

Children of Iniquity

Representation of the Fourteenth century in
A Distant Mirror and *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule*.

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Introduction:

I never expected to write a thesis on a comic book. Not because I thought there was nothing worth talking about or because I do not find it an interesting field of study, but because it never occurred to me that I could. Comic books have, however, always played an important part in my life. I had comic books before I could properly read, later raided my parent's collection and as I got older started my own. How come then, that even though my bookshelf is filled with comics, I never looked at them more closely? The answer is simple: in all the university courses I followed, the written word was always prevalent.

Comics as a commercial medium are often considered an anti-elitist counterpart to the 'high' culture. In America and England, the comic book medium has struggled to find validation. There is a tendency to view mass-marketed, easily accessible graphic works as somewhat less culturally valuable. This situation is changing, however, with comic book scholars exploring how comic books relate to a greater cultural narrative, how certain works can uphold or challenge established norms, and how they can offer a new perspective on culture. Some graphic novels, such as *Maus*, *V for Vendetta*, *Watchmen* and *Persepolis* have garnered great acclaim and have been given much attention in the literary field and in the classroom.

In this thesis I will take a closer look at one specific work: *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule* by François Bourgeon. Bourgeon is a French comic book artist best known for his two historical serials: *Les Passagers du Vent* (1981-2010) and *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule* (1984-1990). Bourgeon has enjoyed enduring popularity since 1979, and although *Les Compagnons* was completed twenty five years ago, it has recently been republished and recoloured in a complete edition. The series is comprised of three books: *Le Sortilège du Bois des Brumes*, *Les Yeux d'étain de la Ville Glaucque*, and *Le Dernier Chant des Malaterre*. The story takes place in France in the fourteenth century and deals with the adventures of a young peasant girl named Mariotte. The medium of comics, and this work in particular, can offer a different perspective on history, and an analysis of Bourgeon's comics can add something worthwhile to the ongoing conversation about comics and history education.

In order to contrast the way Bourgeon has constructed a historical narrative in the medium of comic books, I will compare *Les Compagnons* to another work: *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* by Barbara Tuchman. In this historical non-fiction novel, Tuchman describes the same chaotic period in French history as Bourgeon. The fourteenth century is marked by unrest: plague, war and raiders ravage France as the end of an era draws near. I have called this thesis Children of Iniquity, because that embodies the age as both Bourgeon and Tuchman describe it: where people are born in an immoral and unjust world, their lives filled with hardships and cruelties.

In this thesis, I would like to explore how *Les Compagnons* depicts history in a new and interesting way through a combination of art style and the choice of medium, extensive historical research and an emotional voice. Chapter one will deal with the topics like the reception and status of comics in Francophone culture, and the popularity of historical themes. *Les Compagnons* functions differently as a historical narrative than a novel or movie, so I will take a look at what kind of history *Les Compagnons* depicts. Comics as a medium of historical representation, especially in an educational setting, have their own pitfalls and advantages. In chapter two I will take a closer look at the different aspects that define a graphic narrative, and more specifically what the role of text is, and how the different forms of text can be incorporated

into the visual aspects. The choices made and techniques used in *Les Compagnons* tell us something about the type of story Bourgeon wants to tell, and the way the historicity of the work can be combined with the use of text. Balancing textual and visual information in a graphic narrative can be tricky. Aside from the text, layout itself can carry a lot of meaning and purpose. How exactly this is done will be discussed in chapter three. Graphic narratives have a unique way of depicting and containing time and sequences, and also a way of eschewing or combining the traditional top-to-bottom and left-to-right reading direction with a nonsequential reading experience. How panels are distributed over the page can say a lot about what an artist is trying to convey, and Bourgeon is no exception. His use of layout influences the reading experiences, as it increases or decreases tension, mood and the reading rhythm. Moreover, techniques such as camera angles and combinations of differently shaped and sized panels can influence the way a reader perceives the story. The fourth and last chapter will deal with the use of the personal voice in historical fiction and the way history and fiction are combined in *Les Compagnons*, especially when compared to *A Distant Mirror*.

Chapter 1: Reception, Worth and Education

Introduction:

Before I go into more detail on how *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule* uses the medium of comic books to tell a historical story, it is important to take a look at the status comic books have in France, and Bourgeon's place in the French comic book world. Within the genre of Francophone comic books, historical themes are quite popular. I will examine how this came to be and what place *Les Compagnons* has in this tradition. The last paragraphs will examine what *Les Compagnons* in particular has to offer as a historical narrative, and what unique perspectives this work can bring in the field of historical fiction.

Validation, Status and Importance of Bandes Dessinée:

The question of validation and cultural value of comics is something that many comic book scholars have examined. The cultural status of graphic narrative is quite different in the Francophone countries of Belgium and France when compared to American and English comic book culture. Here a distinctive brand of graphic narrative commonly called bandes dessinée or BD are enjoyed by a wide audience without any stigma attached to it. "In France and Belgium bandes dessinées are avidly consumed, both by the wider public and by the 'intellos'" (Screech, p.12). I will be using the term bandes dessinée and its abbreviation BD to refer to Francophone graphic narrative. This term indicates a cultural distinction, not necessarily a technical one. Rules and conventions about technical aspects such as format and the distribution of text are largely the same in both BD, comics and graphic novels.

The albums of *Astérix* by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo are an example of a classic popular BD that combines bright cartoon drawings and funny action with political and historical jokes that appeal to a broad audience. As Uderzo puts it: "nous n'avons qu'un but: nous marrer et faire marrer les autres".¹ Whereas on the other side of the Channel, the authors of graphic novels often feel the need to distinguish themselves by offering a serious story in order to be taken seriously, many classical BD's are both well-regarded and incredibly funny. Well known titles such as *Tintin*, *Gaston Lagaffe* and *Astérix* are mass-marketed products that require little education of the reader to comprehend it, yet their mastery of craftsmanship, style, presentation and storytelling procure them a cherished place in Francophone culture. "La fresque des types produits par notre société et celle des rêves fantastiques de cette société, on la trouve dans les bandes dessinées, lumineux réservoir d'imaginaire, immense caricature. Elles ne pourront pas être ignorées des historiens des mentalités et de la sensibilité de notre époque".² Some even go so far as to call *bandes dessinées* 'the ninth art'. Traditionally, art was classified into seven categories: the first art being architecture followed by sculpture, painting, music, poetry dance, and theater. Modern classifications include cinema in the seventh art of theater, and add photography as the eighth art and comics as the ninth art. This idea of comics as a genuine category of art has especially been embraced by French culture.

¹ René Goscinny, Albert Uderzo "Conférence de presse" *Pilote* 260, Paris, october 15 1964. p.128.

² Evelyne Sullerot quoted on flyleaf of Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle. "Essai d'Analyse Sémiotique" *La Bande dessinée*. Paris: Hachette, 1972.

The exact status of BD has shifted throughout the years, although it is interesting to note that BD's have always been imbued with a certain cultural importance. Up until 1960, BD was a medium aimed at children and adolescents, largely controlled by church and state, mainly meant to represent an "amythic anti-Republican 'France éternelle'" (Michallat, p.689). BD was the guardian of the new generation: being both typically French and morally instructive. Despite the best effort to promote French culture through BD's, the restrictions on the medium caused tensions: BD's were considered 'safe' and therefore boring by the new generation. "In the late 1950s, emerging youth culture prompted tension between market interests and the state and religious ideologies underpinning BD" (Michallat, p.694). This control meant that there was a limit to the styles and themes that were tolerated. The new generation became increasingly intolerant of the control state and church exercised and as a result traditional aesthetics were questioned. BD became a target for youth rebellion because it was so heavily censored. In 1968, as never before, BD was seized by these rebellious adolescents, and the medium developed into an important element of counterculture. The same happened in the US and the UK with the underground and alternative comics movement. And like comics, the contents of BD changed: references to politics, literature and art became more common. Over time the genre gradually became a prevalent fixture of national culture, encompassing a wide range of styles and themes that made it appeal to many different ages and social groups. In this way, BD has evolved and changed, and earned a prominent place in French culture.

Artistic freedom and stylistic independence are paramount in maintaining this status. BD serials very prominently belong to an artist and writer, who are only rarely replaced within the runtime of a series. In America and England, artists can connect themselves to an existing title, franchise or company in order to find an audience. Since serials very much belong to a specific artist in France and Belgium, the first two are nearly impossible. Magazine publishing is one of the few prominent ways in which an artist can gain popularity in BD. This does mean, however, that they have to capture the attention with sometimes only two or three pages in a single issue. The development of a prominent, easily recognizable style is therefore greatly encouraged. When an artist has found their voice, they therefore rarely deviate from it. Through this evolution, artists involved in making BD have acquired a status of being both immersed in French culture, and free from conformity and uniformity.

Unemployment and uncertainties about society around 1970-1980 led to an increased interest in rediscovering an identity; finding the roots of society in a globalizing world. BD started producing stories that emphasized Francophone culture. In his article; "Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?" Ernest Renan states that BD works on two cultural levels: one in the past and one in the present.³ This happens firstly by giving French and Belgian people a 'shared pleasure', thereby reinforcing "le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble". In addition, BD also engages with a specific Franco-Belgian identity by reinforcing the idea of a shared history: "la possession en commun d'un riche legs de souvenirs". BD's, thus, draw heavily on the notion of a shared cultural identity, either through the depiction of French places, people and history, or through the inclusion of elements from folktales, novels and paintings or other local events.

In recent decades, the drive to establish a unique cultural identity has come under a lot of pressure. The popular culture of the western world has become increasingly influenced by a steady influx of American movies and television, and the unofficial language of the internet is English. "At a time when English-speaking popular culture dominates", Matthew Screech argues, "the bande dessinée's contribution to a strong identity should not be underestimated. In

³ Ernest Renan. "Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?". *Discours et Conférences*. 1887.

the age of mass communication, bandes dessinées give French and Belgian culture a clear, distinctive voice that reaches vast numbers of people" (p. 206). As a medium that chiefly promotes Francophone identity, BD takes a distinctive position in the globalizing culture of the western world.

Historical Themes in Bande Dessinée:

The focus most BD's have on expressing Franco-Belgian culture correlates to a popular theme in BD that surged around 1980, and which is still prevalent: the past. This also goes hand in hand with the popularity of the genre in novels, such as Umberto Eco's *Il Nome Della Rosa*: "Le succès du roman historique est l'un des faits marquants de l'édition littéraire contemporaine. Beaucoup l'interprètent comme un symptôme du 'retour au récit' après les expériences du nouveau roman. Une phénomène analogue a pu être observé dans la bande dessinée, où la réhabilitation du héros et de l'aventure qui s'est accomplie au début des années 80 a entraîné l'éclosion, en France, de nombreuses séries historiques".⁴

While history has always been a popular theme in BD, a specific type of historical narrative started to flourish in 1980: one that aimed at a historical realism in which the setting profoundly influences characters, motivations and story. Artists like André Juillard and François Bourgeon, supported by publisher Glénat, were at the start of this new movement. Bourgeon truly set himself apart with his adherence to historical accuracy and his detailed art style, which first won him great acclaim with *Les Passagers du Vent*. A top 100 list of readers' favorite French BD from 2004⁵ shows the popularity of the historical genre, as 57 titles have a historical setting. It also shows Bourgeon's enduring popularity, as 10 of his albums are included on the list. Furthermore, Bourgeon popularized a new form of BD serial: that of a limited set of albums telling a complete and finished story, instead of serials running indefinitely, or just as standalone stories.

Bourgeon evidently has a passion for history, and where André Juillard with his serial *Les Sept Vies de l'Épervier* could be caught making several historical errors, Bourgeon's research was meticulous. This becomes especially apparent when compared to, for example, Hermann's⁶ *Les Tours de Bois-Maury*, which was published around the same time as Bourgeon's *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule*, and is set in roughly the same historical period and setting. Both Bourgeon and Hermann have a similar focus on the daily lives of the common folk, and neither shy away from showing violence and sex. While Hermann clearly did his research, his work pales next to Bourgeon's elaborate art.⁷ Hermann depicts history in the broad strokes and sketchy lines that are distinctive for his art style, but that renders the historical setting at times vague and indistinct. Because of the lesser detail, Hermann's story could be set about anywhere. Bourgeon, on the other hand, wishes to approximate historical reality as closely as possible, which is a good fit with his art style which is colourful, with clear lines and detailed backgrounds. More than just influencing the depiction of objects, decor and events, the historical setting also profoundly influences the story, relationships and psychology of his characters.

⁴ Groensteen, *La Bande Dessinée*. Depuis 1975 p.16.

⁵ http://www.stripspecialzaak.be/Toppers_FransenTop.htm

⁶ Like many BD artists Hermann Huppen uses a pseudonym for his work, in this case Hermann.

⁷ See figures 1 and 2 for some examples of Bourgeon's and Hermann's art.

How Does *Les Compagnons* Function as a Historical Narrative?

The presumed task of the historian, or anyone who wants to depict history, is to 'unearth' history: to find out "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist".⁸ Yet upon closer inspection, this is a naive outlook. First of all, many artifacts and physical objects are lost over time, so a historian cannot always fall back on those for evidence. More importantly, depictions of history are always more than just a collection of facts. A historian also connects these facts to a larger picture of history, explaining and interpreting them based on other established truths of history. Other than that, manuscripts and accounts from any given time period are biased by the writer. The classical example is that of two people witnessing an execution. One of them will speak of tragic and dishonourable murder, whereas the other will describe the same event as the just punishment of a criminal. From their own personal perspective, both deliver a truthful account of events. In order to create a coherent idea of what happened in the past, the historian needs to do a great deal of critical thinking. And to make matters even more complicated, historians themselves bring certain notions with them that influence their work. In chapter 2 of the *De Constructie van het Verleden*, Chris Lorenz describes three problems of interpretation. Firstly, a witness to an event will interpret and record that event according to their own perspective. One needs to ask themselves how this record relates to the 'truth' of the event. Secondly, the historian needs to interpret the recording of the event. Is his interpretation and subsequent reconstruction of the event correct? Thirdly, the historian connects all these facts into a coherent story, and offers an explanation of the events as he has reconstructed them. Are the events correctly interpreted and connected to one another? These three obstacles make it very clear that interpreting and representing the past is no small task. "The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy but one that is very hard to eradicate" (Carr, p.12). There is no such thing as The History, only many different viewpoints and interpretations, and history is not objective, but always subject to interpretation, the choice of perspective and vocabulary.

Once one can abandon Ranke's statement of a single 'true' history, one can easily start to question what the use of history actually is. In *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, Friedrich Nietzsche distinguishes three reasons people look at history: The antiquarian perspective means looking at history out of love and interest for the subject, the monumental perspective means looking at history to guide them in the present and taking comfort in looking at heroes from the past, and the critical perspective acknowledges the burden of history on the circumstances in the present. The importance of history is often closely connected with the importance it has in the present. In the foreword to *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* Barbara Tuchman explains her motivation for writing about the upheavals of fourteenth century France. She describes the period as "a violent, tormented, bewildered, suffering and disintegrating age", that could offer some comfort, as we presently face a similar chaotic period: "If our last decade or two of collapsing assumptions has been a period of unusual discomfort, it is reassuring to know that the human species has lived through worse before" (Tuchman, foreword p.1). History also has great cultural value, as it affirms that a group of people have a shared culture and a shared past. Through an awareness of the past, a feeling of unity is maintained; the idea that a group of people is connected and belongs together. Milan Kundera, in his book *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, notes that "the first step in liquidating a people

⁸ Ranke, "Preface: Histories of the Latin and Germanic Nations from 1494-1514", orig. "Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514" in *Stern, The Varieties of History*, p.57.

(...) is to erase its memory". History, and the study of history, has, therefore, great cultural value: to create a feeling of unity and to have a well of heroes and misdeeds to draw inspiration from. History functions as a mirror: always reflecting the past through the needs and sensibilities of the present. We elevate or condemn acts of history according to our contemporary cultural values. John Berger notes something similar in *Ways of Seeing*: "history always constitutes the relation between a present and its past. Consequently fear of the present leads to mystification of the past. The past is not for living in; it is a well of conclusions from which we draw in order to act" (p.11). It is no wonder that BD, with its close connection to Francophone culture found history such a compelling theme.

The genre of BD, and Bourgeon's *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule* in particular, distinguish themselves from the more traditional historical narrative in a number of ways. In *Les Compagnons*, the main character, Mariotte, follows a knight who is on a quest to 'the edge of the world'. This journey leads them through the war-ravaged French countryside, eventually ending in the fictional village of Malaterre and in the castle Montroy. Although none of the events or characters actually happened or existed, the setting and circumstances of medieval life are represented in a realistic way. For example, although castle Montroy is fictional, it is an exact reconstruction of an existing castle: that of Tournœl.

The story of *Les Compagnons* includes many social classes and people that do not get a great deal of attention in the classroom or in documentaries, such as servants, peasants, Jewish street performers, a bathhouse owner and a wandering minstrel. While the Knight is a common figure, he is accompanied by two teenagers: Anicet and Mariotte. The main character Mariotte is an illiterate peasant girl, a class that rarely gets mentioned in historical texts. One of the main reasons for this is simply that the lives of women were hardly documented, and those women whose lives were documented were atypical or exceptional. The same can be argued for many of the other classes mentioned above. Lack of documentation is a reason to shy away from going into detail about the lives of these characters, as one has to rely on conjecture. Chapter 4 will go into more detail on the problematics of including conjecture in a historical narrative. For now, suffice it to say that Bourgeon focuses on fairly unusual classes of people.

There is, however, another reason it is rare to find a woman as the protagonist of a historical work: it is difficult to feature them without giving them improbable or extraordinary lives for the time, as they often lacked the means to travel and had little political influence. There were, simply put, very few women that shaped history in fourteenth century France. A woman as a credible main character in a traditional historical narrative has therefore proven to be difficult. Someone who wants to write a historically accurate book about the events that shape history through the eyes of someone who was there, the main character will always end up being a man, usually of noble blood or otherwise connected to nobility. A good example for a historical non-fiction novel like this is Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror*. This narrative can be taken as the example of a more traditional historical narrative: it follows the life of Sire Enguerrand de Coucy the seventh. History is often depicted from the viewpoint of an educated, powerful, patriarchal figure, not just because figures like this were better documented than any other, but also because of the goal of these narratives. Most historical narratives mean to inform: to make the reader understand the different events that lead to developments and changes throughout time. Because Bourgeon does not actually explain the developments of history or important events, nor focuses on actual historical characters, he has the freedom to include original characters in a way that an educational piece cannot.

Bourgeon's entire approach to the historical subject is different from Tuchman's and other traditional historical narratives. *Les Compagnons* is never explicitly dated, does not feature any known historical characters, nor any great historical events. Bourgeon does, however, show the reality of daily life in the past in a vivid and brutal detail that few other works can match. The tale is steeped in the consequences of the Hundred Years' War on the population, yet never explains anything about how the war came to be. While the book is thoroughly historical, it is not meant to clarify or teach history, merely to represent a vivid slice of it; a snapshot of a certain place and time. Due to the incorporation of history, folklore, landscape and culture into the narrative, *Les Compagnons* could not be set anywhere else. So even though, as mentioned before, the story is not dated, an attentive reader could see that the tale is set near the end of the Hundred Year's War in the southeast of France. This knowledge, however, is not necessary in order to follow events and comprehend the story as a reader.

As a historical narrative, it is clear that Tuchman has a bigger scope: her book encompasses a longer period of time and has a wider geographical range. The main character is present at key moments of change as the book focuses on events that shaped the century. In Bourgeon's narrative, by contrast, only around a year passes within the story. More importantly, the characters within *Les Compagnons* have a limited understanding of how their current living conditions came about, and how this will influence their future. The focus is solely on the events surrounding the main character and the way she experiences the world. This ties in with Jean-François Lyotard's notion of a fractured history. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard argues that small, co-existing narratives are the appropriate way to explain social transformations and politics instead of a single grand historical narrative. For example, writing a history on the lives of monks will result in a completely different work than a description of the lives of knights (not to mention that there is great variety within these groups). Historians always work with a certain audience in mind, and will adjust the historical perspective to fit the intended audience. Pure objectivity is not something historians should strive for. Subjectivity offers perspective and a context in which to handle the historical subject. "Wil de geschiedwetenschap niet steeds meer van hetzelfde opleveren, dan zal het verleden vanuit steeds divergerende waardenhorizonten bestudeerd moeten worden" (Lorenz, p.264). All these different perspectives and smaller narratives offer different (equally true and worthy) pieces of history. Bourgeon's little narrative and unusual viewpoint offers a different fragment of history than Tuchman's more traditional narrative of events that we now remember as important. One needs a broader narrative like Tuchman's to understand the significant developments of the time, yet *Les Compagnons* offers, partly due to its medium, an almost tangible slice of history from a very specific time, place and viewpoint.

Many of the differences between *Les Compagnons* and *A Distant Mirror* are due to a difference in intention. Because both authors have a different intention, by extension they also have different implied audiences. Tuchman's narrative is directed towards a critical audience wishing to be educated, whereas Bourgeon's work is meant to entertain a broad public. In its own way, *Les Compagnons* is informative in showing life at that time and place, and evocative with its violence and blatant sexuality, but the story is not meant to be absorbed critically. The main characters are simple, down to earth people wishing to survive, find love (or sex) and companionship. They are not motivated by religion or social conventions that a modern audience would have problems understanding or sympathizing with. This is, however, the case with the main character from *A Distant Mirror*. Enguerrand de Coucy is ruled by strict social conventions that can seem utterly absurd to a modern reader. Moreover, the work does not include thoughts

or emotional utterances and lacks insight in the inner life of the main character. This is because he is an actual historical figure that Tuchman wishes to represent as accurate as possible. Tuchman therefore argues that any remark she makes of an emotional state must have had documentary support, otherwise it is conjecture and cannot be included. This is in stark contrast to Bourgeon's emotional engagement with his characters. Tuchman gives a comprehensive picture of fourteenth century France, the events that shaped it and the consequences of these events whereas Bourgeon paints an accessible, emotionally engaging picture of a fragment of history that can be enjoyed without a great deal of knowledge of history.

Comics as a Medium of Historical Representation:

One can read an entire chapter in *A Distant Mirror* on how a castle looked and what the function of every room was, yet seeing Bourgeon capture the day to day life in the castle through images is quite a different experience. Something about the direct visualization leaves a distinctive impression on the mind. Yet, this direct visualisation can also be problematic. In her article *Comics as literature? Reading Graphic Narrative* Hilary Chute suggests that comics showcase the different styles, methods and modes with which someone can engage with history, thereby making the problem of historical representation apparent: namely that there are many different ways to tackle the historical subject. She says: "an awareness of the limits of representation [...] is integrated into comics through its framed, self-conscious, bimodal form; yet it is precisely in its insistent, affective, urgent visualizing of historical circumstance that comics aspires to ethical engagement" (p.457). They offer food for thought through explicit visualisation and individual voice.

The combination of graphic narrative and the historical subject is certainly an interesting one. It has been argued that comics can create a certain intimacy between the historical subject and the reader through its combination of visual and narrative cues. "The most important graphic narratives explore the conflicted boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown at the intersection of collective histories and life stories" (Chute, p.459). It is probably no coincidence that historical biography is such a popular subject for graphic novels. Not all historical graphic narratives are biographies, however, and it is often presumed that there is an emotional distance between people in the distant past and people now: they had a different culture than our own, lived under different circumstances and had different beliefs. Bourgeon assumes that on a fundamental level people are still the same. They might live in violent times and accept violence and brutality as part of life, but they are still relatable for a modern audience. This is also facilitated by the fact that many of the major characters exist somewhat on the fringes of society, and can be critical towards certain aspects of medieval life. This distances the characters from, for example, the strict social conventions of court life that can seem alien to a modern reader, and allows readers to easily empathize with the figures in the story. Jan Baetens makes a similar point regarding biographical graphic narratives, stating that they "were offering a more underground and authentic encounter with historical reconstruction wherein the individual voices, memories, and experiences were so well captured" (2015, p.234). Like autobiographical graphic novels engage on an emotional level with the past, so does Bourgeon allow for empathy with his characters that are far further removed from the experience of either artist or reader. In this way, Bourgeon gives voice to a unique set of characters, and by extent a voice to the history. The immersion into the historical period is therefore facilitated by two major elements: direct visualisation through the images and emotional engagement through the characters.

Graphic narratives not only offer an interesting experience of history through its intimacy and emotional engagement, they also have other advantages. In a meeting with Bourgeon, marine historian Jean Boudriot noted that Bourgeon depicted a specific space on the ship: a part of the fighting corridor that was often used by carpenters to make repairs. This image was unique, as the space is usually considered too insignificant for painters, artists and historians to depict. A film maker would not be able to build a whole new set for a single shot, yet graphic narratives have the opportunity to showcase nooks and crannies and use a variety of angles that a film maker either is incapable of because of issues of space, or simply cannot afford. Images 3, 4 and 5 in the appendix show some examples of the variety of angles and locations that Bourgeon displays. Historical details like these can enhance how the reader experiences the historical setting. Through these unique images and insights, Bourgeon creates a better understanding and clarity of historical periods.

Taking all the various advantages of the medium of graphic narrative and interesting insights into history Bourgeon offers, it is a shame that his work is not used more often in the classroom or in the field of history. The way *Les Compagnons* functions as a smaller, new perspective on traditional history can be informative. Images and graphic narratives are often used in primary school to help children grasp complex ideas, such as the Van Nul tot Nu (From Zero till Now)⁹ which presents the history of the Netherlands in chronological order, and more recently Rembrandt¹⁰, about the life of the famous Dutch painter. Luckily, the taboo on using graphic narratives in higher education seems to have become less prevalent. Works like *Maus* and *Persepolis* are discussed in literature, media, and history courses. A bigger obstacle in the case of Bourgeon is probably the copious amounts of violence and nudity, which many people balk at, and which makes the work somewhat less suitable for a younger audience. Bourgeon himself lamented the exclusion of his work from educational platforms, and has actively worked to bridge this gap. *Les Compagnons Du Crépuscule, Hors Série : Dans le Sillage des Sirènes* is a book showcasing the historical research Bourgeon did on *Les Compagnons*, and is published as a companion guide to the series. Also, in 2010, Bourgeon had an exposition in the Musée national de la Marine about his other historical series *Les Passagers du Vent*.¹¹ In this way, Bourgeon encourages the public to take his works seriously as historical narratives.

Conclusion:

Bandes dessinée are highly regarded in France, and even considered an art form. The medium is considered closely linked to Francophone culture, as it draws on the notion of a shared cultural identity and a shared past. Within this culture, Bourgeon is an incredibly popular artist, and he has helped popularizing the genre of historical realism in BD. Through the blending of fictional and historical elements, Bourgeon creates an unique historical narrative, one that focuses on the uneducated and poor as opposed to the rich and influential. While *Les Compagnons* is first and foremost a piece of entertainment, its audience is still absorbed in the vivid depiction of the fourteenth century. The medium of graphic narrative creates a certain immediacy and intimacy, and can offer details and insights into history few other media can accomplish.

⁹ Van Nul tot Nu, written by Thom Roep and drawn by Co Loerakker. Published by Oberon in 1982.

¹⁰ Rembrandt, written and drawn by Typex. Published by Oog & Blik in 2013.

¹¹ http://www.musee-marine.fr/sites/default/files/cp_les_passagers_du_vent_paris_2010.pdf

Chapter 2: The Use of Text in *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule*

Introduction:

Comics, graphic novels and BD are usually described as graphic narratives: narratives told through interplay between text and image. However, many have noted that this short description is incomplete because it fails to distinguish comic books from other forms of graphic storytelling, such as picture books. In this chapter, I will first outline the many different arguments and opinions that surround the question of what defines a graphic narrative. The second paragraph will delve deeper into the function of text in a graphic narrative, followed by a short overview of the different applications of text, such as speech acts, narration boxes and sound effects. It has been mentioned before that *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule* functions in many aspects as a sightseeing tour through fourteenth-century France. Aside from this, the main goal of the work is to tell an entertaining story. Text is an important aspect of many graphic narratives, including *Les Compagnons*, and the way text is utilized is influenced greatly by the stylistic choices and goals of the work. It is therefore important to take a closer look at the way Bourgeon conveys speech and thoughts through text balloons, narration and other uses of language. The way Bourgeon utilizes text is directly linked to the historicity of the work, and influences the character's vocabulary and grammar. In the last paragraph I will delve deeper in the ratio of words and image and the perceived 'literariness' of the work. I will be using the term graphic narrative as an umbrella term indicating BD, comics, and graphic novels. At times when I do use the terms comics or graphic novels, take it as a given, unless otherwise stated, that theories applicable to one form of the medium can be used for the other as well.

What Defines a Graphic Narrative?

Upon reading about the formal aspects of comics, I found that there is much discussion on what exactly defines a graphic narrative. The essence of comics, it seems, must be found by focusing on specific aspects of its form. Harry Morgan¹² focuses on the literary qualities of the medium, calling the form 'drawn literature'. Benoît Peeters¹³ argues that the relationship between different parts, specifically between the individual frame and the page as a whole should be the centre of attention. Henri Filippini¹⁴ sees the use of speech bubbles as vital, Yves Frémion¹⁵ the implied narrative in the gap between images. Both Thierry Groensteen and Jan Baetens focus on the system of layout and how all the different elements are combined. Regardless of which aspect one considers the defining trait of comics and graphic novels, it seems there is much flexibility in how a specific work utilizes these formal aspects, since it is entirely possible to leave some out altogether. There are wordless comics and comics without clearly defined panels or speech bubbles, yet most of these works can still be identified as graphic narratives. Very few aspects of comics are indispensable, it seems. The problem with these theories is, therefore, that they do not

¹² Morgan, Harry. (2003). *Principes des Littératures Dessinées*. Angoulême: Editions de l'An. Morgan, Harry. (2008). *Formes et mythopoeia dans les littératures dessinées*. Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris.

¹³ Peeters, Benoît. (1991). *Case, Planche, Récit: Comment lire une bande dessinée*. Casterman.

¹⁴ Filippini, Henri. (1980). *Histoire de la Bande Dessinée en France et en Belgique: des origines à nos jours*. Grenoble, Glénat.

¹⁵ Frémion, Yves. (1990). *Le Guide de la Bédé Francophone*. Paris.

take into account the various exceptions to the rule. "It is nonetheless the combination of these elements (frames and balloons in particular) that, in the modern collective imaginary, seems to typify comics, to characterize the formal apparatus of the medium and its language" (Groensteen 2011, p.11). The common conception of graphic narratives is that they constitute a mixture of verbal and visual elements, and it is this assertion that I want to focus on.

A common definition of graphic narratives is that they are a combination of pictures and text. "Comics might be defined as a hybrid word-and-image form in which two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual, register temporality spatially" (Chute, p.452). Philippe Marion¹⁶ described the combination of these narrative tracks as graphiation: the split that exist in a graphic novel because it is made up out of the two conflicting registers of the verbal and the visual. Images and words are not mixed in a single medium, but exist in tension with one another: they are 'split' or on two different 'tracks'. Scott McCloud emphasizes this contrast, calling pictures *received* information, in contrast to words, whose meaning must be *perceived* (49). "Such a distinction posits a struggle between passive and active experience, that is, between inert spectatorship and committed reading. By this argument, comics depend on a dialectic between what is easily understood and what is less easily understood; pictures are open, easy, and solicitous, while words are coded, abstract, and remote" (Hatfield, p36). Other scholars, however, seem to have quite the opposite view regarding the easy comprehension of the visual elements. In "Graphic Novels: Literature Without Text?" Jan Baetens argues that images have a certain structural independence: images are not just links in a narrative chain, but are also autonomous. "Why does the literary graphic novel stick so fiercely to a certain independence of some of its elements? Because images are very hard to 'tell' when they are not clearly involved in narrative, and because the overall difficulty of verbal paraphrasing acts as a kind of warrant that the proper visual qualities of the image will not be forgotten or neutralized when the global storytelling takes over" (Baetens 2006, p80). I agree that the visual aspects ought not to be so easily be discarded as being simple. It seems that the verbal and the visual are engaged in a tug-of-war on the comic page and in the minds of scholars.

It is precisely this standpoint that Groensteen rallies against by proclaiming the visual aspect of graphic narrative as dominant, with words only supporting the visual narrative. "If I plead for the recognition of the image as pre-eminent in status, it is not for the reason that, except on rare occasions, in comics it occupies a more important space than that which is reserved for writing. Its predominance within the system attaches to what is essential to the production of the meaning that is made through it" (Groensteen 2007, p8). Groensteen's standpoint is logical: it is after all possible to have a wordless comic, yet arguably not one without images. "What is essential in the graphic novel is that drawing is less a technique that is used to shape a given story than a creative operation that produces the images and the very stories themselves." (Baetens 2015, p.164). According to him, the images produce the narrative.

Visuals are an indispensable aspect of graphic narratives, yet words can be equally important. By far the majority of comics have speech and dialogue (usually in the form of text balloons and narration boxes), and the ones that do not are more often than not considered experimental. For a more traditional work whose aim is to entertain readers with a story, words are as necessary as visuals. Not just as an aid in unfolding a story, but also as an intrinsic part of a comic's style and tone. In *Tintin*, captain Haddock's swearing is iconic, as are the many uses of puns and wordplay in *Astérix*. Laurence Grove argues the difference between "a textual narrative

¹⁶ Marion, Philippe. (1993). *Traces en Cases: Travail Graphique, Figuration Narrative et Participation du Lecteur*. Louvain-la-Neuve :Académie.

that includes images", and an "image-based narrative that draws upon written text as an intrinsic element" (p.18) with comics being the latter. Grove also notes that text is just as important in wordless graphic narratives, by their very exclusion: "'Silent' BDs working in the current tradition gain much of their power from the contradiction of expectations. The text remains an important element by its very exclusion, as attention focuses on the way that the images are adapted to overcome the practical difficulties arising from such elimination" (Grove, p.18-19). Wordless graphic narratives in that sense play on the expectations of the reader and subverts them by going against the accepted norm of comics with words.

Word and image should complement one another on the page to form a narrative together. "We continue to distinguish between the function of words and the function of images, despite the fact that comics continually work to destabilize this very distinction. This tension is fundamental to the art form" (Hatfield, p37). The question of how the relationship between words and images should be defined, and how the tension between these aspects functions, is, I think, very difficult to answer. Rather, one should look at individual works or artists, and see how they exploit this tension. I would like to argue that while both words and images form an intrinsic part of graphic narratives, visual can overturn the verbal, but not the other way around. A graphic novel that can be easily understood without images would not be utilizing its medium in a meaningful manner. Images and words should complement or contradict each other, every aspect working together to build the narrative for the audience.

On the Use of Text:

As the previous paragraph has shown, an important aspect of graphic narrative is the specific way the visual and the verbal interact. In "Graphic Novels: Literature Without Text", Jan Baetens describes a technique used in what he has termed 'literary graphic novels'. He posits that in order to escape the view that pictures are merely there to illustrate the text, the artist has to create a tension between what is said and what is shown. "In literary graphic novels words and images often clash, creating a kind of autonomy for the image overall" (Baetens 2006, p80). Words and images should not express the same thing, according to Baetens. In order to become more literary, a graphic narrative should adhere to a few rules: "Ideally speaking, good storytelling, i.e., storytelling that is able to transform a graphic novel into something more (let's say a work of literature), tries to explore and to combine the narrative virtues of each panel, the narrative added value of the sequence of panels, and the narrative subtleties opened by the tension between the various publication rhythms of the work as it has been disclosed to the public" (Baetens 2006, p81). Relevant to this paragraph are the following points: the reader should be able to infer the story by looking at the image, but the image should not be a reduplication of what the reader is told by verbal means. A sequence of images should have what Baetens calls an active function in the production of the plot, not simply show what the reader is already aware of must happen next.

What Baetens describes when he puts up these conditions on how words and images should interact in a graphic narrative; however, is one specific *type* of graphic narrative. *Les Compagnons* is not a literary graphic novel. In *Les Compagnons*, word and image are not contradictory: they work together to tell a (fairly) straightforward and emotionally uncomplicated story. Images are also not a complete reduplication of the text. Rather, the pictures are there to indicate mood and give context to what is being said. Images in *Les Compagnons* have the added value of scene setting, and there is a strong emphasis on displaying

environments. Bourgeon does not just offer a story; he offers a sightseeing tour through fourteenth century France. The following chapter will contain a more detailed analysis of Bourgeon's use of text.

Application of Text:

Language in comic books has often been criticized for being trite, unoriginal, or just plain weird. Distorted or non-standard speech is often used for comedic effect, or to indicate a dialect or speech pattern.¹⁷ "Concern over such 'degradation' of language continues to obstruct the critical reception of comics, even though, properly speaking, this anarchic approach to words should be seen as a creative asset rather than a liability" (Hatfield, p.34-35). Comic artists can rely on pictures to clarify garbled words or distorted vocabulary. Word distortion in comics can therefore be a source of meaning, and show a sophisticated and creative use of language.

Apart from that, text can be used in a number of different ways in a graphic narrative. The first and most recognisable of these is the way dialogue and other speech acts are conveyed: most common is to put these in speech balloons and link them to the character speaking, though these speech acts can also 'float' inside a panel without balloons or be placed beneath or above the panel. There are also thought balloons for unuttered speech, and caption boxes for a character or narrator. Aside from this, text can also convey volume or tone, which is often indicated through changes in the size, font and boldness of the letters. Last but not least, there is also the possibility of indicating sound effects with words.

Another tool sometimes used by comic artists is the use of captions to bridge gaps in time or space, such as 'Meanwhile', 'At the other side of the village' etc. "Words can smooth over transitions and unobtrusively establish a dramatic continuity" (Hatfield, p44). These captions are essentially a handholding device meant to clarify and direct, and not every graphic narrative needs them. These type of transitions are very rarely used in *Les Compagnons*; only when truly necessary for clarity's sake. More often than not, there is a clear logical progression between panels and pages, which makes these transitions redundant. When a character that is seen going to bed in one panel and the next is of them walking around in the morning, it is taken as a given that the reader understands what happens between the two panels.

The last form of text we will be discussing is that of the narration; more specifically, the boxes of text used to narrate events. Usually depicted in the form of a caption box, this voice-over has a few functions: giving an extra perspective or insight, getting the reader up to speed on what is happening, and guiding the reader. The tone of the narrator is often neutral, but can also be emotional, indicating how the reader is supposed to feel at a certain moment. Sometimes the narrator is a character in the story, though not necessarily. By its function, this figure is all-knowing: presenting the story to the reader.

Speech and Thought:

Register, dialects and speech patterns are tools an artist can use to distinguish characters through their speech acts. There are a few examples of such things found in Bourgeon, with different characters having a noticeably different register and vocabulary, such as the conversation between the well-educated noblewoman Carmine, Anaïs the gypsy, and Mariotte in image 1 of

¹⁷ For example, *Krazy Kat* (1913-1944) by George Harriman.

the appendix. More distinctive are the goblins in the first album, who only speak in stilted, rhyming French (image 2).

In graphic narratives, the inner lives of the characters can be expressed by transmitting their thoughts in thought balloons or narration boxes. Bourgeon rarely uses thought balloons and very few personal narration boxes. The few times he does use thought balloons it is usually done like in images 3 and 4: to indicate what a character is hearing or going to do, not what they are feeling. Another convention that is often used, usually when a character is alone, he or she talks to him/herself. These segments could often just as easily been put in thought balloons, but for one reason or the other, are uttered.¹⁸ In *Les Compagnons* characters are very rarely alone, so this type of utterance does not occur often. It is clear that Bourgeon has little interest in the thoughts of his characters, and emphasizes the way they live their lives.

It is obvious that Bourgeon strongly emphasizes speech and the physicality of his characters, and gives little attention to their emotions or lives outside of the events of the story. Bourgeon does, however, pay a great deal of attention to the way characters react to situations. Also, characters in *Les Compagnons* barely have any development, just character unveiling as they react to new situations and give the audience a chance to see this new side of them. The reader is also given little insight in a character's background or desires beyond what they verbally or visually express: all we know of them are their reactions to the physical reality of their lives. The emphasis lies on the story and the setting. Characters are reactionary: what we know of their inner lives is directly linked to the events of the story.

Narration and Other Uses of Language:

It has already been mentioned that Bourgeon uses few caption boxes to smooth out transitions. He also doesn't use captions to represent the thoughts or perspectives of characters. There are, however, a few narration boxes in *Les Compagnons*. Every book starts with a short text: "Celle-ci dura, dit-on, cent ans.... Rien ne la distingue vraiment de celle qui l'a précédée, pas plus que de celle qui l'a suivie... Comme la grêle ou la peste, la guerre s'abat sur la campagne quand on s'y attend le moins... De préférence, lorsque les blés sont lourds et les filles jolies...". This narration is the same in every book, and it serves to give context and set the stage for the rest of the story. Aside from this, there are only two instances of a narrator being directly involved in the story. In book 2, a druid from Roman times casts his voice through time and guides Mariotte and Yuna into the castle of the enemy, narrating its destruction at the end of the book.¹⁹ This narration gives pathos to what is happening, and showcases the destruction of the evil city from a viewpoint that the other characters do not possess. In book 3, again only at the end, the epilogue that describes the fall of Montroy is depicted through images and narration boxes. This narrator is discovered in the last pages to be the survivors of the disaster, who tell the story on stage as travelling minstrels.²⁰ This works as an effective epilogue; describing concisely the events at the end of the story, tying up loose strings, and giving closure about what happened to the characters.

There are other aspects of speech in graphic narrative that Bourgeon utilizes. When talking about someone, the name is printed in bold letters. This is also the case with personal pronouns and nicknames. This is obviously a tool to help readers determine the subject of the

¹⁸ See image 5 in the appendix.

¹⁹ See image 6 in the appendix.

²⁰ See image 7 in the appendix.

conversation quickly. But more than anything, Bourgeon is a master in depicting sounds in a soundless medium. You can see the sound of the horn carrying over the wind in images 8 and 9, and hear the harshness of the curse in image 10 through the sharp angles of the shape. The depiction of tone and sound also influences the lettering and shape of the word balloon, to further intensify this effect.²¹ While these are all common conventions with which to portray sound, the sheer variety of depictions is noteworthy. Another interesting detail when it comes to lettering is that sound effects like animal sounds, screams and noise are sometimes also captured in a word balloons, where convention has these sounds appear directly in the frame, or at the very least not in the same style as an enunciation from a character.²²

Bourgeon effectively uses the narrator to give information and add a great deal of atmosphere and pathos to the story. His use of the visualization of sound effects serves to both clarify and intensify emotion and tone. As a whole, Bourgeon evidently tries to avoid repetition or stating the obvious, allowing the images to speak for themselves. Both captions, narration and sound effects are used sparingly.

Historicity and Speech Acts:

It is common for an artist to emphasize the personality or cultural status of a character through speech. When it comes to history, it is more difficult to incorporate historical setting in speech without becoming cartoonishly incorrect, stilted or incomprehensible. "Certains auteurs plus scrupuleux se sont efforcés d'inventer une langue originale pour leurs héros, qui réponde à la double exigence de la compréhension et de l'exotisme, qui sonne 'médiévale' sans offrir trop d'obstacles à la lecture" (Denoyelle). Both Michel Thiébaud²³ and Corinne Denoyelle have analysed the way in which Bourgeon incorporated historical vocabulary and turns of phrase in *Les Compagnons*. Among which is the use of certain prefixes, abbreviations, amalgamations of different words, and some play with grammatical structure. Bourgeon also makes use of vocabulary specific to objects of the time, for instance "le bassinnet à mézail" to describe a helmet with faceplate. Bourgeon also incorporates parts of the Barzaz Breiz²⁴ in book 2, and various characters sing songs throughout the series. The most attention, however, is given to the use of swearwords and other derogatory vocabulary, of which there are many and varied examples found throughout the series.

Overall, Bourgeon succeeds in building a comprehensive and understandable historical reality, breathing life into the past. "Chez Bourgeon, le souci du détail vestimentaire, architectural, linguistique est emblématique de la charge affective que porte pour lui le Moyen Âge. De même que la répétition litanique inlassable des Séries redonne vie aux anciennes traditions, de même il veut insuffler la vie dans ces vieilles pierres et ces vieux mots" (Denoyelle). Bourgeon's work on historicising speech is admirable and fun to read, and adds greatly to the atmosphere. This is especially prevalent in the second album, where the dark and mysterious atmosphere is enhanced by the inclusion of rhymes, songs, riddles and the more overt historicizing of speech.

²¹ See images 11 to 14 in the appendix for other effective uses of sound effects in *Les Compagnons*.

²² See image 15 in the appendix.

²³ Thiébaud, Michel. (1993). *Les Compagnons du crépuscule, hors série : Dans le sillage des sirènes*. Casterman.

²⁴ Barzaz Breiz, meaning "Ballads of Brittany", is a collection of Breton popular songs collected by Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué and published in 1839. It was compiled from oral tradition and preserves traditional folk tales, legends and music.

The strong presence of the characters and the way Bourgeon emphasizes their physical and emotional reactions to their environment, combined with the historical context creates intimacy with the historical subject in a way that a narrative like Tuchman's never achieves, nor sets out to achieve. *A Distant Mirror* is a descriptive historical novel and does not include dialogue, and, moreover, historicized speech like Bourgeon's can become tiresome and repetitive if it needs to fill an entire novel. Historicized speech is probably also harder to understand without pictures to emphasize and clarify on the meaning. In the end, the inclusion of historical vocabulary and speech patterns might not give much deeper understanding of the historical subject, but it does add flavour and give life to old words.

Amount of Text:

Les Compagnons is not a literary graphic novel by Baetens standards.²⁵ In *Les Compagnons*, word and image are not contradictory: they work together to tell a (fairly) straightforward and emotionally uncomplicated story. *Les Compagnons* might not fit this specific definition of a literary graphic novel, it is still a work that relies greatly on textual exposition. There is comparatively much text in this series, especially in the third album. Does liberal use of text hamper the visual aspects and thereby the function of the work as a graphic narrative?

The amount of text, combined with Bourgeon's detailed art style and liberal use of colour, makes the panels overflow with things to look at. Bourgeon shows himself a graphical artist of great merit as, despite this, his work rarely feels unorganized or unclear. Text is also rarely superfluous, as very little information gets repeated. This does, however, slow the reading pace down significantly. Bourgeon actively encourages lingering, making a reader spend relatively much time on each panel in order to read and see all that is happening. A more detailed analysis of text and page layout will be in chapter 3. For now, suffice it to say that Bourgeon is a slow read.

On the whole, picture and dialogue complement each other: both demand time and attention if the reader wants to grasp the whole story. So while there is a lot of text, there is also a lot of visual information for the attentive reader to work through. Slowing down the reading pace also increases the awareness of the reader, to pause and enjoy a moment in a panel. A good example is found in image 16, wherein Mariotte chats with a shopkeeper. This panel adds nothing to the overall story, but highlights how new and interesting the city seems to Mariotte, and by extension to the reader. With moments like these, readers get an intimate view on the day-to-day lives of people at that place and time, a directness and visuality that novels cannot match in the same way, and very few graphic narratives do so quite like this. So while liberal use of text slows the reading pace down, other aspects of *Les Compagnons* do the same. Bourgeon offers the reader a balanced reading experience, where both image and text demand equal attention through detailed imagery and lack of repetition. This combination ensures attentive reading and absorption.

As a final note, however, it is important to keep in mind that while Bourgeon's style encourages slow reading, it does not enforce it. Speed and reading rhythm, in the end, are up to the individual. In *Comics and Narration*, Thierry Groensteen describes the reading rhythm as forged in the gap of two dimensions: "the reader's engagement with what is being recounted, and, correspondingly, the decoding of a greater or lesser amount of visual and verbal information. The configuration of the multiframe and the density of the information are objective

²⁵ See second paragraph

criteria. However, nothing is more subjective than our involvement in the fabula that is being recounted or shown, the narrative discourse that is addressed to us” (Groensteen 2011, p.149-151). One reader might skim dialogue sections between action scenes, whereas another reader connects emotionally to the characters and yet another reader might linger because of aesthetic pleasure. The readers bring a story to life in their own way.

Conclusion:

It is incredibly difficult, maybe even impossible, to find a single comprehensive definition of what a graphic narrative is. This is not in a small part due to the fact that nearly all of the elements commonly found in comic books such as text, panels and narrative can be left out. I consider the visual aspect rather than the textual aspect of graphic narratives indispensable. The majority of graphic narratives, however, do have text, and there are many ways in which one can use the textual aspect in a meaningful manner. One way is to look at the way text and image coexist on the page: do they complement each other, contradict each other or is the text merely a repetition of what is shown? There are also many different tools for including text in a graphic narrative in a meaningful manner, and the way that text is applied and the manner by which it is distributed on the page give many possibilities for creative use of the medium. Bourgeon's characters have their own distinctive speech patterns which reflect their status and personality, aside from this their thoughts remain largely unknown. The emphasis in *Les Compagnons* is on the story and the setting. Characters are reactionary: what we know of their inner lives is directly linked to the events of the story. Bourgeon also uses narration and sound effects to add pathos and atmosphere to events. All this serves to make the historical aspects of the story more vivid and detailed, as the characters (and by extension the reader) are deeply involved in the events around them. Another aspect of *Les Compagnons* is that historical details are not only depicted in the images, but also represented in the text. Bourgeon depicts historicity through speech acts, adding historical vocabulary, grammar and sometimes verse. The amount of text, and the many different ways text is utilized, have the effect that it takes relatively much time to read *Les Compagnons*. However, this is balanced by the detailed art style that demands equal attention, and the overall effect is that of a rich work that invites the reader to pause and linger.

Chapter 3: Layout as a Carrier of Meaning

Introduction:

Layout is an important element of graphic narratives. The size, shape and orientation of panels on a page determine clarity and reading rhythm. The way the layout looks and functions is therefore largely dependent on what effects the artist tries to create. Another important element is the way the publishing format influences the design of the graphic narrative: the physical size of a book or issue, and also its length influence the type of layout. First, I will go into more detail on how time is experienced when reading a comic book, and on the active participation of the reader. There are different reading techniques one encounters when reading a comic book, both sequential and non-sequential, that do not occur in novels or film. These readings can be influenced by the artist who adapts the format of his work to his intentions. François Bourgeon uses several different strategies in *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule*, which affect the reading experience and greatly enhance how the reader experiences the historical setting. To look at this in more detail, I will take a look at the type of layout Bourgeon uses and to what effect, followed by a more detailed reading on his use of panel density to increase or decrease tension. The final three paragraphs are devoted to the use of camera angles, repetition and the effect of panels within panels.

Tension Between Visuals and the Experience of Time:

One of the ways in which comics differ from a visual storytelling medium like film is in the way the reader experiences time. Films give the illusion of events happening as one watches, whereas a comic, for several reasons, does not create the illusion that events take place as one reads. For one, the reader is holding the physical book and imposes the rhythm and speed of turning pages him/herself. In a movie, after one has seen an image or scene, it is automatically replaced by another: the next image removes the image that came before. With a comic book, one can look back or forwards in time by turning pages or skimming through panels.

Comics have a "visible discontinuity of the sequential flow of the narrative" (82), as Thierry Groensteen²⁶ calls it; the sequences of images are divided by panels. A comic does not present a flowing timeline, instead it offers a series of panels; snapshots of time arranged in sequence on a page. But even within a panel, time is not frozen. If a panel was truly only a single moment in time, characters would not be able to have a dialogue in it. Moreover, one can also assume that the figures within the panel do not remain perfectly still, but at the very least move their lips, and more probably, shift their bodies. "The point is that no bodily shifts occur that are of relevance to the narrative; the image is meant to be *illustrative* rather than *representational*." (Dittmer, p.129-130). Exactly how much time is contained within a specific panel is also not rigidly established: often, the reader does not know how fast the people were speaking, or the pauses between the speech acts. This single panel represents a flexible segment of time. "In short, the image provides visual resources through which the reader can produce temporal order in the scene, but it certainly does not do so in a way that forecloses all other possibilities. It is incumbent on the reader to produce multiple temporalities of the scene from the visual resources

²⁶ Groensteen, Thierry. (2011) . *Comics and Narration*. Ann Miller (Trans.), University Press Mississippi.

provided" (Dittmer, p.129-130). Groensteen describes the process by which the reader seeks out connections between the panels as plurivectorial narration.

Connecting panels to one another demands active participation: it is up to the reader to 'fill the gaps' and to reconstruct the timeline and deduce the correct sequence and emotional tone of the panels. An artist can ensure that readers follow the right path or, alternatively, skillfully manipulate the reader to confuse or obfuscate and increase suspense or mystery: "the form can place a great demand on our cognitive skills. Just an author's spatial construction of the page can beg rereadings and deliberately confuse narrative linearity" (Chute, p.460). Scott McCloud and Charles Hatfield both also noted that in comics, the reader is actively engaged in constructing meaning instead of being an inert spectator. How much active participation is demanded of the reader, however, depends entirely on the skills and intentions of the artist.

There are many names given to the space between panels: *blancs*, *gouttières*, *caniveaux*, gaps, and gutters, and a great deal of importance has been given to them with regards to the active participation of the reader. "If the artist creates a series of *cases* depicting closely linked events, the construction of the *blancs* in the reader's imagination will have a lesser role. The less the apparent link between *cases* the greater the ambiguity of the *blancs*" (Grove, p.31). Yet, the importance of the gutter should not be overestimated, as the logical leaps needed to connect one panel to the next are usually small and intuitive, being guided by the comic book creator. More interesting is the way a page, through the shape and layout of panels, can actively influence reading rhythm and speed.

Independent, Sequential and Nonsequential Reading:

As the previous paragraph shows, an image in a comic book is more than just decoration: it also is a moment in time, meant to be connected to the preceding image and the next image in a sequence to form a narrative. Apart from this, the image on its own must be distinctive and engaging to the reader, and the size and shape of the image and the surrounding frame and gutter influences the way the image is perceived. A panel on a page functions both as a moment in a sequence of events and as a design element. "Broadly, we may say that comics exploit *format* as a signifier in itself; more specifically, that comics involve a tension between the experience of reading in sequence and the format or shape of the object being read. In other words, the art of comics entails a tense relationship between perceived time and perceived space" (Hatfield, p52).

The reader has an active role in deciphering the various tensions and gaps in comic books, and layout plays an important part in this understanding. Every panel does not stand on its own, but is part of a bigger picture: that of the page as a whole. "Readers approach the page both as a fraction of a story and as a visual unit. They notice immediately that the page they are about to read is composed of numerous panels, and thus has moments of stasis, pauses programmed into the narrative" (Groensteen 2011, p.135-136). More than just reading the images sequentially, one looks at the page in its entirety, often before 'reading' the first panel. "Nonsequential reading is inevitable, given the impossibility for the human eye to separate the panel from the page" (Baetens 2015, p.106). There is a second type of organization of the page, one that Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle²⁷ calls "tabular", and Thierry Groensteen²⁸ "translinear",

²⁷ Fresnault-Deruelle, Pierre. (1976). "Du Linéaire au Tabulaire". *Communications*. Volume 24, issue 1. pp. 7-23 [Web:] http://www.persee.fr/doc/comm_0588-8018_1976_num_24_1_1363

²⁸ Groensteen, Thierry. (2007). *The System of Comics*. Bart Beaty & Nick Nguyen (Trans.), University press of Mississippi, Jackson.

which essentially deals with the perception of the reader of the page on its own, aside from the sequential connection of the panels. The process of reading in such a way entails reading back on old panels and skipping ahead to new panels, a process that defies a left-to-right and top-to-bottom sequential reading pattern.

In *Les Compagnons*, this type of reading can be very useful: one can glance at the whole page to get a feeling of the setting of a particular scene and what type of scene it is before reading the dialogue. When reading, one often glances back and forth between the panels as characters act and react to preceding panels. "Reading a comic therefore entails an embodied, durational, multidimensional process of trial-and-error reading that defies the simple linear expectations of 'sequential art'" (Dittmer, p.131). In order to find connection between panels, a reader looks for visual elements that link them. Reading a graphic narrative therefore entails many different ways of looking, many of them occurring subconsciously and near-simultaneously.

Format Design:

The layout of a page offers guidance and immediate recognition to an experienced reader, as the number and shape of panels can give an immediate sense of rhythm and timing. Layout has different functions to fulfill: to showcase art, to support easy reading of a narrative, or conversely, to obfuscate or hide meaning. Which of these functions dominates determines what the layout looks like, and this, in turn, determines reading rhythm. "The 'text' of comic art obeys a rhythm that is imposed upon it by the succession of frames. This is a basic beat that, as in music, can be developed, nuanced, layered over by more elaborate rhythmic effects emanating from other 'instruments' (other parameters of the medium)" (Groensteen 2007, p.45). Will Eisner observed this as well, as he noted that the number, size, and shape of panels help create a rhythmic effect, and that modifying one of these aspects is equivalent to speeding up or slowing down the narration.²⁹ First, I will take a look at the different types of format, before delving deeper in the effects of format on the rhythm of reading.

There are many types of format and comic book scholars have constructed several taxonomies based on the look and function of the layout. I will take a look at several of those taxonomies of layout that are applicable or otherwise related to the way Bourgeon uses format. "Four Conceptions of the Page" by Benoît Peeters is a theoretical article on page layout in comics. In it, Peeters constructs a taxonomy based on two elements: whether narrative or composition is dominant, and whether narrative and composition are autonomous or interdependent. Taking a closer look at *Les Compagnons*, it is clear that the chief function of the work is to tell a story, and that the composition is molded to fit the narrative. Peeters calls this the rhetorical utilization of layout, and it is the most widespread. "The panel and the page are no longer autonomous elements; they are subordinated to a narrative which their primary function is to serve. The size of the images, their distribution, the general pace of the page, all must come to support the narration" (Peeters, 19). This means that Bourgeon's layout is not a repetition of the same format, but that the panel sizes differ according to the scene depicted in them.

In *Comics and Narration*, Groensteen mainly looks at the amount of regularity a layout displays, and what effect this has on rhythm and density. The most common layout of BD's is what is termed the waffle-iron design. This is when the panels are situated on a regular grid. A

²⁹ Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Northampton, MA: Poorhouse Press, 1985).

waffle-iron design can be strictly adhered to, with every page containing the same amount of identical images, or more flexible by changing the size of panels by doubling them in height or width (or both); these shapes still fit within a regular grid, as they are simply duplications of standard panel size, and therefore do not alter the geometric regularity of the grid. Comics can also display second degree regularity: meaning that they conform to a standard height or width, but vary on the other axis. With the degree of regularity of the layout, Groensteen recognizes three schools of contemporary French comic book production. *Les Compagnons* belongs to the second school: elaborated rhetoric. "This consists of multiplying, within a system based on three strips of varying heights, vertical stacks of two or sometimes three panels. This configuration does not breach the regularity of the outline of the strips, but it subdivides them lengthwise, thereby obtaining a smaller panel format" (Groensteen 2011, p.46).

All of these different schools and modes that are made to distinguish layout types serve to underline the basic function of layout: to provide a reading rhythm. A page with many panels quickens it, while a page with only a few panels slows it down. A regular layout of the classical school ensures a regular rhythm. "The 'waffle-iron' is remarkably well suited to any narrative (or section of a narrative) that relies on the stability of some element, or in which a phased process unfolds. It is also ideal for materializing the inexorable flow of time" (Groensteen 2011, p.138-139). Many contemporary comics use a waffle-iron design in combination with the more elaborate rhetoric Groensteen describes; this serves to combine the even rhythm of the waffle-iron with moments of increased or decreased tension. "In this case, the beat inherent to the multiframe, whatever its configuration, is still operative, but no longer in the marked form of a cadence" (Groensteen 2011, p.148). By alternating reading rhythm, breaking up panels, emphasizing graphical elements and changing the density of panels on a page, comic book creators have a great deal of tools at their disposal to influence and direct the reading experience.

Bourgeon's Layout:

As mentioned above, Bourgeon mostly follows the elaborate rhetoric as Groensteen defines it. Roughly eighty percent of the pages in *Les Compagnons* have 3 rows. These rows can be of equal or differing height, but within a single row all panels are the same height, often with some smaller panels created by dividing a regular panel lengthwise. The panels are however of differing width, and the amount of panels per row differs widely from only a single panel per row to as much as six. On a whole, Bourgeon's layout shows great variation in distribution and size of panels. Image 1 for example, consists of two rows. The first two big panels show the arrival of the group at the inn, and serve as an introduction of a new setting. There is also some foreshadowing in the form of the sign hanging outside the inn, as sirens are the heraldry of the noble family that instigates most of the conflicts of the story. The five small panels on the upper right provide a little interaction with the surroundings. The lower row starts again with a bigger picture, depicting the busy inn, whereas the smaller panels focus on the conversation.

The size of the panels gives an indication of their function. Bourgeon uses bigger panels chiefly for landscapes, backgrounds and a bird eye view on the scene. These panels give an overview of a situation or location. Smaller panels are used for actions and interactions, while the smallest units are commonly used to depict emotional reactions by zooming in on a face or details from the surroundings. In *Les Compagnons*, the panels show a clear distinction between the different sizes and their respective functions. "A plan général sets the overall scene, before homing in on specific characters, or, in the case of gros plan, specific features of specific

characters, or indeed a close-up that gives prominence to a particularly important dialogue" (Grove, p.50). This is a common and effective technique that Bourgeon uses frequently.

Bourgeon usually has grids consisting of three rows, with great variety in the density and width of the panels. However, not all rows of the page are necessarily the same height. There are also several deviations from this grid, with panels stretching the entire height of the page, or landscape that take up (nearly) and entire page. On a whole, Bourgeon shows himself to be rather flexible when it comes to layout. Looking at the individual pages it is clear that clarity and readability are paramount. Within a page the panels are clearly distinguishable and evenly sized, the images never extend beyond the boundaries of the panel, and the frames are always rectangular. The reading direction is also always left-to-right and top-to-bottom.

We have already discussed the active participation of the reader, and the importance that is often given to the gutter. Bourgeon in particular has no need for ambiguities in the gutter, as his layout style and story structure suggest a great priority of the clear telling of the story over leaving many logical leaps in the hands of the reader. On the visual level, the gutters in *Les Compagnons* are remarkably thin and small, often strengthening the sense of crowdedness and denseness that is characteristic for Bourgeon's style.

Tension and Panel Density:

Bourgeon's style is exemplified by his crowded, detailed art style. Although he he makes frequent use of silent pages, even those generally contain many details and colours that demand attention. Bourgeon also effectively manipulates the amount of panels not just to increase or decrease the speed of the narrative, but also to add to the busy, crowded feeling of the setting. The last album of *Les Compagnons* in particular, which is set in a city, not only has more panels per page than the previous albums, which were set in the countryside, but also have more text. Not just the streets of the city are crowded, but the pages themselves are as well.

I have mentioned in the previous paragraph the convention of depicting a conversation with several speech acts in a single panel. While this is the most common way of depicting conversation in comics and BD, roughly eighty percent of conversations in *Les Compagnons* are conveyed in a different manner. Bourgeon often depicts dialogue in a series of smaller panels, with each speech act given their own panel, rather than depict several exchanges in the same picture. This is very obvious in image 2. Because many people are talking, and every speech act is given its own panel, the individual panels are rather small with the text balloons taking relatively much space. The close sequence of smaller panels increases the pressure and reflects the tense and unhappy mood of the scene. It also replicates the feeling of many people crowded in a single room. As Mariotte recounts being whipped, she suddenly fears she might have betrayed her lover Aymon, who is a monk at the monastery. The scene then shifts from one setting to another, as the 'camera' first zooms out to depict the part of the castle the room is located in, and then shifts further until you see the castle in the background and the monastery in the foreground, where the last panel lingers on the inside of the monastery where Aymon is waiting for his lover.

The individual panelling of every speech act and the small panels can add to the claustrophobic feeling of the environment, and can be contrasted, as Bourgeon often does, with landscape or other text-free images. Such images are often used to smooth out transitions between locations, as is done in image 2 described above. Something similar happens in image 3, where the view of the snowy rooftops serves as a moment of peace between the different scenes,

to indicate time has passed between the top and bottom row of panels, and to showcase that winter has started. It is due to techniques like this that Bourgeon does not need to rely on caption boxes often.

Camera Angles:

Aside from increasing tension, the first two rows of image 2 also display Bourgeon's dynamic use of camera angles. Evidently, Bourgeon has a clear idea where everything in the room is and shows a certain playfulness in depicting the people from different angles, such as Mariotte addressing the Knight through the holes in the wooden divider. It also ensures that as the focus shifts between characters, as every character is the subject of the panel in which they speak. This is generally the way Bourgeon depicts conversations, especially when the characters are not moving around much. When not depicting private conversation, the camera shifts from time to time to other things while the characters are speaking. This can be seen in the first panel of image 4, where not the speaker, but the subject of their conversation is in the foreground.

Bourgeon also displays his familiarity with the historical setting by representing lesser known or iconic locations within and around the castle from a variety of angles, such as in image 4, where an odd little square of the castle is depicted from several distances and directions. Bourgeon built a model based on the existing castle of Tournœl, to ensure historical accuracy for his fictional castle of Montroy.³⁰ This also enabled him to correctly depict little nooks and crannies that are otherwise left vague. Image 5 is another good example of Bourgeon's use of camera angles. The first two panels seem to regard the Knight from the rafters, followed by a succession of smaller panels showing details of the action. The camera then shifts to the outside of the building: first from below showing how far the child could have fallen, followed by a panel from the opposite angle to show the ground of the square from above, as the Knight would see it.

Repetition:

It has already been noted that the close density of panels on a page can increase tension, but there are also a few other ways in which mood can be conveyed through panelling. The repetition of panels with the same size can create cadence: a regular reading rhythm that suggests that each panel embodies the same amount of time. Bourgeon uses this technique to great effect, and he often combines it with a fixed camera angle.

This is exemplified in image 6, where Bourgeon displays a mastery of timing and building up tension. The first four panels are identical in size and shape and depict Anicet, who is debating to kill the Knight as he lies sleeping. Each successive panel is from the same angle, but increasingly closer to the sword, until it almost fills the panel. The last panel is wider as the scene opens up again when Anicet has made his decision, and prepares to plunge the sword into his master. The use of panelling effectively draws out the moment of suspense in which Anicet makes his decision, to speed it up again once he picks up the sword. Another similar example is found in image 7, where the reader is looking through the eyes of a predator as the camera slowly zooms in on the unsuspecting Mariotte. The repetition of panels can create the feeling of 'and then, and then, and then.....', this is very effective in creating an even cadence to read in. Used as above, however, this repetition creates suspense by slowing down time.

³⁰ Thiébaud, Michel. (1993). *Les Compagnons du crépuscule, hors série : Dans le sillage des sirènes*. Casterman.

Panels Within Panels:

As I mentioned before, the smallest panels in *Les Compagnons* are used to zoom in on a particular detail, most commonly a facial expression. This is usually to show an emotional reaction, or depict a detail in the bigger picture. There is one particular type of panel that Bourgeon often uses: that of the smaller panels floating within a bigger image. Most of these smaller panels depict moments within the bigger panel, such as in image 8. At other times they are used to depict a reaction to what is said or done, such as in image 9, where Mariotte is trying to garner sympathy from the flustered Anicet. Image 10 gives a particularly poignant example of this technique. Here a monk reminds the Knight of the death of his beloved Blanche. The central image zooms in on his horrified face, surrounded by six small floating panels. On the left are his beloved memories of Blanche, on the right her brutal murder. The abrupt disjunction between the panels serves to highlight the radically different ways in which the Knight remembers her: first as the beautiful maiden who saved his life, second as the corpse of a woman he failed to save. The main function of these little panels is to increase the emotional impact of a scene, and they are used often in *Les Compagnons*.

Conclusion:

Graphic narratives do not present a flowing timeline, and the reader is an active participant in reconstructing time, pacing, and the events that happen in the gutter between panels. Comic pages also often invite one to look at the page as a whole, and reconstruct meaning from both the design of the page and the way the individual panels are connected. A comic book artist can, therefore, skilfully adapt format as a significant aspect of storytelling, to create or subvert expectations. The way the panels on a comic book page are arranged also determine in large part the reading rhythm or 'beat' of the work. Format can therefore be a good indicator of the type of graphic narrative one is dealing with. Bourgeon's layout revolves around supporting the narrative, and showcasing historical settings in as varied a way as he can. He increases and decreases tension with many crowded panels squashed close together, alternated with large textless panels or landscapes. His use of camera angles does not just display the dynamic way in which actions and conversations can be presented, but also serve to showcase the historical setting from many different angles. Repetition is a tool used sparingly, but to great effect, to slow down time and make the reader aware of the dangerous or important events about to happen, and panels within panels serve to highlight emotion and can be used to make a scene more emotionally charged or highlight important details. All these tools are used frequently by Bourgeon, showcasing him as a traditional, but highly versatile artist of bandes dessinée.

Chapter 4: History and Fiction

Introduction:

Throughout the last few chapters, I have tried to describe how Bourgeon's *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule* functions as a graphical and historical narrative. In this chapter, I will compare it to the historical non-fiction novel of Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror*, in a little more detail. Both works deal radically differently with gaps in knowledge about history, and though the works do not contradict one another in the information and themes they convey, the way they present these themes is rather different. This becomes especially clear when one looks at the plight of the lower class and how it is represented. Another major theme both works address is the degradation of chivalry, and how violence leads to the breakdown of society. By looking at these two major themes, one gets a better understanding of how *A Distant Mirror* and *Les Compagnons* deal with their subject matter.

Conjecture and Depicting History:

Chapter 1 dealt with several aspects of historical representation, such as the subjectivity that is inherent in all manner of depicting history, the cultural importance of remembering the past, and the way smaller and bigger narratives are relevant in our understanding of history. There is another important aspect that has not been discussed yet, which is closely linked to the difference between representing history in written form and that of a graphic narrative: the way conjecture is handled. Tuchman and Bourgeon deal radically differently with the gaps in knowledge regarding historical representation: those aspects of the past that we cannot know, or those we only have tentative evidence about.

Bourgeon and Tuchman clearly invest a great deal in depicting the past as accurately as possible, but there are still aspects of historical life that are open for interpretation. When relying on manuscripts and archeological evidence there will always be things that were not documented and leave little to no physical evidence. Worse, sources can contradict each other. Tuchman also noted this: "For every statement on peasant life there is another that contradicts it" (Tuchman, p.173). Tuchman's solution to this is simple: she does not mention what, according to her, cannot be stated as a fact. When she does use conjecture, she indicates this with phrases such as 'We do not know for certain that, but' or 'it can be presumed that'.

Bourgeon cannot circumvent these issues of conjecture for a number of reasons. Firstly, because of his choice in perspective: Bourgeon focusses specifically on marginalized or underexposed classes of people such as peasants, servants and Jews. Precisely these groups have often been inadequately documented, and are therefore more reliant on the artist to fill in the gaps. Secondly, the medium itself offers obstacles. Tuchman can address conjecture and mention when she uses it, or simply leave out details of history that in one way or another are problematic. A graphical artist cannot leave out pieces of history in quite the same way. Bourgeon in particular cannot circumvent issues of correct representation of the past because of his semi-realistic, detailed art style. If, for instance, it would be unclear exactly what color fabric or style of clothing was common among the lower class, Bourgeon would have to make an educated guess. A more abstract graphical artist does not have to deal with this, nor does an artist like Hermann, whose style is more sketchy with less detail. Bourgeon, however, invests a lot of

time in making his art as detailed and accurate as possible.³¹ In *Les Compagnons*, all that is known about the historical period has been researched: there are relatively few aspects of historical representation that rely on conjecture. Those aspects that do, usually do so in a fairly small frame of possibility: these conjectures are shaped by surrounding facts, so the probability of these conjectures being close to the truth is high. But while Bourgeon actively tried to minimize moments of conjecture by extensive research, they are, nevertheless, sometimes unavoidable.

Bourgeon's method is emotionally engaging and the visual medium is a very strong tool in experiencing history in a very direct manner. However, it may also give a flawed picture of the past because there are always gaps in the historical knowledge that are filled in by the artist's imagination. Moreover, in contrast to *A Distant Mirror*, *Les Compagnons* is not a descriptive work; it is not mentioned where and how conjecture is used. If what is shown cannot be verified, is it irresponsible to include it in a historical narrative? This refers back to chapter 1 again, to the use of history and the place of BD in Francophone culture. *Les Compagnons* is a work that functions within French culture; showcasing local history and reinforcing the feeling of a shared past. French history is depicted in a compelling and exiting way, through creative use of format and art style. In the end, it is not important that not every single aspect of the work can be verified; it still conveys strongly the sensation of historical life and captures the feelings and conditions of the time closely.

Tuchman's method: omitting that which she does not feel is sufficiently backed up by evidence, can also be misleading. This minimizes the presence of aspects of society that might not be documented, but still had great influence on the life and culture. Tuchman relies heavily on manuscripts and contemporary documentation in her reconstruction of history, and feels that this leads to a true depiction of the past. "Tuchmans en Taylors opvattingen getuigen van een filosofische intuïtie die we als naïef realisme kunnen typeren: de feiten zoals die uit de bronnen gereconstrueerd kunnen worden, geven direct de werkelijkheid weer, en de historicus ordent de feiten in hun chronologische volgorde in een verhaal" (Lorenz, p.23). In chapter 1 I have already has argued that history is always told from a certain perspective and is therefore always subjective. This is something which adherents to the school of naive realism do not sufficiently realize. The goal of *A Distant Mirror* is to depict in a general way the developments of the century through the upheavals, war and other significant events. The danger in this method lies that in leaving out certain aspects, you imply these were not relevant. In a work like *A Distant Mirror*, which strives to elucidate and educate on a piece of history, Tuchman has to pick and choose the aspects that are relevant in understanding the events that shape the century and explain the developments that come afterwards. In doing so ignoring or overlooking other aspects of historical life that do not fit these criteria.

By adhering to factual evidence and careful handling of blanks in historical knowledge, Tuchman gives a much stronger feeling of objectivity than Bourgeon. The subjectivity of Bourgeon's depiction of history is more obvious, not in a small part because of his choice of medium. Moreover, a work like *Les Compagnons* cannot make sweeping statements or describe a general situation, because what are depicted are always specific people or situations. This does, however, not diminish the relevance a work like Bourgeon's has for French culture.

³¹ In *Les Compagnons du crépuscule, hors série : Dans le sillage des sirènes*, Michel Thiébaud mentions that Bourgeon spend two weeks on a single panel because he could not find enough references to the type of crockery and utensils used in a castle kitchen.

The Voice of History:

There are quite a few differences between *A Distant Mirror* and *Les Compagnons* that we have touched upon, such as Tuchman's investment in explaining and teaching history compared to Bourgeon's show-don't-tell method. The facts and information both works convey is extremely similar, unsurprising because they do both deal with the same historical subject matter. Moreover, both works seem to convey the same atmosphere regarding the fourteenth century; one of violence and chaos. "As the war dragged on, the habituating of armed men to cruelty and destruction as accepted practice poisoned the 14th century" (Tuchman, p.139). Bourgeon does not touch upon the war and continuous taxation of the poor that Tuchman gives a great deal of attention to, but both works convey the same feeling of upheaval and breakdown of traditions and norms of society. Tuchman of course has the greater scope and more pages to convey information with, so it is surprising how many historical details are at the very least mentioned or shown in the background of *Les Compagnons*, such as the treatment of Jews and the widespread fascination with astrology of the noble class. Most conspicuous by its absence is the lack of religion in Bourgeon. While Tuchman does mention that church attendance was not as regular and frequent as some would think,³² religion was of great importance to daily life. This is probably in part influenced by Bourgeon's personal feelings on religion,³³ and the fact that his main characters all originate from the fringes of society. Mariotte is brought up by her grandmother with many pagan traditions, the disgraced Knight is a suicidal nihilist, and Anaïs is a wandering palm reader and possibly Jewish.

The two works, of course, differ greatly in their scope and focus. On a whole, we can posit that Tuchman's account is general, whereas Bourgeon's is specific. By this I mean that Tuchman describes the events and sentiments of the century, with some specific accounts to showcase this. Bourgeon, on the other hand, describes the experiences of a specific set of characters, with events that might or might not reflect on a more general situation. By limiting himself to the experiences surrounding a single character, Bourgeon allows for more emotional engagement with the story. Tuchman also understands the importance of the personal viewpoint in history, though probably more regarding the structure and focus it brings, instead of emotional engagement. "I am required to follow the circumstances and the sequence of an actual medieval life, lead where they will, and they lead, I think, to a truer version of the period than if I had imposed my own plan" (Tuchman, p. 14 foreword). However, Enguerrand is not mentioned as frequently as the foreword would suggest, and he only appears after roughly 100 pages. I hesitate to call him the main character of the 'story', and Tuchman extended the scope of her work a fair bit beyond a single life, which is understandable considering her goal to explain the events and mindsets of the fourteenth century. Still, it is interesting to note that both Bourgeon and Tuchman considered the importance of the individual viewpoint.

This also touches upon a difficulty of *A Distant Mirror* as a novel: while a single character could theoretically focus the work more, the work fails to engage on an emotional level. The reader gets little understanding or empathy with the historical figures Tuchman frequently mentions. This is in part because of Tuchman's stringent hold on the historical facts. She ardently refuses to project any personal feelings onto a character, because it is impossible to

³² "For northern France it has been estimated that about 10 percent of the population were devout observers, 10 percent negligent, and the rest wavered between regular and irregular observance" (Tuchman, p.237).

³³ It is rather well known that Bourgeon disliked the Christian undertones of one of his first historical serials: "Brunelle et Colin" (1976), that he drew from scripts by Robert Génin.

construe the truth of those feelings. She allows herself some leeway with terminology as, for example, used on page 460: "Although Enguerrand's friends and adherents entered the competition, he himself did not, which is perhaps a minor clue to personality". Apart from this though, the reader is not encouraged to feel compassion or empathy for these figures.

While *A Distant Mirror* is framed as a story, centered on a single character, his predecessors and his legacy, it is, at its heart, still a descriptive work. The entire book is written in past tense, and often in generalizing terms. "Women of noble estate were frequently more accomplished in Latin and other school learning than the men" (Tuchman, p.53). While such statements are, at times, followed by specific examples, just as often this does not happen. The narrator is objective and omniscient, and fully in charge. There are only a few personal speech acts ascribed to certain historical figures, but for the most part all characters are only described through the narrator. Bourgeon integrates all this sort of historical information in the story itself. Where Tuchman simply inserts part of a speech or song into the text, Bourgeon will have characters sing to ease the mood, or entertain themselves. There is exposition through imagery and conversation instead of description. To take from Tuchman's example given above, Carmine is an important character in the story and a learned noblewoman with a great interest in astrology. At one point, there is a bit of dialogue between her and Mariotte about a clock. From a historical standpoint, this affirms the facts as Tuchman mentions them: that many women of noble estate were learned. Within the narrative, this segment is important because it highlights the differences between the way these two characters look at the world and their different cultural backgrounds. *Les Compagnons* therefore functions simultaneously as an adventure story and a historical narrative.

The personal voice of *Les Compagnons* also gives a sense of urgency and importance to events. The use of past tense in *A Distant Mirror* makes it abundantly clear to the reader that these events have happened a long time ago. Looking through the eyes of characters of *Les Compagnons*, however, the past becomes the present. The reader sees events develop as the character experiences them, and this personal voice gives emotional engagement with the story. Someone with little interest in history, or who simply does not wish to read with the intent of educating himself, would still be able to enjoy an adventure story when reading *Les Compagnons*. *A Distant Mirror*, on the other hand, is purely meant for the critical reader who wishes to learn more about fourteenth century France.

Uprisings of the Lower Class:

Bourgeon clearly depicts the unhappiness and poverty of the lower class, and their growing suspicion of the noblemen. It is Tuchman, however, who explains the source of this unhappiness: the continual raids by both the English and the French and the raising of taxes. Some of this is alluded to when, in panel 5 of image 1, a peasant woman remarks that it does not matter where they come from: "They are all skilled at plunder, rape and arson". This indicates the instability of the country, and also the unhappiness and growing unrest in the peasant class. This unrest also translated into violence towards the nobles who did not protect the peasant class, yet expected that same class to keep paying the rising taxes to fund the war. While the reason behind this is never mentioned in *Les Compagnons*, the consequences of the misery of the lower class are very clear. The nobleman in images 1 and 2 has clearly lost control over his people, as he buckles under their demand for violent punishment against a girl who might or might not be connected to raiders.

What the scene in *Les Compagnons* shows is the habit of violence of the French people, not just the disregard of human life, but the entertainment found in it as well. Panel 5 of image 2 makes it clear that they do not want to kill Mariotte for any perceived wrongdoings (of which they have no evidence), but mainly for fun. As they prepare the stake, village children sing and dance. Tuchman remarks as well that games in the middle ages could be very violent.

“Accustomed in their own lives to physical hardship and injury, medieval men and women were not necessarily repelled by the spectacle of pain, but rather enjoyed it. The citizens of Mons bought a condemned criminal from a neighboring town so that they should have the pleasure of seeing him quartered” (Tuchman, p.135).

Bourgeon makes the attitudes of the time personal by, as the example above, making his characters the victim of these attitudes or, less often, exhibit these attitudes themselves. The instability of society and the fear and violence that the people have become accustomed to is clearly reflected in *Les Compagnons*. There are more than enough acts of aggression and violence of every kind: Jews being burned in their own home, rape, arguments that get out of hand, and criminals getting brutal punishments. What the work rarely shows, however, are acts of violence like raiding parties, soldiers or other depictions of war. Bourgeon focusses on the aftermath of raids, not the acts of violence: the dead lying around, crumbling ruins and the attitudes of people towards one another. Bourgeon, however, omits the one thing that Tuchman gives a great deal of attention to: raiders and plunderers. Tuchman recites the repeated violence unleashed upon France in great detail, to the point where one can start to wonder how there are any peasants left to steal from and/or demand taxation from. The reader is extremely aware of the scale of devastation in *A Distant Mirror*. *Les Compagnons* does not have this scope for obvious reasons, instead unrest is conveyed in a different manner. In Bourgeon the very pronounced threat of plundering raiders is a foreboding danger that is impactful by its very absence. The characters, and by extension the readers, are aware that if they ever were to encounter these war bands, they would not survive it. So even though both works are radically different, they both give a great sense of injustice and chaos. It is Bourgeon, however, who truly captures a sense of helplessness: of people being tossed about by events and circumstance that they have no control over.

The Tragedy of Chivalry:

Reading both *Les Companons* and *A Distant Mirror*, one is struck by the contrasts: the land is raided and burning one day, and just a few miles further along feasts and banquets continue as always. “While clouds of smoke by day and the glow of flames by night mark burning towns, the sky over the neighboring vicinity is clear; where the screams of tortured prisoners are heard in one place, bankers count their coins and peasants plow behind placid oxen somewhere else” (Tuchman, p.234). In the third album of *Les Compagnons* the characters leave the countryside behind to live in a city. The contrast of the peaceful city with the ravaged countryside is a large one, until the scales tip and Montroy also succumbs to raids and plunder, showing the fragility of this peace. More than anything, both Tuchman and Bourgeon show the last, not too glorious gasps of an age: “a violent, tormented, bewildered, suffering and disintegrating age” (Tuchman, page 1 introduction). This end is exemplified by the end of chivalry.

Tuchman repeatedly emphasizes how the ideas of knighthood fail: they are too thirsty for honor and glory on the battlefield and refuse to wage war with tactics and soldiers of common blood. “What knights lacked in the fading 14th century was innovation. Holding to traditional

forms, they gave little thought or professional study to tactics. When everyone of noble estate was fighter by function, professionalism was not greater but less” (Tuchman, p.438). Wars and other extravagant displays of wealth are paid for with tax money from the lower class. These same classes are left against the invading English and the countless mercenaries both sides have let loose on the countryside. Bourgeon exemplifies all the problems of knighthood by creating a character that is the absolute antithesis of chivalry: the Knight. A terrifying, faceless and dark figure.

I have mentioned before that in order to fully understand the context of historicity in *Les Compagnons*, some knowledge of the period, while not necessary to follow the basic storyline, greatly enhances understanding of events. This is especially clear when one looks at the tragic figure of the Knight. The Knight was horribly abused and disfigured after he won a jousting competition and the other knights discovered he was not of noble blood. Because of this, he abandoned his real name and started leading raiding parties all over France. On one of these raids, he discovers too late that one of the castles they targeted belonged to the lady who cared for him after his accident. His fellow raiders have already killed her by the time he arrives. Overcome by guilt, the Knight abandons raiding and goes on a suicidal quest 'to the end of the world'. With some knowledge of the medieval concept of chivalry, it is extremely clear that the Knight is a problematic figure. Despite not being of noble blood, a prerequisite for knighthood, he is the best fighter in the story and has a great desire to be like knights in stories. After his accident, however, he abandons all traditions and rules, and in doing so loses one of the most iconic aspects of knighthood: the pining towards a noble lady.

The Knight is a brutal murderer, and by the time the story starts, he has already abandoned all the veneer of chivalry of jousting, ceremony and courtly love. In fact, both Bourgeon and Tuchman question how far the ideal of chivalry found in countless manuscripts and tales was actually ever true. “If the fiction of chivalry molded outward behavior to some extent, it did not, any more than other models that man has made for himself, transform human nature. [...] Yet, if the code was but a veneer over violence, greed, and sensuality, it was nevertheless an ideal, as Christianity was an ideal, toward which man’s reach, as usual, exceeded his grasp” (Tuchman, p.69). The only thing that separates the Knight in *Les Compagnons* from the raiders roaming the land is that he is better trained and equipped. In fact, he completely lacks that which started the downfall of chivalry: a rigid adherence to tradition. The Knight wanted to become a knight despite tradition forbidding it, and he does not possess the rigid traditionalism of other knights. In fact, despite his own dreams of knighthood, the Knight is quite far removed from the chivalric ideal, as he is dishonorable, ugly and rude.

The tragedy of the Knight becomes truly visible when you realize that despite all, he still wishes to be accepted in courtly life. As soon as he is given the chance he affiliates himself with a lady and is prepared to defend her honor, only to be sacrificed as a pawn in her political power plays. Not only does the Knight fail in all ways to mimic the tales of chivalry, he is also by far the most effective fighter, making it clear he strives for an ideal and a function that is no longer present in society. The untouchable status of the noble class is weakening as the land is plundered by raiders and the peasants' unhappiness towards their lords increases. Tuchman describes the fourteenth century as the downfall of the concept of chivalry, and this is exemplified in Bourgeon through the figure of the Knight. In reality, the Knight already belongs to the new age: he is an effective warrior precisely because he is not bound by rules of bloodlines, chivalry and honor. Yet through his own stubborn wish for something that does not

fit him and that no longer exist (if it ever existed at all), he seals his downfall. He is the last hero of the age, neither glorious nor chivalrous.

Bourgeon mixes a great deal of sentiments Tuchman expresses about knighthood and violence in a single flawed character. The Knight embodies the habits of violence that Tuchman reproaches knights for, shows the inefficiency of traditions that brings about their downfall and embodies the devastation and ubiquity of raiders. Interesting to note that is in the events surrounding the life and death of the Knight, Bourgeon for the first time connects these individual events to a bigger picture of the century.

In *Les Compagnons*, the focus is always on the events surrounding the characters, yet throughout the tale there are also constant allusions to destruction and endings. The culmination of these allusions seems to lie in the conflict between three sisters of noble blood and their power struggle. Carmine, one of these sisters is all too aware that she had no future. In figure 3, she tells Mariotte that the wheel of time goes on. She reproaches Mariotte for only seeking pleasure for her belly, yet acknowledges that while Mariotte's belly holds the future, she is barren. Carmine is aware that she and all who surround her are products of a bygone age.³⁴ This, and a few other instances, are the times when Bourgeon shows that he might be telling a specific story, but that what happens here is a reflection of the bigger picture

Conclusion:

Compared to *A Distant Mirror*, *Les Compagnons* is a more subjective work, not in the least because of its medium. It is, however, a great representation of French history that might not get all the facts right, but does offer a strong representation of the feelings and developments of the time. This is enhanced by the personal voice and the sense of immediacy that the work projects. *Les Compagnons* also puts more emphasis on the effects of violence and instability than the act of violence in itself. Bourgeon also sometimes uses an individual voice to serve as an example for a more general situation, but only rarely explicitly. There is a definite focus on the subject of endings, as the old classes of knights and noblemen all die at the end, while the servants, gypsies, Jews and peasant girls survive.

³⁴ See figure 4 in the appendix

Conclusion:

Bandes dessinée are considered an important part of Francophone culture. Because BD are closely linked to the notion of a shared cultural identity and past, it is not surprising that the historical subject has proven to be popular. Within this genre, François Bourgeon is a highly regarded artist who pioneered in the depiction of historical realism. This subject fits Bourgeon well, as he is a meticulous researcher and has a detailed art style that is very well suited for conveying historical reality. History can have great cultural value, as it affirms that a group of people have a distinctive culture based in a shared past. Through an awareness of the past, a feeling of unity is maintained; the idea that a group of people is connected. *Les Compagnons du Crépuscule* highlights the daily lives of the common folk, as opposed to the influential nobles whose actions in large part shaped the century. While *Les Compagnons* is first and foremost a piece of entertainment, and historical knowledge is not a prerequisite for enjoying this work, the reader is still absorbed in the vivid depiction of the fourteenth century. In large part because of its medium, *Les Compagnons* can be considered more subjective than a work like *A Distant Mirror*. It is however a great representation of French history that might not be absolutely correct in every factual detail, but that does offer a strong representation of the feelings and developments of the time.

One of the distinctive aspects of graphic narratives is the combination of the verbal and the visual. While the visual aspect is very important, text plays a big part as well, especially in *Les Compagnons*. Bourgeon's characters have their own distinctive speech patterns which reflect their status and personality, moreover, historical details are not only depicted in the images, but also represented in the text. Bourgeon adds historical vocabulary, grammar and sometimes verse to the speech acts of the characters. He also uses narration and sound effects to add pathos and atmosphere to events. All this serves to make the historical aspects of the story more vivid and detailed, as the characters (and by extension the reader) are deeply involved in the events around them.

Bourgeon's art style can best be described as semi-realistic, with extremely detailed and colourful images. He also depicts the historical setting from diverse locations, with varied and unusual camera angles. This showcases Bourgeon's affinity with the historical subject, and allows the reader to see aspects of historical life in a variety of ways. *Les Compagnons* contains relatively much text, but it is never superfluous, and at times add greatly to the historicity of the setting. Creative settings, detailed art and large amounts of text demand the reader's attention, and the overall effect is that of a rich work that invites the reader to read slowly, and to pause and linger on the many different aspects of the work.

Format can be a good indicator of the type of graphic narrative one is dealing with. Bourgeon is a traditional, but highly versatile artist of bandes dessinée. His layout revolves around supporting the narrative, and presenting historical settings in as varied a way as he can. Bourgeon also manipulates the panels to increase or decrease tension, or highlight emotional moments.

The medium of graphic narrative creates a certain immediacy and intimacy, and can offer details and insights into history few other media can accomplish. This is in part because of the direct visualisation of the historical subject, but also because of the emotional engagement of the reader. Bourgeon makes creative use of use of camera angles, reaction shots and careful pacing of the story in order to depict the reactions and emotions of his characters. Their thoughts,

however, remain largely unknown. Characters are reactionary: what we know of their inner lives is directly linked to the events of the story. The emphasis in *Les Compagnons* is on the story and the setting. Because the characters are so directly and intimately involved in the historical setting, this creates an emotional connection to the historical subject for the reader.

The fourteenth century is an age of unrest, and characters are largely helpless against the violent upheavals they encounter. Instead of depicting the various wars, raids and plagues ravaging France in the fourteenth century, like Tuchman does, *Les Compagnons* puts more emphasis on the effects of violence and instability than the act of violence itself. This is effective because the reader is aware of the danger these events pose to the characters, the fear and threat they have to live under. Despite all hardships, these people survive and thrive, living to see the start of a new age.

*Celle-ci dura, dit-on, cent ans...
Rien ne la distingue vraiment de celles qui l'ont précédée,
non plus que de celles qui l'ont suivie...
Comme la fleur blanche à l'épine,
l'amour se peut éclore même au coeur de la guerre,
tant est la vie tenace et la fille jolie...
(Bourgeon, Book 3p.239).*

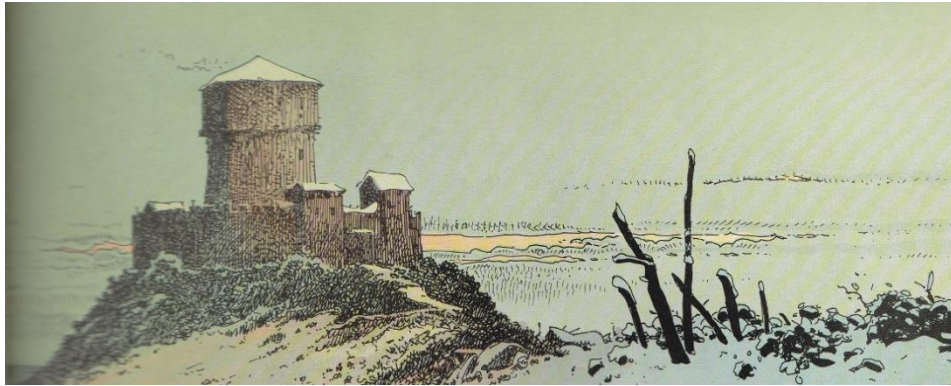
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Appendix:

Appendix Chapter 1:



Hermann. (1986)
p.3



Bourgeon Book 3,
page 103

Image 1: Landscape with a castle in the snow.



Hermann.
(1985) p.7



Bourgeon
Book 3, page
112

Image 2: Banquet at the castle



Image 3: Bourgeon Book 3, page 18



Image 4: Bourgeon Book 3, page 57

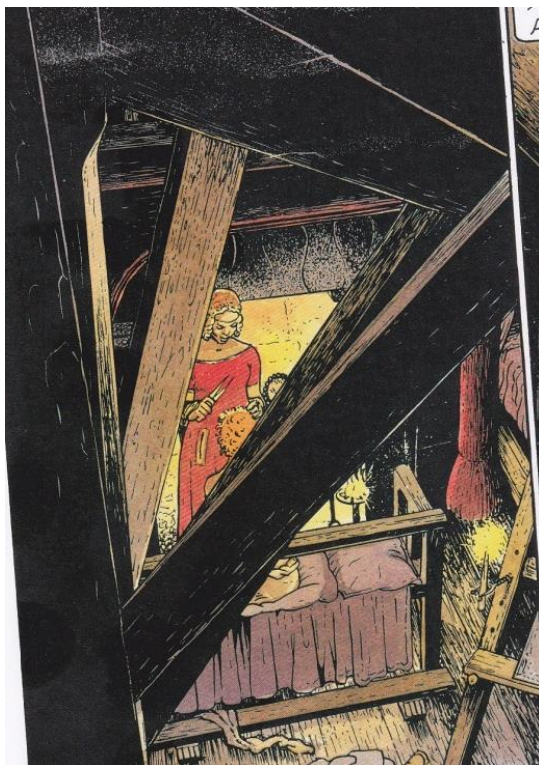


Image 5: Bourgeon, Book 3 page 98

Appendix Chapter 2:



Image 1: Book 3, page 106



Image 2: Book 1, page 29



Image 3: Book 1, page 6



Image 4: Book 3, page 52

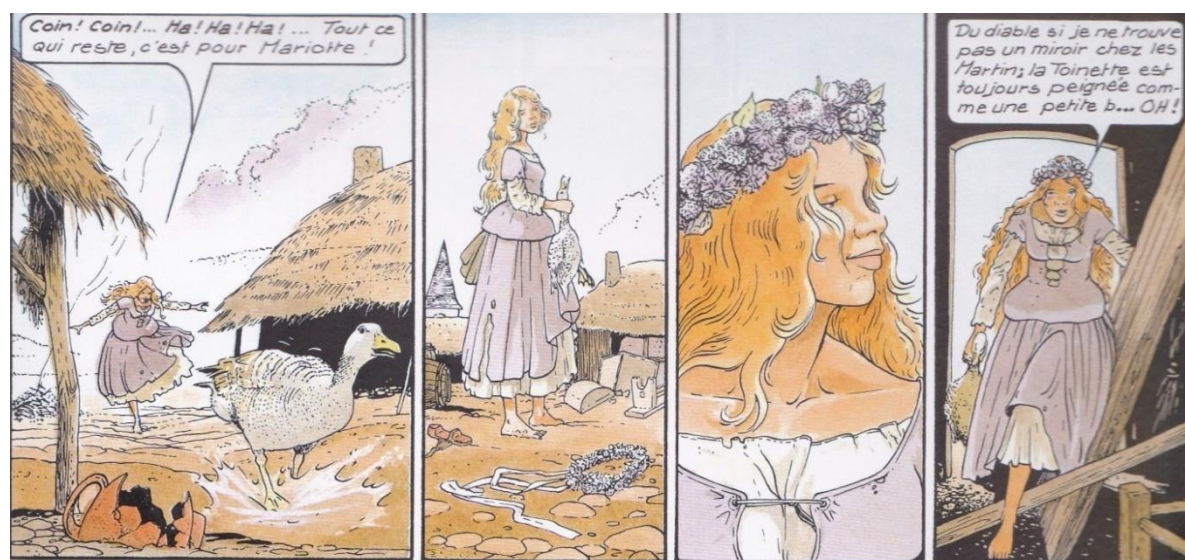


Image 5: Book 1, page 7

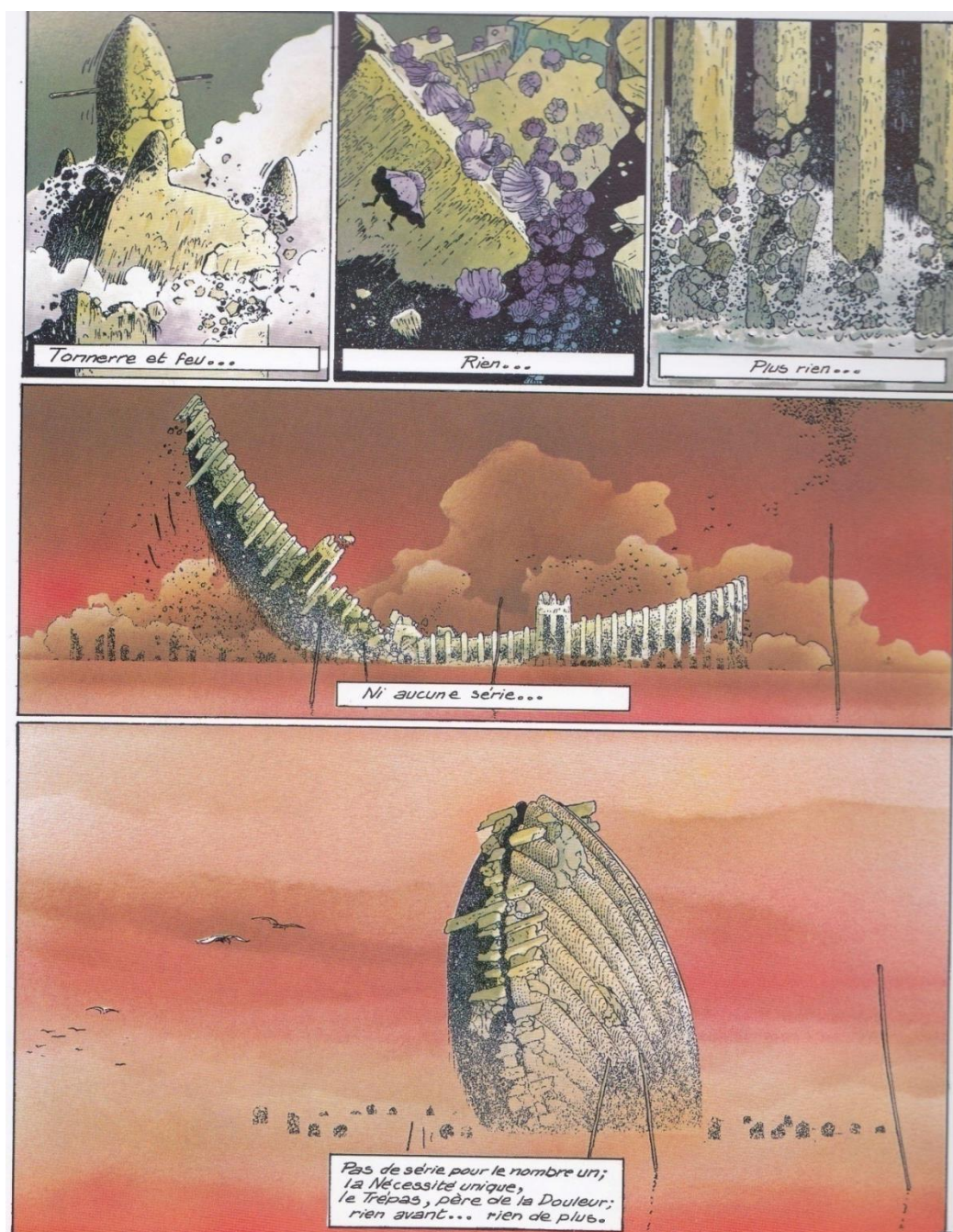


Image 6: Book 2, page 45

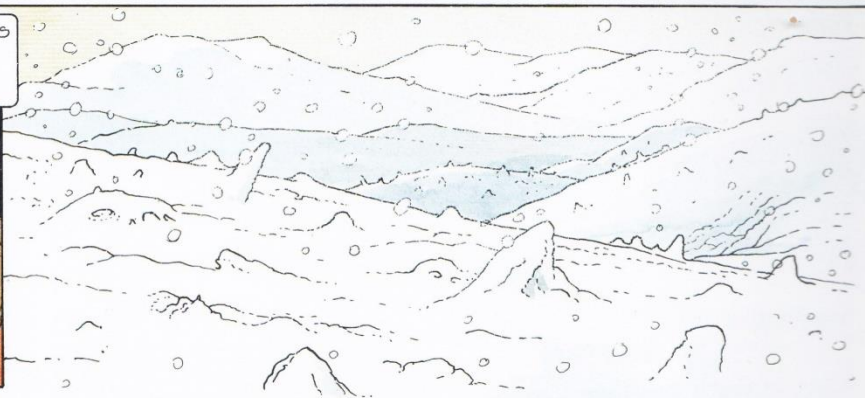
Durant trois jours, aussi trois nuits, nous n'osâmes sortir, terrés comme des loups, tant le ciel était rouge de l'incendie du monde...



Durant trois jours encore, nous restâmes blottis, tant la terre était noire et chaude de ses cendres...



Puis la neige tomba trois longs jours entiers, recouvrant le pays d'un pur et froid silence... Alors nous avons pris la route...



Et c'est là que, longeant le fleuve, il nous a bien semblé les voir...



Image 7: Book 3, page 135

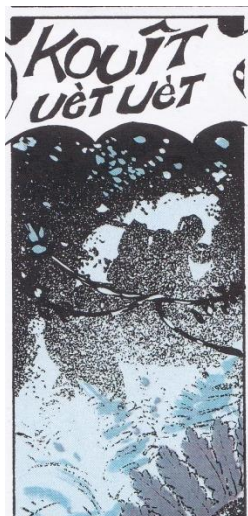


Image 11: book, 1 page 23



Image 12: book 3, page 22



Image 13: book2, page 15



Image 14: book 2, page 29



Image 15: Book 3, page 103



Image 16: Book 3, page 34

Appendix Chapter 3:

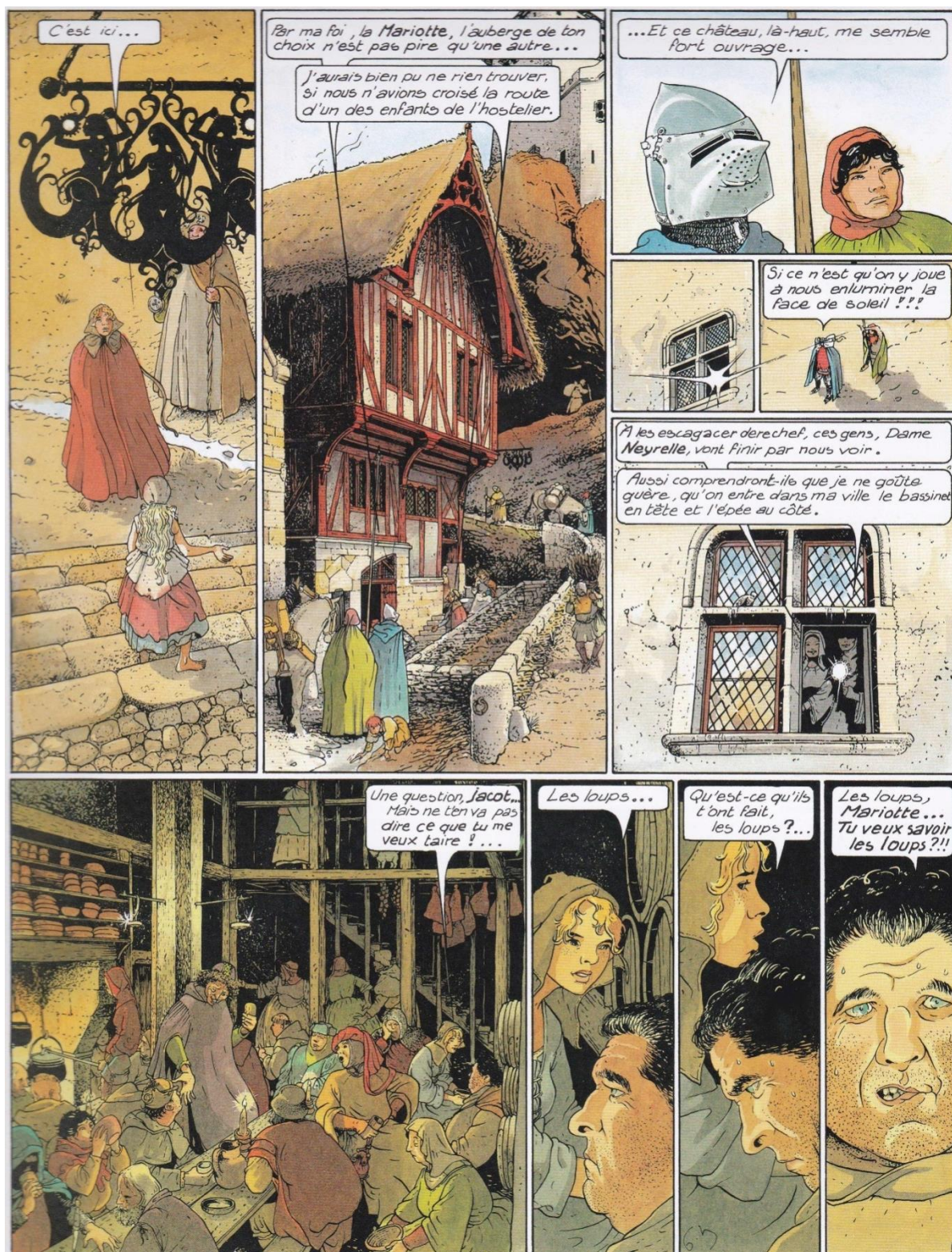


Image 1: Book 3, page 20.

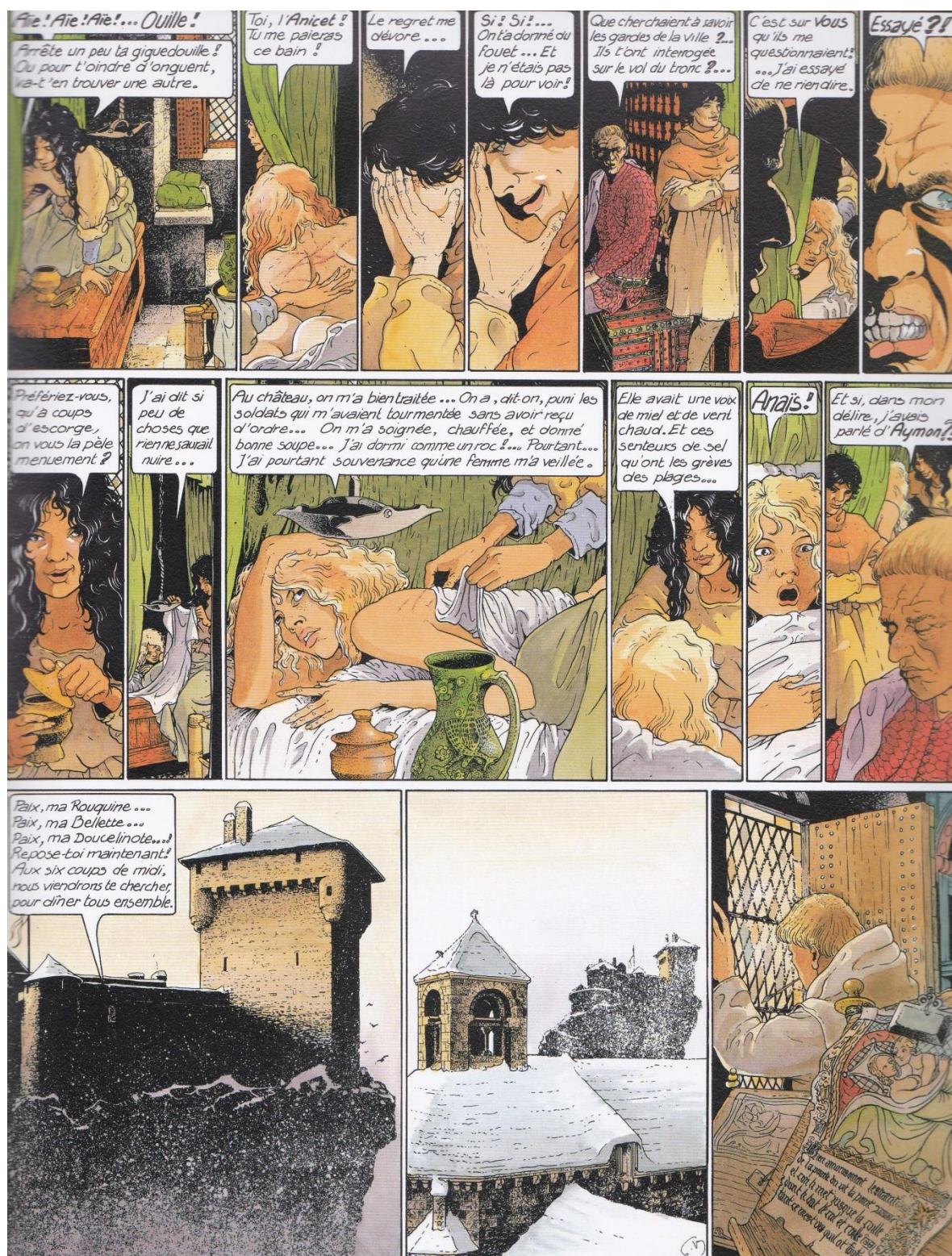


Image 2: Book 3, page 79.



Image 3: Book 3, page 66.

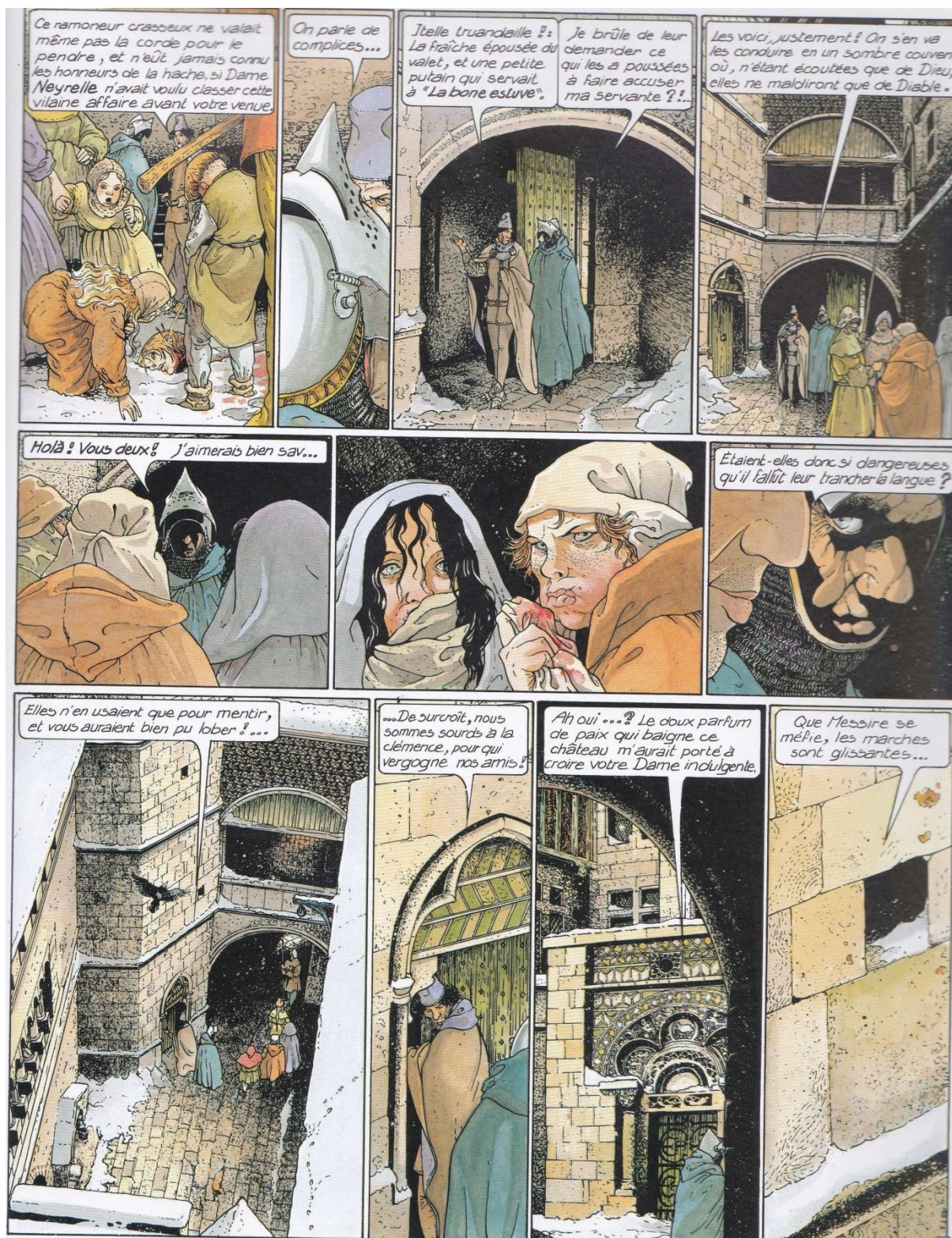


Image 4: Book 3, page 75.



Image 5: Book 3, page 83.

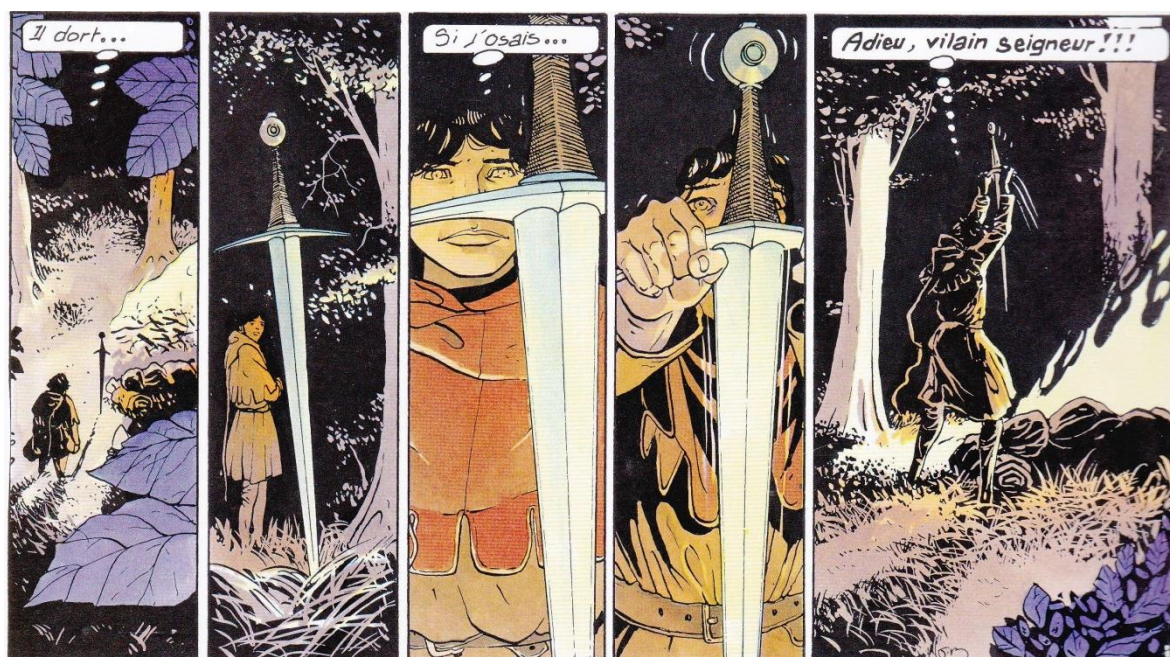


Image 6: Book 1, page 12.



Image 7: Book 3, page 53.

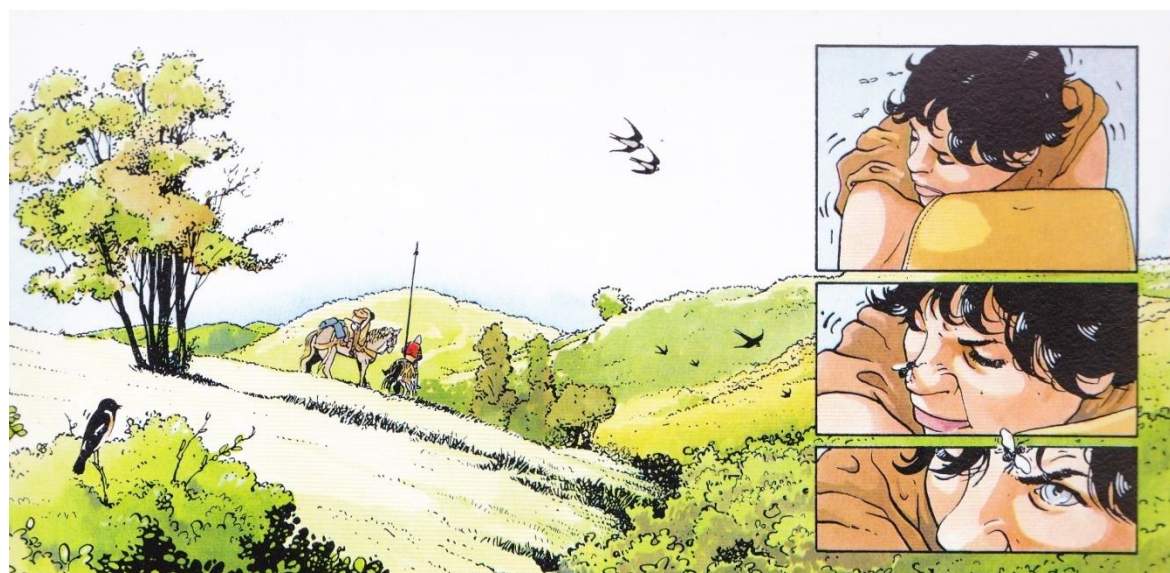


Image 8: Book 1, page 9.



Image 9: Book 1, page 47.

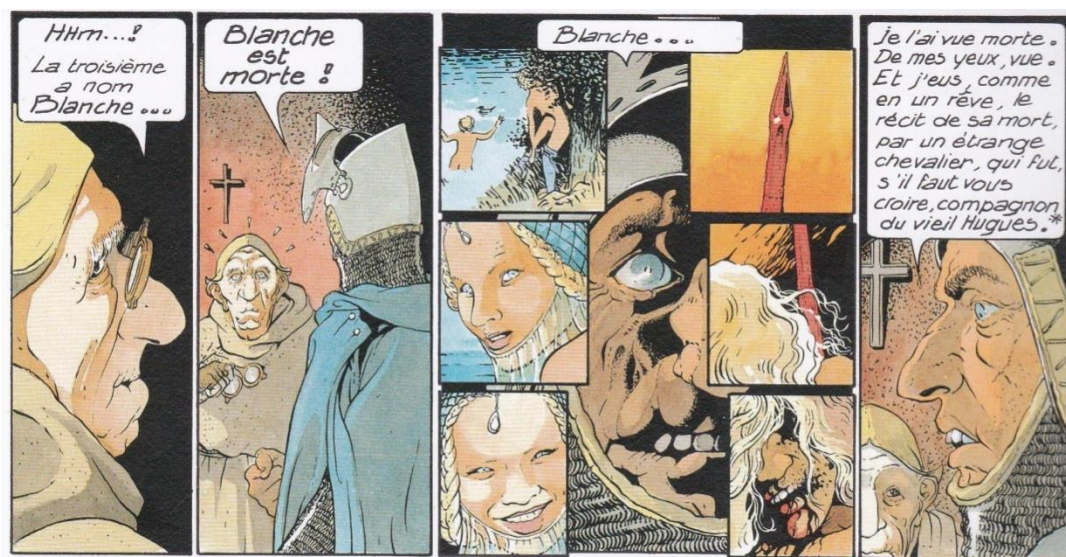


Image 10: Book 3, page 26.

Appendix Chapter 4:



Image 1: Book 2, page 5



Image 2: Book 2, page 6

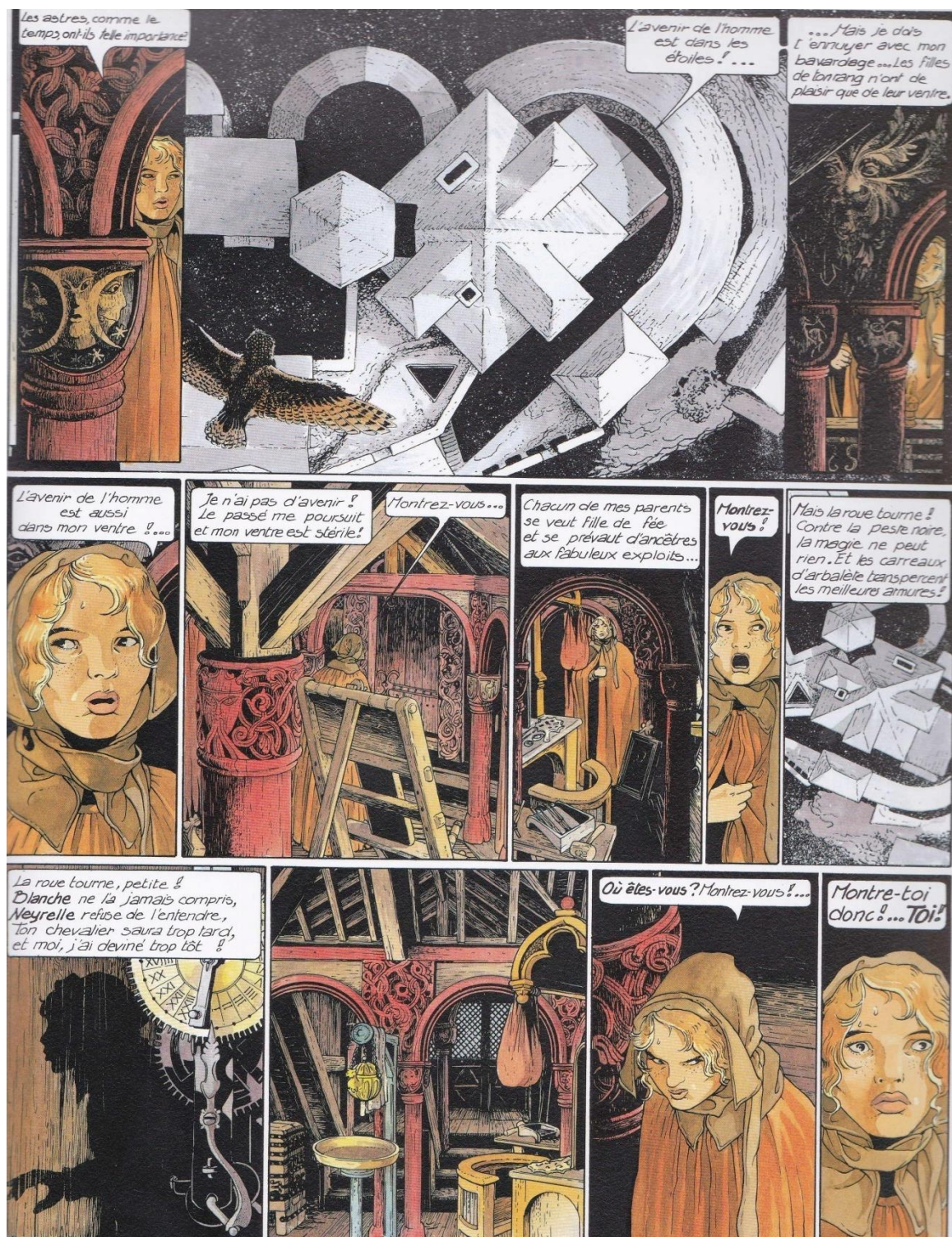


Image 3: Book 3, page 95

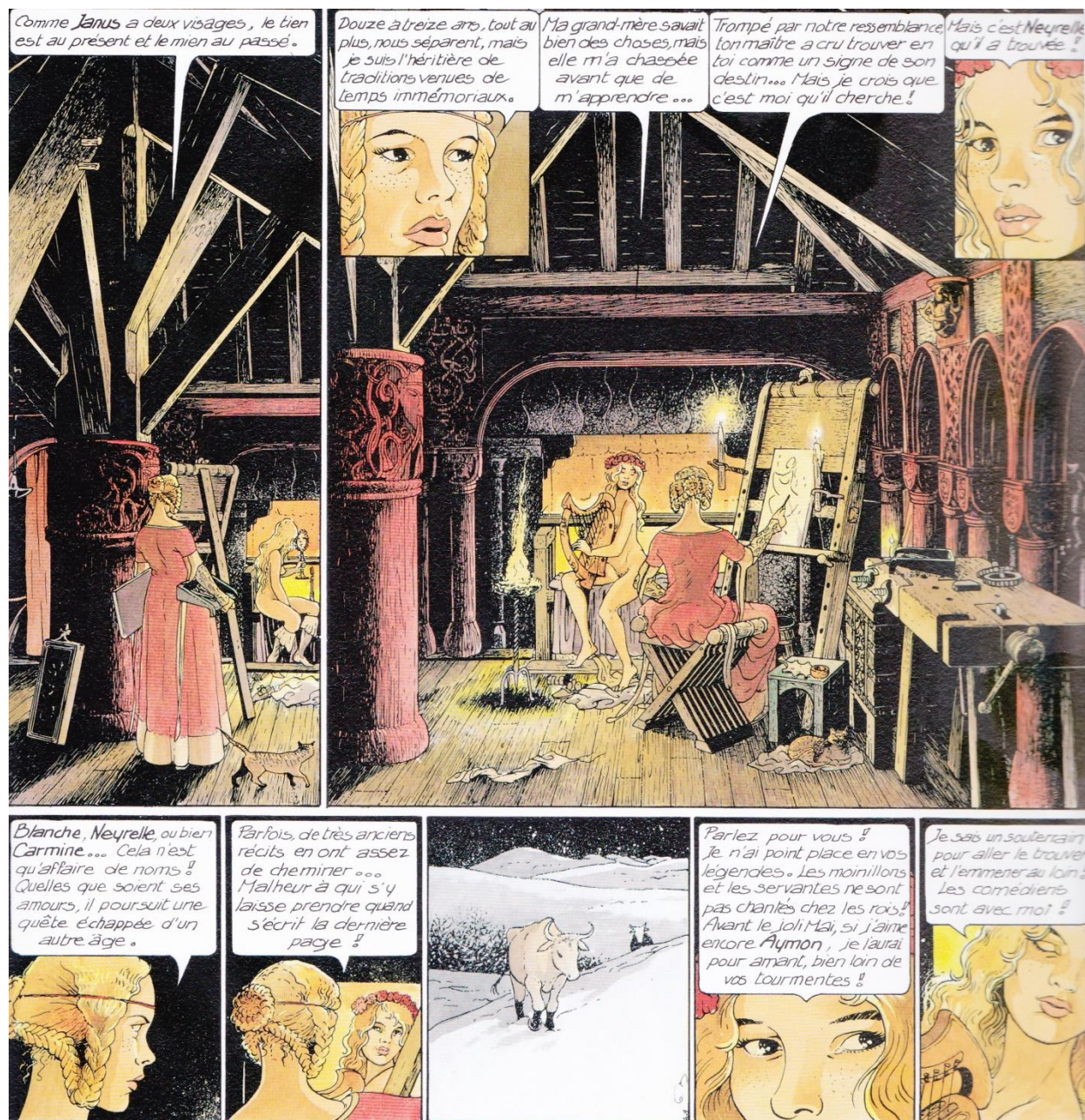


Image 4: Book 3, page 97



Universiteit Utrecht

Faculteit Geesteswetenschappen

Versie september 2014

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Plagiaat

Plagiaat is het overnemen van stukken, gedachten, redeneringen van anderen en deze laten doorgaan voor eigen werk. Je moet altijd nauwkeurig aangeven aan wie ideeën en inzichten zijn ontleend, en voortdurend bedacht zijn op het verschil tussen citeren, parafraseren en plagiëren. Niet alleen bij het gebruik van gedrukte bronnen, maar zeker ook bij het gebruik van informatie die van het internet wordt gehaald, dien je zorgvuldig te werk te gaan bij het vermelden van de informatiebronnen.

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- het opnemen van een vertaling van bovengenoemde teksten zonder aanhalingstekens en verwijzing;
- het parafraseren van bovengenoemde teksten zonder (deugdelijke) verwijzing: parafrasen moeten als zodanig gemarkeerd zijn (door de tekst uitdrukkelijk te verbinden met de oorspronkelijke auteur in tekst of noot), zodat niet de indruk wordt gewekt dat het gaat om eigen gedachtengoed van de student;
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- ook wanneer in een gezamenlijk werkstuk door een van de auteurs plagiaat wordt gepleegd, zijn de andere auteurs medeplichtig aan plagiaat, indien zij hadden kunnen of moeten weten dat de ander plagiaat pleegde;
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**Universiteit Utrecht**

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Hierbij verklaar ik bovenstaande tekst gelezen en begrepen te hebben.

Naam: *Iza Zeeman*

Studentnummer:

3686434

Datum en handtekening:

23-02-2016

Dit formulier lever je bij je begeleider in als je start met je bacheloreindwerkstuk of je master scriptie.

Het niet indienen of ondertekenen van het formulier betekent overigens niet dat er geen sancties kunnen worden genomen als blijkt dat er sprake is van plagiaat in het werkstuk.