

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<b>Institution:</b> University of Glasgow
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D28A – Modern Languages and Linguistics
<b>Title of case study:</b> Shifting the educational perceptions of <i>Bande Dessinée</i>
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>

As little as two decades ago, the notion of comics, graphic novels or *bande dessinée* (BD, French-language comic strips) as an academic field of study would have seemed unthinkable. Following Glasgow-led research and teaching, the study of BD has been accepted as a discipline worthy of intellectual engagement, with BD courses and modules adopted in around 20 universities across the UK, Europe and North America. This unique art form and cultural output has also been brought to a much broader public via exhibitions, conferences and media debate, with the emphasis on BD as a social mirror for which the historical context is key. Glasgow University’s expertise in the study of Early Modern emblems, and its Stirling Maxwell Centre for the Study of Text/Image Cultures, has played a key role in establishing an intellectual and social link to today’s French-language comic strips and graphic novels.

**2. Underpinning research**

The generic label ‘emblem literature’ covers a wide variety of texts whose common feature is to combine images and words. The use of images and the many translations or multilingual editions of such texts allowed emblem books to circulate across Europe, encouraging a fertile dialectic between specific national traditions and common cultural elements. The huge textual and visual corpus fed by the unparalleled fortune this genre enjoyed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries has to be considered not only as a sociological and historical document of European culture, but also as an extraordinary, though not yet adequately valued, artistic heritage. The emblem and related Early Modern forms have been applied to broader critical applications of visual culture, and the French comic strip has become a historically situated phenomenon worthy of intellectual discourse.

Research in Glasgow has led the field in this notion of ‘parallel mentalities’. This research culture has come to fruition via three axes: a growing body of publications in the scholarly, peer-reviewed press; the creation of a community of researchers supported by the founding of the International Bande Dessinée Society (IBDS) and its BD conferences, the first of which was organised by Glasgow University; and public-facing outputs including digitisation websites, invited lectures and exhibitions. These activities by Glasgow researchers since 1999 have served as a catalyst to the culture of BD in Glasgow and elsewhere. This is a culture that builds on the University of Glasgow’s unique and outstanding text/image resources of the Stirling Maxwell Centre and of the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery. By assimilating the outlook of the early text/image era – the first *aetas emblematica* – with that of the BD boom, research from Glasgow has led the field in the notion of ‘parallel mentalities’. In tangible terms, this has meant a previously unconsidered historical contextualisation of BD, as well as a broader application of the workings of earlier visual forms.

Since 1999 Laurence Grove (Senior Lecturer/Reader in French, University of Glasgow) has been examining the historical and cultural resonance of the BD comic strips/graphic novels in France and Belgium. Commenting on social issues, politics and news in these countries from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the importance of BD in French cultural studies had been overlooked in the UK and in many countries. He argues that BD should be studied within a historical and cultural narrative that has its roots in the Early Modern emblem, which juxtaposes image with text to set a riddle, improve understanding or provide commentary and which has influenced art and literature through the centuries.

In 1999 Grove organised one of the first international conferences on BD at the University of Glasgow, the follow-up conference in 2001, when the IBDS was founded, as well as subsequent conferences in London in 2007 and 2009. The 2013 IBDS conference (June 24-28, Glasgow and

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Dundee) hosted 150 participants from six continents and generated 900 tweets. Grove has been a regular contributor to academic discourse over the period, publishing nine books (as sole or co-author or as editor) and many articles in international publications, as well as co-founding and editing the journal *European Comic Art* in 2008, published bi-annually in association with the American Bande Dessinée Society and the IBDS. Grove has given keynote speeches at the University of Cambridge (Adaptation Conference, 2009), St Joseph's University (the Twentieth Annual St Joseph's Lecture, Philadelphia, 2010), the University of Pittsburgh (The Idea of France Conference, 2011) and the University of Wisconsin Madison (Spiritual Optiks Conference, May 2013).

Key researchers in the field at Glasgow have been Laurence Grove (Senior Lecturer 1995-2011, Reader in French 2011-present); Charles Forsdick (Lecturer in French, 1995-1999) and, specifically with respect to emblem digitisation, Alison Adams (Professor of Emblem Studies 1973-2007, Honorary Professorial Research Fellow 2008-present).

### 3. References to the research

- Laurence Grove, ed. *Cahiers Tristan L'Hermite XXXII: Texte/Image au Temps de Tristan* (Bassac: Plein Chant, 2010). ISBN 9782950056603 [available from HEI]
- Laurence Grove, 'Jesuit Emblems and Catholic Comics' In *Emblematic Images and Religious Texts* eds., Peter M Daly and Pedro Campo (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2010), pp. 253-272. ISBN 9780916101619 [REF 2 output]
- Laurence Grove, 'Saint Joseph the Superhero in 'Comics' Old and New' in *Joseph of Nazareth Through the Centuries* ed., Joseph Chorpenning (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2011), pp. 151-171. ISBN 9780916101701 [available from HEI]
- Laurence Grove, *Comics in French: the bande dessinée* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010). 320 pp. (Described by *French Studies* as 'a livre de chevet for anyone teaching a class linked to BD'). ISBN 9781845455880 [REF 2 output]
- Laurence Grove, 'Bond Dessiné(e)' in *James Bond (2)007: Anatomie d'un mythe populaire* eds, Françoise Hache-Bissette, Fabien Bouilly and Vincent Chenille (Paris: Belin, 2007), pp. 269-274. ISBN 9782701146560 [available from HEI]
- Laurence Grove, *Text/Image Mosaics in French Culture: Emblems and Comic Strips* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). 187 pp. ISBN 0754634884 [available from HEI]
- Charles Forsdick, Laurence Grove and Elizabeth McQuillan, eds., *The Francophone Bande Dessinée* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005.), 273 pp. (This was the first scholarly work predominantly in English on BD.) ISBN 9789042017764 [available from HEI]

### 4. Details of the impact

The University of Glasgow has spearheaded the study of BD via its research – disseminated in conferences, publications and exhibitions as well as its undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and PGR supervision – from the 1990s on. As such the University has been instrumental in shifting educational perceptions that now see BD as a valid subject featuring on syllabi worldwide. The academic effect is international – courses are now widespread and largely part of university education – but moreover our research has moved beyond the lecture theatre and into the wider cultural and non-academic world. The shifting perception of BD is set within the context of the central University of Glasgow-based argument that the comic strip is part of broader text/image culture which has a long, often under-explored tradition.

Through key publications, invited lectures and exhibitions, as well as the establishment of the Stirling Maxwell Centre for the Study of Text/Image Cultures in 2011 and the Centre for Emblem Studies 15 years previously, research at the University of Glasgow has been instrumental in propagating a historical framing of text/image forms from Renaissance emblem books to modern day comic strips and graphic novels. Sir William Stirling Maxwell (1818-1878) amassed the world's most complete collection of emblem books, the world's most important archive in this field. Research at Glasgow on BD and emblem books helps preserve and contextualise these cultural artefacts and makes them available to a wider public audience. Developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century,

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emblem books were extremely fashionable and had enormous influence on literature and the visual arts. They featured symbolic pictures and text which expressed a moral, political or religious message which was then decoded by the reader. Over the next 200 years, several thousand were issued from printing presses across Europe. Codes, emblem books and emblematic thinking have featured prominently in popular fiction and films, most famously in Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*.

### Influence on culture and public engagement

In 2011 Grove organised an exhibition entitled 'Breaking the Renaissance Code: Emblems and Emblem Books' which was on display for three months at the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow, attracting 15,414 visitors. The exhibition set emblem books from the Stirling Maxwell Centre alongside contemporary artwork, advertising and BD, exploring the development of emblem books in Europe during the sixteenth century onwards, their decline and subsequent revival in the Victorian Age and the ways in which they have influenced literature and the visual arts in the modern world. In addition to high visitor numbers, the show was well reviewed in the Scottish press, receiving a 4-star rating from *The List*, being included in the 'Hit List' selection of 'best' exhibitions, and being selected as Critic's Choice in *The Scotsman*.



Figure 1. *Biblia pauperum*, from around 1460. Image courtesy of University of Glasgow.

The University of Glasgow also offers a [public searchable database](#) of French Emblems which has recorded over 24 million hits since it was established in February 2009. The database resulted from a project, funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and led by Adams, to digitise all French emblem books of the 16th century and their Latin versions. The site allows scholars and the interested public to find full text and page scans for these fragile and rare books. A sister site, 'Alciato at Glasgow', provides access to 22 editions of the work of Andrea Alciato, considered the 'father' of the emblem genre. The websites are consulted in broad iconographic terms – eg, how are lions depicted – within and outwith academia – eg, booksellers, curators, general public – and have been used as the model for further sites – Dutch love emblems on the Emblem Project Utrecht, and the University of Iowa's 'Reading with the Mind's Eye: A Virtual Emblem Book' exhibit.

Outwith academia, Grove has written about BD for the BBC News website (9 January 2009), which attracts 40 million unique users per week, and has also made invited appearances on STV News (21 June 2013) and BBC Radio Scotland (10 July 2013).

### Influence on global educational curriculum

University of Glasgow researchers have drawn on the resources noted above to set BD firmly within its historical context, and through talks, publications and teaching have brought BD and the idea of BD as the descendant art form of emblem books to a wider audience. Their research has created a shift in cultural perceptions towards comics and a greater appreciation and awareness of BD in English-speaking academic and general audiences. Grove has been invited to lecture on BD and text/image related material at the Universities of Cuenca, UC Dublin, Dundee, Durham, Edinburgh, Grenoble, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Montpellier, Nicosia, Odense, Paris IV-Sorbonne, Portland (OR), Rennes, Strasbourg and the École Normale Supérieure (Lyon), the BnF and Palais du Luxembourg (Paris).

In France, comics and BD are considered far more seriously, often as a way to disseminate political views and encourage serious public debate. However, due largely to University of Glasgow research and dissemination, BD is now widely seen as part of a broader culture of text/image expression in English-speaking countries, with a historical context beyond that normally attributed to comics. This is demonstrated in the introduction and subsequent widespread adoption of BD as an academic field. The influence of Glasgow research on this development is evidenced by statements from roughly two dozen higher education institutions. Selected statements include that from the Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design, University of the Arts London:

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The books by Dr Laurence Grove have been pivotal, and the IBDS is a hub for information and expertise. [...] Glasgow (and Dr Grove) was very much the starting point for what is now a well-established and thriving branch of comics studies.

And from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, USA,

My research and teaching of almost an entire decade has been immensely enriched by bande dessinée-related initiatives issuing to a considerable degree from the University of Glasgow.

Examples of courses worldwide that draw upon BD-related material and have been influenced by ideas, contacts and resources gained at Glasgow conferences can be seen at institutions such as the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (since 2009, around 20 students per year), the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (around 15 students per year), the University of Kentucky (since 2011, around 25 students), Miami OH (since 2004, student numbers increasing from around 20 to 40 in 2012-2013) and Central Saint Martin's College of Arts and Design, London (since 1995, around 40 students per class).

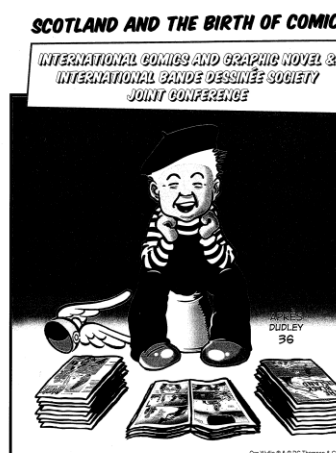


Figure 2. Poster from IBDS Conference, Glasgow 2013.

Undergraduate courses in BD are available in 15-20 universities in the UK and across North America (such courses can be found at, for example, the Universities of Leicester, Brighton, Sheffield, Manchester Metropolitan and Dundee as well as Glasgow in the UK; the University of London Institute in Paris, and Miami OH, Wharton College and University of Michigan in the US). Perhaps just as significantly, BD now features on general cultural courses that are not BD-based. Examples include 'Gay Fiction' at University of Pittsburgh, or 'Belgian Culture' offered by Queen Margaret University.

The National University of Singapore is currently developing a freshman seminar to be introduced in 2015-16 on Comics, BD, and Manga, with Grove's *Comics in French: The European Bande Dessinée in Context* assigned as reading.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

### Evidencing the influence of Glasgow research and Grove in the increasing recognition of BD as an academic discipline (examples from over a dozen received)

- Supporting Statement from Reader in Popular Culture, Central Saint Martin's College of Arts and Design, University of the Arts London (available from HEI)
- Supporting Statement from Professor of French, Department of French and Italian, Miami OH (available from HEI)

### Confirming the popularity of activities related to Glasgow emblem research

- Verification of visitor figures from The Hunterian Gallery for Breaking the Renaissance Code exhibition (available from the HEI)
- [Glasgow Emblem Website](#) Hits (available from the HEI) demonstrating use of the site

### Confirming the enhanced public awareness of comic strips and BD

- BBC News Magazine, 9 January 2009: 'Confused by the cult of Tintin? You're not alone' ([link](#))
- BBC News Website, 28 April 2010 ([link](#))
- The List, 21 July 2011: 'Breaking the Renaissance Code' ([link](#))
- STV News, 21 June 2013: 'Did you know that the first-ever comic book was created in Glasgow?' ([link](#))
- BBC News Website, 28 June 2013: 'New Asterix author Jean Yves-Ferri inspired by Pictish adventure' ([link](#))
- BBC Radio Scotland – The Culture Studio with Janice Forsyth, 10 July 2013: Grove discussing the discovery of world's oldest comic strip ([link](#))