

MUSIC AS REPRESENTATION OF ETHNICITY IN ASTERIX COMIC BOOKS

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Abstract: This article investigates the role of music in shaping ethnotypes in the comic medium, drawing on imagology, a subject of comparative literature. Music and comics are culturally and socially significant, whereas comics, as a visual art form, are a strong tool for the emergence of stereotypes. Both are relevant in imagological terms. Drawing on Daniel-Henri Pageaux’s imagological method, the image of the Other is analysed at three levels: the word; the hierarchised relationship; and the scenario. The analysis focuses on *Asterix* albums, depicting Greeks, Spaniards and Swiss, as they incorporate various aspects of foreign cultures in a humorous and satirical tone. How does the authors’ French gaze produce and sustain the image of the foreigner through the representation of music genres, melodies, musicians and musical instruments, both verbally and visually? The article discusses the widening scope of imagology from verbal to graphic texts, as well as the importance of music and comics as cultural manifestations that challenge stereotypes of the Other.

Keywords: imagology, comics, music, ethnotypes, the Other

1. Introduction

This article focuses on imagology, a field of comparative literature, dealing with the “discursive and literary articulation of cultural difference and of national identity” (Leerssen, *The Rhetoric of National Character* 268-9). It broadens the application of imagology from the verbal to the graphic text, aiming to explore the role of music in shaping the otherness within comics medium. At the same time, it expands imagological analysis to a corpus that forms part of children’s reading. Comics constitute an important part of children’s literature, yet children’s literature has, as O’Sullivan shows, long flown under the radar of imagology even though it is a key site for the construction and circulation of images of Self and Other (2005; 2011; 2023).

The analysis is conducted within the framework of Daniel-Henri Pageaux's imagological approach, which outlines a three-level method for studying the image of the Other: "le mot, la relation hiérarchisée, le scénario" (the word, the hierarchised relationship, and the scenario) (64). The article shows the evolving scope of imagology, the significance of music as cultural manifestation and the role of comics as a visual medium perpetuating representations of the Other, the foreigner.

Imagology studies the mental images or representations of the Other/the foreigner (Beller 7, Chevrel 28, Moura 35, Pageaux 59). According to Pageaux, "[...] toute image procède d'une prise de conscience, si minime soit-elle, d'un Je par rapport à un Autre, d'un Ici par rapport à un Ailleurs" [every image arises from an awareness, however minimal it may be, of a Self in relation to an Other, of a Here in relation to a There] (60). Similarly, in their foreword, Beller and Leerssen state: "The nationality represented (the spected) is silhouetted in the perspectival context of the representing text or discourse (the spectant)". It becomes clear that the Other can only be studied in relation to Self. Literature is significant in shaping cultural, national, and ethnic identity. Leerssen asserts that among all art forms, it stands out as the most explicit in reflecting and influencing the awareness of entire societies (*The Rhetoric of National Character* 268). Thus, imagology offers the possibility of tracing authors' ideas, as well as those of the societies they live in, concerning groups, societies, or nations through the images created in their writing. As contemporary narrative fields expand to include diverse media like film and comics (including their subcategory of graphic novels), the traditional concept of imagology extends. Traditionally focused on studying the cultural construction and literary representation of national characters through literary texts, imagology now embraces a broader scope beyond literature (Edtstadler, Folie, and Zocco; Beller and Leerssen, Pageaux 59).

Music has been used as a form of expression for centuries. It is through music that local, national, ethnic, social and cultural identities are constructed and expressed (Stokes; Wade; Young). It reflects the values, beliefs, and traditions of different communities and serves as a means of cultural transmission (Bryant). Many dominant cultures have utilized music to articulate their cultural heritage and identities. For instance, European classical music has been employed to convey the ideals of European culture, such as notions of rationality, objectivity, and refinement (Bourdieu). Music and its influence on the construction of national identities has been further explored in the context of imagology

(Edtstadler, Folie and Zocco 35). According to Leerssen, contrary to the common perception that music is abstract and lacks specific cultural or social significance, it holds relevance in imagological terms, thus, recognizing music as important “for the expression and dissemination of nationalist ideals” (*Romanticism, Music, Nationalism* 606).

Concerning comics, as a visual art form, they inherently produce images, making them a potent medium for perpetuating national, ethnic, and cultural stereotypes. For Achim Hölter, the comic genre derives much of its vigor from the foreign and the exotic, while “do not autonomously generate a specific ethnotypical register, but passively repeat or invoke generally current common-place ideas” (307). The stereotype combines minimal information with maximum meaning, says Stanzel (cit. Beller 8-9). Pageaux also highlights the stereotype’s tendency to be reduced to the essential by expressing maximum possible communication within minimal information (63). Comics, like other literary genres, rely on action, but their distinctiveness lies in brevity, constituting their primary rule. To be effective, they must convey the maximum perceptible information with the utmost clarity in minimal time (Masson 97), thus aligning with the nature of stereotypes. Indeed, comics demand brief, dynamic panels that present roles, characters, and situations with clarity for immediate recognition; otherwise, the message becomes blurred. Furthermore, in comics, physical appearance, clothing styles, the objects used, as well as the depiction of the environment and climate, contribute to the immediate identification of a specific nationality (Missiou, 222). The artist bears the exclusive responsibility for describing these elements, and the transition from language is unnecessary, as visual descriptions tend to be more explicit than verbal ones (Nodelman 201, Nikolajeva & Scott 83). However, the decision of which elements to incorporate into the depiction of a subject or overlook is left to the artist’s discretion, carried out more or less consciously. These choices play an important role in shaping the image of the foreigner, as Pageaux asserts that every act of referencing or non-referencing marks otherness (68). When such choices appear in works targeted at young readers, their impact extends further. As O’Sullivan has shown, children’s texts construct a fixed repertoire of notions about foreign countries that young readers internalize, thus contributing to processes of “othering” and “same-ing” (2023). The focus of this article is centered on exploring how music contributes to the construction of ethnotypes within the verbal and visual text of comic books. Ethnotypes refer to stereotypical characterizations attributed to ethnicities or nationalities (Leersen

Imagology 16). In the context of imagology, the term “image” has traditionally been associated with mental images and ideas. However, the definition of “image” expands to not only include mental representations but also graphic, optical, perceptual, and verbal expressions (Mitchell 505). Writing about picturebooks, O’Sullivan argues that they offer “a double perspective of images of nations, cultures and ethnic groups – the notional representations formed by the imagination (the subject of imagology) and the material images of the picturebook in which these are expressed.” (2023 p. 105). Comics as multimodal medium likewise mediate ethnotypes through the interplay between notional representations and their graphic realisation on the page. Thus, image will be hereby considered in its graphic, verbal, and mental dimension.

The specific focus of the article is on investigating how music reflects national and ethnic stereotypes in three *Asterix* comic books, written by René Goscinny and illustrated by Albert Uderzo: *Asterix at the Olympic Games*, *Asterix in Spain*, and *Asterix in Switzerland*. The *Asterix* series take place in ancient Gaul, following the adventures of the titular character, a Gaulish warrior, and his friend Obelix. Their village resists Roman occupation due to a magic potion granting superhuman strength. In the series, the protagonists visit many different regions and countries. A plethora of visual codes facilitates the easy recognition of various national and ethnic characteristics. The authors use various elements of foreign cultures, such as artistic masterpieces, historical facts, fixed phrases, folk traditions and gastronomy, to present the identities of various people in a humorous and satirical manner (Rouvière, 2008). Certainly, it is difficult to overlook the extent to which the series relies on stereotypes. As Anthea Bell notes, *Asterix* is arguably one of the few mainstream comics “that can still make harmless use of politically incorrect, xenophobic attitudes.” *Asterix* belongs to the tradition of humorous adventure comics, and its verbal or visual humor is what make its national and ethnic stereotypes highly visible, memorable and apparently harmless. However, Goscinny and Uderzo deliberately use existing mid-20th-century stereotypes, and represent other nations as “uncivilized people with ridiculous customs” (Lefèvre). They use stereotyping and even caricature of cultural features to make readers laugh at themselves and at others: “Notre seule ambition, c’est de faire rigoler... Les autres interprétations sont démesurées” (“Our only ambition is to make people laugh... Anything beyond that is wildly over-interpreted”; qtd. in Lesage). The humor in *Asterix* operates both

through a stereotyped French gaze on foreign peoples and through mockery of French and Gallic traits themselves (Mutta). The mockery of foreigners is actually a way of satirizing the Gauls' ethnocentrism (Rouvière 286). The series stages a "parody of identities" rather than a straightforward xenophobic discourse: all groups, including the Gauls, are stereotyped and ridiculed, within a broadly democratic and universalist framework (Rouvière). This second-degree treatment of clichés helps to account for Asterix's lasting popularity, even though the albums abound in national and ethnic stereotypes. The humorous effect emerges through stereotyping, which emphasizes recognisable traits and behaviors, allowing readers to detect what unites and what distinguishes the various peoples, alterity and proximity.

In imagology the aim is not to determine the accuracy of the image of the Other, but rather to understand how he/she is perceived and represented (Leerssen, *The Rhetoric of National Character* 280). In *Asterix*, where both authors are French, there is the adoption of a French gaze when portraying various cultures, symbolized by the Gauls as the observed culture. Since their first publication in *Pilote*, the Asterix albums have achieved international bestseller status and have been translated into numerous languages. This worldwide dissemination means that the French gaze constructed in the original versions circulates far beyond its initial national context and reaches diverse child and adult readerships. The musical ethnotypes analyzed here thus contribute to a transnational circulation of imagological "auto"- and "hetero-images" (Leerssen 275) of people, allowing readers to recognize themselves either as Others or as the imagined Self.

While *Asterix* comics prominently feature different kinds of music, musical instruments, musicians and singers, the focus narrows down to the Greeks, the Spaniards, and the Swiss. These depictions were selected because in these comics, music is clearly associated with a specific culture, and used to depict ethnic identity, whereas in other albums it tends to appear more diffusely as one cultural element among many. Furthermore, dancing scenes will also be examined, as they acknowledge the intricate relationship between rhythm, melody, and movement expression.

2. Music, musicians and musical instruments in Asterix

A brief presentation of the selected comic books follows to provide context for the reader. *Astérix et les Jeux Olympiques* (Asterix at the Olympic Games) was first published in French comic magazine *Pilote* no. 434/ 15.02.1968, with its first album edition released in 1968; the first

English translation by Anthea Bell and Derek Hockridge appeared in 1972. The narrative unfolds in the context of the Olympic Games in Athens. Asterix and Obelix want their village to participate in the Olympic Games to stand up against the Roman occupiers in their region. *Astérix en Hispanie* (Asterix in Spain) made its debut in Pilote no. 498/22.05.1969, followed by its first album edition in 1969 and its first English translation in 1971. This story transports readers to a small Spanish village, still resisting Rome. Julius Caesar gets tired of the unconquerable villagers and force his centurion to kidnap Pepe, the son of the Iberian chief. Pepe finds himself in Gaul, at the Roman Babaorum camp, where he encounters Asterix and Obelix, who free him and decide to bring him back home to Spain. Finally, *Astérix chez les Helvètes* (Asterix in Switzerland) was first introduced in Pilote no. 557/09.07.1970, with the initial album edition released in 1970 and the first English translation in 1973. The story unfolds in Switzerland, where Asterix and Obelix embark on a quest for the Edelweiss to cure a Roman auditor, poisoned by a corrupt governor embezzling taxes, demonstrating their readiness to aid even an enemy. Throughout this article, the English translations of these comics by Anthea Bell and Derek Hockridge (Hodder Dargaud editions) are used.

Among the plethora of cultural elements in *Asterix* series, music is a recurring theme, with references to melodies, musicians, musical instruments, songs and singers. Goscinny and Uderzo draw inspiration primarily from French songs, with some borrowing from Belgian and other international sources. The series features a wide range of musical genres, including religious chants, regional and national anthems, military songs, drinking songs, nursery rhymes, operettas, films, and popular songs (Rivière). Daniel Russell praised the series for its attention to detail in depicting the music of ancient civilizations. He has compiled a full list of musical instruments featured in *Asterix*, including Roman military musical instruments, ancient Celtic brass instruments, natural wind instruments, fingered wind instruments, ancient stringed instruments, early drums and percussion instruments. Music is often used as a way to set the mood and add to the overall atmosphere of the stories. Notably, Cacofonix, the village bard and one of the principal characters of the comics, is known for his terrible singing, contrasting with his belief in his talent. His singing often serves as a humorous weapon against the Romans and others opponents. Additionally, the use of intertextuality is evident in some instances, such as in *Asterix in Britain*, where The Beatles are caricatured during an autograph session,

in front of frenzied fans, mainly young girls (19). Similarly, in *Asterix in Spain*, the French composer Gérard Calvi is depicted directing music during circus games (44). However, what is of interest within the scope of this article is the ability of music to function as a demarcation line, distinguishing the Gauls from other cultures and thus constructing the image of the Other.

3. The lexical level

One way in which language is used to represent a country or culture is through the selection of lexical registers. A lexical register refers to the specific set of words and phrases used in a particular context or situation. Thus, for the initial step of Pageaux's imagology, it is necessary to categorize words under two main lexical registers: those originating from the observing country and those borrowed from the language of the observed country. According to Pageaux, the words from the observing country are used to define the observed country, while words taken from the language of the observed country are transferred without translation in the texts of the observing country (64).

In this context, exclamations and vocalizations used while singing, which are integral to the native language of the observed culture, provide linguistic authenticity in the representation. For instance, the Spanish exclamation *Olé* expresses approval, encouragement, or triumph (*Chambers concise dictionary* 829). This word is closely associated with dancing and bullfighting, two stereotypical characteristics of Spanish culture (Landborn 78). In *Asterix in Spain*, untranslatable *Olé*, used during singing and dancing, creates a more authentic representation of Spanish culture and a sense of exoticism and otherness for the non-Spaniard reader (35-36). Moreover, the use of vocalizations in music can equally serve as cultural markers. For example, the cantao's "Ayayayaaaa" is associated with the haunting laments of flamenco and embodies the essence of this art form (Sautter 122). Similarly, the yodel vocalization "Yodleiiiiiiiiii" (*Asterix in Switzerland* 38) is a recognizable element of Swiss musical heritage linked with the Alpine surroundings of the yodeler. The region is reflected in the vocal performance: low notes echo the valley and high notes mirror a mountain peak (Plantenga 24). In the context of the popular Syrtaki dance (*Asterix at the Olympic Games* 27), the rhythmic syllables "Lala lala lala" embody the vibrant nature of Greek culture. All the aforementioned vocalizations are frequently written in bold letters in the respective *Asterix* comic books. The choice of this lettering implies

loudness and conveys a sense of intensity, energy, and excitement of the moment, which is transmitted by the music.

The second lexical register comprises vocabulary employed by the observing culture (I, the Self) to describe the observed culture (the Other). When lyrics of songs use the cultural context of the observed culture, they become a significant cultural mark connected to that specific heritage. For example, the themes of flamenco lyrics often include sorrow, poverty and oppression, as well as personal suffering, hope and despair, love and pain of love, devotion to the mother (Chuse 39). These characteristics are found in *Asterix in Spain*. The two protagonists are invited by a group of Spanish Romani to participate in their nocturnal dance and have fun (35). However, during the performance, the cantaor sings a melancholic chorus that lacks cheerfulness: “Ayayayayyyyy, whooooo is meeeee! Ayayayayyyyy, why did sheeeeeee leeeeeeeve meeeeeeeee? Ayayayayayayyyyyyyyyyyyy!”.

The importance of translation needs to be noted here. The French original lyrics: “Ayayayayyyyy, quel malheur d’être nééééééé ! Ayyyyyy, ma mère, pourquoi m’as-tu fait çaaaaaa ? Ayayayayayyyyyyyyy !” would be literally rendered in English as: “Ayayayayyyyy, what a misfortune to be boooooorn! Ayyyyyy, my mother, why did you do this to meeeeeee? Ayayayayyyyy!” In Greek, the lyrics become: Ayay, ayay, ayyyyyy, yy. Ah, what pain, what sorrow! Ayayyyyy! Mother, why was I born poor? ay ay ay ay ay ay, yyyyyyyyyyy.

Although the translations are not literal, they succeed in conveying the general spirit of the flamenco lament. What they lose, however, is the degree of parody and exaggeration that characterizes the French original and its playful use of melodrama, where the lament becomes a heavy complaint, almost a theatrical cry, and at the same time a childlike whine. Nevertheless, the antithesis between the invitation to laugh and the lamentations of the flamenco lyrics creates an incongruity, a reversal of the reader's expectations, which is a fundamental characteristic of humorous discourse (Morreall 11). Moreover, as the lyrics are made up by the observing culture, they offer a parodic perspective on the culture being observed.

Furthermore, in Pageaux's imagology approach, repetition can be employed to reinforce, subvert, or unify images and stereotypes within a text (65). In this context, when a Roman soldier, disguised as a Spanish villager, bursts into song, performing a flamenco piece to convince the two Gauls protagonists of his supposed Spanish identity, the repetition of the flamenco style reinforces the stereotype of Spanish culture

(*Asterix in Spain* 37). Young Pepe further comments on the soldier's unimpressive singing and his knee-tapping rhythm alluding to the flamenco dance style. The image of the Other is further strengthened in the final panel of the comic book. During the customary dinner that concludes the story, Obelix performs a flamenco dance and song for his compatriots. The depiction of this act suggests the acceptance and recognition of the foreign culture.

Finally, the narrator's discourse and the dialogues of the characters are also subject to lexical analysis. For example, the protagonists go out at night in Athens and the following dialogue takes place between them: "Obelix: They seem to be having a good time in there! - Asterix: They're fond of dancing...I hear Greek dances are very interesting..." (*Asterix at the Olympic games* 27). In the caption, the narrator comments: "As the night goes on, our friends are introduced to the art of Greek dancing..." Asterix notes that the sun is about to rise and upon their return to the inn, the Gauls exclaim: "Up with the Greeks!". These exchanges express the Gauls appreciation for Greek customs and the way they entertain themselves. Greece is thus portrayed as a place where partying continues until dawn.

The lexical choices discussed in this section are therefore markers of how the French observing culture constructs Greek, Spanish, and Swiss musical Others; they also form the material that translators must negotiate when adapting *Asterix* for international audiences. The analysis so far has been based on the English translations. However, the representations of these ethnic groups circulate across numerous languages. In the French, English, and Greek editions examined, the artwork is reproduced unchanged, so the visual musical markers (instruments, dance poses, the staging of musical performance in tourist-like landscapes), as well as the onomatopoeic sound effects that are part of the drawn image, remain stable across these language versions. Elements that belong to the observed culture, such as borrowed exclamations (Olé) and musical vocalisations (Ayayay, yodeling, rhythmic lala), also tend to remain unchanged. What changes, rather, is the verbal framing of music in the speech and thought balloons and in the captions; in other words, the vocabulary through which the French observing culture comments on the musical practices of the Others. This underlines how important translation is for the international construction of ethnotypes as articulated through music in *Asterix*.

4. The narrative level

The second step in Pageaux's method, largely inspired by structural analyses conducted by Claude Lévi-Strauss on myths, involves analyzing how different parts of the text are organized. It consists of identifying the hierarchised relationships, that is, to detect the major oppositions that structure the imago-typical text. Pageaux notes that these oppositions are: 'I' - narrator - culture of origin vs 'the Other' - character - represented culture (67). To analyze these relationships, it is necessary to break down the elements that structure the image of the Other: the system of characters, the spatiotemporal framework, and the thematic units. The text is read as an anthropological document, with the goal of identifying the values of the Other and expressions of their culture (Pageaux 68). This can include examining "artistic practices, religion, music, clothing, cuisine etc." (Pageaux 68), that contribute to alterity and create distinct boundaries between Self and the Other.

4.1. The system of character and visual stereotypes

Pageaux emphasizes the significance of external appearance in the enunciation and production of stereotypes, thereby justifying the actions and behaviors attributed to the Other (63). In comics, the portrayal of external appearance is achieved through visual means, enabling the easy recognition of various national elements. In *Asterix*, the characters are often depicted as embodying typical traits of certain nationalities, with their external appearance reflecting these characteristics. Thus, the Swiss characters are depicted with blond or red hair and mustaches, while Mediterranean people like Greeks and Spaniards are characterized by dark hair. Beyond physical attributes, clothing choices and the presence of specific objects contribute to shaping the image of the Other, distinguishing them from the Self. Everyday objects from other cultures might appear strange to outsiders, serving as markers of otherness. This is evident in the depiction of musicians who adhere to traditional dress code of their respective cultures. For instance, the Swiss are portrayed singing in traditional Alpine lederhosen while wielding traditional alpine horns (*Asterix in Switzerland* 38). Spanish Romani characters wear a mix of colorful and patterned garments, accessorized with scarves or headbands. The dancers hold castanets and use their hands to accompany the sounds of Flamenco; they are also depicted barefoot, symbolizing their poverty as another aspect of their otherness (*Asterix in Spain* 35-36). Greek musicians, on the other hand, don cloaks adorned with characteristic

meanders and wield musical instruments from ancient times, such as the pan flute, ancient lyre, and triple pipe (*Asterix at the Olympic Games* 27). These elements evoke the culture of Greek Antiquity, contributing to the portrayal of Greek culture as sophisticated and refined.

In addition, national and ethnic stereotypes in music can be reflected in the portrayal of the singer's facial expressions and gestures. As comics obey the principle of the immediate and rapid transmission of the message, the facial features and kinesics of a character are often stereotyped, formed according to cultural elements. In *Asterix in Spain*, for instance, the cantao's face expression and kinesics are represented as passionate and emotional (35), aligning with the idea that Flamenco artists are individuals "who live their art more fully than they perform it" (Washabaugh 8). Furthermore, the unique vocal texture of flamenco is depicted by prolonging the vowels inside the speech balloons, which host the lyrics, helping to convey the emotions of the song. Meanwhile, Swiss singers' faces are portrayed as vigorous, exhibiting the "esophageal gymnastics" (Plantenga 9) they engage in while yodeling. The comics humorously illustrate what Plantenga describes as "the yodel's characteristic glottal leap, giving it its uniquely vigorous character" (4).

4.2. Characters' reaction to foreign songs

In addition to the aforementioned morphological characterization, which involved the examination of physical, gestural, and expressive traits, the construction of otherness occurs through oppositional pairs (Pageaux 68). Music can serve as a demarcation line between the Self and the Other, where the foreigner's music is perceived as inferior to the supposed superiority of the observed culture. A characteristic instance is the characters' reactions to Swiss yodeling, evoking mixed responses. While the Swiss find it amusing and enjoyable, the Gauls and Romans perceive it as irritating and even painful, with Obelix going to great lengths, such as jumping into the sea, to escape the annoying sound (36-38). Additionally, a subtle irony emerges in the dialogue between a Swiss character and Asterix, where the Swiss expresses pride in his national song and invites Asterix to hear it performed by their Glee Club (37). Asterix answers: "We have a bard at home who sings a bit like that" (37). His response carries a humorous undertone that playfully challenges the notion of yodel music being universally pleasant. However, from one side, this response mirrors the self-awareness and self-mockery of the yodelers, inherent in yodeling culture. It reflects the "cultural prejudice that has been jocularly accepted by one and all",

where “[a]ll yodelers, it seems, learn to laugh at themselves-before someone else does [...]” (Plantenga 4). There is thus a reproduction of an image for which the yodelers themselves satirize. From the other, the reference to the poor singing voice of the Gaulish bard balance any negative image of the Swiss, as the Gauls, through Asterix words, also make fun of a prominent member of their own society. Similarly, when Cacophonix offered to sing lullabies to help Pepe, the young Spaniard, fall asleep, his off-key notes pierced the air, causing the villagers to wince in agony and attempt to make him stop (*Asterix in Spain* 20). However, Pepe responded with enthusiasm: “*Olé!* It reminds me of home, especially the goats!” Thus, through Pepe's words, the Gauls once again engage in self-mockery.

4.3 The space

Pageaux underscores the significance of the spatiotemporal framework in literary texts, suggesting that the cultural representation of a country or society is often constructed based on a specific time and place, affecting how the observing culture perceives the observed culture. He sees a connection between geographical space and psychological space in literary texts, at least on a metaphorical level, as the foreigner's space acquires symbolic value and plays a special role in expressing otherness (67).

The landscapes depicted in *Asterix* comics, resembling scenes from tourist guides or postcards, function as representative backdrops for places where singers are situated and perform, contributing to a portrayal of stereotypical appearances. For instance, Switzerland is depicted with snow-capped mountains, fir trees, and inns reminiscent of Swiss chalets (24, 38, 45). Yodel, specifically the Alpine *naturjodel*, is closely associated with the herder's need and occasional longing to communicate with other herders and the herd over long distances (Plantenga 22). In the comics, this musical tradition, depicted as a form of entertainment for the Swiss, effectively reinforces the stereotype of Switzerland as a country of mountainous landscapes, rural traditions, and a mountain culture. Moving to Greek culture, *bouzoukia* clubs, favored by both locals and tourists, emerge as stereotypical representations in *Asterix at the Olympic Games* (27). As these popular nightlife spots in Greece feature live music and dancing, their presence in the comics perpetuate the idea of Greek people as joyful and fun-loving. Finally, in *Asterix in Spain*, the performance of flamenco dance and singing unfolds amidst the warm glow of the fire and under the

starry night, set against the backdrop of Spanish Romani colorful caravans (35). The portrayal of this space strongly emphasizes the nomadic lifestyle and bohemian exoticism of the Romani people, together with its cultural reputation and image abroad, determined by the “ongoing imagery of festive traditions” (Lopez de Abiada 247).

5. The scenario

The final stage of Pageaux's imagological approach is called the *scenario*. The term refers to the hermeunetic function of the literary text and its overall organization. It highlights the importance of examining a text's lexical and structural analysis in relation to the historical context in which it was written. By doing so, one can identify the underlying ideological, cultural, literary, and aesthetic traditions that the text represents and the imagination that it exploits and addresses (69). In the context of *Asterix* comics, it applies to the representation of cultural myths around various nationalities. It is interesting in reviewing the clichés about Spain, Greece and Switzerland seen by the French, which are very basic: Flamenco singing and dancing, Greek *bouzoukia* and *syrtaki* music and dance, Swiss Alps and yodeling, and, above all, tourism. The comics were written in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and they reflect the French people's perceptions of the countries they visited while traveling abroad. Music has an intrinsic bond with the imaginary culture of the other. Yodel, syrtaki, and flamenco are all distinct forms of music with their own unique cultural and historical contexts, and each has its own set of symbols and meanings which contribute to the overall representation of a culture.

Greek music has a rich history that dates to ancient times. As stated by West in his introduction, Ancient Greek culture “was permeated with music”, and he emphasizes that “the world owes the word [music] to the Greeks” (1). In 1964, the film *Zorba the Greek* contributed to the promotion of Greek popular music and tourism, by celebrating Greek spontaneity, music, and dance (Paschalidis 169). Particularly, the syrtaki gained wide international recognition after being featured in this film and has since become a popular dance performed at Greek-themed events around the world. The slow pace at the beginning of the syrtaki dance lends something contemplative but the delirium that follows with the acceleration leads to an escape from the world and the cares of life. The dance is typically performed by individuals or groups in a linear or circular formation and includes a variety of intense movements. In *Asterix at the Olympic Games*, when the Gauls dance under the syrtaki rhythm and melody, it implies the cultural myth of the Greeks as

hospitable people who enjoy life (27). The dance's movements and formations can be interpreted as a symbol of togetherness, while the faster-paced movements can be seen as a reflection of the Greek spirit of celebration, warmth, and passion.

In the case of flamenco, as Heffner states, during the 20th century it became "one of the most visible symbols of Spanish national identity in the international community, largely due to the attraction of the tourist-oriented spectacles in Spain and abroad" (1). The authors of *Asterix* recognized the profound connection of flamenco in Spanish folklore, a music that links the joy of living to the tragic feeling of life (Rosset). Specifically, they drew inspiration from Andalusian folklore, flamenco, and its *cante jondo* (Rosset), which is "the most serious and deeply moving kind of *cante* [singing]" (Faiella 84). Furthermore, Washabaugh underlines that "[f]lamenco music marks and defines the Andalusian cultural identity, and at the same time the identity itself also marks and defines the music (14)." The portrayal of flamenco as a form of exotic entertainment reinforces the stereotype of Spain as a tourist destination and the Spanish Romani as a passionate and poignant ethnicity.

In a similar way, at the scenario level, Swiss yodeling in *Asterix in Switzerland*, often combined with other folkloric markers such as alphorns and Alpine scenery, organizes the narrative's representation of otherness by providing the *couleur locale* through which the cultural myth of the Swiss is constructed. Beyond its mountain-pastoral origin as a herder's long-distance call, yodeling has been stylized in European popular culture as the musical emblem of an idealized Alpine homeland, from Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* and its numerous adaptations to contemporary Swiss folklore shows for tourists. Furthermore, there is a long European tradition of exoticizing the mountain folk. From the Renaissance through the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, the Alps were repeatedly reimagined by travel writers, naturalists, and artists as a wild, picturesque place of shepherds, and unspoiled nature (Étienne et al.). Moreover, early modern and Enlightenment scholars and travelers constructed the Alps as an exotic internal alterity within Europe, using travel narratives, images and descriptions of Alpine inhabitants, their bodies, customs and environment, contributing to a positive exoticization of the Alps (Boscani Leoni). In the context of the *Asterix in Switzerland*, programmed, repeatable scene of Swissness, yodeling, its sound, its performers and the Alpine scenery in which it is staged, can be understood as part of the same exoticizing gaze,

contributing to a folkloric tableau of Switzerland for foreign observers, and marking the Swiss as a clearly demarcated national Other.

6. Conclusion

The strategic use of cultural elements related to music contributes to the representation of the Greeks, Swiss, and Spaniards in the *Asterix* comics. On a lexical level, vocalizations, exclamations, and lyrics, as well as the choice of specific words in the speech balloons and the captions, relating to musical practices of the foreigners, underscore how language contributes to the construction of the Other. Furthermore, the organization of elements within the comics, including visual morphological characterization of the singers, together with their particular musical instruments, and the setting in which they perform, depicts ethnical representations. The characters' reaction to the music of the Other is also discussed, as it marks major oppositions that structure the imagotypical text. Finally, music is portrayed as cultural myth in *Asterix* comics, crystallizing basic clichés about foreigners, particularly those rooted in tourism.

In the *Asterix* comics, music constructs a certain image of otherness that may or may not reflect reality but contributes to the overall sense of ethnic and national representations. Each ethnicity expresses the supposed national superiority of its own culture through music and ethnotypes are gently ridiculed, with music serving as a vehicle for achieving this effect.

Humor plays a key role in this process. The musical stereotypes in *Asterix* use exaggeration, a common technique of humor. These musical images are not meant to be accurate descriptions of real cultures, but rather playful caricatures. Humor in this context reduces the seriousness of the issues around stereotyping, but it also shows how easily ethnic identities can be simplified into just a few familiar sounds.

At the same time, the comics' musical scenes carry a critical and pedagogical potential. Incorporating various musical styles, songs, singers, and instruments from different cultures involves acknowledging and recognizing the Other alongside the Self and can be used to open conversations about ethnic, national, and cultural differences. By translating these differences into instantly recognizable musical markers, the comics allow young readers to learn who sounds like what, and thus who is like whom, a process at the heart of imagological "othering" and "same-ing." In this sense, the representation of music in *Asterix* offers an opportunity to foster a more self-reflexive and critical imagination of cultural difference in the child readership. From an

imagological perspective, music works as another way of shaping images of foreign peoples, influencing how they are imagined, heard, and laughed at.

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LA MUSIQUE COMME REPRÉSENTATION DE L'ETHNICITÉ DANS LES BANDES DESSINÉES D'ASTÉRIX

Cet article examine le rôle de la musique dans la formation des ethnotypes dans la série de bandes dessinées *Astérix*, en appliquant l'imagologie, un domaine de la littérature comparée. La musique et la bande dessinée ont une signification culturelle et sociale, tandis que la bande dessinée, en tant que forme d'art visuel, est un puissant outil pour l'émergence de stéréotypes. En s'appuyant sur la méthode imagologique de Daniel-Henri Pageaux, l'image de l'Autre est analysée à trois niveaux : le mot, la relation hiérarchisée et le scénario. L'analyse se concentre sur la représentation des Grecs, des Espagnols et des Suisses, car ils intègrent divers aspects des cultures étrangères de manière humoristique et satirique. Comment le regard français des auteurs produit-il et maintient-il l'image de l'étranger à travers la représentation des genres musicaux, des mélodies, des musiciens et des instruments de musique, à la fois verbalement et visuellement ? L'article examine l'élargissement du champ de l'imagologie, des textes verbaux aux textes graphiques, ainsi que l'importance de la musique et de la bande dessinée en tant que manifestations culturelles qui mettent en question l'Autre.

Keywords: imagologie, bande dessinée, musique, ethnotypes, l' Autre