

THE COMIC-STRIP OF HISTORICAL MEMORY: AN ANALYSIS OF *PARACUELLOS* BY CARLOS GIMÉNEZ, IN THE LIGHT OF *PERSÉPOLIS* BY MARJANE SATRAPI AND *MAUS* BY ART SPIEGELMAN

Carmen Moreno-Nuño
Wesleyan University

On 21 October 2007, the Chamber of Deputies in Spain approved the *Ley de Memoria Histórica* (Historic Memory Act) which acknowledges and enlarges the rights of victims of the Civil War, and enables the recovery of personal and family histories, as well as the dignity of the losers.¹ On the same year, Carlos Giménez published in one volume and under the generic title *Paracuellos* (1977-2003), his autobiographical series of stories about children who lived in orphan homes (*Hogares de Auxilio Social*) after the Civil War.² While the first series of *Paracuellos* starts in 1976, taking advantage of Franco's death and the possibilities and utopias allowed by the new political climate, it is the new historical context of 2007 that gave a global sense to a production which has not ceased during the entire democratic period, and allowed the option of publishing all six series in book format.³ *Paracuellos* is “una de las referencias claves (*sic*) de la historieta española” [one of the key comic-strip works in Spain] (Altarriba 93) because of its narrative mastery, its skillful management of dramatic and expressive resources, and its firm political denunciation. Juan Marsé has said that *Paracuellos* “es de una genialidad artística y documental extraordinaria” [shows extraordinary artistic and documentary genius] (5). But, additionally, *Paracuellos* is part of the cultural production that tries to recover, through fiction, a collective (rather than historic) memory about the war, the postwar years, and the repression of the Franco regime, which had been ignored and silenced in Spain.⁴ Within this cultural production, *Paracuellos* is set up as a means to incorporate the absent past into History, in an idealist conception of literature where literature itself becomes cathartic therapy, an exercise in moral justice, and a tool for repairing the fragmented community.⁵

Since the mid-1990s, a new social construct of memory has emerged that reflects the growing importance of debates about human rights in wars and dictatorships, and translates into an increased involvement by citizens (associations for the recovery of the lost memory and opening of common graves) as well as by political parties and government. This process culminates in the *Ley de Memoria Histórica*, since with this law the political power takes the initiative, after thirty years of democracy, to redress a historical injustice; above all, memory acquires an unprecedented public dimension as the axis of the most important public discourse in the country.⁶ Immersed in this context, literature echoes the desire to know and acknowledge the past that characterizes an important sector of Spanish society and

its political class, reasserting the power of the past as a lesson to the present and the future, and giving political relevance to the fantastic realm of fiction. As was the case in other countries like Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany and the dictatorships in the Latin America's Southern Cone, Spain's confrontation of its own traumatic past takes memory away from a neutral ground into a cultural battlefield dominated by the political appropriation of its symbolic content.

Within this context, *Paracuellos* involves an exercise in historic memory about the orphan homes *Hogares de Auxilio Social*. At the end of the Civil War, the *Auxilio Social*, a department of the *Falange*, founded in 1936 by Mercedes Sanz Bachiller and Javier Martínez de Bedoya to serve the basic needs of the most vulnerable segment of the population (women and children) during the war, became the most important institution of the regime dedicated to social welfare, as well as a key element of social control and disciplinary power, as Ángela Cenarro has shown in *La sonrisa de Falange*.⁷ By placing the different stories of *Paracuellos* in the orphan homes of *Auxilio Social*, Giménez commits himself to a historical memory in which political discourse—his denunciation of the exercise of power shows how this institution seeks to establish popular conformity—comes loaded with a social content: Since the treatment of the underprivileged is always a key element in the organization of a State, the children in *Paracuellos* represent not only the vanquished but also the great mass of the population placed outside the production process, and hence outside the social protection benefits of the new Spain, however paltry these benefits may have been. Moreover, poverty and marginalization are in *Paracuellos* the product of a traumatic kernel which—linked to the kinds of enclosure that contributed to the consolidation of the modern state (the prison and social welfare areas)—speaks to us of discipline, time regulations, body classifications and the re-education of minds. *Paracuellos* denounces the underlying logic to this power exercise by depicting children who live in various *Hogares de Auxilio Social*, through a set of testimonial stories, where autobiography is combined with the biographies of many other children who, just as Carlos Giménez, lived in such homes.

This set of biographic and autobiographic stories takes, in Giménez's work, the form of the comic strip, and thus, extrapolating the notion of graphic novel, *Paracuellos* can be said to belong to the genre of graphic stories. This invites a comparative analysis with graphic novels as important as Marjane Satrapi's *Persépolis* (2003, 2004) and Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986, 1991), since all three works deal with the representation of a traumatic past—both personal and communal—through autobiography. While *Persépolis* is the autobiographical tale of an Iranian woman whom the 1979 revolution and the war with Iraq forced to live in a constant exile from which she witnesses the historic vicissitudes of her country, *Maus* shows the problem of depicting the Holocaust through the eyes of the second generation, with

Artie as the biographer of his father Vladek.⁸ The comparative analysis proposed here does not seek to analyze *Persépolis* in detail, much less *Maus*, given the enormous amount of studies on the latter; nor does it attempt to put all three texts on the same footing by ignoring their differences (*Maus* is generally considered the masterpiece of the comic-strip genre) but rather tries to use both works as a starting point for a more detailed analysis of *Paracuellos*.

What *Paracuellos*, *Persépolis* and *Maus* have in common is their rapprochement to a traumatic historical past through the comic strip, a genre which, historically, presupposes a much more scant cultural capital than, for example, poetry or the theater. Since comic strips are associated with humor, it must face accusations to the effect that laughter trivializes and distorts horror and suffering—a criticism often applied to the comic representation of the Holocaust. However, Art Spiegelman himself has stated that humor per se is not an intrinsic component of the comic strip, and that its essence lies in its capacity to mix words and drawings in order to tell a story: *commix*.⁹ Nevertheless, the presence and meaning of humor in the comic strip is not the only challenge this genre faces in literary criticism, since one of the most firmly-grounded prejudices and theoretical foundations of narratology is the predominance of the verbal over the non-verbal. The comic strip is indeed a hybrid genre that mixes words with images, narrative with graphic representation, presence with absence (e.g. the semantic content of *gutters* or the spaces between vignettes) codifying new ways of looking and new hermeneutic practices on a *cronotopo* where time becomes space. But while the traditional comic strip clashes against the limitations of its own genre, the graphic novel implies,¹⁰ from the 1970s, the exploration and culmination of the expressive potential that was locked inside this genre.¹¹ The traditional comic strip was considered a kind of sub-literature for a low-brow juvenile taste, noting its short-lived foundation as a disposable product. The elements that structure the most common form of the comic strip are established in the 1950s: short duration, standardized vignettes, technical restraint, super-hero, stereotyped characters, simplification of stories and situations, hyperbolic proportions and expressionism as a projection of a reductionist perspective. Unlike this traditional comic strip or *tebeo*, the graphic novel that begins to emerge in the 1960s can be understood as an evolution, or even a revolution, within the genre, as it questions its traditional limits of size, format and content to become a vehicle of representation for more serious and diverse topics. The graphic novel eliminates also the distinction between cultured literature and popular culture, offering the reader a richer experience through a new form of representation characterized by its anti-authoritarianism, its representation of ethnicity and marginality, its ideological depth, its metafictional self-awareness, and its great aesthetic resolution.

Besides belonging to a new era of the comic strip genre, *Paracuellos*, *Persépolis* and *Maus* share a series of new common elements. All three works are in black and white to underscore the historical past in which their stories take place. Thus historic memory, which is central to all three texts, appears as if it were an image faded by the passage of time. *Persépolis* shows a black and white that transmits elegance and universality (Satrapi 21-23). In *Maus*, the simplicity of black and white, along with the simplicity of the child-like strokes is what makes possible the identification of the reader with the Jews. In *Paracuellos*, black and white is not only key to Gimenez's aesthetics and a possible technical constraint, but also the appropriate medium to evoke in the reader the very popular cinema of the Franco era where the protagonist is a child: the child as a propitiatory victim and as a privileged witness to a historical period. Along with the use of black and white, these three works inherit from the underground autobiographical comic strip the representation of the character (author, illustrator, protagonist) as a small and insignificant figure, which is the complete opposite of the traditional hero: in *Paracuellos*, the protagonists are children; in *Maus*, the Jews are mice, and in *Persépolis*, Marji embodies the multiple marginalization of being a child, a woman, an Iranian in the West, and a westernized woman in Iran.

In addition, these three works share an insistence in representing the body, which is not surprising since the central driver for movement in the comic strip (an element that distinguishes it from other graphic arts) is the human anatomy. This insistence on the body in *Paracuellos*, *Persépolis* and *Maus* speaks to us about the methods of enclosure, control and discipline that characterize the modern world by classifying and regulating bodies. In other words, the exercise of historic memory put forth by these three works speaks of a trauma from the past fleshed out in bodies that have suffered its historic violence. In *Maus*, the most obvious examples are the representation of the Jews in the ghetto and in concentration camps, but we also have the bodies of dead mice piled up at the feet of Artie, who questions metafictionally the creative process of *Maus* (201) or the famous allegory which throughout the entire work represents the different human groups by means of animal masks. In *Persépolis* there is an abundance of mutilated, disappeared and tortured bodies that are contrasted—drawing by drawing—with other bodies full of life (Worth 146), in clear acknowledgement of the body as a central locus for the articulation of a personal and political identity. This articulation of identity takes place on the double plane of the feminist discourse and the historical one, since, while on the one hand Marji lives the alienation of her new body as a woman, the fact that she is forced to wear a veil shows the strength with which Islamic fundamentalism has exercised its power on the lives and bodies of Iranian women.

Through the representation of the body, these narrations show the loss of one's identity, the experience of estrangement and the transformation of the world one knows as consequences of historic

trauma. In *Paracuellos*, the representation of the body systematically and repeatedly denounces the physical abuse meted out to the children in “homes” (*hogares*) that reproduced the prison system, and a whole critical discourse on violence unfolds throughout all six series: malnourished bodies; faces and hands slapped and hit, bodies broken by physical punishments, wounded bare feet, alienated bodies rigidly in line, faces sweating with fear; ill, uncared-for bodies as recipients of blows and punishment. In *Paracuellos*, the *Falange* and the Church were the main agents in charge of administering a violence which, in the *Hogares*, sought compliance with the regulations underlying the violence that in Spain continued to unfold systematically after the Civil War, especially in its multiple spaces of enclosure (Cenarro 159). According to Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, physical punishment as a public spectacle could be said to perform an exemplary role in the goal of maintaining the arbitrary and despotic power of the state, and of attaining a re-education of minds through the segregation of the bodies.

As has been observed by Danielle Corrado (174-85), the political re-reading of the past in *Paracuellos* seeks the deconstruction of the enormous propaganda campaign always associated with the work of *Auxilio Social* (Cenarro 148-49). Answering such mythical deconstruction, the various narrative strategies used by Giménez, range from the use of different planes to the multiplication of narrative perspectives.¹² If we look at the framing, the great recurrence of close-ups and even extreme close-ups intensify the feeling of anguish, reducing the space between the characters and the reader to a bare minimum, while simultaneously reflecting the totalitarian way in which the winners impose their ideology: grotesque faces of priests, nurses, teachers and keepers with taut grimaces, disgusted gestures and menacing looks (figure 1). On the medium-range shots, the zooms on the long sharp fingernails of the housekeepers exemplify metonymically the aggressivity that prevailed in the *Hogares*. In fact, the feminine portraits of the keepers in *Paracuellos* show the perverting practice of motherhood, whose function was so acclaimed by *Auxilio Social*.¹³ On numerous occasions, the balloons weep larger tears than the children when they cry.

With respect to the angle, the keepers are often seen towering upward from below, while the children are drawn in a downward perspective, highlighting the power relation between the two groups. The minimalist strokes of the pan shots illustrate a defeated individuality under the prison-like uniformity of the *Hogares* and their concentrationist space saturated with ceiling beams, bedposts, closed gates and impassable walls (37, 60, 75, 80, 205, 212, 570) (figure 2). The concise strokes in the drawings of children separated from their families reflects a desolation underscored by the pan shots of a yard represented, through depth perspective, as an immense deserted field. On these perspectives, the zooming in and out (116) emphasize the solitude of the child alone in the yard (47, 194, 413, 568, 586).

The montage reveals the disparity between the official discourse and the reality within the *Hogares* by contrasting the words with images that belie them: the image of a child crying while, on the balloon, other children sing the praises of the regime (71) (figure 3), or the image of an ambulance carrying away a wounded child while on the balloon another song speaks of the happiness that reigns in the *Hogar* (159).

The emblem of *Auxilio Social*—a fist clutching a dagger to fight a dragon that represents hunger (Cenarro 3, 102 (image))—opens the majority of the stories in all six series, functioning as a powerful dramatic leitmotif. The ubiquitous emblem of the regime's shield is also present (167). The symbolic claims its space by means of flying swallows on a sky that becomes a lost and longed-for freedom (46), or a wind which figuratively sweeps everything away with the passage of time (601). Along with these narrative strategies, the ellipsis (124) coexists with the narrative point of view of the various stories and series (first person, first person of a polyphonic plural that encompasses the group of children, and omniscient narrator) in a more or less heterodiegetic position that seeks to combine the testimonial function of the subjective experience in the story with the critical vision of the adult political position (Corrado 186-94). Thus *Paracuellos* proposes the renegotiation of the autobiographical pact, along with the treatment of the story and the character, in order to shape a graphic narrative realism that tends to show how the Franco regime carried out the cleansing of bourgeois society in the *Hogares de Auxilio Social*.

If we focus the analysis on *Paracuellos* and *Persépolis*, both works share a simple layout, as the vignettes are read in the conventional left-to-right and top-to-bottom manner, in contrast with the complexity of the topics it narrates. Both *Paracuellos* and volumes 1 and 2 of *Persépolis* narrate stories about childhood—volumes 1 and 2 of *Persépolis*—and more specifically about a childhood face to face with the horrors of History: its protagonists are direct witnesses of History or members of the first generation after the trauma. But while *Persépolis* has often been read as a humanist and liberal exaltation that speaks of universality, equality and noble purpose in human beings—childhood as a universal category of shared experiences, broken by the fights in the adult world—, *Paracuellos* distances itself from this claim to universality by the wealth of graphic detail.¹⁴ *Persépolis* presents simplified strokes that underscore its comic-strip nature in order to attain a stronger identification of the reader with the character, while *Paracuellos* calls attention to the individuality of each child by giving them distinct traits.¹⁵ Against the universalizing capacity of the autobiographical element in *Persépolis*, *Paracuellos* emphasizes the element of historical truth in each one of its biographical episodes. Since in many cases these are the children of the 'reds', the discourse cannot be universalized; these are not the experiences lived by all, but only by the children of the 'guilty': negation of the fallacy of fifty percent or we all suffer alike. While the

traditional asylum centers, such as orphanages or children homes, based their admission criteria on condition of the children being orphans, abandoned or lacking resources, the *Hogares de Auxilio Social* added a special clause: “the moral conditions of the parents” (Cenarro 131), so that the children of families that did not respond to the moral expectations of the regime would be directed to the *Hogares*. Furthermore, *Auxilio Social* reserved itself the right to decide whether or not it would return the child to the family, which could imply the permanent loss of the minor.

Thus *Paracuellos* and *Persépolis* confront the historical past as trauma and memory. *Persépolis* inscribes the personal history of Satrapis’ suffering as part of the history of Iran, reasserting through the history of her family—a Marxist and westernized family—the existence of a liberal progressive tradition in the country. In addition, being part of the recent increase in the number of testimonial and autobiographical writings by Iranian females in exile, *Persépolis* makes use of this type of writing to recover a national traumatic memory that has been severed by exile itself. In a similar way, *Paracuellos* seeks to register the lives of the children in the *Hogares de Auxilio Social* within a History of Spain that has been mutilated by silence and oblivion during the first stage of the democratic period with regard to the Civil War and the Franco regime. Since the democratic pact of silence affected specially the thorniest aspects of the past, in particular the repression of the regime, the representation of the *Hogares de Auxilio Social* as a space of forced enclosure and gratuitous violence, acquires the status of denunciation and clarification of historical truth. Rejecting the education of the rationalist tradition from the Enlightenment—which was demonized on the grounds that it would result in skepticism and moral relativism—the psychiatry, psychology and education put in place at the service of the New Spain identified abandoned children with juvenile delinquents in order to justify the regulation of daily life, the need of a moral punishment that would lead to the reformation of the minor, conformance to the rules and the interventionism of teachers and caregivers.

Even though the children of *Paracuellos* live the marginalization of public welfare, Carlos Giménez does not fall into the hyperbolic kind of narrative that characterizes much of the literature dealing with trauma through devices such as the metafictional reflection around the comic strip itself. Both *Paracuellos* and *Persépolis* propose a popular culture as a means of escape, transgression and action against suffering. While in *Persépolis* the avid consumption of popular US culture—music and clothes—becomes in the hands of Marji an instrument of identity and transgression against Islamic fundamentalism, popular culture and especially the culture of the comic strip allows a certain agency to the children of *Paracuellos*: they steal the comic strips from a child who is the principal’s pet, as punishment (80-83); they use the comic strips as moral capital (234-35, 393, 507) and they even win

money prizes when their drawings receive awards and are published in famous comic strips (133, 213-14, 222-23). Ángela Cenarro has mentioned how the women and children admitted in *Auxilio Social*—as historical subjects, rather than heroes of everyday resistance—tried multiple forms of resistance to survive, the children in particular showing great resourcefulness and wits to wriggle out of difficult situations:¹⁶ the children of *Paracuellos* fool the keepers (446, 453) and even run away from the *Hogares* (199-205). However, the agency which in *Paracuellos* makes the comic-strip possible recognizes its precariousness to withstand the abuse of power: banning, tearing and burning comic strips that are perceived by the keepers of the *Hogares* as a demonic source of pleasure (174-179, 326-27, 512). Such destruction illustrates the fear that the regime had for the printed word: novels are banned in the *Hogares* (358, 384, 550). Within this metafictional context, *Paracuellos* places the comic strip in dialogue with other genres such as the theater or the novel—the children discuss whether comic strips are better than the theater, and they fight among themselves when Paribáñez is revengefully tearing up all the comic strips he can find, but refuses to destroy a novel (236-247, 548-52)—vindicating the printed word and putting the comic strips on the same footing with the established literary genres: the distinction between high-brow and low-brow culture disappears in the graphic novel. In the end, the alter ego of the author, Pablito Giménez, who dreams of becoming an author of comic strips, cries out in anger: “¿Qué tendrán los pobres tebeos que todo el mundo los quiere tan mal?” [What is it they find so unpleasant in comic strips that everybody dislikes them so?] (551).

Similarly, *Persépolis* contains an important metafictional reflection on the relation between art and politics, but *Maus* is the work that stands out the most in the articulation of its meaning around self-reflexivity.¹⁷ Inscribing itself fully within postmodernity, *Maus* replies to the impossibility of representation characteristic of second-generation Holocaust literature, through a narration that has converted the impossibility of narration into the very subject of the narration act: the historical past is inseparable from the conditions of transmission and representation under which it is remembered and under which it acquires meaning in the present, and this leads, in *Maus*, to a constant questioning and transgression of representation mechanisms as well as of graphic and narrative conventions—metaphorization, literary genres, digression, humor, sequentiality, linearity, narrative voice, etc. Furthermore, this incessant violation of the discursive frame shapes itself as an act of ethical/political resistance against the acritical anesthetization of the historical trauma. As for *Paracuellos*, it functions as a historical metafiction by its recreation of the historical past in the *Hogares de Auxilio Social* from a metafictional reflection on the comic strip itself.¹⁸

Paracuellos includes in its pages the drawings of various comic strips from the Franco period, in a brief reminiscence of the genre during the first stages of the regime: *El pequeño luchador* (105), *El guerrero del antifaz* (105), *El cachorro* (121, 174, 393), *Jaimito* (129, 133), *El coyote* (213) and *Purk: El hombre de piedra* (454). These are adventure comic-strips, favored by the children during the first stages of the regime over the ‘official magazines’ where the indoctrinating mission was predominant (Lara 52). This intertextuality enables *Paracuellos* to pay literary homage to the comic strips that allowed themselves certain incisiveness against the regime, and to display a critical memory against comic strips from the regime which, through an exaltedly patriotic epic narrative, constituted themselves into vehicles of indoctrination of national-catholicism. One of the comic strips destroyed by Peribáñez is *5 Flechas* (548), which lies next to *Gloria Imperial* and *Catecismo Ripalda*.¹⁹ However, *Florita* (520) and *Pulgarcito* (520) manage to escape the auto de fe—the former because it represents the feminine side of the comic strip,²⁰ and the latter because of its sharp criticism of the society of the time, under a deceivingly frivolous and intranscendent appearance.²¹ The homage to the comic strip—to its structure, its themes, its intentions and its function—is complemented by a metafictional reflection on the series of comic strips that Pablito González is constantly drawing:²² *El jinete de la muerte* (218, 224, 254). Through these stories, the metafictional process of creation of the comic strip becomes an instrument of reflection upon the relation between life and literature, and Giménez includes an ironic touch on the problem of humor—the balloons of the vignettes are rife with terrible spelling mistakes (254)—as a central if questionable element of the historic comic strip.

But while, through metafiction, *Maus* reminds us that narrating the past is an ethical act—the second generation of the trauma facing its own necessity and inability to tell the historical horror—this ethical dimension is presented in *Paracuellos* around the problem of victimism. The helplessness shown by the children in *Paracuellos* against violence—underscored by the tenderness of the drawing strokes—is coupled with the representation of the suffering of family members who are forced to leave their children in the *Hogares de Auxilio Social*: the mother as a story never told—it is always the men who carry the children to the *Hogares*—becomes a centre of gravity on which the children of *Paracuellos* shed their tears, and the hidden key on which the story of Vladek turns. However, as noted by Tzvetan Todorov in “Los dilemas de la memoria,” victimization runs the danger of falling into one of the poles of historical construction: Against the historical narration that sings the victory of one’s side, one finds victimizing narration that reports on its suffering, assuring the indefinite moral and political privilege of the victims. *Maus* avoids the moral manicheism that accompanies such victimism, eliminating the didactical-moral sense from the narration, negating the necessity of redemption and closure, and rejecting the attribution

of moral authority from the characters, but without erasing the existence of the moral categories of good and evil. *Paracuellos* repeatedly verges on victimism during the first five series, dominated as they are by the representation of an ubiquitous and ruthless violence. However, Giménez avoids falling into manicheism in these series through a representation of the children themselves—and not only the keepers—also as producers of that violence, in a not-surprising process of assimilation of the violence that surrounds them.²³ The sixth series, *Paracuellos 6*, presents, on the contrary, a significant change: the children are no longer the object of beatings and mistreatment, but the violence has rather transcended the walls of *Auxilio Social* institutions—the keeper, apprehended by the police (Guardia Civil), is paraded in public and mocked by the people (588-601)—in order to negate the exceptionality that could be falsely attributed to the *Hogares*. Hence the fact that violence in postwar Spain is metonymically represented through the imposing figure of two members of the Guardia Civil (591).

In *Paracuellos*, the temporal dimension acquires a decisive importance for the transmission of historic testimony. In fact, the play of various narrative voices in *Paracuellos*—autobiographical first person, communal first person plural referring to the children interned in the *Hogares*, and omniscient narrator who passes judgment from an adult point of view—adds complexity to a testimonial function that is affirmed as such by the historical dates that appear on the header of the first vignette of every story in the first series (figure 4).²⁴ But while the incorporation of the autobiographic testimony of the victims, survivors and losers introduces a destabilizing element in every historical narration, such element is partly offset by the narrative nature of the testimony itself, i.e., by the processes of meaning production that move between the historical and the fictional. En *Paracuellos*, this testimonial function that tries to denounce and demystify the *Hogares de Auxilio Social* gradually leaves more and more ground to the symbolic, from the moment the dates disappear in the second series and are replaced by the titles of the stories and the emblem of *Auxilio Social*—the fist clutching a dagger and killing the dragon of hunger—so that the title and the emblem end up taking over completely the first vignette of each story in the last series (figure 5). This rehabilitation of the symbolic against the testimonial is reinforced by the appearance, starting in the second series, of gutters that open the space to a reconstruction of history by the reader, something the latter had been denied in the first series. Still, the political meaning of the temporal dimension does not disappear with the suppression of dates, since in all six series Giménez represents the passage of time as a subjective experience or a Bergsonian *durée* of a continuously eternal present: the punishments seem unending, as shown in the vignettes of page 59, all the same size, and pointing to the inexorable passage of time but inscribed within an only frame where time has been frozen (figure 6). In addition, one never leaves the *Hogares*, as shown by the ample, landscaped last

vignettes of the stories and by the recurrent appearance of the entrance gate as the first/second and last vignette.²⁵ Indeed, the sense of imprisonment in the circular enclosure of a temporality from which there is no escape is highlighted by the confinement within the *Hogares de Auxilio Social*, whose everyday routine was strictly regulated by—among other religious activities—eight compulsory prayers per day, attendance to daily mass, plus rosary on Sundays, holydays and Lent—activities that invaded the daily existence of the children, regulated their time and set the tone for the routines of the rest of the day (Cenarro 163-64).

The fact that Giménez ends the last series with a reflection on temporality and memory—the wind as a metaphor for the passage of time, erasing the past and the childhood dreams (601)—illustrates how *Paracuellos* recovers a past which, despite being irremissibly lost to the present, refuses to become archetypal. By rejecting the mystifications that the Pact of Silence during the democratic period perpetuated in Spain about the Civil War and the Franco repression, *Paracuellos* places itself firmly within the spirit that promoted the drafting of the *Ley de Memoria Histórica* and the recognition and dignification of the victims of the war and the dictatorship. *Paracuellos* converts the recovery of the historical memory into a demand for moral justice, affirming the need to incorporate the absent past (testimony) into History. Against the conservative positions which still defend oblivion, *Paracuellos* is presented as a space of social construction of memory and public acknowledgement of an unpleasant truth. *Paracuellos*, as well as *Persépolis* and *Maus*, makes us reflect on the destabilizing capacity of the memory of survivors and witnesses to traditional historiography, and simultaneously suggests in a metafictional manner the extent to which this inapprehensible memory is neutralized by its narrative nature. *Paracuellos* is thus an example of how memory has acquired a dimension without precedent, not only in Spain but also in the academic world and in our times in general.

Paracuellos, *Persépolis* and *Maus* stem from the same sense of historic urgency. In all three works there is the need to tell and leave a legacy of witnesses that recognize the profound connection between the personal and the historical. All three works reflect upon the violent destruction of childhood in their orphanage stories, and at the same time speak of History as an act of reconstruction—memory as a public process of reconstructing voices—in which no voice must have the last word. While all three works acknowledge the limits of fiction as a means of establishing historical truth, they also answer to the human need for coherence and sense, affirming the power of the stories to restore and maintain individual, family and group identity. From the domain of the private, the secret and the hidden, *Paracuellos*, *Persépolis* and *Maus* bring up to the public domain a revisionist memory that proclaims the authority of the persecuted and the oppressed, giving biography a transformative power that allows the

encounter with one's own voice through the narration of communal history. In addition, the question of historical precision becomes paradoxical in all three works, since they are based on the comic strip genre and on exaggeration as a basic strategy to generate meaning: against the classic escapism of the comic strip, the representation of historical suffering in *Paracuellos*, *Persépolis* and *Maus* generates a new kind of graphic and narrative realism. Thus from black humor and metafiction, these three graphic works illustrate paradigmatically the capacity of the comic-strip genre to establish a dialogue between History and memory, making an important contribution to the recovery of historical memory.

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FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3

1953





FIGURE 6

Notes

¹ The *Ley de Memoria Histórica* is the most controversial law passed under the Socialist legislature of 2004-2008. When the Zapatero government kept the unwavering goal of reaching a consensus on this law, negotiations dragged on for more than two years despite the pressure of various associations such as Amnesty International and many intellectuals. The condemnation of the Franco regime, the illegitimacy of its sentences and the abolition of its laws are the aspects of the Law that heated up the debate between various parliamentary groups. Finally, the Law was approved with the support of all political parties except PP and ERC.

² Carlos Giménez (Madrid, 1941) is probably the most important author of comic-strips in Spain in the last three decades. A chronicler of the political transition in his trilogy *España, Una; España, Grande; and España, Libre*, and author of the best portrait of Spanish comic strips in *Los Profesionales*, he is also the foremost representative of the autobiographical story in cartoon format, in the series *Paracuellos*, *Barrio* and *Rambla arriba, Rambla abajo*. His long career includes also the excellent science-fiction comic-strips *Dani Futuro*, *Delta 99*, *Hom* and *Érase una vez en el Futuro*. Giménez won the most important prizes in the comic-strip world, both for his drawing and his writing, and in 2003 he received a gold *Medalla al Mérito de las Bellas Artes*.

³ The years in which the six series end are 1977, 1981, 1997, 2001, 2002 and 2002.

⁴ See *Casa encantada* by Joan Ramon Resina and Ulrich Winter, and *Las buellas de la Guerra Civil* by Carmen Moreno-Nuño.

⁵ In *The Ethics of Memory*, Avishai Margalit has analyzed how western culture still defends, through the influence of Freud, the importance of remembering traumatic events in order to be able to forget, and the necessity to break the repression of memories to achieve healing. These 19th century ideas are at the base of current cultural products on the Civil War. However, the construction of an exclusively shared memory contains deep down the mythical or semi-religious search for a community of memory, in other words, the search for a perfect moral world.

⁶ See “Después de tanta memoria...” by Julián Casanova.

⁷ In *La sonrisa de Falange* Ángela Cenarro studies the institution of *Auxilio Social* from a historiographic point of view: *Auxilio Social* was founded in 1936 during the war and, until the beginning of 1937, was one more among the social work entities that proliferated during the war. However, thanks to the backing of the Army and the Catholic Church, *Auxilio Social* starts its rise in the new bureaucratic web of the Franco regime, soon becoming the most favored instance of social welfare power within the regime, and a skilful ambassador of the dictatorship for international opinion. In its emulation of the Nazi social assistance system, *Auxilio Social* is characterized by its totalitarian methods, by the exaltation of the falangist ideology—in constant conflict with the increasingly prevalent interference by the Catholic Church—and by its constant use of propaganda. Rejecting the traditional concept of charity, *Auxilio Social* presented itself as a new way to carry out a social welfare now anchored in social justice. In practice, however, care for the material needs of those admitted in these homes would be only the means to the end of moral and political reformation of the losers, promoting their dependence on the winners.

⁸ Literary criticism has highlighted in *Persépolis* the representation of adolescence and family (Marla Harris), the feminist character of the work (Nancy Miller), the postcolonial discourse setting up East against West (Nima Naghibi and Andrew O'Malley) as well as the autobiographical (Gillian Whitlock) and even liminal level of the text (Jennifer Worth). Directed by Vincent Paronnaud, *Persépolis* was made into a film by the same name in 2007, winning an Oscar nomination as best animated movie of 2008, among other awards and distinctions.

⁹ *Commix* is the term coined by Spiegelman himself for the graphic novel, where the noun *commix* is derived from the verb *to mix* (James Young 18).

¹⁰ The term ‘graphic novel’ was coined by Will Eisner to describe his own novel *A Contract With God*. In Spain, the few magazines that published graphic stories for adults in the 1960s showed a different external appearance but various similarities with the traditional comic strips as far as narrative codes and graphic language. By its title and book format, the publication *Novela Gráfica* satisfies the wish to distinguish itself from the notion of the *tebeo* (comic strip) as defined by the dictionary of the Real Academia Española in 1968: “revista infantil de historietas cuyo asunto se desarrolla en series de dibujos” [children magazine containing stories told in a series of drawings]

¹¹ *Maus* won the Pulitzer price in 1992, the only comic strip to have won this prestigious award.

¹² For a study on the semiology of the comic strip, see *El lenguaje de los cómics* by Roman Gubern.

¹³ The propaganda by *Auxilio Social* always emphasized certain values associated with traits that symbolize femininity—warmth, protection, education, moralizing—presenting the institutions of *Auxilio Social* before society as “los brazos maternos de la dictadura” [the maternal arms of the dictatorship] (Ángela Cenarro 142). Furthermore, the dining halls, homes and daycare centers of *Auxilio Social* were traditional spaces where women could exercise their feminine abilities. Ironically, the introduction of professionalization criteria caused *Auxilio Social* to accurately reproduce the hierarchic relation between the sexes that existed in Franco’s society, with men capturing all power and managerial positions.

¹⁴ Although this is a frequent interpretation about *Persépolis*, Naghibi and O’Malley warn against its reductionist nature, which eliminates the specificity of the experience of being ‘other’ and the complexity of representing the encounter between East and West (228). *Persépolis* has also been analyzed from a post-colonial approach by Janell Hobson, Theresa Tensuan, and Amy Malek.

¹⁵ Jennifer Worth has noted how in *Persépolis* the simplification of the drawings produces an amplification by simplification, i.e. the more iconic nature of the image makes it increasingly conceptual, creating a larger space where readers can project their own subjectivity (154).

¹⁶ There occurred various cases of actions and attitudes of resistance against the disciplinary policies in the *Hogares*. Many of these actions involved a search for strategies of survival and improvement of living conditions: children who escaped, families that did not return their children, girls vomiting food, girls expressing their criticism in letters to important political figures, etc. Discontent and dissidence were generally expressed by showing unease or dissatisfaction – disobedience, insults, humor – seeking to challenge ‘from below’ a power that was despotically imposed ‘from above’ (Cenarro 170-74).

¹⁷ There is an enormous amount of published work on *Maus*, including a book-monograph titled *Considering Maus*, edited by Deborah Geis. Some of the articles that focus on studying the representation of memory and the past are “Of *Maus* and Memory” by Stephen Tabachnick, “Happy, Happy Ever After” by Victoria Elmwood, “*Maus*” by Caroline Wiedmer, “The Shadow of a Past Time” by Hillary Chute, “Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and the After-Images of History” by James Young and “*Maus* and the Epistemology of Witness” by Richard Glejzer.

¹⁸ Linda Hutcheon has developed the concept of historiographical metafiction in, among other works, “The Pastime of Past Time: Fiction, History, Historiographic Metafiction.”

¹⁹ The magazine *Flecha* appears in 1936 as an ideological instrument in the zone controlled by Franco’s forces. In 1937, *Pelayos* appears, and after the unification of FET (Falange Española Tradicionalista) with JONS (Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista), both magazines combined into *Flechas y Pelayos* (1938), a magazine that would

embody the spirit of the winners in Spain, through a triumphant, confessional and totalitarian vision whose most prominent figure is the falangist figure of the “jefe” or chief. In the postwar years, *Flechas y Pelayos* will contribute to the project of implementation of the regime.

²⁰ By feminine comic strip it is meant the kind that is geared to the sentimental education of girls. In Franco’s Spain, the most popular ones were *Mis Chicas* (a counterpart to *Chicos*) and *Florita*, a comic strip characterized by its traditional models of urbanity, its feminine stereotypes and the luxurious world of the upper class.

²¹ *Pulgarcito* appeared in 1921 and resumed publication in 1945 under the direction of Rafael González, the author of some of the most memorable scripts in the magazine.

²² The children of the *Hogares* turn the fantasy world of the comic strips into a refuge against the squalor of their surroundings (104-5, 217-18, 336-41, 364, 442, 445, 510, 519, 555, 571), they long to become authors of comic strips (130-31) and dream of giving comic strips to future children in the *Hogares* when they become adults.

²³ See pages 29-31, 96-9, 124, 136-37, 146, 150-53, 190-91, 225, 228-29, 223-24, 302, 314-15, 319-321, 335, 352-56, 359.

²⁴ In the introduction to *Paracuellos*, Carlos Giménez points out that “en los primeros episodios que publiqué [...] solía fechar las historias y dar el dato de dónde habían sucedido para darle al trabajo visos de documento” [in the first episodes that I published [...] I used to give a date and place for each story, so as to confer a documentary appearance to the work] (16). And later: “Todo lo que se cuenta en estos seis álbumes, todas las historias, todas las anécdotas, están extraídas, repito, de hechos reales. No he inventado nada. Todo lo que he contado sucedió en la realidad. He realizado estas historias con la pretensión de dejar un documento veraz sobre cómo se vivió en los Hogares de Auxilio Social” [Everything that is told in these six series, all the stories and anecdotes, are taken, I repeat, from real events. I haven’t invented anything. Everything I have said happened in reality. My objective in writing these stories was to leave a true account of life as it was lived in the *Hogares de Auxilio Social*] (18).

²⁵ There are several elements that control the temporal rhythm of the comic strip, among them the content, size and number of the vignettes, as well as the space between them. The short vignettes speed up time, the long ones slow it down, and a sequence of equal-sized vignettes shows how time flows at a steady and unstoppable rate. For an analysis of this topic, see Will Eisner (25-37) and Scott McCloud (94-117).