

## ◆ Introduction

### Comics in 21st-Century Spain

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In 2016, cartoonist José Pablo García adapted the essay *La guerra civil española*, by renowned historian Paul Preston, to the comic book format, using the same title. Within a few months, the collaboration between cartoonist and historian reached number three on *El Periódico*'s list of best-selling non-fiction books. The book's commercial success illustrates both the Spanish public's renewed interest in history in recent years and the increasing relevance of comics as a medium in 21st-century representations of the past. Spanish comics make up part of the general boom of the graphic novel over the last two decades, during which the number of graphic novelists has grown, the themes of their work have diversified, and the editions have increased in both quantity and quality. Many Spanish comics have been translated and become staples at national and international exhibitions and fairs, as well as in bookstores around the world. They have garnered considerable critical attention also, resulting in the normalization of their study within the academic disciplines. *The Graphic Past: Comic and History in 21st-Century Spain* seeks to contribute to this growing critical landscape by engaging with the representation of Spain's national past in comics by Spanish authors, published in their country or abroad. The historical past has become a focal point of much contemporary comic production around the world, and its success in Spain is not surprising, given the relevance that issues such as the memory of the Civil War and Francoism, historical revisionism in the media, nationalisms (both regional and central), and the focus on the commemoration of cultural heritage have gained in the new millennium. This confluence of interest in topical issues and narrative form highlights the need for a more in-depth exploration of how the two elements work together to create meaning. With its range of essays examining the sophisticated ways these texts approach their subjects, this volume seeks to contribute to the further consolidation of the comic as an object of academic study, within U.S. Hispanism and beyond.

**The Graphic Past: Comic and History in 21st-Century Spain**  
*Hispanic Issues On Line* 31 (2023)

Contemporary Spanish graphic narrative has come far in the last few years and there is a definite sense that in Spain “we are living in a creatively Golden Age for comics” (García Roca, et al. xiii), more in reference to the quality of comic production than to a spectacular increase in the number of readers. Globally speaking, the graphic novel has gained respectability, and critics and informed readers alike refer to comics and graphic narratives as pivotal cultural referents. Traditionally, comics as a medium have had to struggle with a marginalization that resulted from multiple factors: its mixing of narrative and graphic elements, the stereotypical assumption of an uneducated reader, its relationship with industrialized mass culture, the adherence to forms and genres of popular culture (sci-fi, adventure, comedy), and the close dependency on the popular press and magazines. All these factors contributed in important ways to the tension between *high culture* and comics that defined the reception of the latter for decades, despite the fact that, as comics scholars have long demonstrated, the medium has never been merely childish entertainment but rather a highly stylized and sophisticated tool, whether for purposes of propaganda or social commentary.

More recently, comics have merited considerable critical attention and have enjoyed increasing visibility in curricula, conference programs and publication trends, in Spain and in other countries. Research groups, university courses, and national and international conferences have accomplished much in paving the way toward academic recognition of this narrative mode. It is the focus of dissertations, articles and books, and it is increasingly featured in mass media publications like popular magazines and daily or weekly newspapers. Spanish-language online sites such as Tebeosfera.com and Guiadelcomic.es provide detailed information on the universe of comics to the public and critics alike.

Comics, including the Spanish *tebeos*, have a tradition of vigorous readership in Spain, along with a moderate but sustained editorial production.<sup>1</sup> Restrictions imposed by the Francoist dictatorship prevented the comic from reaching its full potential, yet simultaneously provided the conditions for a graphic production of high caliber, through sophisticated storytelling that disguised mocking satire as childish reading and superficial entertainment. However, Spain’s vibrant comic book scene from the 1940s to the early 1970s, with its representation of subaltern characters giving space and voice to a subtly subversive discourse, fell into a period of protracted decline in the late 20th century. As the 1980s came to an end, the saturation of the market and the general crisis of the industry claimed victims even among prestigious magazines like *Cairo*. The crisis of the European, especially the Franco-Belgian, market made matters worse. By the mid-1990s, only a handful of magazines were being published, such as *El jueves*, *TBO*, and *Top Comics*. The decade was a

desert for graphic authors overall, but the period saw some growth in the number of titles released by small independent publishers. In the 2000s, the market showed encouraging signs thanks to the emergence of the graphic novel format. Independent long-form comics (mostly produced by underground, alternative, and indie artists) began to be published and distributed more widely across Spain and three highly acclaimed graphic novels—*Arrugas* (2007) by Paco Roca, *María y yo* (2007) by Miguel Gallardo, and *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas* (2008) by Fermín Solís—were made into movies. Other important titles in recent years include Max’s *Bardín el Superrealista* (2006), Santiago García and Javier Olivares’s *Las Meninas* (2015), Ana Penyas’s *Estamos todas bien* (2018), and Altarriba and Kim’s *El arte de volar* (2010) and *El ala rota* (2016). As it stands, due to both the fortuitous popularity of graphic novels and the resilience of fanzines and small independent publishers, the comic has weathered the crisis of the medium, managing to remain vital while maintaining solid ties with its own tradition. The launch of publishers that specialize in graphic production and the creation of awards like the National Comic Prize, inaugurated in 2007 by the Ministry of Culture, also contribute to the success of the Spanish comics industry today.

The Spanish market for comics remains stable and relies mainly on the translation of American, Japanese, and Franco-Belgian titles. Yet, according to the 2020-2021 report of the Tebeosfera Cultural Association (“Informe Tebeosfera”), one in four comic books that circulate in the Spanish market is by a national author. Women are credited as authors in just over three percent of graphic narratives, but if we include all the artists who participate in the production of the comics, women contribute creatively to at least thirty percent of the published works. More than half of the published comics are action or superheroes. The ideal format is that of a book, chosen for most new, original graphic works (not translations or new editions of previously published works), and eighty percent of that production is located in Catalonia—ECC, Norma, and Planeta. Other entities, generally very small, publish the remaining twenty percent of original Spanish comics. The labels that bet the most on Spanish authors are medium-sized companies such as Astiberri, Norma, Dibbuku, Dolmen, Diabolo and Evolution. Among the most noteworthy of these publishers is Astiberri (Bilbao), which has launched the works of many of the most recognized authors since 2001. In the last few years, there has been a small increase in publications aimed at children, greater consumption of comics by female readers, and a certain inclination in some publishers to produce comics for educational purposes.

As is often the case for academic disciplines aligned with other artistic forms, the trajectory of Comics Studies begins with recording the history of the comic medium. Contemporary professional scholars owe a debt of

gratitude to the preservation efforts that frequently accompanied this early, often amateur, scholarship. In the American and European contexts, Comics Studies, as a scholarship-driven academic field, has its origins in the 1960s. Since then, comics have been the object of study of several schools of thought. Structuralism studied graphic works from two perspectives, one focused on the narrative of comics as mythological systems, and the other focused on comics as graphic-linguistic systems. Semiology, Psychoanalysis, and Marxism are also well-established lines of inquiry, as well as the study and classification of the comic's expressive resources through cinematographic language. More recently, Cultural Studies, together with post-structuralist and postmodern perspectives, have emphasized the possibilities of the comic medium as a space for cultural reflection.

Comics Studies developed as an interdisciplinary academic field in the early 1990s, with the global Anglophone and Francophone graphic production, along with Japanese Manga, attracting the lion's share of critical attention. One of the most important contributions to this discipline came from a professional cartoonist, Scott McCloud, who in 1993 published *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, a book that took a particularly formalist approach to the medium. It is difficult to overestimate the influence of McCloud's ideas; another landmark book, Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985), maps out the fundamentals of graphic storytelling. Critical publications have multiplied over the years, including important collections of essays that focus on specific topics or trends. Among these publications, *The Routledge Companion to Comics*, edited by Frank Bramlett, Roy T. Cook and Aaron Meskin, stands out as a single collection that can serve as a state-of-the-art introduction and overview of the field. The Modern Language Association (MLA) volume *Teaching the Graphic Novel* (2009), edited by Stephen E. Tabachnick, is also most useful to scholars and students alike. Unfortunately, Spain merits only a few pages in each volume. With that gap in mind, *The Graphic Past*, first provides a case for the value of decentering the American Sequential Art canon; additionally, the volume showcases how Spanish graphic novels are distinctive, particularly in their capacity to challenge readers to resist a stabilizing sense of history as a totalizing narrative. If the focus centers on representations of the past, and the goal is a productive and enriching global conversation, then the privileged position rightly occupied by Art Spiegelman's masterpiece *Maus* (1980–91) and a handful of other titles needs to be expanded to include works published outside the current global market of Anglophone, Francophone, and Japanese graphic production.

A careful look at current critical publications reveals a paradox: most scholarship produced in Spain tends to focus on comics created and published globally, in an apparent attempt to flee from provincialism and partake in the

fascination produced by the seminal titles and trends of Anglo-Saxon graphic novels. Andrés Romero-Jódar's *The Trauma Graphic Novel* (2017) exemplifies this practice; the study approaches comics that portray traumatic experiences as an emerging subgenre but does this through the analysis of important graphic novels in English. Meanwhile, it is U.S. Hispanism, alongside other international centers for the study of Spain's languages and cultures, that seems to be claiming a more relevant place for the Spanish comic within academia. Additionally, while in Spain comics are studied mainly by historians and Art historians, in the United States, like in other European countries, Spanish comics capture the attention of scholars in departments of Hispanic Studies, where literature is the main field of expertise. As a result, this corpus is being normalized as an object of analysis and progressively introduced in the classroom, sharing the space otherwise reserved for canonical literary texts. This practice not only calls into question the divide between high and low culture via a material that is most valid for the understanding of the Hispanic experience in the realms of History and the Arts, but also helps qualify the notion that U.S.-placed academics privilege textual analysis by close reading and theoretical insights whereas Spain-placed academics' main mission is the enrichment and conservation of the literary heritage.

The body of criticism has evolved from the exploration of the comic as a medium within the Visual Arts to examining the richness of a graphic production that transcends both the popular and the countercultural and aims to offer stories of greater depth. *El lenguaje de los cómics* (1972) by film historian Román Gubern, and *El discurso del cómic* (1988), by Román Gubern and Luis Gasca, are among the first comprehensive studies on the medium. Other scholars, including Antonio Lara and literary author Terenci Moix, also have contributed to the birth of the field with historical and semiotic approaches. Mirroring the critical interest in comics created and published globally, Ana Merino's groundbreaking study *El cómic hispánico* (2003) tracks the evolution of the medium in Spanish-language publications, locating Spanish comics within a transatlantic framework. The author analyses Spanish, Cuban, Argentine and Mexican comics of the 1940–60s as cultural artifacts capable of negotiating the massive and popular cultural impulse of 20th-century modernity. In *Diez ensayos para pensar el cómic* (2017), Merino gathers a collection of essays that point to key authors and works from different national and temporal contexts. More recent publications by Spanish comics scholars such as Sergio García Sánchez and Rubén Varillas approach the comics from a wide range of perspectives. These include the exploration of formal conventions, the cultural and historical contexts that originate comics and their reception, and the economic, ideological and socio-political ideas that provide the basis for the—some Spanish but mostly foreign—comics themselves. In

*La novela gráfica* (2010), scriptwriter and critic Santiago García traces back the evolution of the graphic novel from an art history perspective. Looking at comics from a global perspective, including Spain, is also the goal of *On the Edge of the Panel. Essays on Comics Criticism* (2015) edited by Esther Claudio and Julio Cañero.

More critical studies in recent years offer a broad, panoramic approach that reveals the continuing fascination with, in particular, Anglo-Saxon seminal titles, as seen in the volumes published by academic presses in Spain: *Las batallas del cómic: Perspectivas sobre la narrativa gráfica contemporánea* (2016), by Javier Lluch-Prats, José Martínez Rubio, Luz C. Souto and Xelo Candel Vila (eds.), and *Nuevas visiones sobre el cómic: Un enfoque interdisciplinar* (2018), by Julio A. Gracia Lana and Ana Asión Suñer (eds.). These volumes, and other similar publications, examine a diversity of historical contexts and themes, from superhero cartoons to graphic novels, produced in Spain and elsewhere (including Manga). Sometimes comics are analyzed with the hermeneutical tools of literature, without paying too much attention to the formal features that define the medium, but more often the contributors come from the fields of History and Art History. Other works are written by graphic artists themselves, some of whom are also scholars in this or related fields. This is the case of *La España del tebeo: La historieta española de 1940 a 2000* (2001), by cartoonist Antonio Altarriba, who offers a meticulous description of the comics' features during Francoism (particularly in adventure and sentimental comic strips) and in democratic Spain. Another line of scholarly research focuses on the characteristics that make comics particularly apt for use in the classroom, including as a vehicle for the acquisition of Spanish as a foreign language. As an example, *Memoria y viñetas: La memoria histórica en el aula a través del cómic* (2019), edited by David Fernández de Arriba, is conceived as a guide for teachers who wish to introduce comics as a pedagogical tool to engage with recent Spanish history.

While the majority of critical works do have a more international focus, it is important to note the studies that either focus on the representation of Spain's past or present a clear historical perspective, contributing illuminating insights. Jacobo Hernando Morejón's recent compilation, *Catálogo de la historia de España a través del cómic (1940–2018). De la prehistoria a la crisis del 98* (2021), is one that has proved useful for many scholars of Spanish comics. Other titles delve into much narrower topics to offer detailed and even erudite contributions to the field, such as Michel Matly's *El cómic sobre la guerra civil* (2018). The studies produced by U.S.-based critics tend to be more analytical, and many incorporate the specificities of Spain's political and cultural context in their analyses. *Consequential Art: Comics Culture in Contemporary Spain* (2019), co-edited by Samuel Amago and Matthew J.

Marr, exemplifies this combination of analysis and contextualization. Other volumes are also worth mentioning. In *Imágenes del desencanto: Nueva historieta española 1980–1986* (2013), Pedro Pérez del Solar examines how the Spanish comic from the 1980s offers alternative views to those promoted by the Francoist regime—and also to some discourses emerging from the new democratic State—which depoliticized a good part of Spain’s cultural production. For the author, comics are a commentary on this scenario and a reflection of such key phenomena as *el desencanto* or *la movida*. In *Cómics de la Transición (el boom del cómic adulto 1975–1984)* (2001), Francesca Lladó considers the consolidation of adult comics that took place from Franco’s death until the first Socialist government as a golden age for comics, which stands out for its creativity, originality, risk-taking, and widespread acceptance by the public. More recent publications include Ann Magnussen’s edited volume of essays *Spanish Comics. Historical and Cultural Perspectives* (2021), and *Spanish Graphic Narratives. Recent Developments in Sequential Art* (2021), edited by Collin McKinney and David F. Ritcher. Both works share the goal of presenting an overview of the development of comics in Spain, their themes and trends, but the former covers a chronological arc of more than a century, while the latter focuses on titles that have emerged since 2007.

By and large, this body of scholarship, including the most groundbreaking works, will benefit from complementary analyses and deeply focused projects such as the one presented here with *The Graphic Past*. Current focus on issues such as the recovery of the historical memory of the Civil War or the recent surge of Catalan nationalism has brought the national past into the present consciousness in Spain, a relevance that translates into comics production. History has always been a source of inspiration for graphic books; a look back at the stories that tell the painful history of Spain in vignettes reveals, among others, Forges’s masterpiece, *Historia de Aquí* (1980–1981). The very nature of this volume’s focus, the graphic national past, lends itself to a wide range of approaches and interests; nonetheless, the subject matter also provides a certain coherence and focus at its core that can facilitate a deeper understanding and analysis of the texts, while securing an argumentative and methodological consistency. *The Graphic Past* also serves to further consolidate comics as an academic subject within U.S. Hispanism, in much the same way that the study of Spanish cinema came to be legitimized in the 1990s.

The marginalization that has traditionally relegated comics to a lower cultural status continues, even within the seemingly liberal bounds of current cultural criticism. U.S. Hispanism, and consequently Spanish comics, have not proven the exception to this rule—many prestigious academic journals have yet to publish issues on the study of Spanish comics. This volume responds to the lacuna by creating a space to reflect on the question of what

it means to study the comic. While it intends to appeal to Hispanists, it also opens the door to a wide array of scholars interested in the representation of the past from various disciplines. *The Graphic Past* brings together scholars recognized for their previous work on comics and/or the representation of the past, either in the field of historical memory or heritage and national identity, within the frameworks of history, literature, cultural studies, and cinema. Responding to the suggestion from Anne Magnussen in her introduction to the volume *Spanish Comics*, this set of nine essays integrates diverse methodologies and intentionally undermines the traditional division between cultural analysis and formal analysis (12). By bringing together a range of intellectual traditions and disciplines through the work of historians and literary scholars from Spain, France, Peru, and the United States, the volume facilitates an enriching conversation and leaves room for unforeseen connections and links. The commitment to incorporate these different intellectual traditions has yielded a combination of in-depth analyses of specific works and articles that provide overviews of trends or specific historical periods, and even comparative analyses between Spanish and foreign graphic novels. Furthermore, opening this space for interdisciplinary discussion clearly demonstrates the importance of comics within the Humanities and the Social Sciences, expanding the traditional scope of U.S. Hispanism in this present moment of introspection regarding the ways in which the Humanities find themselves required to justify their usefulness and value for our contemporary world.

The goal with *The Graphic Past* has been to gather essays that examine the issues surrounding the writing and the re-writing of national history by engaging with the complex nature of temporality, that is, without dissociating the treatment of the recent past from the imagination of other periods. The ordering of the essays in the volume mirrors the problem of multiple chronologies—the moment when the comics were created, the succession of events that are re-imagined in cartoons, the time in which the comics are consumed. As Isabelle Touton points out, graphic narratives that take on the imagination of other periods are no less relevant for understanding the present in Spain, even when they do not rely on living witnesses or a photographic archive, but rather on a reconstruction of the past that is the result of both extensive research and the psychological strangeness that such reconstruction produces (86). The collection of works in this volume shows, indeed, that the revival of times prior to the Civil War does not indicate a lack of reflection on Spain's developments in recent years, as can be seen clearly in Pedro Pérez del Solar's essay. The order of the essays does not respond to an exact linear chronology, insofar as it seeks to reflect the multiple thematic connections that tie the essays together: past and present, realism, didacticism, public icons, cultural heritage, construction of space, closure, national identity, diaspora, inter-generational dialogue, etc.

Configurations of time, following Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, cannot be separated from those of space.<sup>2</sup> As the essays illustrate, multiple temporalities translate into multiple spatial dimensions. It is undeniable that the proliferation of key platforms for the development of graphic novels in Spain—awards, publishing houses, festivals—coincides with the public scope acquired by historical memory as a discourse. While Anne Magnussen recognizes this fact, she also insists on the transnational character of comics produced in Spain: “they stand out because of the particular interrelation between the country's national history and that of the other parts of the world” (3). In the same vein, Ivan Pintor Iranzo connects the depictions of suffering that pervade Spanish graphic novels of historical memory to the distress brought about by more recent economic crises, while he also identifies a formula for the political rewriting of a pathos that remits from recurrent images of oppression and displacement in the global context (274).

In opposition to memory narratives, valued for seeking to recover collective experience from oblivion, the imagining of more distant periods in History goes back decades in vignettes and often has been considered a conventional and even instrumental tool for hegemonic discourses of national identity. Representing the nation, including nationalism, is a key trait of comics, as Arturo Meijide Lapido's essay explores apropos of Galicia. As with various other essays in this volume, images of the nation's past have evolved from appearing in comics under the ideological lens of Franco's regime to being an essential element of comic works that reflect on archaeological findings and other forms of research. In many cases, showcasing this rich cultural heritage through graphic art allows for commentary where it might not otherwise fit.

The legacy of Medieval times and the Golden Age finds in comics a mirror of the contribution of these periods to the Arts, as well as to the development of the early stages of modernity. Nevertheless, graphic novels also work to challenge elements of nostalgia and complacency with the nation's hegemonic past as a global political power. This multi-layered representation of the Early Modern period, recognizing its contributions to Spain's rich cultural heritage while also acknowledging its power as a political tool to invoke nostalgia, produces an interesting corpus of both graphic novels and critical analysis. Comic production doesn't limit its focus to the Golden Age, but rather reveals a similar fascination for the Silver Age of the first third of the 20th century, which is associated with both cutting-edge artistic activity and the country's economic and political decline. The period includes the outbreak of the Civil War, when artists and intellectuals, like other citizens, endured persecution, exile, prison, or execution. Comics on historical memory reflect this context of suffering and misadventure and the corpus provides more stories of people, unknown to most readers, who serve to represent the struggles of

previous generations, some on the frontlines, some as civilians. Memory as an intergenerational engagement includes other experiences that also marked collective identities, like migration.

Comics of one kind or another share a commonality in their approach to the role of retelling the past from a postmodern standpoint, as Michel Matly shows in the first essay of the volume. Both authors and scholars demonstrate awareness of how the medium not only, or not necessarily, contributes to a knowledge of the past by providing more data and images but also challenges readers to resist a stabilizing sense of history as a totalizing narrative (Cutter and Schlunds-Vials 16). Matly, a renowned expert on the Spanish Civil War in comics, opens our essay section precisely by questioning the historical comic itself as a category dissociated from the real representation of history. The author defines this category as a set of units that are subject to their context of production and consumption. The three-dimensional characteristic of the comic as art, as a narrative, and as an object of history, is none other than that of time, this being understood not only by the succession of actual events that are re-imagined in cartoons but also by the moment in which they are created, which is in turn independent of the time in which they will be consumed. Temporality is thus understood as a source of knowledge about a society that undergoes a given historical experience but not least as a tool that informs about or reveals elements of the society that processes such experience in time. It is the encounter of temporalities that offers the meaning and the pleasure of reading, explains Matly, who uses those pertinent theoretical concepts to lead the reader to an understanding of the instability of history and its constant epistemological evolution.

The relationship between comics and history is represented by the contribution of Jacobo Hernando Morejón. In “From Iberia to Hispania: The Conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in the Spanish Graphic Narrative (1940–2020),” the historian traces the evolution of the graphic representation of the Roman and Carthaginian conquests, both in terms of their ideological content and the relationship that these comics have with academic disciplines. Comics, Hernando shows, evolve from presenting Hispanic identity as defined by resistance, patriotism, and military spirit, to one in the 21st century that ascribes weaknesses and non-heroic feelings to the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula. The transformation is seen as reflecting a change in sensibilities, along with respect for how archaeology provides knowledge about civilizations. Historical accuracy in the vignettes goes hand in hand with greater realism in the portrayal of daily life for the common people.

“The Classics in Vignettes: *La vida es sueño* as a Case Study in Adapting Literary Classical Works to the Comic Format” highlights the possibilities of comics for literary adaptation and pedagogical outreach, specifically in reproducing and conveying the aesthetic complexity of Baroque theatre.

The evolution of the iconic representation of the Early Modern period from Francoist popular comics to the more sophisticated graphic novel leads to the explanation by Moisés Castillo and Carmen Moreno-Nuño of how the authors of the comic adaptation maintain the essence of Calderón de la Barca's work and the expressiveness of Golden Age theater through specific drawing and coloring techniques and the use of meta-theatrical devices. Vílbor and Sanz, in their graphic adaptation of the iconic drama, deftly fuse the textual and the graphic with key elements of the theatrical experience, both the dramatic text and its enactment, and effectively transform the reader of the graphic novel into a spectator of the play. Through the skillful employment of these strategies, comics can be seen as reproducing in the 21st century what Spanish drama in the 17th century represented: a quality cultural product accessible to the public at large.

The *comedia* and all of its spectacle is not the only visual art to be made more approachable for a wider audience through the popular medium of the comic. Elena Cueto's "Avant-Garde Artists and the Aura of Homosocial Creativity: Fermín Solís's *Buñuel en el laberinto de las tortugas*" brings the analysis of graphic novels that explore the visual arts to the realm of film. Solís's album offers a portrayal of artistic and intellectual development in the 1920s and 1930s through the life and adventures of several of Spain's most important cultural figures of the era, providing an example of a comic book that evokes national milestones of universal projection through sponsorship by local institutions. The analysis focuses on how this type of historical fiction contains a meditation on individual genius for bringing about experimentation, but also presents male sociability as a positive element for artistic coming-of-age. The narrative of male camaraderie in the story told by Solís also offers the opportunity to glimpse a commentary on the selective use of iconic figures to represent the repression suffered by the progressive community of artists at the hands of conservative forces.

In "Fragments of a Civil War: From 'Otros tiempos' to *Estampas 1936*," Pedro Pérez del Solar analyzes the search for verisimilitude in the reconstruction of space in vignettes published first in a popular Madrid periodical and later collected in book format. He notes Felipe Hernández Cava and Miguel Navia's gritty and non-partisan approach to representing the conflict at its outset, as they combine the latter's illustrations with testimonies and quotes from moderate Republicans of the time. Pérez del Solar also addresses the significance of the transposition of publication format, moving from a recurring spot in a monthly magazine that sought to insert the memory of the Civil War in the identity of Madrid during the progressive leadership of Mayor Manuela Carmena between 2015 and 2019 to the release of a bound collection of the comics in 2020.

The comics about the Civil War and its aftermath are embedded in the ideological framework that shapes the current debate on the subject in all media. Sarah Harris offers an in-depth analysis of *Los surcos del azar*, one of the key titles that have to do with the memory of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath. With “‘Quería que el lector se pusiera en su lugar’ (I wanted the reader to put themselves in his place): Techniques for the Recovery of History in *Twist of Fate* by Paco Roca,” Harris places Roca’s work within the broader context of the overdue recovery of the war experience. She looks at the formal, discursive, and visual resources used to foster a sense of empathy regarding the experience of a reality that may have received insufficient visibility and recognition: the participation of defeated Republicans in the anti-fascist struggle of WWII. Harris evaluates the productive effect of emotions as a means of acknowledging sacrifice and service carried out beyond the limits of their own country’s experience with war, and therefore removed from the political positionings that shape its interpretation.

Arturo Mejjide Lapido also delves into the intra-historical space of memory to rescue the past as a space for exploring identity and its representation. With “Metafictional Archive: Memory, *mise-en-abyme*, and the Atlantic in Miguelanxo Prado’s *Ardalén*” (2012), Mejjide analyzes intertextuality as a mechanism to capture the construction of an Atlantic Galician identity, determined both by the awareness of a culture rooted in Celtic heritage and by the experience of mass emigration to America. This long-standing intellectual articulation takes shape in *Ardalén* through the inter-generational relationship as a fictitious situation. The protagonist’s inquiry into the personal experience of a family’s ancestor turns into the discovery of a sense of community defined by displacement. In the work’s use of paratexts, such as photographs, to juxtapose historiography and the ownership of memory, Mejjide sees the properties of the graphic novel as vehicle for rewriting national history.

Ofelia Ferrán’s analysis rounds off the collection with a look at graphic art as a medium with yet another role for commenting on the past: the illustration of a text. In “In the Interest of Full Dis-Closure: Miguel Brieva’s Illustrations of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s *Diccionario del franquismo* and the Unending Process of (Un)Learning Francoism,” Ferrán considers the reprint in 2019 of Montalbán’s 1977 book as an attempt to update this critical project. As she notes, Brieva’s drawings not only illustrate some of the dictionary’s entries but also incorporate new images that underscore connections between Francoism and contemporary Spain. Ferrán makes use of McCloud when observing the strategy of “dis-closure,” or the questioning of inherited patterns of ideological closure, with which Brieva establishes complicity with the reader in order to criticize the devastating effects of neoliberalism. In *Diccionario del franquismo*, the didactic function deconstructs an ideological

stance that endures into the present even though the government that upheld it has disappeared.

Whether the idea is to inquire into the fortunes of previous generations, events and historical figures, the literary canon or the imagination of antiquity, a common element emerges from the set of analyses presented here: the didactic function of graphic narratives. Castillo and Moreno-Nuño's essay pays particular attention to the pedagogical aspect, but in every article the comics studied invite contemplation of an experience that took place in the space of the nation. They point out how this space blurs its limits to become part of an international scenario of war and exile, immigration, or artistic endeavor. The comics take us into the past, to times gone by, and to discourses and modes of representing them with a declared intention of filling a gap perceived in the collective mind and in the education system, that has to do with, especially, the memory of the Civil War. These comics bring to the foreground and question the superficial treatment of Spain's recent political history, especially in elementary and secondary schools. The didactic dimension of graphic novels may be especially appreciated by students who try to grapple with a national history that seems far removed from their lives, or that is not their own.

Comics reproduce a range of experiences that could interest a reader who might feel part of a community, connected to that past and space in some way, or is simply eager for a deeper understanding. The visual narrative format brings together fiction, facts, and symbolic capital, to embed the acquisition of knowledge within the pleasure of reading, often involving an element of nostalgia. In so far as they are immersed in patterns of production and consumption intended for the masses, comics are an integral part of popular culture that benefits from the hermeneutical frame of Cultural Studies. In their attempt to convey historical accuracy to readers, cartoonists and scriptwriters often find themselves in the role of researcher. They build stories and create drawings that are compatible with a previous knowledge base, as well as with an archive of visual materials, and they make choices about the transmission and problematization of the past. This is also the case with comics based on testimony, guided by the goal to give visibility to political episodes and experiences and to claim a place for them within the public consciousness and identity.

Taking all of this into account, and given that there are other media that tell stories of other times, that comment and call into question hegemonic discourses and that challenge oblivion, it is worth asking how do comics contribute to the work that novels, theater, film, and broadcast and print media have been doing in this area? How do graphic novels find their place among these other genres that deal with the recollection and consumption of the past? To start, we can think in terms of habits and expectations among

reader audiences, which for comics is no longer limited to children but rather has expanded to encompass readers of all ages. In fact, many who might not be attracted by the format and aesthetics of historical fiction in traditional novels or period pieces in film and television series might find in comics a more appealing, experimental, and dynamic format for such content. Further, comics are a crossroads, incorporating features from several genres that combine text and image, a hybridity that is reflected in their study.

Authors and scholars frequently identify the medium's distinct narrative features in the mechanisms of the storytelling based on the cartoon, but sometimes also apply an analytical methodology more typical for photographic media, especially cinema. This approach strengthens the consideration of graphic novels as legitimate artifacts for documenting the historical experience, as Nina Mickwitz explains, since the idea persists that the documentary is defined by audiovisual technology: "recording media" (9). In fact, Mickwitz posits a role for the comic as a discursive mechanism to question how the experiences of the real and the constructed are closely linked through the medium used (160). In general terms, the graphic novel that claims to be inspired by the veracity of the factual, which includes biography, testimony, and historical fiction, takes advantage of resources found in underground comics as much or even more than in literature and cinema (Gómez Salamanca and Rom Rodríguez 105). In the acknowledgment of its liminal origins, one can also discern the medium's contribution when it comes to providing stories from the past with thoughtfulness and emotion, as Sarah Harris' essay illustrates. Graphic novels thus make a place for themselves alongside other literary and visual media, especially cinema, resisting any relegation to a lesser place in the hierarchy of cultural and artistic production. Cinema and literature already go hand in hand as fields of scholarship in many departments of Spanish Studies in countries other than Spain. The graphic novel is beginning to find its place there also.

When comes to re-imagining the past, cartoonists have greater control over the shape of the material produced than filmmakers in terms of the capacity to construct subjectivity. Their drawings can oscillate between realism and caricature and transcend the limits of rationality and the physical world to conjure the imaginary, the unconscious, or dreamscapes. The connotative character of drawing can disrupt, often ironically, the aura of authenticity derived from the assumed mimetic quality of photography and film (Cutter et al. 5). Hillary Chute identifies the unique ability of comics to be put to political purposes given the way in which they can integrate "aesthetics and ethics" through what is often termed "style" (4). Ofelia Ferrán's essay is an excellent example of this; the emphasis on the political is in fact one of the pillars of Cultural Studies. Furthermore, Chute sees in the fragmentary nature

of the comic—in its arrangement in vignettes and on the page—an optimal element for a language of memory and of past recollection, since such a structure invites the reader to question notions of chronology and causality by having to fill in the gaps (6). These characteristics allow us to apprehend both the narrative and the factual aspects of the story. The reader is not given a closed or fluid temporality, as in cinema or theater, but rather the ability to move synchronically with their eye to any or all the vignettes at the same time, in a sort of “poética aérea” (aerial poetics) (Pintor 265). Drawing also makes it possible to recover for the present the imagination of bodies and spaces that, when subjected to a certain stroke and chromatic range, transcend their referential quality, and embody other values or discourses with ideological or affective significance (Chute 28). The complexity of the relationship between representation and history is, as we mentioned before, the main topic of Jacobo Hernando Morejón’s essay. The urge to grasp the past is linked to factors unique to each country as much as to the universal trend that Andreas Huyssen connects to disenchantment with unfulfilled utopias and technologies as bearers of a more sustainable future (6). The past is in many ways intrinsically connected to the future, and the comic medium presents itself as a most useful vehicle for the understanding of our multitemporal world in Spain, the United States, and abroad.

The study of graphic cultural artifacts may be legitimately claimed by various disciplines but, undoubtedly, literary studies have much to say with respect to graphic novels and graphic narratives at large. Regardless of the different intellectual traditions that inform their work, scholars have an obligation to both preserve and analyze the corpus of Spanish comics. To that double end, the graphic narratives that portray the past offer, as the comics studied in this volume clearly prove, an invaluable opportunity to engage in issues that are key to our contemporary world: the construction of national identities, the fabrication and contestation of an official history, the imagination of remote historical periods, the relationship between the past and the present, the persistence of the trauma of the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship, the transnational nature of memory, the recovery of the collective experience from oblivion, the pedagogical role of culture, the ever-changing notion of readership, the dialectics between forms of expression and meaning, the centrality of the visual for today’s subjectivities, the value of images to document history, the importance of graphic materials for political and ethical discourse, the relationship between the representation of the past and emotions, the postmodern understanding of the writings of history and, probably most importantly, the unique capacity of comics to challenge readers to resist a fixed sense of history as a totalizing narrative. In our current historical juncture in which the quality of democratic life has been diminished in important

ways and the surge of autocratic and neofascist movements is ubiquitous on the international stage, the ability of comics to destabilize totalizing accounts of the past cannot and should not be underestimated.

## Notes

1. *Tebeo* is a phonetic adaptation of *TBO*, a long-running (1917–1983) comic book magazine. In Spain, comics are usually called *historietas* or *cómics*, with *tebeos* primarily denoting the magazines containing the individual pieces.
2. In literary theory, the chronotope is how configurations of time and space are represented in language and discourse. The term was taken up by Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, who used it to show how different literary genres operated with different configurations of time and space, which gave each genre its particular narrative character.

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