

THE PASSAGE OF THE COMIC BOOK TO THE ANIMATED FILM:

THE CASE OF THE SMURFS

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

August 2011

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Baldwin, Frances Novier. The Passage of the Comic Book to the Animated Film: The Case of the Smurfs. Master of Arts (French), August 2011, 56 pp., bibliography, 31 titles.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of history and culture on the passage of the comic book to the animated film. Although the comic book has both historical and cultural components, the latter often undergoes a cultural shift in the animation process. Using the Smurfs as a case study, this investigation first reviews existing literature pertaining to the comic book as an art form, the influence of history and culture on Smurf story plots, and the translation of the comic book into a moving picture. This study then utilizes authentic documents and interviews to analyze the perceptions of success and failure in the transformation of the Smurf comic book into animation: concluding that original meaning is often altered in the translation to meet the criteria of cultural relevance for the new audiences.

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By

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am particularly grateful to Dr. Marie-Christine Koop for suggesting the topic for my thesis. For their instruction and guidance, I am also obliged to Drs. Christophe Chaguinian and Lawrence Williams.

During the process of balancing my professional and academic pursuits, Ted Landry is appreciated for his understanding and patience.

The keen eye and technical expertise of Dr. Kathleen Linnes were instrumental in keeping me organized and focused.

I give thanks to my good friends Martha Cottingham and Patricia Corres and special thanks to my mother, my siblings, my children, and to my husband, Gerard Baldwin, for their love and constant encouragement throughout this academic journey.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
Definition of Terms

Webster's Third New International Dictionary devotes nearly eight inches of tiny print to the three letter word "art". Surprisingly, none of Webster's definitions portray "art" in a light suitable for the purposes of this paper; therefore, "art" shall be defined as a quality of expression that effectively arouses emotion and sentiment. Perhaps, it is analogous to a soul; or at the very least, it is tangible evidence of a soul.

In general, public opinion draws a line between what it considers fine art and commercial art. Fine art has content and form. Content, in a painting or drawing, is the story it tells. Form is the composition, structure, or skeleton that gives support to the story. Fine art requires skill and talent, and is represented by works on display in museums all over the world. These stilled images tell the tales of princes, popes, politicians and other important personalities; furthermore, paintings chronicle the history of great battles, depict the tides of people on the move and the clash of civilizations. Museums sanction art, and the Louvre may have the final say on what is art.

Commercial art, on the other hand, carries a stigma of having been created for money. It is under the umbrella of commercial art that works other than those considered "fine art", are generally categorized by the public. Cartoons, comics and animation are examples of works of art that are not customarily viewed as fine art. These terms are often used interchangeably.

In the United States when discussing a cartoon, reference is perhaps being made to animation or to a printed image. Context differentiates one from the other and the word “political” is often used to specify a stilled drawing from one that moves. *Comics* without the -s is usually an amusing something, but in the plural form comics refer to either the images found in the entertainment section of a newspaper, or a reference is being made to a comic book, the longer version of a comic strip. Projected movement separates animation from the cartoon; in France there is no difficulty differentiating the *dessin animé* from the *bande dessinée*.

Whether art is part of a people’s history or created to pay the rent, art has always had a purpose and a reason to be. Art serves a social function and since the beginning of time there has been an impulse and an ability to tell a story with images. Effectively telling a story that arouses emotion and sentiment *is* an art.

CHAPTER 2 FROM LASCAUX TO HOLLYWOOD

French Beginnings

Man's desire to document the world around him has its beginning in a time before Jesus Christ. While in The Beginning there may have been the Word, before the Word there was the Gesture (John I.1). Some of these motions were observed, stilled and immortalized approximately 30,000 years before our time in the form of prehistoric cave drawings (Lenard 22). If it were possible for these drawings to speak--horses, rhinoceroses, lions, bears, mammoths and bison could explain the reasons behind their creation; why their creators are rarely represented with them; as well as how they became these extraordinary paintings in elegant rendition. Secluded for thousands of years and more, they are the precursors to hieroglyphic friezes, Chinese scrolls, and the Bayeux tapestry (Crafton 6). Although today they are no longer hidden, these ancient representations are sure to remain silent about their origins for yet some longer time to come. Historians and other researchers visit these recently discovered caves, dwellings of the mysterious and unknown artists, looking for clues. Who were these prehistoric artists and exactly why and when were their masterpieces created? The artists remain anonymous and the exact dates of their creations are but an educated guess, at best. Cloaked by this same veil of anonymity, neither may we ever know the exact date that the modern artist first animated a still drawing. Although precise documentation is unavailable, it would seem that

prehistoric cave paintings, the cartoon and the animated film all have their origins in France.

Deep in one of the Lascaux caves is a picture of a bison that appears to be dying having been penetrated by some kind of a spear. Cave visitors can gaze upon the man with a “bird-like head” falling backwards and who, like the bison, appears to be dying (Ruspoli 149). Next to the man is a stick with a bird on top of it. According to Robinson in her 1998 internet article *Prehistoric Rock Art*, the scene remains the subject of debate and interpretation. Some people have concluded that the drawing of the man and the bison is some sort of shamanic depiction; others believe that it is a representation of the order of nature (Ruspoli 88-92). While the artists’ reasons for making the drawings may not be known to us, it is safe to say that the artists clearly must have had specific intentions behind their works because life was too short and survival too primary for these paintings to have been made without a serious purpose.

Unlike the role of the cave paintings in the life of prehistoric man, the role of the cartoon in modern society is not so mysterious; the latter had its début in France and its function was primarily political.

The Role of the Cartoon in Modern Society

Caricatures and political cartoons may likely be as old as the cave paintings, and political cartoonists clearly know what they are doing and have specific intentions behind their works. A picture is worth a thousand words, as the saying goes, and the saying is defensible.

In 1645, a few hundred years before the birth of animation, major thinkers were already fascinated with light and motion. According to Charles Solomon in *The History of Animation*, Athanasius Kircher invented the “magic lantern, a simple device that consisted of a box containing a light source (either a candle or a lamp) and a curved mirror” that created images which moved. While also creating “mutterings of witchcraft” nonetheless, the magic lantern drew audiences to its projected shows well into the mid-1800s (Solomon 3).

Another important ancestor of animation were shadow puppets, a popular entertainment in China since the Tang dynasty, introduced in Europe around 1760 as part of a craze for *chinoiserie* (Op.cit.). Dominique Séraphin, the most famous of the shadow theater proprietors, began presenting shows at Versailles in 1772. The only thing Chinese about these latter *ombres chinoises* was their name. The puppets and scenery were all made in Western styles and the subjects ranged from the Temptation of St. Anthony to adaptations of Molière’s plays, the first being presented at Le Chat Noir, a cabaret in Montmartre, in 1887 (Ibid. 5). While shadow puppets are considered a precursor to animation, and the comic strip an even closer relation, they are not animation. “Animation” explains Solomon in the foreword to *The History of Animation*, “has been synonymous with drawn cartoons throughout most of its history. Two characteristics distinguish animation from live action: the image is recorded on film frame by frame; and the illusion of motion is created, rather than recorded. In animation the motions exist only on film when projected.”

While a writer must carefully choose the words to express exactly ideas and theories that may or may not be interpreted by the reader in the way the writer intended, a picture, on the other hand, has a unique peculiarity: it directs "... itself to all ages and both sexes, startles not only the mind but the eyes. It is a means of speaking even to the illiterate, of stirring up passions, without reasoning, without discourse." In fact, in the 1830s the French were warned that caricatures and drawings are dangerous (Vessels 29-30). Dangerous activities are usually viewed as such by those whose status quo is at risk. In prehistoric times the favorite subjects for cave artists were animals, which were physically more powerful than man and consequently considered dangerous; juxtaposed, the favorite targets of political cartoonists have always been their leaders, considered more powerful than the average man and, consequently, as dangerous as an overpoweringly strong animal. While the cave paintings and the political cartoons may have, each in their own way, functioned as a leveler, the notion of danger appears to be a reciprocal sentiment between the leaders and those they govern. In 1830 the caricatures and drawings considered most dangerous by leaders in France were those published in the comic journals *La Caricature* and *Le Charivari*, founded by the French graphic artists Charles Philipon and Honoré Daumier, respectively (Op.cit.). These artists created images to criticize King Louis-Philippe and ridicule bourgeois society, and the images served to amuse the politically aware and inform the illiterate on the current political issues. The consequences resulted in lengthy legal battles for

Philippon and a six-month prison stay (Ibid. 27). Whereas today's reader of political cartoons may be unaware of Philippon's historic "Les Poires" or Daumier's portrait of King Louis-Philippe as *Gargantua*, these men and their political cartoons became the foundation of a "French tradition" born to address social ills with drawings that can "engrave an idea with an energy that the effort of the most powerful writer can never achieve" (Ibid. 44-45). The influence of French artists like Emmanuel Poiré, (best known by the pseudonym Caran d'Ache); Benjamin Rabier, whose drawings appeared in *Le Gil Blas*, *Le Chat Noir*, as well as *L'Assiette au Beurre*; and Georges Colomb, who signed his work "Christophe", would be models for American political cartoonists. In fact, "Christophe" would perfect the "long time format of the European picture-story, the final experiment before the birth of the [modern] comic strip in the United States" (Op.cit.). His format which utilized descriptive narrative beneath the sequence of pictures instead of speech balloons within the frames is considered one of the "hallmarks" of the French comic strip and "set the standard for French comic strips into the 1920s" (Op.cit.). In the United States, speech balloons were the defining feature of the American comic strip, and by the mid-1920s, the look of the French political cartoon started to take on American characteristics. In the style of his American contemporaries, Alain Saint-Ogan, creator of *Zig et Puce*, was the first French artist to follow "the influence on the industry by pressures coming from America" and to incorporate the speech balloon to provide all the "textual" information within the comic strip (Op.cit.).

Although the comic strip began to blur the line between entertainment and politics and also to provide an arena where political points of view could be incorporated into stories written for children, surprisingly there is no evidence of an attempt to adapt comic strips in animated drawing form in the United States until 1911. In this year Winsor McCay finished some tentative experiments with his ‘Little Nemo in Slumberland’ characters” (Canemaker 131). He “must have been impressed with the French caricaturist Emile Cohl” (Op.cit) because when McKay created his first film, he added his own innovations to techniques borrowed from James Stuart Blackton, a former newspaper reporter/cartoonist and partner in Vitagraph, and Frenchman Emile Cohl, who directed and animated *Fantasmagorie*, the first true animated cartoon” (Crafton 60). The cartoon gave birth to animation.

The Back Story on Animation

In the early 1900s, animating was still a slow and tedious process that was not yet as established as its father, the political cartoon, or the cartoon’s offspring, the comic strip. The masses were still drawn to reading pictures. By the 1930s a variety of different *journaux des enfants* were available for the reading pleasure of France’s youth. Some of the characters were American favorites, renamed for the French audience. Betty Star, for example, known in the United States as Betty Boop, was created by “adding a pair of pretty girl’s legs to a cute little dog and turning its floppy ears into long earrings” (Solomon 74). She *boop-ooop-a-doop-ed* her way into the hearts of millions of Americans and her charm, a

combination of “naïve drawings and absurd dialogue” represented a “dumb but endearing character” firmly rooted in the Jazz Age. As the “archetypical flapper, the speakeasy Girl Scout with a heart of gold” did not have long-lasting appeal to the French, the Betty Star comic strip soon folded (Op.cit). The youth of France seemed content enough with “*Les Aventures de Pipe et Pomme, enfants de prolétaires*, and *Coeurs Vaillants, Mon Camarade*, until the appearance of the new *Journal de Mickey*, in 1934” (Vessels 58). This comic strip, not created with the intent of developing the political conscience of young French readers, changed the course of the European comic strip. Some have suggested that the “cultural phenomenon of the modern francophone bande dessinée” actually begins with the *Journal de Mickey* (Grove). When it first appeared, *Mickey* was viewed as a threat to the French draftsmen, and in 1936 the Union of French Artists and Designers (UADF) demanded government protection against the “supposed invasion *étrangère* of comic strips from outside the Hexagon” (Vessels 62). The concerns of the UADF were soon pushed aside by the threat of invading Germans at the beginning of World War II. Early in the 1940s, Marshal Pétain, named head of the government for barely a full day and later the chief of the Vichy French, saw to it that artists were “engaged in a purification and Frenchification” of art that explored themes consistent with Vichy policy. Pétain encouraged exhibitions at the “Boétie gallery in Paris, thereby giving art work the still valuable imprimatur of the Parisian art scene” and in the face of the advancing German armies, multitudes of French, including artists, “were pushed

into a southern exodus” (Ibid. 80). Paul Winkler, publisher of *Le Journal de Mickey* and also *Robinson*, fled to Marseilles where he attempted to arrange for the continued printing of his popular comic books before leaving for the United States with his three children. Shortly after his arrival in the United States, the publication of his American-inspired comics became illegal in the German Occupied Zone of France. Although it was possible to publish his work in the Southern, Free Zone, under the control of Pétain’s Vichy government, Winkler’s publications were in a significantly smaller format. Nevertheless they continued to appear until the United States entered the war. By 1942, foreign comics were steadily being replaced by French examples. “Popeye” was the last American comic to appear in Winkler’s publication, *Robinson*, and at the end of June the “Adventures of Mickey” had disappeared from *Le Journal de Mickey* (Op.cit). Rationing of paper supplies and censoring and prohibition of American or American-inspired productions contributed to the removal of syndicated American comic strips in France (Ibid. 82). The removal of the American product, however, “did not necessarily force a replacement of the *American style*” and many young artists drew their inspiration from, or “even plagiarized, the excellent American strips still available” (Ibid. 83).

The period of Pétain’s government provided a place for a French *presse enfantine* produced and published by Frenchmen (Op.cit). American products would eventually reappear but would not reclaim their place of supremacy. The French comic strip would somehow survive the war, censorship, and criticisms by

“experts” on their corrupting influence on the children of France, to finish by taking the lead in innovation and vitality. In the early 1940s, new dictates defined “what was expected and allowed” in the comic strip, beginning with the look and its content (Ibid. 100). In an attempt to remove any “modern influences” the dictate “insisted that except for the wordless cartoon, any text will be placed outside the [borders] of the image ... and, above all the cartoon was to play an educational part in preparing youth for the tasks they will face after the war” (Op.cit). This was to be done by putting aside the “silliness” which often characterized children’s books. And finally, “the use of foreign stock or clichés was formally banned” (Ibid. 101).

Following the Liberation of France, artists returned to the subject matter like that found in the Lascaux caves, subconsciously to be sure, as a tool to offer the children of France an “understandable and palatable history lesson on the country’s experiences during the Occupation” (Ibid. 108). The publication *La Bête est morte!* depicted nations as specific animals: Americans were drawn as buffaloes, Russians as bears, the English as bulldogs, the Japanese as monkeys and the Germans as “nasty wolves” (Ibid. 109). The French, on the other hand, were portrayed as “chipmunks, rabbits, sheep, frogs, owls, and even bees, all living in a prewar world marked most by a peaceful and harmonious existence with one another in the wooded glens they all shared” (Op.cit).

Today, political cartoonists continue to target world leaders, document history, and give their opinions on world events. In general, Americans are no

exception; they are familiar with the opinions of Theodor Geisel (also known as Dr. Seuss) on the subject of war. The political stand taken by Garry Trudeau, recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Cartooning, is enjoyed by millions of readers every day in the comic strip *Doonesbury*. Clearly some form of political cartooning has been present throughout the history of human society making an impact on public knowledge and perceptions of local and world events. Needless to say, not every good political cartoon becomes a comic strip, but the political cartoon remains a constant feature in many modern-day magazines and newspapers. For example, cartoons have been an essential feature in *The New Yorker* magazine since its founding in 1925. Chronicled in *The Complete Cartoons of the New Yorker*, 68,647 drawings have themes that can be associated with specific eras. Although many of the cartoons can be appreciated by someone who is not American, these drawings, were created to provide a snapshot of American pastimes and preoccupations. Should an effort be made to translate any of these thousands of cartoons from English into another language, some of them would only be appreciated by readers very familiar with the personages and events in American history. Conversely, the adventures of Obélix, Panoramix (Getafix in English) Assurancetourix (Cacophonix), Abraracourcix (Vitalstatistix) and Astérix, star of the French comic *Astérix le Gaulois* have been translated in many languages and have enjoyed great success in France (Goscinnny 4), but to this date it would seem that the antics of these legendary French characters have never truly peaked American interest.

Perhaps the reason is as simple as the fact that the adventures of these Gallo-Roman characters can be most appreciated by readers with a very good knowledge of French history. The notion of animating Astérix for the American-Saturday-morning-cartoon-television-viewing-audience has been on discussion tables in various Hollywood animation studios for many years, but the historical antics of these legendary French characters have not yet sparked more than a cursory interest on the part of American film makers. It is possible that American children are considered not sophisticated enough or well educated enough to appreciate historical references and jokes about countries other than their own. In fact, some critics have maintained that most American children know very little about American history, much less about the history of the world. On the other hand, education critics give the academic rigor found in French elementary, middle schools and high schools high marks. While the educated reader is more apt to understand a joke, everyone can agree that the joke is no longer as funny if it has to be explained. Yet, even if the targeted audience needs no explanation of the joke, the subject matter may remain uninteresting. The French-Belgian creation Lucky Luke, for example, would seem to possess all of the elements needed to attract the interest of American children. Starring the coffee-drinking, cigarette smoking, card-playing, straight-shooting, all-American-looking cowboy, Lucky Luke has been translated and published in many countries, including American English, in the United States. In the early 1980s in Hollywood, California, studio heads sat around conference tables discussing transforming

Lucky Luke from comic strip to animation for the American-viewing audience. This event has yet to occur. One of the reasons that Lucky Luke never made his television début may be as simple as the fact that his ever-present cigarette, always hanging from his lips or seen clutched between two fingers in Dargaud's publications, is replaced by a long piece of straw in the publications aimed at the American market. This seemingly small change is not a small change. Without the cigarette, it seems that Lucky Luke's *raison d'être* is gone.

Another great French publication not to make American television is *Tintin*, whose universal appeal seems to stop at the American border. Perhaps the adventures of this young reporter were never put on the bargaining table. With the exception of the tale of *Tintin au Tibet*, it may also be a possibility that Georges Remi's political views, which he tried to disguise throughout most of his stories by writing politically neutral plots occurring in fictitious countries, were too controversial (Hergé).

CHAPTER 3

THE TRANSITION OF THE COMIC STRIP TO ANIMATION

Cartoons as Films

Regardless of the final reasons behind why one comic strip character has more appeal than another, it is a fact that procuring the production rights to a copyrighted and successful European comic book, and then developing it into an animated show for the American market, is an expensive undertaking that may or may not reap the desired rewards for the producers. There is no formula of fail-safe ingredients for a “hit” television show. Inasmuch as we have seen that in transforming a comic strip to animation, original meaning is often altered to meet the criteria of cultural relevance for the new audience, what, then, are the elements required to transcend the barriers of language and culture that will transform a nation’s beloved one-dimensional cartoon character into a world-wide animated phenomenon and success? On hand of a case study of the Smurfs, an attempt will be made to provide a possible answer to this issue.

In the preface to his book, *Before Mickey*, a thoughtful overview of the development of the animated film, Crafton includes a “very special thanks” to John Canemaker, author of *Winsor McCay ~ His Life and Art Winsor*. While both Crafton and Canemaker agree that Winsor McCay is one of the first known animators, both authors credit Frenchmen Emile Cohl as being the very first animator. Crafton dedicates the third chapter of *Before Mickey* to “The First Animator : Emile Cohl” (Crafton 59) and Canemaker asserts that McCay’s magical “motion-for-motion’s-sake action” was inspired by Emile Cohl’s films

(Canemaker 135). Crafton further supports Canemaker's assertion by stating that the date McCay claims to have been inspired to create "modern cartoon movies" was in 1909, the very date that corresponds to Cohl's first animated film (Crafton 86).

McCay and Cohl have quite dissimilar views regarding their own individual contributions to the field of animation. Crafton states that the "cerebral and introverted" Cohl was past middle-age when he discovered cinema and "kept his theatrical contributions behind the scenes" but McCay, other the other hand, was a "flamboyant showman" whose life "was one of those legendary turn-of-the-century success stories" (Ibid 89-90). While Cohl's life story was a "patient but futile pursuit of his rightful fame" (Op.cit) McCay, who was "never inclined to modesty," credits himself for being ". . . the first artist to attempt drawing pictures that will move" (Ibid. 101). The name of the artist who actually made this attempt could have been McCay or Cohl; or any one of a number of other artists who, in the early 1900s, worked for Raoul Barré, founder of the first professional animation studio (Solomon 21-22). Barré employed a staff of talented artists, including Pat Sullivan, who by the mid-1920s had opened his own studio and who, in turn, also employed a staff of talented artists. Many artists are remembered today as being among the first to make contributions to the animation field. Some of them are more remembered than others. Winsor McCay, Crafton states, would bask in his glory in his own lifetime while Cohl would die just as the "magnitude of his career was beginning to be recognized"

and after having scrawled an “anguished note in the margin” of Pat Sullivan’s obituary notice: “Pat Sullivan ‘invented’ animation ten years after me!” (Crafton 59).

Canemaker reports that McCay believed his contributions should be “open to universal use, just as the discoveries in medicine are made known” and that the “mysteries” of the animation process should not be kept secret. (Canemaker 141). When McCay was urged to copyright or patent his techniques, Canemaker claims that McCay’s response was, “Any idiot that wants to make a couple of thousand drawings for a hundred feet of film is welcome to join the club” (Ibid. 142). A few years after making this comment to a “young man supposedly writing a magazine article about animation”, McCay was “shocked” to learn that in the same amount of time it would have taken him to “laboriously” produce one film, John Randolph Bray, then head of “the largest and most efficient cartoon film factory of its time” could produce a dozen films (Op.cit). In 1914 Bray became “the Henry Ford of animation” and streamlined the creation of animating into a number of specialized jobs, “such as animation, inbetweening, cleaning up, inking, coloring, and photography” (Op.cit).

The process that McCay referred to as animation “mysteries” was no secret to Emile Cohl (Crafton 18). Crafton credits Cohl for discerning between camera “tricks” used by the American Vitagraph company in the 1907 film *The Haunted Hotel*, and true animation (Op.cit). Cohl “unlocked the secret” of *The Haunted Hotel* that had baffled fellow film makers for months : it was not

animation that made objects “appear to be moving on the screen without any intervention” (Op.cit) it was the fixed camera that allowed the exposure of only one image at a time with each turn of the crank, followed by careful placement of objects while the shutter was closed, that gave the appearance of movement. Unlocking this secret would trigger the “predominant system” pioneered by Emile Cohl and used for animation in France (Ibid. 255). Cohl’s method was to combine “paper cutouts of figures” with “the retracing method for making one object transform itself into another” (Op.cit). Cohl preferred to keep his techniques to himself, but one day during the years 1912-1913, he revealed his animation methods “against his wishes” when visited by “two mysterious strangers during his stay in Fort Lee, New Jersey (Ibid. 194). The mysterious strangers may have been William C. Nolan and Raoul Barré, two cartoonists who were later credited for their contribution to animation of a “slash and tear” technique which was essentially “the inverse of Cohl’s decoupage system” (Op.cit). A few years later, the animation process would include making character drawings on clear sheets of celluloid, commonly referred to as cels. Once inked onto the cel, the characters would then be laid over a background drawing. In terms of production, the use of cels sped up the painstaking process of animation by reducing the number of drawings required to make a character move. This allowed animation studios to have the ability to divide the work into teams (Ibid. 150-153). Concurrently, it can be said the cel distanced the art from the artist by allowing anyone to trace or copy the artist’s original drawing. Winsor

McCay found this process “incompatible with his concept of animation as an art form” and all of Emile Cohl’s animation, including the thirteen “The Newlyweds” films that he co-produced with George Manus, pre-date the cel system that eventually became “industry standard” (Solomon 24-25).

Solomon’s *History of Animation* recounts, in detail, the development of the animated cartoon. The chronology opens with the Silent Era starring Felix the Cat, continues with the Golden Age of Animation beginning in 1928 and starring creations made famous by Walt Disney, includes the enchanted drawings made for television starting in the 1950s, and concludes in the year 1989 with an elaboration on the impact of technology on animation.

In the more than twenty years following the publication of Solomon’s book, animation has become an industry that may not have been conceivable to artists such as McCay or Cohl. Disney’s beautiful and elaborate images, such as those found in the early full-length animated feature films that continue to astound the eyes, fill the screen, and take one’s breath away, were drawn entirely by hand. Today, the images that fill the screen and take one’s breath away are even more elaborate and even more complicated but are no longer drawn by hand. They are created by a computer. Any incidental lack of plot can be easily hidden with sound effects and wild computer graphics.

While animation has undergone quite a transformation since its birth one hundred years ago and it is difficult to imagine what form it will take in the future, cartoons and comic books, however, continue to survive relatively unchanged.

The political cartoon is still a political cartoon. Its societal function remains one that continues to target world leaders, document history, and give opinions on world events. As for the comic book, the drawings may be in color or in black and white, on pages that may be bound in hard-cover or soft; the dialogue may be written in bubbles or included as text under the frame, or both; the paper may be glossy or not; images may pop-up or lay flat; in whatever final book form the content is presented to the public, the comic book remains a constant presence in today's society and is likely to remain so for quite some time to come. The lasting "virtue" of comic books is that they provide "clues" that help people better understand the history of their social milieu (Vessels 234).

Comic book characters created by the French and the Belgians are famous world-wide. A "bande dessinée" museum is located in Brussels, Belgium, and one can also be found in the south-west of France in the city of Angoulême. The latter is the site of the annual International Comics Festival (Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d'Angoulême), an event that has been taking place in January, every year, since 1974 (Fawbush 208). While on the surface Angoulême may appear to be "the *political* heart" of an organization that grants official state recognition to the comic strip medium, Vessels asserts that since the early 1980s a number of commissions have been created that dedicate themselves to the promotion of the comic strip as an art form. Translations and comic book holdings can be found in public libraries in many other cities besides Angoulême, such as in Épinal, Saint-Just-le Martel and

Moulins (Vessels 216-217). In Paris, in late January 2009, “the Louvre, in cooperation with the BD publishing house Futuropolis, held a nearly four-month-long exhibition titled simply “Le Petit Dessin: Le Louvre Invite la Bande Dessinée” (Ibid. 231). The Louvre’s exhibit of comic strips by four Franco-Belgian artists is symbolic of the sanction from the Fine Art community and a testimony that the “bande dessinée” is a creation from an artist’s “palette” that incorporates the “tools of high art” with “popular culture” and “anachronistic nostalgia” (Ibid. 221). Vessels further asserts that, “recognition and valorization of BDs” is an important part of a vital cultural policy” and the openings of a variety of salons that feature comic strips further demonstrate “that the medium [has] truly become a valued part of the nation’s cultural patrimony” (Ibid. 216-217).

The festival in Angoulême, a four-day event, is still noted today for awarding the most prestigious prizes in cartooning. Pierre Culliford (pen name Peyo), creator of the world-wide sensation *The Smurfs*, received the official award from the International Comics Festival in 1984, the same year that producers of the American-made cartoon by the same name were receiving their second Emmy Award from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for Outstanding Children’s Entertainment Series (personal knowledge). The Smurfs merit a one-paragraph mention by Solomon in his *History of Animation*:

During the 1980s, Saturday-morning cartoons improved a little. In 1980, Hanna-Barbera introduced “The Smurfs” on NBC, an adaptation of Pierre (Peyo) Culliford’s popular Belgian comic strip, Les Schtroumpfs” (Flemish for “whatchamacallit”). Happy little blue men (“three apples high”) who dwell in an enchanted forest, the Smurfs are troubled only by the evil wizard, Gargamel, and his cat, Azrael. The Schtroumpfs were originally identical, but Hanna-Barbera made minor alterations in the designs and added a female, Smurfette. “The Smurfs” was a big hit, and regularly drew a Nielsen audience share of 39 to 44. (247)

Based on personal knowledge, a number of corrections need to be made to Solomon’s citation. While the Smurfs are, theoretically, “three apples high” they are not happy little “blue men.” A Smurf is a Smurf. A Smurf is not a man. The Smurfs have no political ambitions, have no need of money, do not marry and do not reproduce. The forest in which they live is not “enchanted.” It is a perhaps an enchanting forest but the forest is not bewitched. It is a forest like any other real forest. Trees are trees. Rivers are rivers. The forest does not morph into some other form. The Great Oak has roots and the forest in which it reigns has creatures that do not speak. Bunnies and deer go about their business as do bunnies and deer in real life. Gargamel is more of an inept wizard than he is “evil”; in fact he is inept at being evil. Whether one is watching Gargamel try to catch the Smurfs in a television episode or one is reading about how he wants to destroy the Smurfs’ idyllic world, alterations were not made as to how the Smurfs

look. They all look alike. Exceptions to the rule, such as Brainy's glasses or Vanity's flower, exist in both mediums. Last, but certainly not least, great exception is taken to the statement that Hanna-Barbera "added Smurfette." This is false. Smurfette was created by Peyo's own hand, and in 1976 she was the feature story in a Dupuis publication, *La Schtroumpfette*.

A more accurate description of the Smurfs' transition from comic book to Saturday morning animation is found in Mallory's book *Hanna-Barbera Cartoons*:

In 1981, Hanna-Barbera launched not just a show, but a phenomenon. *The Smurfs*, based on a Belgian comic strip by "Peyo" (Pierre Culliford), centered around the society of tiny, cute, largely identical blue creatures with uniform white shorts and caps (except for their leader, Papa Smurf, who by nature of his position is allowed to wear red, and female Smurfette, who wears a dress). The Smurfs spoke in "Smurf-talk," a form of English in which "smurfy" is the most popular adjective. Someone who never had (or wanted) a smurfy day, however, was the maladroit wizard Gargamel, who along with his mangy cat Azrael were the Smurfs' natural enemies. As for the Smurfs themselves, their names--Jokey, Brainy, Clumsy, Greedy, Grouchy, Lazy and Hefty--pretty much said it all. *The Smurfs* ran for an incredible nine seasons (over four hundred segments!) and picked up two Emmys along the way for Outstanding Children's Entertainment Series. (Mallory 69)

While both authors agree that the Smurfs were a big hit, Solomon's unintentional distortion of Smurf facts is just one example of the type that can occur when transforming a comic book into an animated television series. The more crucial distortions are the ones that inevitably occur in translating culture.

Importance of Comics

Readers around the world are more familiar with comic book characters such as Astérix, Tintin, Superman, Betty Boop, Popeye or The Smurfs than they are with historical figures, politicians or Hollywood movie icons. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the adventures of comic book characters have been published and read by millions every day. These stories entertain and delight and educate. In fact, in the early 1930s a Gallup poll reported that “the only parts of a metropolitan newspaper consistently ‘read’ by over forty percent of both men and women were pictures and comics” (Vessels 18). In the United States, comic book art “began in 1934 with the arrival of *Famous Funnies* (...) primarily an anthology of reprinted Sunday newspaper strips” that featured “a few original one-page comics” (Benton 1). In France, the weekly cartoons by Caran d’Ache in *Le Figaro* and the appearance of the “French bande dessinée *Zig et Puce*” by Alain Saint-Organ might never have been born had it not been for drawings by Charles Philipon in *La Caricature*, “the largest and most cohesive caricature journals in all of France” (Vessels 20-40). In the 1800s cartoons were seen as an art form that relied on “crude and exaggerated drawings of appeal largely to the lower instinct” (Ibid. 13). In the 1900s cartoons were a vehicle with

which to spread public opinion. Today, Vessels claims, cartoons are “an honest accounting” of all of the “faces and voices” of a nation (Ibid. 234).

The contributions made by comic books artists have not always been acknowledged. According to Mike Benton in *The Art of the Comic Book*, the anonymity of the men and women involved in drawing comic book characters “was encouraged by early publishers and studios” because comic books were viewed as being on the “outer fringe” of publishing and entertainment (Benton 1). Furthermore, as stated by Charles Clarence Beck, one of the artists profiled in Benton’s book, “Comic books were originally harmless little entertaining features of no great importance (. . .) regarded as a bastard art form, neither true writing nor true picture-making” (Ibid. 5).

Comic books are a way of conveying “real life” situations indirectly; artists take their “cues from reality” and then engage in “necessary acts of distortion” (Savage 75). In post-World War II America, for example, Americans lived “in the shadow of the Bomb”; in fear of “atomic war and/or Communist takeover”. The main function of the comic book was to “maintain (if not to boost) morale (. . .) and to that end, comic books told some truths and a great many lies” (Ibid. 74). Readers of American comic books were given history lessons that specialized in the atypical and in stereotypes. The women in comic books were created to serve as role models “for little girls” but it is important to note that the women were regularly getting “bailed out” of danger by a hero-man (Ibid. 78). Superman’s girlfriend, Lois Lane, demonstrated that “it was perfectly all right for a

professional woman to behave like a moron while mooning over the man of her dreams"--and since comic books were established by a team of men--it was expected "that a handsome fellow could turn any female's brain to mush at first glance and without even trying" (Op.cit). Thus, children learn their roles in society as well as their country's cultural views while reading comic books.

According to Savage, many of the villains in *Jungle Comics* in 1940 were white men "and black people were either their stooges or their victims (. . .) and too ignorant, too stupid, or too naïve to see what was transpiring" (Ibid. 76-77). Furthermore, Blacks "were perfectly content with bowing and scraping to the white folks who employed them as menials. Jungle lords and ladies, like Tarzan, were white people who "ruled," or at the very least held considerable influence, over various "inferior" species, including lions, panthers, snakes, elephants, and black people (Ibid. 74-76).

During this same period of time, the French were also using animals in their narration of history. Countries of great political influence were represented by specific animals. As mentioned earlier, Americans were buffaloes; Russians, bears; the English, bulldogs; the Japanese, monkeys; and the Germans, nasty wolves. Using the technique of "anthropomorphized animals to spin its tale", *La Bête est morte!* gave children a "palatable history lesson" of the Occupation and the concluding war (Vessels 101-109).

Comics Under Attack

Both in the United States and in France during the late 1940s and early 1950s, it was determined that comic books were responsible for the alarming rise in juvenile delinquency in both countries. In the U.S. comic books came under attack by “the jaundiced eye of the purist in educational circles” (Savage 95). In France the bande dessinée came under attack by Commission Interministérielle de l’enfance délinquante (CIED) (Vessels 117).

Fredric Wertham, “a New York psychiatrist who believed that prolonged exposure to the medium created disturbed, delinquent children” seemed to be the only “noted authority” on the subject (Savage 95-96). While there may have been some truth in his views that comic books “stimulate children to commit violent, antisocial acts”, the “cynical view” is that he identified some of the problems that related to post-war America, chose comic books as a “scapegoat” and capitalized on it (Op.cit). Wertham “tarred” all comic books with the “same broad brush” with which he had criticized comics that “abounded” in graphic violence and with a “heavy emphasis upon sex” (Op.cit). Once having made the attack, Wertham “could not afford to find redeeming qualities” in any comic book (Op.cit.). *Superman* and *Superboy* comic books that he claimed to have seen sticking out of the pockets of “troubled children” belonged to “children crushed by society’s punishments” (Ibid. 97). *Batman* and *Robin* were “psychologically homosexual” and these two crime fighters were “like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together” (Op.cit.). By the end of the 1950s, the controversy

over a possible relationship between comic books and juvenile delinquency had sealed the fate of the comic book (Ibid. 99). Comic book publishers created something called the “Comics Code Authority” that specified what was and was not acceptable comic book content. In essence, it prohibited most of the material that had appeared in comics since 1954, and the compliance of industry brought an end to what has since become known as the “golden age” of comic books (Op.cit.).

In France, in an article in the September 1945 issue of the journal *Éducateurs*, René Duverne recounts the reasons why the children of France were in great danger of not “becoming good and productive citizens” (Vessels 116). The culprits were “negligence, ignorance, indifference of parents (. . .) poverty, [governmental] inefficiency, (. . .) the insufficiency of disease prevention, [institutional] clumsiness, and alcoholism. Moreover, it was determined that the influence of certain comic books contributed to “juvenile criminality” (Ibid. 117). To address this problem, France created a law referred to as simply the “16 July 1949 Law” that effectively censored content. In truth, the law had several purposes: to block American comics, to reinstate France as “caretakers of the world’s cultural heritage”, to control and protect corruption of the French language and to maintain the “national identity” of France (Ibid. 11-13). Thus, in the late 1950s “pedagogical” comic books such as *Astérix* were born (Ibid. 171). These cleverly written stories provided an amusing view of France’s history to European children and the series was quite successful.

Another comic book personality to appear in comic strips in the late 1950s was the Smurf, who, thirty years later became a world-wide sensation.

CHAPTER 4
THE CASE OF THE SMURFS

The Birth of the Smurfs

In America, the Smurfs were born at nine o'clock on a September morning in 1981 during a television broadcast by the National Broadcast Company (NBC) to a targeted audience of children between the ages of six to eleven. Smurf comic books, in English, were not yet available in the United States; therefore, little did the audience know of the Smurfs' unique language or about the great care that had been taken in renaming the Smurfs for the American audience. Little did these children know about translation or of the interpretations that occur in the process of adapting a European concept to Americanism. Little did they know of the careful thought and consideration that had been given in keeping each Smurf's specific one-dimensional personality true to Peyo's original concept. For example, Brainy was originally named *le Schtroumpf à Lunettes*; Vanity, *le Schtroumpf coquet*; Harmony, *le Schtroumpf musicien*; Jokey, *le Schtroumpf farceur*; Grouchy, *le Schtroumpf grognon*; Lazy, *le Schtroumpf paresseux*, and Greedy, *le Schtroumpf gourmand*. Although the name Greedy is not a perfect translation of *gourmand's* lover-of-food personality, NBC executives feared that American children would not understand the meaning of *gourmand*; therefore the name Greedy was an acceptable compromise. A tattooed heart was added to *le Schtroumpf costaud's* right forearm in order to better distinguish Hefty from the other Smurfs and *le Schtroumpf bricoleur* would be recognizable

henceforth as Handy, thanks to the pencil always tucked behind his left ear. *Le Grand Schtroumpf* was the Smurfs' leader, of course, clearly distinguishable as Papa Smurf by the wearing of a red suit and his full white beard.

Unlike other animated series, where sounds are a combination of canned music and the usual zip, bang, boom sound effects, the first sounds that filled those young American ears on that fateful September morning were different. The great music of Bach, Beethoven, Debussy, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Prokofiev, Rossini, Schubert, Strauss and Stravinsky best represented the idea that the story of the Smurfs took place long, long, *long* ago. Not only was this music appropriate because it was considered *old*, the rights to classical music fall under public domain and was, therefore, free. Thus, classical music heralded the first broadcast of the two 12-minute stories that, including commercial breaks, lasted thirty minutes. What followed those thirty minutes was to be nine years of unprecedented broadcasts of the first animated children's television series based on a European comic book.

In truth, the Smurfs were born thirty years earlier in Belgium, in 1957. Their creator, Pierre Culliford, pen name Peyo, created the Smurfs while on vacation. He was sharing a meal with a friend and while eating, Peyo discovered that his fries lacked salt. As he reached for the salt shaker Peyo said to his friend, "Passe moi le... le... le... schtroumpf!" (Caradec'h 51). Thus, the Smurfs were christened. During this period of time, Peyo was working on a comic book series called *Johan et Pirlouit*. The stories about these two characters take place

in the Middle Ages in an unnamed European kingdom. Johan is a young page and Pirlouit is his sidekick. As do most stories that take place in the Middle Ages involving pages and knights and kings, Johan and Pirlouit are driven by duty to their King. Johan is central to tales that tell of struggles for power among lords, the need to usurp villains, and courage. In the *Johan and Pirlouit* comic book series the brave page, Johan, comes face to face with traitors and outlaws, witches and sorcerers, giants and ghosts and finally, on page thirty-nine of a sixty-two page story titled *La flûte à six Schtroumpfs*, Johan comes face to face with the Smurfs. Here, as secondary characters in the ninth volume of the *Johan et Pirlouit* comic book series, the Smurfs make their début. The Smurfs became popular so quickly that they were given their own comic book series in 1959 (Ibid. 41).

In the same way that the physical appearance of the 1928 Mickey Mouse has evolved over the years, so has the physical appearance of the Smurfs changed since 1957-- not dramatically--but, noticeably. Undoubtedly, books abound documenting the exact year in which certain changes were made to the great Mickey Mouse. To determine the exact time that changes were made to the look of the Smurfs is nearly impossible; however, the original cone-shaped hat of the 1957 Smurf is today fuller, less cone-shaped and softer in appearance; the Smurf's nose is shorter and the thin blue body is more round than its original version. When first introduced in *La flûte à six Schtroumpfs*, Peyo had drawn the Smurfs with five fingers on each hand, but in the *Johan et Pirlouit* story titled *Le*

Pays Maudit, the Smurfs have only four fingers. These are some of the changes that became permanent in the Smurfs' new look throughout the Smurf comic books. It is possible that the alterations to the Smurf's body occurred gradually, or, perhaps the transformations occurred between the printings of one comic book in a series to the next. By the time the Smurfs were being animated for NBC, however, the specifications of the Smurfs were defined by model sheets.

A complete set of model sheets was made for each Smurf, as many as ten pages per main character, showing each of the characters in multiple views: head on, profile, three-quarters, and back. Measurements were precise with respect to height and width. The model sheet artists provided a variety of facial expressions and action poses. All drawings were approved by Peyo.

All Smurfs are blue. Peyo chose blue as their color because he believed that blue is the most popular color in the world. Green, in Peyo's opinion, is too reminiscent of the color associated with Martians, and had he chosen to make them black, yellow or red, he believed that he might have been suspect of racism (Ibid. 44).

The Smurfs are not to be associated with any political entities. During the interview with a writer for the *Paris Match* magazine, Peyo claimed that a Smurf is a pacifist and an ecologist. They live in an unnamed country where the houses are mushrooms and where money does not exist. According to Peyo, the Smurfs eat *salsepareille*, a creeper plant found mainly in Mexico and Central Asia (Op.cit.). Not surprising, Smurf eating habits also evolve with worldly success

and on many occasions the Smurfs are seen eating berries, cake, cupcakes, or enjoying spoonfuls of stuff out of the pot of the Great Pudding.

In the twenty-five years preceding 1984, Peyo had written eleven comic books starring the Smurfs. He considered them charming and poetic tales (Ibid. 51). These are the stories that aired in the first season on NBC, but not all of the episodes broadcast in that first year were original stories created by Peyo. And, although Peyo would write five more comic books--for a total of sixteen original Smurf books before his death on 24 December 1992--in 1981 the Hanna-Barbera studio found itself scrambling to fill air-time in the middle of the show's first season. There were simply not enough stories in Peyo's eleven comic books to fill the demands of a season comprised of thirty-minute shows airing once a week for thirteen weeks on Saturday morning. Peyo was soon busy approving or disapproving story ideas for his Smurfs which were now being created entirely by American writers. During this time period Peyo's main concern was that the Smurf concepts remain true to form and that the Smurfs remain . . . smurfy.

Smurf as a Part of Speech

Peyo claimed that a Smurf is an international personality that is neither Russian nor American nor European and that no one is quite sure where they live. Their language, he asserted, is a type of "auberge espagnole" where each person can bring the word that best fits the circumstances and that the words can be conjugated in all tenses (Ibid. 48).

One of the characteristics of the Smurf language is the frequent use of the word *smurf*. In their conversations with one another, the Smurfs replace nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs with some derivative of the word *smurf*. The overuse of this contrivance, however, is considered *unsmurfy*. Meaning must be clear. “Smurf me the smurf that smurfs smurfs” makes no sense to anyone other than a Smurf; however, no image is required to bring meaning to phrases such as, “Be careful that the baby doesn’t smurf his death of cold” or “The cake you baked today is much better than the one you smurfed yesterday” or “It is better to smurf than to receive.”

In the tale of *Le Pays Maudit*, the little Smurfs are filled with joy when they see that Johan and Pirlouit have come to rescue their Papa Smurf who is being held prisoner while they excavate the mine for diamonds for the wicked Monulf. Meaning is clear: “What a joy to smurf you once again!” “How were you able to smurf all the way here?” “Have you come to smurf us?” The Smurfs understand one another, but humans must rely on context clues for meaning; therefore, in order for the viewer of the animated series to understand the language of Smurfs, only some words (or a portion of the word) were replaced with the word “*smurf*.” Context offers a reliable understanding of this speech pattern and care was taken by the Hanna-Barbera staff to ensure that words would not be misundersmurfed. The meaning behind a remark about something that is “*just smurfy*” or “*smurftastic*” is quite clear.

The Hanna-Barbera production team followed Peyo's lead regarding the treatment of Smurf language. Every effort was made to ensure that replacing a part of speech with some derivative of the word smurf would not be pejorative in any way. Peyo established the ground rules for proper Smurf language with the first appearance of the Smurfs in his book *La flûte à six Schtroumpfs*. While the meanings behind the Smurfs' first words are a mystery to Johan and Pirlouit, the reader of the comic book completely understands: "Nom d'un schtroumpf! Vous ne pouvez pas regarder où vous mettez vos schtroumpfs? Vous avez failli me schtroumpfer!" (Peyo 38). Liberty has been taken in translating these lines as follows: "For the love of smurf, why don't you smurf where you're going? You nearly smurfed on me!" After the initial meeting between Smurf and human, Johan still has difficulty understanding the Smurf language; however, he guesses correctly that, "Schtroumpfez-moi! Je vais vous schtroumpfer chez le Grand Schtroumpf!" means they should follow the Smurf (Ibid.39).

The plot in both the comic book version and the movie version of *La flûte à six Schtroumpfs* are essentially the same. As is typical of many stories written during the Middle Ages, this story is primarily about the heroic adventures of men. With the exception of a brief appearance by Dame Barbe, a hawk-nosed old and seemingly foul-tempered *grand dame*, women are essentially absent from the tale. Scenes have been added to the movie version that are not in the book and story points have been moved around, perhaps to better establish the roles of the characters and their relationships to one another in the story,

perhaps to better elaborate some of the social mores of the Middle Ages.

Inasmuch as *La flûte à six Schtroumpfs* is number nine in the series, a faithful reader would not need to be reminded of the role of the good King, of the role played by his loyal page, Johan, or of the one played by his tone-deaf sidekick, Pirlouit. On the other hand, the producers of this movie could not risk assuming that the audience was already aware of these factors; consequently, adaptations to the original comic book were made in the creation of the movie. Several sequences explaining Smurf language were added; in one of the sequences, Smurfs sing their explanation of the proper way to replace various parts of speech with the word smurf.

Another story that features language in its plot is Peyo's original *Schtroumpf Vert et Vert Schtroumpf*. Aired on NBC under the title *Smurf versus Smurf*, this story could be viewed as a parody on the still ongoing language war between French- and Flemish-speaking communities in Belgium. The story unfolds as one of the Smurfs who lives on the north side of the village goes to borrow "un tire-bouschtroumpf" from Handy Smurf, who happens to live on the south side of the village (Peyo 5). In the ensuing dialogue it is revealed that southern Smurfs use the term "smurf" as a noun, while the Smurfs in the north use it as an adjective. Each Smurf considers the other Smurf's manner of speaking "bizarre" and "marrant" (Op.cit.). Eight days later when Handy Smurf asks for the return of his property, a discussion over the correct term to use when referring to a bottle-opener becomes a heated argument. Papa Smurf is kept out

of the argument, busy in his laboratory. Meanwhile, the Smurfs debate the linguistic issue and the result is tension which erupts in an all-out fisticuffs during the theater performance of *Little Smurf Riding Hood*, or *Little Red Riding Smurf*, depending upon the point of view. Papa Smurf breaks up the fight, pointing out the silliness of fighting over a matter of words and returns to his laboratory.

The next day when Papa Smurf attempts to organize his Smurfs to follow him off to work on the bridge of the river Smurf, he realizes that the linguistic problem has not been resolved. Papa Smurf tries to lift the tension by giving the Smurfs a day off and suggesting that the Smurfs play ball together in a friendly manner. The plan seems successful, at first, but the Smurfs finish by dividing into teams; coincidentally, the north versus the south, and the tension rises even more. Finally, the game finishes with insults flying as the Smurfs from both sides of the village attempt to assert their linguistic superiority over the other. The battle continues to the point that a Smurf decides to paint a boundary line down the middle of the village. Henceforth, each Smurf will stick to his own side of a border that divides the village in two and cannot be crossed without giving proof of residency to the self-appointed border-patrol.

In a desperate move to restore order, Papa Smurf uses his magic to exchange his physical appearance with that of Gargamel's, sworn enemy of all Smurfs. The plan works as the Smurfs reunite to fight against their archenemy. At the end of the story it would seem as if peace has been restored. The next morning we see Papa Smurf approaching an open window, hand to his ear, to

listen-in on on-going conversation, “Tu veux bien me schtroumpfer ta...heu ... ton...comment dirais-je?...Ta chose à truc qui sert à schtroumpfer des bidules!” “Ah! Tu veux dire: Mon machin chouette pour schtroumpfer des fourbis?” Peyo notes, “Eh non, le problem du langage au Pays des Schtroumps n’est pas près d’être résolu . . . “ (Ibid. 32).

Few changes, if any, were made to this story for broadcast in the United States; an explanation of how the plot may correspond to a post-Civil War United States seemed unnecessary. Dupuis published Peyo’s story in 1973 and while it is hoped that the United States is, indeed . . . united, the problems with language that existed in Belgium long before 1973 continue to prevail in Belgium today.

Smurfette and the Middle Ages

When Peyo first conceived the Smurfs, a female was not part of his vision. This is evidenced by the fact that Smurfette is not present in the early comic books and years did pass before her existence was validated. In truth, what purpose could she serve in this all-male self-sufficient village of happy little blue Smurfs? Women complicate situations; therefore, Peyo kept one out of his stories for as long as he could. Finally, he bowed to the pressure.

Although Smurfette’s creation is among the first of the eleven original comic books by Peyo and the story of Smurfette aired during the first season on NBC in a single twenty-two minute episode, there are several stark differences in the manner in which Peyo presented her to the public in his comic book and the manner in which she is represented by the Hanna-Barbera animation studio.

Even today, Smurfette's place in the village remains controversial.

Created by Gargamel, Smurfette first appeared in 1976 in the Dupuis publication, *La Schtroumpfette*. Formed out of a lump of magical blue clay, Gargamel used pearls for her teeth, sapphires for her eyes, the finest silk for her hair and painted her the color of forget-me-nots. Gargamel measured out other key ingredients which he added to the bubbling mixture in a pot: a touch of *coquetterie*, a thick layer of prejudice, three crocodile tears, some feathers for a brain, a handful of anger, a half-a-pack of lies, a pinch of pride, a pint of envy, a bit of silliness, a bit of cunning and a lot of obstinacy. The kinds of ingredients used to create Smurfette in the comic book are equal, in spirit, to the ingredients used in the animated version.

The manner in which Smurfette is introduced to the Smurfs and their village is much the same in both versions. Found crying in the forest and claiming to be a Smurfette, weak and helpless and all alone in the world, and lost in a big scary forest with no one to defend her, she declares she will die of hunger and thirst or be devoured by a ferocious beast if Hefty does not lead her back to the village. Oh *boo-hoo*, she cries, "...mais qu'est ce que je vais devenir?" (*La Schtroumpfette* 7). Hefty volunteers to lead her back to the village, which requires crossing the River Smurf, but when Smurfette declares her fear of falling into the water and requests that Hefty carry her, he does so in just the same way as he might have carried so many sacks of potatoes.

While Smurfette's main purpose in both versions is to open the dam and flood the village, a story point that exemplifies a difference in the French and American cultures is found in the comic book version exclusively: specifically, in the manner in which the Smurfs behave toward Smurfette when she first settles into their village. Not only are the Smurfs rather indifferent toward Smurfette (which is true in both versions) in the original story the Smurfs find Smurfette's presence in their village an inconvenience and an annoyance; they are actually unkind toward her. Jokey Smurf comes up with a way to force her out of the village : summarily the plan is for the Smurfs to go out of their way to be overheard discussing cellulite, the results of over-eating, and the need to strengthen the bridge over the River Smurf so that it does not break under Smurfette's weight. While she is absent from her house, the Smurfs alter her clothes so that they become a tighter fit, add weights to her scale and replace her mirror with the kind found in a fun-house House of Mirrors. As she gazes at her reflection, Smurfette becomes convinced that she is fat, ugly, that everything about her is atrocious, that nothing fits and she admits to Papa Smurf, who forced his way into her house since she did not answer the door when he knocked, that she just wants to "*MOURIIIR!*" (Ibid. 21).

Papa Smurf is aware that his Smurfs have played some not-very-kind-tricks on Smurfette. Although he somewhat agrees with his Smurfs that Smurfette is not, actually, very pretty after all, he decides to fix the problem. He and Smurfette disappear into his laboratory. The following afternoon, as he

opens the door to introduce the new Smurfette, clouds roil in the sky which turns to thunder as a giant bolt of lightning cracks from the sky. Even Peyo wonders, “Est-ce un hasard?” (Ibid. 22). For the Smurfs, it is love at first sight and they have lost even their good sense to get out of the rain. From this point forward in the story, the Smurfs vie for Smurfette’s attention, but her heart belongs to Gargamel and her purpose remains to flood the village.

Smurfette appears sweet and lovable and she uses the pout to get her way with the Smurfs; but on the inside she is coy, cunning and manipulative. The Smurfs do not seem to mind her haughty and demanding demeanor and, as would any knight for his lady during the Middle Ages, the Smurfs will do whatever it takes to satisfy her feminine wiles, including painting the dam pink or risking life and limb for her love. Even after she admits to the Smurfs that she is the instrument of Gargamel, they defend her honor and find her not guilty of any wrong doing. At the end of the story she leaves the village but not before writing a note explaining that her departure is due to the fact that although she really likes the Smurfs there will never be any peace in the village as long as she is present. “Adieu”, she writes, adding the “post-schtroumpfturn” that she may perhaps return some day (Ibid. 41).

Somewhat resembling the magic mirror used by Belle to make contact with her father in Disney’s story of *Beauty and the Beast*, in Hanna-Barbera’s animated version of *Smurfette*, Smurfette uses a magic mirror to communicate with Gargamel. The mirror serves as a sort of magical-looking electronic

communication device on which Gargamel's face appears to remind Smurfette to go out and "capture the Smurfs' hearts". Furthermore, he threatens, Smurfette had better comply because he can break her just as easily as he made her.

Just as in the comic book, when Smurfette first appears in the village on the screen, Smurfs are indifferent to her. Inasmuch as her first attempts to win the Smurfs' hearts fail, she decides to plan a picnic to which every Smurf is formally invited and which every Smurf is too busy to attend. All alone in the forest she wonders why no Smurfs have come to her picnic when suddenly Jokey appears, carrying his usual beribboned gift box. "Surprise ! . . . yuk, yuk, yuk . . . boom!" Smurfette's face is covered in soot as she searches for another way to comply with Gargamel's orders. She resorts to tricking Greedy into showing her how to open the dam by tempting him with a delicious looking cake which she refuses to give to him until he shows her how to open the gates to the dam. Greedy gives in to the temptation. He pulls on the handle so as to give her a peek but when she attempts to stop him from closing the gate, he realizes that Smurfette's destructive actions are purposeful. At that same moment, Smurfette falls from the top of the dam into the waters below. Greedy manages to close the gate just as Papa Smurf, at the head of a line of Smurfs, reaches out to save Smurfette from the rushing water and drowning in the flood.

In both stories, Smurfette is put on trial. She cannot justify her actions of attempting to flood the village, and finally, standing in the middle of a wooden cart like the kind that might have been used to haul someone off to be burned at

the stake, Smurfette admits to her taking orders from Gargamel. In tears, she also admits to being ashamed and full of remorse. Wise Papa Smurf explains to Smurfette that her actions are not her fault; her actions are the fault of Gargamel, who created her in order to “smurf” the Smurfs. Papa Smurf’s kind words fill Smurfette with gratitude. Smurfette realizes that Papa Smurf and all of the other Smurfs are so nice and so kind. Sounding a bit like a female version of Walt Disney’s Pinocchio, Smurfette exclaims with a big “Oh!” If only she could be a real Smurf, just like all of them.

Behind closed doors, Smurfette floats in an aura of purple haze; her eyes are closed and she is smiling. Papa Smurf adds the finishing touches to his magic potion, a “touch of Venus” and “moonbeams for light”. With all of the powers in his command, he orders Smurfette to become Smurf and before him stand! No foreboding skies or thunderbolts announce the arrival of this new and improved Smurfette and when the Smurfs get their first glimpse of the blonde goddess, as in the original story, the Smurfs’ love for Smurfette is love at first sight.

With the help of the two-way magical mirror, the audience is reminded of Gargamel, who also notices the change in Smurfette and who must now resort to trickery to get Smurfette to lead him to the Smurfs. Surely Smurfette wants to repay the Smurfs for all their kindness?! She agrees. If Smurfette will bring all of the Smurfs out into the forest and gather them at the foot of the Great Oak, Gargamel convinces Smurfette that a surprise party awaits. The surprise is on

Smurfette when she discovers Gargamel tricked her in order to make captives of all of the Smurfs.

Smurfette's transformation from Smurfette to Smurf only becomes complete when she finds the courage to disguise herself as the Lone Smurf and rescue the Smurfs out of the clutches of the wicked Gargamel. At last, Smurfette is a real Smurf.

At the end of both stories the Smurfs take their revenge on Gargamel by doing unto him what was done onto them. When last seen, Gargamel is being chased into the country-side by an ugly old hag covered in warts while he wails, "I'll get those Smurfs; "Je me vengerai! Je me vengerai!! . . ." (Ibid. 42).

During a dinner one night sometime in the early 1980s while visiting the home of the author of this essay in Los Angeles, California, Peyo was asked by one of the invited guests, "Mr. Culliford, can you tell me why there is only one female Smurf?" Peyo gave his reply without even batting an eye: "Because one is *quite* enough." While Peyo's response was received with a knowing nod and an understanding smile, it is not a satisfying answer to a sincere question.

With the exception of Papa Smurf, all Smurfs are one dimensional. Handy Smurf is certainly handy, and that is all there is to him. His role in the village is to invent and to fix things and that is all that he ever does. Brainy's role is to pontificate and annoy others, and he is very good at what he does. Vanity is vain, and that is all there is to him. Clumsy does not go far without tripping over his own two feet. Greedy's only interest is food, and all he wants to do is eat.

Lazy would rather sleep than do anything else, and that is all there is to him. Not one of the one hundred Smurfs is more than what is represented in a one-dimensional trait.

Papa Smurf, however, is a fully realized Smurf with depth and complexity. He is 542 years old and therefore very wise. He rules over his village as would a benevolent King, always finding a just and fair way to resolve all problems. Although not a King, he imposes his primacy upon the other Smurfs, and even if he loses his temper from time to time, he is a symbol of what is good in the world. The Smurfs look up to him for an answer to all their questions because Papa Smurf, like God, knows everything.

Smurfette is the only other fully realized Smurf with depth and complexity. Young, beautiful and created with a stroke of wickedness, Smurfette represents all of the mysterious characteristics of a noble female. Any attempt to disassemble her would result in a total of one hundred one-dimensional Smurfettes: a handy Smurfette who goes around fixing things; a pontificating Smurfette who pontificates and annoys; a vain Smurfette who only has eyes for herself; a lazy Smurfette; a clumsy Smurfette; a greedy Smurfette, etc.; therefore, disassembling Smurfette would be unwise. Sexual innuendos regarding a lone female living in a village with one hundred males may be one of the reasons Peyo first kept her out of his books. Sex is, understandably, a taboo subject in stories for children, and in some polite circles, discussing sex is considered bad form. Consequently, the discussion about sex and Smurfette is more about love

than it is about sex; is brief and conducted with utmost delicacy.

The distinct roles of the men and women of the Middle Ages are well documented in many books by many authors. Females, both noble women as well as the peasants, were expected to behave in a manner beyond reproach. Marriage was strictly a business arrangement. Love was perfect, chivalrous, pure, and unblemished by sex. Consequently, when the Smurfs first cast their eyes upon Papa Smurf's new and improved Smurfette, they cannot stop their tongues from hanging out of their mouths or their hearts from pounding wildly in their chests. The Smurfs are filled with a desire, but for what, they are not sure. Their love for Smurfette remains, by necessity, platonic. Smurfette's chastity is further enforced by the appearance of a Baby Smurf, whose arrival to the village is explained away by its delivery by a stork. Imposing a role on Smurfette that is anything other than the role of a Smurfette, would risk criticism by today's "fâcheux" referred to on line ten of the anonymous poem, *Aube*.

Cultural Differences and Their Effects on the Transition

Comic books and animation are two different types of art that tell a story. In a comic book, however, the story is told through one or more pages of words and pictures. Although the process of creating a comic book page or an animated cartoon require specific steps unique to each art form, "a good story cannot be ruined by poor animation, but neither can a poor story be saved by the very best animation" (Thomas 367). Sometimes a story can only be saved by adaptations that have nothing to do with either the plot or the quality of

animation, as in the case of the story of *Les Schtroumpfs Noirs*. This simple story begins with Lazy Smurf being pestered by an annoying fly who bites Lazy Smurf and causes the Smurf to turn black, become angry, and “GNAP!” his way to the Smurf village where he bites another Smurf who bites another Smurf who bites another Smurf until finally the entire village, including Papa Smurf, has become an angry, biting, gnapping village of Black Smurfs. This episode was not going to air on American television if Peyo did not agree to change the color of *Les Schtroumpfs Noirs*. The color red was considered, but there was fear of offending American Indians. The color yellow was considered but there was fear of offending the East. The color brown was considered and rejected. The color white was *not* considered because the Smurfs wear all white. The story aired as *The Purple Smurfs*.

It is possible that Peyo was aware of the 1982 novel *The Color Purple* by the American author Alice Walker. This is an epistolary novel that takes place mostly in rural Georgia in the 1930s. The title of the book is an important symbol because the color purple is equated with the suffering and pain of a young black woman. The novel contains explicit content, particularly in terms of violence. Although Smurfette is not present during the angry biting gnapping in the comic book version of *Les Schtroumpfs Noirs*, she shares the same fate as that of the other Smurfs who turn purple in the 1982 television broadcast. Fortunately, a fire in Papa Smurf’s laboratory causes an explosion that is strong enough to cover the village in enormous clouds of pollen. This causes the Smurfs to sneeze their

way back to good health. As they become cured, their healthy blue color replaces the color purple, and all is well that ends well.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most cartoon characters follow a traditional path from paper to film. Beginning as an idea in the mind's eye, the artist defines the shape of the characters as they migrate from a thought to a tangible form. The characters may have a political agenda; perhaps not. The characters' popularity may warrant a few inches of space as a comic strip in a newspaper, or not. If the characters achieve the status of becoming very, very popular, they may be deemed as worthy of their own comic book. Some cartoons are watched while munching on popcorn in a movie theater, entertainment to be enjoyed while waiting for the main attraction. Some cartoons achieve the ultimate and crowning glory of success in the twenty-first century--a film of their own.

Peyo's idea of introducing the Smurfs into an already established and popular comic book series was a stroke of genius blessed by Lady Luck. Such was the Smurfs' popularity that the story in which they were introduced justified repeating the tale with a movie. *La flûte à six Schtroumpfs*, story by Peyo and directed by Peyo, premiered in Belgium in 1976. The film unfolds in much the same way as the story is presented in the comic book. Peyo tells the tale of the magic flute within sixty-two pages of a comic book and in seventy minutes of film. In the comic book, the Smurfs appear on page thirty-nine. In the film, the Smurfs appear after twenty minutes into the story. Although the Smurfs play a part in the story about the magic flute, the story is not, in fact, about the Smurfs. Set in the

Middle Ages, the story is primarily about the adventures of Johan and Perlouit. While it is assumed that the film enjoyed some amount of success in Europe, it would seem that Peyo was a much more accomplished cartoonist than he was a movie director.

In the wake of the Smurfs' enormous popularity, Peyo's film was released in the United States in 1983. Somewhere along the way, the decision was made not to use the talent of the actors who gave the Smurfs their American voices. To the American audience watching this 1976 re-release, not only did the Smurfs sound unfamiliar, but something about the way they looked was different. Their gestures, and even the way they moved were different. The story did not seem to be about the Smurfs, after all. In truth, Peyo's film bears little to no resemblance to the Hanna-Barbera television series. Although the film did feature the Smurfs, without the presence of Smurfette and other smurfy attributes with which America had fallen in love, it is understandable why the movie was not much more than a disappointment.

The children who grew up watching the Smurfs on Saturday mornings on American television are now in their thirties. They remember the original concept: there is only one Smurfette, one Papa Smurf and one smurfy village which no human can ever find unless led there by a Smurf. They remember specific stories and the moral to the story. They remember that Gargamel's cat is named Azrael, and while they may not quite remember whether Gargamel wants to eat the Smurfs or turn them into gold, they know that he is the bad guy from whom

the Smurfs will always escape. Children want to know that they can depend on their villains and their heroes to behave consistently. Consequently, today's Smurf fans remember the essence of the Smurfs more than they remember the compromises made to satisfy the egos of network moguls.

Attempts were made to compromise the concept of the Smurfs from the moment of their transition from comic book to television. For the first few years, Peyo's response to a second Smurfette was always a smile, a shake of the head and a firm, "non." He also rejected stories that were driven by contrivances or contained new-fangled contraptions viewed out of place in stories meant to be set in the Middle Ages. Modern devices such as telephones or televisions were forbidden. Eventually, however, Peyo gave in. Compromises in the form of a Sassette, a Smurfling, a GrandPa Smurf and other non-smurfy additives appeared. The more the compromises appeared, the more the ratings dropped.

A new movie about the Smurfs, titled simply *The Smurfs*, premieres in 2011 on August 3. This is exciting news for true-blue Smurf fans. It is presumed that millions of thirty-year-olds, perhaps with a child or two in tow, will fill the theaters in anticipation of a movie-going experience that will carry them back to the joys of childhood. Promotions for the film have already begun. Below, from the *Parade* section of the *Houston Chronicle* dated Sunday, May 15, 2011, an anonymous blurb:

"The Smurfs (Aug. 3) Starring Neil Patrick Harris, Jayma Mays, with voices of Katy Perry, George Lopez. Harris didn't grow up a Smurfs fan ("They

freaked me out,” he says, laughing”), but he liked them as co-stars. “They never forget their lines,” he dead-pans. In the franchise’s first animation and live-action hybrid, the Smurfs find themselves in Manhattan, bunking with Patrick (Harris) and Grace (Mays) as they try to return to Smurf Village. There will be new faces in the blue mix, but director Raja Gosnell vows, “All the characters people know and love will be there.”

Undoubtedly, but will the characters be recognizable to the people who know and love them well? How in the world did the Smurfs end up in New York? In the mid-1980s when ideas for new and fresh Smurf stories were becoming increasingly more difficult, Hanna-Barbera executives sat around discussing the idea of taking the Smurfs to Manhattan; apparently they would make the journey in some kind of Clockwork Smurf time-machine-gone-berserk. It is not documented that the Manhattan idea was ever presented to Peyo, but curiosity alone will be impetus enough for this author to buy a ticket to the premier. Meanwhile, Peyo must be turning over in his grave.

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