The Adventures of. . . Scholar Travels Overseas to Study Famed Cartoonist, Comic

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The globe-trotting adventures of a comic book icon led one literary expert on his own international journey to solve a mystery.

Joe Sutliff Sanders, assistant professor of English at Kansas State University and a Fulbright Scholar, spent the spring 2013 semester in Luxembourg and Belgium researching Hergé, one of the world’s most acclaimed cartoonists and author of “The Adventures of Tintin” series.

Hergé was the pen name of Belgian writer and artist Georges Remi. “Tintin,” his best known creation, first appeared in 1929 as a series in a Belgian newspaper. It follows an investigative reporter named Tintin and his fox terrier Snowy. Sanders is considered one of the leading scholars on the “Tintin” series and Hergé.

At the Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels, Sanders furthered his research on the series and Hergé’s life by studying an exclusive microfilm collection archived at the library. The collection contains Hergé’s serialized newspaper comics that were published during the 1944-1945 Nazi occupation of Belgium.

“When the Nazis took over, the newspaper in which Hergé published his comic folded rather than run what the Nazis told them to,” Sanders said. “When Hergé started publishing again during the occupation, he ran ‘Tintin’ in a newspaper that was widely regarded as a mouthpiece for the Nazi propaganda ministry.”

Although “Tintin” boosted sales for the Nazis, Hergé’s beliefs didn’t match with those of the Nazis, Sanders said. After the war, Hergé stated that he chose to continue publishing his comics in the Nazi newspaper because it was his occupation. However, doing so raised questions about Hergé’s behavior as a citizen.

After World War II ended, Hergé revised strips that ran in the newspaper into book-length comic collections. Revisions included changes to the format, pacing, length, color and content. Sanders was able to compare the original versions to their altered counterparts, looking at what changes Hergé made to the wartime content that was under close scrutiny by the Nazis and the public.

“Being able to look at not just the strips, but also at the editorial cartoons and commentary that ran alongside them, gave me an unprecedented opportunity for insights into how Hergé’s comics borrowed from and revised the ‘official’ version of reality from the Nazis,” Sanders said.

Sanders plans to publish his findings as well as introduce them into the classroom.

In part because of his Fulbright research, Sanders has been asked to edit a collection of new scholarship on Hergé from the University Press of Mississippi.

By Greg Tammen, Communications and Marketing