

Comics as a critical reading of history in the construction of identity and territorial diversity

El cómic como lectura crítica de la historia en la construcción de la identidad y la diversidad territorial

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Abstract

This article approaches a genre little studied in the academic field: comics and historical comics in particular, that is, comics that use history with a capital H as a backdrop to explain and disseminate ideas. We analyse how comic features favour the dissemination of concepts such as historical memory and it is an ideal tool to establish an ideology. In the present case, we are dealing with the comic in the Catalan language that deals with the medieval history of Catalonia with the objective of verifying, on the one hand, the ideological intentionality that is hidden behind the narration and selection of some specific events and characters of Catalan history to divulge a certain idea of territorial and identity construction and, on the other hand, to propose a model for analysing comics both from the literary point of view, from the narrative structures, and from the visual point of view.

Keywords: Comic; historical memory; text analysis; Catalan history.

Resumen

El presente artículo se aproxima a un género poco estudiado en el ámbito académico como es el cómic y en particular el cómic histórico, es decir el que utiliza la historia con mayúsculas como telón de fondo para explicar y difundir ideas. Observamos como las características del cómic favorecen la divulgación de conceptos como el de memoria histórica y es una herramienta idónea para establecer una ideología. En el caso que nos ocupa tratamos el cómic en lengua catalana que versa sobre la historia medieval de Catalunya con los objetivos de comprobar, por un lado, la intencionalidad ideológica que se esconde tras la narración y selección de unos hechos y unos personajes concretos de la historia catalana para divulgar una determinada idea de construcción territorial e identitaria y, por el otro, proponer un modelo de análisis del cómic tanto desde el punto de vista literario, de las estructuras narrativas, como desde el punto de vista visual.

Palabras clave: Cómic; memoria histórica; análisis de textos; historia de Catalunya.



COMICS AS A MULTIMODAL MEDIUM: OWN FEATURES AND FEATURES SHARED WITH OTHER MEDIA

Defining what is a comic, graphic novel or illustrated album is a complicated task, mainly because of the narrow line that separates all these genres, since they all have in visual language, in illustration, one of their main *raison d'être*. In fact, as [Groensteen \(2013\)](#) points out, it would be useful to find the common denominator of all the conceptions that these forms of expression present from different points of view. These are books, narrative texts in which the importance of the narrative is carried by illustrations, images. Hence we refer to a multimodal medium in which texts and images go hand in hand to form a unique and singular architecture:

“When images are essential to understand who does what, how, when and why; when, by observing it, we can get a full and reliable idea of the story or anecdote being told, explicitly or implicitly, and when, by analysing it, we can appreciate how and why that iconic discourse expresses what it expresses” ([Duran, 2008, p. 16](#)).

It is then that we are dealing with an illustrated text. Therefore, it is clear that these types of genres share joint synergies in establishing the meaning of the story, so that in order to understand what happens in it, we must go back to what the words say as well as what the illustrations express. The sequential images, the format, the size, the colour, the typography used, the background, the arrangement of the elements on the page are intrinsic characteristics of these genres, which also share the elements of narration, such as the narrator, the characters, the events, the time and the space.

In order to define comics, an “industrial object [...] that is massively reproduced by mechanical means” ([Vilches, 2015, p. 15](#)), has not been an easy task for decades, nor is it currently an easy task. One reason was given by [Altarriba \(2008, 2011\)](#) pointed out barely a decade ago: comics have aroused little interest due, perhaps, to their caricatural bias in the nineteenth century, its childish, and sometimes moralising, nature in the twentieth century and “the popularity not without vulgarity that it reached between 1930 and 1960” ([Altarriba, 2011, p. 9](#)). Moreover, from a conceptual point of view, comics and comic books have lived “at the intersection, always marginal, of other media” ([Altarriba, 2008, p. 1](#)), to the point of coining terms that take more into account the relations of comics with other media than their own merits. We are referring to terms such as “literature in prints” or “drawn literature” ([Altarriba, 2008, p. 1](#)), among others.

In any case, the specialised bibliography does give comics a set of characteristics that define them as a multimodal medium which, among other possibilities, is that of reading a comic book in which, as has already been pointed out, text and image go hand in hand. Among them, the following can specifically be highlighted: it is a specific form of expression and a delimited means of communication, given that we can talk about adventure comics or historical comics, such as those we will analyse in this work. Secondly, they are stories that “are all told following a code, a pictographic grammar, a scripto-iconic rhetoric, a lexical-graphic combination, which gives them originality while making them legible” ([Altarriba, 2011, p. 9](#)). And thirdly, “it is not enough for it to be a story in 'drawn' images”. It has to be reproduced in printed form. It must be arranged sequentially in contiguous figurative spaces within an overall space (vignettes on a page)” ([Altarriba, 2011, p. 10](#)), which [Pintor](#) defined as “the golden rule of classicism” according to which “each vignette demands the next” ([Pintor, 2017](#), cited in [Vilches, 2019, p. 208](#)). 208), although this last characteristic has been discussed only a few years ago by the latter

author who, again taking [Pintor \(2017\)](#) as a reference point for study, states that from the 1930s onwards other historical modes of narration in comics were imposed ([Vilches, 2019, p. 208](#)).

Distinguishing and singling out comics from among the so-called illustrated genres with which they share literalism seems an arduous task. The answer lies in the intervention of the reader. [Mc Cloud \(2005, p. 9\)](#) defines comics as “juxtaposed illustrations and other images in deliberate sequence, with the purpose of conveying information and eliciting an aesthetic response from the reader”. This succession of images forces the reader to participate actively in the story, decoding, filling in the discursive gaps between images, with the aim of constructing, or filling in the story ([Suau, 2021](#)). Or, in the words of [Altarriba \(2011\)](#), “the reader’s eyes will give it a meaning according to the circumstances of reception” (p. 12). In this sense, the definition of comics fits in perfectly with post-textual literary theories where the reader is placed at the top of the interpretative hierarchy, granting him/her all the prerogatives over the meaning of the text, insofar as it is the reader who ultimately constructs the text ([Pardo-Jiménez, 2021](#)). Comic thus become a current form of communication where emphasis is placed on the role played by the reader, on his or her interpretation of the work, being a perfect tool for the construction of meaning, for reading practice from different points of view, for metaliterary reflection on the role of the reader in the construction of the literary artefact, for the metacognitive abstraction of the interpretation of meaning, of narrative comprehension. This is an understanding that depends on the reader’s textual and non-textual knowledge. For the comic takes characteristics from various arts: from literature, the texts, dialogues, onomatopoeias and graphic symbols; from cinema, the shots, their chaining and angles of view; from theatre, the facial expressions, body gestures and the whole performance; from painting and photography, the composition of images, perspective, the use of colour and the play of light and shadows.

All of this makes comics a magnificent teaching tool for learning reading skills, enriching vocabulary, developing oral and written expression, as well as the ability to memorise, stimulates creativity, develops verbal and visual language literacy, and contributes to understanding and having a critical attitude towards the social and cultural reality of their immediate environment ([Ortiz, 2009](#)).

COMICS AND HISTORICAL MEMORY

Comics can be an ideal tool for working on historical reality with young readers ([Fernández-de-Arriba, 2018](#)), because they belong to a medium that sharpens the reader’s thinking and forces him/her to create his/her own message through images and texts. Not only do they help to develop imagination, but they are also a discourse that the reader must make his or her own in order to position him or herself in front thereof and, consequently, take sides in one direction or another. Hence, comics help young readers to construct their own identity and thinking on subjects such as history.

In fact, the theme of historical memory marks a before and after in the valuation of the genre as an artistic and cultural medium. Thus, the work that marks this milestone by winning a Pulitzer is [Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* \(1986\)](#), which deals with the Holocaust, explaining the family history. In fact, the autobiographical format, which is widely used in comics, serves to portray an era. There are many examples of comics that narrate historical events, both from a documentary, essayistic or journalistic point of view, such as

Best of enemies (2012) by Jean-Pierre Filiu and David B. or *Palestine* (1993) by Joe Sacco, for example; and from the point of view of personal and social memory, using the historical background to reflect on the events that took place and to extract thoughts of a social and ideological nature. Examples thereof include the aforementioned Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and the classic *Persepolis* (2000) by Marjane Satrapi, but also more contemporary ones such as *Un largo silencio* (1998) by Miguel Gallardo, or *Vive la France* (2013) by Wolinsky. We would ALSO find those comics where the historical background is the frame to narrate a fictional story, as in the case of *Los surcos del azar* (2013), by Paco Roca, or *Il était une fois en France* (2013), by Fabien Nury and Sylvain Vallée.

As for the Middle Ages, the presence of this historical period in comics has been a constant feature since the beginning, especially since the publication of Harold Foster's *Prince Valiant in the Days of King Arthur* (1937). Both this foundational work and many of the comics about the period convey a *clichéd* vision of the medieval world: a dark, dangerous era in which knights, castles and even fantastic elements such as dragons are mixed in the collective imagination, with a literary and romantic vision of history (Gallo & Jativa, 2017), as we will see, somewhat distant from the vision offered by the Catalan comics to which we will devote particular attention in this study.

Depending on their relationship with history, Oriol García (Gallo & Jativa, 2017), author of the comics analysed in this paper, divides albums into: informative, usually with an excess of information that makes them unattractive, while they are not useful as a reference tool for the student; entertaining, in which the historical framework is just a scenario that is taken care of according to the author's own interest; and mixed, in which the plot can be invented or real, but always framed within historical facts, so it can also serve as an informative or instructive tool, which is the case of the comics we are dealing with.

COMICS AND THE HISTORY OF CATALONIA: TOWARDS THE CONSTRUCTION OF ITS OWN IDENTITY

If in international comics the memorial narration of the great world conflicts is a fundamental theme, such as the world wars and the conflicts in the Middle East, Palestine, Iran, Iraq, in the case of Catalonia, comics have dealt with three key dates in its history: the medieval period, the war of succession and the civil war. The choice of these periods corresponds to three moments in the ideological construction of Catalonia as a territory. If the medieval period represents the birth of this territory, the Spanish War of Succession, with its defeat by the troops of Philip of Anjou, marked the end of the effective independence of the former Crown of Aragon, which was definitively assimilated into the Castilian centralism represented by the Bourbon monarchy. For its part, the Spanish Civil War symbolises the penultimate attempt to fight for Catalan uniqueness, as well as a propitious period for the recovery of and reflection on the concept of historical memory (Falguera, 2012).

In this sense, the comic format, its visual and narrative appeal, its popular and informative nature represents an ideal instrument for the recovery of historical memory and the vindication of national cultural identity (García-Ruiz, 2019). During the first decade of the 21st century, we can read the first attempts to publish works that deal with the civil war and the recovery of historical memory through comics: *Cuerda de presas* (2005), by Jorge García and Fidel Martínez, *Nuestra guerra civil* (2006) and *Malos tiempos* (2007), by

Carlos Giménez, and *Un llarg silenci* by Miguel Gallardo are the origins thereof. The creation of the National Comic Prize in 2007 and the fact that the first prize-winners are works of a social nature flattens the path towards the recovery of historical memory. The subsequent rise of the graphic novel has made a decisive contribution to the theme.

Thus, the comic becomes a genre conducive to the recovery of this memory, because on the one hand it represents, graphically reconstructs characters, objects and environments of the period, for example it can represent the greyness of Franco's regime in greyish tones or in black and white, and on the other hand, it allows us to develop the fragmentary approach to reality, typical of memory, somewhere between the real and the fictitious, to point out in a partial and subjective way fragments of our history as in the case of the Catalan mediaeval myths.

In this article, we look at the first of the historical periods listed above: the medieval period. As we have pointed out, the Middle Ages saw the birth of Catalonia as a territory in its own right, first from the Frankish counties, and in particular from the figure of Wilfred the Hairy (840-897), and later as part of the Crown of Aragon. This territorial identification is based on historical figures that have become myths in Catalan historiography. In this respect, the legend of the creation of the Catalan flag is particularly interesting. Wilfred the Hairy, before dying, wounded in battle against the Saracens, drew with his hand, with his own blood, four vertical bars on the yellow shield that protected him. This fact gave rise to the flag with the four stripes. Evidently, the figure of Wilfred is real, but neither the battle, nor the act of drawing the bars, nor the heraldic sense itself are true.

Apart from Wilfred the Hairy, the comics studied deal with other key figures or events in the medieval history of Catalonia: King James I (1208-1276), responsible for the incorporation of the lands of Valencia and the Balearic Islands into the Crown of Aragon; Count Despertaferro Guillem Galceran de Cartellà (1230-1306), the first Almogavar captain, leader of the Crown's Mediterranean expansion; and the Frankish counts, Hug Roger III (1430-1503) and Ermessenda of Carcassonne (972-1058).

These comics thus relate historical events and real characters, but from a mythical and legendary perspective that contributes to perpetuating a mythical idea of the history of Catalonia and its birth as a nation, an idea that is based on the romantic historiography of the 19th century and that is not always historically true or verifiable.

METHOD AND OBJECTIVE

This article analyses 10 comic strips that fictionally narrate the history of Catalonia from its founding origins with Wilfred the Hairy to the union of the Catalan-Aragonese Crown with the Crown of Castile in the 15th century. On the one hand, the analysis takes into consideration the basic elements of comic language (Fernández de Arriba, 2018), the vignette, planes and angles, narrative sequencing, balloons, lines of movement or kinetics, visual metaphors and graphic signs, onomatopoeias; and on the other, the narrative elements, such as time and space, the characters with their facial expressions and body gestures and postures, the events of the narrative and the themes that are addressed. All of this with three objectives:

1. To verify the ideological intentionality behind the narration and selection of specific events and characters from Catalan history;

2. To accept the efficacy of the genre as a useful instrument for the dissemination and teaching of certain events in the history of Catalonia;
3. To propose a model of analysis of a genre that is very popular but far from the academy, such as comics.

COMICS ANALYSIS

As we have already mentioned, 10 comics are presented, 9 of which are written by Oriol Garcia Quera, the main author who has dedicated his efforts to the genre of historical comics in Catalonia. Born in Barcelona in 1967, he began his career in the children's magazine *Cavall Fort* and specialises in historical comics, particularly of characters and episodes from the history of Catalonia. The comics under study, in chronological order of the story they tell, are:

- *Guifré 897. L'origen de la nació* (Casals, 2006). 57-page album, colour, hard cover, size 30x21.5 cm. This is a comic dedicated to the historical figure credited with the creation of the Catalan flag. The text recounts Wilfred's work to unite the county territories linked to the Frankish monarchy he received. It was a fragmented, depopulated territory under constant threat from the warlords of the upper frontier of Al-Andalus. Wilfred sets himself up as the leader of these territories and "lays the foundations of the nation" as explained in the paratext on the back cover (Garcia-Quera, 2006).
- *L'Amenança sarraïna* (Signament i comunicació, 1995). 69-page album, colour, hard cover, size 29x21 cm. This album focuses on the struggle between the Frankish empire led by Charlemagne (742-814) against the Saracens, situating the gestation of Catalonia in the Hispanic mark, under the Carolingian influence.
- *Fa mil anys* (Cim edicions, 2006). Album of 33 pages, colour, hard cover, size 30x22 cm. and *Revenja*, album of 65 pages, colour, hard cover, size 29x21 cm. (Signament i comunicació, 1996), which explain the struggles between Christians and Saracens around the 9th and 10th centuries between Charlemagne and the Saracen generals Moussa (640-716) and Abd al-Malik (646-705).
- *Terra de frontera Olèrdola 1058* (Dalmau editor, 2015). 61-page album, colour, hard cover, size 27x20 cm. It does not focus on any specific historical figure and narrates the birth of a new Christian world with Romanesque art as the main sign of cultural and social identity in the early Middle Ages.
- *Mallorca 1229: Jaume el Conqueridor* (Casals, 2010). 80-page album, colour, hard cover, size 20x27 cm. It is about the story of the conquest of Mallorca by one of the fathers of the Catalan people, King James I.
- *El desafiament de Burdeus* (Cim edicions, 2006). 9-page album, colour, hard cover, size 30x22 cm. It recounts the Catalan-Aragonese expansion in the Mediterranean, starting with the figure of Peter III (1240-1285) and his struggle for control of Sicily. This theme is also dealt with in *El comte Despertaferro*, the only comic not published by Garcia Quera (Cartes catalanes, 2011). 47-page album, colour, hard cover, size 30x21.5 cm. This time it focuses on the figure of Guillem Galceran de Cartellà, a legendary figure in Catalan historiography. Created by Josep Ma Ramírez.

- *L'exèrcit errant: La darrera gran batalla dels almogàvers* (Signament i comunicació, 1993). 69-page album, colour, hard cover, size 29x21 cm. Produced in collaboration with Xavier Escura i Dalmau and Francesc Riart. Album dedicated to the Almogavars and in particular to the episode of the battle of the River Cephis (Greece, 1311).

- *Hug Roger III, un rebel indomable* (Cim edicions, 2006). 18-page album, colour, hard cover, size 29.5x21 cm. This comic strip is based on real events in the history of Catalonia, much less known than the previous ones, but equally symbolic: the life of Count Hug Roger III, his family and the captains in the period 1479-1487. This was the last count who resisted submission to King Ferdinand II the Catholic (1452-1516) after the Catalan Civil War (1462-1472). It suffered to a long siege by an army led by a rival count. (Joan Ramon Folc III (1375-1441)) following the king's orders, until they finally took their last stronghold by force.

From the point of view of the ideological transmission of history, the works studied can be grouped into two groups. Firstly, the group of comics that deal with the early Middle Ages, which can be subdivided into two: firstly, those comics (*Fa mil anys...*, *Revenja*, *L'amenaça sarraïna*, *Guifré 897* and *Olèrdola 1058*) that relate the origins of Catalonia. Its origins are closely linked to the Hispanic brand and its relationship with the Frankish kingdoms of northern Catalonia, which confronted the Saracen warlords from the south. These albums make clear the struggle of the Catalan warlords for their territory, for their people and for their independence from the Islamic empire. As stated in one of the paratexts of *L'amenaça sarraïna*, the story explains the epic legends of the Pyrenees and their connection with the documented history of the military chronicles of "clashes between Charlemagne and Islam that laid the foundations of the future Catalan nation" (García-Quera, 1995). Thus, while the future Castilian nation was under Arab influence, the territories of the future Catalonia fought for their independence with a clear view towards Europe, specifically towards Frankish influence. These albums portray war, rivalry, the harsh living conditions of the warlords and their men, sexuality, the everyday life of the High Middle Ages and the role of the church in the construction of national identity, as for example with the construction of the monastery of Sant Cugat in *Fa mil anys...* All of this with a strong action component that turns the historical story into a framework where war and love adventures take place. Most of these texts are undoubtedly aimed at young people, who, as well as reading for fun, can also find information in the informative appendices that the works contain. Of these, *Olèrdola 1058* is particularly noteworthy, an album slightly different from the previous ones because it presents not the struggles between Christians and Muslims, but between the various Christian counts, with art as the protagonist in the dissemination of the values of the new nation.

Secondly, we find the albums that describe the expansion, growth and fall of the territories of the Crown of Aragon, which arose from the union of the different counties that had grown and become singularised during the 10th-11th centuries, as explained in the comics analysed above. The comics in the second group range from the first expansion of the Crown to Mallorca in the 13th century, through the Mediterranean expansion of the 14th century, to the Catalan civil war and the dynastic union with the Trastámara in the second half of the 15th century. These are stories which, instead of presenting the epic grandeur of conquests and the building of a new empire, focus on the human aspects of the battles and in particular on extolling the human and military qualities, bravery and cunning of the main protagonists of the story. *Mallorca 1229* is an example of this, where the mythical

personality of King James and his tolerant, democratic and open to dialogue character are revealed, as when he distributes the booty accumulated and stolen during the conquest by auction or when he chooses a member of the Torroella family as the first lieutenant of the island, in gratitude for his loyalty. Or *Hug Roger III, un rebel indomable*, a comic a bit particular in this group because it does not relate an event outside the Catalan borders but explains the history of the Count of Pallars in his struggle against the monarchic power that leads to the civil war that ravaged Catalonia between 1462 and 1472. It is a struggle between social groups, noble families, economic crisis and confrontations over a model of power: the one close to the people, symbolised by the *Generalitat*¹, on whose side the protagonist of the story is, and the absolutist power of Ferdinand the Catholic, far removed from reality. Hug Roger III is presented as an indomitable rebel fighting for the common good of his people: “El rei Joan mai no ha estimat Catalunya! Hem de continuar la guerra fins a la fi!” (Garcia-Quera, 2004, p. 15).

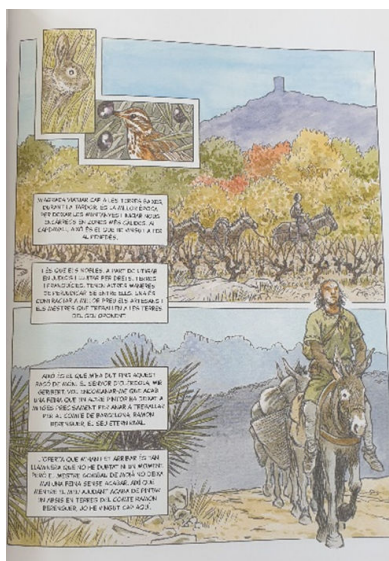
In the albums *El comte Despertaferro* and *El desafiament de Bordeus*, the struggles for the conquest of Naples and Sicily are narrated. This is possibly the most epic narrative, where, alongside Peter III's determination to conquer Sicily, we read of the harshness of the battle and the internal struggles between the king and Charles d'Anjou for control of the island and the bravery of the Catalan troops personified by Guillem Galceran de Cartellà and Roger de Llúria, leaders of the Almogavars. These troops were mercenaries who acted with impunity and brutality under the cry of *despertaferro* and controlled territories for the benefit of the Catalan-Aragonese monarchs. Instead of explaining the barbarities of war, these comics, following the pattern of medieval chronicles such as Ramón Muntaner's and perpetuated by 19th century romantic historiography, show the Almogavars and their leaders as heroes who end their days peacefully ruling their lands. Therefore, in these stories, there is an exaltation of patriotism and national glory over the narration of violence and historical reality.

As we can see, these comics identify key historical moments in the history of Catalonia with the idea of vindicating and strengthening a certain conception of the birth of Catalonia's own cultural identity and disseminating its patriotic ideal. In his albums Oriol Garcia Quera takes advantage of the narrative and dramatic resources offered by comics and places in the historical plot the fictional elements necessary to create plot tension. In fact, the vast majority of the books analysed are works of fiction based on real events that present informative and informative paratexts about the historical period in question. For example, in *Mallorca 1229*, the paratext describes the historical context through text, illustrations, photographs and infographics, explaining the figure of James I and his past, the social situation of the island of Mallorca and its inhabitants, the role of the Catalan courts in the expedition, the expedition itself and the figure of the knights. Subsequently, the conquest, the chronicle of the *Llibre del fets* and even the presence of the conquest in previous comics are explained. In the aforementioned paratext of *Olèrdola 1058*, the mark of the Penedès, the role of the church in the early Middle Ages, the function of the Romanesque as an artistic period, and we even read informative information on the current condition of the Olèrdola site and a glossary of terms that are difficult to understand for a teenage audience. This information undoubtedly helps to contextualise the comic didactically and to convey its narrative, fictional and ideological message.

Comics always begin with framed vignettes that frame the initial situation and briefly explain the historical context through text cartridges that provide the information not

displayed. These are voice-over texts that have a clearly narrative and informative function, as can be seen in [figure 1](#).

Figure 1. Olèrdola 1058 (Garcia-Quera, 2015, p. 1)



One of Oriol Garcia Quera’s graphic characteristics is his detailed composition of the page, which he works with manual techniques, in a realistic style, full of details at the service of historical re-enactment. The general shot of the larger vignettes becomes a detail shot recreating aspects of the landscape or the faces of the characters, which slows down the pace of the story and allows the reader to enter into the story experientially, living the narrative from the inside.

Discourse is successfully constructed through the sequential arrangement of the vignettes in a generally dynamic page layout, which favours both narrative interest and visual effects.

Figure 2. El desafiament de Burdeus (Garcia-Quera, Escura & Garcia-Quera, 2006, p. 36)



In figure 2, we can see how the dynamic composition of the page facilitates the narration by emphasising the aspects that are of interest at each moment, whether it is the close-up of the face of the bishop emissary of Charles of Anjou or of King Peter III, or the sharp general shot that identifies the whole of the encounter and situates us in space. This set of vignettes allows us to see other characteristics of Oriol Garcia Quera's comic, the size of the letters and the use of bold type that indicates the mood of the characters and their volume of voice, intensifying the reader's experiential sensation that we referred to earlier.

The arrangement of the vignettes highlights another of the comic's resources to mark dynamism in the narrative, the ellipsis that allows us to relate what happens in the vignette with what has happened in the previous or next one, which allows us to insinuate what has happened. As we see in figure 3, in this other example, this ellipsis is evident in this sequence where we can infer what happens between the lovers:

Figure 3. L'amença sarraïna (Garcia-Quera, Escura & Riart, 1995, p. 37)



We can also see how the author makes use of onomatopoeic resources, kinetic lines and visual metaphors to express movement and overcome the static condition of the drawing.

Oriol Garcia Quera presents hand-drawn pencil vignettes, as can be seen in many of the final pages of the comics, which are an authentic making of the album.

This manual technique is combined with colour and cold tones, which is linked to narration and has a symbolic value.

For example, reddish colours thus refer to the blood of the battle, of the struggle, and dark blue colours refer to the weather conditions in which the scene takes place. The use of colour, the pale degradation of colour, is particularly interesting to narrate a change in the chronological line of the narrative and to create a narrative flashback, as happens for example in Hug Roger III to narrate the count's childhood.

Language use is a final aspect of these albums. Beyond the visual use of language with the use of boldface, onomatopoeia and visual metaphors, it is remarkable how the language itself places the reader in a medieval and realistic world. Thus, if the character, as in the case of Hug Roger III, uses a dialectal Catalan typical of his geographical origin in the Pyrenees, the comic retains its dialectal characteristics, such as the use of the possessive "meua" instead of "meva". Or the place names that appear in all the albums respect the medieval form: Octavia del Vallés for Sant Cugat del Vallés, Sant Joan del Ter for Sant Joan de les Abadesses, or Cauco Illiberis for Cotlliure. Medieval lexicon is also used, such as *brans* for swords, *caves* for galleries, *manganells* or *fonèvol*s, which were instruments of war, or *besants*, which was a Muslim silver coin in common use.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have pointed out, using comics as a means of disseminating or extolling historical memory, cultural identities and diversity, a patriotic ideal, or disseminating a period of history that is particularly noteworthy for society as a whole is a valid and viable instrument. It is a relatively inexpensive and accessible medium, and its impact can be quite high, especially on children and young people (García-Ruiz, 2019). The combination of vignettes with simple texts in sandwiches, the use of images to explore and narrate the

events through shots and angles, the narrative sequencing, the visual metaphors and graphic signs, or the onomatopoeias are instruments that make action easier to understand and, consequently, reading and literary competence. In comics, narrative elements such as time and space, the characters with their facial expressions and body gestures and postures, the events of the narrative and the themes addressed are discovered alongside the image.

This article deals with Catalonia's medieval history and shows how the comics analysed are a powerful reading resource for disseminating certain ideas about the Catalan cultural identity and the initial construction of a specific territory, Catalonia, based on three characteristics: firstly, it is a nation that from before its origins has distinguished itself from the rest of the Iberian Peninsula with a European and Europeanising gaze; secondly, it is a territory that constantly fights for its independence, as in the civil war at the end of the 15th century; and finally, it is a people that is represented by great personalities, brave and smart, who aspire to magnify and magnify their own history. Catalonia's medieval history is the story of the greatness of a dominion that is born and grows in a tremendously hostile context and ends up defeated and assimilated, an assimilation never accepted by the main characters of these comics who convey the idea that the struggle is not over and must continue.

Therefore, it is clear that comics belong to a genre that is ideal for disseminating certain ideas because the effort of reading a markedly visual text is less than that of other media, while the format itself is an attraction that is difficult to resist for everyone, both for those who use it as a vehicle to expand their thinking and for those who read it without paying attention to the ideological discourse it may hide, as it serves as a platform for telling any story from a particular perspective and point of view (Vilches, 2014, p. 11).

In this sense, reading and analysis of comics on Catalan history allow the construction in the minds of readers of their own historical and mythological references: the Frankish counts, the Catalan kings, the Almogavars, which form the backbone of a cultural identity of the origin of the Catalan nation, in search of its own cultural, national, linguistic, mythological and, consequently, narrative identity, individualising it from neighbouring countries, and contextualising it within a Europeanist framework that advocates respect for the cultural diversity of each territory at the same time.

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Notes

¹ Government of Catalonia.