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An Empirical Study of the Publication Format and Beginnings in the Belgian Francophone Weeklies, *Spirou* and *Tintin*, in the 1950s

Pascal Lefèvre (Brussels)

As argued before (Lefèvre 2000 & 2013), the publication format, i.e. the way a comic is initially published, can influence the creation of a graphic narrative – and thus the final product that the consumer buys – on various levels. Different publication formats not only impose strict formal constraints (like the format of the page, the number of pages, etc.) on the authors, but also regulations regarding the content or the genre. Compare for instance the serial publication of graphic narratives in Japan, the U.S.A. and France: they differ both in their material look and in the way the stories are drawn and told. While a fan of a French series has to wait about a year to read the next album of 46 pages of a continuing story, a Japanese fan can often read installments of about 20 pages per week in a weekly. For this contribution, we will zoom in on the implications of a particular publication format (the comics weekly) for the beginning of a new comics series by taking the two dominant Belgian comics weeklies of the 1950s, *Tintin* and *Spirou*, as our case studies. To what extent did

the manner of publication influence the way new comics series started? Traditionally, in fan discourses the importance of the individual artist is overestimated and the role of the context underestimated. Such romantic conceptions of the artists and their creations must be, at least, tempered by an analysis of the contextual factors. An additional research question thus concerns the relation between the individuality of the artist, the possibly shared conventions and the editorial guidelines.

The 1950s was a crucial period for the development and expansion of francophone comics production in Belgium. With the start of the *Tintin* series in 1929, the Belgian comics industry saw a first boom at the end of the 1930s (including the 1938 launch of the children's weekly *Spirou*). This development of the comics industry was, of course, interrupted by the occupation of Belgium in 1940; but after the Liberation the comics industry outgrew its initial success of the 1930s. For instance, in 1946 the weekly *Tintin* was launched as an important competitor to *Spirou*. Furthermore,

in contrast to the 1930s and 1940s when imported comics from other countries still made up the bulk of the comics published in the small kingdom (Lefèvre et al. 2011), in the postwar period local Belgian artists increasingly got their chance to enter the field. Both weeklies would grow in the following decades, especially the 1950s and 1960s, not only in circulation figures (cf. Lesage, 2005) but also in the number of pages per issue. As the weekly issues became thicker over time, consequently more new series (or other editorial content) could be included per issue. Table 1 presents some technical data about the dimension and number of pages of both weeklies.

	<i>Spirou</i>	<i>Tintin</i>
Format dimensions	28 x 20 cm	29,5 x 21 cm
Total Number Pages in 1950	24	20
Total Number Pages in 1959	40	32

Table 1: Dimension and number of the pages of the weeklies.

Both journals targeted more or less the same age group, especially children between 7 and 14 years old, but readers could, of course, continue to read comics when they grew up. Both genders, boys and girls, read the weeklies. In fact, there were almost no comics magazines aimed at girls only in Belgium. An exception was *Line* (1955–1963) by the same publisher as the *Tintin* weekly. It has been often suggested that there was a difference in social classes: *Spirou* was mostly read by members of the lower classes and *Tintin* by members of the somewhat higher classes. But real statistics about the readership are not available.

Methodology

Few comics scholars study comics in their original publication format. However, for our research question it is crucial to see how comics were actually published in the 1950s, because that context is by definition lost in later republications of these comics in album format. Unfortunately, few written documents concerning the editorial policy of the weeklies have survived or are accessible for external researchers. Nevertheless in published artist's interviews sometimes a brief reference to the editorial policies may be noticed, but these rather fragmentary remarks by individual artists do not suffice to provide adequate, comprehensive insight into the internal functioning of these publishers (moreover testimonies can contradict each other on some issues). Therefore, the chosen method will be a kind of 'reverse engineering': the underlying conventions of the beginnings will be inferred by an empirical analysis of the comics as they were published in the (original) weekly format, sometimes (where relevant) supplemented by an additional analysis of the original drawings. These are then interpreted as symptoms of the editorial policy of the studied period, taking into account, however, that not every individual case is a perfect example of the editorial guidelines. Such a methodology obviously runs the risk of 'Hineininterpretieren', but this problem can be reasonably contained by focusing especially on formal features that are quite easily deducible, like the amount of pages per installment, the number of tiers per page, the use of color versus black and white, and the type of framing. Such features can be quantified simply, but further qualitative

analysis is necessary for a better understanding of their uses and goals for the narration. This is in line with what formalist film scholars like David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson have done in their study of a group style like Classical Hollywood Cinema, which takes the purely statistical approach of Barry Salt one step further by also paying attention to the narrative strategies underlying the use of particular technical devices. Like these formalist film scholars I assume that some kind of aesthetic system characterizes features of individual products, in our case of the comics published in those two weeklies:

The system cannot determine every minute detail of the work, but it isolates preferred practices and sets limits upon invention. [...] My emphasis on norms should not be taken to imply an iron-clad technical formula imposed upon filmmakers. Any group style offers a *range* of alternatives. Classical filmmaking is not, strictly speaking formulaic; there is always another way to do something. You can light a scene high- or low key, you can pan or track, you can cut rapidly or seldom. A group style thus establishes what semiologists call a paradigm, a set of elements which can, according to rules, substitute for one another. Thinking of the classical style as a paradigm helps us retain a sense of the choices open to filmmakers within the tradition. At the same time, the style remains a unified system, because the paradigm offers *bounded* alternatives. If you are a classical filmmaker, you cannot light a scene in such a way as to obscure the locale entirely (cf. Godard in *Le gai savoir*); you cannot pan or track without some narrative or generic motivation; you cannot make every shot one second long (cf. avant-garde works). Both the alternatives and the limitations of the style remain clear if we think of the paradigm as creating functional equivalents: a cut-in may replace a track-in, or color may replace lighting as a way to demarcate volumes, because each device fulfills the same role. Basic principles govern not only the elements in the paradigm but also the ways in which the elements may function. (Bordwell et al, 1988, 4–5)

We might expect to find some kind of group style for each weekly (historians like Groensteen 2009 have often pointed out the differences between both magazines), but possibly also some common features for both weeklies (see for example Groensteen 2009, 75–76 and 84). Bordwell and colleagues (1988, 5) in their study of the Classical Hollywood style stress that one should not think of a group style as a monolith but as a complex system of specific forces in dynamic interactions. Individual filmmakers working in the heyday of Hollywood still had some liberty, but the paradigm surely offered bounded alternatives.

Given the context of a regular weekly publication, one could expect that already by the 1950s some practices were regarded as conventional by publishers, artists and readers alike. The early pioneer years were over and various famous series¹ already functioned as a model to follow, or newcomers learnt the tricks of the trade from already seasoned authors like Joseph Gillain (Jijé).² In exceptional cases also an important collaborator of a famous artist might have functioned as an inspirational model: Evany (Eugène Van Nijverseel) has not left any memorable comic himself, but he was the first assistant of Hergé in the 1930s and he later became the head of the Studio Hergé; in this last function he took over the task of forming many youngsters like Raymond Macherot.³ In general, almost every artist who started a new series in the weeklies already had some experience in the profession in other publications. They plied their trade in newspapers (eg. Sirius in *La Libre Belgique* and *La Dernière Heure*, Hubinon in *La Meuse*), in an advertising agency (eg. Fred Funcken

started in Studio Guy in 1940), in comics studios (like Tibet in the Walt Disney Studio in Brussels in 1947), in syndicates (like Weinberg and Goscinny at World's Press in 1947), other album publishers (eg. Gérald Forton had his first comic published by Ray Flo in 1950). Seldom could a complete novice start directly in a weekly like *Spirou* or *Tintin*.

At that time, there was not yet a specialized education in this discipline. It was only from the 1970s on that art schools offered a workshop for comics; but some of the artists (Attanasio, Paape, Lambil, Berck) of the 1950s had attended art school before starting their artistic career. Occasionally, they had received a quite different higher education: for instance Jean-Michel Charlier studied Law, and Jacques Martin engineering.

Since this research is only interested in the series made especially for these weeklies, various types of comics were excluded: first of all, reprints of foreign comics, because they were originally conceived for some other foreign publications, which may have had a somewhat different approach or editorial guidelines. Excluded from our analysis are, secondly, also the gag comics that only consist of a tier, a page or a few pages. Though they may feature a recurring character (like Gaston Lagaffe), these gags are not in the business of setting up a continuing story over several installments. Thirdly, the corpus does not include self-sustained short narrative comics that are not intended to be the start of a series of interlinked episodes.⁴

A fourth type that has been excluded in this study are the one-shots, complete stories standing on their own (and not starting a series): in the 1950s *Spirou* included seven

one shots of this type (see table 2), quite often drawn biographies of famous people.

Series Title	Author(s)	Start	Genre
<i>Le triangle de feu</i>	Unknown	1952	historical fiction
<i>Stanley</i>	Hubinon (A) & Joly (W)	1953	biographical
<i>Xavier</i>	Defoux (W/A)	1953	humor, medieval
<i>Jean Mermoz</i>	Hubinon (A) & Charlier (W)	1954	biographical
<i>Cady</i>	Denys (W/A)	1954	humor
<i>Winston Churchill</i>	Paape (A) & Charlier (W)	1958	biographical
<i>Le roi captif</i>	Laffond (A) & Charlier (W)	1959	historical fiction

Table 2: One shots in the weekly *Spirou* in the 1950s.

A fifth type that has not been included are the series that were initially launched by Dupuis in *Risque-Tout*, a sister magazine of *Spirou*. After the failure of that magazine, some of its series – like *Gill Jourdan* or *Bobosse* (see table 3) – were picked up by *Spirou*, as a consequence their first appearance in *Spirou* was not really the original beginning of the series.

Series Title	Author (W/A)	Start	Genre	Graphic Style
<i>Gill Jourdan</i>	Tillieux	1956	humor crime	cartoony
<i>Bobosse</i>	Remacle	1956	funny animal	cartoony
<i>Tom et Nelly</i>	Joly	1957	historical fiction	naturalistic
<i>Guy Pingaut</i>	Forton	1957	crime	naturalistic
<i>Alain Cardan</i>	Forton	1957	adventure	naturalistic

Table 3: Series originally started in *Risque-Tout*.

The sample does include short stories that afterwards became the forerunner of a series of longer stories centered on / revolving around a particular character or group of characters. This try-out system was at various times used by the weekly *Tintin*. In *Spirou*, new artists (like Graton in 1951) got their chance in a series of short documentary stories, *L'Oncle Paul*, scripted by experienced writers. The idea is to start with small bits before undertaking a longer and proper story.

As commodities, popular series have a vested interest in continuing for as long as possible (Kelleter 2017, 17), but not all series that were started in the 1950s did achieve eventually some commercial success. Not all comics published in the weeklies could move to the second phase of comics publishing (Lefèvre 2015), namely the collection of the installments in book form, usually called *albums* in French and Dutch.

When applying all these defining criteria, nine new continuing series could be listed for the weekly *Spirou* (see table 4): they belong to quite different genres such as western, medieval knight stories, humor and so on. The rather low amount of new humor series may surprise us because the editor, Charles Dupuis, demanded that three quarters of the journal consist of cartoony style comics (Dayez 1997, 124). There are two explanations for this paradox: first, I excluded gag series from this study and second, the weekly also ran series which were started earlier (like *Spirou*, *Tif et Tondu*, *Blondin et Cirage*, *Lucky Luke*) and which were generally in a cartoony drawing style.

Some of the new series were made by artists already established in the weekly, like Jijé and scriptwriter Charlier.

Series Title	Author(s)	Start	Genre	Graphic Style
<i>Timour</i>	Sirius (W/A)	1953	historical fiction	naturalistic
<i>Kim Devil</i>	Forton (A) + Charlier (W)	1953	adventure	naturalistic
<i>Jerry Spring</i>	Jijé (W/A)	1954	western	naturalistic
<i>La Patrouille des Castors</i>	Mitacq (A) + Charlier (W)	1954	adventure	naturalistic
<i>Thierry le Chevalier</i>	Laffond (A) + Charlier (W)	1957	medieval	naturalistic
<i>Saki</i>	Hausman (A) & Delporte (W)	1958	humor, prehistory	cartoony
<i>Le vieux Nick</i>	Remacle (W/A)	1958	humor, pirate	cartoony
<i>Marc Dacier</i>	Paape (A) + Charlier (W)	1958	adventure	naturalistic
<i>Sandy & Hoppy</i>	Lambil (A) + Henri Gillain (W)	1959	adventure	naturalistic

Table 4: New continuing series in the weekly *Spirou* in the 1950s.

Meanwhile *Spirou's* competitor, the weekly *Tintin* started 13 new series (see table 5) in the same decade. Again a variety of genres emerged: from funny animal to western or adventurous sports comics. This last genre was quite typical for this weekly (Lefèvre forthcoming 2018a): a fictional hero who was a star sportsman in particular discipline (like car racing in the case of Michel Vaillant, or tennis in the case of Jari) was typically involved in some kind of adven-

ture. Such series were usually drawn in a more naturalistic way. The publisher of the weekly *Tintin* explained how the journal became oriented after the *Tintin* series itself:

Nous avons convenu avec Hergé que le journal »Tintin« serait un journal à base de morale chrétienne au sens large, mais sérieux, éducatif, instructif. »Spirou« avait choisi une voie un peu différente, tout aussi intéressante: il était plus axé sur l'humour, le rire. (Dayez 1997, 19)

We agreed with Hergé that the newspaper »Tintin« would be a newspaper based on Christian morality in the broad sense, but serious, educational, instructive. »Spirou« had chosen a slightly different path, just as interesting: it was more humorous, laughing. [My translation]

Some comics were produced by already active artists such as Jacques Martin and Uderzo, others were made by relative novices such as Macherot or Tibet.

Series Title	Author(s)	Start	Genre	Graphic Style
<i>Le franc</i>	Martin (W/A)	1952	adventure	naturalistic
<i>Pom et Teddy</i>	Reding (W/A)	1953	adventure	naturalistic
<i>Le Chevalier blanc</i>	Funcken (A) & Macherot (W)	1953	medieval	naturalistic
<i>Chlorophylle</i>	Macherot (W/A)	1954	funny animal	cartoony
<i>Dan Cooper</i>	Weinberg (W/A)	1954	adventure pilot	naturalistic
<i>Ric Hochet</i>	Tibet (W/A)	1955	crime	naturalistic
<i>Harald le Viking</i>	Funcken (W/A)	1956	medieval	naturalistic

<i>Jari</i>	Reding (W/A)	1957	adventure, sport	naturalistic
<i>Michel Vaillant</i>	Graton (W/A)	1957	adventure, sport	naturalistic
<i>Signor Spaghetti</i>	Attanasio (W/A)	1958	humor	cartoony
<i>Oumpah-Pah</i>	Uderzo (A) & Goscinny (W)	1958	humor, western	cartoony
<i>Strapontin</i>	Berck (A) & Goscinny (W)	1958	humor	cartoony
<i>Clifton</i>	Macherot (W/A)	1959	humor, crime	cartoony

Table 5: New continuing series in the weekly *Tintin* in the 1950s.

The slight difference in the number of new series between the two journals can be partly explained by the fact that one-shots (like the 7 one-shots, see table 2) or series started elsewhere (in *Risque-Tout*, see table 3) were not selected as study material.

Maybe the amount of new series – 7 in the case of *Spirou* and 13 in the case of *Tintin* – look quite limited for a ten year period, but the bulk of the journals was made up of already running series, like those of their respective title characters, *Spirou* and *Tintin*. Popularity of a series in the recent past (the late 1940s) functioned as a guarantee, or at least as a hope, for a continued interest among the readers. This did not imply that once published a series continued »forever«, as the interest in a series could dwindle among readers (both journals organized a yearly pop poll), the editorial team could change the course of a series or the author himself, could lose his

motivation. As a consequence, series could be discontinued and the duration of series was variable: some ran only a short amount of time (a few years), while others ran over decades. Nevertheless, once a decent amount of pages (like two stories of 38 pages) was published, already existing series had a clear advantage over potential newcomers (see also Lefèvre 2015). As a result, the space in the weekly open to new comics was in fact quite limited (generally limited to a few pages); nevertheless the weekly issues grew thicker in the course of the decade (see Table 1).

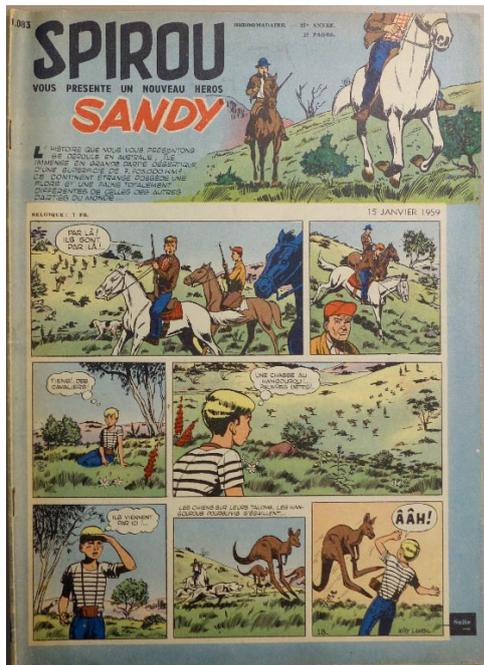
Results and discussion

After the discussion of four rather technical aspects (announcement of new story, length and density of first installment, page layout, color) the narration of the beginnings itself will be analyzed through the prism of framing and *mise-en-scène*. Both aspects are crucial to graphic narratives: framing refers to both the choice of a perspective on a scene and to the choice of borders of the image, while *mise-en-scène* concerns the representation of a scene by a specific organization of its virtual but figurative elements such as décor, props and characters. The same fabula (the chronological sequence of events as they are supposed to have occurred in the time-space universe of the narrative being interpreted) or even the same ›syuzhet‹/plot (the actual composition or employment of events in the work) can receive a complete different atmosphere and look through a particular use of stylistic elements such as

mise-en-scène or framing (Lefèvre 2012, 71). Of course, graphic style is another crucial factor in the readers' experience of a comic, but I exclude this aspect from our analysis because it is even more complicated to objectively analyze it (in Lefèvre 2016 some suggestions are offered). Paraphrasing music scholar Meyer (1989, 3), graphic style is also a replication of patterning that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints. Regarding graphic style, I will here only deal with the choice of full color versus black and white (with possibly an additional color). Moreover, the graphic styles in the weeklies *Spirou* and *Tintin* have received already a lot of attention by various critics (see for instance Lecigne 1983, Capart & Dejasse 2006).

a) Announcing a new story in the paratext of a weekly

As a rule, both magazines reserved their front cover for announcing already known, popular series. The front pages of *Spirou* and *Tintin* were conceived differently in the 1950s. While *Spirou* generally opted to publish a comic immediately on the cover page (see Ill. 1), *Tintin* preferred a full-page cover illustration related to one of the comics or texts on the inside. In contrast to *Spirou*, the weekly *Tintin* at various times also dedicated the front cover to a completely new series like *Ric Hochet* or *Michel Vaillant*.



Ill. 1: Cover of *Spirou* (January 15, 1959), typically with a comic (*Sandy* by Willy Lam-bil and Henri Gillain) on the cover.

What both journals had in common is the convention that the name of the hero was used in the title of the series, sometimes also his profession or nationality were mentioned like *Thierry le Chevalier* [Thierry the Knight] or *Harald le Viking* [Harald the Viking].⁵

b) Length and density of the first installment

Although the length of a first installment was not accidental but clearly fixed in both journals, they differed in their system. In *Spirou* a new series started usually with a first installment of 2 to 3 pages (see table 6). There is one exception, *La patrouille des castors*, that started with more pages (5 !). Furthermore there was a difference in length between the first installment and later installments of the story: a first installment got

generally more pages (3 or 4) than the following installments (usually 1 or 2 pages, 3 pages only in rare exceptions). The usual total length for fiction was 44 pages (max. 46 pages).⁶

Series Title	Total Pages	Pages First In-stallment	Pages Later Install-ments
<i>Timour</i>	44	2	2 or 3
<i>Kim Devil</i>	46	3	1
<i>Jerry Spring</i>	44	3	2
<i>La Patrouille des Castors</i>	44	5	2
<i>Thierry le Che-valier</i>	44	2	2
<i>Saki</i>	44	3	2
<i>Le vieux Nick</i>	44	3	2
<i>Marc Dacier</i>	44	2	2
<i>Sandy & Hoppy</i>	44	3	2

Table 6: Pages per installment in the weekly *Spirou*.

In *Tintin* we have to differentiate between a first installment of a longer story and the use of a complete short story as the first episode of a series of stories about a hero (for a listing of them see table 7).

Series Title	Pages (First) Short Story
<i>Ric Hochet</i>	4
<i>Michel Vaillant</i>	4
<i>Signor Spaghetti</i>	2
<i>Strapontin</i>	3

Table 7: Short comics.

Such complete short stories were usually between 2 and 4 pages long, and were generally not followed by another short story of the same hero in the next issue. There were longer time gaps between these short stories than in the continuing stories, which had to be

published in the successive issues. As already mentioned *Tintin* adopted the strategy to test out new characters (like *Ric Hochet*, *Michel Vaillant*, *Strapontin*) in such complete short stories before publishing longer stories of these characters in a weekly rhythm.

The rhythm of the weekly installment evolved in the 1950s: in the first half of the decade it was only one page, but from 1956 on this amount was doubled (see table 8).

Series Title	Total Pages	Pages First Installment	Pages Later Installments
<i>Lefranc</i>	60	1	1
<i>Pom et Teddy</i>	59	1	1
<i>Le Chevalier blanc</i>	34	1	1
<i>Chlorophylle</i>	32	1	1
<i>Dan Cooper</i>	48	1	1
<i>Harald le Viking</i>	62	2	2
<i>Jari</i>	30	1	1
<i>Oumpab-Pah</i>	30	2	2
<i>Clifton</i>	30	2	2

Table 8: Pages per installment in the weekly *Tintin*.

Thus, the first installment in *Tintin* was usually shorter than in *Spirou*. Moreover, also the usual installments after the introduction were shorter in *Tintin* than in *Spirou*. In *Tintin*, an installment comprised only 1 page or 2 pages; the editors did not make a difference between the installments for the introduction and those following. Evidently, it makes a difference whether a story can be told at the rate of only one page or two pages: a one page rhythm may incite the artist to become even more succinct (more panels) and also wordier. We can consider the total number of panels or words per first page as quantitative indications of narrative density:

more panels will imply more different visual phases or scenes, more words will imply more verbal descriptions or explications.

The average of panels (also panels only filled with words) is 10.2 for *Tintin* and 8.5 for *Spirou*; the maximum number in *Spirou* is 10, but in *Tintin* half of the series consist of more than those 10 panels (11 or 12) per first page. If we discount the wordy panels and count only the panels with drawings, the average in *Spirou* is 7.6, while in *Tintin* it is 10.1, so almost a third more panels. One can assume that the artists confronted with only one page per issue in *Tintin* tried to show more different scenes than in *Spirou*, moreover they would also use more words on the first page. While the most wordy page (*Kim Devil*) in *Spirou* counts 234 words, 5 of 12 series in *Tintin* start with more words: an increase, in comparison to the most wordy page in *Spirou*, ranging from 4.7% to 37% (*Chevalier Blanc* 4.7%, *Pom et Teddy* 16%, *Dan Cooper* 18%, *Jari* 22%, *Lefranc* 37%). The average number of words in *Spirou* is 155 words, in *Tintin* 227. There is one beginning (*Jerry Spring*) in *Spirou* with an exceptionally low number of 19; if we discount this case from the *Spirou* batch, then the average is still 174 words, so still almost a quarter less than in *Tintin*. Thus, the series in *Tintin* generally started with significantly more drawn panels and words per page than in *Spirou*, where artists did not have the necessity to introduce a series by means of only one page. As the number of panels grows per page, there is in principle relatively less space for words per panel, but in practice it is surprisingly rather the other way around: there seems to be a positive correlation (a linear relationship) between the number of panels and the number of words.

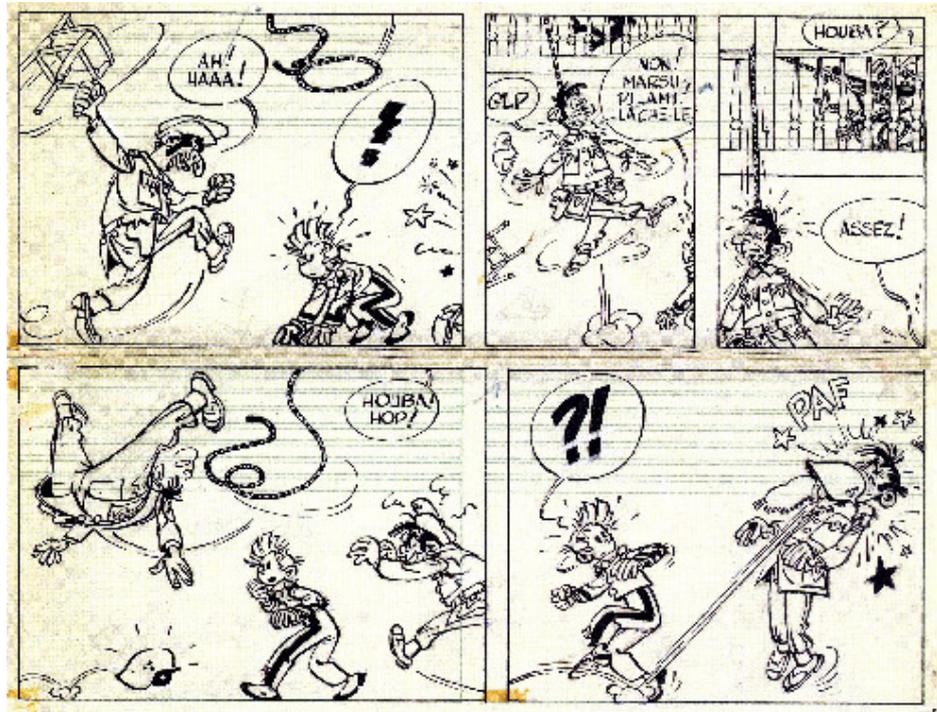
As a consequence, we conclude that the first pages in *Tintin* are more densely packed with panels and words.

The editors at *Spirou* preferred relatively more pages for the first installment; probably to give the reader a little more to read the first time, to get him or her into the story more easily. This strategy is not so unusual in popular seriality; the first episodes of an American TV series might have a longer duration than the following episodes.

The total length of the first stories in the *Tintin* weekly is quite variable, but two tendencies are nevertheless clear: five comics were between 30 and 34 pages long, 3 comics between 59 and 62, one 48 pages. Also in the case of *Tintin* we see some tendency towards standardization in the 1950s, which would only become stronger in the following decades (imposing two main formats of 46 and 62 pages).

c) Page layout

The page layout that most comics used in *Spirou* and *Tintin* was the regular four tiers layout: while the height of the individual panels was generally fixed, the panels could still vary in width. In general, once a story was started in a particular layout, the rest of the story was



Ill. 2: Dupuis delivered drawing paper with light blue lines for the placement of texts (this original is by André Franquin, 1953).

consequently done in the same way. During some years in the 1950s Dupuis printed a 4 tier layout (of 2 x 2 panels) on blank drawing pages and inside, at the top of each tier, some light blue lines destined for the text of balloons or captions, thus imposing a fixed position for the text in a panel (see Ill. 2). But by the end of the decade this system was not used any longer since it was considered too constraining (Vandooren 2014, 25).

Only if an artist needed a larger panel (for instance for an exposition of a scene), the higher panel was exactly the height of two tiers; in this way it still respected the basic grid system (remember the bounded alternatives that create functional equivalents). In the case of four tiers, the artist also respected a central break. The reason for this system was that a page of four tiers could easily be split up in

two halves – which is impossible with varying heights of the tiers or with an odd number of tiers per page (like 3 or 5).

Various artists preferred to work on half a page moreover for quite practical reasons: one does not have to lean too much forward or stretch the drawing arm – as can be seen on photos showing Franquin and Jijé drawing on such half a page (Vandooren, 28 & 67). On many originals (cf. for instance the illustrations in Groensteen 2009, 77–97) we can still notice the traces of scotch tape, used to unify the two halves.

A quite exceptional case was the publication of the first story of *Le Chevallier Blanc*, which was published on the lower part of a complete spread, and the tier on the left page ran over to the tier on the right page. The motivation for this unusual layout and reading direction is probably linked to the upper illustration (part of the non-comic content of the journal), a large horizontal cutaway illustration of a race car (and additional textual information).⁷

Since most artists worked with four identical tiers, this change of layout did not cause any fundamental problems. Small deviations of the usual 4 tier layout, however, remained possible in both journals.⁸ For instance, a star artist like Jijé could enjoy the freedom to use only three tiers for his new western series *Jerry Spring*. In *Tintin*, 3 tiers were still unheard of in the 1950s, but one could deviate from the fixed height of the tiers: for example in a short *Michel Vaillant* story Graton let the characters in the last panel overlap the panel above and there is no white gutter separating both panels, just a black curved line separating the panels. Unlike Jijé in *Spirou*, the *Tintin* collaborator

Graton cannot be considered a star author at that time. Thus, we can only speculate about the reasons why Graton was allowed to deviate from the usual practice in the journal.

d) The use of color

The weeklies in the 1950s were not yet completely printed in full color. Only about half of the pages got full color, the other half was in black and white (sometimes with an additional color) (see Ill. 3).

Furthermore, the printing of pages in sections resulted in the alternation of full color pages and black and white pages in the journal. For instance, the first installment of the *Timour*-series (*Spirou*, from November 12, 1953, see Ill. 3) was published with the first page in full color and the second page in black and white and a red support color. This procedure of non-consistent color schemes for the publication of the same story was thus quite common in the journal, but it may have presented quite a strange sight for the readers: almost like a film that would switch between color and black and white every ten minutes.

A similar non-consistent use of color could be encountered in *Tintin*. For instance, the March 30, 1954 issue features a short story of 4 pages launching a new hero, *Ric Hochet*: while the comic on the first spread (with pages 1 and 2) is in black and white, the second spread (pages 3 and 4) is in full color.

It is unknown if every contributor to the weeklies did know in advance which pages would be published in full color and which in black and white (maybe with an additional



Ill. 3: First two pages (in the weekly page 21 and 22) of *Timour* by Sirius in *Spirou* (November 12, 1953): in the weekly the first page of the story is put on page 21 in full color, while the second page on page 22 is in black and white with an additional red color.

color). Though the weeklies generally used a somewhat similar distribution of the material (so that the reader could find particular material at particular places), variations still happened, not least because the material itself was not completely identical every week: not every issue contained the same comics (a series might be interrupted) or the same non-comics material (short stories, short news, games ...).

The irregularity of the use of color in the magazine was the reason that the artists themselves could not really consider color an essential element in their storytelling – except for well-established artists like Jacobs or Hergé who were certain that every page of their comics would be published in full color.

In the 1950s there were three important ways of coloring. The first method consisted of the artist just delivering a black and white drawing; it was at the journal that colors or screen tones were added. Alternatively, the artist indicated suggestions for coloring on the back of the black and white drawing. Or else, the artist used a reduced blue print of his black and white drawing for coloring himself. For this work the artist would be paid a little extra (less than 10% of the price for the black and white drawing) (Vandoren, 37). This difference in technique hardly affected the way colors functioned in the comics themselves.

e) Narrative strategies of framing and mise-en-scène in the first three panels

The frame implies two different concepts of space (the space of the extradiegetic frame and the represented diegetic space) and the idea of a position from which mise-en-scène is viewed. As I explained in my contribution to the volume *Critical Approaches to Comics*: »In contrast to a photographic image there are no actors or objects in front of the lens of the camera. A cartoonist suggests only with drawn or painted dots, lines, shapes figures in a context« (Lefèvre 2012, 73).

Framing in the sense of ›taking a perspective‹ includes various parameters: angle, level, height and distance. Since I will only discuss the parameter ›distance‹ for the first three drawn panels of the beginnings, distance is perhaps the most crucial parameter of framing because it determines how close the reader is brought to the scene.

The first shot in the *Spirou* beginnings is always long, sometimes very long or even extreme long (see table 9). The second drawn panel generally offers a closer view on the scene. The third shot is usually quite varied.

Series Title	First Panel	Second Panel	Third Panel
<i>Timour</i>	extreme long	long	extreme long
<i>Kim Devil</i>	long	medium	long
<i>Jerry Spring</i>	long	close-up	long
<i>La Patrouille des Castors</i>	extreme long	medium	long
<i>Thierry le Chevalier</i>	long	long	medium
<i>Saki</i>	very long	long	long

<i>Le vieux Nick</i>	very long	long	close-up
<i>Marc Dacier</i>	long	medium	long/medium
<i>Sandy & Hoppy</i>	long	long	long

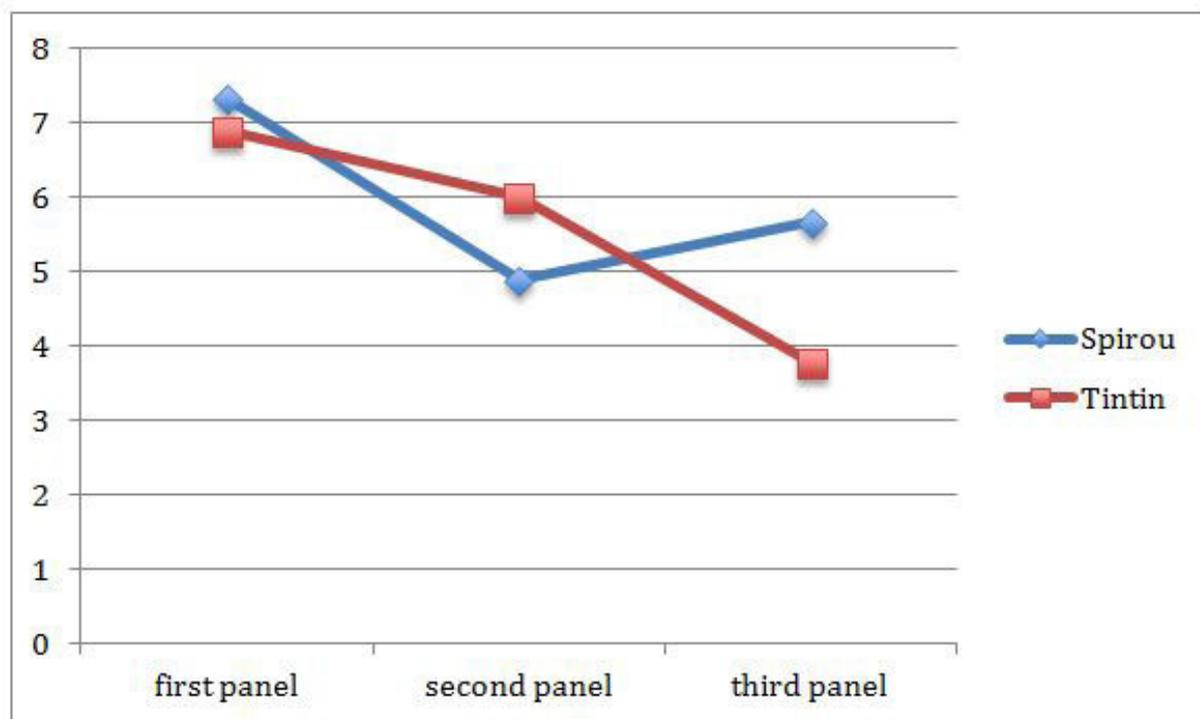
Table 9: Distance of framing in first three panels of the beginning of a new series in *Spirou*.

Table 10 shows the results for the series in *Tintin*. Again, we see that the first panel (except for two cases) is always at least long. The second panel again offers a closer view than the first. This virtual advancing movement of the framing is continued in the third panel (mostly a close-up) – far more than in *Spirou* (see Graph 1).

Series Title	First Panel	Second Panel	Third Panel
<i>Lefranc</i>	very long	long	close-up
<i>Pom et Teddy</i>	very long	long	close-up
<i>Le Chevalier blanc</i>	long	long	close-up
<i>Chlorophylle</i>	very long	long	close-up
<i>Dan Cooper</i>	long	long	medium
<i>Harald le Viking</i>	very long	long	very long
<i>Jari</i>	close-up	very long	medium
<i>Oumpab-Pab</i>	very long	long	medium
<i>Clifton</i>	very long	medium	long

Table 10: Distance framing in first three panels of the beginning of a new series in *Tintin*.

When we quantify the various distances (extreme long = 10, very long = 8, long = 6, medium = 4, close-up = 2), we can calculate the averages and put them on a graph (see Graph 1).



Graph 1: Average distances of framing for the first three panels.

Rather exceptionally, a few more panels than the usual three panels were needed to conclude the process from far to close: as in the case of *Harald le Viking* where only by the fifth panel the reader could see the characters in medium shot; the first four panels had varying distances and even positions (with the inclusion of a top shot on the Viking ship) (see Ill. 4).

The most conventional practice thus required a transition from an overview to a panel with more detail. Only in exceptional cases does the first panel present a close-up without much context. In the case of *Jari*, for instance, a sports reporter commenting on a tennis match (see Ill. 5). This close-up is however immediately followed by a long shot, showing the larger context of the tennis court; the establishing panel is just delayed for a moment, not eliminated. Furthermore, the use of a long shot in the first drawn panel



Ill. 4: First page of *Harald le Viking* (by Liliane and Fred Funcken) in *Tintin* (June 20, 1956).



Ill. 5: First page of *Jari* by Raymond Reding in Tintin (August 28, 1957).

often coincided with a much larger dimension of the panel. Vice versa, close-ups were usually put in panels of relatively smaller dimensions; hence these two features (distance of view and dimension of panel) are generally positively correlated.

All these formal devices served a classical narrative strategy of clear visual storytelling: the long shot in the big panel introduced the viewer to the contextual spatial and temporal features of the scene. The following panels brought the characters into closer view and left out a lot of the contextual information, which

would be only redundant if repeated. New contextual information is only necessary with an important temporal and/or spatial change of scene. This kind of comics storytelling forms part of larger practice of visual storytelling (which can involve various media like photography, cinema, animation film ...): for instance, also in classical Hollywood narration a long shot was used to establish the total space before more closer shots followed (Bordwell et al., 63). The basic idea behind the classical paradigm is that the viewer can grasp quite easily the necessary information for understanding the links between the panels/scenes and the basic setting of the story. Visual storytelling is first and foremost built on the way our brain makes sense of what our eyes perceive – in combination with the other senses (Lefèvre 2018b forthcoming). Though to really understand for instance a complex sequence of a film, the perceiver must already possess some experience with similar artificial sequences of

images. A naïve viewer may still recognize the depiction of objects in the shots, but may not be equipped to understand the relationships between the shots (see experiments with first time film adult viewers by Schwan and Ildirar 2010).

Regarding the mise-en-scène and the framing there is again a rather remarkable similarity amongst the comics of the corpus. Almost every comic introduced the protagonist on the very first page. Regardless of the genre or the graphic style, the basic convention was that the protagonist needed to be present as quickly as

possible. Furthermore, implicitly or explicitly also the time and the setting are immediately visible. The spark, the unexpected event that directly affects the protagonist, as Abel and Madden (128) have called it, is also present on the first or the second page. This is a classic practice in visual storytelling, one that is also advocated in handbooks on screenwriting (like Dancyger, 44).

While almost every artist chooses to show the protagonist on the very first page or at least on the second page, in *Lefranc, La Grande Menace* (1952) Jacques Martin deliberately circumvents this main strategy by not showing any trace of the protagonist in the first two weeks of publication in *Tintin*. It is only in the third week of publication that the reader gets the first glimpse of a character who only later will emerge as the main hero of the story. The first two pages are

just setting up a mystery (involving a violent incident at a border crossing) and introduce, though just roughly, the antagonists.⁹ For one of the gurus of classic film scriptwriting, Robert McKee (1999, 335), only a confident writer will parse out exposition.

Script writing handbooks usually (like Dancyger 2013, 44) advise a critical moment (in medias res) as the optimal point to join the narrative. Also some comics artists in the 1950s opted to start in the middle of an ongoing, rather spectacular action. An example is Macherot's *Chlorophyll contre les rats noirs* (Chlorophyll against the black rats). The first panel looks like an article in the newspaper, telling the reader about a destroyed old mill, which had served as the refuge for a horde of rats. The second panel shows us black rats all running in the same direction. One of them, standing upright, says: »Forward guys! We will settle in this valley. Occupy all the holes you can find and expel the residents.« From the very start, a near confrontation is explicitly stated. Two tiers later, the mouse Chlorophyll (the title character) says that he will resist the rats, but

in the very last panel, he is strongly impressed by the huge number of the enemy forces. Another example of an in medias res beginning is the first story of Dan Cooper, *Le triangle bleu*, with a rocket flying through the sky in the very first panel (see Ill. 6).



Ill. 6: First page of Dan Cooper by Albert Weinberg in *Tintin* (November 17, 1954).

f) The last panel of a page / installment

The »site«, the location of a particular panel on a page (Groensteen 1999, 36), may also involve some conventional practices. A crucial site is the lower right corner, which is reserved for the last panel of the page. The last panel usually contained typical features: some kind of mystery – often by using an unknown enemy (as in Ill. 6) or by directing the attention to the *hors champ* (as in Ill. 5), or a sensational but indecisive moment, also known as a cliffhanger (see Ill. 1 or 3). There is no formulaic mise-en-scène for a cliffhanger because quite different situations can be imagined: a hero in doubt (a big question or exclamation mark above the head or in the balloon as in Ill. 4 and 5), a hero violently menaced by an antagonist or a natural threat (as in Ill. 1). While the hero may not be aware of the danger, the reader must be aware of it (in Ill. 6. the reader learns thanks to the caption about the mindset of the dark silhouette), otherwise the effect would not work.

A cliffhanger had to incite the reader to look out for what may come next, to turn the page to curiously read on, and ultimately buy the next issue of the weekly. The reader of such Belgian comics magazines in the 1950s thus had a week to figure out how the story could continue. As a consequence, in serial publication the active participation of the reader was more intense than in the case of an album publication, where only a second separates one page from the following page.

Unfortunately the flow of the narration on the page did not always allow a logical introduction of a cliffhanger in the last panel. In those cases the motiveless use of the cliffhanger

rather became a constraining device than something that strengthens the narration. Thus, the conception of the page usually emerged from the idea that it had to end on a cliffhanger.

Conclusion

At first sight the beginnings of twenty new series in two Belgian comics weeklies may look rather diverse: graphic styles ranging from the cartoony to the rather naturalistic, divergent genres, etc. Such a variety in style and contents seems normal when more than twenty different authors (artists and script writers) are involved in the creations, each possibly bringing their own individuality to the table. Despite this seemingly broad variety, on a more structural level these series bear many common similar strategies.

It seems that the individuality of each artist was somehow molded by a set of shared conventions or editorial guidelines and practices. The reason is obviously the role of the editors of the weeklies, who decided not only the number of pages that would be published in the weekly (in the case of *Spirou* even making a difference between a first installment and other installments), but also which pages got full color and which pages were printed only in black and white (sometimes adding a monochrome support color). Moreover, most artists used a conventional page layout of 4 tiers; layouts with 3 and 5 tiers were also allowed but used less frequently. Next to these rather technical decisions the way the beginning of a story was dealt with also bears fundamental similarities in the use of framing and mise-en-scène: the most

conventional way was starting with a long shot introducing the time, space and protagonist, followed by panels that showed the scene from a closer view. Also essential on the first, or at least on the second page, was the introduction of a problem that confronts the hero (enforced by a cliffhanger in the final panel of the page). The rest of the story was devoted, as in most classic storytelling (in Hollywood films, in fairy tales etc.), to further developing this problem and the ways to solve it.

Some of these shared or imposed practices or norms continued strongly throughout the 1950s (like the use of regular tiers or of cliffhangers), but other norms (editorial choices like the amount of pages per installment) did change somewhat over time. There was certainly a tendency to standardization, but one that offered ›bounded alternatives‹. Various strategies were centered on continuing the reader's interest, so that he or she would buy the next issue, or even better buy a subscription.

Both weeklies applied somewhat comparable conventions in the way they published comics and their collaborators made comics, but each weekly also developed some particular publication strategies (for instance a different amount of pages for the installments). Variations within a limited range (of bounded alternatives which create functional equivalents) and evolutions thus remained possible in a publication format like the francophone Belgian weekly comics magazine in the 1950s. There were norms at work that molded the individuality of the authors into a rather limited number of variations of particular features.

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Table of Figures:

- Ill. 1: cover *Spirou* (January 15, 1959), typically with a comic (*Sandy* by Willy Lambil and Henri Gillain) on the cover.
- Ill. 2: Dupuis delivered drawing paper with light blue lines for the placement of texts (this original is by André Franquin, 1953, source Vandooren 2014, 19).
- Ill. 3: First two pages (in the weekly page 21 and 22) of *Timour* by Sirius in *Spirou* (November 12, 1953): in the weekly the first page of the story is put on page 21 in full color, while the second page on page 22 is in black and white with an additional red color.

- Ill. 4: First page of *Harald le Viking* (by Liliane and Fred Funcken) in *Tintin* (June 20, 1956).
- Ill. 5: First page of *Jari* by Raymond Reding in *Tintin* (August 28, 1957).
- Ill. 6: First page of *Dan Cooper* by Albert Weinberg in *Tintin* (November 17, 1954).

Endnotes

- 1] Not only famous Belgian comics served as a model but also the translated American comic strips (especially those by Alex Raymond and Milton Caniff) and the Walt Disney productions.
 - 2] Some artists started by imitating popular comics: for instance Mitacq imitated *Tintin* in *Tam-Tam* in 1944. Various artists of that postwar period have testified about the influence of star artists. Tibet was strongly impressed by the first album of *Valbaridi* by Jijé (Matthys, 3). For instance Jacques Martin (Groensteen & Martin 1984, 46) about Edgar P. Jacobs: »Jacobs était le grand homme du moment. [...] Ce succès fantastique incitait bien sûr les gens du journal à nous donner Jacobs comme modèle. Il nous était demandé de nous inspirer de son graphisme, de son découpage, du rythme qui caractérisait ses récits. Cela recommençait... et, pour de jeunes auteurs, il était parfois bien difficile de résister à pareille pression.« [My translation : Jacobs was the big guy at the moment [...] That fantastic success incited of course the editors of the journal to present Jacobs to us as a model. We were requested to be inspired by his graphic style, its découpage, the rhythm that typified his stories.] André Franquin (Sadoul 1986, 17f.) about his influences and his training by Joseph Gillain/Jijé: »Je crois que Dupuis m'avait envoyé chez Gillain car celui-ci, fort de sa position dans le métier, était considéré comme un maître à penser dans la maison dont il était le dessinateur principal, et à qui l'on demandait son avis avant de prendre des décisions. Je suppose que tout jeune dessinateur arrivant était envoyé de la sorte chez Gillain. [...] Gillain
- m'avait bien expliqué les rudiments; le reste m'est venu assez facilement. A cet âge-là, on est très instinctif, très naturel: on est aussi très proche des lectures de bandes dessinées que l'on vient de lire, on est donc imprégné plus ou moins consciemment de technique, et c'est la pratique qui nous apporte rapidement ce qui nous manquait. [...] Nous avons bénéficié de l'héritage de tout un système utile, notamment avec le cinéma et le dessin animé: Disney, Tex Avery, Laurel et Hardy, Keaton, Harold Lloyd, etc., c'est-à-dire un ensemble de gags et des gestes humoristiques dont nous avons considérablement tiré notre dictionnaire d'efficacité graphique.« [My translation : I believe that Dupuis had sent me to Gillain, because he was an experienced man in this job and he was considered a reference of the publication house of which he was the principal artist, and who was consulted before taking decisions. I assume that every young artist who arrived was sent to Gillain. [...] Gillain explained the basics to me; the rest came to me quite easily. At this age, one is very instinctive, very natural: we remembered also the comics we had read, we were impregnated more or less consciously by technique, and it was the practice that brought us quickly what we lacked. [...] We have benefited from the legacy of a whole useful system, notably with the cinema and the cartoon: Disney, Tex Avery, Laurel and Hardy, Keaton, Harold Lloyd, etc., that is to say one set of gags and humorous gestures from which we derived our effective graphical tools].
- 3] In an interview (Sadoul 1975, 3) Macherot explained how he was trained by Evany at Studio Hergé: »Gedurende een jaar heb ik elke ochtend en elke avond heen en weer gereisd tussen Verviers en Brussel om acht uur per dag in de studio te gaan werken. En daar heb ik m'n vak geleerd; ik heb er enorm veel dingen van Evany geleerd en ik ben hem heel dankbaar voor 't feit dat hij me zoveel heeft geholpen, vooral wat betreft de technische kant van 't vak, waar ik absoluut niets vanaf wist.« [My translation : During a year I've commuted between Verviers and Brussels to work for 8 hours in the studio. There I've learnt my profession; I've learned a lot of things Evany and I'm very grateful for the fact that he has helped me so much, especially regarding the technical side of the profession, of which I knew absolutely nothing].

- 4] Examples of such short comics are the short documentary comics published in *Tintin* or in *Spirou*, usually with a historical theme.
- 5] Only a one-shot could use a title different from the name of the protagonist, eg *Le triangle de feu* (1952 in *Spirou*).
- 6] Exceptions are three much longer biographical documentaries (60 to 92 pages).
- 7] Furthermore also the *Tintin* story *Le Temple du Soleil* had been already published in 1946 in the weekly spreading over two adjacent pages.
- 8] Remarkably when the first short story of *Ric Hochet* was published in an album collection (*58. Premières Armes*, 1997), the 5 tier pages were redesigned to a more usual 4 tier grid.
- 9] Jacques Martin did not use such a delayed introduction of the protagonist for his first series, *Alix*: on the very first page, the hero is clearly introduced.