Research Note

Médard Meets Mighty Mouse

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Abstract

This note presents a recently discovered 1969 photo of Martinique's well-known “Maison du Bagnard” at the time when its creator, Médard Aribot, still lived in it. The head of a mouse, not previously known in writings about the house, graces its mast. Terrytoon's animated cartoon hero, Mighty Mouse, is proposed as its source.

Keywords

Martinique – “Maison du Bagnard” – The Convict and the Colonel – Médard Aribot – Mighty Mouse

In early 2017 in Martinique, I spent a hectic week of TV and radio interviews to launch a new edition of *Le bagnard et le colonel* (Price 2016), a translation of *The Convict and the Colonel* (Price 1998). In the course of those activities, Dominique Taffin, director of the Archives départementales de la Martinique, mentioned that she thought the archives held a photo¹ of the famous “Maison

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¹ The original photo, by Arlette Rosa Lameynardie, can be accessed at <http://www.patrimoines-martinique.org/ark:/35569/a011423604739jq97Oo/1/3>. The reference to the full series of La-

du bagnard” (House of the Convict) from 1969, earlier than any other known photo. The next day, at my urging, she kindly located it.

For anyone familiar with the life and works of Médard Aribot, the pile of detritus in front of his lived-in house, ripe for his artistry as a master bricoleur, should not surprise. But a closer look at the remarkable mast rising from the roof reveals a startling discovery. Just below the well-known *tricolore*, it shows, for the first time, the head of a mouse—and not just any mouse.²

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meynardie's 1969 photos in the Archives départementales de la Martinique is MDAP 2012. 0.1.92.

2 The only other known photo of Médard's house when he lived in it is reproduced in Price 1998, p. 116, where it is labeled “ca. 1970.” It is unclear whether that photo predates or postdates that of Lameynardie but it is evident that the mast lacks the mouse.

I can only speculate about the source for Médard's mouse but believe I have found a strong possibility.

In 1962 and 1963, when Sally Price and I first lived in Petite Anse—one of Médard's favorite haunts, just over Morne Larcher from his house—there was a sprawling open-sided structure where, of a summer evening, a pick-up band occasionally made music and people danced. It was referred to locally as the “cinéma.” We were told that an itinerant man with a generator and movie projector sometimes came to show films on an improvised bed-sheet screen, as he passed from commune to commune, throughout the island. (Like other rural hamlets in those days, Petite Anse lacked electricity.) People watched cartoons and a feature, paying a few (*ancien*) francs.

Médard loved watching spectacles. As a friend who knew him once told me, “Though he was a loner, he'd come at night and stare for hours through the window of the *mairie* whenever there was a *bal*. He loved to watch dancers, people all dressed up. And parades—whenever there was a military parade, he'd be there, watching.” It seems quite likely, then, that when a movie was shown in Petite Anse, he'd be there, watching from the back of the crowd.

And during the 1960s, the best-known of Terrytoon's characters, Mighty Mouse, might well have featured in the opening cartoons.

Unlike Mickey Mouse, whose ears (and other features) have quite another aspect, Mighty Mouse's resemble those on Médard's mouse. And I suspect that he was just the sort of superhero that would have captured Médard's imagination.³

References

- Price, Richard, 1998. *The Convict and the Colonel*. Boston: Beacon Press. (Second edition, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
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³ Only a few Mighty Mouse cartoons are available for streaming, but see, for a typical example, "The Cat's Tale" (1951) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdEf2Jma6Kk>.