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Remembering the Jazz Orpheus: *Barney and the Blue Note* by Loustal and Paringaux

MATTHEW SCREECH

IN FRANCE, THE ARTIST JACQUES DE LOUSTAL AND THE WRITER PHILIPPE Paringaux collaborate on comic strips that revive an old text/image arrangement: words appear beneath pictures and there are no balloons at all. Some critics mention Loustal's and Paringaux's original use of that text/image combination: Benoît Peeters, who analyzed one page from their album *Barney et la note bleue*, describes their attempts to establish new relationships between texts and images (91–93). Other commentators like Patrick Gaumer and Claude Moliterni think Loustal gave comics a literary dimension (403).

Barney et la note bleue was translated into English and published under the title *Barney and the Blue Note*. Sales were unspectacular and the critics largely ignored it, although Alan and Laurel Clark praised Loustal's "evocative watercolours" (115). This article will encourage a wider appreciation of *Barney and the Blue Note* among English speakers, by analyzing the album in translation and by drawing upon an interview with Loustal.[1] Over the coming pages, the implications of having no balloons to represent speech and thought are discussed; I also assess the album's contribution to comic strip mythology and enlarge on its literary aspect.

Barney and the Blue Note differs sharply from other comic strips. Nevertheless, it resembles literary work by French filmmaker/writer Marguerite Duras and French detective novelist Patrick Modiano, who were both highly praised by Loustal at interview. Despite the differences in their chosen forms Loustal, Paringaux, Duras, and Modiano directly engage their readers with remembering the past. In order to do that, they abandon conventional, linear modes of storytelling in favor of fractured narratives; readers piece the narratives together by making an effort of memory.

When *Barney and the Blue Note* is pieced together, it recounts the meteoric rise and fall of a half-forgotten 1950's saxophonist, who was briefly the darling of the Paris jazz scene before succumbing to heroin. Loustal said that the hero was loosely based on the saxophonist Barney Wilen, but added that Barney was mythological: "There's a bit of Chet Baker and of the jazzman's myth in general" (qtd. in Alagbé 47).[2] To place *Barney and the Blue Note* in its context, the history of text/image narratives up to the 1980s requires revision, with particular emphasis on two artists who influenced Loustal: Hergé and Moebius.

Pierre Couperie has analyzed the French tradition of telling stories by combining pictures with words. The nineteenth century *Images d'Epinal*, for example, put texts beneath images. In the texts, omniscient narrators recounted hagiographies, historical events, folktales, and songs; meanwhile, the pictures illustrated whatever the narrators described. The pictures thus played a subordinate role and, for all their charm, they interrupted left-to-right reading: the reader's eye was constantly pulled from the text up to the picture and back down to the text again. Words and pictures also came together in Rodolphe Töpffer's *Monsieur Vieux Bois* (1827), a humorous strip with texts below pictures and still no balloons. In Töpffer's work, for the first time, pictures and texts were equally important to understanding the story. Benoît Peeters and Thierry Groensteen argue that Töpffer's interplay between texts and images make him the first comic strip artist.

In America, texts also appeared beneath pictures in the early comics, the best known being Harold Foster's *Tarzan* (1929) and *Prince Valiant* (1937).[3] The pictures were saved from redundancy by Foster's high-quality artwork. *Tarzan* had close-ups, panoramic views, and "motion lines" that created the illusion of objects moving through space. *Prince Valiant* depicted the days of Arthurian chivalry, with a previously unseen elegance of line: bold knights, beautiful maidens, castles and battles evoked an age of heroism and gallantry.

Loustal distanced himself from the above-mentioned text/image stories: "Those strips did not influence me at all. They are like excerpts from novels, cut out and stuck below a picture. You see someone opening a door and the text says 'he opens the door'; but there's no point in showing it as it is written down."

From the 1930s, texts beneath images were largely abandoned in favor of balloons. Balloons enjoyed distinct advantages. They introduced an agreeable continuity: as words and pictures coexisted in the same panel, left-to-right reading ceased to be interrupted. Balloons also permitted direct speech; consequently, characters' bodies were no longer cut off from their voices.

In France, Hergé's *Adventures of Tintin* (1929) were chiefly responsible for popularizing balloons. Hergé's neat, rectangular balloons were a distinguishing feature of his graphic style, which is generally known as "clear line." "Clear line" consisted of well-documented, scrupulously researched pictures, which produced powerful effects of reality; detailed street-scenes, landscapes, and interiors encouraged readers to believe that Tintin genuinely existed. Loustal, like many of his generation, grew up reading Hergé. Even though *Barney and the Blue Note* has no balloons, Hergé is the dominant influence over Loustal's visually realistic artwork.

New French talents such as Jacques Tardi, Enki Bilal, and Moebius emerged in the 1970s. Loustal praised Moebius especially highly. Moebius was instrumental to starting the trend known as *nouveau réalisme*, which was identified by Bruno Lecigne and Jean-Pierre Tamine. Nouveaux réalistes found new uses for pictures of that which is real: genuinely existing places and things no longer authenticated fiction; instead, they asked where the real ends and where the imaginary begins.

Moebius' *Cauchemar blanc* (1974) is an early example of *nouveau réalisme* (1: 97–108). *Cauchemar blanc* depicts a racist attack in which a gang of white youths run an Arab off the road, and a fight breaks out; but that was just a dream from which the ringleader awakes; he then goes out with his cronies and they run the Arab down for real. Moebius did not evoke the racist's dream with thought-balloons; in consequence, the character's dream is indistinguishable from the outside world; uninterrupted urban banality provides continuity between external reality and pure fantasy. Loustal combines *nouveau réalisme* with "clear line." *Barney and the Blue Note* has detailed urban landscapes which, in the absence of thought-balloons, ask what is real and what is not; readers are not always sure where the real ends and where the imagined begins.

Moebius is better known for his science fiction. His *Garage hermétique* (1976), set on a distant planet, has a fragmented narrative: it is not a series of panels arranged in a logical sequence (3: 46–144). Like *Le* *garage hermétique*, *Barney and the Blue Note* has a nonlinear plot. However, *Barney and the Blue Note* is more conventional: each chapter has a single narrating voice and a unity of place; also, links between panels are more logical than in *Le garage hermétique*.

Barney and the Blue Note coincided with the French vogue for graphic novels, which was particularly prevalent in historical dramas. The graphic novelists sought to introduce subtleties of characterization, plotting, and scene setting, which are normally associated with literature. Their attempts to make comics literary met with varying degrees of success. As Roger Sabin commented: "The best [. . .] demonstrated a historian's eye for detail in the artwork, combined with believable plotting; the worst tended to feature lashings of sex and violence in a phoney period setting" (222). *Barney and the Blue Note* belongs to the former category: it produced effects previously unknown in comics, while avoiding the attendant pitfalls.

The Rise and Fall of Barney

Like a novel, *Barney and the Blue Note* is divided into chapters. Chapter 1's title "Besame mucho" quotes a Mexican Bolero by Consuelo Velasquez; thus, fictional Barney is authenticated by a real song. Hergé had used similar ploys by bringing songs into Tintin's adventures. One example is "The Jewel Song" from Charles Gounod's 1859 opera *Faust* (*Le sceptre d'Ottokar* 28).

The first page of *Barney and the Blue Note* shows a party at a villa in Spain. The text in its box below says that Boris is being sick. The narrating voice describes Boris' unedifying debut, but the picture does not illustrate it; hence, readers form a mental image of him. This opening page, with its unorthodox text/image relationship, is typical of what is to come: pictures and texts give different information; therefore, we visualize what is described but not depicted.

Although we cannot see Boris we trust the text. That is because the narrating voice is not attached to a character's body; like a cinematic voice-over or a comic strip caption, the voice speaks from beyond the frame. Michel Chion calls that disembodied voice "acousmatic," adding that it has tremendous authority as "its word is like the word of God [. . .]. The one who is not in the visual field in the best position to see everything that is happening" (24). Our trust seems justified: this

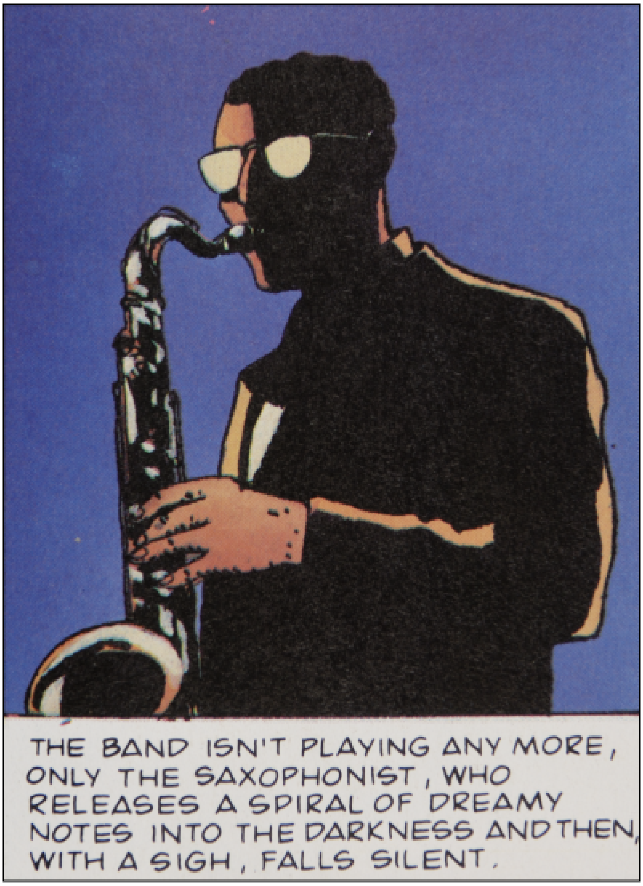
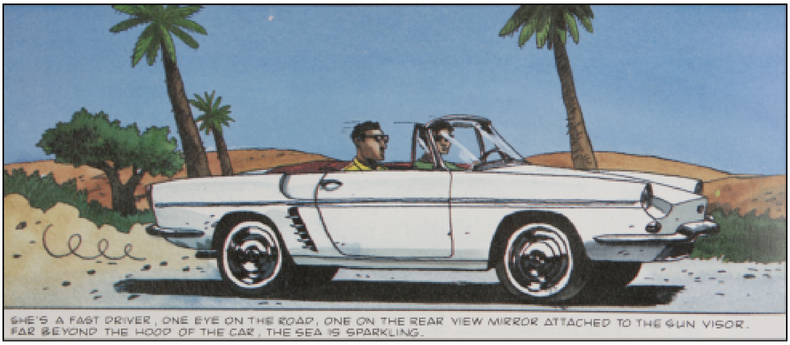

THE BAND ISN'T PLAYING ANY MORE, ONLY THE SAXOPHONIST, WHO RELEASES A SPIRAL OF DREAMY NOTES INTO THE DARKNESS AND THEN, WITH A SIGH, FALLS SILENT.

FIGURE 1. Barney plays "Besame mucho" (9). *Source*: All illustrations are from *Barney and the Blue Note* by Jacques de Loustal and Philippe Paringaux.

omniscient narrator knows the smallest details; for example, that a cigarette is burning Boris' fingers.

Boris wanders through the party and notices Barney (see Figure 1). He excitedly tells his wife Pauline; they try desperately to find Barney, but he has vanished.

Chapter 3 depicts Boris' exclusive residence with Hyperrealism: open-plan buildings, comfortable furnishings, immaculate lawns, and a swimming pool. The tall palm trees, cloudless sky, yellow diving board, and splashing water recall a Hyperrealist masterpiece, with which Loustal was acquainted: David Hockney's *Bigger Splash* (1967).



SHE'S A FAST DRIVER, ONE EYE ON THE ROAD, ONE ON THE REAR VIEW MIRROR ATTACHED TO THE SUN VISOR.
FAR BEYOND THE HOOD OF THE CAR, THE SEA IS SPARKLING.

FIGURE 2. Pauline's Renault Floride (24).

The absence of balloons enhances the similarity between Loustal's panels and Hockney's painting, despite the obvious differences between comics and fine art. Hyperrealism suggests we are in the 1960s. Pauline's fashionable sports car, a Renault Floride, provides a further clue about the date (see Figure 2). This is no earlier than the summer of 1959: the Renault Floride was manufactured from June 1959 to September 1963 (see "Renault Floride et Caravelle").

In Chapter 4, Barney is in Paris. Losing their Hyperrealism, Loustal's pictures adopt motifs from film noirs: darkness, rainy streets, deserted pavements, late-night bars, shadows falling obliquely across faces. The change from Hyperrealism to film noir implies that the narrative has gone backwards chronologically, from the 1960s to the 1940s/1950s. Yet according to the narrator it has gone forwards: "Perhaps he misses [. . .] the nights full of Spanish cognac, and all the years it didn't rain" (27). The speculative "perhaps" makes the narrator less omniscient. His/her less authoritative voice, combined with the different graphic style, suggests that the narrator's identity has changed; someone else has apparently taken up Barney's story.

Chapter 5 is set explicitly in the spring of 1958. It opens with a picture of Barney at the Paris Gare de Lyon; in the text a first person narrator, speaking in a colloquial register, recalls the day Barney arrived (see Figure 3). Barney comes from an undisclosed location in Africa. This new narrator is not present at the time; he/she is imagining what took place. Loustal's graphic style changes again: it loses its film noir malaise to adopt an innocent-looking clarity reminiscent of Hergé. As in the *Adventures of Tintin*, a recognizable railroad station makes the

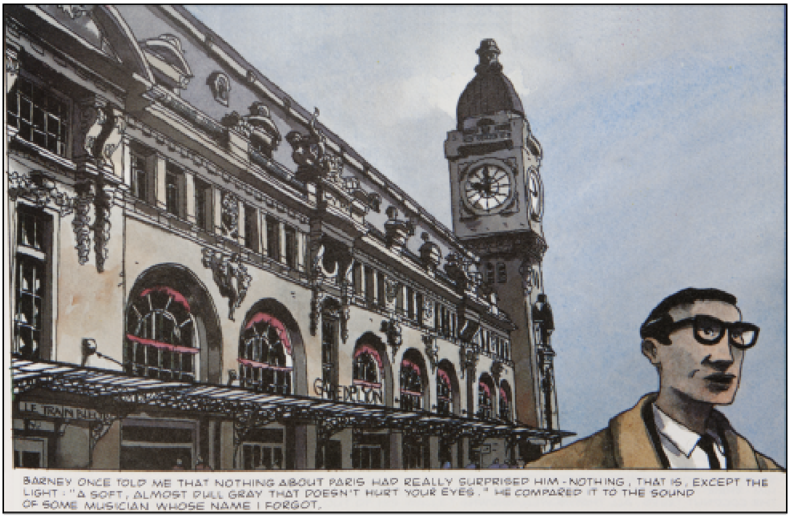

BARNEY ONCE TOLD ME THAT NOTHING ABOUT PARIS HAD REALLY SURPRISED HIM - NOTHING, THAT IS, EXCEPT THE LIGHT: "A SOFT, ALMOST DULL GRAY THAT DOESN'T HURT YOUR EYES." HE COMPARED IT TO THE SOUND OF SOME MUSICIAN WHOSE NAME I FORGOT.

FIGURE 3. Barney arrives in Paris (31).

hero's journey look plausible; analogies exist with Tintin arriving at the Brussels Gare du Nord (*Tintin au pays des Soviets n. pag*) or at Geneva Cornavin (*L'affaire Tournesol* 19).

Yet Loustal departs from Hergé by substituting speech-balloons for a voice off. In consequence, our perception of texts and images changes: the action here is not allegedly unfolding in external reality; events are happening within the narrator's mind. Barney's arrival is being recalled years later by someone who never witnessed it. Despite the accurate details, everything is a figment of his/her imagination.

The narrator reminisces about meeting Barney on the Paris jazz circuit. We see a review of Barney's concert with the drummer/bandleader Art Blakey, cut out of the genuinely existing Parisian magazine *Jazz Hot* (1935 to date); according to Loustal, the reviewer's initials PK refer to Philippe Koechelin, a journalist with *Jazz Hot* (34). Barney meets Boris and Pauline. Boris, a record executive, offers Barney a contract, but then Barney starts taking heroin. When Barney becomes addicted, texts and images diverge again. Barney plays music and socializes, but the texts, granting Barney a psychological depth more common in novels, explore his disillusionment with Paris and his dreams of conquering America.

In chapter 6, the first person voice gives way to another third person. However, the setting, Boris's recording studio, links chapter 6 to chapter 5 thematically. Pauline has an affair with Barney; she leaves Boris and her daughter, who looks about five years old, and she elopes with her lover.

Chapter 7 recounts Barney's and Pauline's love-idyll at a cheap hotel, in a torrid sequence of texts and images which Peeters analyzed (93). The first picture shows Pauline naked. The text reads: "When the ashtrays are full and the packs empty, he goes to the café across the street for cigarettes" (44). Neither ashtrays nor cigarette packs are depicted; they exist only as thoughts in the reader's mind.

Chapter 8 is set in Paris again. It is recounted by another first person voice and it interrupts the narrative thread. He/she admits to limited knowledge, saying "I guess I'm in no position to state this with any degree of authority" (50). Barney makes Pauline pregnant; he unceremoniously dumps her and he runs off to America. A description of Barney's onstage triumphs appears beneath a picture of him injecting heroin alone (51). The diverging words and the pictures show the gulf between Barney's public and private personas.

The artwork draws closer to the New Objectivist painters, notably Max Beckmann, who Loustal cited as the biggest influence over him after Hergé. Like Loustal, Beckmann depicted small-time entertainers and tawdry dance halls in a naïve, even childlike graphic style; also like Loustal, Beckmann combined naïveté with a visual realism which refused to beautify the subject. Loustal's depictions of Barney's musical and social engagements recall Beckmann's *Dance in Baden Baden* (1923) and *Carnival* (1942): loneliness lurks behind the festive façade; stiff, ungainly people have thick, heavy lines; shadows are gathering ominously in the background.

In chapter 9, we assume Barney is in the United States. The third panel of the opening page confirms our assumption at first glance: it contains an American car—a 1959 Plymouth Fury (see Vanderveen 77). However, on closer inspection we see that "rooms" ("chambres") is written up outside the hotel in French (see Figure 4). Chapter 9 is set in the southern French town of Hyères.

Questions arise. Why is Barney in Hyères? Is the narrative thread broken again? Is chapter 9 a flashback to before Barney's departure? Is it a leap forward to after his return? Or is there some other reason? Maybe Barney does not go to the United States after all. Perhaps Barney has faked his departure, duping the previous fallible narrator; then he can have a tryst with Pauline at a safe distance from Paris.

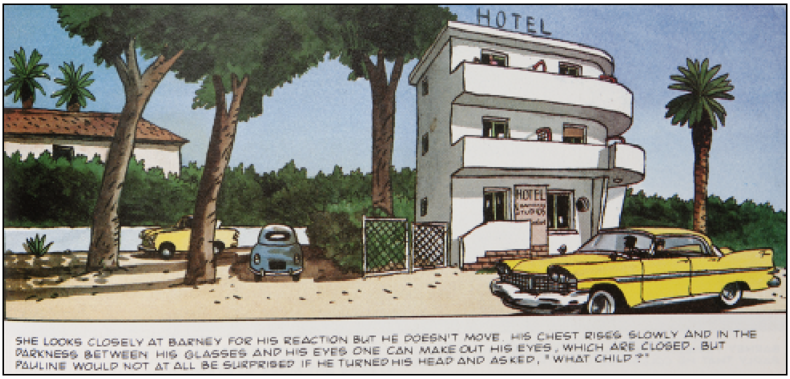

HOTEL
HOTEL
SHE LOOKS CLOSELY AT BARNEY FOR HIS REACTION BUT HE DOESN'T MOVE. HIS CHEST RISES SLOWLY AND IN THE DARKNESS BETWEEN HIS GLASSES AND HIS EYES ONE CAN MAKE OUT HIS EYES, WHICH ARE CLOSED. BUT PAULINE WOULD NOT AT ALL BE SURPRISED IF HE TURNED HIS HEAD AND ASKED, "WHAT CHILD?"

FIGURE 4. Barney and Pauline in Hyères (57).

Chapter 9's title "Whisper not," an Art Blakey tune, insinuates that their meeting is clandestine. Boris arrives unexpectedly and Barney locks himself in the bathroom. Barney eventually emerges, only to find that Pauline has gone home to Boris.

In chapter 10, Barney is touring Southern France with a mediocre band. Following a traffic accident, Barney and Josie, the singer, go to Paris. An ellipsis opens up in the narrative between chapters 9 and 10, but we can guess what happened: Barney stays on in the provinces and wastes his talent.

Chapter 11 breaks the narrative thread again: Barney is in New York. His activities are recounted by another first person narrator, who does not accompany him. He/she guesses what happened, and admits that "the circumstances of his stay there remain vague" (70–71). The account may indeed be exaggerated: Barney jams at the 5-Spot Jazz Club every night; Barney goes to Los Angeles and kills a drug dealer; Barney is interned in a psychiatric institution for five years.

Chapter 11's texts appear beneath the well-documented pictures of the 1950s America, which again have a meticulously copied realism worthy of Hergé. For example, on the West Coast, Barney stays at a Californian beach-front house; 1955 Fords Thunderbird and Fairlane are parked outside (see Vanderveen 41). Barney also frequents an African-American trumpeter, who resembles Miles Davis (see Figure 5). As previously, the voice off alters "clear line." Loustal's realism cannot be taken at face value because this narrator never crosses the Atlantic: he/she is uncertain about what occurred; for all the authenticating detail, we are witnessing imaginary events.

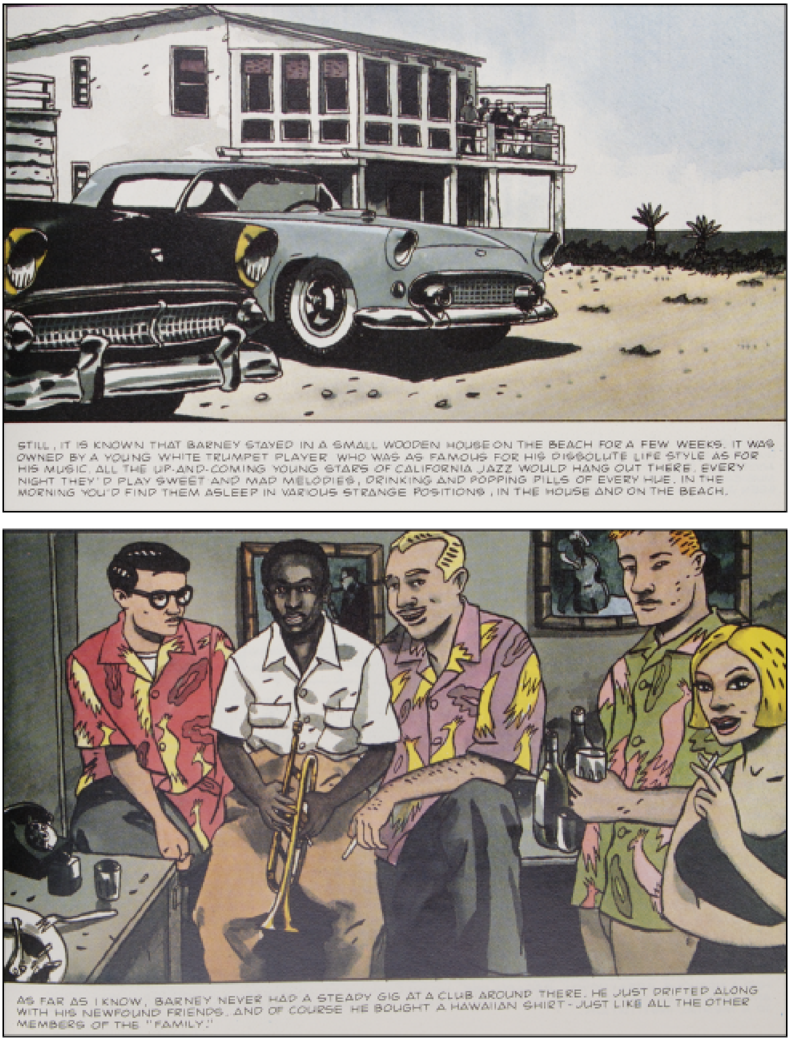

STILL, IT IS KNOWN THAT BARNEY STAYED IN A SMALL WOODEN HOUSE ON THE BEACH FOR A FEW WEEKS. IT WAS OWNED BY A YOUNG WHITE TRUMPET PLAYER WHO WAS AS FAMOUS FOR HIS DISSOLUTE LIFE STYLE AS FOR HIS MUSIC. ALL THE UP-AND-COMING YOUNG STARS OF CALIFORNIA JAZZ WOULD HANG OUT THERE. EVERY NIGHT THEY'D PLAY SWEET AND MAD MELODIES, DRINKING AND POPPING PILLS OF EVERY HUE. IN THE MORNING YOU'D FIND THEM ASLEEP IN VARIOUS STRANGE POSITIONS, IN THE HOUSE AND ON THE BEACH.
AS FAR AS I KNOW, BARNEY NEVER HAD A STEADY GIG AT A CLUB AROUND THERE. HE JUST DRIFTED ALONG WITH HIS NEWFOUND FRIENDS. AND OF COURSE HE BOUGHT A HAWAIIAN SHIRT - JUST LIKE ALL THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE "FAMILY."

FIGURE 5. Barney on the West Coast (71).

Chapter 12 explicitly follows on from chapter 10, putting chapter 11 into parentheses. Barney enters a Paris jazz club and plays a barnstorming show. He then goes home, injects heroin, overdoses, and dies. The narrating voice is cold and detached; the pictures are concise and sober. The text implies that Barney is dying for the third time: "When the door begins to give he jerks the tie loose; it's an easy thing to do for someone who's already died twice" (83). Chapter 13 is a poignant epilogue: Josie telephones Pauline and blames her for killing Barney; Pauline goes upstairs to the little girl's bedroom and clasps her hand.

History, Memory, Mythology

Barney and the Blue Note bristles with accurate, historical details. Yet it is evidently no standard biography: the facts about someone's life are not recounted in chronological order by a unifying narrator; the story ends with the subject's third death; shifts between literary and graphic styles suggest that different people are telling the story; various unidentified narrators come and go, giving competing accounts which may/may not be authoritative. Readers are expected to weave those accounts into a story. This can be done by dint of a certain mental effort.

We put aside chapters 1–4 with their 1960s décor and begin at chapter 5, which takes place in 1958: Barney arrived in Paris, where he shot to prominence in the jazz clubs; he also met Boris and Pauline. Now our original reading becomes questionable: Chapter 6, which is set in Boris' recording studio, cannot follow chapter 5 as previously assumed. Chapter 6 must take place after Barney came back from America because of the little girl: as she is Pauline's child by Barney, she would be about five years old when Barney returned. Chapter 8, not chapter 6, fits best after chapter 5: Barney made Pauline pregnant and he ran off to the United States. Now chapter 11 follows logically. Barney stayed in the United States for five years, where he experienced his first (metaphorical) death in a mental institution. Barney's return to Europe is neither depicted nor explained. Perhaps Barney was deported; or perhaps he slipped out via Mexico (hence "Besame mucho"). Readers decide.

In chapters 1–4, Barney resurfaced in Spain during the early 1960s; after which, we surmise, he accompanied Boris and Pauline back to Paris. Chapters 6 and 7 are now inserted: Barney recorded in Boris' studio in chapter 6; yet unbeknown to Boris, Barney's affair with Pauline was ongoing. Barney and Pauline eloped and had their moment of bliss in chapter 7, but in chapter 9, Boris persuaded Pauline to come home; Barney then experienced his second death. Chapters 10, 12, and 13 bring matters to a close: having lost Pauline Barney toured provincial France, returned to Paris, and died. The definitive chapter ordering of Barney's rise and fall is 5/8/11/1–4/6–7/9–10/12–13.

Anybody piecing Barney's narrative together makes a concerted attempt to remember, and more than one rereading is required. We revisit the chapters, trawling through everything that happened and reminding ourselves of (sometimes minor) details. We search for evidence to support chronology: the little girl, the Renault Floride, the two deaths, etc. We bear sequences of events in mind before inserting them, revising our opinions about how, where, and why they fit. We bridge gaps by inventing and rationalizing—precisely what we do when we recall the half-forgotten past.

As a result, *Barney and the Blue Note* engages the reader's memory in recreating the hero's rise and fall. At interview, Loustal spoke about his fascination with the recreative powers of the memory:

> I always work with memories. I never draw stories with contemporary settings. That does not interest me, as there would be no recreation. Recreation comes from photographs and from what people have told me. I also have an idea of the 1950s from my parents' experiences, the atmosphere, the objects. I work with that.

Loustal's interests show up throughout *Barney and the Blue Note*. This album is not merely the story of a drug-addled saxophonist: it is a story about recreating the past from memories. Loustal's balloonless panels work together with Paringaux's fractured storyline to achieve that effect: Loustal depicts visual memories; to recreate Barney's story is to order those memories into a rise and fall.

The lack of speech-balloons is essential to Loustal's aesthetic: his sequences of panels resemble memories for two reasons. Firstly, people we remember do not have balloons protruding from their mouths. Secondly, in most comics, balloons bring time into the sequences: each panel lasts the time needed to say/think whatever is in the balloons. Meanwhile, direct speech establishes temporal links between panels: speeches flow on from one to the next, as characters respond to each other. However, a distinctive air of timelessness pervades Loustal's panels. As they are silent, their duration is unverifiable; in each one, time is momentarily frozen. Temporal links between panels are still implied by the unfolding events and by the narrators; yet, those same links are simultaneously undermined by the absence of direct speech. Thus, without balloons, Loustal conjures up lingering memories: he captures fleeting glimpses of a vanishing era, in which time is suspended.

Loustal's panels further resemble memories because they have no thought-balloons. Traditionally, thoughts appear inside balloons with wavy borders, attached to the thinker's head by a chain of bubbles; the border marks the boundary between subjective thought and objective reality. But in *Barney and the Blue Note* there is no such device. Hence, no visible difference exists between what Barney did and what the narrators think Barney did. In Loustal's realistic images, false memories mingle interchangeably with true ones. The human mind, likewise, is notoriously ambivalent about what was real and what was not; we are only too liable to remember things wrongly, but to think that we are right.

Paringaux complements Loustal by evoking recollected sensations, notably sounds. In particular, Barney's music is described by synaesthetic metaphors. The most obvious is "the blue note." Such metaphors are not gratuitous. They allow Loustal to avoid the standard devices for evoking music, which are inappropriately caricatural in the context: drawn notes and onomatopoeia. Furthermore, Paringaux's metaphors resemble memories: they create pictures which (like memories) exist only in the mind and not in objective reality.

In counterpoint to the abundant memories, the nonlinear chapters suggest events being forgotten. Nobody recalls the whole truth about Barney: chronology is broken up because recollections of him are fading and fragmenting; gaps arise where things are permanently consigned to oblivion.

Barney and the Blue Note is designed to activate the process of remembering. When we piece Barney's story together, we use our own ability to recollect, we sift through the memories of others, we imagine; and, as a last resort, we guess. Consequently, Barney is recreated in the reader's head as if he were a memory: Barney is a reconstruction of the past by the subject.

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Loustal called Barney mythological. If Barney is indeed mythological, then he is no personal memory, shut away inside one individual's mind. To be mythological Barney takes his place within the collective memory. Before discussing Barney's mythological status, the link between comics and myths requires revision. This link was first analyzed by Umberto Eco who concentrated on Superman, although his study applies to other heroes of the same generation, such as Tintin and Tarzan. Barney's originality stands out clearly when he is compared with his mythological forebears.

Superman's adventures lead, through a logically linked sequence of events, to his triumph over evil. The next adventure then begins without showing that an earlier one had preceded it, and it repeats a similar sequence. Beginning each new story where the previous one had ended would lock Superman into time. Not doing so does the opposite. As Eco says: "In Superman it is the concept of time that breaks down. The very structure of time falls apart" (113). Superman's repetitive narrative gives him rite of passage into mythology: whenever the preordained sequence is ritually repeated, Superman escapes from "the law that leads from life to death through time" (114). Thus Superman attains an "emblematic and fixed nature which renders him easily recognizable" (110); that fixed, emblematic nature defines all mythological heroes, including Barney.

According to Loustal, Barney embodied the spirit of jazzmen. Barney certainly embodies a strain of jazz mythology: Barney's outstanding talent, drug problem, and untimely death recall John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Chet Baker, and Miles Davis; his dark glasses and slicked down hair recall Dave Brubeck and Barney Wilen.

Yet Barney also fits a pattern that transcends the jazz age: Barney is an archetype because he has Orphic characteristics. Like Orpheus, Barney is a preeminent musician whose background is unclear; similarly, uncertainty surrounds precisely what he did and did not do. Orpheus and Barney are travelers and lovers, as well as musicians: both go to the land of the dead and return, losing the women they love en route. Orpheus and Barney both experience a rise and fall: their prodigious talent wins them admiration, but they are brought down prematurely, by their human failings. Orpheus and Barney are "the symbol of the embattled individual [. . .] who dies because he or she is incapable of overcoming his or her own deficiencies" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 725).

Barney's rise and fall happened during the late 1950s/early 1960s. Yet Barney could have emerged in the 1920s Chicago, the psychedelic late 1960s, the punky 1970s, or at other times. Barney would live and die amid different period decor; he would make different music, wear different clothes, and have different hair. Nevertheless, he would follow the same trajectory. Barney is a recurring Orphic figure: the genius on the fringes of society who dies young, a victim of excesses. He embodies a long tradition, whose best-remembered exemplars are Robert Johnson, Nick Drake, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, and Kurt Cobain. This list is far from exhaustive, and future generations of musicians will take Barney's Orphic path.

Barney passes into mythology through his narrative ritual, but Barney's ritual differs from Superman's, Tarzan's, and Tintin's. A fragmented narrative gives Barney rite of passage. There is only one way to transform *Barney and the Blue Note* into a coherent story: constructing it entails systematically reenacting the procedure which was followed above, in the opening paragraphs of this section; that same preordained procedure is inevitably repeated (with minor variations), every time anybody else assembles *Barney and the Blue Note*. Barney's ritual differs from that of his predecessors, but its outcome is identical: the hero escapes from the "law that leads from life to death through time"; he attains an "emblematic and fixed nature which renders him easily recognizable." Barney is a jazz incarnation of Orpheus. Yet Barney's rise and fall must be reconstructed correctly, according to its proper ritual.

Loustal's characteristic preoccupation with memory is apparent in Barney's ritual. Mircea Eliade analyzed "the inability of the collective memory to retain historical events and individuals except insofar as it transforms them into archetypes" (46). Barney's peculiar ritual is the process Eliade describes: anyone who turns *Barney and the Blue Note* into a coherent story, turns half-forgotten scraps of history into a myth.

Barney and the Graphic Novel

We must now analyze *Barney and the Blue Note*'s literary aspect. The fashion for graphic novels proves that Loustal and Paringaux were not alone in giving comics a literary dimension. François Bourgeon's *Les passagers du vent* (1979), an eighteenth century seafaring adventure, epitomizes the French graphic novels of the day. *Les passagers du vent* is a complex intrigue, which hinges on the heroine's personal relationships, moral dilemmas, and power struggles aboard ship and in isolated colonial outposts. Sophisticated characterization rules out simplistic distinctions between good and evil. A carefully researched setting, drawn in "clear line," lends the story credibility. To many of his contemporaries, Bourgeon perfected the genre; *Les passagers du vent* was a best seller, and it spawned numerous imitators. However, *Barney and the Blue Note* recreates the past in ways closer to Marguerite Duras and Patrick Modiano, both of whom Loustal admired greatly.

Barney and the Blue Note has word/image combinations particularly reminiscent of Duras' films *India song* (1975) and *Son nom de Venise* (1979). *India song* is a costume drama, which is set in the dying days of British colonial India; this is an era which, like Barney's jazz heyday, is just on the verge of being forgotten. Moreover, *India song* and *Barney and the Blue Note* both break with the realist conventions, which had dominated since the 1930s: for the first time since balloons and lip-synchronized soundtracks, there is no direct speech; instead, words are spoken by "acousmatic" voices off. Despite the local color, realism's illusion that the action unfolds in external reality is called into question. A new possibility arises: namely, that what is seen emanates from within a narrating subject's consciousness; the scenes resemble memories summoned up by the voices.

In *India song*, as in *Barney and the Blue Note*, those voices recall events leading up to the main character's demise, but the voices are fallible and they do not arrange things in chronological order. It falls to readers and viewers to piece the story together, by making an effort to remember: we look back over what occurred, we search for clues, we weigh up the details, we fill in unexplained blanks by imagining and guessing. Najet Limam-Tnani suggests that in Duras' work, reconstructing the past combines ritual with myth. Her comments are relevant to *Barney and the Blue Note*: "The attempt to piece back together events swallowed up by time and generally buried in the past, [and] the quest for the origin which runs throughout Ms. Duras' work and gives it life, involve ritual [. . .] in the authors' novels and films, myth and ritual have an intimate, unbreakable correlation" (188).[4]

Loustal singled out for praise Duras' *Son nom de Venise*, which consists of *India song*'s soundtrack played unaltered over pictures of a decaying palace. As a result, words and pictures give different information: the soundtrack does not coincide with what is on screen. The effect is similar to the one produced by the divergences between Paringaux's texts and Loustal's pictures: words produce mental images which, like memories, do not exist in objective reality; meanwhile, pictures are freed from their illustrative function. Again, Limam-Tnani's comments apply to *Barney and the Blue Note*: "This discrepancy is intended [. . .] to change the nature of representation and to discourage the spectator's desire to see objects and characters on screen as illustrative. Those elements are to be seen as reflections, as lingering traces of a story which is completely buried in the memory" (41).[5]

Further similarities exist between *Barney and the Blue Note* and Modiano's detective thrillers. In particular, Modiano's early work describes (unsuccessful) investigations into the Nazi occupation of France. Modiano's *La place de l'étoile* (1968) is especially comparable to *Barney and the Blue Note*: the story is recounted by more than one narrator; the central character, a Jewish victim, dies at least three times. As in *Barney and the Blue Note* and in Duras' films, events are not chronological and witnesses may be unreliable; in the absence of any omniscient narrator readers put the fragments into order, making judgments about what occurred.

Lastly Modiano, like Loustal and Duras, breaks with accepted codes of realism. Modiano's descriptive passages proliferate with precisely reproduced details lifted from reality, which traditionally authenticate what happened: recognizable places, real people, period fashions, identifiable vehicles, popular songs, newspapers, etc. However, as in *Barney and the Blue Note* and *India song*, such elements prove deceptive: they lend authenticity to memories which may have little objective value; the distinction between the real and the vividly imagined is blurred.

Loustal, Paringaux, Duras, and Modiano depict different historical periods: the late 1950s/early 1960s, colonial India, occupied France. Nevertheless, a common thread links their stories: all are quests to save rapidly receding eras from oblivion. In *La place de l'étoile*, this quest ends in relative failure: no definitive version is recovered and the mysteries remain unsolved. But in *India song* and *Barney and the Blue Note* the quest may yet be completed, by enacting the appropriate ritual: if readers recreate the story accordingly, then the hero/heroine enters the collective memory as a myth. We cannot raise the dead, but, through myth and ritual, we can achieve a partial victory over time.

Conclusion

Even without balloons, *Barney and the Blue Note* is a comic strip: there is no redundancy; texts do not describe pictures, pictures do not illustrate texts; words and pictures bear equal narrative responsibility.

Barney and the Blue Note may look outmoded. However, the album's dated appearance is appropriate: the text/image arrangement, combined with "clear line," Hockney, film noir and New Objectivism, evokes Barney's defunct epoch with archaisms; the past is revived through styles redolent of bygone eras.

Loustal and Paringaux do not simply rehash "retro" styles. They make an original contribution to the 1980s graphic novel. Loustal is evidently influenced by previous realists, particularly Hergé. Nonetheless his balloonless panels, combined with Paringaux's fragmented narrative and voices off, conjure up a hero who is on the edge of oblivion; readers save Barney from being forgotten, by piecing his story together in their heads. This interest in remembering distances *Barney and the Blue Note* from work by other artists, but brings it closer to Modiano and Duras. To strengthen the similarity, Duras and Modiano, like Loustal, go against conventional realism when they evoke the past.

Barney and the Blue Note successfully introduced a literary dimension. *Barney and the Blue Note* has a narrative complexity that exceeds that of most comics. Rather than foregrounding physical actions, it deals with the repercussions of such actions on the subject. The hero has exceptional psychological depth. Paringaux's texts, written in literate French or English, have more space to develop than balloons permit; literary devices abound, notably metaphors. Like much literature, *Barney and the Blue Note* probes the mind's innermost workings: it emulates the actions of the memory.

Finally, *Barney and the Blue Note* brought a new mythological hero into the comic strip's pantheon. Barney is more comparable to Tintin than to Tarzan or to Superman: as his world is drawn with documented realism, readers are encouraged to accept that he existed. But Barney is no embodiment of triumphant goodness: he is a half-forgotten junky, who is no more. Moreover as Barney is dead, readers must effect his passage into mythology: we assemble Barney's shattered life into a rise and fall; in so doing, we refashion an Orphic archetype from the detritus of memory. Barney dies three times during the story, but Barney is resurrected *ad infinitum* as a myth.

Notes

1. Loustal was interviewed by the author in Paris on May 15, 2004. All following quotations from Loustal come from this interview unless otherwise stated.

2. Translated by the author. The original reads "On y trouve un peu de Chet Baker et du mythe du jazzman en général."
3. For more on the French and American publishing histories of these strips, as well as those of other strips discussed below, see Gaumer and Moliterni.
4. Translated by the author. The original reads "La tentative de reconstituer des événements happés par le temps, généralement ensevelis dans le passé, la quête de l'origine qui animent et sillonnent les œuvres de M. Duras impliquent le rituel [. . .] le mythe et le rite se trouvent, dans les films et les romans de l'auteur, dans une corrélation étroite et indéfectible."
5. Translated by the author. The original reads "Ce décalage vise [. . .] à dénaturer la représentation et à décourager chez le spectateur toute volonté d'attribuer aux objets, aux personnages produits sur l'écran, une valeur illustrative. Ces éléments doivent être perçus comme les reflets, les traces qui persistent d'un récit complètement enfoui dans la mémoire."

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