

◆ Chapter 4

Avant-Garde Artists and the Aura of Homosocial Creativity: Fermín Solís's *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*

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Fermín Solís's 2008 comic *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* (*Buñuel in the Labyrinth of the Turtles*) presents a fictional account of the filming of Luis Buñuel's film *Las Hurdes, tierra sin pan* (Land without Bread) in 1933. Ten years after the album was named a finalist for the Premio Nacional del Cómic, it was re-issued in 2019 following the release of Salvador Simó's awarding-winning animated feature adaptation. For the new version, Solís adjusted the original black and white comic to match the lines and color palette of the screen version more closely so that it could function as a tie-in. While today this book owes much of its popularity and renown to the film adaptation, it also holds a place within comics produced in Spain, leading the way for a thematic set of similar works that take up cultural history to investigate the relationships among intellectuals and artists. By focusing on the creative process as a vehicle to portray artistic personalities and their context, this grouping offers an alternative to conventional biographies and adaptations. In Spain, it has been used to recreate the Golden Age period of Cervantes and the Velázquez of *Las Meninas*, the 19th century of Goya, Galdós and Gaudí, and the context of the 20th century studied here, which was similarly marked by artistic experimentation and political upheavals. Here I analyze *Buñuel en el laberinto* by situating this work in the broader context of graphic novels that appropriate emblematic figures of 20th-century Spanish avant-garde. I look at how comics promote these figures as part of the nation's cultural heritage by imbuing their creative spirit and works as youthful experiences within masculine sociability. Additionally, I explore how the creative evocation of a cultural landmark allows Solís to reflect on the artist as a celebrity, and the pursuit of art as both a personal and collaborative endeavor. For this analysis, the comic genre needs to be understood in relation to three interlocking issues: the

policies governing commemoration of cultural legacies; the avant-garde as an artistic development that emerges on the fringes of establishment culture; and the dynamics of male sociability as a youthful context for growth, discovery, and identity definition.

Comics, Heritage and Male Sociability

Solís's account of the origins of *Las Hurdes, tierra sin pan* starts in Paris with the anecdote of how during a night-on-the-town, Buñuel's friend Ramón Acín promises to finance the film with the cash from a winning lottery ticket. The story continues in the poverty-stricken southwestern Spanish region, where Buñuel and Acín summoned the photographer Éli Lotar and poet Pierre Unik to assist with the shooting. The group encounters a spectacle of overwhelming misery that nonetheless fails to discourage the visionary Buñuel from persisting in the creation of his ethnographic documentary famously marked with Surrealist elements.

Initially published by Editora Regional de Extremadura, *Buñuel en el laberinto* follows a trend in 21st-century Spanish comics that recreates cultural milestones, often funded by regional governments seeking to showcase local history (Hernando Morejón 138). Furthermore, Solís's is notably the first in a series of graphic narratives dealing with Buñuel and his relationships with other members of the avant-garde movement, most especially Salvador Dalí and Federico García Lorca, who he met at the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid. The re-release of the album in 2019 coincided with the centennial commemorations of García Lorca's arrival in the Spanish capital to take up residence at the storied institution, a celebration sponsored by the regional government of Madrid, in the form of exhibitions, conferences, theater, and also the publication of a comic: *Residencia de Estudiantes*, commissioned to Barcelona-based graphic artist Susanna Martín Segarra. My analysis also looks at how this and Solís's album connect to other comics that treat the figure of Buñuel by reframing the quasi-mythical quality of his associations with other male artists: Javierre and Juanfran Cabrera, *Los caballeros de la Orden de Toledo* (The Knights of Order of Toledo) (2017); Queco Ágreda, Javier Ortiz, and Guillermo Montañés, *La noche perdida de Luis Buñuel* (Luis Buñuel's Lost Night) (2018). These comics were all published in the 2010s and appeared alongside or following others that center squarely on García Lorca's biography, such as El Torres and Carlos Hernández, *La huella de Lorca* (Lorca's Footsteps) (2011); Enrique Bonet and Juan Mata, *La araña del olvido* (The Spider of Oblivion) (2016.); Carles Esquembre, *Lorca. Un poeta en Nueva York* (Lorca. A Poet in New York) (2016); and Ian Gibson and

Quique Palomo's *Vida y muerte de Federico García Lorca* (Life and Death of Federico García Lorca) (2018). In all of them Buñuel is a presence or a reference, as well as Dalí, protagonist in turn in other comics, such as Carlos Hernández's *El sueño de Dalí* (Dalí's Dream) (2018) and much earlier *El juego lúgubre* (Lugubrious Game) (2001) by Paco Roca.

The role of comics as promoters of cultural heritage is a prominent feature of the European tradition that injects the popular entertainment function of the American product with social commentary and cultural stewardship (Vessels 20). Comics about the past incorporate concerns and discourses relevant to the present by highlighting personal aspects of the protagonists and their experiences that may be public knowledge, but which cannot always be addressed in the graphic mode offered by comics or in a commemorative story. Given their countercultural tradition, comics easily depart from the conventions of promoting the past as a discourse of national uniqueness and pride. The fact that regional institutions participate as promoters, to some extent, contributes to dispelling the idea of a national discourse expressed through a single hegemonic narrative. There is not much controversy about recognizing and celebrating figures and milestones pertaining to different regional communities, even though governing local political parties do not share similar views about dealing with issues related to the recent past. Specifically, the recovery of the historical memory of the Civil War and its aftermath has been promoted by Socialist administrations since the 1990s but not supported by conservative governments.

As I observe here, regionally based initiatives produce comics that do more than merely link historical figures and events of universal recognition to places of origin within the European-style commemoration system, by which states promote heritage while stimulating cultural markets (Johnston 63). To be sure, such projects also offer opportunities for graphic authors to demonstrate the comic genre's potential for education on a variety of levels. They engage in reinforcing awareness of the past for new generations as well as in teaching about the medium itself by disclosing the process of documenting historical subject matter and techniques for transforming drawings into narrative content. Furthermore, the double didactic goal, embedded in the promotion of heritage and graphic art, also allows for examining attitudes of social engagement.

Graphic novels deal with the evocation of artists and authors from all periods and use various forms of ekphrasis to visually reproduce paintings, photography, and audiovisuals. However, a special connection exists between comics as a form of popular entertainment and the avant-garde: both develop in industrialized urban contexts in the early 20th century and place value on identifying with spontaneous modes of expression typically relegated to the margins of society (Sjastad 3). The movements of cultural renewal and aesthetic innovation identified as Avant-garde are derived from the audacious,

innovative, and open-minded drive to supersede outdated values of previous generations. The evocative celebration of this creative impulse that advances art into new territories similarly mirrors the purpose of legitimizing the graphic novel as an art form. Furthermore, it can be seen in the dialogue and identification that it establishes across disciplines, almost always based on its self-awareness as a form of expression traditionally considered on the margins.

The fascination with the earliest forms of comics is evidenced by the continuous evolution of the genre. Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey emphasize the form's nostalgic component by identifying its retrospective gaze in the constant references to the forms of the popular comics out of which the graphic novel evolved (217). At the same time, they note that it also participates in the increasing interest in delving into the past along with other forms of cultural products (217). This explains how comics come to be involved in promoting heritage, but this role does not imply a loss of their countercultural character that allows them to question cultural policies at large, including the politics of commemoration and consecration of historical figures and icons. Furthermore, Daniel Gómez Salamanca y Josep Rom Rodríguez point to the element of expositive density which achieves maximum expression in each panel for more complex narrative as a recourse that graphic novels take from alternative comics, as these leave behind the most simple and generic stroke of popular comics (105). This resource is especially visible in the unconscious and the states of mind that form the imagination of artists, and which display comics dedicated to avant-garde creators and their precedents, as in the case of *Goya, lo sublime terrible (Goya, Sublime Horror)* (2018) by El Torres and Fran Galán.

Critics have extensively explored the linkage between masculinities and comics in terms of the construction of superheroes and the evolution of comics in this category. Likewise, they have noted much about how comics foster environments of consumption and masculine imaginaries that favor the transmission of gender normative patterns of behavior. Challenges to this latter tendency can be observed both in the development of comics as a form of counterculture and in the greater sophistication and thematic range they acquire with the emergence of the graphic novel in the 1970s. Masculinities studies have developed over the same period, providing a lens to observe male sociability reflected in cultural production and its celebration. Among other aspects, there has been a focus on the dynamics of sociability and its effects. As a form of male bonding, homosociality has defined a set of practices derived from the hegemonic masculinity that guarantees patriarchal hierarchies (Connell 75). The concept, however, is not static; indeed, as observed in the context of graphic narratives, modes of masculine sociability have evolved toward alternative models of productive relationships among men based on shared emotional experiences. The term "horizontal homosociality," coined

by Nils Hammarén and Thomas Johnanson, describes these new modes and contrasts them with “vertical” or exclusionary associations that subordinate other masculinities and femininity (5).

The thematic structure of *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*, like most comics analyzed in this paper, lies outside the superhero’s story conventions. Yet, as I suggest, it is also tied to a self-awareness of the comic milieu as one that fosters collaboration and experimentation among artists in different fields. Along with the cultural and political contexts promoting local and national histories, the discourses of homosociality that underpin Solís’s storyline also require closer scrutiny, since homosociality is an essential component of the narrative connections that comics create between companionship and creativity as modalities of masculine experience and adventure.

David F. Richter has observed that comics that address García Lorca’s biography also engage with the author’s work, “in both visually and thematic ways” as “an artistic attempt to interpret literary and poetic language” (88). One can add that, as comics connect García Lorca’s personality as an artist to his fate as a victim of political repression, they invite consideration of how commemorating artistic life in the 1920s and 1930s can easily be connected to the repression suffered by many intellectuals after 1936 and narratives of historical memory. This is also the case of poets Antonio Machado and Miguel Hernández, which also feature in comics narrating their life experience. These biographical accounts also give poems a narrative role, as they are inserted in the recreation of the situations in which they were written. Here, I contend that *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*, while imbuing the filmmaker’s experience in his creative imagination, might also invite critical debate within this rubric, by recovering the figure of Acín, an anarchist architect and pedagogue killed in August 1936. While García Lorca does not appear in Solís’s comic, the concurrence of events conjures the association between the two artists within the broader commemorative frameworks. Photographs and biographical testimonies evoke playful camaraderie among the artists but also friction during formative years. This archive of cultural heritage takes on symbolic significance when it becomes the antecedent of a time of war, which would be destructive to both the artistic energy that sets out changes in the country’s cultural landscape and García Lorca’s life. The end of such a spirit of congeniality comes before the war, however. Buñuel’s survival and hypermasculine personality turn the encounter and falling out between the artists into a harbinger of tragedy. The structure of this article shows the contiguity of motifs: how the friendship between Buñuel and Acín in Solís’s book vertebrates a discourse of male artistic collaboration, which in other comics is presented by contrasting the raucous filmmaker with García Lorca’s vulnerable masculinity.

Acín and *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*

Las Hurdes, tierra sin pan has been amply analyzed by critics and film scholars worldwide since its 1933 debut. Yet, the alleged limited existent information about the actual making of the film allows Solís to fabricate specific details surrounding the event. He declares to have conducted a thorough investigation into the subject and Buñuel in order to make him a character and adapt his well-known personality traits to the fiction through interactions with his companions and with the people of *Las Hurdes* (Jiménez). *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* follows the model of the fictionalized biography that focuses on a limited period in the life of the historical figure. Naomi Jacobs describes the approach as an exercise designed to invite readers to embrace the artificial boundaries between truth and invention of “intractable material” while “conforming to pre-existing portraits” (xix). In the case of Buñuel, the pre-existing profile is that of a genius with a quirky and irreverent personality. Solís molds this reputation to fit the speculative plotline dealing with the circumstances surrounding the creation of *Las Hurdes*. Solís projects Buñuel’s subconscious through dreamlike episodes evocative of Surrealism and mentally constructed characters such as the embodiment of death and time. This incursion reflects the graphic novel’s potential as a genre to explore characters’ mental states, a strategy that confers a literary dimension to the otherwise historical subject (Romero-Jodar 20). Likewise, it moves the book away from the formula of biography found in many comics with a heritage focus. Instead, it connects to the tradition of fictions that seek to recover past events and their protagonists in the form of stories of personal development. In this case, the work achieves this goal by evoking the artist in a time rich in cultural and political innovation; it also explains the creative process behind his work of art, which in turn becomes a process of emotional growth. Simó’s animated feature emphasizes this element by adding a dramatic component and an emotionally moving climax to the adventure of finishing up the documentary. The 2019 film also presents a Buñuel character more endearing in his awaking to other peoples’ pain, together with Acín as a benevolent and reconciliatory figure. However, Solís does not invite the reader to empathize so much with Buñuel’s character but rather leaves it up to that reader to form their own opinion of the filmmaker’s complex personality and inconsistent mood.

Historical figures and celebrated intellectuals are easily desacralized when given a body and a voice and represented as acting outside an idealized context. This effect can be more pronounced in comics. Solís admits to having created a Buñuel to suit his own needs, which could evolve with the continuous revisions of the comic (Jiménez). His drawings transition from the pronounced caricature of the first edition to a greater degree of stylization in

the second; even so, it still cannot be seen as realistic. The greater precision of the strokes is most notable in the countenances of the main characters: the more familiar Buñuel is presented as large-eared and square-faced, whereas an elongated nose simply marks the lesser-known Acín. These features are more stylized in the animated film. By contrast, there are fewer differences in the drawings of the local Hurdanos, who are portrayed as a wretched crowd in a full-page grid of 12 vignettes. The composition comprises a gallery of anonymous individuals whose humanity and dignity are otherwise eroded by the misery that prevails in the remote region. Solís acknowledges that the palette of muted colors employed in the animated feature fits very well with his own drawing style (see fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Fermín Solís, page 41, *Buñuel en el país de las tortugas*, 2019

Solís belongs to a generation of graphic artists whose works address themes associated with their home regions, although he is also not strictly limited to such topics; case in point: he has also produced children's comics. He discovered the subject for *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* by traveling in the Hurdes district, which is located in his native province of Cáceres. In his own words: “apenas una hora y media de mi casa y que no conocía (is barely an hour and a half away from my house and which I did not know)” (Caro). Upon entering the area, he found that the making of *Las Hurdes* is subsumed into the local history with mixed feelings. The graphic artist seems to have been ultimately inspired by the comments of the manager of the Centro de Documentación Hurdana, José Pedro Domínguez: “entró Buñuel, un joven insolente procedente de un entorno burgués y salió una persona más humana, marcado y conmovido por su experiencia (Buñuel entered, an insolent young man from a bourgeois environment, and came out a more humane person, marked and moved by his experience)” (Caro). Director Salvador Simó reiterates Solís's point of departure as inspirational idea when he states: “Buñuel pretendía cambiar Las Hurdes y fueron Las Hurdes las que le cambiaron a él (Buñuel wanted to change Las Hurdes and it was Las Hurdes that changed him)” (Yuste). This is a way of vindicating the region and at the same time reinforcing Spain's contribution to the international context of the artistic Avant-garde, which has its center of production in other countries while counting influential Spanish artists among its ranks.

The unflattering depiction of the rural reality of 1930s Extremadura that inspired *Las Hurdes, tierra sin pan* is reflected in *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*, yet the impact of extreme poverty gets diluted by the sketchy style of Solís. The documentary was made after the tradition of the ethnological report and inspired by a 1927 study by French anthropologist Maurice Legendre. The film was controversial for its raw portrayal and the instrumentalization of human and animal subjects it carries out. Yet, according to Buñuel's passing comments in his memoirs, he found the region fascinating because of “el desamparo de sus habitantes, pero también su inteligencia y apego a su remoto país, a su tierra sin pan” (Belinchón) (the helplessness of its inhabitants, as well as their intelligence and attachment to their remote country, to their land without bread). Solís's treatment of the Hurdanos, described above, replicates Buñuel's impressions.

Extremadura is not the only element of personal identity that Solís connects to the story of the filming of *Las Hurdes*. Recording the event also functions as a vehicle for addressing the artist's responsibility *vis-à-vis* the use of actual or living subject matter for aesthetic or political purposes. He also sees the story as an opportunity to reflect on the creative process as a transformational experience. In *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*, the friendship

between Buñuel and Acín becomes a tactic to contrast personalities and attitudes. The activist Acín serves as the voice of Buñuel's conscience through his commentary on Surrealism, which he considers the product of bourgeois privilege masquerading as a revolutionary movement. Acín supports his friend's initiatives but does not hesitate to admonish him when the quest to realize his peculiar cinematic vision leads to bizarre and reckless behaviors, i.e., when he makes bees swarm a donkey or shoots a goat to film it falling from a cliff. Such scenes have become emblematic of the film, and the pleasure of recognition and speculation about how Buñuel created them, is undoubtedly an attractive reference for the moviegoers who might figure among the comic's readers. As the producer, Acín mediates between the Hurdanos and the local authorities, bound to be discontent with Buñuel's methods. The filmmaker explains his approach and goals, which are also expounded through comments made by Lotar and Unik. In this respect, the book goes beyond merely recounting the filming experience led by the stubborn and irreverent Buñuel, who dresses up as a nun, drives recklessly, and discharges firearms (see fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Fermín Solís, page 77, *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*, 2019

The rest of the group does not display the same behavior: they assist Buñuel in defining his documentary in aesthetic and political terms while they also help him mature and acquire greater sensitivity as a person (see fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Fermín Solís, page 85, *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*, 2019

In this way, the graphic novel presents a paradigm of productive association amongst artists. The conviviality of the group in the remote location in the western Iberian Peninsula is what *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* identifies as the key to the filmmaker's transformation and, ultimately, the realization of the symbolic film. In short, it is suggested that the documentary owes its very existence as much, if not more, to horizontal homosociality than to Buñuel's genius.

As Paul Frassen and Ton Hoenselaars explain, biographical fiction that turns the author into a character reveals the projection of the author's own experience of the fiction, yet always counterbalanced by recognition of difference,

“through historical perspective or even through outright rebellion against the historical author” (20). Diego García Rouco points out that by pushing the artistic event toward its discursive limits, Solís replicates how Buñuel falsifies the reality that passes before his camera. In doing so, he consolidates the imagination of a place and its inhabitants as a paradigm of extreme backwardness and isolation. The process corresponds to the actual condition suffered by the Hurdanos at the beginning of the 20th century, and that was cause for concern among a good number of intellectuals of the time. Seemingly, the impulse to criticize government inaction after King Alfonso XIII visited the area in 1922 guided Buñuel, and the character in the comic verbalizes this. The film, however, premiered during the Second Republic and the liberal government repudiated the abysmal image projected of the country. Buñuel resorted to manipulating the techniques of ethnographic documentary filmmakers to strengthen the truthfulness and impact on the viewer. Solís makes use of “descartes archivados en la Filmoteca, algún libro y mucha inventiva para comprimir el imaginario pasado y futuro de Buñuel” (Belinchón) (discards archived in the Filmoteca, some books and a lot of inventiveness to compress Buñuel’s imaginary past and future). The strategy of falsification to transmit the truth, exposed in the panels through discussions between characters, reflects art and representation.

The models for sociability in the fictional story do not undermine its historical and documentary dimension; indeed, the two are rendered compatible. On the final page, the faces of the four collaborators appear accompanied by a few lines about their subsequent careers. Buñuel is just one among them, and he appears in fourth place. Three lines report on the creative hiatus of over 17 years that separates *Las Hurdes* and *Los olvidados*, which he directed in Mexico. The controversy spawned by the later film because of its treatment of poverty and degradation is a topic that Solís declares he would like to take up in a future album (Caro). As for Lotar and Unik, readers learn that the pair continued artistic careers and that the second suffered internment in a Nazi concentration camp. The author has more to say about Acín’s tragic fate: “Cuando estalló la guerra civil española, un grupo de extrema derecha fue a buscar a Ramón Acín a su casa, en Huesca, consiguió escapar, pero se llevaron a su mujer. Dijeron que la fusilarían si Acín no se entregaba. Ramón se presentó al día siguiente y los dos fueron fusilados” (105) (When the Spanish Civil War broke out, a group of right-wing extremists went looking for Ramón Acín at his home in Huesca, and he managed to escape, but they took his wife. They said they would shoot her if Acín did not surrender. Ramón showed up the next day, and they were both executed).

For many readers, this information may come as a shocking surprise. The animated film presents the news in a telegram Buñuel receives in Paris, with an epigraph explaining that the director sent the profits to the daughters of

his friend and generous producer. The Government of Aragón figures among the sponsors of Simó's film, and in one scene, which does not appear in the graphic novel, the action is moved to Acín's hometown, Huesca, and his wife is introduced as a character. Solís does not include female characters in his work other than the anonymous women inhabitants of *Las Hurdes*, and only on one occasion is there a reference to one of them as being attractive. Otherwise, the opposite sex does not exist except in intellectual conversations peppered with irony. Hence, in Acín and Buñuel's final exchange in the comic, the latter says: "¿Sabías que una de las fantasías más recurrentes de las mujeres es acostarse con enanos? Es porque creen poseer a la vez a un amante y a un hijo" (Solís 100) (Did you know that one of the most recurrent fantasies of women is to sleep with dwarfs? Apparently, it makes them believe they are possessing both a lover and a son). Buñuel is not without his typically male fantasies and prejudices, some of them latently psychotic, which Acín calls into question. The closing scene between the pair takes place in the loneliness of the night and can be described as an instance of "bromance," or a relationship of intimacy capable of being created publicly between men, without establishing hierarchy or competition, but making clear heterosexuality as a shared identity (Hammarén and Johansson). In another moment of intimacy, Buñuel shares with Acín his animosity toward Salvador Dalí's wife Gala. These culturalist gestures are directed to readers who identify with or are at least curious about them and are not necessarily as young as the comic's protagonists. Nevertheless, these moments expose a clear awareness of male sociability and its limits, including the need for a certain degree of misogyny.

Comics are among the plethora of cultural productions that memorialize accounts of violence and repression produced by the Civil War, and *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* relates to that vital line of education about the past. For Solís and other authors, the ignorance of Spanish youth about this part of 20th-century history, including its cultural legacy, is a gap that the graphic novel can help fill.

By having Buñuel share the limelight with other lesser-known figures of his formative years, many of which are new to readers, Solís promotes another aspect of the recovery of a creative past that transcends his speculations concerning the 1933 film. He invites a critical inquiry into the greater notoriety enjoyed by certain figures and their role as cultural legends of the nation's intellectual history. It is possible to interpret the news of Acín's death as a fact that, in its concise inclusion within the comic, establishes an eloquent parallel with the murder of García Lorca, thereby commenting on the limits of the mythical-allegorical function of the much more well-known event.

Buñuel's controversial documentary was released in Spain in the 1980s when intellectual and cultural figures repressed during the dictatorship were

reinserted into the national cultural imaginary, and their prestige was re-consolidated internationally. The cases of the exiled Buñuel along with the assassinated García Lorca are emblematic of this process. At the same time, other members of the same generation who remained in the country, like Dalí, experienced a slight decline in their international and national reputations. In the 21st century, while the trio formed by the filmmaker, the poet, and the painter acquires a quasi-mythical status, the names of individuals like Acín inform the list of victims of the Civil War whose visibility had to wait until policies of historical memory in the 2000s rescued them from oblivion.

Buñuel Versus García Lorca: Nostalgia of Youth and Foreseen Tragedy

Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas is at the starting point for a tendency in Spanish graphic novels to cultivate the memory of the avant-garde generation of artists. These are most often presented as a coterie of young men exploring creative and sexual identities both at the collective and the individual level, which is the axis of artistic personality since Romanticism. Comics have a unique capacity to express playfulness and irreverence and violence and morbidity in the same gesture, making commemoration compatible with the implicit desacralization of cultural icons when given dynamic corporeality. The latter is true even when such embodiment is not achieved through caricature.

La noche perdida de Luis Buñuel, written by Queco Ágredas and illustrated by Javier Ortíz and Guillermo Montañés, was published in 2018 by GP Ediciones, a publisher dedicated to the promotion of Aragon's cultural heritage. The graphic novel received support from the Government of Aragon and the Buñuel Center in Calanda, the filmmaker's birthplace. The story is set in Los Angeles, California, in April 1946, where Buñuel lives as an ex-pat with his wife and children. Fourteen years have passed since the making of *Las Hurdes*, and he is unable to find steady employment in the United States. In certain ways, the career impasse mirrors the situation depicted in *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* when Acín encounters the disoriented filmmaker in Paris; his film *L'age d'or* was received with scandal; Surrealism was on the decline. The Parisian nightlife is a backdrop of taverns, brawls, and musings on art and politics, in which Buñuel professes not to be a good fit for a future in the North American artistic milieu. *La noche perdida de Luis Buñuel* opens at a Hollywood mansion, where an international group of film industry professionals has gathered for a party. Buñuel hopes to meet producer Darryl Zanuck, but the opportunity eludes him; instead, he finds himself entangled in an endless series of

random encounters and adventures involving other Hollywood types, who, for the most part, are men, and also a prostitute. The story is a mini odyssey that ends when the filmmaker returns home in the early morning after concluding that he would not find the professional success he sought in Cold War Hollywood. The epilogue shows him with his family in November of the same year arriving in Mexico with promising signs that his career might prosper there.

Like *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*, the comic by Ágreda, Ortiz and Montañés also explores Buñuel's subconscious but in a different way. Solís begins and ends with dreamlike apparitions, such as that of the Virgin Mary with the face of the filmmaker's mother or giant animals like the turtle that beckons him to defend his irrational portrayal of misery in the *Hurdes* as a means for change. Among other delusions, there is also a walking artifact depicted with Dalí's characteristic mustache (see fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Fermín Solís, page 65, *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*, 2019

Interestingly, almost all comics about avant-garde artists begin in a similar fashion, graphically reproducing a dream or dreamlike obsessions of its protagonists. By contrast, in *La noche perdida de Luis Buñuel* the main character's hallucination never departs from the realism of Ortiz's drawings. Yet, Buñuel's drunken state conjures up the presence of friends from his years

at the Residencia de Estudiantes. He engages in a reproachful dialogue with Salvador Dalí about the latter's success and their early film collaborations *Un chien andalou* and *L'age d'or*. The legendary encounter and falling out between the two geniuses are also addressed in *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*. The spectral reunion in Los Angeles also includes García Lorca, who from beyond the grave puts into perspective the paradox of the painter's fame and the filmmaker's apparent failure (see fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Queco Ágreda, Javier Ortiz, Guillermo Montañés, page 23, *La noche perdida de Luis Buñuel*, 2018

Together with Pepin Bello, another friend of the trio, he takes on the role of peacemaker. Bello is the one who leads the phantasmagoria and mentions another reference point for the group: the *Oden de Toledo*.

Buñuel started this so-called association in 1923 by imitating the ancient orders of knighthood. The society of friends made excursions to the ancient capital to wander its atmospheric streets and enjoy its traditional inns. The fraternity is the inspiration for the comic *Los caballeros de la Orden de Toledo* that illustrator Juanfran Cabrera and scriptwriter Javierre published in 2017 based on a series of comics created starting in 2015. Both Javierre and Cabrera

have backgrounds in satirical and underground comics: the first with comic strips in his Madrid neighborhood of Vallecas, and the second, with a comic evoking a historical episode set in his home province, Granada. However, Buñuel does not play a more prominent role than the other group members in *Los caballeros de la Orden de Toledo*. The storyline opens with García Lorca in a timeframe that takes readers up to the present and the unsuccessful search for his remains, including details that remark the mass media dimensions of the story. The action soon returns to Madrid, where a young García Lorca arrives at the Residencia de Estudiantes. The album's cover is subtitled with the three names of the legendary friendship: Buñuel, García Lorca, Dalí, although it is divided into chapters dedicated to various figures linked to the institution, which also included Miguel de Unamuno and Bello (see fig. 6).

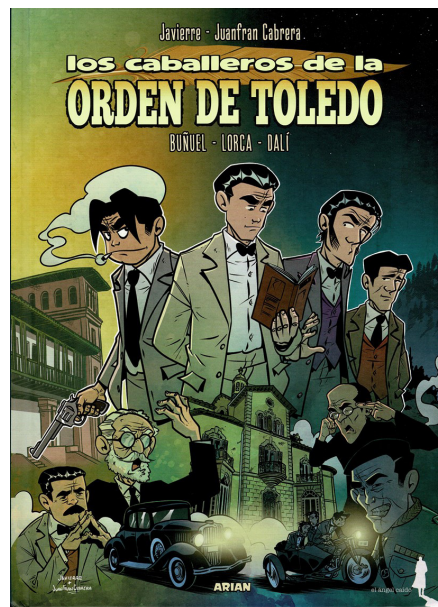


Fig. 6. Javierre, Juan Fran Cabrera, cover, *Los caballeros de la orden de Toledo*, 2017

The comic represents a group of young people, including several women as secondary characters, organizing excursions and other activities, and carrying out a series of secret missions. These invented adventures are set in a well-documented context of 1920s Madrid, with places and events of cultural life, such as lectures by Albert Einstein and famous literary gatherings at the Café de Pombo led by Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Madrid also looms as the capital city of a country marked by political unrest and strikes and the coup d'état of Miguel Primo de Rivera.

The three titles depicting Buñuel in different periods and scenarios of his life are a sample of the comics that seek to instruct readers in cultural history and the genre itself as an artistic practice. *La noche perdida de Luis Buñuel* includes a complete appendix of references and personalities that appear in the graphic novel, emphasizing the documentary character of the fiction's background. This material transcends the scope of GP Ediciones's initiatives to promote local history by familiarizing readers with the milestones and pioneers of the world of cinema. The 2019 edition of *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* features an appendix that describes the comic's genesis and includes a few pages of the first black-and-white version and other sketches and documents, including a photograph of Acín. In *Los caballeros de la Orden de Toledo*, both kinds of supplementary materials are provided in the introduction and final appendices, which contain a chronological guide to the historical events evoked and some notes on the evolution of the design of characters and settings. Some of these notes present rich historical detail; for instance, one identifies the many intellectual figures attending a gathering at Café de Pombo (see fig. 7).

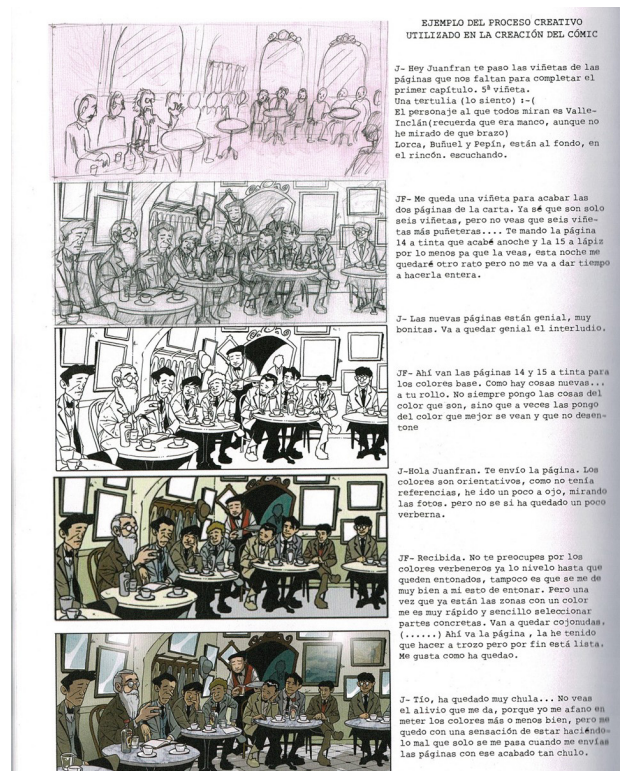


Fig. 7. Javierre, Juan Fran Cabrera, page 174, *Los caballeros de la orden de Toledo*, 2017

The integrated way of showing two types of informative materials, the first of a cultural-historical nature and the other, related to the graphic creation, reveals the aim of connecting the latter with the intellectual and artistic developments of the nation. The genre is thus vindicated by the authors of the comics themselves and the publishers. In comics about writers, the appendices often also explain the narrative role of poems or other texts integrated into the biographical structure.

The partnership between illustrators and scriptwriters is a common practice in the comic industry, comprised mainly of men, and is also reflected in these prefatory explanations and contextualization of the work. This atmosphere of teamwork mirrors the dynamics of the shared experience among the characters in the stories mentioned above. The fabled friendship between a writer, a painter, and a filmmaker reflects the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of the intellectual and artistic life of the first half of the 20th century. The inclusion of Acín, a creator in his own right, or Bello, a cordial friend who brought the group together, constitutes a recognition of the instrumental role played by such unknown individuals in coordinating the collaborations and, ultimately, facilitating the materializations of great works of art. As writer and illustrator of his stories, Solís establishes a fluid and collaborative relationship with the artists who adapted his book for the screen.

An analogous didactic element regarding social behavior is added to the lines of information on cultural history and the creation of comics in these opening pages. The youthful experience of the protagonists in *Los caballeros de la Orden de Toledo* is typical of the adventure comic and presents a homosocial relationship of initiation more clearly than in the other comics, in which the filmmaker and his cohort are adults. From the cover, the idea of young men in a group with forceful personalities is already present. Buñuel is drawn as a budding artist with a restless, joking, and athletic nature, which coincides with the personification attributed to him in *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* when the character is already more than 30 years old. In addition to his fondness for reckless behavior, *Los caballeros de la Orden de Toledo* adds a tendency to physically confront his opponents, inspired by his love of boxing, which clashes to some extent with the idea of him as an intellectual. This aspect of his identity, distinctive and rare among artists, features in other comics in which he is a secondary or passing character. His characterization as the fearless leader in *Los caballeros de la Orden de Toledo*, who energetically takes on the secret missions, brings him closer to the superhero model that authors of graphic novels shy away from on principle. The superhero, Peter Coogan points out, is a metaphor for the young man's yearning for freedom, for an ability to act without consequences or restrictions imposed either by the laws of gravity or by the rules of family and other obligations (14).

Furthermore, in the figure of the young artist, the freedom manifested is that of the creator without prejudices or self-imposed limits. Hence, García Lorca as a character in comics has been described as “super héroe de la poesía” (Cappa) (superhero of poetry). The idea is more thought-provoking if we consider the frail nature with which the poet’s character from Granada is usually evoked. In the comic *Vida de Miguel Hernández. La voz que no cesa*, there is an emphasis on the support that the young poet from Orihuela receives from his friends in Alicante, over and above the more irregular treatment he later receives in Madrid from other established poets and intellectuals, including the circle at the Residencia de Estudiantes. The support from friends allows the writer of peasant origin access to the literary milieu and frees him from the violent misunderstanding of his father. Artists of bourgeois origin, as we see in the stories about Buñuel and García Lorca, receive the economic support of their parents, even if the latter are reluctant to the artistic inclinations of their offspring. Hernandez is otherwise a vulnerable character from his humble upbringing to his death in prison, all the way surrounded by protective male friends.

Buñuel’s character contrasts the sensitive and fragile García Lorca as a potential victim of the hegemonic, toxic, and exclusionary homosocial dynamics of masculinity. At the risk of falling into anachronism, the relationship between the main characters is portrayed in *Los caballeros de la Orden de Toledo* in terms of “inclusive masculinity,” which Eric Anderson describes as based on a progressive discrediting of homophobia among the current generation of college-age students (606). To be sure, it contrasts sharply with the silence and secrecy about García Lorca’s homosexuality during his lifetimes, and which extends to the continued unease manifested by scholars *vis-à-vis* indications of his sexual orientation in his works (Sahuquillo 25). Fiction here takes on the role of rectifying a reality that Nerea Aresti explains as a systematic exclusion of homosexuals that the intellectual elite of the 1920s would also practice within their vindication of women’s social advancement and of sexual difference in lieu of women’s inferiority (2010, 298). The way the comic includes and normalizes the writer’s alternative masculinity resonates also with how it is accepted now to positively present gay characters in comics, even within the realm of superheroes (Kvaran 150). The initial homophobic attitude of Buñuel, coupled with his fondness for frequenting prostitutes, are projected as behaviors to be corrected. Indeed, they are modified when he faces Lorca’s sexual orientation and accepts it along with most of his peers with the corresponding sensibility. The tension generated by the refusal of the character Federico to join the visit to a brothel also serves as an anecdote in Gibson and Palomo’s comic *Vida y muerte de Federico García Lorca* based on the previous biography written by the former. Here, though, Federico’s associations with other men are vital for his artistic development, not just the friendships from the Residencia de

Estudiantes but also the young intellectuals from Granada, some of whom he meets again in Madrid and who accept his homosexuality.

Homophobia and bullying are presented as commonplace outside the circle of friends: a made-up character among the other residents embodies toxic masculinity traits. Besides his unattractive physiognomy that exudes violence, this invented character displays an ultra-conservative mentality; he is the son of landowners and is eventually involved in the 1923 military coup. Read as a transposition of the traditional dynamics of the superhero comic book, the character and his political affiliation allows him to be cast as the villain who threatens the order of modernity, liberal democracy, and culture that could have defined the country's future progress. As a threatening caricature, he embodies the model of virility that the Primo de Rivera dictatorship seeks to restore as a reflection of old-fashioned patriotic national principles which were perceived as being in decline (Aresti 2010, 26). By confronting him, and, in this way, Buñuel's character is allowed to redeem himself for his initial attitudes.

The comic *Residencia de Estudiantes*, created by Susanna Martín Segarra as a commission for the centennial of García Lorca's arrival in Madrid, also features a wide range of personalities from the intellectual and artistic world of the time together with events of the poet's life. The volume also reproduces the personalities and tastes of the tight circle of friends, including Buñuel's like for boxing and the collaborations with Dalí that led to the early Surrealist films and his falling out with García Lorca. The contribution of Martín Segarra, who declares to have spent more time researching than drawing, departs from the conventional biography but not through fiction (Crespo). She creates what can be more accurately called a graphic documentary, with a flat chromatic palette that reproduces photographic material and other types of images to compose a portrait of the writer in terms of his artistic, sexual, and political life (Crespo). The book tackles the poet's sexuality and awakening to the rejection of homosexuality in society and his sexual initiation and ambiguous intimacy with Dalí. Like many other episodes associated with the two artists, these are based on Ian Gibson's biographies. The work of Martín Segarra also stands out for making the women in the young artists' environment more visible than in *Los caballeros de la Orden de Toledo*. One section evokes the Residencia de Señoritas, which constituted early outposts of the feminist movement. While García Lorca is cast as a supporter, Buñuel is admonished for making sexist and homophobic comments by female intellectuals represented in the text by Concha Méndez, who was allegedly Buñuel's girlfriend from 1919 to 1926.

The evocation of Buñuel, Dalí, and Lorca focuses obsessively on formative experiences, which corroborates the association of the avant-garde with the concept of youth as a symbol of innovation and generational change, and also reflects the idea of young men as the main consumer of comics. With this, aspects

typically located on the margins of intellectual activity acquire relevance, such as athletic fitness and clothing. While contributing to the establishment of a hierarchy in social relations, attention to physical appearance also blurs the facets of the masculine and the feminine. Such ambiguity is reflected in the comics studied here through the duality characterized by the athletic Buñuel and the dapperly dressed Lorca and Bello, as well as by the showy Dalí. Smart attire confers a certain effeminacy filtered in the practice of elegance of well-to-do young men and this is perceived as an abandonment of the manly roles that would be censored at the time in parallel to the masculinization of women through modern fashion (Aresti 2001, 101). The twofold effect of physical appearance on sociability is also observed in the promotion of the comics' homosociality that cancels out its hierarchical propensity utilizing an inclusive attitude toward homosexuality. *Residencia de Estudiantes* projects a particularly severe image of Buñuel based on biographies of the future film director and stories about his relationship with Dalí and García Lorca. Martín Segarra is indeed harsher on the filmmaker than the authors of the other comics, who concede him the capacity to make amends. The Barcelona-based cartoonist chooses Buñuel over Dalí, whose portrayal is more generous, to represent the unsavory side of male sociability, even among liberal and intellectual dissidents (see fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Susana Martín Segarra, *Residencia de estudiantes*, 2019

She reflects well the issue of the correlation between masculinity and the notion of nationhood that have been studied by Aresti when her comic includes

modern women as being criticized for participating in the “afeminación del país” (2010, s/p) (feminization of the country) instead of receiving recognition for their intellectual advancement. She illustrates this idea also by introducing in her account the acts of public defiance carried out by the so-called “las sin sombrero” (the ones without hats), who went out into the streets without covering their heads. The episode shows the painters Maruja Mayo and Margarita Manso attacked by men who also branded García Lorca and Dalí, who accompanied them, as “maricones” (faggots). The incident is recreated during a mixed group outing, which was a novelty amongst the many recreations geared to facilitating the association of men. The scene suggests that such activities between young men and women were more frequent than recorded in photographic archives and memoirs. In Ramón Pereira’s comics illustrated by Ramón Boldiú on Miguel Hernández, Mayo appears as his voluptuous and liberated lover, in contrast to Josefina Manresa, the poet’s famous wife, a traditional woman that inspired verses rather contributing to his career as a writer. There Mayo could indeed have a place.

The episode of García Lorca’s death is eloquently omitted in *Residencia de Estudiantes* since it falls outside the decade-long timeframe she was commissioned to depict, ending with the writer’s departure for New York in 1929. Esquembre’s comic *Lorca, un poeta en Nueva York* focuses instead on the author’s travel experience in the United States as framed by his feelings of depression in the aftermath of breaking up with his lover Emilio Aladrén, and after Dalí and Buñuel manifest contempt toward his poetry. He feels rejected by the latter, even when in New York, he finds himself surrounded by other friends who introduce him to new experiences and sources for inspiration. The epilogue of *Residencia de Estudiantes* brings him back to the institution during a series of sporadic stays that culminate with his new departure for Argentina and a note on the success that awaits him there. The final page summarizes the fate of the institution and its buildings, and also that of the Residencia de Señoritas, “un año después del asesinato de Federico” (one year after Federico’s assassination) under the prevailing ideology of the regime that came to power after the Spanish Civil War (Martín Segarra, s/p). Downplaying the poet’s death follows a longstanding preference in Madrid to celebrate his modernity and universality over other aspects of his biography. His sexual orientation is incorporated in the 2019 commemoration, as it contributes to the projection of the capital as the modern liberal city that shaped the world-renowned artist. His death is linked to the vindication of historical memory, which conservatives governing in Madrid antagonize.

Other comics explore both García Lorca’s sexuality and death as characteristics that anchor the biography as hagiography. Among the episodes that recount their lives, there is no lack of the legendary broken friendships:

the “sinistra reunión en la Residencia de Estudiantes entre Dalí y Buñuel, que dan de lado a su amigo rompiéndole el corazón” (sinister meeting in the Residencia de Estudiantes between Dalí and Buñuel, who turn their friend aside and break his heart) declares El Torres, collaborator with Granada-born Carlos Hernández in *La huella de Lorca* (Cappa). This comic states the acquired status of the group in the Residencia de Estudiantes: “El paso de esos tres por la resi es legendario. Eso no se lo discuto . . .” (73) (The passage of those three through the resi is legendary. I don’t dispute that . . .) say an anonymous attendant to the meeting in 1928 in which Buñuel stages the rudeness toward the poet. The meeting is punctuated by Buñuel’s prank of bringing a flock of sheep into the building of the residence. Hernández is also the author of *El sueño de Dalí* (Dalí’s Dream), a biographical account developed from the artist’s point of view during the last day of his life, in a structure of flashbacks, one of which is, again, about meeting his fellow artists at the Residencia. Interestingly, the episode evoked by the agonizing and individualistic Dalí is of a gathering of the group of friends in which Federico plays at simulating his death. While Bello and Dalí are amused by the recurring game and declare Federico “el verdadero motor creativo de nuestra hermandad” (Esquembres 48) (the true creative driving force of our brotherhood), Buñuel is cynical about the theatrical style of the Granada-born fellow resident.

In sum, García Lorca appears in all these cases in a vulnerable position that makes him the potential victim of prejudice and conservative reaction, resulting in his death. The construction of Buñuel as a character in opposition to García Lorca parallels, in a way, his relationship with Acín in *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*. The lasting and heartfelt gratitude the director felt for his friend conveyed in the story provides an alternative to the disdain and homophobia with which García Lorca is treated in all other accounts. Acín was shot around the same time as the poet from Granada, although he hardly has enjoyed the same level of visibility and memorialization. Historical memory likewise runs the risk of leaving gaps since it still depends on the public recognition of some personalities to the detriment of others. Therefore, it is worth adding that Acín’s wife Conchita Monrás, as mentioned in Solís’s epilogue, was also executed by Nationalist troops who entered Huesca a few days later.

The coincidence in the same year of the re-release of *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* and debut of the animated feature film, along with the release of Martín Segarra’s *Residencia de Estudiantes* and other initiatives commemorating García Lorca’s centenary in Madrid, give Solís’s story greater visibility as well as draw attention to the figure of Acín. Indeed, somehow Acín and García Lorca converge since both share a common destiny that renders them victims of political repression. Both were close friends and partners in Buñuel’s artistic formation. While the latter friendship is more

famous, the former, though less well known, becomes more instrumental in launching his renown as a world-class filmmaker. In the end, although perhaps unintentionally, *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* appears to counter the repetition in all the other comics on the myth of the creative triad Buñuel-Lorca-Dalí, at times constructive and at times strained. The partnership between Buñuel and Acín commemorated in Solís's books offers a variation that invites reflection on the limits of narratives of mythification.

Furthermore, stories of maturity and growth connect well with the genre's youthful consumer base, increasingly less comprised of children, and more of adults, with a growing potential for the genre as a teaching resource. Likewise, the coming-of-age plots also mimic the elevation of comics and recognition of graphic novels as reading material for a broader range of ages. As Pizzino observes, comics "reach into the realm of adult literature without having left behind their default role as juvenile reading" (1–2). The impulse to evoke figures who innovated the nation's intellectual landscape a century ago runs parallel to the comic medium's awareness of its cultural impact. The latter is seen as a dynamic and accessible framework for the renovation of forms of expression. This creative freedom was not always guaranteed in Spain, and was once attacked and outlawed. Projecting diverse models of sociability by privileging horizontal and inclusive homosociality can very well be a strategy to recover the memory of an artistic and social avant-garde whose legacy is widely recognized but also marked as an eminently masculine environment that puts into question the notion of modernity and progress attached to it from the perspective of present-day parameters.

Notes

1. The film garnered various awards including the Goya for the best feature in its category and Jury's prize at the Los Angeles Animation Film Festival.
2. Also involved in the filming was the historian from Zaragoza Rafael Sánchez Ventura, who Solís ultimately omits from the graphic novel, in order to simplify the number of characters (Jiménez).
3. The second edition was published by Astiberri in 2009. The re-release by Reservoir Books.
4. El Torres and Granada-born Carlos Hernández's work was issued on the 75th anniversary of the poet's murder in 2011; Bonet and Mata's book relies on the investigation by Agustín Penón into the poet's death in the 1950s.
5. Ramón Pereira and Ramón Boldiú's *La voz que no cesa: Miguel Hernández's Life* (The Voice that Does not Cease: Life of Miguel Hernández) (2018); Cecilia Hill and

- Josep Salvia's *Antonio Machado: Los días azules* (Antonio Machado: Blue Days) (2019) and Ian Gibson and Quico Palomo's *Ligero de equipaje: Vida de Antonio Machado* (Traveling Light: Antonio Machado's Life) (2020).
6. He was impressed to learn that during a local festival for Carnival season a dummy representing Buñuel is burned (Jiménez).
 7. This is the case of Carlos Hernández's *El sueño de Dalí*, Carles Esquerres's *Lorca un poeta en Nueva York* and Enrique Bonet's *La araña del olvido*. In the latter case, the American writer Agustín Penón is haunted by a shadow that symbolizes fear and his own obsession for finding out about García Lorca's death. In Esquerre's book, Lorca experiences a nightmare in which he sees ants coming out of his hands, a reference to Buñuel's film *Un chien andalou* (1927).
 8. The series of strip comics *Vallekurros* (1996–2004) and the albums *Los vallekurros: Titeres sin cabeza y otras yerbas* (Ezten kultur Taldea, 2005) and *Marruecos Trip* (Cretino, 2008); *Naufragio en La Herradura* (Ayuntamiento de Almuñécar, 2012) created about the shipwreck that took place in 1562, edited with the local council in remembrance of the 450th anniversary of the event.

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