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Spanish Comics

Historical and Cultural Perspectives

Edited by
Anne Magnussen

Contents	
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	17
Chapter 2	37
Chapter 3	57
Chapter 4	80
Chapter 5	101



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Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Introduction	1
Spanish Comics	
<i>Historical and Cultural Perspectives</i>	
Anne Magnussen	
Chapter 1	19
Dissenting Voices?	
<i>Controlling Children's Comics under Franco</i>	
Rhannon McGlade	
Chapter 2	37
Satirical Panels against Censorship	
<i>A Battle That Raged during the Spanish Transition</i>	
Gerardo Vilches	
Chapter 3	58
Tintin in the <i>Movida Madrileña</i>	
<i>Gender and Sexuality in the Punk Comic Book Zine Scene</i>	
Louie Dean Valencia-García	
Chapter 4	80
From Pioneer of Comics to Cultural Myth	
<i>Castelao in Galician Graphic Biography</i>	
David Miranda-Barreiro	
Chapter 5	101
The Representation of Traumatic Memory in Spanish Comics	
<i>Remembering the Civil War and Francoism</i>	
Juan Carlos Pérez García	

Chapter 6	125
'For He Bestirred Himself to Protect the Land from the Moors'	
<i>Depicting the Medieval Reconquista in Modern Spanish Graphic Novels</i>	
Iain A. MacInnes	
Chapter 7	143
An interview with Paco Roca	
Esther Claudio	
Chapter 8	163
'They Tried To Bury Us; They Didn't Know We Were Seeds'	
<i>Intergenerational Memory and La casa</i>	
Sarah D. Harris	
Chapter 9	182
Paco Roca's Graphic Novel <i>La casa</i> (2015) as Architectural Elegy	
Benjamin Fraser	
Chapter 10	202
Therapeutic Journeys in Contemporary Spanish Graphic Novels	
Agatha Mohring	
Chapter 11	221
Social Criticism through Humour in the Digital Age	
<i>Multimodal Extension in the Works of Aleix Saló</i>	
Javier Muñoz-Basols and Marina Massaguer Comes	
Chapter 12	243
Historicising the Emergence of Comics Art Scholarship	
in Spain, 1965–1975	
Antonio Lázaro-Reboll	
Index	265

Illustrations

1.1.	'Doña Urraca se encuentra un billete' [Doña Urraca finds a note], <i>Pulgarcito</i> 125 (1949), 15.	27
1.2.	'Doña Urraca', <i>Pulgarcito</i> 1658 (1963), 16.	34
2.1.	<i>El Papus</i> 31 (18 May 1974), cover.	46
2.2.	Distribution of the administrative causes. Cases against satirical magazines (Archivo General de la Administración 1973–1977).	48
2.3.	Final resolutions of the causes. Cases against satirical magazines (Archivo General de la Administración 1973–1977).	49
2.4.	El Perich, <i>Por Favor</i> 72 (17 November 1975), 4.	50
2.5.	García Lorente, 'The Illustrated Se Lo Juro News', <i>El Papus</i> 113 (27 March 1976), 8.	51
2.6.	<i>Por Favor</i> 18 (25 October 1974), cover.	52
3.1.	<i>La liviandad del imperdible</i> 1 (October 1977).	60
3.2.	<i>Kaka de luxe</i> 1, pirate edition (1977, 1984).	70
3.3.	<i>96 Lágrimas</i> 2 (c. 1981–1984).	74
3.4.	<i>96 Lágrimas</i> , unnumbered (c. 1981–1984).	76
4.1.	Castelao, 'Ojo clínico' [Clinical eye], <i>Vida gallega</i> 5 (May 1909), np.	83
4.2.	Castelao, 'Conto' [Story], <i>175 debuxos</i> , np.	84

4.3.	Paco Martín, Ulises S. Sarry and Xoán Balboa, <i>Castelao: O home, Axóuxere</i> supplement of <i>La Región</i> , 11 January 1975, np.	88
4.4.	Isaac Díaz Pardo, <i>Castelao</i> (A Coruña: Edición do Castro, 1985).	90
4.5.	Siro, Mazaira and Cubeiro, <i>Castelao</i> (A Coruña: Nova Galicia, 1987), 62	94
4.6.	Inacio and Iván Suárez, <i>Atila</i> (Santiago de Compostela: Demo Editorial, 2015), 36–37.	98
5.1.	Carlos Giménez, 'Noche de Reyes' (1977).	106
5.2.	Antonio Hernández Palacios, <i>Eloy: Río Manzanares</i> (Vitoria: Ikusager, 1979), 50.	108
5.3.	Francisco Gallardo Sarmiento and Miguel Gallardo, <i>Un largo silencio</i> (Alicante: De Ponent, 1997), cover, 30–31.	110
5.4.	Antonio Altarriba and Kim, <i>El arte de volar</i> (Alicante: De Ponent, 2009), 13.	115
5.5.	Antonio Altarriba and Kim, <i>El arte de volar</i> (Alicante: De Ponent, 2009), 93.	116
5.6.	Paco Roca, <i>Los surcos del azar</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2013), 34–35.	118
5.7.	Carlos Guijarro, <i>Paseo de los canadienses</i> (Alicante: De Ponent, 2015), 12, 110.	121
6.1.	Antonio Hernández Palacios, <i>El Cid</i> (Rasquera: Ponent Mon, 2015), 124.	132
6.2.	Jesús Cano de la Iglesia, <i>1212: Las Navas de Tolosa</i> (Rasquera: Ponent Mon, 2016), 49.	134
6.3.	Jesús Cano de la Iglesia, <i>1212: Las Navas de Tolosa</i> (Rasquera: Ponent Mon, 2016), 63.	136
6.4.	Antonio Hernández Palacios, <i>El Cid</i> (Rasquera: Ponent Mon, 2015), 164.	139
6.5.	Antonio Hernández Palacios, <i>El Cid</i> (Rasquera: Ponent Mon, 2015), 173.	140
7.1.	Paco Roca, <i>El invierno del dibujante</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2010), 95.	148
7.2.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 6.	150

7.3.	Paco Roca, <i>El invierno del dibujante</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2010), 14.	151
7.4.	Paco Roca, <i>Los surcos del azar</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2013), 151.	151
7.5.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 116.	152
7.6.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), cover.	157
7.7.	Miguel Gallardo and Paco Roca, <i>Emotional World Tour</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2009), 60.	159
8.1.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 4.	170
8.2.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 76.	172
8.3.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 47.	173
8.4.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 31.	174
8.5.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 30.	175
8.6.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 20.	176
8.7.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 18–19.	179
9.1.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 5.	188
9.2.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 65.	190
9.3.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 6.	191
9.4.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 7.	192
9.5.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 83.	195
9.6.	Paco Roca, <i>La casa</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015), 99.	199
10.1.	Cristina Durán and Miguel Ágel Giner Bou, <i>Una posibilidad entre mil</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2017), 23, 27.	206
10.2.	'De Barcelona a Canarias', Miguel Gallardo, <i>María y yo</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2010).	211
10.3.	Cristina Durán and Miguel Ágel Giner Bou, <i>Una posibilidad entre mil</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2017), 73.	213
10.4.	'Tiempos muertos', Miguel Gallardo, <i>María y yo</i> (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2010).	215
11.1.	Aleix Saló, <i>Fills dels 80, la generació bombolla</i> (Barcelona: Edicions Glénat, 2009), 14.	225
11.2.	Aleix Saló, <i>Fills dels 80, la generació bombolla</i> (Barcelona: Edicions Glénat, 2009), 68.	229

- 11.3. Aleix Saló, *Simiocracia* (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2012), 114. 230
- 11.4. Frame fragments from the book trailer *Españistán* (2015) (6:25–6:28). 234
- 11.5. Frame fragments from the book trailer 'Euronightmare' (2014) (1:26–1:36). 237
- 12.1. *Cuto: Boletín Español del Comic* 3 (San Sebastián, 1968), cover. 257
- 12.2. *Bang! información y estudios sobre la historieta* (1971), 4. 260
- 12.3. Subscription form enclosed in *Bang!* issue 2 (November 1970). 262

Introduction

Spanish Comics Historical and Cultural Perspectives

Anne Magnussen

It is probably impossible to pinpoint anything that is unique about Spanish comics.¹ Since the beginning of modern comics history at the end of the 19th century, comics as a medium has been truly transnational, with comics artists and publishers interacting and inspiring each other across national borders. In the case of Spanish comics, a common language unites the Spanish and Latin American comics and markets, but interactions with European (mostly Italian and Franco-Belgian) comics, US comics and, more recently, Asian comics and manga have also been and are at work. This basic transnational characteristic invites us towards studies that move beyond the nation state and focus on comics, artists, publishers and readers as part of 'multidirectional flows of peoples, ideas and

¹ 'Comic' is used here as a general term (including comic strips, series, books, and graphic novels).

PR: Yes, mainly the ambiguity. A storyboard's going to be the basis for a lot of people to work on, so there can't be metaphorical allusions or things left to the readers' interpretation, whereas in a comic or a graphic novel it's the opposite.

EC: Also, you know that many people consider comics the younger or poorer brother of cinema. How do the two languages differ, given that you've worked on both?

PR: First of all, comics mean complete freedom to me. In terms of money, a film is a huge investment, and that may ultimately thwart your project; it doesn't have to, but it may happen. In a comic that doesn't happen: the publisher invests because they like your project and they give you almost total freedom. It's true that some artists, like Will Eisner, considered comics as some sort of film on paper, but when you're working on it, you realise that it's closer to a novel because many details are left in the hands of the reader. In a film, the voices, the music, the takes and everything are very defined. This also conditions the way you narrate. In a comic, you can have lots of characters, time lapses, et cetera because in a comic you can stop, but in a film you can't go backwards and forwards continuously, and if there's an important detail, you have to emphasize it more. The act of watching has limitations regarding the type and amount of information that you can keep in order to understand and get the story going. There are more differences than similarities between cinema and comics.

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Chapter 8

'They Tried To Bury Us; They Didn't Know We Were Seeds'

Intergenerational Memory and *La casa*

Sarah D. Harris

The Trembling Giant, or Pando, [...] an enormous grove of quaking aspens [...] really is a single organism. Each of the approximately 47,000 or so trees in the grove is genetically identical and all the trees share a single root system.

—Atlas Obscura

In Spain, discussions of memory have dominated political and cultural discourse for the past twenty years. Jo Labanyi called the Spanish literary phenomenon in the late 1990s a 'memory boom', and debates since then have centred on 'historical memory', with corresponding attention to the large-scale political ramifications of collective violence and repression.¹ In this respect, Spain is one of many countries that participated in a global search for restorative

¹ Jo Labanyi, 'Memory and Modernity in Democratic Spain: The Difficulty of Coming to Terms with the Spanish Civil War', *Poetics Today* 28, no. 1 (2007): 89–116 (94).

justice in the early twenty-first century, and Spain's comics have taken up the politics of memory as well.²

While several excellent Spanish comics (*Un largo silencio* [A long silence], *Cuerda de presas* [String of prisoners], *El arte de volar* [The art of flying], *El ala rota* [The broken wing], *Los surcos del azar* [Twists of fate], etc.)³ build on the tradition of *Maus* and others in considering memory in overtly political contexts, this chapter's focus is Paco Roca's *La casa* [The house] (2015) and the fresh, infra-ordinary perspective it adds to the well-established conversation on memory in Spain.⁴ *La casa* relates the quite apolitical struggles of three siblings who inherit their father's second home in the countryside. This relatively short and semi-autobiographical work reduces the national obsession with memory to an intimate scale, using quotidian metaphors to invoke the power of intergenerational memory. In its intimacy, the book invites a reconsideration of notions of 'giving voice' and 'sites of memory' by focusing on an ordinary Spanish family and then drawing a blurry line between their present and their past, and between characters themselves and the objects that carry their memory.

The Pando grove, referenced in this chapter's epigraph and connected by a single root system, survives underground during times of intense fires, but the Pando is not the only tree to connote hidden depths or interconnectedness. This chapter will situate the visual and verbal metaphors of tree, house, food and land in *La casa* within the larger context of comics and memory, and within the consistent attention to memory across Roca's work. I argue that the comic's focus on tending to *la casa's* land, via Roca's sophisticated use of the medium, demands also that we cultivate a new generation taking up its ancestors' struggles, including the silent struggles of a repressed (or buried) generation.

As has been echoed throughout this book, Spain has a vibrant and exciting comics scene, one that deserves more international acclaim. Spanish comics have increased their domestic visibility in media and online and garnered institutional support in the form

2 Anne Whitehead's critical guide to memory ends with a reflection on the flood of public apologies and searches for restorative justice that defined the first decade of the twenty-first century. Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 154.

3 Jorge García and Fidel Martínez, *Cuerda de presas* (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2005); Antonio Altarriba and Kim, *El arte de volar* (Alicante: Ediciones de Ponent, 2010); Antonio Altarriba and Kim, *El ala rota* (Alicante: Ediciones de Ponent, 2016); Francisco Gallardo Sarmiento and Miguel Gallardo, *Un largo silencio* (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2012); Paco Roca, *Los surcos del azar* (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2013).

4 Paco Roca, *La casa* (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2015).

of the annual National Comics Prize from the Spanish Ministry of Culture since 2007. Growing numbers of conferences and seminars have emerged, and recent comics offer appealing and accessible options to myriad audiences. After years of calling the attention of an international academic community,⁵ Spanish comics have more recently reached a wider Anglophone audience, as exemplified in the 2016 *Publishers Weekly* article 'Spanish Graphic Novel Boom Reaches America', which announced the US publication of the anthology *Spanish Fever* (by Fantagraphics), or the fact that a slim selection of other Spanish comics is finally getting translated into English.⁶

One of the best-known contemporary Spanish cartoonists, Roca is a seriously heavy hitter. Borja Usieto writes in *Cuadernos de Cómic*, 'Si tuviéramos que escoger un paladín de la novela gráfica española este sería con gran probabilidad Paco Roca, el autor al que se le debe [...] el consolidamiento del cómic bajo la forma de novela gráfica en el tejido cultural de nuestro país'⁷ [If we had to choose a paladin of the Spanish graphic novel, it is likely Paco Roca would be it. We owe to him [...] the consolidation of the comic, in form of the graphic novel, in the cultural fabric of our country].⁸ Following the game-changing success of Roca's *Arrugas* (2007, published in English as *Wrinkles* in 2015),⁹ Roca has earned the freedom to write and draw whatever he chooses.¹⁰ The immense success of *Arrugas* also allowed for the broader artistic bonanza that we have since seen in Spain. Usieto attributes much of this impact not only to Roca's considerable storytelling and artistic chops but also to his intention to create work accessible to a broad audience. Roca never strays from this objective of broad appeal; given much artistic freedom, he has also increasingly chosen subjects that will raise awareness of underrepresented stories and historical events.

5 See e.g. *The International Journal of Comic Art's* symposium on Spanish comics in 2003, and related articles in John A. Lent, ed., *International Journal of Comic Art* 5, no. 2 (2003).

6 Heidi MacDonald, 'Spanish Graphic Novel Boom Reaches America', *Publishers Weekly* (16 September 2016), <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/comics/article/71507-spanish-graphic-novel-boom-reaches-america.html>.

7 Borja Usieto, 'Los surcos del azar', *CuCo – Cuadernos de Cómic*, 2 (2014): 227–230 (227).

8 This translation and all others from Spanish are mine.

9 Paco Roca, *Arrugas* (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2007), published in English as *Wrinkles* (London: Knockabout, 2015).

10 Pepo Pérez, 'Entrevista a Paco Roca: La vida es sueño' [Interview with Paco Roca: Life is a dream], *Guía del Cómic* (February 2009), <http://www.guiadelcomic.es/paco-roca/entrevista-2009-perez.htm>.

Comics, Autobiography and Memory Work

Comics provide a paradoxical opportunity for (re)presenting memory that is both very visible and invisible. In this sense, the cartoonist Chris Ware suggests that comics themselves are 'a possible metaphor for memory and recollection'.¹¹ In many settings, the marginal status of comics has allowed freedom for subversive content. As a result, some have called comics themselves sites of memory in times of repression, citing the immediacy of self-publishing, low production costs, their underground status and sharing practices that facilitate dissemination.¹² Diego Espiña Barros writes that the memory boom in Spain 'se producía por primera vez fuera de la torre de marfil de la academia, alcanzando su máxima expresión en las múltiples manifestaciones de la cultura de masas, entre las cuales [...] el cómic no fue ajeno' [was produced first outside of the ivory tower of academia, reaching its fullest expression in several manifestations of mass culture, among them the comic].¹³ About the opportunities afforded by the marginal status of some comics in the United States, the comics scholar Hillary Chute writes, 'Underground comics were avant-garde; they were political; they were taboo-shattering; and they were formally experimental'.¹⁴

More broadly, much of Chute's research focuses on memory in autobiographical comics; she asks, for instance, 'what does it mean for an author to *literally* reappear – in the form of a legible, drawn body on the page – at the site of her inscriptional effacement?' and theorises that 'the medium of comics can perform the enabling political and aesthetic work of bearing witness powerfully because of its rich narrative texture: its flexible page architecture; its sometimes consonant, sometimes dissonant visual and verbal narratives; its structural threading of absence and presence'.¹⁵ Her final point in this list refers to the fact that the medium is built on the

ongoing counterpoint of presence, in frames or panels, and visible absence, in the gutter.¹⁶

Autobiography is a genre that has long thrived in the medium and engages questions of memory and its (re)presentation. Harriet E. H. Earle argues that comics promote a particular type of narrative, especially in autobiographies, because they allow for intensely personal and individual stories.¹⁷ The cartoonist Eddie Campbell shows how the underground scene in the United States expanded the possibilities of autobiographical comics, so *La casa* joins a still-growing body of important autobiographical or semi-autobiographical comics worldwide.¹⁸ In Spain, recent autobiographical comics have been among the most celebrated. Among these, the notion of simultaneous absence and presence adds to our understanding of intergenerational memory in Antonio Altarriba's prize-winning *El arte de volar* (2009), Miguel Gallardo's *Un largo silencio* (1997) and *La casa*. In each, the patriarch is gone yet still present in the objects and child(ren) he has left behind, as well as in the comic itself as a site of memory. In each, the past is over, but somehow more evident than it was in its own time.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980–1991), probably the most well-known autobiographical comic in the world, depicts the transference of memory through dialogue between father and son, creating the comic's double authorship, a structure that is taken up in both *El arte de volar* and *Un largo silencio*.¹⁹ In *El arte de volar*, a biographical-autobiographical hybrid about the late-life suicide of the author's father, Altarriba states that just as he is the son who inherited his father's DNA, Spain is the daughter of her history, confirming a thread on familial and shared memory that runs through many of these works, including *La casa*.²⁰ Both Altarriba and Gallardo speak in the first person for an elderly or recently deceased parent. Altarriba explains:

16 Hillary Chute, 'Comics Form and Narrating Lives', *Profession* (2011): 107–117 (108).

17 Harriet E. H. Earle, *Comics, Trauma, and the New Art of War* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017).

18 Eddie Campbell, 'La autobiografía en el cómic', in *Supercómic: Mutaciones novela gráfica contemporánea* [Supercomics: Contemporary graphic novel mutations], ed. Santiago García (Madrid: Errata, 2013), 25–38 (30).

19 Xavier Dapena, '"Nobody Expects the Spanish Revolution": Memoria indignada e imaginarios de la historia en la narrativa gráfica española contemporánea' [Indignant memory and historical mindsets in contemporary Spanish graphic narrative], *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 50, no. 1 (2015): 79–107 (92).

20 Abel Grau, '"El arte de volar", crónica del choque de utopía y realidad en la España del siglo XX' ['El arte de volar' A chronicle of the clash of utopia and reality in 20th-century Spain], *El País* (16 November 2010), https://elpais.com/cultura/2010/11/16/actualidad/1289862004_850215.html.

11 Chris Ware, 'Introduction', in *The Best American Comics 2007*, ed. Chris Ware and Anne Elizabeth Moore (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), xiii–xxiv (xxii).

12 Jorge L. Catalá Carrasco, Paulo Drinot and James Scorer, 'Introduction', in *Comics and Memory in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), 3–32.

13 Diego Espiña Barros, 'El día que mi padre comenzó a hablar: Trauma y memoria de la guerra civil española en *Un largo silencio* de Miguel Gallardo' [The day my father started talking: Trauma and memory of the Spanish Civil War in *Un largo silencio* by Miguel Gallardo], *CuCo – Cuadernos de Cómic* 7 (2016): 88–109 (91).

14 Hillary Chute, *Why Comics: From Underground to Everywhere* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 15.

15 Hillary Chute, 'The Texture of Retracing in Marjane Satrapi's "Persepolis"', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1–2 (2008): 92–110 (93–94).

A pesar de que mi padre no hablaba mucho conmigo, yo tenía con él una extraña complicidad. Por eso en el álbum hablo de una alianza de sangre entre él y yo. A fin de cuentas la suya todavía corre por mis venas. La historia, por tanto, no podía contarse de un modo distante e impersonal. Había que hacerlo con la primera persona que [...], en ningún caso, supone una traición a la vida real de mi padre.²¹

[Although my father didn't speak much to me, I had a strange complicity with him. That's why in the book I speak of a blood alliance between him and me. At the end of the day, his blood flows through my veins. His story, therefore, can't be told in a distant or impersonal way. I had to tell it in the first person, which (...) in no way betrays my father's real life.]

Roca also tells a story of the inheritance of memory, but with a strong focus on objects as carriers of this. *La casa* portrays memory as an active and shared effort, a portrayal with which many theorists agree. Memory studies scholars often reference Maurice Halbwachs's *On Collective Memory*, in which he proposes that memory is a social process and an activity; its creation requires work and communication,²² or Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), where he defines collective memory as 'what remains of the past in the lived reality of groups, or what these groups make of the past' (emphasis added).²³ Although Nina Fisher calls memory work a 'natural human activity', most of the theory on intergenerational memory relates to the offspring of survivors of mass violence, who inherit an absent or unprocessed memory.²⁴ Other than the very natural human experience of losing a parent, no extreme loss or intense pain is present in *La casa*. Nonetheless, the comic still shows memory as a shared effort, and it reveals the blurry limits between individual and collective memory across generations.

Roca and Memory

All of Roca's recent comics explore memory and oblivion: for example, his aforementioned breakout success *Arrugas* is about

21 Herme Cerezo, 'Conversación con Antonio Altarriba y Kim sobre "El arte de volar", un tebeo magistral' [Conversation with Antonio Altarriba and Kim about 'El arte de volar', a masterful comic book], *Siglo XX* (5 November 2009), <http://www.diariosigloxxi.com/texto-diario/mostrat/48818>.

22 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

23 Quoted in Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 95.

24 Nina Fischer, *Memory Work: The Second Generation* (London: Palgrave MacMillan: 2015), 4.

Alzheimer's patients; *Las calles de arena* [Streets of sand] (2009) is about a man losing his memory and his identity as he wanders a labyrinthine city; *El invierno del dibujante* [The winter of the cartoonist] (2010) reclaims the forgotten story of cartoonists fighting for artistic rights under the dictatorship; and *Los surcos del azar* [Twists of fate] (2013) intentionally brought recognition to the anti-fascist Spaniards who liberated Paris in the Second World War.²⁵ Many of these books reclaim the stories of those who are forgotten, lost, or silenced by the machine of modern society.

In some ways, *La casa* is the next logical chapter of *Arrugas*. Whereas *Arrugas* focused on dementia in old age, *La casa* focuses on the aftermath of an aged parent's death. As I have suggested about Altarriba's and Gallardo's comics, the small story in *La casa* is representative of a much bigger story – one that reads as largely universal yet still specific to a time and place. In interviews, Roca has stated that in *La casa* he wished to offer tribute to the 99 per cent of the population that never gets to be a protagonist of a story, did not get traumatised in the postwar years and did not do anything more heroic than create a family while surviving a period of austerity.²⁶

Roca calls the phenomenon by which a relatively large number of impoverished Spaniards purchased and maintained second homes in the 1970s and 1980s 'very Spanish' and 'very Mediterranean'. Also relevant to how *La casa*'s story is representative, Roca notes the tendency of his father's whole generation towards Diogenes syndrome, known as senile squalor syndrome and characterised by self-neglect, compulsive hoarding and apathy. Because of this tendency among aging Spaniards (likely in response to the postwar poverty they had survived), many second homes became landing places for school projects, old fabric, toys, discarded gifts and so on, and Roca calls them 'un Gran Museo de Recuerdos' [a great museum of memories/mementos].²⁷ The museum of mementos ties the two generations and makes the family's past visible – even impossible to ignore – in the present.

In fact, the entire culture of the Spanish Transition to democracy, according to Guillem Martínez, was meant to continue the

25 Paco Roca, *El invierno del dibujante* (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2010); Paco Roca, *Las calles de arena* (Bilbao: Astiberri, 2009); Roca, *Los surcos del azar*.

26 Abella, Anna. 'Paco Roca, la muerte y ausencia del padre' [Paco Roca, the father's death and absence], *El Periódico* (4 December 2015), <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/ocio-y-cultura/paco-roca-comic-Casa-padre-4725848>.

27 Ibid. Translation note: the same word, *recuerdos*, means either mementos or memories. The implications for objects of memory are important to keep in mind for the analysis of *La casa*.



Illustration 8.2. Simultaneity of past and present (Paco Roca, *La casa*, 76). © text and illustrations 2015, 2018 by Paco Roca. All rights reserved. Published by agreement with Astiberri Ediciones.

lingers in the present too. This phenomenon, Chute writes, the ‘all-at-onceness’, [or] “symphonic effect” of comics, heightens the sense of the house as an ordinary yet powerful place of memory.³⁴

In addition to the apparent simultaneity of memories in the intradiegetic present, *La casa* also reinforces the presence of memories through devices such as the literary and visual metaphors of trees, house, food and land. A detail panel of a tree marks the passing seasons when Antonio’s daughter takes him to regular doctor’s appointments over several months, for instance.³⁵ Trees are a frequent symbol for intergenerational memory, and the most important tree to Antonio is the fig tree (Illustration 8.3). Antonio’s son José wonders, ‘Mi padre no era constante con las cosas [. . .]. No sé por qué esa fijación por las higueras’ [My father wasn’t steady about things (. . .). I don’t understand why he had that obsession with figs].³⁶ This question is answered for readers in a flashback to Antonio’s childhood, when he breaks through a fence to play in an old streetcar and then eats figs while reclined in the branches of the tree. Here, as a child in the forbidden fig tree, Antonio later

34 Chute *Why Comics*, 25.

35 Roca, *La casa*, 111–116.

36 *Ibid.*, 41.

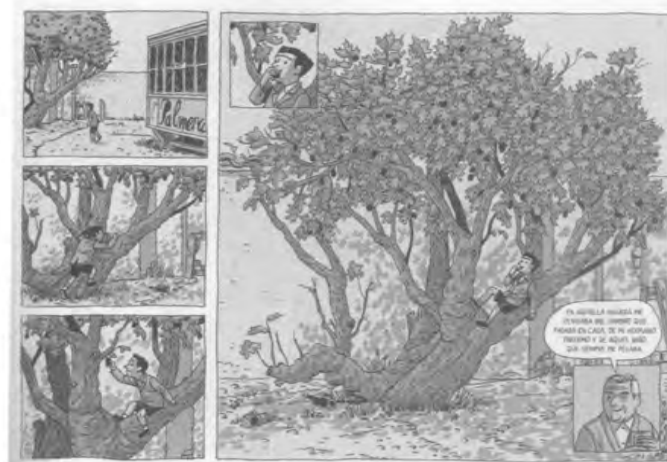


Illustration 8.3. The fig tree (Paco Roca, *La casa*, 47) © text and illustrations 2015, 2018 by Paco Roca. All rights reserved. Published by agreement with Astiberri Ediciones.

explains to a friend, ‘me olvidaba del hambre que pasaba en casa, de mi hermano enfermo y de aquel niño que siempre me pegaba’ [I forgot the hunger I felt at home, my sick brother and that kid who always hit me].³⁷ After Antonio’s death, this same friend speculates to Antonio’s son, ‘Supongo que todos tenemos un momento feliz que recordamos siempre. Para tu padre debía ser ése’ [I suppose we all have a happy moment that we always remember. For your father, that must have been his].³⁸ The fig tree Antonio plants on his own land becomes both a reminder of his postwar past, and an obligation for his children (to care for it now).

Within and beyond *La casa*, trees are a frequent metaphor for family, and the book takes advantage of this connotation with a large-scale illustration to diagram the family structure that José lays out verbally for his girlfriend (Illustration 8.4). The inherited plot of land and its house appear as elements growing on the family tree, as does the text of José’s explanations about who is who, and how everyone is connected. The house and its land appear in the same position as members of the family. Unlike many family tree layouts, here the most recent additions of the family are at the

37 *Ibid.*, 47.

38 *Ibid.*, 48.

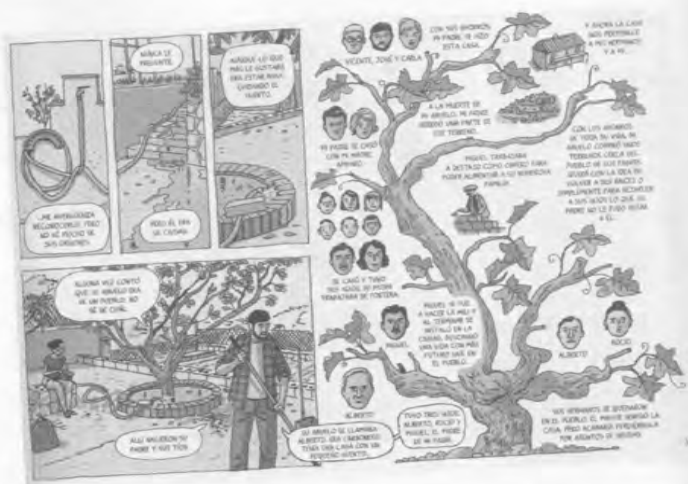


Illustration 8.4. The family tree (Paco Roca, *La casa*, 31) © text and illustrations 2015, 2018 by Paco Roca. All rights reserved. Published by agreement with Astiberri Ediciones.

top of the page. This design choice is a clever way to introduce all the family members, and it leads the reader through an unusual U-shaped engagement with the page. This page provides a clear example of what Chute proposes in arguing that 'comics locates the reader in space and for this reason is able to spatialize memory', and 'because of its spatial conventions, comics is able to map a life, not only figuratively but literally'.³⁹

Another large-scale diagram – this time, one of an almond tree's trunk – also spatialises the memory of various past events and draws a map of the family's shared life. Like the detail panels set alongside Antonio's regular doctor's visits, here the tree's growth makes visible the seasonal passage of time. After cutting down the large tree from his father's land, José looks at the trunk's rings and explains, 'Aquí sería el momento en que mi padre lo regó por última vez. Aquí sería cuando dio las primeras almendras, y más o menos por aquí, lo plantamos' [This would be when my father watered it for the last time. Here would be when it first bore almonds, and here, more or less, when we planted it].⁴⁰ Each of these events connects visually (by colour and by diagrammatic line) to a

39 Chute, 'Comics Form and Narrating Lives', 109.

40 Roca, *La casa*, 33.



Illustration 8.5. The tree speaks (Paco Roca, *La casa*, 30) © text and illustrations 2015, 2018 by Paco Roca. All rights reserved. Published by agreement with Astiberri Ediciones.

specific annual ring on the trunk, further reinforcing the way the past lingers visibly in the present.

In another scene, José mentions to his girlfriend that he finds it strange to sit in his father's house without being asked to help with any tasks or projects, until the rustling leaves seem to call to him (Illustration 8.5). Antonio's ghost returns to say, 'Ayúdame con esto, anda. Voy a construir una caseta aquí para poder hacer las barbacons' [Help me with this; come on. I'm going to build a hut here so we can have barbecues].⁴¹ Their interchange reveals that Antonio's presence remains in the space where he spent so much time and energy, and suggests visually that his voice lives in the very tree he planted.

Antonio's presence remains palpable inside the house as well. Not only is the second home a repository for all the objects that have nowhere else to go, but also Antonio's hard work went into its many projects throughout the decades he spent there. Unfortunately, Antonio's children do not know what to do with the objects of their past, and they suppose they will have to discard them in the dumpster outside. Roca's use of design and colour are remarkable once again, as they illustrate the origins of some precious but discarded

41 Ibid., 30.



Illustration 8.6. Traces of the past in the dumpster (Paco Roca, *La casa*, 20).
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objects of memory in the dumpster (Illustration 8.6). These items have been chosen and saved for many decades, and the literary scholar Bill Brown explains that 'family heirlooms are meaningful beyond their legibility as carriers of memory, almost as though by association they have soaked up traces of the former owners' being'.⁴² The sense that these objects could contain a record of the past, even traces of their owners, is heightened by the colours on the page and makes their relegation to the dumpster more tragic.

The house itself has 'soaked up traces' of its owner's being too. Roca explains to an interviewer:

La casa somos nosotros, la forma que le hemos dado y la que nos ha dado a nosotros. La casa es el contenedor de los recuerdos de una vida. Quería entender al padre a través de la casa y todos los elementos que hay en ella.

[We are the house, the shape we gave it, and that it gave us. The house is the container for the memories/mementos of a life. I wanted to understand the father by way of the house and all of the elements that are in it.]

42 Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 104.

Roca goes on to note that his decision to give *La casa* a horizontal orientation recreates the orientation of the house itself, which elevates the idea of comics as a site of memory.⁴³ The book is the house, and both contain memories and juxtapose different moments in time.

In addition to the figs that will grow on Antonio's favourite tree and remind us of his childhood, rituals around food at the family's second home bring additional weight to intergenerational memory. In *La casa*, what Patricia Caplan has written is true: 'food is never "just food" and its significance can never be purely nutritional'.⁴⁴ The sensory experience of foods triggers memories, while the ritual of family meals cements collective identity. The first flashback in the comic shows a family meal – Antonio's birthday lunch – under his beloved yet rickety pergola. This and other annual food rituals echo the aforementioned practice of marking each passing year as if they were rings in the trunk of a tree. In fact, the father's obsession with the pergola dates back to his admiration for a similar traditional meal among his boss's family, whose country home he calls an 'ambiente de ensueño' [a fantasy place] that symbolises 'llegar a ser el patriarca de una familia . . . y tener un terreno y una casa donde reunirse y disfrutar de la familia' [becoming the patriarch of a family . . . and having land and a house to gather together and enjoy the family].⁴⁵ The memory of a plentiful and elegant meal is especially powerful in the post-war 'years of hunger'.

At the flashback birthday meal, the siblings' partners meet each other for the first time. José complains about the timing of the meal, which may cause him to miss a movie. His sister Carla worries about her young daughter being cold. These comments foreshadow other, more serious conflicts regarding the siblings' priorities and responsibilities. Specifically, as already seen in Illustration 8.2, resentment arises from those left behind to care for the family and the home. Further, in the present day, the surviving siblings continue to have different approaches to food, which adds another element of conflict to their interactions. José dislikes cooking, so he and his girlfriend snack on potato chips and buy frozen pizzas. His older brother Vicente complains that this way of eating is a waste of money.⁴⁶ The comic suggests partial resolution when

43 Infame&Co, 'Entrevista a Paco Roca', *El Portaluco* (9 November 2015), <https://elportaluco.com/la-Casa-entrevista-a-paco-roca>.

44 Patricia Caplan, *Food, Health, and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.

45 Roca, *La casa*, 36.

46 Ibid., 54.

the whole family finally enjoys frozen pizzas together and reminisces about the birthday lunch we saw at the start of the comic.⁴⁷

Other scenes focus on produce grown on the very land the siblings have inherited. This land has special significance as a place of memory, as the seeds and saplings that Antonio planted continue to live in the present, more immobile than the children he engendered, and who also represent his ongoing legacy. In more political contexts, some of the debates around historical memory in Spain have centred on opposing tendencies to cover or to uncover sites of memory, including former prisons.⁴⁸ Many of the fiercest debates have swirled around access and funding for the literal unearthing of mass graves. In *La casa*, the land serves as connection between past, present and future as well.

In a metaphor for their shifting roles in the family, Roca plays with the visual representation of the passage of time by exaggerating the relative heights of Antonio and José in two parallel panels on a two-page spread (Illustration 8.7). In the first panel, the two characters harvest potatoes as José listens to his father's advice. In this visual exaggeration, we are to understand that as a child, José looked up to his father. In the second panel, and as echoed in Antonio's explanation of his humble job, José grows aware that his father is a simple, even powerless, man. He is, we might even say, the salt of the earth.

According to Xavier Dapena, the publication of Roca's *Arrugas*, along with its contemporary *María y yo* [María and I] (by Miguel Gallardo, the aforementioned author of *Un largo silencio*), marked the beginning of the 'predominio de la materia de la memoria, no solo de "memoria histórica" [predominance of the subject of memory, not just 'historical memory']'.⁴⁹ As this chapter has described, *La casa* advances this shift, introducing a nuanced exploration of banal and personal, yet still collective and intergenerational, memories in Spain. If left unattended, memories of Antonio would fade and dry like the plants in his yard. As Roca explains about *La casa*,

Esos árboles, ese campo, es, al final, lo único que le queda. Cuando él ya no está esos árboles se van secando, esos frutos van cayendo al suelo sin que nadie los recoja. Es como la casa pero con elementos vivos.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁸ M. Cinta Ramblado-Minero, 'Sites of Memory / Sites of Oblivion in Contemporary Spain', *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 36, no. 1 (2011): 29–42 (32).

⁴⁹ Dapena, "Nobody Expects the Spanish Revolution", 80.

⁵⁰ Infame&Co, 'Entrevista a Paco Roca'.



Illustration 8.7. Growth and perspective (Paco Roca, *La casa*, 18–19). © text and illustrations 2015, 2018 by Paco Roca. All rights reserved. Published by agreement with Astiberri Ediciones.

[Those trees, that land, is, in the end, all that is left for (the father). When he is gone, those trees dry out, those fruits keep falling on the ground without anyone to pick them. It's like the house but with living elements.]

This question of who will carry on the memory and the chores of a generation drives Roca to conclude this comic by suggesting that the surrounding community must do the work of maintaining memories across generations.

La casa draws near its close when the family eats together under a new pergola that honours Antonio's memory. The middle child, 'the writer', says, 'No necesitamos esta casa para acordarnos de Papá' [We don't need this house to remember Dad], and despite their earlier conflicts, there is a lovely panel where the family seems united, glowing and discussing their interconnected future.⁵¹ Yet the book does not end there. The family members go back to their respective homes and a 'For Sale' sign appears on the gate of the house. Antonio's friend prepares for a last visit to the dead man, setting up a concrete block where his old friend can sit, and Antonio (or his ghost) appears. The two men talk about how important it is for them to gather family together at their country homes. But we readers now know that Antonio's children have likely gathered together there for the last time.

The last thing the ghost and his friend say to each other is about the fig tree. Antonio says, 'No me voy a morir sin subirme a las ramas a comer higos' [I'm not going to die without climbing the branches to eat figs] as he walks away.⁵² The friend finishes his drink, frees the tree from its supports, gathers up all its roots and takes it with him. In so doing, he picks up an established symbol of the past, of memories and of a friend, and accepts the responsibility of providing ongoing attention to this living memory trace.

If the symbolism of the tree were not clear enough, *La casa* presents just one last indication of the importance of carrying on our ancestors' struggles: the book closes with a photograph of Roca and his real-life father, deceased shortly before Roca wrote this book. Evoking the age-old idea that photographs exist between life and death, the book's final photograph serves as an apt metaphor for the book's entirety. The photo offers one more reminder of a message carried throughout the comic: it is necessary to honour the legacy of those silenced and buried, so that their memories live on.

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51 Roca, *La casa*, 121.

52 Ibid., 127.