◆ Afterword

Graphic Pasts in Graphic Presents

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When celebrated cartoonist Will Eisner asserted that "critical to the success of a visual narrative is the ability to convey time" (24), he was, of course, referring specifically to the cognitive process required to create sequential narrative in comics. And yet, the ability of comics, cartoons and graphic narratives to "convey time" stretches beyond their formal properties into questions of figuration. Scott McCloud, for example, proposes that in a "full-bleed"—where an image is printed to the edge of the page—"time is no longer contained by the familiar lines of the closed panel, but instead haemorrhages and escapes into timeless space" (130). Meanwhile, intercalating multiple perspectives creates what Nick Sousanis has called a "kaleidoscopic" (39) lens, since "by seeing through multiple eyes, we can trace otherwise invisible connections across layers of time and space" (45). As such, comics allow—even encourage—the destabilizing of linear narratives, engaging readers in an optic dance across the page. Our eyes look ahead, then back as the textual-pictorial dynamic pulls our attention in multiple directions: from the micro of individual panels to the macro of the hyperframe, skipping through the interstitial gutter spaces where cognitive closure takes place. In this way, the form deploys a unique set of frames which choreograph synchronous and asynchronous elements alike, navigating readers across multiple cartographies of time (Cameron and McGlade 179).

Complementing these formal ways in which comics toy with elasticities of time and space, graphic narratives dealing with the past as theme or plot are themselves part of multiple, overlapping chronologies and histories; the historical issues or events which they are engaging, the periodic context of the creation itself and the moment in which —and by whom— the works are being read. These chronologies must be understood as products of their own present, since not only does the historic comic author transmit a representation of a moment or event that is marked by the context of its production but also, the reader-*cum*-analyst themself applies a critical lens where socio-political

baggage cannot be simply checked at the door. Memory, like history, is of course also conditioned, bearing as it does the same imprints of the present in which it was enacted and the present in which it is recalled (Whitehead 1–2). Indeed, in graphic narratives of the past, where memories and histories overlap most clearly is the way in which they are framed to offer the illusion that they are passively discovered rather than actively constructed (Moxey 142). The relaying of memory, then, is equally selective; tethered to the *Zeitgeist* and resonating with the current ideological sympathies at the cost of other material, which is rejected. Nevertheless, by framing and re-framing memorialization and transmission of selected moments of Spain's history, comics are a graphic passport with which to travel back in time, connecting the present with the past, allowing readers to acquaint themselves with heretofore unfamiliar histories, while engaging new perspectives on other paths more trodden.

In a new era of research and investigation which underpins many of Spain's contemporary comics set in the past, "*mise-en-page* of archival investigation" and a "foregrounding of testimony and witnessing" powerfully combine with an artistic capacity for "visualizing the emotional, affective links that make intergenerational communication possible" (Amago 32–33). As a number of the contributions in this collection adduce, this is particularly true in the case of the persistent trauma surrounding the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath of repression and dictatorship. Where memory is read as a metahistorical category, 'trauma' has been described as "the key to authentic forms of memory and memories shaped by trauma are the most likely to subvert totalizing varieties of historicism" (Kleinn 138). Thus, if trauma-as-theme in such works can be understood in terms of 21st-century efforts to recover and preserve the memories of Spain's previous century, the use of comics is equally apposite in light of claims that comics possess an "immediacy and diagrammatic ability to display otherwise hard-to-express realities and sensations" (Chute 241) and that "comics mirror at a formal level the effects of trauma" (Whitehead 84).

Graphic renderings of Spain's 20th century have been, and will continue to be, reframed according to the socio-political order of the moment, constructed and reimagined over time, as a reflection of contemporaneous political relationships with history. The hybridity and multimodality of the comics medium, then, additionally offer the ideal figurative frames with which to interrogate time's connection to persistently evolving epistemologies of the past as seen from the vantage points of the present and (imagined) futures. Echoing throughout the contributions to the present collection is the notion that Spanish graphic novels are uniquely positioned to encourage readers to reject the stability of totalizing narratives of history. As auto/biographical memories join with fictionalized historical testimonies to transmit reflections on selected avatars in Spain's variegated history, we are reminded by the active cognitive

participation required when reading comics, of our own place in framing and (re)constructing understandings of these multiple pasts.

Jacques Rancière has described history as "an anthology of what is worthy of being memorialized [. . .] not necessarily what *was*, and what witnesses testify to, but what deserves to be focused on, mediated upon, imitated" (61). It is in this sense, in the opening to *Graphic Pasts: Comic and History in 21st-Century Spain*, that Michel Matly stresses the instability of history and its parity with fiction, since both, as he argues, depend on the societies in which they are produced. Matly's highly engaging and thought-provoking piece chimes with a number of the aforementioned questions surrounding constructions of the past and sets the tone for a measured approach to a history. His reflections are at once attentive to contexts of production and consumption, while also acting as a celebration of the multidimensional complexity that graphic narratives can offer to nuance and necessarily destabilize readings of Spain's past. Pre-empting the pervasive presence of the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist period in the essays that follow his own, Matly identifies a prevalent trend in recent studies of comics engaging this period; that of excluding or including material according to what he terms the "angelic consensus" on the war, in which pro-Republican material reigns supreme. This observation supports the subsequent claim that, while historical comics may not necessarily provide historians with additional information on the events in question, what they do offer is a significant insight into how subsequent generations and societies come to consider these events retrospectively (31).

Following this thread, as Hernando Morejón's essay elucidates, the deployment of Iberian Antiquity in Spanish comics over the past 80 years—in particular, the choice to focus on pre-Roman societies facing the colonizing Carthaginian and Roman forces—forms part of the construction of the national myth and/or its associated identities. As Morejón's genealogical treatment shows, the graphic framing of this particular period of Spain's past has much to do with extant attitudes, making these comics—produced at various junctures since 1940—useful tools with which to understand comics as not only participating in the creation of a particular perspective of history, but as historical markers of attitudes themselves. Echoing Matly's observations on conditioned representations of history, Morejón's critical analysis of the shifting narrative and iconicity redresses a paucity of scholarship on the subject, which in turn he notes, underscores that the Ancient period is something of a marginalized moment in graphic treatments of Spain's past; frequently overshadowed by desires to connect with the Medieval era.

What Morejón shows is not only the influence of evolving attitudes to history in society, but also advancements in approaches to the production of comics about history in the present-day. Comics produced in the 1950s,

which considered, for example, the relationships between Iberian tribes and Punic and Roman peoples or featured historic figures such as Viratius, were egregiously rife with inaccuracies. If this was a product of a lack of critical engagement with extant attitudes in the source texts, it was far more so that the plots were "entirely manipulated by the propaganda discourse of Francoist nationalist historiography" (46), later co-opted and molded to suit the nationalist discourse of the mythic hero, something which was also reflected in the school textbooks of the period. By the time the 2020 version of *Viratio* hit the shelves, its high-quality finish and more accurate depictions incorporated details which underscore its underpinning by academic study. This contrast is not only a reflection of changing attitudes and new perspectives on the Iberian past, but also marks a shift in the contexts of production and consumption of the medium of comics itself, as its increasing cultural prestige has seen publishing houses and readers of comics alike become more exacting. Another change in these representations of time is reflective of contemporary popular tastes, in which the richly colored comic pages revive the past for a modern aesthetic and the presence of flawed heroes combined with a focus on the lives of the everyman, bring the past to the present in a discernibly humanistic frame.

The established capacity of the comics form for effectively engaging the complexity of history is the asset that renders them equally well-placed for conveying the complexity of literary classics. The multiliteracy of graphic narratives occasions connections with other literary and visual texts and, at their most effective, adaptations into comic form have the potential to draw together the sociocultural distances that exist between source text and present day. In a world dominated by the visual, comics have come to be understood as ways to reach younger or uninitiated audiences, while their didactic potential in the classroom has been the subject of a wide range of scholarship. Thus, while the adaptation of Golden Age theater into comic form may run the risk of horrifying purists, these works should not be read as a reductive simplification of the original, nor are they necessarily indicative of diminishing capacities to engage traditional, so-called highbrow culture. Rather, as Moisés Castillo and Carmen Moreno-Nuño's article shows, the 2016 graphic adaptation of *La vida es sueño* not only brings Calderón's classic play into modern-day relief, but also underscores the capacity of comics to render dynamic theatricality, while presenting the work's major themes in innovative ways. Moreover, restaging classical texts for performance on the contemporary comics page affords "transhistorical and trans-cultural encounters" which offer opportunities to critically examine our present media contexts as much as the cultural contexts of Golden Age writers (60). Thus, far from distorting it, for these authors, the comic version "elevates" the original as dialogue and image interact with dramaturgy to portray theater as "text in performance" (79).

The multiple temporalities present in the source text take to the stage in the comic via a semiotic and chromatic prism—to extend Sousanis' original analogy—that further nuance the complex layering in the presentation of the thematic drifts encapsulated by Calderón's original. The end of the comic incorporates metafictional panels, which reminds the reader of the source text's relation to performance, and in particular a modern-day performance. Thus, the text can not only negotiate temporal movement between moments in the plot, but also cast connections between past and present by looking back, across, forward and out from the stage. This comic underscores, then, that far from unified, in the Aristotelian sense, time is kaleidoscopic.

As the collection moves its attention from source material of the Golden Age to the creative canvas of the Modernist era, the possibilities to aesthetically capture avant-garde artistic practices, as well as the humanity of the personal biographies of key cultural figures from the time, have caught the imagination of Spanish graphic narratives engaging this particular period of the past. The status of the comic medium, operating in the gutter space between high and low culture, makes it the ideal locus from which to explore the lives of figures, marginalized in their time, but co-opted and popularized in the present imaginary. Moreover, in the case of the avant-garde aesthetic, the comic form in all its abstraction seems opportunely placed as a medium through which to render that which resists and destabilizes the established order, moving beyond the more formulaic presentations of biographies. As Elena Cueto Asín notes in her examination of *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*, while it tells the story of the shooting of *Las Hurdes,* the comic also depicts the iconic filmmaker's subconscious projected through dreamlike episodes, as well as anthropomorphized visions of death and time, both recalling the Surrealist aesthetic.

A key question raised by a reading of this work concerns the way in which it participates in a (re)framing of the past, in a cultural stewardship that reconstructs the relationship between the icons of the period. Engaging the "policies governing commemoration of cultural legacies" (84), Cueto Asín sees Fermín Solís's comic as a celebration of the way in which the region left its mark on a young bourgeois Buñuel, while at once underscoring Spain's contribution to the Avant-garde by casting as its protagonists some of the movement's most recognized members. The co-opting of comics such as these for education and/or the promotion of cultural heritage by public and political institutions, importantly for Cueto Asín, does not equate to a loss of their countercultural character, since they can still "question cultural policies at large, including the politics of commemoration and consecration of historical figures and icons" (86). Nevertheless, and echoing Matly's observations of cultural gatekeeping, while comics do bring iconic figures to life on the page, if historical memory is replete with gaps which are the product of socially determined framings of the past, comics

which reclaim certain histories and/or biographies inevitably do so at the expense of overlooking others.

The Spanish Civil War as subject has continued to dominate the market of graphic works about the past, which engage individual and collective memories alike. (Re)telling suppressed stories salvaged from the wreckages of forty long years of imposed silence, the turn of the 21st century has witnessed a healthy flow from comic authors who have sought to add their historical take to the surfeit of creative and literary outputs—as part of what Jo Labanyi came to term the "memory boom"—that deal with the Spanish Civil War and its dictatorial aftermath (95). These narratives comprise (semi)fictionalized biographies of family members—*El arte de volar* (2009) by Antonio Altarriba and Kim being the most internationally recognized example—and those which draw on historical events and testimonial/memoirs to form the basis of their fictional narratives, such as Paco Roca's *Los surcos de azar* and, the lesser-studied *Estampas 1936*, both of which are the subject of essays in the collection. At the heart of these graphic narratives is a dialogic grapple between real events and given testimonies, with fictionalized narrative that seek to capture and relay extant, while undocumented, perspectives from the period.

The realist style in *Estampas 1936*, Pérez del Solar argues, is used to establish a sense of credibility—by which we might also be encouraged to understand 'authenticity'—via highly accurate and thoroughly researched external spaces with which to frame the scenes. This in turn, allows for the trust in the verisimilitude to be extended to the fictitious internal spaces surrounding the characters, and when combined with detailed depictions of the trappings of class and gender, renders these otherwise two-dimensional extras as complex, credible participants in the action. As such, peripheral characters are imbued with their own sense of developed plots, which contributes to the framing of a world of multiple histories, where no one story—regardless of the indicated protagonist—is representative of all. This approach hinges on the notion that challenges the unilateral histories so often associated with this particular period in Spanish history, one which has been revised, revisited and recast according to shifting attitudes as well as the uncovering of hidden or heretofore lost testimonies and/or experiences.

Pérez del Solar's reading of *Estampas 1936* underscores the commingling of individual and collective experience within the same panel. Such framing is yet another example of the comic's unique contributions to the recovery and reflections of/on memory in Spain. Here, it suspends time in order to give space to the telling of multiple stories and perspectives at once, and as a result represents the notion of individual and collective histories; experienced and shared but each from a unique position as the events unfold. At the same time, the disruptive textboxes of internalized monologues chaperone the reader

around the page between the multiple potential protagonists, as they search for the individual to whom the words might belong. The reader's point of focus dances from character to character, both leading and being led across the comic page. The dynamic push and pull, as mentioned, is reflective of the relationship with the past since, on the one hand, it underscores our own role in constructing collective experiences and understandings of the history, while on the other highlighting that these understanding are framed and directed by the socio-political order of the day.

Although it is a text which has received much scholastic and critical attention, existing studies of Paco Roca's *Los surcos del azar* have tended to focus on the thematic bastions of exile, war and memory. Instead, Sarah D. Harris uses Roca's historical graphic narrative to engage its contribution to the recovery of memory by focusing on visual and formal strategies and the inherent complexities of fictional memory. As a comic artist Roca's body of work is diverse but the question of memory both individual, personal and private, as well as collective and widespread, are pervasive markers, as he seeks to create bridges between these past lives and present reality as experienced by his readers. A fictional account which like *Estampas 1936* also plays with verisimilitude, *Los surcos* calls into relief the complex dynamic of that core of 'authentic' history—giving and receiving testimony.

Roca toys with the triad of temporalities outlined in the introduction to the collection: the period being described; the period of creation; and the period of consumption. In doing so, his creative deployment of the comics color palette opens up further reflections of the experiences of time, memory and history. Inverting the typical flashback aesthetics, he replaces softer or sepia-toned hues—usually used to imply the faded nature of memories—with solid and bold colors to frame the recounting of the past, while the present is rendered in neutral, grey tones with blurred edges. In this respect, as Harris argues, the frame story is not that of the interview about the past experience, as might be expected of an interpolated narrative, but rather it concerns a "past that encircles an uncertain present" (146). Thus, Roca aptly deploys the aesthetic of sketches and drafts to reflect the metahistorical notion of a present still under construction.

The importance of testimony, this time with a focus on its orality, also lies at the heart of the way in which memory and identity are engaged by Miguelanxo Prado's *Ardalén*. These intertwining features, as Arturo Meijide Lapido's contribution attests, bring together on the comics page the universality and the particularity of an identity rooted in regional specificity: that of an Atlantic Galician imaginary. In a body of work that looks ever-Westward, Prado shows clear Latin American literary influences and the Atlantic Ocean "constitutes the rhizomatic geopolitical space where Galician mobile identity is displayed" (160). Profiting from the creative opportunities of form, in *Ardalén* Prado underscores

the importance of space and geography to an understanding of the specificities of Galician identity construction, while also foregrounding oral histories to encourage reflections on the tension between archive and memory. Beyond their attested role of paratexts to convey a sense of authenticity through the suggestion that the comic has been underpinned by historical research, in *Ardalén* they are put in dialogue with the main narrative with the result of querying and destabilizing any sense of a singular, homogenous, all-encompassing "truth" to any one version of history. In so doing, it raises the question of ownership, in other words: who owns collected and/or collective memories?

The inclusion of this work and its critical discussion in the *Graphic Pasts* collection is key since, among its many contributions, it deploys the formal properties of the comics form to engage the complex issues surrounding memory, exile and the presence of multiple temporalities, which resist categorization into past, present and future. Prado's artistic approach echoes the testimonies of many exiles and diasporic communities concerning the overlapping and divergent experiences of time and memory associated with the excision from the homeland. Thus, the exile is one who has not only experienced the removal from his territory (*destierro*) but, what Joseph Wittlin termed *destiempo*: of its time (105). As a result, memories become entwined with the hope of return. Meijide Lapido notes that in *Ardalén* the presence of the Todorovian fantastic—a device also traceable in Prado's *Streams of Chalk*—resides in characters that do not belong to the same realm, as an erstwhile friend and a former lover among others dance teasingly across the panels to evoke the disordering and unreliability of chronologies of memory. Nature's metaphoric potential is likewise deployed to explore the concepts of the transmission of history over time and space as Fidel's memory is tethered to the Ardalén wind, which carries the memories of Galicia's imagined community, the vast Atlantic meanwhile is cast as the receptacle of history and the locus of the foundational myth.

Cognitive and conceptual notions of closure—which, since Scott McCloud's iconic distilling of *Gestalt* theory are a widely acknowledged core concept of Comics Studies—are appositely introduced to bring the collection to a close. However, far from tying up loose threads, we are encouraged to continue looking back and forward beyond a work's conclusion. Indeed, despite the catharses implied by giving a voice to past traumas and memory through the recovery of testimonies, where history and comics align is in their disavowal of *full* closure. More akin to the sense of Derridean 'différance' which, instead, implies a continued deferral of meaning, this approach is apt for understanding how such meaning is constructed formally and figuratively on the comics page. For Ofelia Ferrán, the process of closure, which in certain cases implies a reader's "complicity with the *breaking* of ideological closure" (181) is more fittingly defined as 'dis-closure', as she explores Miguel Brieva's dismantling

and unlearning of the haunting traces of Francoist doctrine, which are not simply located in the past but [linger] in the present (183). Brieva's illustrated 2019 edition adopts the same iconographical play present in his previous works—frame bleeds, the commingling of cartoon and realist styles, ironically anachronistic or recontextualized images, among others—to suggestively adduce the commonalities between the repressive systems of Francoist ideology, as presented by Vázquez Montalbán's satirical original text, and market economy culture of the present day. As a source text, "the dictionary questions as much as it defines, interrogates as much as it delimits, unsettles rather than settles the meaning of what it presents" (188). Meanwhile, subversive strategies are just as discernible in Brieva's accompanying illustrations. Thus, as the former shows that the traces of Francoism were still very much alive in 1977, the latter emphasizes that they still continue into 2019.

Brieva's unmistakable style of overlaying disparate temporalities takes shape here as he co-opts a 1950s-America consumerist aesthetic to deliver his critique of present neoliberal and capitalist logic. His graphic framing of Vázquez Montalbán's original not only participates in the notions already alluded to and echoed throughout *Graphic Pasts*—that history is a product of its present—but also offers an important engagement with the ludic aspect of the comic form, reclaiming its etymological ties with humor and comedy. Brieva deploys his humor based on the incongruity of anachronistic iconography. It goes without saying that this humor, while playful, pulls no punches as in the case described by Ferrán of the acerbic depiction of Franco and his wife, Carmencita, surrounded by images of the victims of his repression and crimes, putting the comic's figurative and formal capacity to effective use as the image bleeds out of the frame and off the page. The humor then, present in both the subversive messages of Vásquez Montalbán's text and in Brieva's expansive graphic responses, serves to deliver a continuity between these two comments on the survival of the past into multiple, respective presents.

Here, the commentary on the importance of education beyond the classroom for our relationship in the present with the past and its political vagaries, is palpable. As Paloma Aguilar has argued, "memory and learning are closely linked [. . .] given that without a retentive capacity it is not possible to apply the lessons of the past and that without the light which learning sheds on the present memory is of little use to us" (xvii). Brieva's graphic rendering of Vázquez Montalbán's *Diccionario* is more than simply giving a playful aesthetic update. Rather, it enters the debates head on, with the implication of the desperate need for Spaniards of today to first learn about Francoism in order to successfully "*unlearn* its discursive and ideological manipulations" (X) that persist in today. The artist's ironic nostalgia-driven graphics, then, provocatively bring the past under the microscope of the present.

Framed by an approach that is deeply rooted in an interdisciplinary dialogue between History, Memory Studies and Comics Studies, what is echoed throughout the essays comprised in *The Graphic Past: Comics and History in 21st-Century Spain*—or indeed, kaleidoscopically cast—is a sense of the way in which Spain's multiple histories continue to have a bearing on its present. The collection does not rest on the laurels of simply adding to the conversation, but rather steers it in compelling directions in ways that challenge, enrich and elucidate the debates. Though a comprehensive chronology drives its order, ideas from previous chapters chime with and/or complement those which follow, thus effecting yet another dialogue between multiple temporalities and perspectives. A sense of nostalgia resides implicitly in the comic form, tied as it is to associations with cherished childhood ephemera, and, in the case of comics about the past, connections with the periods they engage. As we have seen, representing the past in the present requires persistent scrutiny, since the selection processes of what is recovered and how it is (re)framed is often just as much about "jostling for the future" (Baetens and Frey 232). What shines through is the capacity of the form to "blend present and past together on single pages, while progressing narration through chapters" (220). Indeed, framing these panels of graphic engagements with Spain's distinctive past, the collection attests the myriad ways in which contemporary artists have grappled with individual and collective memories as well as the nation's complex historical make-up.

Bringing life to the past is not the sole purview of the comic form, and yet its capacity to aptly convey the complexity of time's passing, its relationship to memory and individual and even national identities we construct for ourselves jumps out from the page. Deploying the visual-verbal tug-of-war at the heart of comics, the works in question—as well as those which comprise Spain's rich comics tapestry more broadly—aesthetically toy with form and figuration as a means to challenge and resist totalizing accounts of history. Destabilized panels which defy linear narratives and the framing of multiple temporalities are just some of the ways in which contemporary Spanish graphic narratives about the past effect their ruminations on the evocative question of time and memory in all its "partial, allusive, fragmentary [and] transient" (Klein 138) ways, which is adroitly framed center-page. As such, contemporary graphic narratives in Spain are uniquely positioned to reflect the tensions between multiple—often contradictory—understandings of the past. Consequently, their kaleidoscopic commentaries on the pervasive imbrications of memory and history in current times illuminate the ways in which the Graphic Pasts live on in Graphic Presents.

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