Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages

Part XI

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Frontispiece: Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 13 Oct., 1968.

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I close this "Biblical Boffos" section of this "Comical Cultures" essay by looking at two cartoons about other ancient cultures tangentially related to the Biblical world. [I am shoe-horning these in here because, unlike the plethora of cartoons about ancient Greece and Rome we will examine in the following section, cartoons about non-Biblical ancient Near Eastern cultures are almost never found in the American funny pages.] The silly wordplay in a 1906 George Herman *Krazy Kat* strip (**Fig. 1420**) does assume that readers would recognize the name of the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, presumably through the references to Nineveh found in the Bible, if not through the mid-19th-century excavations of Austen Henry Layard at ancient Nineveh (near Mosul in modern-day northern Iraq) that yielded Neo-Assyrian sculptures now in the British Museum in London and the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. Wesley Osam's 2008 comic strip (**Fig. 1421**) about archaeologists uncovering humorously literal "Hittites" assumes a more surprising recognition of the name of that powerful 2nd-millennium B.C.E. Late Bronze Age Anatolian empire.

Comical Classics

A major trend in Classical studies over the last few decades has been the re-evaluation of ancient Greek culture in terms of postcolonial theory. As the ancient historian Irad Malkin put it in his 2004 article 'Postcolonial Concepts and Ancient Greek Colonization":

> Too often, ancient Greeks are treated as though they were both "white" and "European," the people who both put together and kept rocking the cradle of Western civilization. The fact that Europe defines itself in terms of the ancient Greek world does not, of course, mean that the ancient Greeks owed their self-definition, in terms of either racial prejudices or national units, to categories important to modern Europe.

In this re-evaluation, the Greek world from the Mycenaean Late Bronze Age (ca. 1600–1200 B.C.E.) to the emergence of the Greek city-states in the Archaic period (ca. 750–480 B.C.E.) is now seen as peripheral to the much more powerful, Semitic-speaking state systems of Egypt, the Levant, and Mesopotamia. Yet, as we have noted above, Mesopotamia—the birthplace of "civilization" where, among other things, writing, geometry, astronomy, epic poetry, and wheeled transport originated—is virtually absent in the American funny pages; and the Levantine Phoenicians do not appear at all. And although ancient-Egyptian-themed gags are common in the funny pages, ancient Egypt

is treated in these cartoons and comic strips as an exotic “Other” unrelated to the Western tradition. The dearth of cartoons about ancient Near Eastern cultures may be explained by the “culturally bound background” ignorance of American readers about the ancient world, although a general anti-Semitism in Western culture may also play a part.

In contrast, cartoons and comic strips about the Classical world abound in the American funny pages, and cartoonists and comic strip artists can assume that their readers are at least somewhat familiar with the mythology and major monuments of the ancient Greeks and Romans. But, as we have seen with cartoons about the Stone Age and ancient Egypt, these Classical-themed cartoons and comic strips also reflect “culturally bound background” misconceptions about ancient Greece and Rome

We begin with a short excursus on Classical allusions in comic books.

Fig. 1422. Curt Swan, Cover art, *Superman’s Girlfriend Lois Lane* #92, D. C. Comics, May, 1969. (From Kovacs, 2011, fig. 1.1.)

Fig. 1423. David Mazzucchelli, Cover art, *Daredevil* #226, Marvel Comics, Jan., 1986. (From Kovacs and Marshall, 2011, fig. 0.1.)

In their introduction to the 2011 volume of essays *Classics and Comics*, the editors George Kovacs and C.W. Marshall state: "In terms of the history of the reception of the ancient world, comics represent an important and unexplored corpus of material that reflects popular conceptions of antiquity." They continue:

> Classics is a discipline that embodies, even in its name, the high-culture associations and aspirations of Western culture. The discipline of Classics has also changed in recent decades, however, expanding its purview to include academic discussion of the uses to which antiquity has been put in more recent times. The reception of Classics (itself a refiguring of a concern for "the Classical tradition") looks at the place of Greece and Rome and at times the idea of Greece and Rome in later cultures. However, it also recognizes that any audience for a text is a legitimate one and that our interpretations of an ancient source is itself mediated by those receptions and interpretations that have accumulated over the centuries. If any reading is an interpretations (and therefore a reinterpretation), our understand of an ancient source will be enriched by looking at how that moment has been understood and read by others. Sometime those reading will be poorly or mistakenly informed. That does not make them illegitimate, however.

Kovacs and Marshall note several parallels between Classics and comics (by which they exclusively mean comic books), beginning with the retrospective periodization of American comic books according to the Hesiodic metallic ages: the Golden Age (comic books from the 1930's and 1940's); the Silver Age (1950's and 1960's); and the Bronze Age (1970's and 1980's). They also see a parallel between Classical scholars and comic-book fans, both of whom reread and reinterpret a small corpus of non-linear documents to reconstruct a consistent narrative.

As examples of how comic books reflect "popular conceptions of antiquity" Kovacs and Marshall analyzed a 1969 D.C. comic book where Lois Lane was transformed into a female centaur (**Fig. 1422**) and a 1986 Marvel comic book where the Daredevil fights a Roman gladiator (**Fig. 1423**). They note that the covers of both comic books are misleading: Lois was only temporarily transformed by magic into a centaur ("the unbreakable spell" on the cover refers to a separate story about Supergirl's horse Comet) and the gladiator the Daredevil is fighting in the chiastic design of David Mazzucchelli's cover turns out to be a modern New Yorker in costume. Kovacs and Marshall observe ". . . a popular classical model was being used to sell a superhero comic and even though the connection was not quite as integrated as we might have wanted, here was an intersection of the ancient world and modern comics."

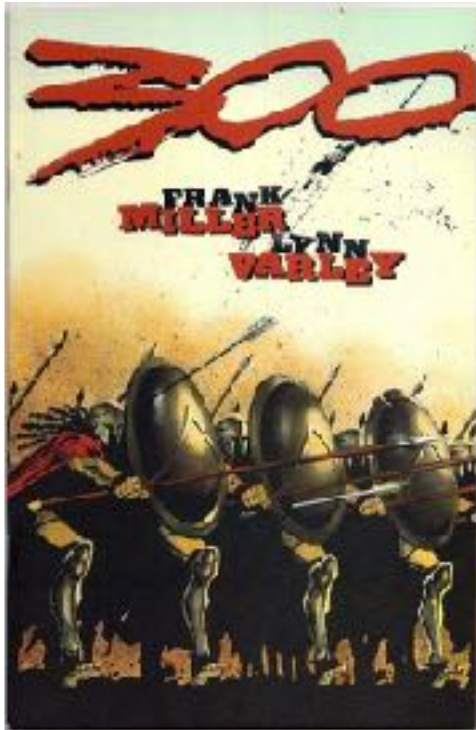

Fig. 1424. Frank Miller, *300*, Dark Horse Comics, 1998.

Fig. 1425. Everett E. Hibbard, Cover art for *The Flash* #10**,** D.C. Comics, Oct., 1940.

Fig. 1426. William Moulton Marston and Harry G. Peter, Panel from *All Star Comics #8*, D.C. Comics, Dec. 1941.

Fig. 1427. George Perez, *Wonder Woman Omnibus*, D.C. Comics, 2015.

In her 2019 article, "From God to Superhero: The Reception of Mercury in Comics," the Israeli scholar Bar Leshem put forth a typology of Classical-themed comic books:

> I propose a novel division of the portrayal of classical themes in comics into four types. Firstly, there are comic books that are based on, or inspired by, events from Greco-Roman history. The second type concerns specific gods who are referred to by their name and their traditional characteristics. This type can be further divided into two sub-types: (1) Comic books in which the entire narrative is based on Greco-Roman gods. (2) Narratives in which familiar Greco-Roman gods enter the world of superheroes, but do not constitute the sole protagonists. The third type refers to figures or storylines that are inspired by the classical world, but not by a specific god, character or event. Finally, the fourth type refers to superheroes who are clearly inspired by specific Greco-Roman gods or other mythological figures.

A notable example of Leshem's first type of comic book—those based on events from Greco-Roman history—is Frank Miller's *300*, the 1998 comic book (**Fig. 1424**) that was later made in to a block-buster movie in 2006 and a video game in 2007. Miller, who had co-authored the 1986 Daredevil comic (**Fig. 1423**), was criticized for the historical inaccuracies in his tale about the heroic 480 B.C.E. Spartan stance at Thermopylae against Xerxes' invading Persian army (such as his downplaying the role that Leonidas' non-Spartan allies had in the battle, not to mention the monsters that fought on Xerxes' side). Kovacs and Marshall, however, praised the epic scope of Miller's *300* and thought that the Spartan warriors fighting with a notable lack of clothing was evocative of the heroic nudity found in Classical vase painting and sculpture; Kovacs and Marshall also noted that, between the time Miller wrote *300* and when it came out as a movie, Miller's tale took on a new meaning in the post 9/11 world, with resonances of a militarily superior superpower invading a much weaker country.

Leshem's typology of Classical-themed comic books is based in her analysis of the evolution of the D.C. Comics' superhero The Flash, who originally appeared in 1940 (**Fig. 1425**) with the winged helmet and winged boots iconography associated with the Roman god Mercury. Another notable example of the overlap between Classical mythology and the modern comic book is Wonder Woman, the character William Moulton Marston created in 1941 (**Fig. 1426**) as a Nazi-fighting feminist archetype for young American girls. Marston could assume that his readers would have the sufficient "culturally bound background knowledge" to recognize the Classical allusions to the Amazons and the Olympian deities, but not be so well versed in Classical literature as to

be disturbed that he had transformed the Amazons from Greek-fighting villains to world-saving heroines or that Hyppolyta, the Queen of the Amazons who was killed by by Heracles (or by Theseus in other Classical versions), somehow survived to become the mother of Wonder Woman. [It was not until well after Marston's death in 1947 that it was revealed that Wonder Woman was in part based on Olive Byrne, who lived in a *ménage à trois* with Marston and his wife, or that Marston's propensity to depict Wonder Woman in kinky bondage poses was the part of the "sex love training" the psychologist Marston advocated to promote beneficial psychological submission; George Perez's cover to D.C. Comics' 2015 reprinting of the Wonder Woman comic books (**Fig. 1427**) is evocative of this eroticism.]

Fig. 1428. C. C. Beck, Cover art for *Whiz Comics #2,*, Fawcett Comics, Feb., 1940.

Fig. 1429. Al Plastino, Cover art for *Action Comics* #293, D.C. Comics, Oct., 1962.

In his 2009 article, "Saying 'Shazam': The Magic of Antiquity in Superhero Comics," Luke Pitcher highlighted the role that occult magic played in Classical-themed comics:

> The popular consciousness more readily associates superhero comics with science-fiction than with the occult. There is justice in this perception. Superhero comics usually go to some trouble to establish a scientific or pseudo-scientific basis for the powers of their major characters. Marvel's X-Men derive their abilities from genetic mutation; the alien cell structure of DC's Superman is a natural transducer for the energy from Earth's Sun. Also common are heroes

> who enhance their capabilities through advanced technology. Witness Batman's utility belt, or Iron Man's suit of powered armour.
>
> Nonetheless, the realm of magic is an important element in the universes of DC and Marvel comics. Sorcerers and magically empowered heroes appear from the very earliest days of the medium. . . .
>
> References to the ancient world tend to congregate around these mystically inclined characters. Magical power in superhero comics commonly has its roots in the ancient world. . . .
>
> In itself, the link between antiquity and magical power in superhero comics is unsurprising. Real-world occult and magical traditions have repeatedly stressed their authenticity and authority by claiming access to the secret wisdom of a remote past.

Pitcher notes that the first connections between antiquity and the magical power of comic-book superheroes were associated with ancient Babylon, such as the Vishanti spell book from the temple of Marduk used by Marvel Comics' Dr. Strange or the magical helmet containing the essence of the Babylonian god Nabu that empowers D.C. Comics' Dr. Fate. Greco-Roman magic entered the comic-book universe with the appearance in 1940 of Fawcett Comics' Captain Marvel, who obtained his super powers by incanting SHAZAM—the magical acronym of the names of Solomon, Hercules, Antaeus, Zeus, Atlas, and Mercury; C.C. Beck's cover of the 1940 *Whiz Comics* where Captain Marvel was first introduced (**Fig. 1428**) is clearly derivative of the famous 1938 *Action Comics #1* where Superman first appeared. [National Comics, the publisher of *Action Comics* and predecessor to D.C. Comics, would later sue Fawcett Comics for copyright infringement; the case was eventually settled out of court and Fawcett sold the Captain Marvel trademark to Marvel Comics in 1967.]

Another example of Classical magic in comic books is Supergirl's horse Comet. In a 1962 *Action Comics* (**Fig. 1429**), Comet telepathically tells Supergirl his backstory: originally a centaur named Biron in ancient Greece, the witch Circe had attempted to transform him to full humanity but her plan was foiled by an enemy sorcerer and Biron was transformed into a horse instead; to make up for this, Circe gave him a potion that endowed him with the speed, invulnerability, strength, immortality, and telepathic power of the Greek gods.

Given the emphasis Classical scholarship puts on the analysis of textual sources, it is hardly surprising that scholars such as Bar Leshem, Luke Pitcher, and the contributors to Kovacs and Marshall's 2011 *Classics and Comics* and to its 2016 successor *Son of Classics and Comics*, have focused exclusively on the longer sequential narratives of superhero comic books and graphic novels and do not address the types of Classical-themed cartoons and comics strips we will examine in this section. But, as I hope to show below, excluding the genre of funny-pages comics is a missed opportunity to examine the "popular conceptions of antiquity" as reflected in the comics medium.

Fig. 1430. Theatrical release poster for *Hercules*, Walt Disney Pictures, 1997.

Compared to superhero comic books, animated cartoons have also been given relatively short shrift in scholarly Classical reception studies. One exception is the Walt Disney 1997 animated movie *Hercules* (**Fig. 1430**), the eclectic allusions in which have been subjected to a recent extensive study by Antonio María Martín Rodríquez:

> Disney's *Hercules* exemplifies the ways in which classical culture expands, recreates itself, and acquires new meanings in popular culture. In the first place, the film is the product of a careful research process that results not in a mere derivative copy of the canonical versions but in freedom for its

creators to adapt the story to their own tastes and interests, as well as to the specific conditions of its context. Alongside the free use of classical mythological sources, in *Hercules* we can see examples of hybridization with second-degree mythological sources, such as successful popular movies, and with elements borrowed from prototypical heroes of audiovisual culture such as Superman. To this, the film adds some subtle Biblical subtexts, as well as recycled material from the Disney vault.

As Luis Unceta Gómez and others have noted, comic-book superheroes were to a large degree modeled on Heracles (to give him his Greek name, which for some reason is not used in modern popular culture, even when other figures are given their Hellenic designations). But Disney's *Hercules,* and its 1998 spin-off television *Hercules: The Animated Series*, is hardly the robust hero whose twelve labors we see represented in the metopes of the mid-5th-cen. B.C.E. Temple of Zeus at Olympia. The "freedom for its creators to adapt the story to their own tastes and interests" has transformed Hercules into a goody-goody character that bears little resemblance to the ruthless and mentally unhinged figure we see in the plays of Euripides or Seneca or to the gluttonous and sex-obsessed buffoon of Classical Athenian satyr plays. The American watering-down of the Hercules story can be seen in the Disney bowdlerization of making Hercules a legitimate son of Zeus and Hera rather than the child of Zeus and his great-granddaughter Alcmene, whom Zeus slept with in the disguise of her husband Amphitryon. Another Disney revision to the Heracles myth—making Hades an evil villain whose attempts to overthrow Zeus are foiled by Hercules—simplifies the complexity of the ancient Heracles cult which, as detailed in the Nekuia episode of Book XI of the *Odyssey*, viewed the demigod as having an afterlife in both Mount Olympus as well as in the underworld.

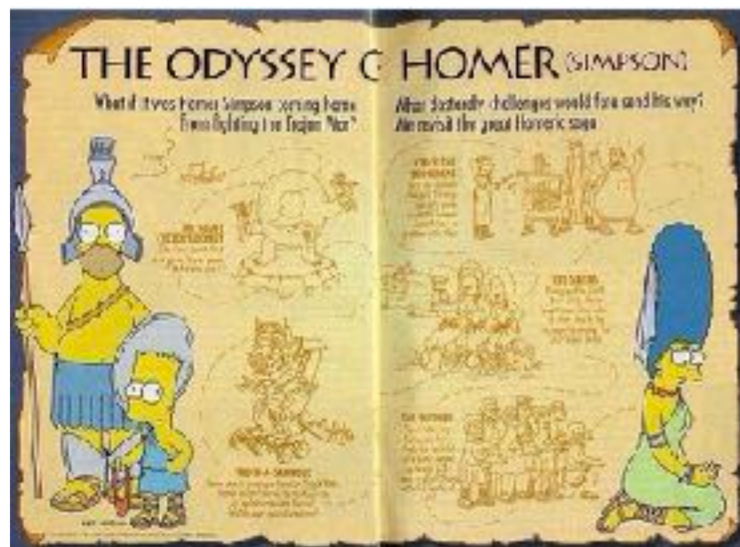

Fig. 1431. Andrew Kreisberg, Josh Lieb, and Matt Warburton, "D'oh, Brother Where Art Thou?" *The Simpsons*, March, 2002.

Another Classical-themed cartoon animation is the silly *The Simpsons* re-make of the *Odyssey* (**Fig. 1431**). In this episode, which was part of *The Simpsons*' "Tales from the Public Domain" series and which aired in the show's thirteenth season on television, Homer Simpson replaces Odysseus, and along his way home from Troy encounters a donut Cyclops and a Circe who turns his crew into pigs that Homer eats. The authors of this episode, Andrew Kreisberg, Josh Lieb, and Matt Warburton, assumed that their viewers would be familiar with the basic outline of the Homeric epic as well as with the doofus, gluttonous, nature of Homer Simpson.

Fig. 1432. Pedro Cifuentes, Title page to *Historia del arte en cómic 1. El mundo clásico*, 2019.

And just as we saw with the works of André Houot (**Figs. 818–819**) and Éric Le Brun (**Figs. 820–821**), who used the comics medium to provide realistic depictions of the Paleolithic age, so too have comics artists used the medium to depict ancient Greece and Rome. One notable example is the Spanish secondary-school Social Science teacher and comics artist Pedro Cifuentes, whose first volume of the *Historia del arte en cómic* covers the Classical world (**Fig. 1432**).

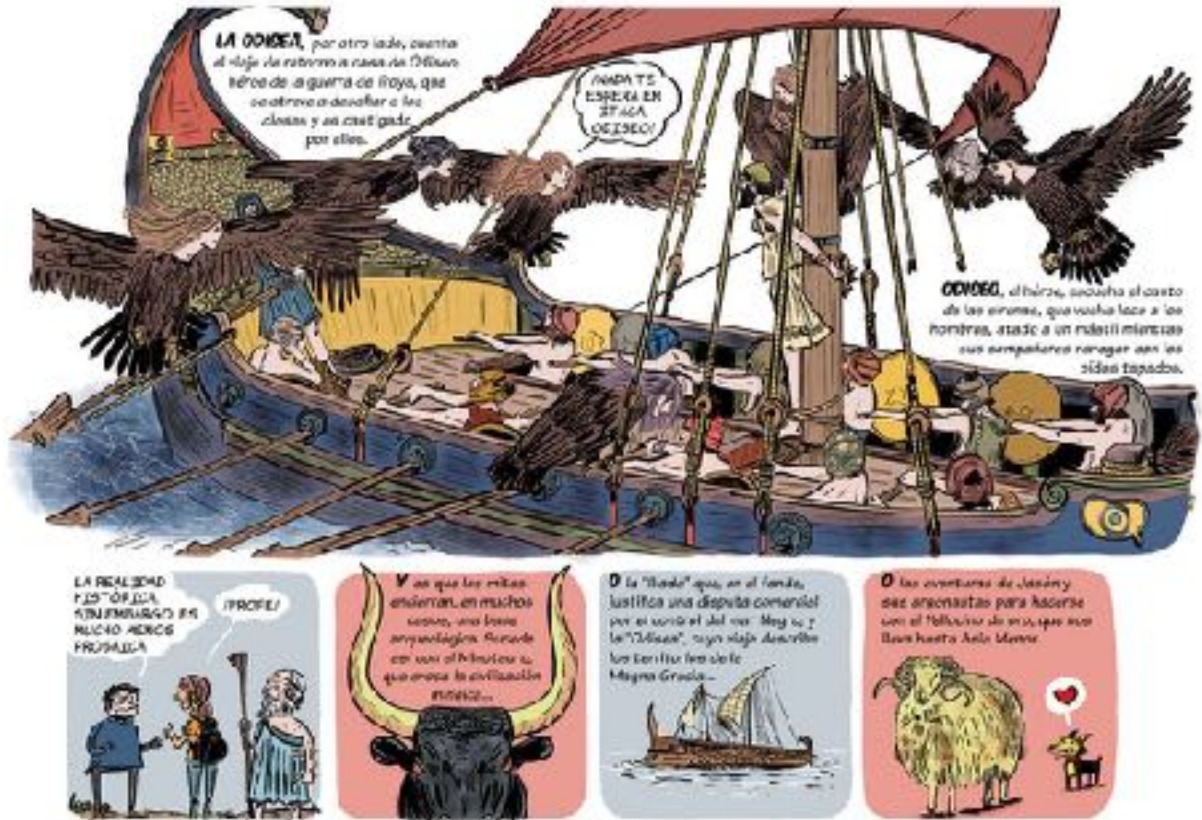

Fig. 1433. Pedro Cifuentes, *Historia del arte en cómic 1. El mundo clásico*, 2019, p. 42.

Fig. 1434. Detail of an Attic Red-Figure Stamnos (“The Siren Vase”). From Vulci, 480–470 B.C.E. The British Museum.

Fig. 1435. Pedro Cifuentes, *Historia del arte en cómic 1. El mundo clásico*, 2019, p. 43.

Fig. 1436. Marble sculpture of Aphrodite, Pan, and Eros. From Delos, ca. 100 B.C.E. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Employing the conceit of a fanciful school trip to Greece, Cifuentes has a "Profe" explain Classical Greek culture to his students, which we see in a series of single-panel vignettes accompanied by informational texts. On one page of his *History* (**Fig. 1433**) Cifuentes gives an overview of the *Odyssey* using an adaptation of an early Classical Attic Red-Figure vase painting of Odysseus' encounter with the Siren (**Fig. 1434**). On the

following page (**Fig. 1435**), Cifuentes discusses ancient Greek religion, with one panel showing a humorous vignette of a glass-half-empty man debating with a glass-half-full woman whether Zeus is showing anger or pleasure by sending a storm. In another panel on this page, the "Profe" points to the sculptural group of Pan, Aphrodite, and Eros now in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens (**Fig. 1436**) and tells his students that everyone in antiquity would recognize who was being represented; the student's silly, but apparently actual, response—that they clearly are a slimy guy, a woman who is going to beat him up, and an angel—matches the playfulness of this late Hellenistic work.

Fig. 1437. John Buscema, Cover art, *The, Iliad*, Marvel Classics Comics #26, July, 1977.

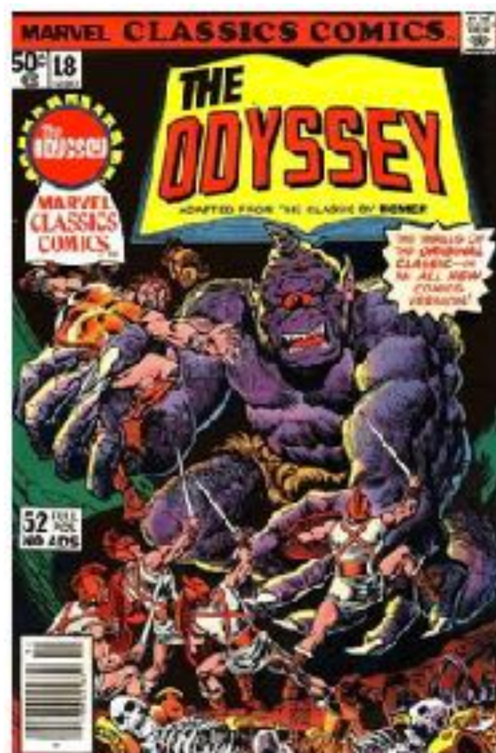

Fig. 1438. Ernie Chan, Cover art, *The Odyssey*, Marvel Classics Comics #18, Dec., 1976.

The Homeric epics seem to have an irresistible pull on comics artists. In 1976 and 1977 Marvel Comics issued comic-book versions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as part of their Classic Comics series (**Figs. 1437–1438**). The Marvel Classic Comics adapted famous works of (Western) literature as a way to circumvent the Comics Code Authority (CCA) prohibition against the depiction of "scenes of excessive violence," "scenes of horror," and "all lurid, unsavory, [and] gruesome illustrations." [Other titles in this series include *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and H. Rider Haggard's racist and

imperialist novel *She*—with the “she-who-must-be-obeyed” title character depicted on the cover in scandalously skimpy clothing.] By presenting adaptations “from the literary epic by Homer” and “the classic by Homer” Marvel was able to obtain the CCA seal of approval for comic books with covers illustrating a violent sword fight and an ogreish unicorn Cyclops crushing Achaeans. [If there had been a Classics Comics Code Authority, the anachronistic Roman armor worn by the Trojans and Greeks on these covers would not have passed muster, even if the background building was adorned with appropriate downward tapering columns like those depicted on Late Bronze Age frescoes and like Sir Arthur Evans reconstructed at the Palace of Minos at Knossos.]

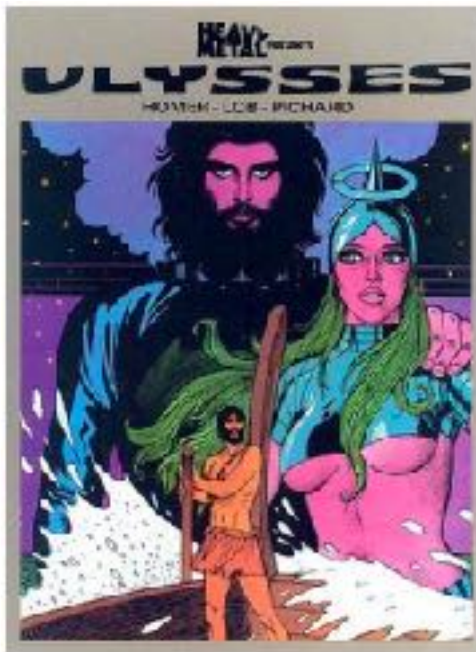

Fig. 1439. George Pichard, Cover art to *Ulysses*, Heavy Metal, 1978.

Fig. 1440. José María Martín Saurí, Cover art to *The Odyssey*, Heavy Metal, 1983.

Fig. 1441. José María Martín Saurí, Illustration for *Odiseo*, 1983.

The French sci-fi and horror comics magazine *Métal Hurlant* ("howling metal") produced two separate versions of the *Odyssey* that were translated and republished by the American spinoff *Heavy Metal*. Like its French progenitor, *Heavy Metal* comics were geared to adolescent male readers and featured cheesecake depictions of scantily clad curvaceous women. (And, like the American underground comix of the 60's and 70's, these *Heavy Metal* comics would not receive Comics Code approval.) The *Heavy Metal* cover art to the *Ulysses* by Georges Pichard and Jacques Lob (**Fig. 1439**) gives us Zeus and Athena looking down at Odysseus from Mount Olympus, with Zeus being depicted as a stern Christ-like figure and Athena shown wearing a revealing tank-top breastplate and sporting an absurd suggestive spiked helmet penetrating a floating circle. Similarly, the *Heavy Metal* cover to Francisco Navarro and José María Martín Saurí's *The Odyssey* (**Fig. 1440**) gives us an overly musculated Odysseus standing next to a Circe in skimpy lingerie. [As risqué as this Circe might have been for Americans in 1983, Circe's more revealing outfit in José María Martín Saurí's Spanish version of this scene (**Fig. 1441**) would, presumably, have been too much.]

Fig. 1442. José María Martín Sauri, illustrations for *The Odyssey*, Heavy Metal, 1983. (From Jenkins, 2011, figs. 16.1 and 16.2)

In his 2011 article "Heavy Metal Homer. Countercultural Appropriations of the *Odyssey* in Graphic Novels," Thomas E. Jenkins analyzed the *Heavy Metal* versions of the

Odyssey by Georges Pichard and Jacques Lob and by Francisco Navarro and José María Martín Saurí. Jenkins locates both works within

> . . . a Zeitgeist . . . heavily influenced by the countercultural impulses of the '60s and early '70s. Intriguingly, both adaptations must negotiate the same interpretive stumbling block: the return of Odysseus to his faithful wife, Penelope. If the *Odyssey* à la *Heavy Metal* is to be read as a fantastically erotic voyage through a midlife crisis, any wife is at best a dead end, and Penelope—as spouse par excellence—even more so.

Jenkins characterizes Georges Pichard and Jacques Lob *Ulysses* as "an unabashedly sexual odyssey: Odysseus as a randy swinger on a particularly psychedelic trip. Odysseus' wandering are thus figured as an erotic sci-fi voyage, replete with exaggerated sexual overtones and a surprising amount of gratuitous, even campy, nudity." In analyzing Francisco Navarro and José María Martín Sauri's version, Jenkins focuses on the ending (**Fig. 1442**):

> . . .a disconcertingly pensive scene, one in which Odysseus and Penelope stare attach other silently, banished to the background, as the camera zooms away from the garden. It is a powerful, defamiliarizing ending: a single panel page in a comic that normally resists them. Moreover, the heavy black backgrounds that once defined the affair with Circe are gone, replaced by vast open spaces both of air and patio. As Virgil does in his own *Aeneid*, Navaro and Saurí have thrown at the reader a literally "open" ending: one that admits of myriad interpretative possibilities. This includes the intimation of Penelope and Odysseus are not actually to be reunited or at least not happily reunited. There is a melancholy to the composition: in the smallness of the humans, in the autumnal array of the falling leaves, in the stillness of motion, and, above all, in the quiet. And—it goes without saying—there is none of the sex of the Homeric version or the flesh of Navarro and Saurí's previous sixty-three pages. What is any reader—Heavily Metallic or otherwise—to make of this?

[We might also note that Jenkins praises "Saurí's careful attention to detail [including] myriad 'classical' touches, from ancient amphorae to statuary to architecture." The culture police of our putative Classics Comics Code Authority might object that the mid-6th-century B.C.E. Attic Black-Figure eye-cup kylix and amphora, the round temple with a Renaissance-style domed roof, or the vaguely Classical statue of a nude helmeted warrior seen in the **Fig. 1442** illustrations are inappropriate for a story about the 12th-century B.C.E. Trojan War.]

Fig. 1443. Cover to Virgin Steele, *The House of Atreus* album, 2009.

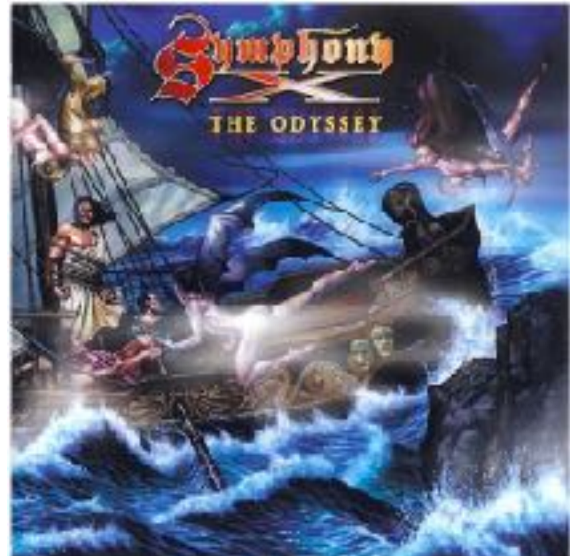

Fig. 1444. Cover to Symphony, *The Odyssey* album, Inside Out Music, 2002.

[And as long as we are on the topic, we might note that Classical reception scholars such as KFB Fletcher have documented the popularity of Trojan War themes in heavy metal music; the Virgin Steele band, for instance, has produced a rock opera based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (with an ersatz late Black-Figure vase painting on their album cover, **Fig. 1443**) and the group Symphony has written a 24-minute song about the *Odyssey* (with a lurid version Odysseus and the Sirens on its album cover, **Fig. 1444**). We might also note that the popular Ubisoft video game *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*, released in 2017, is only tangentially related to the Homeric epic; but, with its remarkable, and mostly well researched, CGI visuals, this action role-playing video game set in the beginning of the Peloponnesian War (431–422 B.C.E.) supplies a surprisingly excellent introduction to the landscape and monuments of Classical Greece.]

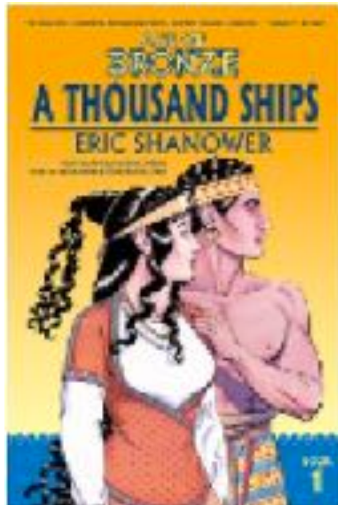

Fig. 1445. Eric Shanower, Title page to *Age of Bronze*, Vol. 1, 2001.

Fig. 1446. Eric Shanower, *Age of Bronze*, "Mycenae Palace Courtyard," (From Shanower, 2005, fig. 1.)

The most notable Trojan War comic book is Eric Shanower's *Age o Bronze. The Story of the Trojan War*, which is described on its website "as the continuing graphic novel series by Eisner Award-winning cartoonist Eric Shanower, [which] presents the complete story of the world-famous War at Troy, freshly retold for the 21st century. All the drama of the ancient and thrilling tradition unfolds before your eyes, with all the familiar people and events of the Trojan War." In 1998, Shanower began publishing his epic comic rendition of the Trojan War in separate fascicles; to date, Shanower has produced thirty-three fascicles which have been collected and republished in four volumes out of a projected seven-volume series (**Fig. 1445**). On the *Age of Bronze* website, Shanower describes the methodology he employs to create his epic comic series:

> Primary sources for *Age of Bronze's* version of the Trojan War story begin with Homer's *Iliad*, include major and minor works from classical Greece and Rome, many Medieval European sources, and continue through Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and beyond. The art of *Age of Bronze* draws upon the archaeological excavations of the places where the story took place: Mycenae, Knossos, and Pylos, among others, and especially Troy itself.
>
> While everything in *Age of Bronze* is based on existing sources, whether mythological or archaeological, the final product is a version for the 21st century. All the comedy, all the tragedy, all the wide canvas of human drama of the Trojan War unfolds within the pages of *Age of Bronze*.

Far from being a mere re-telling of Homer in a comic-book format, Shanower's eclectic use of sources make his *Age of Bronze* an original work of fiction—one, as he says, that is directed towards a contemporary audience. Moreover, Shanower's meticulous attention to archaeologically attested detail puts his visual reconstruction of the Late Bronze Age Aegean world of the Trojan War, such as Agamemnon's palace at Mycenae (**Fig. 1446**), in a different league from the D.C., Marvel, or Heavy Metal comic books we have just examined.

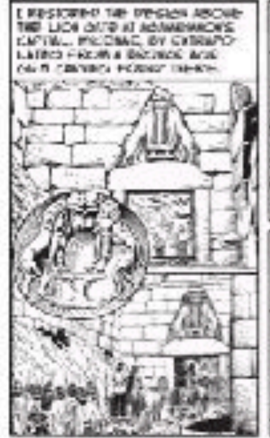

Fig. 1447. Eric Shanower, "Twenty-first Century Troy" (2011), pp. 199, 200, 202, and 206.

And just as Troy Lovata had drawn a comic-strip account (**Fig. 848**) of his experience of writing a Ph.D. thesis in a comic-strip format (an account which appeared in the same 2005 Society of American Archaeology's *Special Issue: Cartoons in Archaeology* where Shanower also published a paper about his Trojan War comics), Eric Shanower drew, for George Kovac and C.W. Marshall's 2011 *Classics and Comics*, a comic-strip account about his creation of the *Age of Bronze*. In this twelve-page "Twenty-first Century Troy" comic strip (**Fig. 1447**), Shanower details how he uses archaeological sources for his visual imagery (such as taking the excavator of Troy, Manfred Korfmann's, advice to model his Trojans on how the Hittites depicted themselves in their art); Shanower also discusses how he struggled to find the right tone for his character's dialogue, something neither absurdly archaic or contemporary (citing Eugene O'Neil's *Mourning Becomes Electra* as a source of inspiration).

Fig. 1448. Eric Shanower, Paris and Helen, detail from *Age of Bronze* 23, 2006. (From Sulprizio, 2011, fig. 15.2)

In the pages of George Kovac and C.W. Marshall's 2011 *Classics and Comics* immediately following Shanower's "Twenty-first Century Troy" comic strip, Chiara Sulprizio presents her analysis, "*Eros* Conquers All. Sex and Love in Eric Shanower's *Age of Bronze.*" Sulprizio observes:

> . . . What Shanower has chosen to foreground and elaborate in the initial volumes are the personal relationships, in particular, the sexual and romantic relationships, that both major and minor characters engage in. . . .
>
> . . . The themes of sex and love figure so prominently at the outset of the story precisely because they are foundational to it. As Shanower himself has pointed out, "The Trojan war began with sex and it ended in violence." Elsewhere he affirms, "You can't get away from the sex in the Trojan War. I mean, that's why the war happened. It's because of sex. I had to show that."

. . .

> At first glance, the decision to depict these youthful romances in this way seems to conform to the interests and fantasies of the comic book genre's historically masculine, adolescent readership. The racy sex scenes and the aggressive subtext underlying some of them may be viewed as providing the series with the elements of shock and scandal required by superhero-themed comics—elements that might otherwise be provided (at least in part) by battle and death scenes. Yet, when fuller consideration is given to both Shanower's authorial objectives and his inclusive approach to recounting the epic, it seems that his romantic depictions instead work to undermine many of the male-defined tropes and conventions that dictate how sexuality and violence are represented in comic books and graphic novels. . . .
>
> . . . Nevertheless, the romantic configuration of [*Age of Bronze*], whether intended or not, foregrounds eros as a force that is as powerful and influential upon human life as war itself. In this Troy, love still serves to fan the flames of war, but just as often it offsets and overcomes them.

And Sulprizio concludes:

> As his sophisticated portrait of Helen makes clear, Shanower has cultivated a distinctive style of representation that takes his work far beyond the realm of the average superhero comic. His honesty, his variety, his humanity, and, in particular, his privileging of eros and its power in the many relationships he delineates—all of these qualities make his account of the Trojan War appealing and accessible to other, nontraditional comic book audiences, which include adult, gay, and female readers. Its amorous and erotic scenes most clearly reveal the ethos of intimacy and inclusivity that guides Shanower's artistic practice and which lies at the heart of his message of peace and personal responsibility. In sum, it is by making love and not war in his own skillfully crafted epic that Shanower ultimately inspires his audience to try to do the same.

And now—finally!— on to Classical-themed cartoons and comic strips in the funny pages.

Compared to comic books and graphic novels with Trojan War themes, Homeric-inspired gag cartoons are rarely found in the funny pages.

Fig. 1449. V.T. Hamblin, *Alley Oop*, 23 Aug., 1939.

An early example of a Trojan-War comic strip is a V.T. Hamblin's 1939 *Alley Oop* comic (**Fig. 1449**), where Dr. Elbert Wonmug used his time machine to transport Alley Oop and himself back to ancient Troy. [Our Classics Comics Code censors would not only object to the strip's anachronistic Classical architecture and sculpture, the Roman armor, and the Victorian ceramics Helen uses to serve coffee (!), but they would strongly object to Wonmug's erroneous assertion "Long thought to be but a Homeric legend, this Trojan War is now known to be the first great war of history!" While Heinrich Schliemann's excavations at Hisarlik in the 1870's demonstrated that Troy was a real place, to claim that the Trojan War was "the first great war of history" is a whopper right up there with the strip's premise that cavemen lived with dinosaurs.]

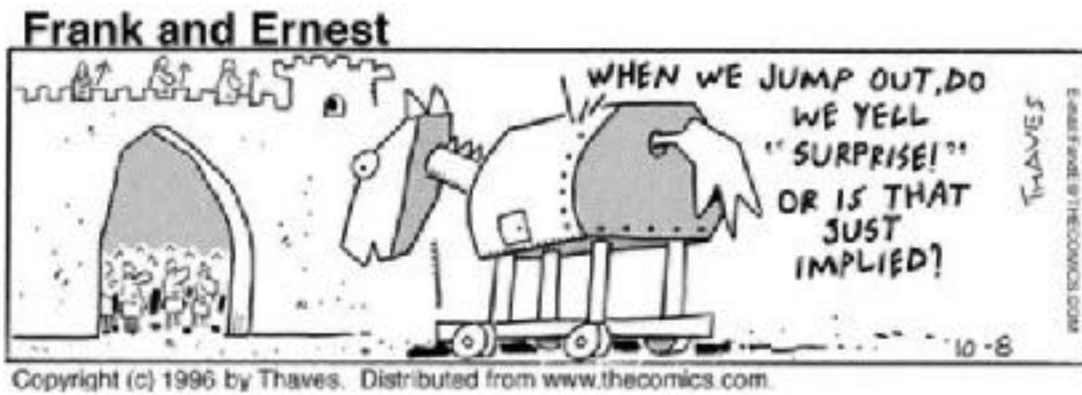

Fig. 1450. Bob Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 8 Oct., 1996.

Fig. 1451. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 1 Feb., 2015.

Fig. 1452. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 11 May, 2015.

Fig. 1453. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 20 Feb, 2012.

One part of the Troy legend that has struck American cartoonists' funny bones is the story of the Trojan Horse, which is alluded to in the *Odyssey* and spelled out in Book II of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Bob Thaves (**Fig. 1450**) cracks a joke about a surprise party; Mike Peters (**Fig. 1451**) transforms the horse into a frisbee to make an "inverse humorous uchronía" gag about the enmity between dogs and cats; and Dave Coverly's Trojan-Horse cartoon (**Fig. 1452**) targets the well known Swedish ready-to-assemble furniture company IKEA. Scott Hilburn took a different tack to make a Trojan-War cartoon gag (**Fig. 1453**), suggesting that the Achilles' Heel of the greatest of the Achaean warriors was actually a "humorous uchronía" shoe fetish. [Our Classics Comics Code censors would object to Achilles wearing Roman armor in this Hilburn cartoon, as well as to the Medieval crenelated towers in the Thaves and Coverly cartoons.]

Fig. 1454. Mark Schultz and Thomas Yeates, *Prince Valiant*, 4 Jan., 2015.

Fig. 1455. Mark Schultz and Thomas Yeates, *Prince Valiant*, 11 Jan., 2015.

Fig. 1456. Dolphin fresco, Palace of Knossos, Minoan, ca. 1500 B.C.E. Herakleion Museum, Crete.

Fig. 1457. "Ladies in Blue" fresco, Palace of Knossos, Minoan, ca. 1500 B.C.E. Herakleion Museum, Crete.

A handful of Trojan-War cartoons aside, the Aegean Late Bronze Age is almost never alluded to in the American funny pages. One exception is a Mark Schultz storyline in the long-running *Prince Valiant* adventure strip that Hal Foster began in 1937. Lured to a "lost island" (Crete) by a Siren queen, our valiant Nordic prince aids her in ridding the island of pirate slavers; as depicted by Thomas Yeates (**Figs. 1454–1455**) the Siren's ruined palace has a vaguely Minoan feel to it, with quotations of the Dolphin fresco (**Fig. 1456**) and the "Ladies in Blue" fresco (**Fig. 1457**) from Sir Arthur Evan's excavations at the Palace of Minos at Knossos. [Our testy Classics Comics Code critics would point out that, in the last panel of the 4 Jan. Sunday strip, Yeates has demurely closed the open bodices of the "Ladies" dresses and that while his bull-headed sculpture and altar with horns of consecration in the next-to-last panel of the 11 Jan. strip are appropriately Minoan, the dolphin sculpture depicted in both strips is off by some 1200 years.]

Fig. 1458. Dan Thompson, *Brevity*, 31 March, 2012.

While readers of the Mark Schultz and Thomas Yeates' *Prince Valiant* story do not necessarily have to pick up on their Minoan allusions, the joke in Dan Thompson's 2012 *Brevity* cartoon (**Fig. 1458**) depends on readers recognizing the clever pun with "baby minotaur." [But our alert Classics Comics Code critics would point out that the Minotaur of Minoan legend had a bull's head and tail but a fully human body.]

Fig. 1459. Eric Shanower, panel from Shanower, 2011, p, 196.

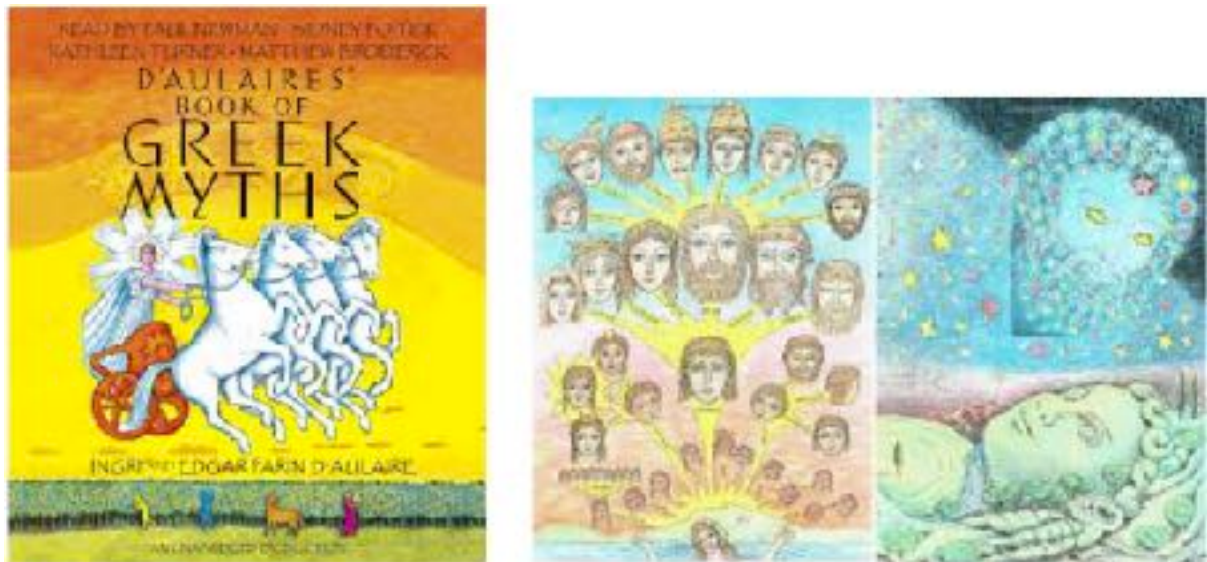

Fig. 1460. Cover and illustration from *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths*.

Many Americans (including Eric Shanower (**Fig. 1459**)—and myself!) first encountered Classical culture through Ingri and Edgar D'Aulaire's *Book of Greek Myths* (**Fig. 1460**), which has been in continuous print for more than fifty years and which has been lauded as one of the most important American children's book of all times. We should not be surprised, then, that the preponderance of Classical-themed cartoons and comic strips found in the American funny pages poke humorous fun at Classical Greek myths or that the American readers of these strips would be expected to recognize the allusions to those myths.

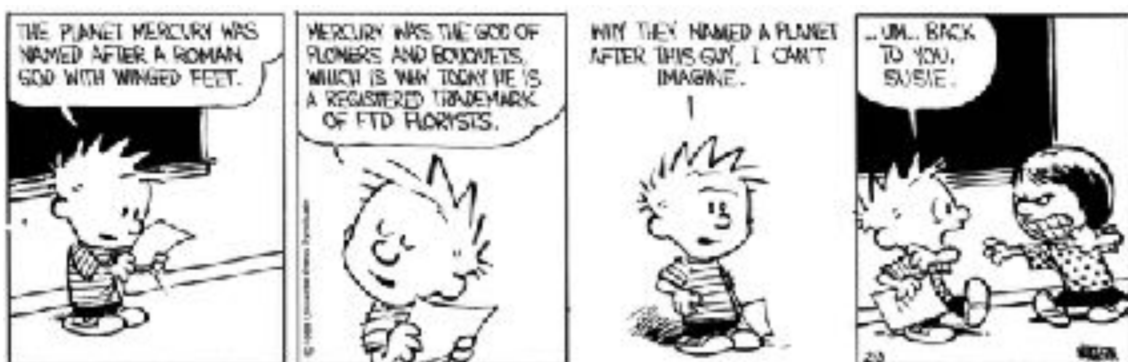

Fig. 1461. Bill Waterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 3 Feb., 1988.

The joke in a Bill Waterson *Calvin and Hobbes* strip (**Fig. 1461**) depends on readers being aware that Calvin's report on Mercury, the "god of flowers and bouquets," is an incongruous misidentification; it is not clear whether, in the final panel, Susie is going after Calvin for his preposterous school report or whether she is upset that, in the next-to-last borderless panel, Calvin adds that he doesn't think the "registered trademark of FTD florists" should have a planet named after him.

Fig. **1462**. Arnie Levin, *The New Yorker*, 8 Jan., 1990.

Fig. **1463**. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 23 June, 2013.

Funny-pages cartoonists can expect that their readers would instantly recognize a long-haired bearded man wearing a robe and standing on a cloud while throwing a lightening bolt as Zeus. We smile at a wordless Arnie Levin *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 1462**) when we see Zeus' dog incongruously retrieve the lightening bolt. A Hilary Price *Rhymes with Orange* strip (**Fig. 1463**) uses a "humorous inchonía" glasses-wearing angel holding an old-fashion telephone receiver to make a similar joke, one that assumes readers know that dogs can be afraid of thunder and lightening. [Our Classics Comics Code critics might be upset with Price's conflation of the iconography of Mount Olympus and the Christian Heaven.]

A similar Greek-themed cartoon iconography that American funny-pages readers are expected to recognize is Eros depicted as a winged baby with the bow and arrows he uses to make people fall in love with the first person they see after being stuck.

Fig. 1464. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 12 Feb., 2008.

Fig. 1465. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 15 May, 2016.

Dan Piraro's *Bizarro* cartoon (**Fig. 1464**), for example, has an "inverse humorous uchronía" Eros arrested for indecent exposure and assault by a patrolman who incongruously falls in love with his dour, bald desk sergeant. A Hilary Price *Rhymes with Orange* cartoon (**Fig. 1465**) again plays with a conflation of Greek and Christian iconography, with Aphrodite making a "humorous uchronía" comment about parental hovering in her complaint that her Cupids are are no angels.

Of all the mythological Greek cartoons and comic strips one finds in the American funny pages, two clichés stand out: the snake-headed Medusa and Sisyphus pushing a boulder up a hill. It would seem that, at one time or another, nearly every major cartoon humorist has felt compelled to try their hand at coming up with a Medusa or Sisyphus gag.

Fig. 1466. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 28 Oct., 2012.

Fig. 1467. Roger L. Phillips, *The Grey Zone*, 2014.

As we have seen with the cartoons of Michelangelo using Medusa's head to create his David sculpture (**Figs. 485–486**) or Medusa petrifying the Easter Island moai (**Figs. 1283–1284**), one way to make a Medusa cartoon gag is to make fun of the Gorgon's ability to turn to stone anyone who gazes at her. visage A Scott Hilburn *The Argyle*

Sweater cartoon (**Fig. 1466**) cleverly combines this with the myth of the Phrygian King Midas, who turned everything he touched to gold. [Our cranky Classics Comics Code critics might be disturbed by the snaky body of Hilburn's Medusa, though they should forgive the obvious "humorous uchronía modern setting of Medusa's home, and they should be happy that Hilburn expects his audience to know who Midas was.] Roger Phillips, who specializes in alien cartoons (cf. **Fig. 1321**), uses this trope to make a Medusa selfie joke (**Fig. 1467**), with the Gorgon holding an anachronistic cell phone. (For other Classical-themed selfie cartoons, cf. **Figs. 455–456** and **458** above.)

Fig. 1468. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 25 June, 2013.

Fig. 1469. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 21 June, 2013.

Fig. 1470. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 7 Sept., 2017.

Fig. 1471. Scott Maynard, *Happle Tea*, 19 July, 2013.

Given the American obsession with hair—especially with women's hair—it comes as no surprise that many Medusa cartoon gags focus on her unusual reptilian coiffure, ignoring her petrifying danger. And what better way to make a joke about Medusa's hair than to put her in a hair salon? A John McPherson *Close to Home* cartoon(**Fig. 1468**) gives us a hairdresser at "Greek Goddess Grooming" who goes wide-eyed and sweats when she sees that her next customer is "the snake-headed chick." Scott Hilburn—who, together with Dan Piraro and Dave Coverly, can't seem to resist Medusa—drew a 2013 *Argyle Sweater* cartoon (**Fig. 1469**) where we need to read the backward window sign "Honey Badger Hair Heaven" in order to get the reference to the 2011 YouTube viral video "The Crazy Nastyass Honey Badger." (For another Hilburn backward window sign cartoon, cf. **Fig. 338**.) Dan Piraro's "Medusa at the Hair Salon" cartoon (**Fig. 1470**) makes a gory gag, with snake blood spilling down Medusa's face and gown as she regrets getting bangs. In Scott Maynard's *Happle Tea* strip (**Fig. 1471**), Medusa cleverly employs a snake charmer to untangle her snake snarls.

Fig. 1472. Dave Blazek, *Loose Parts*, 6 June, 2006.

Fig. 1473. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 26 Dec., 2015.

Dave Blazek (**Fig. 1472**) and Scott Hilburn (**Fig. 1473**) both came up with Medusa gagging-snakes ponytail gags, an idea obvious enough to assign the similarity to independent invention and not plagiarism. [But the Classics Comic Code critics may wonder why Hilburn didn't get the memo to ditch Medusa' snake body, and we all might wonder if her snakeskin brasserie is an article of clothing or part of her body.]

Fig. 1474. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 10 Sept., 2011.

Fig. 1475. John Zakour and Scott Roberts, *Working Daze*, 11 June, 2012.

A Dave Coverly *Speed Bump* cartoon (**Fig. 1474**) gives us an incongruous, balding, Medusa's husband, with the gag assuming readers are aware of the common marital spat about men not cleaning hair out of bath drains. John Zakour and Scott

Roberts's *Working Daze* cartoon (**Fig. 1475**) also puts Medusa in an "inverse humorous uchronía" setting as she explains to her office colleague that her snakes had been hypnotized and that the one snake still upright is sleepwalking.

Fig. 1476. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 31 May, 2018.

Fig. 1477. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 30 May, 2014.

Another approach to making a Medusa cartoon gag is to imagine her as a baby, as Dave Coverly did with another *Speed Bump* cartoon (**Fig. 1476**) where the young Gorgon has snake-eggs for hair. Mark Parisi took a related tack in an *Off the Mark* cartoon (**Fig. 1477**) where the snake-headed Medusa encounters a snake with human heads—humorously suggesting that both were the products of a human-snake miscegenation.

Fig. 1478. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 16 March, 2012.

Fig. 1479. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 16 Feb., 2018.

Several months before Scott Hilburn published his 2012 cartoon about a disastrous date between Medusa and King Midas (**Fig. 1466**), Dan Piraro had drawn a *Bizarro* cartoon (**Fig. 1478**) about an equally disastrous date Medusa had with the snake-ridding St. Patrick. Similarly, following up on his 2011 snake-hair-in-the-shower-drain Medusa cartoon (**Fig. 1474**), Dave Coverly drew another *Speed Bump* cartoon in 2018 (**Fig. 1479**), this time with Medusa's snake hair awkwardly falling into her partner's soup as they dined at a "humorous uchronía" cafe.

Fig. 1480. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 28 May, 2010.

Fig. 1481. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 28 Aug., 2017.

Both Scott Hilburn and Dan Piraro took yet another approach to making a Medusa cartoon gag by having her hair snakes eat things. In a Hilburn 2010 *The Argyle Sweater* cartoon (**Fig. 1480**), one of Medusa's snakes has eaten her pet "Polly wants a cracker" bird, whose box of saltines is open next to the Gorgon (again with that snake body and snakeskin brassiere!), who is reading a newspaper in her "humorous uchronía" modern home. In a Dan Piraro cartoon (**Fig. 1481**) we need both the text and the visual clues to realize that Medusa's snakes have eaten mice in her rodent-infested home; although Piraro seems to be trying to create a Classical setting for this cartoon with Medusa's dress, her bracelets, and the carved ivory box (with his secret"Eyeball of Observation" symbol carved on it), the old-fashioned telephone receiver Medusa uses to call "Athens Pest Control" breaks the spell. [And have Dan Piraro and Hilary Price, who has a similar telephone receiver in her **Fig. 1463** cartoon, forgotten that these receivers were not cordless?]

Fig. 1482. Dan Piraro, 2003.

In a cartoon (**Fig. 1482**) that Dan Piraro considers one of his funniest but which, for obvious reasons, he was unable to get published in the United States (although it did appear in print in Scandinavia), Piraro racily speculates that Medusa also has snake hair "down there." It is unclear whether these genital snakes have the power to petrify, although they seem to have transfixed the "humorous uchronía" male nudist listening to his transistor radio.

Fig. 1483. Jason Adam Katzenstein, *The New Yorker*, 30 April, 2018.

In 1942, Albert Camus published *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (translated into English as *The Myth of Sisyphus* in 1955), comparing the fate of the Ephryan king Sisyphus to the existential question of finding the meaning of life in an indifferent universe. Just as Sisyphus was condemned for his hubris to endlessly roll a huge boulder up a hill only to have it roll back again as it neared the top, so too, Camus maintained, are humans engaged in absurd struggles to create meaningful lives against the "unreasonable silence" of a universe where every day brings us closer to the end of our existence. A Jason Adam Katzenstein's April 2018 *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 1483**) humorously epitomizes this dilemma by having Sisyphus still being unhappy even after he had succeeded in pushing the boulder to the top of the hill.

Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* was hugely popular in America; almost every American undergraduate in the 1960's had read it and Sisyphus became the symbol for all of their existential angst. [A side note: in the past decade, the word "existential" has lost its original philosophical meaning and is now being almost universally used as a simple equivalent for "life-or-death".] And, apparently, many of those undergraduates went on to subscribe to *The New Yorker*, where Sisyphus has become one of the most popular cartoon clichés in that magazine. [At the conclusion to the "Miming the Masters" section of the above "Amusing Art" essay we noted the relative sophistication of the "culturally bound background knowledge" of *New Yorker* readers.]

I present here a selection of *New Yorker* Sisyphus cartoons:

Fig. 1484. Mort Gerberg, *The New Yorker*, 20 July, 1998.

Fig. 1485. Roz Chast, *The New Yorker*, 22 Sept., 2008.

Fig. 1486. Charles Barsotti, *The New Yorker*, 8 Dec., 2008.

Fig. 1487. Zachery Kanin, *The New Yorker*, 1 June, 2009.

Fig. 1488. Christopher Weyant, *The New Yorker*, 29 Nov., 2010.

Fig. 1489. Paul Booth, *The New Yorker*, 24 Dec., 2012.

Fig. 1490. Drew Dernavich, *The New Yorker*, 20 May, 2013.

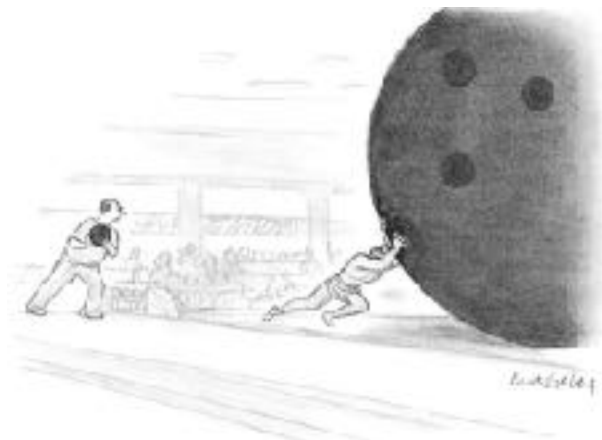

Fig. 1491. Mort Gerberg, *The New Yorker*, 21 Oct., 2013.

Fig. 1492. Shannon Wheeler, *The New Yorker*, 11 Nov., 2013.

Fig. 1493. Bob Eckstein, *The New Yorker*, 27 July, 2015.

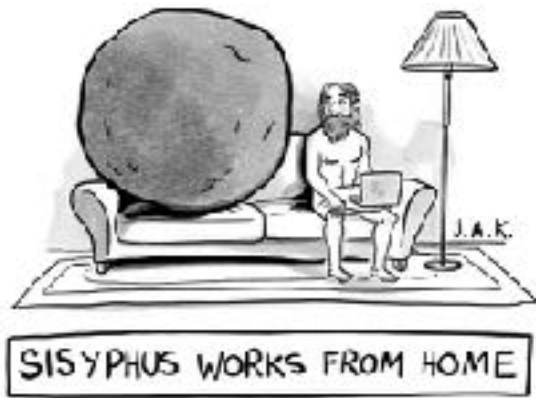

Fig. 1494. Jason Adam Katzenstein*, The New Yorker*,16 Aug., 2015.

Fig. 1495. Kaamran Hafeez*, The New Yorker*, 26 Oct., 2015.

Fig. 1496. Danny Shanahan, *The New Yorker*, 2 Nov., 2015.

Fig. 1497. Seth Fleishman, *The New Yorker*, 22 Aug., 2016.

Fig. 1498. Pat Byrnes, *The New Yorker*, 24 March, 2017.

Fig. 1499. Jason Adam Katzenstein*, The New Yorker*, 18 Feb., 2020.

"Oh—you're right. I see mine now. Sorry about that!"

Fig. **1500**. Lars Kenseth, *The New Yorker*, 1 June, 2020.

"Do you struggle endlessly through here often?"

Fig. **1501**. Benjamin Schwartz, *The New Yorker*, 17 Aug., 2020.

Considering these nineteen *New Yorker* Sisyphus cartoons as a whole, a few general patterns emerge. First of all, in most of the cartoons, the hill up which the tortured Greek is pushing his rock slants upward from left to right, which is in line with how how Western texts are read, and with the social semiotic insight that the "given" (the boulder) is on the left and the "new" (the endless torture) is on the right; the two exceptions to this rule, Christopher Weyant's November 2010 cartoon (**Fig. 1488**) and Paul Booth's December 2012 cartoon (**Fig. 1489**), both feel a little "off"—although perhaps these reversals of the normal flow are meant to stress the inevitability of, in the case of the Weyant cartoon, the ball of fall leaves falling back on the suburban leaf-raking Sisyphus or, in the case of the Booth cartoon, the on-going marital spat Sisyphus is condemned to have with his crossed-arms wife.

Another feature of this set of *New Yorker* Sisyphus cartoons is that they all employ an incongruous "humorous uchronía" retro-projection of modern American society back into the Classical myth. Reflecting the American obsession with physical fitness and healthy diets, Mort Gerberg puts Sisyphus in a gym (**Fig. 1484**) and in a bowling alley (**Fig. 1491**), Roz Chast's Sisyphus (**Fig. 1485**) is happy about how many calories he is burning, and Bob Eckstein's policeman Sisyphus (**Fig. 1493**) rolls a stereotypical donut up his hill. Reflecting middle-class American concerns about white-collar office work, Charles Barsotti's Sisyphus (**Fig. 1486**) pushes a man sitting at a desk up the hill. Zachery Kanin's office-worker Sisyphus (**Fig. 1487**) is worried about his

progress report, and Jason Adam Katzenstein gives us a loin-clothed Sisyphus (**Fig. 1494**) working at home on a laptop with his boulder next to him on the sofa, and a Sisyphus (**Fig. 1499**) happy to have a three-day weekend. The American stereotype of marital conflict is reflected in Shannon Wheeler's cartoon (**Fig. 1492**) and in the nagging-wife cartoons of Paul Booth (**Fig. 1489**) and Pat Byrnes (**Fig. 1498**). Modern American family life is reflected in Drew Dernavich's cartoon (**Fig. 1490**) about a mother giving advice to Sisyphus as she pushes a double baby stroller, and in Danny Shanahan's cartoon (**Fig. 1496**) with its cliché of bored American children complaining in the backseat of a car. (For another "are we there yet?" cartoon gag, cf. **Fig. 1386**.) Kaamran Hafeez uses Sisyphus as a metaphor in an editorializing cartoon (**Fig. 1495**) where a cloud-floating Zeus incongruously asks him to pass a health-care bill through Congress. Seth Fleishman's cartoon (**Fig. 1497**) assumes readers will recognize the allusion to the disco-ball and John Travolta's famous pose from the movie *Saturday Night Fever*. Benjamin Schwartz's recent *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 1501**) has a young woman at a bar incongruously hitting on a particularly elderly Sisyphus.

Fig. 1502. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*, Work Cartoon #7042.

Lars Kenseth's *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 1500**) humorously has Sisyphus and Atlas mixing up their punishment spheres at an airport luggage carousel, where the luggage chute visually mirrors the upward slope of Sisyphus' hill. Mark Anderson has made a similar cartoon gag (**Fig. 1502**), with Sisyphus and Atlas comparing their burdens as they take a break to have a "humorous uchronía" beer in a bar. Both of Kenseth and Anderson assume their readers will recognize Atlas from the globe, in both cases depicted with the North American continent clearly visible.

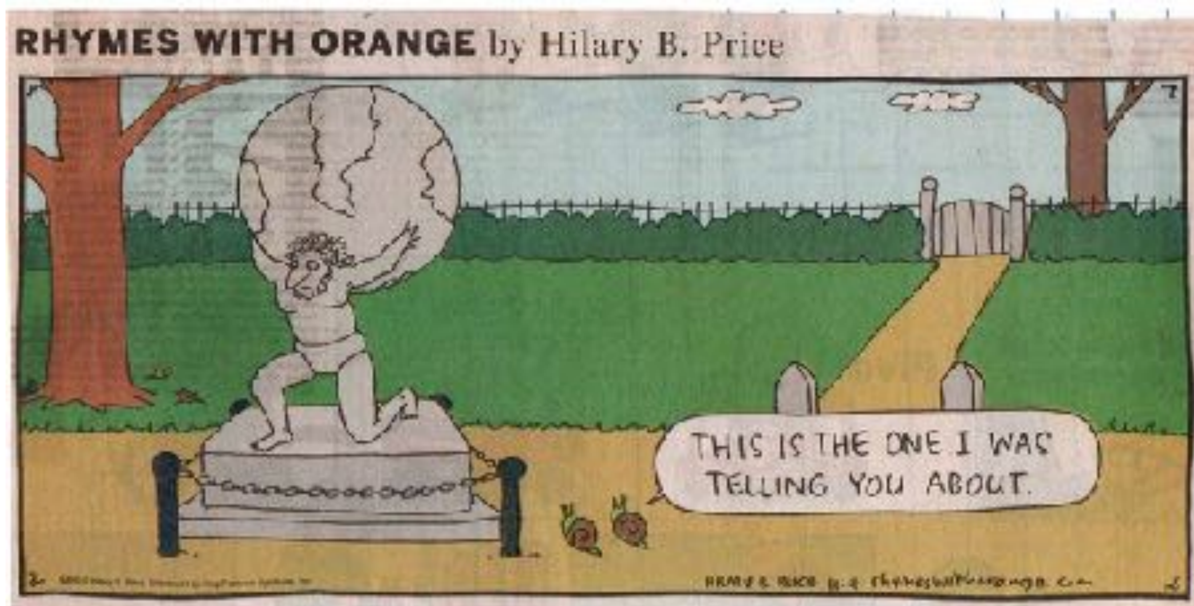

Fig. 1503. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 4 Nov., 2012.

Fig. 1504. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grim*, 26 May, 2013.

The syndicated newspaper cartoonists Hilary Price and Mike Peters have also assumed that their readers would recognize Atlas, condemned to hold up the universe for his part in the Titans revolt agains the Olympian gods. Price's cartoon (**Fig. 1503**) humorously has snails admiring a statue of Atlas, who is carrying a globe with continents that vaguely resemble the break-up of Pangea. Peters' cartoon (**Fig. 1504**) is a hands-on-hips nagging-wife gag targeting the in-bulk discount chain Costco, as Atlas comes back home with a huge globe where we can see North and South America, Africa, Europe, and most of Asia. (The Pacific Ocean is apparently especially large on this globe! And Atlas and his wife apparently live in a Classical temple!)

And, of course, the *New Yorker* does not have a monopoly on Sisyphus cartoons. Many funny-pages cartoonists have also been drawn to this Classical cliché.

Fig. 1505. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 20 Jan., 2013.

Fig. 1506. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 30 March, 2013.

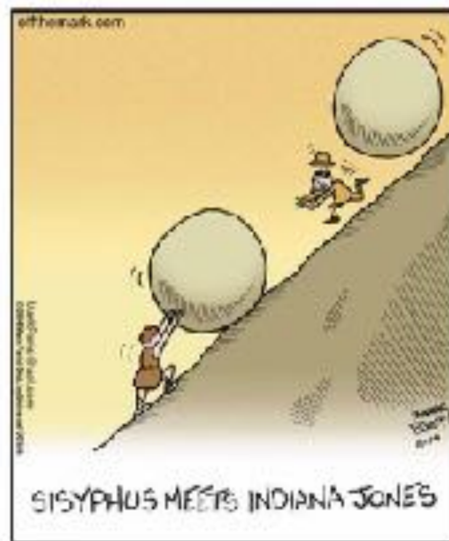

Fig. 1507. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 14 Aug. 2014.

Fig. 1508. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 3 May, 2015.

Fig. 1509. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 6 Dec., 2016.

A January 2013 Dave Coverly *Speed Bump* cartoon (**Fig. 1505**), for instance, envisions Sisyphus pushing a giant bowling ball up his hill on his day off—a gag similar to the one Mort Gerberg would make in the *New Yorker* in October of that year (**Fig. 1491**), which is no doubt another example of independent invention. Mark Parisi has drawn two Sisyphus cartoons: a 2013 version (**Fig. 1506**) humorously comparing his task to that of a dung beetle and a 2014 one (**Fig. 1507**), where viewers are expected to recognize the scene from the Indiana Jones movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, where Indy runs from a boulder in a booby-trapped Peruvian temple. A Hilary Price cartoon (**Fig. 1508**) humorously adds a dancing circus dog insult to Sisyphus' punishment. The Wulff and Morgenthaler *Wumo* team (**Fig. 1509**) also gives Sisyphus time off from his task, putting him in a "humorous uchronía" sofa dismayed to be watching reruns on his TV.

As popular as are the Medusa and Sisyphus cartoon clichés, they are by no means the only Greek mythological subjects to be found in the funny pages.

Fig. 1510. Anatol Kovarsky, "Leda and the Swan," unpublished drawings, 1953–1959.

Fig. **1511**. Frank Modell, *The New Yorker*, 16 Nov., 1968.

The Russian emigre artist and long-time *New Yorker* cartoonist Anatol Kovarsky played around with making a cartoon about Leda and the Swan, drawing two versions that were never published but discovered among his papers after his death (**Fig. 1510**). In one of these Kovarsky drawings, Zeus, who had taken the form of a swan to rape Leda, uses his long neck to leer at a passing buxom woman; in the other, which is drawn as if it were a a scene on a Greek vase, a hand-on-chin Leda seems to be trying to pick out the swan who had mated with her. Although it is doubtful that Frank Modell ever saw the first of these Kovarsky drawings, his wordless *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 1511**) is remarkable similar, and assumes that readers would recognize the myth.

"Do you know how close to the sun you were flying?"

Fig. **1512**. Jason Adam Katzenstein, *The New Yorker*, 14 March, 2016.

"Really, though, he flew too close to the ground."

Fig. 1513. Charles Hankin, *The New Yorker*, 20 Nov., 2017.

The Greek myth of Icarus, whose wax wings melted when he flew too close to the sun as he and his father Daedalus were fleeing the Cretan King Minos, has also appeared in the *New Yorker*. Jason Adam Katzenstein (**Fig. 1512**) adds a flying patrol officer to this cautionary tale about hubris, much like Mick Stevens and Bill Whitehead did in their "March of Progress" cartoons (cf. **Figs. 951–952**). Charles Hankin (**Fig. 1513**) humorously points out that Icarus' downfall came from flying too close to the ground.

Fig. 1514. Robert Leighton, *The New Yorker*, 10 Jan., 2005.

Fig. 1515. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 25 March, 2009.

Another Greek myth that has made its way into the funny pages is Pandora, who, as Hesiod relates in his *Works and Days*, was the agent of Zeus' vengeance on

Prometheus for his having given fire to humanity; when Pandora opened a jar ("pithos") left in her care, sickness, death, and all the evils of the world flew out before she could shut it, leaving only hope trapped behind. Robert Leighton and Dave Coverly both assume that their American readers would be well aware of the "opening a Pandora's box" story which they use for their "inverse humorous uchronía" cartoon gags: Leighton's *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 1514**) has Pandora putting her box through an airport luggage screening; Coverly's *Speed Bump* cartoon (**Fig. 1515**) humorously equates Pandora's box with computer malware spread through opening an email attachment.

Fig. 1516. Dylan Spencer, *Earth Explodes*, 2013.

Fig. 1517. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 11 July, 2014.

In another nod to Greek mythology, the webcomic Dylan Spencer has made a "humorous uchronía" gag (**Fig. 1516**) targeting Millennials who try to be on the cutting edge of cultural trends; while Spencer could expect his readers to recognize Hermes, it is unclear how many would know the minor deities Karpo, a goddess associated with the harvest, or Adephagia, the personification of gluttony. Readers of an "inverse humorous uchronía" Scott Hilburn *Argyle Sweater* gag (**Fig. 1517**) would be expected to recognize the incongruous centaur couple as well as to have the "culturally bound background knowledge" to recognize the common complaint American husbands make about their wives having too many shoes.

Fig. 1518. Richard Thompson, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, 5 Sept., 2018 (reprint).

Fig. 1519. Ros Chast, *The New Yorker*, 30 Nov., 2015.

Both Richard Thompson and Ros Chast have played with Greek mythology by inventing their own humorous divinities. Thompson's "composite cartoon"(**Fig. 1518**), originally created when the Olympics were being broadcast, appropriately uses made-up Greek gods to target the inanities of American television. Ros Chast's *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 1519**) invents new, hands-on-hips, Furies to make fun of stereotypes of angry women.

And of course, given the centrality of Classical Greek culture to the Western tradition, mythological subjects are not the only aspect of ancient Greece that have been speared by funny-pages cartoonists and comic strip artists.

Fig. 1520. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 23 Oct., 2015.

Fig. 1521. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 6 April, 2019.

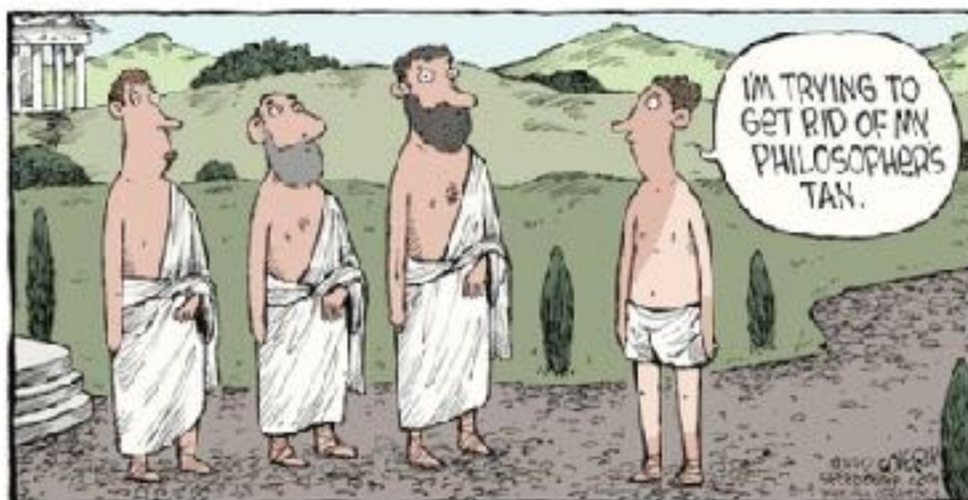

Fig. 1522. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 9 Aug., 2020.

Fig. 1523. Scott Adams, *Dilbert*, 3 Jan., 2016.

One thing that everyone—cartoonists and readers alike—knows is that ancient Greece was the birthplace of philosophy. Mikael Wulff and Anders Morgenthaler take advantage of this "culturally bound background knowledge" to make a "humorous uchronía" gag (**Fig. 1520**) about Socrates pondering "the ontological reason" for the *Keeping up with the Kardashians* star Kylie Jenner, and to poke fun (**Fig. 1521**) at the supposed unemployability of philosophers. A Dave Coverly *Speed Bump* cartoon (**Fig. 1522**) plays with the idea that philosophers, in their off-the-shoulder chitons, would have had an ancient version of a "farmer's tan." A Scott Adams' *Dilbert* comic strip (**Fig. 1523**) assumes that readers would have a rather sophisticated "culturally bound background knowledge" about Zeno's so-called Dichotomy Paradox—the Elean philosopher's attempt to support Parmenides' doctrine that change is an illusion by suggesting that motion is impossible because, to go anywhere, one must first travel half the distance from point A to point B, then half the distance from the new point A' to point B, etc., leading to an infinite regress that leaves one forever short of point B.

Fig. **1524**. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 2004 and 2016.

Normally an apolitical cartoonist, Dan Piraro has on two occasions used the motif of Classical philosophy to make fun of Republican politicians (**Fig. 1524**). In a 2004 *Bizarro* cartoon, Piraro has Karl Rove, a senior advisor to President George W. Bush, make the cynical assertion to Plato that truth can be created by repeating a lie; in 2016, Piraro intentionally self-plagiarized his earlier cartoon to put this assertion into the mouth of Donald Trump, whose politically and psychologically motivated mendaciousness has, among his supporters at least, provided evidence of the validity of this inversion of truth. (For obvious reasons, Piraro never attempted to publish this "Donald Trump & Plato" cartoon, although he did post it on his Facebook account.)

[Although it is outside of the scope of our discussion of humorous cartoons and comic strips, we should just note that Classical Greece is frequently evoked in political cartoons. Lauren E. Talalay has shown how modern Greek political cartoonists used antiquity to cast zings at contemporary political figures for their handling of the post-2008 economic crisis; Ian Runacres and Michael K. MacKenzie have shown how Classical allusions are used to lend a sense of *gravitas* to British political cartoons.]

Fig. **1525**. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 11 March, 2016.

Fig. **1526**. Rob Murray, "Alternative Histories: Greece, c. 560 B.C.," *History Today*, 23 April, 2015.

Fig. **1527**. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*., 28 Sept., 2014.

In addition to philosophy, other aspects of ancient Greek culture have found their way into the funny pages. A Scott Hilburn *Argyle Sweater* cartoon (**Fig. 1525**) makes a clever visual pun on the hair-regrowth product Rhogaine, one that assumes viewers will be sophisticated enough to recognize the P-shaped Greek letter "rho." Rob Murray's "Alternative Histories" cartoon (**Fig. 1526**) gives us a "humorous uchronía" retro-projection of digital-age technology back into ancient Greece. In a *Frank and Ernest* strip

(**Fig. 1527**), Tom Thaves felt that he had to spell out to his readers that Euclid was the "father of geometry" so that they could get his silly joke about pyramid schemes and love triangles. [Our Classics Comics Code wet blanket would point out that Thaves, in addition to mistakenly thinking that Classical Greeks had indoor theatrical playhouses and that ancient Greek chairs had high backs like modern chairs, has put vaguely Renaissance-looking caps on his ancient Hellenes, Like many other cartoonists, Thaves has tried to give an ancient Greek feel to his comic strip by putting a Greek-key pattern on the fringes of the garments the characters wear and by putting colonnaded temples in the background, as if there were no other types of buildings in the Classical world.]

Fig. 1528. Peter Duggan, *The Guardian*, 12 Oct., 2015.

As we noted in the "Humorous Art History 101" section of the above "Amusing Art" essay, the supposedly "low-brow" medium of cartoons and comic strips can, ironically, educate readers about "high" art. A Peter Duggan's *Guardian* cartoon (**Fig. 1528**) is a good example of how this educational function can apply to Classical Greek art and architecture. In this cartoon, cleverly laid out like an Egyptian wall frieze, the Australian Duggan provides a basic Art History 101 lesson on Classical Greek sculpture: in contrast to earlier, Archaic, statues where figures were portrayed in a style based on the traditional Egyptian model, with hands held rigidly at the sides, one foot forward, and heads looking straight out, in the 5th-century B.C.E., Classical Greek sculptors began

to represent the human body in a more realistic, “contrapposto,” manner, with the weight of the body placed on one foot and the shoulders and hips shifted into a sinuous “Praxitelean” curve. [As we have noted (cf. **Fig. 446**), Duggan can assume that his British *Guardian* readers have a relatively sophisticated art historical background knowledge, and one might suspect that this cartoon would go over the heads of many American readers; in any case, the funny, “ass-hole” rebus comment made by the jealous Egyptian man on the right would probably have prevented Duggan from publishing this cartoon in an American newspaper.

Fig. 1529. Harry Bliss, illustration from *Bailey at the Museum*, 2012.

Greek art makes a guest appearance in *Bailey at the Museum*, the young reader book written and illustrated by Harry Bliss. At one point as he is tagging along on a school trip to a natural history museum, the mischievous dog Bailey passes by an Attic Black-Figure amphora decorated with a silly scene of a dog chasing a squirrel (**Fig. 1529**). [While hunting dogs were sometimes represented on real Archaic and Classical Greek pots, squirrels never were! It is not clear why Bliss chose to put his otherwise accurate depiction of a Black-Figure amphora in a natural history museum as opposed to a fine art museum where one would normally expect to find ancient Greek antiquities; in addition to affording an opportunity to make a visual joke, putting an icon of Western art in a natural history museum may be Bliss’ way of making a comment about the offensive practice of natural history museums in displaying teepees, totem poles, and other artifacts of indigenous cultures as if these peoples were part of the natural—i.e., non-human—world.]

Fig. 1530. Bill Amend, *FoxTrot*, 5 Jan., 2014.

Of course, cartoons and comic strips aim to entertain and amuse, not to educate, and they only incidentally provide didactic art history lessons. For example, in a Bill Amend *FoxTrot* strip (**Fig. 1530**), our eyes first land on the incongruously monumental Greek temple made out of snow, and it is only when we read Eileen's comment in the inset panel that we are told that it is an flawed replica of the Parthenon because (if we didn't already know) that Athenian temple had Doric, not Ionic, columns; the gag that Jason had to build a snow replica of the Parthenon because he lost a bet with Eileen is highlighted when we notice the inscription "Fall Report Card Goddess" and see the snowmen worshippers in the pedimental sculpture. (The humorous incongruity of Jason creating such a monumental, if erroneously Ionicized, snow-Parthenon parallels that of a Charles Schultz *Peanuts* strip where Linus built a snow replica of Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, cf. **Fig. 497**.)

Fig. 1531. Jim Davis, *Garfield*. 2 Feb., 2013.

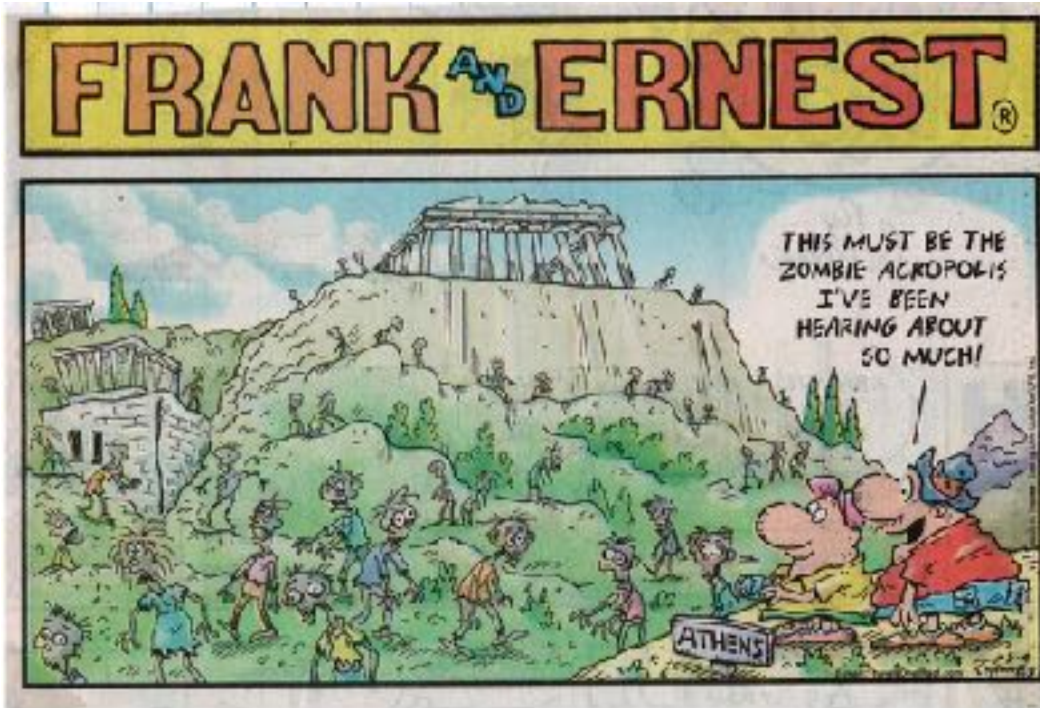

Fig. 1532. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 4 May, 2014.

Similarly, in the first panel of a *Garfield* strip (**Fig. 1531**), Jim Davis felt it was necessary to have the gluttonous title character identify what we are looking at as a replica of the Parthenon. [Our pedantic Classics Comics Code critic would point out that, given the absence of triglyphs and decorated metopes and the absence of pedimental sculpture, Garfield's chocolate creation is hardly a"perfect" replica.] Likewise, in a *Frank and Ernest* strip (**Fig. 1532**), Tom Thaves felt he had to put in an identifying "Athens" sign so that readers could get his silly zombie "apocalypse/acropolis" pun. [The CCC critics are just shaking their heads over the serious misrepresentation of the Athenian Acropolis in this cartoon.]

Fig. 1533. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 18 Sept., 2016.

If cartoon representations of Classical Greek architecture seem to be limited to the Parthenon, so too are cartoon allusion to ancient Greek sculpture restricted in number. A Mike Peters strip (**Fig. 1533**) assumes readers would recognize Myron's mid-5th-century B.C.E. *Discobolus* sculpture as well as having the "culturally bound background" awareness of dogs chasing frisbees.

This Mike Peters allusion to the *Discobolus* aside, the one ancient Greek statue that most cartoonists and comic strip artists assume their readers would recognize is the Hellenistic *Venus de Milo* (cf. Frederick Opper's "Our Antediluvian Ancestors" 1904 cartoon, **Fig. 790**).

Fig. 1534. George Herriman, *Krazy Kat*, 15 May, 1919.

"Careful now. It's fragile."

Fig. 1535. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 20 Oct., 1956.

The truth about the Venus de Milo.

Fig. 1536. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 4 March, 2016.

Fig. 1537. Ian Baker, "Exhibition Piece," 22 June, 2008.

Fig. **1538**. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 6 Jan., 2009.

Fig. **1539**. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 8 Nov., 2014.

A 1919 George Herriman, *Krazy Kat* cartoon (**Fig. 1534**), laid out in three numbered panels (as if viewers needed help to know the order to read them!), starts with Krazy Kat looking at a statue of a frontally posed, "harmless," Venus that presumably is meant to allude to the much more revealing contrapposto *Venus de Milo*; the bottom panel of this Herriman strip, where Ignatz Mouse is picking up a brick to throw at Krazy for her atrocious pun, is an example of what I have been calling "anticipatory humor," as we have to fill in in our minds the normal ending of a Herriman *Krazy Kat* cartoon. A 1956 Anatol Kovarsky *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 1535**) gives us a photographic representation of the *Venus*, which, together with the cut-out photos of statues of a sphinx and a semi-draped youth in the background, evokes an "associative inversion" that focuses our attention on the statues rather than on the cartoonishly rendered wreathed sculptor and pallet bearers; the photographic Venus in this cartoon, with her nippled breasts, is decidedly more risqué than Herriman's discretely clothed version, which is in keeping with Kovarsky's other explicit representations of nude females (cf. **Fig. 307**). If the joke in Kovarsky's cartoon is another example of ""anticipatory humor," as we have to imagine the clumsy pallet bearers breaking off Venus' arms as they take the statue through the doors of the sculptor's studio, a similar 2016 John McPherson cartoon (**Fig. 1536**) shows us the "humorous uchronía" "Zeus

Movers" in the act of breaking off her arms. [Our Classics Comics Code pedant would point out that scholars have reconstructed the Venus with her right arm draped in front of her body hiding her lower torso and with her left arm resting on a plinth.] The British cartoonist Ian Baker (**Fig. 1537**) has given us a more macabre explanation for the Venus' lack of arms. The armlessness of the *Venus de Milo* has inspired Mark Parisi to come us with cartoon gags about Venus being jealous of a multi-armed Buddha statue (**Fig. 1538**) and incongruously having a drink in a bar with Michelangelo's *David* (**Fig. 1539**).

Cartoons with ancient Greek themes are not confined to the American funny pages.

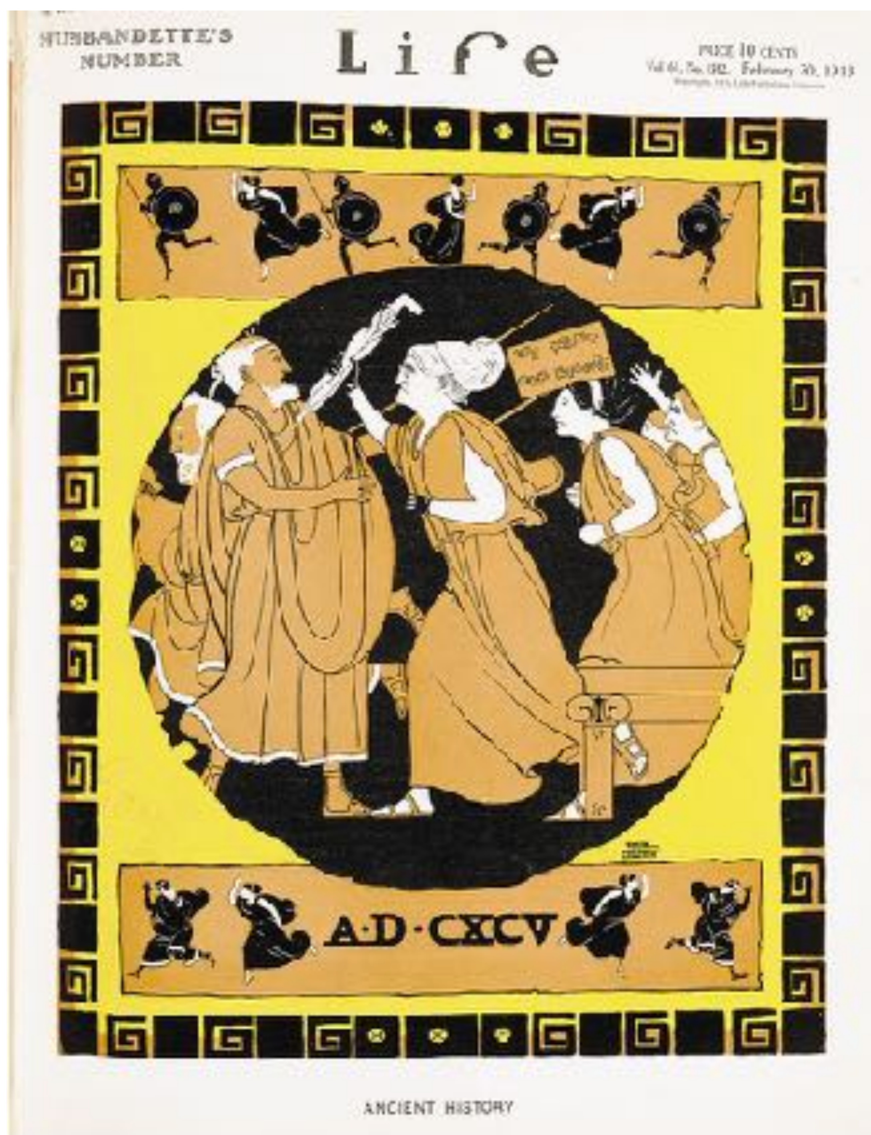

Fig. 1540. Rea Irvin, Cover to *Life*, 20 Feb., 1913.

A 1913 cover to *Life* by the magazine's art editor Rea Irvin (**Fig. 1540**), drawn in the style of Attic Black-Figure and Red-Figure pottery, has a central rondo depicting an umbrella-wielding Susan-B.-Anthony-esque figure leading a group of women fighting for their rights; above and below the central rondo are friezes of women chasing armed soldiers and balding men, and the cover is bordered with a Greek-key pattern. While the "humorous uchronía" parody of Classical Greek art in Irvin's cover is meant make us smile, it is not unsympathetic to the women's suffrage movement, evoking as it does Aristophanes' play *Lysistrata*, where the title character leads women from warring Greek city-states on a sex-boycott to convince their men to end the war.

Fig. **1541**. Garrett Price, *Life*, 30 Sept., 1940.

Like Rea Irvin, who supplemented his income with advertisement work, his fellow *New Yorker* cartoonist Garrett Price also took on commercial assignments. Price's clever 1940 cartoon for a Manning-Bowman "iron that wags its tail" (**Fig. 1541**) has an American woman incongruously thinking of the cord on her iron when she sees the coiled snake on the famous Laocoön statue— a work which most scholars now take to be either a late 1st century B.C.E. copy of an early 2nd century B.C.E. Greek statue or an original early Roman Imperial statue made in the Hellenistic baroque style. The helpful labels (in English!) indicate that Price did not assume all of his viewers would recognize this statue, which has been in the Vatican since it was discovered in the early 16th century; Price may, however, have expected that his viewers would appreciate the humorous irony—excuse the pun!—of Doris' mother thinking about her modern household appliances when viewing an ancient statue that has become an iconic representation of human suffering. Behind Doris and her mother are a bearded man and another with his hand to his chin (cf. **Fig. 740**), presumably contemplating the gruesome death of the Trojan priest and his sons, although they may be wondering why Price felt that he had to add a fig leaf to the statue!

[As we have seen with Fred and Wilma Flintstone hocking Winston cigarettes in Hanna-Barbera's TV cartoon (**Fig. 845**) and with Johnny Hart's advertisements for Dr. Pepper (**Fig. 1065**), by the 1960's franchise fees for successful funny-pages cartoonists could be a substantial part of their income. For example, Charles Schultz, with his *Peanuts* empire of syndications, televisions specials, and product endorsements, earned millions of dollars in royalties during his lifetime; in 2014 Brian Warner estimated that the *Peanuts* brand was making some $20–$30 million a year in royalties, a decade after Schultz' death.]

Before we turn to humorous Roman-themed cartoons and comic strips, we should just mention Alexandre G. Mitchell's 2009 study, *Greek Vase-painting and the Origins of Visual Humor*. Rejecting ingrained attitudes among Classical scholars that ancient Greek art only addressed "serious" subjects, Mitchell has shown that vase-painters, especially Athenian potters, often painted humorous scenes on their wares, and that these visual gags on their inexpensive pots would have been appreciated by a wide swath of Classical Greek society. Mitchell has categorized the visual humor on

ancient Greek vases into four types: visual puns, caricature, parody, and situational comedy.

Fig. 1542. Left: Attic Black-Figure olpe, ca. 550–520 B.C.E. Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology; right: vectorized drawing by Alexandre G. Mitchell, from Mitchell 2009, Fig. 1.

Fig. 1543. Attic eye cup from Vulci, ca. 550 B.C.E. Tampa Museum of Art.

As an example of a visual pun on an ancient Greek vase, Mitchell cites an Attic Black-Figure olpe now in the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum at the University of California at Berkeley (**Fig. 1542**). Here, the painter has taken the large eyes that Athenian potters often painted on vases, especially on the so-called eye cups (**Fig. 1543**), and transformed them into large wine sacks that two satyrs carry by the tear ducts as they flank Dionysus; anyone pouring wine out of this olpe would have smiled at this appropriate transformation.

In 1917, David Robinson of Johns Hopkins University noted:

> The Greeks and Romans had their "funnies," and caricature was a well-known diversion of classical artists. The art of caricature, if we can call it an art, is not new. As the ancients had no daily press or comic supplement, the channels of communication with the public were the open-air theatre, the decoration of vases, and other objects of every day use such as bronzes and terra-cottas and wall-paintings. Modern newspaper caricaturists have not been the creators even of political caricature. The mediaeval caricatures on the cathedrals at Chartres, Rouen, and Amiens, Leonardo da Vinci in Italy, Holbein and the Fliegarde Blatter in Germany, Goya in Spain, Callot and Philipon in France, Gillray, Bunbury, Cruikshank and Punch in England, Puck and Judge, Harper's Weekly, McCutcheon, Goldberg, Payne, Fisher, etc., in America, all have been continuing an instinct in human nature with which the Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans were perfectly familiar.

Fig. 1544. Fragment of an Attic Red-Figure cup, ca. 440–430 B.C.E. Acropolis Museum. From Mitchell, 2009, Fig. 3.

As an example of vase-painting caricatures, Alexandre Mitchell illustrates a fragment of a ca. 440 B.C.E. Attic Red-Figure cup (**Fig. 1544**), where we, like the Athenians of twenty-four centuries ago, smile at the squatting, large-headed man holding his nose because of the smell as he defecates; in his right hand he holds a sponge—the ancient Greek form of toilet paper.

Fig. 1545. Attic Red-Figure kylix from Vulci, ca. 500–490 B.C.E. British Museum.

And for an example of situational visual humor on ancient Greek pottery, Mitchell brings in the well known Attic Red-Figure cup signed ("epoiesen") by Euphronios (**Fig. 1445**). To help his Classical Greek viewers appreciate the gag, the vase-painter inscribed on the rim of a pithos the name Eurystheus—the man who is hiding in it as Herakles lifts a live boar over his head; reading the name leaves no doubt that this vase is humorously portraying Herakles on one of his twelve labors for the Argive king Eurystheus—comically bringing back the Erymanthian boar alive, much to Eurystheus' chagrin.

[As I observed when discussing Hellenistic "Homeric" bowls (cf. **Fig. 830**), we have to be careful when noting ancient analogues to the comics media not to fall into the trap of the "Lascaux Hypothesis" and try connect that analogue to the historical development of our modern comics. Nonetheless, with its combination of text and image, as well as for its visual humor that is still funny to us today, the British Museum Euphronius cup clearly functions as a cartoon in the sense of the term I have been using in these essays.]

Judging by the relatively smaller number of Roman-themed cartoons and comic strips in our corpus of Classical comics, American humorists seem to find the dour, practical ancient Romans less intrinsically funny than the Classical Greeks.

Fig. 1546. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 3 Nov., 2014.

Fig. 1547. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 14 Sept., 2015.

One exception to this rule is Scott Hilburn, who has dipped into the ancient-Rome comic well time and time again for his *The Argyle Sweater* gags. For instance, Hilburn assumes that his readers have the "culturally bound background knowledge" of Roman mythology to know that Romulus and Remus had been raised by a she-wolf—a myth he used in 2014 to crack a "humorous uchronía" mother-in-law gag (**Fig. 1546**) and, in the following year, a Mother's-Day joke (**Fig. 1547**).

Fig. 1548. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 14 March, 2010.

Fig. 1549. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 5 May, 2018.

Scott Hilburn also made fun of the "Rome Wasn't Built in a Day" call-to-arms for patience (a phrase that arose in 16th century England, not ancient Rome!) in a *The Argyle Sweater* cartoon (**Fig. 1548**) where part of the humor comes from Romulus spelling out in Roman numerals the 564-year estimate of the contractor. In Mark Parisi's version of this gag (**Fig. 1549**), it is the contractor who objects to the "a day" deadline humorously spelled out on a scroll.

Fig. 1550. Dave Blazek, *Loose Parts*, 19 Jan., 2015.

Fig. 1551. Rob Murray, "Alternative Histories," *History Today*, 2020.

Dave Blazek assumes readers are aware of the story that Nero fiddled when Rome burned in a *Loose Parts* cartoon (**Fig. 1550**) where the emperor is shown playing an incongruous "humorous uchronía" accordion. The British cartoonist Rob Murray could assume that the readers of one of his "Alternate Histories" cartoons (**Fig. 1551**) published in the magazine *History Today* would have the "culturally bound background knowledge" to get his gag about Hannibal and the elephants crossing the Alps during the Second Punic War, although he does need to label the "Alps" and he adds a helpful, and correct, date.

Fig. 1552. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 19 July, 2008.

Fig. 1553. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 7 Nov., 2010.

Fig. 1554. Dean Young and John Marshall, *Blondie*. 12 Aug., 2012.

Fig. 1555. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 9 April, 2017.

If the Parthenon is the one Classical Greek monument that has found a place in the American funny pages, the Coliseum is the Roman equivalent for cartoonists (cf. the framed picture of the Coliseum in **Fig. 1546** and the amphitheater in the background of **Fig. 1548**). Dan Piraro has drawn a "humorous uchronía" Roman chariot-racing gag (**Fig. 1552**) that targets parents who brag about their children with bumper stickers. Piraro has also drawn a bizarre Coliseum cartoon (**Fig. 1553**) with the stereotype of lions attacking condemned people. The Dean Young and John Marshall team at *Blondie* and Hilary Price have also set their jokes in the Roman Coliseum: the *Blondie* strip (**Fig. 1554**) uses the setting for silly gags about Bumstead; Price's cartoon (**Fig. 1555**) gives us a "humorous uchronía" toga launcher.

Fig. 1556. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 12 Nov., 2014.

Fig. 1557. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 1 Nov., 2014.

Fig. 1558. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 3 Dec., 2014.

Fig. 1559. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 19 July, 2016.

Roman numerals, it would appear, are funny. Mike Peters uses them to make a "humorous uchronía" medical pun (**Fig. 1556**). Scott Hilburn can't seem to stay away from them: in Nov. 2014 he used Roman numerals in a punning cartoon (**Fig. 1557**) about the "five-second rule" for eating food dropped on the floor; a month later, Hilburn published a Roman-numeral cartoon (**Fig. 1558**) where viewers need to know that XL is smaller than L; another Hilburn cartoon (**Fig. 1559**) requires viewers to know that the Roman numeral C = 100.

Fig. 1560. Cast of characters of *Asterix*.

As we conclude this “Comical Classics” section of our “Comical Cultures” essay, we must wave a hand at the juggernaut that is the Asterix comics empire. Begun by René Gossiny and Albert Uderzo in Belgium in 1957, to date 38 volumes of *Asterix* have appeared, most recently under the imprimatur of Hachette Livre, and this comic strip about Gallic resistance to the Roman Empire has spawned ten movies, a theme park, a host of board and video games, as well as a number of lawsuits by Gossiny’s and Uderzo’s heirs, and a mini-industry of academic articles (cf. **Fig. 817**).

Nationalism is the primary focus of *Asterix* studies, from the obvious connection to the French historical hero Vercingetorix, to the problems of translating this Gallic chauvinism into the languages of other cultures. French nationalism *vis a vis* American comics has a long history, going back to 1949, when the French government enacted a law, *sur les publications destinées à la jeunesse* (“On Publications Aimed at Youth”), that created an Oversight Commission which banned several American comic books in the 1950s and early 1960’s on the grounds of their excessive violence and explicit sexuality; this protectionism was enacted at a time when American comic books were overwhelming a Franco-Belgian comics industry struggling to emerge from post-war paper shortages.

Fig. 1561. Advertisement for McDonalds, from *Le Figero*, 2010.

The issue of American cultural hegemony and French comics was again in the news in 2010 when a McDonalds' ad campaign featuring the *Asterix* gang ran in France (**Fig. 1561**). The report in *Le Figero* began: "McDonalds' latest publicity campaign shows the world-famous comic-strip star and legendary defender of French tradition Asterix eating in a McDonalds restaurant. Is nothing sacred any more?"

There is no equivalent in the American funny pages to *Asterix*, the "legendary defender of French tradition." And while *Asterix* is a known quantity in the United States, it is hardly the hugely popular cultural phenomenon it is in Europe; for example, the latest *Asterix* movie to be released in the US, the 2019 *The Secret of the Magic Potion*, grossed only slightly over $1 million in US box-office receipts, placing it 237th on the list for that year, just ahead of *Metallica and the San Francisco Symphony*.

Wacky Vikings

The post-Classical Western world is little represented in the American funny pages. Apparently, American cartoonists and comic strip artists can find little humor in the, mostly religious, monuments of Late Antiquity and the Medieval period. One exception are the Vikings.

Fig. 1562. Jack Kirby, *Tales of the Unexpected* #16, 1957.

Fig. 1563. John Buscema, cover art for *Thor* #272, June, 1978.

As Florian Rubis and Pierre-Marie Jamet explored in exhibitions about Vikings and comics (*bande dessinée*) held in Normandy and Brittany in 2012 and 2013, Vikings are often represented as bloodthirsty, illiterate, pagan looters—a popular cultural image that Rubis and Jamet takes pains to demonstrate is at odds with historical and archaeological evidence that Viking civilization was highly complex and that, with its long distance trading networks ranging from Russia and the Mediterranean to the British Isles, fundamentally transformed Scandinavian and northern European culture. The American comic-book superhero Thor, the mythological Asgardian god of thunder, fits the model of the Vikings as fierce warriors. As first introduced by Jack Kirby in 1957 (**Fig. 1562**), Thor was depicted as a bearskin-clad barbarian; later versions of Thor (**Fig. 1563**) depict him with a cape and skintight armor like other superheroes in the Marvel Avenger universe.

Fig. 1564. Chris Browne, *Hagar the Horrible*, 25 Dec., 2006.

But, for American cartoonists, Vikings are people who wear funny hats and whose supposed bloodthirsty nature can be used for incongruous humor. Dik Browne,

for instance, created the syndicated comic strip *Hagar the Horrible* in 1973, a highly popular strip that was continued by his son Chris after Dik retired in 1988. Like the *Flintstones*, *Hagar* employs "humorous uchronía" to poke fun at contemporary American culture. A Christmas *Hagar* strip from 2006 (**Fig. 1562**), for instance, presents the Hagar family incongruously wishing their viewers a sappy "Seasons Greeting."

Fig. 1565. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*.

Fig. 1566. Colby Jones, *SirColby*, 27 Dec., 2007.

Fig. 1567. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 5 June, 2011.

In spite of the fact that there is no evidence that actual Vikings wore horned helmets—a misrepresentation that apparently began in 1876 when horned helmets were part of the costumes used in the first Bayreuth Festival production of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*—American cartoonists have found that impractical battle gear a

great source of amusement. A Gary Larson gag (**Fig. 1564**) has Vikings wearing silly bobblehead duck helmets before "Ole Johnson" came up with the horned helmet design. [A real Viking would have been named "Johnsson", not "Johnson".] The Texan cartoonist Colby Jones gives us a "Thorbob" with a Texan longhorn helmet (**Fig. 1565**). [While archaeologists have uncovered a temporary Norse settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows in northern Newfoundland dating to ca. 1000 A.D., we can be certain that Vikings never sailed into the Gulf of Mexico; in addition, the breed of Texan longhorn cattle are descendants of animals brought to the New World by Spanish colonists long after the time of the Vikings.] A Dan Piraro cartoon (**Fig. 1566**) about a graduation ceremony at Viking University ("VU") assumes that viewers are aware of the tradition of college graduates tossing their mortarboard caps into the air at the end of the ceremony; Piraro adds to the humor of this joke with the VU motto: "take the best, burn the rest."

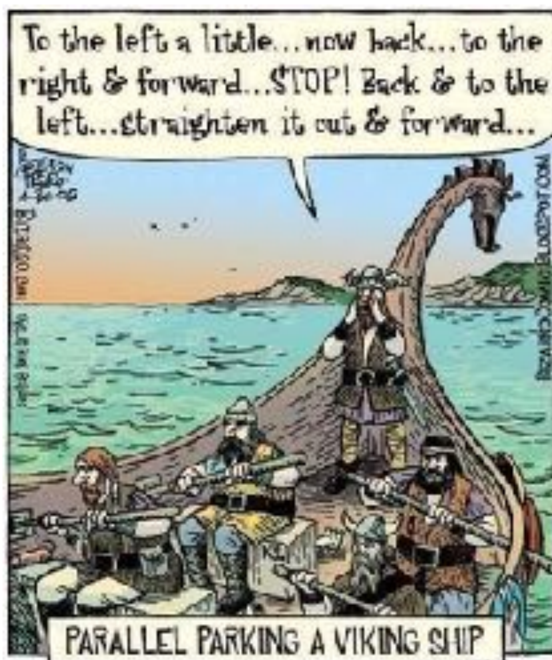

Fig. 1568. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 30 April, 2009.

Fig. 1569. Leigh Rubin, *Rubes*, 4 March, 2014.

Horned helmets are not the only thing that American cartoonists have found funny about the Vikings. Dan Piraro (**Fig. 1568**) jokes about parallel parking a Viking longboat. Leigh Rubin (**Fig. 1569**) gives us a humorous Viking child who enjoys being read Edward Gibbon's monumental *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as a bedtime story; the axe in the head of the child's teddybear only highlights this incongruously humorous gag.

Fig. 1570. Scott Maynard, *Happle Tea*, 6 Aug., 2013.

The webcomic artist Scott Maynard, who specializes in mythological cartoons (cf. **Fig. 1471**), has drawn a strip (**Fig. 1570**) based on the Norse myth Lokasenna. As Maynard says on his happletea.com website: "The strip is designed to be read without much prior knowledge. Sometimes it helps to know mythology to really appreciate the jokes, but when that happens, the blog is there to teach you a thing or two without much time investment!" While Maynard does provide enough information in this strip for viewers to appreciate its humor, his webpage discussion of the Lokasenna myth is indeed quite educational.

Playful Pre-Columbians

The United States is a country that constantly reinvents itself. Founded in a struggle to win its freedom from European colonization, the US is a multi-ethnic entity without roots in a unifying mythologized past like the French, and its culture has largely ignored its pre-Columbian heritage, other than to present offensive stereotypes of "Cowboys and Indians." That Native Americans have had little place in American syndicated comics is hardly surprising, given the nation's troubled history of genocide and racial discrimination against its indigenous peoples—a history in which it is hard to find humor.

Fig. 1571. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 27 Nov., 2016.

In a rare exception to this rule, Dan Piraro has penned a cartoon (**Fig. 1571**) that, with Columbus' crew incongruously setting up a "humorous uchronía" sound stage, targets the phenomenon of *Survivor*-like reality shows; this *Bizarro* cartoon is sympathetic to the native Arawak peoples looking on, and is in accord with the changing zeitgeist in America as the traditional observance of Columbus Day is being replaced by an observance of Indigenous Peoples' Day.

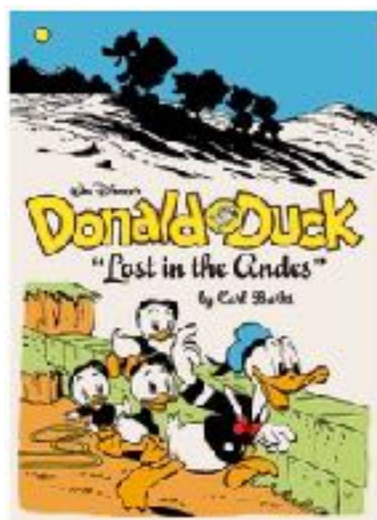

Fig. 1572. Carl Barks, Cover and page from *Donald Duck "Lost in the Andes"*, Walt Disney, 2011.

But, by and large, pre-Columbian cultures have been ignored by American cartoonists, and when they do appear, these cultures have been portrayed as an exotic "Other"—much like how "lost world" prehistoric novels were set in the Amazon or Antartica. The Disney artist Carl Barks' 2011 cartoon book *Donald Duck "Lost in the Andes"* (**Fig. 1572**), for example, has the title character Donald and his waterfowl nephews stumble upon a "lost world" that vaguely resembles ancient Tiwanaku near

Lake Titicaca. [This Disney book seems blissfully unaware of the cultural hegemony controversy surrounding Walt Disney's Brazilian comic book character Zé Carioca ("Joe from Rio de Janeiro") whom the Brazilian abstract artist Rivanne Neuenschwander took to be a stereotypical cliché of Brazilians as street-smart, lazy, flirtatious scoundrels (cf. **Fig. 150**).]

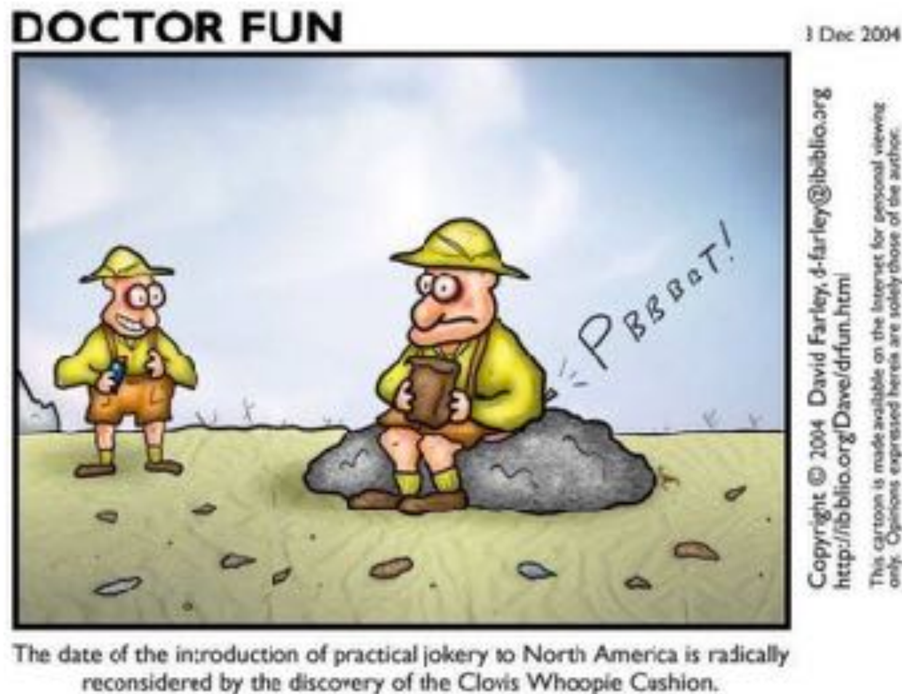

Fig. 1573. David Farley, *Doctor Fun*, 3 Dec., 2004.

The computer technician and pioneer webcomic artist David Farley, whose *Doctor Fun* cartoons were posted online from 1995 to 2006, has drawn a single-panel cartoon (**Fig. 1573**) with an esoteric reference typical of nerdy webcomics; even if readers were not aware that the Paleoamerican Clovis culture, whose characteristic fluted stone points date to ca. 11,200–10,900 B.C.E., had long been thought to be the first human inhabitants of what is now the United States (a theory that was just beginning to be overturned at the time that this cartoon was published) they would surely recognize the humorous stereotype of the pith-helmeted, khaki-shorts-wearing, archaeologists.

American cartoonists and comic strip artists do expect their readers to have at least a high-school-level "culturally bound background knowledge" to recognize allusions to the Mayan and Aztec cultures of Mesoamerica.

Fig. 1574. Glenn and Gary McCoy, *The Duplex*, 17 July, 2009.

Fig. 1575. Lalo Alcaraz, *La Cucaracha*, 13 Feb, 2010.

For instance, a McCoy brothers comic strip (**Fig. 1574**) uses the two-people-talking-in-front-of-a-museum-object trope to make a silly pun. [Curiously, the generic globular vase with wavy comb-patterned decoration the McCoys depict does not look to be Mayan, and is scarcely a museum-quality piece; given our comic-strip suspension of disbelief that allows for the talking dog Fang, we are not upset that a canine is allowed in the museum, but Eno's slurping a a drink makes the museum curators among us cringe!] The pioneer Hispanic cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz, whose *La Cucaracha* was the first nationally syndicated Latino comic strip in the United States, makes a banker joke (**Fig. 1575**) that assumes we readers had at least heard about the ca. 900 C.E. collapse of the Classic Maya civilization; note the innovative layout of Alcaraz' strip, with its alternating normal- and silhouette-view panels and the borderless initial and final panels that provide the set-up and punchline as the car is driving away.

Fig. 1576. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 7 Feb., 2012.

Similarly, a Scott Hilburn cartoon (**Fig. 1576**) assumes readers have some "culturally bound background knowledge" about ancient Mayan calendars to get his outrageous pun; readers are also expected *not* to be concerned that the stereotyped pith-helmeted and khaki-shorts-wearing archaeologists have unearthed the "colander" by digging a small hole like common pot-hunters.

Fig. 1577. Aztec Sun Stone, ca. 1502–1521 A.D. National Anthropology Museum, Mexico City.

One ancient Mesoamerican artifact that readers of the American funny pages are expected to recognize is the Aztec Sun Stone, the late post-classic Mexica sculpture now housed in the National Anthropology Museum of Mexico City (**Fig. 1577**). Often mistakingly taken to be a calendar, the Aztec Sun Stone is actually a complex

representation of Aztec cosmology, with a central disc depicting the solar deity Tonatiuh surrounded by four squares that represent the cosmic eras preceding our current one, eras which ended in the destruction of humanity and the world; this central disc is surrounded by concentric rings depicting the twenty days of the months in the Aztec solar calendar, the sun's rays aligned to the cardinal points, and an outer band with two Xiuhcoatl fire serpents. Rather than being used to tell the date, the Aztec Sun Stone served as a visualization of a violent Aztec ideology that required human sacrifice to repay the gods for their self-sacrifice in renewing the world for humanity and as a method to maintain control and suppress resistance among the conquered peoples of their empire.

Fig. 1578. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 26 Nov., 1960.

Fig. 1579. Leigh Rubin, 24 Jan., 2006.

Fig. 1580. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 2 Dec., 2009.

But, for American cartoonists, the Aztec Sun Stone is just a funny-shaped calendar. In a 1960 *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 1578**), Anatol Kovarsky makes a joke that assumes readers know the "thirty-days-hath-September . . ." ditty we use to remember how many days each month has; Kovarsky's trope of a man with an elaborate headdress standing in front of the inscription carver is analogous to the Egyptian cartoon cliché of two people standing in front of hieroglyphics (cf. **Figs. 1352–1363**). [Note that, for the setting of his cartoon, Kovarsky adds an appropriate Mesoamerican-style stepped pyramid and, in the background, totally inappropriate Old Kingdom Egyptian pyramids.] Leigh Rubin (**Fig. 1579**) and Dan Piraro (**Fig. 1580**) have mistakenly taken the Aztec Sun Stone to be a Mayan long-count calendar—the system that the Mayans (but *not* the Aztecs!) used to indicate dates longer than the 52-year cycle during which their 365-day topical calendar and their 260-day ritual calendar would realign. It is unclear whether these two pre-2012 cartoons, whose similarities we can generously attribute to independent invention, contributed to the erroneous urban myth that the Mayan long-count calendar predicted that the world would end in 2012; in the long-count calendar, the Julian date of 2012 was a year when the Mayan date reverted to 0.0.0.0—*not* the "end of the world" but rather more like an automobile odometer reverting to all zeros after 99,999 miles.

Fig. 1581. Tom Cheney, *The New Yorker*.

Fig. 1582. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 4 Sept., 2015.

American cartoonists also assume that their readers would recognize the Mesoamerican stepped pyramid and be aware that it was the locus of Aztec human sacrifice. The incongruous humor in a Tom Cheney *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 1581**) comes from the unexpected use of a Mesoamerican pyramid for playing air hockey; it is unclear why Cheney clothed his figures in odd headdresses that more resemble the kalimavkion worn by Greek Orthodox priests than they do anything in either Mayan or Aztec iconography. A Wiley Miller comic strip (**Fig. 1582**) combines the sacrificial Aztec stepped pyramid with one of the most common of cartoon clichés, the wise man who lives in a cave at the top of a mountain.

Fig. 1583. Ballgame scene on a Maya vase K5435; (bottom right) speed depicted by Hergé in 1930 in the Quick & Flupke series - Acroabaties p. 2. (From Wichmann and Nielsen, 2017, fig. 3.)

Fig. 1584. Rolled-out view of "Regal Rabbit Pot," K1398, Maya, 693–728 A.D., Private Coll.

As we close out this "Playful Pre-Columbians" section, we should make mention of Søren Wichmann's and Jesper Nielsen's discussion of what they have termed "sequential text-image pairing" in Classic Maya art and their suggestion that it represents "America's First Comics?" Given the fact that only a few painted Maya screenfold codices have survived, the richest source of this Maya "sequential text-image pairing" are the polychrome painted decoration on Classic Maya ceramics, especially the class of elite cylindrical drinking vessels. As Wichmann and Nielsen note, there are striking parallels between Maya "sequential text-image pairings" and the modern comics medium, such as the use of wavy lines to connect speaker to text and to indicate motion (**Fig. 1583**). Wichmann and Nielsen also note that humor is also a feature of some Maya "sequential text-pairing" decorative painting, such as with the "Regal Rabbit Pot" (**Fig. 1584**), which they describe (Wichmann and Nielsen, 2017):

> A cheeky rabbit (seen in the right-hand half of [the] picture) has nicked the clothes from the naked old man on the far right (now identified as God L, one of the most important gods of the Maya underworld). Adding insult to injury, the rabbit says to the god 'Smell your sweat, Wizard-willy'. Then (the story reads from right to left in the [rolled-up version of the] picture) the rabbit hides under the left arm of the Sun God, who pretends to God L that the rabbit is nowhere to be seen.

Wichmann and Nielsen are careful not to fall into the "Lascaux Hypothesis" trap and suggest that there is any historical connection between the Maya "sequential text-

image pairings" and the modern comics medium. In their revised version of their article (Wichmann and Nielsen, 2016) they point out that

> . . . the stories that the Maya artists tell are few in number and abbreviated to one or two scenes. In contrast, the number of Western comics is massive and they always tell whole stories. We attribute this phenomenon to the fact that the Maya were more unified in terms of shared cultural knowledge than are members of Western society. For the ancient Maya, the messages existed before the medium, i.e., as orally transmitted myths and stories, and the artists would elaborate on, but not create narratives.

[In this regard, Maya "sequential text-image pairings" are analogous to the "Homeric" bowls we discussed above (cf. **Fig. 830**), in so far as they both are ancient analogues to the comics medium that illustrate stories already known to viewers.]

Wichmann and Nielsen conclude:

> While we find many similarities at the level of visual narrative techniques—similarities that reveal shared cognitive features across cultures—'Western' and Maya sequential text-image pairing are radically different from a more sociological point of view. From the 18th century and onwards the combination of and interplay between text and image was, in Western society, considered a debased form of communication. Only artists who directed themselves towards a mass audience, prominently including the lower classes, dared venture into text-image pairing. The ancient Maya, however, considered the combination of text and image the most exquisite and exclusive form of artistic communication, and, as far as we know, reserved it for elite consumption. Thus, under these diametrically opposed social conditions art forms arose more than a thousand years apart in radically different cultures, art forms that nevertheless share an incredible amount of minute technical detail. With these observations we hope to have contributed a little to filling one of the holes of the official history of art

And now, as we draw this final Part III "Comical Cultures" essay to a close, one more point.

As we noted in the"Miming the Masters" section of the above Part II "Amusing Art" essay, American art-themed cartoons and comic strips are almost exclusively about works of art from the Western canon. So too are American cartoons and comic strips about ancient cultures mostly restricted to those deemed to be part of our Western heritage, the Easter Island moai and a handful of Pre-Columbian cartoons notwithstanding. The absence of American funny-pages cartoon gags about ancient East

Asian or African cultures is in keeping with the country's cultural myopia—a cultural prejudice that mirrors the current American isolationist political climate.

Fig. 1585. Ray Billingsley, *Curtis*, 23 Nov., 2014.

An exception-that-proves-the-rule of this observation is a Ray Billingsley *Curtis* comic strip (**Fig. 1585**), where Curtis humorously substitutes "ricotta" for the famous terracotta sculptures buried with the first Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang in 210 B.C.E. But Billingsley doesn't assume that his American audience would have the "culturally bound background knowledge" to get this joke, and instead has the teacher Mrs. Nelson spell it out to us in the second, zoomed-in, panel of the bottom row, a panel that is followed by a wordless panel which provide a beat-pause timing before the final punchline.

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Conclusions

A discerning reader might suspect that I was dissembling somewhat in the "Preface" where I stated that

> [This work] is not a mere compilation of humorous cartoons and comic strips with art or archaeology themes. Although I assume that, like me, readers will smile at most of the hundreds of comics included in this study, they were not selected just for the sake of the reader's enjoyment. The representations of art or ancient cultures in these cartoons and comic strips are, rather, the *subject* of this analytical study, examined to see what they can tell us about humor in American comics, about American attitudes towards art and antiquity, and, more broadly, about American culture in general.

The inordinate amount of space I have devoted to categorizing the various types of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips I have collected here and the often excruciating amount of detail I have gone into in analyzing their formal characteristics and the forms of humor they employ may seem to belie my stated goal of using this corpus of cartoons and comic strips to uncover insights about humor in American comics and about American culture in general.

Fig. 1586. Dave Horton, *Hortoon*, 2008.

Truth be told, as an archaeologist, I am an inveterate typologist, and like the seashell collector in the Floridian Dave Horton's *Hortoon* cartoon (**Fig. 1586**), I felt compelled to impose order on this corpus of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons that began with my wife and me innocently clipping out comics from the funny pages. [And, as Horton suggests with his collector creating an unending trail of repeated groupings of starfish, scallop shells, etc., this compunction to impose order can become pathological.]

Nevertheless, although I was motivated to write *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* more for my own enjoyment and pathological need to impose order than I was willing to admit in the "Preface," I hope that these essays have revealed at least some insights into the nature of American cartoon humor and the American cultural values that these cartoons embody.

Humor Theory and Comics Scholarship

As I noted in the "Preface," one of the aims I had in writing *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* was to integrate the analytical tools developed by humor theorists with those developed by comics scholars and to apply them to the analysis of humorous cartoons and comic strips—a category of comics art that has generally been neglected by both groups.

One of central issues involved in that integration concerns what constitutes visual humor. As we discussed at the end of the Part II "Amusing Art" essay, humor theorists, grounded in the General Theory of *Verbal* Humor (emphasis added), have, in elucidating the structure of the humor in "gag" cartoons, tended to make no distinction between a visual image and a verbal description of that image. But, as I said:

> Giving a verbal paraphrase of visual humor . . . not only "kills the joke" but it also distorts the way that visual gags actually elicit a humorous response. . . . Our initial appreciation of such humor is immediate, and non-verbal. . . . We smile first and think later.

To be sure, the humor theorists Andrea Samson and Oswald Huber have noted that, while the humor in some cartoons comes from information solely supplied by the text with the "picture" only being "an illustration of the verbal joke," at other times "the picture is essential for the production of humor," whether by supplying information not provided in the text (if any), or by supplying information that supports what is given in the text. (This latter category would seem to be the same as the comics scholar Robert Harvey's ideal gag cartoon which exploits a creative interplay of verbal *and* visual elements.) But even with this recognition of the role of the visual in producing humor, neither humor theorists nor comics scholars have seriously addressed the question of exactly *how* an image might convey humorous information in a manner independent of a verbal paraphrase of that image. As the aesthetician Patrick Maynard humorously put it: "It may seem funny that no standard account of depiction can account for funny pictures."

Christian Hempelmann and Andrea Samson have claimed that "aesthetic elements are non-essential to humor" and that "aesthetic aspects of visual humor remain largely unexplored, not least because of difficulties of quantifiability and operationalizability." But, as we have noted, part of the visual humor in cartoons and comic strips derives from their context. When we turn to the funny pages in a newspaper or encounter an inset cartoon in a magazine like the *New Yorker*, the very act of *seeing* a visual image drawn in a style that our "culturally bound background knowledge" recognizes as "cartoonish" sets up an expectation—what Patrick Maynard calls a "mental bubble"—that that cartoon or comic strip is meant to be funny. And, as I suggested in discussing **Fig. i** in the "Preface," we could employ the Chomsky-inspired heuristic tools of substitution, deletion, and modification that Neil Cohn employs in his Visual Narrative Grammar analyses as a possible mechanism to provide the sort of "operationalization" that Hempelmann and Samson seek. In order to uncover *how* visual humor in comics can be humorous we might begin by asking whether removing or modifying such elements as pictorial runes, speech bubbles, or the gutters between panels—what Tierry Groensteen calls the "mechanisms" of comics art—or whether depicting the figures in the visual image more realistically would make a given cartoon more or less humorous.

[While I must admit that, in *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages*, I have not pursued this avenue of investigating the nature of visual humor, I have laid the groundwork for doing so by providing extensive analyses of the formal characteristics of the cartoons and comic strips in this collection.]

In addition to raising the question of how visual humor can be humorous, *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* has addressed a number of other issues that have been either neglected or under-explored by humor theorists and comics scholars alike.

One of the most important of these issues is what I have called the "humorous uchronía" incongruity, where the past is humorously re-contextualized in terms of contemporary cultural elements. (Think *The Flintstones*.) Although recognized by the comic scholars Luis Gasca and Asier Mensuro in their 2014 *La Pintura en el Cómic*, humor theorists have yet to acknowledge this category of humorous incongruity—an incongruity that is common in art-themed cartoons and comic strips and, together with

its cousin "inverse humorous uchronía" (where the present is re-contextualized in terms of the past), nearly ubiquitous in archaeology-themed ones.

Another type of cartoon humor we have identified in this study that is as yet unrecognized in humor theory or comics studies is what I have called the "anticipatory" gag (cf., e.g., **Figs. 224**, **369**, **373**, and **1535**), where the joke comes from our imagining events that will happen *after* the time period represented in a cartoon. As such, "anticipatory" cartoons undermine Scott McCloud's contention that single-panel cartoons are not narratives.

As we have noted, scholars of the comics medium—of sequential narration—have naturally paid a great deal of attention to how comics artists use the layout of their narrative presentations. Thierry Groensteen, for example, in a chapter entitled "The Rhythms of Comics" in his *Comics and Narration* (the 2016 translation of his 2011 *Bande dessinée et narration: Système de la bande dessinée*), makes a distinction between a comics' primary rhythm formed by the placement of panels and its counterpoint rhythms made out of components like color and subject matter. These visual "rhythms," Groensteen maintains, are distinct from the passage of time in the narrative, which may move at a very different rate from the rhythm produced by the page as a whole.

But, again as we have repeatedly noted, comics scholars like Groensteen have tended to focus their attention on page layouts in longer narratives like comic books and graphic novels, and they have generally neglected the short-form comic strip and have paid virtually no attention to how the layout rhythms of comic strips can contribute to producing humor. One of the ways that *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* has tried to fill in this lacuna is by suggesting that mechanisms such as panel elongation, conjoining gutterless panels, the use of silhouette views, or employing visual close-ups, can provide a rhythm that supports a joke much like a snare-drum rimshot accompaniment to a stand-up comic (cf. **Figs. 1**, **117**, **182–184**, **231**, **245**, **341**, **388**, and **722**).

In terms of the layout of humorous comic-strips, this study has identified a heretofore unrecognized category I have called "composite cartoons," which I defined as "compilations of discrete comic images about a single subject which do not form a sequential narrative but which, taken together, create a general humorous comment about that subject. In a 'composite cartoon', the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (cf., e.g., **Figs. 188**, **199**, **391**, **397**, **430–440**, and **1518**). The "composite

cartoon" is a favorite of the cartoonists Richard Thompson and Grant Snider, who also use a variant, the "quasi-narrative composite cartoon," which I have characterized as composite cartoons "in which the separate comic vignettes do not form a single sequential story but nonetheless are designed to be viewed in the order presented in the cartoon" (cf. e.g., **Figs. 441–443**, **468**, **594**, and **1129**).

In addition to exploring ways in which this collection of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comics present humor, *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* has also addressed a number of other issues involved in an analysis of the comics medium.

One of these issues concerns "intertextual" cartoons and comic strips that visually quote a work of art, whether as parodies (quotations that differ in style, tone or setting from their originals) or as pastiches (quotations meant to mimic the graphic styles of their originals). As we discussed in our first "A Test Case" essay and in the "Miming the Masters" section of the "Amusing Art" essay, Nancy Pedri has claimed that such "re-presentations" of quoted art in cartoons and comic strips "asks readers to adopt an interpretative practice that respects, but also crosses boundaries, separating visual semiotic modes." But, as we have shown (e.g. **Figs. 463–464**), not all comics quotations of art are "re-presentations" that require viewers to decode the cartoon or comic strip in terms of the symbolic meanings that we have culturally ascribed to the quoted art, such as James Abbott Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1* as a symbol of motherhood and family values or Edvard Munch's *Der Schrei der Natur* as a symbol of existential angst.

A related issue that arises when cartoons or comic strips quote works of art is what I have called the "associative inversion" effect. As Michael Picone observed, when a quoted work of art is depicted more realistically than the "mimetic 'reality'" of the cartoon universe in which it appears, viewers experience a curious inversion of the experience they have when looking at a work of art in a museum. In a museum, we are more "real" than the representations in the art hanging on the walls; given that we tend to identify with cartoon characters presented as abstracted icons(what Scott McCloud calls the "masking effect"), in cartoons or comic strips with realistic quotations of art, we are less "real" than the works of art. As visual artists themselves, cartoonists have naturally had great fun in playing with this "associative inversion" effect (cf. **Figs. 469–471**).

A common issue in comics scholarship that comes up time and time again is the refutation of the view that comics is a "low-brow" form of mass-produced popular culture suitable only for children and adolescents. However, with the advent of academic departments of comics studies and academic journals dedicated to the study of comics, with graphic novelists such as Art Spiegelman receiving Pulitzer Prizes and cartoonists like Lynda Barry winning MacArthur "genius" grants, with the mounting of exhibitions of comics in major art museums (e.g. **Figs. 140**, **141**, **144**, **147**, and **151,**) with collaborations between art museums and graphic artists (e.g. **Figs. 165–169**), and with the establishment of institutions like the French Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image in Angoulême, and the American Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum at Ohio State University, this perceived "low-brow"estimation of the comics format is now firmly out-dated, although it remains a boogeyman that comic scholars seem compelled to chase.

The proposition that comics is a legitimate art form that should be analyzed on its own terms is no longer controversial, and it has certainly been accepted by American cartoonists and comic strip artists. The frequent quotations of "fine" art by cartoonists and comic strips artists, such as we have seen in the numerous examples presented in the Part II "Amusing Art" essay, is evidence of this. Whether as targets of gags, set-ups to gags targeting other subjects, or even as homages to "fine art" artists (e.g. **Figs. 279** and **280**), such cartoon and comic strip parodies and pastiches reverse the cooptation of "low-brow" mass culture cartoons by such Pop artists as Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. On the other side of the coin, this new evaluation of comics *qua* art is reflected in the works of "fine art" painters who incorporate comics into their works as an equal art form and not as an ironic parody of popular culture (cf., e.g., **Figs. 143**, and **149–154**).

This new meta-narrative that comics *is* an art form can also be seen in the trend for cartoonists and comic strip artists to incorporate "intertextual" quotations of the work of other cartoonists and comic strip artists, such as with allusions to Charles Schulz' *Peanuts* (**Figs. 270**, **271**, **273**, **663**, and **1416**), the Comic Switcheroo of 1997 (**Figs. 262–266**), the Team Cul de Sac's allusions to Richard Thompson's comic strip (**Figs. 275–277**), or Berkeley Breathed's supposed "collaboration" with Bill Watterson

(**Figs. 268–269**). Such “intertextuality” is in line with the ironic metafiction that characterizes much of post-modern art and literature.

To illustrate some of the points raised so far in this “Conclusion,” I present here three cartoons by Peter Kuper, the New York cartoonist, graphic novelist, and teacher perhaps best known for continuing Antonio Prohías’ “Spy vs. Spy”comic in *Mad Magazine*, which he took over in 1997.

Fig. 1587. Peter Kuper, “This is Not a Pipe,” Screenprint, 2008. University of North Dakota.

A screenprint that Kuper made with his students when he was a visiting artist at the University of North Dakota in 2008 (**Fig. 1587**) is an example of a “quasi-narrative composite cartoon,” which, although it does not present a coherent sequential narrative, is designed to be read as a conventional comic strip, beginning in the upper left with the parody of René Magritte’s *La Trahison des images* and ending with the bottom right panel of the television shot of what looks to be George Bush. Like Scott McCloud’s 1993 comic riff on this iconic Magritte painting (**Fig. 595**)—a riff one suspects may have been

the inspiration for this exercise Kuper undertook with his students—Kuper's print plays with Magritte's Dadaist absurdity in a series of panels where visual images supplement the texts, much like Robert Harvey's ideal of a gag cartoon. In the case of this biting political commentary, of course, the ironic images of environmental and social crises are hardly meant to convey humor!

Fig. **1588**. Peter Kuper, cagle.com, 21 Sept., 2020.

Another Peter Kuper "quasi-narrative composite cartoon" (**Fig. 1588**) employs "humorous uchronía" to present a nostalgic comment on how our world has changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic (for other similar comments, cf. **Figs**. **57–84** in the "Pandemic Pastiches" section of the "Webcomics and Internet Memes" essay). This Kuper cartoon assumes viewers would have the "culturally bound background knowledge" to get the reference to the 1966 movie *One Million Years B.C.* (cf. **Fig. 763**).

[It also assumes that readers would not be bothered by the fact that the coronavirus outbreak was only a quarter of million minutes old in September, 2020!] The bitter-sweet humor in Kuper's cartoon comes from the incongruous contrast between the noncontroversial textual descriptions of Paleolithic life with the "humorous uchronía" depictions of cavemen and cavewomen shopping in grocery stores, getting their hair done at beauty salons, going out on dinner dates, and rooting for their favorite basketball teams—a format that comports with Robert Harvey's ideal gag cartoon where the humor consists of contributions from both verbal and visual elements.. That these depictions are rendered as if they were painted on stone slabs reinforces what we have noted is the erroneous cartoon cliché that Paleolithic people drew on stone tablets (cf. **Figs. 1206**, **1216**, **1218**, and **1220**). The final panel in Kuper's cartoon, where a COVID-19 molecule is represented as crashing into a caveman much like the 65 million-year-old Chicxulub impactor, also reinforces the mistaken belief in the contemporaneousness of cavemen and dinosaurs (cf. **Fig. 1370**).

The joke in this 21 September, 2020, Kuper cartoon closely resembles an 11 March, 2020, Dave Granlund "inverse humorous uchronía" cartoon where a future caveman Grampa is telling his grandkids "what life was like before Covid-19" (**Fig. 1110**). While the similarities of these Granlund and Kuper cartoons might be chalked up to independent inventions of cartoonists using a common caveman cartoon cliché to address the topical issue of the pandemic, the fact that both cartoons were published in Daryl Cagle's syndicated politicalcartoons.com argues against such a lenient interpretation. On the other hand, the structures of the jokes in the two cartoons are quite different, and rather than accusing Kuper of plagiarism, we should generously attribute the similarities to Kuper building on a cartoon cliché Granlund initiated.

One more recent Peter Kuper cartoon, this one published four days before his "One Million Minutes B.C." one:

Fig. 1589. Peter Kuper, cagle.com, 17 Sept., 2020.

In this cartoon (**Fig. 1589**), Kuper assumes his viewers are familiar with the common cartoon cliché of a bedraggled naysayer carrying a "The End is Near" sign. Kuper's variation has turned the tables on the textual/visual dichotomy in humorous cartoons and has transformed the textual *into* the visual—something that Thierry Groensteen and other comics scholars have noted must be taken into account when texts are incorporated within a cartoon universe. Kuper uses the trope of wine-sipping patrons at an art gallery (cf. **Figs. 157**, **193**, and **402**) to have his be-robed soothsayers admiring each other's signs incongruously hung on the gallery's walls as works of art—a joke very similar to a Dave Coverly cartoon (**Fig. 424**) of a school child making art out of her "I will not talk in art class" detention. As a metafictional comment about comics *qua* art, this Kuper cartoon resonates with Nina Paley's "The frame is the art" comic strip (**Fig. 170**).

[And, for my patient readers, the end is indeed near!]

The issue of plagiarism vs. independent invention is one that permeates *Art and Archaeology in the Funny Pages*, as with our discussion of Peter Kuper's "One Million Minutes B.C." cartoon above, and it is one that has received a great deal of attention among editors and cartoonists themselves in recent years.

When confronted with two (or more) humorous cartoons that seem remarkably similar, either in their visual layouts and/or in the humor they employ, I have tended to err on the side of generosity and attribute the similarities to independent invention, especially when the topic of the cartoons is a well known cliché (e.g., with **Figs. 485–486**, **504–505**, **540–541**, **603–604**, **614–615**, **630–632**, **637–638**, and **1472–1473**). As Jamie Smith put it when Tim White chided him for the similarities in their "Keister Island" cartoons (**Figs. 1268–1269**): "these accidental overlaps do happen," given "just how challenging it is to generate original material, especially with clichéd topics that have become almost as well-worn over the centuries as the subject matter." Similarly, Bob Mankoff said in defending Lee Lorenz—his predecessor as art editor at the *New Yorker* who was accused in 2007 of using same joke as a Gary Larson 1984 *The Far Side* cartoon—"Often in the same week different cartoonists will independently come up with identical ideas. Other times cartoonists generate ideas that have been previously published in the magazine. This is not plagiarism; rather it is the result of very creative people developing many ideas from a few well-established, well-traveled cartoon settings."

But this not to say that cartoonists have never crossed the line between building on an established cartoon cliché and plagiarism. Alan Gardiner has noted that the Oklahoman editorial cartoonist David Simpson actually redrew earlier Jeff MacNelly cartoons—not once, but twice! Gardiner has also accused Jeff Stahler of using the same punchline that David Sipress had earlier used in a *New Yorker* cartoon. (Jamie Smith reports that both Simpson and Stahler resigned their respective newspaper positions after Gardiner's revelations came to light.) While redrawing a cartoon originally drawn by another cartoonist would seem to be an open-and-shut case of plagiarism, using the same punchline another cartoonist had used might really be an innocent coincidence; still, as I suggested in the case of a "March of Progress" cartoon by Clare Mulley, which uses the same punchline that Jordo had used (**Figs. 949–950**), and one by Bill Whitehead, which uses the same punchline that Mick Stevens had used (**Figs. 951–952**), such overlaps are indeed suspicious. And, as I added, "now in the internet age when so many cartoons are available online . . . it would seem that professional responsibility would require cartoonists to undertake an online search before publishing their 'original' cartoons."

A related issue arises when cartoonists plagiarize themselves, either by recycling a gag they had used before, like Wiley Miller did with his “Renaissance” cave-painting cartoons (**Figs. 1134–1135**) and Dan Piraro did with his pigeon statue cartoons (**Figs. 395a–395b**) , or by reusing a drawing they had previously published with a different punchline, which Mike Baldwin (**Figs. 1136–1137** and **1388**), and Dan Pirarro (**Figs. 1357** and **1359-1360**) have done. In trying to generously explain this latter category of self-plagiarism, I have suggested that “in this age of ‘caption that cartoon’ contests . . . some may consider it acceptable for a cartoonist to republish an earlier cartoon with a new text.”

In one of his *Savage Chickens* cartoons (**Fig. 555**) Doug Savage has Timmy the Tasteless Tofu say “Stealing is the new creativity.” But, as Jamie Smith noted in his 2011 “Imitation Flattery” *Ink and Snow* blog post, the collaborative means of production in modern cartoons and comic strips complicates the question of creativity:

> These issues of authenticity and originality affect the creator as being the *only* one who does *everything* in the production of a cartoon, to varying degrees along the continuum: using writers, pencillers, background artists, letterers, colorists, art by committee etc. - to the point where the original artist has nothing to do with the piece that bears their name.

In his talk “The Cheapening of the Comics” that he gave in 1989 at Ohio State University, Bill Watterson made a similar point as he railed against the commercial power of the syndicates that supply cartoons and comic strips to newspapers:

> Consider only the most successful strips in the papers today. Why are so many of them poorly drawn? Why do so many offer only the simplest interchangeable gags and puns? Why are some strips written by committees and drawn by assistants? Why are some strips still stumbling around decades after their original creators have retired or died? Why are some strips little more than advertisements for dolls and greeting cards? Why do so many of the comics look the same?
>
> If comics can be so much, why are we settling for so little? Can't we expect more from our comics pages?
>
> Well, these days, probably not. Let's look at why.
>
> The comics are a collaborative effort on the part of the cartoonists who draw them, the syndicates that distribute them, and the newspapers that buy and publish them. Each needs the other, and all haves common interest in providing comics features of a quality that attracts a devoted readership. But business and art almost always have a rocky marriage, and in comic strips today the interests of business are undermining the concerns of the art.

David Sipress raised a related issue in his 2020 *New Yorker* article "Stop, Thief! My Cartoon Gets Appropriated," where he complains about the artist Karl Haendel's "theft" of one of Sipress' cartoons, which Haendel had redrawn and incorporated with four other redrawn images into a work Haendel entitled "Mazel Tov Group." While Sipress certainly does have grounds to complain that Haendel had used Sipress' copyrighted cartoon without attribution, and that he had done so in order to create his own work of commercial value, Sipress also is not unaware of the long history of artistic appropriation, from "Marcel Duchamp's readymades (think of a snow shovel hanging in a museum), Robert Rauschenberg's 'combines,' and the work of artists such as Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns."

As I noted in the "Preface," *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* also walks a fine line between theft of copyrighted property and fair use expropriation: "I have taken a rather liberal view of the degree to which I need to obtain (i.e. pay for!) permission to quote copyrighted material for my non-commercial, analytical study." I have, of course, tried my best to give accurate attributions to every cartoon and comic strip I discuss in this work. I will leave it up to the reader to determine whether my study has added value to the cartoons and comic strips I included in it, or whether I should have coughed up the many tens of thousands of dollars it would have taken to pay for the rights to use these copyrighted images. [I doubt that any reader would suggest that my work has added such value that I ought to ask the hundreds of cartoonists and comic strip artists (or their heirs or the syndicates that represent them) whose works appear in *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* to pay *me* for the privilege of my having prattled on and on about their jokes!]

Of course, one is naturally sympathetic to the cartoonists and comic strip artists who struggle to make a living in a commercial environment where, as Bill Watterson described it in 1989:

> Today, comic strip cartoonists work for syndicates, not individual newspapers, but 100 years into the medium it's still the very rare cartoonist who owns his creation. Before agreeing to sell a comic strip, syndicates generally demand ownership of the characters, copyright, and all exploitation rights. The cartoonist is never paid or otherwise compensated for giving up these rights: he either gives them up or he doesn't get syndicated.

> The syndicates take the strip and sell it to newspapers and split the income with the cartoonists. Syndicates are essentially agents. Now, can you imagine a novelist giving his literary agent the ownership of his characters and all reprint, television, and movie rights before the agent takes the manuscript to a publisher? . . . virtually every cartoonist does exactly that when a syndicate demands ownership before agreeing to sell the strip to newspapers. Some syndicates take these rights forever, some syndicates for shorter periods, but in any event, the syndicate has final authority and control over artwork it had no hand in creating or producing. Without creator control over the work, the comics remain a product to be exploited, not an art.

Add to this economic stranglehold of cartoon syndicates the pressures of having to produce a daily gag (cf. **Figs. 240–241**), and one can have at least some sympathy for the cartoonist or comic strip artist who is tempted to cross a plagiarism line.

Watterson's 1989 "The Cheapening of the Comics" talk was given when the funny pages in printed newspapers were still the main vehicle driving the distribution of gag cartoon and humorous comic strips. (And it was also a time when Watterson's gender-specific "he" was an accurate reflection of the dearth of female artists in the cartoon business). Now, of course, the internet has changed the production and consumption of cartoons and comic strips in ways we have touched upon in the Part I "Webcomics and Internet Memes" essay. And while cartoon syndicates like Andrews McMeels' Syndication, CartoonStock, and the Cartoonist Group still exercise great economic sway, many cartoonists and humorous comic strip artists have used the internet to maintain "creator control" over their work by publishing their cartoons and comic strips on their own websites, often producing esoteric and sexually explicit cartoons that would never have been allowed into the newspaper funny pages.

In comparing the popular comic strips of his day to the great early masters like George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, Watterson asked "Why are so many of them poorly drawn?" The deteriorating level of attention gag cartoonists and humorous comic strip artists pay to the art of drawing seems to have only worsened since 1989—a point I made in discussing a Winsor McCay *Little Nemo in Dreamland* comic, **Fig. 242**. And now in the digital age, webcomics "artists" like Randall Munroe can get away with peopling their jokes with stick figures (e.g. **Fig. 22**). But, while of course many contemporary webcomics are being drawn with great artistic skill, the fact that cartoonists and comic strip artists are abandoning ink and paper and producing their comics on computer tablets poses another problem *vis-à-vis* the evaluation of the comics medium as a "high"

as opposed to a "low" art. Matt Kennedy noted in the catalog to his 2018 *Pop Sequentialism: The Art of Comics* exhibition (**Fig. 160**): "single pages of important, original comic art routinely fetch more than half a million dollars each. And new records are set almost quarterly, with the current record being $3.5 million for a set of Tin Tin endpaper illustrations." But, if part of the re-evaluation of the comics medium as a "high" art came from the sale of original, hand-drawn, comics for prices equivalent to those realized for drawings by Old Masters, what are we to make of comics created digitally, where one cannot distinguish between an "original" and any of an infinite number of identical copies? [We might note that this problem also exists for artists like David Hockney who "paints" in Photoshop on his computer; while Hockney makes limited editions of prints of his computer-generated art, the claim he makes on his website that "they are not photographic reproductions" rings hollow.]

American Culture in Art and Archaeology Cartoons

Fig. 1590. Detail from Fig. 288, Stephan Pastis, "The Sad, Lonely Journey of a 'Pearls' Comic Strip," *Pearls Before Swine*, 11 July, 2004.

One of the main features of American culture as represented in this corpus of art- and archaeology-themed humorous cartoons and comic strips is its conservatism. Mainstream cartoonists and comic strip artists—as opposed to editorial cartoonists—tend to avoid controversial subjects like religion or politics, and, as we have seen on numerous occasions, overt sexuality is a taboo topic, even to the point where quoted artworks that depict nudity have to be bowdlerized (cf. **Figs. 359–361**, **472**, **485–487**, and **1541**). To be sure, this conservatism is, as Stephan Pastis humorously portrayed it (**Fig. 1590**), more a function of the modes of production of cartoons and comic strips—where syndicates and newspapers are trying to make money by not offending readers—

than it is due to any inherent conservatism in comic artists themselves, who tend to be a generally liberal group.

Another feature of American culture that our examination of these art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips has brought to light is its isolationism. Quoted works of art and references to ancient cultures overwhelmingly come from the Western canon, as if the "culturally bound background knowledge" of viewers does not extend to the rest of the world. The restricted number of artists that American cartoonists quote—almost none of them living artists—and the limited number of cartoon stereotypes they use to make fun of these artists suggests that American cartoon viewers have a rather poor grasp of art history, especially when compared to the "culturally bound background knowledge" British cartoonists assume that their viewers have. I have even suggested: "It is ironic, then, that comics—that supposedly low-brow, childish medium—have thus become a venue where many Americans learn about fine art, as if cartoons and comic strips are a sort of a game where one tries to decipher the art references one encounters."

As the Part II essays in *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* have revealed, American cartoonists and comic strip artists have demonstrated a marked hostility towards the elite art establishment that had for so long excluded comics from the ranks of "fine" art. It is unclear whether their American viewers share this hostility towards art museums, art critics, and professional artists, but it is certainly in line with the general current of American anti-elitism that has given rise to Trumpism. Further, in contrast to how earlier American cartoonists had generally been sympathetic towards *avant-garde* art even as they made jokes about it, it would seem that, like Bunny Hoest's and John Reiner's more recent snarky attacks on abstract expressionist art in *The Lockhorns*, (**Fig. 709**), contemporary Americans feel, as George Melly put it, ". . . that somehow an assault on accepted visual standards masks an attack on moral standards."

As I've noted in the Part III essays, American cartoonists and comic strip artists have played fast and loose with historical reality in their humorous portrayals of ancient cultures, from perpetrating the erroneous belief that cavemen lived with dinosaurs to the "humorous uchronía" re-contextualization of antiquity in terms contemporary social customs. These humorous portrayals of ancient cultures reflect an underlying American exceptionalism—an ahistorical unrootedness of a people who view their country as a timeless, eternal, paragon; as Fredrick Burr Opper put it in the introduction

to his 1903 *Our Antediluvian Ancestors:* "In fact, the ordinary man's mind, I am convinced, worked then as it works now, and was occupied with the same interests, desires and emotions. . . . although everything else in the world changes constantly, Human Nature has not changed, is not changing, and will never change." Americans live in a culture of instant gratification, where the past is viewed as if from the wrong end of a telescope, where it is difficult to distinguish the distance separating 1,000 years from 10,000 years or even from 100,000 or 1,000,000 years.

Fig. 1591. Mothers taking their children to the art museum(from Figs. 158, and 223–225).

These observations about American conservatism, isolationism, and lack of appreciation for the depth of our human ancestry aside, the most prominent feature of American culture revealed in this corpus of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips is the American family, which is almost universally portrayed as a white, middle-class, suburban household consisting of a mother, a father, and one or two children. This cartoon portrayal is a "white-picket-fence" idealization of the American family stuck in a 1950's fantasy where the husband goes off to work (cf. **Figs. 846**, **1486–1487**) while the wife stays at home minding the children (cf. **Figs. 266**, **477**, **559**, **618**, **627–628**, **732**, **742**, **843**, **867–868**, **1029**, **1116–1117**, **1165**, and **1490**) and inculcating social values in her offspring (cf. **Fig. 1591**). This cartoon vision of the ideal bourgeois American home—often presented as a "humorous uchronía" re-contextualization of the past in terms of contemporary customs—is a place where the backyard is mowed (cf. **Figs. 319** and **925**), raked (cf. **Fig. 1488**) and adorned with garden sculpture (cf. **Fig. 393**), where children make snowmen (cf. **Figs. 388**, **389**, **497** and **1530**), boys resist taking bubblebaths (cf**. Figs. 559**, **1396–1397** and **1409**), and parents read bedtime stories (cf. **Fig. 1569**), where children go to school to take art

classes (cf. **Figs. 419–429**, **433**, **633–634**, **647**, and **1118**), go on school outings (cf. **Figs**. **227–234**, and **519**), get report cards (cf. **Figs**. **20** and **1559**), and have their annual school picture portraits taken (cf. **Fig**. **340**), and where parents brag about their children on the bumperstickers of their cars (cf. **Figs**. **1366f** and **1552**), take them on educational trips to the art museum (cf. **Figs**. **163**, **235–239**, **496**, **718**, and **1591** above), and listen to them complaining in the back seat of the car (cf**. Figs**. **163**, **235**, **1104**, **1386**, and **1496**). And don't forget about the family pet! (cf. **Figs**. **341–346**, **739**, **873–874**, **1120–1121**, and **1141**).

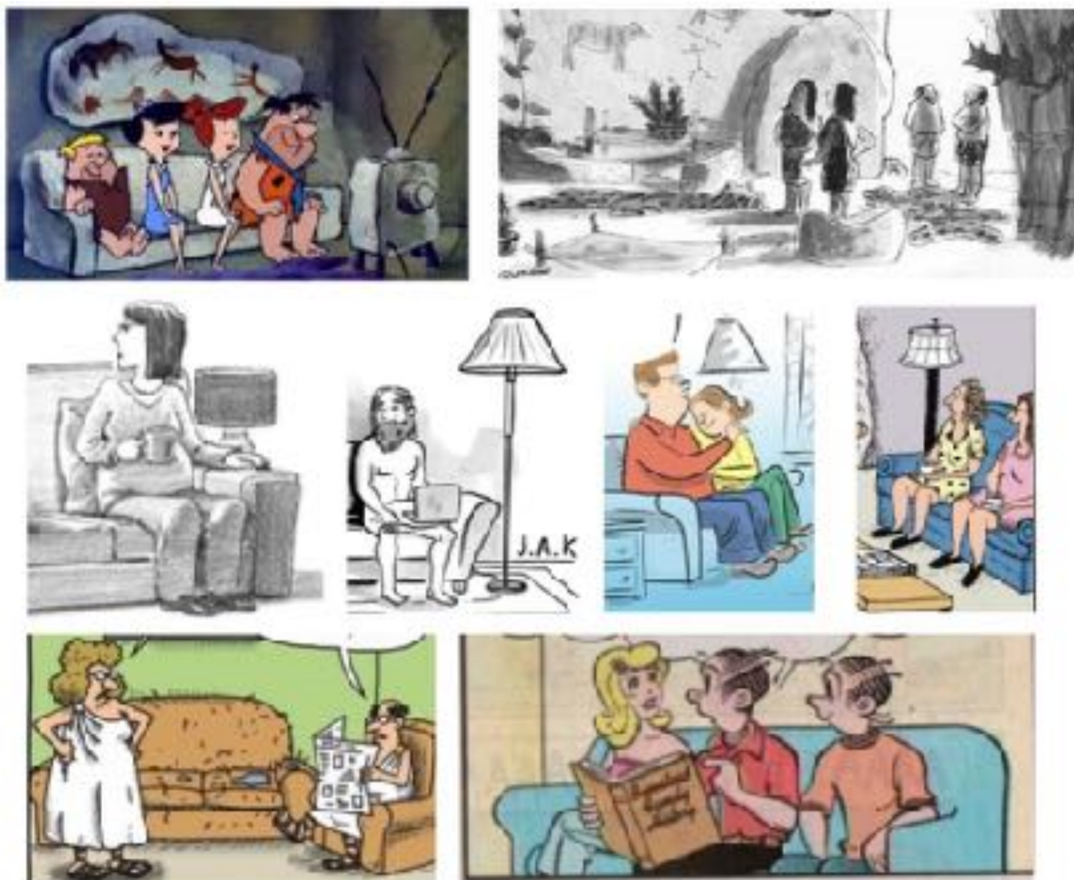

Fig. **1592**. The living room sofa (from Figs. 845, 1075, 535, 1494, 1458, 1084, 1546, and 1554).

Curiously, this idealized cartoon American family is almost never shown sitting around the dining or kitchen table (although the kitchen refrigerator as a repository of children's art is frequently depicted, cf. **Figs**. **137**, **402–409**). Instead, our cartoon American family seems to spend most of its time on the living room sofa, which is usually depicted with side-tables and lamps (**Fig. 1592**). And like the good bourgeoise they are, the cartoon American family invariably hangs art above their living room couches (**Fig. 1593**).

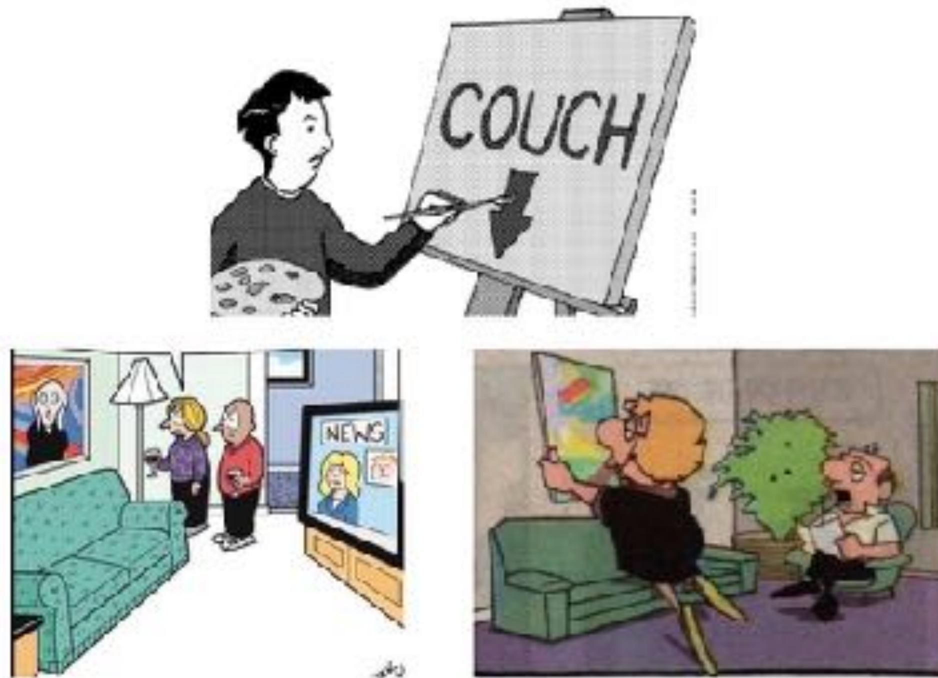

Fig. **1593**. Art above the couch (from Figs. 725, 536, and 709).

On its surface, the idealized cartoon American family appears to live in a benign world. There are no racial or ethnic conflicts, no poverty or economic inequality, and even the police are polite and non-threatening (cf. **Figs**. **951–952**, **1493**, and **1512**).

But all is not peaceful in this cartoon utopia.

Fig. **1594**. Mothers chiding their children (from Figs. 21, 297, 298, 331, 636, 1099, and 1331).

Fig. 1595. Disgruntled women (from Figs. 17, 18 1489, 1504, 1519, 1558, 1586).

Fig. 1596. Men watching television (from Figs. 505, 551, 618, 1509, 883, and 894).

Fig. 1597. Men sleeping in chairs (from Figs. 200, 201, 239, 377, and 504).

The cartoon American family has been touched by a feminist movement, a "battle of the sexes" (cf. **Figs. 1087–1089**, **1340**, and **1492**) where the woman has become fed up with her traditional role of doing the grocery shopping (cf. **Fig. 1010**), cooking the meals (cf. **Figs**. **118**, **552**, **601**, **842**, and **1088–1089**), decorating the house (cf. **Figs. 726**, and **1075–1077**), and preparing for dinner parties (cf. **Fig. 117**). The modern American cartoon wife is often depicted, with crossed arms or hands on hips, as being exacerbated by her children (**Fig. 1594**) or her husband (**Fig**, **1595**; for other complaining wife cartoons, cf. **Figs**. **451**, **454**, **521–522**, **949–950**, **1029**, **1034**, **1072–1073**, **1080**, **1151**, **1195**, **1207**, **1229**, **1232**, and **1546**). And it would seem that these cartoon wives have grounds to complain. When American cartoon men are not out drinking in bars (cf. **Figs**. **55**, **558**, **576**, **602**, **881**, **1038**, **1052**, and **1502**), they are hanging out in their "man caves" (cf. **Figs. 1079–1085**), watching television in their recliners with a remote in one hand and a can of beer in the other (**Fig. 1596**), or simply just asleep in a chair (**Fig. 1597**). And the American cartoon man always seems to have sex on his mind (cf. **Fig. 528**; for other cartoons about toxic masculinity and the male gaze, cf. **Figs**. **224–225**, **307**, **309**, **682**, **701**, and **1055**).

While our corpus of humorous cartoons and comic strips do contain some outdated sexists jokes about fat wives (cf. **Figs. 493**, **1366c**, and **1558**) and about husbands complaining their wives spend too much money on clothes and shoes (cf. **Figs. 114**, and **1517**), for the most part, the American hands-on-hips cartoon wife is depicted as having agency while her cartoon husband is a lazy doofus—a characterization of husbands and fathers that we have noted has become the norm on American television sit-com shows (cf. **Fig. 1234**).

Fig. 1598. Andrew Toos, 2011.

And, finally, one more point on what our corpus of cartoons and comic strips reveals about American culture. Like the joke in an Andrew Toos cartoon (**Fig. 1598**), the American cartoon universe lacks diversity. It is a homogenized "melting pot" dominated by white, heteronormative middle-class values. But, just as American culture is not static, so too have the winds of change begun to ripple through its reflection in humorous American cartoons and comic strips. Increasingly, women, African-American, and Latinx artists have broken into the ranks of commercially successful cartoonists. Gay characters have appeared (cf. **Figs. 976**, **1033**, **1042**, and **1096–1097**)—although lesbians and transgendered people remain unrepresented in mainstream American comics. And *Nancy*'s Aunt Fritzi is still the only single parent one encounters in the funny pages. And while it is doubtful that we will soon see much of a change in the stereotyped—and often erroneous—comic representations of art and archaeology in the American funny pages, how these stereotypes are humorously presented will undoubtedly continue to evolve.

There are more jokes to come!

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Fig. 594. Grant Snider, "My Neighbor Magritte," *Medium.com*, 3 Sept., 2013. Web.
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