

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Glasgow (UofG)		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 26A Modern Languages and Linguistics		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Advancing the status of comics as a cultural and educational asset		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2003–present		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Laurence Grove	Professor of French and Text/Image Studies	1995–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2013–31 <sup>st</sup> July 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Through his research into <i>bandes dessinées</i> Grove has increased recognition of the status and utility of comics as a cultural and educational asset. This work has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness of both the importance of Scottish contributions to early comics, and of the ubiquity and accessibility of the culture of comics, through public exhibitions and outreach activities including invited lectures and broadcasts. These have appealed to a younger demographic than normally reached by museums.</li> <li>• Established comics as a powerful aid to learning and teaching, through the exhibitions, increased academic recognition, and an <i>Astérix</i> resource for schools delivered through Education Scotland.</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>The result of several years' research, including an AHRC-sponsored study leave, Grove's <i>Text/Image Mosaics</i>, published in 2005, proposed the concept of 'parallel mentalities' by comparing the structures of Renaissance emblems with those of the current <i>bande dessinée</i> (meaning comics in French). Grove defines emblems as the interaction of text with image so as to create an overall message, and argues for a commonality between Renaissance emblems and other text/image combinations. Rather than an evolutionary or linear connection going from one influence to the next, Grove's analysis finds that the mindset, or even zeitgeist, that underpinned the fashion for emblems is essentially the same as the one which later allows for the popularity of the <i>bande dessinée</i>, and which is now ubiquitous in Western contemporary culture, including for example memes or street art [ref 3.6].</p> <p>This body of work was continued with <i>Comics in French</i> (2010, second edition 2013), in which Grove contextualised the <i>bande dessinée</i> and explored the form's origins. At this stage, received wisdom (e.g. Groensteen, <i>M. Töpffer invente la bande dessinée</i>) was that the inventor of comics was Rodolphe Töpffer, specifically with his <i>M. Jabot</i> of 1835. <i>Comics in French</i> questioned the notion of 'inventor', pointing rather to a rich tradition of narrative expression through text/image interaction from ancient times onwards, but exemplified in the Renaissance emblem book [3.5]. <i>Comics in French</i>, discussing many examples of text/image interaction in popular culture, also makes the case for the usefulness of comics/<i>bandes dessinées</i> for teaching both as the proper subject of academic research-led teaching, and for language learning. Grove points out that <i>Astérix</i>, for example, can allow students to follow with the aid of the images, engaged by visual humour, whilst working toward understanding the linguistic humour and checking against their native language version as appropriate.</p> <p>The 2016 Hunterian exhibition, <a href="#">Comic Invention</a>, and its accompanying box-set publication, conveyed Grove's concept of commonality between examples of text/image combinations, providing examples from Egyptian hieroglyphs, medieval illuminated manuscripts, and pre-</p>		



Figure 1:  
*The Glasgow Looking Glass*

industrial print culture. The 'box-set' was a collection of short books, embodying a flexibility in reading order that reflected that of the exhibition. *Comic Invention* also reinforced the theme of 'parallel mentalities', exhibiting the pervasive nature of the mindset behind comics through examples that drew on pieces by Rembrandt, Picasso, Warhol, Boyce, Borland and others. All of these examples provide visual narrative with the text either implied by context or specifically present [ref 3.4]. *Comic Invention* also showcased the [Glasgow Looking Glass](#) (1825; Figure 1), a satirical caricature magazine which fulfilled many criteria of the definition of a modern comic, whilst predating *M. Jabot* by nearly a decade [3.1; 3.3].

As well as his notion of 'parallel mentalities' and the role of Scottish innovation in the development of the modern comic, Grove's body of research has moved on to further explore the educational value of comics. In relation to this he has given a conference paper for the International Bande Dessinée Society in Dundee, and invited lectures

including for the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities, in Dundee and Cambridge Faculty of Education.

### 3. References to the research

- 3.1 Laurence Grove. 2005. [Text/Image Mosaics in French Culture: Emblems and Comic Strips](#). Aldershot: Ashgate. ISBN 0754634884. [available from HEI on request]
- 3.2 Laurence Grove. 2010. *Comics in French: The European Bande Dessinée in Context*. Oxford: Berghahn; [paperback edition](#) 2013. ISBN 9781845455880. [available from HEI on request]
- 3.3 Laurence Grove and Peter Black. 2016. [Comic Invention: The World's First Comic, Everything Before, After – and Frank Quitely](#). Glasgow: BHP Comics. ISBN 9781910775035. [available from HEI on request]
- 3.4 Laurence Grove. 2019. 'La Caricature comme pilier du premier comic du monde: The Glasgow Looking Glass (1825)'. *L'Image railleuse: La Satire visuelle du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours*. Eds. Laurent Baridon, Frédérique Desbussions and Dominic Hardy. Paris: Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art. (<https://books.openedition.org/inha/8213?lang=en>)
- 3.5 Grove, L. 2019. [Scotland, the cradle of comics](#). *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)*, 134(3), pp. 601-613 (doi:[10.1632/pmla.2019.134.3.601](https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2019.134.3.601))
- 3.6 Laurence Grove. 2021 (forthcoming). Bande Dessinée: The Ninth Art of France that is not really French. *Transnational French Studies*. Eds. Charles Forsdick and Claire Launchbury. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

**Quality:** these publications have been through a rigorous peer-review process, with the exception of 3.3, and the body of work is expected to meet or exceed the 2\* threshold.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### 4.1 Changing public perceptions of the history of comics, reaching younger audiences

A key aim of the Hunterian exhibition, *Comic Invention*, (March–July 2016) was to raise the profile of the little-known *Glasgow Looking Glass* (1825; see Figure 1 above), establishing it as the world's first modern comic and Scotland as the 'Cradle of Comics'. Survey data indicate that after visiting, preconceptions that comics originated in America reduced by two-thirds and the knowledge that they originated in Scotland increased by a third [5.1]. The message was also received by the *Guardian*, which stated '*Did you know that comics were invented in Glasgow? That is the claim of this exhibition...*' when it listed *Comic Invention* in its '[unmissable culture](#)' list [2016](#). *Comic Invention* also emphasised the ubiquity and influence of comics in modern culture. Survey data indicates that after visiting people were less likely to think in stereotypical ways about comics, such as obvious associations of characters, comics and entertainment [5.1].

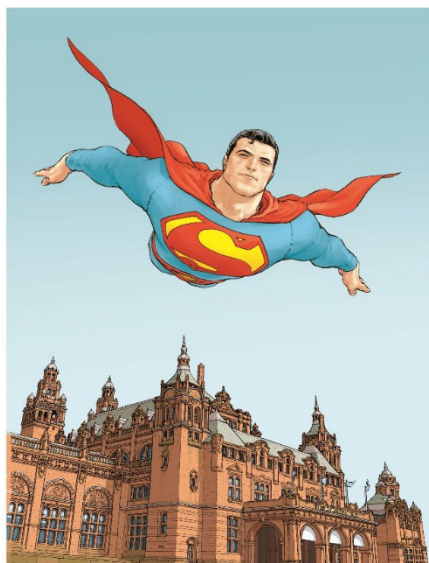
The Hunterian exhibition exceeded expectations for visitor numbers (7,569 visitors over 121 days), and attracted diverse media attention, including the [Scotsman](#), the [BBC](#), the [Herald](#), [Culture24](#) and the [Times of Malta](#) [5.2, further examples listed in 5.1]. The exhibition also received universally positive critical reaction, for example a review in [Museums Journal](#), commented that '*Comic Invention succeeds in revealing this art form to a new audience, making a confident, clever, clearly articulated case for comics as a grown-up medium*'.



Figure 2: Visitors at *Comic Invention*, Clydebank

*Comic Invention* at Clydebank's Museum and Art Gallery (May–June 2017) incorporated references to Clydebank's landmarks and history in the newly remodelled exhibition. West Dunbartonshire Council added a programme of outreach activity to engage the local community, including a school art competition, talks, creative workshops, and a 'Comics Day' at Clydebank Town Hall that attracted over 500 visitors [5.2]. A survey of 70 attendees and 145 pre-attendees found that three times as many attendees associated Glasgow with comics versus pre-attendees. [5.3]. The survey indicated that 23% of the responses were young people under 17. The Exhibitions Officer at West Dunbartonshire Council [5.4] observed:

*'The exhibition and associated integrated activity ... engaged with 8,765 visitors across a wide-ranging demographic... [W]ithin this framework Comic Invention was able to engage with visitors not usually invested in the arts with Clydebank Museum experiencing an uplift in visitor figures particularly in the 12–30 year age group, a demographic the service normally would struggle to attract.'*



*Figure 3: Superman and the Kelvingrove Museum; promotional material for the exhibition.*

*Frank Quitely: The Art of Comics* (Kelvingrove Museum, April–October 2017) displayed text/image combinations from *The Glasgow Looking Glass* up to 2017, emphasising Scotland's comics creativity exemplified by artists Mark Miller and Grant Morrison, and in particular Frank Quitely. Visitor numbers exceeded previous exhibitions on Van Gogh or Mackintosh, there was once again enthusiastic media coverage, and income generated for the Kelvingrove Museum surpassed GBP250,000. The curator at Glasgow Museums [5.4] commented that, *'we had 52,198 visitors which made it one of the most popular paying exhibitions since Kelvingrove re-opened with the temporary exhibition space [in 2016]'*. He added that the exhibition shop *'smashed its targets'*, which is important because retail is one of the three major ways that Glasgow Museums generate income. A Kelvingrove visitor survey report [5.4] noted that:

*'Significantly, 63% (421) of respondents were under the age of 34, with the highest proportion of this age range, 24% (160), being under the age of 15 ... [indicating] that the exhibition attracted a young audience profile and ... that the exhibition was successful in attracting its target audiences, particularly teenagers'*.

#### **4.2 Establishing the educational value of comics**

Grove's research has also led to increased recognition of the value of comics for educational purposes, both for school language-teaching and in Higher Education. A Professor of Popular Culture at the University of the Arts commented: *'Comics are now the focus of numerous modules on degree courses, and of dedicated BA and Masters courses (at Dundee, East Anglia, Staffordshire, Teesside and elsewhere) ... the breakthrough has been made, and Professor Grove's work has been a big part of this'* [5.7]. The exhibitions too have demonstrated this didactic quality of comics/*bande dessinée*, exemplified by school pupils visiting the exhibition and participating in related activities at Clydebank. The exhibitions officer at West Dunbartonshire commented that *Comic Invention*, Clydebank, engaged all six of the area's secondary schools, including a highly successful competition that drew 66 entries and attracted family members who had never been to a museum or gallery before to a presentation evening hosted by Grove and Quitely. [5.4]. A teacher at a local school for children with a wide range of additional support needs commented that: *'since participating in the comic art competition the level of engagement has been incredible and some of the young people have been communicating and interacting with people in ways that I have never seen before'* [5.8].

A partnership with Education Scotland has also allowed Grove to create a Curriculum for Excellence [National Improvement Hub](#), utilising the benefit of comics (in particular *Astérix*) for language learning, as well as teaching cultural aspects of French-language comic books. The resource supports French teachers and pupils from Primary 4 to Secondary 2 Levels, and is also offered through [SCILT](#) (Scotland's National Centre for Languages). Education Scotland use

pageviews as a proxy for usage statistics for such resources; Grove's resource ranked third nationally for all subjects following its launch. We were able to obtain pageview figures for 2016–2017 (2,204, spiking at launch) and 2019 (591), with 1,079 total downloads in 2019, indicating continued use [5.9]. Education Scotland's Development Officer for Modern Languages [5.10] commented:

*'The uptake on this resource following the launch was substantial and the number accessing the materials was amongst the most popular downloads from the modern languages section of the website. ... the publication of the materials has raised awareness of the place and importance of comic books as part of French culture.'*

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 MSc (Museums Studies) dissertation on *The Comic Invention Exhibition at The Hunterian: An Evaluation of its Impact and Potential as a REF Impact Case Study*, [PDF], corroborating the changes in public attitude to comics via detailed survey work and analysis.
- 5.2 Selected examples of media coverage [collated PDF], indicating public interest.
  - a. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04y62q6/p04y62h5>
  - b. <https://www.culture24.org.uk/history-and-heritage/literary-history/art542639-worlds-first-mass-produced-comic-strip-to-go-on-show-at-hunterian-in-2016>
  - c. <https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/worlds-oldest-comic-go-display-glasgow-1482227>
  - d. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/jan/04/150-unmissable-culture-events-2016>
- 5.3 Report on the impact of *Comic Invention* at Clydebank Museum, including survey feedback from 235 respondents [PDF], showing differences in associations and perceptions between those who had and had not yet visited the exhibition, the success of the associated schools programme, and the significance of the exhibition more broadly.
- 5.4 Testimonial, Exhibitions Officer, West Dunbartonshire Council [PDF], corroborating and detailing the success of the Frank Quitely at Clydebank, May–July 2017, including visitor numbers, wide demographics and visitor comments, also commenting in detail on the related events and schools engagement programme.
- 5.5 Customer Feedback Summary Report *Frank Quitely The Art of Comics* at the Kelvingrove Museum, Oct 2017 [PDF], corroborating the impact on audiences through a summary of audience demographic profile and feedback.
- 5.6 Email, Curator Producer, Glasgow Life Museums [PDF], corroborating the success in terms of visitor numbers and commercial sales for Kelvingrove of the *Frank Quitely* exhibition.
- 5.7 Testimonial letter, Professor of Popular Culture, University of the Arts [PDF], evidencing the impact of Grove's work in establishing the study of comics as an artform.
- 5.8 Email correspondence, teacher, Kilpatrick School, Dalmuir, 8 June 2017 [PDF], commenting on the impact of the Frank Quitely exhibition on her class, which includes many with additional support needs, in terms of a highly unusual degree of enthusiastic engagement.
- 5.9 Download figures from Education Scotland [combined as PDF], evidencing use of the educational resources created by Professor Grove:
  - a. Pageviews March 2016–May 2017 [extract from spreadsheet]
  - b. Pageviews and downloads Jan 2019–December 2019 [extract from email from Development Officer for Modern Languages, Education Scotland]
- 5.10 Testimonial letter, Development Officer for Modern Languages, Education Scotland [PDF], corroborating the impact of Grove's work and expertise in creating a valuable and effective set of teaching resources, noting that this has raised awareness of the value of comics for teaching, and commenting on the uptake of the teaching resources.