

SANTAMÒNICA

Contrasts and influences of the great masters of North American comic strips (1895-1950)

In just a few years the number of series and characters multiplied and became interlinked. "Comic" or funny at first, they quickly became "serious" and "realistic". Prior to World War II, comic strips were born, bred, reproduced and even looked as if they could die peacefully in the United States. But their story had only just begun.

In 1895 the United States press established itself as the most innovative in the world. Joseph Pulitzer was competing with William Randolph Hearst to sell more newspapers. Richard Felton Outcault, a talented but still raw illustrator, was working for Pulitzer, who started printing in colour. Pulitzer commissioned Outcault for some picture stories portraying the deprivation and struggle for survival in the most humble neighbourhoods. Thus the Yellow Kid was born, so named because that was the colour of his nightshirt. A sequential story arranged on a page, with a set character and dialogues that would soon be recorded on spherical surfaces marked the new style.

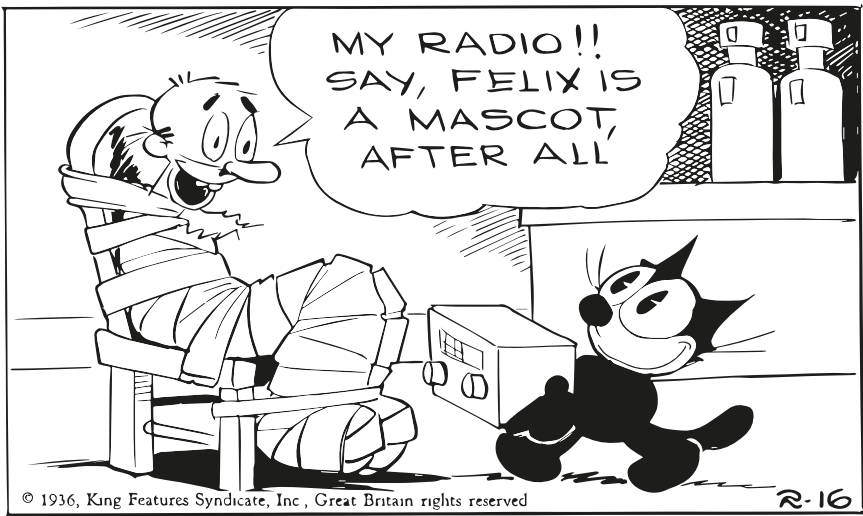
The modern comic was born and the competition between the two editors would give wings and aeroplane engines to the new sequential kids. From the Yellow Kid to Buster Brown, from Buster Brown to the Katzenjammer Kids, and from the Katzenjammer Kids to Little Nemo, to Mutt & Jeff, to Krazy Kat and so on. The list is endless.

Comics were an industrial art, as much industry as art. Or more industry than an art. And the survival of their artists, better and better paid but never enough, was as important as their pride or their creative instinct. This premise defines Richard Felton Outcault, but also Ricard Opiso, Manuel Gago, Josep Sanchis or Francisco Ibáñez.

Comic technique always moved between those two extremes. Responding to creators' artistic demands but, at the same time, producing quickly and reducing dispensable work as much as possible so they would make their obligatory daily or weekly appointment in a fit state. The comic was born out of art and industry. And its great creators had to remain equidistant. Leaning on one side of the scales has produced art or industry, but not comics.

Original ideas, the relationship between a comic strip and illustration or painting, exchanges between creators, copies and plagiarism, tributes, fights, lawsuits and trials, teaching acknowledged and rejected, and so on. Comic strips in the United States in their most classical stage defined a world full of geniuses and mutual influences. Those who grabbed, in turn, let go. They came, blossomed and conquered.

Very quickly, Felix the Cat, Mickey and all Disney's characters, including Popeye and many more stars of the North American fantasy firmament, entered European homes and started to be celebrated, while copies, plagiarised versions and derivatives multiplied. Soon after Tarzan, the Phantom and Flash Gordon appeared on American newsstands, the publishing house Vecchi "imported" them into Italy, enjoying huge success. And thanks to Lotario Vecchi then, later, his nephew, Jorge Parenti, they rapidly spread throughout Spain, featuring in: Yumbo (1934), Aventurero (1935) and Tim Tyler (1936). These three magazines, which catapulted publishers Hispano Americana de Ediciones into the



To build on this success, the Barcelona publishing house Molino took the heroes Parenti did not publish and put them in Mickey, magazine launched in 1935 where Disney's characters, exclusively, added to the huge success they enjoyed at the cinema. The influence of this entire universe on Spanish cartoonists was enormous. Although TBO, the strongest, longest-running local magazine was apparently not suffering and refused to yield to the new styles, for example, speech bubbles, some of its cartoonists did. Like those of many other publishing houses. Who could resist?

How can we deny the influence of those heroes, of that drawing style, on Manuel Gago or Jesús Blanco, to mention just two of the biggest names in comic strips in Franco's Spain? El Guerrero del Antifaz, Cuto, El Pequeño Luchador, even someone as Spanish as Roberto Alcázar, owed a great deal to the American heroes. Not everything, obviously, because Spanish tradition also carried some weight, but a lot. It is true that there was a clear influence of this "own" tradition on the scripts, which were inspired by both the North American series and the earlier Spanish soap operas. But there was also the "other" influence, although the new authorities played it down and tried to avoid it until the German star began to wane.

In children's and humorous cartoons, Disney hovered over the shadows of Emili Boix and Josep Sanchis. "Hipo, Monito and Fifi" or Pumpy, Chivete and Blanquita, are Disney factory derivative characters. At publishers Editorial Valenciana, the alma mater, Josep Soriano Izquierdo, came from a tradition forged in the Catalan and Valencian satirical press, with a drawing style that linked him to L'Esquerra de la Torratxa or La Traca. His Jaimito, the character the magazine was named after, was like that, but he was also inspired by the influence of North American cinema. Sanchis, on the other hand, had already been through Disney's blender. Like the "Fallas" themselves until well into the 1970s.

Today, Spanish comics from the 1930s, whether humorous or realistic and produced mainly in Catalonia and the Valencia region, would have been something else without the solid presence of North American stories and heroes, which took hold among cartoonists and scriptwriters. Despite the initial Francoist rage, which considered "old Anglo-Saxon liberalism" finished, the strength of the comic that emerged with Yellow Kid imposed itself without any resistance. Post-war Spanish comic books are also an offspring of North American comics. Less so than in France, where the end of World War II imposed vetoes and censorship and boosted an art with unique claims, but just as in Italy. Today Mickey Mouse or Flash Gordon are as much ours and as "Spanish" as El Guerrero del Antifaz or Capitán Trueno, who would not pass a DNA test if someone else claimed other paternity.

With the perspective that time gives, no one can deny that everything American comics have given us in the subsequent decades, whether we want to acknowledge it or not, has always survived. Of course, there is a French-Belgian school, the Japanese have come a very long way with styles undeniably their own, while other styles have developed in other corners of the world too. That is all very true. As is humbly acknowledging the effect on world culture of some creators who felt as big as they wanted their bank accounts to be at the end of the month and who sweated ink for that. Glory to the heroes!



CONTRASTOS I INFLUÈNCIES DELS GRANS
MESTRES DE LA HISTORIETA NORD-AMERICANA
(1895-1955)



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**SU NOCHE
ANGUSTIOSA**

**UNA
AVENTURA
DEL
INSPECTOR**

DAN Y STELLA

DAN Y STELLA

- ME PARECE QUE NO VOY A PODER DORMIR ESTA NOCHE. SUZY Y GLADYS NO SE DAN CUENTA DE LA SITUACIÓN. EN ESTA CASA SE HA COMETIDO UN CRIMEN. HACE ROJO. Y LO PEOR ES QUE EL CRIMINAL DEBE DON-
DAR POR AQUÍ TODAVÍA.

QUE NO VOY A PODER DOR
XHE. SURY Y GLADYS NO
LA SITUACION. EN
HA COMETIDO UN CRIMEN
LO PEOR ES QUE EL CR
MINAL DEBE PON
DAR POR AQUI
TODAVIA.

- MIENTRAS MIS AMIGAS
DESCANSAN TRATARE DE IN-
VESTIGAR POR MI CUENTA.
NO QUISIERA ASUSTAR-
LAS.

CE
509

- DESGRACIADAMENTE, NO CONOZCO ESTA CASA Y ME TEMO QUE NO OBTENDRE NINGUN RESULTADO. PE RO... ¿QUE EXTRAÑO! TENGO LA SENSACIÓN DE QUE ALGUIEN VA SIGUIENDOME.

¡MALDICIÓN!

PERO EN QUEL MOMENTO ATRAVE SO EL PARQUECI LLO QUE EDDEA BA LA CASA.

- NO TE INQUIETES STELLA. ESTA CASA TIENE LA VIRTUD DE ALTERAR LOS NERVIOS. EN ESTE MOMENTO SE HALLAN LAS TUMBAS DE MAS DE CINCUENTA LEPROSOS. MAS EN CINCO AÑOS QUE SE GAVIDO SU EMPLAZAMIENTO ENERO. PERO LA GENTE DE ESTOS CONTORINOS DILE QUE DURANTE LA NOCHE SE VEN APARICIONES ENTRE LOS ARBOLES.

¡OH!

¡MI... MIRA!
¡SOCORRO!

...CO
...AS TAR-
...E, EN
...OTLAND
...ARD...

EL INSPECTOR
DAN AL HABLA.
¿PERO QUE DICE?
¿ES USTED STELLA?

A black and white comic panel. On the left, a vertical strip shows a man's face in profile, looking down. The main part of the panel shows a man from the chest up, facing slightly right. He is holding a telephone receiver to his ear with his right hand. He has a concerned or questioning expression. A large speech bubble originates from the top left of the panel, containing the text: "EL INSPECTOR DAN AL HABLA. ¿PERO QUE DICE? ¿ES USTED STELLA?". The background is dark and textured with heavy black lines.

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