

## **Rodolphe Töpffer (1799–1846): A Swiss Satirist of French Society and Culture**

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Amongst nineteenth-century *Suisse romande* writers whose work still attracts critical attention is the Genevan Rodolphe Töpffer. This author is particularly and immediately attractive to a modern audience as one of those *rarae aves* of Protestant Switzerland, a writer possessing a sense of humour. Töpffer has attracted much attention recently as a precursor in the development of the modern comic strip,<sup>1</sup> his fame long resting on about half a dozen picture-stories, which he called 'histoires en estampes' and which, full of wit and mordancy, were even to attract in their day the attention and approval of Goethe,<sup>2</sup> who encouraged Töpffer to have them published.

Töpffer is indeed a protean character: not only is he today recognised as a competent artist and caricaturist, pioneer of the 'bande dessinée', but also as a novelist (*Le Presbytère*, 1832), a writer of short stories (collected in 1841 as *Nouvelles genevoises*, the most famous being 'La Bibliothèque de mon oncle'), a playwright (although his dramas were meant for performance only in his own group, and were not published until long after his death, and even then appeared as mere curiosities),<sup>3</sup> an art critic (for example, his *Réflexions et menus propos d'un peintre genevois*, a series finally published as a whole in 1848), and even a journalist and polemicist (for example, his *Du progrès dans ses rapports avec le petit bourgeois*, 1835). Töpffer's achievements in all these fields, although never completely out of critical scrutiny, have recently been highlighted by several publications which appeared in 1996 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of his death.<sup>4</sup>

I propose here to present examples of the work of this talented

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author from the *Suisse romande*, concentrating on a theme running throughout his work, a pronounced dislike of French things in general and Parisian things in particular. I do not mean to imply that Töpffer criticised only the French, believing that the citizens of Geneva and of what was to become modern-day *Suisse romande* were without fault. Far from it. However, to go into details about Töpffer's moral, artistic and particularly political outbursts regarding, especially, the citizens of Geneva, would take me far beyond the limits of this paper.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, all francophone literatures define themselves in some way or other in relation to the 'mother country', France, and it is always interesting to note if writers in a francophone tradition see themselves positively or negatively in this relationship. In Töpffer's case, his dislike of what he perceived as the superficialities of French culture is indeed inscribed in a tradition of thus viewing France from a Swiss perspective. Before examining the particularities of Töpffer's negative reaction to the French and especially the Parisian French, one should first see how he fits into the history of 'helvétisme'. By this term is meant that consciousness, on the part of the francophone cantons coming to join the basically germanophone Swiss Confederation after the French Revolution, that, in spite of language differences, they had in common a 'Swissness' of outlook, which cemented them almost inevitably into one nation. The perception that they shared with their German-speaking compatriots the same religious outlook as well as the same geographical and climatic concerns played no small part in the acceptance by the French-speaking Swiss of the idea of 'helvétisme'.<sup>6</sup>

It is to be remembered that the cantons of Neuchâtel, Vaud and Geneva constituted the only French-speaking Protestant bastion in Europe, thus creating a deep cultural chasm between them and the *ancien régime* in France. In addition to this religious difference, an incipient awareness of a certain 'Swissness' was developed over the years in these francophone cantons by such Swiss historians as Jean-Baptiste Plantin (1624–1700), Abraham Ruchat (1678–1750), and, later, Charles Monnard (1790–1865), as these same cantons, though maintaining local identity, moved closer

to the Swiss confederation of German-speaking cantons. 'Helvétisme' as a concept was brought into focus in the eighteenth century by B at de Muralt in his *Lettres sur les Anglais et les Franais* (1725).<sup>7</sup> The main thrust of his criticism of the French as a nation was that the French weren't philosophers at all, in spite of their claims, and, in fact, gave much more importance to appearances than they did to essences. Thus was born that idea of the superficiality of the French which has had such a long run in the *Suisse romande*. Readers of Jean-Jacques Rousseau will be aware that he was an author imbued with this '*discours helv tique*', balancing the perceived ostentation of French taste against what he saw as the simplicity and depth of Swiss culture. Excellent examples of Rousseau's attitude in this regard are to be found in, for example, Saint-Preux's twenty-third letter to Julie in the first section of *Julie ou la Nouvelle H lo se*.<sup>8</sup> It remained for le Doyen Bridel (Philippe Sirice Bridel, 1757–1845), a member of the *Soci t  helv tique*, to develop this difference into an aesthetic system permitting a distinction in form and content from French literary works of the time. Although considered during his lifetime as a pedant and poetaster, regarded rather as a Swiss version of the pedantic Malherbe than a poet in his own right, Bridel gains his modest place today in the history of Swiss-French literature for his concept of a national Swiss literature. His adverse reaction to the French is evident, indeed, in the following couplet quoted from his *Po sies helv tiennes*:

Forons le Franais m me   r p ter nos vers  
Et vengeons l'Helv tie aux yeux de l'univers.<sup>9</sup>

In the nineteenth century, 'helv tisme' continued to have its proponents, as certain influential Swiss-French writers reacted against Parisian literary fashions and claimed for *la Suisse romande* literary autonomy, sometimes emphasising traditions and culture of the particular canton, at other times leaning on a new-born concept, the very idea of the existence of the *Suisse romande*, or, again, suggesting a connexion with the Swiss Confederation as a whole. Juste Olivier (1807–1876) is important here, as he, in his *Le Canton de Vaud* (1837) marked his awareness

of the specificity of his canton. Amiel (1821–1881), in an essay *Du mouvement littéraire dans la Suisse romane et de son avenir*, published in 1849, warned his readers against ‘l’esprit français’, calling specifically for a French-Swiss literature independent of the influence of French dictates, and setting out for the new generation of Swiss-French writers a civilising mission to be based on the principles of Protestantism and democracy.<sup>10</sup> Important also is Eugène Rambert (1830–1886), who exalted Swiss national spirit in his monumental six volume *Les Alpes Suisses* (1865–1889), in which he stated that the Alps were a sort of natural institution in Switzerland, a God-given gift to the country.

Rodolphe Töpffer can be seen to be in this tradition, attempting as he does in his *Nouvelles genevoises* (collected edition in 1841) to seek out and define the peculiar character of his compatriots. However, he also had particular experiences which helped shape his attitude to the French and came to shore up a negative opinion which may well originally have derived from the tradition of ‘helvétisme’.

Of fundamental importance in any appreciation of Töpffer is the fact that he had to renounce, at an early age, his ambition to become a painter, and so to follow in the footsteps of his successful father, Wolfgang Adam Töpffer, because of his poor eyesight. One of the reasons he went to Paris was to consult specialist doctors about his malady, but he seems never to have managed to present himself to any one of them for an examination. While in Paris,<sup>11</sup> the young Rodolphe studied at the Sorbonne, visited museums, both public and private, met important artists and attended plays and operas, and, fortunately for us, maintained a diary in which he recorded not only his own scholarly and social progress but also some of his impressions of life in the French capital. The diary of his sojourn in Paris has been published by Jacques and Monique Droin-Bridel in the journal *Genava*.<sup>12</sup>

In Rodolphe’s Parisian diary can be found in several entries his impressions of the behaviour of the denizens of that great city. Here, for example, he is watching skaters:

La glace se couvre de patineurs; il y en a peu de forts, tous ont de l'affectation dans la pose et les manières. Les dames vont en traîneau, le tout est fort brillant.<sup>13</sup>

While he is present at the home of a countess to whom he is giving art lessons, two Parisian ladies arrive, talk volubly, and ignore Töpffer:

Arrivent deux dames de qualité, bien bruyantes, bien évaporées. Elles causent de 36 choses dans une minute dans le ton qu'il faut. Elles s'en vont sans répondre nullement à mon salut, quoique leur ayant parlé, c'est l'usage, qu'y faire?<sup>14</sup>

In the next extract, he continues his observations on Parisian ladies, but also comments on the superficial comportment of the men at a Paris 'bal':

Le bal est magnifique et assez gai. On ne danse que des françaises. Il y a peu de femmes jolies, presque toutes sont décharnées ou mal faites, mais les toilettes sont superbes. J'y remarque une espèce de ton galant qui me déplaît. Les messieurs y sont tous plus fats les uns que les autres.<sup>15</sup>

In this last passage, one notices a touch of grudging admiration for the dress of the ladies, but also Töpffer's derision for the empty conceit of both sexes; a theme which he takes up in, for example, his 'histoire en estampes', *Mr Jabot* (1832).

The brilliance and show, yet fundamental emptiness, of Parisian life strike him as he records a promenade along the Champs Élysées with two friends in March:

Nous y trouvons Walner et Diedey avec qui nous revenons par les boulevards extérieurs et les Champs Élysées. Quelle frime, que d'équipages qui viennent se faire voir, que de brillans cavaliers et quel vuide [*sic*] au milieu de tout cela.<sup>16</sup>

A visit to Longchamp in the bois de Boulogne in late March, 1820, incites young Rodolphe to further comments on the vanity of Parisian life, as well as moral observations on the lack of piety in the population:

Je travaille chez moi et vais le soir à Longchamp, où tout ce que le luxe et la vanité peuvent étaler de plus brillant se trouve exposé. C'est là que les Parisiens se préparent pour la Semaine Sainte; pour

peu qu'on ait fait son tour à Longchamp et au concert spirituel, on se croit parfaitement préparé pour communier.<sup>17</sup>

This outing to Longchamp really affected Töpffer, for he elaborates on his experience there as he writes home to his sister Ninette in early April, 1820:

Quand on a fait une promenade à Longchamp et entendu un concert spirituel, on se croit ici parfaitement en règle. Il me semble qu'il n'y a jamais eu tant de luxe et de fêtes que pendant la Semaine Sainte. Il faut à toute force que les Parisiens s'amuse, que les riches se montrent et une dévotion un peu simple et tranquille les rebute infiniment. Aussi ont-ils transformé en promenade et en fêtes où on peut s'étaler les institutions qui étaient pieuses dans l'origine.<sup>18</sup>

'Simple and calm devoutness' ('une dévotion un peu simple et tranquille') should be read, it seems, as 'Swiss simple and calm devoutness'.

Outside Paris, things can, however, change, and Töpffer recounted one excursion in the immediate surrounds of the capital where he encountered honest townspeople who probably reminded him of the solid Swiss citizenry of the sort he encountered at Geneva. In a letter to his father dated 2 May 1820 he described such an excursion:

Dimanche soir nous avons été faire un petit repas délicieux dans l'un de ces endroits où l'on paie les plats d'avance bien entendu, et où le meilleur vin coûte 10 sols. Nous y avons trouvé ce qu'on rencontre jamais dans nos restaurants de Paris, complète liberté, bonhomie franche et ouverte chez les hôtes, et compagnie de bons bourgeois parfaitement honnêtes. Ils viennent là avec un morceau de boeuf dans un cornet de papier bleu, prennent une bouteille de vin de cinq sols qu'ils font durer deux heures, ils causent de leurs petites affaires et jouissent entièrement de la vie. Encore une fois ce n'est qu'en dehors de la barrière qu'on trouve cela: rentrez à Paris, les fripons, les filles, la gêne et la réserve vous accompagnent partout.<sup>19</sup>

So not all French are bad in Töpffer's eyes, not all are to be quartered 'sous l'aile de cette vanité française qui s'accommode de tout ce qui brille'.<sup>20</sup> In fact, in the field of French letters, there are many French authors he admires, but nearly always these

are from the past. In a letter to Sainte-Beuve (29th December, 1840), Töpffer lists amongst French writers who have influenced him Brantôme, Montaigne, Rabelais, Amyot, Ronsard, Molière, Bayle, and Rousseau. Of more contemporary authors, he shows enthusiasm only for Chateaubriand, Paul-Louis Courier<sup>21</sup> and Xavier le Maistre.<sup>22</sup> But Honoré de Balzac and George Sand are seen as particularly pernicious examples of French showiness and emptiness by Töpffer. In his *Réflexions à propos d'un programme*, he fulminates against those contemporary French novelists in order to protect his fellow citizens of Geneva against the harmful effects of French literature:

Restez vous-même, gardez les principes reçus dans votre enfance, résistez aux séduisantes théories d'une civilisation artificielle, aux progrès rapides, trompeurs, dus aux événements ou aux révolutions bien plus qu'au concours bienfaisant des intelligences.<sup>23</sup>

As for Lamartine and Hugo, Töpffer found their poetry execrable.<sup>24</sup> In *Histoire d'Albert*, one of his later 'histoires en images', and perhaps the work in which Töpffer castigated the widest range of nefarious influences from France—education methods, political revolution and French literature—fun is made of Hugo's proclivity of prefacing his poetic collections with prefaces explaining his doctrines.<sup>25</sup> Young Albert, a failure at school because he cannot manage to learn the elements of any subject, takes to declaiming aloud Hugo's poetry before he continues his studies at university. He discovers that what he really likes are the prefaces, for there he discovers the doctrines. It is then that he realises why he had never been able to take to the elements—what he had really needed all along were doctrines!

For Töpffer was a conservative in art, literature and politics. He hated progress, which he saw perhaps as emanating from France or Britain, but certainly from outside Switzerland. He vented his spleen against the evils of progress in a delightful pamphlet in which one can judge his rhetorical skill, humour, and delight in words: *Du Progrès dans ses rapports avec le petit bourgeois*.<sup>26</sup> This short work, written in 1835 and qualified by the author as 'un article de combat', is basically an invective against speed and railways, but has glancing blows in its course against other

'bêtes noires'. For example, white chocolate, 'le chocolat blanc', he obviously considered an abomination, and used as a symbol of 'progress'. To give an idea of the satirical tone adopted, here is how Töpffer begins his attack on progress:

Le progrès, la foi au progrès, le fanatisme du progrès, c'est le trait qui caractérise notre époque, qui la rend si magnifique et si pauvre, si grande et si misérable, si merveilleuse et si assommante. Progrès et choléra, choléra et progrès, deux fléaux inconnus aux anciens.<sup>27</sup>

Progress he discovers everywhere and inveighs against it, utilising all the rhetorical procedures available and sometimes approaching bombast in his effect. Progress can still be avoided in the countryside, but for how long will this be the case?

Aussi pour moi, et pour quelques autres que je connais, le progrès est notre bête noire, notre ennemi, celui qui a importuné nos années, sali nos souvenirs, gâté notre demeure; il en est là en tête, il est là en queue, en flanc, fâcheux insupportable, sot bavard, taquin fiévreux. Et le dimanche, nos boutiques fermées, nous allons en Savoie goûter le repos sous les châtaigniers des Allinges, sous les noyers d'Évian. Là, le progrès nous laisse tranquilles; pas trace; mais qui sait ce qui peut arriver?<sup>28</sup>

And as for that wretched political export from France, revolution, it too is taken into the fold of 'progress'. Here one must remember that Töpffer was dismayed by the constitutional revolution effected in Geneva in 1841, a political event which led him and his conservative friends to start a newspaper against liberalism:

En politique, fièvre continuelle. Tout est à faire, dit-il. La révolution de quatre-vingt-treize, misère! c'est la révolution qui va venir qui importe; et quand elle sera faite, vite une autre. Ces cinquante dernières années franchies au pas de course, misère! c'est ce galop que nous allons prendre qui importe.<sup>29</sup>

Progress, of course, manifests itself not only in industry and transport, but also in more intellectual pursuits, like education, and there are many fads, as well, which masquerade as progress. For example, in the nineteenth century, phrenology was *le dernier cri*. New-come systems and methods of education, as well as phrenology, drew Töpffer's scornful glance in one of his most

successful 'histoires en estampes', *Mr Crépin*.<sup>30</sup> The methods of education advocated by the various tutors Mr Crépin engaged for his large brood of children, under the persuasion of his dizzy and scatter-brained wife, are all useless, except for the method espoused by a tutor preferred by Crépin himself. Mr Bonnefoi, aptly named, is for a traditional, well-disciplined sort of education, and after many vicissitudes, it is his method which prevails. In the final frame of the story, Mr Crépin proposes to his sons the following toast to the successful tutor:

Rien de si commun que les méthodes, rien de plus rare que la conscience. Buvons, Messieurs, à Mr Bonnefoi, dont les soins, les lumières et la patience vous ont mis dans la voie du travail et de l'honnêteté.<sup>31</sup>

Referring to *Mr Crépin* offers the opportunity of examining the technique of Töpffer in his 'histoires en estampes', of appreciating the skill with which his high competencies in both sketching and writing blended for heightened comic effect. The economy of Töpffer's presentation is to be noted, whereby the concise text is complemented by the suggestive grotesqueness of the line of his drawing.<sup>32</sup> He was fascinated by physiognomy (the art of judging character from features of face or even the form of body). He left hundreds of his experiments in drawing faces and types, and even wrote an illustrated treatise on the subject, *Essai de physiognomie*, published in his home city in 1845.<sup>33</sup>

French characters crop up from time to time in the *Nouvelles genevoises* of Töpffer. The reader will not necessarily find these personages unsympathetic, but nearly always there is an elegance about them which harks back to the idea of exterior show. In 'La Vallée de Trient', the narrator comes across in the Alps some tourists, two Englishmen and a Frenchman conversing. The portrait of the Frenchman is restrained, but emphasises the elegance of the man while hinting at a certain foppishness in his make-up:

Le Français était un élégant jeune homme, carliste d'opinion, de langage et de moustache; un de ces politiques de salon qui se flattent d'avoir conspiré, qui estiment avoir combattu en Vendée, et qui se persuadent que l'Ouest pacifié, ils doivent à la tranquillité de leur famille de faire une tournée en Suisse, pour fournir au gouvernement

un prétexte honnête de fermer les yeux sur l'audace de leurs antécédents. Du reste, jovial, le meilleur homme du monde, et des gants blancs.<sup>34</sup>

The drawing which Töpffer sketched to accompany his text complements this verbal portrait, with the Frenchman's pose, elegant features and sartorial elegance contrasting pointedly with the laissez-faire attitude and dress of his two English companions.<sup>35</sup>



Daniel Maggetti, ed., *Töpffer*, Geneva, 1996, p.54.

Elegance and foppishness are nicely satirised in *Mr Jabot*,<sup>36</sup> one of Töpffer's earliest 'histoires en estampes'. Although not specifically designated as 'French', Jabot has all the vanities which our author considers as 'typiquement français'.<sup>37</sup> He is what in *Suisse romande* dialect would be called a 'grimpon':

Le grimpon est un animal à deux pieds et sans plumes, né dans les classes inférieures ou moyennes de notre société, et qui s'efforce, par tous les moyens, de grandir, de s'élever, de planer au-dessus de la position où le ciel l'avait fait naître.<sup>38</sup>

Although obviously vain and unintelligent, Jabot succeeds in social climbing by continually doing what he believes should be done in 'good society'. The theme of the 'histoire' is succinctly encapsulated in the 'Préface':

Ci-derrrière commence l'histoire véritable de Monsieur Jabot, et comme quoi, rien que par ses manières comme il faut, et sa bonne tenue, il sut réussir dans le monde.

Töpffer realised the importance of repetition in the creation of humour. After each social grace practised by M. Jabot, the fop 'se remet en position' ready for his next encounter in climbing the social ladder. In the drawing, one notes that this position involves standing with one leg slightly advanced forward of the other, one or other hand tucked in behind the lapel of the coat, the hat, gloves and cane held securely in the other hand, the arm being allowed to rest parallel to the side.<sup>39</sup>

From his student days in Paris, Töpffer had also been a critic of the current fashions in French art, as art was still what he loved in spite of his realisation that the state of his eyesight would not permit him to become a painter. In a letter to his father dated 2 December 1819, he wrote, after visiting several Parisian art galleries: '... plus je réfléchis, plus il me semble que l'école française est bien encroûtée'.<sup>40</sup>

As an art critic, Töpffer showed himself over the years as an enemy of all schools and systems of art, classical, antique or romantic. He wanted to reform the teaching of art, the methods of which, deriving from Paris, corrupted student artists of his country, making them incapable of viewing nature any other way than



Rodolphe Töpffler, M. Jabot, M. Crépin, M. Vieux Bois, M. Pencil. Docteur Festus, Histoire d'Albert, M. Cryptogramme, Geneva, 1996, p.13.

through the spectacles forced on to them in their apprenticeship. He doggedly demanded 'le simple bon sens' in painting. In his long-running series *Réflexions et menus propos d'un peintre genevois* (1830–1843) Töpffer defended a freedom for painters in which they could express their spontaneity, individuality and, above all, truth to nature.<sup>41</sup>

There are at least two other reasons which may explain why Töpffer's attitude to the French was negative. Both concern the publication of his works in Paris. Firstly, before he managed to have published in the French capital *M. Vieux-Bois*, *M. Jabot* and *M. Crépin*, a French publisher named Aubert put out a pirated edition of these 'histoires en images'. To add insult to injury, the pirated edition was badly conceived, the copies of the drawings botched, some of the comic sequences out of order, others just left out. Töpffer was obviously most upset about the incident, which could only have confirmed his bad opinion of Parisian practices.<sup>42</sup>

Then the legitimate edition of his *Nouvelles genevoises* at Paris in 1841 also caused him problems. It was considered in Paris that corrections would have to be made to Töpffer's style, since he was an author from the *Suisse romande*, for his *Nouvelles* to pass muster with the Parisian public. Thus certain specifically Swiss-French locutions were changed (e.g. 'depuis ma fenêtre' to 'de ma fenêtre'; 'il me causait' to 'il me parlait'); all stylistic indicators of orality were suppressed (e.g., 'c'est vrai' to 'il est vrai'); and, finally, certain turns of phrase had to be altered for decency's sake, for 'bienséance'. Thus 'cuisse de poulet' needed, ridiculously, to be changed to 'aile de poulet'.<sup>43</sup> Although Töpffer does not seem to have protested loudly in this instance, one feels he could not have helped but shake his head once again in frustration about Parisian ways.

It is difficult, finally, to judge what part personal experience on the one hand, and the tradition of 'helvétisme' on the other, had on the formation of Rodolphe Töpffer's undoubted life-long prejudice against the French. What has certainly been seen in this examination of some of Töpffer's works is that in his judgements of French (and especially Parisian) society, art and literature, he was ever

on the defensive against excesses of manner and style, which he judged as not only 'pas suisses', but definitely, ineluctably, 'français'.

#### Notes

- 1 Thierry Groensteen reminds us that, as well as being the author of some of the first comic strips, Töpffer was also their first theoretician: 'Si Rodolphe Töpffer n'était que l'auteur des sept récits en images que sont *Mr Jabot*, *Mr Crépin*, *Mr Vieux Bois*, *Mr Pencil*, *Le Docteur Festus*, *Histoire d'Albert* et *Mr Cryptogam*, la dette de la bande dessinée à son égard serait déjà considérable. Mais, non content d'avoir créé le genre, Töpffer en est aussi le premier théoricien'. See Thierry Groensteen and Benoît Peeters, *Töpffer. L'Invention de la bande dessinée*, Paris, 1994, p.vii.
- 2 Here is Goethe's summary reaction to the 'histoires en estampes' of Töpffer: 'Dans les romans caricaturés, il faut admirer les motifs multiples qu'il sait déduire de très peu de figures: il humilie l'inventeur le plus fertile en combinaisons, et on peut le féliciter de son talent inné, gai, et toujours prêt'. These words are cited from a letter to Töpffer from Frédéric Soret. See Auguste Blondel, *Rodolphe Töpffer, L'Ecrivain, l'artiste et l'homme*, Paris, 1886, reprinted Geneva, 1976, p.110.
- 3 *Théâtre de Rodolphe Töpffer*, ed. Jacques Bueznod and Jacques Droin, Geneva, Société d'études Töpffériennes, 1981.
- 4 Of especial importance is the publication by Daniel Maggetti, *Töpffer*, Geneva, 1996. A compact disc is included with the book.
- 5 Töpffer was most critical, for example, of the progressive, anti-conservative political forces in Geneva. When, in March 1841, a conspiracy overthrew the government and the institutions associated with the Genevan 'Restoration', Töpffer founded a newspaper, the *Courrier de Genève*, to fight back. The paper lasted through 1841 and into 1842, until the party he represented was beaten by the majority. See M. Gagnebin, *Rodolphe Töpffer*, Neuchâtel, 1947, p.15.
- 6 See the article 'Helvétisme' in Pierre-Olivier Walzer, ed., *Dictionnaire des littératures suisses*, Lausanne, 1991, pp.175-76
- 7 Béat-Louis de Muralt, *Lettres sur les Anglais et les Français*, Lausanne, 1972. The first edition appeared at Geneva, published by Fabbri and Barillot, in 1725, but copies of the letters, originally written in 1694, had been circulating throughout France and England. See Perrette Chappuis, 'Béat de Muralt et son oeuvre', printed as a 'Postface' to the 1972 edition, p.224.
- 8 Saint-Preux, Julie's lover, comments at one stage on the wholesome simplicity of manners he notes among even the more important

inhabitants of the Haut-Valais in Switzerland, and imagines how French counterparts of these good folk might have reacted: 'Un autre usage ... c'était de voir, même chez des magistrats, la femme et les filles de la maison, debout derrière ma chaise, servir à table comme des domestiques. *La galanterie française se serait d'autant plus tourmentée à réparer cette incongruité, qu'avec la figure des Valaisanes, des servantes mêmes rendraient leurs services embarrassants.*' I quote from the edition by René Pomeau: J. J. Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, Paris, 1960, p.55. (My italics.)

- 9 Roger Francillon, *Histoire de la littérature en Suisse romande. I. Du Moyen Age à 1815*, Lausanne, 1996, p.240. The verses translate as: 'Let's force the French themselves to rehearse our verses and take revenge for Switzerland in the eyes of the whole world.'
- 10 Alfred Berchtold, *La Suisse romande au cap du XXe siècle. Portrait littéraire et moral*, 2nd edn, Lausanne, 1966, p.396.
- 11 Töpffer's sojourn in Paris lasted from October 1819 to July 1820. In a letter to the French critic Sainte-Beuve, dated 29th December 1840, Töpffer explains that he had to cancel a trip to Italy, where he was to continue his education to become an artist: 'J'étais au désespoir et fort inquiet de mon avenir, et ces deux années dont je m'étais promis tant de joies, ont été les plus cruelles de ma vie. La peinture m'échappait; incertain encore sur le parti que je devais prendre, j'allai à Paris pour y consulter des hommes habiles; je ne les consultai pas parce que j'avais tout autant de crainte de voir ce qui pouvait me rester d'énergie se briser contre quelque présage de cécité future que d'espoir d'être guéri par une science douteuse.' See Léopold Gautier, *Un bouquet de lettres de Rodolphe Töpffer*, Lausanne, 1974, lettre 38, 99–107, p.102.
- 12 See Jacques et Monique Droin-Bridel, 'Le journal intime de Rodolphe Töpffer à Paris en 1820', *Genava* (1968): 247–315.
- 13 Entry for 13th January, 1820.
- 14 Entry for 23rd January, 1820.
- 15 Entry for 29th January, 1820.
- 16 Entry for 29th January, 1820.
- 17 Entry for 29th January, 1820.
- 18 This letter is cited by Droin-Bridel, p.295, note 260.
- 19 Cited by Blondel, p.26.
- 20 Remark made by Töpffer in his *Réflexions à propos d'un programme* and cited by Daniel Maggetti and Jérôme Meizoz, 'Un Montaigne né près du Léman', in Maggetti, pp.133–188, esp. p.166.
- 21 Sainte-Beuve, in an appreciation of Töpffer's style, compares him first to Courier, but then corrects himself, opting for Montaigne as a better stylistic comparison: 'Sans y mettre tant d'artificiel il procède comme Courier, ou plutôt c'est un Montaigne né près du Léman, et qui cherche

- à racheter sa rudesse et certains sons rauques par du mordant et du vif.’ This passage is quoted in Maggetti, p.182.
- 22 ‘Töpffer adressait régulièrement ses oeuvres à Maistre, qui s’en délectait et ajoutait à ses remerciements des observations très fines témoignant de l’attention avec laquelle il les lisait.’ Gautier, p.58, n.2.
- 23 *Réflexions à propos d’un programme* first appeared in *Bibliothèque universelle*, January and April 1836. Long extracts of the article are published in Groensteen and Peeters, *Töpffer. L’invention de la bande dessinée*, Paris, 1994, pp.144–160. I am citing the passage from Paul Chaponnière, *Notre Töpffer*, Lausanne, 1930, p.108. Just as Rousseau flailed the French theatre and its deleterious influence on morals, so did Töpffer, another Genevan citizen, bear down on French novels. For Balzac and Töpffer, see Marie-Jeanne Durry, ‘Töpffer et Balzac ou de M. Jabot et de Célestin Crevel’, *L’Année balzacienne* (1976): 275–76.
- 24 Töpffer makes fun of the romantic hero, as conceived by Goethe in his *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, in his comic strip *Mr Vieux Bois*. Caroline Gautier draws attention to Töpffer’s originality in this respect: ‘On remarque l’originalité de Töpffer qui prit le parti de se moquer d’un héros romantique sur lequel son époque pleurait encore.’ See Caroline Gautier and Martine Duruz, ‘Töpffer en musique’, *Scènes Magazine* 102 (March 1997): 41.
- 25 Éditions Slatkine have recently (1996) published in a single volume the principal ‘histoires en estampes’. See Rodolphe Töpffer: *M. Jabot, M. Crépin, M. Vieux Bois, M. Pencil, Docteur Festus, Histoire d’Albert, M. Cryptogame*, Geneva, 1996. For *Histoire d’Albert*, Töpffer felt obliged to assume a pseudonym, Simon de Nantua. The text of *Histoire d’Albert*, composed in 1845, is to be found pp.217–238. The sally against Hugo is on p.220.
- 26 I have used the following edition: Rodolphe Töpffer, *Du progrès dans ses rapports avec le petit bourgeois*, Cognac, 1983.
- 27 Töpffer, *Du progrès*, p.1.
- 28 Töpffer, *Du progrès*, p.5.
- 29 Töpffer, *Du progrès*, p.5.
- 30 Töpffer, *M. Jabot, etc.*, pp.39–83.
- 31 Töpffer, *M. Jabot, etc.*, p.83. In a letter sent to accompany a gift of a copy of *Mr Crépin* to a Docteur Maunoir, Töpffer thus sums up the story: ‘L’histoire véritable du sieur Crépin, homme de sens, placé dans une position difficile, et parvenant à élever bien onze enfants, malgré les instituteurs, les méthodes et la phrénologie’. See letter 19, in Gautier, p.56.
- 32 For incisive comments on the artistic achievement of Töpffer’s drawing in his ‘histoires en images’, see Pierre Sterckx, ‘Les desseins du dessin selon le docteur Festus’ in *L’Art. Les cahiers du Musée de la bande*

- dessinée* 1 (January 1996): 96–108.
- 33 This treatise has been conveniently republished by Groensteen and Peeters, pp.185–225. An excellent example of the many grotesque face details devised by Töpffer and interspersed with his textual commentary can be found on p.184.
- 34 ‘La Vallée de Trient’ is published in Rodolphe Töpffer, *Nouvelles*, 2 vols, Lausanne, 1986, Vol.II, 93–115. The text I have quoted is at p.99.
- 35 See Maggetti, *Töpffer*, p.54.
- 36 Töpffer, *M. Jabot, etc.*, pp.11–38.
- 37 ‘L’histoire de M. Jabot est celle d’un jeune homme qui veut se pousser dans le monde. Afin de réussir, il s’impose le devoir d’imiter ce qu’il voit faire aux gens de la société. Naïf comme M. Jourdain, il fréquente les cafés à la mode, va au bal, se croit tenu d’ignorer ses anciennes relations et de présenter ses hommages aux personnes distinguées. Il se fait un mérite de s’attirer plusieurs duels. Après toutes sortes de complications ridicules, il épouse une marquise de province.’ Gagnebin, p.10.
- 38 W. Pierrehumbert, *Dictionnaire historique du parler neuchatelois et suisse romand*, Neuchâtel, 1926, p.294b.
- 39 Töpffer commented on his intentions in composing *Mr Jabot* in ‘Notice sur l’*Histoire de Mr Jabot*’ published in the *Bibliothèque universelle de Genève* 18 (June 1837): 334–37. The text has been reprinted in Groensteen et Peeters, pp.161–63.
- 40 Letter cited in Maggetti, p.78.
- 41 See Philippe Kaenel, *Le métier d’illustrateur 1830–1880. Rodolphe Töpffer, J. J. Grandville, Gustave Doré*, Paris, 1996, p.129.
- 42 See Gautier, p.103, note 7. Töpffer was sufficiently annoyed by Aubert’s pirate edition to insert an ironic ‘Notice sur l’histoire de *Mr Jabot*’ in the *Bibliothèque universelle de Genève* of June, 1837. See above, note 39.
- 43 Daniel Maggetti and Jérôme Meizoz, ‘Un Montaigne né près du Léman’, in Maggetti, p.183.