

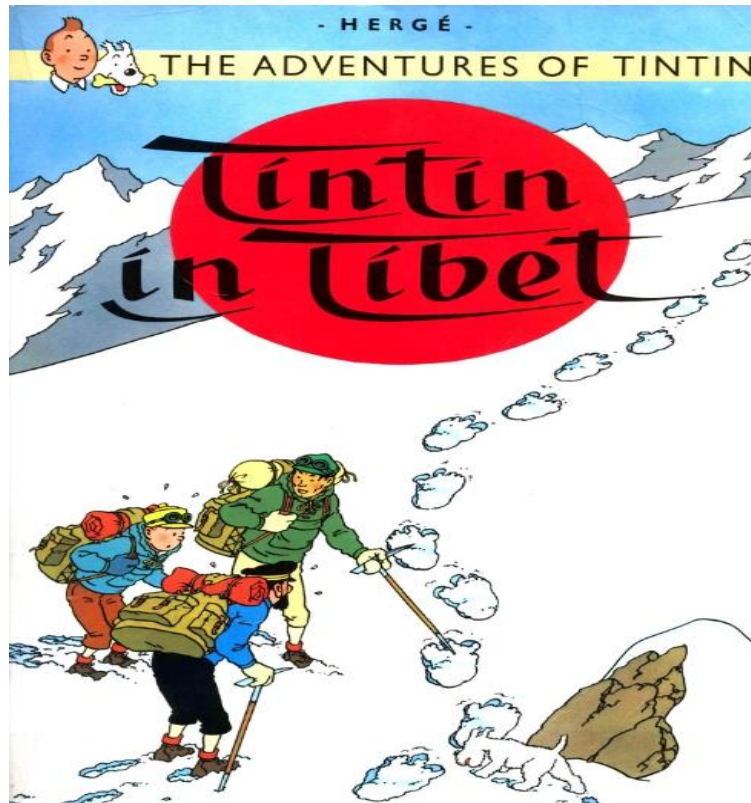
The Department of English

RAJA N.L. KHAN WOMEN'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)
Midnapore, West Bengal

Course material- 3 on

Tintin in Tibet

(Insights on critical issues)



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Tintin in Tibet

The theme of friendship and camaraderie

“A song dedicated to friendship” is what Herge had to say about *Tintin in Tibet*. The entire story is all about a friend’s quest to save his friend’s life, come what may. Through this album, Herge is seen championing the bond of friendship and brotherhood that has always been a part of Tintin adventures since its advent into the literary scene. However, in this particular story, the entire plot is woven around friendship and bonds, displaying multiple pairs, new and old. Like all other stories, the bond between Snowy and Tintin, the one between Tintin and Haddock is shown to be in perfect sync. They share a relationship that involves love, trust and absolute commitment. Haddock, the retired sea-faring Captain did accompany Tintin in a voyage he did not like. His concern for Tintin drove him away from a comfortable holiday and brought him in the middle of rough and cruel nature as they found in the Tibetan Himalayas. But what stands out in this story is the relationship between Chang and Tintin.

The story was set into motion with Tintin determined to save Chang who is believed to be dead by everyone. The plot is provided impetus to move forward as Tintin discovers a crucial circumstantial evidence in the form of a scarf. The story reached its climax when the Blessed Lightening had his vision and Tintin finally finds Chang in the cave. The resolution of the plot was also a way to rekindle the old fire that warmed their friendship. Another defining pair in the story is the Yeti and Chang. Herge, very consciously deconstructed the age-old belief that Yeti was a creature who was inherently cruel and abominable. The Yeti is show to be creature with compassion, who seeks love and coziness. Herge writes, “My Yeti is a being that also seeks friendship. Already at the outset I had the intention of making him more human and not at all abominable.” Yeti was finally considered to be a creature that looked like a beast but had a warm heart. Chang’s words towards the end of the story are enough evidence to testify that it was only because of the Yeti’s care and comfort that Chang could sustain and did not

succumb to the pressing needs of hunger and cold. The final scene of the story is bound to melt one's heart when the Yeti is found looking at the caravan that is carrying his friend Chang away from him forever, with eyes soft with sadness and pain of separation.

Limited cast in Tintin in Tibet

Tintin in Tibet is also significant because of the struggle it poses for all the characters in it. The entire story is fraught with multiple difficulties that must be overcome to bring about the resolution. To begin with, the trek along the Himalayas to reach the wreckage of the crashed plane was a very difficult task to undertake. Not only would one require essential skills, but also certain degree of alertness would be needed to survive in the rough mountains. Encountering intense cold, snowstorms and a life in tent was always on the card. Therefore, it would indeed be foolish to imagine Professor Calculus or Bianca Castafiore scaling unimaginably steep cliffs with Tintin. This had limited the cast of this story to the essentials, keeping out characters who might find the situation thoroughly uncomfortable. Calculus is found only at the beginning of the story and in the Captain's dream, while Bianca Castafiore is only heard in the porter's tent but not seen. Also, the principle of trekking requires one to carry luggage as light as possible, without any trace of extravagances. Similarly, it was indeed a conscious decision on Herge's part to cut short Tintin's extended family to just Tintin himself, the Captain and Snowy. Dropping extra baggage might also have symbolic significance in Herge's personal life. It was during this time that Herge's conjugal life with Germaine had gone dry and cold. This marriage seemed to be weight he wanted to drop but couldn't due to his strict Catholic upbringing, after fell in love with Fanny Vlaminc, a young artist who joined his 'Studios'.

Can *Tintin in Tibet* be considered a graphic novel?

Richard Kyle first coined the term “graphic novel” to mean a novel in illustrations and dialogues. A graphic novel is generally considered to be a published book that involves a self-contained story employing the comic form. A graphic novel includes a complete story with a beginning, a climax and a proper resolution, much like a novel or a short story. A comic periodical, however, is serialized and tells the story only in fragments. Graphic novels had the advantage of being read in one go, as a self-sufficient comics, which the comic periodicals lacked. The length of a graphic novel offers the creator a greater scope to concentrate more on characters and issues instead of worrying about making each of the sections interesting in order to hold the readers for the next issue, like the periodicals. *Tintin in Tibet* does hold a very problematic ground when we tend to weigh its claim as a graphic novel. The fact that it was first published in serialized form in periodicals 1958 and 1960, does not do any good to this claim. However, if we consider its publication in the book form in 1960, it indeed subscribes to all the requirements of a graphic novel, which is also true for most of the albums in the series *The Adventures of Tintin*. Through brilliant illustrations and dialogues, *Tintin in Tibet* does give us a story sufficiently complex and layered to be called a graphic novel.

Lack of a villain par excellence in *Tintin in Tibet*

Most of the adventures of Tintin have furious and badass villains who make the plot even more complex and multi layered. More often than not, these villains prove to be a threat to harmonious living and ethical citizenship while they also pose a threat to Tintin’s life. In this regard, *Tintin in Tibet* is indeed an exception. This is one of the rare adventures which do not feature any substantial threat from a prominent and active villain. Yeti, initially thought to be an abominable creature, cruel and dangerous to be a perfect villain is seen to be an adorable one at the end of the story. In reality, in the context of the story, the incidents like the plane crash that catapulted the plot movement and the rough Himalayan terrain and its weather could be considered playing a negative

role, posing threat to Tintin and his group. Metaphorically, the inner fears and inhibitions in Tharkey, Tintin and Haddock before the trek begin was the villain that needed to be defeated in the course to the story.

Introduction of the supernatural in *Tintin in Tibet*

The employment of super-sensory perceptions in *Tintin in Tibet* was also something no one expected from Herge and had turned many heads, quite naturally. It began with the perceptive visions that Tintin had while he dozed off in the middle of a game of chess. It was this vision that hinted Tintin about Chang's distress and his present state of being, something that Tintin had no reasons to believe. This was fuelled by a letter from Chang and supported by the subsequently published news articles mentioning the plane crash and declaring Chang's death. However, the most powerful agent of the super-sensory powers was the Blessed Lightning. This Tibetan Buddhist monk had special powers which he used to levitate in the air and have visions and foresights about occurrences happening elsewhere. This too had immense significance in the construction of the plot. His visions were instrumental in discovering Tintin and his group in trouble, without any prior intimation, whatsoever. But this vision, and its use in identifying Snowy is crucial in the rescuing of the group. Similarly, it was also solely because of this supernatural power that Tintin got to know about Chang's whereabouts, which was otherwise absolutely impossible for him to find. Thus, calling the supernatural interventions in the plot movement a significant one can, in no way, be an overestimation.

Snowy's heroics in *Tintin in Tibet*

Snowy did his bit of foolery in this adventure as well. He was intrigued by the taste of leaking wine from the Captain's bottle and treated himself with it quite generously. With *Loch Lomond* working its trick, Snowy lost balance and fell into the river, thus landing the group into more troubles and was responsible for pure wastage of

time. This was a classic case of the ‘Id’ working its magic in Snowy, when the bad angel, the red one in the picture below, won.



Similarly, he got distracted when he discovered a bone towards the end of the story. He was given a very crucial responsibility of carrying the letter to the monastery, which was the only feasible option that Tintin, Haddock and Tharkey had for their survival. But the sight of a fresh and tasty bone brought back the fight between the good angel and the bad angel in him, i.e. the conscience (super-ego) and the desire (Id). However, his love for Tintin and his unflinching loyalty implored him to act sensibly and let Ego work its course. Fortunately, this time the good angel won and Snowy managed to rush to the monastery, where he was immediately recognized to be the dog in the Blessed Lightning’s vision. The day was saved.



Links for further readings

1. Farr, Michael. *Tintin: The Complete Companion*. Belgium: John Murray, 2001.
2. <http://www.en.tintin.com>
3. <http://www.tintinologist.org/guides/herge/>
4. <http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,986416,00.html/>

Link for watching an adaptation of *Tintin in Tibet*

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=h4kxIufj9w>

Links for watching other Tintin adventures

The Secret of the Unicorn:

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=qboqep_n6pA
https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=l2tS_TTt04Q

Land of Black Gold:

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=ZI_THZ0BUMc
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=cAtxXRrWi6g>

The Black Island:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=sw3BmjgrFo&list=PLnflkYIFZrHw8bT76gfKLDN7HQ2iI4eFx&index=7&t=0s>

The Adventures of Tintin, (2011 movie)

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=eFVOH-dKRWY>

The Calculus Affair

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=z1UocgNJ1Ns>

The Crab with Golden Claws

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=z1UocgNJ1Ns>

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=xckGfOt2Blg>

Cigars of the Pharaoh

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=0idA4p0Cp3A>

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=0idA4p0Cp3A>

Note:

With this material prepared by me, I am also attaching a very short essay, “Tintin and the Secret of Literature” by Tom McCarthy, which you might find useful.

[Excerpted from Tom McCarthy, *Tintin and the Secret of Literature* (London: Granta Books, 2006). Reprinted courtesy of the author and Granta Books.]

Tintin and the Secret of Literature

Tom McCarthy

How, then, can philosophy deal with the question of metaphor itself? ‘Only around a blind spot or central deafness,’ writes Derrida. Looking at philosophers’ attempts to do this, he is drawn to the example of metaphor that Aristotle favours in his *Poetics*: the sun casting forth light like a sower casting forth seeds. Wait a minute, Derrida says: when was it ever *seen* that the sun ‘casts forth’ light? The analogy relies on ‘a long and hardly visible chain’ of associations held together within language. But Aristotle’s choice of the sun is a good one, he continues, because all metaphors are heliotropic: they turn towards what is supposedly absolutely present and visible, and what is more absolutely present and visible than the sun? Is not the sun the very pre-condition of all presence and all visibility? And yet the sun is never wholly present within language; how could it be? It, too, turns, via all the figures, or ‘tropes’, of light and vision that pervade philosophy’s rhetoric of knowledge and understanding (clarity, insight, perception, illumination – they are everywhere). Metaphor, then, is doubly heliotropic: it is both the movement of sunflowers as they turn after the sun on the horizon *and* the turning of the (always metaphorical) sun itself within language. And notions of the true, the natural, are born of metaphor’s double-twist, its solar-floral prestidigitation – plucked from its hat, as it were. While classical philosophy turns always to the ‘true’, absolute sun, Derrida proposes that a more adventurous, poetic version of philosophy should let the absolute itself be taken captive, held to ransom, even disgorged at every moment in the twists and turns of language. To put it metaphorically: poetic and adventurous philosophy should collapse the sun into a sunflower and unfold it without limit, rupturing the horizon’s line, wresting open its circle.

Where is this new detour through secrets and sunflowers leading us? To the west, via Calculus – or, to restore to him his proper name, Toumesol: the turning flower who turns people into flowers via their names and people from their habits via flowers. As Abdullah finds out when he pushes him, *Tournesol tourne*: Tournesol turns, and turns, and turns. If he constantly mishears things, this is because the Epicurean Garden in which his flowerbed lies is located extremely close to the spot of central deafness that Derrida describes. Always twisting and mutating meanings, he is a principle of tropism, a tropic agent. On his entry to the books, he copies nature to make a submarine, giving his friends access to the bed of history. Returning from there, he makes money on the basis of his simulacrum. It is this money that returns Haddock to his home, completing his Odyssean circle, as we have seen. Later, as we have also seen, drawn westwards again by the sun, he distrusts the veracity of what the sun illuminates as it approaches its high noon, perceiving it as metaphor, which in fact it is. He, just as much as the others, is held by the forcefield of the secret – but he takes a different route through this, sliding sideways, turning words around, detouring through flowers, names, minerals to meaning. Tournesol is metaphor in action. While Tintin and Haddock track the secret and believe – mistakenly – that they have found it, he concerns himself with tropism’s embodiment, the pendulum, whose unending movement, rather than confirming the certainty of truth, unfolds it without limit. Philosophically and poetically speaking, Calculus is the real hero of the *Tintin* books.

[Excerpted from “Sirens, Symbols, Serendipity,” a talk given by Paul Feigelfeld at L’Atelier-ksr, Berlin, 23 April 2016. Reprinted courtesy of the author.]

Kittler and the Sirens

Paul Feigelfeld

Because this fiction - is history. It all happened. Or so the story goes. The Odyssey happened. The islands are real. The way it is told is fact and fiction, faction, science, poetry and history in one. Just like early science was philosophy and vice versa.

Ernie Bradford, retired Royal Navy first lieutenant, stayed in the Mediterranean and over many years of research and sailing recharted the course of Odysseus. So he also found the Li Galli islands - The Cocks - off the coast of Amalfi, close to Capri, also known now as the Sirenuse, the Siren Islands. One of them was purchased in 1922 by the principal choreographer of Diaghilev’s Ballet Russe, Léonide Massine, a close collaborator of Erik Satie and Pablo Picasso in creating the ballet Parade. Initially Massine restored and converted the old Aragonese Tower on Gallo Lungo into accommodation with a dance studio and featuring an open-air theatre. The theatre was subsequently destroyed by a storm. With design advice from his friend Le Corbusier he constructed a villa on the site of the original Roman structure. After Massine’s death the islands were purchased in 1988 by Russian dancer Rudolf Nureyev, who spent the last years of his life here. He redecorated the villa in the Moorish style and clad its interiors with 19th-century tiles from Seville.

And in 2004, a bunch of Berlin media scholars, led by Odysseus Kittler, creatively applied for some research grants and traveled to Li Galli, to find the Sirens. Actually, they brought their own.

in between, they pass the island of the Sirens. Or do they? This is where Kittler and his crew landed:

''Come here,' they sang, 'renowned Ulysses, honour to the Achaean name, and listen to our two voices. No one ever sailed past us without staying to hear the enchanting sweetness of our song - and he who listens will go on his way not only charmed, but wiser, for we know all the ills that the gods laid upon the Argives and Trojans before Troy, and can tell you everything that is going to happen over the whole world.'

"They sang these words most musically, and as I longed to hear them further I made by frowning to my men that they should set me free; but they quickened their stroke, and Eurylochus and Perimedes bound me with still stronger bonds till we had got out of hearing of the Sirens' voices. Then my men took the wax from their ears and unbound me."

The only problem being: From that distance, sailing past, you cannot hear, let alone understand what they were singing. If anything, you can make out the singsong of the vowels, but definitely no words or sentences. Ergo: Odysseus must have lied. He must have actually landed on the island to be, as the sirens promise, not only charmed, but wiser, and - and that's the part i never fully understood, but then again, it's Kittler - to have a threesome with the Sirens.

It's all about vowels and consonants, and about the edges of sound. Without the Alphabet, there is no poetry, no mathematics, no art, no knowledge.

We rarely recognize it, but since Sappho, we haven't read secrets between the lines, but between symbols. When one goes by way of symbols or characters, for the moment, there is neither the true nor the false, but only what possesses voice and what is without voice.

PHONEENTA

"φωνήεντα" (phoneenta / possessing voice) and "ἄφωνα" (aphona / without voice, voiceless) says a dead tortoise to the poetess, hence vowel and consonant.

Only those who possess speech can be speechless. At the transition from spoken or sung language to writing, it is poetry that seals the acoustic continuum with the two component adhesive of vowels and consonants. The great achievement in the form of the Greek vocal alphabet—whoever may then have invented it—was making it possible, by means of a finite number of symbols, to write the infinite of the acoustic, the continuum of flowing voiced vowels along with consonants that are voiceless or even sound along with the vowels and to mark the edges of sound, thus also initiating oxymoron and ontology.

"We have already detected an ancient analogy between language and love, implicit in the conception of breath as universal conductor of seductive influence and of persuasive speech. Here at the entrance to written language and literate thinking we see that analogy revived by the archaic writers who first ventured to record their poems. The alphabet they used is a unique instrument. Its uniqueness unfolds directly from its power to mark the edges of sound. For [. . .] the Greek alphabet is a phonetic system uniquely concerned to represent a certain aspect of the act of speech, namely the starting and stopping of each sound. Consonants are the crucial factor. Consonants mark the edges of sounds. The erotic relevance of this is clear, for we have seen that eros is vitally alert to the edges of things and makes them felt by lovers."

The first oxymoron in history—sweetbitter, or bittersweet, as we say today—is also found in one fragment by Sappho:

Ἔρος δηΐτέ μ' ὀ λυσιμέλης δόνει,
 γλυκύπικρον μάχανον ὄρπετον
 Eros once again limb-loosener whirls me,
 Sweetbitter, impossible to fight off, creature stealing up beast irrepressibly
 creeping in.

Sweetbitter is Eros, the god of absence, sweet is the flow of vowels, bitter their consonant edges. Sweet, bitter are also the cosmogonic pairs of opposites that Aristotle has appear in *Metaphysics*. All being sounds together in the bittersweet symphony of the oxymoron, the flowing and the constant, the unbounded and the bordering...

In the work of Aristotle this leads directly further to the systematizing of this cosmos in the grammar of language and writing. He writes in his *Poetics*:

Language in general includes the following parts: letter, syllable, connecting word, noun, verb, inflection or case, sentence or phrase. A letter is an indivisible sound, yet not every such sound, but only one which can form part of a group of sounds. For even brutes utter indivisible sounds, none of which I call a letter. The sound I mean may be either a vowel, a semivowel, or a mute. A vowel is that which without impact of tongue or lip has an audible sound. A semivowel, that which with such impact has an audible sound, as “S” and “R.” A mute, that which with such impact has by itself no sound, but joined to a vowel sound becomes audible, as “G” and “D”. . . . A syllable is a nonsignificant sound, composed of a mute and a vowel, for “GR” without “A” is a syllable, as also with “A—GRA.”

The fact that Aristotle supposedly stuttered does not only stand literally in this text. Thus, G-R-A-GR-GRA-GRA, slow morphemes, syllables, and ultimately a word called grammar is spoken and written starting from stochastic *stoicheia* (Lat. elements / Gr. letter). In the first occidental analytic science of language, there are therefore disruptions, moods, and (their) fluctuations.

Between sirens, symbols and sand, the serendipity of knowledge and invention is always tied to technologies, play, and love.