

The comic strip and the politics

Published 19.04.2007

The comic strip resists, recovers and gets renewed

Recently, in Spain, the Department of Culture created the National Prize of the Comic strip that is compared to the National Prizes of Literature, of Infantile and Juvenile Literature, of History of Spain, or to the Best Translation and to the work of a Translator.

The Spanish Parliament approved bill last April 4, 2006, which urged the Government to institute a new prize dedicated to this art. This award for this genre coincides with its great moment, with a considerable increase of titles and copies which keeps growing (in 2005, 6 % more of titles was edited in the market and the number of copies increased of 55 % with regard to the previous year).

The comic strip shows therefore that it is in a good shape and claims for its own role in the construction of values and of a specific symbology that come with us though all the ages and stages of life.

25 years of the Comic strip Show and 30 years of "El Jueves" magazine

The Comic strip Show is 25 years and celebrates a new edition from April 19 to April 22 in Barcelona, where the 30th anniversary the first "political" comic strip magazine of the country, "El Jueves", is also commemorated. It is the most veteran humorous publication of political satire in Spain, which since 1977 has become a point of reference with regard to the criticism to the political parties and the monarchy. Every three months it edits a special number of more than a hundred pages on a relevant topic.

From heroes' comic strips in the XXth century ...

The comic strip has reflected the current political and social context and has crossed borders around the whole world. In the XXth century the model of heroes of resistance and of justice which stood out are: Asterix (symbol of the national resistance), Tintin (the hero par excellence); or the patriots, American superheroes such as Captain America, who was born in 1941, fighting against Hitler and against the USSR and personifying the original values of The United States and, after selling near 210 million copies in 75 countries, "died" recently murdered by a sniper in the entrance of a court. The hero refused to accept the antiterrorist law, promulgated after the attempts of September 11th, which forces persons having superpower to register in a police record. For that reason he was taken to court.

... to the new Arabic superheroes of the XXIst century.

A new generation of Arabic superheroes that fight for peace and justice, attacking besides stereotypes and prejudices, triumph in several countries of the Middle East. Jalila, Nanny, Zen and Rakan, these are the names of a quartet created by an Egyptian teacher of Economy, Ayman Kandeel, who practises different religions, promoting the harmony between three big monotheistic religions.

It is not the case for "The 99", a band of heroes who have inherited the power of Nur's mystical stones (endowed each of them with one of 99 qualities that the muslims attribute to Allah). The group, created by the psychologist Kuwaiti Naifal Mutawa, is genuinely Islamic, and tries to extract from the Koran the pacific and positive content.

THE COMIC STRIP IN THE POLITICS: 4 emblems of current importance.

1. From Muhammad's cartoons to Sharon's pork

Cartoons have been recently in the eye of the hurricane of the international political relations. In September 2005, the Danish "Jyllands-Posten" newspaper published twelve satirical cartoons on the prophet as a result of a call addressed to Danish draftsmen. The drawings were reproduced later by many European newspapers. The cartoons, which raised a big wave of protests in the Moslem world, generated a serious diplomatic crisis, which had a wide coverage media worldwide. In February, 2006, one year later, the French justice has considered that the publication of these cartoons, as well as some other new ones published in the satirical French weekly Charlie Hebdo, is protected by the freedom of expression, tackling this way the question with this sentence, which has already been appealed by the French Union of Islamic Organizations (UOIF). On the other hand, one of the most polemic front pages was the one in 2002 showing Ariel Sharon's cartoon with porcine features and a Nazi swastika that Shimon Peres used as example to explain the supposed anti-Israelian feeling in Europe.

2. The comic strip of September 11th

"A comic strip to bring the official investigation over to the public". The text comes from the Report of the Commission of Investigation and the drawings inspired by official pictures of President Bush, as well as from the abductors. From the first chapter a follow-up of what happened minute to minute in and with the four kidnapped planes is done. Intrigue and realism are added as the graphical aspects to the imagination.

150 pages sum up the 600 pages of the Report in order to attract young readers that might probably overwhelmed by the extension of the official documents. It has been a great best-seller in the whole world, especially in The United States, thanks to its "bold and brave" language. In Spain, Panini Comics bought the rights and published this graphical novel with an initial edition of 30.000 copies.

3. Sarko against Ségo

The comic strip has turned into the tool to go beyond the official image of the candidates for the French presidency elections. France is a country really sensitive to the culture of the comic strip and Nicolas Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal bring the necessary characteristics together to turn into the new main characters of these sarcastic tales. Sarko and Ségo have already led already several titles: 'Everything on Ségo', 'Everything on Sarko', 'Aim Elisée' or 'Vive la politique' that complement the wide sarcastic existing offer (TV's programs, books,...) and feed this electoral parallel campaign that develops basically in Internet (Antisarko, NoaRoyal, Sarkostique, Segolene, Antisegolenecanalblog.com or Nicolás Sarkozy's Satirical Blog Oficial are some of the non-official satirical pages or even of bad taste webpages existing on the candidates).

4. Operation Red Dragon

"Operation Red Dragon" is the title of the comic strip created by the ALDE group (Alliance of the Democrats and Liberal for Europe) at the European Parliament with in order to bring this institution and his functioning over the youngest, though the fictitious adventures of a member of the Parliament called Elisa Correr. The only reference before in the European Parliament is the comic strip "Troubled Waters", which received the Alph-Art prize in the Festival of the Comic Strip in Angoulême in 2003 to the best campaign of communication where the comic strip is used as the medium.

It is a new communication and approximation formula which connects with the essence of the real values of the classic comic strip. Simultaneously it relates to the current affairs and the most immediate present time.

PD. On April 19, 2007, I had the opportunity to share a round table with the journalist of LA VANGUARDIA Màrius Carol and the member of the European Parliament Ignasi Guardans (member of the ALDE political group). I am grateful for the invitation of the MEP to present the comic strip "Operation Red Dragoon" in Barcelona. I believe that the new forms of political communication, between which the comic strip has its own importance, are a reflex and a reaction of the representative politics given that there is a lack of connection with the electorate. In addition, in case of the aforementioned comic strip, it is a good tool to make the work done in the institutions become known since this is sometimes perceived as too remote from the daily worries of the citizens.

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