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STUDIES IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES



Intl. Journal
for the History *of*
Early Comics *and*
Sequential Art

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Intl. Journal for the History of Early Comics and Sequential Art



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STUDIES IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

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SIGNs - Studies in Graphic Narratives

International Journal for the History of Early Comics and Sequential Art

Welcome to SIGNs — Studies in Graphic Narratives. *This new, peer-reviewed journal focuses on Comics (or, in contemporary jargon, Graphic Novels), from modern times up to the early decades of the 20th century.*

Why a new journal? We have been living a steeply growing interest in comics since the 1990s, with the medium gaining large acceptance as an art form and a significant part of popular culture as well as an investigation subject in social studies. This interest and intellectual appraisal has extended to the rich history of comics and related forms as well. However, hitherto the (still scarce) current scientific research tends to focus on post-1930s publications, and early comics remain largely unexplored. Signs *aims at bridging this gap. Notwithstanding impressive field work by pioneers like David Kunzle in his two volumes of* The History of the Comic Strip, *the medium still suffers from a somewhat meager historiographic 'legacy'.*

Since Kunzle's opus, *though, a small body of research has dwelt on the intersections between visual and print cultures worldwide, mostly centered on the 19th century. This process is making possible the rediscovery and understanding of pioneering figures (such as Töpffer, Cham, Frost), contents and aesthetic models, formal and technological aspects (the 'book format' and the concept of album or graphic novel), cultural values and artistic traditions (relations between ideas of art, drawing, illustration, caricature, graphics), industrial models (the early days of licensing and merchandising industries), social discourses (the early star system of comics)…*

Yet a basis of shared facts so far remains to be devised, so SIGNs *has the ambition to become a regular forum for establishing a common historical knowledge on comics, dismissing surviving myths and putting modernity under the limelight.* SIGNs *strives for the multi-disciplinary approach which is common today in other fields, encompassing economy, linguistics, cultural studies, aesthetics, publishing history and art theory, thus offering new pieces for the completion of the dispersed sort of puzzle that constitutes comics history.*

SIGNs *has the ambition to push forward the historiography on the medium by bringing together the best researchers and publishing articles on Graphic Narratives — let them be called comics, graphic novels or sequential art — printed worldwide in a period roughly encompassing the 1830s and the 1930s. Each issue will*

also contain high-quality reprints of rare material, reproductions and translations of hard to find texts, and, in forthcoming issues, a review section surveying publications of relevance.

Even if our ambition is scientific, text readability and attractive, profusely illustrated, layouts are of great importance as well. We hope that the reader will find it a pleasure to glance over the pages, to become charmed by the drawings or to be caught up in a solid discussion.

Something is changing in the world of comics today. And in the current transitional climate — where digital media are restructuring our cultural scape — the self-consciousness of contemporary comics culture is linked to a reworking of comics history and memory. If retracing its past may contribute to redefining its nature, then historical studies are definitively a direction worth taking.

Ally Sloper: 'Our bibulous hero'
Possible Readings of a Comedy Type

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STUDIES IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

by: Roger Sabin

Ally Sloper's status as 'the first comics superstar' has been increasingly accepted.[1] This Victorian reprobate had a false start as a character in a penny dreadful, but quickly became famous in comic strip form in *Judy* magazine, and was subsequently exploited in collected editions, and on the music hall stage, where a roster of actors queued to imitate him. Yet it was not until the establishment of his own publication, *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, in 1884, that he realised his true potential. Now, merchandised and advertised in tune with the new commercial age, he became a household name in Britain and the Empire. The *Half Holiday* was soon styling itself as having "the largest circulation of any penny paper in the world", while one commentator claimed of its success: "[Sloper] may be said with this event to have achieved his growth, and to have ceased becoming *to be* the great modern jester or popular type of England".[2] (My emphasis.)



Figure 1.
Detail from cover illustration, **Ally Sloper's Half Holiday**, May 9, 1885.
Concept: unknown.
Art: W.G. Baxter.
Sloper, old but happy, in his Baxter incarnation.

But the question of exactly why Sloper attained this superstar status has been less well explored by historians—especially in terms of the nature of the humour he embodied. In this short essay, we will begin by looking at looks. It is hoped to undertake the playful experiment of scrutinising the appearance of this 'great modern jester'—his age, his physique, his clothes—in an effort to discover what audiences might have found so amusing. This is without, in other words, taking too closely into account the adventures he got up to—an altogether larger project.[3]

A word of caution before we begin. Proving why something, or someone, is 'funny' is notoriously difficult. There is no shortage of theories of comedy, from Plato up to Bakhtin and Freud. But they all begin with the simple idea that it is only by recreating the context for a joke that we can begin to understand its impact. In the case of Sloper, such an exercise is doubly necessary because modern audiences, insofar as they take any notice of him at all, have a tendency to dismiss him as being intrinsically unfunny, mainly because he is not 'familiar' in the way that, say, some turn of the 19th century American strips might be familiar.[4] He is more

[1] See (Castelli 2006) and (Sabin 2003).

[2] See (Pennell 1886). This remarkable article is recommended to anybody with an interest in Sloper, and must be counted as one of the first instances of what has become known as 'comics scholarship'.

[3] The best close reading of *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, as it appeared in the 1880s, remains (Bailey 1983).

[4] The (understandably) blank faces of my students when I show them images of Sloper tell their own story. He is much too alien-looking for them to have any purchase on his comedic

often than not looked upon as a creation that might have appealed to a Victorian populace that was somehow less sophisticated than we are in 2007. Not only less sophisticated, but less inclined to have fun: British Victorians in particular are often seen as a people who were as unsmiling as their Queen, living in an age when humour was nothing to laugh at.[5]

So, on with the experiment. Imagine, if you will, you are coming to *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday* for the first time, in the late 1880s, at the height of the character's fame.[6] What is the first thing you notice? It'd probably be his age. [Figure 1] Sloper is clearly somewhere in his late 50s or 60s - much older than the comedy stereotypes we are familiar with today, and old enough to be fast approaching death at a time when life expectancy was a lot less than the Biblical "three score years and ten".[7] Why might this have been amusing? Possibly because by that age, a person was supposed to be settled in society: to have built their personal 'empire' and be contented in their lot. Not so for Sloper, who from his demeanor and shabby clothing was immediately recognisable as belonging not just to the working class, but also possibly to what Charles Booth's famous *London Poverty Map* (1889) referred to as "The lowest class—vicious, semi-criminal".[8]

Here was somebody who was not settled at all, and evidently always 'up to something': like a scam at the seaside, or a moneymaking scheme involving some new kind of technology. (His other manifestations, including trying to pass himself off as a member of the gentry, are discussed below.)

The image of Sloper the old man, in other words, went against the Victorian 'improving ideal', touted from pulpits across the country. Here was an individual who manifestly hadn't improved himself, and who furthermore wasn't interested in doing so by legitimate means. Such an attitude also went against the Liberal ideal that the working class should play more of a part in society as 'citizens', with all the responsibility that word implied, by dint of better education and rising literacy rates: the ideal, in other words, that an educated populace would be better able to undertake the obligations of a broadened franchise. (1884, the year of *Half Holiday*'s founding, also happened to be the year of the

potential. This is not the case when I show images of *Mutt and Jeff* or *Krazy Kat*—more modern creations in every sense, and kept modern through republication, imitation by others, and critical scrutiny. Sloper, on the other hand, remains largely forgotten, and largely un-recuperable for our times (Denis Gifford's 1976 publication *Ally Sloper* arguably failed partly for this reason).

5 This is the start for the essay collection (Wagner-Lawlor 2000), which opens: "'Comedy' and 'humour' are not words most associate with the Victorian period…". Even during Victoria's reign, the British were often stereotyped as humourless. Thus, an article that appeared in the *New York Times* in 1900 chides that, "…[An Englishman] is a grim, melancholy person who only smiles when he beats his wife…". It goes on to call *Half Holiday* "an alleged comic illustrated paper" (London Literary Letter. *New York Times*, January 27, 1900).

6 This requires some suspension of disbelief. The premise of the experiment is flawed because anybody 'coming to Sloper for the first time' in the late 1880s would no doubt already have been well aware of the character via posters, music hall productions, shared talk, etc. (Even in the 1870s he was being merchandised widely and seen in a variety of theatre productions: his ubiquity thereafter has been well documented (see for example (Castelli 2006)). How this prior knowledge would have affected one's appreciation of the comic is debateable. Suffice it to say that this kind of conditioning has become a hot topic within academia in recent years: see for example (Scott 2006).

7 It has been estimated that the average life span in 1840, in the Whitechapel district of London, was 45 years for the upper class and 27 years for tradesmen. Laborers and servants lived only 22 years on average (Mitchell 1988). Although life expectancy improved through the 19th century, accurate statistics are hard to find, and are anyway complicated by factors such as the extremely high infant mortality rate and the persistence of sporadic lethal epidemics (e.g. cholera).

8 See the Charles Booth Online Archive at http://booth.lse.ac.uk.



Figure 2.
Cartoon, back page of **Ally Sloper's Half Holiday**, March 26, 1887.
Concept: unknown. Art: anon, but almost certainly W.F. Thomas.
Gladstone (GOM) and Sloper (FOM), 'two intellectual giants', link arms and take the day off.

Franchise Bill, which extended the vote to male householders in county constituencies.)

But Sloper, whether educated or not, is the opposite of 'a responsible citizen'. It's clear that he will go to his grave scamming, and this is what gave his adventures added gusto and pathos: he had no choice but to carry on doing what he did. From his advanced years and his place in society, readers could deduce that nothing was going to change for him unless he made it change. True, he was outside of the grind and monotony of factory or office work. But he was caught in an equally pernicious cycle that meant he had to come back to some kind of new scheme week after week: a classic tragi-comic scenario.

Occasionally, Sloper would be depicted enjoying his outsider status, smiling in the face of adversity or even enjoying the rewards of his dodgy dealings. It's possible to imagine, in these circumstances, that readers might have been entertained by the idea that he was flaunting his lack of conventional ambition—an "underachiever and proud of it", in the words of a saying associated with Bart Simpson a century later. And like the fuss that accompanied Bart's words (e.g. President H.W. Bush stating that he wished more Americans were like the Waltons and fewer like the Simpsons), we can speculate that the idea of a layabout "getting away with it" would probably have given the more conservative readers of the *Half Holiday* pause for thought.[9]

But there were other associations that readers could have made with Sloper's advanced age. Britain's Prime Minister in the years 1868-74, 1880-85, 1886, and 1892-94 was one William Gladstone, a man born in 1809. Gladstone is today revered by some historians as one of the greatest politicians the country has ever known, and has been cited as an inspiration by everybody from Churchill to Blair. As a Liberal, he was associated with reforms aimed at bettering the lot of the common man. One nick-name for him was 'the People's William'; another was 'The Grand Old Man' (GOM). Sloper's writers and artists in this period were obviosly aware of Gladstone's impact, and paid homage by referring to Sloper as the 'Friend of Man' (FOM).[10] Thus

[9] What were the political leanings of the readers of *Half Holiday*? It's impossible to say, but we should be careful not to assume that they shared the politics of the publication, any more than the readers of today's newspapers necessarily condone their particular views—see (McNair 2000: 144-145). We do know, however, that the readership was quite mixed, with a majority of (predominantly male) working class and lower middle class readers, but a significant readership among the upper middle class and with some upper class readers. (This information can be gleaned from the letters pages, details of the winners of prizes, memoirs of employees, and so on, not to mention the careful detective work of historians like David Kunzle.) However, any statistics are debateable, and would have to factor in the pass-around readership, and the market in second-hand copies.

[10] The letters 'FOM' would appear after Sloper's name, thus performing the double task of taking the mickey out of people who identified themselves via their awards, memberships of associations, etc. (In the edition of November 7, 1885, he is in-

Sloper became a mirror image of the politician; at once standing for working class rights, but at the same time undercutting Gladstone's dour Christian moralism with his own brand of underhand 'policy making'. [Figure 2]



Figure 3.
Cover illustration,
Ally Sloper's Half Holiday, February 21, 1885.
Concept: unknown.
Art: W.G. Baxter.
Sloper the teacher herds Gladstone the educational reformer into class, with a gentle hand on the back of his head. Other famous faces follow.

The relationship was complicated. At the start of Sloper's existence, in *Judy* magazine at the end of the 1860s, he was not so identifiably old and Gladstonian. In this incarnation, typically written by Charles Ross and drawn by Marie Duval, Sloper was not intended to be a symbol of any kind of politics. Furthermore, *Judy* was a Conservative publication, and commonly declared itself for Gladstone's arch-rival, Disraeli. After 1884, when the *Half Holiday* was founded, a new team of Sloper creators took over (although the Ross/Duval material continued to be reprinted in its pages), and developed the character in different comedic directions—foremost among them being the cover artists William Baxter and William Thomas. However, whether Sloper ever took on the mantle of Liberalism is highly debateable.

Indeed, through the 1880s and 90s it is more true to say that Sloper was a conservative with a little 'c'—a 'little man' virulently opposed to extremism of any kind. Cartoons depicted him dressed as a policeman and fighting off the unemployed, oozing up to the royal family, and hugging 'the dear old flag' in times of war. None of this was necessarily out of kilter with Gladstone's Liberal politics, but it did place Sloper on what we would now recognize as the right wing of the political spectrum (though whether audiences were expected to laugh at his more reactionary stances, a la Alf Garnett, is, again, debateable). Thus the association with Gladstone had limits, and it is interesting to note that several times in the pages of the *Half Holiday* it is stressed that Sloper has no party affiliation.[11]

troduced as 'A. Sloper, Esq, FOM, TOE, TWM+C+C'.) It also associated Sloper with this class—or, rather, as a fake among them (on his mock gentrification, see below).

[11] For example, *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday* July 31, 1886: "honestly speaking, we none of us know anything about [politics]. Whether Conservative, Liberal, Unionist, Gladstonite or Parnellite, what on earth does it matter as long as *Ally Sloper's*

Gladstone himself was occasionally caricatured in *Half Holiday*, including one famous Baxter cover in which Sloper herds him into a school (a comment on the GOM's education plans).[12] [Figure 3] It was even true that Gladstone was awarded the Sloper Award of Merit, a certificate given to eminent personalities of whom Sloper approved, which he was proud to display in his Scottish home (where it can be seen by tourists today). But was this simply a marriage of convenience? Clearly, for Gladstone it meant demonstrating he had a sense of humour (always crucial for a politician) and was 'down with the common people'; for the creators of Sloper it was an easy comedic device that gave the character a patina of topicality.

If age was the first thing that you, the reader, might notice coming afresh to the figure of Sloper, then the state of his body might be the second. Here is a man with stick-thin legs and a pot belly, always depicted with an oversize head—the focus of which is a bulbous red nose. [Figure 4] Clearly, he is a comedy type—familiar from the caricatural tradition of Hogarth, Rowlandson and Cruikshank (the latter being an acknowledged influence upon Charles Ross).[13] Equally clearly, Sloper has the physique of a malnourished drinker, emphasised by the bottle often pictured sticking out of his back pocket: again, somebody who in all probability belongs to that class of people living in the wrong districts of Booth's *Poverty Map*. (Sloper, in fact, was meant to be a resident of 'Mildew Court', Battersea, which on the map is indicated to be an area including the very poorest neighbourhoods to those of mixed income).[14] Such Londoners knew very well about the links between diet and health, and readers from all backgrounds would have empathized quite readily with Sloper's vulnerability to something like rickets, which his ambling gait may well allude to, as well as to the more serious diseases that were endemic (typhoid, cholera, etc.).[15] [Figure 5]



Figure 4.
Cartoon, interior,
Ally Sloper's Half Holiday,
March 23, 1889.
Concept/Art: unknown,
possibly W.F. Thomas.
A passing boy tries to warm his hands on Sloper's nose.

Sloper's was hardly the physique of the 'muscular Christian', as portrayed in the pages of the *Boys Own Paper* and others. Such well-fed, middle class fellows were meant to be role models, 'leaders of Empire', and would eventually form the basis for the officer class in the First World War.[16] Again, Sloper didn't fit the plan, and the

Half-Holiday comes out regularly every Saturday…"; January 4, 1896: "…Sloper is neither Whig nor Tory…"; June 20, 1903: "[The *Half Holiday*] has always steered clear of party politics".

12 Indeed, Gladstone was the subject of a cover portrait as early as June 21, 1884.

13 The oversize head, a common caricatural trait, would also have had associations with pantomime masks—huge papier mache heads that fitted over the head of the performer. Sloper himself became a star of pantomime, and shows were duly commented upon, and illustrated, in the *Half Holiday*.

14 On the map, Battersea included the following shades: Black to represent "The Lowest Class—vicious, semi-criminal"; dark blue for "Very poor, casual. Chronic want"; light blue for "Poor—18s to 21s a week for a moderate family"; and purple for "Mixed. Some comfortable, others poor". For the richer neighbourhoods elsewhere, the map used pinks and reds.

15 In fact, Sloper rarely gets ill in the comics, chiefly no doubt because this wouldn't have much comedy value. However, on one occasion (October 9, 1886) he comes down with the flu, only to be tended by the Royal Physician, Dr. William Gull. (The same William Gull identified as Jack the Ripper in the popular 1999 graphic novel *From Hell* by Moore and Campbell.)

16 In the various wars that took place during *Half Holiday*'s existence, Sloper is invariably depicted as taking part as a soldier.

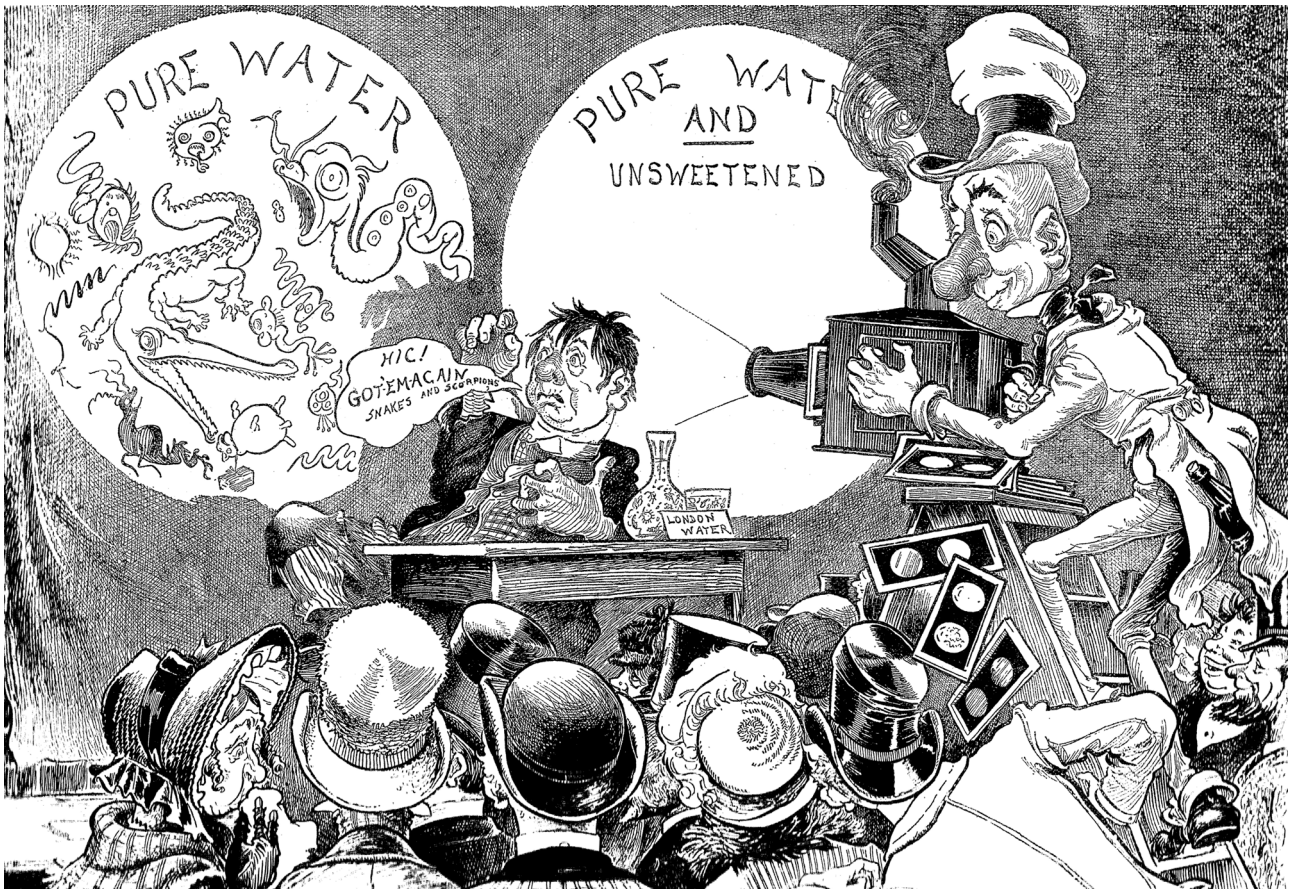


Figure 5.
Cover illustration,
Ally Sloper's Half Holiday,
February 2, 1889.
Concept: unknown.
Art: W.F. Thomas.
Sloper, posing as a County Councillor, puts forward his plans for a cleaner water supply for London—essential in the fight against cholera. The slide on the right refers to his preferred use for water, as an addition to alcohol (unsweetened gin). The slide on the left is the artist's homage to the 1828 print **Monster Soup, commonly called Thames Water** by William Heath.

effect of picturing him in the company of such prime physical specimens would no doubt have been doubly amusing. [Figure 6] (It is interesting to note that the spindly limbs, pot belly and big nose recur through the later history of comics: think of examples such as Reg Smythe's *Andy Capp*, the *Viz* team's *Sid the Sexist*, and Peter Bagge's *Buddy Bradley*.)

As for the drinking, Sloper's nose isn't just big, it's swollen and red (a condition known as rhinophyma) in the manner of a man with 'a problem'. And yet the comic is loathe to make any easy judgments. Indeed, quite often the portrayal of his drinking habits is done in a sympathetic, even winked-at, way. For example, anybody reading the *Half Holiday* in the 1880s would have been aware of the revival of the Temperance Movement, and of the stereotyping of alcohol as 'the curse of the working classes'. The Movement's crusades in the poorer districts of London were generally not welcomed, and Sloper would have stood as symbol of rebellion against them. Some of the funniest cartoons

However, it is inconceivable that anybody in his physical state would have been enlisted in real life. Historians Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell point out that: "The difficulty of recruiting soldiers for the Boer War in 1899-1902, because of the high rejection rates of young working class men due to physical defects like flat feet and inadequate physique, caused public alarm'. (Gunn & Bell 2002: 47-48).

in the comic are of him subverting the Movement in some way.[17] [Figure 7]

Moreover, Sloper's rebellion wouldn't just have been about seeing him as the defender of the right to get drunk. It would also have involved the right to have fun. For example, Victorian pubs in the period were not simply drinking dens, and included all manner of entertainments—always a piano in the corner, but also, often, marionette stalls, stages for small-scale theatrical performances, and even pitches for flower-sellers.[18] The campaigns by temperance organisations against the pubs, therefore, would have been opposed for much wider reasons: in short, they were killjoys, and Sloper was a saviour.[19]

Yet it is still true that, to make the 'drinking comedy' more palatable in *Half Holiday*, Sloper is rarely shown in an incapacitated state. We know he's a heavy indulger (from his physique and the bottle), but in the Baxter and Thomas cartoons he is typically shown with clear eyes, and to be fully able to carry out his scams.[20] Put simply, if he was blitzed out of his mind, he couldn't rip anybody off. True, it's more common in the early strips by Ross and Duval that we see scenes of him grabbing onto lamp-posts for stability, collapsing having passed out, and the like. But these early stories were reproduced less and less frequently in the *Half Holiday* as time went on. Sloper, if he's an alcoholic, is a high-functioning one.



Figure 6.
Cartoon, interior, **Ally Sloper's Half Holiday**, March 28, 1896.
Concept/Art: unknown, probably W.F. Thomas.
Sloper meets some 'muscular Christian' chaps from the rowing teams of Oxford and Cambridge.

Possibly, we can extend this line of thinking to the depiction of the 'half holiday' itself—the newly-established practice of allowing workers to go home at lunchtime on a Saturday. In the *Half Holiday*, this is portrayed as a time for workers to relax by going to the seaside, the races, the football or whatever, and have a bit of harmless fun. In other words, we can say quite confidently that the publication was a quintessential expression of the new leisure age taking shape in Britain at the end of the 19th century. Yet, what we don't see in its pages is much mention of the binge drinking in the pubs that was just as much of a feature of these holidays as anything else. Here is a quote from a news-

17 The fact that the temperance crusaders were known for making alliances with Gladstone's Liberals would have added another, political, dimension.

18 I am grateful to Dr. Ann Featherstone for pointing me in the direction of sources on pub history. Her invaluable paper *Performing the Pub*, delivered at the 2001 British Association for Victorian Studies Conference at Lancaster University, highlighted new perspectives on leisure studies.

19 This explains why the Salvation Army, always linked with the temperance movement, used certain tactics to draw men away from the pubs, such as adapting working class popular music, and theatrical forms of presentation. See (Walker 2005).

20 Baxter himself died of drink-related illness, on June 2, 1888, aged 31.



Figure 7.
Cover illustration
Ally Sloper's Half Holiday,
January 2, 1886.
Concept: unknown.
Art: William G. Baxter. Sloper 'turns over a new leaf' by going to church and avoiding the pub. The bottle in his pocket says otherwise...

paper article from slightly later (1904) that gives a very different perspective: "In fining a number of working men for being drunk on Saturday afternoon and evening, Alderman Dr. Crosby, at the Guildhall yesterday, remarked that the Saturday half-holiday was a curse to working people instead of a blessing… The men, directly they drew their earnings, went to the public-house with them instead of taking them home to their wives…".[21]

Perhaps by turning a blind eye to the commonly 'pissed-up' nature of the Saturday break, the producers of *Half Holiday* were themselves making some kind of stand against what they saw as the 'extremists' in the Temperence Movement. The comic's consumers would have read between the lines and got the message - and this message fitted perfectly with the vision of Sloper

[21] Newspaper article, 1904. No further details. Reprinted in (Sieveking 1980). The same conclusions about the boozy nature of the half-holidays can be drawn from the descriptions in Robert Tressell's classic novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. London: Grant Richards Ltd, 1914, especially p. 375 of the Grafton Books 1989 edition.

as the Friend of Man who took on other kinds of extremists (the aforementioned unemployed, along with socialists, anarchists, and, occasionally, 'new women'). It was a kind of drinking comedy much different to the depiction of booze in the popular prints of half a century before (commonly focused on dissipation, bodily effluvia and violence); and different again from the *Eight Ace* humour of *Viz* a century later (*always* focused on dissipation, bodily effluvia and violence). As such, *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday* was a promoter of what its creators no doubt saw as a moderate world (rather in the same way as *The Sun* today sees itself as speaking for the middle ground): a comic where extreme politics were not wanted and where advertisers could feel safe in investing their money.[22]

So that's Sloper the old man, the malnourished man, and the heavy drinker. What of the clothes he wore? In his 'everyday attire', he is very shabby—typically dressed in an old swallow-tail suit, worn-out shoes, and an old stovepipe hat, crumpled with ill-use. He also carries an umbrella, pocked with holes and with broken spokes, with which he sometimes defends himself or uses exaggeratedly to make a point. Although these vestments are 'neutral' to some degree, they are not labourers' clothes. Sloper is immediately positioned as a man of leisure. Somebody from the working class who doesn't work—rather like the idle rich at the other end of the social spectrum.

It could even be argued that the suit and umbrella make Sloper more akin to a member of the lower middle class—especially the sub-group of 'clerks' that had recently come into being thanks to the country's changing economic circumstances. This was the demographic that Charles Ross had good reason to observe around the time when he was inventing Sloper, when he was working at the Admiralty. (Today, this perception of Sloper as 'petit bourgeois' is something one sees quite often in the descriptions of Sloper memorabilia put up for auction, especially on e-bay, often by traders not greatly interested in the character.) Yet everything else about Sloper speaks of a working class context, and it is surely more sensible to think about his suit in terms of the huge market in second-hand clothes that existed in London. Fashion historian Christopher Breward has written about a sophisticated network of street markets, rag fairs, and 'wardrobe dealers', all of whom traded in cheap garments from a variety of class origins.[23] He goes on to say that such retail outlets operated "at the peripheries of legal and social acceptability".[24] Where better for Sloper to purchase his clothes?

By the same token, Sloper was a conman, and, as such, could be expected to 'dress up' in order the better to fleece people. This would have been understood by streetwise readers, who were aware of the long history of such petty criminality. Historian Donald Thomas, drawing on Mayhew et al's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861-62), paints this evocative picture of a London encounter: "As the visitor progressed on his journey through the West End, two 'tall, gentlemanly men' crossed the Strand together and went into a restaurant. These were pickpockets, also well known to the police. 'They were attired in a suit of superfine black cloth, cut in fashionable style. They entered an elegant dining-room, and probably sat down to costly viands and wines'. If such men were not quite at the top of their profession, they were certainly a cut above Bill Sykes and the Artful Dodger and did not appear in the least like the criminal of the Victorian imagination".[25]

[22] See (Sabin 2003).

[23] (Breward 1999: 122-128). See also (Ginsburg 1980).

[24] (Breward 1999: 123).

[25] (Thomas 2000: 43). Quotes from Henry Mayhew, Bracebridge Hemyng, John Binny and Andrew Halliday, *London Labour and the London Poor*. London: Charles Griffin, 1861-62.

So, in other words, for Sloper to dress in aspirational clothes would suit his purpose. It was this ostensibly upwardly mobile aspect to the character that was built upon in different ways by his creative custodians as time progressed.

For, in *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, Sloper is perhaps only half of the time seen in his everyday attire, and then rarely on the covers. Rather, there is a move away from the old Ross/Duval model and towards a version of the character who is clothed in different ways to suit different comedic situations. Thus, we have Sloper the footballer, cricketer and rugby player; Sloper the soldier, sailor and policeman; Sloper the dancer, musician and music hall performer; and so on. We also see Sloper becoming 'mock gentrified' in order to make comment on the manners of the middle and upper classes. Thus, he wears an Eton schoolboy's uniform on a trip to the school; a top hat, tails and monocle on a visit to a society event; ermine on becoming elevated to the House of Lords, et cetera. [Figure 8]

Historian Peter Bailey has written perceptively that this mock-gentrification could be interpreted as a method for the publication to attract two audiences: the traditional base, who were working class and who would laugh at Sloper's gaucheness in the company of the higher orders (and the way he manages to make a further mess of things when in their company); and a newer audience who were more middle class and who might pick up on more subtle cues, such as the particular way in which Sloper wears his clothes, or his choices in matters of taste.[26] They might be viewing his gaucheness from a different perspective, and catching him out for his lack of cultural capital. Laughing 'at' Sloper as well as with him. [Figure 9 and 10]

Such a theory makes a lot of sense, especially bearing in mind that *Half Holiday*'s cartoonists and gagsmiths themselves were largely drawn from the middle class. But we should also remember that the working class could often be very clued-in to the manners and fashions of their 'superiors'. As we have seen, the market in second-hand clothes gave ample opportunity to see, buy and wear 'classy' hand-me-downs, and not just from a petit bourgeois provenance. Garments more associated with the upper classes could also occasionally be found. Breward, for example, quotes an 1871 account of the Petticoat Lane Rag Fair: "…trousers that have been worn by young men of fashion,… trousers that have been worn by criminals hung at Newgate…; waistcoats that were the pride of fast young brokers in the city, waistcoats flashy enough to have been worn by the Marquis of Hastings at racecourse, or the Count D'Orsay at a literary assemblage…; coats for the peer and the pugilist…".[27] Not without reason does Breward conclude that, bearing in mind this context, Sloper could have been seen as a fashion icon for the working class—a dandy to be admired for his sartorial flair.[28]

More than this, Jonathan Rose has shown that large sections of the working class were avid consumers of other kinds of high culture, especially when it came to reading.[29] For example, the 'classic' novels were demonstrably not the preserve of the upper and middle classes when mass production meant that there was a thriving trade in tuppenny second hand editions—and thus the cultural capital afforded by knowing what such books were about could be easily attained. Similarly, information on fashion was available, via the secondhand trade in newspapers, journals and magazines. Even if the poor weren't wearing 'fashionable' clothes, that's no reason to assume they didn't know what they were.

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[26] See (Bailey 1983), especially pp. 18-20.

[27] (Breward 1999: 123), quoting D. Kirwan, *Palace and Hovel, or Phases of London Life*. Hartford, Conn: Belknap & Bliss, 1871, p. 140.

[28] (Breward 1999: 204).

[29] (Rose 2003).



Figure 8.
Cover illustration, **Ally Sloper's Half Holiday**, February 11, 1888. Concept: unknown.
Art: W.F. Thomas.
Sloper reads the Queen's Speech at the opening of Parliament. None of the politicians assembled (all accurately caricatured) are taking any notice, because they are all too absorbed reading the **Half Holiday**. Gladstone is having a laugh third from the right.

Finally, Sloper's fancy threads might also be interpreted on a more basic level, as associating him with a tradition of making comedic figures seem more absurd. As one commentator from 1886 says: "Mr Punch sometimes wears a silk hat and frock coat like any other gentleman; Stenterello, so long as he keeps his queue, and the lines on his face, and has one front tooth missing, can figure as a modern Florentine. The more strongly caricatured were the features of Ally Sloper, the less dependent was he on his clothes for identification, while it was only more ridiculous to make him appear at appropriate seasons in Highland dress, or Eton collar and jacket, in boating flannels or racing jerseys".[30]

To conclude: it was stated at the beginning of this essay that the aim was to 're-create the context for the joke', and in this way to try and shed light on why Victorian readers found Ally Sloper so amusing. By look-

[30] (Pennell 1886: 518).



Figure 9.
Cover illustration,
Ally Sloper's Half Holiday,
November 27, 1886.
Concept: unknown.
Art: W.F. Thomas.
Sloper's efforts to gentrify himself come unstuck when he goes fox-hunting in a London park. The horse is spotted like a rocking horse, the 'hounds' are led by Sloper's dog, and the prey is a domestic cat.

ing at the very basics of the way the character is constructed—his age, physique, and clothes—we can start to picture the beginnings of an amazing web of possible associations and references that might have been fired in readers' minds. And that's before we even take stock of the kinds of adventures Sloper has, the role of his supporting cast (his family and Iky Mo in particular), the other kinds of strips and stories in the comic, the merchandising of the Sloper brand, and the way he inter-relates with other aspects of 19th century culture, such as music hall. The web gets ever more sophisticated the harder we look.

It is also before we take stock of the situatedness of the reader—the 'you' of the experiment. For it is an obvious but under-appreciated fact that everybody approaches cultural products with prior assumptions—personal baggage, expectations of the genre, et cetera. Thus, if 'you' happened to be a conservatively-inclined member of the middle or upper class, you might read Sloper as a comforting stereotype of the working class: a man who is a reprobate, but who knows his place in society, and who is unlikely to revolt. In other words, possibly a de-fanged imaginative response to a per-

ceived threat.[31] Or, if you were a working class reader with socialist or anarchist leanings, then you might see him as a hero, a man who has turned 'getting by' outside of the system ('ducking and diving', in today's parlance) into a lifestyle. The reader, in other words, is never neutral.

Even taking these limitations into account, the analysis can only be partial, and 'the context for the joke' can never be fully recreated. Despite what some historians might like to persuade us, the past is gone—*kaput*, over-with—and can never be recovered. What we see in the 21st century are fragments, and what this means is that we can never know exactly what made Victorian readers laugh so hard. For example, *that* gesture that Sloper makes on a cover in 1888—is it just an artistic flourish, or does it refer to some long-forgotten music hall routine? *That* hat he wears to the races—is it chosen for no particular reason, or is it deeply significant for its fashion associations, to which we are completely oblivious today? (If you doubt the idea that recovering the past is impossible, try pondering your favourite TV comedy from, say, a couple of years ago, and then try to work out why you found it so funny at the time—and why it doesn't seem quite so amusing now.)

Ally Sloper 'worked' because he tapped into some of the key obsessions of his age, and because, thanks to the skill of his various writers and artists, he developed layers of meaning over time which led him to become a comedy archetype. His appearance mattered very much in this process—his physical degeneracy reflecting his supposed moral degeneracy—and readers would have picked up on this in a variety of ways. Those readers were not humourless dupes. Rather, it is more helpful to think of them as clued-up consumers enjoying a semi-ironic relationship with a multi-layered entertainment phenomenon. There's no reason at all to think that they didn't find Sloper as 'side splitting' as the *Half Holiday*'s strap-line promised, or that they loved him any less dearly than we love our comedy heroes today. Perhaps it is time that we jettisoned the sepia tint through which we view the past, for, in this sense, the Victorians were/are us.



Figure 10.
Illustration for text story, interior, **Ally Sloper's Half Holiday**, November 20, 1886.
Art: unknown.
Sloper, dressed appropriately (plus monocle), mixes with the upper class in a story about his daughter, Tootsie.

[31] The idea of the working class as a perceived threat to the middle and upper classes follows the famous, but now dated, essay (Stedman Jones 1986: 92-121). A contemporary perspective from a middle class position is offered by the Elizabeth Pennell article, in which she—an avid fan of Sloper—concludes by lamenting the fact that the character has become the symbol of a great nation brought to its knees by drink ("…intemperance is the great curse of modern England…", p. 522): the opposite viewpoint to that of the possible supporters of Sloper as the saviour of the right to booze.

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The Imagerie Artistique of the Maison Quantin

signs
STUDIES IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

by: Antoine SAUSVERD

In France, the turn of the 19th century witnessed a renewal of so called 'popular prints', sold by the sheet. If the most famous and extensive series is undoubtedly the one published by Pellerin in Épinal, numerous other such prints appeared at the time (such as Vagné from Pont-à-Mousson, Jarville from Nancy, and Wentzel from Wissembourg) and have unfortunately remained far too little known up until the present.

This paper offers an introduction to one of these relatively unknown series, namely the *Imagerie Artistique* [Artistic Imagery] created for children by the Parisian Maison Quantin [Quantin Publishing House] in 1886. In commissioning the best artists of his time and in modernising in this way the 'graphic' formula of the 'stories in images', Quantin became a direct competitor to his counterpart based in Épinal.

I. Quantin Publishing House and children's literature

Albert Quantin (1850-1933) launched out into printing in taking over one of the biggest Parisian businesses of the Second Empire (1852-1870), namely that of Jules Claye. The printing works were located 7, rue Saint Benoît. Quantin expanded the works to occupy numbers 5, 9 and 11 as well, and endowed them with the most modern equipment. Thanks to his printing houses' capability in reproduction, line-engraving, carving and editing, he became the specialist of art books and luxury illustrated manuscripts. Starting as a modest printer, he then soon became a publisher.



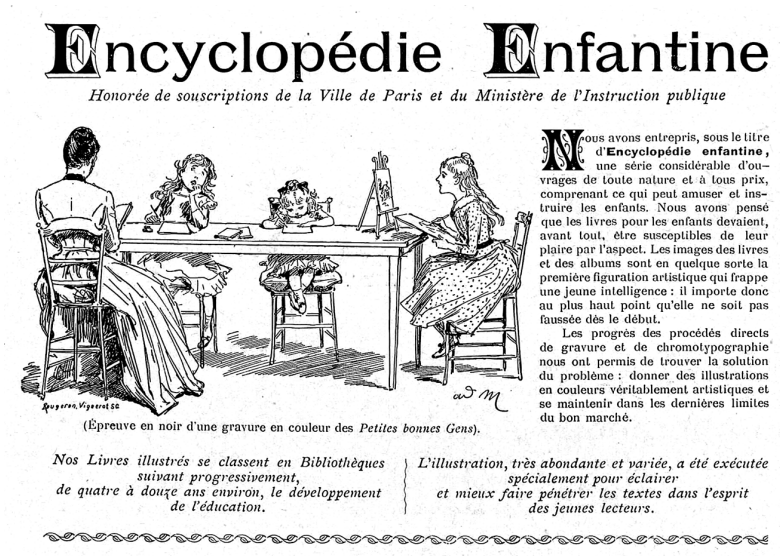
Figure 1.
Logo for Maison Quantin (1890).

Quantin enriched his catalogue of library books both on his own and through association with others: he added the complete works of Rembrandt, Holbein, Boucher, Van Dyck, or of Manet, on the one hand; while he created a "collection of the master-pieces of contemporary novels" that included beautifully illustrated volumes of works by Sand, Vallès, Flaubert, Balzac or Goethe, on the other. Moreover, Quantin owned the monopoly on the printing business of the French National Assembly and published all the analytical tables of the minutes of the debates. Later, other specialised collections also came to enrich the diversity and range of his catalogue.[1]

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[1] See (MOLLIER 1988).

In 1885, the Maison Quantin launched a new collection of illustrated works aimed at children and young people. It created at once a significant number of books, at all prices, gathered under the generic label of the *Encyclopédie enfantine* [Children's Encyclopaedia]. [Figure 2] This encyclopaedia was constituted of albums, alphabets, and various illustrated books. It also included works organised into three collections—called *Bibliothèques* [Libraries]—aimed at young readers of different ages, namely the *Bibliothèque maternelle* [Nursery School Library], the *Bibliothèque enfantine* [Children's Library], and the *Bibliothèque de la famille* [Family Library].[2]


Encyclopédie Enfantine

Honorée de souscriptions de la Ville de Paris et du Ministère de l'Instruction publique

Nous avons entrepris, sous le titre d'**Encyclopédie enfantine**, une série considérable d'ouvrages de toute nature et à tous prix, comprenant ce qui peut amuser et instruire les enfants. Nous avons pensé que les livres pour les enfants devaient, avant tout, être susceptibles de leur plaire par l'aspect. Les images des livres et des albums sont en quelque sorte la première figuration artistique qui frappe une jeune intelligence : il importe donc au plus haut point qu'elle ne soit pas faussée dès le début.

Les progrès des procédés directs de gravure et de chromotypographie nous ont permis de trouver la solution du problème : donner des illustrations en couleurs véritablement artistiques et se maintenir dans les dernières limites du bon marché.

(Épreuve en noir d'une gravure en couleur des *Petites bonnes Gens*).

Nos Livres illustrés se classent en Bibliothèques suivant progressivement, de quatre à douze ans environ, le développement de l'éducation.

L'illustration, très abondante et variée, a été exécutée spécialement pour éclairer et mieux faire pénétrer les textes dans l'esprit des jeunes lecteurs.

Figure 2.
Advertising for **L'Encyclopédie enfantine**, taken from the Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies' catalogue (1890).

Quantin's venture into children's and young's people literature is a testimony to the development of youth books publishing at the end of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 1880s, numerous publishing houses were established in Paris and gradually came to end the supremacy of the catholic publishing houses of the provinces in the children's literature sector[3]. With free yet compulsory primary education, the potential market for children and young people literature was growing[4] and many publishers made a start in this promising publishing activity.

In this context, Quantin needed to position himself favourably by offering quality children's literature. The new books of his publishing house were meant to offer "a collection of printed works made both to please and to educate". Moreover, he wanted to "give to these works a form that would be as delightful and artistic as possible". In this perspective, the Maison Quantin presented itself as a champion of the visual education of children: "the pictures in the books and albums are, so to say, the first artistic figuration which will strike the young mind: it is therefore highly important that it shall not be distorted from the outset".[5]

Quantin was able to carry through his artistic agenda thanks to the progress achieved in direct tech-

[2] Albert Quantin himself was an author of children's books (as other publishers of the time were, such as Hetzel, Plon, etc.). From the very beginning, his *Histoire de Germaine*, illustrated by P. Kauffmann (Paris: A. Quantin, 1885) was published in the *Encyclopédie enfantine*.

[3] The Mame Publishing House in Tours, the Ardant Publishing House in Limoges and the Mégard Publishing House in Rouen all saw their supremacy being challenged by publishers such as Hachette, Delagrave, Larousse, or Armand Colin (the latter of which published albums illustrated by Christophe—e.g. *La Famille Fenouillard*, *Le Sapeur Camembert*, etc.) from 1893. See (Mouranche 1994).

[4] See (Mouranche 1994).

[5] *Bulletin de la Maison Quantin* (Cie Générale d'Impression et d'Édition), n° 2, May-June 1886. These editorial choices seem to have borne fruit: the Ministère de l'Instruction publique et de la Ville de Paris [Ministry for Public Education and the Paris City Council] themselves subscribed to the *Imagerie Artistique*, as well as to the whole *Bibliothèque enfantine*, shortly after their launch in the 1890s.

niques of engraving, namely in chromotypography.[6] These new techniques largely contributed as much to the success of his illustrated books as they did to the respect they generated among the public. They also allowed his publishing house to offer quality colour illustrations while "remaining within the boundaries of inexpensiveness". The inexpensiveness of his products indeed represented one of Quantin's main concerns.

II. Quantin's prints and their publishers

The administrative and legal evolution of the Maison Quantin went hand in hand with the development of its activity in the young people's literature sector. It resulted at the same time from successive operations of capitalistic concentration, which were emblematic of industry at the time. These typically involved banking capital being invested in big industries so as to secure rapid profits. In this process, 'limited companies' came to replace traditional printers and publishers.

In light of the success encountered by his products, the printer and publisher Albert Quantin decided in 1886 to convert his firm into a 'limited company' in order to sustain its growth. He then joined forces with Louis Henry May, a trader and former judge at the Tribunal du Commerce (equivalent to the British Industrial Tribunal), to launch a new company called Compagnie générale d'Impression et d'Édition [General Company for Printing and Publishing], though preceded by mention of his original company name Maison Quantin, on January 16, 1886.

Although still in very good financial health, the Maison Quantin merged in May 1890 with the Imprimeries Réunies [United Printing Houses] group, which was represented by Claude Martinet and Claude Motteroz. The corporate name of this new company was Ancienne Maison Quantin—Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies [The Former Quantin Publishing House—United Printing Houses and Bookstores]. In this new business structure, Claude Motteroz acted as technical director, while L.H. May worked as commercial director.

At the end of 1896, May quit the company and acquired in exchange the stocks of the bookstore. At this time the Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies privileged the activity of prints manufacturing over any other. Because of the intense competition holding sway in the publishing world, this business sector had become the most profitable of the group. The shareholders of the Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies therefore decided to dispose of the bookstore and let May have it.[7] He settled at 11, rue Saint Benoît[8] and created the Société française d'Éditions d'Art [French Society of Art Publishing] in 1897. He used again the Quantin catalogue, including the *Encyclopédie enfantine* (and hence the *Imagerie Artistique*). In his books and prints, May presented himself as the "publisher of the Quantin collections".

May also developed a collection of books for use as school prizes, which came to generate reasonable profits, without however being substantial enough in order to counterbalance the financial difficulties of the company. The May company thus became one of the casualties of the crisis that affected French publishing, and youth publishing in particular, from the 1890s. This crisis arose from a general drop in sales combined with overproduction. Having set itself objectives that proved to be too ambitious in the art books sector, the May Publishing House finally went bankrupt in September 1904.[9]

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6 Chromotypography is a mechanical process by which colour typographic printing was made possible. Several colours were applied at once by the same ink roller. This process was in use from the 1880s up until 1900.

7 (Mollier 1988).

8 Following a first bankruptcy in 1901, the company moved to 9, rue Bonaparte.

9 Bankruptcy file, Archives de Paris, Perotin/25/64/1 1087, quoted in (Mouranche 1994: 266).

After L.H. May's bankruptcy, it seems that the Quantin prints, including the *Imagerie Artistique*, were taken over and commercially run by the Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies from January 1905. This company was initially lead by Claude Motteroz and Louis Martinet (the son of Claude Martinet, the founder), and only by Martinet after the resignation of Motteroz in 1908.

As will be addressed below, Martinet published some of the Quantin plates and children's books until the beginning of the 1930s. After this date, neither the prints, nor the publisher, can be traced.

III. The Imagerie Artistique (Artistic Imagery)

A. Formal presentation

A few months after the creation of the *Encyclopédie enfantine*, Quantin started to publish plates akin to those edited by the Maison Pellerin [Pellerin Publishing House] of Épinal. Gathered under the generic title *Imagerie Artistique*, this collection of stories in pictures for children laid claim from the start to the possession of a certain quality.

In its bulletin of May 1886, the Quantin Publishing House introduced its brand new *Imagerie Artistique* as a collection of "one *sou* pictures,[10] from a completely new style, both comical and adapted to children".[11]

The prints of this collection were divided up in series, each of them consisting of twenty titles. Between the first publication and the years 1902-1904, which were a time of intense creation, about twenty series came to be published. This collection was therefore built up in a consistent and regular manner, with an average production of about one series of twenty plates every year. A last series—the twenty first—was published in the midst of the First World War, probably in 1917. Accordingly, it is assumed that the *Imagerie Artistique* comprised of a total of 420 titles.

The plates of the *Imagerie Artistique* collection were printed by means of chromotypography[12] on large sheets 38 by 28 cm in size.[13] They characteristically displayed two 'ears'[14] at the top of the page, on both sides of the title of the plate: generally, the name and address of the publisher were given on the right-hand side; the designation *Imagerie Artistique*, and underneath, the series and plate numbers, were indicated on the left-hand side.[15]

The series of the *Imagerie Artistique* can be organised, according to the publisher's advertisements, into three categories:

a) The *Historiettes* [Little stories] formed about three quarter of the collection (series 1, 3 to 5, 7, 9 to 11, 13 to 15, 17 to 20). Apart from a few exceptions, these series were made up of stories in pictures with legends.

b) The *Fables* [Fables] (series 6, 8 and 16) narrated de La Fontaine's Fables. The plates of series number 6 and 8 only contained one full-page illustration, the verses of the fable being placed in a caption. Series number 16, for its part, bears resemblance to the *Historiettes*, with unfolding stories in pictures through a dozen panels on each plate.

c) The so-called *Militaires* [Military sheets] (series 2, 12 and 21). Series number 2 and 21 were classical plates of children's prints, with either full-

[10] A 'sou' is to the 'penny' what the 'Franc' is to the 'Pound'.

[11] *Bulletin de la Maison Quantin*, n° 2. One *sou* corresponds to 5 *centimes*. The sheets were also sold wholesale for 2.50 frs the hundreds, 9 frs the 500 sheets ream and 18 frs the 1,000 sheets ream.

[12] On rare occasions, some plates were printed through bichromy, as for instance numbers 17 and 20 from series number 3.

[13] These dimensions were given by the publisher in his catalogues. It is worth noting that the format of the plates gathered in *Albums* and *recueils* were slightly smaller.

[14] In using this notion, we are drawing on (Frossard 1989).

[15] See Appendix for a typology of the 'ears'.

length soldiers or historical battles presented in one or more scenes on each page (series number 2 deals with battles from the 18th century to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870; series number 21 was published at the height of the First World War). Series number 12 consisted of pictures on Napoleonic themes.

In the Quantin catalogues, two other series—which were also sold for one *sou* a sheet—were mentioned. Yet they do not seem to have included more than four plates each. The first one was called *Les Images des connaissances utiles* [Pictures of a Useful Knowledge], published around 1887-1888, and included the following titles: *Les aliments* [Food], *Le blé et ses produits* [Wheat and its Products], *La culture du blé* [The Cultivation of Wheat] and *Le vin* [Wine]; the second series had the title *Les Bons points nationaux* [The National Pluses] (published around 1889) and included *Infanterie* [The Infantry], *Cavalerie* [The Cavalry], *Artillerie* [The Artillery] and *Pompiers* [The Fire Brigade].

These different types of plates are not new: the themes and genres they cover belong to traditional children's popular imagery, both in France and elsewhere. Yet, Quantin wishes to distinguish himself from his competitors.

B. The Renewal of Children's Literature

From the start, Quantin took up the idea of the prints of Épinal and created numerous series of plates telling stories in successive pictures. The formats of these sheets were broadly similar, but Quantin recalled that "it is needless to say that this is the only point of comparison between the two types of prints".[16] Indeed, the Maison Quantin did not hide the fact that it sought to compete directly on the grounds of the Alsatian publisher based in Épinal. In its advertisement campaigns, it boasted of having "replaced everywhere the old and grossly illuminated subjects over which our fathers rejoiced".[17]

To this end, the Maison Quantin innovated in different areas, while selling its plates at the same price as those published by Pellerin of Épinal.

The Artists. One of the novelties introduced by Quantin lays in this publisher's attention to the visual and graphic aspects of its *Encyclopédie enfantine*. For its prints, and to the same degree for other books of pictures aimed at young people, it hired the "best artists". He used to ask them to create "drawings of a completely new type, either humorous or fantastic, but always within the reach of children".[18] The advertisements of the Maison Quantin have therefore highlighted the fact that its artists and cartoonists were the best of their time. Consequently—and this is particularly unusual in the popular imagery of the time—the plates were actually almost all signed by the drawer.

Throughout the development of the *Imagerie Artistique* collection, Quantin recruited more than a hundred artists. Among the most popular of the time, most of whom were Parisians, one finds Firmin Bouisset, Théophile Alexandre Steinlen, Job, Caran d'Ache, Christophe, Godefroy, Louis Malteste, Louis Döes, Georges Tiret-Bognet, Albert Robida, Raymond de la Nézière, O'Galop, Benjamin Rabier, Alfred Daguet, Jack Abeillé, Henri de Sta, André Vallet, or later, Francisque Poulbot.[19] Most of them, and particularly Stein-

[16] *Bulletin de la Maison Quantin*, n° 2.

[17] Advertisement for the Maison Quantin in the Literary Supplement of the newspaper *Le Figaro*, on December 19, 1891.

[18] *Bulletin de la Maison Quantin*, n° 2.

[19] It should be noted that Quantin had an interest in caricature too. He published *Les Maîtres de la caricature française au XIXe siècle* in 1888 (with engravings from Cham, Daumier, Gavarni, Grandville, etc.), and the reference book by Arsène Alexandre, *L'Art du rire et de la caricature* in 1892, the latter part of which



Figure 3.
Series 1—nº 9:
Le Sel sur la queue
[Salt on the Tail],
by Théophile Steinlen (1885).
Steinlen published
the same story in
Le Chat Noir (March 21, 1885).

len and Caran d'Ache (who signed the very first plates published by Quantin), had attracted attention through their contributions in the illustrated press and in satirical journals, which were flourishing at the time.

They belonged to a new generation of artists, who was familiar with popular prints, and used to work for papers such as *La Caricature*, *Le Chat Noir* [Figure 3] or *Le Courrier Français*. These publications came to give more space, though only intermittently, to the new literary genre inherited from the *histoires en estampes* of Rodolphe Töpffer, which—while in their terms 'stories in pictures'—were actually real comics.

was dedicated to the most famous cartoonists who used to contribute to the Quantin imagery.

It is precisely these 'stories in pictures' which inspired a new type of children's literature, such as those edited by the Maison Quantin.

Composition and layout. The best artists and cartoonists working for Quantin displayed a much more sophisticated and free graphic sensibility than their forerunners. Their stories in pictures broke with the then prevailing conventions, which consisted namely in a strict layout in a so called 'waffle iron' shape (i.e. regular and framed captions). The layout of the Quantin prints, for its part, was organised around 3 to 4 strips of 2 to 4 panels each, so that the sheet was broadly divided into about ten panels for each story.



Figure 4.
Series 5—nº 13:
Un Projet téméraire
[A Daring Project],
by Rip (1888).

This was therefore far less than the conventional plates published by the Maison Pellerin, which all contained sixteen to twenty scenes.

The *Imagerie Artistique* collection also shows its distinctiveness relative to the production of Pellerin through a discernible greater freedom in the plates' composition: the plots were more intense (due namely to the limited number of pictures), all the scenes were not necessarily framed, the scenery remained neat and simple, and the texts were more concise. The illustrations of a plate could also have different forms and sizes, sometimes even overlapping each other.[20] [Figure 4 and 5]

Themes and stories. The themes of the stories of the Quantin prints largely replicated those of Pellerin and, more generally, of the young people's literature and prints of the time. These included mainly fairy tales, de La Fontaine's Fables, and military topics (see above). Stories staging exemplary figures, be they children or adults, remained rare. The edification of the young mind rather occurred through the misfortunes of the main characters. Most of the time, the concerns and framework of the plot were of their time, either located in the city or on the countryside, either on the streets or in a front room. The stories could also take place in the past, [Figure 5] or abroad, then comprising exotic sceneries. Exceptionally, the stories could take the form of a fantasy, of animal tales or of dreamlike adventures. In the Quantin *Historiettes*, the intrigue showed most of the time the misfortunes of children of different ages. They revolved around the mischief and uncertain initiatives of disobedient, cheeky, or even naïve, young people. Maliciousness, laziness and pride were depicted in illustrations along other moral de-



Figure 5.
Series 12–nº 20:
Le Perroquet [The Parrot],
probably drawn by
Raymond de la Nézière
(1894-1895).

fects. Yet punishment for these failings always awaited in the final caption.

German illustrated children's literature, in particular the *Struwwelpeter* by Heinrich Hoffman (1845) and the *Bilderbogen* by Wilhelm Busch (1860-1870), largely influenced the *Historiettes*. Some of the Quantin plates even directly plagerised German prints.[21] [Figure 6]

[20] Although it is to be noted that from 1900, the composition of the plates of the last series (numbers 16 to 20) almost on every occasion regresses back to the traditional 'waffle iron' shape.

[21] For W. Busch, *Le Tonneau de Diogène* (series 1 - n° 3) plagiarises the *Münchener Bilderbogen* n° 350 (1862), *Diogenes und die bösen Buben von Korinth*, whereas *Le Moulin de Kerbiniou* (series 14 - n° 1) draws extensively on the first part of MB n° 300 and n° 301 (1860), entitled *Der Bauer und der Windmüller*. As fo the *Struwwelpeter*: *Les Allumettes* (series 5 - n° 7) had its story copied from *Die gar traurige Geschichte mit dem Feuerzeug*, and *La vengeance d'un nègre* (series 3 - n° 15) the one entitled *Die Geschichte von den schwarzen Buben*.



Figure 6.
Series 14–nº 1:
Le Moulin de Kerbiniou
[Kerbiniou's Wind Mill],
by Albert Robida (1898).

But entertainment and humour occupied an important place in the production of the Maison Quantin. Children became mischievous schoolchildren at the expense of adults, and the plot often turned into a farce or a purely comical story. This new wind was blown by a new generation of artists coming from a press, which had gained more freedom through the 1881 law on "emancipation and liberty".

In the remaining *Historiettes* of the Maison Quantin, the characters were mostly adults: unfortunate, [Figure 7] scatter-brained or conceited bourgeois, clumsy servicemen or knights, circus clowns, misunderstood geniuses, or exotic foreigners (Chinese, 'Negros', Egyptians, Mohammedans, etc.).

Finally, it is worth noting the existence of a few plates staging children edited in the 1880s, which played, as a result of the 1870 war, on nationalist and anti-Prussian sentiments (series 1 - nº 10, series 4 - nº 13 and nº 16). These plates later came to be removed from the catalogue and replaced by others.

IV. Albums and collections

A. The Albums d'images

According to the publisher, the publication of the first series of sheets was from the beginning an immediate success: at the end of the year 1886, Quantin announced that the sales of its publishing house had reached the more than respectable figure of two mil-



Figure 7.
Series 4–nº 14:
L'Arroseur [The Waterer],
by Hermann Vogel (1887). This
story inspired
The Watered Waterer,
the 1895 movie by the Frères
Lumières.

lions sheets a month.[22] The publisher thus noticed that "these pictures are worth being kept" and decided to give "a more enduring and elegant form to these twenty humorous pages".[23] For every series, an *Album d'images* [Book of Pictures] was thus created.[24]

In the ads of the time that we were able to access (covering the 1886-1905 period), these *Albums* were described as follows: they contain twenty images of the same series printed through chromotypography on strong paper (the plates sold as loose sheets were printed on thinner sheets of paper). The dimensions are 38 by 28 cm.[25]

Other features in these *Albums* have been noted. The series used to correspond to many *Albums*, each with its own cover. The covers—an "elegant colour cardboard"—followed the same pattern: rich decorative motifs or floral strips and framed or circled illustrations, or captions repeating some of the scenes of the collected plates.[26] The *Albums* of the *Historiettes* series featured on the front the title *Images enfantines* [Children's Pictures], while the *Images militaires* [Military Pictures] series and the *Fables de La Fontaine* [de La Fontaine's Fables] series showed an eponym title. Most of the covers also bear the publisher's name and details, as well as—though less evidently—the series number.

Inside, the plates did not have 'ears', and came after a title page indicating *Imagerie Artistique* and outlining the table of contents (on two columns). The name and address of the publisher were displayed at the bottom of the page.

B. Editorial evolution of the Quantin prints

Even if every plate of the *Imagerie Artistique* collection bears the name of 'Quantin', the sheets, *Albums* and collections drawing together the Quantin prints have been published by various publishers or printers, varying on the date of their publication and distribution in bookstores.

The different companies which succeeded the original Maison Quantin were careful, and actually wise, not to shed the name of the founder. The name Quantin indeed remained prestigious amongst editorial circles at the turn of the 19th century.

The collections drawing together the plates from the Quantin imagery published between 1886 and 1930 never showed the date of publication. However, relying on the mention of the publisher in these printed works, it is possible to track down the date of their publication.

1886-1890: Maison Quantin, Cie générale d'Impression et d'Édition [Quantin Publishing House, General Company of Printing and Publishing].

The first half-dozen of these series created during this period were published under the form of *Albums d'images* and sold for a price of 3.50 francs each.

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22 *Bulletin de la Maison Quantin*, n° 5 and n° 6, November and December 1886.

23 *Idem*.

24 At the same time, it is not certain if each series was also published as loose sheets.

25 This is according to the 'official' format indicated in advertisements and catalogues by the publisher, which also corresponds to the dimensions of the sheets sold individually. The format of the plates collected together in *Albums* and *recueils* (see below the section *1908-1930: Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies, Louis Martinet directeur*) was slightly smaller.

26 This is true except for two *Albums* of de La Fontaine's Fables, the covers of which were labelled *Imagerie Artistique, 20 Fables de La Fontaine* and were illustrated with a large drawing by Bouisset. On the cover of the first *Album* (series number 6), a standing schoolmistress shows her (also standing) 8 pupils eleven frames representing scenes of the Fables (set in a U shape around the title). The publisher figures on a wood bench on the left hand side of the image. Concerning the second *Album* (series number 8), different characters of the Fables of the series (The turtle and the two ducks, the heron, the earthen pot and the iron pot, etc.) are gathered in a landscape scene around the title caption.

1890-1897: Librairies-Imprimeries réunies, Ancienne Maison Quantin, May et Motteroz directeurs [United Printing Houses and Bookstores, Former Quantin Publishing House, run by May and Motteroz].

Under the lead of these two directors (1890-1897), the series numbers 7 (or 8) through to 13 came to be added to the existing collections of prints and were published as *Albums* as well.

At the same time, these *Albums* were also sold in a black and white versions (also for 3.50 francs each): these new products were colouring books, to be left to the imagination of children equipped with their colour pencils.[27]



Figure 8.
Series 20 Album cover, published by the Société française d'Éditions d'Art, Louis Henry May (1902-1904).

1897-1904: Société française d'Éditions d'Art, L. Henry May [French Society of Art Publishing, L. Henry May].

Under the lead of L.H. May, new series were created (probably series number 14 to 19). Until then, it was possible to buy single sheets, but under May, the sheets were only sold in series of 20. These new prints were akin to the previous series. But with series number 15, they started bearing slight changes: their covers included the label *Imagerie enfantine* [Children's Imagery] or *Mes Images* [My Imagery] [Figure 8] instead of *Images enfantines* [Children's Prints], and they were somewhat different in terms of presentation (namely through their Art Déco arabesques of flowers and leaves). It is worth noticing that the colours of the plates were a little less neat, since May chose to work with another Parisian printer whose name appeared on the back cover: C. Lamy, 124 Boulevard de la Chapelle.

The decline of the *Imagerie Artistique* dates back to the first years of the 20th century. May's bankruptcy in 1904 put a brake on the production of new series of plates taken from the Quantin imagery. By this time, a total of 18 series had been produced. We only know of three other series that were produced until the First World War.

1908-1930: Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies, Louis Martinet directeur [United Printing Houses and Bookstores, run by Louis Martinet].

It appears that no collection of prints taken from the Quantin imagery were published by the Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies, jointly lead by the two directors Motteroz et Martinet (1904-1908).

A few editorial changes were effected by L. Martinet, the sole director from 1908: while giving up almost entirely the production of new series (only one is known to have been made, that is the series number 21 published around 1917),[28] he nevertheless made great

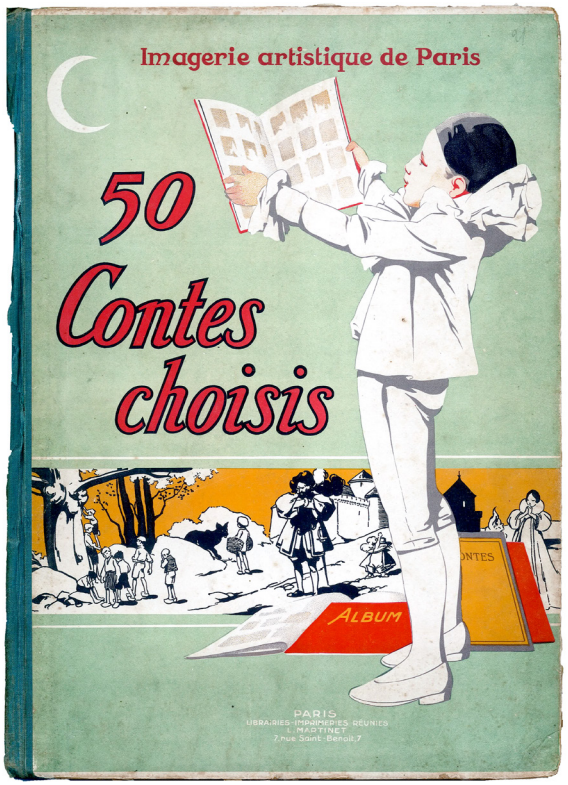
[27] These *Albums* remain to be seen. They were mentioned in advertisements published in the serial of the *Bibliographie de la France de 1893 à 1900*.

[28] This military series, similar to series number 2, was created in the midst of the First World War. It was probably the last one to be created for the *Imagerie Artistique*. It was published in

use of the old series of the Quantin collections. He published a plethora of different collections of plates, to the point that it is actually difficult to establish a coherent typology in the current state of research.

In the course of inquiry into materials of this period, it was noticed that other collections draw together prints from the Quantin imagery, which are however absent from the consulted advertisements or catalogues.

Furthermore, it is possible to distinguish between the *Albums d'images*, which all ensued from an achieved editorial project on the one hand, and what might be called a *recueil* [collection][29] on the other. A *recueil* is a book, with less elegance and finish, that just consists of a collection of isolated or remaining sheets. It is assumed that the covers must have been printed separately and the plates elsewhere again. The joining of cover and plates was made according the needs, probably driven by the need to sell remaining print stock.



However most of the *recueils* that it has been possible to view bear mention of the publisher Martinet[30] and therefore came out after 1908. There is no indication that *recueils* were published before this date, but this possibility cannot be ruled out altogether. These *recueils* did not have title page, the constituting plates were published on thin paper, and they always had 'ears' (type 3, see Appendix). The printing of the plates (lines and colours) was more often of poorer quality than the collections of preceding publishers. The *recueils* were published under different titles,[31] with different styles of bindings and colours. There were many sorts of covers (at least fifteen), some of which were originals (with an illustration, a photograph, or a cotton print with golden inscriptions and adornments), others were based on the plates of the imagery (*Fables de La Fontaine* or *Historiettes*), or even on covers of past *Albums*. The *recueils* were comprised of one or more series, either in fragmentary or complete form. Some of these *recueils* drew together 10, 20, 40 or 50 stories, while others could contain up to 80 or 100 of them.

Figure 9.
Imagerie Artistique de Paris, 50 Contes choisis, Album cover, published by the Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies, Louis Martinet (circa 1930).

Albums, following the example of preceding publishers, with cardboard covers, title page, strong paper, but with 'ears' of type 3. The cover—illustrated by Léon Fillol—represented a French soldier framed in a patriotic tricolour strip, bears the title *Imagerie enfantine. Guerre de 1914*.

29 Note should be made that some of the covers of the works published by Quantin, Pellerin or other publishers, sometimes bear mention of the word *recueil* or *album* (examples are given in footnote 32). Yet, this use is does not necessarily fit with the definition of *receuil* and *album* adopted in the present paper.

30 A minority of *recueils* published by Martinet bear no mention of the publisher on the cover. Since *recueils* had no title page, they only are to be identified thanks to the 'ears' on each sheet.

31 Most of the time, these titles were *Contes choisis* [Selected Tales], *Histoires choisies* [Selected Stories] or *Images enfantines* [Children's Imagery], and were preceded by the number of the plates included in the *Album*.

It is likely that Martinet published plates from the Quantin imagery up to the 1930s. Around this time, he published a series of collections which was slightly neater, and therefore comparable to the original Quantin *Albums*: even if the plates still bear mention of *Imagerie Quantin* [Quantin Imagery], these new *Albums* with original covers display the heading *Imagerie Artistique de Paris* [Artistic Imagery of Paris]. [Figure 9] They had a title page (but without a table of contents), followed up by 20, 50 or 100 *Contes choisis* [Selected Tales] printed on thick paper sheets (unlike the earlier *Albums*) bearing 'ears' (of type 3).

It also seems that the new director initiated a new editorial genre in half-format.[32] The plates of this new type of printed works were based on already published stories, which were then cut by half (i.e. two strips were taken away). [Figure 10] Their size was 21 by 30 cm (with slight variations depending on the copy), that is three quarters of the standard format. The plate kept the same title as of the original, but the legends were re-written in order to give consistency again to the story.[33]

V. Épinal strikes back

Facing the novelty, and therefore the direct competition, of the Quantin imagery, the publisher from Épinal, Pellerin, took action. As he later explained to his Parisian collaborator in a letter dated from February 16, 1893: "When it came to wrestle with the Quantin imagery, we decided to do so in creating an imagery in all respects superior, which we called the 'superior series bearing the arms of Épinal' and which you know".[34] Pellerin thus created in 1889, that is just a few years after the publication of Quantin's first plates, his *Série d'images supérieures* [Series of Superior Pictures], the so called *Série aux armes d'Épinal* [Series Bearing the Arms of Épinal].[35] He further took inspiration from the innovations introduced by Quantin, namely through the integration of lighter and more humorous themes, and of more flexible layouts, as well as the recourse to talented artists and cartoonists of the time. Many of them have in fact signed stories for both publishers.[36]

Pellerin also made use of the material improvements initiated by the Maison Quantin for his sheets and collections of the *Série supérieure* [Superior Series]: he increased the size of the sheets, printed them on a better quality paper and used lighter colouring; he also published plates sold as *Albums* (25 to 100 sheets) printed on a slightly thicker paper.

This policy made possible for the Épinal prints to flourish again until the beginning of the First World War. This counter-attack seems to have been beneficial to Pellerin in his struggle against Quantin. In the letter quoted above, Pellerin also wrote: "we succeeded […] This is exactly what put the creator [Quantin] off".[37]

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[32] Collections of similar half-format plates were also published by Pellerin (*Pour amuser Petits et Grands—Recueil de Petites Images d'Épinal*) and by Marcel Vagné in Jarville-Nancy (*Album d'Images pour garçons et fillettes*). However, because of a lack of clear dating, it is impossible to know who emulated whom.

[33] Unlike the half-formats of Pellerin, it has been impossible to find any Quantin half-format published as loose sheets. These half-formats usually contained 32 stories (sometimes only 20) with 'ears' of type 0, that is without any other marker than their title. The plates used to be printed on thin or strong paper, and sometimes come after a title page. In the current state of research, it is impossible to argue that there were distinct *recueils* and *Albums* in half-format.

[34] Quoted in (Meyer 1997).

[35] This series, the 'ears' of which bear the name *Histoires et scènes humoristiques - Contes moraux et merveilleux*, came to comprise 500 plates by 1914.

[36] The artists who used to work both for Pellerin's *Série supérieure* and Quantin's *Imagerie Artistique* were Job, Caran d'Ache, Steinlen, Rabier, Tiret-Bognet, Hénault, Godefroy, Döes, Le Mouël, O'Galop, Robida, and de Sta. Pellerin directly commissioned the artists or bought plates already published in the satirical press of the time.

[37] (Meyer 1997).

VI. Dissemination of the Quantin prints

It is difficult to gauge the scale of production and diffusion of the sheets, *Albums* and collections of this imagery. It would seem that the *Imagerie Artistique* collection had definite success in France and on the Dutch market. It is known that the first sheets sold very well. Further proof of the success of the imagery is the fact that Pellerin copied the formula elaborated by Quantin for his *Albums*. But the question of the scope and method of dissemination of these sheets remains open.

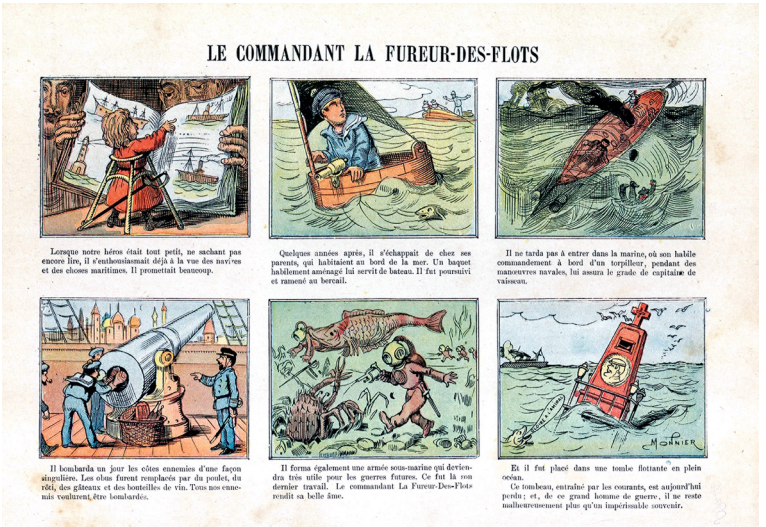


Figure 10.
Le Commandant La-Fureur-des-Flots [Skipper Waters-Fury], by Marius Monnier (1902). This half-format plate was originally published as series 17–n° 7.

It is known that they were sold in bookstores in Paris and the provinces. So far, we are not able to tell whether or not they were also sold through colporteurs. The relative inexpensiveness of the *Albums*, sold for 3.50 francs each, made them accessible to a large number of costumers.[38] Outside of France, two Belgian agents are known, both based in Brussels: Désiré Van Dantzig & Fils and Em. Rossel.[39] Both distributed *Albums*, *recueils* and probably sheets edited by the Maison Quantin in French.[40] It is probable that they also distributed sheets in Dutch translation,[41] but this remains to be confirmed. In the current state of research, we only know that Van Dantzig used to distribute Quantin sheets in Dutch, which also used to bear his own logo.

In both these languages, some plates from the Quantin imagery printed as loose sheets were used for advertisement purposes. [Figure 11] Some *recueils* were published with a back cover showing an ad, as for instance the one for the shoes *Incroyables*, which also displayed the addresses of the agents. Other collections seem to have been especially published in order to be sold in department stores in Paris as much as in their branches in the provinces, such as the *Magasins Réunis* or *Au Bon Marché*. For some of these stores, the Quantin plates published as loose sheets were used as an advertising media.[42]

38 3.50 francs at the beginning of the 20th century would amount to about 12 € today.

39 This was probably Émile Rossel (1844-1915), the founder of the Brussels daily newspaper *Le Soir*. The mention of Van Dantzig is visible on many *recueils*, whereas the name of the latter appears on the sheets, vertically on the left.

40 When exactly did Rossel and Van Dantzig start to supply the Quantin prints remains to be clarified. In any case, in an advertisement which probably dates back to after 1908, Désiré Von Dantzig & sons claimed to be "the only agent of the imagery of the Société Librairies-Imprimeries réunies, Paris.–Éditions Artistiques.–Imagerie enfantine Artistique Quantin".

41 The only known Dutch plates have 'ears' of type 2 (or 2a and 2b for the Van Dantzig variants—see Appendix). It is not known whether or not *recueils* or *Albums* in Dutch were published. According to (De Meyer 1962), at least 16 Quantin series were published in Dutch (p. 50, note 4). Dutch Quantin prints were also used for the advertisements of the biscuit factory Victoria, in Brussels (Belgium) and Dordrecht (Netherlands) (p. 52).

42 As in these two books: *50 Images enfantines, Grands Magasins, Au bon Marché, n° 1* et *n° 2* (2 volumes), Paris; and *20 Histoires choisies, Imagerie des Magasins Réunis* (several series published, including series n° 1 and n° 16).
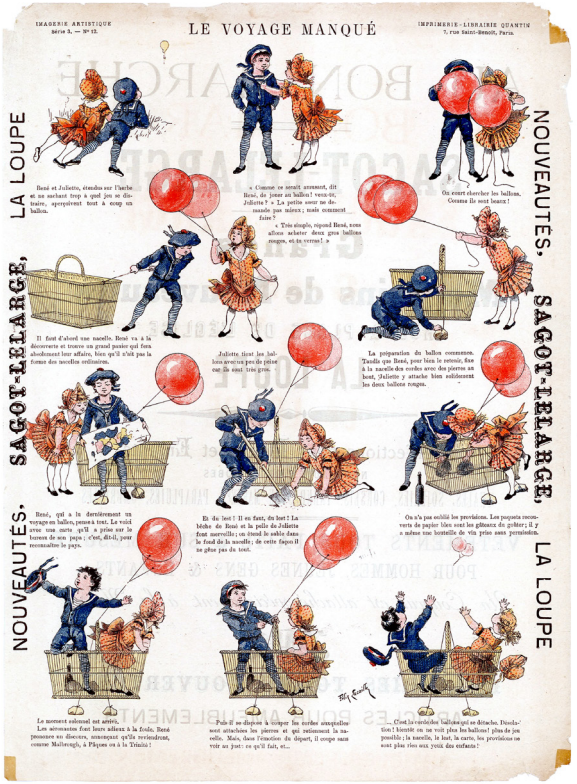


Figure 11.
Series 3—nº 12:
Le Voyage manqué
[A Failed Trip],
by Félix Lacaille (1886-87).
The back of this plate
is an advertisement
for a department store.

VII. The Quantin imagery in libraries' and museums' collections

No French public collection has significant holdings of the *Encyclopédie enfantine* of Quantin, and even less so in the case of *Imagerie Artistique*. Plates, *recueils* and *Albums* are hardly to be found in these collections.

The most interesting collections are those from the *Musée de l'Image* of Épinal, which possesses more than 250 plates, and those from the *Musée de la bande dessinée* of Angoulême. The latter museum bought in 2002 a collection of printing house files comprising the plates of the Quantin imagery: these 237 files are printers' files and represent 93 illustrators.[43] These files when in a complete state include the original plate in black and white, an aquarelle colour version, the various colour proofs (yellow, red, blue and the blends), the hand-written text, the typographic galley of the text with hand-written amendments, and the final printed plates. Around thirty files are complete, the others more or less so.

It is also worth noting in regard to the plates in Dutch, that the Waller Collection (portfolio R), kept at the Rijksprentenkabinet in the Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam, encompasses 261 Dutch plates in total. Fourteen series are in the Waller Collection, namely series number 1 to 16, seven of which are complete (numbers 1, 5 to 8, 11 and 16). Two series are absent—understandably—namely the military series number 2 and 12 (on French and Napoleonic themes), of which it is possible to suppose that they have never been translated in Dutch. The type of 'ears' that are to be seen on these plates are of type 2, 2a and 2b.[44]

VIII. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to give a formal presentation of the *Imagerie Artistique*, so as to allow for a classification and chronology, and thereby provide a sound basis for future research. Indeed, it now remains to concentrate on the Quantin plates themselves, and to compare them with the production of the time.

Through the *Imagerie Artistique*, Quantin gave new impetus to a traditional genre. Without aiming to change drastically its prevailing conventions, this ambitious publisher nevertheless managed to renew it by making use of the best innovations and tools.

Firstly, from a technical point of view, he employed one of the most modern industrial printing method, which largely contributed to his success and his reputation in the artistic prints sector.

43 Les acquisitions du musée. Le fonds Quantin. *9e art, Les Cahiers du Musée de la bande dessinée* 8 (January 2003): 112-114.

44 Thanks are due to Michel Kempeneers for this information.

Secondly, from an artistic point of view, Quantin commissioned the best artists of the time and thereby took part to the modernization of popular imagery. Moreover, the artistic imagery made illustrated children's literature accessible to artists of comics and of the satirical press.

Lastly, from a marketing point of view, Quantin managed to combine the above mentioned two elements so as to offer a new type of products: these original products, which were sold in bookstores, showed clear artistic ambitions while remaining within the boundaries of inexpensiveness.

The Quantin imagery does not seem to have particularly declined. It was a casualty of the more general and brutal crisis that affected the French publishing sector from the 1890s. It continued to be published by Louis Martinet until the 1930s, but only in the form of re-editions of poorer quality. In any case, 400 plates of this wonderful imagery are now waiting to be rediscovered and situated within the history of comics.

[Translated from the French by Irène Eulriet]

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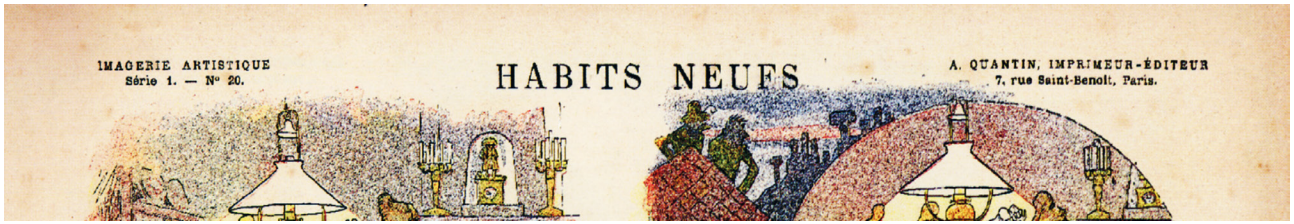


Figure 12.
'Ears' of Type 1, Series 1–n° 20:
Habits neufs [New Clothes],
by Caran d'Ache (1885).

Appendix: Typology of the different 'ears' showed on the Quantin plates

On each side of the title of the story at the top of the page, the Quantin plates display two 'ears' indicating the series and the number of the plate on the left hand side, and the details of the publisher on the right hand side.

These 'ears' differ according to the development of the Maison Quantin, as well as to the country were the plates were sold. In the following, a typology of the 'ears' that have been recorded is presented. However, a definite logic or chronology has not emerged from examination thus far.[45]

Type 0: No 'ears'. The plates without 'ears' come from *Albums*, but have never existed as loose sheets. [See e.g. Figure 5]

Type 1: on the right hand side: «A. QUANTIN, IMPRIMEUR-ÉDITEUR», and underneath: «7, rue Saint-Benoît, Paris»; on the left hand side: «IMAGERIE ARTISTIQUE», and underneath «Série [n° of the series].—N° [n° of the plate].». [See e.g. Figure 12]

Type 2: on the right hand side: «IMPRIMERIE-LIBRAIRIE QUANTIN», and underneath «7, rue Saint-Benoît, Paris.»; on the left hand side: «IMAGERIE ARTISTIQUE» and underneath «Série [n° of the series].—N° [n° of the plate].». [See e.g. Figure 11]

Type 2a:[46] on the right hand side, a crossed arrow and feather behind an inkpot are shown, with the mention: «Marque de fabrique déposée / *D.V.D.*»; on the left hand side: «IMPRIMERIE-LIBRAIRIE QUANTIN» and underneath «7, rue Saint-Benoît, Paris», underneath again «IMAGERIE ARTISTIQUE» and finally «Série [n° of the series].—N° [n° of the plate].».

Type 2b:[47] there is only one difference with type 2a, namely that the mention of: «Marque de fabrique» is placed above the inkpot, and «déposée» underneath. There is no mention of «D.V.D.».

Type 3: on the right hand side: «IMAGERIE QUANTIN» and underneath «7, rue Saint-Benoît, Paris»; on the left hand side: «Série [n° of the series].—N° [n° of the plate].». [See e.g. Figure 3]

Type 4: on the right hand side: «ANCIENNE MAISON QUANTIN» and underneath «7, rue Saint-Benoît, Paris»; on the left hand side: «IMAGERIE ARTISTIQUE» and underneath «Série [n° of the series].—N° [n° of the plate].».

Type 5: on the right hand side: «SOCIÉTÉ FRANÇAISE D'ÉDITIONS D'ART» and underneath «L.-HENRY MAY» and then «9 et 11, rue Saint-Benoît, Paris.»; On the left hand side: «IMAGERIE ARTISTIQUE» and underneath «Série [n° of the series].—N° [n° of the plate].».

[45] One can assume that the 'ears' of type 1 correspond to the first period of the imagery; those of type 4 have probably appeared after 1890; those of type 5 correspond to the Société française d'Éditions d'Art of L. May between 1897-1904; those of type 3 to the Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies run by Louis Martinet from 1908.

[46] «D.V.D.» for Désiré Van Dantzig (see par. VI). Type of 'ears' seen on Quantin plates and compendiums in Dutch. It would seem that the inkpot on the right hand side was made with the help of a red colour pad.

[47] «D.V.D.» for Désiré Van Dantzig (see par. VI). Type of 'ears' seen on the Quantin plates translated in Dutch. The inkpot on the right hand side was printed in black colour.

Traditions of Contemporary Manga (1)

Relating Comics to Premodern Art

signs STUDIES IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

by: Jaqueline Berndt

In contemporary Japan, comics proliferate to such an extent that they are not in need of general cultural authorization anymore. Until the 1980s, pioneering manga artists such as Tezuka Osamu[1] (1928-1989), and manga historians such as Shimizu Isao pointed to premodern Japanese art works in order to moderate the wide-spread suspicion towards modern manga. Their approach was mirrored, for example, by Schodt's unrivaled survey *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (1983) which, although not specifying its sources in the main text, allows a glimpse into its references to the above-mentioned by means of its bibliography. However, since the 1990s, the field of Japanese manga criticism has changed fundamentally. Instead of detecting manga's origins in premodern Japan and pursuing their continuity during the modernization process, the centre of attention shifted towards the development of *story-manga* as supposedly originated by Tezuka after WWII. Corresponding to the commercial as well as cultural prevalence of narrative comics over caricatures and cartoons, critics also exhibited a greater concern with conventions of graphic story-telling than with the previously predominant issue of satiric representation.[2] This led to the present situation: whereas manga experts today exercise caution with respect to alleged premodern origins, educators, the mass media and state institutions gladly refer to them in a populist manner. The art-education curriculum of junior highschools (effective since 2002) and the recent picture-scroll exhibition of the Kyoto National Museum (2006) are only two of many examples which show an inclination to utilize manga as a means of popularizing old art and promoting national identity.[3]

This said, my essay will foreground some persistent assumptions about manga's artistic traditions and cultural particularities. The underlying intention is twofold. On the one hand, I would like to provide various views of the matter by drawing upon publications of both Manga Studies (by Japanese historians as well as japanologists) and Japanese art history, in order to raise the level of debate over the relationship between contemporary manga and its predecessors among those who are not in command of the Japanese language and/or who are not familiar with the respective discourses. On the other hand, it is hoped that my manga-related discussion contributes to the larger issue of what general importance the pursuit of comics' 'origins' is to be given nowadays and in what way it could be more than a mere status claim.

It goes without saying that the respective understanding of comics predetermines which traditions, or

[1] Japanese names are given in the Japanese order, family names preceding first names.

[2] See for example (Inoue 1995), (Murakami 1998), (Natsume 1995, 1996, 2004), and (Takeuchi 1992, 1995, 2005).

[3] I have discussed the implications of traditionalizing manga in my forthcoming essay (Berndt 2007); for a discussion of the problematic discursive relationship between comics and fine art in Japan see (Berndt 2001). Regarding the junior-highschool curriculum see (Berndt 2002), summarized by (Gravett 2004: 18).

'origins', come into view. To me, manga is an aesthetically and culturally, but also historically highly ambiguous medium vacillating as much between historic continuity and discontinuity as between the Gutenberg galaxy and the computer era, temporality and spatiality, reading and writing, playfulness and seriousness, infant and adult. From such a point of view, it seems much more appropriate to rely on manga's fundamental ambiguity instead of giving in to rather anachronistic purity claims, as happens whenever the relation between contemporary comics and premodern Japanese art is either absolutely affirmed or denied.

My essay is divided into two parts. I leave the discussion of general problems such as the assumption that the Japanese are "predisposed to more visual forms of communication because of their calligraphy which evolved from ideograms and fused drawing and writing" (Bongco 2000: 73) to the latter half, while focusing on traditional pictorial art in this one. Starting from the name 'manga' allegedly derived from *Hokusai Manga*, I will illuminate how comics have been related to woodblock prints of the 18-19th centuries and also—going a longer way back into history—to medieval picture scrolls (*emaki*), and for what reasons these links are repudiated. Instead of pursuing *whether* there is a continuous artistic tradition culminating in contemporary manga, I will highlight *which* traditions have been considered to be crucial by critics and researchers.

1. The Term 'manga': Hokusai and Beyond

The word 'manga' consists of two components initially written in Sino-Japanese characters, [Figure 1] which are often literally translated as "funny, spontaneously drawn pictures". Let's first focus on the latter component *ga*. Tsuji Nobuo, a specialist of Japanese art history who has been showing a penchant for manga-likeness in his field,[4] explains that the word 'manga' meant "random sketches" in the 18-19th centuries whereas it translates now as comic-strip, or more precisely as "cartoon-like art created in Japan or rendered in a Japanese style" (Tsuji 2001: 54). Besides his emphasis on Japanese particuliarity, it is worth noticing that he (or his translator) uses the word 'sketches' instead of 'picture' or 'painting'. 'Sketching' points to activities employing brush and ink and resting mainly upon the potential of the line. In this respect, it recalls the fact that the East-Asian tradition did not set painting apart from drawing and ('calligraphic') writing. The Sino-Japanese characters for 'picture' (*ga*) and 'to write' (*kaku*, *sho*) share the same scriptural origin after all.

漫 画

man ga

Figure 1.
The two Sino-Japanese characters which form the word **manga**.

Unlike the component *ga* the former *man* has been inviting manifold readings. The randomness mentioned by Tsuji refers to rather uncalculated visualizations of observations and thoughts in quick brushstrokes which suggest movement before any contents representation. Yet, this movement covers only one semantic aspect of *man*. Equal importance has been ascribed to laughter. The bilingual *Dictionary of Japanese Art Terms* defines manga (with respect to the premodern era in the past tense) as "comic pictures intended to make the viewer laugh", continuing with the reservation that "it means, however, free pictures of self-indulgence in case of Hokusai's Manga" (1990: 599).

The *ukiyoe*[5] master Katsu-shika Hokusai (1760-1849) known in Europe more for his woodblock-print

[4] See for example (Tsuji 2005: 428-433).

[5] Lit.: pictures of the floating world. Initially derived from the Buddhist notion of transcience, the 'floating world' referred increasingly to the pleasure district, the theatre and other ur-

series than for his book illustrations of entertaining fiction, began to publish his so-called *Hokusai Manga* in 1814. [Figure 2] Fourteen more volumes, reprints notwithstanding, were to follow until 1878, the last three naturally not created by the master himself anymore. Hokusai did not coin the word 'manga' though. Japanologist Stephan Köhn, for example, traces the characters, which are nowadays read as *manga*, back to titles of literary works of the late 18th century signifying miscellaneous writings (Köhn 2005: 206, note 32), probably drawing upon manga historian Shimizu Isao's speculation that the word 'manga' was initially an abbreviation of *manpitsu-ga* which stemmed from *manpitsu* [rambling, or meandering essayistic writing] (Shimizu 1991: 17). Whereas the latter can also be found in Chinese, 'manga' as a word for *pictorial* essays, so to speak, seems to be a Japanese invention, a fact which deserves attention with respect to the often-observed predisposition of Japanese culture for visual representation and communication. Köhn, whose groundbreaking study shall be introduced in the next section of this paper, illuminates that in the course of intertwining word and picture, in Japan, oral traditions were rather transformed into pictorial narratives than into new literary genres as customary in China (Köhn 2005: 129). In passing it is interesting to note that in the early 20th century, the word 'manga'—as an offspring of Japan's exemplary modernization—became one of the historically rare linguistic exports from Japan to China where it has been signifying not narrative comics but caricatures and cartoons since (a fact which reveals what 'manga' mostly meant in Japan at the time of its export).



Figure 2.
Katsushika Hokusai:
Kaze [Wind], from
Hokusai Manga (1834).

In the early 19th century, besides miscellaneous writings, assorted drawings were published under the name of manga such as Aikawa Minwa's *Manga hyakujo* [Pictures of (Kyoto) Women] (1814, 31 illustrations), or, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the death of painter Ogata Kôrin (1658-1716), the catalogue-like *Kôrin manga* (1817, ca. 80 illustrations). Like *Hokusai Manga* the latter did not serve a humorous but an educational purpose; it was a model or practice book for students of pictorial art (*edehon*). Due to the then-new phenomenon of amateur painters, such publications enjoyed great popularity, and they spread into even wider circles feeding the urbanites' novel obsession with visual information. Whereas their educational intention—in addition to the missing emphasis on story—distinguishes these early 'manga' from Japan's comics as established by Tezuka Osamu and others, both their deliberate rendering and the thoroughness required by the printing process set them apart from random, spontaneously drawn sketches.

To sum up, one may say that prior to Japan's modernization, 'manga' was mainly a collective term which referred less to a certain quality—that is, a specific style (random drawings) and content type (satire)—than to a certain quantity, signifying an "entirety of acts by which all sorts of things are drawn in all sorts of styles, and a vast amount of pictures as its result" (Miyamoto 2003: 322). Comprising 4.000 pages of illustrations, not linked by a narrative and not neces-

ban spaces which were the subject of genre pictures (paintings as well as originally designed prints) in the 17-19th centuries.

sarily funny thoughout, *Hokusai Manga* appears to be a visual reference book, an encyclopedia of life, or an anthology of pictorial sketches. Mentioned in passing, manga artist Ishinomori Shôtarô (1938-1998) emphasized this semantic nuance of entirety when he deliberately used the homophonic character designating 'ten-thousand', or 'everything' for the component *man* (also read *yorozu*) in an attempt to resist the narrowing down of the notion of manga to the bestselling series in weekly magazines. In his *Manga Manifesto* (1989) he suggested to translate 'manga' into English as "million art" in tune with its wide range of subject matter, style and readership (Onodera 2001: 56). Manga historian Shimizu Isao foregrounds this aspect, too, when he characterizes *Hokusai Manga* as, first, a manual to the depiction of all creatures and creations, second, a playful and whimsical depiction of human society, and third, a promotion of the 'picture' in its broadest sense embracing both daily-life reality and fantasies, last but not least erotic ones (Shimizu 1985: 59-61).

In contrast, about three decades earlier than Ishinomori and Shimizu, Theodore R. Bowie, an art historian with an interest in woodblock prints (not in comics), still had to argue against the then-dominant disparagement of Hokusai's work: "in attempting to understand Hokusai and to gauge the quality of his humor it would be a mistake to accept too literally his status as the 'leader of the Plebeian School' and to assume that he was unsophisticated and ignorant of the great tradition of Japanese painting" (Bowie 1960: 224). Interestingly, Bowie appealed to older, already-canonized art works (like the *Chôjû giga* [Frolicking Animals scroll]) in order to defend Hokusai—just as manga creators and critics did in order to legitimize comics. Furthermore, the fact that especially Hokusai's humor called for justification can be linked to the central role

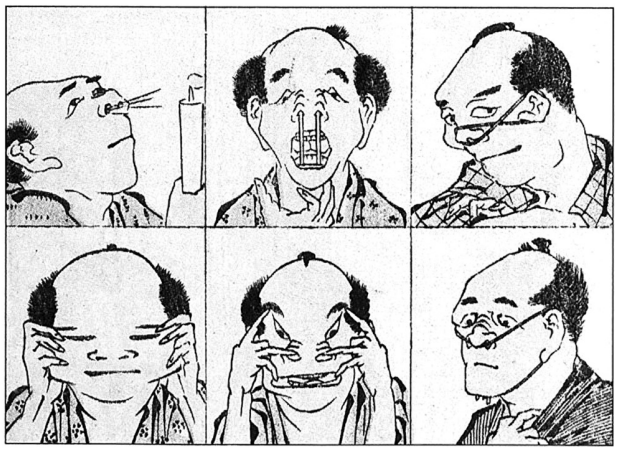


Figure 3.
Katsushika Hokusai:
Hyakumensô [Funny Faces],
from **Hokusai Manga** (1819).

which, until recently, modern definitions of manga ascribed to laughter.

However, the word 'manga' does not mean funny pictures which make the viewer laugh in the first place. Not 'manga' itself, but its references to the scattered, aimless, uninhibited and involuntary may occasionally lead to comic impacts. Such aspects can, among other things, provide preconditions for laughter insofar as they throw social norms and aesthetic conventions into doubt, for example, by visualizing contortions of human bodies and faces. [Figure 3] The 'laughter', if relevant at all, should be qualified though. What sets it apart from an ordinary contemporary understanding is suggested by the erotic (if not pornographic) prints of the 18-19th centuries. Known today mainly under the name of 'spring pictures' (*shunga*) they were at their time also labeled 'laughing pictures' (*warai-e*)—not precisely because they made fun of sexual intercourse, but rather because they belonged to a "cognitive condition of being apart from the 'fixed' world of daily life and duty" (Screech 1999: 8), a cultural realm such as manifested in the pleasure district. [Figures 4 and 5] In contrast, comical pictures were called *Toba-e*—"anonymously drawn and mostly wordless comic books" modelled on the alleged creator of the *Frolicking Animals scroll*, the

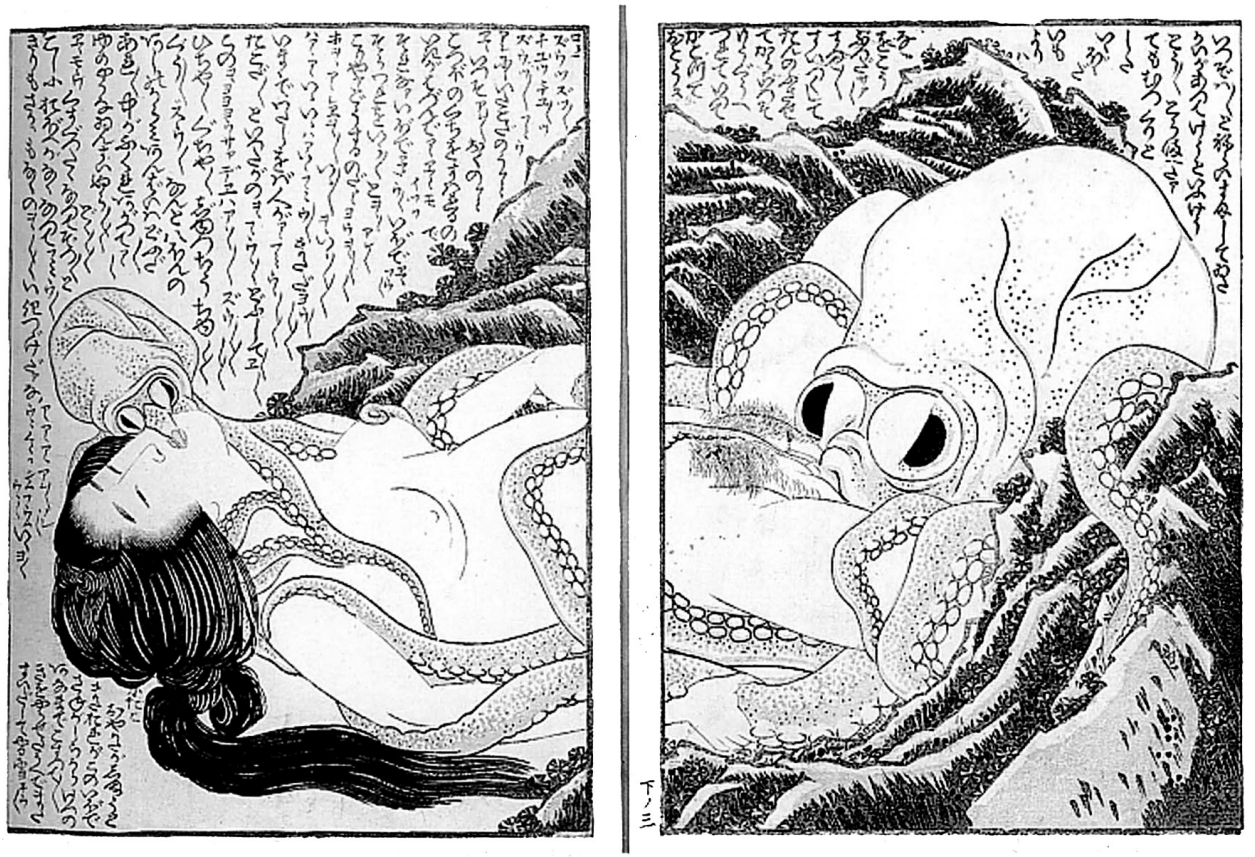


Figure 4.
Katsushika Hokusai:
Tako to ama ga karamiau
[Octopi and Pearl Diver],
from the book **Kinoe no komatsû**
[Young Pine Shoots, actually: Pining Away for Love],
4th plate of vol. 3 (1814).

Buddhist abbot Toba Sôjô (aka Fujiwara no Kakuyû, 1053-1140) (Duus 2001: 968), *giga* [cartoons],[6] or even *kyôga* [crazy pictures], to name just a few.

Eventually, around 1900, Hokusai's (and others') collective term 'manga' was reduced to the meaning of "satirical and comical picture" (*fûshi kokkei no ga*), that is to say, it changed into the signifier of a certain style of pictures. This new 'manga' emerged from modern newspapers. One of the leading intellectuals, Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), who titled *Mangen* [miscellaneous words] the editorials in his *Jiji shinpô* [Current-affairs news] (1882-1936), employed his America-experienced nephew Imaizumi Ippyô (1865-1904) as a cartoonist in order to make political issues more easily accessible to his readers. In 1895, Imaizumi published a collection of his drawings under the name of 'manga' (*Ippyô manga shû*), and two years later he presented some 'manga' works in the second exhibition of the White Horse Society (*Hakubakai*), a group of young Western-style painters. Due to illness though, he had to hand over the cartoon section in his uncle's newspaper to Kitazawa Rakuten (1876-1955). Kitazawa went down

[6] Cultural sociologist Tsurumi Shunsuke, for example, translates *giga* with 'cartoon' when he regards *The adventures of little Shô* (*Shô-chan no bôken*, 1923-) as "the first *comic strip* in the history of Japan" and distinguishes it from "the Japanese *cartoonist* tradition of long standing closely bound up with the use of the brush as a writing instrument" (Tsurumi 1984: 750; my emphasis). See also (Yumoto 1997).



Figure 5.
Eishôsai Chôki:
Zendama akudama seirô yûkyô zu
[Struggle between Good and Bad],
(ca. 1800).
A visitor to the pleasure district of Yoshiwara torn between clear and bad conscience as symbolized by small figures with the Sino-Japanese characters of good 善 and bad 悪 in place of their faces.

in history as the first professional manga artist of modern Japan. In 1902, when *Jiji shinpô* was experiencing financial difficulties after the death of its founder, he was given a *Jiji manga* [Current-affairs manga] section in the Sunday supplement which soon became popular. By calling his cartoons and comic-strips 'manga' Kitazawa did not emphasize the pictorial traditions of the *ukiyoe* woodblock print; he rather distinguished his drawings from the caricaturesque *ponchi-e* [Punch Pictures] of the late 19th century which had stayed close to the visual culture of the previous era but saw a decline around 1900. Kitazawa attempted at raising the Punch pictures' level to Western heights as demonstrated by Charles Wirgman (1832-1891), the founder of the satirical magazine *Japan Punch* (1862-1887) from which the name *ponchi-e* derived, and George Bigot (1860-1927). [Figure 6] How important the European model was to him reveals the title of the magazine he launched in 1905: *Tôkyô Puck* [Figure 7].

Quite exceptional for modern Japan, the word 'manga', used by Japanese elites around 1900, was not a neologism. Drawing upon a certain tradition of pithy pictures and the visualization of ideas, this very tradition was nonetheless reduced: whereas previously reading, watching and talking intermingled, modern manga showed an inclination to isolate pictures from text and to address itself to an individual viewer—just like fine-art painting to which it was finally assigned as a subgenre, impure to some and far more free in its expression to others (Miyamoto 2001: 11/298). How this sort of pictures relates to the medium of children and/or youth from the lower class, as which manga has been increasingly presenting itself since the 1950s, still needs to be explored thorougly. In the 1920s, in the wake of newspaper comic-strips—such as those by Okamoto Ippei (1886-1948) or *The Adventures of little Shô*,[7] one of the first series addressed to children [Figure 8]—the term 'manga' came into wide use, but it were to change its meaning fundamentally after WWII when Tezuka Osamu brought on earlier attempts at *story-manga* by profiting from references to modern novels and cinema rather than traditional painting or calligraphy.



Figure 6.
Georges Bigot:
La femme nue de M. Kuroda, 1895; in (Ganesco 1895: 33).
This caricature depicts the scandalous display of the nude painting **Chôshô** [Morning Toilet] (1893), by Western-style painter Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924) at the 4th National Industrial Fair in Kyoto in 1895.

Similarly, the actual relevance of *Hokusai Manga* for Imaizumi, Kitazawa and their contemporaries has not been validated yet. On the one hand, modernizers back then regarded the culture of the previous Edo era (including Hokusai) as anachronistic and old-fash-

[7] *Shô-chan no bôken*, by scenarist Oda Shôsei and artist Kabashima Katsuichi, 1923-.

ioned; on the other hand, Hokusai and other *ukiyoe* masters were highly appreciated in the metropolitan centres of Europe, in the context of *japonisme*. While there can be no doubt about the cultural ambiguity underlying the modern term 'manga' (due to its intertwining Japanese traditions with European models), in light of the art-historical disdain for woodblock prints in Japan between the 1890s and the 1990s, it remains to be proven whether Kitazawa actually used the word in order to upgrade his profession as Köhn assumes (Köhn 2005: 207).

Finally, it should be noted that the word 'manga' today is not anymore predominantly written with the above-mentioned Sino-Japanese characters. Equally common is the use of the *katakana* syllabary (three syllables, to be precise: *ma/n/ga*). [Figure 9] In contemporary Japan normally deployed to transliterate foreign terms and 'Japanize' them phonetically as well as textually, the *katakana* writing has the effect of de-Japanizing the word 'manga', which on account of manga's modern cultural ambiguity—not to forget the influence of American comics after WWII—, appears to be very appropriate.

2. 'Visuo-Narrations': Mangaesque Elements in Premodern Art

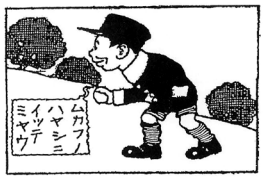
"Japan's manga culture which set off from the one-panel satiric picture [around 1900], seems to have returned to the narrative world of the picture scrolls when it reached its height of prosperity with graphic novels" (*Shûkan Nihon no bi wo meguru* 2002: 36). Not only publications popularizing old art like the one quoted here, but also manga histories which do not restrain themselves to the postwar era often fall back on picture scrolls (*emaki*) of the 12th century in order to determine the origin of contemporary Japanese comics. Passing over matters like non-exclusive access and reproduction technology in favor



Figure 7.
Kitazawa Rakuten: "Miss Haneko, Daughter of a new Peer/ **Shinkazoku no himegimi Haneko**", in **Tôkyô Puck**, October 1, 1907, p. 5. This upper half of page 5 comments satirically upon the then-newly enacted New Aristocracy Law, which increased the number of artistocrats in order to facilitate loyality to the emperor, by depicting the snootiness of the previous commoner Miss Haneko.



5.『お伽　正チヤンの冒険』
朝日新聞社刊（全７巻）
大正１３年 貳の巻「シノミヤコ」より



1.『正チヤンのぼうけん』
日刊「アサヒグラフ」連載
大正１２年１月２５日（創刊号）
より



6.『お伽　正チヤンの冒険』
朝日新聞社刊（全７巻）
大正１４年 四の巻「テング」より



2.『正チヤンのぼうけん』
日刊「アサヒグラフ」連載
大正１２年 「ヒメノユクヘ」より

Figure 8.
Shô-chan no bôken
[The Adventures of little Shô],
by scenarist Oda Shôsei and artist
Kabashima Katsuichi,
examples from
1923 (right) and 1925 (left).

of formal resemblances, they usually point to the rendering of the passage of time, especially in the form of pictorial sequences, and pursue the integration of verbal text into pictorial space as well as comic-specific symbolizations, above all speedlines.

In (Köhn 2005), japanologist Stephan Köhn deploys a semiotic three-stage model in order to attain precise criteria for the determination of mangaesque 'visuo-narrations', assuming that manga is, above all, to be understood as a sort of story-telling. The first focus is on the so-called micro-level which comprises basic elements such as comics-specific pictorial attributes, impact lines, graphically rendered script, sound words, extradiegetic inscriptions on cloths and buildings, dialogue text and internal monologue. The variety of verbal and pictorial styles is intentionally disregarded because they are not thought to be primarily relevant for the process of visual story-telling (Köhn 2005: 90). Then, the syntagms of these single elements are located on the so-called macro-level. Special attention is paid to the framing of the field of vision, from (more dream or thought than speech) balloons to splash-pages. What happens within the single frame, the respective *mise-en-scène* and its pictorial rendering, is not considered to be of fundamental importance for the narrative. Finally, the so-called supra-level regulates the interrelations of all micro and macro components putting them in the service of story-telling. According to Köhn, only the functionability of this third level—which ultimately matured in the printed entertaining fiction of the 18-19th centuries—justifies an acknowledgement of certain traditions as mangaesque. Yet, this does not mean that these traditions were continuously passed on during the 20th century. Köhn emphasizes their disruption (Köhn 2005: 198).

In view of Köhn's model, the often-cited medieval picture scrolls reveal manga-like characteristics on the first and, partly, on the second levels. For example, in the *Frolicking Animals scroll*—"Japan's first undisputed masterpiece of cartooning" (Schodt 1988: 28)—a monkey monk releases smoke-like lines from his mouth while sitting in front of a frog Buddha sculpture; the lines visualize his sutra recitation in honour of a deceased. [Figure 10] Similarly well known as an alleged ancestor of contemporary manga are the *Shigisan engi emaki* [Miraculous Tales of Mount Shigi], 12th century. This set of scrolls tells of monk Myôren who eventually

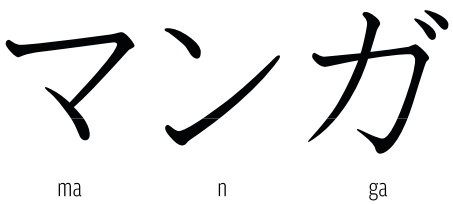


Figure 9.
The word 'manga' written
in **katakana** syllabary.

founded the temple Chôgôsonshi-ji northwest of Nara. One day when locked inside a granary and forgotten, the monk's magic alms bowl lifted the whole building and took it to his hermitage in Mt. Shigi; delicate lines indicate this movement. Another sequence visualizes how Myôren helped the ailing emperor without

attending in person. The guardian spirit he sent instead makes his entrance on a kind of cloud [Figure 11] which animation director Takahata Isao finds quite mangaesque (Takahata 1999: 36-37). In contemporary Japan, such elements are often likened to comics, although closer inspection reveals that they are actually rather exceptional among the about three dozens of remaining illustrated hand scrolls.

The *Frolicking Animals scroll* has been praised for its manga-likeness also in terms of the allegedly humorous or even satiric nature of its depictions. Experts of Japanese art such as Mimi Yiengpruksawan point out not only the groundlessness of this alleged intention but even more hindrances for linking *Frolicking Animals scroll* to contemporary comics: it was not an entertaining commodity addressed to a (more or less) anonymous audience, and it does not have an identifiable plot-line; it lacks any text brushed into the pictures, and a supplementary booklet has not been found either (Yiengpruksawan 2000: 75). Obviously, narrativity ranks high as an aesthetic criterium. The already-mentioned *Tales of Mount Shigi*, for example, clearly tell stories, and to such an extend that Wakasugi Shunji, curator at the Kyoto National Museum, calls them the most typical of all remaining *emaki* (Wakasugi 2006: 8). Köhn, though, does not approve of their characterization as a manga-like 'visuo-narration', stressing that their pictorial sequences are only rarely based on visual information alone and their narrations not conclusive as such; they still require an exclusive background knowledge, or oral explanations (Köhn 2005: 133-134). While the role of shared stories in premodern times is not being examined, the often-underrated importance of oral story-telling for the intertwining of the verbal and the pictorial is elucidated, which leads to the assertion that Japan's 'visuo-narrations' resulted from a confluence of both pictorial and narrative traditions with the human voice.

Going over the ground, Köhn's exploration allows for critizing ahistorical claims such as those by art historian Tsuji Nobuo who responds to the above-mentioned critical remarks by Yiengpruksawan with the following words: "still I believe there is merit in looking from a broader art historical perspective to examine transhistorical resonances when they can be discovered: we should not simply look at *anime* as a direct import from the West, which evolved in Japan according to postwar consumer tastes" (Tsuji 2001: 54). Tsuji refrains from giving any further explanation why such resonances deserve attention. The subliminal inclination to nationalizing contemporary manga (and anime) is symptomatic though.



Figure 10.
Chôjû giga
[Frolicking Animal scroll],
(12th century).

In contrast, Köhn's study focuses on thorough historical research. However, the underlying definition of comics is rather narrow and not explicated in comparison to other conceptions. Köhn's understanding of comics draws upon the primacy of a story-telling as unequivocal and, thus, as easily decodable as possible. The same applies to the majority of Japanese publications in the field of Manga Studies during the last decade or so, and it is no less in tune with the kind of manga commercially most successful today (although

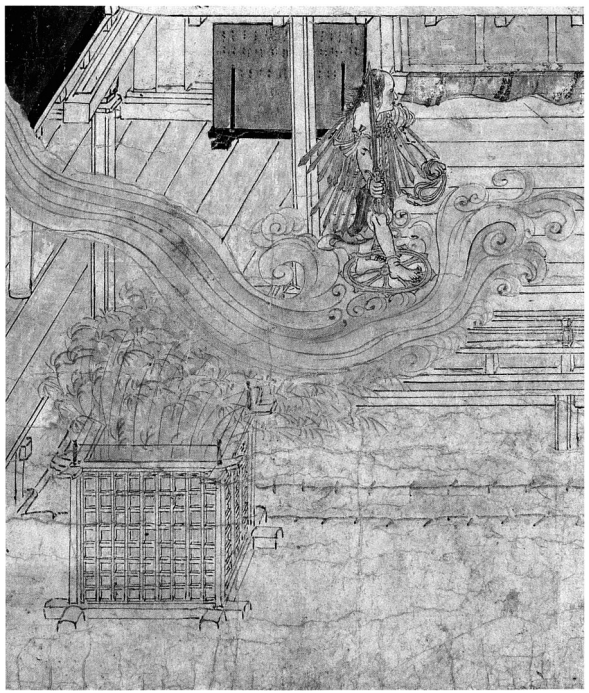


Figure 11.
Shigisan engi emaki
[Miraculous Tales of Mount Shigi],
(12th century),
in (Kyoto National Museum 2006: 127).

the recent dominance of cute characters raises questions about the actual relevance of narratives and their changing nature). At the centre of Köhn's study are not semiotic ambiguity and a respective semantic diversity, not possible frictions between the materiality and the representationality of symbols, but comics as a highly conventionalized language. This becomes especially apparent when the transition of 'visuo-narrations' from hand-drawn scrolls to printed booklets is recapitulated.

According to Köhn, the emergence of a new culture of printed fiction in the 17th century involved at first a regress with respect to the interaction of the verbal and the pictorial, while both the new medium and the readership, which was not limited to the aristocracy anymore, already pointed to the future. Back then, the technology of the woodblock print, allowing for more illustrations than typesetting because text and pictures are manufactured in one and the same process, came into use for entertaining fiction, too. Pay libraries—the *kashihon'ya* which reappeared in the manga culture of the 1950/60s—flourished, especially in the capital of Edo. Yet, the publication of books could also lean increasingly on a ready market instead of the previously dominant individual order (or, print-on-demand). Furthermore, many city dwellers had just become literate. Addressed to this new audience, a new genre emerged: illustrated narrative booklets called *kusazôshi* (lit.: potpourris, or jumble books). Deploying syllabary which phonetically aided the deciphering of Sino-Japanese characters, these publications provided prose text as well as dialogue, the latter placed right next to its drawn speaker and often marked with brackets initially used in drama texts (which, by the way, was not the only thing they adopted from the *kabuki* theatre). Furthermore, the booklets maximized the potential of the script by using sound words and by rendering text visually, for example as an indicator of the rain it talked about. In addition, the space of the two-page spread began to be subdivided. The first 'balloons' (often containing pictorially rendered thoughts rather then just dialogue text) are said to have appeared in 1745 (Köhn 2005: 181). [Figure 12]

In his understanding of mangaesque 'visuo-narrations', Köhn favors linguistic characteristics above pictorial ones. One might assume that a consideration of pictorial style would not be meaningful anyway. Already the *Frolicking Animals scroll* was "flat-footed if not amateurish in form and composition" and deploying a "rather workman-like and economical" brushwork (Yiengpruksawan 2000: 79). This observation by Yiengpruksawan is, although not exactly in her spirit, remarkable on account of the conventionality of present mainstream manga. It is precisely the predominance of quick execution and expressive symbols instead of

deliberate artistry which relates the *Frolicking Animals scroll* stylistically to contemporary Japanese comics.

In addition to the minor role of pictorial style, Köhn's study attaches more importance to the integration of the verbal and the pictorial in service of a narrative than to non-verbal story-telling and the pleasure of enjoying non-narrative movement. In the name of 'real narrativity', the dynamism usually ascribed to traditional Japanese painting is dismissed. However, the not necessarily narrative movement in medieval picture scrolls is comparable to contemporary manga, at least in two regards: the recent proliferation of cute characters and, in a more general way, spatiality as one crucial dimension of comics. Indicative of that is the dynamism of the graphic linéament as well as the so-called technique of simultaneous depiction (*ijidôzu*). In the *Tales of Mount Shigi* monk Myôren's sister who is a nun spends one night in front of the Great Buddha of Tôdaiji temple—kneeling, praying, sleeping and finally departing the next morning after she was told where to look for her brother. [Figure 13] Whereas the pictorial background stays the same, the viewer sees the nun in a succession of moments. This technique, however, can only be recognized as mangaesque if comics are understood as spatial narratives, that is, blendings of time and space.

Pertaining to the spatial rendering of temporality, art historian Yamamoto Yôko points out an interesting



Figure 12.
Kakinomoto Hitomaro ichidai ki
[Scenes from Kakinomoto Hitomaro's Life as Described by Himself], (around 1800).

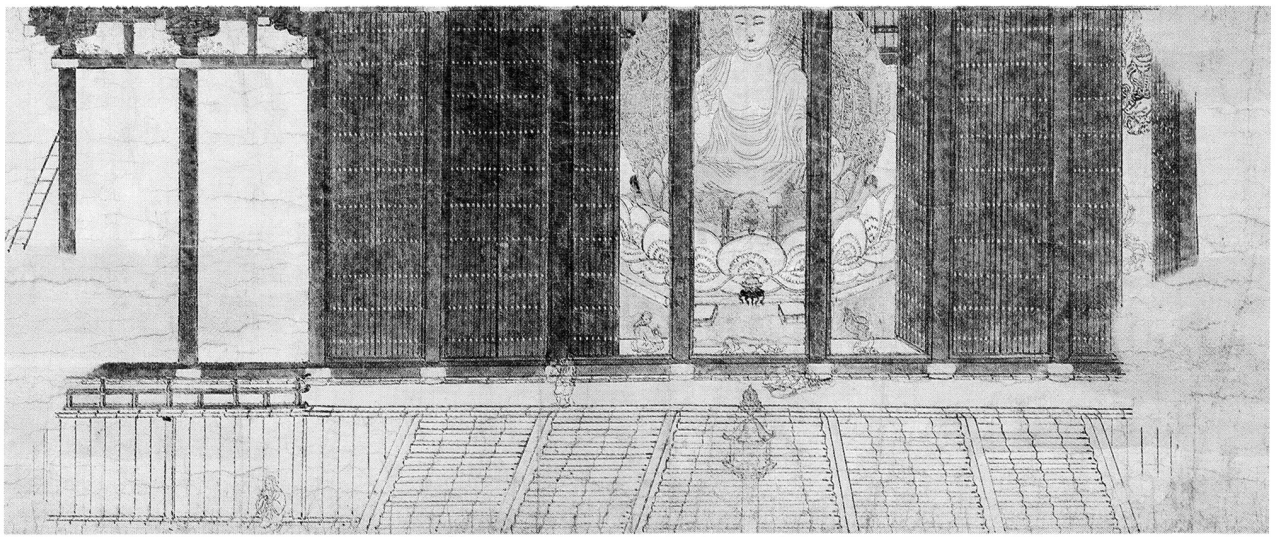


Figure 13.
Shigisan engi emaki
[Miraculous Tales of Mount Shigi],
(12th century).

phenomen: whereas Japanese manga are globally appreciated today, among other things, for their highly varying panel-layout (and the 'movement' conveyed by panel transitions), prior to the late 19th century, Japanese artists were not very fond of this device although they were familiar with it. According to her, the alleged ancestors of contemporary comics—from the *Frolicking Animals scroll* to the entertaining pictorial narratives of the early 19th century—deployed whatever device of rendering temporality was available to them, but refrained from subdividing the picture plane (or page) in a mangaesque way (*koma-wari*). [Figure 14] While Köhn merely mentions the *ukiyoe* artists' restraint in regard to changing angles and frame sizes, Yamamoto provides an explanation. Laying a picture plane out in panels was regarded a technique for young and/or uneducated persons lacking the ability to recognize the passage of time, that is, sequentiality within simultaneity (Yamamoto 2004: 125). Living on in this assumption were older meanings: for artists of the 18-19th centuries the device of the panel-layout was too strongly laden with religious connotations which involved seriousness. It had been used in hanging scrolls illustrating Buddhist tales or the life of famous monks (*setsuwaga*) with the purpose of aiding the viewers' understanding by combining verbal (as oral) with pictorial information. [Figure 15] In order to tone down the religious references, the panel-layout had to be filtered by a foreign culture. This occurred at the end of the 19th century

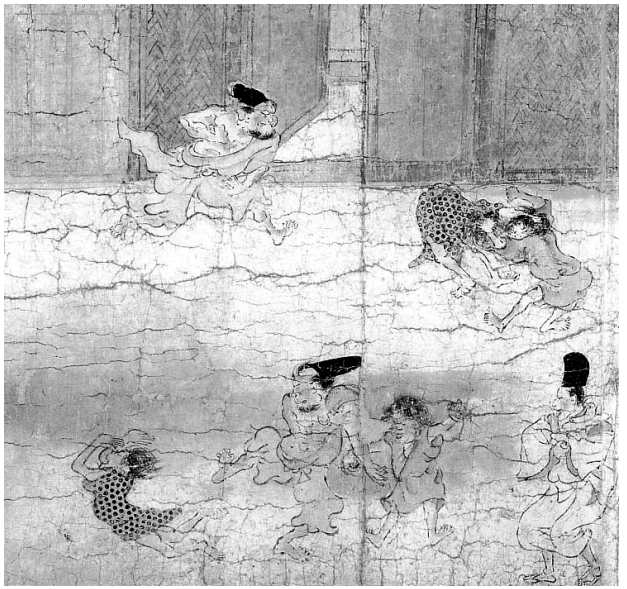


Figure 14.
Ban Dainagon ekotoba
[The Tale of the Major Counsellor Ban],
(12th century).
In this scene, a father pushes away a boy, who is fighting with his son, in such a violent manner that the other boy's mother discloses in fury a long-kept secret: the responsibility of the man's master, that is, major counsellor Ban, for the arson another lord had been convicted for.

when western comic-strips came to Japan.

As demonstrated by the discussion above, the pursuit of manga's traditions as well as their repudiation is not only predetermined by the respective understanding of comics but also triggers further questions in regard to almost naturalized definitions. In what context is it meaningful to determine comics primarily as 'visuo-narrations'? Why should special relevance be given to speedlines, speech-balloons and the panel-layout? What kind of comics suggests to conceptionally favor the visual over the other senses? To what extent does the exploration of formal structure call for a consideration of cultural contexts? Against this background, I would finally like to mention four points besides pictorial story-telling with respect to where Japan's premodern art meets with contemporary manga.

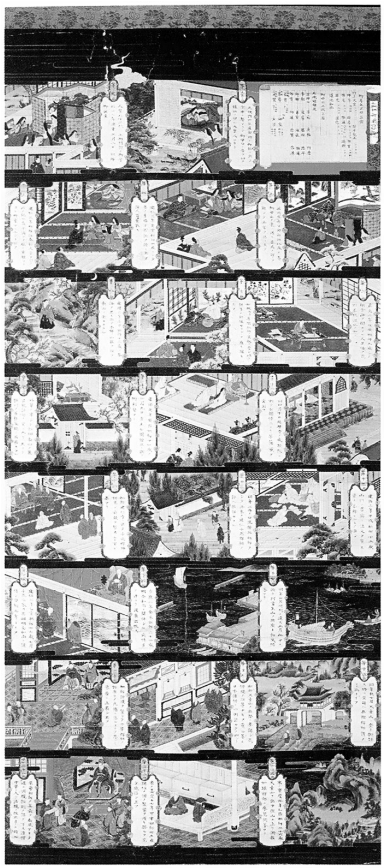


Figure 15
Dôgen zenshi ichidaiki zue
[Pictorial Biography of the Zen Priest Dôgen], (mid-19th century), hanging scroll, water colour and gold on silk, unsigned.

First, they resemble each other insofar as they both combine the visual (the eye) with the tactile (the hand). In contradistinction to modern painting, they demand touching, by turning pages, holding prints or unrolling scrolls.[8] In fact, what seems to be pictorially flat often gains depth at the hands of the viewer. Picture scrolls were viewed from above, and the entertaining booklets of the 18-19th centuries had to be held at a certain acute angle due to their being bound with string stiches between soft covers. Likewise, contemporary manga—both as magazine series and as *tankôbon* books—are not read by flattening the pages. Second, neither old Japanese paintings nor manga are intended to be exhibited for long periods of time under modern spotlights. Rather, they are made to be occasionally exposed to sometimes pausing, mostly wandering gazes. Third, traditional pictures (not only prints) tend to escape the modern concept of originality just as manga does although less in a premodern than postmodern way. The aura of traditional art works, for example, owed much to these works' cultural circulation, to being revisited and to having their value reassured by being copied. Similarly, manga is highly 'parasitic', on part of its professional creators as well as its creatively appropriating fans (suffice to mention the *dôjinshi* fanzines). Fourth, *ukiyoe* woodblock prints especially can be compared to manga in terms of being popular and highly commercialized forms which historically proved to be much more open to foreign influences than their high-culture counterparts. Hokusai and others integrated, for example, partly the European central perspective, a phenomenon which is echoed by manga's openness to a range of pictorial sources, stretching from Chinese ink-painting and European tableau to western caricature and American superhero comics, from photography and film to animated movies. What is globally known as manga style today is as much the result of intercultural exchange as was the woodblock print 200 years earlier.

[8] Picture scrolls are held in both hands and successively unrolled exposing approximately 60 cm at a time. This unrolling is said to be a Japanese innovation (Armbruster 1959: 211).

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The Marriage of Marfisa
A Florentine Series of Prints from 1796

signs
STUDIES IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

by: Alberto Milano

The Publishers Pagni and Bardi

"Lo sposalizio di Marfisa, o sia raccolta di Caricature diverse inventate da Giuseppe Piattoli in Num. 10 mezzi fogli imperiali, ed espresse a colori—Paoli 15,—" [The Marriage of Marfisa, or, Collection of various Caricatures drawn by Giuseppe Piattoli in 10 half imperial sheets, coloured—Paoli 15,—].

This is the item description, as it occurs in the catalogue[1] of the Florentine publishers Niccolò Pagni and Giuseppe Bardi, of a series of prints that were widely available in Italy between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. The catalogue bears no date of issue; however, it includes a print for the coronation of the Emperor of Austria Francis I, born in Florence. Since the coronation took place in August 1804, it is likely that the catalogue was issued at the end of the same year.[2]

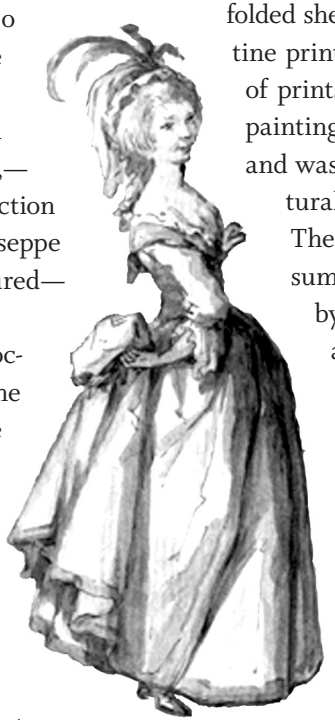


Figure 1.
Detail from a water-colored pen drawing by Giuseppe Piattoli. A charming lady in a preliminary sketch for the print titled **Il diavolo non è brutto quanto si dipinge**, plate n. 23 of the **Proverbi** second series, published in Florence by Bardi and Pagni in 1788.

The catalogue, printed on four sides of a single folded sheet, offers important insights into the Florentine printing scene of the time. It includes the series of prints on Florentine artistic treasures (churches, paintings, and so on) produced by Pagni and Bardi and was aimed at the art collectors market and 'cultural tourists' of the time, especially foreigners. The publishers' catalogue includes reprints (presumably taken from the original plates) of works by Stefano della Bella (Florence, 1610-1666) and Jacques Callot (Nancy, 1592-1635), side by side with descriptions of sheets of visiting cards, prints of religious scenes and calligraphy manuals.[3]

Furthermore, some of the series belonged to a more decorative genre, designed for a larger public, and which were quite popular during the day.[4] These series included two collections of *Proverbi, o Motti Toscani espressi con figure da Giuseppe Piattoli* [Sayings, or Tuscan Mottoes expressed with pictures by Giuseppe Piattoli], comprising of up to eighty sheets; twenty-five engravings of *Giuochi, Trattenimenti, e Feste annue che si consumano in Toscana,*

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1 The *Catalogo delle stampe incise in rame che si vendono in Firenze da Niccolò Pagni e Giuseppe Bardi* [Catalogue of the copper engraved prints that are sold in Florence by Niccolò Pagni and Giuseppe Bardi] is in the Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli. Many thanks to Giovanna Mori and Patrizia Foglia for their friendly collaboration to my research.

2 "Arco Trionfale eretto fuori della Porta S. Gallo per l'Incoronazione di Francesco I Imp. In fog. imper. Paoli 2,—" [Arch of Triumph built outside of Porta S. Gallo for the coronation of Emperor Francis I. In imperial sheets. Paoli 2,—]

3 Pagni and Bardi's output, and in general the Florentine production of larger diffusion prints, was quite important between 1780 and 1820; different from the contemporary prints from Bassano, Milan and Venice, these Tuscan prints show some common characteristics. So far, no research has been specifically devoted to the analysis of these prints.

4 See (Mazzocca 1981: 342).

e specialmente in Firenze disegnate da Giuseppe Piattoli [Games, Entertainments and yearly Celebrations held in Tuscany, and especially in Florence, drawn by Giuseppe Piattoli]; and the *Favole* [Fables], drawn by the same Piattoli. [Figure 1]

For their publishing activities Pagni and Bardi employed a large number of artist and engravers; among them, however, special status can be assigned to Giuseppe Piattoli (Florence, 1743?-1823?) and Carlo Lasinio (Treviso, 1759-Pisa, 1838).

On Piattoli and Lasinio

Neither the birth date nor the date of death of Giuseppe Piattoli are known with certainty. Florentine, son of the painter Gaetano Piattoli, he was born between 1740 and 1750 and died after 1818. It is known that he was teacher of drawing at the Florence Academy from 1785 to 1807.[5]

Carlo Lasinio was a prolific painter and engraver. He taught engraving at the Florence Academy from 1779 to 1835[6] and held various civic positions. He worked for many printers in Florence and Pisa, though his large output has not yet been completely indexed.

Piattoli and Lasinio worked together in the production of some decorative series for Pagni and Bardi. Their work relationship differs slightly from the demarcation of tasks between artist and engraver that was typical at the time. It seems that Lasinio supervised the copper engraving process of the Piattoli's original drawings. That is, beside producing his own engravings, Lasinio likely supervised and organized the work of other engravers, in order to harmonize their style.

In the first series of *Proverbi*, published in 1786 in portrait format, Piattoli created rather detailed drawings,[7] but their engraving followed rather traditional shadowing schemes, using parallel and perpendicular lines, heavily cluttering the scenes. In the second series of *Proverbi*, published in 1788 in landscape format, Piattoli's drawings are more animated, sporting light touches and bright colours. The engraving lines however, albeit less crowded, do not do justice to the drawings: the different plates are rather inconsistent, and well-rendered scenes alternate with less refined ones. In the two series of *Giuochi* (published between 1790 and 1795), the engraving lines are fewer and often limited to shapes, in order to render the open-air settings of parks and gardens.

Working on *Marfisa*

For the *Sposalizio di Marfisa* prints, Piattoli and Lasinio show a division of responsibilities in their work, the result of a long acquaintance as well as a necessity dictated by time costrains. Likely, the two artists worked on a tight schedule: their personal situation (with short deadlines and low salaries) must have been similar to that described in the many letters of the engravers working for the biggest publishing house of the time, the Remondini of Bassano.[8] Indeed, the drawings by Piattoli for the *Marfisa* series[9] are sketchier than the rather detailed works of previous years. The settings and backgrounds of the scenes are vaguely delineated,

5 See (D'Ancona 1909) and (*Dizionario Bolaffi* 1974: *s.v.*).

6 A wealth of information on Carlo Lasinio is available in (Torri 1839), (Gigli 1943), (Forlani Tempesti 1970), and (Cassinelli 1990, 2004). The latter item includes a complete bibliography on the artist.

7 Some surviving examples of these drawings has been reproduced in (Galleria W. Apolloni 2001). See also (Pazzini 2005). For an interesting comparison with the heroic-mythological drawings of the same artist, see (Ruggeri 1978).

8 A selection of letters between the Remondini and their engravers, as well as an analysis of a few recurring themes in them, may be found in (Gosen 2000).

9 Seven original drawings for the *Marfisa* series are located in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. They have been reproduced in (Scrase 1983).



Figure 2.
Etching. Print for flag fan, published in Venice by Vettor Romagni around 1690-1700. It directly reproduces two prints from the **Facétieuses inventions** series, published around 1650.

and their construction has been delegated to the engraver. Lasinio preserved the distances and proportions given by the drawings but expanded and filled up the lower and upper sections of the scenes. Some drawings include typical Piattoli details, such as in the rendering of clothes; facial expressions, however, were often modified in the engravings. Nevertheless, the resulting ten scenes have an internal stylistic coherence without betraying Piattoli's original compositions.

Perhaps the recent attribution to Lasinio of the original drawings for the series[10] can be traced back to the close collaboration between the two artists. In the past, however, the attribution to Piattoli was never questioned, and the Pagni and Bardi catalogue (previously unknown) confirms the traditional lore. The truth was in fact in plain sight, even if in small print: on plate 4, *L'Anello* [The Ring], the signature "G. Piat. inv. Lasinio f.", meaning "G. Piattoli invenit, Lasinio fecit" [G. Piattoli devised, Lasinio engraved] occurs in the lower left corner of the engraving.

A careful analysis of the prints seems instead to disprove prior attributions as to the year of issue, suggesting that the series should be dated to 1796, and not to 1790. In the plates 2 and 10, Lasinio inscribed in the lower right corner, with his peculiar thin writing, the year of the engraving as well as his name. The 1796 date is in fact more in keeping, as it is argued above, with the professional evolution of Piattoli and Lasinio, as well as with the new series appearing in the print market—and in particular with the series drawn by Gian Domenico Tiepolo (Venice, 1727-1804; son of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo) in Venice beginning in 1791.

Description of the *Marfisa* Series

The *Marfisa* series was engraved in copper plates measuring between 295 and 300 mm in height and between 365 and 375 mm in width. As stated in the catalogue, these prints were sold by the publishers already coloured. The colours, painted by hand with a brush, play a major role with respect to the value of the series as a decorative item. It is interesting to note that Piattoli indicated in his drawings the different colour fields with suitable abbreviations. This suggests that Piattoli supervised the artistic finishing of the work, including the choice of colours to be added by professional *coloristi* (usually women working at home). The palette is rather wide, surely wider than in most of the prints produced for a large public: it ranges from yellow to red, from blue to green, and from gray to rose, with many hues in between. Every plate includes in the lower section a centered title and two couplets at its sides. The signature "Lasinio incise" [Lasino engraved] occurs in plate 3; "Lasinio f." appears in six plates (1, 2,

[10] (Scrase 1983: 33).

5, 6, 8, 10), while plate 4 includes, as described above, the signature "G. Piat. inv. Lasinio f.".

The sequence of ten scenes includes interesting details about the key moments of a marriage at the end of the 18th century. No scene dominates the series, and their order could in places be altered without any real loss of meaning. The focus is on the characters of the single scenes, and their representation is strongly caricatural. In particular, the lines of the faces, the lips, the noses and the eyes are greatly exaggerated; the heads are out of proportion with respect to the bodies, while the details of the clothes and of the furniture are rendered in a more realistic fashion. The two newlyweds are the only recurring characters of the scenes, while the other characters (with the exception of the priest, appearing twice) form a nondescript surrounding. If this is social satire, it is far from being harsh. The scenes have the flavour of good-natured play, an ironic twist that is self-indulgent. The verses describing the scenes belong to the heroic, courtly genre and clearly contrast with the look of the characters. Thus, the strength of the series is built over those two contrasting aspects: on the literary side, between the pictures and the verses; on the visual side, between the caricatures and the realistic background. Both of these aspects were used in Italian prints and helped promote their wide diffusion since the 16th century, but they did so with more vigour in the 17-18th centuries.



Figure 3.
Etching. Plate n. 2 (of 12) of the **The Lilliputian Riding School** series, engraved and published in London by John Bowles around 1730-1740.

Graphic Sources for the *Marfisa*

Piattoli and Lasinio surely did know well the creations of Stefano della Bella, Baccio del Bianco, Valerio Spada and Antonio Francesco Lucini.[11] These artists worked in Florence a century and a half before the time of Lasinio and Piattoli, but they were well represented in the local collections accessed daily by the two artists. In particular, there is a clear echoing of the characters created by Stefano della Bella and Baccio del Bianco in the characters of the Marfisa.

Such seems the case for the series *Facétieuses inventions d'amour et de guerre* [Funny Pictures of Love and War],[12] engraved by François Collignon (Nancy, 1609 or 1610-Rome?, 1685) likely after drawings by Stefano della Bella, even if the prints do not have an accompanying text. Another series taken from the same drawings was engraved by Agostino Mitelli in 1654, slightly changing the circumstances of the characters and including a satiric caption under each character.

It seems that these series were very popular. Indirect proof of these being by the fact that these same characters also appeared in a series of *ventole* [flag

[11] On this topic see (Cassinelli 2005: 32).

[12] For a general survey on the work of Stefano della Bella, and in particular on his characters or figures in caricature, see (Baudi de Vesme 1971) and (Viatte 1977). For characters *caricati* in Baccio del Bianco (Florence, 1604-Madrid, 1656), see (Gregori 1961: 407-409 and plates 194-195). On dwarf characters in the work of Valerio Spada (?, 1613-?, 1688), see (Dearborn Massar 1986, 1987). Less known is the work of Antonio Francesco Lucini (?, 1605-?, 1640): see (Viatte 1977).

fans][13] printed in Venice by Vettor Romagni, a small publisher quite active during the last decade of the 17th and the early years of 18th century. [Figure 2] *Ventole* were a primary source for the diffusion of images in Italy: they were a common dress accessory, and they often carried either satiric or moral prints, as well as scenes with a lovers' theme, often with a contrast between picture and text. Indeed, the caricatural and playful themes of the prints were responsible for the popular use of flag fans, widely disseminated among all kinds of people at the time.

A new thematic thread in caricatural prints started in 1718 with the publication by Engelbrecht of the series *Callotto Resuscitato*,[14] referring explicitly to, but distinguishing itself from, the renowned models of the *Gobbi* [Hunchbacks] engraved by Jacques Callot and of the dwarves engraved by Florentine artists in the first half of 17th century. The fashion spread all over Europe rather quickly, lasting for a few decades. [Figure 3] The characters in the prints depicting grotesque and caricatural dwarves, and published at the time either in Ausburg, London, Amsterdam or Bassano, echo those of the original *Callotto* series. Also, those series include the same characteristics of the *Marfisa* series that were pointed out above: the apparent incongruity between the look of the characters and the high-sounding captions, as well as between the grotesque figures and the plain, real-life background upon which they act.



Figure 4.
Etching and engraving by Gian Domenico Tiepolo. Print titled **Il cavalier servente**, published in Milan by Pietro and Giuseppe Vallardi around 1810. The print was originally published in Venice by Teodoro Viero after 1791.

In subsequent series, around the middle of the 18th century, the occurrence of less 'ugly', more 'gracious' dwarves is noteworthy. It is most likely that these 'embellished' characters were considered by Gian Domenico Tiepolo in 1791, when he devised an untitled series of six prints, published in Venice by Teodoro Viero probably after 1791.[15] [Figure 4] This series was a *unicum* in the production of the artist, even if it became widely distributed.[16]

[13] Fans were a simple tool for fly swatting, as well as for protection in front of the fireplace. Flag-shaped, they were formed by cardboard attached to a stick, and they often sported a picture for each side. These pictures were printed in a single page, to be folded in the middle. Concerning fans and their diffusion, see (Milano 1987) and (Milano & Villani 1995).

[14] The most complete work on the topic is still (Bauer & Verfondern 1991).

[15] So far, the current research on the drawings by Gian Domenico Tiepolo has not yet fully clarified the publication date of those caricatural prints: see (Gealt & Knox 1996: 34, 2005: 66, entries 83-89) and (Nessi 2005: 18, entries 119-122).

[16] The diffusion was further fostered by Pietro and Giuseppe Vallardi, the largest Milanese printers of the 19th century, who bought the original copper plates in Venice and added them to their large collection. They reprinted the series in the first decade of the century, replacing Viero's address in the prints with their own.



Figure 5.
Black chalk drawing by Giuseppe Piattoli. A grotesque lady in an unpublished sketch for a print of the **Proverbi** first series, published in Florence by Bardi and Pagni in 1786.

Indeed, it can be thought that the successful appearance on the market of the Venetian series directly inspired the Florentine one: the different styles chosen for the two series suggests that Tiepolo's composition provided just the hint for the Florentine artists, who adapted the style and themes of the Venetian prints to the same social context already explored with the *Proverbi* and *Giuochi* series. In fact, both Florentine artists seemed already receptive of caricatural themes: a drawing by Piattoli from mid-1780s is known, possibly not engraved, depicting a grotesque and caricatural lady; [Figure 5] while Lasinio, likely around 1790, engraved a series of caricatural faces taken from Leonardo's drawings.[17] [Figure 6]

Literary and Artistic Sources for the *Marfisa*

It is quite natural to wonder about the influence over this series of prints from the poem composed between 1761 and 1768 by Venetian Carlo Gozzi and titled *Marfisa bizzarra*. The poem was printed in Florence in 1772, and perhaps after only a generation the name could have still held popular appeal, especially since the biting satire of Gozzi's work must have raised quite a fuss. However, the two heroines have quite different characters: the Venetian one as foolish and spiteful, the Florentine one as doubtless in love. Furthermore, the social context was by then completely changed, since the most tragic years of the French revolution separate the two works.

Similarly, reference to William Hogarth (London, 1697-1764), and more exactly to his famous *Marriage à-la-mode* paintings (appr. 1743) and subsequent print series (1745), as a direct source for the Marfisa series should probably be played down. As previously argued, the series' origin lies in the rich well of popular images, often disregarded by art historians. It is rather these images that were largely known by the artists of the time; occurring in the everyday life of a large cross-section of people, who belonged to all layers of the society. On the contrary, it should be stressed that Hogarth elaborated on many typical themes recurring in the Italian prints from the 17th century, as argued by Hilde Kurz in a seminal article from 1952.[18] This cultural operation is quite close to the elaborations made by Francisco Goya (Fuendetodos, 1746-Bordeaux, 1828) in his series of prints from a few decades later, and con-

[17] More precisely, as shown by Clelia Alberici, Lasinio copied from the Leonardo' series published in Milan by Carlo Giuseppe Gerli in 1784: choosing some of the characters, putting two of them side by side for each print and adding the underlying humorous text. See (Alberici 1984: 131): the article provides a complete list, print by print, of the characters taken by Lasinio from the Gerli prints.

[18] See (Kurz 1952).

temporary to those by Lasino and Piattoli, on themes and topics taken from a shared store of popular images.

This stream of images and themes, largely distributed for decorative purposes, must include also the caricatural compositions by Tiepolo and Piattoli & Lasinio, even if they surface in the official art history only after having been tackled by a renowned artist who is able to provide larger contexts and a superior artistic value to characters and topics with whom the public at the time was quite familiar.

A Final Remark

The *Sposalizio della Marfisa* series was produced with a decorative purpose: the colouring, the format and the layered structure of text and pictures made them the perfect item for the wall of a room. Indeed, in the years between the 18th and the 19th century, it was fashionable to have rooms decorated just with prints, and those prints themselves were used as conversation topics.[19] In order to be displayed, the prints were often glued to a canvas, framed, and then hung, not necessarily with glass protection. In fact, most of the surviving copies of these prints suffer from light exposure and show the signs of time; most rare are prints in mint condition. These series were never considered to be collectors' items, at least until the late 19th century, when Achille Bertarelli discovered their value as witnesses to their time.[20]

[Translated from the Italian by Fabio Gadducci and Mirko Tavosanis]

[19] See e.g. (Praz 1964) and (Thornton 1984).

[20] Achille Bertarelli (Milano, 1863-1938) has been the most important collector of widely circulated prints in Italy. He donated his collection, now housed in the Castello Sforzesco, to the city of Milan. For a bibliography on Bertarelli's contributions to the history of popular prints, see (Bertarelli 1974).



Figure 6.
Colored etching and engraving by Carlo Lasinio.
Plate n. 2 (of 12) of a series published in Florence around 1790.
Lasinio directly refers to Leonardo ("L. da Vinci inv."), even if his work is based on the **Disegni di Leonardo da Vinci** series, engraved and published in Milan by Carlo Giuseppe Gerli in 1784.

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Lo sposalizio della Marfisa

The Prints by Giuseppe Piattoli & Carlo Lasinio

Welcome to the first reprint project of Signs. *It is our firm belief that the quality reproduction of rarely seen or forgotten material is pivotal to our endeavour. One important reason is that these reprints should help to fulfill the need for establishing a common base of visual data for discussing graphic narratives and their development. Another is that inserting these reprints in the proper social and cultural milieu may help in focussing on the specificities of the history of comics since the dawn of the Modern era.*

In order to comply with these, we feel mandatory, duties, the current issue of Signs *offers the* Lo Sposalizio della Marfisa, *a Florentine series of ten prints from the late 18th century. The series is renowned in Italy, mostly thanks to the fame of its authors, the artist Giuseppe Piattoli and the engraver Carlo Lasinio. However, since its appearance it has never been published in its entirety. An introductory article by Alberto Milano fosters discussion on the series by presenting the artistic context in which the* Marfisa *was conceived, by discussing the graphic tradition the series relies upon and by illustrating its peculiarities in the works of Piattoli & Lasinio.*

We believe that you will enjoy the series, and we do hope that the reprint of this rare series represents only the starting point for a much larger offering.

We would like to express our thanks to the staff at Raccolta Bertarelli in Milan for their assistance, and for allowing us to reproduce the plates in their collection. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Dr.ssa Paola Cassinelli, for her help in locating a section of the plates and her help in the preliminary stage of the present reprinting project.


N°. 1.
Marfisa accoglie il fuo leggiadro amante
Che un' amico fedele a lei preſenta,
IL PRIMO ABBOCCAMENTO
Si mirano a vicenda, e in un iſtante
In due bell' alme Amore i dardi avventa.

Lo sposalizio della Marfisa
Giuseppe Piattoli & Carlo Lasinio
1796




3.
Tra le tazze Spumanti i lieti Amici
Alla bella Martisa applauso fanno
I RINFRESCHI
Augurando agli Sposi i di felici
Senza temer di gelosia l'Affanno.

Lo sposalizio della Marfisa
Giuseppe Piattoli & Carlo Lasinio
1796




5.
La bella Coppia a lauta mensa prende
Ristoro, e fan contrasto Amore, e fame.
IL PRANZO
Bello il veder saziar le ingorde brame,
E Bacco, che a garrir gli move, e accende.

Lo sposalizio della Marfisa
Giuseppe Piattoli & Carlo Lasinio
1796




7.
Ecco spiega Marfisa il suo valore,
E che sola beltà non è il suo vanto;
ACCADEMIA
Scioglie il labro leggiadro al dolce canto,
Che le Insegnò di Maggio il gran Cantore.

Lo sposalizio della Marfisa
Giuseppe Piattoli & Carlo Lasinio
1796




9.
Mira Marfisa bella il nobil dono,
che trasportato fù già dalla senna:
IL REGALO
Spesso torna a guardar quali ore sono,
e altrui con grazia, e con stupor l'accenna.

Lo sposalizio della Marfisa
Giuseppe Piattoli & Carlo Lasinio
1796

