

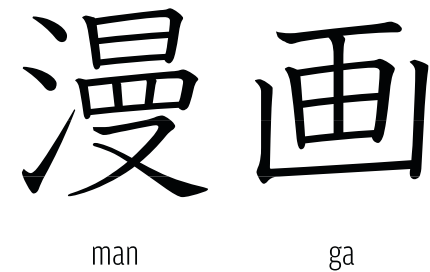
cally and culturally, but also historically highly ambiguous medium vacillating as much between historic continuity and discontinuity as between the Gutenberg galaxy and the computer era, temporality and spatiality, reading and writing, playfulness and seriousness, infant and adult. From such a point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

My essay is divided into two parts. I will leave the discussion of rather general problems such as the assumption that the Japanese are “predisposed to more visual forms of communication because of their calligraphy which evolved from ideograms and fused drawing and writing” (BONGCO 2000: 73) to the latter half, probably to be published in the next issue of this journal while focusing on traditional pictorial art in this one. Starting from the name “manga” allegedly derived from *Hokusai Manga*, I will illuminate not only how comics have been related to woodblock prints of the 18-19th centuries but also — going a longer way back into history — to medieval picture scrolls (*emaki*), and for what reasons these links are repudiated. Instead of pursuing *whether* there is a continuous artistic tradition culminating in contemporary manga, I will rather highlight *which* traditions have been considered to be crucial by critics and researchers.

1. The Term “manga”: Hokusai and Beyond

The word “manga” consists of two components initially written in Sino-Japanese characters [Figure 1], which are often literally translated as “funny, spontaneously drawn pictures”. Lets first focus on the latter component *ga*. Tsuji Nobuo, a specialist of Japanese art history who has been showing a penchant for manga-

likeness in his field,⁴ explains that the word “manga” meant “random sketches” in the 18/19th centuries whereas it translates now as comic-strip, or more precisely as “cartoon-like art created in Japan or rendered in a Japanese style” (TSUJI 2001: 54). Besides his emphasis on Japanese particularity, it is worth noticing that he (or his translator) uses the word “sketches” instead of “picture” or “painting”. “Sketching” points to activities employing brush and ink and resting mainly upon the potential of the line. In this respect, it recalls the fact that the East-Asian tradition did not set painting apart from drawing and (‘calligraphic’) writing. The Sino-Japanese characters for “picture” (*ga*) and “to write” (*kaku*, *sho*) share the same scriptural origin after all.



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

⁴ See for example (TSUJI 2005: 428-433).

Signs - Studies in Graphic Narratives

International Journal for the History of Early Comics and Sequential Art

This new Journal focuses on a traditionally forgotten field: early comics or, more broadly, graphic narratives. We believe that the study of this area deserves more attention, and the aim of SIGNS – STUDIES IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES is twofold: to address a lack of investigation in academic circles, and to boost awareness of the field in contemporary comics culture.

During the last few decades there has been an increasing level of attention among publishers directed towards comics, yet precious few serious pieces of research have appeared. Those that exist tend to be about post-1930s publications, and this is a growing trend. However, early comics remain largely unexplored. There is a need for them to be contextualized in terms of their audiences, economics and socio-cultural environments.

In addressing this gap, SIGNS hopes to bring together the best researchers in the field, which is by definition multidisciplinary, since different approaches – linguistic, aesthetic, sociological – inevitably complement each other. Most of the articles will deal with graphic narratives – let them be called ‘comics’, ‘graphic novels’ or ‘sequential artworks’ – printed worldwide between 1800 and 1930, but without ruling out the inclusion of earlier periods. Moreover, each issue will contain reprints of rare works and crucial texts. And in the journal’s review section, recent publications will be highlighted and discussed.

While our ambition is academic (including blind peer reviewing of papers), text readability and attractive, profusely illustrated layouts are of great importance as well. We hope the reader will find it a pleasure to glance over the pages, to become charmed by the drawings or to be caught up in a solid discussion.

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

Traditions of Contemporary Manga (1)

Relating Comics to Premodern Art

by: Jaqueline BERNDT

In contemporary Japan, comics proliferate to such an extent that they are not in need of general cultural authorization anymore. Until the 1980s, pioneering manga artists such as Tezuka Osamu¹ (1928-1989), and manga historians such as Shimizu Isao pointed to premodern Japanese art works in order to moderate the wide-spread suspicion towards modern manga. Their approach was mirrored, for example, by Schodt’s unrivaled survey *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (1983) which, although not specifying its sources in the main text, allows a glimpse into its references to the above-mentioned by means of its bibliography. However, since the 1990s, the field of Japanese manga criticism has changed fundamentally. Instead of detecting manga’s origins in premodern Japan and pursuing their continuity during the modernization process, the centre of attention shifted towards the development of *story-manga* as supposedly originated by Tezuka after WWII. Corresponding to the commercial as well as cultural prevalence of narrative comics over caricatures and cartoons, critics also exhibited a greater concern with conventions of graphic story-telling than with the previously predominant issue of satiric representation.² This led to the present situation: Whereas manga experts today exercise caution with respect to alleged premodern origins, educators, the mass media and state institutions gladly refer to them in a populist

manner. The art-education curriculum of junior high-schools (effective since 2002) and the recent picture-scroll exhibition of the Kyoto National Museum (2006) are only two of many examples which show an inclination to utilize manga as a means of popularizing old art and promoting national identity.³

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

It goes without saying that the respective understanding of comics predetermines which traditions, or ‘origins’, come into view. To me, manga is an aestheti-

3

I have discussed the implications of traditionalizing manga in my forthcoming essay “Considering Manga Discourse” (BERNDT 2007); for a discussion of the problematic discursive relationship between comics and fine art in Japan see (BERNDT 2001). Regarding the junior-highschool curriculum see (BERNDT 2002), summarized by (GRAVETT 2004: 18).



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COVER: Detail from album cover, *Imagerie Artistique de Paris, 20 contes choisis*, Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies, Circa 1930.

In 1885, the *Maison Quantin* launched a new collection of illustrated works aimed at children and young people. It created at once a significant number of books, at all prices, gathered under the generic label of the *Encyclopédie enfantine* (Children's Encyclopaedia) [Figure 1]. This encyclopaedia was constituted

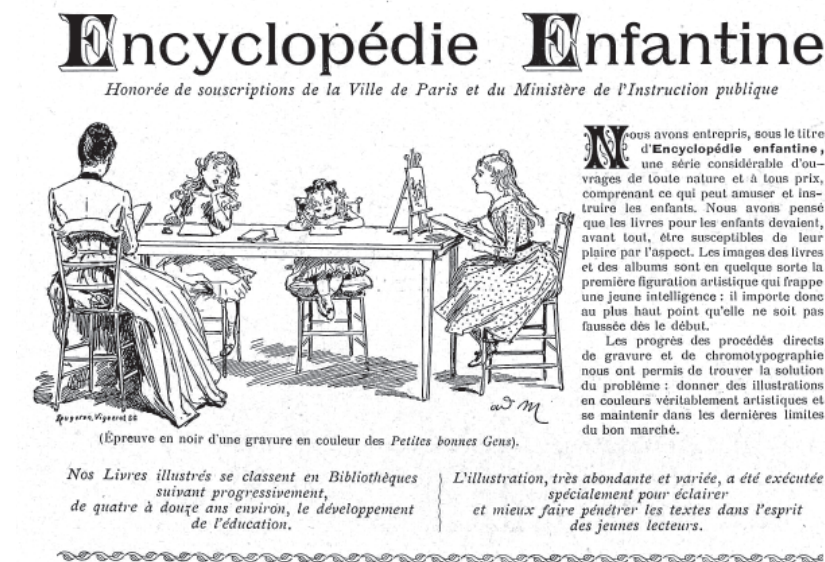


Figure 1.
Presentation for
L'Encyclopédie Enfantine,
from Librairies-Imprimeries
Réunies' catalogue, last
months of 1890.

of albums, alphabets, and various illustrated books. It also included works organised into three collections – called *Bibliothèques* (Libraries) – aimed at young readers of different ages, namely the *Bibliothèque maternelle* (Nursery School Library), the *Bibliothèque enfantine* (Children's Library), and the *Bibliothèque de la famille* (Family Library).²

Quantin's venture into children's and young's people literature is a testimony to the development of youth books publishing at the end of the 19th century. At the

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

beginning of the 1880s, numerous publishing houses were established in Paris and gradually came to end the supremacy of the catholic publishing houses of the provinces in the children's literature sector³. With free yet compulsory primary education, the potential market for children and young people literature was growing⁴ and many publishers made a start in this promising publishing activity.

In this context, Quantin needed to position himself favourably by offering quality children's literature. The new books of his publishing house were meant to offer 'a collection of printed works made both to please and to educate'. Moreover, he wanted to 'give to these works a form that would be as delightful and artistic as possible'. In this perspective, the *Maison Quantin* presented itself as a champion of the visual education of children: 'the pictures in the books and albums are, so to say, the first artistic figuration which will strike

the young mind: it is therefore highly important that it shall not be distorted from the outset.'⁵

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

⁴ See (MOURANCHE 1994).

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

Ally Sloper: 'Our bibulous hero'

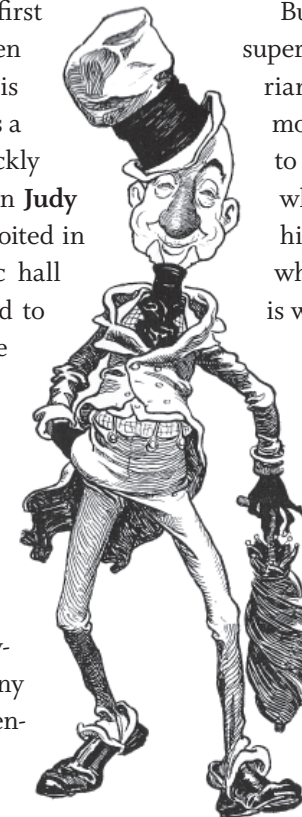
Possible readings of a comedy type

by: Roger SABIN

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

¹ See (CASTELLI 2006) and (SABIN 2003).

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



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

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

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

⁴ The (understandably) blank faces of my students when I show them images of Sloper tell their own story. He is much too alien-looking for them to have any purchase on his comedic potential. This is not the case when I show images of 'Mutt and

Detail from cover, *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, May 9, 1885.
Art: W.G. Baxter.
The 'classic' Sloper strides
towards us.



Figure 1.
Ally Sloper's Half Holiday,
March 23, 1889.
Art: Probably W.F. Thomas.
Script: Unknown. Sloper's
'drinker's nose' had other uses.

Boy. Please, sir, my hands is so jolly cold. Le's give 'em a warm at your nose!

a creation that might have appealed to a Victorian populace that was somehow less sophisticated than we are in 2007. Not only less sophisticated, but less inclined to have fun: British Victorians in particular are often seen as a people who were as unsmiling as their Queen,

living in an age when humour was nothing to laugh at.⁵

So, on with the experiment. Imagine, if you will, you are coming to **Ally Sloper's Half Holiday** for the first time, in the late 1880s, at the height of the charac-

Jeff or 'Krazy Kat' – more modern creations in every sense, and kept modern through republication, imitation by others, and critical scrutiny. Sloper, on the other hand, remains largely forgotten, and largely un-recuperable for our times (Denis Gifford's 1976 **Ally Sloper** arguably failed partly for this reason).

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

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

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

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

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

⁸ See: <http://booth.lse.ac.uk>

The Imagerie Artistique of the Maison Quantin

by: Antoine SAUSVERD

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

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

I. Quantin Publishing House and children's literature

Albert Quantin (1850-1933) launched out into printing in taking over one of the biggest Parisian businesses of the Second Empire (1852-1870), namely that

* Many thanks to Jean-Pierre Mercier, Anne Cablé, Pascal Lefèvre for help with sources, and particularly to Michel Kempeneers, whose friendly support and clear insight have largely contributed to the shaping of this article.

of Jules Claye. The printing works were located 7, rue Saint Benoît. Quantin expanded the works to occupy numbers 5, 9 and 11 as well, and endowed them with the most modern equipment. Thanks to his printing houses' capability in reproduction, line-engraving, carving and editing, he became the specialist of art books and luxury illustrated manuscripts. Starting as a modest printer, he then soon became a publisher.

Quantin enriched his catalogue of library books both on his own and through association with others: he added the complete works of Rembrandt, Holbein, Boucher, Van Dyck, or of Manet, on the one hand; while he created a 'collection of the master-pieces of contemporary novels' that included beautifully illustrated

volumes of works by Sand, Vallès, Flaubert, Balzac or Goethe, on the other. Moreover, Quantin owned the monopoly on the printing business of the French National Assembly and published all the analytical tables of the minutes of the debates. Later, other specialised collections also came to enrich the diversity and range of his catalogue.¹

¹ See (MOLLIER 1988).



Logo for Maison Quantin, 1890.