

# Dressing the sign: Semiotic analysis of attire and fashion in the Universe of Tintin

Marina Bargón García\*

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**Abstract:** This article examines clothing in *The Adventures of Tintin* from a semiotic perspective, considering dress as a system of signs embedded in the visual logic of comics. Building on Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle's pioneering studies (1976, 1999, 2002, 2006, 2012) and later contributions by scholars such as Groensteen, Marion, and Floch, the analysis explores how the aesthetics of the *ligne claire* transform garments into both narrative and symbolic operators. The results identify seven functional categories of dress—core attire, everyday wear, professional/functional outfits, disguises, cultural costumes, ceremonial garments, and altered clothing—which serve as identity anchors, indicators of action, or markers of cultural otherness. Tintin's consistent base attire ensures visual coherence, while subtle variations introduce narrative nuance and contextual adaptation. The study concludes that clothing in Hergé's work is far from decorative; it functions as a central semiotic device whose stability and transformations reinforce the character's iconicity and his status as a timeless cultural hero.

**Keywords:** Tintin, comics semiotics, clothing and identity, visual narrative, cultural symbolism

## 1. Theoretical Framework

Since the mid-twentieth century, comics have ceased to be regarded merely as products for children's consumption and have become objects of academic study. Within this framework, *The Adventures of Tintin*, by the Belgian author Georges Remi, better known as Hergé, have been analyzed from multiple perspectives, including semiotics.

Its main character, Tintin, has been established as a timeless hero whose impact transcends his own era. His adventures, marked by journalistic integrity, bravery, and the shrewdness of the young reporter, have resonated across generations (Soto Sierra, 2023). This transcendence is reflected in his direct influence on later narrative and audiovisual figures: for instance, Steven

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\* Marina Bargón García, University of Oviedo, Spain, E-mail: [bargonmarina@uniovi.es](mailto:bargonmarina@uniovi.es)

Spielberg—an avowed admirer of Hergé’s work—projected such influence in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), acknowledging multiple parallels between Indiana Jones and Tintin in the traveling and adventurous spirit of the protagonist, before eventually directing *The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn* (2011) (Friedman & Notbohm, 2019).

Similarly, in literature, contemporary authors have acknowledged the *tintinesque* imprint; the Spanish writer Arturo Pérez-Reverte admits that Tintin inspired him to become both a reporter and a storyteller, to the extent of defining himself as a “*clear line* writer,” following Hergé’s stylistic legacy (Altares, 2011).

From a historical and literary perspective, Hergé’s work is inscribed within the classical tradition of adventure heroes: the author drew upon the nineteenth-century novels of Alexandre Dumas and Jules Verne, whose influence is evident in the construction of Tintin’s epic adventures. In this way, the figure of Tintin links the genealogy of nineteenth-century adventure heroes with the modern heroes of cinema and literature, thus confirming his status as a timeless archetype in popular culture. For this reason, it was from the 1970s onwards that various scholars began to unravel the visual, narrative, and ideological mechanisms underlying this popular Franco-Belgian series, recognizing its potential as a structured system of signs.

It was Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, a French semiologist specialized in the semiotics of the image and a pioneer in the study of comics, who, in his article “*Du linéaire au tabulaire*” (1976), first proposed the dual logic of linear and tabular reading in the *bande dessinée*. This author published several monographs on the analysis of Hergé’s universe: in *Hergé ou le secret de l’image* (1999), he explains how Hergé’s work is articulated through a system of internal resonances and recurring motifs, which he terms *scénariographie*. Later, in *Hergé ou la profondeur des images plates* (2002) and *Les mystères du Lotus bleu* (2006), he delves into the function of the *ligne claire* and the apparent flatness of Hergé’s imagery as the foundation of narrative coherence. With *Hergéologie. Cohérence et cohésion du récit en images dans les aventures de Tintin* (2012), he inaugurated the “Iconotextes” collection and systematized his vision of the visual cohesion of the narrative. Subsequent works, such as *Les rêves de Tintin* (2017) and *Hergé ou le retour de l’Indien* (2021), demonstrate the continuity of this line of research into the graphic poetics of Hergé.

Building on this foundation, Thierry Groensteen developed a more systematic theory in *Système de la bande dessinée* (1999; 2025), in which he postulates that comics function as a sequential visual language governed by their own rules. He introduces notions such as *multiframing* and *régime séquentiel*, which describe the ways in which panels interact and generate meaning as a whole. Although Groensteen (2013) does not devote an exclusive study to *Tintin*, his analysis of the *ligne claire* style associated with Hergé is notable for emphasizing its graphic clarity and its capacity to facilitate the immediate reading of the visual narrative. He points out that the *ligne claire* is based on the simplification of line and the elimination of accessory elements, thereby reinforcing an “iconic grammar” that enables readers to quickly identify characters and situations. This principle applies directly to Tintin’s attire, which functions as a visual and semantic stabilizer, contributing both to narrative coherence and to the recognition of the character across different scenes.

In *Traces en cases* (2025), Philippe Marion analyzes how the visual identity of comic characters is constructed through graphic repetition and stylistic consistency. Although not focused exclusively on Tintin, his approach to *graphiation* makes it possible to understand how

linework and figuration function both as authorial marks and as stabilizing elements of meaning. In this regard, David Pinho Barros (2022) notes that in Hergé's work, visual stereotypes—such as Tintin's plus-fours or the villain's mustache—operate as cognitive abbreviations loaded with cultural codes, thereby reinforcing the immediate recognition of the character and his symbolic role within the narrative system.

One of the most detailed semiotic analyses of *Tintin* was conducted by Jean-Marie Floch (2023), who examines how graphic, narrative, and symbolic elements are articulated in a story that departs from the classical adventure scheme. Floch applies tools from structural semiotics to explore the construction of meaning through figurativity, the contrast between characters, and the introspective dimension of the album. Within this framework, clothing acquires an expressive function: despite the extreme conditions of the environment, Tintin's attire remains unchanged, underscoring his condition as an immutable and universal figure. Hergé's visual economy, rather than impoverishing expressiveness, reinforces the symbolic character of each sign.

These approaches to Tintin's attire engage in dialogue with a broader semiological tradition inaugurated by Roland Barthes. In *The Fashion System*, Barthes (2022) defines clothing as a structured code that communicates social meanings beyond its functionality, describing it as a "language without a tongue," composed of signs that refer to cultural and ideological values. This perspective has been expanded by authors such as Barnard (2013), who considers fashion as a medium that communicates and constructs social identity through signs that both reproduce and challenge structures of class, gender, and sexuality. Entwistle (2002) analyzes the dressed body as an interface between the biological and the cultural, arguing that fashion addresses the body as a site of social inscription. Calefato (2001), in turn, explores clothing as a cultural text, imbued with tensions, concealments, and strategies of signification.

From visual semantics and multimodal theory, authors such as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Jewitt (2009) have provided tools to understand the construction of meaning through visual elements such as color, composition, and form. In the case of comics, where text and image are articulated within a spatial sequence, these tools make it possible to interpret clothing as a fundamental semantic operator. This intersection between fashion and visual narrative has also been explored by understanding clothing as a bridge between symbolic systems, since both fashion and comics employ symbols, colors, and styles to convey ideas and emotions, while semiotics examines how these elements acquire meaning within cultural and social contexts" (Bargón García, 2024). Floch (1993) distinguishes practical, aesthetic, ludic, and identity functions of the image, a framework that applies directly to Tintin's attire, where costume may convey anything from institutional affiliation to cultural otherness.

Authors such as Martine Joly (2012) and Scott McCloud (1994) have noted that the expressive power of comics lies precisely in their capacity to condense meaning into simple visual forms. In this sense, clothing in *Tintin* serves both to identify characters and to define their narrative roles, origins, or relationships with the exotic. Uniforms, oriental robes, or diplomatic suits are not neutral: they activate a set of values, stereotypes, and historical associations that enrich the narrative. Within this framework, attire functions as an identity sign (as in the case of Tintin's constant outfit) or as a sign of displacement (as in his disguises and transformations).

The semiotic analysis of clothing in *Tintin* thus allows for a reading that transcends the anecdotal or the merely aesthetic. In a medium that is fundamentally visual, attire becomes a narrative and symbolic tool of the highest order. The logic of the *ligne claire*, the restricted iconicity, the stability of signs, and their cultural charge place clothing at the very center of the signifying system created by Hergé. From a semiological perspective, the sophistication of the language of comics is revealed, as well as the potential of dress as a vehicle of meaning within a visually codified universe.

## 2. Results

With the aim of addressing attire in *The Adventures of Tintin* as a system of signs integrated into the visual and narrative logic of the comic, a functional classification of clothing has been adopted, based on its recurrence, variation, and symbolic charge. This taxonomy, derived from the analysis of the albums and the semiotic theoretical framework, makes it possible to organize the appearances of attire according to their relationship with the character's identity, the spatial context, the dramatic action, or the cultural implications. Starting from Tintin's basic outfit—which remains unchanged throughout the series and acts as an identity anchor—attention is also given to those modulations that enrich the narrative without compromising the visual coherence of the character.

The proposed classification comprises seven main categories: the basic outfit or constant visual identity; everyday variants linked to the urban, domestic, or climatic sphere; professional or functional attire, associated with occupations, technical contexts, or specific actions; disguises as devices of camouflage or identity displacement; traditional or cultural garments in contexts of geographical otherness; ceremonial clothing, imbued with symbolism and drama; and, finally, attire altered by environment or conflict, which introduces elements of realism and vulnerability. Each of these categories will be analyzed below, considering both their narrative function and their semiotic value within Hergé's visual economy.

### 2.1 Basic Attire or Constant Visual Identity

Tintin's attire—plus-fours, blue sweater, white shirt, and white or black socks—remains practically unchanged throughout the entire series, functioning as a kind of undeclared uniform that renders him an instantly recognizable sign (Altarriba, 2014/2019). This graphic consistency facilitates the identification of the character in any narrative context, acting as a semiotic anchor in contrast to the visual variability of the surrounding environment. It thus becomes a symbol. Accordingly, clothing emerges as an essential element within the comic's visual and narrative system. In Tintin's case, his attire decisively contributes to the construction of an iconic identity, in line with the principles of the *ligne claire*, where graphic simplification prevails over realism. This permanence of attire can be interpreted as a deliberate semiotic choice: clothing, understood as a sign, reinforces the character's identity continuity and projects him as an almost mythical figure, closer to a narrative symbol than to a body subjected to the material conditions of the real world.

As José María Paz Gago (2020) points out, “fashion is a paradoxical, fragile and empty system, characterized by the disappointment of meaning,” although this apparent vacuity may be re-signified through repetition, iconicity, and the symbolic charge of the sign. In this regard, Tintin’s constant attire—far from being an empty sign—becomes a hypericoneme, a powerful sign that articulates identity, neutrality, and cultural hegemony within the narrative universe.

However, certain elements are deliberately altered, serving as stylistic connectors across space and time. In this regard, the socks constitute a surprisingly expressive component of Tintin’s attire, and one of the few elements that display chromatic and functional variation throughout the series. In the early albums, such as *Tintin in the Congo* or *Tintin in America*, the socks are typically white, accompanying his plus-fours and projecting a neat, youthful image. In later titles, however, such as *The Crab with the Golden Claws* or *The Secret of the Unicorn*, they appear in black, which may be interpreted as a sign of greater sobriety in the character. In *Prisoners of the Sun*, they return to white, in coherence with the light shirt and jacket worn in Peru. By *Tintin in Tibet*, the socks adapt to climatic demands: they first appear yellow, matching the boots, and later shift to orange in the final scenes. This chromatic evolution is not merely an aesthetic decision but also functions as an indicator of environmental context and narrative state, subtly modulating the character’s basic attire without compromising his recognizability.

Tintin’s footwear also presents discreet yet significant variations, depending on geography, climate, or the physical demands of the adventure. In *Tintin in the Congo* and *Land of Black Gold*, he wears sturdy closed shoes evocative of colonial explorers, paired with knee-high socks and shorts. In urban settings such as *The Shooting Star* or *The Castafiore Emerald*, his footwear is discreet, dark, and functional, scarcely distinguishable from the rest of his attire. In contrast, in more physically demanding adventures such as *Tintin in Tibet*, footwear becomes both a narrative and practical tool: nailed boots designed for walking on snow and rugged terrain. In the space voyages of *Destination Moon* and *Explorers on the Moon*, the magnetic boots worn inside the rocket and the external space boots function not only as technical devices but also as symbols of Tintin’s transformation into a technical subject, prepared for new frontiers of exploration. Even Snowy participates in these sartorial decisions, as when he is dressed with booties and a cap in *The Shooting Star*, reinforcing the mimetic and semiotic logic of clothing in exceptional circumstances.

The white shirt constitutes another constant element of Tintin’s attire and plays a key role in the construction of his visual identity. Its neutral color and classic design reinforce the idea of ideological neutrality and moral integrity that define the character. The shirt remains visible beneath the sweater in most albums, as in *The Secret of the Unicorn* or *The Calculus Affair*, where its collar discreetly emerges, reaffirming the continuity of the outfit. In formal situations, such as in *The Shooting Star* or during dinners on board in *Flight 714 to Sydney*, it is paired with ties of different colors, introducing slight variation without breaking from his recognizable style. The shirt is also worn alone in moments of greater heat or informality, as at the beginning of *Tintin in America*. Its omnipresence contributes to the sober and functional aesthetic that defines the character, while its near-permanent cleanliness operates as a sign of self-control, hygiene, and narrative order, reinforcing his role as a rational and methodical hero.

Nevertheless, the tandem formed by Tintin’s plus-fours and sweater constitutes the most stable core of his attire and, consequently, of the visual system that organizes his identity. The plus-fours, with their loose cut, inherit an interwar style linked both to sport and comfort,

allowing Tintin to maintain a recognizable and mobile silhouette in all kinds of contexts (Assouline, 2009). In *Tintin in America* or *The Black Island*, these trousers consistently appear in earthy tones, while the sweater—usually light blue—reinforces the neutral and universal dimension of the character. Its first appearance occurs in *Cigars of the Pharaoh*, where it is introduced as a garment to combat the cold, and from then on it becomes a distinctive feature. In *Land of Black Gold*, the sweater is transformed into a turtleneck, adding a more modern and sophisticated nuance. On other occasions, such as *The Seven Crystal Balls* or *Flight 714 to Sydney*, the classic design is preserved, without altering its iconic charge. The versatile and timeless character of this ensemble enables Tintin to move across diverse geographies and cultures without compromising his visual identity, functioning as a matrix that admits contextual variations without losing its identifying role. Only one formal variation of this attire is found in *Tintin and the Picaros*, when Hergé decided to replace the plus-fours with trousers more in keeping with contemporary fashion: straight brown jeans, which reinforce the image of a sober and respectable young man.



Figure 1. Tintin, in his most recognizable attire, Professor Calculus, and Captain Haddock discussing the purchase of Marlinspike Hall. Adapted from *The Calculus Affair* (p. 2), by Hergé, 1993, Editorial Juventud. (Original work published 1956). Copyright © Editorial Juventud.

The change from one type of trousers to another constitutes, in semiotic terms, a significant mutation in the system of signs that shapes the character's visual identity. Hergé, fully aware of the symbolic force of this garment as a marker of recognition—to the extent of describing the substitution as "*une véritable révolution*"—deliberately breaks with a stable iconic sign that had functioned as a timeless emblem, in order to inscribe it within a new historical and cultural context. The garment, beyond its utilitarian function, had operated as an index of the character's temporal anchoring in the 1930s; its replacement with a symbol of 1970s fashion visually translates the desire to "update" Tintin, adapting him to the expectations of contemporary audiences without stripping him of his narrative essence (Chantal, 2018). The reactions of part of the public—including humorous protests calling for the return of the plus-fours—confirm that clothing functioned as a sign of high identity value, capable of provoking emotional interpretations and cultural debates around the modernization of a graphic icon (Altarriba, 2014/2019).

In any case, the stylistic decision to characterize Tintin with beige plus-fours and a blue sweater carries profound implications. First, it contributes to consolidating Tintin as a classical heroic figure, where moral constancy is visually translated into aesthetic immutability. Second, this repetition functions as a narrative strategy to facilitate reading: in a visual medium such as comics, where comprehension must be immediate, the recurrence of attire operates as a reminder of identity continuity, even when the setting, culture, or even the role assumed by the character may change.

This principle of visual repetition is not exclusive to Tintin. Hergé applies the same logic to the other main characters, granting each of them a fixed and highly recognizable attire. Captain Haddock regularly wears a navy blue turtleneck sweater, dark trousers, and, at times, a sailor's coat, reinforcing his identity as a rough yet endearing seafarer. Thomson and Thompson, for their part, always appear with bowler hats, canes, and black suits with white shirts, distinguishable from one another only by their mustaches, thus turning their attire into a comic sign of confusion and interchangeability.

The same applies to Bianca Castafiore, whose chromatic range and sartorial elements (voluminous dresses, jewelry, elaborate updos) remain consistent throughout her appearances, underscoring her role as an operatic diva. Professor Calculus invariably wears his green coat, glasses, and hat—signs that reinforce his image as an absent-minded scientist. This visual homogeneity among the central characters responds not only to narrative and visual economy but also fulfills a semiotic function: fixing the identity of each one through repeated signs, easily legible to the reader.

In albums such as *The Crab with the Golden Claws*, *Tintin in Tibet*, or *The Castafiore Emerald*, Tintin's outfit remains identical even in the face of adverse climatic conditions, cultural shifts, or altered emotional states. The only exceptions are functional or climatic additions (such as an anorak or a trench coat), which serve as practical adaptations. The chromatic neutrality of the outfit—blue, brown, and white tones—also plays an important role: it allows Tintin to function as a kind of canvas onto which the various cultures, conflicts, and aesthetics he encounters are projected. His clothing, by avoiding any explicit national or temporal affiliation, enables him to act as a mediator between worlds, reinforcing his role as a mobile and observant subject rather than as a character deeply inscribed within a specific tradition.

## 2.2 Casual or Street Attire

Beyond his basic attire, Tintin incorporates small variations that point to a more domestic or everyday sphere, linked to the immediate environment, climatic changes, and the rhythm of the narrative. These garments do not alter his visual identity nor disrupt the stylistic coherence of the character, yet they introduce subtle modulations that enrich his characterization. One of the most representative elements in this regard is the beige trench coat, a recurring garment associated with movement, urban displacement, or the beginning of action. The trench coat first appears in *The Blue Lotus* and from then on becomes synonymous with departure, transition, or narrative urgency. In *The Broken Ear*, Tintin is shown rushing out of his house with the trench

coat slung over his shoulder, an image that immediately conveys his haste while simultaneously reinforcing the notions of exposure and displacement.

Moreover, the trench coat functions as an indicator of transition between spaces. Tintin wears it systematically in situations associated with travel, thereby reinforcing its semantic link with mobility. In *Flight 714 to Sydney*, for example, he appears wearing it at the airport before the hijacking, and also in other albums in which he embarks on an expedition, such as *The Red Sea Sharks* or *The Calculus Affair*. The trench coat thus operates as an emblem of the character in situations of transit, underscoring his itinerant dimension and the constant condition of departure that defines his figure.

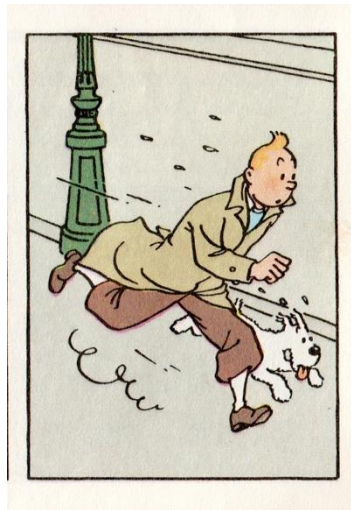


Figure 2. Tintin running through the city in his trench coat. Adapted from *The Seven Crystal Balls* (p. 21), by Hergé, 1993, Editorial Juventud. (Original work published 1948). Copyright © Editorial Juventud.

The beret, another common accessory, fulfills a similar role. Associated with interwar European attire, the beret appears on several occasions as a resource of urban stylization, especially during city displacements. The combination of beret and trench coat thereby becomes a kind of visual code to signal the passage between the private and the public, the static and the mobile. In *King Ottokar's Sceptre*, for instance, Tintin wears this combination when leaving his house, highlighting the beginning of the investigation.

Another recurrent garment in this category is the pajama, which introduces the reader into moments of the character's intimacy. In albums such as *The Shooting Star*, *The Seven Crystal Balls*, or *The Broken Ear*, pajamas are used not only to reflect nocturnal or resting scenes but also to mark the transition between domestic routine and the irruption of extraordinary events. It is worth noting that the pajamas change color from one album to another (green, blue, or with more neutral patterns), allowing for a slight humanization of the character without compromising the overall visual logic.

Small modifications of the basic outfit also appear in this category, such as the sports jacket combined with his usual blue sweater in *Prisoners of the Sun*, or the brown aviator-style jacket worn in *The Castafiore Emerald*, adapted to the spring season and the rural setting of Marlinspike Hall. These garments reveal the capacity of Tintin's wardrobe to incorporate

nuances that reinforce the plausibility of the environment without altering the character's iconic matrix.

Taken together, these “street” variations act as meaningful modulations of the fixed attire, serving as spatial, climatic, and narrative indicators. They are effective resources that Hergé introduces with economy of means to enrich the storytelling without disrupting the protagonist's identity continuity.

### 2.3 Professional or Functional Attire

In certain episodes, the plot requires Tintin and other characters to adopt specific outfits associated with professions, technical functions, or work-related contexts. These garments do not replace the identity-defining attire but rather complement it, situating the character within a given framework of action. The most paradigmatic example is found in *Destination Moon* and *Explorers on the Moon*, where Tintin, Captain Haddock, and the project's technicians wear work overalls in different colors. Tintin's is light blue, Haddock's a darker blue, and the technician Wolff's green, establishing a visual hierarchy that reflects their roles within the expedition. These garments, tied to the futuristic aesthetics of the 1950s, allude to the universe of applied science and transform Tintin into a technical subject prepared for an unprecedented challenge: the conquest of space.

Similarly, the diving suit in *Red Rackham's Treasure* introduces a formal rupture with the character's usual attire. The helmet and pressurized suit respond to a practical function—underwater immersion—but also serve a symbolic role: the exploration of the unknown. The use of this outfit already anticipates the aesthetics of space suits and reinforces Tintin's image as a modern hero, adaptable to multiple technological contexts.



Figure 3. Tintin and Haddock exploring the sea. Adapted from *Red Rackham's Treasure* (p. 39), by Hergé, 1993, Editorial Juventud. (Original work published 1944). Copyright © Editorial Juventud.

In other albums, changes in clothing respond to specific functions within a given environment. In *Land of Black Gold*, for example, Thomson and Thompson appear dressed in mechanic's overalls, while in *The Broken Ear* Tintin is depicted in a ship steward's uniform as

part of an infiltration. Furthermore, when he is mistakenly appointed colonel, he is given a full military uniform consisting of a light blue jacket, dark blue trousers, a saber, and a decorated cap. This attire momentarily imposes a change in the character's role and stages, through costume, his passage through structures of power or bureaucratic confusion.

These functional outfits allow clothing to become a reflection of narrative action while simultaneously opening Tintin's visual universe to new aesthetics. They act as signs of temporary specialization and reinforce the protagonist's versatility without compromising his visual coherence. In all cases, these garments are designed not only to fulfill a narrative necessity but also to inscribe the character within a visual language recognizable to the reader: that of the worker, the technician, the soldier, the professional.

## 2.4 Disguises or Camouflage Attire

Disguises play a prominent role within Tintin's visual repertoire, functioning as a narrative strategy that enables camouflage, infiltration, or deception, as well as serving as a comic resource and a mechanism for reflection on identity. Unlike functional attire, which responds to technical or professional demands, disguises are linked to a theatrical, playful, and even ideological dimension, since they reveal both the character's capacity for adaptation and the cultural limitations of the surrounding environment (Altarriba, 2014/2019).

One of the most notable examples appears in *Prisoners of the Sun*, where Tintin and Captain Haddock adopt Andean attire to integrate among the local inhabitants and remain unnoticed. This act serves a strategic purpose, while also symbolizing a form of visual empathy with the indigenous culture. The disguise in this case neither parodies nor exaggerates, but instead seeks integration, distinguishing it from more mocking uses.

At the opposite extreme is the caricatural use of disguise in characters such as Thomson and Thompson, whose constant identity confusion is a defining trait. In *Land of Black Gold*, the detectives disguise themselves as mechanics, as bathers in completely outdated striped swimsuits, and even as a Portuguese woman, complete with wig, glasses, and hat. This last case highlights a comic dissonance that underscores their clumsiness and cultural ineptitude. Their insistence on referring to their outfits as "disguises" emphasizes the lack of genuine integration and turns their clothing into a parody of local codes.

Tintin himself also resorts to disguise as a tactical device. In *The Broken Ear*, he briefly appears disguised as a Black waiter in an infiltration maneuver, and later dons the military uniform assigned to him when he is mistakenly appointed colonel. In these cases, disguise temporarily transforms his status without erasing his central identity.



Figure 4: Thomson and Thompson disguised in traditional Chinese attire to go unnoticed. Adapted from *The Blue Lotus* (p. 45), by Hergé, 1993, Editorial Juventud. (Original work published 1936). Copyright © Editorial Juventud.

Even Snowy takes part in this game of camouflage, as when he is dressed with a cap and booties in *The Shooting Star*, in a scene that ironically transposes human codes of clothing onto the animal world.

Thus, disguises in *Tintin* operate as multivalent devices: they serve as tactical tools, catalysts of humor, and cultural mirrors. From a semiotic perspective, they constitute unstable signs, capable of temporarily transforming the character's identity while exposing the tension between self and other, between effective camouflage and comic imposture.

## 2.5 Traditional or Cultural Attire

Traditional or cultural attire occupies a central place in *The Adventures of Tintin*, especially in those stories set in exotic or non-European contexts. These garments enrich the visual narrative and function as identity markers that reinforce the otherness of local characters, while simultaneously engaging with the Orientalist, colonial, or ethnographic imaginaries of the twentieth century. Characters who wear culturally marked clothing allow Hergé to introduce a visual representation of the “other” without disrupting the overall graphic economy, while also affirming, as Mérand observes, that Tintin “does not hesitate to integrate into the surrounding population by adopting its attire” (Mérand, 2017).

One of the most eloquent examples appears in *The Blue Lotus*, where Tintin visits a clothing shop in Shanghai whose storefront presents two contrasting aesthetics: on the one hand, a Western-style suit displayed on a mannequin with Asian features, and on the other, a traditional kimono. This contrast is not gratuitous; it clearly points to the tension between modernization and tradition, between assimilation and the preservation of local codes. Tintin, in this context, chooses to wear a blue Japanese-style suit with a matching cap, a gesture that demonstrates his willingness to adapt and to show respect—standing in sharp contrast with the clumsy and stereotyped gaze of Thomson and Thompson, whose folkloric disguises provoke the laughter of the local inhabitants.

In *The Black Island*, Tintin dons a Scottish kilt, complete with beret and pompom, as part of his integration into the cultural environment of Scotland. Although brief, this choice reveals the character's ability to adopt signs of the environment without parodying them, unlike other Western characters who ridicule or overact alterity. This gesture is repeated in a more significant way in *Prisoners of the Sun*, where he wears a poncho and hat characteristic of the Andean highlands. In this case, the attire is not only functional (protection against the climate) but also signifies insertion into the human and cultural landscape. Even when crossing the mountain pass, Tintin and Haddock adopt the traditional way of wearing the ponchos diagonally, an indication of careful attention to local detail.



Figure 5. Tintin in traditional Scottish attire. Adapted from *The Black Island* (p. 41), by Hergé, 1993, Editorial Juventud. (Original work published 1938). Copyright © Editorial Juventud.

In *The Red Sea Sharks*, the disguise with a *djellaba* and covered face worn by Tintin and Haddock to infiltrate enemy territory refers to traditional Arab attire and sets up a complex interplay between camouflage and exoticism. Although in this case the garment serves a strategic function, the way it is drawn and presented in the narrative reflects a European gaze on the dress codes of the Islamic world. Similarly, in *Cigars of the Pharaoh* or *Land of Black Gold*, the appearance of turbans, tunics, and slippers emphasizes the coding function of clothing as a sign of otherness.

In all these cases, traditional clothing functions as a visual index of the culture represented. Yet its interpretation depends on the degree of empathy or caricature with which it is treated. Whereas Tintin tends to adopt such garments with respect and a will to integrate, humorous secondary characters wear them in a decontextualized manner, allowing the reader to detect and question the ways in which the cultural is visualized, represented, or appropriated within Hergé's narrative universe.

## 2.6 Ceremonial or Ritual Attire

Ceremonial or ritual attire appears at key moments in the narrative, generally associated with episodes of symbolic or mystical tension in which clothing assumes a central role in

staging cultural, ideological, or religious conflict. In these cases, dress is not merely an aesthetic contextualization but functions as a highly codified sign that reinforces the dramatic and spiritual meaning of the scene.

One of the most striking examples is found in *Prisoners of the Sun*, where Tintin, Haddock, and Calculus are captured by the descendants of the Incas and prepared for ritual sacrifice. In this context, each of them is dressed in ceremonial garments designed according to a solar visual logic: orange tunics with triangular borders evoking the rays of the sun, with details in red, blue, and yellow. This chromatic and formal code alludes both to solar symbolism and to the sacred nature of the moment. The visual arrangement of the characters on the pyre, with Calculus in the center and the other two on either side, produces a strongly hierarchized image that amplifies the symbolic weight of the attire. Calculus's costume, yellow with blue flowers and cool-toned borders, further introduces an ironic nuance into the solemnity of the scene.

The ceremonial importance of attire is also reinforced through its contrast with the characters' usual clothing. In this episode, the shift from everyday dress to ritual costume signifies a transformation of status: from active protagonists to sacred victims. The narrative effectiveness of the attire lies precisely in this visual rupture, which anticipates the climax and underscores the exceptional nature of the event. The change of clothing accompanies the action, dramatizes it, and marks a transition between worlds: from Tintin's modern rationalism to the magical and ancestral universe of the Inca descendants.

In this sense, ceremonial attire functions as a discursive strategy that visualizes hierarchies, dramatizes sacrifice, and reinforces the symbolic codes of the cultures represented. In Hergé's work, these garments operate as condensers of meaning, distilling into a single visual gesture—the act of dressing a character in a particular costume—a complex network of narrative, ideological, and cultural significations.



Figure 6. Tintin, Haddock, and Calculus dressed for ritual sacrifice after being captured by the descendants of the Incas. Adapted from *Prisoners of the Sun* (p. 59), by Hergé, 1993, Editorial Juventud. (Original work published 1949). Copyright © Editorial Juventud.

## 2.7 Altered Attire: Damage, Climate, and Transformation

Unlike voluntary or symbolic changes in attire, the alteration of clothing due to damage or climate introduces a realist dimension into Tintin's universe. These are external interventions that modify the character's appearance and make it possible to visualize—without resorting to explicitness—the consequences of conflict, physical strain, or environmental exposure. In a comic that avoids the direct representation of bodily violence, the deterioration of clothing functions as a visual substitute for the injured body, preserving the “clean” aesthetic that characterizes the series.

One of the most recurrent devices is the tearing of garments after explosions, falls, or confrontations. In *The Broken Ear*, the reader observes Tintin's clothes reduced to rags, thereby conveying the intensity of the scene without showing blood or injuries. This use of attire as a surface of impact responds to a logic of visual restraint while simultaneously allowing for a credible representation of danger and action.

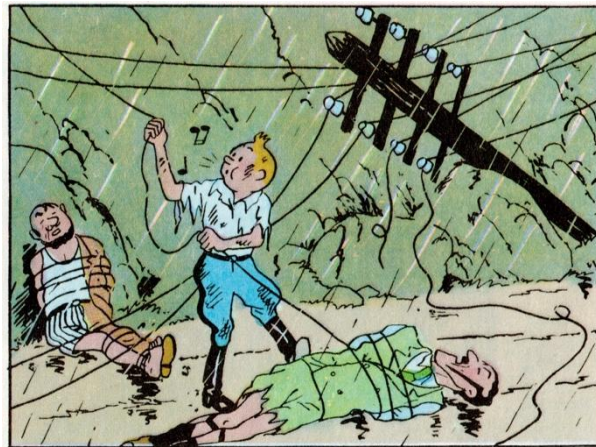


Figure 7. Tintin in a South American military uniform during the war between San Theodoros and Nuevo Rico. Adapted from *The Broken Ear* (p. 27), by Hergé, 1993, Editorial Juventud. (Original work published 1937). Copyright © Editorial Juventud.

On the other hand, adaptation to climate constitutes a functional transformation that deepens the characterization of the protagonist as attentive, methodical, and prepared. In *Tintin in Tibet*, for instance, attire evolves progressively: beginning with his usual outfit, incorporating special socks and boots, then a blue hooded anorak, and finally a longer sweater and a peaked cap. Even the yellow scarf belonging to his friend Chang becomes a significant garment that remains with him throughout the adventure. In this album, clothing operates as an indicator of effort, progressive adaptation to the environment, and emotional involvement.

Similarly, in *The Shooting Star*, Tintin begins with light clothing, but as the expedition advances into the Arctic he adds raincoats, heavy coats, and even a small cap and booties for Snowy. These decisions reflect a careful concern for environmental plausibility and demonstrate how clothing can accompany narrative evolution. A comparable process takes place in the space episodes, where the change from the interior technical uniform to the orange exterior spacesuits establishes a clear boundary between the domestic environment (the rocket) and the hostile one (the lunar surface).

In all these cases, altered clothing—whether by damage, climate, or progressive transformation—does not break with the character’s visual identity but rather reinforces it by situating it within a dynamic context. Through this, Hergé demonstrates that even within a graphic logic of visual economy, clothing can act as a witness to conflict, environment, and narrative growth.

### 3. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of clothing in *The Adventures of Tintin* reveals that attire does not serve a merely decorative purpose nor does it respond solely to narrative or atmospheric demands. On the contrary, it is configured as a highly codified system of visual signs, in which each garment, color, or accessory actively participates in the construction of identity, the organization of the narrative, and cultural mediation. This logic is fully aligned with what Roland Barthes (2022) defined as a “language without a tongue,” where fashion and dress operate as structured codes imbued with ideological and social values.

The constancy of Tintin’s basic attire—his blue sweater, plus-fours, and white shirt—functions as a visual and symbolic anchor that ensures the character’s continuity across diverse geographies, cultures, and narrative epochs. This immutability recalls the notion of the body-sign, in which graphic and narrative identity is stabilized through repetition. At the same time, the *ligne claire*, as a purified and legible graphic style, enhances this coherence and transforms each visual element into an efficient and systematically decodable sign (Fresnault-Deruelle, 1976; Groensteen, 1999).

From a functional perspective, Tintin’s attire fulfills what Floch (1993) would describe as an identity function, insofar as it reinforces his status as a universal hero, devoid of any explicit political or national affiliation. By avoiding specific cultural or historical inscriptions, his clothing becomes a symbol of neutrality—or, more critically, of a form of Western cultural hegemony—that allows him to act as a mediator between worlds without ever fully integrating into any of them. This “active neutralism” reproduces a Eurocentric vision in which the Western subject is able to move, interpret, and represent otherness without his own identity being questioned or transformed.

By contrast, when Tintin adopts traditional or cultural attire from the contexts he visits, a significant oscillation occurs in visual representation. These changes do not invalidate his basic identity but rather introduce elements of controlled mimicry, in which adaptation to the environment takes place within the limits of a structured Western gaze. In this sense, the Andean, Asian, or Arab garments he wears in different albums must be read not only as signs of respect or camouflage, but also as manifestations of the orientalist dispositif analyzed by Said (1978), in which the representation of the “other” is filtered through aesthetic and cultural codes that reinforce difference without dissolving the superiority of the observer.

Similarly, disguises—whether worn by Tintin or by characters such as Thomson and Thompson—reveal the tensions between identity and performativity. In these cases, attire no longer functions as a stable sign but as a device of displacement or even comic destabilization. While the protagonist’s disguises usually reinforce his role as a rational and active agent, those of secondary characters generate dissonance, ridicule, or confusion, exposing the fragility of

the visual categories upon which meaning is constructed. Here, humor becomes a critical tool that makes visible the limitations of the representational system itself.

The use of functional or technical attire, such as space suits or diving suits, introduces another significant dimension: the inscription of the body into highly technological contexts. These outfits temporarily transform the character into a modern subject, adaptable to extreme environments, thereby reaffirming his role as a scientific and rational hero, in harmony with the imaginaries of progress of the second half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, even in these exceptional situations, Hergé's visual logic remains within a formal economy that seeks to preserve the legibility of the character.

Finally, alterations in attire caused by climate, damage, or the physical environment function as a strategy of verisimilitude within an aesthetic that nonetheless avoids the direct representation of suffering. Torn, wet, or snow-adapted clothing, rather than dismantling Tintin's figure, serves as an indirect testimony of conflict. This decision confirms the existence of a visual regime of restraint, in which violence is displaced onto peripheral signs (such as clothing) so as not to undermine the visual and moral cleanliness of the protagonist.

Taken together, the results of the analysis show that clothing in *Tintin* operates as a polyvalent semiotic system, one that stabilizes, adapts, displaces, or dramatizes the identity of characters according to the needs of the narrative. This versatility is made possible by the formal refinement of Hergé's style but also by a cultural construction that places clothing at the center of the relations between subject, space, and power. In this sense, attire in *Tintin* participates in the aesthetics of the *ligne claire* while at the same time functioning as a key discursive artifact for understanding the modes of representation, hierarchization, and mobilization of meaning in twentieth-century Franco-Belgian comics.

## 4. Conclusions

Clothing in *The Adventures of Tintin* operates as a complex system of signs whose reading, from a semiotic perspective, grants access to deeper layers of narrative, ideological, and cultural meaning. Each garment, each accessory, each transformation of attire responds to a precise visual logic that translates, organizes, and projects information about the characters, their contexts, and their relationships. Rather than being mere aesthetic or decorative elements, costumes function as signifying units that articulate narratives of identity, displacement, conflict, or cultural integration.

Tintin's basic attire acts as an identity anchor, ensuring coherence and visual continuity throughout the series. Variations of everyday or professional clothing, disguises, ceremonial costumes, or traditional outfits introduce discursive modulations that allow the reader to recognize the symbolic framework of each episode. Damaged or climate-adapted clothing adds a realistic and affective dimension that connects the character with his environment and with risk. Each of these registers of dress participates in a graphic system which, through the visual economy of the *ligne claire*, enables an immediate and effective reading of the social, cultural, and emotional codes represented.

From these conclusions, multiple avenues of research open up that would broaden and diversify the study of clothing in comics. On the one hand, it is pertinent to compare the

treatment of attire in *The Adventures of Tintin* with that of other contemporary graphic series—European, North American, or Japanese—in order to examine how each visual tradition articulates cultural meanings through fashion. Likewise, the analysis could be extended toward reader reception, investigating how different audiences interpret clothing and what role it plays in the construction of generational or national identities. Finally, another line of exploration lies in the interdisciplinary dialogue with fashion studies, visual anthropology, cultural history, and even mathematics, from which the proportions, patterns, and geometric regularities of attire may be studied in relation to the aesthetics of the *ligne claire*.

Therefore, from Barthes to Floch, including Eco and the notion of multimodality advanced by Kress and van Leeuwen, semiotic studies have emphasized the capacity of dress to produce and organize meaning. In Hergé's work, this capacity is manifested with singular clarity: attire narrates who Tintin is, but also where he is, what he is doing, and what relationship he establishes with the world. Comics, as an expressive medium that hybridizes image and text, thus offer fertile ground for clothing to deploy its narrative and symbolic potential. Analyzing fashion in Tintin from this perspective makes it possible to better understand the mechanisms of signification in comics, while also reclaiming the cultural and communicative value of attire as an autonomous visual language.

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