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The Metamorphoses of Tintin or Tintin for Adults Jean-Marie Apostolidès, Translated by Jocelyn Hoy (Stanford University Press, November 19, 2009)

Tintin, the legendary creation of the Belgian artist Georges Remi's (Hergé), is a figure who has enchanted readers for the last eighty years. *The Adventures of Tintin* (1929-1983) became one of the most popular European comics of the twentieth century. In albums set in exotic landscapes, such as *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, *Tintin in the Congo*, *Cigars of the Pharaoh*, and *Destination Moon*, the adolescent Belgian reporter with a flip hairdo and button nose, was transformed into an international hero.

In *The Metamorphoses of Tintin* Jean-Marie Apostolidès traces the evolution of Tintin's character, tracing the many metamorphoses of Tintin chronologically as well as *synchronistically* – viewing the adventures as a whole to examine Hergé's overall vision and as a reflection of twentieth century life. According to Apostolidès, these transformations were both internal to the text (having to do with the development of stories, changing relationships between the characters), and driven by changes in Hergé's political beliefs. To his critics, they were calculated disavowals to retain the popularity of Tintin.

In the first four adventures published before the war, Tintin openly responds to the political conflicts of his time by trying to restore political order, which for Hergé meant the rule of colonial monarchies, such as those of England and Belgium. These albums are heavily laden with colonialist ideology – replete with references to “little Moors,” “negroes” both of whom need to be saved by the Whites, and the language of the Africans is pejoratively referred to as “pidgin.”

The end of the second World War, and with it the liberation of Belgium and the rest of Europe, was a turning point in Hergé's portrayal of Tintin, “While Tintin had been the shining model of The Good, with the Liberation he finds himself if not exactly in the camp of the wicked at least suspected of having consorted with Evil. Tintin had shown his other side.”

In the albums after the war, Tintin is no longer cast as the superman boy scout, he becomes transformed as Tintin the detective, “He thinks he is Sherlock Holmes, Snowy tells us!” Most racist references and political overtones are purged. When Tintin does act politically, the action often takes place in imaginary countries. Now, when our hero is in foreign lands, he is more likely to listen to the natives (for example, Tintin in Tibet). Tintin even becomes more human, occasionally doubting himself.

Apostolides argues that it is the distance from history and actual historical contexts that allows Tintin the possibility of becoming a mythical figure. As the book points out, it also helps explain Tintin's continued appeal, "Partly because Tintin is rooted in heroic mythology, he is more open, more susceptible to being interpreted in numerous ways. If generations to come are at all interested in his adventures, they will make of Tintin something quite different. The metamorphoses of Tintin may be only beginning!"

About the Author and Translator:

Jean-Marie Apostolides is William H. Bonsall Professor in French and Professor of Drama at Stanford University. Among his books are: *Le Roi-machine* (1981), *Le Prince sacrifié* (1985), *L'Affaire Unabomber* (1996), *Les Tombeaux de Guy Debord* (1999, 2006), and *L'Audience* (2001).

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