

Dissenting Voices? Controlling Children's Comics under Franco

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Abstract

The installation of the Franco dictatorship sparked an inadvertent boom in comics production. While many cartoonists hailing from Barcelona's rich satirical tradition went into exile or clandestine publication, still more turned to the children's comics market that had become firmly rooted in the Catalan capital since the 1920s. Until the 1950s, comics remained relatively free from censorial intervention and the development of characters such as La Familia Ulises, Carpanta and Doña Urraca offered cartoonists an outlet for covert critique. However, in 1952, the *Junta Asesora de la Prensa Infantil* was established to police 'inappropriate' content of children's publications, marking a turning point in Spain's comics genre. This article discusses the implications of this specific legislation for editors, artists and their comic strip characters, focusing on the publications *Pulgarcito*, *TBO* and *DDT*.

Key Words: *tebeo*, *Spanish comics*, *censorship*, *TBO*, *Pulgarcito*, *DDT*, *Junta Asesora de la Prensa Infantil*, *Francoist dictatorship*.

The rich history of comics in Spain owes much to the tradition of including illustrated narratives, caricatures and humorous cartoons in the country's satirical press, which began in the nineteenth century.¹ Nevertheless, since these periodicals also featured an abundance of text, it was not until the arrival of the children's publication *Dominguín* (1915-1916) – consisting exclusively of illustrated strips – that the comics genre in Spain truly began.² Technological improvements in printing and pictorial reproduction at the turn of the twentieth century had made a cheaper press possible and saw a concentration of publishers establish themselves in Barcelona and Valencia. This also reflected rising literacy levels, which had spawned a growing popularity in recreational reading. In this context, two publications, *TBO* (1917–1998) and *Pulgarcito* [*Tom Thumb*] (1921–1986), established a foothold for this new type of publication, which by the 1920s had become embedded in Spanish society, with *TBO* – *tebeo* – soon becoming the proprietary eponym of choice.³

Echoing *Dominguín*, both *TBO* and *Pulgarcito* broke away from an educational style in favour of more playful entertainment, while the delivery of humorous punchlines typically occupied the pictorial, rather than the textual, frame.⁴ Nevertheless, for its part, *Pulgarcito* was also responsible for the gradual introduction of speech bubbles; a practice already well-

¹Rhiannon McGlade, *Catalan Cartoons: A Cultural and Political History* (Cardiff: University Wales Press, 2016), 21.

² Until *Dominguín*'s arrival, cartoon strips were deemed incompatible with the intended didactic outlook of children's publications. See Antonio Martín, 'Apuntes para una historia de los tebeos II. La civilización de la imagen (1917–1936)', *Revista de Educación* 195 (1968), 7-21 (8).

³ Viviane Alary, 'The Spanish Tebeo', *European Comic Art* 2, no. 2 (2009), 253-276 (253). The term – adapted from the Spanish *te veo* [I see you] – remained in use unofficially until it was eventually recognised by the *Real Academia Española* [Royal Spanish Academy] in 1968.

⁴ Viviane Alary, ed., *Historietas, comics y tebeos españoles* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2002), 32.

established in other nations.⁵ Challenging for readership, the publication directly undercut *TBO*'s erstwhile low price of ten cents, charging only five. The success of *Pulgarcito* was fundamental in allowing its publishing house, El Gato Negro – later Bruguera – to establish itself in the burgeoning market.⁶ Indeed, the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939) marked a generally prosperous period for the *tebeo*, helped in part by the economic growth following Spain's neutrality during the First World War, as well as a rise in domestic comic production in response to the influence of the American adventure comic.⁷ The period also saw the intensification of a fierce rivalry between *TBO* and *Pulgarcito* during which Bruguera reportedly prohibited its contributors from using the word '*tebeo*' in their work – despite its consolidation within the vernacular – in case it might inadvertently promote the opposition.⁸

Although the outbreak of the Civil War naturally brought challenges of its own, initially, many publications were able to continue, albeit with more ideologically charged content. Indeed, the recognition of the propagandist potential of the genre saw warring factions keen to establish *tebeos* of their own. The Nationalists and their Carlist supporters produced comics with the aim of attracting members to their youth organizations, the most famous being *Pelayos*⁹ (1936-1938) and *Flechas* [Arrows] (1937-1938) – later merged into *Flechas y Pelayos* (1938-1949). On the Republican side, Gato Negro was taken over by a syndicate of the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* [National Workers' Confederation] (CNT) on 27 August 1936, although the Bruguera family was subsequently reinstated to oversee the editorial process.¹⁰ *TBO* was also appropriated, this time by the *Consejo de la Escuela Nueva Unificada* [Board for the New Unified School] (CENU) with the anarchist influences of the Barcelona graphic art syndicate.¹¹ Joaquim Buigas was permitted to continue in his post as editor on the condition that a dedicated section be included under the heading 'Floreal: Revista infantil semanal publicada bajo el signo de la Escuela Nueva Unificada' [Weekly children's magazine published under the New Unified School]. The occupation of the back page seemed to have little effect on the publication's content and was short-lived, since *Floreal* only appeared until June 1937. Indeed, despite political takeovers, according to Alary, these *tebeos* showed little interest in overt propagandist manipulation of their young audiences.¹² Nevertheless, the appropriation of *tebeos* reflected a general awareness on both sides of the power and impact of the press as propaganda as well as its potential threat in the hands of the opposition. Thus, a year prior to the war's end, legislative

⁵ Simone Castaldi, 'A Brief History of Comics in Italy and Spain', *Routledge Companion to Comics*, ed. Frank Bremllett, Roy Cook and Aaron Meskin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 83-87 (83).

⁶ El Gato Negro was established in 1910, initially publishing chapbooks. The company currently trades as Ediciones B, following a takeover by Grupo Zeta in 1987.

⁷ Alary, 'The Spanish Tebeo', 255.

⁸ Antoni Guiral, *100 años de Bruguera: de El Gato Negro a Ediciones B* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2011), 65.

⁹ *Pelayos* was the name given to the Carlist youth movement, in honour of a young Cordovan martyr from the ninth century who, despite being tortured by the emir Abderramán kept his faith (Didier Corderot, 'Adoctrinar deleitando, el ejemplo de la revista *Pelayos* (1936-1938)', *Hispanística*, 20, (2003), 93-108 (94).

¹⁰ Antonio Martín, *Historia del comic español: 1875-1939*, (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1978), 189.

¹¹ Antoni Marrimon, *Guerrers, corsaris, soldats i detectius*, (Palma: Edicions Documenta Balear, 2005), 309. Established in 1936, CENU sought to overhaul access to education in Catalonia, promoting a rationalist perspective free from religious influence.

¹² Alary, *Historietas, comics y tebeos españoles*.

measures were already in place in Nationalist-occupied areas to control the dissemination of all published material.

Originally intended as a provisional measure, the 1938 Press Law reconditioned the press as a puppet of the State and dominated the publishing industry for the subsequent three decades of the dictatorship. In its preamble, the legislation charged the free press of the Republic with engendering ‘Un sistema metódico de destrucción del Estado, decidido por el rencor de poderes ocultos’ [A methodical system of destruction of the state, driven by the resentment of occult powers] and identified a need to ‘despertar en la Prensa la idea del servicio al Estado’ [awaken in the press the notion of service to the State]. As part of this decree, the State assumed overall control of journalism as a profession, including the organisational structures of newspapers. The press was now responsible for disseminating State orders and directives to the public as well as cultivating community conscience and steering cultural formation. Thus, all material for print or broadcast had first to be submitted for official approval.

A significant challenge created by the 1938 Press Law was the lack of an articulated procedure in the day-to-day application of censorship, which naturally created discrepancies.¹³ Moreover, many of those charged with overseeing the process during the Franco period were under immense pressure themselves. With no extra training and no structured boundaries, these government employees worked mostly arbitrarily within the broad categories of: political opinions; sexual morality; religion and improper uses of language, the latter being particularly designed to prevent the appearance of Spain’s ‘other’ languages as well as dialectal variations of these.¹⁴ These challenging conditions were still more pressured since censors were personally responsible for the material that passed for publication, being subject to reprimand – including loss of salary and position – for failure to apply the law.¹⁵

Growing political pressures notwithstanding, by 1938, access to materials was becoming more of a challenge and the noticeably inferior quality of paper available rendered colour production untenable. In large part due to these pressures, *TBO* was forced to suspend publication. Nevertheless, during the industry’s state of semi-paralysis, *Pulgarcito* limped to the finish line of the Civil War, only to be silenced by Barcelona’s eventual capitulation to Nationalist troops.¹⁶

The Tebeo in Post-war Spain

In the wake of a three-year conflict, the prohibitive cost of paper and printing had by no means improved. However, the playing field had now shifted since those publications that had been sympathetic towards the victorious Nationalists, such as *Flechas y Pelayos*, were afforded both permission to publish regularly and offered subsidized rates for materials. Unsurprisingly, those that were not given the same freedoms struggled both economically – forced to pay the market price for paper – and against substantial bureaucracy in order to be able to produce and distribute their publications with any semblance of periodicity.

Naturally, the overtly critical publications that formed part of the erstwhile satirical industry located in the Republican stronghold were shut down without delay. In addition, the individuals that had contributed to these maligned periodicals also found themselves

¹³ Items censored in Madrid could be found authorised elsewhere; Justino Sinova, *La censura de prensa durante el franquismo* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1989), 149.

¹⁴ Manuel L. Abellán, *Censura y creación literaria en España (1936-1976)* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1980), 88.

¹⁵ Sinova, *La censura de prensa*, 141-142.

¹⁶ Guiral, *100 años de Bruguera*, 32.

unofficially – and in some cases officially – blacklisted. In order to continue working, the cartoonists among these practitioners were faced with three options: exile; clandestine production – which faded following the lack of Allied intervention in Spain at the end of the Second World War; and/or seeking employment in the recovering *tebeo* industry.¹⁷ With many of the country's finest graphic artists opting for the latter, somewhat ironically, Francoist repression arguably sparked a boom in the production and quality of the comics industry during the 1940s and 1950s.

Tebeos were still subject to censorship under the general umbrella of cultural production. However, while there was a discernible focus on ensuring the avoidance of sexualised images and nudity, violent themes and even examples of sadomasochistic torture could still be found in *tebeos* of the early 1940s.¹⁸ The initial lack of attention paid to the medium is ambiguous. On the one hand, it is feasible that the genre was still not taken seriously as a possible threat in terms of content. Indeed, Barrero and Manzanares have argued that the roots of the *tebeo*'s dismissal as a mere frivolity lie predominantly with *TBO* due to the immutably childish and bland content of what was still considered the prototype of the genre.¹⁹ On the other hand, given the regime's vague directives, censors were already overwhelmed by the sheer volume of potentially subversive newspapers, films, books and other material directed at an adult audience. As a result, beyond the preoccupations of a few outspoken religious figures, the impetus to scrutinise the comic genre formally took several years to emerge. Thus, although restrictions and penalties were still an everyday occurrence, the initial lack of specific scrutiny by those charged with controlling the press allowed comics of the time to act as a social barometer during the early years of the dictatorship. As Alary remarks, the *tebeo* became 'part of the fabric of everyday life in the post-war period, part of the urban landscape, creating a common space and a possibility for social exchange'.²⁰

The particular brand of graphic humour found in *tebeos* of the 1940s and 1950s 'evoked an unofficial but no less real Spain, that of ordinary people in the post-war period'.²¹ While there is some dispute over exact dates, *TBO* was the first of the non-Nationalist affiliated publications of its kind to return. However, it was unable to attain any form of periodicity until 1946, when it began to appear monthly, only moving to fortnightly in 1949.²² Keen to avoid missing the opportunities of this reopening market, *Pulgarcito* returned to the shelves – although almost unrecognisable from its namesake – at the end of 1946. These *tebeo* stalwarts were able to manipulate a loophole in the law by publishing issues without numbers or dates and making slight changes – typically through the use of subheadings – to suggest that each submission was an entirely new publication. While Bruguera rebelled and hid numbers within its publications, Buigas, always more conservative in his approach, did not return to numeration until a change in the law in 1952. This divergent approach to the legislation was indicative of the overall way in which the two publications tackled their return to the shelves. While Buigas and *TBO* had sought to resume its light, atemporal approach to humour, Bruguera took the opportunity to inject *Pulgarcito* with a

¹⁷ See McGlade, *Catalan Cartoons*, 120-166.

¹⁸ Marimon, *Guerrers, corsaris, soldats i detectius*, 16.

¹⁹ M. Barrero and J. Manzanares, 'El tebeo que dió nombre a los demás', in *Tebeos. Las revistas infantiles* (Seville: ACyT, 2014), 13-97, p. 58.

²⁰ Alary, 'The Spanish Tebeo', 261-262

²¹ *Ibid.*, 264-266.

²² Following Antonio Martín, *Apuntes para una historia de los tebeos* (Barcelona: Glénat, 2000: 132-133), it has been widely stated that *TBO* reappeared in 1941, however, Barrero has propounded a compelling argument dating the publication's return as June 1943; Manuel Barrero 'El TBO de Buigas, el TBO de siempre', *Tebeosfera*, 8, (2011), np.

new lease of life, hiring a new team of contributors to reach a broader audience that would now include an older readership. Indeed, the editorial's post-war monopoly on the country's finest cartoonists, inspired Terenci Moix's identification of the 'Escuela Bruguera' [Bruguera School].²³

Initially characterised by short strips featuring ephemeral characters – although some did enjoy relative periods of endurance – *TBO* nevertheless also laid claim to one of the longest-running and most iconic series in the history of the Spanish *tebeo*, *La Familia Ulises* (1945–1998). Drawn and written by Marino Benejam (1890-1975) and Buigas respectively, the strip humorously charted the daily travails of a middle-class family from Barcelona. The strong focus on its patriarch Ulises Higuero, who always had cause for complaint via extensive monologues, has led Vázquez de Parga to argue that the series could not be considered part of the family subgenre.²⁴ The remaining family members were, however, developed characters in their own right, and played discernible roles in the elaboration of the narrative. Ulises' wife Sinforosa was an unquestionable social climber, keen to marry off their attractive daughter, Lolín, to a rich suitor. The younger children, Merceditas and Policarpito – often accompanied by the family dog, Tresky – typically introduced a mischievous yet kind-hearted tone. Meanwhile, hailing from rural Catalonia, Sinforosa's mother, Doña Filomena, was the source of much of the humour in the strip via malapropisms and mispronunciations involving Catalan-Castilian linguistic play. Beyond the surface humour created by these linguistic foibles, Vázquez Montalbán has observed that 'los catalanismos que se infiltraban en el habla cotidiana [...] traducían la irregularidad de una situación, satirizaban los esfuerzos de aquella burguesía pequeñísima por hacer meritos en la nueva situación' [the Catalanisms that infiltrated everyday speech translated the irregularity of a situation and satirised the efforts of this petite bourgeoisie to gain recognition in the new situation].²⁵ Benejam played down the existence of any political critique in his depiction of the family's life, claiming that it was nothing more than observational humour.²⁶ Indeed, as Barrero has noted, Buigas was typically conservative and conformist in his approach, something that was reflected in the bland humour that typified *TBO*.²⁷ And yet, in the elaboration of *La Familia Ulises*, the *costumbrist* style undoubtedly facilitated elements of social critique manifested via its reflection of extant social divisions.

One of the most successful cartoonists of the Bruguera 'schools' was Josep Escobar (1908-1994), responsible for many of Bruguera's best-known strips including *Carpanta* (1947), *Zipi y Zape* (1948) and *Doña Tula, suegra* [Mrs Tula, mother-in-law] (1951). Before arriving at Bruguera, Escobar contributed to the Catalan satirical press and was considered one of the war's sharpest cartoonists. The bitter experiences of the late 1930s – including internment in Barcelona's Modelo Prison for assisting the rebellion – left their mark and many of Escobar's cartoons projected an acerbic attitude to the situation of the day. This was particularly discernible in his iconic character, *Carpanta*, a vagabond who symbolised the hunger, repression and – via his singular protruding tooth – Spain's poor health and sanitation

²³ Terenci Moix, *Los 'comics': Arte para el consumo y formas 'pop'* (Barcelona: Llibres de Sinera, 1968).

²⁴ Vázquez de Parga, *Los comics del franquismo*, 178.

²⁵ In Joan Navarro, *Papeles encontrados (2) Vázquez Montalbán escribe sobre La Familia Ulises*, (2010), <http://navarrobadia.blogspot.co.uk/2010/12/papeles-encontrados-2-vazquez-montalban.html>

[accessed 18 January 2018].

²⁶ Román Gubern, 'Prólogo', in *Historietas, comics y tebeos españoles*, ed. Viviane Alary, 7-12, p.10.

²⁷ Barrero and Manzanares, 'El tebeo que dió nombre a los demás', 54.

under the Franco dictatorship.²⁸ Escobar's creation became a point of reference for Spanish society at the time and was soon imbricated in 1950s culture, as the saying 'más hambre que Carpanta' ['hungrier than Carpanta'] found its way into common parlance.

Complementing detectable influences of the Spanish picaresque tradition such as *Lazarillo de Tormes* and Quevedo's *El Buscón*, Escobar also parodied the established convention of comic double-acts from Don Quixote and Sancho Panza to the popular Laurel and Hardy, when he introduced Carpanta's sidekick, Protasio – Greek for 'preferred one' – at once friend and foe. The plot typically took on a structured and predictable form, which involved Carpanta's ingenious attempts to acquire food, typically ending in failure. This approach supports Alary's observations that 'in *Pulgarcito*, there is no explicit criticism but a parodic tone [... and] the mechanism of the gag invariably communicates a fatalistic vision which upholds the established order: the anti-heroes attempt at all costs to get the upper hand'.²⁹ Thus the inevitable failure of the protagonist invites the Spanish reader to reflect sardonically on the humour of his or her own harsh reality.

[Figure 1] Continuing the darker humorous side that typified *Pulgarcito* in this initial post-war period, Doña Urraca – introduced in 1948 by 'Jorge' (1921-1960) – was a sinister middle-aged crone, who typically preyed on the vulnerable for personal gain.³⁰ Perfidious at heart and dressed in the unflattering nineteenth-century style of an old spinster, she is adjudged to be a grotesque representation of the Carlist leader María Rosa Urraca Pastor.³¹ As we will see, Doña Urraca was later joined by her own metaphorical sparring partner, Caramillo in an attempt to water down the strip's typically macabre and nefarious themes.

We return to Escobar to introduce his most famous and longest-running series, *Zipi y Zape* (1948). These prepubescent brothers personified the Spanish phrase 'zipizape', denoting the sense of a chaotic brawl, with a clearly discernible influence of comics classics such as *Max und Moritz* and *The Katzenjammer Kids*.³² Saturated with Escobar's critical tone from the outset, the boys' mischief knew no bounds, nor indeed did their punishments which included Malaysian and Chinese tortures as well as the omnipresent and eerie 'rat room'.³³

Two strips equally worthy of mention are *Las Hermanas Gilda* [The Gilda Sisters] and *Doña Tula, Suegra*. The first, a creation of Manuel Vázquez (1930-1995), began in *Pulgarcito* in 1949 and portrayed the relationship of two single, middle-aged sisters, Hermenegilda and Leovigilda. Like Carpanta with Protasio and Zipi and Zape, the relationship between the sisters, and some of the resulting humour in the series, was a product of a clash of opposites: Hermenegilda was plump with a sense of naïve romanticism in her desperate search for a husband, while Leovigilda, was slim but unpleasant, suspicious by nature, typically bossy and barely able to withhold her joy at her younger sister's failures. Inspiration for the strip is said to have come from the film *Gilda*, which had proved highly controversial on its release in Spain, and from the names of the father and son Visigoth rulers

²⁸ McGlade, *Catalan Cartoons*.

²⁹ Alary, 'The Spanish Tebeo', 264.

³⁰ Jorge was the pen name of Miguel Bernet.

³¹ Mercedes Ugalde Solano, *Mujeres y nacionalismo vasco: Génesis y desarrollo de Emakume Abertzale Batza (1906–1936)* (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 1993), 432.

³² *Max und Moritz* (1865) by Wilhelm Busch (1832-1908) was one of the first ever children's comics and centres on the lives of two mischievous young boys, later inspiring the *Katzenjammer Kids* strip in the *New York Journal* by Rudolph Dirks (1877-1968).

³³ Antoni Guiral and Joan M. Soldevila, *El Mundo de Escobar*, (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2008), 110-112. The 'rat's room' was a literal depiction of the traditional Spanish threat meted out by parents at the time.

Leovigildo and Hermenegildo.³⁴ Vázquez's creation proved popular, also appearing in Bruguera's new publication *DDT contra las penas* [*DDT against suffering*] (1951-1977).³⁵

The arrival of *DDT* in 1951 was the result of a relaxation and subsequent expansion of the official register for permitted periodical publications.³⁶ With official status came a reliable and consistent influx of subsidised, superior quality paper, allowing for the publication, along with a number of other newcomers, to sustain itself in the growing market. Edited by Miguel Martín Monforte (1925-2013) as part of the 'Bruguera School', *DDT* sought a more adult audience – from ages 15 to 117 – reflecting a growing shift in the genre that gave rise to the subversive satirical publications of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Included from *DDT*'s inception was another Escobar creation, *Doña Tula, suegra*, (1951-1955). Full of familial disharmony, the humour in the strip typically hinged upon the caricatured stereotype of the overbearing mother-in-law, founded upon a gendered role-reversal in the hierarchies of the household. Her son-in-law, Clotildo, habitually found himself on the receiving end of Tula's violence, which she appeared to deliver with impunity since his wife Filomena invariably sided with her mother.

Legislation

The Ministry for Information and Tourism, which had taken over the application of censorship from the Ministry of the Interior in 1951, brought a new scrutiny to the content of children's publications. The following year, it established the *Junta Asesora de la Prensa Infantil* [Children's Press Advisory Board], comprising a membership that reflected the Regime's narrow moral compass, including the groups *Acción Católica* [Catholic Action]; and the *Comisión de Ortodoxia y Moralidad* [Commission for Orthodoxy and Morality]. In 1952, the Board articulated a series of parameters for publications aimed at children, regarding formatting, the preservation of national Catholic values and appropriate content defined along gender lines.³⁷ In a directive published on 24 June 1955, the Ministry asserted the need to bring this previously overlooked outlet under governmental control, declaring that:

Las publicaciones infantiles deberán adoptar los textos y gráficos [...] cuidando de acentuar el debido respeto a los principios religiosos, morales y políticos que fundamente el Estado español. No contendrán, en ningún caso, ideas o descripciones que puedan inducir a error o perturbación grave de la formación psicológica o educativa de los niños o jóvenes que las lean.

[Children's publications should adapt their texts and images to suit the psychology of their readers, being mindful to emphasise due respect for the religious, moral and political principles of the Spanish state. They should not contain, in any instance, ideas or descriptions that are misleading or detrimental to the psychological or educational development of the children or young people who read them.]

To ensure compliance, dedicated officials were tasked with overseeing moral content. A legal order published in February 1956 ratified the initial decree, while expanding its scope. Reiterating that only authorized publications would be permitted to appear periodically – a provision previously laid out in the 1938 Press Law – not only would those wishing to market this material be required to appear in the *Registro de Publicaciones Infantiles de la Dirección*

³⁴ Enrique Martínez Peñaranda, *Vázquez: El dibujante y su leyenda* (Madrid: Ediciones Sinsentido, 2004), 24-28.

³⁵ Its name was a play on the popular pesticide dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethanol.

³⁶ Victor Mora, *Los tebeos de posguerra* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 2010), 66.

³⁷ See Fernández, 'Viñetas truncadas', 48.

General de Prensa [General Press Office Registry for Children's Publications] – as per the 1952 norms – but they would also be obliged to state with further precision their target audience. In this respect, readerships were categorized by age into: young girls and boys; adolescent boys; and adolescent girls.

The legislation also contained expanded directives on content that was to be avoided in these publications, including: 'Ejemplos destacados de laicismo' [notable examples of secularism]; 'humor hacía la ridiculización de la autoridad de los padres, de la santidad de la familia y del hogar, del respeto a las personas que ejercen autoridad, del amor a la Patria y de la obediencia de las Leyes' [humour that ridicules the authority of parents, the sanctity of the family and the home, respect for people in authority, a love of the fatherland and obedience of the laws]. Also to be avoided were: 'escenas terroríficas' [instances of horror]; 'un sentido de humor demasiado cerebral [...] para ser infantil, con desconocimiento u olvido del candor y la ingenuidad que fundamenta el sentido infantil de la ironía'; [a sense of humour too cerebral or sterile to be childish, demonstrating ignorance of the candour and ingenuity underlying the childish sense of irony] and 'deficiencia o incorrección en el uso de la lengua española' [incorrect use of the Spanish language]. In addition, Section VII of the law proposed rewards for 'model publications' as well as fines of between 1,000 and 10,000 pesetas and suspensions for infringements.

While the influence of the US adventure-superhero comic was growing in the rest of Europe, the legislation of the 1950s also maintained a tight control on both the nature of material from abroad as well as the quantity permissible – only 25 per cent according to the 1956 legislation (VI, art. 22). Following these directives, Spanish censors at first rejected many American superheroes on nationalist grounds, going on in the 1960s to object to their promoting ideas of the supernatural, something potentially injurious to the adolescent psyche.³⁸

Before discussing the fates of the strips outlined above, two key implications of the 1956 legislation are worthy of note. First, is the trend that it engendered of prior-censorship from the managerial perspective of the editorial – prescient of what would become the 'voluntary consultation' inscribed by the 1966 Press Law.³⁹ Second, the increasing pressure on cartoonists towards self-censure. It is worth reiterating that *tebeo* production during the 1940s was not *per se* designed to be revolutionary – despite its often subversive tone – and was, rather, a professionalised industry. Thus, apart from the many inevitable conflicts with the censors, the primary concern for the cartoonists was to maintain the interest of readers – with the additional result of ensuring paid work, and for the editorial houses to make sure that the business not only remained viable but turned a profit. For the latter, censorial intervention, aside from the inevitable impact on content, had major and often unpredictable ramifications for the production process. Notwithstanding having to cover the cost of fines for transgressions, the inherent delay caused by the additional process of ensuring that each issue would pass for print significantly jeopardised the publications' chances of getting to press in time to maintain a regular and reliable presence in the market. Thus, for Guiral, the subsequent creation of systems of in-house censorship can be directly attributed to the 1956 directive with the resulting loss of acerbity, and indeed, in some cases the discontinuation of whole series.⁴⁰

³⁸ Guiral, *Cuando los comics se llamaban tebeos*, 120.

³⁹ Heralded as a move towards a democratic press, voluntary consultation by no means abolished censorship, but rather transferred responsibility of its application to authors, editors and publishers (McGlade, *Catalan Cartoons*, 174).

⁴⁰ Guiral, *100 años de Bruguera*, 60.

All the aforementioned characters and their parent publications tackled the shift in censorial scrutiny during the initial decades of the dictatorship to varying effects. For reasons of space, rather than an examination of specific examples of censorship,⁴¹ what follows is a broader overview of shifts in content based on extensive consultation with material before and after the legislation.⁴²

Notwithstanding the context of restricted political and social commentary that ruled out overt references to specific political events, it is worth noting that given the young age of their primary target audience, the level of humour found in *tebeos* needed to be accessible, and would thus have typically avoided reliance on political awareness at the punchline. Rather, many of the iconic characters that became synonymous with the period were cast in the role of picaresque anti-heroes, offering an outlet for low-level critique in the form of social observational humour.

Blanket objections were more easily advanced against *Pulgarcito*, which tended towards fixed characters, on a recurrent theme. Indeed, as has been observed in existing histories of the *tebeo*, the censors almost terminated *Carpanta* because it challenged the regime's claim that 'no one in Franco's Spain goes hungry'.⁴³ The resulting shift in emphasis that saw starvation replaced by an insatiable appetite is discernible upon consultation of subsequent episodes. However, reflecting the well-documented arbitrary nature of censorial application during the dictatorship,⁴⁴ it should be noted that no objection was raised to *Carpanta*'s life of abject poverty, and his residence under a bridge remained unchanged. It is reasonable to suggest that the failure itself of the character's attempts to cheat his way to food allowed many strips to pass censorial muster, based on a supposed moralising element. Ultimately, Spain's shift towards economic recovery in the 1960s altered the socio-political context and the backdrop of the hunger years that had made *Carpanta* so popular lost its relevance. Thus, rather than exclusively the result of censorial pressure, the strip's waning popularity can also be attributed to the social changes that rendered *Carpanta*'s message of hunger less identifiable.

The alterations enforced on Doña Urraca went right to the heart of her character. The censors threatened to axe the strip, adjudged to be excessively 'demoralising' – for example her proclivity for 'killing time in the mortuary' – unless the protagonist's character was mollified. Rather than put an untimely end to one of *Pulgarcito*'s stalwarts, who was certainly responsible for attracting readers away from the competition, Jorge introduced Caramillo to the strip. Cast in the role of sidekick, he played his part in Doña Urraca's schemes as well as becoming the newly pacified old maid's permanent victim, counterbalancing her remaining malevolence with his naivety. [Figure 2] This transformed version of her character proved less popular. The shift saw the strip cede its previous mainstay status as it appeared less frequently throughout the latter part of the 1950s, later becoming an exercise in nostalgia, until it was finally discontinued.

⁴¹ For this type of study, see Ignacio Fernández, *La legislación sobre historieta en España*, (Madrid: Asociación Cultural Tebeosfera, 2017) and Vicent Sanchis, *Tebeos mutilados: La censura franquista contra Editorial Bruguera*, (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2010).

⁴² Primary material consulted for the present research includes the archives of the Biblioteca de Catalunya and several private collections.

⁴³ Ana Merino, *El cómic hispánico* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2003), 126.

⁴⁴ See for example, Abellán, *Censura*; Sinova, *La censura de prensa*; Enric Bordería Ortiz, *La prensa durante el franquismo: Represión, censura y negocio* (Valencia: Fundación Universitaria San Pablo, 2000); and McGlade, *Catalan Cartoons*.

Zipi and Zape drew the censors' attention since the characters challenged the ideal familial hierarchy promoted by the Regime. Moreover, the patent lack of morality in the storylines – in that there was no attempt to suggest lessons were learnt in the episodes' conclusion – was exactly the type of theme to which the 1956 legislation explicitly objected. The boys' defiance of their parents and/or teachers, although typically innocuous, was an overt metaphor for challenging repressive authority, *qua* the Regime more generally. As a result, Escobar was forced to shift the typical elaboration of the strip to reflect a more *costumbrist* style, as well as moderating the level of violence in their ultimate punishments at the end of the narrative. Nevertheless, an underlying critique of power structures remained and *Zipi y Zape* was able to navigate the shifting socio-political background throughout the dictatorship and beyond, adapting to survive the censorial pressures that were to come, while still retaining a sense of relevance until the start of the new millennium.

For *TBO*, it was *La Familia Ulises* that shared most closely the tone of its rival publication, *Pulgarcito*. Although typically socially centred, the first period of the strip often exhibited a sharp sense of humour that did not shy away from violence or the macabre. An example of this was the fate of the Family's first dog, Kuki, whom they inadvertently ate in 'La liebre a la montañesa' ['The Hare in the Mountains'] (1945). However, unlike the continued critique of authority still discernible in *Carpanta*, *Doña Urraca* and *Zipi y Zape* – albeit shrouded – the themes dealt with in the Ulises family narratives became increasingly bland, with the idiosyncrasies of the characters becoming a stronger point of focus. Particularly noticeable was the reduction – and often complete omission – of Filomena's use of malapropisms since this was a direct contravention of the 1956 legislation's prohibition of the 'incorrect' use of the Spanish language. As mentioned above, more than simple grammatical errors, this ruling applied to the presence of Catalan, and all of Spain's 'other' languages, outlawed under the Regime. Buigas' moderate approach that insisted on innocuous themes saw the strip lose relevance and as a result its popularity waned, with *Pulgarcito* eventually overtaking *TBO* in circulation.⁴⁵

Other characters that saw their content, style and even appearance challenged were the Gilda sisters. According to Francisco González Ledesma, Hermenegilda's hairbun seemed to have a life of its own, serving not only to exaggerate her theatrical responses to developments in the strip, but also suggesting sexual innuendo.⁴⁶ Vázquez himself was less clear on the censors' objection, offering the response, 'sería porque moño rima con coño' [probably because hairbun rhymes with cunt].⁴⁷ While seemingly churlish, this retort speaks to the inherent frustration among the cartooning community of both the arbitrary and often irrational reasons cited for the censoring of a piece. Moreover, like Benejam, Vázquez maintains that this particular 'subversion' of the sanctity of the family was not a conscious artistic decision: 'nadie crea un personaje y lo hace pensando en adoctrinar, como no sea una historieta netamente política, claro' [nobody creates a character to indoctrinate, unless it's a political cartoon, obviously].⁴⁸ Following censorial directives, Vázquez opted to relocate the sisters to the countryside couching his situations in surrealist fantasy. Accordingly, the focus in the strips moved from Leovigilda's harshness to Heremenegilda's exaggerated enthusiasm, although usually lacking sexual charge. Nevertheless, the censors still found cause for objection. For example, when Hermenegilda had been depicted riding a centaur, problems were raised since, although a fantastical being, the centaur was male and had a naked chest.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Barrero, 'El TBO de Buigas'.

⁴⁶ Guiral, *100 años de Bruguera*, 64.

⁴⁷ Manuel E. Darias 'Cara a cara con By Vázquez', *Diario de Avisos*, 30 April 1978, 15

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Guiral, *Cuando los comics se llamaban tebeos*, 120.

Nevertheless, despite the imposition of changes and recurrent intervention, the series survived until 1972.

Given Escobar's trademark mordacity palpable throughout the initial years of the strip, *Doña Tula, suegra* eventually attracted censorial intervention, accused of projecting a disharmonious picture of family life that was in direct contrast to the values promoted by the regime. Specifically, the inherent critique of patriarchy, with Tula repeatedly undermining Clotildo's role as head of the household, was seen as a breach of the directive in the 1956 legislation to avoid ridiculing the authority of parents as well as that of the sanctity of the family and the home.⁵⁰ The subsequent demand that Escobar soften the behaviour of his protagonist – as had been the demand with *Doña Urraca* – was a shift too far for her creator. In this case, rather than adhere to the required changes, which certainly would have rendered the characters beyond recognition, Escobar preferred to pull the strip altogether, cutting *Doña Tula* short after six popular years.

Despite the difficulties and challenges in post-war Spain, the mid-to-late 1940s reflected a positive reception of the *tebeo*, as the genre managed to carve out a sustainable space of its own. With satirical publications outlawed and any critical lens directed firmly away from the newly established regime, the *tebeo* represented an escape from the harsh realities of the time. The succession of legislative measures that sought to bring children's publications under stricter supervision caused a general muffling of the previously caustic humour exhibited by the *tebeos* of the 1940s. Nevertheless, but for the vision and persistence of those working in the industry during the first two decades of the dictatorship, it is hard to imagine the subsequent evolution of the vibrant and cutting-edge publications of the 1960s and 1970s, whose dissenting voices were instrumental in the country's eventual transition to democracy.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.





Doña Urraca (Figure 1; black and white)

‘Doña Urraca se encuentra un billete’ [Doña Urraca finds a note], *Pulgarcito*, 125 (1949), p. 15.

Doña Urraca finds a 1000 peseta note but it blows away. When another man looks like he’ll get it instead she knocks him out and runs off with her reward as a policeman gives chase. Once she has finally given her pursuants the slip, she discovers that it is not in fact a 1000 peseta note, but rather a flyer indicating how much one could save over twenty years of shopping at the advertised supermarket. As well as the violence, the strip contains deception of the authorities and references to No-Do, the Regime’s cinematic propaganda arm.

Doña Urraca (Figure 2; colour)

‘Doña Urraca’, *Pulgarcito*, 1658 (1963), p. 16

Reading an announcement about an escaped madman, Doña Urraca warns Caramillo. She thinks she sees the man in question, chases him and beats him into unconsciousness. Caramillo informs her she has the wrong person and the man's sister comes to report her – effecting some physical revenge of her own – with Urraca ending up behind bars. Here, the protagonist shows concerned for Caramillo, is going after a criminal and ends up caught by the authorities – three unlikely scenarios in the pre-legislation strip.