ABSTRACT

Comics and The Canon of Flanders

This essay reports on the results of my search for examples of comics and graphic novels illustrating themes from The Canon of Flanders.

On closer inspection it may be surprising, given that this specifically concerns the Flanders region, that (even in the comics/graphic novels mentioned) an international dimension often emerges. The reason may be twofold: either the 'Flemish' subject has found (broad) international resonance, or other countries are involved in the subject one way or another.

A typical example of the former may be found, for instance, in Het lam Gods (The Adoration of the Lamb) by the Van Eyck brothers ('window' 14 in the Canon). One of the comics cited in our essay (Lefranc 32. De rechtvaardige rechters) serves as a good example: not only is the painting known far beyond our borders, but the authors of this Lefranc-comic (Martin, Alvès & Corteggiani) are three French comic artists.

An example of the latter (other countries are involved in the subject) can be found in the Bakelandt comic Mule Jenny (window 27), which is also the title in the Dutch version of the Canon. The comic tells the story of a modern spinning machine, the export of which the English have banned because they are at war with France. But Lieven Bauwens, a Flemish entrepreneur, manages to circumvent that ban.

To quote Paul Gravett: "How can anyone 'give up' comics, when this medium is so varied and vibrant? Think of how much we can do with pictures. And how much we can do with words. Then imagine how much we can do with them both. This is what comics, past, present, and future, can offer. For me, comics are for life."

ABSTRACT

Sébastien Hertsens

Authenticity for Sale? Heritage Consumption in Hypercommercialized China

What role do heritage and heritage tourism play in contemporary China? This essay examines recent developments in how heritage and the rise of nationalism, domestic commercialization, and consumption have affected China's heritage since the turn of the century. After exploring the turbulent history of China's approach to its own past through successive periods of civil war, revolutions, and fast-paced industrialization, the country has, over the past two decades, taken a different approach to securing its heritage. The renewed appreciation of its own culture and history following decades of economic success has led to a growing Chinese nationalist sentiment that has prompted the nation to re-embrace its millennia-old past. This has entailed a transition from destruction to complete reconstruction, replicating, and even rebranding the many lost ancient monuments and entire cities for commercial, touristic, and nationalistic gains. As a result, this has blurred the boundaries between historical authenticity and entertainment in many of China's historic centres. Many of China's current tourist hotspots, such as Yunnan's cities along the Tea and Horse Road, but also Datong in Shanxi province, have become compelling case studies on how layered cities have been entirely transformed with the aim of attracting mass tourism aimed at promoting romanticized heritage consumption. After the Chinese government's call in the post-COVID era to focus on domestic consumption to boost economic growth, China has seen a surge in domestic mass tourism. This has led to an accelerated gentrification and further transformation in many of China's heritage cities, carrying vast socio-economic consequences for the locals, as well as raising questions about the role heritage currently plays in Chinese society and what impact this will have on its existing monuments.

ABSTRACT

Marc Jacobs

The Ethnology Maps on Gnomes. Monuments to invisible (and other) work.

This article discusses two printed maps about "kabouters" (gnomes, dwarfs, ...) and the underlying data generated by questions in written surveys conductedby correspondence in 1937 and 1953/1954 in function of an Atlas of Ethnology in the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. The maps were printed but never published. They were rediscovered in the archives after becoming famous due to the first of the seven volumes in the novel Het Bureau (The Office, 1996-2000) by J.J. Voskuil. In the first volume, Het Bureau I, Mister Beerta, he discusses how he started working in the Bureau for Folklore Studies in Amsterdam, which is now known as the Meertens Institute. Beerta is the name in the novel for dr. P.J. Meertens, who introduced Voskuil to his new job, starting on 1 July 1957. One of his first tasks was interpreting the two previously prepared maps about dwarfs, gnomes and "kabouters" and what they were supposed to be doing, according to the correspondents responding to the surveys. The interactions surrounding this task, including those on 1 July 1957, with his wife and mother-in-law, triggered the interest for this remarkable trajectory that never resulted in a published atlas. This article examines the problems, including with the misunderstandings of and negative reactions to the questions that were trying to document the belief in the existence of those supposedly helping and invisibly working small creatures, versus collecting motifs in stories about them. It leads to an investigation of the problems in folklore studies in the Low Countries in the 1950s and 1960s and the growing tensions and power struggle between research networks in Amsterdam and in Flanders, and the failure of the Atlas project. It explores the importance of infrastructure and invisible work in these networks. It also discusses the role of literature in exploring science in action and vice versa, not only in the lives and work of J.J. Voskuil and P.J. Meertens, but also in a phase in the life and work of the famous Dutch poet Gerrit Achterberg. The article proposes not to consider the two printed Ethnology Maps on Gnomes as flawed or failed scholarly projects or as literary gadgets connected to the Voskuil-hype, but to repurpose them as Monuments for invisible work, urging more research on care, maintenance and invisible work in heritage studies and other zones of society.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the humorous death notice as a distinctive form of ephemeral print culture in Belgium from the nineteenth century to the present. Drawing on an extensive corpus of printed and archival material, it analyses how the familiar conventions of the formal death announcement – including the black border, family listing, and solemn language – were deliberately appropriated and subverted to mark transitions of a very different kind, such as the completion of military service, electoral defeat, municipal mergers, wartime liberation, and social protest. The article explores the genre's form, language, production, circulation, and preservation, before concluding with a comparative perspective on similar practices in France and Germany. It argues that the humorous death notice offers a valuable lens through which to understand how communities appropriate established cultural forms to negotiate change, express social commentary, and reflect on power and collective identity.

ABSTRACT

Paul Vandenbroeck

Vagantur cum reticulo ... Pieter Bruegel, ecstatics from peasant culture, the Dirty Bride, and the pilgrimage of the Regraga

We begin with an inconspicuous detail in the paintings, prints, and drawings of Bruegel and his contemporaries: common folk wearing white or pale-yellow nets over their faces. They take part in the ritual of the 'Dirty Bride' and other performances held between Epiphany and Shrove Tuesday. Townspeople referred to this ritual as the 'Dirty Bride'; however, we do not know whether this was its original name, and we suspect it was not. Numerous texts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries refer to the net-bearers as *netteboeven* or *lodders* ('vagrant rabble'). These texts and later traditions reveal that the net-bearers were 'born with the caul': they became **ecstatics** whose souls could travel to the 'other world' during cataleptic trances. This 'other world' was partly earthly and partly supernatural, and fell under the authority of the *domina ludi*, the 'mistress of the ritual'. The *ecstatici* possessed the 'second sight', enabling them to foretell the future and exercise healing powers. In effect, they formed a local branch of shamanism. Although few would associate this spiritual phenomenon with the Low Countries, shamans continued to exist there until around 1600. Their presence at the performances mentioned above suggests that these rural enactments were rituals endowed with particular power.

We ourselves encountered the only – unlikely yet genuine – direct parallel to the rite of the Dirty Bride in 1997, in the region surrounding the Moroccan city of Essaouira. This is the forty-day procession (*daour*) of the Regraga, a group believed to possess *baraka* and divided into two factions: that 'of the bride' (*'aroussa*) and that 'of the tent' (*khaima*). Here too, the bride is not a woman but a man performing the role, while the 'tent' is a makeshift structure of branches from the wild doum palm. Both the bride and the tent confer blessings upon the communities that receive them. There can be no question of historical contact or influence between the two traditions. Rather, similar rites emerged independently within rural subsistence economies, inspired by the same aspirations for abundant harvests and good health.