

## Conference report

### 'Comics & Nation', Bangor University, 13-14 July 2017

Organisers: Dr Armelle Blin-Rolland, Dr David Miranda-Barreiro, Dr Guillem Colom-Montero (Bangor University)

'Comics & Nation', a two-day international event held at Bangor University with the generous support of the ASMCF, brought together scholars working on a variety of cultures and disciplines to provide a forum for the discussion of the interrelation between comic art and nation. The conference placed special emphasis on text/image creation from minority cultures, such as Brittany, Corsica and Picardy in the Francophone context, in this way furthering the understanding of contemporary France. The conference therefore made an important contribution to the thriving field of *bande dessinée* in French and Francophone studies, and contributed to interdisciplinarity and critical dialogue within subjects in Modern Languages, Celtic Studies, and American Studies. There were around twenty-five attendees across the two days, including fifteen speakers, from the UK, Australia and the USA.

Over two days, delegates discussed a remarkable wealth of graphic texts in various national, political and historical contexts, and engaged in stimulating discussions and debates throughout the conference. The panels were organised according to themes rather than national contexts in order to foster a transnational, critical dialogue. The first panel was devoted to colonialism and its discontents, with papers exploring the X-Men and the question of Palestine (Sophia Azeb, New York University); Breton autonomism and independentism in comics (Armelle Blin-Rolland, Bangor University); and the contestation of the collective memory of Algeria in Morvandiau's *D'Algérie* (Muhib Nabulsi, University of Queensland).

Professor Charles Forsdick (University of Liverpool), in his fascinating ASMCF keynote lecture, talked about Haiti and/in comics, with a particular focus on the graphic representation of Toussaint Louverture as a historical figure in the Haitian Revolution. He discussed the emergence of a more independent Haitian comics scene that contrasts with the presence of Haitian characters in US comics.

The second panel explored the reconstruction of memory, in papers focusing on remembering Galician intellectuals in *banda deseñada* (David Miranda-Barreiro, Bangor University); the representation of political memory and Corsican identity in *Aléria 1975* (Lise Tannehill, University of Glasgow); and the Franco-Belgian *Lucky Luke* series as a critical lens into the milieu surrounding post-war Europe through its interaction with recognisable symbols of Americana (William Grady, University of Dundee). The conference dinner, which took place at the University restaurant, provided further opportunities for networking and discussion among the delegates.

On the second day of the conference, the first panel focused on representations of the past and the present, with papers exploring the perception of comics in art history, and the national/cultural narratives in Yslaire and Carrière's *Le ciel au-dessus du Louvre* (Tobias Yu-Kiener, University of the Arts London, Central Saint Martins); the links between post-apocalyptic and propagandistic 1947 comic *Is This Tomorrow: America under Communism*, Woody Guthrie and Charles Schulz as a hitherto unwritten chapter in the history of comics

(Edward Shannon, Ramapo College of New Jersey); and Isaac Rosa and Cristina Bueno's 2016 graphic representation in *Aquí vivió* of the crisis of 'desahucios' in Spain in the wake of the financial crisis (Gareth Wood, University College London).

The second panel explored links between language, identity and the nation, through the 1950s comic strip *Jacques Croédur i voéyage* as a series epitomizing Picardy's contribution to the cultural heritage of France (Peter V. Davies, University of Glasgow); the construction of a graphic Wales in Carol Swain's *Gast*, and the ways in which Swain shows the transition from an English to a Welsh identity (Alice Vernon, Aberystwyth University); and issues of transnational tourism, language and national dissent in the Majorcan comic *Els darrers dies de l'Imperi Mallorquí* (Guillem Colom-Montero, Bangor University). The last panel focused on transnational identities, with papers exploring transnationalism and (dis)connection in graphic novels from Brazil (Edward King, University of Bristol), and tracing the Afro-Caribbean roots of transnational superheroes (Paul Humphrey, Monmouth University).

This conference served to bring together a range of perspectives on comics and nation, to reflect on ways in which comics, in and beyond France, have been instrumental in the construction of national identities, both in nation-states and in stateless nations. The organisers are in the early stages of editing a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal stemming from the conference.

The organisers would like to thank the ASMCF for their generous support for 'Comics & Nation'.