

Sugar, Spice and the Not So Nice:

Comics Picturing Girlhood
International Symposium



22 - 23 April 2021
Virtual conference

Abstract Keynote 1

'Professional identity, girlhood comics, affection, nostalgia and embarrassment'

This paper is about being 'the girl' in various comics worlds and why, despite loving comics, I didn't immediately connect library collections and comics together when I became a librarian in the 1980s. It is also about trying to reach other female librarians using the girls' comics familiar from their own childhoods and about running training on manga by using the connection across cultures re gendered reading in the 'noughties'.

This is linked to the responses of the librarians, which ranged from a deep affection for girls' comics (or their choice of other kinds of comics) to embarrassment about stereotypes of those comics and their readers, to nostalgia.

The final two were often mixed due to cultural constructions of girlhood, something also revealed in nostalgia re-publishing around girls' comics in that period.

Dr Mel Gibson has been working with children, young people and comics since the mid-1980s when she started work as an Outreach and Children's Librarian in Gateshead Public Libraries, UK. This continued through that career and into her later academic one. She is currently working on UK histories of libraries, comics and graphic novels as well as the content of contemporary graphic novels, especially titles aimed predominantly at girls. These interests both link with her interest in women's memories of their childhood comic book reading, as shown in her book *Remembered Reading* (2015).

Beyond the WASP: Disability, community, and girl power in *The Unstoppable Wasp*

Charlotte Johanne Fabricius, PhD Candidate, University of Southern Denmark

Marvel Comics' two latest runs of *The Unstoppable Wasp* (written by Jeremy Whitley, with art by Brandt, Charretier, Fish & Stein (2017) & Gurihiru (2018-19)) reflect trends which have dominated superhero comics published in the past decade: a diverse cast of characters and an emphasis on girl power, as well as a focus on girls in STEM fields. Importantly, the runs also foreground characters with mental and physical disabilities, engaging with issues of community and belonging while being aware of intersecting oppressions. This makes it a powerful series through which to discuss the body politics and feminist ethos of US superhero comics today.

In this presentation, I will explore the intersections of race, ability, and access presented in the series. Drawing on findings from my ongoing research on depictions of girls in contemporary superhero comics, I situate *The Unstoppable Wasp* in relation to ways of depicting girls as empowered. The series' focus on a diverse community of girls facing both individual and collective challenges creates space for exploring the radical potentials of girl-centered community. It also, however, centers a white girl as the literal and figurative gatekeeper of access and opportunity. This allows me to critically examine how the superhero genre's centering of whiteness (Guynes & Lund 2020) impacts a title that in other ways foregrounds diversity.

The series have also gained attention due to Whitley's storylines centering mental illness and issues of disability, something Whitley himself has commented on in paratextual material and on social media. Drawing on scholarship on comics and disability, particular as pertains to the superhero genre (Alaniz 2014, Cocca 2014, Ratto 2017, and Fabricius 2020), I will discuss how questions of disability and neurodiversity inflect the issues of whiteness, community, and girlhood explored in the series. In this discussion, as in the discussion of whiteness, the question of access and gatekeeping will be central to unpacking the politics of *The Unstoppable Wasp*.

Charlotte Johanne Fabricius is a PhD Candidate at the University of Southern Denmark. Her doctoral work investigates manifestations of superheroinic girlhood in contemporary superhero comics through intersectional critique of comics aesthetics. She has published work on the body politics of superhero comics, included in *Monstrous Women in Comics* (U. of Mississippi Press, 2020) and in the journal *Academic Quarter* (No. 20, 2020).

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Sugar and Spice and the Not So Nice: Comics Picturing Girlhood

What does a girl with an intellectual disability really want?

JoAnn Purcell PhD, York University and Seneca College, Toronto, Canada

This project combines my work as a diary cartoonist with a theoretical discussion of the unique ability of comics to *draw out* encounters with my daughter, Simone, born with the genetic difference Down syndrome. My practice began four years ago in the ordinary days of family life where I began to draw a four panel comic every day to consider the mundane experience of daily living. I distilled our exchanges to a single comics page (see fig. 1) with particular attention to what seemed to be Simone's focus, not mine. The comics bypass her medical diagnosis of Down syndrome and gather encounters as they occur to transpose Simone's actions, interactions and words into comics form. Simone is a teenager now and this practice foregrounds her voice and embodiment into puberty, a developmental stage marked by her physical departure from childhood. While I anticipate what is next for Simone in terms of her sexuality, made more complicated by her vulnerability and intellectual difference, she lives in the moment, on her time line, with her desires.

Alongside the mundanity of life with a teenage girl, is my awareness that sexuality and disability have a fraught relationship, in part because disability is often overdetermined and socially, the only defining characteristic. While reproduction is only one part of sexuality, the possibility becomes complicated by sometimes conflicting issues of informed consent, personal desires and a parental need to protect. These thoughts do not enter the comics, rather are a dialogue in my head as I observe Simone growing up.

This paper reads my drawing practice through comics' theory, more specifically the subgenre of autographics coined by Whitlock and DeFalco's ethics of care. My daily practice draws upon the methods of sensory anthropologists Taussig's fieldwork observations and Myers' "affective entanglement of inquiry". I argue that my practice is a form of autoethnography and will contribute to the emergent scholarship of graphic medicine. Each drawn encounter is not about smoothing out the edges and finding the commonalities; rather, I follow critical disability theorist Shildrick's assertion that it is about "opening oneself – becoming vulnerable – to an encounter with irreducible strangeness". The strangeness in my encounters with my daughter arrives from her different embodiment, her age and generational experiences, which combine to create a unique voice that is transmitted through my comics.

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What does a girl with an intellectual disability really want?

JoAnn Purcell PhD, York University and Seneca College, Toronto, Canada



fig. 1 J Purcell Simone and Charlie (2017)

JoAnn Purcell holds a PhD in Critical Disability Studies at York University where she combined her background as a visual artist and registered nurse and created comics alongside disability and difference. She holds an MA in Art History from York University, a BScN from the University of Toronto and is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. She is the current and founding Program Coordinator of Illustration at Seneca College and occasional contract faculty at York University. She was instrumental in the creation of the award winning Animation Arts Centre and coordinator in the early years. She held the interim position of Chair of the School of Creative Arts and Animation in 2019. As Faculty she teaches drawing, painting, colour theory, art and illustration history and a seminar class in Comics and Social Justice. She has years of hands on experience as a visual artist, animator and visual effects artist and previously, psychiatric nursing.

“A harrowing, transient girlhood:” representations of refugee girls in the context of European migrant crisis

María Porras Sánchez

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

In recent years, authors from different cultural backgrounds have represented refugee girls in the context of European migrant crisis in their graphic narratives. These illustrate the “age of migration” (De Haas, Miller and Castles, 2020) and the restrictive frontier policies in the Northern shores of the Mediterranean and the East of Europe. Such policies conform, according to Paul Gilroy, “a war against asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants” (xi). In this scenario, all migrants become “redundant humans” (Bauman 30), and even “non-persons” turned into public enemies based on fear and exclusion (Dal Lago 27).

According to Judith Butler, images and stories of suffering compel the readers’ concern and move them to act, since they “voice our objection and register our resistance to such violence through concrete political means” (135). Therefore, comics may function as “ethical solicitation” (Butler 135), eliciting an ethical response that goes beyond borders and the national / regional / cultural paradigm.

Although the potential of comics for approaching trauma, memory and history has been largely explored (Chute, 2016; Prorokova and Tal, 2019; Nabizadeh, 2020; Davies and Rifkind, 2020), the term “refugee comics” has been adopted by Rifkind (2017) and Mickwitz (2020) to highlight their contrapuntal nature in counteracting predominant political and media discourses as “representations, counter-representations, or advocacy tools” (278).

The graphic narratives addressed in this communication “span a factual-fictional continuum” (Mickwitz 279). While some of them bear witness to specific life-stories — Ali Fitzgerald’s *Drawn to Berlin* (2018), Reinhard Kleist’s *An Olympic Dream: The Story of Samia Yusuf Omar* (2016)—, some others present fictional refugees —Horneman and Dürr’s *Zenobia* (2018), Samya Kullab’s *Escape from Syria* (2017)— while others introduce anonymous girls in the background of larger narrative, whether factual —Spottorno and Abril’s *La Grieta* (2016)— or not —Javier and Juan Gallego’s *Como si nunca hubieran sido* (2018).

Documentary or fictional, most of the above-mentioned narratives represent girls as transient beings caught between innocence and experience, childhood and womanhood, East/South and West/North, violence at home and precariousness and vulnerability at their destination. This transit is evoked through a common metaphor: the act of crossing the frontier by land or sea. It is in this symbolic standstill when they become visible, paradoxically moving “into visibility when they die in this way, or when they are arrested by border police or when they suddenly appear in their thousands fleeing war” (Young 26).

By comparing representation and counter-representation strategies, the communication argues that factual narratives frequently objectify and victimize girls as voiceless and passive symbols of suffering. However, a group of fictional accounts offer examples of agency by presenting dynamic and multifaceted characters, while a second group romanticize the girls' disgraces and even deaths by exclusively focusing on the crossing and its immediate consequences. I contend that the possibilities for "ethical solicitation" are undermined by the focus on the girls' crossing, since it dehumanizes them by reducing their existence to that timeless, transient and harrowing impasse.

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BIO

María Porrás Sánchez (PhD in Cultural and Literary Studies in English) is an assistant professor at the Department of English Studies, Universidad Complutense de Madrid. She has formerly taught at Aberystwyth University and Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. Her main research areas are graphic narratives, cultural translation and postcolonial and transnational literatures in English language. She combines her teaching and research with her work as a literary translator. She has coedited, with E. Sánchez-Pardo and R. Burillo, *Women Poets and Myth in the 20th and 21st Centuries: On Sappho's Website* (Cambridge Scholars, 2018). Her last work to date is a critical edition and translation of *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution* (2018), by Mona Eltahawy.

Green apples sometimes fall far from the tree: the evolution of *Valentina Mela Verde* from the pedagogy of girlhood to engaged realism

Valentina Mela Verde is the protagonist of the eponymous comics created and drawn by the Italian author Grazia Nidasio, which debuted in 1969 in the children's magazine *Corriere dei piccoli*. The comics were published until 1976 on the pages of the *Corriere della sera* sister publications aimed at young people: the already mentioned *Corriere dei piccoli*, the *Corrierino* and its later incarnation *Corriere dei ragazzi*; they also gave birth to a spinoff dedicated to Valentina's younger sister, Stefi, which continued until 1992.

The comics were a hit with audiences and it is noteworthy that they were fully authored and drawn by a woman, something that was (and unfortunately still is) uncommon in a traditionally male-dominated environment like that of Italian comics. What is maybe even more interesting, though, is the thematic evolution that the stories undertook: born with a clear pedagogical intent, the comics quickly foregrounded their realistic setting (the life of a bourgeois family in Milan) and concentrated more and more on echoing the news, not shying away from taking committed stances on controversial topics.

Valentina and their relatives became less and less the ready-made impersonation of gender and age stereotypes, and started to show multi-faceted personalities and interests; they grew older (Valentina is 11 at the beginning of the series and around 15 at the end), navigated their first flings, travelled the world and found their first part-time jobs. At the same time, the topics of the issues turned their focus from, say, make-up tips and popular music to student protests, environmental issues, consumer culture, the consequences of the economic crisis in the Seventies, and the shadow of the so-called *anni di piombo* (years of lead), which saw a series of right- and left- wing terrorist acts. The comics provided a commentary on the ongoing events with a distinctive reformist stance (which is not surprising in the light of the left turn in the political orientation that the *Corriere della sera* held at the time), while still managing to preserve a light atmosphere and an easy appeal for a young audience.

For all these reasons, the comics provide a series of interesting examples of how girls *could* behave – rather than how they *should* behave – and fascinating insights into the historical period in which they were written (and of course, seen from the abroad, into the Italian culture of those times).

This contribution will try to untangle and comment on the subject.

Bio

Giorgio Busi Rizzi is a BOF post-doctoral fellow at Ghent University, with a project investigating experimental digital comics. He holds a PhD in Literary and Cultural Studies with a joint supervision by the Universities of Bologna and Leuven, focusing on nostalgia in graphic novels. He is interested in comics studies, TV series, digital humanities, humour theory and translation.



***Sidika* Behind the Window and the Women's Activism in Turkey**

Turkey has a long standing tradition of caricature and comics dating back to the late Ottoman period. During the 20th century various comic books were published and widely read. Likewise, Turkish language and literature is rich in jokes, satires and relevant forms of discourse. However, Turkey is no exception in the mainstream humour sector where the narrators and the characters are highly male-dominant as humour is considered as a manly thing. On the other hand, comics magazine *Bayan Yanı* which is produced solely by women on a gender related socio-political agenda has been published monthly since 2011.

This paper focuses on an earlier feminine comics character called *Sidika* which was narrated and illustrated by men and first published in 1989. *Sidika* is a remarkable comics character in many ways. Beginning from 1997 *Sidika* became a television series character based on the comics and story book written by same author and it lasted for 98 episodes. The television gave her fame and she was especially popular among children. She was a young girl, not allowed to continue her education or work and lives with her middle-class family in the suburbs of Istanbul. She was very inspiring for girls with her smart questions and humour as dynamites to the patriarchal family and cultural conventions. However, she was never considered intimidating and watched by every family even if she was very critical about everyday politics, family traditions and gender roles. She probably owes this privilege to her smooth satire, smart humour and being very rational all the time.

1980s were the years when the feminist movement gained power in Turkey when all other political organizations were suppressed following the 1980 coup d'état. This paper seeks to analyze the status of comics character *Sidika* in relation to the newly flourishing feminist movement in Turkey. *Sidika* mostly preferred technics of passive resistance and non-violent disobedience and she never attempted to do something which could change her situation

radically. Is it possible to find parallels in the methods of *Sıdıka* and women activism in Turkey? The paper also intends to make a historical comparison between then and now where both feminine humour and feminist movement is more powerful.

Biographical Note – Özlem Aliođlu Türker

I am a doctoral student and research assistant in the department of sociology, Ankara University. My dissertation is about immigrant art and the role of immigrant artists. I had the chance to conduct relevant research in Washington D.C. via Fulbright Scholarship. I am interested and humbly publishing in the fields of sociology of immigration and sociology of arts.

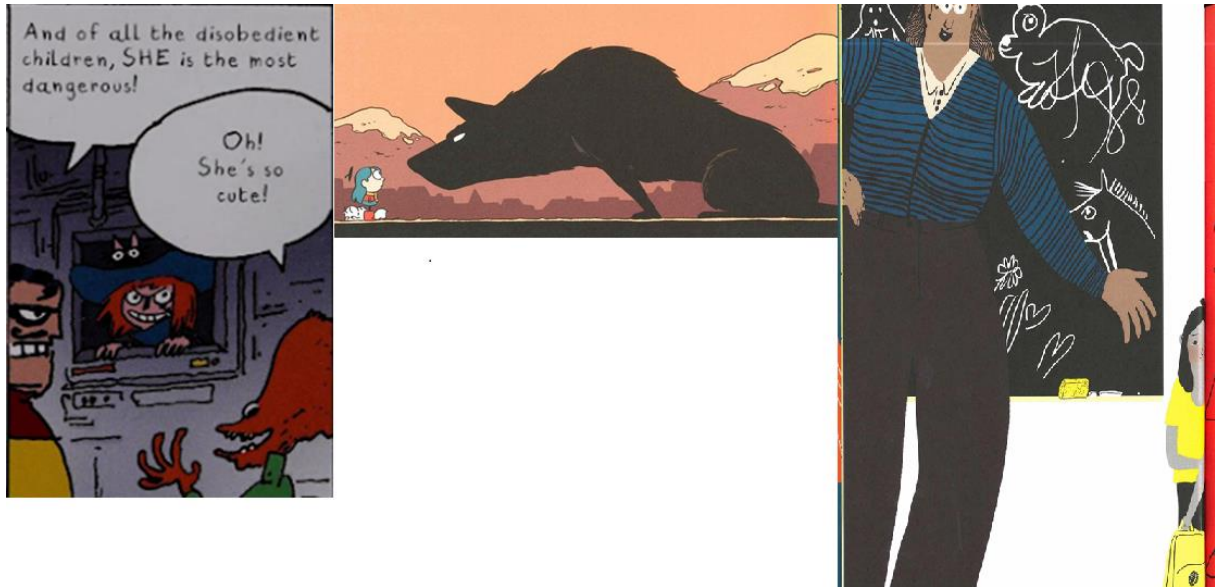
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Round table on three comics with girls

Sardine by Emmanuel Guibert and Joann Sfar

Hilda and the Black Hound by Luke Pearson

Jeg rømmer by Mari Kanstad Johnsen



Monalesia Earle is an independent scholar living in Liverpool, England. Her research interests are in: graphic narratives, critical race feminism, postcolonial, queer, and gender theory, as well as afrofuturism. Her book, *Writing Queer Women of Color: Representation and Misdirection in Contemporary Fiction and Graphic Narratives* (2019), received Honorable Mention for the Charles Hatfield Book Prize, and also runner up for the John Leo and Dana Heller Award for Best Single Work in LGBTQ Studies. She is currently juggling several new projects.

Joe Sutliff Sanders is University Lecturer in children's literature in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. His most recent books are a study of the 1990s television show *Batman: The Animated Series* and the first literary theorization of children's nonfiction. He is currently working on a book about how children's comics have required a reconception of the definition of literacy.

**“Friendship to the max!”:
The Lumberjanes’ Collectivist and Feminist Revision of the Scouting Story**

Dr. Alison Halsall

Noelle Stevenson and Grace Ellis’s successful comics series *The Lumberjanes* (2017-) revises the scouting genre of popular fiction that was made lucrative by the Edward Stratemeyer Syndicate between the late 1910s and 1940s. The scouting movement sprung from popular beliefs at the turn of the century about the positive effects that the outdoors and outdoor education could have on young people. Scouting groups for both boys and girls inadvertently solidified traditional and conservative gender roles and expectations.

One hundred years later *The Lumberjanes* series hit the American market to confront the problematic gendering that was built into the very foundations of the scouting ideology and literary genre. Stevenson and Ellis’s series creatively bypasses traditional stereotypes of girlhood by means of the fantastical plots that the series relies upon, offering an exciting reading opportunity for young readers in the collectivist ethos it encourages as well as the multiple points of gender and sexual identification the series offers for young (female) readers. The girls who attend Miss Qiunzella Thistkwin Penniquiquil Thistle Crumpet’s Camp are a far cry from the shrinking violets and demure young women that early girl scouting camps and manuals encouraged. Instead, this camp is inhabited by self-proclaimed “Hardcore Lady-Types,” an ironic label that calls attention to the diverse typology of girlhood that the series presents: April and Molly, for example, are outwardly cisgender; Mal is non-binary; Jo is transitioning; and Ripley is androgynous, all scrapes and childlike bravery. Over the course of the series, young readers are presented with typologies of femininities and sexualities that are neither justified nor explained. The series self-consciously emphasizes diversity (sexual, gender, and racial) instead.

The quirky adventures that the young female campers have at camp are the principal focus of the narratives. Stevenson and Ellis’s *The Lumberjanes* series offers a wonderfully liberating reading experience for young readers, parodying the iconic elements of the summer camp experience in its self-aware queering of the traditional binaries of male/female, culture/nature, white/black, queer/straight, etc., associated with the scouting genre of literature. Stevenson and Ellis’s comics series—now stretching to 15 issues—parodies the traditional scouting experience to showcase different versions of girlhood, while featuring multiple points of identification for young readers. The wonderful irreverence that the series has for conventional representations of girlhood is thus reflected in the form and content of the series as a whole.

BIO

Dr. Alison Halsall is Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities at York University, Toronto, Canada. She holds a Ph.D. in English literature, with specialties in Victorian and Modernisms. Her current research examines world “crisis comics” for young readers. She is also co-editing the first-ever collection of LGBTQ Comics Criticism, under contract with the University Press of Mississippi. She has published articles about H.D., the Pre-Raphaelites, Penny Dreadful, South Park, Harry Potter, and neo-Victorianism in contemporary graphic novels.

'It's fun-it's new and it's all for YOU': Modernity and the Active Female Body in *Mirabelle* 1964-1967

Joan Ormrod (Manchester Metropolitan University)

This paper analyses the promotion of the female active body that connotes modernity and youth in Fleetway's *Mirabelle* 1966-1967. *Mirabelle* (1956-1977) was a teen girl magazine featuring picture stories, articles, pop music, fashion, advice and beauty. From 1963 images and rhetoric on active female bodies began to appear in advertisements and picture serials with buzzwords describing girls, fashion and pop as 'new', 'madcap' and 'zany'. From 1964 images of active female bodies began to appear fashion, spy and fashion stories and advertisements, possibly influenced by *Honey* magazine's promotion of 'get-ahead' femininity (Fan Carter 2016) and the notion of the swinging single girl emerging in the mid-1960s (Lockett 1999).

Active female bodies in *Mirabelle* were discursively constructed through modernity, movement, spatiality and consumerism. The active female body is evident in fashion-based stories and articles and hygiene advertisements from 1962. An example of this active female body can be seen in 'Marina Square' (08/04/67-07/10/67) which was based in the shopping mall of new-build Southern seaside town, Burssea. It featured Carol Jones, a fashion designer, who moves down South to make her name. The story constructs active female identities from spatial discourses in the movement of female bodies from the domestic to the public, the North to the South and through fashion and tourism. It reflected modernity in the Labour Government's project of modern house building of the 1960s, the growth of tourism, the development of new fashion styles and tensions between young and older people. The active female body was also enabled by fashion in the trouser suit, man-made material and hygiene products like tampons.

My analysis is informed by Penny Tinkler's (2016) argument that magazine content analysis should be holistic 'engaging with different types of content within a magazine and how they are presented, particularly the relationship between text, images and design features' (43). In addition to picture stories, I examine paratextual elements of the magazines such as advertisements, fashion and pop music articles. As Tinkler observes, the polyvocal nature of these magazines enables an identification of the tensions constructing girlhood. Although 1960s female bodies seemed freer and more energetic, they remained restricted in more ideologically coded ways through the tensions between free bodies vs dieting, perceptions of the nice girl and dirty girl, the shameful girl or the confident girl and independence vs home or infantilising of girls as 'baby', 'chicks' and 'dollybirds'.

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BIO

Joan Ormrod is a senior lecturer in Film and Media BA Hons in The Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her research explores gender and representations in comics. Her books include *Wonder Woman, the Female Body and Popular Culture* (Bloomsbury Academic 2020), co-edited collections *Superheroes and Identities* (with Mel Gibson and David Huxley, Routledge, 2015), *Time Travel in Popular Media* (with Matt Jones, McFarland and Co. 2015). She is currently researching UK romance comics and girlhood and published preliminary research 'Reading production and culture UK teen Girl comics from 1955 to 1960,' in *Girlhood Studies*, (2018) 11 (3). pp. 8-33. She edits Routledge's *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rcom20/current>) and is one of the organising team for the annual International Graphic Novels and Comics Conference (IGNCC).

**“Developing A Style of One’s Own in *Mophead*,
a Graphic Novel by Selina Tusitala Marsh (2019)”**

In *Mophead*, New Zealand Poet Laureate Selina Tusitala Marsh offers readers a graphic representation of her own childhood experience of racism. Inscribing herself in a tradition of graphic novels such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (1980), *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (2000) and *Poppies of Irak* by Brigitte Findakly and Lewis Trondheim (2016), Tusitala Marsh uses this hybrid genre appealing to the readers’ different senses to express her traumatic experience of school bullying. Better known for her poetry and the performance of her poems, as in Westminster Abbey in 2016 when she read “Unity” for Queen Elizabeth II, Tusitala Marsh defies patriarchal order one more time in her graphic autobiography. Using Leigh Gilmore’s reflection on self-writing, *Mophead* could be considered as “a limit-case” which allows Tusitala Marsh to give voice to the Pacific Island minority she belongs to. Pacific Islanders are the third minority in Aotearoa New Zealand (8.1%), after Māori people (16.5%), and Asian communities (15.1%), as the 2018 census shows (<https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/new-zealands-population-reflects-growing-diversity>). This varied group is more and more visible in the media, as in the TV cartoon series *bro’Town* (2004-2009), yet prejudices remain against them. Colonized by Europeans, they have long been subjected to the colonial gaze. Girls and women from this community have traditionally been exoticized by travellers, writers, and painters from the West – a deformed perception denounced by Tusitala Marsh in her poem “*Two Nudes on a Tahitian Beach, 1894*” (2009). In *Mophead*, the protest poet amplifies her dissent from Gauguin’s colonial representations of Samoan, Marquesan, and Tahitian girlhood. Drawing herself as a scapegoat for being physically different from her schoolfellows, she draws a line between colonial and postcolonial representations of girls from the Pacific Islands. A girl with a pen, “Mophead”

overcomes the prejudices she had to face when a child, highlighting the liberating effect art and poetry gave her when she was a teenager.

I will therefore show how, in *Mophead*, Selina Tusitala Marsh uses the multiple modes of expression composing graphic novels (visual, textual, tactile) to represent her own girlhood trauma, therefore decolonizing trauma theories imported from the West claiming that trauma is unrepresentable (Caruth). At first, I will focus on hairstyles, then on humour, to finally end with the empowerment of girls from the Pacific Islands.

Marine Berthiot's Short Biography

I am in my second year of PhD in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. My thesis deals with "Rewriting Girlhood Trauma in New Zealand Literature" and is supervised by Professor Michelle Keown. The purpose of my research is to study the impact of genres on the representations of trauma experienced by female characters in their childhood. I have already written a chapter on the Bildungsroman, comparing four novels: *Cousins* and *Baby No-Eyes* by Patricia Grace, *Reconnaissance* by Kapka Kassabova, and *Aukati* by Michalia Arathimos. I am currently working on a chapter on self-writing texts. This paper reflects the results of my research.

Girls' comics, the lost continent of the Ninth Art?

Sylvain Lesage (Université de Lille)

Initiated by the *bedephilia* fandom since the 1960s, the transformation of comics into a Ninth Art has had a profound impact on the gender of French comics. This paper aims to re-evaluate the place of girls in the heritage of Franco-Belgian comics, and the mechanisms that have pushed girls' comics out of the memory of the ninth art (Ahmed and Crucifix 2018).

Even today, girls' comic strips are undoubtedly the least known in the history of Franco-Belgian comics. In fact, much more than in the English-speaking world, girls' comics have been systematically pushed aside in the writing of the *Bildungsroman* of the advent of a ninth art (Pizzino 2016).

Indeed, these publications have a triple handicap: intended for a female and childish public, they are also limited to the world of newspapers and magazines. Girls' comics are thus apprehended as ephemeral publications for audiences traditionally perceived as "weak" (Lyons 2001): so many features that make them a driving bolt for the construction of the ninth art. Initiated by a group of fans who liked to call themselves *bédéphiles*, the transmutation of French comics into the Ninth Art is a very masculine affair, just as the *cinéphiles* canonized cinema as a "masculine singular" (Sellier 2008).

By canonizing a certain type of comics, and by acknowledging only a handful of "good" attitudes towards comics, the *bédéphiles* buried the memory of girls comics in the shadows of the past. The publications (e.g. girls' comics magazines) and the uses of these comics are only starting to re-emerge, as a new generation of scholarship is questioning the scope of the comics canon.

This paper will be based on the archives of the first *bédéphile* movements, on an analysis of the canon as it is progressively elaborated through re-editions, anthologies, exhibitions and critical discourses, and also on a quick survey of the French-language scholarship related to girls comics. It will also try to evaluate the place of girls' comics into the fandom, by analyzing different institutions that structure the field: collectors databases, forums... It will show the mechanisms of exclusions, the consequences on the profile of comics readers today, and try to suggest a few leads to overcome this occultation.

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BIO

Sylvain Lesage is associate professor in history at the University of Lille. A member of the IRHiS (CNRS) research team, he specializes in book history, media studies, with a particular interest in comics. He holds a PhD in history from the University of Versailles-Saint-Quentin, dedicated to the "codex effect". His PhD dissertation provided the material for two books published at the Presses de l'Enssib (Publier la bande dessinée. Les éditeurs franco-belges et l'album, 2018) and at the Presses universitaires François Rabelais (L'Effet livre : métamorphoses de la bande dessinée, 2019). He also co-edited with Gert Meesters a book dedicated to the magazine (À Suivre), which played a key role in the history of the French-language graphic novel: (À Suivre). Archives d'une revue culte (2018).

Abstract: The Childhood of Malayalis: The (Im)possibilities of Comic Imagination

Submitted by: Dr Aswathy Senan

Estha and Rahel, the Syrian Christian¹ boy-girl twin protagonists of *The God of Small Things* (1998)² introduced to the international readers the life and landscape of Malayalis through the eyes of children. In the paper I will be introducing Boban and Moly, the twins of the comic strip *Bobanum Moliyum*³ who remain stuck in an eternal childhood and are forced to make sense of the adult world from their limited perspective within those parameters. Analyzing various episodes of the series and tracing the spaces and actions the twins engage in and juxtaposing them with other comic strips which have similar twin characters, this paper examines the recurrent trope of childhood in the genre of comic strip. The paper chapter argues that rooted in the adult reality of the artist and the readers, these children, rather their childhood, feature as a vantage point that offers space and distance for the artist to critique and comment on several aspects of the adult everyday. In this paper, I will be focusing on the girl child among the twins and its imitation and recurrence in other comic strips over the decades. Among the twins, the girl child is the more prominent one features as the free, willful and naughtier spirit. The site of girlhood thereby features as a fluid space that allows transcending the boundaries of the child and the adult space of action, and this has facilitated its journey through various publications and varied set of readers for over six decades. Compared to political cartoons and other graphic narratives, the comic strips in magazines or popular weeklies reach the reader “unbidden” (Duncan 7) due to its placement and thematic unpredictability. The spatiality and temporality of comic strip that appears in a weekly or daily newspaper is a factor that aesthetically and commercially deprives them of “the possibility of narrative development” (Eco 16). Taking this fluidity as the point of departure, this paper intends to presents how the comic strip reorients itself to appeal to the ‘childhood of the readers’, who may not necessarily be children.

Bionote:

Dr Aswathy Senan (Coordinator, The Research Collective, Delhi, India) is a writer, translator, researcher and social activist. Her PhD thesis titled “The Comic Strip of the Kerala Everyday: Bobanum Moliyum, 1957-2014” (University of Delhi, India) studies the comic strips published in Malayalam periodicals, focussing on Bobanum Moliyum comic strip. She has worked as an editor of comic strips and graphic narratives and also contributed to and edited publications on gender and media.

¹ St Thomas Christian or Syrian Christians are an indigenous religious group known for their use of the Syriac language in their mass though most of their practices are taken from the Hindu customs.

² Written by Arundhati Roy, the book won the Booker Prize in 1997.

³ The longest running comic strip in Malayalam which has been on print since 1957.

Dr. Nicoletta Mandolini (Universidade Do Minho)

Re-appropriating Abjection. Ana Caspão's *Fundo do nada* (2017) as a Feminist and Macabre Coming of Age

Julia Kristeva's theories on the abject has proven extremely fruitful in the area of feminist criticism, which, since the publication of *Pauvoirs de l'horreur* (1980), has produced a huge variety of research on the representation of motherhood and femininity as macabre, especially in the field of film studies (e.g. Creed 1993; Constable 1999; Butterton 2006). More recently, the employment of the abject paradigm by Anglo-American criticism has been blamed for supposedly legitimising, instead of questioning, patriarchal de-subjectivisations of women (Tyler 2009).

Despite this theoretical controversy, a growing number of comics and graphic novels where the abject, the monstrous and the macabre is used as a representative technique to illustrate the formation of girls' gendered identity were published in the last decade. Examples include *Pretty Deadly*, by Kelly Sue DeConnick and Emma Rios (Image, 2013), *Monstress*, by Marjorie Liu and Sana Takeda (Image, 2015) and *My Favourite Things Is Monsters*, by Emil Ferris (Fantagraphics, 2017). In the European context, an example is the Portuguese *Fundo do nada* (2017), a comic zine by Ana Caspão distributed by the underground feminist publisher Sapata Press.

This paper aims to analyse *Fundo do nada*, a young woman's coming of age in which the abject functions as a tool to express the intrinsically disquieting process of negotiating subjectivity from a feminine positioning, by putting the work in dialogue with the aforementioned non-European comics/graphic novels on girlhood and the macabre. Using feminist theories that challenge the Hegelian contraposition between subject and object (de Lauretis 1990; Haraway 2003; Benjamin 2018), the contribution will contend that the study of the medium-thematic intersection of graphic narratives and girlhood is a crucial site for the re-appropriation of the concept of abjection as a productive critical category that describes feminist authors' effort to portray the troubled construction of female identity.

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Dr Nicoletta Mandolini is FCT Junior Researcher at CECS (Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade) at Universidade do Minho (Portugal), where she is working on the project [Sketch Her Story and Make It Popular. Using Graphic Narratives in Italian and Lusophone Feminist Activism Against Gender Violence](https://www.sketchthatstory.com/) (<https://www.sketchthatstory.com/>). She worked as FWO Postdoctoral Researcher at KU Leuven (Belgium) and she owns a PhD from University College Cork (Ireland). Funded by the Irish Research Council, her doctorate project focused on the representation of gender-based violence and femicide in contemporary Italy. It resulted in the monograph *Representations of Lethal Gender-Based Violence in Italy Between Journalism and Literature: Femminicidio Narratives* (Routledge 2021). Among other articles on sexist abuse in contemporary Italian literature and media, she co-edited the volume *Rappresentare la violenza di genere. Sguardi femministi tra critica, attivismo e scrittura* (Mimesis 2018). She is an active member of the CASiLaC (Centre for Advanced Studies in Languages and Cultures) research cluster on Violence, Conflict and Gender, that she co-convened from 201

Girlhood in training: Learning to become a warrior and a woman in *The Legend of Wonder Woman* (2015-16) *Sword Daughter* (2018-20) and *Age of Conan: Valeria* (2019)

Dr Amanda Potter, Open University

Abstract

The female warrior has been an object of fascination from the ancient Greeks onwards, but until fairly recently representations have been primarily created by male writers and filmmakers aimed at a male readership and audience. In the twenty-first century the interest in the female warrior from female readers and viewers has increased, along with the increase in female comic readership,¹ and this has spawned a number of comics by female and male writers that include not only the stories of adult warrior women and their interactions with men, but also the stories of their girlhoods as the origins of their paths to become warriors. In this paper I will focus on three recent examples; two by female writers, *The Legend of Wonder Woman* from (2015-16) by Renae De Liz, *Age of Conan; Valeria* (2019) by Meredith Finch, and *Sword Daughter* (2018-20) written by Brian Wood.

In *The Legend of Wonder Woman* the young Princess Diana is excluded from military training by her protective mother, Queen Hippolyta, who privileges an academic education for her daughter. The rebellious Diana leaves the boundaries of the city, where she meets mystical creatures, both peaceful and malevolent, and is saved by military commander Alcippe, who agrees to train her in the ways of war in secrecy. In *Age of Conan; Valeria* we learn through flashbacks that the young Valeria is raised by her elder brother after the death of their parents. Like the young Diana she rebels, and denied the comfort of a pet kitten she is instead trained to become an accomplished swordswoman by her brother's friend Antonius, who later becomes the enemy she aims to kill. In *Sword Daughter* the young Viking girl Elspeth survives for ten years without her mother or father, after her village is burned, her mother murdered, and her father left in a coma by the forty swords. When her father awakens Elspeth joins him on his journey to take vengeance on the forty swords, leaving behind her puppy, and becomes an expert swordswoman, surpassing her father in completing his mission.

Each of these girls are trained to become warriors by figures other than their mothers. They fleetingly find comfort through animals (Pegasus, kitten and puppy), but must leave these animals, and their trainers, behind, to become adult female warriors. However, they must leave the path of the warrior and vengeance if they are to find a future as a woman. In this paper I will interrogate the girlhoods in training of these female warriors, and to what extent these girlhoods equip the characters as warriors and as women.

Biography

Amanda Potter was awarded her PhD by the Open University in 2014 for her thesis on viewer reception of classical myth in *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Charmed*. Amanda's main research interests are public engagement with the ancient world including audience reception of classics in popular film and television, and creative engagement with classical mythology and ancient history. She has published on a number of television series and films including *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Charmed*, *Doctor Who* and spinoffs, *Wonder Woman*, *Game of Thrones*, HBO *Rome* and Starz *Spartacus*. She is currently co-editing a volume on Ancient Epic in Film and Television for EUP with Hunter Gardner from USC, and working on her first novel, *Nausikaa's Odyssey*.

¹ On the increase in female comic readers see for example <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/18/female-comic-book-readers-women-avengers-a-force> accessed 22nd August 2020.

'There's no room for demons when you're self-possessed'
Supernatural Possession in 1970s British Girls' Comics

Julia Round, Bournemouth University

This talk explores the theme of possession in 1970s British girls' comics, with a particular focus on the titles *Spellbound* (DC Thomson, 1967-78) and *Misty* (IPC, 1978-80). I begin by giving a brief critical background to the evolution of British girls' comics (1950 onwards) and the back-and-forth between publishing giants DC Thomson and Fleetway (IPC). I trace a timeline of early instances of possession in stories (dating from 1964) and discuss the visual markers and qualities that are associated with this.

I then examine *Spellbound* and *Misty* more closely, using archival research and case studies to analyse how these titles depict spiritual possession. This reveals that possession isn't shown simply as a negative thing, or as mere indoctrination. Although it does sometimes appear as a means of controlling females who are disobedient, badly behaved, or perhaps just too powerful, characters' struggles against control and influence simultaneously present strong willpower, personal strength, and even rebellion as important and desirable traits. Possession also appears as a means for characters to address or negotiate historical trauma, especially relating to gender.

I argue that the treatment of this theme exemplifies the contradictory line that the girls' comics had to tread, balancing thrills and adventure against conservatism and propriety. As my title quote (from the late great Carrie Fisher) suggests, possession of various types is used in these comics to comment on 'approved' female qualities, but also demonstrates female power.

Julia Round's research examines the intersections of Gothic, comics, and children's literature. Her books include *Gothic for Girls: Misty and British Comics* (2019, winner of the Broken Frontier Award for Best Book on Comics), *Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels: A Critical Approach* (2014), and the co-edited collection *Real Lives Celebrity Stories* (2014). She is a Principal Lecturer at Bournemouth University, co-editor of *Studies in Comics* journal (Intellect) and the book series *Encapsulations* (University of Nebraska Press), and co-organiser of the annual International Graphic Novel and Comics Conference (IGNCC). She shares her work at www.juliaround.com.

Title: Drawing comics: A methodology to materialize queerness within childhood

How might comics-making about childhood memory disrupt normative readings of girlhood given by family, society, and the surrounding visual material culture? The heteronormative family context of childhood may cause distance within the self – a gap between who we *might* be, and who we *must* become. This paper presents my practice-based research project, *looking for queerness*, as a methodology to visualize queer ways of being in childhood that may have been discounted, ignored, or erased within normative constructions of girlhood. Drawing comics about such obscured and disavowed memories provides a way to imagine girlhood beyond the pervasive gender binary. Hilary Chute notes that graphic self-narratives are “not only about events but also, explicitly, about how we reframe them... authors revisit their pasts, retrace events, and literally re-picture them... [where] the work of (self-)interpretation is literally visualized”.¹ Drawing the child self serves as a performative agent to play with memory, to reorient to past experience, and to materialize experiences that have been made invisible. This practice of drawing memory to (re)make the self manifests a careful looking again at the self in the processes of becoming. Drawing comics to visualize the queer ways of my child self is an affirmative, queer re-construction that both imagines and witnesses those queer fragments of being that exist alongside, throughout, and underneath official narratives of girlhood.

Bio:

Martha Newbigging is a multi-disciplinary artist with practices in illustration, comics and animation. They have illustrated over a dozen children’s books and their animations have been screened internationally. They teach illustration in the School of Creative Arts & Animation at Seneca College in Toronto and have facilitated many arts workshops for children and youth in both school and community settings. They hold a BFA from OCAD University, and a Bachelor of Education and Masters of Environmental Studies from York University. Their current practice-based doctoral research focuses on autobiographical drawing and critical pedagogy.

Affiliations: Professor, School of Communication Arts & Animation, Seneca College, Toronto, Canada
Doctoral student, Faculty of Education, York University, Toronto, Canada

¹ Hilary Chute. (2010). *Graphic women: Life narrative and contemporary comics*. Columbia University Press. pp. 2-4.

Image: Martha Newbigging, *looking for queerness*, comics page excerpt, 2017.



Title: 'There are a lot of ways to be marked': Suffering Bodies in *Skim* by Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki
Barbara Postema

"Being sixteen is officially the worst thing I've ever been," Kim "Skim" Cameron writes in her diary in *Skim*, by Jillian Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki (2005). Kim's seventeenth year is one of upheaval, with burgeoning feelings for her teacher Ms. Archer and a best friendship that is disintegrating. The comic *Skim* shows these shifting relationships through embodied experiences—body language and gestures—while Kim's own body continues to be a source of anxiety. A broken arm in a cast sets her apart from her peers, but she's long been marked as different by less temporary signs, as one of the few Asian Canadian girls in her school, and with her mother harping on her for being overweight. Countering these marks she cannot control, Kim wields her own chosen marks, as a Wiccan and an artist.

I argue that besides the physical marks of identity that the panels convey about Kim and her friends, the drawings in this comic also evoke how Kim feels, often by differentiating the representation of her body from the rest of the world around her. Thus the visual marks on paper offer a way to understand Kim, not just to see her, but to see inside her, capturing the fraught experiences of girlhood.

Bio:

Barbara Postema is a Senior Lecturer in English at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand. Her monograph *Narrative Structure in Comics* was published in a Brazilian translation in 2018. She has contributed work on comics to *Image and Narrative*, *the Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, and *the International Journal of Comic Art*, as well as collections such as *The Routledge Companion to Comics and Graphic Novels*, *The Cambridge History of the Graphic Novel*, and *Abstraction and Comics*. Dr. Postema is working on a project on wordless comics, considering their history, their thematics, and the ways this form allows readers to navigate non-verbal narration through sequences of images. She is co-editor of *Crossing Lines: Transcultural/Transnational Comics Studies*, a book series from Wilfred Laurier University Press.

“Out of the Mouths of Babes: Jackie Ormes and the Children of the Civil Rights Movement”
Mel Loucks

Abstract

Although her name is not often mentioned alongside those of the Black vanguard, Jackie Ormes was most decidedly a trailblazer as the first Black woman in the United States to cartoon professionally. Yet she is perhaps best remembered not for her comic art, but for the “Patty-Jo” dolls inspired by it. The incomplete remembrance of Ormes is predictable to some extent, for the doll, which eschewed the stereotypical designs characteristic of black dolls that preceded Patty-Jo in favor of realistic, positive Black iconography, was groundbreaking in its own right. But troublingly, the doll’s history as a comic strip spin-off is too often ignored by collectors and seemingly unknown to literary scholars. Patty-Jo’s namesake, the sassy little Black girl who appeared each week in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, was one of very few representations of black children in newspaper funny pages, and perhaps the only one leveling scathing criticisms at American culture and society for the injustices faced by non-whites in the 1940s.

Ormes’s characters were unequivocally, unmistakably, and unapologetically Black. Torchy, of Ormes’s *Torchy Brown in “Dixie to Harlem,”* for example, began as an embodiment of Great Migration participants, moving North to pursue opportunities unavailable to Black women in the Jim Crow South. Later, as the civil rights movement revved up in the 1950s, Ormes recast Torchy in the ostensibly romantic but searingly race-conscious *Torchy in Heartbeats*. But it was in *Patty-Jo ‘n’ Ginger* that one of Ormes’s characters would participate directly in developing conversations about civil rights. Spunky little Patty-Jo was quick-witted and alert to all sorts of discrimination. In various panels, Patty-Jo takes on hot-button issues such as vote piking, NAACP membership, and McCarthyism.

Ormes made it her business to provide positive representations of Black children that would combat far more prevalent pickaninny images, and in doing so, she brought the discourse of civil rights to a new audience, a younger audience who would become the next wave of civil rights activists. But the academy has largely failed to recognize Patty Jo—and more importantly, her outspoken critique—as a significant voice of the civil rights movement. There is a grave danger, I contend, in silencing Ormes this way, for if her work remains unexamined, so too does the impact of her work, particularly in terms of its influence on the children who learned about their role in a changing society from Ormes’s art. In an effort to invigorate scholarly engagement with Ormes’s legacy, this paper will survey the ways in which her comics participate in broader conversations about childhood, femininity, class-consciousness, and activism.

Biographical Note

Mel Loucks is Associate Professor of English at New Mexico Military Institute, where she teaches both undergraduate and high school courses. Her research focuses primarily on race and gender in early- and mid-20th century American comic strips. Dr. Loucks earned her Ph.D. at the University of Florida in 2015, and she currently serves as an *MLA International Bibliography* Fellow. Her work has appeared in *ImageText* and *Studies in American Humor*. She is currently co-authoring a book that uses comics as a vehicle for explaining the theoretical frameworks of International Relations.

Death and the Maiden: Charlotte Salomon in Red and Yellow Dots

Sebastien Conard (KASK Ghent School of Arts and LUCA Brussels)

Between 1941 and 1943, the year she was murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the young, German-Jewish artist Charlotte Salomon intensely created *Leben? oder Theater? Ein Singspiel* ('Life? Or Theater? A Song-play'). Salomon, then 24 to 26 years old, worked relentlessly on the 769 painted and handwritten plates (with transparencies), that form what we would call now a partly fictionalized autobiographic novel. Looking back on her troubled childhood and puberty, Salomon narrates her growth out of girlhood and the discovery of love through her obsession with Amadeus Daberlohn (based on Alfred Wolfson). By the time Salomon finished her graphic 'song-play' - she used to hum while painting - she was pregnant but would never deliver her child, never be a mom nor a young woman or a girl again. After reading Salomon's song-play and visiting the recent exposition on the influence of early cinema on Salomon's work (*Charlotte Salomon in Close-Up*, Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam, 2020), I made a graphic essay, focusing on the themes and motifs at play in *Life? Or Theater?*

What can we say about girlhood? Or to put it with Sofia Coppola's brilliant adaptation of J.K. Eugenides' novel *The Virgin Suicides*: 'Obviously, doctor, you've never been a thirteen-year-old girl.' Charlotte Salomon had. If Salomon explains us something about looking back on girlhood, it seems that, in her case, it is riddled with music, art, mad love, suicidal melancholy, obsession, admiration and (a call for genuine) affection. If femininity has something to do with that 'other jouissance', to speak Lacanian, Salomon's becoming-a-woman is affected by a more sacrificial calling to translate one's young life in 'rote und gelbe Punkte'. At all costs, Salomon seemed to have followed Daberlohn's 'hopes' for future young girls who would follow the 'Orphean' or 'Christian way' toward their own 'pacification'. In her song-play, Daberlohn's passionate and inspiring discourse on the duty and revealing possibilities of true artists is framed as what gave voice to her calling and, to a certain extent, her sacrifice. Oddly enough, Salomon had the occasion to leave Europe but dedicated herself to the care for her grandparents and the completion of what she had decided to be her life's work and her gift to mankind. The tragic circumstances of her upbringing and her disappearance highlight the necessity for some young women to tell and deliver oneself to those who leave this life later on.

*

Sébastien Conard is an author, artist, art teacher and a researcher. He holds a PhD in the Arts concerning word, image and narrative in the graphic novel and the historical avant-gardes (LUCA-KULeuven 2016). He teaches theory and practice within the fields of Graphic Storytelling, Illustration, Printmaking and Graphic Design at KASK Ghent School of Arts and LUCA Brussels. As an author and artist, he created several comics, graphic novels, artist's books and many individual and collective publications with text and/or images. He recently edited and curated the *Post-Comics* project and group publication (KASK & het balanseer, 2020). Upcoming is a special issue of *DWB* literary magazine, which he edited with novelist Patrick Bassant: through several essays and short comics the issue of March 2021 tackles the speculative question of the 'Great Flemish Graphic Novel'.