, n°10, Brussels, p.56-71 One understands partly why readers of the small reporter often make the choice of a conservative political orientation and at the same time, why they hate any psychological approach and still psychoanalytical of the behaviors.

<sup>2</sup> Spee B. ( 2006), *Reading Tintin in the Congo or The murmurs of the ghosts of a small Belgian or The clear line of a found innocence ?* Editions Onehope, Coll. Petites Etudes Hergéennes n°11, 92 pages. Available on the site [www.onehope.be](http://www.onehope.be)

<sup>3</sup> The version of 2016 integrates a whole development (p.40-42) on the metaphorical consequences of the probable abuse of the small Georges Remi without Peeters quoting his sources.

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The two major orientations which run in the texts, are:

> for one, to show the artist attentive to his time, an option that allows both to show his rooting in History but also to excuse the artist from certain prejudices that appear today as hardly acceptable. It is, for example, the discussions on the lack of sexualization of the characters or on the Western cultural domination.

> for the other, to outline how much the artist shows a critical spirit or a very personal vision at the price of a cryptography of the work. It is biographies such as that of Peeters and Assouline that allow us to begin this deciphering.

However, this critical dimension is only possible if there was very early in the author's life, one or more tragic events that taught him to distrust all authority figures, starting of course with parental figures, to reflect on political figures, the representatives of a certain elite.

These tragic events are three in number: a sexual assault at the age of six by a maternal uncle<sup>4</sup>, the refusal of his engagement to Marie-Louise Van Cutsem after six years of love affair<sup>5</sup>, his sterility due to an X-ray treatment<sup>6</sup>.

The acceptance of this hypothesis by the reader supposes the adoption of the Freudian principle according to which in the life of an individual, "everything is played before six years"... In fact, it is proven that a traumatic experience can destroy or at best, put very early the child in a defiance with regard to his close relations. This experience, if it does not dislocate the individual, will lead him to rebuild himself through a process of resilience, but always with a touch of mistrust, and therefore, the resilient individual will set in motion a word or a personal work, original, which will know how to say things while hiding in order to really exist.

We think that Hergé is in this disposition. We have taken the measure of it not so much through biographies but through the analysis of a Hergean dream<sup>7</sup>, that of Captain Haddock during the reading of *Tintin in Tibet*, Hergé's favorite album.

The understanding of this dream of Captain Haddock supposes that one takes into account the first 16 pages of the album. It is one of the most beautiful examples of the narrative construction of which Hergé is capable that Fresnault-Deruelle<sup>8</sup> absolutely does not see, all centered on his culture of advertising images. The three vignettes of this dream of Haddock associated with the elements coming from the previous pages form by themselves a small story that convinced us that Hergé had reappropriated the logic of dreams<sup>9</sup> which is an intellectual challenge intriguing the humanity since its origins.

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<sup>4</sup> Peeters B., *Hergé, fils de Tintin*, Editions Flammarion, Coll. Champs n° 726, 2006, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Spee B. (2004), *Tintin or the nostalgia of a lost love*, La Revue Nouvelle, n°10, Bruxelles, p.56-71.

<sup>6</sup> Assouline P., *Hergé*, Editions Plon, 1996, p.365-366

<sup>7</sup> Spee B. (October 2002), *Le rêve de Haddock dans Tintin au Tibet*, La Revue Nouvelle n°10, Bruxelles, p.86-93. Currently censored (?) on the website of La Revue Nouvelle.

<sup>8</sup> Fresnault-Deruelle P., *Les rêves de Tintin Entre métaphores et métamorphoses*, Editeur Georg, Genève, 2017, 221 pages. Interrogation: how is it possible that an academic does not take into account the literature published Vignettes 30B2-4 and 32D1-3 from *The Crab with the Golden Claws* on the subject ? The author is quite opposed to the importance of the Freudian discovery and to the readings that Hergé made personally of Freud, Jung and his notes on his own dreams...

<sup>9</sup> Vignettes 16B2-3 and 16C1. The reader is referred to our study: Spee B., Editions Onehope, Coll. Petites Etudes Hergéennes n° 15, *Des rêves ... de Freud à Hergé (Du rêve de La gouvernante française à celui des Bijoux de la Castafiore) Ou Comment introduire à une méthodologie des rêves*, 2018, 16 pages. Available at [www.onehope.be](http://www.onehope.be).

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This hergean narrative sophistication is confirmed in the rest of the album with the figure of the yeti. This character comes from a Tibetan cultural myth and is the opportunity for Hergé to make a double of Captain Haddock. Indeed, Haddock, through his addiction to whiskey and his insults, projects what he knows to be one of the most reprehensible consequences of his addiction to alcohol, the physical aggression of people. This oral aggression echoes the two dreamed aggressions<sup>10</sup> of the little reporter during the irruption of the character in the album *The Crab with the Golden Claws*.

With *Tintin in Tibet*, as far as oral aggression is concerned, it is no longer a question of "strangling or uncorking" the little reporter but of "drinking Chang"<sup>11</sup>. Hergé shifted the aggressive, rapist inclination of the captain to the yeti *via* a homonymy<sup>12</sup> between the first name Tchang and the Tibetan rice alcohol called tchang. It is the genius of the "curious fox", Georges Remi's totem in the scouts, to have spotted this linguistic resemblance and to integrate it into his narrative construction. Thus the album *Tintin in Tibet* offers Hergé the opportunity to negotiate in a subtle and masterly way the return of repressed memories of the character of Haddock, who, drunk, said from the beginning in *The Crab with the Golden Claws* all the truth of his deep being by singing: "I am the king of the mountain..."<sup>13</sup> and who, if one goes to look for the continuation of the text<sup>14</sup> omitted by Hergé, proclaimed: "But the pretty girl / I pick her as old ... My heart a little wild / Violent and forgetful/ Quite often fickle/ A makes old and beautiful eyes cry, etc. "

In *Tintin in Tibet*, under the guise of saving Chiang, his young friend, an accidented and abandoned teenager, Hergé can afford to bring back into the picture his well-buried childhood trauma, where Michel Serres will only see in the yeti a kind monster with an evangelical attitude... This is the height of misunderstanding, which is only due to Hergé's art of encrypting his family past!

Thus with *Tintin in Tibet*, Hergé takes the gamble of putting back into history his initial trauma to better define the responsibilities of his socio-familial environment. This family past that he drags along, will allow him to discover and to take the measure of the behaviors of his close relations who are in the prolongation of the suffocation of which his childhood was the object... It is the metaphor of a new suffocation which sees the day with the creation of the character of La Castafiore... With this character, what Hergé inaugurates and projects is a silent criticism of the one he married, Germaine Kieckens, who without knowing it, except when she signs certain drawings Snowy<sup>15</sup>, has taken the place in his heart of Marie-Louise Van Cutsem, known as Snowy, the love that he was denied<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Vignettes 30B2-4 and 32D1-3 from *The Crab with the Golden Claws*.

<sup>11</sup> The vignette 23C1-2 of *Tintin in Tibet*. The reader will complete by reading our study: Spee B. (December 2002), *Une lecture éthique-éthylque de Tintin au Tibet*, La Revue Nouvelle n°12, Bruxelles, p. 82-93. Currently censored (?) on the website of La Revue Nouvelle.

<sup>12</sup> Name which has the same spelling, the same pronunciation but a different meaning.

<sup>13</sup> The vignette 55B2 of *The Crab with Golden Claws*.

<sup>14</sup> Excerpts from Berval, "Le roi de la montagne", in *Les plus belles chansons des années TSF*, available on YouTube.

<sup>15</sup> Spee B., (2012), *Milou, une histoire de grandes personnes ou La surdétermination d'un prénom dans le rapport vie/œuvre chez Hergé*, Editions Onehope, Coll. Petites Etudes Hergéennes, 2012, 4 pages.

<sup>16</sup> Spee B., *Tintin ou la nostalgie d'un amour perdu*, La Revue Nouvelle, n°10 octobre 2004, Bruxelles, p.56-71.

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It is important to remember here that Germaine Kieckens had a passionate taste for opera and a filial attachment to the artist's first patron, Abbé Wallez, who wanted to appropriate the creation of the character of Tintin. For Hergé, this attachment became burdensome over time; it became unbearable at the end of the war with the trial and conviction for collaboration of Abbé Wallez...

It took a long time, but with *The Jewels of the Castafiore*<sup>17</sup>, Hergé takes his distance: he stages his separation from his wife Germaine and his new love for a young colorist, Fanny Vlaminck. This narration is built via an identification - Oh! Surprise! - of the artist in the character of Haddock who drags with him a past of alcoholic and abuser... This final adoption and identification will not surprise those who are aware of the famous Stockholm syndrome<sup>18</sup>, which sees the victims of a hostage taking take the defense, or even fall in love with their aggressors. It is urgent to understand that the *Adventures of Tintin* are a hidden autobiography of the artist and that they should be reread by adults...

In fact with *The Jewels*, we have the metaphorical description of a Germaine Kieckens who has become a real matron and who wants to be the guardian of the work as if the albums were her jewels: this denunciation is initiated at the dream level in the dreams that Hergé wrote down in small notebooks<sup>19</sup> at the time of his writing of the album *Tintin in Tibet*. At the same time, with *The Jewels*, Hergé tells of his love for a young girl, a "pretty little doll"<sup>20</sup> in Germaine's eyes...

In the end, it is with *Tintin and the Alph-art* that Hergé will finish his personal introspection: in this album, which has barely been sketched out, we find ourselves in the center of a nightmare of Haddock's where La Castafiore, again, is this time the image of an all-powerful mother who supports and encourages the consumption of alcohol under a pharmaceutical pretext. In this nightmarish vision, one can see, in the last resort, the artist's ultimate and deepest attempt to understand what happened to him in his childhood and his search for those responsible. In fact, in an extraordinary twist, the artist identifies with the figure of the abuser in order to turn against his mother: this ultimate nightmare of a work becomes the questioning of the maternal imago of Georges Remi's mother. It is more than likely that the mother of little Georges, frightened by the rape of her child, did everything she could to hush up the affair; she came to show a clear preference for her next child, Paul, Georges' little brother, and finally ended her life in madness<sup>21</sup> because she was never able to break her silence.

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<sup>17</sup> The reader will refer to our study "*Kilikikili The Jewels of the Castafiore? or Chut! Hergé talks about the female question...and about his life.* ", Preface by Madame Nicole Everaert-Desmedt, Afterword by Nicolas Rouvière, Editions Onehope, Petites Etudes Hergéennes n°11, Liège, November 2016, 100 pages. Available at [www.onehope.be](http://www.onehope.be)

<sup>18</sup> The reader is referred to pages 198-200 of Cyrulnik B. (1989), *Sous le signe du lien*, Edition Hachette Littératures, Collection " Pluriel psychologie ", Paris.

<sup>19</sup> The reader is referred to our study: Spee B. (2003), *Les rêves d'Hergé et Tintin au Tibet*, La Revue Nouvelle n°11, Brussels, Moreover, these notebooks that Moulinsart possesses and hides from research, exist. In the course of a conversation, we learned that Benoît Peeters had managed to make a copy.

<sup>20</sup> The vignette 10C3 of *The Jewels of the Castafiore* We refer the reader to our study: in *Les Bijoux de la Castafiore*, we find a dream where Haddock sleeps with a "little doll" made by the Castafiore as compensation for the aggression caused by the parrot, a metaphor of the abbé Wallez.

<sup>21</sup> Mouchard B., Rivière F., *Hergé Portrait intime du père de Tintin*, Editions Robert Laffont, 2011, p.139-144.

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In conclusion\*, when Georges Remi, known as **RG**, tells us that he put in the *Adventures of the Little Reporter* or that he brought his whole life to it, we are asked to believe him or at least to read him more carefully, more seriously than to collect his pictures... In fact, the artist's entire project is indicated and supported by the choice of his name as creator: to reverse the family past, and beyond that, all the other dimensions of existence, to say all the abuses of power, educational, social, racial, commercial, religious, artistic, scientific and political. It is the "Air I have!" or "To look like" which he is impregnated with and which one must read...

The *Adventures of the Little Reporter* is, in the end, an ode to childhood, abused<sup>22</sup> by family, marital, educational, scientific and political powers. The great novelistic and human dimension of the work is that its little reporter, against all odds, will attack all the abuses of power with a "loved one" who was his tormentor and whom he will keep and convert into a pleasant travelling companion in his quest for justice. An incredible moral perspective<sup>23</sup> emerges, namely that to live, one must know how to forgive one's loved ones<sup>24</sup>. Obliterating the critical dimension that the little reporter cultivates is a fault against true Culture, the one that allows us to reinterrogate our existences and the world we live in.

Liege, March 15, 2021  
Bernard Spee

Translated with [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator) (free version)

\* For a complete study, the reader will refer to our essay :

Spee B., Hergé or the secret of a wounded childhood  
Signs of tracks  
Ten studies A systemic reading.  
Preface by Nicole Everaert-Desmedt.

Unpublished essay (2008, 2021 revised and completed edition), 225 pages.  
ISBN 987-29308774-40-1  
Available soon on the website: [www.onehope.be](http://www.onehope.be)

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<sup>22</sup>Spee B. (2018) ,*Geography of unhappy childhood in The Adventures of Tintin*, p.193-210 in *Les géographies de Tintin* sous la direction de Paul Arnould , CNRS Editions, Actes de colloque, Paris, 270 pages.

<sup>23</sup> Because it integrates the sufferings of a life, it seems to us that the moral perspective evoked here goes further than the systemism and abstract universalism that Jean-Luc Marion brilliantly explains in his article "Tintin as a system Esquisse d'une interprétation", Gallimard, la revue Le Débat n°195, 2017, p. 143-158.

<sup>24</sup> A loved one who will be successively an uncle, a boss, a wife and finally a mother...