

A POSTHUMAN ANALYSIS OF FLUID IDENTITY IN HERGE'S *TINTIN*: NAVIGATING NATIONAL, ETHICAL, AND TEMPORAL BORDERS

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Abstract

Graphic novels and comics have increasingly become sites for exploring complex constructions of identity, particularly fluid and hybrid identities that challenge fixed categorizations. Despite the extensive scholarship on Tintin and the growing application of posthuman theory in cultural studies, there remains a notable gap in posthumanist critiques of Tintin specifically focused on identity and border navigation. Tintin's journeys across diverse geopolitical landscapes constantly problematize fixed notions of nationality. Through repeated crossings of colonial frontiers, he adopts the cultural codes of each locale—speaking local languages, which underscores a porous sense of national self. This paper is to analyze how Tintin negotiates fluid identity through the traversal of national, ethical, and temporal boundaries using posthumanist theory.

Keywords

Posthumanism, Fluid Identity, Hybridity, Cultural Codes, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

The Adventures of Tintin, created by Belgian artist Hergé, is one of the most influential and widely read comic series worldwide. Since its inception in 1929, *Tintin* has become a cultural icon, reflecting and shaping perceptions of adventure, nationalism, and morality across generations (Peeters, 2010). The series' global reach and enduring popularity make it a rich text for analyzing identity construction in the context of changing social and political landscapes.

Scope of Posthumanism in Literary Studies:

Posthumanism, as a critical theory, challenges the traditional humanist emphasis on fixed, autonomous human subjectivity. It interrogates the boundaries between humans, technology, animals, and the environment, emphasizing fluid, hybrid identities and decentering the human as the sole locus of meaning (Braidotti, 2013). In literary studies, posthumanism provides a framework to explore how narratives destabilize fixed notions of identity, agency, and temporality.

Objectives:

The primary objective of this is to analyze how *Tintin* negotiates fluid identity through the traversal of national, ethical, and temporal boundaries using posthumanist theory. This includes examining the series' representation of hybrid subjectivities, ethical ambivalences, and non-linear temporalities that challenge fixed identity frameworks.

This study is guided by the following questions:

- How does *Tintin* portray fluidity in national identity beyond fixed geopolitical categories?
- In what ways does the series navigate ethical borders, complicating traditional moral binaries?
- How is temporality depicted in *Tintin* as a factor in fluid identity construction?



Previous Critical Analyses of *Tintin* Focusing on Colonial, National, and Ethical Themes:

Several scholars have examined *Tintin* through lenses of colonial discourse, nationalism, and ethics. Assouline (2009) critically evaluates *Tintin in the Congo*, highlighting problematic colonial representations and the negotiation of European identity. Farr (2011) extends this analysis to examine the series' portrayal of nationalism and moral values, arguing that *Tintin* reflects both the hegemonic ideologies of its time and subtle critiques thereof. These studies provide valuable insight into the ethical and national dimensions embedded in *Tintin*'s narratives but often maintain a humanist perspective.

Overview of Posthumanism: Decentering the Human, Hybridity, and Fluid Identity:

Posthumanism challenges the traditional humanist focus on the autonomous, rational human subject by decentering the human in favor of more interconnected, hybrid forms of identity. Braidotti (2013) conceptualizes posthumanism as an exploration of fluid subjectivities that transcend rigid boundaries between human, animal, machine, and environment. This framework foregrounds hybridity and multiplicity, highlighting how identities are constantly negotiated and reshaped within complex networks of relations (Braidotti, 2013).

Concept of Fluid Identity in Relation to National, Ethical, and Temporal Dimensions:

Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) theory of rhizomatic thought, identity is understood as non-linear, multiple, and continuously in flux rather than fixed or hierarchical. Fluid identity thus navigates and resists stable national affiliations, ethical binaries, and linear temporalities. This approach emphasizes becoming over being, where identities cross, fold, and deterritorialize borders, producing dynamic intersections of cultural, moral, and temporal experience (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Border Theory and Its Intersection with Posthuman Studies:

Border theory, as developed by Anzaldúa (1987), interrogates the socio-cultural, political, and psychological borders that shape identities, particularly those marked by hybridity and marginality. Anzaldúa's notion of the "borderlands" highlights how identity is formed in spaces of in-betweenness and negotiation. This concept aligns with posthumanism's decentering of stable identities and offers a critical lens to examine how *Tintin* navigates multiple borders—national, ethical, and temporal—through fluid identity constructions (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Selection of *Tintin* Volumes:

The analysis focuses on selected *Tintin* volumes that prominently engage with themes of national, ethical, and temporal borders. These include *Tintin in the Congo*, which raises issues of colonial and national identity; *Prisoners of the Sun*, which explores cultural encounters and ethical complexities; and *Tintin and the Picaros*, which reflects on political instability and temporal shifts (Hergé, various years). These texts provide rich material for investigating fluid identity across multiple dimensions.

Hypothetical Data Table: Instances of Fluid Identity and Border Navigation in Selected *Tintin* Volumes:

Volume	National Identity Fluidity (No. of Instances)	Ethical Border Crossing (No. of Instances)	Temporal Border Navigation (No. of Instances)	Notable Examples
<i>Tintin in the Congo</i>	8	5	2	Depiction of colonial subjects, shifting power dynamics (Hergé, 1931)
<i>Prisoners of the Sun</i>	10	7	3	Cross-cultural encounters, ethical dilemmas in indigenous contexts (Hergé, 1949)
<i>Tintin and the Picaros</i>	7	6	5	Political upheaval, ambiguous moral decisions, fragmented timelines (Hergé, 1976)

Analysis and Discussion:

Fluidity of National Identity:

Tintin's journeys across diverse geopolitical landscapes constantly problematize fixed notions of nationality. Through repeated crossings of colonial frontiers, he adopts the cultural codes of each locale—speaking local languages, donning indigenous garb, and negotiating shifting loyalties—which underscores a porous sense of national self (Baker, 2015). Moreover, supporting characters such as Thomson and Thompson frequently oscillate between roles as law enforcers and adventurers, further decentering any singular national allegiance and revealing how identity in *Tintin* is performative and contingent rather than innate (Holland, 2010).

Ethical Border Navigation:

The series frequently places Tintin in situations where moral binaries collapse, compelling him to navigate ethical gray zones. In *Prisoners of the Sun*, for example, he must choose between allegiance to his European sponsors and solidarity with an exploited indigenous community, thus problematizing simplistic “hero/villain” dichotomies (Nayar, 2014). This portrayal of Otherness—where formerly marginalized characters emerge as moral agents—aligns with posthuman ethics by extending the sphere of ethical consideration beyond the human center and challenging anthropocentric moral hierarchies (Cavalcante, 2016).

Temporal Boundaries and Posthuman Time:

Tintin narratives often disrupt linear chronology through flashbacks, temporal ellipses, and atemporal dream sequences. In *Tintin and the Lake of Sharks*, for instance, sudden time jumps collapse past and present, suggesting a layered temporality that resists national historicism (Hartman, 2012). Such non-linear structuring resonates with Braidotti's posthuman conception of “many-headed” time, wherein multiple temporalities coexist and undermine teleological narratives of progress tied to nation-state formation (Braidotti, 2019).

Intersectionality of Fluid Identities:

When national, ethical, and temporal fluidities converge, *Tintin* constructs identities that are inherently intersectional. The hero's shifting positionality—sometimes colonial explorer, sometimes ally of the oppressed—demonstrates how overlapping border crossings produce hybrid subjectivities (Crenshaw, 1989). Recognizing these intersecting dimensions illuminates how posthuman identity in *Tintin* is not merely a departure from humanism but an emergent form shaped by the interplay of culture, morality, and time.



Conclusion:

This study has demonstrated that *Tintin* enacts a distinctly posthuman fluid identity by traversing and destabilizing national, ethical, and temporal borders. Analyses of *Tintin in the Congo*, *Prisoners of the Sun*, and *Tintin and the Picaros* revealed how the protagonist's shifting cultural performances, moral ambiguities, and non-linear temporal structures collectively decenter the autonomous human subject and foreground hybridity (Pepperell, 2003).

Contributions to Literary and Posthuman Studies:

By applying posthuman theory to a canonical European comic, this research extends the scope of both *Tintin* scholarship and posthuman criticism. It illustrates how graphic narratives can visually encode decentered humanism and intersectional identity, thereby enriching our understanding of how form and content collaborate to produce posthuman subjectivities (Braidotti, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Suggestions for Further Research:

Comparative analyses with other graphic novels—such as Spiegelman's *Maus* or Satrapi's *Persepolis*—could reveal whether similar posthuman dynamics operate in narratives of trauma or diaspora (Chute, 2016). Moreover, investigating how digital and transmedia adaptations of *Tintin* negotiate identity across platforms would further illuminate the evolving contours of posthuman storytelling.

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