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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter begins by examining the tension between education and entertainment in comics from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yellow Kid exemplifies the agentic, carnivalesque comics child who gets away with everything he does, and Buster Brown narrates the antics and slips of a naughty child who is duly punished. This also holds for Katzenjammer Kids and the children in the British magazine Beano. Children in comics are first situated in the broader media context of the nineteenth century. Changing conceptions of children and childhood and the relationship between children and laughter are also elaborated. The chapter then focuses on naughty children in comics and the degree of impunity offered to them in order to map the negotiation between education and entertainment as well as social commentary. It highlights the queer inclinations and affective power of comics children while also tracing the continuation of racist stereotypes.

Keywords: children, comics, education, entertainment, Struwwelpeter, Max und Moritz, Yellow Kid, Buster Brown, Katzenjammer Kids, Beano

This chapter unpacks representations of children in comics as well as the many connections established between children, children's culture, and the medium of comics. In looking at the connections between children and comics from within (representations of children in comics stories for both children and adults) and without (associations established between children and comics, especially the shared attribute of childishness and the often nostalgic perception of comics as childhood reading), the chapter seeks to nuance and complexify the relationship between children and comics. It also suggests that, irrespective of intended audience, comics children reflect their rapidly changing modern contexts. Striking a balance between education and entertainment, which varies according to the intended audience, these children channel the desires, fears, and prejudices of the society in which they are created and propagated.

Beginning with Heinrich Hoffmann's *Der Struwwelpeter* and Wilhelm Busch's *Max und Moritz*, the chapter examines children in popular American and European comics from the late nineteenth century until the end of World War II, covering Richard F. Outcault's *Yellow Kid* and *Buster Brown* and several young characters from the *Beano*. Juxtaposing early comics made for a mixed audience and comics for children helps trace how comics children changed with their audiences, their times, and the formats in which they were bound.

Fluid Media Contexts and Changing Readerships

"The world's most popular and influential comics have always been rooted in ideas about childhood, and they have had millions of child readers," writes Charles Hatfield (101). Although old, the relationship between children and comics is also entangled and fraught. While children and childishness have been a recurrent feature of comics, the acceptance of both elements is deeply affected by the discourse surrounding comics legitimization, which is based on the claim that comics have "grown up" and cater, like other legitimized literary forms, to a serious adult readership (cf. Pizzino). Before and even alongside the legitimization of the graphic novel, comics have traditionally and infamously been regarded as reading material for the young, the illiterate, and even the degenerate. Accused of corrupting young minds, comics have faced censorship campaigns, the most virulent of which can be dated to the 1940s and the 1950s in Europe and the United States. As Martin Barker highlights through the example of Britain, these censorship campaigns were often also battlegrounds for cultural and ideological power; the backlash against in comics in Europe was often also a backlash against American influences, both in allied countries such as the United Kingdom and in the more openly hostile Soviet bloc (cf. Scholz). Comics have often been hailed as a distinctively American form, incarnating the energy and vitality of an emerging superpower and a burgeoning consumer culture (Bukatman; Gordon, *Comic Strips*). As suggested by the repeated episodes of comics censorship, the medium, owing to its marked preference for images over words, has been perceived as both a powerful but also subversive means of communication. The prominence of images coupled with the informal, caricatural drawing style preferred by comics has also contributed to the medium's relatively low, sometimes disreputable status.

The role of comics children as early proponents of mass culture complicates the relationship between children and comics: on one hand, the medium of comics was seen as childish, and this childishness spread, like contagion, to comics readers, increasing numbers of which were children; on the other, while many successful comics characters have been children, they have often catered to a mass adult readership rather than an exclusively young one. This holds for the earliest comics, such as *The Yellow Kid* (ca. 1895) and continues today; children, especially in newspaper comic strips such as

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Peanuts, Calvin and Hobbes, or *Mafalda* entertain, often in spite of themselves, both adults and children.

It is also important to situate comics in the context of the rapidly transforming media environment of the late nineteenth century, which was the golden age of book illustration. It also witnessed the rise of the illustrated press and caricatural art that targeted primarily adults. Around the same time, children's literature also became a profitable enterprise, offering memorable characters such as Lewis Carroll's Alice (1865) and J. M. Barrie's Peter Pan (who first appeared in a theater piece from 1904). As these characters suggest, children's literature rapidly moved away from the educational imperatives incarnated by early alphabet books proposed by John Locke at the end of the seventeenth century toward striving to entertain children. Nonetheless, the guiding principle behind these works, to teach children, never went away completely; it was imbued instead with the importance given to untutored imagination during the Romantic period. Concurrently, the modern notion of childhood, which had earlier taken hold in the households of the upper classes in the seventeenth century, was established across classes, becoming the "privileged age" of the nineteenth century (Ariès 26, 30). The distinction between the child and the adolescent would take longer to be concretized, at first slowly in the course of the eighteenth century, acquiring prominence through Romantic protagonists, and, after the generational split propelled by World War I, borrowing elements from both childhood and adulthood and becoming society's "favourite age" (Ariès 30). This generational split is in many ways incarnated by the figure of Tintin, who hovers between youth and adulthood (Apostolidès). In order to better contextualize these changes in perceptions of childhood and adolescence, it is important to first understand how the connections between childhood and adulthood were strengthened and how comics and children, through the attribute of childishness, established a distinctive relationship in the course of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. This relationship, based on humor and drawing style, not only allowed for the denigration of comics but also created space for largely permissible moments of realistically impossible liberty and subversion.

Through the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the notion of childhood "came to be understood as a component of selfhood" (Steedman 7). Conceptualizations of the modern self, Carolyn Steedman reminds us, interiorize the self and layer it with past experiences, especially those from childhood (12). Such conceptualizations were encouraged by psychoanalytical theories. As Steedman has argued, the child came to figure (adult) interiority. This is the source of the affective power associated with children: child figures incarnate a degree of pastness which, in the case of a mass-cultural product like comics, is also a shared or collective past. By the 1890s, children had become "discursive vessels of cultural and personal memory" (Crain 151).

The concretization of the notion of childhood was reinforced by a growing children's culture thriving on illustrated books. Patricia Crain points out that the "material artifact of the book" itself was "one of the first dedicated spaces of childhood" (Crain 18). Childhood was therefore also being indirectly defined through the works consumed by

child readers. Books were, and still are, seen as companions of their readers, especially young ones. This association also extends to comics, which nonetheless always run the risk of being figured as disreputable companions. Both comics and illustrated books marked not only entrance into the world of commodities and consumerism for children but also a degree of empowerment, through the imaginative freedom offered to readers. The close relationship between children's literature and comics can perhaps best be described as follows: comics were indulging in childishness as the very concept of modern childhood was in the process of being redefined and acquiring unprecedented importance as an incubator for adult subjectivities. The inherent presence of childishness in comics drawing informs prejudices regarding the low cultural standing of comics and their readership. Despite the childishness evoked by the naive, untutored, primitive aspect of the drawing, such works were catering to a mostly adult readership through the nineteenth century (Smolderen 22, 25). For Thierry Smolderen, influences from caricature, graffiti, and children's drawings are inherent components of comics style and enable the medium to ironically transform its subject matter.

Complementing the childishness of the style, another link between comics and children can be drawn out through the connections between laughter and children. Nelly Feuerhahn traces the source of laughter to two kinds of orders: one aims at social critique, whereas the other evokes childlike logic (251). For Feuerhahn, children's laughter can have carnivalesque elements when unfolding in an adult context (21–25). She traces this back to François Rabelais's Pantagruel, who was a child in an adult world. Maria Lypp develops a similar line of thought in arguing for the affinity between the fool and the child: "the fool is child and teacher in one person" (184). She locates this connection in four aspects: the accessibility of folk humor for children; "the ambivalence between simplemindedness and wisdom"; the conceptualization of childhood as a happy time; and the conflation encouraged by the Romantics between children and "ordinary" or "common" people (186). These factors, combined with the rise of caricature, which transposed a liberating strand of humor shunning all norms in images, normalized carnivalesque laughter in children's literature (187). For Lypp, this normalization is regrettable because it banalizes subversive laughter and restricts it to the world of children's literature. Strains of similar laughter, however, prevail over comics, in varying degrees of subtlety: while the Yellow Kid cheerfully turned the grown-up world upside down, mocking both class and culture, Tintin's subversion is only apparent through an ageist lens; it is Tintin, the child, who is able to bring order to and resolve the issues of the grown-up world (Apostolidès).

As a figure of laughter and liberty, the comics child seems to be quite the opposite of the interiorized child discussed by Steedman. Yet the liberty manifested by the comics child is a reflection of adult fantasies about childhood. The comics child molds and expresses a variety of concerns that change according to the intended readership and often map, somewhat distortedly, the binaries central to the modern age of childhood and adulthood, urban life and rural life, work and leisure.

Despite this variety of readerships and publication formats, which range from newspaper comic strips to the booklike form of the album, it is possible, as Ian Gordon has recently suggested, to unite comics with child protagonists under the common generic banner of kid comics. Often humorous in nature, these comics enable an understanding of what qualified as funny while providing clues about the social contexts of those comics. As Gordon shows, recurrent factors in kid comics, such as street play and interaction with authority, particularly parents, teachers, and the police, can paint fairly accurate pictures of actual lived conditions (Gordon, *Kid Comic Strips*). This is comparable to the way in which the diversifying media appearing toward the end of the nineteenth century, such as chronophotography and cinema, were reconfigured to create "an audiovisual stage on paper," a "bundling together of speech and action without any hierarchy" in contemporaneous comics (Smolderen 145). Newspaper strips such as *Yellow Kid* and *Katzenjammer Kids* (1897) were at the forefront of incorporating direct speech into the panels, first through the words on the Yellow Kid's nightshirt and eventually in the form of word balloons. Comics as a medium therefore incorporates changing media contexts and experiences of reality (cf. Bukatman; Smolderen; Gardner).

For Michael Chaney, "the child has been the default actor of American comics since the commercial conception of the form" (57). While Chaney is here referring to the many famous kids populating American comics from the turn of the nineteenth century, such as the Yellow Kid and the Katzenjammers, it is possible to extend Chaney's remarks to the many children in European comics. Two of the earliest child protagonists in a "comic" are Busch's Max and Moritz, who left a strong imprint on the imagery of nineteenth-century visual culture, inspiring, among others, Rudolph Dirks's Katzenjammer Kids, which had been created with the aim of competing against the popularity of Yellow Kid. Busch himself had been inspired by Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* (Ries). Instead of reproducing visual tropes, however, Busch reversed them and, in the case of *Max und Moritz*, added a note of irony to the harsh punishments meted out to the incorrigibly naughty boys.

Although most of the comics examined in this chapter also put norms and figures of authority to the test, they are, on closer observation, rarely as radical as Busch's two naughty boys. The extent to which the naughty child is punished functions as a litmus test revealing the different shades of compromises made between education and entertainment. It also, by extension, reveals the extent to which the comics child is an entertainer and a model for how not to act in a cautionary tale or, instead, an enabled hero enjoying, unpunished, a degree of freedom denied to children, and even adults, in the real world.

Struwwelpeter's Far-Reaching Influence

While determining when comics really started is a thorny debate since it entails deciding on a more or less monolithic definition of what comics really is, it is easier to point out several works that function as milestones in comics history: *Max und Moritz* is one of these, and comics starring children such as *Yellow Kid* and *Tintin* are others. Although

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Struwwelpeter, first made available to the public in 1845, is less frequently mentioned in discussions of early comics, in contrast to those on children's literature, it merits further attention for the kind of stories it offered to children as well as its far-reaching influence on Busch's own work and beyond. Like *Max und Moritz*, the series, *Défauts des enfants* (*Children's Shortcomings*) from 1857 by French caricaturist Bertall was also inspired by Hoffmann's work and contributed toward establishing the figure of the *enfant terrible* in popular images and, eventually, comics. Also aimed at a young readership, these children were naughty but avoided the excess of their German counterparts (Sausverd). This was in keeping with the motto of the Hachette magazine *La Ssemaine des enfants*, in which they were published: "Magazine of amusing and instructive images and texts." Decades later, brothers Robert and Philip Spence wrote and illustrated the anti-Nazi satire, *Struwwelhitler*, for the Daily Sketch War Relief fund, which catered to soldiers and victims of air raids. In this case, material intended for very young children—three to six years old, as announced by the subtitle of *Struwwelpeter*—was reconfigured for adult amusement.

Nevertheless, German psychiatrist, or alienist, Hoffmann originally wrote and drew *Der Struwwelpeter*, a collection of short stories with fifteen colored illustrations, as a Christmas gift for his son. Unable to find a worthy illustrated children's book and convinced of the power of images to productively harness children's attention and imagination, he decided to make his own book, unaware of the phenomenal success it would have. Bearing the subtitle "Pretty Stories and Funny Pictures," the book shows each young misbehaving protagonist facing a punishment tailored to his or her tort: the thumb sucker has his thumb cut off by "the great long red-legg'd scissor-man," and the three boys laughing at a young black boy are thrown into a giant pot of ink, becoming so dark as to resemble silhouettes.

Amid the resounding success of the book, the only objections levied against *Struwwelpeter* concerned the negative impact of its caricatural style on children's aesthetic senses, which Hoffmann rebuffed. Such criticism is comparable to the one levied on comics. As he explains in his note from 1871, Hoffmann had chosen a childlike drawing style and evocative, sensual images, rejecting the laws of realism with the express purpose of effectively communicating to children (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Heinrich Hoffmann, *Der Struwwelpeter*, 1844. Original manuscript. Universitätsbibliotheek J. C. Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.

Resembling but also inverting the trope of a religious icon—a pair of scissors and a comb become the symbols of this unholy martyr—the title figure of Struwwelpeter only appears on one page (Feuerhahn 65). The attribution of his name to the entire collection testifies to the character's popularity with young readers. Of all the boys and girls pictured in the book, he is the largest, taking over most of the page. Dressed in eye-catching red, horrifically unkempt, with curling nails uncut for a year and a wild bush of hair, he is the most monstrous of the child characters encountered in the book. Reworked editions were careful to add a single teardrop capturing the boy's isolation and loneliness and, by extension, remorse for his unkempt appearance. With this title image Hoffmann shrewdly combines the fascination wielded by images with the affective pull of characters calling for reader identification. Propelled by these two forces, Struwwelpeter channels the educational message of bodily care and hygiene. Hoffmann's manner of conveying an educational message was completely unprecedented: "the invisible, the impermissible, the forbidden and the unreal were made visible through the image" (Feuerhahn 64). *Struwwelpeter*, writes Feuerhahn, is "the first book where the spectacle of children's imagination and its seductive lack of reason can be read." This is comparable to the "edge of seriousness" evoked through untutored, childish drawing styles, with which nineteenth-century cartoonists chose to express themselves (Smolderen 25).

More than moral and affect, for *Max und Moritz*, Busch seems to have picked up on the lightness and liveliness of Hoffmann's other drawings in the book and added an ironic twist to the early children's literature genre of the cautionary tale. Like *Struwwelpeter, Max und Moritz: Eine Bubengeschichte in sieben Streichen* (literally, *A Story of Young Boys in Seven Strokes*), is a small book starring two boys, unfolding in verse, and accompanied by illustrations. "In earlier kids strips," Gordon points out, "from Wilhelm Busch's *Max und Moritz*, Rudolph Dirks's *Katzenjammer Kids*, to Richard Outcault's *Yellow Kid* and *Buster Brown* the core aspect of the humor centered on the contrast between prevailing notions of childhood innocence and the reality of the mischievous child" (*Kid Comic Strips* 39). In the first six of the seven "strokes" or chapters, Max and Moritz are seen gleefully wreaking all kinds of havoc in their village: they kill a widow's

chickens and then eat them up after she has cooked them, they saw off bridges, cause explosions, and introduce bugs under the covers of the nicest man in the village. While they survive being baked in an oven, they do not survive the mill they are eventually dumped into and transformed into fodder for two gleeful ducks.

Although the drawing style adopted by Busch can be called childish because of its simplicity and abstraction, he indulges in a strain of social satire that would only be comprehensible to adults, mocking the tenets of moral education. Its irony exemplifies what Lypp sees as the "humor of liberation" accompanying the rise of caricatural art in the nineteenth century (189). This humor of liberation also speaks to children, allowing them to vicariously experience and, like the two boys, enjoy acts of naughtiness. Since, at the end, this naughtiness does not go unpunished, *Max und Moritz* also fulfills an educational function, but it does so by combining a range of elements that are bound to fascinate the young reader: the energetic movement of the drawings, their simplicity and playfulness, the ample use of rhyme, and, eventually, lots of onomatopoeia adding an extra dimension to the action and contributing toward building the audiovisual stage that comics transformed into. This technique echoes Hoffmann's theory of enticing the child through images and giving form to the forbidden. It also contributes to the carnivalesque element of comics humor, which is arguably at its strongest with the presence of the comics child; in acquiring more power and liberty than real children, these comics children underscore the extent to which the order of the modern world has been reversed or turned upside down. The world turned upside down is a centuries-old staple of both the carnival and caricature (Stallybrass and White; Mainardi). In this respect, it is noteworthy that the boys' pranks result in performative, slapstick, bodily humor. Moreover, most of these pranks involve eating, an act that foregrounds bodily needs, which is also a carnivalesque trope embodied by Pantagruel, the gluttonous child replacing the adult (Feuerhahn 21–22).

Commercialized Kids

Max und Moritz was a direct inspiration for Dirks's *Katzenjammer Kids*, where joyful naughtiness, once again, is not punished until the very end of the story. These newspaper strips, such as the one from May 26, 1901, used a motif that would be a faithful companion of naughty comics children for decades to come: the spanked child. The Katzenjammers are a family of German immigrants in America, and the two children, Hans and Fritz, resemble Max and Moritz both visually and also in their endless thirst for pranks. Recalling slapstick comedy, the stories are laden with action, and dialogue is limited. In this particular strip, however, Hans and Fritz have a relatively elaborate plan that relies on sound. The two teach an obliging parrot the line "Mama, your time has came [sic]." They then hide the parrot under the chair of their mother, who settles in it to read a story to the children. The parrot does not take long to start declaring his ominous sentence. As their mother becomes increasingly scared, the children can barely control their laughter, and one remarks, in exaggeratedly German-accented English, "Oh, how pale Ma iss!!!!" Meanwhile, the parrot bites the unsuspecting Mama's thumb, and the

children burst out laughing. After trying to thrash the parrot but only succeeding in destroying its cage, Mama Katzenjammer turns to her two boys. The last panel shows a crying Fritz turned over her knee, being thrashed by a stick (possibly a remnant of her chair). A wailing Hans rubs his behind, while the parrot triumphantly declares, "Your time has came" (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Rudolph Dirks, "The Katzenjammer Kids' Time Had Came," last two panels: Mama smashes the parrot's cage and then beats up the kids. *American Humorist* (Sunday supplement to the *New York Journal*), May 26, 1901.

Comics children's time for spanking will come again and again, but not in the case of the Katzenjammers' rival, the Yellow Kid. However, while *Katzenjammer Kids* continues to this day, drawn by different hands, Outcault's *Yellow Kid* only survived a few years due to Outcault's inability to successfully copyright his character, much coveted by other newspaper publishers because of his ability to attract new readers (Gordon, *Comic Strips* 44).

Katzenjammer Kids began in 1897 in *American Humorist*, a supplement to William Hearst's *New York Journal*, to counter the popularity of the rival *New York World*, owned by Joseph Pulitzer, which had been publishing the immensely successful Sunday strip, *Hogan's Alley*. This comic strip with street urchins as protagonists, much in the vein of Michael Angelo Woolf's cartoons from the 1870s (Gordon, *Comic Strips* 25–26), shifted to the *Journal* in October 1896, retitled as *McFadden's Row of Flats* and eventually *The Yellow Kid*, after the most popular character from *Hogan's Alley*. Sunday strips such as *Yellow Kid* and *Katzenjammer Kids* were a distinctively American phenomenon that would eventually be exported across the Atlantic. However, as Gordon is careful to emphasize, American comics had "a distinctively commercial bent and those comics were a constitutive element in shaping a culture of consumption in America" (Gordon, *Kid Comic Strips* 3; cf. also Harvey; Wood). "What made American comics different," Gordon explains, "was that they were ongoing features that appeared on a regular schedule and were so essential to the creation of mass circulated newspapers, the mass media, that it is difficult to separate the two" (*Kid Comic Strips* 3). The Yellow Kid himself is arguably the first of these commercial enterprises propelled through comics. He closely resembles the "Me Worry?" kid, which had been used in American advertisements aiming at adults rather than children since at least the early twentieth century (Sweet). He persists, since the 1950s, as Alfred E. Neuman, the ageless mascot of *Mad* magazine. Something, perhaps the "cuteness" of these childlike figures, contributed toward selling products to adults (and not essentially children and women, as is the case nowadays).

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The "archetypical working-class city dweller," the Yellow Kid was able to "capture the public and boost newspaper circulation" (Gordon, *Comic Strips* 29, 32). In the context of the New York newspaper wars between the *World* and the *Journal*, the *Kid* was a formidable tool for attracting readers, inciting, especially in the absence of copyright, fervent copying. The Kid first appears on the sidelines, in a pale nightshirt, in a 1895 circus strip. The nightshirt and his baldness reinforce Outcault's claim that the Kid, who would later be given the name Mickey Dugan and the identity of an Irish immigrant in New York, "was not an individual but a type" (Harvey). Barefoot and wearing a shift that in this early cartoon is stained by a handprint, the Kid highlights the difficult living conditions of New York's poor while reflecting increasing concern regarding the plight of street children as concretized by Woolf's cartoons and Jacob Riis's photographs in *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (1890). But the Kid is simultaneously timeless. He stands out with his nightshirt, colored a bright yellow after his first few appearances and often bearing his words, poorly spelled and heavily accented. His baldness likewise situates him between babyhood and old age. This ambiguity of age, mirroring the scope of readers the comic spoke to, permitted the Kid to create disorder, or exacerbate existing disorder, while commenting on the dire social conditions of his milieu.

The difference between the urban experience of the rich and the poor is a recurrent theme in the comics. While the circus mentioned above is already a disastrous affair, with the street children failing at being acrobats and clowns, the Yellow Kid's two attempts at golf result in more casualties in the flurry of intense action that marks all of the Kid's strips. In "Golf—the Great Society Sport as Played in Hogan's Alley" from January 5, 1896, the Kid only points to the disorder and violence around him as clubs are swung, hitting other children instead of golf balls. In "The Yellow Kid Takes a Hand at Golf" from October 24, 1897, the Kid announces, "This gang tinks dey kin queer me but wait en see," joyfully proceeding, in the course of the final three panels, to hit every other child, parrot, and cat on the scene. The Kid and his environs transform the leisurely game of golf into one of physical combat. Such reversals of elements of upper-class urban living resemble the carnivalesque trope of turning the world upside down. That same year, in December, the Kid takes part in a grand opera in his neighborhood, a production of *Faust*. Dressed up as the devil ("Gee, ain't I a sassy little devil?"), the Kid plays the cello while another one blows a horn "left over from election." The "private boxes" are on top of the fence separating the backstage, where the Kid is playing, from the main stage. A stage manager is shown shooing away the only black child in the cartoon, hissing, "Git out of here, dis ain't vaudeville." Even though the Kid himself is marked out as an outsider, he is connoted in a far more positive manner than any black child in Outcault's comics.

Less well known and comparatively less successful is the strip *Pore Lil' Mose*, which first appeared in the *Herald* in 1901 (Halvig 33; cf. also Saguisag 73-83). One of the earliest strips starring a black character, it consists essentially of letters, often in rhyme, that Mose sends from New York City back to his family in "Cottonville," Georgia, also called "coon town." The comic is rife with racist stereotypes, which are reinforced by the contrast between the urban milieu of New York in which Mose finds himself and the rural

Cottonville where his family lives. Unlike Outcault's other two comics children, who are usually accompanied by one animal—Tige in Buster Brown's case and a dog or a goat in the Yellow Kid's—Mose has an entourage of animals, including a bear, a monkey, a dog, and a cat. Domestic animals and wild ones coexist, just like the racist association of black people with the jungle. By the time *Mose* was printed, the imagery of minstrel shows, concretized by the Jim Crow figure, was widespread, and Outcault's comic was no exception, as suggested by the cover of the collected edition of *Mose* comics from 1901, in which the boy wears white gloves, his mouth stretched in a wide smile.

In comics, it is difficult to find images that rejected stereotypes, and this extends to the representation of children. Mose, like many other black children in comics, follows the dictates of a stereotyping that is harsher on him than on the Yellow Kid. Even in the comics, his realm of action seems more limited than that of the other children, his poorness and littleness more of a hindrance. And while Outcault's drawings are not flattering to any community, black characters always fare worse: their features and gestures are overexaggerated, and there is less differentiation of individual characters' traits. It is, then, hardly surprising that in "The Yellow Kid's Great Fight" from December 20, 1896, which unfolds between the Kid and a black boy, it is the Kid who wins, with help from his goat, who "turns dat nigger blue," dislocating "de bote of dat coon's jaws." As a final act, "dat goat at de wool right off dat nigger's nut."

Similarly, even though Mose is the protagonist of his strip, he is often far less agentic than the Yellow Kid. This is exemplified by two comic strips with a similar theme: "The Yellow Kid's R-R-Revenge" from January 9, 1898, and a *Pore Lil' Mose* strip from 1901 where "He Gets Mixed Up with a Painter." While the Kid emerges victorious but soaked in paint after his scuffle with a painter's son, Mose and his animal friends emerge terrified from a similar paint shop. This incident is accompanied by a little letter from Mose to his mother making a pun on the adjective *colored*: "When I lef home ob cose yo knows I wuz a colored boy … now we haf ter go an buy a bran new set ob clothes/Cause we is yaller, red an blue."

Just like Lil' Mose is often beaten up and thrown out, it is Buster Brown, the Yellow Kid's cousin from a comfortably bourgeois family, who is subjected to rhythmic spanking. Spanking was clearly not a sufficiently strong punishment for Max and Moritz or even the children drawn by Hoffmann. Outcault never seems to have considered spanking the Yellow Kid. In the case of Buster Brown, whose antics infringe on the ordered, clean home space of Mrs. Brown, spankings are frequent and intense, as suggested by the pillow that Buster sometimes wears on his rear. Outcault began his *Buster Brown* strips for the *New York Herald* in 1902. *Buster Brown* was transformed into a lucrative commercial enterprise through becoming, most memorably, the face of Buster Brown Shoes as early as 1904. His love interest, Mary Jane, lent her name to the buckled leather shoes that have become a staple of girls' wardrobes. Nonetheless, the most dominant image remains that of Buster and his pit bull terrier, Tige. In contrast to the Yellow Kid but similar to Mose, Buster is dressed in an elaborate Lord Fauntleroy costume. While Buster is—like the Yellow Kid, Mose, the Katzenjammers, Max and Moritz, and the children in

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Struwwelpeter—a naughty kid, his pranks unfold by and large within the confines of his home. This setting mirrors what can be called the "gentrification" of the notion of childhood and children's culture, which was being increasingly located in the space of the home. This change of setting is accompanied by the presence of parental, usually maternal, control. Mrs. Brown often appears at the beginning and at the end of the comic strip, containing Buster's actions through her presence and chastising. The somewhat unwieldy title of a strip from 1903 summarizes its story: "Buster Brown Gets Some New Summer Boots, His Mother Gets a New Brush and Buster Gets a New Licking, While Tige Only Gets a New Laugh." The panel behind the title page shows Buster at a counter gravely telling the salesclerk, "My Ma sent me for one of your best spanking hair brushes," and adding, "You better send her a strong one, as I have a board in my pants." This is accompanied by an insert showing Mrs. Brown furiously spanking her child, who cries while his dog looks on in despair. This insert works as both past and present. Its rounded, almost circular form mirrors the seemingly endless cycle of Buster's naughtiness and foolery and beatings from his mother that structure the strips (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Richard F. Outcault, "Buster Brown Gets Some New Rubber Boots" title panel, *New York Herald*, Sunday supplement, 16 August 1903.

The story itself is more mundane and less naughty than most of Buster's other adventures. Thanking his mother for a new pair of rubber boots, Buster sets out in the rain with his boots and his umbrella, delighted with his new equipment, while Tige looks on baffled. As the rain turns into a storm and Buster tries to prevent his umbrella from flying away, he falls into the rapidly gathering water on the street. His boots soaked, he prefers carrying them in his hands and walking back home in his socks, knowing he is in for a beating. In the last panel, we see Buster, pillow tied against his back, writing under "Resolved" his lesson from the incident. This is not the actual moral of the story but a continuation of the humor already present in the mistakes and nonsense peppering the text: Buster has learned that the board in his pants cannot protect him from a thrashing when the pants are taken off. With *Katzenjammer Kids* and *Buster Brown*, spanking is established as just punishment for naughty children in comics, becoming the norm for most of the twentieth century, until it stopped being socially acceptable.

Many of Buster's resolutions evoke social issues, much like the Yellow Kid. In one strip, for instance, Buster's resolution pokes fun at the apathy and lack of concern regarding social issues, such as the assumption that the unemployed are "time wasters" (April 11, 1909). In this story, Buster prints an advertisement offering to hire a hundred men with red whiskers and inviting them to visit the Browns' house. While he is receiving the customary spanking from his mother, his father is shown handing out money for red dye

to one of the many hopefuls queued up before their house. In the last panel, Buster opens his "Resolved" note with a declaration that "those men are all members of the Time Waster's Union" and contrasts the fate of "the boy who is industrious, honest, earnest and believes in himself … steered for easy street and happiness" with "the boy who is lazy, idle and slip shod" and destined to run after menial jobs. Despite the irony pervading the comic, the socially acceptable path of industriousness remains cast in a positive light.

Buster crosses many lines in the course of his appearances in Sunday supplements. One of the most memorable ones is a 1903 strip in which he entices Florence, the daughter of his mother's friend, into cross-dressing. The panel announcing the title foretells the plot: Buster is wearing a frock, twirling and smiling at another child with a ribbon in her hair, who wears Buster's clothes. She stands next to a neatly folded scroll of resolutions and an overturned inkpot that predicts the transgression. The story proceeds as follows. Smiling at Florence and heeding his mother's command to amuse her, Buster takes her to his room. As Tige watches aghast, Buster follows Florence's instructions to cut her hair like his. After switching clothes and accessories, the two children are delighted at how similar they look. Their mothers, in contrast, are horrified, and both children end up being spanked with hairbrushes. Pillow against his back, wearing his own clothes, Buster regrets his poor judgment but resolves to "be happy, whatever else betide, how's that?" A note of resentment seems to ring through this last line.

Gender is one of those boundaries that none of the comics children drawn by Outcault seem to have crossed. All of the characters remain male and heterosexual, and even though Buster is by far the "prettiest" of the children and is usually dressed in pink, he is not allowed the option of testing girlhood. Yet out in the real world, writer Charlotte Perkins Gillman had declared, in her 1898 book, *Women and Economics*, how the "tomboy" had become the new norm (Abate ix). In *Buster Brown*, however, and in the eyes of most readers of the *Herald*, tomboyishness and cross-dressing seem to have remained an aberration, permissible only for brief moments of humor and meriting a spanking.

Comics children, however, are often queered, even when they are given unmistakably specific gender identities, which are usually those of the heterosexual male or the heterosexual female. They are likely to be read by all kinds of children, regardless of gender. This is similar to children's interactions with other elements of children's culture, where stories with boy protagonists are popular across genders simply because boys, even in storyworlds, have greater liberty and are allowed to participate in more interesting stories than girls. Nonetheless, it is possible to argue that many comics children live in a queer time, imposed by the seriality of their existence which insists that they continue, usually unchanged and following a familiar plot line as long as they remain lucrative and attract readers. Their lives are marked by moments of energy and action that remain under the threat of being cut short (Halberstam 2–3). In this way, comics children also grow sideways (Stockton), accumulating a variety of adventures without really changing.

Children in Comics: Between Education and Entertainment, Conformity and Agency

"There's something queer about comics," write Ramzi Fawaz and Darieck Scott (197). I would like to suggest that queerness is almost the norm in popular comics with children. It can be connected to the resilience of comics, which in turn relies on the medium's ability to speak to a mass readership. This "capacity to adapt and innovate in a rapidly evolving media world" is tied to the functioning of comics "as a powerful semiotic laboratory" (Smolderen 158), reworking and innovating with the visual vocabularies accumulated and disseminated for more than two centuries of print production. This constant need to innovate and rejuvenate, to capture and entice a significant readership in order to survive on a serial basis, could be one of the reasons behind the many proudly, openly "abnormal" children populating the *Beano*'s pages, ranging from Tin-Can Tommy the robot boy to the muscled, extremely strong Pansy Potter. However, even amid the proliferation of abnormality, racist stereotypes persist. I will now turn to the *Beano* to wrap up these reflections on children in comics and show how elements highlighted by the comics children discussed above—naughtiness but also racist stereotyping—persist in Britain's longest-running comics magazine for children.

The *Beano*: Stereotyping and Queering, Companionship and Education

Although the *Beano* is now associated with its mascot from the 1950s, the black-haired, extremely naughty Dennis the Menace, the early issues of the magazine, which started in 1938, bear the figure of Peanut on their front pages. Peanut is a barefoot black boy in patched-up overalls, often eating a banana, while a bunch of other bananas stick out from his pocket. Affirming the persistence of racist stereotyping, Peanut closely resembles Mose. Moreover, a 1909 postcard drawn by Outcault and currently housed in the National Museum of African American History and Culture, shows a black boy with a wide grin who closely resembles Peanut, eating a watermelon. It is, of course, revealing that both figures are shown gleefully eating exotic fruit. Already, Peanut's name evokes food. His eating bananas echoes racist imagery that associates black people with uncontrollable "base" instincts such as eating and with monkeys. Food, as epitomized by *Max und Moritz*, also plays a prominent role in children's culture, since (from the adult perspective) children still need to be socialized into containing instincts such as the drive to eat. Apart from Peanut, nonwhite characters, even in racist forms, are by and large absent in the pages of the magazine. Peanut himself usually reappeared in the title for the jokes section and for some time in a brief comic strip (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 "Jolly Jokes" title image with Peanuts' head. *Beano*, 11 December 1938. Copyright DC Thomson & Co.

The Jokes section, providing "Lots of merry jokes for you—to cheer you up when you're feeling blue" (August 20, 1938), is headed by Peanut's smiling face, holding a curving something that he seems to have bitten into but that does not look edible. The slogans championing the page

change each week. The *Beano* from December 31, 1938, declares, "Peanut is black as jet —his page is a winner you can bet!" whereas the one from February 11, 1939, promises, "Peanut's jokes are bright an' snappy—the very thing to make you happy." Once again, the functions of the children's book, often personified as a child's companion and friend, are taken over by the comics magazine. The Jokes section in these early *Beano* magazines is also a page that usually contains advertisements, often for other comics magazines, and these advertisements usually offer candy as incentives. There is even a comic strip, *The Magic Lollypop*, that revolves around fantasies of food, especially candy, fantasies that children are very likely to indulge in and which also mark the establishment of a consumer culture.

Apart from the stereotyping informing Peanut's appearance and being, other (white) children in the *Beano* are less conformist. Most notable among these children is Pansy Potter, the Strongman's daughter, who first appeared in the Christmas issue of December 17, 1938. Stronger than most characters she encounters in her world, she rectifies a vast range of problems through sheer strength and thus rejects clichés associated with respectable girlhood. Already, her appearance rejects femininity: her hair stands up in spikes around her head, her gestures are ungainly, and her hands and feet are big. She comes across as a less attractive version of Rosie the Riveter, whose image adorned American propaganda posters a few years after Pansy's first appearance.

In what seems to be a rare moment in the magazine, the editor himself appears in Pansy's first comic strip to introduce her to readers in the manner of a television presenter: "Boys and girls meet Pansy Potter, daughter of the world's strongest man." While order is maintained in the panels as Pansy shakes the editor's hand, things start getting out of hand as soon as she realizes that she has dropped her penny. Unaware, she tugs too much on the editor's arm as she bends down, causing him to scream. Pansy does eventually find her penny but only after the entire office has been turned upside down. Once again, the carnivalesque trope of the world turned over structures a comic with a child protagonist. Pansy's disruptions are good-natured and unintentional, as in the story where she takes the initiative to search for what she thinks is a newt for a biology class (February 6, 1939): she ends up with a crocodile, a terrified teacher, and a guard chasing after her.

The gags in Pansy's stories rely on her impossible strength and her ability to do unexpected, unthinkable tasks. Tellingly, she does not use this strength against adults unless they do wrong. A story from March 16, 1940, shows Pansy being punished for unintentionally breaking a blackboard while cleaning it. Banished to the roof, Pansy ends up breaking, bending, and fusing the iron railings on the roof into a rope. On seeing her furious teacher waiting for her at the end of the rope, Pansy is terrified. Crucially, instead of using her strength to beat the teacher, she is the one who is beaten. This final scene, likely to lack credibility for regular readers of *Pansy*, is covered up by a note from the editor: "I've stuck a piece of paper over this painful scene." Only symbols of violence and sound effects are to be seen (see Figure 5).
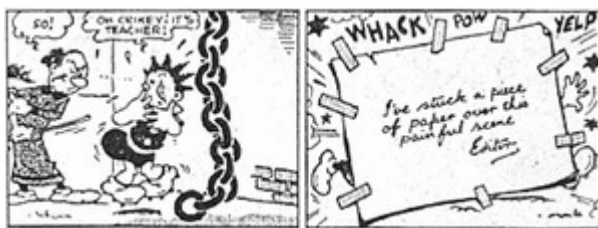
Figure 5 "Pansy Potter, the Strongman's Daughter," final two panels: Pansy is beaten up by her teacher. *Beano*, 16 March 1940. Copyright DC Thomson & Co.

Hence, despite being queer and bending norms, the children of *The Beano* remained at the service of adult authority, even going so far as to actively help in the war effort. In a story from November 19, 1939, Pansy ends up finding and punching a German submarine. She then informs the captain of a British destroyer of the enemy's presence and shoots down a second German submarine with his encouragement. On reaching shore, Pansy is awarded a medal for her courage. Similarly, in a story from March 9, 1940, Pansy and her friend run into two escaped German POWs, with swastikas on their caps and even, we find out later, on their underwear. She not only stuffs them back into the tunnel they had dug but also uproots a tree and replants it on that spot. Other *Beano* children likewise helped with the war. Tin-Can Tommy, the Clockwork Boy, and Baby chase a Nazi spy into a police cell and are rewarded with a sumptuous feast (March 23, 1940); Mikki from *Hooky's Magic Bowler Hat* also catches a Nazi spy (December 30, 1939); and Lord Snooty traps a Nazi submarine (January 6, 1940). The list is long, and it shows that these children, already unrealistically agentic, participated actively in the war and thus engaged with the very real experience and desires of their young readers while reinforcing the spirit of patriotism, consequently fulfilling a patriotic, pedagogical agenda.

"It all starts with a kid and his books," Brian Cremins writes in his book on nostalgia and superhero comics (3). Indeed, comics often form a memorable part of childhood reading. They are, at the same time, strictly relegated to childhood; giving up reading comics, even throwing them away, is seen as part of the rite of passage toward adulthood (Gibson). Such real, lived childhood practices are, however, very different from the childhoods painted in the comic strips discussed here. Regardless of intended readership, the children of comic strips are freer, more agentic. Their actions and the consequences of those actions are far more exaggerated than those faced by most children. The agency of the comics children discussed in this chapter reverberates beyond the comics page, the newspapers, magazines, and albums in which they find themselves; they are sociopolitical agents taking part in the work of entertainment, acculturation, and education. While entertaining their readers, these children also prepare them for the real world, propagating the world view of the dominant class.

The comics child has a fluid body, anchored in commercial desires, while also incarnating, in skewed ways, changing notions of not only childhood and children but also collective notions of the permissible and impermissible, of the very constituents of the social fabric in which they find themselves. This body, its actions, and its world are distinctive because it is often carnivalesque while maintaining an affective hold, combining nostalgia (for adult readers) and comfort and companionship (for young readers). A history of children

in comics is, in part, also a history of the reconfiguration of moral education to attract and convince young readers. Furthermore, while over the years, the entertaining potential of comics children has been exploited to the full, they, even the naughtiest of them, continue to reflect the general moral landscape of society, through the implicit labeling of the children as naughty and deviant, which reaffirms how good children are expected to act, as well as through tempering entertaining deviancy and queerness with acceptable and even commendable behavior.

The horrific visual fascination wielded by Struwwelpeter and the prankful lightness of Max and Moritz remain as undercurrents in later comics children, who retain the carnivalesque inclinations of their predecessors while adopting less directly pedagogic and more unabashedly commercial tactics. As confirmed by these early works, comics children were always made to attract the eye and delight the imagination before educating their young readers. Entertainment and education remain the core business of comics for children and sociopolitical commentary is often only to be gleaned between the lines (or panels); comics for a broader audience, such as *Yellow Kid*, energetically entertain while channeling sociopolitical commentary.

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