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Toward Fulfillment 1950–1958

THAT HE KNEW HOW TO BE GENEROUS is undeniable. Ingratitude was not in his character. He never abandoned a friend in adversity. Yet these virtues belonged to Georges Remi rather than to Hergé.

Having begun a new start in midlife, the illustrator maintained a curious balancing act: the more he delegated work, the more he drew all the attention to himself; the more he was surrounded by others, the more he wanted to present the image of the solitary artist. He insisted repeatedly that the adventures of Tintin were the work of a single author and not of a factory or a collective. Interviewers sometimes had to persist to get Hergé to recognize the contributions of others and to praise their work.

Given the vanity of artists there is perhaps nothing paradoxical about this. In Hergé's case, however, his self-involvement grew the moment his work became a truly group effort. No longer was Edgar Jacobs backing up Hergé, occasionally joined by temporary helpers. Now there was a team at his house working full time.

Either Hergé denied them rights, or he would praise them as if they were Benedictine monks working at their illuminated manuscripts. Whether disparaged or praised, they constituted the Hergé Studios.

The company was created on April 6, 1950, shortly after Belgium, always unsettled about the “royal issue,” voted in a referendum in favor of the eventual return of Léopold III, who had been exiled to Pregny-Chambéry near Geneva, Switzerland. (It disturbed Hergé, a fervent royalist, of course, that the king led with a slight majority among the Flemish voters but not

among the Walloons.) Start-up capital amounted to 250,000 francs (current equivalent, \$44,240). Hergé was naturally the principal shareholder and took the title of director. On the board of directors with him were his father, Alexis Remi, Germaine, his mother-in-law, Albertine, and old friends, such as his secretary, Marcel Dehaye; his artistic advisor, Maurice Lemmens; and the illustrator Guy Dessicy.

He had created Hergé Studios for several reasons. The most important was personal: to overcome his depressive state and insecurity, he needed to be part of an organizational structure. Being surrounded gave him reassurance. The second was technical: considering the scope of his production, he was forced to delegate some of the execution and even the conception to his colleagues. The last reason was purely financial: by incorporating himself, he could charge things to the company, and these things were becoming increasingly numerous.

Right from the start Hergé Studios created a false comparison to the Walt Disney Company. Disney was a visionary who had somehow succeeded in bringing talking animals to newspapers, books, and the screen. The illusion was such that the viewer forgot that Disney's characters were animals. He was also a pure businessman. Workers found lacking were pitilessly dismissed. So were those who revealed too much talent. There was no room either for the mediocre or the prima donna. Whether scriptwriters or illustrators, they knew that they were sentenced to forever be effaced by Disney, the brand name.¹

Hergé adopted another plan. In his mind, his work was that of one man, even if carried out by many. He hadn't created the Studios to diminish his creativity but to expand it. He hoped to gain time to think about his work instead of always being concerned with producing it.

For Hergé, time did not matter, and his depression only confirmed this. It did not matter how many hours, days, or weeks his work demanded. Costs be damned. Material consideration should never outweigh quality. He had trouble drawing, for example, old telephones (because of the number of lines) and derby hats (because of the lack of distinguishing characteristics).² Therefore, he devoted to the drawing of these objects an amount of time disproportionate to their importance to the illustration.

What distinguished Hergé Studios from Walt Disney was not solely the differences in the personalities of the two founders. When it came to comic book art, the European mentality was distinctly more individualistic than the American. If you didn't sign your work, you didn't exist. Everyone had

heard of Mandrake the Magician, Superman, Spiderman, and Batman. But who outside an inner circle of fans and specialists knew the names of their creators?

FOR THE FIRST THREE YEARS the Studios remained small scale. In addition to Germaine, there were only three people working around Hergé: an illustrator, a colorist, and a secretary. The atmosphere was congenial. Hergé behaved less like an authoritarian than like the guy in charge, a subtle but important distinction. He still had not given up the idea of gradually bringing his colleagues at *Tintin* magazine to the Studios so he could exert more direct control over its artistic direction without setting foot there. Starting in 1953 Hergé Studios took on more people; there were now fifteen full-time employees working solely on his projects.

Hergé Studios had something of the atmosphere of a Benedictine abbey in its rigor and in the quiet determination with which the copyist-monks performed their labors. It was also a gathering place, an out-of-control classroom, and an English club, where every day at four o'clock honor was paid to the ritual of the cup of tea over which Hergé tested his ideas. Finally, it was a utopian commune that seemed to unite a diverse range of talents.

At the Studios, more than at the magazine, Hergé had all the latitude he needed to help those damaged by the liberation. Over the years would appear the discreet but continuing presence of individuals in a delicate position with the justice system. Jean Libert and Paul Jamin had not simply come knocking at Hergé's door on their release from prison. They were too prominent and did not want to awaken the suspicions of the vigilante committees and thus put their friend Hergé in an embarrassing situation.³ Libert, under the name "Paul Kenny," would turn his hand to writing immensely popular detective novels around a character named Coplan. Jamin would become an illustrator for the weekly *Pan* under the pseudonym Alidor. Had they overcome their own scruples, it was likely that Hergé would have employed them somehow, just as he had the others: Jacques Van Melkebeke, Marcel Dehaye, and Evany.

Sometimes his assistance manifested itself in a less visible form, such as when he took on as a colorist the young widow of a member of the Walloon Legion (a Belgian brigade that fought alongside the Germans) mysteriously assassinated while out riding. Or lent large sums of money to Robert Poulet for a down payment on an apartment outside Paris, money that Poulet would conscientiously repay.

Had it been up to him he would also have hired Raymond De Becker, his former editor in chief. But Hergé was afraid that it would become a reason to apply Article 123 of the penal code against De Becker, who was of course forbidden from working for any newspaper, play, film, or broadcast. Hergé paid the fees of De Becker's lawyer, Guy Delfosse, who was helping him in his case against the Belgian state and in the European Court of Human Rights. He also lent De Becker money so he could find decent housing in Paris, where he struggled to earn a living. Through his recommendation, De Becker obtained a job as a sales inspector in Swiss bookshops, mainly to study distribution issues involving *Tintin* magazine.⁴

De Becker would continue to be haunted by poverty and would always have trouble keeping up with the times. He became increasingly spiritual and mystic, for a period writing a great deal for *Planète*, a journal of parapsychology and parascience. It was naturally to Hergé that he submitted the outline for *La Politique de "collaboration" en Belgique*, an essay of four hundred pages that he wanted Hergé to cowrite. Hergé hurriedly but politely declined.⁵

Another key person during this difficult postwar period officially became a member of the Hergé Studios in 1953 and would remain with it for twenty-one years as Hergé's secretary, replacing Marcel Dehaye, who became the editor in chief of the magazine. Everyone at the Studios called him "the Baron." Baudouin van den Branden de Reeth would play a major role when the *Tintin* phenomenon became international. Ten years younger than Hergé, he was a journalist who had begun his career with *L'Indépendance belge* before joining the staff of *Nouveau Journal* toward the end of 1942. Both were accused of having Nazi sympathies. For this, after liberation he was sentenced to three years in prison and a heavy fine, despite the fact that his brother Adrien was a major figure in the resistance. Van den Branden was a fervent Léopoldist with close ties to the royal family (hence his nickname). For four generations a member of his family had held a post in the Palace of Laeken.⁶ This was naturally the sort of thing that would have deeply impressed Hergé.

Van den Branden was in charge of everything aside from drawing, specifically internal organization and public relations. He was the filter, the éminence grise. When fans and invitations became overwhelming, he acted as the screen, protecting the master from importuners of all sorts: journalists, collectors, publicity hounds. He helped Hergé by editing out the adverb that slowed the sentence, or fighting for a semicolon that modified

the pacing of the sentence. But one duty superseded everything: that of personal secretary in charge of correspondence.

With Hergé's increasing fame, the volume of his mail took on frightening proportions. He was one of those courteous men who not only acknowledged a letter but answered by return mail. Any deviation from this rule would have seemed an unbearable ethical failure on his part: "Not answering children's letters would be to betray their dreams."⁷

A new routine was established: every morning Hergé read all the letters and answered everyone with the humor and humility that were his trademark. Whenever he thought it necessary he assured young fans that Tintin—like Tom Thumb, Gulliver, and Ali Baba—really and truly existed, but only in books.

Hergé left to his secretary subjects that were too technical and required research. When he was traveling or ill or simply overwhelmed, he turned over all correspondence to van den Branden. But he didn't want this to be made public, and more than once corrected his secretary's more polished literary style. He preferred a more neutral tone, more spontaneous, less pure, a vocabulary of words in current usage among teenagers of all social classes. The letters on which Hergé prided himself became more and more surreal, reflecting the atmosphere in some of his books.

The letters ran the gamut. Frequently children addressed their letters to Mr. Casterman, as if he were the illustrator, and to Mr. Hergé as the publisher. Others, having heard about the "School of Brussels," asked Hergé for its address in order to apply. Not to mention all those who had matrimonial designs on Captain Haddock. And it was a national sport to find the most infinitesimal errors in his books. But there were also a huge number of correspondents who asked for advice on how to become an illustrator. To which Hergé invariably replied: Learn to see, make sketches from nature, study perspective and anatomy, learn spelling, and work, work, work!

A typical *Tintin* book contained an average of eighty-three thousand typographical characters, and Hergé was terrified of typographical errors. He felt it reflected sloppiness. He was always scrupulous about his usage and familiar with subtle issues of syntax. Whenever anyone questioned him about something, he was prepared with a defense, having consulted his authority, Joseph Hanse's *Dictionnaire des difficultés grammaticales et lexicologiques*. His obsession with language did not extend to foreign translations. How could it have? The exception, which was naturally understandable, was Dutch. After noticing grammatical errors in the

Flemish-language versions of *The Broken Ear*, *The Shooting Star*, and *The Crab with the Golden Claws*, he solicited the expertise of a professor at the Atheneum of Schaerbeek.

His main advice was to look and work. In other words, only by drawing can you become an illustrator. This was not a casual remark, but the most sincere expression of his faith in his art. It might appear simplistic or elementary. Nevertheless it reflected the intimate truth of an autodidact who could not believe what he had become.

Once you joined Hergé Studios it was to stay. Hergé could not bear anyone leaving. However, in the course of the years many did. Some were only passing through, and Hergé encouraged them to go when he thought their future lay elsewhere. Right from the start of Hergé Studios, two names would stand out: Bob De Moor and Jacques Martin. These two men would have an impact on Hergé, each in his own way, just as Jacobs had symbolized the early years.

In 1948 De Moor, a twenty-three-year-old from Antwerp, was introduced to Hergé when he timidly showed him the illustrations he had brought for *Tintin* magazine. The Flemish-language press could testify to his enormous productivity. De Moor could accomplish in half an hour what other illustrators would take a day to do. After having illustrated *The Lion of Flanders* in *Kuifje*, he moved to the French edition of *Tintin* magazine as illustrator, most notably of *Conrad the Bold* and *Cori the Sailor Boy*. One day on leaving an editorial meeting, Evany introduced him to Hergé, who was already a living legend for illustrators of his generation. Face to face with him, and to please him, De Moor reverted to Flemish and said, haltingly, “I know your work, it’s really not bad at all.”⁸

De Moor’s professional skills were such that he made himself indispensable without trying. Hergé appreciated his kindness, generosity, and discretion. His specialty was drawing, and in the drawings, the backgrounds. Hergé considered him an extension of himself. Known for his technical talent, De Moor revealed a creative quality that raised his work well above mere reproduction. Down to the smallest detail in the décor of a vignette, De Moor did such a complete job that nothing remained to be done. In his way he was even more obsessive than Hergé; he even erased pencil marks on the back of plates. Both he and Hergé had the habit of rendering their own pencil drawings in ink, one with a pen, the other a paint brush. This modified the unified tone and the depth of the black. Without ever being slap-dash, De Moor could draw faster than his own shadow.

He could complete eight plates a week (each plate being a full page of final art, ready for the printing process). De Moor knew he had arrived when, comparing two identical drawings of locomotives with Tintin as the only figure, Hergé had to admit that he couldn't tell his drawing from that of De Moor.

Jacques Martin's contribution to Hergé Studios was altogether different because he was someone else altogether. Trained as an engineer, he came from an aviation family and was passionate about history and classical painting. His tastes were eclectic, ranging from comic books to high art. In his imagination Tintin stood alongside Titian. His passion for drawing was born at a precise moment: between the publication of *The Broken Ear* and *The Black Island*. After the war he worked with a number of publications before he gathered enough nerve to submit his drawings to *Tintin* magazine. Raymond Leblanc was embarrassed because he had to reject them, saying that the artistic director thought them too detailed and overworked; they sacrificed harmony for precision. Several years would pass before Hergé revised his judgment.

Hergé had admired the way Martin presented the action of *The Golden Sphinx* and started calling for his assistance in 1949. He had discerned in him not only a universe, an eye, and a skillful hand, but also an infallible documentary memory. He never hesitated to call on him, such as when he needed a drawing of a 1949 Buick. In return Jacques Martin borrowed Hergé's *National Geographic*, looking for pictures of Carthage or of the Azore Islands archipelago, which he needed for *Alix*. They started working together on a regular basis when Martin was commissioned to draw the chromo illustration for the section "Voir et Savoir" (dealing with airplanes, locomotives, airports), very popular with young readers of the magazine. Hergé then invited him to lunch and asked him to work with him at the Studios. He had to ask twice, because six months later Martin still hadn't decided. He was not ready to sacrifice his independence, even to work with the man whose work had dazzled him in his youth, whose discipline, probity, and perfectionism had made such a lasting impression. When he finally accepted, it was on condition that Hergé, against his will, also hire Martin's two assistants. On January 1, 1954, Jacques Martin officially joined the team at Hergé Studios.⁹

Hergé considered Bob De Moor his closest assistant; Jacques Martin would become his most indispensable critic. Unlike his Flemish colleague, he lacked the temperament of a diplomat. When people said that he was one of the most difficult persons to deal with, they meant that he was one

of the few who told his superiors what he actually thought. The structure of a story was key, and if it didn't work, he said as much. If the story held together, the rest would follow. And if he was obsessed by perspective, it was partly due to Hergé's reactions to his early work. "You have all the right ideas," Hergé told him, "but still need to learn to draw."

Hergé would always be grateful to Martin for his honesty, even if he was as irritated by Martin's critical attitude as he was by the linguistic punctiliousness of van den Branden.¹⁰ Anyone other than Martin would have been upset. Martin felt vindicated. He was flexible enough to take ribbing by the boss.

There was one thing on which they never agreed. Hergé wanted gags everywhere, in every comic strip. Martin believed that they took up too much room and wanted them to be used in moderation. He would explain, in vain, that his stories did not rely on the comic element but on suspense. Even their concept of the gag was different. Hergé's notion was less and less mechanical, more and more free form; Martin remained in the slapstick spirit of Max Sennett. Hergé indulged in situations that were more and more absurd; Martin preferred the car chase.

Once the lineup at the Studios was complete, the division of responsibilities occurred fairly naturally. To Bob De Moor fell the work of the background and décor, to Jacques Martin the plot and characters. But as soon as he received his first assignment, Martin realized that were he ever to become known it would not be thanks to Hergé. His job was to finish *The Valley of Cobras*, the final adventure of Jo, Zette, and Jocko, of which only the first twenty-five plates had been completed. They both worked on the story, but Martin did all the drawings. However, the publisher would not let him cosign the book with Hergé. Hergé also opposed it; he had, after all, paid Martin to do it.¹¹

Martin and De Moor quickly were given the space necessary to devote to their own projects. But when they worked on projects for the Studios, it was as hired hands. Though he treated them as colleagues and friends rather than as employees, Hergé always distanced himself from them. The Studios was named for Hergé, not Tintin. When someone had the good fortune to become a member, he or she understood the terms.

It was about telling a story—nothing more, nothing less. If you wanted to make pictures, give up comic strips and show your work in a gallery. Hergé had been saying this for twenty-five years. He had an ideal conception of the comic strip and held to it. He could not conceive of

his profession in any other terms. His experience only reinforced his conviction.

A story began with an idea. He did not look for it because that was the best way of not finding it. It came naturally, out of the moment, the news, chance meetings, the circumstances of life. Hergé was a sponge; he absorbed everything he observed. Intense periods of receptivity sometimes alternated with long dry spells. Why? He did not want to know. He was afraid of discovering the inner mechanism that made them function. Or stagnate. He was schooled in the adventure novel, the detective story, and silent movies; he could not start without a thread. When he had it firmly in hand right from the start, then he could advance fearlessly into the maze of empty plates.

When he was pressed on the subject of the inspiration of his work, Hergé always maintained that nothing was premeditated. The artist was not an intellectual; he was intuitive. Everything was born of instinct. In his mind the line came directly from his unconscious, where it proliferated without losing the pace of an adventure. Among his imitators everything became too premeditated. Talented illustrators were able to imitate Hergé's hand and plagiarize his stories, but none other than he could ever reconstitute his touch.

Hergé believed that the comic strip artist was a kind of novelist with pictures, and consequently *sui generis*. The goal of this humble artisan in a subgenre was to entertain young people by offering and cultivating a type of morality. He would feel guilty if his work degenerated into violence or vulgarity, which he loathed. Yet for all that, he refused to see himself as a moralizer or an educator.

From his illustrators he expected a steady hand, confidence when confronting the blank page. Shadows and chiaroscuro were to be banished as worthless conventions. Hergé's aversion to shading and toning down the colors stemmed from the days when such techniques were prohibited by the poor-quality paper. It coincided with his tendency to focus on only the essentials, with just one goal: maximum comprehension. Hergé played the card of absolute clarity to the point of transparency. Clarity was the one great quality he granted the American comic strips of the 1930s.

He let himself daydream as he was drawing, but only within strict limits. His imagination was free but always under surveillance. Traditional in his storytelling techniques, Hergé was modern in his rejection of nostalgia. The legibility of the composition and the soundness of the graphics were

indispensable qualities of a naturally creative person, the results of a highly trained eye. Learning to draw was first about learning to see.

HERGÉ'S GUIDE TO COMIC BOOK COMPOSITION

1. Find a story line sturdy enough to hold for the whole course of the adventure. A simple chase connecting gags is not enough.
2. Find a story that is believable enough to seem true. Jot it down on paper, in twenty lines, maximum.
3. Divide up the story, panel by panel, plate by plate. Each page has to conclude with an element of suspense.
4. Pencil-in stage: sketch the figures with a cursory background drawn with 9-cm (3.54-in) squares on Steinbach paper measuring 51 by 36 cm (20 by 14 in) in size, within a useful format of 40 by 29.5 cm (15.75 by 11.6 in), which is to say twice as large as a book page. Divide the sheet into four strips of 9.5 by 29.5 cm (3.74 by 11.6 in) each, separated by a blank space 6.5 cm (2.55 in) wide. (The blank areas were used as scrap paper, combining all the early versions. All sorts of notations were scribbled there: portraits, objects, landscapes, lists of names, addresses, and telephone numbers.)

When the characters are sketched, everyone takes turns posing, including Hergé himself. Everything is still open to debate. The plate is often criss-crossed with broad strokes of the eraser and things crossed out. It will only start looking “normal” when the action is set.

5. Final drawings are copied square by square to offer a better selection and reframed and placed on another white page, which will become the definitive plate. Touch-ups and final details are added. Copy is moved around. Hergé ceaselessly sought simplification. His objective: hide the scaffolding.
6. Coloring stage: focus on the costumes and the background décor, relying on a solid base of documentation. Exactitude is required, as the settings (desert, sea, moon, jungle) aren't static.
7. The inking stage is done on Schoeller-Parole paper, with a Gillott's Inqueduct G-2 pen (made in England) of stainless steel, which can be cleaned in water and has a small ink reservoir. (Hergé stocked up on these pens before the war. Thirty years later he still had a few. He used to sharpen them with a steel file to conserve them as long as possible.)

8. Photographed by the photo engraver, the black-and-white plate is transferred to transparent film accompanied by several proofs on blue-gray paper.
9. More coloring: the colors applied in flats do not take into account shadows or shading. Watercolor is used for delicate tints, Ecoline for bright colors, and, if necessary, gouache for opaque colors. (Hergé established standard guidelines. For example, there were to be two superimposed layers for Tintin's sweater to bring out the color's full intensity.)
10. Set out the dialogues on the typewriter to gauge the exact number of letters for each vignette, to calculate, with the help of a grid, their position in the dialogue balloons. Draw in the letters. Lettering is delicate because it poses numerous problems. (At these times they also had to consider the English translators, who had to change the French Milou into "Snowy," the only acceptable name in five letters that would not exceed the line when Tintin spoke to his dog.)
11. Last, add the graphics of sound effects, which consist essentially of "Crack!" "Bang!" "Bzzzz."

IN THE BEGINNING "Tintin" was a serial. As such it obeyed the fundamental law of the genre: using suspense to send the reader from one page to the next. Suspense marked a hiatus that increased the reader's expectation. Had Hergé been a musician, it would have been a pause. He could create suspense from the most improbable elements. For example, Tintin bursts into a cave where bandits are holed up. A trap. "Hands up!" But in the opposite corner a bandit is sleeping. He also yells, "Hands up!" Tintin is disarmed. They are going to kill him. A speech by the bandits recalling certain past incidents. Then one of the bandits asks to speak: he declares that he alone should have the honor of killing Tintin. They give him the Browning automatic. He walks toward Tintin, takes aim, then spins around, shouting, "Hands up!" Tintin had once saved the life of his brother.

All the elements (the frame, the page, the picture, etc.) are subordinate to the story. It's all about facilitating the narration, and, as always, clarity and legibility are the two fundamentals. The reader should be able to identify the characters and understand the action when opening the book to any page. There are no frames remaining purely for atmosphere once the

book is finished. No frame is extraneous. Ideally each one serves a double function: it picks up on the preceding frame and anticipates the frame that follows. To accomplish this Hergé sometimes had to make substantial cuts. When done successfully, the result is as intricate as lace. His colleagues understood this only when it came time to recast one of his earlier works. It was sometimes easier to start from zero rather than risk ruining the miniaturist character of his work.

His gags were the only narrative element that maintained their autonomy. They could be displaced without damaging the story, but there was one absolute condition: they had to obey an internal logic that corresponded to a rhythm in three parts: the set-up, the crescendo, and the fall. In his personal notes Hergé always marked them briefly in a telegraphic style, summing up the gag in a few words. Without realizing it, he had created a madcap inventory:

Mistake due to darkness: saddles a cow instead of a horse, turns on the switch of the television instead of the lights, beats up his partner instead of the enemy.

Policemen: they come to board the boat. The gangplank is sawed through. Plouf.

Distracted scientist or policeman: Put a fishbowl on his head instead of his bowler hat.

Detective takes Snowy's paw prints.

It's evident that he never outgrew Chaplin's influence. There are Hergé books lacking suspense, even without narrative, but never without gags. In his mind, the ideal reader was an attentive child who could laugh out loud from time to time. He never sought to place himself at the level of children; they had to raise themselves to his level.¹²

THE MOST TIME-CONSUMING of all tasks, and the reason Hergé eventually hired a dozen assistants, involved the recasting of his older books. In 1942 he was resigned to hiring help for technical reasons: reformatting, converting from black and white to color, reducing the number of pages, and so on. But after the war another reason emerged, one more connected to the spirit of his work. No longer was it merely a matter of correcting errors or changing the aesthetics, but of changing the work's whole orientation. Hergé was no longer merely adapting old works to a new format; he was reinventing them.

Modernizing *The Blue Lotus*, which he'd undertaken at the end of the war, had not completely altered the work. The changes were minor and mostly involved Edgar Jacobs's maniacal precision. Jacobs had searched obsessively for a way of obtaining a Chinese-looking red for the lacquered columns. With a little vermilion, a dash of ochre, he finally discovered it—in vain, it turned out, because the photo engraver and the printing process produced another shade. Hergé was helped by a translator-illustrator sent by Father Gosset, who had corrected the Chinese text in the narrative as well as on the posters, shop signs, walls, and storefronts in the background. Mainly Hergé worked at condensing his original black-and-white book, from 124 to 62 pages. He knew that readers would notice a difference in style and a thickening of his lines in the beginning, but he had resigned himself to redrawing the first four pages of the book.¹³

With most of the other early books Hergé had to go much further. He had profoundly reworked *King Ottokar's Scepter*, and the hand of Edgar Jacobs jumps out at you in the Balkanization of the background and the costumes. They had worked cheerfully together; proof of this can be found in the last scene at the ball in the palace, where the two colleagues and their friend Jacques Van Melkebeke are pictured standing next to a sumptuously dressed Germaine. Paul Remi, Ginette Van Melkebeke, and the painter Marcel Stobbaerts are also in the crowd.

Modernizing *Tintin in the Congo* and *Tintin in America* during and after the war, Hergé had to do more than condense them. He also wanted to make his hero more international, less Belgian. Tintin no longer teaches the history of the Walloons and the Flemish to the children in the jungle, but arithmetic instead. And when his life is in danger Tintin no longer cries, "Let's die like a true Belgian!" He also stops commending his soul to God.¹⁴

Once the Studios were fully staffed at the beginning of the 1950s, Hergé was looking forward to fine-tuning his early works. Correcting errors was the most obvious task, though he was also aware that a growing number of readers, especially the hardcore younger readers, delighted in searching them out. In *Prisoners of the Sun* the *Pachacamac*, like all boats more than 300 feet (100 meters) long, should have a nighttime light not only up front, but also in the rear. In *Cigars of the Pharaoh* Snowy appears on page 52 between Tintin and the maharajah, though he had been separated from his master on page 47 and last seen on page 50 at the end of a leash held by the Thom(p)sons searching for . . . Tintin! Hergé suggested to Casterman that they hold a contest "with the goal of finding and notifying us when a

character is not where he should be. This without saying that it was done on purpose but also without denying it either.”¹⁵

Some of the changes were not to correct errors as such, but to defuse awkward moments. For example, Casterman received complaints after the publication of *The Seven Crystal Balls* that the Indian with a skull for his head appearing on the title page frightened children. Hergé agreed that it had not been a felicitous choice and replaced it with a comic image of Haddock. Likewise a scene with snakes was eliminated from *Cigars of the Pharaoh*.

While Jacques Martin was redrawing all the airplanes, Hergé was erasing ambiguities from his characters. The Egyptologist Sophocles Sarcophagus, for example, joins the ranks of victims and becomes a good man, and Rastapopoulos’s status as a villain is confirmed. Inside jokes and references were added. In the cover image of *Cigars of the Pharaoh* one of the mummies, resembling Edgar P. Jacobs, has the label “E. P. Jacobini.” In the story the enigmatic Grossgrab is a reference to the German Egyptologist Grossgrabenstein, a character from *The Mystery of the Great Pyramid*, by a certain Edgar Jacobs.¹⁶

Sometimes the changes were less innocent. In 1946 Hergé agreed to Casterman’s demands to alter the race of a mother and child, the porter at a hotel, and a gangster in *Tintin in America*. Simon and Schuster, his New York publisher, which was bringing out his second book, also wanted some race changes in *The Crab with the Golden Claws*. Hergé explained to a reader, “I have not replaced the blacks in *The Crab with the Golden Claws* with white people; they are now of an indeterminate race. You can immediately see that they are not from here, but exactly where they come from remains a mystery. What the American editor wanted was the following: No blacks. Neither good blacks nor bad blacks. Because blacks are neither good nor bad: they don’t exist (as everyone knows, in the USA).”¹⁷

In the new version the black sailor onboard the *Karaboudjan* becomes white. In the same spirit Captain Haddock’s insulting epithets follow the temper of the times and a new sensitivity. He no longer shouts, “Anthracites! Blackamoors!” but “Doryphore! Boob!” and the (curious) “Black Marketeers” becomes “Iconoclasts!” because the objects of his anger have been whitewashed. However, he continues to use the expletive “Licorice Juice!”

A more complicated problem to resolve was alcohol. It is true that *The Crab with the Golden Claws*, the first story in which Haddock becomes a presence, holds the record for the number of pictures with a direct

relationship to alcohol: 27 percent.¹⁸ So as not to provoke the wrath of the national education lobbies and moralistic groups, both of which influenced American critics and editors, Hergé proposed to attenuate the text here and there. Afraid that he had not gone far enough, he eliminated all images of Haddock drinking straight from the bottle, filling in the blank spaces with “continuity texts.”¹⁹

If it wasn't censorship, it looked like it. Hergé seemed to find it natural not to resist and made no secret of all his alterations: “The blacks have been whitened, and Captain Haddock has to refrain from guzzling his drink,” he wrote a reader.²⁰ He resigned himself to puritanical American morals. However, the expurgated version was not confined to his overseas readers. Though his publishers claimed the demands originated with his New York editors, they seemed to agree with the changes and incorporated them.

But there were limits. Hergé himself was a connoisseur of all sorts of alcohol, and though Belgium had had a law against drunkenness on the books since 1919, Hergé never for a moment even considered the demand that the brave Captain undergo a detoxification cure. Haddock had indeed appeared to be an alcoholic when he first met Tintin, but he had evolved into a connoisseur of whisky.²¹ His lapses were rather exotic: *pisco*, *spadj*, *aguardiente*. When a major cognac producer proposed that he replace whisky with cognac to stress the prestige of the European drink, Hergé agreed, as an exception. In the next adventure Haddock is offered a glass of cognac and drinks it to demonstrate his appreciation. But immediately afterward he returns to his preference for malt.²²

GENERALLY CASTERMAN WAS IN FAVOR of updating the *Tintin* books, but they became alarmed by the scale of the reworking. At the end of 1956, for example, they urged Hergé to cut back on his ambitious reworking of *The Broken Ear*. It did not matter to them that he redrew a frame to change the language, but they balked when he proposed redrawing ten whole pages (out of sixty-two) to deepen the background, such as when Tintin goes up the River Badurayal to find the Arumbayas. They were most worried about the readers noticing a difference between Hergé's style in the 1930s and twenty years later, not to mention the technical issues raised by having to match the color schemes and the textures.²³ Casterman's sensitivities to readers' reactions were well founded. When Hergé made extensive changes in a book, his readers expressed their reactions even more virulently than his publishers did. They felt it was their right to complain because the books had had such an influence on their imaginative life.

Hergé had to face up to his critics, as was the case when he made significant changes in *The Shooting Star*, a work shaped by the events in 1941. The first change concerned the American expedition launched against their European rivals in a pitiless race to recover the precious mineral Phostlite. In the new version the team lost its American identity. New York, the headquarters of the “villains,” was replaced by Sao Rico, the capital of an imaginary state. This team’s flag is a black cross on a red ground instead of the Stars and Stripes.

His second revision concerned the depiction of Jews. Some have assumed that this was when Hergé erased the two frames showing Isaac and Salomon rejoicing at the coming of the end of the world because they would avoid their creditors. He had in fact removed them in 1942; they appeared in the serial but not in the original edition of the book. Hergé thought that the sequence was filler, which became superfluous in the finished work. But he did change the name of the most odious villain in the book. “Blumenstein” became embarrassing after the end of the war, less for Hergé than for his publishers. Casterman himself took the initiative, to forestall critics.²⁴

Interestingly the second run of the book in its original version after the war did not cause the dreaded public outcry. A Parisian complained, and the author replied. One reader sent a long letter explaining that whereas before the war her family considered anti-Semitism merely asinine, she now considered it a crime. Hergé wrote her a detailed letter assuring her of his aversion to all forms of prejudice. He pointed out that his caricatures of British colonials, African sorcerers, and Japanese swindlers were no more racist than his portrait of Blumenstein was anti-Semitic. “The suffering of a people, of a race,” he wrote, “did not automatically confer a certificate of virtue to certain isolated villains in the community (who usually escape the common fate).”²⁵ These were the only two reactions, which Hergé did not consider worrisome: “You can’t call it a general outrage.”²⁶

Later, when asked about this subject in an interview, he replied, “*The Shooting Star* was composed before the Nazi atrocities and the death camps became known; otherwise you can be sure I would never have written this.”²⁷

Although Hergé was not happy about these changes and grumbled about his publisher’s thin skin, he complied. He replaced “Blumenstein” with “Bohlwinkel,” whose irony was clear only to those familiar with the Brussels dialect. “Bohlwinkel” was inspired by *bollewinkel*, a small candy store. Ironically one day he would receive a bitter complaint from a Mr. Bohlwinkel, a reader of Jewish origin, shocked that Hergé would use such a name for a character as unscrupulous and villainous as this.

Blumenstein would pursue Hergé to the end of his days and was the origin of a curious incident regarding the painter Pierre Alechinsky. Alechinsky was a native of Brussels who used to say that he was Belgian by “distraction” and French by adoption. Jewish on his father’s side and Walloon on his mother’s, he had been a devoted reader of *Tintin* in his youth. (He had read the stories as books in their black-and-white version, not in *Le Vingtième Siècle*.) He was fascinated by their expressive action and cinematic sequencing, which later influenced him as an artist. He saw Blumenstein in the wartime *Le Soir* as a young refugee.

When Hergé and Alechinsky met in 1969 and decided to exchange works, the painter inscribed in the margin of one of his large ink drawings, titled *Sources of Information*, “To Herger [making his name look Jewish], source of pictures, with admiration from Pierre Alechinsky, Jan. 4, 1969.” When Hergé pointed out the error, Alechinsky replied, “I hope an eraser will do the trick, but so many family names end with an ‘r’: Bamberger, Blumberger, Braunberger. . . .”

Alechinsky recounted this event in one of his books, and once he’d read it Hergé answered him immediately. “This being the case, you are a little too severe with me for this Blumenstein from the year 1940. I admit that I was wrong, but (and I hope that you will believe me) I was far from imagining that the Jewish stories that people told (and still tell today, like stories about people from Marseilles, or the Scotch, and, more recently, stories about the ‘belches’ [Belgians]) would lead to such horrors.”²⁸ Again Hergé’s equations seem willfully obtuse.

Although Hergé could not erase the past, he could play it safe. At the end of 1950 he completed a list of “corrections to be made in the *Tintin* books” and listed the details to be worked on: the curve of the mustaches of the Thom(p)sons, the color of a cap, the number of steps to the entrance of Marlinspike Hall. He underlined two changes. The first was to turn the blacks into whites in *The Crab with the Golden Claws*. The second was to change the shape of Mr. Bohlwinkel’s nose in *The Shooting Star*.²⁹

Henceforth when readers tried to catch him in an error by pointing out the contradictions among the different versions of his books, Hergé was ready for them. When the old accusations of colonialism, racism, and anti-Semitism cropped up, he had a prepared response: “I am not excusing myself, I am explaining.”³⁰

He felt that was all he needed to say. For commercial reasons he wanted to satisfy his publishers, but not to the point of being false to himself. He believed it was an honorable position, whatever his opinions and his past.

Others changed their stripes out of opportunism or weakness of character, but not Hergé. When he refused to rework *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, it was not out of fear of arousing the Kremlin's wrath; he was thinking of what it would do to the illustrations and the story.³¹

THE 1950S WERE A PERIOD of return to the moral order. That, at least, was the avowed policy of the authorities.

In the United States warning signs of censorship appeared in 1949, when the reporter Debbie Dean, the heroine of a hugely popular comic strip, was suddenly forced to say farewell. Her creator had let the word "drugs" appear in one of her speech bubbles. At the same time, a public opinion campaign led to the censoring in three states (Michigan, New York, and Massachusetts) of comic books that vindicated crimes. Launched by a psychiatrist named Frederic Wertham, who believed the comics were making violent crimes seem enticing, the campaign reached its apogee in 1954 with the publication of his book, *Seduction of the Innocent*, and the promulgation of the "Comics Code Authority." It was a charter of self-censorship of McCarthyite inspiration, and it had the same effect on the publishers of comic strips as the Hays Code had on film directors. Women had to be modestly dressed, their bodies should not be flaunted, government and religion deserved respect, the word "horror" must not appear in the title. Though it all seemed puritanically American, Europe was not far behind.

At the beginning of the fifties in France a meeting was called of all the members of the new Commission for the Surveillance and Control of Publications for Children and Adolescents. Among its members were representatives of several concerned ministries and agencies, youth groups, and family associations, as well as newspaper editors and even illustrators. They gathered to hear the inaugural speech given by the Keeper of the Seals, René Mayer, highlighting the importance of this new struggle:

We have seen publications, supposedly "for children," offering them exaggeratedly dramatic adventures, whose generally unrealistic inventions, arbitrary or absurd, only serve as the pretext for upsetting episodes of human violence and fantastic deeds accomplished by brutal force. The legislators wanted to protect children from being exploited by people more concerned with their own self-interest and assuring their profits than in exercising a moral and salutary influence on young minds.³²

This was the tone set by this assembly of diverse people, which owed its existence to an alliance between Communists and Catholic legislators. Since 1947, when the Communists proposed a law concerning children's publications and the Catholics seconded the motion immediately, an alliance of *Vaillant* and *Coeurs Vaillants* had been formed. This surprised only politicians ignorant of the world of comic strips, unaware that these two lobbies controlled this industry. At this stage it was only a question of guaranteeing the morality and patriotism of those in charge of children's publications. The worst was still to come. A campaign was forming in the press. A purely nationalist argument began to be aired, but the polemics went beyond the left or the right. The writer Jacques Perret was one of the few to denounce the muzzling of children's publications, which was simply a pretext for eliminating the American competition.

"If you have to censor everything that is idiotic and vile, let the censors start with the adult press, some of which outdo us by far!" wrote Perret, railing against the hypocrisy underlying this proposed law.³³ You did not have to be a genius to understand that behind the moralizing other factors were at work aside from wanting to protect young people: *Vaillant* was 100 percent French, *Coq Hardi* was 12 percent American, *Tarzan*, 50 percent American, *Donald* and *Zorro*, 100 percent American. Protectionism lay behind the debate.

The illustrators were naturally in favor of the projected law; it was in their interest, even if they were not proud of it. The exception was Alain Saint-Ogan: "The newspapers are flooded with American cartoons so that a person cannot earn a living in that profession."³⁴

The struggle against violence, vulgarity, and pornography was only a screen for those frantic for protectionism in the face of foreign competition. They continued using the cultural excuse. To hear them you would believe that the genius of Descartes was menaced by the muscles of Tarzan.³⁵

The law on "publications destined for young people" was finally voted on in July 1949. The Communists walked out because they refused to include a clause that would have reserved 75 percent of each publication for French illustrators. Certain articles of the law were constraining. Article 2, for example, stipulated that "said publications cannot include any illustrations, any stories, or chronicles, any categories, any insertions presenting in a favorable light acts of banditry, lies, theft, laziness, cowardice, hate, debauchery, all acts categorized as crimes or violations, or of a nature to demoralize childhood or youth."³⁶ Five years later the law was amended

with additional restrictions. The paragraph was completed with “or that inspire or entertain ethnic prejudices.”

Hergé, already so sensitive to the currents of decolonization, was directly affected by this clause. The commission recommended that illustrators not characterize natives as cruel, treacherous, or foolish, and “in stories called ‘colonial’ should take extra care not to offend foreign readers, and encourage domestic readers to feel sympathy and solidarity for them.”³⁷

The new censors had three measures at their disposal: warning, indictment, and legal penalties. They had their offices in the Ministry of Justice. Their first target was *Tarzan* magazine. He was not deemed a suitable hero for the family: he was too naked, too lascivious, too wild. “Man must at least control the myths he shows children. We have good reasons to deem Tarzan, the Ape Man, suspect.”³⁸ But Tarzan was not the only one caught in the machinations of the censors.

In Brussels everyone understood that this accursed law was conceived of as a weapon against American comics. However, the Belgians also had to suffer the consequences. The censors were openly supporting French interests against the foreign press, and *Spirou* and *Tintin* were naturally the first targeted. Commercially the risks were considerable: a Belgian publisher could lose the right to distribute the offending works in France. Morris and Goscinny were forced to tone down *Lucky Luke*, which was deemed too violent. Their lone cowboy had to temper his efforts to defeat the villains. The atmosphere in the industry became such that everyone began to self-censor.³⁹ Before publication publishers would show the plates to one of the censors for his opinion.⁴⁰

Tintin magazine was not spared, but censors had more difficulty faulting it. The publishers had been extremely skillful. Hergé’s hero had nothing to fear; he was virtuous, and his upright nature served as moral caution to other, less enlightened characters, such as Haddock. The most effective censor of Hergé’s work was Hergé himself. He had learned to be prudent.

AFTER EXTENDING HIS CONTRACT with *Tintin* magazine in the beginning of the fifties, Hergé renewed it for a period of thirty years in 1953. His depression and his repeated episodes of absenteeism had shaken the morale of his team. Marcel Dehaye was one of the few who could get through to him. One day he asked Hergé either to leave or to help them accomplish their goals; Hergé had to decide one way or the other. “Is there anything more disappointing than seeing a master failing?” Dehaye wrote him.⁴¹

By 1953 Hergé had taken hold of himself, and the magazine was thriving. The Tintin coupon had really given a boost to sales. Beginning in 1950 the coupons could be found in three different designs in magazines, but also with a number of products, such as Victoria chocolates and Materne preserves. The idea was sheer genius. In the first year 200 million were printed. Needless to say this marketing tool spread the name and picture of Tintin, increasing the sales of books.

Hergé reached an understanding with Raymond Leblanc. The proof of this is an illustration he did for the magazine's seventh anniversary. It showed Haddock, rowing a boat named *Tintin* and tossed about by waves, calling out to the panicked Thom(p)sons, "Don't worry, landlubbers! There's no danger. It's Leblanc at the stern!"⁴²

Hergé seemed much more involved with what was, after all, his magazine, yet his assumptions were still based on the flourishing trade of 1940. Now new magazines for young people were appearing all the time. First came *Mickey Magazine*, launched by Armand Bigle, Disney's man in Europe, in conjunction with the Belgian publisher Éditions du Pont-Levis, with a print run of one hundred thousand a week. The real danger was that it included not only comic strips from the Disney factory, but also stories and illustrations by well-known French illustrators. Shortly afterward Paul Winkler, back in Paris, revived *Le Journal de Mickey*, with equal success. In Belgium Hergé was most concerned by the competition from *Spirou*. It wasn't just a question of sales, which were comparable, and soon *Tintin* would surpass *Spirou* by fifteen thousand copies.

Since the appearance of the magazine and the opening of the Hergé Studios, people had been speaking of a "Brussels School," referring to those artists favoring what would be called a "clear line," following Hergé's example. His influence on young talents was such that the public called it a "hergémony." The idea of a school was a little farfetched. But as soon as creative people gather together, drawn by their affinities and with similar ideas, history is quick to label them as such. History, or rather, those who write it—journalists, professors, and others—feel reassured by such labels.

Tintin magazine was unquestionably imaginative. Hergé had gathered a constellation of talent that was the envy of everyone: Jacobs, Cuvelier, and Étienne Le Rallic in the beginning. Others joined them, authors of series that made a lasting impression (even if mostly obscure today): *Bob et Bobette*, *Alix Lefranc*, *Chlorophylle*, *Dan Cooper*, *The White Knight*, *Ric Hochet*, *Modeste et Pompon*.

With such a wealth of material in the content, it was difficult to understand the public's relative lack of interest. The overall circulation of illustrated works had been larger before the war. In drawing up an inventory of the symptoms and causes, Hergé marked the growing distance between the magazines and the public. The readership had matured, he believed, yet were being fed the same simple comic lines as the generation before. Yet he didn't agree with those who touted *Superman* and *Flash Gordon*, which were escapist to a fault and not above demagoguery. If concessions had to be made to modernity, they should involve technological progress and scientific discoveries.

Hergé was persuaded that this gap in communication became a problem the day the cultural level for adults was lowered to such an extent that it appealed to the more mature young people. The divide between publications for children and publications for their parents had gradually been eliminated, transforming the market. This was Hergé's analysis. Newspapers included more and more comic strips, which were shared by all members of the family. Even text-based periodicals (*Constellation* and *Reader's Digest*) covered the great new discoveries so expertly that they drew young readers away from publications designed expressly for them.

Hergé was inspired by the success of *Paris-Match*. *Tintin* too ought to follow the news: "It looks like it was made by and for people who lived outside of our time. Our magazine is up to its neck in fiction, in the unreal, in fairy tales old and new." He pointed to the illustrated stories with historical characters: *Cori the Sailor Boy*, *Hassan and Kadour*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, and others. Characters set in modern times were the exceptions: *Barelli* by Bob De Moor, *Blake and Mortimer* by Jacobs, and, of course, *Tintin*. As for novels and short stories, he believed those in *Coeurs Vaillants* were superior. Hergé was convinced that if the public wanted entertainment and escape, young people wanted something other than fiction, something "real, true, solid, and serious."

He was basing his opinion on the results of a survey of publishers of general literature, according to whom the best nonfiction about society would sell as well as Pierre Benoit's *L'Atlantide* (1919), a novel combining fantasy and adventure. Translated as *The Queen of Atlantis*, it was a worldwide best-seller in the period between the wars. A general evolution of ideas had to be taken into account. It was urgent that the magazine catch up. He did not believe they should take a survey of readers. For him the best proof was the success of Edgar Jacobs's *The Secret of the Swordfish* in the first few issues of the magazine. The heroes, Captain

Blake and Professor Mortimer, are working on a secret weapon to combat a Far Eastern empire that is taking over the world. It should have served as an example: “Jacobs used recent events and anticipated the future. His novel was both historical and a projection. It resonated profoundly with all readers (children, adults, soldiers). The subject was in the air.”

To hear Hergé speak, or to read his writings, it would seem as if the magazine was sinking. Nothing of the sort. He simply didn't like what was going on at *Tintin*. He never really accepted the editor in chief, André Frenez, whom he always felt had usurped Jacques Van Melkebeke. Were it up to Hergé, everything would be redone. He criticized the feature on cars, saying it looked too much like a showroom. The editorials? Excellent, but old-fashioned. His major criticism he reserved for the illustrators in charge of the comic strips, however. With few exceptions, their graphic talent was infinitely superior to their storytelling abilities. And, after all, it was about telling a story in pictures. “Everywhere it's the triumph of mechanical action, always a tragic or comic situation, never a comedy or tragedy of feelings.” More and more, their “puppets” were merely characters and less and less heroes.

Hergé was no longer asking his colleagues at the magazine to modernize, but he wanted to prevent *Tintin* from becoming fossilized. For the growing distance between reader and the magazine not to become unbridgeable, they needed to follow a map of reality, but not to the detriment of poetry, mystery, or magic.⁴³

In his quest to save *Tintin* Hergé resorted to citing his own work, which had come to grips with actual events. He had only to make an inventory of his sources to prove the relevance and timeliness of the adventures of Tintin: the cold war, arms and drug trafficking, the Sino-Japanese War, the Anschluss and the Sudetenland, the conflict between the Arabs and the Jews. Hergé could not be dismissed for being passé. He wanted to be contemporary, but without demagoguery or smugness. For him, to be modern was to be ahead of events.⁴⁴

In 1952 space travel was still in the realm of science fiction, which was not his genre. Hergé was fascinated by the speed of scientific progress, and nothing excited him as much as hearing of a new discovery or invention. This time Hergé sped ahead of progress and took Tintin to the moon. The word can be found in the titles of his next two volumes, *Destination Moon* and its sequel, *Explorers on the Moon*.

He began with a structure rather than with a clear story line. Using tried and true means throughout—gags, reversals of fortune, chase scenes—Hergé

intended to tell the epic story of Tintin's space odyssey with Snowy and Haddock. They are following Professor Calculus, who has always dreamed of reaching the moon using a rocket with atomic propulsion. Foreign spies attempt to disrupt the expedition, adding suspense to the technical preparations: manufacturing plutonium, readying the atomic fuel. Explanatory passages became rather dense, and Hergé seemed to sense this, as halfway through he expresses what the reader may be feeling through Captain Haddock. An engineer wonders, "What is going to happen to all the other neutrons?" "Yes, I was worried about them," the Captain replies with mock interest.⁴⁵ In fact the poetry and pace of the action, hallmarks of Hergé at his best, really come into play only once the rocket is launched.

Before plunging into this universe about which he knew nothing, Hergé collected an enormous amount of documentation, gathering scientific articles and space primers: *Astronautics* by Alexandre Ananoff, the first encyclopedia in French to popularize the latest discoveries in space technology; *Our Friend the Moon*, by Pierre Rousseau; *Between Earth and Sky*, by Auguste Piccard; and *Man among the Stars*, by Bernard Heuvelmans.⁴⁶ These works were as valuable for their scientific data, presented for the layman (the physics of the atmosphere, flight into the stratosphere, interplanetary and interstellar travel) as for their illustrations: pictures of craters, mountains, and lunar seas. He relied most heavily on two new books of popular science, *Humanity in the Face of Interplanetary Travel* by Albert Ducrocq, with its wealth of details about the problems of combustion and atomic energy, and *The Conquest of Space* by Willy Ley, filled with fascinating illustrations by Chesley Bonestell. Though he set it in outer space, Hergé wanted this adventure to be grounded.

From the start, a number of colleagues and friends helped him prepare. Rarely had such a diverse group been assembled for one of his books. After his episodes of depression, as we've seen, Hergé needed to be surrounded, reassured, and stimulated. He was paralyzed by the vision of coming to a sudden halt, dreading the consequences of his collapse, the confusion followed by flight, and everything that that entailed.

So that he would never be thwarted by technical problems, he gathered experts, including Louis Brouwet, chief of air traffic around Brussels. Hergé consulted him because he planned for the story to conclude with the return of the rocket, and he wanted the landing to seem plausible.⁴⁷ In the same spirit Hergé interviewed Max Hoyaux, head of the Center for Atomic Research in Charleroi. Hoyaux became actively involved, entering into the problems, suggesting that if there was ice on the moon they use

solar heat to thaw it, and pointing out situations that were scientifically doubtful, such as the oxygen supply being sufficient for two stowaways. Or the fact that Snowy regains consciousness before anyone else, although it was a known scientific fact that dogs withstood the pressures of acceleration less well than humans.⁴⁸

Then came the illustrators, who formed a vital support system. Bob De Moor was of course the first among them, playing a pivotal role in completing some of the illustrations of *Destination Moon* and drawing the background. The famous red-and-white checkerboard rocket came entirely from his pencil.

Hergé had M. Van Noeyen construct a model of the pilot's control room in the rocket, based on Alexandre Ananoff's specifications and drawn from some of the illustrations in his book. Ananoff advised him to project on a circular screen the pictures of what would be visible from the rocket piloted by Professor Calculus.

None of this prevented Hergé from taking certain liberties, such as with the astronauts' helmets, which he made transparent so that his characters could be identified. Other liberties would make any scientist burst out laughing. A meteorite striking the moon would have been moving at such speed as to send projectiles flying like bullets, which none of the astronauts could have escaped or survived. Our hero, however, is barely thrown off balance. There is the picture of the asteroid Adonis, which Professor Calculus spots in his telescope and recognizes at first glance; no one had ever been able to identify it by sight.

One of the most appealing of Hergé's paradoxes was that his dedication to accuracy never overwhelmed his sense of play. He knew perfectly well the gravitational pull of the asteroid Adonis but could not resist the idea of sending Haddock orbiting around it.⁴⁹ Hergé always chose being true to the story over being factually exact. Launching the rocket at night may have been dreamlike, but it made no sense.⁵⁰

Another of his entourage to play a major role was Bernard Heuvelmans, "Bib," a friend who had written the column "Scientific Humanism" for *Le Soir* during the occupation. A professor of zoological sciences, known as the "father of cryptozoology," he was a man who hesitated at nothing. Hergé liked him because he was a serious scientist but with a sense of humor, and as imaginative as a novelist. When Hergé was depressed he called on Bib to help him get through *Prisoners of the Sun*.

There was no contract drawn up now; among friends a handshake or a word was enough. Bib was eager to start and went directly to the source,

scientists who would eventually form NASA. He invented nothing; like Jules Verne he extrapolated from what was known, if theoretically.

When Bib and Jacques Van Melkebeke delivered the script, however, it had one fatal flaw: the text and the drawings were conceived in the manner of Hergé but seemed like a pastiche of his work.⁵¹ Although the script was rejected, Bib continued on the team as the scientific advisor. Nothing remains of their original version of the book.

Hergé acknowledged his debt to Bib's 1944 book, *Man among the Stars*. The book's illustrations helped him visualize his story. At the beginning Hergé wanted his characters to benefit from all the latest discoveries. He asked his friend to gather information about atomic plants, security codes, controls, cyclotrons, and a hypothetical rocket capable of carrying seven people and one dog, including its interior design (cockpit design, navigational instruments, sleeping accommodations, helmets, emergency equipment, fuel reserves, and the propulsion engine). Afterward he never failed to credit Bib for all his "interplanetary documentation." But Hergé also owed to him certain visual gags: the games with gravity, the whisky turned into a bubble, and Haddock in orbit around the asteroid. Had Bib been an employee of the Studios, Hergé would have taken all the credit for everything. His colleagues were there to support him, not to outshine him. "I'm afraid I'm deeply ungrateful," Hergé once admitted. "I forget immediately and completely the person who gave me the idea in the first place. I instantly appropriate it for myself. It's not very nice, but that's the way it is."⁵²

Unlike Van Melkebeke, who took the appropriation of his work badly, Heuvelmans never complained, though he knew Hergé owed him more than he would ever admit to: "In going through the two books we really had the impression that it was what we had originally done at the beginning. In broad outline, that was it."⁵³ Hergé always insisted that he never used Bib's scenario, just as Heuvelmans never relinquished his claim that the second volume's title, *Explorers on the Moon*, was his invention. He even made it the opening intrigue of the second volume.

On New Year's Eve 1953 *Tintin* magazine published the last plate of this lunar expedition, more than three years after the appearance of the first. Never had the publication of a series by Hergé been so chaotic. The idea for it had initially been raised in 1948, then dropped, then picked up again in 1950, delayed for six months, then dropped for two years, then finished in 1953.

Hergé's depression dogged him. Retreats, medicinal plants, and medications offered only temporary respite. He was in a shattered state.

His readers, who were unaware of these problems, wondered whether he was tired of carrying his hero after such a long time, and whether he didn't intend to kill him off, the way Conan Doyle did with Sherlock Holmes. To those who inquired he answered, hoping to allay their concern. "If you ask doctors, they will tell you that there is nothing that takes longer to cure than a nervous depression, or more exactly, cerebral anemia," he said in an interview. "It took twenty years to destroy me consciously, how do you expect me to recover in six months?"⁵⁴

Again he sought refuge by fleeing to Lake Geneva and the wide open spaces with the vertiginous drops in the mountains. When he returned, so did his anguish. His team was his crutch. Too many people depended on him, both at the magazine and in the Studios, for them to allow him to self-destruct.

THE PUBLICATION OF THE TWO MOON BOOKS did not have the same impact as his two previous two-book adventures, the search for Captain Haddock and following in the footsteps of Professor Calculus. Those titles had played on a familiar register of secrets, treasure, mystery, and paranormal phenomena. He had taken a great risk on leaving the planet Earth. Had it not been for Hergé's pedagogical gifts, he could have lost his readers well before the moon landing.

As a sign of the times, the moment his serial began publication in *Tintin*, the Commission on Censorship met in Paris to deliver its first report. Apparently they wanted guidelines for depicting future scientific advances:

This anticipation is valid precisely to the extent that it remains worthy of being called "scientific." Whereas Jules Verne anticipated the development of science by projecting actual progress, the imagination of writers of children's books absolves itself too often of any scientific consideration, and improvises according to the needs of the fantastical story without any concern for linking these to some sort of scientific category. It seems that a great show of caution is required in projecting the advances in science and to remain with science in its actual state to find all the authentic marvels rather than to exaggerate dangerously in the realm of pure fantasy.⁵⁵

The only regret Hergé felt concerned a minor character in the story, the engineer Frank Wolff, assistant to Professor Calculus from the beginning

and guilty of double treachery: not only had he agreed to deliver the plans of the rocket to spies, but he had agreed to hide a stowaway from his fellow passengers. To make up for his misdeeds he confesses to Tintin and is forgiven. But when the oxygen reserves run out, he redeems himself by sacrificing his life for the others. The engineer Wolff is neither completely a villain nor one of the good guys. He is torn by inner conflict. His leap into space is the ultimate escape.

When this sequence first appeared in *Tintin*, the Catholic press did not react well to Wolff's suicide note: "Farewell and forgive me the wrong I have committed toward you."⁵⁶ It provoked heated discussions among priests. Though the word "suicide" was not written in bold letters, the idea was there. Casterman encouraged Hergé to rethink things. In the book version the engineer leaps into the void full of hope. "As for me," he says in his note, "perhaps a miracle will also enable me to escape. Forgive me the wrong I have committed toward you."⁵⁷

Hergé himself had no hope. He didn't even have the energy to fight; he saved all his strength to complain to the publisher about the flaws he found on receiving the first few copies of *Explorers on the Moon*. The paper was too yellow and porous; he blamed the photo offset and the printing. He complained that in order to obtain a deep violet red he had tried everything, going from watercolor to gouache to mixing the two before settling for watercolor. All these efforts had been in vain; his work was destroyed. He kept praising the Éditions du Lombard for the sharpness of its coloring in publishing Jacques Martin's books and thought Jacobs's *The Mystery of the Great Pyramid* a model of printing.⁵⁸

His unhappiness stemmed from the care with which he and his whole team at the Studios had shepherded the plates through publication. In adapting his narrative from the magazine into book form he had taken delight in introducing large drawings with a wealth of details. In the magazine their presence would have hampered the flow of the action. Still he felt he had not gotten his due. Whether because of all the interruptions in *Tintin* or the futuristic spirit of the story, the adventures left Hergé's readers bewildered.

Destination Moon and *Explorers on the Moon* nevertheless mark a stage in the development of Hergé's work. It was simply a matter of time before it would receive the recognition it deserved. In 1969, fifteen years after Tintin and his crew, Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon. Some seemed genuinely surprised that they didn't find footprints. Later, during a psychiatric and neurological convention, several notable

specialists would use *Destination Moon* to illustrate the symptoms of temporary amnesia, which in the story Dr. Calculus exhibits when he can't recognize Captain Haddock and his space suit loses all meaning. Since then, the condition has sometimes been called "the Calculus syndrome."⁵⁹ At the suggestion of Jean Meeus, an astronomer fascinated by Tintin and his world, a small planet previously known as "1652" was renamed "Hergé." It was discovered by the Observatory at Uccle in 1953, the same year as the publication of *Destination Moon*. An asteroid discovered in 1950 had already been named "Castafore."⁶⁰

AT THE END OF 1954 Hergé started publication of a new adventure, *The Calculus Affair*. For some Tintinologists, it represents the summit of Hergé's oeuvre.⁶¹

The opening panel starts with a "Rrring!" and the last one ends with a "Brrrom!" which prepares the reader for subsequent events. There are spies in the gardens of Marlinspike Hall, and a series of strange events results in the disappearance of Professor Calculus. Rarely had Hergé concentrated the action to such an extent. First a lead takes Tintin and company to Switzerland, and later to Borduria, an imaginary country, pursuing the production of a bomb infinitely more destructive than the atomic and hydrogen bombs, which would give mastery of the world to Marshal Plekszy-Gladz.

Needless to say, Professor Calculus knows of the plot and refuses to turn over the plans of his invention, because he does not want to create an engine of death. Finally his friends manage to rescue him and escape from their prison, and by commandeering a tank, flee the country, literally crashing through the border.

This time Hergé has both feet firmly planted in his own cold war world. The plot takes readers back to *King Ottokar's Scepter*, putting them in familiar territory. The illustrations and the scenario are vibrant and rich; the story thread holds from beginning to end. Jacques Martin's gags and sense of humor are present throughout. Hergé inserted himself as a reporter speaking to a local peasant in the crowd gathered at the gates of Marlinspike Hall. He portrays his friend Jacobs as Jacobini, an opera singer with Castafore in *Faust*. He offers a wink and a nod to Walt Disney by naming the Italian scientist Topolino ("little mouse"), the Italian name of a character known to everyone as Mickey.

This playfulness extends to the cover of the book, which Hergé submitted to his editor in total disregard for the cost of production.

He was not satisfied with the drawing, which has Haddock and Tintin hiding a groggy Professor Calculus behind some boulders. He wanted to intensify the drama by placing it in the center of shattered glass. Real glass. He proposed having the shards cut out of a plastic or mica material and superimposed over the drawing in transparent relief, creating a dramatic illusion.⁶² Needless to say, Casterman didn't go for this.

Hergé had scouted the locations in the manner of a film director. The shores of Lake Geneva in French-speaking Switzerland had become familiar to him over the years, of course. The Hotel Cornavin, built in 1933 near the train station of the same name in Geneva, would acquire an international reputation thanks to Hergé. For years it received letters addressed to Professor Calculus in room 122 on the second floor. There was no room 122, though eventually the owners decided to have a door with a plaque indicating room 122 made and placed against a wall.⁶³

In general, researching the book was easy. The Bordurian language resembles its Syldavian cousin (aside from using the Latin alphabet instead of Cyrillic). Its spelling and syntax is Slavic. As for the vocabulary, it is a dialect spoken in Brussels sprinkled with slang words from across Europe.⁶⁴ The laboratory in which Professor Calculus makes his ultrasound experiments was based on plans for the construction of a laboratory in the Congo drawn up by Armand Delseemme, a professor of astrophysics. Hergé also obtained a copy of the American scientist Leslie E. Simon's 1947 book *German Research in World War II*, reproducing its cover in one scene and copying every detail exactly except for the swastika, which he eliminated. He had conceived of it as a story of the cold war, and not World War II. Marshal Plekszy-Gladz of Borduria is clearly a product of the two. His physical appearance, his authority, and his regime use elements borrowed from both Hitler (uniforms, insignias, even the salute "Amaïh, Plekszy-Gladz!") and Stalin (his mustache is promoted to a national emblem).⁶⁵ Just before 1956, the year of the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, the events in Poland, and a bloody rebellion in Hungary, only a few dared to point out the similarity between the crimes of Stalin and those of Hitler.

The Calculus Affair is, however, focused less on politics than on the moral dilemma confronting Professor Calculus as a scientist and the use of his inventions. Again Hergé was ahead of his time, because the cold war was not as yet a subject in popular culture. Not until 1966 would Alfred Hitchcock direct *Torn Curtain*, in which Paul Newman plays an American scientist trying to escape from East Germany.⁶⁶

EIGHT MONTHS AFTER the last appearance of *The Calculus Affair* in *Tintin*, the magazine started publication of *The Red Sea Sharks*. It almost seemed as if Hergé had regained the pace and rhythm of his most creative period. However, no one was fooled: the support of the Hergé Studios, the imagination of Jacques Martin, and the energy of Bob De Moor were behind the effort. Hergé remained the catalyst, however. This time a chance article in a newspaper caught his eye. The reporter had investigated the mysterious disappearance of some pilgrims on their way to Mecca. They reappeared later, only to be sold off as slaves. Hergé immediately wrote a fifteen-page synopsis, then proceeded to make an initial storyboard outline, while his colleagues did their own versions. Pieced together from the different contributions, a story of sorts emerged.

It begins with the words “The End,” projected on a screen. On leaving a movie theater, Tintin and Captain Haddock, by the greatest coincidence, run into General Alcazar, an old acquaintance from the times of *The Broken Ear* and *The Seven Crystal Balls*. He is in such a rush that he drops his wallet. It holds enough clues that they try to find him. Quickly the family gathers at Marlinspike Hall: the Thom(p)sons, Professor Calculus, old Nestor, and even Abdullah, the irritating boy from *Land of Black Gold*, whom the Emir Ben Kalish Ezab entrusts to the Captain, fearing an imminent coup d’état. Tintin quickly realizes that Alcazar is in Europe trying to buy arms for a war to overthrow his rival. When Tintin finds the general, he is conferring with Dawson, chief of the International Police from Shanghai in *The Blue Lotus*.

Tintin and Haddock jump on a plane for Khemed, where the revolution feared by the emir has overthrown the government. Dawson, now an arms dealer without nationality or scruples, tries to eliminate them and orders an attack that makes their plane crash. After numerous intrigues they manage to find the emir in his hiding place. The real reasons for the coup become evident and less than revolutionary. The cause was a conflict with the airline Arabair, which the emir had authorized to land in Wad ès Dà (from the Flemish for “What is that?” pronounced “Wad ès dà” in the Brussels accent), a city on the road to Mecca. The emir had threatened to reveal to the world that Arabair was trafficking in black Senegalese and Sudanese, who were sold off as slaves. Tintin and Haddock take a sailboat toward Mecca, which is attacked by war planes. The survivors escape on a raft and are rescued by the yacht of the Marquis of Gorgonzola, a multinational capitalist working in films as well as trafficking in arms, and the owner of Arabair. As it turns out, he is the slave trafficker and none other than Rastapopoulos, another

old acquaintance. One of his guests at the masked ball he is giving is Castafiore. Rastapopoulos manages to sideline our heroes by sending them on the SS *Ramon*, a cargo ship captained by Allan, from *The Crab with the Golden Claws* and *Cigars of the Pharaoh*. Abandoned on the ship, which has been set on fire, they succeed in releasing the prisoners from the hold and manage to make port so that the pilgrims can continue on their way to fulfill their religious duty—or, if they value their lives, to put ashore at the nearest harbor. The ship has to avoid the torpedoes from Rastapopoulos's gang. When they finally turn the tables on him, the villain manages his escape in a mini-submarine. Once back in their country, Tintin and Snowy expose the whole intrigue in the press and return to Marlinspike, only to find that their haven has been invaded by Jolyon Wagg, who first appeared to irritate Captain Haddock in *The Calculus Affair*. He is holding an automobile rally.

Hergé often said that by having characters return in his work, he was humbly imitating the great novelists, such as Balzac and Proust.⁶⁷ But with *The Red Sea Sharks* he gave himself over to it more wholeheartedly than ever. The book is a real reunion of friends and enemies, major and minor characters. Rarely had he convoked so many in one place. New readers unfamiliar with the Tintin cast of characters had to consult his earlier works. In this nineteenth book, the biography of Tintin can be seen to be emerging, like pieces of a mosaic being reconstituted.

Hergé seemed to have acquired a taste for travel after his recent expedition to Switzerland, reconnoitering the settings and locations of *The Calculus Affair*. Preparing for *The Red Sea Sharks* he was no longer satisfied by reading books. Now he wanted to travel to possible locations, place himself in the atmosphere, make sketches, and take photos. He had never traveled during all these years except through Tintin. At the age of forty-nine he finally decided to change that. With permission from the Department of Military Armament in Brussels, Hergé and Bob De Moor set sail in mid-August 1956 onboard the steamship SS *Reine Astrid* of the Thornton Line, bound for the Mediterranean.

Hergé now was in the habit of sending copies of his books to notables. When he learned from reading the papers that the novelist Françoise Sagan was reading *Tintin* during her convalescence from a car accident, he immediately rushed her a copy of *The Calculus Affair*.⁶⁸ Starting with *The Red Sea Sharks*, his public relations list became organized, since it was now as much a matter of marketing as an homage. A permanent list was drawn up,⁶⁹ with some receiving a deluxe copy with a printed dedication, others

a handwritten dedication, and still others a deluxe edition that was not numbered. The name of the recipient and the quality of the dedication ranged from “respectful recognition” to “best wishes” to “amicably yours” to the neutral “sincerely.” As *Tintin* became famous, the list grew longer; some names were dropped, others passed through a purgatory before reappearing later. This list is an accurate indication of Hergé’s social standing. The Royal Family of Belgium (Prince Alexander, Princess Marie-Christine) received the finest copies, now sought after by collectors. Copies were also sent to the following:

- His publishers (Raymond Leblanc, Georges Dargaud)
- His friends (Edgar Jacobs, Bernard Heuvelmans, Robert Poulet,
Adelin Van Ypersele de Strihou, Father Gall)
- High-ranking Belgian political officials (Paul-Henri Spaak)
- Officers of the resistance (Jacques Chaban-Delmas)
- President of the National Assembly (Maurice Chevance-Bertin)
- Journalists who were also Tintinophiles (Oliver Todd)

Nor did he neglect those who had been asked to contribute to the research, such as Paul-Emile Victor, who was asked to procure the photo of a boat photographed through the periscope of a submarine, a delicate mission that took the polar explorer five years.⁷⁰

Some felt that Hergé reached his peak with *The Red Sea Sharks*. Here was the culmination of his golden age, which had started more than twenty-two years earlier with *The Blue Lotus*. As always, Germaine’s influence could be felt throughout the book; she stood by him as his wife during good and bad times over three decades. Her mark on the work is less in the technical details than in the moral dimension of the story. She was upright, rigorous, and demanding about all things, traits largely inherited from her long work with Father Wallez. This encouraged perfectionism in her husband, pushing him toward the heroic and his Boy Scout instincts, which had always remained a part of him. Her impact on his behavior, however, seems less profound, as Hergé would always be the first to concede.⁷¹

His readiness to acknowledge his indebtedness to Germaine may have been sincere, but it was also colored by guilt. In 1952, between two interims of crisis resulting from his depressive state, the Remi couple went through a terrible year. Speeding along the highway at the wheel of his Lancia, Georges Remi had a serious accident. He emerged unscathed, but Germaine was left with a limp for the rest of her life. In addition, their friend Father Wallez succumbed to cancer. Toward the end, to help him recover from the

effects of his imprisonment, the Remis took him into their home for three months. Georges, who stayed by his bedside as he lay dying, attended his funeral in his native village, one of only a few people present. He felt that he had lost a father.

IN 1957 HERGÉ TURNED FIFTY. To his readers, especially those of *The Red Sea Sharks*, he would always remain the same. However, he had changed. He went through another serious crisis of conscience, which threw him into paroxysms of depression. Few outside of his very close friends and colleagues at the Studios were aware of it. It was there, where he least expected it, that the roof fell in.

In June 1956 Fanny Vlamynck, a lovely young woman of twenty-one, was hired as a colorist. After a trial period she was assigned regular duties. She had expected to meet a serious old man and instead discovered a mature man, reserved but warm. She admired him instinctively, the man more than the artist. Like everyone else, she had read *Tintin* though had never been a devotee of comic books. They seemed to understand one another, and at the usual afternoon tea, when the little group at the Studios came together to relax and laugh, their glances crossed.

Five months after she was hired, just before the weekend preceding All Saints' Day, they found themselves alone in the elevator at the Hergé Studios. They kissed between the fifth floor and the lobby.⁷² On leaving her in front of the door at 194 Avenue Louise, Hergé was no longer the same man. From now on there would be a before and an after in his life and, consequently, in his work.

WHENEVER A MAJOR EVENT occurred in Hergé's life, his immediate entourage at the Studios, and a little later those at the magazine, were generally the first to learn of it, whether to their detriment or to their benefit. When he had his self-destructive impulses under control, Hergé would have countless projects on the boil, some of questionable merit.

By the fall of 1956 he had been thinking for some time about what he called "the Tintin problem" before putting all his ideas on paper, with Casterman as the intended recipient. That things were going well should have made Hergé optimistic, but he was persuaded that it was an urgent matter that he find new distribution outlets. In his eyes, time was working against him; he was afraid that his characters would become outmoded. There were young rivals everywhere you looked, more aggressive, modern

and dynamic. What did they have in common? A publisher called Le Lombard. If they succeeded it was because Lombard was aggressive. *Tintin's* director, Raymond Leblanc, had won Hergé's admiration for his business acumen, and Hergé was the first to admit that wherever the *Tintin* books had appeared on the market ten years earlier—in Italy, Portugal, and Germany and in South America—they had done well. But now other illustrators such as Craenhals, Cuvelier, Macherot, and Willy Vandersteen reaped the benefits.

Hergé was therefore convinced that the moment had come to explore new outlets such as Spain and Scandinavia. He wanted a promotional campaign with publicity in all bookstores, book-signing ceremonies and press stories, and the distribution of books to hotels and vacation resorts where young people congregated.⁷³ He hoped that his publisher would see things his way. To the public at large, Georges Remi had ceased to exist; he had become Hergé. He had to maintain his image and protect his reputation, and anything that slowed the distribution of his work was a problem. The novelist Marguerite Duras wrote in the *France-Observateur*, "The *Tintin* books published by Casterman have gone around the world. You could say there is an international Tintin. Every child in the world has a Tintin culture before having their own, and they drink their Tintin milk like water from a fountain."⁷⁴ *Paris-Match* devoted several heavily illustrated pages to what it called "the Belgian who scared Walt Disney."⁷⁵

Divided between two women, Germaine and Fanny, one whom he could not manage to leave, and the other whom he could not resolve to join, he was paying dearly for his indecision, which he attributed to his being a Gemini. His suffering made him acutely aware of everything.

HERGÉ KNEW NOTHING about Pol Vandromme when Vandromme's secretary transmitted his proposal to write a book about Hergé, citing his friendship with the playwright Félicien Marceau as a recommendation.⁷⁶ Pol Vandromme was an up-and-coming young writer, an editorial columnist and literary critic, age thirty-one, from Charleroi. He was of a satirical and polemical bent of mind and a pamphleteer. He had written major essays sympathetic to Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Robert Brasillach, the two writers who symbolized Nazi collaboration.

There was no question of their working on it together, but Hergé assumed he had complete control. Vandromme submitted forty pages to him, and after reading them Hergé expressed certain reservations but never censored anything. Vandromme, he thought, was as perceptive as he was

admiring. It would be the first book written about him, and all the better for being written by a nonconformist who was skeptical and yet cared a great deal about the characters.

When the manuscript was delivered, *The World of Tintin* was less a biography than a monograph; the author had always conceived of it as an essay on the universe of Hergé's imagination. However, the publisher, Claude Gallimard, wanted Vandromme to add three chapters on the life of Hergé at the beginning of the work.

Vandromme was more convincing as an essayist than a biographer. In the first instance he wrote with a culture, an irony, and an irreverence that was refreshing. He showed the Thom(p)sons as more like Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet than cops on the beat, and saw in Tintin more of the legendary Vidocq (a criminal turned policeman) than a Boy Scout. He likened Snowy to Sancho Panza and ranked Haddock among the great Shakespearean figures, Macbeth most notably.

As a biographer Vandromme was hamstrung. Hergé was not communicating at all. He would feel Hergé's eyes looking over his shoulder, especially when the Dark Years were the subject. "Hergé's life started imitating Tintin's only in the years after Liberation. Since then, it has been without any interest, and could be summed up as an anti-novel."⁷⁷ That was it.

Roger Nimier, an advisor to Gallimard, was in charge of commissioning authors to write prefaces to the classics of the *Livre de Poche* (paperback series). He wanted to write the preface to Vandromme's biography, which he saw as revolutionary. He wrote an essay titled "Tintin Makes His Entrance in Literature!" evoking a mad world of great authors to support his enthusiasm. Nimier compared *The Blue Lotus* to Malraux's *The Conquerors* and *Tintin in the Congo* to Hemingway's *The Green Hills of Africa*. *Tintin in America* was paired with Simenon's *Maigret at the Coroner*, and the influence of Alfred Hitchcock was everywhere. It was overwhelming; to be more succinct, "The world of Tintin is actually a universe."⁷⁸ *Tintin* was being offered a place next to the works in the catalogue of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, the pantheon of letters.

Hergé feared, very simply, being made to look ridiculous. He could not see Tintin praised to the level of Zola's characters. He was embarrassed and asked that Nimier's preface not be used. Vandromme pushed, but Hergé refused to budge. If they kept in Nimier's preface, he would withdraw permission to use the illustrations that had been promised.

Even when the book was published—without the preface—in the series "L'Air du temps" by Gallimard, he remained dissatisfied. His complaints

went beyond what was reasonable. He was infuriated by the heading “Illustrations by Hergé” on the cover. He had given Vandromme permission to draw from his reserves of illustrations, and together they had made a selection of three facsimiles and two dozen small drawings. Hergé had even asked one of his assistants to make a montage of the heads of his characters for the cover. Nonetheless, he thought that calling this “Illustrations by Hergé” was an abuse of confidence and “false marketing.” He insisted that the line be eliminated from all future editions of the book. He did not want it to look as if he had participated in any way with this panegyric of his work.⁷⁹

Everything about Vandromme’s book embarrassed him, but after his initial response, and after his bad mood had lifted, he was thrilled. In one way or another the appearance of *The World of Tintin* in bookstores was deeply gratifying. He enjoyed it all the more because it had not been his idea. He believed that he still had work to do before earning that kind of recognition. But now that it was out, the myth was in place.

10.

The Demon of Purity 1958–1960

TOWARD THE END OF THE FIFTIES there seemed no hiatus in Hergé's life, private or professional. For three years he had managed to have a life with Fanny without leaving Germaine. Neither was satisfied, and the situation became increasingly unbearable. "If she had been a great actress, or an artist, I wouldn't have objected. There would have been a certain flair to it. But a nobody, a little colorist from the Studios, no!" Germaine exclaimed to anyone would listen.¹

She was frustrated and appalled. She had endured his dalliances, though they had hurt her deeply, but this time she felt stabbed in the back. He had told her immediately about Fanny and his burgeoning feelings of love for her, all the stronger because they were reciprocated. He preferred to be open about it, even if this pained her. In any event, she'd had her suspicions. She knew him better than anyone and could guess what was happening from the expression on his face, the way his shoulders slumped, the way he avoided looking at her. She also knew as no one else that his Achilles' heel was his powerful sense of guilt, the one trait that he retained from his Catholic education. To unsettle him she had only to touch this sore point.

The staff at the Studios did not need a picture to understand what was going on, realizing that it was a midlife crisis. Fanny's beauty, youth, and freshness were undeniable. Georges was untiring in his praise of her sense of humor, her good nature and thoughtfulness, and her way of smoothing things over. A quarter of a century younger than he, she was a classmate of the daughter of his old friend Paul Jamin.

Germaine represented the irretrievable past and Fanny the future. Germaine hadn't known how to handle her husband's success. Even some of their friends found them staid and preoccupied with petty conventions. Proud and reserved, driven by her sense of duty, she hadn't changed and adapted because, Georges felt, she stubbornly chose not to. Her perspective had remained locked on *Le Vingtième Siècle*. Their marriage seemed indestructible, past the point beyond which anything could be put into question. She had been lulled for years by that thought. But her sense of security was an illusion. When they were first married, she had been the one who was sociable and read books. She took him everywhere, opening his mind. He had admired her unreservedly. Over the years the roles were reversed; he went out and she stayed home. Since the end of the war they had gone in different directions. Little by little home life had been poisoned. They were both driven by ambitions, but not the same ones.

In the aftermath of Hergé's depression he had turned inward. In his retreats on the French border and on Lake Geneva he had engaged in intense meditation, having discovered Oriental philosophy. The religious texts affected him morally and philosophically rather than spiritually, toward Taoism and revelations foreign to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Fanny was a catalyst for him to change what Germaine and Father Wallez had inculcated in him. For three decades he had been rigid, buttoned up, and virtuous. All of a sudden he discovered different instincts: openness, tolerance, and sense of freedom.

He wasn't able to reconcile all these contradictory aspects of himself. He still adhered to a moral code, where a word once given is for life. To leave his wife would be to abandon her. To renounce their vows, twice blessed—once by the Church and again by Father Wallez—would be to deny his faith. It was sheer torture. Although he had become less and less of a practicing Catholic, he still did not have the strength to resolve his problem: to be free and also free of sin. He had to break his vows without feeling that he had betrayed his wife. His pride and self-esteem would always be in conflict with his vanity. He wanted to look at himself every morning in the mirror without shame.²

The crisis dragged on for months, and at first even his old friends were angry with him for the way he was treating Germaine. Some people were shocked and disappointed that the big brother they had admired for being so straightforward wasn't in the end. They might have altered their opinion had they known what Hergé wrote about Tintin to Olivier Todd, one of the first (and rare) journalists who understood his work: "Tintin's primary flaw

is no doubt that he is too virtuous: I, more than anyone else, have become irritated sometimes by his obstinate refusal to stray from the path of duty.”³

In 1960, following three years of procrastination, the situation became untenable. A series of crises and exhausting scenes culminated in his slamming the door on his conjugal home and moving into a hotel in Brussels. To make his point he left both women. He was in a no man’s land, the ideal place to pull himself together. At this point he was beyond self-recognition; he who abhorred violence surprised himself by ripping off the sleeve of a shirt, or shattering an ashtray. At first he thought of leaving definitively, then changed his mind and thought of making his double life official. This time it was Fanny who put his back against the wall. He had to choose. “If I continue this way there will be three unhappy people,” he confided to one of his colleagues. “It’s better if there is only one.”⁴ There would be only one—his wife. In 1960 Georges and Germaine separated, but it would take Georges an additional seventeen years to obtain a divorce. Throughout, Germaine clung to the hope that he would return. He did not abandon her, either materially or morally. Until the end of his life he would spend Mondays with her in what had been their home in Ceroux-Mousty.⁵ Still, Hergé felt as if at last he had killed off the puppet in him and was now set free.

SINCE THE PUBLICATION of *The Red Sea Sharks* Hergé had been running in circles. He wasn’t lacking in ideas or the desire to work; the problem was settling on a subject. He no longer hesitated about working on a scenario with others, even if his experiences were not entirely satisfactory. With his loyal and efficient assistants Jacques Martin and Greg Régnier, he set to work on a project titled *Tintin and the Thermozero*. A story outline was drawn up, along with a few working sketches: a container of a deadly radioactive material is taken by mistake by someone Tintin would pursue, catching up with him just as the product is about to wreak its devastation. As the story would evolve, J. W. Howard, a British physicist defecting across the Iron Curtain, contacts the CIE (Central International Espionage agency), headquartered in Berlin, which would slip him through the border. The scientist is carrying atomic secrets plus a container of deadly radioactive material. On landing in Europe, to minimize the risk Howard gives the container to a German spy named Schülte, who, disguised as a salesman, takes it to Berlin.⁶

The problem was that it was all done in the style of Hergé. Every time he worked with others, the project became too calculated and elaborate.

Hergé had always needed to improvise, finding ways of keeping the material fresh. In fact he was only at ease with what was his. Working with the most talented colleagues in the world he still could never feel free from all restraints or inspired to create those strokes of genius balancing logic and the madcap.

Then in the last months of 1957 he read an article on American Indians, reviving his youthful passion. He found his thread: Tintin finds himself on a reservation trying to prevent unscrupulous businessmen from evicting the natives in order to drill for oil. He immediately wrote to his old friend Father Gall to ask for his advice on the project. The Cistercian monk was an expert on the Plains Indians, who had named him “Lakota Isnala.” He sent Hergé five single-spaced typewritten pages filled with details and anecdotes about the geography of Little Rock and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Indians’ hostility toward white people and the despoliation of their land by big corporations. He even wrote of how Indians had been on the front line when the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy.⁷

Like the previous project, the story opens with an incident on the road to Marlinspike Hall. An accident, or is it an attempt on the life of a Sioux? At the hospital, in his delirium, the man mentions a peace pipe, a tomahawk, and a monastery. Going to the monastery and visiting an exhibit of Indian artifacts, Tintin discovers that the peace pipe has disappeared. It contained a precious official document proving the claims of the Indians to their hunting grounds. As all the other copies have vanished, it is the last thing to prevent their being forced from their land by an oil company. Hergé abandoned this project instinctively.

At the end of *The Red Sea Sharks* Hergé had drawn a sketch of a story about Nestor, the butler at Marlinspike Hall, being involved in a mysterious murder. Then he abruptly changed the subject: “General theme, very simple. But what? Tibetan wisdom—the Lama. Abominable Snowman. Why do they leave for Tibet: the yeti?”⁸

Hergé had always been fascinated by Tibet, and using it as a subject remained in a corner of his subconscious. A recent book by his friend Bernard Heuvelmans, *On the Trail of Unknown Animals*, had been a worldwide best-seller, popularizing cryptozoology, the study of legendary animals. Heuvelmans attacked the commonly held view of the yeti as an “abominable snowman.” His yeti was neither hungry for human flesh nor a kidnapper, but a friendly and misunderstood giant.

Hergé plunged further into his research: Fosco Mariani’s *Secret Tibet*; Heinrich Harrer’s *Seven Years in Tibet*; *Tibet my Homeland* by Tsewang

Pemba, the first Tibetan doctor with a degree from a Western medical school; *Annapurna* by Maurice Herzog; *Nanda Devi, the Third French Expedition to the Himalayas*, by J. J. Languépin and L. Payan; and, naturally, the writing of the Tibetan explorer Alexandra David-Neel. Aside from their information, these works were invaluable for their maps and photographs, such as those in Herzog's book showing yeti footprints in the snow. Hergé went to the Belgian Alpine Society for more photographs and documentation. They sent him Richard Lannoy's work on India. On one page he found a photo that showed only the lower half of a New Delhi policeman, forcing him to write the author to ask for the original photo so he could see the entire uniform.⁹

Hergé's research led him back to where he began: with his friend Heuvelmans. Bib was the specialist most up to date on the subject; in 1959 he had received a letter from Nepal sent by Peter Byrne, head of the American Slick-Johnson expedition, which had set out to capture a yeti alive.¹⁰ He appreciated Bib's erudition, his sense of humor, and his originality in his approach to science; he started with a character that was half-man and half-beast, which legend had turned into a monster but that turned out to be less frightening than pathetic. Right from the start Hergé had the idea of making Tintin come face to face with some beast.¹¹

Heuvelmans's sketch of the abominable snowman convinced Hergé to make him a creature closer to humans than to animals (if only to absolve the young Hergé for having slaughtered so many animals in *Tintin in the Congo*).¹² After a number of false starts he proceeded to make an outline of his story. Once he felt he had the structure set, he started the drawings. The first plate of *Tintin in Tibet* came out in *Tintin* magazine on September 17, 1958.

The story opens with a vacation in the Alps, invigorating to the young reporter but not to Captain Haddock. Learning from the newspapers of an airplane accident in Nepal that has taken the life of eighteen people, Tintin has a nightmare: his friend Chang from *The Blue Lotus* is in danger; he is buried under snow; he is calling for help. In the morning Tintin receives a letter from Chang, announcing his imminent arrival. Our young reporter verifies from the passenger list that Chang had been on the plane. Tintin weeps, a rare occurrence; the last time had been in the final frame of *The Blue Lotus* onboard the steamship taking him back to Europe. Getting hold of himself, Tintin rejects fatalism, choosing to believe his dream is a premonition. Convinced that Chang is still alive, he books passage to India with Haddock.

In Katmandu the sherpas who found the wreckage try to dissuade them from pursuing their search, which they think is both dangerous and doomed to failure. Determined to go it alone, Tintin forges on with a small group, Haddock in the lead. During the ascent, dizzy and disoriented, Haddock and Snowy nearly lose their lives several times. Tintin discovers Chang's name written in a cave near where the wreckage is buried in the snow. He survived the crash. The expedition cannot even find Chang's remains, however, and is forced to return to base camp. As they are about to leave, Tintin spots a yellow scarf caught on a boulder. He continues his quest with Haddock, his guides and porters having fled. Only the sherpa Tharkey, in a fit of remorse, returns. During a stop in a lamasery nestled in the high mountains they find the trail of the yeti that he believes has taken Chang captive. Haddock, who does not believe any of this and wants to turn back, is forced once again to follow Tintin. In the end they discover Chang in a cave, guarded by a so-called abominable snowman, a sort of giant gorilla. He is about to attack the intruders when Tintin's camera flash frightens him off. They take Chang back with them, with the yeti sadly looking on from a distance. "Well, as for me, I hope people never find him," Chang tells his friends, "because they would treat him like a wild animal. But I can assure you, Tintin, that he acted toward me in such a way that I have often wondered if he wasn't a human being. Who knows?"

There are no savages. Tintin, who is goodness personified, made this journey to understand that man is the problem. Chang would also have made him conscious of that dark region of the soul where absolute evil comes in conflict with the spirit of brotherhood. The same evil has driven the abominable snowman to haunt the solitude of the mountains.

The sixty-third and last plate of the story appeared on November 25, 1959. In March, the Year of the Pig, a massive popular uprising against Chinese domination in Lhasa was violently suppressed, resulting in bloodshed. The Dalai Lama was forced to flee into exile, followed by some one hundred thousand Tibetans. The Chinese Army then proceeded to destroy the resistance in the monasteries and absorb Tibet into China—the territory, if not the people.

Hergé's timing is not what made this book remarkable, however. In fact halfway through it he almost abandoned the project. Rather than the news, he had been watching and listening to himself, obsessively, to the point of inhibiting all his creativity. In his sleep all his dreams were white; they were so powerful that he felt a need to write them down as soon as he awoke:

I was climbing up the stairs of a tower (the Hassan Tower in Rabat?) where everything, the ground, the walls, the ceilings were covered with dead leaves. (I was startled that my walking on this carpet of leaves made not a sound.) At every turn I expected something terrifying to leap out at me. Finally, filled with fear, I decided to walk down, and looking into the stairwell, I realized that I had reached the seventh or eighth floor. I continued walking down; on one landing lying on a platform was a dead body (white). As I touched the leg, it remained in my hand; it was a sort of cardboard tube, very light, and I threw it down the stairwell. At that moment on the lower landing a hole opened in the wall and out came a white skull, then a sort of demon, a large man, terrible and white, who threw the skull and piles of bones and other things into the stairwell. I was terrified he was also going to throw me into the void. I tried to pass by him by jumping over space, but he barred my way. I knew that I could not get past him, and that I had to climb back up again.¹³

Another dream:

A horse's head jutted out of a wall, like the shop sign of a butcher shop for horsemeat; the wall was all white, dazzling in the sunshine. On my left was a woman, and I approached the horse (perhaps to give it something to eat) but the trainer shouted at me: "No, don't come any nearer! You are wearing a white shirt. You mustn't. You're going to frighten him!" I thought that if he was afraid of white this wall must terrify him. Then I thought, he couldn't see the white because it was in back of his head jutting out of the wall. I thought that I must go change my shirt, perhaps into my green wool cardigan.¹⁴

The whiteness was not entirely new. Between the wars Hergé had thought of sending Tintin and Snowy on an adventure in Alaska. He drew them stranded on a melting ice floe. Later he returned to this project and set it in what looks like either Canada or Greenland. He had made lists of names of the characters—Eskimos, mounted policemen, seals, and bears—and drawn the accessories: sleds, icebreakers, and snowshoes. The story was inspired by the novels of Jack London. But it had gone nowhere.

Now, paralyzed by this vision of whiteness, he visited Professor Franz Ricklin, a Zurich disciple of Carl Jung. Hergé had read all Jung's works in French and believed in the collective unconscious, the interpretation of dreams, and the union of the individual, the species, and the cosmos.

Jung's shadow hovers over *Tintin in Tibet*. For years, on his own or with patients, Jung drew tankas on cloth as well as what he called European mandalas, inspired by the circles of colored sand representing the universe of a divinity in Tantric Buddhism.

Hergé's meeting with Professor Ricklin was brief and fruitless, however. He told Ricklin about his dreams and was stunned by the man's reply: "I don't want to discourage you but you will never complete your work," he told Hergé. "It's a crisis that you must face. If I were in your place, I would stop work immediately. You must exorcise your demons, your white demons. You must kill within yourself the demon of purity."¹⁵

The man was asking Hergé to choose between his inner well-being and his work. In the middle of publication of *Tintin in Tibet*, having to make a decision, Hergé decided not to see his psychoanalyst again and to finish the story on which he was working. He was determined to work through his book and his own problems. He returned to work feeling triumphant. "When in trouble a Scout smiles and whistles" became his mantra.¹⁶ He knew that if he carried his story to its conclusion he would succeed in accepting himself as he was, not completely white but soiled. On that day he could turn the page. It would no longer be a crushing weight on him. He put the best of himself into *Tintin in Tibet*, a portrait of the artist at a turning point. Fortunately, at the instigation of his publishers, he dropped the original title of *The Cow's Snout* (which was the name of a fictitious mountain in Tibet).

His twentieth book stands alone among his work. There are no chases and pursuits, no villains, no family except for Captain Haddock. It's not a police investigation but a spiritual quest; the only conflict is between man and nature. Nothing really happens; the drama is internal. Hergé seems to have dropped all the traditional tools of an illustrator (though he did not give up visual gags, all instigated by Haddock).

Tintin is again the principal character. He is neither redressing wrongs nor bringing justice—is neither Don Quixote nor Zorro—which makes him all the more human. To find his lost friend he climbs to higher altitudes, surpasses his limits, and elevates himself. By sending Tintin into the mountains of Tibet, Hergé had retraced his own path as a troop leader in 1923 crossing the Pyrenees. Tintin, like Hergé, had become more of an individual, which paradoxically made his quest more universal. In the search for identity, an ideal, he illustrated the most universal of emotions: friendship.

Tintin in Tibet would remain Hergé's favorite. He thought it an ode to friendship, composed "under the double sign of tenacity and friendship."¹⁷

“It’s the story of a friendship,” he wrote in a letter, “the way people say, ‘It’s a love story.’”¹⁸

The personal significance of the work was symbolized by the size of the numbered deluxe edition. The first, naturally, went to King Baudouin, fifth king of the Belgians, on the throne for nearly ten years and on the eve of his marriage to the very popular Fabiola de Mora y Aragon. After the king, the members of the Palace at Laeken, then the editors of the Belgian and French *Tintin*, then Casterman, followed by the children of all his colleagues, coworkers, friends, politicians, notables, and writers. Not forgotten was a seventy-eight-year-old man: “To my young father, from his old son, very affectionately, Hergeorges.”¹⁹

Publication coincided with the date of his formal separation from Germaine. He moved in with Fanny. With *Tintin in Tibet* he seemed to have come to terms with himself, as he wrote in an inscription, “the lovable abominable snowman?”²⁰