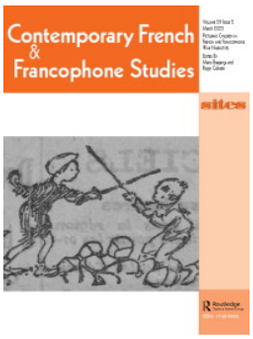

Article:
Michallat, W. orcid.org/0000-0003-2042-1702 (2025) Why no war in French comics? The Trente Glorieuses and redrawing of the second thirty years war. Contemporary French and Francophone Studies, 29 (2). pp. 215-231. ISSN 1740-9292

https://doi.org/10.1080/17409292.2025.2488614



Contemporary French and Francophone Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/gsit20

Why No War in French Comics? The *Trente Glorieuses* and Redrawing of the Second Thirty Years War

Wendy Michallat

To cite this article: Wendy Michallat (2025) Why No War in French Comics? The *Trente Glorieuses* and Redrawing of the Second Thirty Years War, Contemporary French and Francophone Studies, 29:2, 215-231, DOI: 10.1080/17409292.2025.2488614

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17409292.2025.2488614

CONTEMPORARY FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE STUDIES
2025, VOL. 29, NO. 2, 215–231
https://doi.org/10.1080/17409292.2025.2488614

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

Check for updates

Why No War in French Comics? The *Trente Glorieuses* and Redrawing of the Second Thirty Years War

Wendy Michallat

School of Languages and Cultures, University of Sheffield, UK

ABSTRACT

This article looks at transitions in representations of war and Occupation across three cartoon journals for children published in France between the Liberation and the early 1970s: *Cœurs vaillants*, *Coq hardi* and *Pilote*. The comics censorship legislation of 1949 and 1952 is examined as a palliative response to war trauma experienced by children and by their parents across both world wars. The rejection of war is also traced back to the efforts of inter-war peacemakers to engender cross-cultural tolerance in the minds of the young and the French state's careful management of war memory throughout the period of the "trente glorieuses." Finally, the article explores how the early strategies adopted for the representation of war shifted in line with socio-cultural change and, in particular, the politicization of authors and readers after '68. Analyses of strips from *Pilote hebdomadaire* between 1960 and the early 1970s show how the distorted memorialization of the Occupation in the Gaullist era became a target for a contestatory rewriting of war into cartoons.

KEYWORDS Comics; war; censorship; children; trauma

The dearth of cartoon representations of military conflict is an enduring and conspicuous characteristic of French comics in the inter-war years through to the 1970s. There were text features, although even these commemorative pieces which memorialized the dead and celebrated heroes of decisive victories, were infrequent. France largely ploughed its own furrow in respect of comics in the inter-war and in the years after the Occupation. Its market was dominated by comics that had grown out of youth movements of the Catholic Church and the Communist Party although Disney and Disney-inspired comics had made in-roads into a captive market, largely off the back of the success of early Disney

CONTACT Wendy Michallat w.michallat@sheffield.ac.uk

animated films. At the same time, it was not immune to some thematic and stylistic influence from outre-Manche. Successful British strips were routinely dropped into French comics and, it is well known that the 1950s *The Eagle* magazine, in respect of its red-top look and its text-cartoon mix of "sport, stories, adventure strips, humor, science, real life stories, hobbies, nature, engineering," was a "calque" for *Pilote*, which was launched at the end of that decade. But when in the 1960s the British comics market (and Britain's toys and games industry) faced off the threat of television by embracing war as a discrete genre, France didn't follow. War was a dizzyingly successful fun activity for British children, deployed into their everyday play by way of Palitoy's Action Man complete with jeep, helicopter and tank. There were self-assembly Airfix planes and ships which one could paint in camouflage colors and hang from the bedroom ceiling, plastic armies of soldiers in 1/32 scale or the tiny 1/72 and field guns which, when loaded with a hair grip could flatten an entire battalion with one shot. Comics like *Victor, Warlord and Commando* were full of cartoon strips about the glorious soldiering of the Allies in mainland Europe. War was a thrilling and, in hindsight, grim play area. Why was it that war did not find such robust and vivid expression in comics in France from the inter-war and throughout the second post-war period through to the 1970s despite the longstanding pollination from one market to the other? There is no single answer to that question but the multifarious factors that combined to keep war out are to be found on the French side of the channel. This article undertakes an original investigation not only into why war was a subdued, tempered thematic of French comics but also why did it not entirely disappear when it was squeezed down by censorship and public opinion and, instead, found a way out through allegory and temporal displacement of the action to remote places and contexts. An important and original part of this work is to provide for a fuller understanding of the reasons for the infamous censorship legislation of 1949 and 1952 which particularly targeted comics content. It examines "the second thirty years war"—De Gaulle's notion of a continuum of conflict between 1914–1945—in connection with the wartime experiences of young readers of the 1940s and 1950s and their parents' experience of the Great War. This collective cross-generational trauma unique to France in respect of its peril and upheaval made the seeding of a war genre next to impossible. This antipathy to representations of war in children's reading is also traced back to the peace and reconciliation efforts of the League of Nations in the 1920s and in particular the ethos of the "international mind" which found expression in the recommendations of educationalists in the Intellectual Committee of the League of Nations. Member states were asked to remove bellicose nationalism and

glorification of war from school textbooks. This socio-cultural analysis of what shaped anti-war antipathy in children's publications is read alongside examples of representations of war in French comics. The article looks at several issues of *Cœurs vaillants* published under the Occupation alongside issues of *Coq Hardi* published in the immediate post-war. A selection of early issues of *Pilote* magazine in the 1950s and 1960s and of later issues from the 1970s provide insights into how the wartime generation and the distortions of its memorialisation of the Occupation in the Gaullist era became an opportunity for a contestatory (and occasionally abusive) rewriting of war into cartoons in its pages.

War Trauma

Comics censorship has, in general, been disapprovingly judged by *bande dessinée* commentators sympathetic to the industry and to its *auteurs-dessinateurs* who, identifying with the radical political and lifestyle narratives of '68, pushed back the boundaries of the acceptable in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was broadly accepted that the "loi n° 49–956 du 16 juillet 1949 sur les publications destinées à la jeunesse" and, in particular, the "arrêté"—decree—of January 11, 1952 suppressed freedom of speech and creative expression. There was also the suspicion that the move against comics was an authoritarian hangover from Vichy where comics had first been subject to State control and, more generally, Vichy's obsession with young people which it stigmatized as feckless and degenerate offspring of the Popular Front generation. However, the reality is somewhat more complicated.

In Britain, throughout the Great War and into the 1920s, charities were run in support of families impacted by the war and this charitable endeavor extended, on occasion, to initiatives set up to relieve the misery of "devastated France" and its suffering people. There was a degree of recognition that of all the allies, France had suffered the most because the conflict had destroyed vast swathes of its territory and displaced hundreds of thousands of people (Osborne 2001, 66–67). Calls to help were met grudgingly by many caught up in their own considerable suffering but help was forthcoming. The success of cross-channel town-twinning (then called "god-parenting") whereby money and materials were donated to ruined towns and cities in France by counterparts in Britain (e.g. Bradford-Nieppe) was one example of a generalized acknowledgement that France's civilian experience of the horror of the Great War was particularly profound (*The Observer* 1920, 18, for example). The second invasion of France, in 1940, experienced by many who had endured the horror of the first, was arguably more traumatic for the civilian

population. Millions of civilians were displaced (many permanently) and many were attacked and bombed during the 1940 defeat and the 1944 allied campaign. The Armistice and Occupation then ushered in four years of fear, insecurity, material deprivation and repression perpetrated by France's own government and institutions. But representations of military ineptitude and the French state's collaboration with the occupier were carefully controlled in the post-war. It was an unpalatable civilian trauma sitting within the trauma of national humiliation. Historian Jean-Pierre Azéma describes a cover-up whereby horror and trauma were mostly excluded from narrative which had crystallized around the military victory and Liberation: « Ce qui revenait à occulter les morts des bombardements anglo-saxons (des milliers de Normands sont tués) ou ceux qui furent massacrés par les nazis, négliger les réactions de ceux que j'appellerai par commodité 'les vaincus de la Libération' » (Azéma 1994, 223–224).

Over 550,000 civilians and soldiers had died in France through bombing and resistance combat to add to a near two million killed only 25 or so years previously during the Great War. This article returns later to how this suppressed and sanitized experience of war described by Azéma became an object of contestation and ridicule by comics in the 1960s and 1970s but, first, what about the children whose experience has been, until recently, another hidden story of the Occupation? How did they live the war and might the absence of war in comics be as much explained by welfare concerns for a traumatized generation than a State-led moral panic?

By way of interviews with elderly French civilians who were children in 1940, Lindsey Dodd records an oral history of childhood trauma largely ignored in accounts of France's experience of the Second World War. Painful recollections of bombing, bereavement and persecution surface in the conversations. Feelings return too, feelings which, Dodd writes, were "forgotten, denied, refused, discredited, silenced or omitted" and which, when recovered through testimony, can serve to challenge "the dominant discourse" (Dodd 2022, 3). "For some of the younger children," writes Dodd, "old enough to recognize death, hurt or loss but young enough to be dependent—the moment of bombing was uniquely terrifying" (Dodd 2016, 100). Pierre Haigneré was eight years old when an air-raid in Lomme, near Dunkirk, on April 10, 1944 killed 500 of the neighbors on his estate and spared only two houses of which his family home was one: "But, well, you can't imagine—how can I put it?—the terror, you know […] It was the apocalypse for a child […]. You had the feeling that the whole world was collapsing, you said to yourself 'It's the end. We're going to be killed'" (Dodd 2016, 87). Physical displacement was another significant source of suffering for children. Millions of

children were forcibly uprooted during the Battle of France in 1940 and during the Normandy campaign four years later. In particular, the largely forgotten organized evacuations that removed around 215,000 French children from their parents did expose many to suffering. Although there were happy stories, there were also accounts of children being unwanted, overworked, neglected and abused (Dodd 2020, 160). Many children who went through the Second World War may well have experienced vicarious trauma through parents, who had themselves suffered as children during the Great War of 1914–1918 (Dodd 2016, 57–60). It is a compelling argument that the legislation censoring comics came of concern for a vulnerable and psychologically harmed generation of children. In recent work, Camille Mahé has also pointed to widespread concern about how best to protect children who had lived through the war: "Aussi, au lendemain du conflit, les craintes à l'égard de cette potentielle « génération perdue » sont-elles grandes parmi les adultes, qu'ils soient experts de l'enfance (pédiatres, nutritionnistes, psychologues, etc.), acteurs politiques ou humanitaires" (Mahé 2024).

The exposure of childhood trauma in relation to the war does throw into question the largely unchallenged idea that the 1949 law was mostly a mean-spirited authoritarian hangover from Vichy. Indeed, in the text of the 1952 decree which strengthened the 1949 law, tucked away alongside provisions relating to acceptable and unacceptable plots and storylines and acceptable and unacceptable types of heroes, is article 14 of the "Compte Rendu des Travaux de la Commission de Surveillance et de Contrôle des Publications destinées à l'Enfance et l'Adolescence 1950" (Commission de Surveillance 1952, 26–27). It specifically cites the mental health of children who had lived through the war as reason for not including in strips anything that might cause them further psychological injury:

> Dans le même esprit, il convient, d'une façon générale de ne pas accentuer exagérément les scènes empruntées, par exemple, à des guerres passées ou futures et qui sont susceptibles d'inspirer l'épouvante et l'angoisse. Beaucoup de jeunes lecteurs actuels de la presse enfantine ont subi pendant la dernière guerre des chocs nerveux qui ont entraîné une extrême sensibilisation affective. Il y a lieu de ménager ces enfants et de ne pas les prédisposer aux névroses, non plus qu'aux terreurs paniques. (Commission de Surveillance 1952, 26–27)

This segment of the legislation is more in tune with the pacifist tenor of educationalists working with the League of Nations Intellectual Committee throughout the 1920s. European states were urged to oust bellicose, nationalist and militaristic content from the school curriculum, and from History books in particular. Children were an important focus for a wished-for pedagogy valorizing cross-cultural understanding and controlling warmongering in publications for children was one way of

achieving it. As Ken Osbourne writes, the success of the League of Nations "depended on the creation of an internationalist, peace-oriented mind-set among the world's peoples, and this would best begin with children whose ways of thinking were still to be formed, shaped in part by what they learned in school, and above all in their history classes" (2016, 218). Specific guidance was given by the teaching sub-committee of the League of Nations itself. In the words of the League's Advisory Committee on League of Nations Teaching, cited by Osbourne, "[t]he teaching of history offers very frequent opportunities of imbuing the younger generation with the ideals of an international order, the necessity for international collaboration and the ideas of humanity and peace which are at the root of the Covenant" (2016, 217).

There was also the realization that the memories of war were too raw to be the stuff of light-reading for children in British comics which, after the Great War, according to Kelly Boyd, returned to the pre-war staple content of school, sport and detective fiction (Budgen 2010, 110).

The original 1949 text had been designed largely to clamp down on the US horror comics genre, which it was wrongly believed had become common reading fare outside of the GI camps still in France. The Catholic Church and the Communist party keen to protect their own ideological influence in the market were also supportive of it. The provisions warding off the evils of gang crime, thieving, cowardice, hatred and debauchery had very little relevance to the anodyne children's comics on sale in France in the immediate post-war. At the same time, the 1952 clarification, and, in particular, what was written about the representation of hero characters, appeared to pick up the pacifist reframing of war for children urged in the aftermath of the Great War: "Il ne doit pas commettre d'actes répréhensibles. Il est toujours loyal, même avec des adversaires déloyaux. Il se montre chevaleresque avec des adversaires blessés ou dans l'impossibilité de se défendre et il a toujours le plus grand respect de la vie humaine" (Commission de Surveillance 1952, 26–27). A benevolent hero kind to his enemies and respectful of human life was not an obvious fit with the theme of battle. The vagueness of the legislation made publishers uncertain and nervous about their content. Statements outlawing content liable to "démoraliser l'enfance ou la jeunesse" and "désorienter l'esprit du lecteur" meant that publishers erred on the side of caution and self-censored, just as publishers had during the Occupation, when they were required to observe the Liste Otto, a blacklist of published books.

But war did not disappear in its entirety. Recent war may have been removed from comics but the adventure and excitement of hero-led adventures in which conflict was a keystone theme appeared in remote historical narratives or tales of sporting battles where loyalty, courage,

honor on the field of play mapped onto battlefield derring-do. David Budgen alludes to a surge in new genres in children's fiction, which, although circumventing the horrible realities of the First World War, referenced it indirectly. Flying and pilot heroes became a popular subject: "[o]ne of the most romantic aspects of the Great War, particularly in comparison with the carnage and heavy losses of the Western Front, was the war in the air," Budgen writes (2010, 117). War in outer space became another means to avoid discussing directly "the carnage of the First World War" (Budgen 2010, 134). This displacement of the war theme into flying adventures and science fiction is interesting. There may well have been a cross-over of this strategy into comics providing impetus for the development of genres which crossed-over into French comics (either directly or by way of imitation) in the inter-war period. Flying adventures and pilot heroes, as we will see when we come to *Pilote* magazine, are the theme of the magazine's signature comic strip, "Les Chevaliers du Ciel."

War in *Cœurs Vaillants* and *Coq Hardi*

During the Occupation, paper and ink shortages coupled with the extreme material hardship suffered by the civilian population, in Paris in particular, meant that many pre-war publications which relied on the capital for the majority of sales disappeared very quickly. There were exceptions, like *Cœurs Vaillants*, which, with the wealth of the Church and the favor of Vichy behind it, published freely in Lyon. It was not virulently pro-Nazi like the comic *Le Téméraire* published in the occupied zone (Ory 1979), but, in the early years of the Occupation, it aligned its material with the public's faith in Vichy and its leaders which had yet to be shaken by the yellow star edict in June 1942, the invasion of the so-called free-zone in November of the same year and the militarization of the Vichy's control of civilian dissent through the fascist French paramilitary, the "milice."

Cœurs vaillants framed conflict as a civilizing and ideological duty not unlike early Tintin strips published in *Le Petit Vingtième*, the children's supplement to the Catholic Belgian newspaper *Le Vingtième Siecle* where, in the very first episode, Tintin, the hero-reporter goes to the Soviet Union to expose the moral, ideological and literal bankruptcy of Communism. Tintin was published in *Cœurs vaillants* during the Occupation. But the series "Tintin et Milou au pays de l'or noir" which had Europe of the immediate pre-war as a setting (in which the British army played a prominent part) was cut short (as it had been in *Le Petit Vingtième*) and replaced as lead strip by a new one, "La Cité Perdue." Jean Cordier "jeune colon français" is the front page hero of this new and lush (for the time) four

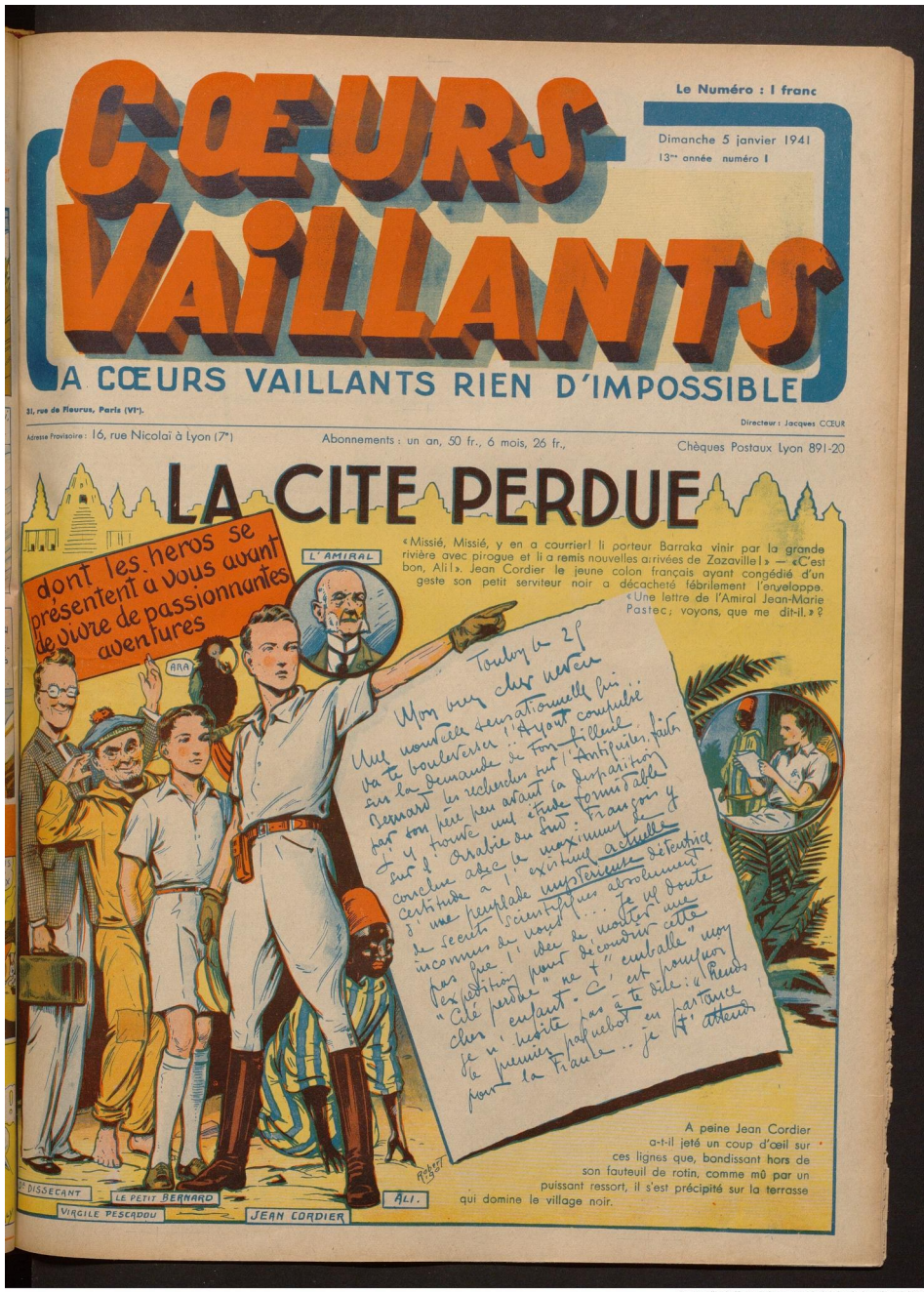
color strip which first appeared on January 5, 1941. Wearing jack boots and breeches (like the Langhosen worn by officers of the Wehrmacht, but white) and matching leather gloves (also standard Wehrmacht officer uniform, but brown) and a holster (but not gun-shaped), Jean is pictured pointing the way forward to the exciting adventures to follow. A handwritten letter from his uncle, explaining the "thrilling" mission to hunt down in "South Arabia" a mysterious people who hold incredible scientific secrets is placed alongside and serves as an introduction to the strip (Figure 1; *Cœurs Vaillants*, January 5, 1941, front page).

If the breeches and jackboots and black character on his knees weren't enough of a clue of colonial marauding and contempt for non-white races, the letter is introduced by a tellingly worded paragraph of racist text:

> Missié, Missié, y en a courrier ! li porteur Barraka vinir par la grande rivière avec pirogue et li a remis nouvelles arrivées de Zazaville ! » - « C'est bon Ali ! ». Jean Cordier le jeune colon français ayant congédié d'un geste son petit serviteur noir a décacheté fébrilement l'enveloppe « Une lettre de L'Amiral Jean-Marie Pastec; voyons, que me dit-il. » ? (*Cœurs vaillants*, January 5, 1941).

Interestingly, it is the Great War that has the most explicit exposure in this issue of *Cœurs vaillants*. In the text feature "La Nuit Tragique du Bois Noir" (*Cœurs vaillants*, January 5, 1941, 4), death in combat is presented to the young reader as a religious homily in text form about a pious child who never forgets his dream to be an explorer to find myrrh and finishes up mortally wounded. It's a piece that commends sacrifice for the country and frames death as a journey from pain and fear to the bliss of ascendance into heaven with the chaplain by his side. In one respect, it conveys the message that death in combat is never wasteful and sacrificing oneself for one's country is the "gift" (the myrrh) he had set out to find. But it also could be taken to be providing solace and comfort to young readers grieving the dead of the Battle of France of the previous year in which over 90,000 French soldiers perished. Both the aforementioned features are implicitly uncritical of war and they also could be said to operate as propaganda. A colonial adventure restates France as an imperial power when anti-British propaganda claims that the former allies and perfidious imperialists are coveting its overseas territories—particularly after destroying the French fleet at Mers-el-Kébir on 3 July 1940. And a feature about a soldier dying a worthwhile death may have been intended to counterbalance claims of the nascent Resistance that the Battle of France was an avoidable debacle.

Also seen in *Cœurs vaillants* are traces of the rhetoric of the "Revolution Nationale" aimed at young people who were a particular target for a Vichy administration determined to straighten out the offspring of



Source gallica.bnf.fr / La Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image

Figure 1. *Cœurs Vaillants*, January 5, 1941, front page. Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

the Popular Front generation for whom—according to Vichy—church, country and family mattered less than feckless self-indulgence. This message is seen in text snippets of editorials like that of the first issue of 1943 with the title—by way of admonishment—"Cela dépend de vous": "A l'heure actuelle le monde est triste, le monde souffre. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'il a oublié Dieu. La cause des malheurs du monde c'est l'égoïsme" (*Cœurs Vaillants* January 3, 1943, 3). In cartoons, this moral "redressement" is routinely trotted out through "Les Aventures de Jean-François, chef d'équipe." One vivid example of this comes from 1941 where a naughty schoolboy is reprimanded for the careless spilling of ink which is worked into a lecture about how such bad behavior is particularly unacceptable in France's hour of need. The tone and language are redolent of how Vichy was trying to mobilize civilians behind the "recovery project" of its Révolution Nationale. The reader is set a comprehension exercise to ensure that the message of the cartoon had got through: "Pourquoi le maître était-il si mécontent du temps perdu à cause de Raoul ? Pourquoi a-t-il dit qu'en ce moment un écolier devait avoir à cœur de bien travailler ? Comment ce travail contribue-t-il au relèvement de la France ?" (Michallat 2018, 17–18).

Coq Hardi, first published in France in November 1944 is an interesting example of how war was countenanced in a post-Occupation comic before the 1949 legislation. The strip "Tonnerre sur le Pacifique" in issue January 5, 1945, featured battle scenes, injury and heinous behavior (on the part of the enemy of course) which would not have been possible after 1949. Here, the stranded, defenseless aviator of a downed plane is shot through the wrist by a merciless and relentless enemy but, in an about-turn of fortunes, the American pilots win the day (and the battle) when the plane navigator regains consciousness and mows down the Japanese with a machine gun. It is interesting that conflict, even before 1949, is displaced and set in a far-flung place between foreign adversaries in a connected, yet remote theatre of war in which the French are not involved. War was elsewhere present, but largely by way of the commemoration of Resistance heroes (in text and comic strip form) and lighthearted gag strips poking childish fun at the Germans. In the second issue, there is the illustrated story of Adrien Baugé who joins the Maquis to "se soustraire au STO" (forced labor to contribute to the German war effort) and risks his life in daring adventure when separated from his unit (*Coq Hardi* November 20, 1944, 2). In issue 7, February 3, 1945, "L'Évasion de Pontmort," another illustrated text feature, recounts how the deportation of resistance fighters to hard labor camps was foiled by a maquisard ambush in Clermont-Ferrand (*Coq Hardi* February 3, 1945, 4). For the most part, and particularly in cartoons, representations of the War in France kept clear of anything violent yet made reference to a

common lived experience. In a four panel gag strip, "Le Piège à Fritz," a young beret-wearing patriot singlehandedly captures a German soldier by tricking him into taking a sausage attached to a weight that drops on his head (*Coq Hardi*, November 30, 1944a, 2). In another sketch from the same issue, the ingenious Flipette runs out of matches to light the stove (matches were in short supply), pinches a cigarette out of her father's coat pocket and asks a stranger for a light much to the consternation of passersby (*Coq Hardi* November 30, 1944b, 4). The publication's flagship series, "Les Trois Mousquetaires du Maquis," continues in this vein with simple drawings and dialogues evoking civilian experience of the Occupation and puns, slang, nicknames are used to poke fun at the Germans. In the issue of February 3, 1945, the slang term "les frisés" is used, and a stubborn old horse—called Fernandel, possibly in mocking reference to the popular comic actor who starred in films throughout the Occupation—obstructs the German pursuit of the Maquis. In the issue of January 10, 1945, the Germans are referred to as "fridolins" (Krauts), "pèlerins de la nouvelle Europe" (pilgrims of the new Europe) and "lezards" (lizards).

Pilote Magazine and Changing Representations of War

Pilote was launched on October 29, 1959. It was primarily a text-based magazine in its early years with approximately a third of its content comprising comic strips designed around a formula of newspaper and radio topicality and pedagogical content based on science, technology and natural history. It was a three-way collaboration between Radio Luxembourg, the newspaper press and established comic strip writers and artists Jean-Michael Charlier, Albert Uderzo and René Goscinny. The "pilot" was emblematic of the jet-powered new age encompassing aviation industry and re-militarization and, of course, the solid education young boys needed to follow in his footsteps. The scénariste of *Pilote*'s flagship strip, Jean-Michel Charlier, who had been censured for depicting the Korean War only a year after its end in his Buck Danny strip, diluted the military aspect in its early issues by casting the pilots Tanguy and Laverdure as trainees. In the issue published on 21 October 1960, almost a year to the day after the first 200,000 issues of *Pilote* dropped into subscriber mailboxes and hit news kiosks across France, the front cover titled "24 heures avec un pilote de jet" has two fighter pilots standing on an airbase tarmac in flying overalls pointing quizzically towards the horizon (*Pilote* October 21, 1960). References to air warfare in Tanguy and Laverdure, as in Buck Danny later in the 1950s, did not sublimate soldiering into civil ambition entirely. Algeria, Morocco and Indochina are the colonial and cold war

theatres for a reconstituted French military in the 1950s and 1960s, and Tanguy and Laverdure's early adventures are against the background of the desert of Morocco. But, in these early "Tanguy et Laverdure" strips, the characters go into battle against themselves, their own perceived weaknesses and character flaws. The first episode, "L'École des aigles," is about a character's struggle to overcome "cowardice" in order to emulate and honor the memory of his father who had died in combat. Here, St Helier, the "cowardly" fellow trainee, bravely executes a courageous flying maneuver to save the lives of his comrades but dies in doing so, earning himself a posthumous honor (*Pilote* October 21, 1960, 18). Working conflict into comics through messages of self-betterment in order to attenuate the violent face of the military or, in the case of sport, through physical struggle and "healthy" competition was common in the magazine. Roger Rivière, one of the leading French cyclists of his day speaks of his "battle" to recover from his injuries sustained in a fall. In a contribution to *Pilote*, he writes "Le fait de rédiger ces lignes est mieux qu'un symbole. Pour moi c'est la confirmation que je viens de franchir victorieusement une nouvelle étape" (*Pilote* October 21, 1960, 3). Another way of getting fighting in was by "piggy-backing" it on existing conflict narratives already introduced into the public domain through cinema and television. *Pilote* made good use of strips—some of which were imported from the British press—to displace conflict to historically distant contexts. Twentieth Century Fox's western film *Broken Arrow* (1950) was reproduced as "Cochise" (*Pilote* October 21, 1960, 12). Ivanhoe was adapted by Parras (*Pilote* October 21, 1960, 3). The "Démon des Caraïbes," pirate story was another, which, interestingly begins with Barbe Rouge's men slaughtering the helpless parents of hero Eric (although we don't of course see this happening) who, a babe in arms, is discovered, pitied and adopted by the pillaging, murdering pirate leader.

For now, like *Cœurs Vaillants and Coq Hardi* before it, *Pilote* skipped over the gore and trauma, persecution and deprivation of both wars in favour of the commemoration of heroes and martyrs. In the issue of November 10, 1960, an article titled "11 Novembre 1918 le monde sortait d'un cauchemar" commemorates the 42nd anniversary of the internment of the remains of the unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe on November 11, 1918 (*Pilote*, November 10, 1960, 3). The "dark days" of the Occupation are worked into the same feature but only to pick out the heroism of those so determined to light the flame of remembrance for France's war dead that they did so on the day the Germans marched into Paris in June 1940 and even during the street battles at the Liberation in August 1944. Only a month later, on December 15, 1960, the Occupation returned and, again, it was packaged as a heroic commemoration by way of a

cartoon based on Adrien Dansette's biography of General Leclerc. The Leclerc motif—the general and his tanks rolling into Paris "first" in August 1944—was routinely employed to exaggerate France's role in its own Liberation. The feature is another tribute/eulogy to a dead hero with an account of "tragedy" of Leclerc's death in an airplane crash in 1947 prefacing the cartoon. War, it would seem, passed muster if it leapfrogged over the business of killing to the heroic sacrifice (*Pilote*, December 15, 1960, 17).

In fact, it was "Astérix le Gaulois," a cartoon designed like "Tanguy" specifically for *Pilote* which engaged the most vividly and robustly with France's wartime history in early strips, with its evocation of the Occupation shifting from implicit by way of its concept to explicit by way of its plot by 1965. The strip concept and the episodic story plots were, like the *Pilote* concept itself, designed for both adult and child readers. Astérix was a good fit with the school "friendly" formula of *Pilote*. Goscinny's characters were the schoolyard boys of his narrative for the Sempé illustrated "Petit Nicolas" strip. The dreamy poet, the chubby dullard, the feisty hothead running around in a gang defying the teachers, who in 50 BC, were cast as the hapless romans unable, like teachers, to maintain order. Latin, the cornerstone of a good French education, was scattered across the pages and every episode opened with the map of Roman Gaul, a "clin d'oeil" to the illustrations of the textbooks of the core history curriculum (Michallat 2018, 73–75). This was not only great entertainment: it was a powerful diversion for a parallel concept of war, which had not been a subject of fictional *bande dessinée*, in any sustained way, since the Liberation. The re-telling of the Occupation as a heroic struggle of a France that never gave up is obvious. A small but resolute tribe of Gauls—"authentic" ancestors not only of the French, but of the French national character—hold out stubbornly and with ingenuity. Their "savoir-faire," camaraderie, solidarity and knowledge of the land wrong-foot the bumbling, disoriented enemy who suffer routine defeats and humiliation to those it expected to crush. It is a cartoon incarnation of the Gaullist myth of "resistancialisme," a term coined by Henry Rousso to describe France's post-war exaggeration of military resistance and civilian opposition to the German occupation. The "Tour de Gaule" episode ran in *Pilote* in 1963 and was re-published in album format in 1965. In short, the Romans build a wall to pen the Gauls into the village but, refusing to be imprisoned, Astérix declares that Gauls will not be prisoners in their own country, declaring that he and sidekick Obelix will tour the country collecting from each town and city they visit en route a delicacy of the region as proof that they have passed through. Throughout the journey, they are shielded and sheltered from the pursuing Romans by locals—

other than one collaborator who denounces them for monetary reward (Goscinny and Uderzo 1965).

By the late 1960s, allegorical representations of military and social conflict sublimated into benign narratives were challenged by a new genre of "statement" *bande dessinée*. A younger generation of politically literate artists had emerged, many of whom had an art college or university education. This was the generation that would drive the May 1968 protests. In respect of the cartoon industry, they were committed to the overthrow of what they saw as an authoritarian grip that stifled free expression on youth publications. This "grip" was State control through censorship and the micro-management of content which, it was perceived, favored commercial interests (and commercial exploitation) and, also, contributed to the careful management of the pro-Gaullist political narrative in the post-war period. One of the mainstays of de Gaulle's legitimacy—the *résistancialisme* "myth"—was exposed to problematization and challenge by a younger generation of historians, thinkers, writers, filmmakers and also comic artists. A first generation of young cartoonists who, for the most part, had not lived through the war began to challenge the dominant narrative, and older, more established artists saw which way the wind was blowing in market terms and joined in. After the attempted "coup" at *Pilote* in 1968 and the subsequent agreement to allow artists to introduce satire on topical issues through the feature "actualités" the necessity of a quick turn-around of work meant that there was an influx of work from new freelancers as well as more established artists. The rapid turnover also meant that there was more need for originality to provide the necessary copy to fill the pages. Still, not many of these new one-off "statement strips" addressed the Occupation and the ones that did included it in the range of topics deserving of mockery.

Pilote and the Memory Turn of the Late 1960s–Early 1970s

Finally, the memory turn of the late 1960s and 1970s gave the representation of war a new impetus in *Pilote* through strips that satirized erstwhile representations of patriotic glory, valor and collective resistance and reactivated war as an expression of the pacifism that had been instrumental in neutering its violent expression from the earliest years of the inter-war.

Issues of Francis Cavanna's *Hara-Kiri* had, from the early 1960s, made the "old soldier" an object of ridicule in one-off sketches poking fun at the war generation's conceit, self-entitlement and pomposity. In *Pilote*, by 1968, similar themes were being picked up and, on occasion, were the unique subject of "histoires complètes" like Chakir's "L'Invasion"—an episode of the strip series "Tracassin"—where French and German veterans

hear of a plan to twin a town in Alsace and a town in Lorraine, and erupt in belligerent objection which takes a pugilist turn. They rampage across the border and descend on the town hall where the subject is being debated only to be thrown out by a bunch of long-haired youths who taunt them as fake veterans (Chakir 1968, 14–15). "La Guerre véhiculaire" by Chakir (*Pilote* April 19, 1973, 36–37) is, on the face of it, a strip about environmental pollution caused by motor cars choking the roads. In fact, it is used as a jumping-off point for satirical gags referencing contemporary politics and historical events. The "MLR" (Mouvement de Libération des Routes) is a skit on the newly formed "MLF" (Mouvement de la Libération des Femmes) and in all likelihood an allusion to the *Nouvel Observateur*'s recently published "Le Manifeste de 343 salopes 1971" in the context of the campaign for abortion rights. From second-wave feminism, the strip jumps into an allegory of the most repugnant examples of French-on-French abuses during the Occupation. The largely unspoken darker side of "les années noires," which is stirring interest in film, in particular, at the end of the 1960s into the early 1970s, begins to show up in cartoons. Here, the "Mouvement de la Libération des Routes" gets into power and immediately transforms into a Vichy-like fascist administration, the "Mouvement réactionnaire et ségrégationniste." The Holocaust (and the part France played in it) is referenced with a caricature of Hitler at the rostrum brandishing a yellow sticker that cars would have to "wear" so that the "sales bagnoles" could be identified (Chakir 1973, 37). The milice (French paramilitary fascist police) is in charge and meetings of the opposition are forbidden. Those in yellow stickered cars are attacked, there are lynchings, people are forced to leave carrying suitcases, and automobile businesses are incarcerated in concentration camps if they complain. The resistance emerges and civil war ensues.

In 1973, Pélaprat et Billon's "Ah ! Le Beau temps de l'Occupation" (*Pilote* July 5, 1973, 22–23) is, like Chakir's "La Guerre véhiculaire," a strip that narrates the dark underside of the Occupation and it swoops aggressively over the inaccuracies in the historical record, concentrating, in particular on the civilian experience. An elderly woman tells of life under Occupation to an attentive audience of hippie youths sitting around her chair. But there was no nostalgia here for the myth of civilian togetherness against the common foe trotted out by the State. Instead, she picks holes in the familiar narrative. Civilians did indeed "lier connaissance dans les queues" but by bickering and fighting over who was first. In the cellar shelters during air raids, it was possible to make friends too, if you didn't mind being groped by your neighbor. The liberating American army rode through Paris in tanks but the outpouring of joy was less about being liberated and more about getting cigarettes and

chewing gum. The final frames are the most damning because they expose the scandal of the "femmes tondues"; women brutalized by the Resistance at the Liberation by having their heads shaved and being paraded and humiliated before a hostile public. Back then, the woman says, long hair wasn't so much in fashion, with a final frame showing her with a shaved head against the background of a flag of the FFI resistance movement.

A final example, "Sergent Laterreur," written by Frydman and illustrated by Touis, was an anti-militarist skit on the lunacy of war and those perpetrating it. The series appeared in *Pilote* between 1971 and 1973 and was the first single-strip representation of a modern-day French military in the magazine. Occasionally, embedded in 1970s cartoon narratives, are references to other well-known strips to appeal to an audience of experienced reader-fans. Here, the pocket-sized Sergent and the corpulent buffoon soldier side-kick he maligns and berates recalls the Astérix and Obélix pairing and dynamic in Goscinny and Uderzo's strip. Disrespectful spoofs of famous strips were beginning to appear in new-era cartoons and the Astérix concept of French historical comedy had been tried out in "histoires completes" in attempts to ride on its success. "Sergent Laterreur" could be said to subtly co-opt and spoof Astérix's war theme. Unlike Astérix though, the protagonists do not have a patriotic battle that they and the reader can get behind. In the episode "Mode d'emploi" in issue 623 of October 14, 1971, the regiment has taken delivery of a "fabulous" new tank and the Sergent is handed an instruction booklet which he cannot wait to use. Off he goes and with each press of a button he visits destruction on the environment and ultimately on the tank and on himself. The gag is that the instruction booklet is for his wife's new washing machine which, like Chakir's polluting cars, could be read as a critique of the materialism and chaos of modern living. By the early 1970s, the rapid modernization of the *trente glorieuses*, increasingly in evidence in *Pilote*'s cartoons, was emerging as a new symbol of societal conflict (*Pilote* October 14, 1971, 28–29).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

Azéma, Jean-Pierre. 1994. "Les Libérations de la France: Prologue." *French Cultural Studies* 5 (15): 223–226.

Budgen, David. 2010. "British Children's Books and the First World War 1914–2007." PhD diss., University of Kent, 87–136. https://kar.kent.ac.uk/id/eprint/94244.

Chakir. 1968. "L'Invasion." *Pilote*, November 21, 14–15.

Chakir. 1973. "La Guerre véhiculaire." *Pilote*, April 19, 36–37.
Coeurs vaillants. 1941. l'Union des œuvres catholiques de France (UOCF), January 5.
Coeurs vaillants. 1943. "Cela dépend de vous" January 3, 3.
Commission de Surveillance et de Contrôle des Publications Destinées à L'Enfance et à l'adolescence. Compte Rendu. 1952. *Loi n° 49–956 du 16 juillet 1949 sur les publications destinées à la jeunesse*, 1–36. Melun: Imprimerie administrative.
Cœurs vaillants. 1944. November 20, 2.
Coq Hardi. 1944a. "Au Service de la France: Combat dans les Bruyères." November 30, 2.
Coq Hardi. 1944b. "Flipette et la Crise des allumettes" 30 November, 4.
Coq hardi. 1945. "L'Evasion de Pontmort." February 3, 4.
Daves, Delmer, dir. 1950. *Broken Arrow*. USA: 20th Century Studios
Dodd, Lindsey. 2016. *French Children under the Allied Bombs, 1940–45: An Oral History*. Oxford University Press; Manchester University Press.
Dodd, Lindsey. 2020. "The Evacuation of Children inside Wartime France." *Nottingham French Studies* 59 (2): 159–173. https://www.euppublishing.com/doi/10.3366/nfs.2020.0282. https://doi.org/10.3366/nfs.2020.0282.
Dodd, Lindsey. 2022. "It's Not What I Saw, It's Not What I Thought': challenges from below to Dominant Versions of the French Wartime past." *Conserveries Mémorielles* 1 (25): 1–21. http://journals.openedition.org/cm/5169.
Goscinny and Uderzo. 1965. *Le Tour de Gaule d'Astérix*. Paris: Dargaud Editeur.
Mahé, Camille. 2024. "Pédagogies nouvelles, échanges scolaires… Après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, comment les enfants sont devenus acteurs de la paix," *The Conversation*, December 10. https://theconversation.com/pedagogies-nouvelles-echanges-scolaires-apres-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale-comment-les-enfants-sont-devenus-acteurs-de-la-paix-239651.
Michallat, Wendy. 2018. *French Cartoon Art in the 1960s and 1970s: Pilote hebdomadaire and the teenager bande dessinée*. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press.
Osbourne, Ken. 2016. Creating the "International Mind": The League of Nations Attempts to Reform History Teaching, 1920–1939 *History of Education Quarterly* 56 (1): 213–240.
Ory, Pascal. 1979. *Le Petit Nazi illustré. Une pédagogie hitlérienne en culture française : « Le Téméraire » (1943–1944)*. Paris: Éditions Albatros.
Osborne, Brian S. 2001. "In the Shadows of Monuments: The British League for the Reconstruction of the Devastated Areas of France." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7 (1): 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527250118973.
Pilote. 1960. October 21. Paris: Sté Nlle d'Exploitation du Journal Pilote.
Pilote. 1960. December 15. Paris: Sté Nlle d'Exploitation du Journal Pilote.
Pilote. 1971. October 14. Paris: Dargaud Editeur.
The Observer. 1920. "Fifty French Towns Adopted." December 19, 18.

Notes on Contributor

Wendy Michallat is Senior Lecturer in French at the University of Sheffield. She specializes in twentieth century French cultural history and has written on post-war French cartoon art, French feminism of the inter-war, women's football in Britain and France and life-writing under the Occupation. Her most recent research focuses on British working-class women and language studies in inter-war Britain about which she is currently writing a monograph.