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Miller, Anne. Reading Bande Dessinée. Critical Approaches to French-language Comic Strip. Bristol/Chicago : Intellect, 2007. 272 p. ISBN : 978-1-84150-177-2

Bande dessinée studies, once the ugly duckling of literary analysis, have been attracting increasing interest in the past several years. This phenomenon has grown to such an extent that it can now be said they have fully developed into an autonomous field. This recent critical interest in bande dessinée within academic circles has not been confined to France or Belgium alone, as proven by the publication of this latest work by Ann Miller that aims to provide a comprehensive introduction to the domain for English-speaking readers. In many ways it could be said that knowledge of bande dessinée remains sketchy in the Anglophone world. This is particularly true in North America, due to the general lack of accessible translations and to the comparatively high cost and limited availability of those that have been attempted, often by small publishers, with the exception of some best-selling works that have had great media exposure, such as Marjane Satrapi's recent *Persepolis* (discussed in Miller's book).

Miller adopts a deliberately systematic and pedagogical approach, one that will make her book particularly useful for introductory courses on the subject. Four main sections provide a variety of methods and analyse representative works in a detailed and generally very satisfying manner. For each, Miller has provided what amounts to a summary of the various critical tools she uses, couched in precise and accessible language. As she states in her "Introduction", "no prior knowledge of terminology is assumed" and once again, this approach will certainly be welcomed by students. The first section, ""The History of bande dessinée"", gives an overview of the medium's development over the last century and uses the theories of Pierre Bourdieu as a theoretical basis for the discussion of its "struggle for recognition as an art form" (13). Bande dessinée's transition from children's entertainment to legitimate cultural phenomenon is traced through a short history of its publications, presentation of the two main schools (the "Ecole de Bruxelles" and the "Ecole de Charleroi", loosely connected to the magazines "*Tintin*" and "*Spirou*"), and the appearance of "adult" BD and of cultural institutions such as the Angoulême salon. Miller presents the evolution of BD not only in artistic, but also in economic terms, as a conflict between market-oriented interests, whose "priorities were overwhelmingly commercial rather than artistic" (33) and independent creators bent on pushing the boundaries of the medium. The "Return of the Independent Sector" and its attempt to create a "bande dessinée *d'auteur*" (53), often connected to the themes of reportage or autobiography, closes the section.

Part two, ""Analytical Frameworks"", focuses on "the formal features of the medium" (73), codes, mise en page, metaphor and metonymy etc., bringing into play linguistics, semiology and narratology. Concrete examples are given through discussion of several panels by Baru (*L'autoroute du soleil*), and Julliard (*Le Cahier*

bleu). These readings are consistently clear and well-explained, and in some cases, such as the section on "Focalization and ocularization in *Le Cahier bleu*", quite perceptive in their analysis of narrative viewpoint. Jameson's theory of post-modernism provides the theoretical framework for a discussion of Mathieu's five-volume series *Julius Corentin Acquefacques*, a panel of which also provides the very appropriate illustration chosen for the cover of the book. Metafiction, *mise en abyme* and intertextuality are explored as the main devices that characterize these post-modern creations.

Part three, "A Cultural Studies Approach to bande dessinée", touches on questions of national identity, ethnicity, class and gender. Astérix, icon of Frenchness, is necessarily discussed, as is the satirical working-class hero Super-Dupont and Jacques Tardi's work on historical memory and World War One. The discussion of Post-colonialism features reflections on three contemporary authors who have dealt explicitly with the problems of the integration of first and second-generation Maghrebis in France: Manu Larcenet (*Le Combat ordinaire*), Farid Boudjellal (*Petit Polio*) and Kamel Khélif (*Ce pays qui est le vôtre*). Social class and masculinity evoke Binet's famous Bidochon series, Margerin's suburban rocker Lucien and Dupuy and Berberian's Monsieur Jean, a caricature of the intellectual milieu. Miller notes quite rightly that "Bande dessinée is a particularly apt medium for the representation of social class" (196), as the examples she chooses attest.

Part four, "Bande dessinée and subjectivity", uses a psychoanalytic approach to discuss Tintin, certainly the hero that lends itself best to this method, evoking and summarizing various previous analyses by Peeters, Tisseron, David and McCarthy. Autobiography as a subject for BD artists is the subject of the last two chapters, the first dealing with three male authors (Trondheim, Berberian, Dupuis) and the second, more specifically concerned with "Gender and Autobiography", with two female authors (Julie Doucet and Marjane Satrapi) and one man (Jean-Christophe Menu). No one globalizing view is offered, as Miller highlights the different approaches these authors bring to the telling of the self, with considerably different graphic and narrative styles.

Well-organized and methodical, this book provides a most useful introduction to the analysis of the 9th art, through clear readings supported by pertinent theoretical frameworks and judiciously chosen illustrations. One could regret the absence of a conclusion, even though it could be argued that the wide array of themes and approaches chosen by Miller could have made that exercise superfluous or artificial – these many strands do not necessarily need to be brought together, and their variety is enough to prove the richness of the field. It could also be claimed that a more precise sub-title for the book could have been "Critical Approaches to Contemporary French-language Comic Strip". Indeed, Miller chooses to focus essentially on recent productions, mostly close to the Independent milieu, as she considers the last few years as "one of the most fertile periods in [the] history [of the medium]" (227). This is a legitimate point of view, even though the decades preceding the emergence of bande dessinée as an "adult" medium had much more to offer than just Tintin, and sometimes produced some remarkably original works in spite of the commercial orientation of the publishers. Within the necessary limits she sets for herself, however, Miller's book deserves much praise and will undoubtedly prove valuable in the developing field of BD studies within university literature departments, as well as offer an interesting and informative read to the

general public.