

QUESTIONING THE INESCAPABLE MALE GAZE IN ALTARRIBA AND KIM'S *EL ARTE DE VOLAR* AND *EL ALA ROTA*

Mikel Bermello Isusi

Eileen Meehan argues that cultural products reflect society's dominant ideology, regardless of whether they are trying to go against it or not (2006, p. 313). In a patriarchal heterosexist society, the visual works produced are not exempt, and authors often tend to tell their stories from a masculine point of view, or for an imagined masculine audience, through which patriarchy can be observed. The inescapability, and the techniques developed by film, of this 'male gaze' has been analyzed by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 study 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. Graphic narratives share some of these techniques, as I discuss in due course, which makes them also portray many instances and events through the male gaze, even if their intention is to avoid it.

This chapter considers two case studies of this male gaze: Antonio Altarriba Jr and Kim's *El arte de volar* (*The Art of Flying* [2009]) and *El ala rota* (*The Broken Wing* [2016]). In both, writer Altarriba Jr discusses his parents' lives and experiences during the Spanish Second Republic, the Civil War, the Dictatorship, and the Transition to Democracy in the late twentieth century. His mother Petra died in 1998, and his father, Antonio Altarriba Sr – Antonio from now on – died by suicide in 2001. In *El arte de volar*, by omitting key events in Petra's life, and by making it appear to be Antonio's autobiography, the authors misrepresent her through their narration, as they seem to represent her religiosity as without nuance or understanding of her perspective excessive. From their perspective, they seem to be blaming her for her husband's depression and later suicide.

Furthermore, specific representational techniques that relate to autobiography are used in *El arte de volar*; the creators did not use these techniques again in *El ala rota*, so they fail to give Petra the agency that they had attempted to give Antonio earlier. *El ala rota* was a new biography published to share all this information and for them to try to repair this image previously portrayed, as stated in its epilogue (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2009, p. 257).¹ The result is laudable, but,

unfortunately, they cannot leave this male gaze behind, and Petra is still represented as ‘an object of sexual stimulation through sight’, as Mulvey argues (2006, p. 346). Moreover, while there is less agency in biography than in autobiography because the voice is someone else’s and there is a lack of mediation, for *El ala rota*, the authors had much less information from Petra herself than in Antonio’s case. It could be further argued, in line with Sidonie Smith, that men here are still the mirror. Plus, as glimpsed earlier, Antonio’s agency is only an attempt, because even though he had left written manuscripts, the final representation depends on Altarriba Jr and Kim, on what they include and what they omit. *El arte de volar* may seem an autobiography, but it is not. However, if these two graphic novels are still a valid ‘chronicle of a whole generation’, as stated in *El arte de volar*’s prologue by the Spanish Historian Antonio Martín (2009, p. iv), it is for their attempt to repair and do justice to these underrepresented experiences, since they address the ‘need to come to terms with a past purportedly neglected’, as critical theorist Ángel Loureiro argues (2008, p. 227). Their publication helps to continue to question how memory is treated in Spanish visual culture and to keep criticizing the patriarchal lens, common in so many narratives.

In this chapter, I will consider the techniques through which the authors present *El arte de volar* as Altarriba Sr’s autobiography and the implications of this. Then, I analyze these techniques in both graphic novels through two moments: first, the wedding night, in which Antonio and Petra have sex for the first time; second, her ‘religious turn’ during their marriage. These two events are particularly important because Petra would refuse to have sex later in her life, since she was afraid to die in childbirth, and for health reasons she was dissuaded from having further children. I use Mulvey’s theoretical framework, together with cartoonist and theorist Scott McCloud and US scholar Kate Polak. First, McCloud explains how identification is sought by the artists in comics, because ‘through simplification’ of facial portraits and by avoiding hyperrealistic portraits, the audience can see themselves. He further develops this by adding that ‘we [humans] see ourselves in everything’ (1993, pp. 30–33). Second, in *Ethics in the Gutter*, Polak centres on the importance of the reader to break with this attempt by the authors, since how we emotionally situate with regard to the content and the form influences their readings. Polak uses narratology to explain the importance of the ways both authors and readers position themselves, because ‘identifying with a perpetrator and identifying with a victim are two very different ethical relationships with a text’ (2017, p. 15).

This chapter fills a gap in scholarly articles within comics studies and memory studies in Spain, because although these two graphic novels have been written about elsewhere (see Auroy, 2019; Ausente, 2013; Caicedo Tapia, 2019; Fernández de Arriba, 2015) and used for history classes in Secondary Education (Fernández de Arriba, 2019), they fail to acknowledge the authors’ attempts to ‘repair’ representational issues – by either society or themselves – despite their inability to completely break with the system (that is, patriarchy and the male gaze). Again, if the works can still be considered ‘a chronicle of a whole

generation', as Martín says about *El arte de volar* in its prologue (2009, p. iv), it is *because* this attempt to repair Altarriba Jr's parents' images in society, not because Kim and Altarriba Jr are completely fair towards each of them. When Jo Labanyi says that a country's modernity is related to its 'attitudes toward the relation of present to past', she tries to go against the supposed modernity that technological advancement brings forth, as she explains (2007, p. 91). The importance of this analysis lies not only on this need, as Loureiro puts it, 'to come to terms with a past purportedly neglected' (2008, p. 227), but also on Labanyi's understanding of modernity. This chapter analyzes two graphic novels that indeed look back but also critiques that male gaze and how this is portrayed, following Mulvey, because, as she argues, and this can be applied to Petra, 'meaning ... does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory which oscillates between memory of maternal plenitude and memory of lack' (p. 342). As she continues to argue, 'women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-atness' (2006, p. 346). Understanding and moving away from this may help to continue to look back at and relate to the past in ways that can help society move on, become 'modern'.

Reading a Biography as Autobiography

In *El arte de volar*, *EAdV* from now on, the authors introduce Antonio's suicide at the age of 90 in 2001, having lived through the Civil War, exile in France, his return to Spain during Francoism, and the Spanish Transition to Democracy. Altarriba Jr presents the event through a third-person narrator who says that he had manuscripts Antonio had written (2009, p. 14), but, by the end of the first page of chapter 1, the voices of the narrator and Antonio are merged (p. 19), and Altarriba Jr adopts a first-person narrator to tell his father's story. Altarriba Jr recognized in an interview that he had attempted to write it in the third person but that it was too difficult (2019, p. 82). Unlike *EAdV*, *El ala rota*, *EAR* from now on, is only visually narrated – i.e., the first-person narrator is now missing – and dialogues accompany, which means there is neither a third person nor a first-person narrator in the captions. As inferred by *EAR*'s epilogue, Altarriba Jr is not as emotionally linked to Petra as he was to Antonio and therefore cannot give her the voice that he had given his father (albeit mediated through his own in *EAdV*). This is because he had not gathered as much precise information in life from her as from his father, as he says in the aforementioned epilogue (p. 259). In this attempt at making *EAdV* seem an autobiography, Altarriba Jr is performing an 'ethical' act, and not only a discursive one, as Loureiro reminds us (2001, p. 135), in a way as a 'responsibility' towards 'the other' (p. 136), that is, his father. This is linked to what Loureiro argued about memory, as stated earlier, with 'the need to come to terms with a past purportedly neglected', and this can be viewed as 'a moral and political restoration' (2008, p. 227) – of his father, in this case. The fact that he does not do this with his mother is significant, as it

points directly to their relationship. The case that Altarriba Jr is affected more deeply by his father's death than by his mother's, which led him to write his biography before hers, even if he died later, speaks about these decisions and these relationships.

Through what the authors tell us throughout *EAdV*'s prologue, we can see Altarriba Jr has inherited his father's trauma, in line with Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'post-memory'. She says, 'these experiences were transmitted to [the children] so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Post-memory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation' (p. 5). Although Petra had died three years prior to Altarriba Sr's suicide, it was this later event that marked him most. This graphic novel represents an attempt to understand it, and thus the use of a first-person narrator. He is trying to be in his father's position, and therefore the use of a first-person narrator, which cannot be done with his mother. While *EAdV* can still not be read as an autobiography, as it is not, because Antonio did not write it himself, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson share some terms in their book, *Reading Autobiography* (2010), that are still relevant to *EAdV* and *EAR*. Smith and Watson use several different 'I' forms to refer to the different personas in terms of the narration, which are more easily differentiated in these cases, since they are not autobiographies. In both works, Altarriba Jr and Kim are the 'narrating I[s]' (p. 72) since they are jointly telling this story. Antonio and Petra are two different Is: the 'real person I' and the 'narrated I' (pp. 72–73), the first being the referent, of each graphic novel, the model, and the second being the result of the narration, the characters represented, who are obviously different to the 'real person I'. Smith and Watson further define 'the ideological I' as 'the concept of personhood culturally available to the narrator when he tells his story' (p. 76). In this case, it is from an early twenty-first century (Spanish) perspective of 'personhood' that is valid for almost all twentieth-century Spain, and there is a necessary contrast of what is understood by a 'man' (Antonio) and a 'woman' (Petra), a perception that changes from one graphic novel to the next, as her story is considered in depth in *EAR*. The authors' perspective on men and women ('personhood') definitely influences how they portray both main characters and how the Dictatorship affected them differently, as developed later in this text.

Connected to all this is the concept of 'relationality', with which Smith and Watson encourage their reader to think of 'the different kinds of textual others – historical, contingent, or significant – through which an "I" narrates the formation or modification of self-consciousness' (p. 86). Consequently, considering these are not autobiographies, it is important to highlight that 'relationality' occurs here in mainly two different ways: first, in the way the characters are portrayed relating to one another, and second, how the authors – more importantly Altarriba Jr – relate to the characters and the period. Here, Altarriba Jr is relating not only to the characters as his own 'self-consciousness' shifts but also to the idea of Antonio and Petra as individual persons, as they relate to others. The way

Antonio is represented – or is seen making relations – is not only referring to his life and his actions but to the portraits of these relationships is a result of Altarriba Jr's gain of consciousness: he is searching to be more aware of the period and of his father's traumata. In *EAdV*, the reader first sees the difficult life as a teenager in the countryside, as well as his need to go to Zaragoza and Barcelona in search of independence and happiness. Readers can see him face the political events that lead to the Civil War and become increasingly disappointed with the politics and the Civil War in itself; he loses a great many friends before, during, and after the war. Living in exile in France after the war does not make his life better, and in his return to Spain, which is already fully immersed in the Francoist Dictatorship, he comes to realize his hardships. His bad marriage continues to reinforce a life filled with losses, expectations, and wishes never met, and, finally, the reader can more easily perceive his depression.

EAR, however, points to different interpretations of *EAdV*. It reminds the reader of how the positioning of Antonio as the character and Altarriba Jr as the narrator relate to Petra, allowing some neglected aspects of Antonio's and Petra's lives come to light. This points to not only the 'past purportedly neglected' (Loureiro, 2008, p. 227) but those aspects that are left aside in our reconstruction of the past, to these exercises of memory, whether as an 'artistic' artefact or as a work that is more 'scholarly' produced, which reminds the reader that these are, after all, biographies, and not autobiographies. The decision to use a first-person narrator in *EAdV* gives the authors a chance to temporarily give Antonio a voice, which Altarriba Jr knew well, because of everything that they had shared and the manuscripts his father had left him, as said in *EAdV*'s prologue (2009, p. 14). In addition to this, and as stated earlier, he has recently acknowledged in an interview that he had tried to tell his father's story with a third-person narrator, and the result was never convincing (2019, p. 82). Altarriba Jr does not tell Petra's story as an autobiography because he cannot. This third-person narrator is absent in *EAR*, because of the lack of reference material, as stated earlier, and, with it, the sense of autobiography leaves. The narration is a continuation of *EAdV*, but the attempt to make it seem like an autobiography is not. However, the different 'I' forms that Smith and Watson use to talk about autobiographies still provide a useful framework for analysis, because Altarriba Jr is still the son of the protagonist. The 'real person I' refers to a person with whom he had a strong bond. Furthermore, how he relates to Petra and makes her relate to other characters, is still relevant to consider because she is still not seen as a subject with agency, as I discuss later in this chapter.

As stated earlier, Petra died before Antonio, and the fact that Altarriba Jr needed to understand his father's life and decision to commit suicide is significant. This is crucial once we consider the way the author is portrayed as surprised and sad in *EAR*'s prologue, when he is told Petra could never use her arm and that neither he nor his father had ever known about it, which is significantly omitted in *EAdV*, since this happens before Antonio dies. Her disability seems to serve as an 'excuse' to do historical research for the Second Republic, the

Civil War, and Francoism, for which the authors praised by scholars (Ausente, 2013; Fernández de Arriba, 2015; Sánchez Zapatero, 2017). With regard to *EAdV*, Daniel Ausente (2013), David Fernández de Arriba (2015), and Javier Sánchez Zapatero (2016) all speak highly of the level of historical research and representation. These three articles, which were published either before or in the year *EAR* was published (2016), do not question the nature of Petra's character, her silence, or the way she is represented. Once this new graphic novel appears, Altarriba Jr acknowledges in its epilogue that he had misrepresented her (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, p. 258), and, consequently, the new articles reflect this, as if, prior to *EAR*, it was an invisible issue. In these articles, these scholars seem to accept Altarriba Jr's text as an apology, and neither of them delves into this misrepresentation nor questions whether it is now better or somehow fixed.

Altarriba Jr stated earlier in the epilogue that it was a woman in the audience of the *EAdV* book presentation who first asked him about her, which led him to question his own position towards his mother (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, 257). In *EAdV*, Petra is portrayed as an important factor in Antonio's depression, due to her religious devotion and sexual restraint. Lynne Huffer poses a question that is appropriate to consider here, due to the change from one graphic novel to the second: 'how can the other reappear at the site of her inscriptional effacement?' (2001, p. 4). In this case, it directly questions the omissions regarding the pain and fear Petra feels, first, because of her mother's death in childbirth, for which her father almost killed her right after, because he was blaming her for it, or, second, the attempted rape she suffered as a teenager. This is completely unknown in *EAdV* and, if not for *EAR*, the reader would never know about these events. Moreover, in *EAR*'s epilogue, Altarriba Jr acknowledges Petra would frequently talk about the story of her childbirth (p. 258). Being the reason for her disability, this omission directly points towards Altarriba Jr's consciousness – or lack thereof – of what he and Kim were doing when they portrayed Petra like they did in *EAdV*.

The articles written after its publication had to consciously reflect on this previously unknown information. Sánchez Zapatero wrote again about Altarriba Jr and Kim's work, now including *EAR* (2017), and he called it a 'rewriting' (p. 352). Meanwhile, Danilo Caicedo Tapia defined *EAR* as 'a complement' of *EAdV* (2019, p. 44). Sánchez Zapatero acknowledges the need of this graphic novel and all the light that it shines on women during the Dictatorship. Vanessa Auroy and Pedro Piedras Monroy are probably the ones who do more justice to this topic. While Auroy analyzes the always secondary, half-hidden places women like Petra occupy in both works – although she also focuses on Ana Penyas's *Estamos todas bien* (2017) – Piedras Monroy writes directly about Petra's individual change from *EAdV* to *EAR*, from her 'frigidity, lack of sensitivity and roughness' (p. 66, my translation). She is now a full-fledged character, unlike in *EAdV*, where she is represented, in Altarriba Jr's own words, 'to extol [my father]'.

I find two gaps in the existing literature about these two works. First, as stated earlier the fact that none of the articles analyzes how Petra is specifically misrepresented in *EAdV*, neither regarding content nor through the analysis of their narratives. Second, no critic questions whether this attempted restoration, as Altarriba Jr sees it (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, p. 258), is effective or whether Altarriba Jr can break the emotional distance with Petra that is seen in *EAdV*. Therefore, I now briefly analyze two events that are present in both graphic novels: first, the wedding night; second, when she begins to turn to religion as a safeguard against a second pregnancy, which is seen as simple religious devotion in *EAdV*. Through this realization, which goes against the portrayal of Petra in *EAdV*, Petra becomes, to a certain extent, more of a subject, instead of the object she was portrayed as in *EAdV*. However, her representation is still conveyed through the male gaze, following Mulvey, and it is through active readership involvement that one can and/or must identify with Petra, as discussed later (Polak, 2017, p. 15). This helps see how, despite all progress and amendments that the authors achieve through *EAR*, some questions or concerns are harder to avoid, as they have continued to be avoided.

Questioning the Gaze

Whether we understand *EAR* as a ‘complement’ to *EAdV* or not, it is still influenced by the earlier work in two ways (Caicedo Tapia, 2019, p. 44). First, as Altarriba Jr acknowledged, *EAR* came as a response to *EAdV*, in a way to repair the misrepresentation (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, p. 257), and this gave them the realist tone for the drawing. Second, regardless of the position from which the authors are trying to depart in order to publish *EAR*, the images that I here analyze have obvious echoes in *EAdV*, which tie them to the very viewing position they are trying to leave behind. While it was obvious that the authors were aware of the political system in which Antonio and Petra were living in *EAdV*, the roles portrayed and assigned to them are not actively represented as part of a patriarchal, heterosexist system. Petra is portrayed stereotypically through iconography and structure, following Richard Dyer (2006, pp. 357–358). Mostly in *EAdV*, she might ‘appear to choose [her] social type in some measure, [but] she is condemned to a stereotype’ (p. 355). The first scene here analyzed, the wedding night: she is sexualized, as an object that is desired, about to be consumed, without any agency. In *EAdV*, the text and the image work together to emphasize how she helped Antonio feel better, despite the silence into which he was immersing (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2009, p. 147), and that this would happen frequently until the birth of their only child. She is obviously open to sex, without a doubt or pain that may make the reader question her willingness, as Figure 11.1 proves. In *EAR*, however, this is not so, and, as Figure 11.2 shows, she is willing to engage in intercourse, despite being shown as both scared and in pain. With Figure 11.3, the scene closes, and the reader needs to fill in some gaps.



FIGURE 11.1 *El arte de volar*, Altarriba and Kim, 2009, p. 145. © Norma Editorial.

The reader necessarily must fill in the gaps here, and how they do so is crucial. Polak reminds us of the importance of the readers' understanding of graphic novels and how they make meaning out of what they read, since there is much left unexplained. She says that the meaning we make out of comics

automatically has an ethical dimension; who you are and who you are prompted to identify with, how you are prompted to make inferences about what is and isn't depicted, how you make sense of your own imagination in relation to what is depicted, these are only a few areas in which comics create a *different* ethical universe for the reader. For example, identifying with a perpetrator and identifying with the victim are two very different ethical relationships with a text.

(2017, p. 15)

In *EAR*, the reader is probably more likely to become emotionally closer to Petra than in *EAdV*, in which she is portrayed as a less kind, less sympathetic figure. Regardless, this scene in *EAR* still presents the action through Antonio, by putting the reader in his position, and as seen later, it is done so to empathize with him. As the story moves forward, the turn to religious devotion demonizes her in *EAdV*, while in *EAR* this turn is represented differently. In this case, the sentence 'you're going to like it' brings back bad memories (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, p. 142), and the reader remembers the attempted rape she suffered as a



FIGURE 11.2 *El ala rota*, Altarriba and Kim, 2016, p. 142. © Norma Editorial.

teenager (pp. 67–68), or, if not remembered, some awful experience with sex or sexual harassment is implied. However, by the end of the scene, she hugs him with a big smile on her face, which the reader needs again to link, this time to the prologue.

In this instance, while she is already on her deathbed, the nurses tell Altarriba Jr that, according to what they can tell, Petra could never use her arm. Afterwards, he visits his father, who tells him that he knew nothing about this and, as a result, he wonders what kind of love and caresses they shared, and, finally, ‘what hug was I born from?’ (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, p. 8). The sex scene, then, is first portrayed in this way so it can fulfil Altarriba Jr’s wishful thinking, to suggest that they were happy together, at least momentarily, before Antonio started being unfaithful to her as she refused to have sex and before his depression drove them apart. Second, this sex scene is portrayed in such a way that the reader will, first, position with Antonio and then identify and sympathize with him, so they may understand that Petra was, after all, satisfied with sex, after that initial fear. In



FIGURE 11.3 *El ala rota*, Altarriba and Kim, 2016, p. 143. © Norma Editorial.

EAdV, her religious devotion did not help him with his depression, but Antonio's decisions are completely understood and backed by Altarriba Jr, whereas hers are not, because nothing about her inner life is shown or explained in any way. Through what the authors omit, what and how they tell these stories, the reader easily sympathizes with Antonio and condemns Petra for her behaviour. The moment when Petra tells her husband that she is scared of dying during childbirth in *EAR*, just like her mother, becomes a crucial piece of information that the reader did not know in *EAdV*, for which they can understand her religious turn better and more fairly.

The beginning of her religious turn early in the marriage, after the birth of their only child, is visually portrayed in similar terms in both graphic novels, although now Petra's past and suffering are explained for the reader to understand her better. In *EAdV*, the reader sees her acting according to society's mandates that she needs to be a devoted Catholic, because that is what is expected. When Antonio sees her praying in tandem with a radio broadcast (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2009, p. 149) while she cooks and takes care of their child, as Figure 11.4 shows, the reader sees her through Antonio's disappointed eyes. In *EAR*, this image is represented almost identically but for two key shifts. First, Antonio is erased from the picture, in which she is now the complete focus of attention. Second, with regard to *EAdV*, she is holding her crucifix with her left hand while rocking the baby's cradle with her right. In *EAR*, she holds her crucifix with her right hand, while her left arm, which is the one she cannot use except to hold some lightweight, leans on the countertop (see Figure 11.5). Whereas the image in *EAdV* emphasizes religion and family through Antonio's disappointed and judgemental look, the panel in *EAR* can be seen as a way to protect herself



FIGURE 11.4 *El arte de volar*, Altarriba and Kim, 2009, p. 147. © Norma Editorial.



FIGURE 11.5 *El ala rota*, Altarriba and Kim, 2016, p. 149. © Norma Editorial.

from a figure that cannot understand her. According to what the authors share in *EAR*, right after this last scene, Petra, at bedtime, told her husband about the way her mother died and her consequent fear of dying in the same way at bedtime how her mother died (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, pp. 150–151), which confirms that her refusal to have sex again is based on self-preservation rather than on pure religiosity. Since her religious devotion aligns with the dominant ideology of the Regime, she is merely using any means necessary to survive and avoid her fears. Again, one wonders whether Antonio's representation of this dialogue can be read as wishful thinking, believing – or wanting to believe – that Petra actually told her husband something related to her traumatic childhood. If so, Antonio's own traumata and depression, which come through his many losses through his childhood and his experience during the Spanish Civil War, incapacitate his ability to emotionally relate to her. In any case, Altarriba Jr is in some way sharing the guilt for not seeing it, but, to a certain extent he is also making his father for not telling him earlier or for forgetting. One may continue to wonder, then, because, as said in *EAR*'s epilogue, Altarriba Jr acknowledges that she had told him about her mother's death (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, p. 258).

There are two questions posed about other autobiographies that relate to these two graphic novels. The first one is related to Lynda Barry's early statement in her autobiographical comic *One! Hundred! Demons!* (2002). In a drawing of herself at her writing desk, she wonders, 'Is it autobiography if parts of it are not true? Is it fiction if parts of it are?' (p. 7). Of Barry's graphic novel, Jared Gardner writes, 'The losses and glosses of memory and subjectivity are foregrounded in graphic memoir in a way they can never be in traditional autobiography' (2008, p. 6). This is even more the case with these two examples here studied, since the authors exist between two positions which they must mediate. On the one hand, there is mediation between what they know from Altarriba Jr's memories of his father with what he told him throughout his life; on the other, they mediate between the research necessary to know more about Petra's life, as they gathered the little he knew from her, due to her silence, and the family and historical research required to fill this gap (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, p. 259).

Without intending to establish how much there is of fiction or facts, alluding to what Gardner states, this fiction vs fact difference still leads to the affiliative memory about which Sebastiaan Faber talks in the chapter 'The Spanish Civil War Retold: The Novel as Affiliative Act' (2018). Such 'act' refers to the artistic decision to find 'non-filiative types of human relations' (166). This is the opposite of what Altarriba Jr is doing here, what Faber names 'filiative', which is defined by 'loyalty' (p. 167). Altarriba Jr is going back to the familial roots, as he remembers and reminds the readers that these are extremely personal stories, in opposition to this affiliative trend that Faber describes in his chapter. It is then important to ask what it means that Altarriba Jr is first paying attention to his father through *EAdV*, even though Petra had died earlier and, as he acknowledged in *EAR*, because he apparently knew of her disability right before she died, as the authors admit at the beginning of *EAR* (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016,

p. 6). It is also important to remember that, according to Altarriba Jr, she would often talk to him about her mother's death (p. 258), which did not prevent him from misrepresenting her in *EAdV*. Altarriba Jr's blood relation to his parents is what led him to write these two works, and therefore the use of Faber's 'filiative memory'. However, in this attempt to tell his father's story, this empathizing with his father and poorly representing his mother is well framed within the patriarchy, even if it is later re-visited. In *Historical Memory*, these decisions with regard to tone, style, and perspective are, as Germán Labrador argues, decisions of a political and ethical dimension (p. 124), and they are immersed in this patriarchal system that focuses on the experience of men, leaving women and their experiences in the margins.

The second issue is situated here in the authors' political and ethical decisions, and it points to the way they relate and how they show it narratively, regardless of Altarriba Jr's recognized attempt to amend his mother's misrepresentation (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, p. 257). Then, following Mulvey, the arguments she uses for film can be applied to these two graphic narratives, while still considering Polak's previous statement, together with McCloud, who also talks about readers' identification in comics. Mulvey says that 'films [and also graphic narratives] reflect ... reveal ... and even play ... on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle' (2006, p. 342). She later says, 'There is no way in which we can produce an alternative out of the blue, but we can begin to make a break by examining patriarchy with the tools it provides' (p. 343). I here focus on this patriarchal system in which both the works and their scholarship are immersed. More analysis of the images mentioned above helps see that, while the genre and the style have a political and ethical dimension in historical memory, as Labrador Méndez says (2011, p. 124), what is systemically omitted in the scholarly analysis of these works is also political and ethical.

In order to consider Mulvey's argument, it is important to be aware of an earlier quotation from the same text that was quoted earlier:

[T]he function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is two-fold, she first symbolizes the castration threat by her real absence of a penis and second thereby raises her child into the Symbolic. Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end, it does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory which oscillates between memory of maternal plenitude and memory of lack. Both are posited on nature.

(2006, p. 342)

This is crucial, and it is important to remember that Altarriba Jr was consciously more involved with his father than his mother, regardless of what he would later say in an interview that he had distanced from her more in ideological terms than in emotional ones (Fernández de Arriba, 2019, p. 82). This is still doubtful,

because it seems that the political distance between him and his mother has led him to side with his father more than with his mother. She is firstly harshly judged by her religious devotion, and, secondly, her position and/or perspective is never truly taken into consideration: rather than being the subject of her life, the graphic novel seems a report of facts that happened to her. Altarriba Jr's tendencies to side with either of them – as well as his reasons – are not sufficiently explored, and they would have expanded and helped either of the graphic novels or even both.

The importance of this ethical and consequent visual positioning lies in what Mulvey argues later as different “pleasures” in film. First, as she summarizes, she talks about pleasure as ‘an object of sexual stimulation through sight’. At the same time, ‘The second [form of pleasure], developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen’ (2006, p. 346). This is easily seen through the images shown earlier in this chapter. Petra, as portrayed in both versions of the wedding night, is the ‘object of sexual stimulation’, regardless of the aims of each project. Plus, she is always seen through Antonio’s eyes and/or his position, since the picture always comes through him, and the reader is situated right below his elbow or behind his back. The image of Petra in the kitchen as she prays further confirms this visual and political position, and considering McCloud’s stand on readers’ identification in comics, it is even more so. McCloud states that, regardless of the realism of the picture, the reader will identify with the character they see (1993, p. 36), because the reader identifies with the idea that is represented, not the actual picture (p. 41). Both scenes – sexual intercourse and her prayer – are meant to be seen through Antonio’s eyes. Kim’s artwork is linked to what McCloud says when he states artists can portray realistically ‘in order to objectify [characters]’ (p. 44), which can be applied here. She is always the other, the unreachable object that can never be understood. Actions and events always seem to happen *to and around* her, but she is never the agent, only the reagent. She is always stoically resisting, and that is apparently her strength. However, even if McCloud’s analysis is accurate, when we consider Polak’s claim about the importance of the readers’ understanding and positioning, the reading can be seen differently, however slightly. Following Polak, it is important to remember that the way the readers are positioned to sympathize with one character or another is crucial. The scenes analyzed here can then be understood as creative decisions that, whether consciously or not, attempt to guide readers’ experience of the lives of Altarriba Jr’s parents through sympathizing with the author’s father. Readers can, consciously or not, follow their guidance, but the authors’ sympathies are still there.

That smile and hug Petra gives her husband during sex can be understood not only as an echo of Altarriba Jr’s wish for his parents being happy together, at least in the beginning of their relationship, but of her need to smile back at Antonio to make him comfortable, as part of her role as wife. Ultimately, as seen later in *EAR*, when Petra talks to her friend about marriage (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, pp. 166–167), sex is something men want, not women, and they need to be

satisfied. This is a response by the system instilled in many women, and Petra's friend exemplifies this. Petra's friend trusts her priest when he asks her to be patient, because her husband 'needs to vent, somehow' (p. 167). Petra's decision to avoid sex can be then seen as an act of resistance. She is still seen as a largely agentless object, but she can use what little agency is afforded to her to protect herself from violence, sex, and a possible pregnancy.

This agency is seen to a certain extent in *EAR*. She is seen helping a former friend escape from Spain to prevent Francoist Regime to kill him, and in this section, Altarriba Jr is frequently represented still as a child, which can be read as a statement that he remembered this event (Altarriba Jr & Kim, 2016, pp. 177–194). However, there are two noteworthy aspects with regard to this. First, Antonio is the one risking his life to protect Petra's friend and portrayed, then, as the male saviour. Second, this event is another important issue that is omitted in *EAdV*. The number of omissions, together with the perspective from which Petra is always portrayed – never her own – is what makes these two graphic narratives problematic. They need to be read together to make sure the image the reader has of Petra is more nuanced and has an awareness of the male gaze which underpins it. After all, Petra is a character here, but she was a real person, and her story could appeal to many readers who have similar experiences.

The 'new' content introduced in *EAR* confirms some of the problems in their previous work, although the male gaze is still present. Knowing that *EAdV* was published first is important because of its implications with regard to memory and Spanish graphic narratives – impact, visibility – but had Altarriba Jr never been questioned at the book presentation, he probably would have never sought to restore Petra's image or come to that conclusion. This proves that representation matters, because while the graphic novel may show that good historical research has been done, there are questions to ask ourselves with regard to representation, despite our emotional, ethical, and political ties. These are two commercially successful graphic novels to which academia has paid attention, and they portray the main characters' living experiences clearly and accessibly, since they point towards the way Francoist society worked in many respects, but they cannot completely escape the vision of women we have inherited from this period, and also earlier. Although the comics' representation could be seen as being heavily influenced by the Francoist understanding of – or lack thereof – women and, therefore, a criticism of it, these works were published 33 and 40 years after the death of Franco, respectively, and the need to relate to how we look at the past in general, and women in particular, in this case, is still important to consider.

Conclusion

El arte de volar and *El ala rota* are important in contemporary Spanish graphic narratives because of their impact and because of the authors' work and research on the protagonists' lives and life contexts. Having won one of the first Spanish National Comics Award in 2010, *EAdV* set the stage for these graphic narratives.

This graphic novel and this award confirm certain trend within the field to pay attention to historical memory, and it helped other works get the attention they may not have received, otherwise. Such is the case of Miguel Gallardo's *Un largo silencio*, which was published again in 2012 after receiving little interest when it was previously published in 1998. Later works also gathered both media and scholars' attention, such as Paco Roca's *Los surcos del azar* (2013) [*The Twists of Fate*, translated by Fantagraphics] and *Regreso al Edén* (2020) [*Return to Eden*], Sento's *Dr. Uriel* (2016), or the recently awarded *Estamos todas bien* [*We're All Fine*, my translation] by Ana Penyas (2017). Penyas's work further confirms this trend to talk about history and family, but it also fills in this gap regarding female representation in history, because she addresses both her grandmothers' lives, and she does it from a female perspective. Her graphic novel does not deepen in their lives as much as Altarriba and Kim's works, but *Estamos todas bien* represents another change of paradigm with what may come within the field, departing from previous works, like Altarriba Jr and Kim's.

By avoiding more successfully the male gaze than Altarriba Jr and Kim, Penyas's graphic novel may set an example of the stories graphic narratives may bring us in the future. Both *EAdV* and *EAR* have already opened up the conversation, bringing it into a different form and diversifying the products, making them available for a different audience. Because of the attention *EAdV* received for its award in Spain, *EAR* received attention too, and although it is not a 'complement' (Caicedo Tapia, 2019, p. 44), but a reparation and an individual work worthy of attention on its own, part of its impact comes through *EAdV*. However, *EAR* augments, corrects, and enhances the meanings of *EAdV*, allowing the conversation to continue, and it serves as an example of new approaches in graphic narratives. Another example can be Marina Cochet, Juan Sepúlveda Sanchís, and Antonio Mercero's graphic novel *El violeta*, in which they talk about the oppression gay men suffered during the Regime, and there can definitely be more stories, more experiences to which society has often not paid attention.

EAdV and *EAR* do this research and representation, and they tackle 'the need to come to terms with a past purportedly neglected', together with the 'moral and political restoration' (Loureiro, 2008, p. 227). Francoism and its effects on both the people that lived through it (or died during it) and the current political situation still needs to be addressed for its long-lasting impact on society on different sides. For example, the lack of funding for the Historical Memory Law, published in 2007, has its effects on current research, which is translated into not allowing people to find out what happened to their relatives, or literally find where their graves are (Saz, 2017). Recent political changes have led the ultra-conservative party, VOX, to win representation in Congress, who refuse to call Francoism a Dictatorship (Moltó, 2019), and who have influenced the traditionally conservative party, *Partido Popular*, to turn to a more conservative position (López de Miguel, 2018). Plus, the current *Partido Popular* President continues to mock the victims of the Regime and their relatives (público.es Editorial, 2020),

although he had done this before VOX existed and before he was the Party President (eldiario.es, 2015).

The study of memory reminds us of the importance of remembering the oppression through which our ancestors lived. Doing so on a familial level, with our relatives, is a first step that often seems the only option, as Faber hints at in his book *Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War* (2018), though this is not necessarily so. More needs to be done at the level of governmental institutions, because how a society remembers and dialogues with its past, as Labanyi reminds us, has to do with the modernization of it (2007, p. 91). As Faber writes, the political position from which one talks when dealing with memory matters (2018, p. 99) and saying otherwise is an oversimplification. Just as Polak argues, how we empathize with a victim or a perpetrator influences how we read a comic; it also influences our look at historical events. *EAdV* and *EAR* may still have issues with the male gaze through which the authors represent Petra, but they are working with memory and history, and they are helping it take another step forward in the development of a better, fairer history. If history is written by the winners, and the Fascists won the Civil War, not telling these histories and stories helps perpetuate memory as we already understand it, because, in the Spanish context, as Caroline P. Boyd reminds us, the Transition's Amnesty Law from 1977 was understood more as 'amnesia' (p. 135), rather than as 'Amnesty'. Remembering is as important as delving into, expanding, and questioning the existing Archive.

Note

- 1 Since *El ala rota* has not been translated into English, all translations are my own. In the case of *El arte de volar*, as it was translated by Adrian West and published by Adrian Cape in England [*The Art of Flying*, 2011], translations are his, when given.

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