

## PREFACE

While Steven Spielberg is moving forward on the production of the first of a series of films featuring the adventures of Tintin, to be followed soon after by a second film directed by Peter Jackson, it is important to say a few words to the American audience about Hergé's cartoon character.

Tintin appeared for the first time in 1929, but by the eve of World War II he had already become a notable cultural figure. In the 1930s, his adventures first appeared in a newspaper for children, *Le Petit Vingtième* (*The Little Twentieth*), and were collected each year in an album. During the war years, rather than cut back on his work, Hergé continued to produce a daily version of the exploits of his little hero in a collaborationist newspaper called *Le Soir* (*The Evening*). His drawings appeared side by side with the anti-Semitic caricatures of Jam as well as the brilliant but conformist articles by a young Belgian critic, Paul de Man.<sup>1</sup> From 1942 on, despite the scarcity of paper, *The Adventures of Tintin* also appeared as albums in color. It was during the war years that Hergé realized the full scope of his work, and in that time period he produced the most gripping adventures. Between 1940 and 1945, he published *The Crab with the Golden Claws*, *The Shooting Star*, *The Secret of the Unicorn*, *Red Rackham's Treasure*, and *The Seven Crystal Balls*, in that order. In these adventures Tintin was no longer a journalist commenting on world politics from the standpoint of the Right, as he was between 1930 and 1939. Now he was transformed into a kind of literary hero acting in a purely fictitious world. Next to Tintin appeared Captain Haddock and then Professor Calculus—a trio of friends whose exploits took place all over the world.

After the war, Hergé was put out of commission and had to remain silent until 1947. When Hergé's years of penance were up, Tintin's adventures reappeared in a new magazine devoted to children, *Le Journal de Tintin*. Hergé resumed work on *The Seven Crystal Balls*, completing the adventure with the famous episode *The Temple of the Sun*.

In France and Belgium, children born after the war—the so-called baby boomers—grew up with Tintin. Children eagerly followed the new adventures as they appeared in *Le Journal de Tintin*. They also had access to the earlier episodes that Hergé Studios had reworked and Casterman Press reissued in album form. In a few years, Tintin had become more than just a commercial success. He had been transformed into a mythical figure whose task was to cope with the perils and challenges of modernity. His fame and influence spread well beyond the Catholic youth whom Hergé was addressing at the outset. Tintin was not merely a passing fad but a formidable social phenomenon. It is no exaggeration to claim that Tintin was part of the education of most of the young Francophone boys and girls growing up after the Second World War. With Tintin, they discovered the world; with Tintin, they developed the taste for adventure. Taking Tintin as their role model, they learned generosity, daring, tolerance, openness, self-control, and the need to understand and explain everything. Moreover, children learned to speak just like the characters in the adventures. On this point it is important to note that Hergé was as great a writer as he was an extraordinary artist.<sup>2</sup> Many of the children learned by heart the numerous dialogues and rejoinders in Hergé's albums as if they were verses in a sacred text.

I was one of those thousands of boys whose youth was marked by Hergé's hero. Approaching my forties, and having become a father myself, I wanted to undertake a positive reassessment of the many values I had learned through Tintin's adventures. Thus, between 1980 and 1983, I began a systematic rereading of the adventures, which were published in this book in 1984. Although my book has been republished in its original form by three different presses, at its initial publication in 1984 the field of "Tintinology," or "Tintin studies," was at its infancy.<sup>3</sup> At that time the most important piece was the 1959 pioneer study by Pol Vandromme.<sup>4</sup> But Vandromme was both suspicious of and frankly hostile to academic jargon, and he refused to engage in any in-depth analysis of Hergé's world. Even though many of Vandromme's insights were subsequently confirmed, his ideas were not presented in any systematic way in his book, and most readers of his day

thus overlooked them. Fifty years later, studies of Tintin include more than one hundred scholarly books and surely many more hundreds of scholarly articles. In addition, there are four or five biographies of Hergé that allow us to learn more about the personal context of his creative work. Also, regular conferences and subsequent publications are dedicated to Tintin.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, a museum dedicated entirely to Hergé is soon to open in Louvain, Belgium, to spread public knowledge and appreciation of his work. One is surely justified now, if not before, of speaking of Hergé's work as a classic.

In order to orient the American reader, let me clarify two points. First, this book initially was addressed to those readers perfectly familiar with the Tintin albums. Thus, I did not always clearly explain the circumstances of one or another particular adventure, for I supposed they were already known to my readers. Second, the systematic use of scholarly language—among others, that of psychoanalysis—to interpret the adventures of Tintin was intended to highlight the fundamental oppositions that seemed to me to be the underlying framework of this saga. In particular, I focused on the opposition between Tintin the “foundling” and Haddock “the bastard.” Although today a majority of readers may have assimilated these psychoanalytic notions, the vocabulary might seem heavy or outdated. If that is the case, I ask your pardon. However, in a study I intended to be entertaining, I was still very much concerned with showing that a domain typically consigned to children is indeed amenable to legitimate scholarly interests.