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**Les femmes et la bande dessinée: autorialités et
représentations**

Women Comics Authors in France and Belgium Before the 1970s: Making Them Invisible

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Women Comics Authors in France and Belgium Before the 1970s: Making Them Invisible

Jessica Kohn

Introduction

- 1 The question of the poor representation of women amongst comics authors in Europe and the United States has been addressed repeatedly in the last decade (Groensteen, 2014; Robbins, 2013; Falardeau, 2014). However, in France, the recent studies of the États Généraux de la Bande Dessinée [EGBD], which focus on comics authors' social status, have shown the number to be widely underestimated. Indeed, when the Angoulême festival estimated that 15% of comics authors were women, the EGBD set this figure at 27%.
- 2 This underestimation does not only apply to the present time, but also to the history of the comics field in general. I am currently writing a social history of cartoonists and illustrators in France and in Belgium between 1945 and 1968. A seminal part of my work is quantitative: I study a population of 400 cartoonists who worked in illustrated magazines between 1945 and 1968, of which at least 80% (320) once drew in the comics form. While studying this sample, I discovered that the emergence of Claire Bretécher and Florence Cestac in the comics industry around 1968 has been mistakenly taken as a key date for women in comics history. In fact, at least 7% of comics authors were women after World War Two, some of whom had even started to work in the 1930s.
- 3 Few people remember the names of Manon Iessel, Marie-Mad or Nadine Forster, but their drawings did appear in illustrated magazines which children and young people would buy weekly. However, almost none of their comics work were published in book form, a fact which partly explains why they were forgotten so quickly. As a historian, I am thus confronted with a methodological challenge: there is both a need to retrieve information about these authors' careers in order to correct a blind spot in the field of comics history,

and to understand why and how they were made invisible. Indeed, this state of ignorance is related to the issue of women's overlooked role in the labor force in general, which was acknowledged quite late in social history; but it is also linked to a cultural question, concerning women's role in modeling mass culture during the “Trente Glorieuses” (the thirty years of post-war economic growth in France).

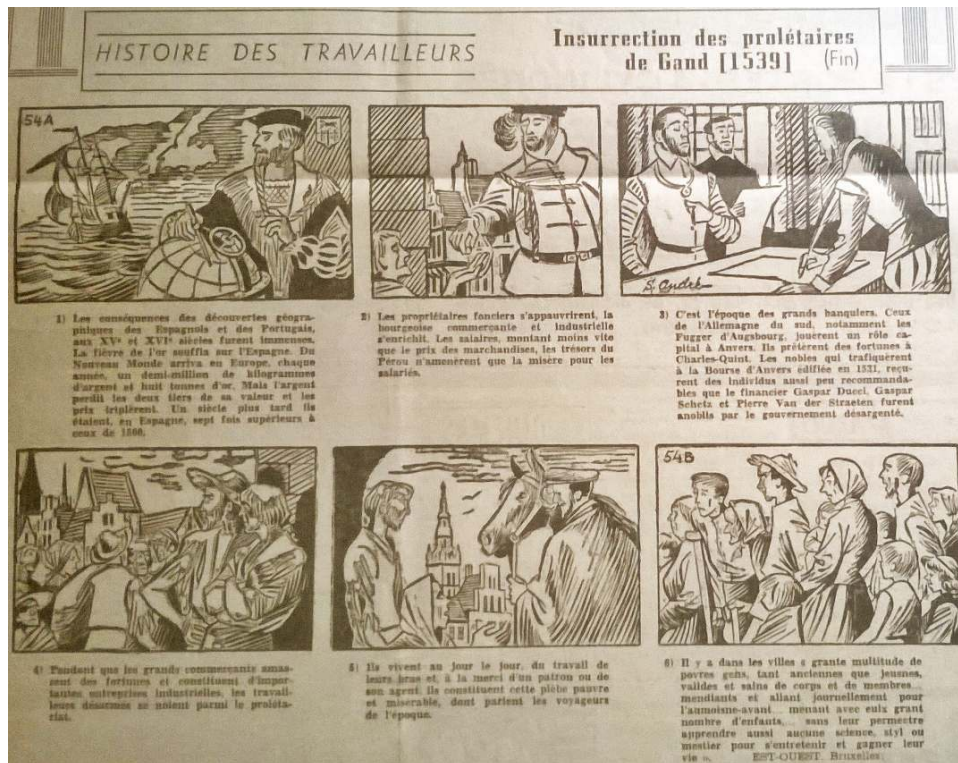
- 4 Therefore, I began a social history of those women, and I tried to decipher what differences existed between their male counterparts and them, regarding their social origin, their schooling and artistic training, and their professional and personal trajectory. In the process, I discovered that women were often given subordinate tasks or associated with a certain childlike style that belied the diversity of their talents. Moreover, it seems that the specificity of the cartoonist's profession, which at the time was quite a solitary pursuit, made it difficult for them to encounter other women and build a social network made of common references. Thus, a woman's specific approach to drawing was hardly an option before the 1970s, either in the style they used, the themes they addressed or the contacts they made in the world of cartoonists. Consequently, it was not possible for them to fight the process of invisibilization they underwent.

The women who drew

The famous 5

- 5 When I started my research, I was told there were only five women cartoonists in France and in Belgium before the 1970s : Liliane Funcken, Suzanne André, Claire Bretécher, Manon Iessel and Marie-Madeleine Bourdin. The usual narratives concerning these women are rather bland, when they are not purely demeaning. They do not benefit from the overall fascination for 1950s-1960s Franco-Belgian comics the way male authors do in publications such as *Les Cahiers de la Bande Dessinée*, *Hop* or *Le Collectionneur de Bandes Dessinées*.
- 6 In mainstream literature, Claire Bretécher is the only woman named when talking about French comics in the 1960s. One could say she is a “Gotlib with a skirt”, in the same way Anne Sylvestre is often depicted as being “une Brassens en jupons” (Pruvost, 2016). More than an individual and a professional woman cartoonist, Bretécher has become an allegory, the exception which helps to trace the contours of a men-only field. However, her fame remains limited : while Gotlib had a 2-floor exhibition at the Jewish Art and Culture Museum in Paris in 2014, Bretécher's show in 2015 was held in the library at the Centre Pompidou, and was not half as long. Overall, she has given fewer interviews in specialized or non specialized media than most famous authors. The fact that she chose to self-produce some of her books is a telltale sign that she does not entirely fit in the professional comics world. Though she has tried to fight being described as a *woman* cartoonist, for many she embodies that specific characteristic.
- 7 Suzanne André's career was seminal as a Belgian cartoonist. If she is remembered, it is not because of her contributions to girls' magazines (such as *Annette*, 1945-8), but because she was a collaborator of *Tintin* magazine in Belgium, a status few women can claim. While, on the contrary to many other women, her presence cannot be forgotten (especially because she signed her work), we still know very little of her overall work, her career and her biography. The new *Dictionnaire illustré de la bande dessinée belge* (Lambeau,

2016, p. 22) names her husband Francis André, and cites her socialist history of the working class for the newspaper *Le Peuple*.



Ill 1: Suzanne André, *Le Peuple*, Histoire des travailleurs, 19 février 1948

- 8 But while we are provided with her marital status, the dictionary does not state her date of birth (maybe 1909?), what she studied or when she died. It would, however, be interesting to know how she came to work for *Le Peuple* and learn more about her acquaintance with the Belgian Socialist Party, as it was not common for Belgian cartoonists to adopt a political stance.
- 9 Liliane Schorils-Funcken has had both more and less luck. Because she was married to the cartoonist Fred Funcken, she was often interviewed with him (or about him, after his death). By means of these interviews, we know more about her daily work and her contributions to *Tintin* than all the other women cartoonists. But this also implies she was defined by her marriage, and given an inferior rank. This is how they both present their collaboration (Anspach, 1988) :

Fred : "Thanks to her, I started drawing comics again: she literally dragged me to the World Press." Liliane : "I started by coloring his work. But I got bored quickly. Once, Fred told me : "It'd be ideal if you drew with me". I told him I wasn't the drawing type. [...] He then asked me to ink one drawing: *he entirely trusted his wife*. [...] We do the scenario and the setting together. Then Fred does all the penciling. He loves the penciling because it's quick and pretty, but *he hates the inking*. He loses patience immediately. *So, I ink, apart from faces and hands*."

Fred : "Apart from that [faces and hands], I don't care about inking. Liliane also helps me with colors. *She taught me to harmonize colors*."
- 10 Unlike Fred whom she encouraged to keep drawing, she was not the one with the vocation: she would not have started drawing without him. As a consequence, she takes care of what he dislikes; it is not a surprise that she is also in charge of colors, as this was considered a woman's skill. Indeed, when Fred first showed her work to *Tintin's* artistic

director, the latter thought it looked like Fred's work, only “cleaner” (Anspach, 1988). Her talent for drawing is considered a natural gift among women; and though we do not know anything about her artistic studies, she is not praised for being a self-taught cartoonist. However, when reading the minutes of *Tintin's* weekly meetings, I discovered that, starting in 1953, Fred was repeatedly asked to improve his coloring. Therefore, Liliane was not only good with colors; she also helped Fred to keep his job. But, in the *Dictionnaire illustré*, she does not have an entry of her own, but is mentioned in her husband's in one sentence : “A great part of Funcken's work must be associated with his wife, Liliane. [...] Does *this author* [masculine form] have one specific style?” (Lambeau, 2016, p. 117). Being a wife, she is only here to help, not to develop a style of her own.

- 11 As for Manon Iessel (Marie-Antoinette Iessel) and Marie-Mad (Marie-Madeleine Bourdin), they escaped oblivion almost by chance. Manon Iessel's first comic, in *Le Journal*, in 1934, was retrieved by Franco-Belgian comics fans.

PAT ET PIOUS. **1. Le départ pour l'aventure**



III 2: Manon Iessel, *Le Journal*, Pat et Piou, 1934 (Droits d'auteur : Claude et Alain Vautier).

- 12 However, even though she worked in that field weekly for 40 years, she has not been published once in comics form. Her entry in the Solo dictionary states that she is : “a cartoonist who made some humorous strips, then illustrated children's books and comics” (Solo, 2004, p. 425). As for Marie-Mad, whose career spanned over 30 years, she is one of the only women who was published before the 1970s (Schorils was published, but under her husband's name), with the children's comic, *Titounet & Titounette*.



Ill 3: Marie-Mad, *Titounet et Titounette dans la forêt d'automne*, Fleurus, 1958 (Droits d'auteur : Marie-Mad; Éditions du Triomphe.)

- 13 These five women are described as archetypes : they are “bright exceptions”, “wives of”, or “children's illustrators” who indulge in comics. Is it true that the only women who dared to draw at the time were wives or mothers who accidentally stumbled upon the comic book form? If that exclusive narrative had been true, it would have meant that only 1,5% (5) of the 319 comics authors I studied were women; unsurprisingly, there happens to be more of them. As Pierre Le Goff, president of the cartoonist's union, the Syndicat national des dessinateurs de presse (SNDP), stated in an interview I conducted with him : “Oh, yes, there were other women. Ms Bretécher wasn't all by herself!” (Kohn, 2016).

The invisible 7 %

- 14 The *BD oubliées* authors' database (BD oubliées, 2016) helped me to retrieve some cartoonists' work in a number of children's illustrated magazines, drawn from “mainstream” *illustrés*. By “mainstream”, I mean that this database does not include any *illustrés* geared specifically towards girls. Therefore, I decided to include *Mireille*, *Line*, *Bernadette*, *La Semaine de Suzette*, *Lisette* and *Fillette* in my research – all of which were actually also read by young boys and had a broad audience.
- 15 While doing so, I was able to retrieve the names of 41 women, of whom 23 (56%) once drew comics, a figure that can be contrasted with the 80% of men cartoonists who drew comics. This number is four times higher than expected, meaning that 7.2% of comic book authors were women in France and in Belgium before 1970 (23 out of 320). On average, they published in 1.5 newspapers, while the number rises to 2 for men cartoonists.

- 16 Unfortunately, I did not have the time to review comics before World War Two, nor to discover who was hiding behind unsigned work, nor to get a better look at the Belgian production. However, since that scientific bias also exists for my male population, the numbers remain correct for my period. I do know the name of Davine (Robert Velter's wife), Madeleine Gérard, Colette May-Pattinger and Mariel Dauphin (Jacque Naret's wife) who worked in the daily press. However, of the four biographical sources I use the most (Solo 2004, Osterwalder 2005, Gaumer 2010, Lambiek 2016) the Solo dictionary, which focuses on the press, is the one which tends to overlook women the most, hence accounting for my lack of information on that medium. I also retrieved at least 5 well-known women writers in the *illustrés* themselves: Maud Frère, Henriette Robitaille, Geneviève de Corbie, Isabelle Gendron and Liliane Fabris. But writers are not referenced accurately either in the Gaumer's dictionary or in the Lambiek database.
- 17 About those women, little information exists. Some of them had very small entries in dictionaries, but nothing I could really use ; some were entirely forgotten. Overall, Lambiek's website remains the most complete source I used, and it only listed 10 out of my 23 comics authors. I found Camille Hallé while looking at the National School of Fine Arts archives, by mere chance; I thought Claude Soleillant was a man (as the Lambiek website stated) before I talked to her over the phone and mistakenly asked to talk to her husband; and I had no idea who "Constant" was, before Pierre Le Goff told me about his colleague "Nicole Constant" who was also a member of the cartoonists' union.
- 18 It is true however that most of the male cartoonists I study have also been long forgotten, especially when they were published in the Catholic press. Who, but a few fans, remembers Yvan Marié, Maurice Thomas de la Pintièrre or Claude Verrier? But still, their entries in the dictionaries are always bigger and more documented, even if they were not published in albums and drew only for children. Moreover, when I started my research in the illustrated magazines and had no names of cartoonists yet, I expected to end up with a population of about 400 men working in the illustration field at the time; and indeed, it is roughly what I found. If there had been as many overlooked men as there were women, I would now be struggling with 1200 cartoonists!
- 19 Therefore, it seems obvious that women, even though they are far less numerous than men in the field of comics, and a bit less active, have been made invisible. Their lives and careers have been forgotten, they have been restricted to their status of wives and mothers, and their work has not had the chance to be published. One of the most vivid examples is Nadine Forster, who is still famous for drawing the children's shows *Casimir* (*L'île enchantée*) and *Émilie Joly*, yet whose very modern comics such as *Le Journal de Véronique* (*Lisette*, 1967-1968) have been forgotten.
- 20 If those women who were published daily, and sometime for decades, were made invisible, what about those who published less, or in less publicized specialties? At the time, there was indeed a good amount of unsigned work, even though some of it was often of foreign importation, and there are at least 9 individuals I study of unknown gender. Moreover, the work of assistants – mainly inkers and colorists – remains anonymous, seen as a less prestigious task. If it is impossible to have statistics on them, as I did find that 15% of male authors mention their wife as a work assistant. Besides Liliane Funcken, who remembers that Madame Craenhals, Janine Le Goff, Petra van Custem, Annie Gillain-Geldhof all colored for their husbands? What about Rémi Bourlès' wife, who wrote his scenarios, or René Bonnet's wife, who apparently helped him to draw, and then

painted with him when he retired? Some people are more forgotten than the forgotten cartoonists : their wives.

- 21 It is very instructive indeed to study the way these women talk about their work for their husbands, as it gives us a good sense of the alienation it entails. Nine Peyo started coloring for her husband after her own workday, and also did a bit of accounting “without liking it at all”, while she “didn't get involved in Peyo's work” though he would ask for her advice “including in the middle of the night”. Liliane Denayer thinks “cartoonists need a tough and organized 'mommy' to manage their stuff”, one who can “incidentally help out slightly with colors”. And Petra Van Custem, after 44 years of being her husband's colorist still thinks the best thing is to “see him healthy, able to keep going on with the work he loves” (Bodoï, 2006, p. 8-24).

The retrieved lives of women in funnies

Drawing a social picture

- 22 It is one thing to retrieve names; but this does not help me understand why the few women who did make this career choice chose to do so and why they were so easily erased from the memory of comics. There is a historical and social explanation for the discrepancy between men and women in the comics field, and it has to do with the gender labor divide even more than with the way the market of comics and cartoons is organized.
- 23 Hence the necessity to draw a social picture of these women, before relating their lives to the world of cartoonists in general. But the search was quite disappointing, as I did not end up with a satisfactory sample. Indeed, out of 23 women cartoonists, I found the social origin of 6 of them, which means I knew their place and date of birth and was able to ask for their birth certificate, and therefore learn their parents' professions. I also know that 8 of them enrolled in art studies. But for most of them, their lives remain unknown, and I was left with what I retrieved while looking at comic books, magazines and library catalogs, which are obviously incomplete.
- 24 However, I can use what I know of other women who drew, even if though they did not draw comics. Indeed, there is more information on women who specialized in both adult and children's illustration, publicity and graphic art, than there is on those who worked primarily for children's magazines. Unless the comics were published in book form later on, this can partly be explained by the lack of legitimacy of children's magazines: if it was the only field a cartoonist worked in, she would be less remembered than if her (or his) work went beyond this field (fashion and graphic designers, commercial artists, and more importantly book illustrators and movie/theater decorators) or was directly targeting an adult readership (such as editorial cartoonist). Interestingly enough, Suzanne André, who maybe drew less regularly than someone like Jacqueline Dargier or Janine Lay, has not been entirely forgotten, perhaps since she drew comics for the Belgian newspapers *Le Peuple*.
- 25 Since all those professions can be related to the global art of drawing – especially at a time when careers were heterogeneous and unspecialized – it is safe to say that I can use the information and interviews I have on the global population of 41 women. Overall, I know the social origins of 18 of them, and besides Germaine Bouret (whose parents were

servants, although her father did draw as a hobby), all of them come from a liberal, upper middle class background: among the fathers, 2 of them are doctors, 5 of them engineers and 4 made their career in the administration or the army. Higher up on the social scale, 1 is a landlord and 2 come from an aristocratic background. One would be tempted to draw the conclusion that, in contrast to their male counterparts, the social origin of female cartoonists is less mixed, since the middle upper class is heavily represented. This would concur with the idea that drawing is part of female upper class education. Being an “art d'agrément” (a leisure, such as playing the piano, singing and embroidering), it is a talent encouraged in order to make good bourgeois wives. However, it is important not to forget we are missing half of the information for these women; indeed, the working class suffers from the same process of invisibilization as women do, and we do not know if those for whom we have no information are not, indeed, those who come from a working class background. For example, in her interviews, Marie-Madeleine Bourdin says her father was an engineer-machinist (Lehideux, 1996), while her birth certificate only specifies “machinist”: he probably climbed the social ladder; but she might also have improved the reality.

- 26 There is one type of profession which is easier to decipher, though. Among the fathers, one of them is an important printer and three are painters, which reminds us that these women are often related in one way or another to the artistic world, either by their relatives or their husbands. Moreover, though only two mothers have a known profession (the rest being listed as “without profession”, though Marie-Mad says her mother was a dressmaker), they are both artistic: Claude Soleillant's mother was a fashion designer, while Albertine Deletaille's mother was nothing less than one of the portraitists of the Dutch Queen. Having such a female artistic model must have made a strong impact on one's career as a cartoonist. When Claude Soleillant wrote her acceptance speech for the prestigious award, the *Décoration de Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* in 2001, she noted : “Going back through time, I started thinking about my great grand-mother [...] who was a goldsmith. I'm very proud of it! Maybe she wasn't the first woman in the family to work in the art world. In the next generation, my grand-mother used her skilled hands for embroidering and lacing. [...] My mum with her dexterous hands created wonderful hats [...]. She was a wonder in her art. [...] When I was 11 years old, I drew a fake ID card for myself, and for the profession, I stipulated : 'children's newspapers cartoonist'.” (Soleillant, 2001).

Women in the art world

- 27 Insisting on a bourgeois social origin might also place too much emphasis on women's fondness or calling for drawing. It is true that drawing must have been part of their female education, and they often got involved in the art world because of their relatives or their husbands. But at least 15 of them studied art, and some with great success: Nadine Forster held shows in the United States after graduating with honors from the Royal School of Fine Arts in Brussels and working as Anto Carte's assistant. Camille Hallé and Elise Million went to the School of Fine Arts in Paris, while Marie-Madeleine Bourdin and Claude Soleillant passed the test to enter the Élisabeth Lemonnier School of Applied Arts and ranked respectively first and second. Just like their male counterparts, they did not engage in the comics and illustration field of work without training, the various schools of Fine Arts and Applied Arts always being the starting point.

- 28 However, not all the workshops and classes in the schools of Fine Arts were open to women. Women could be more easily recruited in applied arts classes and schools, especially after the creation of the Élisabeth Lemonnier school in 1864, which became the École Duperré in 1882. At least three of them followed that path; the others went to private schools and workshops, such as the Académie Julian or la Grande Chaumière in Paris. In any case, they benefited from the attempts to implement applied arts, lithography and publicity in the artistic curriculum after the 1940s and learned about Art Déco. The women's applied arts training was not specifically geared towards illustration: at the time, it was advocated as a way for women of the working and the middle class to earn their living in a suitable way, and for the domestic economy to prosper: the applied arts were no longer “arts d'agrément”, and women could be of use in the industrial world (Laurent, 1996). By looking at the syllabuses, one can say that the specialization in the applied art schools for women was more intense and more focused on design than in the men's equivalent: they chose a profession they would keep after graduating, while men could more easily change their specialization once they started working. Moreover, in women's schools, even though they learned about lettering and mocking-up, illustrating and lithography were rarely an option, unlike in Germain Pilon or Bernard Palissy's applied art schools, which were more open to these applied art forms. Finally, they were often expected to become art teachers. Still, those schools offered a very good training. Just before World War Two, the Paris National School of Fine Arts reformed the teaching of Applied Art and noted that “women professors who have been recruited in the last decade (and who generally come from Duperré and Fleury school or the Decorative Arts National School) are of first rank. [...] Men teachers are not as good.” (Archives nationales, AJ52).
- 29 Therefore, the women who worked in the cartoon and comics field might have come from a quite privileged social background and have enjoyed a good artistic environment; but they also engaged in a field that was becoming professional, and for which a good artistic and technical education was needed. Drawing was hard work indeed: Germaine Bouret died of exhaustion (Frémion, 1998); Maggie Salcedo worked as a divorced woman to feed her children (Osterwalder, 2005). It was not a woman's hobby one could do at home as, at best, a complement to her husband's salary. For those reasons, it also became harder for women to have a real place in what slowly became a workshop world: it could mean working away from home and threatening the gender work division in a “men-only” field of work which belonged to the craft world. Marie-Mad remembers having a three-hours commute to work at *Cœurs Vaillants*, before deciding to work from home for *Bernadette*; and Nadine Forster's sons recall they were different from other kids, because they had a working mother who was away all day (Kohn, 2016). But Claude Soleillant's story is even more blatant: she was asked to leave Fleury's office as soon as she got pregnant; and even though there was still time before she would give birth, her boss decided he would rather not have a pregnant woman around. At that point, she started working from home for Fleury and other editing houses, and never came back to an editorial office (Kohn, 2016). Even though she had great success during her career in creating craft books, she stopped drawing in the comics form afterwards; had she kept working in the editorial office, maybe she would have become more interested in that type of work. In any case, though there are not enough archives to know if women were paid less than men were, this kind of anecdote tends to prove they were treated like other women were in the world of work: even though their labor force was needed, it was

considered as a complement to men's jobs and a potential threat. Claire Bretécher later described “guys-only meetings” in editorial offices, which were also drawn by Gotlib and photographed. She rightfully observed that above all, her presence “was hard for them” (Belleval, 1977): the sense of threat also explains the small place which was left for women to occupy. Conversely, it would be very interesting to interview Nadine Forster's male assistants whom she hired when she was working for the French television, Walt Disney and Adès, as this provides a unique example of a woman cartoonist in charge of a workshop at that time. Her lifestyle, anyhow, is a good reflection of the independence one could gain being a cartoonist: in the 1970s, after a strong devaluation of the French franc, she moved from Belgium to France to stop losing the money she was earning from French editors; her husband and her children followed her, showing that her salary was obviously the most important one in the household.

- 30 With that in mind, it is encouraging to note that half of these 41 women not only stayed in the *illustrés* industry but also experimented with the comics form. But one can also understand why many of them decided to focus on the editing and illustrating world, where the people in charge were also more often women, according to Michelle Daufresne, who, as the other women interviewed, said she gained more consideration from that world, where only the drawings were considered (Kohn, 2016). On the other hand, it is now easier to understand how women were made invisible: not only were there fewer of them, and they were less active, but their presence was not acknowledged, because it could not be accepted without challenging the definition of this specific field of work.

Drawing like a woman

A condescending tone

- 31 Studying the way women are talked about in the world of cartoonists is a good indicator of the invisibilization of their work, if not of their talent. Being an “art d'agrément”, the art of drawing can be reduced either to its seductive potential or, more often, to its maternal aspect. At a time when images were closely associated with education, and women with childcare, it was only natural that women would draw and write for children, and it is still how the profession is thought of today. Hence Suzanne André, whose style Frans Lambeau describes as “schematic” but with a “very didactic narrative power” (Lambeau, 2016, p.22); Marie-Mad who “love[s] childhood” and lives in a “world that's not unreal but wonderful, that [she] can feel in a tangible way” (Francq, 2013); Manon Iessel whose bibliographical entry on Babelio describes her as “a sensitive, modest artist, full of delicacy, like her drawings”. When critics write that way nowadays, they are actually reproducing outdated tones of speech.
- 32 As an example, one can study the tone of critics in *Écho-dessin*, the magazine of the French union of artist-drawers, for a 1963 exhibit. Indeed, while one can read about Alain Saint-Ogan's “fine illustrations of military scenes”, André Galland's “courthouse sketches, full of character and life” and about “caricaturists who are funny without crudeness such as Flip”, one on the contrary “notices above all [Michelle Daufresne's] portrait of a child”; learns about “Manon Iessel, very popular among girls, who exhibits pretty illustrations of Perrault's tales”, and about “Ms Pécourt [who] achieved a good colored aspect with very few means” (*Écho-dessin*, p. 2-3). Humor is only on the men's side, with scenes from

political, judicial and military life; women are stuck with children's illustrations, and are, at their best, awarded the adjective “pretty”, while their sense of color remains the most important aspect which is looked upon: obviously, they draw with “very few means”. Even nowadays, when talking about her past career, Nicole Constant adopts the same condescending tone: the first thing she told me when I started her interview was that she was “very flattered to be considered a cartoonist; I did work, but it was rubbish [...] and I was also very lucky.” (Kohn, 2016). But, in the same way Claude Soleillant is still angry at being fired for her pregnancy, Nicole Constant is somewhat aware when talking about her interview in 1961 for *Femmes d'aujourd'hui*: “I would never have shown that to my friends! 'Sweet Constant, silent Constant...' They wouldn't talk about my diplomas!” (Kohn, 2016).

33 In that atmosphere, when girls were considering drawing careers, they were probably often answered the way François Cheneval replied to Odette Thirion in *Héroïc-Albums*, alerting the readers with obvious condescension that “our artist is called 'Doll' by her family; we thought it was interesting to point it out”. A few months before, he had wished “good luck and success” to Serge Genneaux in the same “Bouts d'essai” section (Cheneval, 1954). Serge Genneaux became a comics author himself; of Odette Thirion, the only girl ever published in that section, we know nothing after that episode. When Nadine Forster was interviewed on the French television in 1960, the journalist, a woman herself, hints she is lucky that neither her parents nor her husband opposed her career choice. And though Nadine Forster refuses the use of the word “luck”, the journalist concludes: “Then, we'll thank you for bringing to Paris your grace, your charm, all those qualities...and furthermore, your face; because you'll admit this painter looks more like a model!” (Forster, 1960).

34 Women who drew were expected to become art teachers or children's and fashion illustrators, not newspaper cartoonists or comics artists. None of them seem to have been reading comics as young children the way their male counterparts did. The teaching exam itself included two different tests: where male candidates were supposed to be tested on their geometrical and perspective drawing, female candidates were asked to compose on a fashion model (Archives nationales, AJ52). The women I retrieved did not want to teach though: as quoted earlier, Claude Soleillant wanted to be an illustrated magazine cartoonist since she was 11 at least. More so, Nicole Constant dropped out of the École Duperré because she did not want to enroll in the teacher's course (Kohn, 2016), and Martine Berthélémy, who passed the test to be a drawing teacher, panicked on her first day of class and never went back (Lehideux, 1999).

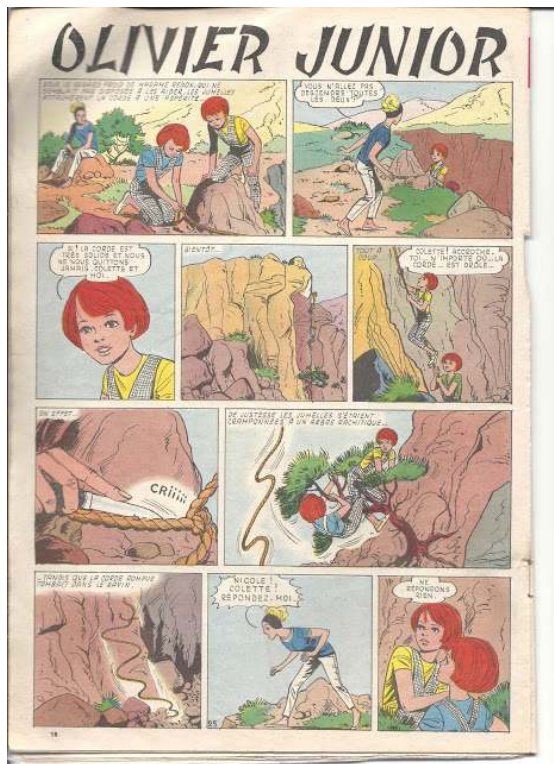
For kids only?

35 It is indeed true – and obviously also a consequence of that construction – that women did tend to illustrate for kids rather than for adults, and their work was less heterogeneous than that of men. While 70% of my male population did illustration, 90% of the women were illustrators. Manon Iessel and Dody, for instance, were keen on fashion and drew the “poupée Bleurette” for the sewing pages in *La Semaine de Suzette*, or adventures related to “girls' interests”.



Ill 4: Manon Iessel, *Mireille*, Le bracelet de pierres bleues, 1958 (Droits d'auteur: Claude et Alain Vautier).

- 36 Claude Soleillant started to work as a cellophane decorator, in a mixed team, where “boys would do more technical stuff, such as motors, airplanes, cars. Some girls would do it too, but less. Girls would draw sweeter and finer stuff. I was in charge of teddy bears, animals, flowers and birds” (Kohn, 2016). On the other hand, even in the children's illustration world, they were far from outnumbering men: in Père Castor's collection, except for Gerda Muller, Nina Morel and Lucile Butel, one reads only men's names. According to Michelle Daufresne, both genders were equally represented, and when one wanted to become a cartoonist, working for children was one of the only options. (Kohn, 2016).
- 37 But not all children's stories were alike, in a childlike and derogatory sense. Someone like Janine Lay also drew many adventures for children.



III 5 : Janine Lay, *Bernadette*, Les Jumelles, 1962

- 38 Madeleine Berthelemy or Suzanne André adapted classics and historical events: girls *illustrés* would publish comics of all sorts with female protagonists.



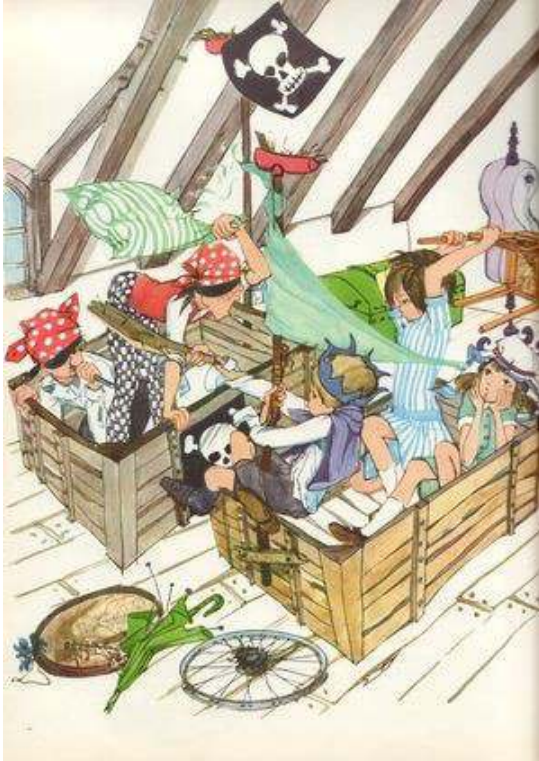
III 6: Suzanne André, *Line*, Madame Sans Gêne, 28 Feb 1957

- 39 These comics were seldom published, however: comics for girls were not considered good enough; and as a consequence, people now think they never existed. And even though some women, such as Suzanne Ballivet, specialized in luxury and artistic illustrations, never working for children, it seems as if the doors of the cartoonists world were more sealed for women than they were for men, keeping them in one field of action, whereas men could come and go from various places and therefore become more easily acknowledged authors. This difference also accounts for their lesser fame, and maybe for their greater isolation in the social network.
- 40 The women cartoonists I interviewed seldom cite fellow cartoonists. It was a solitary job, where the social network was not wide. Nonetheless the union, later led by Pierre Le Goff, helped people to meet each other at least once a year. A woman, Joëlle Savey, was even the general secretary in the 1970s. But her best friend there, Nicole Constant, recalls that, even though she knew Joëlle, she was terribly afraid of Pierre Le Goff, and felt she was

annoying him while he was explaining serious matters. As Claude Soleillant states, “there was, in a way, a general indifference” (Kohn, 2016). The other narratives always concern the world of editing rather than the world of magazines: Michelle Daufresne made four very good friends (Noëlle Herrenschmidt, Pascale Claude Lafontaine, Pascale Tisné and Édith Raymond), but she met them in the 1970s in editing houses or in youth authors shows. For those women, the world of children's illustration seemed to make interaction easier than the world of *illustrés*, especially after the 1960s. However, they rarely worked together, because their styles were “so different” (Kohn, 2016).

- 41 When asked to cite a cartoonist who inspired them, Manon Iessel appears to be almost the unique reference, a reference which is undoubtedly related to the world of children's illustration, through *La Semaine de Suzette*. In a sense, this reference is seminal, not only because she was a woman working for girls *illustrés*, but also because fewer male comics authors think about her when asked the same question, even though Manon Iessel was fundamental in the history of children comics, with her “very pure, very simple, very linear, and above all very expressive way of drawing” (Soleillant, 2016). Claude Soleillant and Marie-Mad did actually meet her, the latter even working with her from time to time. However, it seems complicated to point out any common references for those women, which also makes it harder to self-define themselves as women cartoonists. Furthermore, they never refer to American comics, which, on the contrary, are often considered by male comics authors as an important part of their calling for drawing comics.
- 42 However, *Le Journal de Véronique*, a comics drawn in *Lisette* by Nadine Forster and written by Maud Frère, shows that even in the genre of children's literature, women can work together and interpret the comics form in an original and modern way. The fluidity and modernity of Nadine Forster's drawing of Véronique's colored world, which does not respect the usual grid or succession of events, reflects the freedom of speech and action

of the little girl, who would rather fight with her cousin in practical clothes than stay “still as an image” in a pretty dress, the way girls are often depicted in these magazines.



Ill 7 : Nadine Forster, *Lisette* n°2, Le Journal de Véronique, 1968 (Droits d'auteur : Nadine Forster).

- 43 Véronique is not the first female character whose life is a daily adventure; but she might be the first one whose train of thought is the only source of information. This work comes from the collaboration of two women who met by chance on a train; Nadine Forster says this was the only time she can recall working with another woman, who also became her friend. However, she claims to have never suffered from the manly world in which she was working, as she told me fifty years later: “I never felt it. You're making me think of it only today”. After a while though, she added that in the editing houses where she worked “the chief executives were often men. But women would always take care of the rest.” (Kohn, 2016).

Conclusion

- 44 After World War Two, more than half of the women who drew in *illustrés* started drawing comics on a regular basis, at least for an obvious economical reason: if a woman wanted to be published, she had to be part of this new trend. In that regard, why were *Les Jumelles* or *Priscille et Olivier*, Janine Lay's weekly productions, so easily forgotten? How come Nadine Forster's *Journal de Véronique* never get any publicity or publication?
- 45 It is not because they did not draw as well as the men did. The talent or lack of talent, for that matter, was equally shared, at a time when a good number of pieceworkers were simply filling the pages of magazines. Even Alain d'Orange does not show a lot of enthusiasm for the field: it was a “routine”, a profession and not a calling (Blanchet and Cance, 2006). The stories in children's magazines were rather conventional, mixing

adventures, historical tales and stories from daily life. They were not even truly specific to girls or boys: the characters, to some extent, can be considered gender-neutral.

- 46 Women did find work more easily in children's magazines geared towards girls; and when they did so, their career was often not as long as that of their male counterparts, because it was more easily pursued in the field of children illustration. But, by emphasizing the difference between male and female comics authors, the history of comics has overlooked an important body of work which was published in magazines read by half of the young population. Women have been forgotten because there were fewer, but also and mainly because the field of comics would not acknowledge them. In that regard, their collaboration with one another was not enough to counteract a field whose history was told by men.

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ABSTRACTS

The very masculine history of the comics world is often held to account for the small proportion of women among comics authors nowadays. However, when examining the Franco-Belgian illustrated magazines of the 1950s and 1960s, I discovered that 7% of authors were women, some of whom had started to work in the field in the 1930s. Hence, the history of comics has thus far ignored an entire population of authors who, though they were a minority, were nonetheless active. In this article, I attempt to retrieve the names and the careers of these post-war women comics authors, in order to understand the process of invisibilization they underwent, which consisted mainly in restricting them to children's illustrations. This context made it difficult to promote the emergence of a women's network and reference system in the world of Franco-Belgian comics.

La faible présence actuelle des femmes parmi les professionnel.le.s de la bande dessinée est souvent expliquée par l'héritage presque uniquement masculin de ce médium. Pourtant, quand

on dépouille les illustrés franco-belges des années 1950 et 1960, on constate que les auteures sont en fait déjà 7 % à exercer ce métier, certaines continuant d'ailleurs une carrière commencée dans les années 1930. L'histoire de la bande dessinée s'est donc construite en passant sous silence une population certes minoritaire, mais malgré tout active. Cet article cherche donc à retrouver les noms et retracer les carrières des auteures de bande dessinée de l'après-guerre, afin de comprendre un processus d'invisibilisation qui passe notamment par l'assignation à un style unique, celui de l'illustration pour enfants, et qui a rendu difficile l'émergence d'un réseau et d'un système de références véritablement féminin dans le monde de la bande dessinée franco-belge

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Mots-clés: bande dessinée, auteures, dessinatrices, histoire culturelle

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