

The Sequential Art of Memory: The Testimonial Struggle of Comics in Spain

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In a 2010 article about the Holocaust in Spanish memory, philosopher Reyes Mate affirms that “[m]emory always quotes a higher price” (15) and that memories concerning the Spanish Civil War have flourished in contemporary Spain with an intensity never seen before. He argues that along with the memory of a brutally divided past, there also came criticism of the Spanish Transition and accusations of political amnesia. Mate alludes to the tension surrounding the ways in which both literature and politics relate to the past, and how historical memory has come to have a growing resonance. At the same time, he is cognizant of the fact that “memory opens wounds and makes living together more complicated” (16).

While the predominant role of memory has been of critical interest to many historians, Mate’s concern, in line with that of historian Santos Juliá, is its political implementation. In terms of concrete examples relating specifically to Spain, Mate invokes the theoretical perspectives of thinkers such as Walter Benjamin and Maurice Halbwachs. Moreover, in the search for a definition of memory, he was confronted by several answers. Memory can be said to be connected to the hermeneutic activity of making the invisible visible, and it can also be defined as justice. At the same time, this relationship between memory and justice makes uncomfortable those historians who believe that it is not a question of judging events, but of understanding their internal logic. On his part, Mate highlights the importance of memory for recognizing injustice, for, as he claims, “[w]ithout the memory of injustice there can be no justice” (27). Lastly, for Mate memory can be understood as duty. Thus, after Auschwitz, ‘being conscious of what happened’ acquired a sense of moral obligation through

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which the exercise of remembering became a means of not allowing history to repeat itself. Above all, Mate is interested in the multiple dimensions through which Memory and History navigate, and how they interact in their own contexts. As he states, “History has focused on the reconstruction of facts, and memory on the building of the present tense. One works with testimonies, the other one with files—two different views that continue to merge and contaminate one another” (30).

This essay reflects on the uses of memory in the Spanish comic, and the importance that it has had in the creation of plots, both real and fictional. It seeks to analyze key works constructed around lived experiences, as is the case in Carlos Giménez’s *Todo Paracuellos*, Miguel Ángel Gallardo and Francisco Gallardo Sarmiento’s *Un largo silencio*, and *El arte de volar*, by Antonio Altarriba (scriptwriter) and Kim (illustrator). These three comics (the last two conceived as graphic novels) have entered into the space of testimonial memory, alluding to the necessity of making visible the invisible and, at the same time, seeking symbolic justice for the protagonists of each work. Yet history has also inspired a more literary bent in other comics, which have used the realm of fiction to allude to events that have marked Spanish reality, most notably the drama and complexity of the Spanish Civil War and the postwar period. Both *Las serpientes ciegas* and *El ángel de la retirada* evoke this convulsive period, demonstrating to readers the textures of different realities and how to represent them through fictional comics.

Testimonial Memory in the Adult Comic

In 2007, Random House Mondadori published Carlos Giménez’s *Todo Paracuellos*, considered to be one of the most important works of the history of Spanish comics. Its publication made the entire series of *Paracuellos* available in a single, complete volume of over six hundred pages (what had been previously published in six separate volumes). A haunting personal testimony of the lived experiences of children in the “Hogares de Auxilio Social” (Social Welfare Homes) during the postwar years, *Todo Paracuellos* is both a valuable cultural and historical artifact and a text that managed to completely revolutionize the Spanish comic for adults.

The Spanish comic was a well-established popular genre by the early years of the twentieth century, and by the second half of the same century there emerged an established tradition of the exploration of social problems and concerns in Spanish graphic art. Classic Bruguera school titles such as Josep Escobar’s *Carpanta* and Francisco Ibáñez’s *Rue del Percebe*, 13 are but a few examples of mid-century titles that explore the hardships and social problems and tensions of the postwar years through a humorous, absurd sensibility that is designed to appeal to all ages. However, it is not

until the publication of Giménez's *Paracuellos* that the Spanish comic truly reaches full maturity, evolving into a genre that is capable of not only interrogating a violent and inherently fractured national past, but also of doing so through a form that the Spanish comic had not previously undertaken.

Carlos Giménez had worked on the series over the course of two clearly distinct stages: one that ran from the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s, collected in two separate volumes; another beginning at the end of the 1990s and continuing until 2003, collected in four volumes. In the prologue to the complete volume, writer Juan Marsé explains that Giménez's work was "una genialidad artística y documental extraordinaria" (a work of artistic genius and extraordinary documental [value]) that painted a definitive picture of the reality of those children residing in the "Hogares" during "los años más represivos del régimen franquista" (5) (the most repressive years of the Francoist regime). In addition to discussing the postwar years, Marsé also alludes to the political tensions of the current moment in Spain, during which the debate regarding historical memory was becoming more and more heated:

Hoy en día, que tanto énfasis y tanta bilis ponen los nostálgicos de la dictadura en su negativa a la recuperación de la memoria histórica, una memoria que fue sojuzgada, amordazada, expoliada, falseada y humillada a lo largo de casi cuarenta años, convendría recordar la labor de los que se adelantaron en el testimonio y la denuncia de esa interminable ignominia. (5)

(Today, with so much emphasis and so much bile used in their denial of the recuperation of memory by those nostalgic of the dictatorship, a memory that was subjugated, muzzled, stolen, falsified and humiliated in the course of thirty years, it would be worthwhile to remember the work of those who came forward in their bearing witness and denunciation of that unending ignominy.)

Aligning himself with those in favor of the *Ley de memoria histórica* (Law of Historical Memory) of 2007, Marsé underscores the relevance of Giménez's work as a graphic narrative testimony that serves important artistic and documentary functions. A work born out of personal childhood memories, transcribed group interviews, and informal conversations, *Todo Paracuellos* is the evocation of both an individual and collective national past; one that remains very much alive in the minds and memories of those who were its protagonists. This compilation, positioned firmly within the space created by memory, manages to summon, as Marsé argues, "la risa y la sonrisa, la compasión y la indignación, liberando una dolorosa experiencia personal de vejaciones y agravios y alcanzando objetivos que van más allá

de los meramente artísticos” (5–6) (laughter and smile, compassion and indignation, freeing a painful personal memory of vexations and affronts and reaching objectives that go beyond those that are merely artistic).

Projected within these autobiographical memories are the painful anecdotes of those children who, during the 1940s, populated the “Hogares,” the homes created by the regime to care for children bereft of their caretakers during the war years. The majority of those children were either the orphans of families who had supported the Republican faction during the Civil War (children whose parents were serving jail time for sympathizing with the defeated side), or the sons and daughters of those who were simply too poor to care for them. During the postwar years, many children were admitted into these centers; among them was a young Giménez (born in 1941), who entered one of them with his brother shortly before turning six because their father had died and their mother was gravely ill with tuberculosis.

Though these homes were designed to take care of children in need during a painful transitional moment in Spain, the kids placed there suffered a great deal; the children of Republican families much more so than the few of those from the winning side of the war. Indeed, one of the most revolutionary contributions of Giménez’s *Todo Paracuellos* is the way in which it highlights the false generosity of Franco’s political regime. By demonstrating on both a graphic and a textual level the continued persecution of an already victimized and completely powerless social group, Giménez manages to uncover the cruelty and hypocrisy underlying Franco’s rule, and he gives a tangible reminder of the suffering that the regime imposed on certain sectors of Spanish society over the course of nearly four decades.

In the introduction to *Todo Paracuellos*, Giménez himself explains that the series need not have been titled “*Paracuellos*,” that a more appropriate title would have been a general one that referenced all that it included: “*Historias de Auxilio Social o Historias de los Hogares*” (15) (*Histories of Social Welfare or Histories of the [Social Welfare] Homes*) Noting that “si no fuera porque resultaría demasiado largo y una pizca repelente” (if it were not because it would end up being too lengthy and a bit repulsive), he could have titled the series “*Historias de los niños que vivieron en los Hogares del Auxilio Social durante la posguerra franquista*” (History of the Children who Lived in the Social Welfare Homes During the Francoist Postwar Period) (15) because, in essence, this is the story told by *Todo Paracuellos*.

Giménez’s introduction to the 2007 complete volume is quite illuminating. In it, the artist confronts a personal work that took him decades to develop, and he highlights both individual and collective history through the use of personal anecdotes, as well as those related to him by others. Indeed, Giménez claims that each episode of *Paracuellos* is based on real experiences, “siempre vividas por personas que, de niños, estuvieron

internados en alguno de los Hogares de Auxilio Social” (15) (always lived by people who, as children, were interned in one of the Social Welfare Homes). The first episodes were loose, individual stories of two pages that were not meant to be expanded into an entire series. In each episode, Giménez was careful to include both the time and place in which the stories occurred, with the intention of creating a type of documentary record of those experiences.

Curiously, the name that seemed to stick with readers was “Paracuellos,” the nickname for the *Hogar Batalla del Jarama*.¹ The name of the series was thereby conceived organically in response to its readership, and when Giménez compiled the first volume, in 1977, he decided to title it “*Paracuellos*.” This first volume, published by Ediciones Amaika in 1977, is important for a number of reasons. The Franco dictatorship had only just come to an end, and this comic was offering testimonial stories regarding the systematic abuse to which the children in the “Hogar” had been submitted under the guise of *falangista* charity and ideology. Indeed, this publication established Giménez as a pioneer in the realms of the adult comic and the testimonial memoir in Spain. His work emerged alongside the first blossoming of the reflective adult comic, demonstrating the emotive implications of comic art and creation. More specifically, it represents a type of graphic experimentalism that attempts to define identity through memory.

Among those recognized for their reflection on memory is Art Spiegelman, the American author known for his influential work *Maus*, which narrates his father’s harrowing testimony of his experience as a prisoner in Auschwitz during World War II. Initially published in serial form during the 1980s in *RAW* magazine, the first allusion to the comic that would transform the genre appeared in 1973, when Spiegelman created an underground comic titled “Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History” (in *Short Order Comix No. 1*). In it, Spiegelman expresses the enormous amount of guilt that he felt in regards to his mother’s suicide. She, like his father, had also been interned in the Nazi concentration camps. It is here, implicit in this dialogue between memory and feeling, that a new form of graphic expressivity was to find its first articulation.

Like Spiegelman, Giménez finds within the comic the space from which to explore memory and experience. He records his memories, along with those of his peers, within its frames. In anticipation of this graphic narrative record, he compiles an extensive audio archive composed of the conversations between himself and others who lived within the confines of the “Hogares de Auxilio Social.” Over the years, these voices are slowly transformed into the backbones of each episode compiled in *Todo Paracuellos*. As he explains, various types of documentation (belonging to him and others) help with the reconstruction of the past explored in his work: “Esta documentación se compone de fotografías, cartas, textos diversos, recortes de periódicos . . . pero sobre todo, de grabaciones” (19)

(This documentation consists of photographs, letters, different types of texts, newspaper clippings . . . but above all of recordings). In a natural, intuitive way, Giménez manages to create a space of encounter in which memory flows in anecdotal form among former residents of homes like “Paracuellos”:

El procedimiento más habitual de recogida de datos, anécdotas e historias ha consistido en reunirnos en número de tres o cuatro alrededor de una grabadora, con unas cervezas y unas almendras [o unos cubatas], y charlando desenfadadamente, como hacen los amigos y las gentes que se conocen bien, ir contando cada uno, yo también, las historias que va recordando tal y como llegan a la mente. (20)

(The most common procedure for collecting facts, anecdotes and histories has consisted in gathering in groups of three or four around a phonograph, with bottles of beer and some almonds [or whiskey and coke], and chatting freely, as among friends and people who know each other well, each telling, and I as well, the histories that one recalls exactly as they come to mind.)

Giménez appeals to fluid, free-flowing memory; the intimate space created through the sharing of stories and experiences among friends. By his own account many of those sessions lasted day and night—some lasted days. The audio archive that resulted from those sessions is full of facts, anecdotes, and musings that not only helps him to write, but that he clearly values as an important cultural artifact that he is now responsible for sharing through his work:

Una documentación tan extensa y variada que podría proporcionarme temas para realizar otro buen montón de álbumes y a la que me está costando mucho esfuerzo renunciar. Si vivo lo suficiente, estoy seguro de que, algún día—ahora no quiero pensar ni cómo ni para qué—la emplearé. No hacerlo sería un imperdonable desperdicio. (20)

(An extensive and varied documentation, which could provide me with [enough] themes or subjects to be able to complete a good number of additional albums, something that I find difficult to forego. If I live long enough, I am sure that someday—at this point I don’t want to think of how nor for what purpose—I will use it. Not doing so would be an unforgivable waste.)

Giménez’s introduction to *Todo Paracuellos* not only serves as a reflection on his creative process and its relationship to memory; it also provides a more in-depth look at his view of the homes of *Auxilio Social*,

which for Giménez, were a key part of the Spain of that moment and *la España de Franco* was just as perverse outside their walls as it was within them: “Fuera de las tapias de estos ‘hogares,’ la España normal, la España de posguerra, era igual de fea” (21) (Outside the walls of these “homes,” normal Spain, postwar Spain, was equally ugly). Above all, it is violence that marks the plot of each episode of *Todo Paracuellos*. The caretakers, teachers, and priests, among others, practice a kind of daily sadism with the children under their care. There is a disturbing trend of slaps, blows, smacks and kicks that can be traced back to the general dynamic of postwar Spain:

La España de esos años [...] era una sociedad muy dura y muy violenta. Se sumaban en ella factores tales como la proximidad de la reciente guerra civil, el talante de los vencedores y el miedo y la pobreza generalizados. En este caldo de cultivo sólo monstruos podían desarrollarse. Y estos colegios, estos “hogares,” eran el monstruo lógico que engendraba una sociedad monstruosa. (22)

(The Spain of those years [...] was a very harsh and violent society. It encompassed factors such as the proximity of the recent civil war, the countenance of the victors and generalized fear and poverty. In this culture of microbes only monsters could develop. And these schools, these “homes,” were the logical monster that engendered a monstrous society.)

As a pioneer of the testimonial comic, Giménez knows all too well the painful world of childhood that he has drawn in the pages of *Paracuellos*. He was one of those boys with huge eyes curled up in the corners of its vignettes, crying desperate tears in the far reaches of the yard. Giménez had to live in five of those homes, which he describes in his work over the course of eight hellish years. In those days, the comics he managed to get his hands on were his refuge, and his dreams of becoming a comic artist his main comfort. What he was unable to imagine was that the essence of that pain would eventually transform itself into a graphic testimony of a denunciation that would create reverberating echoes in the adult manifestation of the Spanish comic.

Paracuellos manages to transcend various periods and genres, culminating in a series that explores various forms of memory, both individual and collective. It is a series that, after its beginnings in the 1970s, continues even today to represent a space created through memory. Furthermore, it is a key piece of Spanish comic production in that it will inspire other comic artists, as well as writers, to explore the theme of historical memory in their own work. In many ways, this comic by Giménez vindicates the personal history of memory, which in certain ways confronts objective institutionalized history and, containing contradictory information,

seeks to offer other perspectives. Paul Connerton, studying the ways in which societies remember, highlights the manner in which “[t]he ‘personal’ history of the memoir writer has confronted an ‘objective’ history embodied in institutions” (19). The two graphic novels analyzed in the pages that follow emerge as a personal vindication of the fathers of each author. *Un largo silencio* is the result of the necessity felt by Miguel Ángel Gallardo to narrate the experiences of his father, while *El arte de volar* also recuperates the figure of the father, from the perspective of its scriptwriter, Antonio Altarriba. Both pieces are born of the experience of memory, as is the case with Giménez’s *Paracuellos*. In all of these works, the compilations of experience are formulated through oral histories as related to the children of these paternal figures. Connerton emphasizes that:

The oral history of subordinate groups will produce another type of history; one in which not only will most of the details be different, but in which the very construction of meaningful shapes will obey a different principle. Different details will emerge because they are inserted, as it were, into a different kind of narrative home. (19)

Un largo silencio, by Miguel Ángel Gallardo and Francisco Gallardo Sarmiento, published in 1997, demonstrates a clear continuation of the exploration of memory in late twentieth-century Spanish literary production. While Giménez’s *Todo Paracuellos* is a compilation of a comic that serves primarily to reveal and denounce the systematic violence and social division of the Franco years, *Un largo silencio* is a hybrid combination of graphic and textual narratives that combines Gallardo’s and his father’s writing, drawings, photos, documents, and comic art to illustrate his father’s experience as a republican soldier before, during, and after the war.

The parallels with Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* are notable: written in the first person, it functions as a sort of artistic transcription of his father’s memories and experiences. Both Gallardo and his father effectively “author” this work; while the bulk of it is linear textual narrative, “voiced” by Gallardo’s father, Francisco Gallardo Sarmiento, this traditional textual space is further reinforced by the graphic dimension that Miguel Ángel Gallardo adds to it, oftentimes in comic form. In the prologue, Gallardo himself highlights the hybrid, at times fragmented nature of the text, explaining that it is “una historia que, a fuerza de oír, se me ha quedado grabada . . . la historia que me contó mi padre una y otra vez, hecha de trozos y retales, de piezas que no encajan, pero que yo sé es cierta” (5) (a story which, by dint of hearing it, has become engraved on [my memory] . . . the story that was told to me by my father once and again, made up of bits and remnants of pieces that do not fit, but which I know to be true).

Though this work provides multiple examples of the brutal violence of the Spanish Civil War, the persecution of Republican soldiers following the war, and the difficulties of reintegrating a profoundly divided Spanish society, it also functions as a narrative space that repositions the Republican soldier not just as a victim, but as a national hero. Additionally, through his father's experience after the war, Gallardo demonstrates the ways in which examples of humanism shone through the violence and cruelty of the postwar period, creating ways for people like his father to reclaim a place in Spanish society, or at the very least to simply survive. In doing so, through the narration of his father's memories he locates not just the trauma inherent in Spanish national history, but also moments of human solidarity that managed to trump a vast ideological divide.

In the very first line of the prologue, Gallardo states: "Mi padre es un héroe" (5) (My father is a hero). He goes on to explain that this heroism is not the kind touted by mass media and popular entertainment, in which the heroic figure finds some sort of superhuman strength to relinquish a powerful enemy or save society from disaster. The Spanish Civil War followed its brutal course, and in the end, justice did not prevail for men like Gallardo's father. Some were gunned down in battle, while others were left traumatized from vast amounts of violence, forced to flee Spain to avoid political persecution, captured in other countries and sent to concentration camps, killed by those now in power, or forced into the margins of society. As Gallardo makes evident in detailing the early life of his father, many of these men had already struggled to overcome difficult social conditions: poverty, difficulty in gaining access to education, fragmented family situations, high mortality rates, and low employment rates.

The heroism that Gallardo locates in his father (and presents through this text) is his ability to survive: not just a difficult childhood and young adulthood, in which he discovered and honed certain skills to improve his lot in life (primarily through education), but also the devastating effects of a brutal civil war, and the trauma that for so long kept him silent. In finally finding the strength to recount his experiences to his son, Gallardo's father also overcomes the last vestiges of power of the Franco regime, refusing to allow their abuses to be swept under the rug. In passing down his personal experiences to his son, he ensures that the next generation of Spanish citizenry will not be without a tangible link to an important (though painful) national past.

In positing the survival of his father as a heroic act, Gallardo also valorizes the actions of the Nationalist official that made his father's survival possible, freeing him from a certain death in a concentration camp for Spanish prisoners of war in Barcelona. While Francisco Gallardo most certainly would have been killed because of his position as a Republican officer during the war, an old classmate of his, the lieutenant in charge of running the camp, recognized his name on the list and had him called in to

his office to verify that he was the indeed the man he had gone to school with years ago. This lieutenant not only got him out of the camp; he erased his name from the official lists of known Republican officers, thus allowing him to escape the retaliation that so many others suffered. Through other friends who had connections to the Falange, Gallardo's father was able to obtain official government recommendations citing him as a Nationalist sympathizer. With these references, he was able to obtain work and began the process of rebuilding his life.

In narrating and reconstructing his father's personal history through documents, pictures, and a combination of the transcription of his father's stories and Gallardo's own interpretation of events through short series of vignettes interspersed throughout the text, Gallardo manages to conflate the concepts of personal, generational, and national history. The *historia* (history) he tells is his father's, but it is also his own: he not only re-tells it, he also re-writes it, adding his own personal memory to that of his father in a way that presents this as a mutual history. Like Spiegelman's *Maus*, the first volume of which was published eleven years before, this transposition of generational testimony through memory serves as a powerful commentary on the ways in which national histories continue to mark subsequent generations of national subjects, who inherit through their predecessors the traumas, scars, and complexities of a divided national past.² In publishing his father's memories, which are now also his, Gallardo not only gives voice to one person's lived experiences, but also (re)inscribes them into the larger collective national memory and identity.

The most recent Spanish graphic novel to combine the dimensions of testimony and historical memory is *El arte de volar*, created by Antonio Altarriba (scriptwriter) and Kim (illustrator). Winner of the *Premio Nacional de Cómic* in 2010, *El arte de volar* relates the life of Altarriba's father who, born in 1910, was driven by circumstance to take his own life in May of 2001. Clearly, Altarriba is conscious of the expressive dimension that the comic form offers, as well as the implicit possibilities that the genre contains. In the final text that closes the book, Altarriba himself asks: "¿Por qué en cómic? Toda la información, escrita o como relato oral, me había llegado verbalmente. Así que lo más lógico habría sido mantenerme fiel a las fuentes, ordenarlas, limpiarlas, darles estructura dramática y convertirlas en novela" (211) (But why in the form of a comic? All of the information, either written or told orally, had reached me through words. Therefore it would have been most logical to be faithful to the sources, ordering them, cleaning them, giving them a dramatic structure and converting them into a novel). But Altarriba, as a comic enthusiast, theorist, and scriptwriter, understands all too well the narrative potential of the genre:

Su carácter mixto, combinando los valores plásticos y literarios, barajando la expresividad gráfica con el dialogismo teatral, integrando

el espacio de la figuración y el tiempo de la narración en agrupaciones secuenciales muy distintas a las de otros medios audiovisuales, hace del cómic un vehículo idóneo para todo tipo de relatos. (213)

(Its mixed character, combining plastic and literary values, shuffling graphic expressiveness with theatrical dialogism, integrating the space of figuration and the time of narration into sequential groupings quite different from other audiovisual media, makes of the comic a vehicle suitable for all kinds of stories.)

By creating interior monologue through the use of captions and relating dialogue through traditional text balloons, thereby positioning the voice of his father in first person, Altarriba manages to play with the possibilities offered by the interplay of text and image that characterizes the comic, using multiple levels of expression to portray the universe inhabited by his father; to express and insert all of the materials that he had accumulated about him over the years. Linked to the concept of historical memory are his father's civil war years, as well as his years in exile in France and his return to Spain in 1949 in spite of the dictatorship. *El arte de volar* is pervaded with a profound sadness; one which is so all-consuming that the only way out for this elderly man is suicide, which he manages by leaping out of the window of his nursing home. This moving graphic novel makes us reflect on the weight of life and the pain of existence.

Richard Terdiman explains that in psychoanalysis, “memory is the heart of the matter. Memory constitutes us and undoes us simultaneously” (241). For Altarriba, the creative process of evoking his father is the key to redeeming his own pain. In his words,

Este libro ha cambiado mi existencia. Recupero la vida de mi padre, la vivo con él, casi en él, y, como contrapartida, me devuelve una nueva, como si me volviera a engendrar y me lanzara a un mundo donde él es un poco más digno y yo, en consecuencia, un poco menos culpable. (217)

(This book has changed my existence. I recover my father's life, I live it with him, almost with him, and, in return, it gives me a new one, as if I were engendered anew and thrust onto a world where he is a bit more dignified and I, consequently, a bit less guilty.)

Retelling his father's story and representing it within the vignettes of a comic has helped him to heal his wounds. As Terdiman indicates, “the exercise of memory is intended to heal the traumas” (241). For Altarriba, writing this graphic novel has served as a form of therapy, and the

exploration of his father's memory has indeed aided him in the overcoming his own personal traumas.

Fiction and Historical Memory in Dialogue

Historical memory has been a fascinating component in the social realist graphic novel in Spain, thanks to Giménez, Gallardo, and works by Altarriba and Kim. However, the fictional plots of the Spanish comic have also been inspired by the past, and some notable works have acquired definite relevance in terms of their inclusion of historical aspects. In 2009, the graphic novel *Las serpientes ciegas*, published as a script in 2008 by Felipe Hernández Cava, with illustrations by Bartolomé Seguí, was awarded the *Premio Nacional del Cómic*. Set in New York in 1939, *Las serpientes ciegas* tells a story of treachery and revenge linked to the Spanish Civil War, in which the Republican faction is doomed to failure. A work of fiction, *Las serpientes ciegas* is the result of a number of contradictory feelings of its scriptwriter. In an article published in *El Periódico de Aragón*, Gemma Tramullas quotes Cava, who insists that this work is neither about the Civil War in Spain nor the Great Depression in the United States. According to Cava, this was “solo un pretexto para hablar de algo que está de rabiosa actualidad: los excesos que cometen las personas en nombre de las ideologías” (only a pretext to speak of something that is very current: the excesses committed by people in the name of ideologies). It is true that Cava wants the reader to reflect about the contradictions inherent in humankind, and that this work is, as Álvaro Pons has indicated, “un giro hacia el descreimiento” (a turn toward disbelief), that forges “un fondo de profunda decepción hacia las ideologías” (a background of profound disappointment toward ideologies). But although Cava might deny the centrality of the Civil War in this piece, the given context of the war connects clearly with this contemporary period of historical memory in Spain.

The script, by Cava, highlights the ideological tensions of the period, at the same time that it demonstrates the ways in which personal identity was constructed through political thought. Decades after the fact, the Civil War is still very much present in the minds and memories of contemporary comic creators, and the parallel discourse of the political reality that vindicates its memory is being forged with more power than ever. Paco Roca, for example, has come to be known by readers both foreign and domestic for his award-winning graphic novel *Arrugas*, published in 2007 and also the recipient of the *Premio Nacional del Cómic* in 2008. Recently, *Arrugas* was made into an animated feature film, further cementing Roca's success and recognition. *Arrugas* is a graphic novel that deals with themes of aging, illness, and memory, as well as its loss. Set in a contemporary Spanish

nursing home, it tells the story of a man battling Alzheimer's; struggling to maintain both his memories and his autonomy. Though it does not deal specifically with the Spanish Civil War, it is a work that is very much centered around the concept of memory and its role in both constructing and maintaining identity.

In 2004, however, Roca published a sixty-four-page album titled *El Faro* (republished by Astiberri in 2009) based on the story of those who fled to France after the defeat of the Republicans at the close of the Spanish Civil War. The impetus of this story, which recounts the adventures of Francisco, a seventeen-year-old Republican border guard who tries to cross the border in order to save himself from Nationalist retribution, was based on the true story of the grandfather of a friend. In 2010, Roca continued with this theme in *El ángel de la retirada*. The script is by Serguei Dounovetz, from France, and in this case, the story revolves around memories of the Civil War and those who were forced into the French concentration camps. *El ángel de la retirada* is a comic that was commissioned by the Spanish colony of Beziers, a locality in the south of France that has a complicated association with Spanish migratory tendencies and circumstances. There were three large waves of migration documented in this region. The first wave of Spanish citizens arrived for reasons as much economic as political at the end of the nineteenth century; the second group would migrate for political reasons in 1939, at the end of the Spanish Civil War; the third group, would arrive in the 1970s, driven by economic motives. The plot of Roca and Dounovetz's work is constructed from within present-day France, and takes place during the summer of 2008. It narrates the fictional story of Victoria, an adolescent daughter of Spanish immigrants who attempts to investigate her grandparents' past. This personal curiosity gives cause to a series of conversations and fantasies that lead her to recreate the times of the Spanish Civil War and the harsh reality of those who were forced into the camps. One of her interlocutors is Adrián, another young French descendant of Spanish immigrants who is not nearly so eager to seek out the details of such a painful past. The reality of the French camps and the suffering of the Spanish citizens is depicted in all of its harshness. Dysentery, typhoid, malaria and pneumonia were the norm that besieged these Republicans in their painful exile. This comic also has a didactic projection that seeks to educate its readers about all of the dimensions that the past acquires in the present. To these ends, information is included that alludes to the option that descendants of Spanish citizens have regarding Spanish citizenship. This work also serves to disseminate information among readers about the above-mentioned *Ley de Memoria Histórica*, which recognizes the victims of the Civil War and the resulting dictatorship. This law, among other concessions, gave the children and grandchildren of those exiled the right to Spanish citizenship. Under the parameters of the law, those who abandoned Spain between July 18, 1936 and December 31, 1955 were considered exiled. In

this way, the subject matter of *El ángel de la retirada* seeks to connect audiences that have been directly or indirectly linked to the experiences of the Spanish Civil War and the exile that resulted from it for so many citizens. The necessity to remember from the present and to evoke past events alludes to the quest for visibility that is so central to the space of memory.

The comic object is sequential art, in which image and text coexist. In this essay, we have seen that due to its unique format, it is capable of offering surprising textures and perspectives, where the expression of reality acquires a great deal of intensity upon combining these disparate languages. All of these works have been conceived from the space of memory, in some cases intimate and full of traumas; in others, as products of existential reflection in regards to a historical period that continues to mark Spanish society.

Notes

1. Along with the Hogar Batalla del Jarama, the episodes of *Paracuellos* take place in the following *Auxilio Social* homes: the Hogar Bibona, Hogar Azul, Hogar General Mola, Hogar Batalla de Brunete, Hogar Generalísimo Franco, Hogar Joaquín García Morato, Hogar Enfermería and Sanatorio Santa Clara.
2. *Maus* was initially serialized from 1980–1991. Volume I was published in 1986; Volume II in 1991.

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