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On translating *Tintin au Congo* in the twenty-first century

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ABSTRACT

Controversy has plagued Hergé's *Tintin au Congo* for the last few decades, and numerous academics have discussed the phenomenon, particularly in the contexts of law and ethics. This article seeks to examine and compare three English-language translations of *Tintin au Congo*. As a particularly problematic text that continues to be pilloried, praised, and parodied, its different versions provide a fruitful corpus when considering various questions regarding translation strategy and the responsibilities of translators and publishers. Hergé's representation of Black people is unacceptable, by modern standards, in a multi-cultural society. Indeed, given the current political climate, this article argues that the re-translation of texts such as *Tintin au Congo* is highly problematic. The paradox is that any attempt to erase the original racism is as fraught, ethically, as is the strategy of reproducing it. With no clear function or audience in the twenty-first century, how can *Tintin au Congo* survive in translation?

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Introduction

The original black-and-white album version of Hergé's *Tintin au Congo* (*TaC*) was published in 1931. Hergé would publish a revised color version in 1946. A later revision – in 1975 – was provided to placate the Scandinavian publisher of this work. The color versions may thus be viewed as Hergé's own intralingual translations of the text, as much as they are his re-drawings of the images.

Translations of *Tintin au Congo* into English (whether British or American) were relatively long in coming. Whilst the translation of Tintin's adventures into English had begun in earnest in the 1950s, the first British-English-language version of *Tintin au Congo* (the original 1931 version in black-and-white) appeared in 1991. The same translators – Leslie Lonsdale-Cooper and Michael Turner – turned their hand to translating the 1946 color version in 2005. Completing the corpus of this study is the 2015 digital version (in color) translated by Michael Farr.

This article seeks to examine and compare the British-English translations of *Tintin au Congo*. As a text that has been 'translated' intralingually (by Hergé himself) as well as into three versions in British English (two by Lonsdale-Cooper &Turner, and the latest by

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Farr), it lends itself well to examining how texts change – and are changed – over time. As a particularly problematic text that continues to be pilloried, praised, and parodied, its different versions provide a fruitful corpus when considering various questions regarding translation strategy and the responsibilities of translators and publishers in the twenty-first century.

The translator of *Tintin au Congo* arguably has certain obligations, given that they are translating across time as well as space (and culture). And if Childish Gambino's representation of the Black body in contemporary society can be interpreted as a warning that little has changed in this regard since the time of Jim Crow[1], translating Black voices demands the utmost sensitivity (Beaumont-Thomas, 2018). The paradox discussed here is this: why change, update, or 'smooth out' the style if the aim is to allow young readers – or adults, for that matter – to be able to witness and understand the so-called 'bourgeois, paternalistic stereotypes' produced by the young Hergé, reflecting the 'colonial attitudes of the time', as stated in prefaces to the first two translations?

The age of re-Translation

Hergé himself transformed his Congo story over a period of some 44 years. In 1946, he re-drew his 1931 original and made significant changes to its style and content in what Philippe Delisle (2008, p. 5) calls 'un toilettage' ['a clean-up']. The result was an album that was 'modernised' – by erasing 'some racist elements' – with a deliberate aim to increase sales beyond Belgium (Sartori, 2016, p. 41). Whatever the motive, in undertaking this 'process of purification' (Fernández López, 2000, p. 30), Hergé was responding to the changing times, and he would do so, again, in 1975.[2] His actions can be seen as part of a process of re-translation that 'brings change because times have changed' (Gambier, 1994, p. 413). What changed, in the case of the versions of *Tintin au Congo*, was the acceptability of Hergé's representation – linguistic *and* graphic – of Black people and his treatment of animals in stories seemingly aimed at children.

For Isabelle Collombat (2004), re-translation offers a raft of opportunities, not least in view of developments in translation theory. It allows a translator to capitalize on research undertaken and published *after* a previous translation, for example. That research into Tintin (and Hergé) has exploded, over recent years, with new readings and new information constantly coming to light, is useful – as we shall see – to the re-translator of Tintin. Collombat also raises the issue of the aging of texts (in form, linguistically; in content, ideologically) and their 'accessibility'. Collombat does not specifically address the re-translation of children's literature, so it is worth making the point, here, that 'the translation of works for children has traditionally been mediated by pedagogical and didactic considerations that affect the so-called operational translation norms' (Fernández López, 2000, p. 30). Yet this, perhaps, is the most controversial issue surrounding *Tintin au Congo*: to what extent should the (re-)translator follow Hergé in trying to make this text 'accessible' to a new audience of children, if that, indeed, is the intended audience?

Translators' strategies

A particular problem in (re-)translating *Tintin au Congo* involves the translation of 'voice', or what Nigel Armstrong and Federico M. Federici (2006, p. 11) describe –

more neutrally – as language 'variety'. Kathryn Woodham discusses the four strategies that Lauren G. Leighton came up with – all unsatisfactory in their own ways – for translating varieties of 'dialect', but suggests they could be allied with the approach of the 'Skopos school':

> According to such an approach, the presence of vernacular or colloquial language in literature would be viewed in terms of sender's (i.e. authorial) intention and/or the effect on receivers, giving rise to questions such as: Why has the author chosen to represent this speech act/narrative section in colloquial rather than standard language? What 'meanings' does this particular speech variation convey to the source text reader? (Woodham, 2006, p. 403)

If Hergé's intention was to portray the Black characters as child-like, inferior, and one intended effect was laughter at their expense, then the most valid of Leighton's strategies would appear to be 'dialect-for-dialect' or 'replacing with '"equivalent" domestic' (Woodham, 2006, p. 402). Whilst the strategy of 'blandscript' – 'replacing colloquial with formal language' – would also constitute 'domestication' of the original (in the sense that it erases otherness and difference in favor of formal target language), it would not have the same effect. Blandscript eradicates any significance in the style or form of what is communicated in the original and renders it subservient to content and the ease with which that content can be read.

Whatever their strategy, choices made by translators have impacts or repercussions and so belong to the realm of ethics. In considering strategy for (re-)translating *Tintin au Congo*, the translator cannot be blind to the offensive graphic representation of the Black characters. The way they speak, equally importantly, is offensive and unrealistic: it must be understood as Hergé's own representation – or parody – of how they speak. In the 1946 revision, the graphic representation of Black characters – utterly unacceptable, by today's standards – was made slightly less crude, but the visual 'jokes' in the original were faithfully reproduced, if not embellished. Whilst some of the racism was played down at the level of language, the French of all Congolese characters is, ultimately, 'broken'. Crucially, the (re-)translator of Tintin cannot be immune to the harm that such representations can cause.[3]

Different voices

The French 'voices' of Tintin and Snowy have a certain accent that situates them in time, place, and social standing. Their variety of French is formal and correct. It may also be qualified as elegant, educated, old-fashioned, conservative, or exemplary: their way of speaking is a paradigm that smacks of privilege and superiority. In 1946, Hergé excised a few Belgicisms, giving Tintin a more standard French accent. The Congolese characters, in contrast, are portrayed as speaking a variety that all French-speaking readers will recognize immediately as *petit nègre*. For Delisle (2008, p. 65), this situates it within:

> […] a tradition of colonial humour that seeks to ridicule the impoverished forms of French used by the majority of the 'natives' […]. In *Tintin au Congo*, most of the black people speak in the traditional vernacular known as 'petit nègre', which can make one smile.

One aim of the original, therefore, is to derive comedy from the way in which the Black characters talk. As Sartori (2016, p. 53) has shown, a translator can – when faced with

such language – choose to 'reinforce' the 'racist and differentialist aspect' (or even accentuate the caricature) or 'erase' it.[4] The first approach reproduces – 'faithfully'? – the racism, while the latter approach seeks actively to misrepresent the original.

As Latifa Khodja (2017, p. 107) has observed, the broken French in the 'African' accent contrasts with the correct French spoken by all Western characters – the American, British, and Portuguese newspaper representatives, for instance. The problem, here, is that the 'childish' French of the Congolese characters serves the representation of the Congolese as inferior. 'Faithfully' translating this for comic effect would appear unacceptable, today, *unless* the text is presented as a historic document. However, if the function of the translation is to entertain an audience of modern children, it is difficult to imagine how – without contextualization – *Tintin au Congo* can be translated at all. Any attempt to 'sanitize' the language would be a dubious practice and ultimately doomed (given that the language is inescapably situated within Hergé's artwork). As Nancy R. Hunt (2002, p. 92) notes: 'The new version also replaced the use of Brussels street vernacular by Congolese natives with a standardized *petit nègre* speech, although it did not reform the caricatured, cannibal humor representation of the black body.'

Without dwelling on the artwork, Coco reports the theft of the car – in 'French' – in these terms:

> *Hi! hi! hi! … Ça y en a missiéblancvenir et battre petit Noir … Coco li avoirpeur … Et missiéblanc parti avec tomobile …* (*TaC*, 1946/75, p. 14)

This 'bubble' contains non-standard pronunciation, lexis, and syntax. '*Missié*' – as we shall discuss further – represents a certain pronunciation of 'Monsieur'. Lexically, '*tomobile*' – updated from the 1931 '*teuf-teuf*' – presents as a child-like version of '*automobile*'. The syntax is similarly childish, given the absence of correctly conjugated verb forms. The fact that Coco – a child – speaks in this manner is arguably understandable. As a literary ploy, it could be seen as a way of inducing a sense of pathos or empathy in the reader. That *all* of the Black characters speak in this manner is more problematic. If – as Samuel Bidaud (2017, p. 155) has suggested – the language of Tintin constitutes a paradigm of 'transparency' and 'reason', what is the paradigm of the Congolese characters' language?

If one's strategy is to translate *Tintin au Congo* as a notionally 'faithful' rendering of a historic document, then our imagined readership would perhaps consist of adults – Tintin fans and aficionados, academics, people who read Tintin as a child – *as well as* contemporary schoolchildren. We might expect our adult audience to be able to situate and understand this album in time. But the same cannot be said for *all* children. Nonetheless, if our re-translation is that of a historical document, we might expect no concessions to be made to the nature or style of the content: thus, if the original voices of Tintin or Snowy are of their time, we might expect a British-English translation – following this strategy – to be quaint, old-fashioned, and evoke, for example, the dated English of a Billy Bunter. And we might expect the English of the Congolese characters to be as 'broken' as their French. If, on the other hand, we are given the job of creating a translation that seeks to entertain and speak – and sell volumes – to a modern audience, it would not be difficult to adapt or update the language of Tintin or Snowy. With relative impunity we might eschew Bunteresque exclamations of 'Crikey!' and 'Crumbs!' in favor of language that speaks more readily to children today. However, to similarly update the

language of the Congolese characters is more problematic. Again, the erasure of racism at the linguistic level would not mitigate the potential harm that can be caused by the album's *graphic* representation of Black people.

Let us now briefly discuss the three English-language translations of *Tintin au Congo*. We shall see some of the ways in which the English voices of the characters have changed over time. It will be argued that the translator – or, at the very least, the publisher – is responsible for 'packaging' and 'contextualizing' the translation for a given contemporary audience and context. The potential and opportunities for such work can be seen in the digital documents accompanying the latest translation that can be accessed via iPhone, for example.[5]

The re-packaging and re-presentation of *Tintin au Congo*

In the brief foreword to the 1991 translation – *Tintin in the Congo* (*TiC*) – of the 1931 original, Lonsdale-Cooper and Turner explain the following:

> In his portrayal of the Belgian Congo, the young Hergé reflects the colonial attitudes of the time. He himself admitted that he depicted his Africans according to the bourgeois, paternalistic stereotypes of the period. The same may be said of his treatment of big-game hunting and his attitude towards animals. (*TiC*, 1991, n.p.)

Whilst hardly constituting an overt warning, it reads as an apology for what, we *infer*, will follow: a 'faithful' translation of a text with – by modern standards – some objectionable content. It seemingly heralds a strategy of reproducing the values of the original, as a translation of a historical document. The target audience, we might imagine or hope, is a mature, discerning, educated, adult readership capable of understanding the racial stereotyping – both graphic and linguistic – as well as the context of its genesis, but it does not preclude an audience of children.

Some 14 years later, in a more expansive foreword, the same translators provide a caveat that is marginally different (my emphases):

> In his portrayal of the Belgian Congo, the young Hergé reflects the colonial attitudes of the time. He himself admitted that he depicted *the African people* according to the bourgeois, paternalistic stereotypes of the period – *an interpretation that some of today's readers may find offensive*. The same *could* be said of his treatment of big-game hunting. (*TiC*, 2005, n.p.)

Referring to Hergé's 'interpretation' of Black Africans as 'the African people' is itself – suitably – less 'paternalistic' than describing them as '*his* Africans'. However, the conflation of Congolese with African people as a whole remains problematic. Ahead of – and perhaps hoping to avert – the UK Commission for Racial Equality's claim of racism, the comment regarding potentially 'offensive' content is a more open recognition that the story may not be suitable for all readers (Vrielink, 2012, pp. 99–101). The foreword in later editions replaces the word 'offensive' with 'anachronistic'. But is either statement enough?

The brief forewords in both translations by Lonsdale-Cooper and Turner were not enough, as Vrielink notes, to save this particular Tintin album from controversy. What of the 2015 digital version? Farr's translation is accompanied by a good number of documents designed to provide historical information and contextualization. They appear to be designed for a younger audience and help us to discern a dual function

in the translation that they contextualize. In acknowledging – and overtly addressing – that part of the audience made up of 'Young readers', one function of the translation appears to be to educate said 'Young readers'. A twin function is to entertain and excite: to this end, the language is modernized and the style of the Congolese characters' speech is occasionally 'smoothed out', as we shall see.

In the digital documents accompanying the 2015 translation, providing useful and engaging background information regarding the production of Hergé's second album, we find the following statements:

> Times have changed a lot since Tintin in the Congo was first published in 1931. Attitudes were very different then. For example, most people living in Western countries that controlled parts of Africa and other countries around the World were proud of their colonies. Today the idea of colonisation is abhorrent to most people – nothing more than the invasion of another country. (Tett, n.d., p. 4.)

This goes some way to contextualizing *Tintin in the Congo* for a twenty-first-century audience, but it begs a question: for whom is the 'idea of colonisation' *not* 'abhorrent'?

Elsewhere we read:

> In real life the 'Leopard Society' did exist: members practised cannibalism (ate their human victims), believing it gave them and their tribes strength. (Tett, n.d., p. 17.)

This information potentially serves only to titillate and reinforce extremely outmoded stereotypes of Black Africans.[6]

Another statement provided by way of contextualization is differently problematic:

> The priest takes Tintin to his mission, a village where a group of priests run facilities such as schools and hospitals, to improve the lives of local people. (Tett, n.d., p. 18.)

Unfortunately, there seems to be no critical edge to the cool, accompanying content. The last gloss might easily have been written in the 1930s: it portrays priests (as Hergé does), unquestioningly and unapologetically, as benevolent. More than this, the accompanying literature fails to deal appropriately with the African elephant in the room: the representation – graphic and linguistic – of Black people.[7]

The master, the mister, and the boss

In his brief but thorough analysis of the 2005 translation (not the 1991 translation, as stated), Bernard Spee (2013b, pp. 20–23) illustrates a number of ways in which 'the English translation contains value judgments absent from the original text, resulting in a pronounced ideological bent'. He observes five forms of spin: the repeated and ironic use of 'petit' is avoided; sense is distorted (in the mis-translation of 'malin', p.20) in favor of a negative portrayal of Tintin; an ideological aspect is restored – through the restoration of a reference to Belgium (p.53) and through the addition of 'all-powerful' (p. 62); the English word *boy* is placed in inverted commas (thus – ironically – distancing its denotation for a contemporary audience); and the name of the parrot 'Jacko' is omitted. The extent to which these 'value judgments' were deliberate or knowing is questionable. But Spee's analysis is enlightening.

The strategic spin of all three translations can be seen in other ways and not least in terms of 'voice'. In the 1991 translation, the English used by Tintin and Snowy is as

formal – and dated – as is their French. The story is peppered with dated exclamations: SMASHING!, GOLLY!, GOSH!, HORRORS!, HEAVENS!, HIP HIP HOORAY!, BRAVO!, WHAM!, EEK!, CURSES!, CRUMBS!, CRIKEY! (*TiC*, 1991) The register and style of the English used by Tintin and Snowy in the 2005 translation is more mixed. Most of the Blytonesque exclamations survive from the 1991 edition, but there is more variety as they are thinned out with slightly less marked exclamations of 'Excellent!, 'Perfect!', 'Marvellous!', and 'Whew!' Snowy still shouts 'Hip hip hooray!', but he also exclaims, 'Absolutely crazy!' (*TiC*, 2005, p. 24) and 'We're going back home? … Terrific!' (*TiC*, 2005, p. 61) Similarly, Tintin still exclaims 'Crumbs!', 'Crikey, no!', and so on, but his voice is not so consistently upper-/middle-class.

In some ways, the 2015 translation marks a return to the very dated – and British – language of the 1991 translation. Snowy's language is particularly revealing. Blytonesque exclamations still prevail: '*Yikes!*', '*Drat! …* ' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 1); '*Good gracious!*' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 2). The use of '*I say, Tintin*' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 3) and of '*one*' is quite formal: '*Hunting really gives one an appetite …* ' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 16). Thus, Snowy is portrayed – accurately – as the linguistic equal of Tintin: to the majority of a modern British audience, they appear sophisticated and confident. Some of Snowy's English – in terms of syntax or form of expression – even smacks of the Shakespearean: '*Come, Tintin, explain to me this phenomenon? …* ' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 30) and '*Take heart, Tintin!*' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 44) That said, Snowy's language – in 2015 – is also characterized by Americanisms and more modern vocabulary: '*The lion better watch out*! […] *Are you going to quit playing rough now? …* ' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 23); '*But boy can he shoot*! … ' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 56). This is more in tune with the English spoken by a modern audience but the register of Snowy's idiom is lowered. In terms of entertainment, considering solely the level of lexis, certain choices are arguably an improvement: '*My goodness, he's gone bonkers*!' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 5) and '*He's crackers*!' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 24) particularly stand out as having colloquial currency – in Britain – today. As does Snowy's final exclamation: '*We're going home? … Cool! …* ' (*TiC*, 2015, p. 61)

The shift from the very formal register of the 1931 album to markedly – and progressively – less formal English in translation can be illustrated in the various renderings of Snowy's exclamation on seeing people fighting:

QUEL PUGILAT! (*TaC*, 1931, p. 47); TALK ABOUT BOXING! (*TiC*, 1991, p. 47)

Quel pugilat! (*TaC*, 1946/75, p. 27); *What a fight!* (*TiC*, 2005, p. 27)

What a punch-up! (*TiC*, 2015, p. 27)

We can observe that Hergé himself did not update the erudite, sophisticated French '*pugilat*' of the 1931 text. We can also observe that Lonsdale-Cooper and Turner changed tactics. In 1991, they avoided the literal structure (*Quel* [What (a)] + noun + exclamation mark) and used an idiomatic equivalent for that context. In 2005, they reverted to the literal structure and used standard, everyday English. In 2015, Farr used the same literal structure but opted for a more colloquial – and entertaining – expression. To isolate this utterance, to compare these translations, to argue that one is better than the others, or to recommend alternatives is, in itself, pointless. Any such 'decision of detail' can only be assessed in view of the translator's overall strategy.

(Hervey & andHiggins, 2002, p. 14) The point, here, is to illustrate a certain trend in the re-translation of *Tintin au Congo*.

Perhaps more significantly, we also see change in the speech of the Congolese characters:

> MASTER, 'M'HATAVU, TERRIBLE 'M'HATAVU, THEY COMING! … THEY GOING TO ATTACK OUR PEOPLE! (*TiC*, 1991, p. 50)

> *Mister, terrible M'Hatuvu! They invading our land! … They going to kill us all! …* (*TiC*, 2005, p. 29)

> *Boss, the terrible M'Hatuvu have invaded our territory! … They're going to massacre us all! …* (*TiC*, 2015, p. 29)

The trend here – over the course of just 24 years – is toward standard English. Lonsdale-Cooper and Turner – in 1991 and 2005 – opt for a strategy of 'dialect-for-dialect' translation that 'faithfully' portrays the Congolese characters' use of language as incorrect, childish, or unsophisticated. The strategy employed in the 2015 version is that of 'blandscript'. This is not translating 'the characters as they speak': unlike the previous translations, it is written in English that is grammatically correct. Whilst Hergé made a point of having all of the Black characters consistently speak *petit nègre*, the most recent translation occasionally 'smooths out' their language.

Another specific difference in the translations can be seen in the forms of address for Tintin (and for Snowy). In 1991, in translating '*Missié*' as 'Master', the translators perhaps made a conscious decision to draw attention to colonial history and to the supposed superiority of Tintin, the white boy, over the Congolese characters.[8] Indeed, Tintin is generally addressed as 'Master' throughout. The same form of address in this French 'dialect' is sometimes translated as 'Mister' – which is the default choice in the 2005 translation. Again, this seems more gauche than 'Sir', and would seem to indicate a deliberate decision on the part of the translators to 'mark' the English of the Black characters as non-standard. We might view this decision as a perfectly valid strategy of 'compensation' (Hervey & andHiggins, 2002, pp. 35–40) – and it certainly complements the overall strategy of translating a historical 'record'. The 2015 translation shies away from evoking colonial history, favoring the less formal choice of 'Boss'. This form is marked, nonetheless, and carries all sorts of connotations, such as indicating inferiority.

We might note that all three translations avoid the 'blandscript' translation of 'Sir' – indicating that they are all seeking some effect similar to that in the original, whilst shunning like-for-like phonetic transcription. In other contexts, translators have translated this form of address as 'Massa', evoking stereotypes of the English of Black characters in Alex Haley's *Roots*, for instance.[9] Rather than adopting the strategy of phonetic transcription – whether because politically incorrect or fraught with 'interference' from particularly Afro-American connotations, Tintin's translators 'transpose' the idea that Congolese English deviates from standard English in terms of unidiomatic usage.

Let us return to Coco's report of the car theft:

> BOO HOO! … THIS WHITE MASTER COME AND BEAT LITTLE BLACK BOY … THEN COCO IS FRIGHTENED AND IS HIDING … THEN THIS WHITE MASTER IS GOING AWAY WITH CHUG-CHUG … (*TiC*, 1991, p. 23)

> *Boo hoo! … White mister come and beat little black boy … Coco, he afraid … And white mister, he going away with car …* ' (*TiC*, 2005, p. 14)

> *Boo hoo! … White man come and beat little black boy … Coco afraid … And white man go off with car …* (*TiC*, 2015, p. 14)

The English – in each case – mirrors the issues with verbs in the original and 'faithfully' has Coco expressing himself in the thirdperson. But where the nominal '*Noir*' (Black) is capitalized in the original, the translators have all denominalized it – by adding 'boy'. Furthermore, the three 'marked' items in this form of French – '*missié*' [*Monsieur* (Mister/Sir)], '*li*' [*lui* (he/him)], and 'TEUF-TEUF'/ '*tomobile*' [*automobile* (car)] – have no 'accent' in English. It can only be supposed that these choices were made in view of what was seen as socially acceptable or politically correct when the translations were published (Tabbert, 2002, pp. 324–328).

Is *Tintin in the Congo* a book for children?

Irrespective of the decision of Belgian Courts in 2011, the actions of many bookshops, libraries, and schools around the world have shown that *Tintin au Congo*/*Tintin in the Congo* is no longer seen – unproblematically – as a book designed solely to entertain children. It could be argued that Tintin's Adventures – famously aimed at a readership aged from 7 to 77 – were always intended to operate much in the same way as British pantomime: with children reading on one level and with adults working (potentially) on another level (Tabbert, 2002, pp. 337–340). Thus, adults and children alike may enjoy the Tintin albums for the adventure, the excitement, and Tintin's evolution. Whilst children are far from barred from deeper readings, adults – potentially – may have a greater capacity to enjoy the historical, autobiographical, psychoanalytical aspects, and may bring a keener critical eye to symbolism embedded in the albums. In this light, we shall bring this analysis to a close with discussion of four further issues with consequences for translation.

Firstly, in the original, the parrot that bites Snowy's tail cries '*Jacko est content! …* ' ['Jacko is happy!'] Four times. In the 2005 re-translation, this refrain is variously translated as follows: 'Every man for himself!', 'Dirty dog!', 'Man overboard!', and 'Dirty dog! … Dirty dog!' (pp.3-5). On one level, this strategy arguably 'compensates' for inevitable loss elsewhere by having the parrot seemingly consciously – and amusingly – goad Snowy the dog. In contrast, Farr (2015) translates the parrot's refrain as either 'Jacko's happy! … ' or as 'Jacko's a happy bird! … ' These more literal translations may appear less engaging, but they hold a key – held in the original – that the 2005 translation loses. For Spee (2013b, p. 13), the trauma that Snowy undergoes can be seen as a Hergean psychodrama that will be repeated – he reminds us – in *The Broken Ear*[10]: the parrot, he suggests, is associated with a 'ghost' and 'keeping a secret'. Therefore, if Georges Remi was indeed sexually abused by his uncle 'Tchake', the 2005 translation can be seen as a cover-up: the autobiographical reference (Jacko/Tchake) is lost. The more literal 2015 translation has the advantage of catering for Tintin 'connoisseurs'. As Spee (2013b, p. 22) correctly concludes: 'The suppression of this link is only important for a reader knowledgeable about Hergé's biography and his penchant for encryption.'

The second issue concerns the translation of proper nouns. The names of the neighboring tribes – the *Babaoro'm* and the *m'Hatouvou* – are not based or modeled on fact. They are jokes that French-speakers – of all ages – will immediately 'get', ever on the look-out, as they are, for word-play in *bandes dessinées*. In the first case – translated as '*Babaorum*' (*TiC*, 1991/2005/2015), it is true that an English-speaking adult *may* appreciate the pun on the exotic *baba au rhum* (rum baba) but the taste of this regal dessert will probably be lost on the lips of a child in Britain, for example, today.[11] In the second case, again only slightly anglicizing what presents as a word from some African language, with the '*M'Hatuvu*', the joke is lost utterly. It is a transliteration – of sorts – of the question: '*M'as-tu vu?*' ['Have you seen me?'] The intended 'joke' is that this epithet can be used to mock somebody who is 'showing off'. To give a sense of the meaning, it might be translated – idiomatically – as 'Get a load of me!' For Spee (2013a, p. 40), the name of this tribe hides 'a value judgment [on the part of Hergé] regarding the extrovert nature of the Africans'. It could also be seen as signaling a narratological game of hide-and-seek instigated by Hergé, as an invitation to read the (encrypted) text biographically.

For some, such linguistic playfulness is a barrier to the translatability of Tintin. For instance, Jan Baetens (2001, p. 367) explains that in *The Red Sea Sharks*, the name of the country, '"Khemed", is a pun based on "k hem het" [I have it] which, in the Marollian [Bruxello-Flemish] dialect, is the popular equivalent of "Eureka!"' Such insights justify continued re-translation as the complexity of Hergé'soriginal work is revealed, over time, through the research of Tintinologists. Whilst it is true that translating the same effect is sometimes impossible, the creativity of translators armed with imagination is not to be underestimated.[12]

The third example concerns an epithet that is used in reference to Tintin throughout the albums: '*freluquet*.' In French, this word can be used pejoratively to describe a 'frivolous man'. It has connotations of pretentiousness and common English translations include 'whippersnapper', 'jackanapes', and 'pipsqueak'. In the final battle with Tom, the bad guy's opening gambit is: '*Attrape ça, freluquet!…*' (*TaC*, 1946/75, p. 47) Both the 2005 and 2015 translations render this as 'Take that, whippersnapper!' As far as any French-English dictionary is concerned, this is an adequate translation. So why change it? One reason could lie in the word's etymology. Spee (2013a, p. 37) explains that this epithet derives from '*freluque*', meaning 'quiff' or 'tuft', and he notes the amusing preciseness and aptness of Hergé's language. The fact that even the average French-speaker will probably not get this reference immediately is unimportant: it is there, like a gag in a Jacques Tati film, waiting to be spotted. To defuse such a gag is to impoverish the text and – without compensation – to reduce the capacity of the target audience to enjoy the same variety of humor to be found in the original. 'Coxcomb' – or even 'popinjay' – might be suitable alternatives, here, in line with certain strategies. But if they are deemed too old-fashioned for a given strategy, a more creative approach would be worth exploring.

Another interesting strategy at work in the three English translations is the decision to de-humanize Snowy. Toward the end, Snowy remonstrates: '*Je ne suis tout de même plus un enfant, voyons…*' (*TaC*, 1946/75, p. 57) Both the 2005 and 2015 translations render '*enfant*' [infant/child] as '*puppy*'. As a story originally aimed at children – and, on another level, seemingly dealing creatively with issues from Hergé's own allegedly traumatic childhood – this is a noteworthy distortion. The same might be said of

Tintin's exclamation, when he hears Snowy's barks as he is taken to be made king of the pygmy tribe: '*La voix de Milou!…*' (*TaC*, 1946/75, p. 48) In the 2005/15 translations, we read '*That's Snowy!*' (*TiC*, 2005/15, p. 48) In losing his '*voix*' [voice], Snowy's humanity – schematically opposed to the animal world of *Tintin au Congo* – is down-played.

Tintin in the future

Who today's (English-language) readers of Tintin are – and who may or may not be offended by *Tintin in the Congo* – are difficult questions to answer.[13] What is certain, however, is that the function of a translation of *Tintin au Congo* must be different to the function of the original French-language versions. Times have changed and Hergé's-representation of how Black people look, speak, and behave is unacceptable, by modern standards, in a multi-cultural society. That is not to say it should be hidden from view, forgotten, or censored. The problem – unresolved – is that *Tintin au Congo*, in translation, has no clear function or audience.

Is 'smoothing out the style' a viable option in the twenty-first century? If nothing else, such a strategy misrepresents how Hergé saw the world toward the beginning of Tintin's adventures. However, if this *is* the adopted strategy, this should arguably be clarified. Whatever the strategy, moreover, the safest option would appear to lie in articulating an explicit function and audience. As this audience could consist of children *and* adults – as with a pantomime – the translator is under great pressure to please everyone at the same time. When they are in their 70s, today's children may well return to their cherished Tintin albums – or iPads, if they are not obsolete – and read them with different, adult eyes. In this light, translations should – as much as possible – enable multiple readings, not least through attention to puns and etymology, style and register, and effect. The difficulty lies in reconciling the aim to entertain – despite the unacceptable representation of Black people – with the aim to educate.

We have seen that the trajectory of the three translations discussed in this article appears to seek to maintain the appeal – and entertainment value – of the originals.[14] Having learnt from the furor created by previous translations, the 2015 translation wisely surrounds itself with documents designed to contextualize the story and its genesis. This is essential if the intended functions of this problematic text are to be understood and appreciated by the intended audience. Nonetheless, more could be done to explain the translation strategy at play, in view of the linguistic and graphic representation of Black people. The growing use of comics, graphic novels, and *bandes dessinées* in the classroom – itself a growth research area – could soon provide more guidance in this area. Seen as 'a cultural artefact, being created, produced, manufactured and consumed at a particular point in time' (Abraham, 2017, p. 15), *Tintin au Congo* lends itself very well to analyzing the 'moment of history' that was Hergé's vision of the Belgian Congo.

In conclusion, it is worth remembering that the original *Tintin au Congo* is as problematic today – in Belgium and throughout the francophone world – as its English-language translations. Whilst Albert Algoud's stated desire to provide the 'definitive' judgment on racism in *Tintin au Congo* may seem cavalier, he does express the problem – and offer a solution – in plain terms:

> To put a stop to the recurring controversies, it would seem appropriate to add – as is now the case with the English-language version – a pedagogical foreword explaining to new readers the context in which *Tintin au Congo* was created and published. Rather than wait for new charges to be levelled at it, all it takes is to recognize that this vision of Black Africa was completely fanciful, a grotesque caricature with the potential to hurt readers from Africa or of African origins. (Algoud, 2016, from the entry on *Congo*)

Unfortunately, the forewords in the 1991 and 2005 translations hardly constitute material of any pedagogical depth. An idea of the potential for greater depth in contextualization for new, younger readers can, however, be seen in the example of literature accompanying the 2015 translation, available digitally. In the twenty-first century, the digital platform of the iOS albums is a privileged place for a more visible, more responsible translator or publisher to contextualize the story and explain the method in its translation. Often styled as a 'righter of wrongs' (Peeters, 2016, p. 99), my guess is that Tintin – if he were his own translator, today – would probably regret and challenge the graphic representation of Black people in *Tintin au Congo*, contextualize it, but have the Black characters' language 'faithfully' contrast with his own in the name of historical 'accuracy'.

Notes

1. Philip Nel's work on *The Cat in the Hat* allows us to see remarkable parallels in the works – and evolution – of Hergé and Dr Seuss (Nel, 2014). However, whilst the 'racialized origins' of Dr Seuss's cat are ambiguous, Hergé's graphic caricature of the Congolese characters is categorical.
2. Farr (2002, pp. 22–25) illustrates this beautifully.
3. Phyllis J. Yuill's fascinating discussion (1976) of the history of Helen Bannerman's *The Story of Little Black Sambo* is enlightening – not least in underlining the need for continued debate.
4. Sartori (2016) illustrates this very clearly in his analysis of *The Red Sea Sharks* and the 1991 and 2005 translations of *TaC*.
5. Available via http://en.tintin.com/digitalstore
6. See, for example, Vicky Van Bockhaven (2009, p. 80): 'The leopard-men images contribute to stereotypical and racist representations, with the violent aspects of past African societies being overemphasized in a similar way as contemporary war and violence in Africa is overemphasized.'
7. Such multi-media presentation is arguably in its infancy, but the concept of contextualising an outdated work of literature such as *TaC* appears to be perfectly sound.
8. Whilst recognising that this choice 'suppresses the accent', Khodja (2017, p. 110) sees in this an example of 'explicitation'. As such, it serves as an example of the third of Leighton's strategies: 'Distillation (replacing colloquial with an explanatory phrase).' (See Woodham, 2006, p. 402.)
9. *TaC* is cited in this context by Collombat (2004, p. 5) when she discusses the French translation of 'Mister' in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.
10. Spee (2013b, pp. 13–15) suggests that Georges Remi may have been sexually abused by his uncle, Charles Arthur, whose nickname was 'Tchake'.
11. Coincidentally, Hervey and Higgins (2002, p. 37) discuss the translation of the Roman camp, 'Babaorum', in relation to *Asterix in Corsica*. It is rendered, in English, as 'the Roman camp of Totorum'.
12. See, for example, Gillian Lathey (2005) on the translation of names in the Harry Potter series.

13. By way of limited research, I found 6 Tintin albums in the top 100 best-sellers in the amazon.co.uk category of 'Comics and Graphic Novels': *The Secret of the Unicorn* (33), *The Black Island* (37), *Tintin in the Congo* (59), *Cigars of the Pharaoh* (62), *The Blue Lotus* (76), *Destination Moon* (86). [19 May 2018.] Whilst this tells us nothing of the age of those buying and/or reading the Tintin stories, it does testify to Tintin's continued popularity. Performing the same informal research today would seem to give an indication of Tintin's waning popularity in the UK, today.
14. Compare this situation with the analysis of Velez (2014) of more contrasting approaches in Italian translations of Tintin.

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