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TRACING THE JOURNEY OF SPANISH PICTUREBOOKS UP TO THE LATE 20TH CENTURY: ORIGINS, EVOLUTION, AND CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER VISUAL NARRATIVES

*EL RECORRIDO DE LOS ÁLBUMES ILUSTRADOS
ESPAÑOLES HASTA FINALES DEL SIGLO XX:
ORÍGENES, EVOLUCIÓN Y VÍNCULOS CON
OTRAS NARRATIVAS VISUALES¹*

Abstract

This study examines the emergence and evolution of picturebooks in Spain, analysing illustrated literary products—either specifically targeted at childhood audiences or equally suitable for them—whose inclusion is justified by their relevance to the historical comprehension of the genre. The investigation begins with the protohistory of Spanish children's literature, progressing from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, from the primitive Isopetes to periodical publications that gradually incorporated visual elements. The research highlights the fundamental contribution of nineteenth-century publishers such as Bastinos, Calleja and Biblioteca Verdaguer, which significantly advanced the integration of images with enhanced narrative and visual potency, supported by artists like Bartolozzi and Apel-les Mestres. The analysis culminates with twentieth-century developments, wherein diverse graphic forms flourished despite the regressive impact of the Civil War and dictatorship on editorial innovation. The cultural aperture of the 1960s facilitated the development and consolidation of the contemporary picturebook as an integrated artistic-literary product, revealing the complex interplay of aesthetic, social and ideological factors in its evolutionary trajectory.

Keywords: Picturebooks; Illustrated children's literature; Editorial evolution; Visual narrative; History of illustration.

Resumen

Este estudio examina la emergencia y evolución del álbum ilustrado en España, analizando productos literarios ilustrados —bien destinados específicamente a la infancia o apropiados por ella—

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cuya inclusión se justifica por su relevancia en la comprensión histórica del género. La investigación parte de la protohistoria de la literatura infantil española, progresando desde el siglo XV al XIX, desde los primitivos Isopetes hasta las publicaciones periódicas que incorporaron gradualmente elementos visuales. Se destaca la contribución fundamental de editoriales decimonónicas como Bastinos, Calleja y Biblioteca Verdaguer, que impulsaron significativamente la integración de imágenes con mayor potencia narrativa y visual, con el respaldo de artistas como Bartolozzi y Apelles Mestres. El análisis culmina con los desarrollos del siglo XX, donde diversas formas gráficas florecieron pese al impacto regresivo de la Guerra Civil y la dictadura en la innovación editorial. La apertura cultural de los años sesenta facilitó el desarrollo y consolidación del álbum ilustrado contemporáneo como producto artístico-literario integrado, revelando la compleja interacción de factores estéticos, sociales e ideológicos en su trayectoria evolutiva.

Palabras clave: Álbum ilustrado; Literatura infantil ilustrada; Evolución editorial; Narrativa visual; Historia de la ilustración.

1. Introduction

The development of picturebooks in Spain is deeply intertwined with the broader evolution of children's literature, yet it follows a distinct trajectory that warrants focused analysis. To understand the concept of children's literature, we follow Mínguez-López (2012; 2015), who identifies its fundamental characteristics as literariness, suitability for the intended audience, and its role in literary education. From its earliest manifestations, children's literature in Spain was largely defined by didactic and moralising intentions, shaped by pedagogical frameworks aimed at instilling specific values in young readers. Over time, however, shifts in literary and artistic sensibilities led to the emergence of the picturebook as a distinct creative form—one that relies on the dynamic interplay between text and image to construct meaning and engage readers visually and narratively. This study aims to analyse a corpus of illustrated works that, while sometimes not exclusively intended for children, are nevertheless relevant for understanding the historical evolution of the genre. By examining these works within their broader cultural, educational, and artistic contexts, the article highlights how picturebooks gradually gained recognition as both a literary and artistic medium, playing a key role in reshaping the landscape of children's literature and visual storytelling.

2. The beginnings of Children's Literature in Spain

The evolution of children's literature has been inextricably linked to the broader historical, social, and political transformations that have characterised successive epochs, each introducing distinct conceptualisations of childhood itself. Cultural movements have exerted profound influence upon the development of children's literary traditions throughout history, with the French Baroque influence evident in Perrault's works, the Enlightenment principles reflected in the fables of Samaniego and Iriarte, and the Romantic sensibilities embodied by the Grimm brothers serving as paradigmatic examples within the established canon of children's literature scholarship. Whilst a dedicated corpus of texts explicitly intended for young readers did not emerge until the nineteenth century, earlier historical periods nonetheless witnessed the creation of literary works that remained accessible to children (Colomer, 2010; García Carcedo, 2004). This preliminary examination focuses upon selected

works from the protohistory of children's literature, seeking to trace the origins and developmental trajectory of illustrated literature designed for young audiences.

Building upon this foundational understanding, the incorporation of illustrations within children's literature has not been a consistent feature throughout the genre's historical development. Technological innovations have fundamentally altered publishing and production methodologies, consequently affecting the resources available to artists in the creation of their visual accompaniments. Within the context of Spanish children's literature, the protohistorical examination leads to the earliest literary texts, as documented in Carmen Bravo Villasante's seminal work *Historia de la literatura infantil española* (1959, 1st edition), which is complemented by an accompanying *Antología de la literatura infantil en lengua española*. This scholarship represents the first systematic attempt to construct a historical account of children's literature predating the eighteenth century, which is widely regarded as marking the commencement of literature explicitly crafted for younger audiences. Prior to this period, as Bravo Villasante observes, "en el estadio primitivo de nuestra literatura, niños y grandes escucharían las mismas cosas y tendrían las mismas lecturas" (1985, p. 12). Consequently, from romances to epic poetry, from the *mester de clerecía* to historical chronicles, these manifestations of primitive, oral, and popular literature contained elements that would prove appealing to children: "El infantilismo de los orígenes de casi todas las literaturas explica que esta fuera apta para niños" (Bravo Villasante, 1985, p. 12). In this regard, Bravo Villasante and subsequent scholars of early children's literature have established connections between the primitivism of literary origins, characterised by deeply embedded popular elements, and infantilism, thereby highlighting the intimate relationship between popular, children's, and primitive literary forms.

Illustrations have not always been a part of children's literature texts from their inception. Technological advancements have significantly influenced the publishing and production methodologies, thereby impacting the resources accessible to artists for crafting their illustrations. In the case of illustrated Spanish children's literature, the protohistory leads us to the earliest literary texts, as depicted in the essential volume by Carmen Bravo Villasante on the *Historia de la literatura infantil española* (1959, 1st edition). It is accompanied by an *Antología de la literatura infantil en lengua española*. This work represents the first attempt to create a history of children's literature predating the 18th century, considered the beginning of literature explicitly tailored for younger audiences, as before, "en el estadio primitivo de nuestra literatura, niños y grandes escucharían las mismas cosas y tendrían las mismas lecturas"² (Bravo Villasante, 1985, p. 12). That is to say, from romances to epic poems, from the *mester de clerecía* to chronicles, in all these examples of primitive, oral, and popular literature, there would be attractive characteristics for children: "El infantilismo de los orígenes de casi todas las literaturas explica que esta fuera apta para niños"³ (Bravo Villasante, 1985, p. 12). In this regard, Bravo Villasante and other scholars and historians of children's literature in its early stages associate the primitivism of literary origins, marked by deeply rooted popular features, with infantilism, highlighting the close relationship between popular, children's, and primitive literature.

Within this introductory examination of illustration in the protohistory of children's literature, it is essential to acknowledge that these early epic and didactic texts, being manuscripts intended for

2 "In the primitive stage of our literature, children and adults would listen to the same things and have the same readings" (translation by the authors)

3 "The childishness of the origins of almost all literatures explains why it was suitable for children." (translation by the authors)

royalty and the few literate recipients of the Middle Ages, were all magnificently illustrated. These images also served as an incentive for the entire illiterate population receiving this legacy. However, such observations remain largely conjectural, as concrete evidence regarding texts specifically intended for children does not appear until the fifteenth century, rendering earlier assertions necessarily speculative in nature.

3. Early developments in illustrated Children's Literature in Spain before the 18th century

In Spain, the history of illustrations can be traced back to the compilation of Aesop's fables by Heinrich Steinhöwel (1476/1477), which was later translated into several languages, including Spanish under the title *Isopete Istoriado*. Throughout the Middle Ages, collections of Aesop's fables, called Isopetes, existed in oral and manuscript versions. References are found in *El libro del Buen Amor* and in *Don Quixote*, which demonstrates their popularity. In fact, printed copies with woodcuts, which continue the manuscript tradition, have survived until the 19th century (Carro Carvajal, 2013a, 2013b). There are four incunabula of the historical Ysopete (Zaragoza, 1482, Tolosa, 1488, Zaragoza, 1489 and Burgos, 1496) and their publishing history presents some confusion. Domínguez Lasierra (1990) states that the 1489 edition is the princeps, but Lacarra (2010) offers, without a doubt, the history of these four incunabula, with special emphasis on the discovery in 1974 of the 1482 copy. So, the oldest copy found so far is from 1482 and has 125 hand-coloured engravings; this volume, however, is incomplete and some later models containing almost 200 have also been recovered, such as the Burgos edition of 1496, which had 197 black and white, uncoloured engravings (Grupo Clarisel, n.d.).

In addition to these, Domínguez Lasierra (1990) highlights the *Exemplario contra los engaños y peligros del mundo* (1493), which is the Castilian version of the *Calila e Dimna*, precisely because of its illustrations: "En el prólogo del *Exemplario* el lector infantil aparece como uno de los destinatarios a quien especialmente ha sido dirigida esta versión ilustrada de los apólogos árabes"⁴ (p. 13). Other works aimed at young people also came out of Zaragoza presses, such as the *Preguntas y Problemas*, based on small riddles to entertain the youngest. It is noteworthy that the *Orbis sensualium pictus* by Comenius, published in 1658, is always accepted internationally as the first illustrated children's book, despite the mentioned Isopete being 170 years older.

But for the purposes of this work, the most interesting time period is perhaps from the late eighteenth century onwards, when a corpus of works specifically aimed at children began to be created in Spain coinciding with the slow process of compulsory schooling (Colomer, 2010).

4. Progress and expansion of illustrated Children's Literature in Spain: 18th and 19th centuries

During that period, fables continued to be extremely popular, both those of Aesop and those of Spanish writers such as Iriarte and Samaniego, which echoed the moralising spirit of La Fontaine (García Carcedo, 2004). Some of them contained interesting engravings, such as those illustrated by Joseph Ximeno in 1782 (Obiols, 2003). Furthermore, a few decades after the first illustrated children's

4 "In the preface of the *Exemplario*, the child reader appears as one of the intended recipients to whom this illustrated version of the Arabic apologues has been especially directed." (translation by the authors)

periodicals appeared in England, initiated by bookseller John Newbery in 1744, similar publications began to emerge in Spain. One such example is the *Gazeta de los niños* (1798), which, while retaining an indoctrinating tone, was nonetheless a bold and singular initiative nonprofit in nature and remarkable considering that approximately 75% of the population at the time was illiterate (Viñao, 1984). The major shift in Spain occurred with the Moyano Law (1857), as the illiteracy rate in 1850 was approximately 75%, as previously mentioned, and decreased by 1900 to between 50% and 59%, depending on the sources consulted (López Melgarejo, 2019). It was published monthly, lasted for two years, and appeared shortly after Newbery's *The Lilliputian Magazine*, the German publications of the seventies, and even the French *L'Ami des enfants* of 1782. Additionally, it was printed by one of Madrid's most important printing presses at that time, Antonio de Sancha, by the hands of the Canga Argüelles brothers, with very specific objectives: to be inspired by French children's magazines, targeting children from eight years old, with a clear pedagogical purpose, but without forgetting some entertainment value (Chivelet, 2010).

In Spain, fantastic themes did not manage to gain a foothold in children's magazines until the middle of the century, with publications such as *La floresta infantil* (1855), *La educación pintoresca* (1857) or *La aurora de la vida* (1860) (Biblioteca Nacional de España, n.d.-b; Hidalgo Rodríguez, 1999). Also in the mid-19th century, other magazines that included images were published, such as *El mentor de la infancia* (1843), *La ilustración de la infancia* (1877) or *El mundo de los niños. Ilustración decenal infantil* (1887). The illustrations were generally realistic and fulfilled a decorative function (Biblioteca Nacional de España, n.d.-a; García Padrino, 2004b; García Padrino, 2010), as can be seen in Figure 1. This secondary role of the image was still far from the prominence it would later attain in the picturebook; however, the gradual inclusion of images in publications aimed at children highlights how visual language was steadily gaining importance in children's literature –something that was also taking place in other European countries (Larragueta, 2021)— and constitutes a fundamental step in the eventual development of the picturebook.



Figure 1. *El mentor de la infancia*, 1843, *La ilustración de la infancia*, 1877, and *El mundo de los niños. Ilustración decenal infantil*, 1887 (Biblioteca Nacional de España, n.d.-a)

Around this period, the first children's publishing houses appeared. The emergence of Bastinos, founded in Barcelona in 1852 by Juan Bastinos, marked a turning point in the development of

illustrated children's literature in Spain. As one of the first publishers to specialize in works for children—produced in both Catalan and Spanish and widely exported to Latin America—Bastinos played a key role in promoting the visual dimension of children's books. The creation of this publishing infrastructure, combined with technical advances such as the importation of offset printing machinery in 1916, enabled the production of cheaper, more visually engaging books that could meet the growing demand generated by increasing children's schooling. (Colomer, 2010).

Also noteworthy is the publishing house Calleja, which, alongside other contemporary initiatives mentioned, represented a significant step forward in the development of a visual language aimed at children. It was founded by Saturnino Calleja in 1876 in Madrid and followed a model similar to Newbery's or to that of other contemporary publishers in Spain, such as the Basque editor Isaac López de Mendizábal (Colomer, 2010).

It had the intention of reaching all types of publics: small, cheap books with a large number of images, usually characterised by realistic scenes reflecting customs and habits (Hidalgo Rodríguez, 1999). Calleja's progressive modernization, expansion of readership, formats of works, and interest in the artistic aspect contributed to a unique aesthetic as the editor "buscó la colaboración de artistas plásticos que supieron configurar un estilo y una presentación formal que marcarían durante muchos años unas ediciones"⁵ (García Padrino, 2004b, p. 32). These publications represented an advance in terms of their conception of the image and they gave great value to the work of the illustrators by reflecting their names on the works —Figure 2—. This kind of recognition, however, was not achieved by the illustrators of the Bastinos publishing house —Figure 3— until the end of the 19th century, with the thoughtfully edited publications of "Biblioteca Azucena" and "Biblioteca Elvira" (García Padrino, 2004b).

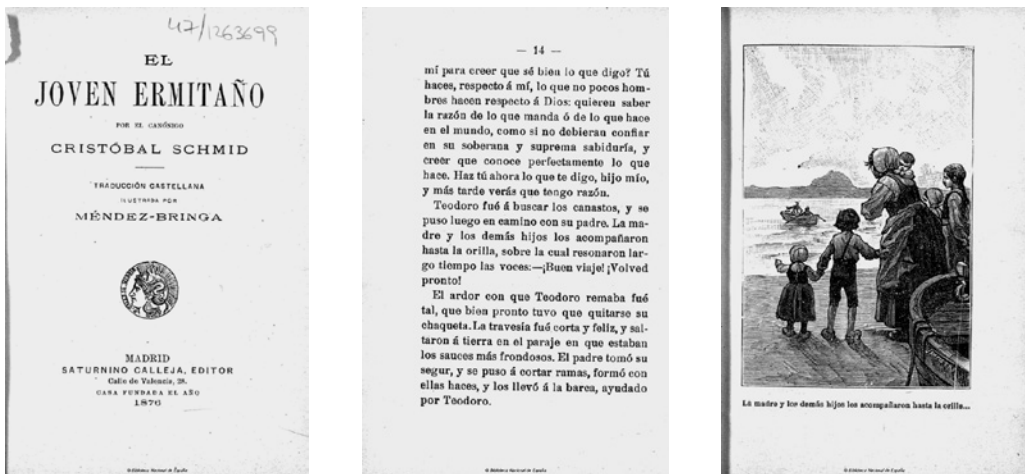


Figure 2. Frontpage and pages from *El joven ermitaño*, by Calleja publishing house, 1876 (Biblioteca Nacional de España, n.d.-b)

5 "(he) sought the collaboration of visual artists who knew how to configure a style and formal presentation that would define editions for many years." (translation by the authors)

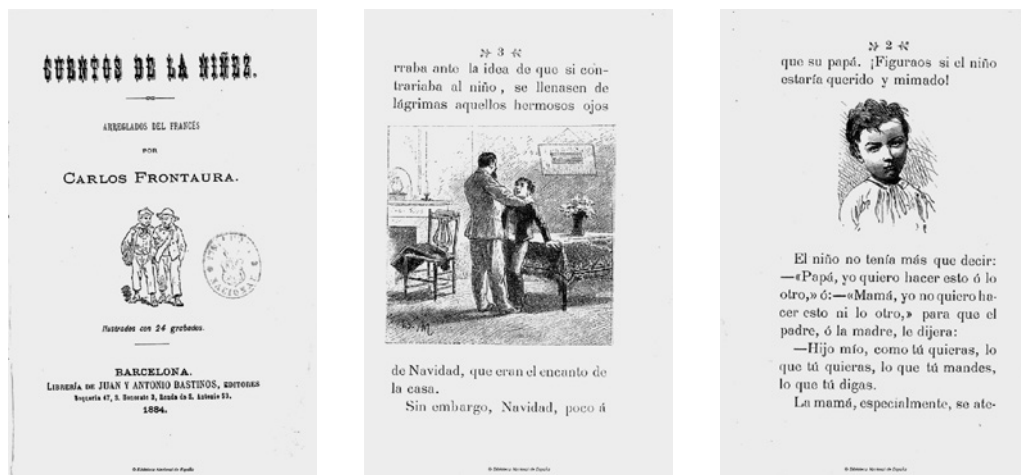


Figure 3. Frontpage and pages from *Cuentos de la niñez*, by Bastinos publishing house, 1884 (Biblioteca Nacional de España, n.d.-b)

It is also worth mentioning the work of Celesti Verdager, who in 1882 founded the publishing house Biblioteca Verdager, with the collaboration of Apelles Mestres, who was in charge of the artistic direction and the author of works such as *Cuentos vivos: La sonda. El conde tal. Cuatro hombres y un cabo* (1882). In this collection of short stories, illustration plays a central role, often occupying most of the page and reducing the text to just a few words beneath the images as shown in Figure 4 (Duran, 2015; Rodríguez Gutiérrez, n.d.). This predominance of the visual recalls the page composition of *Der Struwwelpeter* by Heinrich Hoffmann (1845) and *Max und Moritz* by Wilhelm Busch (1865)—both landmarks in the development of the Western picturebook, where illustration is primarily responsible for telling the story and for building the humorous and narrative atmosphere through its interaction with the written code (Larragueta, 2021). However, the publishing line of the Biblioteca Verdager was not maintained for long because the printer died after having released only eleven books (Rodríguez Gutiérrez, n.d.).



Figure 4. *Cuentos vivos: La sonda. El conde tal. Cuatro hombres y un cabo*, 1882 (López, 2012)

Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, new publishing houses such as Araluce, Folch i Torres, Hijos de Santiago Rodríguez y Cenit, Sopena, and Juventud appeared. It is worth noting here the crucial importance of the Catalan publishing scene, especially in Barcelona. Not only in the field of children's literature but also across all literary styles and formats, as well as in the realm of literary awards. Some of the mentioned publishing houses have managed to reinvent themselves over decades and are now major references in the world of picturebooks, such as Juventud. According to García Padrino (2016), the aesthetic movements of Art Deco and Art Nouveau influenced the avant-garde period in children's literature, particularly in the Catalan publishing houses Araluce and Sopena, as well as in the renewed Calleja.

5. The rise of visual arts in the 20th century

In the 20th century, the presence of illustration in children's works continued to develop and spread. Thus, in 1917, for example, the Calleja publishing house opted for colour printing in its new collection of "Cuentos de Calleja en colores" (García Padrino, 2016). In fact, there are researchers who see in this period the appearance of the first traces of picturebooks in Spain, thanks to these formats in which illustration had a very important role and the layout of texts and images explored expressive possibilities (García Padrino, 2007).

Salvador Bartolozzi was artistic director of the publishing house between 1915 and 1928 and made an important contribution to the evolution of the format. For three years he was responsible for the magazine *Pinocho*, created in 1925 from *Le avventure di Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi. It included some sections in full colour and great illustrators of the time collaborated in it. The publication was a good example of a commitment to the role of illustrations in the narrative, as these were not limited to decorating the text, but expanded and anticipated what the words conveyed (Regueiro Salgado, 2019). With significant training at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, his pictorial and artistic style is intimately linked to avant-garde movements such as futurism, cubism, and simultaneism. Not only did he become famous with *Pinocho*, but he also created other characters like Chapete, Pipo, and Pipa (Lozano Bartolozzi, 2018). In a similar vein, we should mention Lola Anglada and her work in titles such as *Margarida* (1929) and *Narcís* (1930), as well as Mercedes Llimona with very important pieces such as *El ninot de paper* (1942) (García Padrino, 2007). All these illustrators showed a strong interest in producing high-quality illustrations with a meaningful role in the narrative, making this approach increasingly less anecdotal within the field of children's literature—a fundamental step toward the development of the picturebook.

The early twentieth century witnessed a growing interest in visual culture across Europe and the United States, which coincided with the emergence of comic strips as a significant precursor to the picturebook. These narratives, which appeared primarily in children's magazines and newspapers, drew inspiration from earlier visual traditions such as the Catalan *aucas* and *aleluyas*—illustrated sheets combining images with short captions. Typically didactic and occasionally satirical in tone, these compositions reflected a longstanding connection between visual storytelling and childhood (Fundación Joaquín Díaz, n.d.). While most were produced in a vertical layout—Figure 5—, horizontal formats also appeared—Figure 6—, revealing early experimentation with page structure and visual rhythm.

These kinds of publications marked a pivotal moment in the consolidation of sequential visual narratives. In line with seventeenth-century publishing innovations and the work of figures such

as Apel·les Mestre's, these sheets featured compositions where images dominated both the physical layout and the construction of meaning. Their emphasis on visual progression and narrative continuity –shared with early comic strips– demonstrates the growing sophistication of visual language for children and anticipates core elements of the modern picturebook (Santiago-Ruiz, 2021).



Figure 5. *El Cid Campeador*, 1866, and *Aleluyas del joven Telémaco*, 1867 (Fundación Joaquín Díaz, n.d.)



Figure 6. *Nuevos versos para las máscaras* and *La vida del hombre malo* (Fundación Joaquín Díaz, n.d.)

Concurrently, in the first half of the twentieth century, children's magazines took over the children's market and transformed their formats with the use of vignettes and enlarged layouts (Hidalgo Rodríguez, 1999). Many of these publications placed increasing emphasis on visual storytelling, allowing for the gradual emergence of elements central to the picturebook: high-quality illustrations, an integrated relationship between text and image at both the compositional and narrative levels, sequentiality, and larger formats. Although this study does not aim to offer a comprehensive account of the Spanish comic or magazine tradition, it underscores how these editorial and visual practices contributed to the aesthetic and narrative development of the picturebook.

One of the most remarkable examples is *En Patufet* –Figure 7–, a children's magazine published by the aforementioned Bastinos publishing house, founded in 1904 and in circulation until 1938. It reached an average print run of 60,000 copies, making it a significant phenomenon in a society with

low literacy rates. The magazine regularly featured the work of many artists, such as Josep Maria Folch i Torres, one of the most prolific children’s authors of the early twentieth century, whose stories –such as *Les aventures extraordinàries d'en Massagran* (1910)– were vividly brought to life by illustrator Joan Junceda (Colomer, 2010).



Figure 7. *En Patufet* (Rodríguez Humanes et al., 2008)

Other notable early examples include *Correo de los niños* and *Chiquitín*, both first published in 1913. In these magazines, illustrations frequently dominated the page, often adopting structures reminiscent of comic strips and incorporating colour imagery –Figure 8. *Violet* (1922) and *Chiribitas* (1925), the latter published by Calleja, are also worthy of mention. These magazines featured contributions from various artists and regularly included black-and-white, two-colour, and full-colour illustrations.



Figure 8. Frontpage and pages from *Correo de los niños*, edited in 1913 (Biblioteca Nacional de España, n.d.-b)

Likewise, the magazine *Blanco y Negro*, already consolidated in the publishing scene and which had shown interest in including illustration and comics in its pages, created the children's supplement *Gente menuda*. It was published between 1932 and 1936 –Figure 9– and reappeared between 1988 and 2000 as a supplement of the newspaper ABC. It had around twenty pages and included both black-and-white and colour plates, with a wide variety of artists contributing (Biblioteca Nacional de España, n.d.-a). It is worth highlighting the aesthetic innovation of some of its proposals.



Figure 9. Cover and pages from number 9 of *Gente menuda* (Biblioteca Nacional de España, n.d.-b)

From this moment onwards, the general historical framework is essential for organizing the chronology of the 20th century. The dates from 1936 to 1939 and from the end of the Civil War to the end of the dictatorship in 1975 represent the paradigm shift moments, considering the openness of the 1960s in Spain. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the years immediately afterwards had a marked influence on literature aimed at children. Due to paper shortages, the quality of children's books declined; however, the illustrations by Piti Bartolozzi can still be appreciated (García Padrino, 2024). As a general rule, the publishing market saw the returning of the indoctrinating tone and the didactic and moralistic intention of transmitting appropriate behaviour to children. There were changes in the children's magazines and new titles such as *Flechas y Pelayos*, *Bazar*, *Maravillas*, *Chicos* or *Mis chicas* took the lead. In these publications, artists such as Emilio Freixas, Serny –pseudonym of Ricardo Summers and Iser–, Mercè Llimona, Rafael de Penagos, Jesús Blasco or María Claret developed their work (García Padrino, 2004a, 2018). It is important to note that due to paper shortages, the quality of children's books declined; however, the illustrations by Piti Bartolozzi can still be appreciated.

In the 1950s, Spain saw a notable increase in children's editions because the difficulties of the post-war period started to be overcome. This also meant an increase in the number of artists dedicated to the format, which translated into a marked disparity of styles in illustrations. The publishing house Aguilar, with its collection "El globo de colores", focused on the children's market with large formats in which illustration played an essential role again, resuming the path towards the development of the picturebook format. In 1952, the Exhibition of Illustrators and Book Decorators was held at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, where figures such as Bartolozzi, Goico Aguirre and Goñi exhibited (Hidalgo Rodríguez, 1999). Furthermore, in 1958, the Spanish National Book Institute created the Lazarillo Prize and in 1959, that had a specific category of Illustration, the Doncel publishing house

was founded. In its collection "La ballena alegre" promoted carefully illustrated books with the collaboration of a large panel of artists such as Asun Balzola, Lorenzo Goñi, Julio Montañés or Paredes Jardiel (Bravo Villasante, 1983). These facts are once again relevant for understanding how illustration continued to gain prominence in children's literature in Spain, gradually advancing towards the development of the picturebook as a complete artistic product, as it is conceived today and as it was evolving, at different paces, in other European countries (Larragueta, 2021).

During the 1960s, following the lifting of restrictions on publishing in languages other than Spanish, Catalan children's literature experienced a notable revival, spearheaded by the launch of the magazine *Cavall Fort* in 1963 and the establishment of *La Galera*, a publishing house devoted exclusively to children's books. This period was also marked by a conscious effort to re-establish connections with earlier European cultural movements, which involved translating prominent works such as the *Le Père Castor* picturebooks, European comics, and collections aimed at adolescent audiences. These initiatives played a pivotal role in modernising and revitalising children's literature across the entirety of Spain. It is also necessary to mention the innovation proposed by the publishing house Noguer, with numerous collaborations by the award-winning artist Riera Rojas, and the first editions by the publishing house Galaxia (Colomer, 2010). Probablemente, muchos de los ilustradores que por aquel entonces se estrenaban en esta revista o editorial se deben ruborizar al ver sus primeras obras. Pero en aquellos momentos, esas obras eran un cambio tan importante respecto a la dinámica general, que sin duda representaron una nueva manera de entender la literatura y también a los niños"⁶ (Obiols, 2003, p 118).

Returning to the close relationship in the graphic and visual evolution of various genres and formats that accompanied the development of the picturebook, it is worth mentioning Francisco Ibáñez. In the latter half of the 20th century, specifically in 1961, Ibáñez introduced the inaugural episode of *13, Rue del Percebe* in the magazine *Tío Vivo*. This series presented an innovative page layout by depicting a multi-storey building with its façade removed, allowing readers to simultaneously observe the humorous antics of its diverse inhabitants across different floors. Each apartment functioned as an independent vignette, yet the collective arrangement fostered a cohesive narrative structure (De Gregorio & Moreno, 2010). This architectural cross-section approach not only broke the conventional bidimensional vignettes but also offered a quasi-three-dimensional perspective, enhancing the reader's engagement. While there had been precedents to this type of graphic and narrative proposal—such as Manuel Vázquez's contributions to magazine *Pulgarcito* (De Gregorio & Moreno, 2010), and earlier work by Joaquín Xaudaró and Echau, whose training in France enabled him to incorporate stylistic and structural innovations into the Spanish scene—Ibáñez's work is of particular interest due to its longevity and widespread impact. *13, Rue del Percebe* became a cultural reference in Spain, shaping the collective imagination and standing as a landmark in the development of humorous sequential art.

6 "Probably, many of the illustrators who were debuting in that magazine or publishing house at the time might blush upon seeing their early works. However, at that moment, those works represented such a significant change from the general dynamics that they undoubtedly embodied a new way of understanding literature and also children."(translation by the authors)

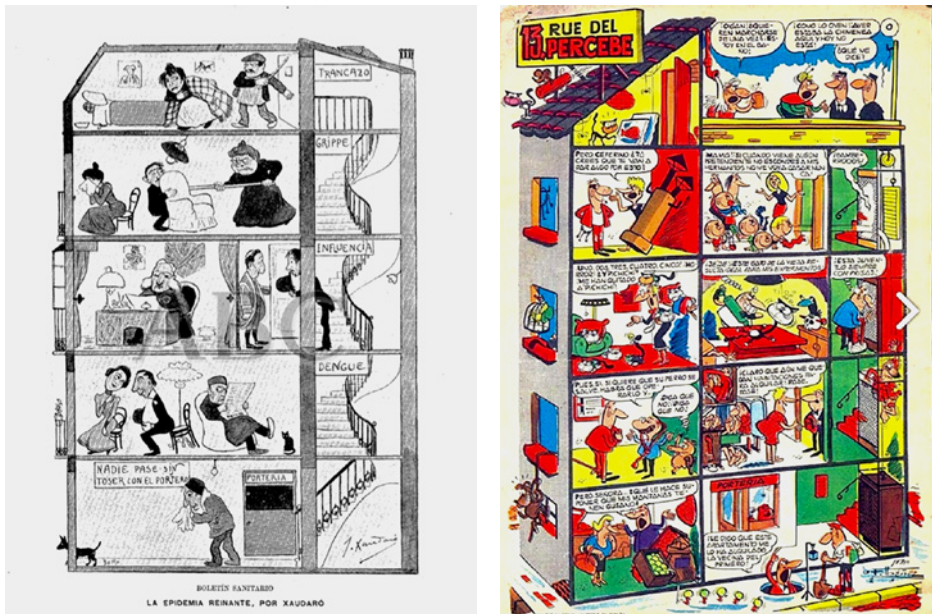


Figure 10. *La epidemia reinante*, by Xaudaró (1900) and first episode of *13 Rue del percebe*, by Ibáñez (1961) (Archivo ABC, n.d.; De Gregorio Et Moreno, 2010)

Between the late 1960s and early 1970s, the production of hardcover books with few pages, relatively high prices and characterised by a combination of images and words in which the one seemed to depend on the other, gained momentum in Spain (Hidalgo Rodríguez, 1999). This marks the clear beginning of the picturebook in Spain, albeit with editions of titles already published in other countries, translated into Spanish for the first time. It is important to note that the 1950s, 60s, and 70s saw the flourishing of contemporary classics such as Ann and Paul Rand, Bruno Munari, Maurice Sendak, Shel Silverstein, and many others from various European and American countries. This coincided, and not by chance, with the famous openness (social, tourist, economic, welfare) of Spain in all areas starting from the 1960s.

In this line, the publishing houses Altea -with its "Primera biblioteca" collection for new readers-, Doncel and La Galera stand out (Hidalgo Rodríguez, 1999). Altea, which later became part of the Santillana group, was established in the 1970s and fully understood the format, objectives, aesthetics, and value of the picturebook, publishing Raymond Briggs' *The Snowman* for the first time in Spanish in 1981. Additionally, it created several collections, such as Altea Benjamin and Altea Mascota. This significant initiative was led by Miguel Ángel Pacheco and José Luis García Sánchez, who were responsible for some of the most notable picturebooks of the 1970s and 1980s. Altea, however, was not alone in this endeavour. Several publishing houses founded in the early decades of the 20th century also played a crucial role in consolidating the picturebook as a distinct literary and artistic form in Spain. Among them are Juventud (Barcelona, 1923), Molino (Barcelona, 1933), Aguilar (Madrid, 1923), and Miñón (Valladolid, 1946). In the final decades of the century, these publishers showed a renewed commitment to visual storytelling by promoting high-quality illustrated works, thereby contributing to the continued evolution and establishment of the picturebook in the Spanish literary landscape (García Padrino, 2007).

During these decades, illustrators such as Carme Solé Vendrell, Miguel Ángel Pacheco, Vivi Escrivá, Ulises Wensell and José Ramón Sánchez emerged and established themselves, joining Asun Balzola, or Miguel Calatayud. They all shared a common concern for renewing the conception of illustrated children's books through innovation in techniques and themes. Furthermore, initiatives such as the Bratislava Children's Book Illustration Biennial, first held in 1967, and the Bologna Book Fair fostered international openness and the exchange of ideas and experiences among artists from different countries. These spaces of dialogue and collaboration can be seen as particularly valuable for Spanish illustrators, many of whom had experienced limited contact with the international scene during the more isolationist years of the dictatorship (García Padrino, 2004b).

In the 1980s, children's literature continued to evolve, new publishing houses appeared, and new artists joined the already large number of illustrators working in the field. Many of them came from Fine Arts schools, so their artistic training was no longer as self-taught as in previous periods, but the diversity of styles was maintained. In this period there were numerous publications in which the illustrations reached the same level as the text, following the Anglo-Saxon and French publishing tradition of the 1980s. In this perspective, titles such as *El mayor tesoro*, by Arcadio Lobato, emerged, the result of a trend of illustrators who "reivindican su papel de recreadores del texto y no como simples ornamentadores de este"⁷ (Selfa Sastre & Reis da Silva, 2014, p. 449). In addition, different professional associations and specialised institutions arose. Some of them are still in existence today and carry out important work to promote the sector of children's and young people's literature. These include the Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez, founded in 1981, and the Organización Española para el Libro Infantil y Juvenil (Spanish Organisation for Children's and Young People's Books) founded in 1982.

There were also various initiatives aimed at disseminating and promoting the work and quality of Spanish illustrators. In 1982, for example, the Spanish National Book Institute published *Ilustradores españoles de libros infantiles y juveniles* with bibliographical information and images of all those professionals who wished to participate. In 1989, the Ministry of Culture organised, through the Centro del Libro y la Lectura, the exhibition *A todo color. 23 ilustradores españoles de libros para niños y jóvenes* with a selection made by a committee made up of official and private entities and professional associations; they also published a catalogue. These institutional frameworks provided valuable support and infrastructure for the development of picturebooks and contributed to advancing the professional recognition of illustrators and publishers working in this field. Such organisational backing helped strengthen the position of illustration as an important artistic component within children's literature, thereby creating favourable conditions for the creative and technical advancement of picturebooks as a distinctive literary-visual format.

However, all this editorial strength, of immense aesthetic quality, was disrupted in the late 1980s and only recovered in the late 1990s: "llama la atención esta recuperación si tenemos en cuenta aquel olvido o abandono anterior, tras unas décadas, los años 70 y 80, donde tanto el álbum de imágenes como el libro ilustrado –más bien, profusa y ricamente ilustrado y de gran formato– había conocido iniciativas editoriales de enorme interés"⁸ (García Padrino, 2007, p. 25).

7 "claim their role as recreators of the text and not as mere ornamenters of it" (translation by the authors)

8 "It is noteworthy to observe this revival considering the previous neglect or abandonment, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, when both the image album and the illustrated book – rather, profusely and richly illustrated and of large format – had seen editorial initiatives of great interest." (translation by the authors)

A little later, there were more specialised publications, such as *Guía de ilustradores*, released in 1997 by the Asociación Española de Amigos del Libro Infantil y Juvenil, which again contained bibliographical data on two hundred artists, or *El texto iluminado*, the result of an exhibition in 2002 presenting the works of 28 artists, both Spanish and Latin American, related to the illustration of texts in general.

In the 1980s and 1990s, we can no longer speak of precedents for the picturebook, as it effectively exists within the mentioned publishers, such as La Galera, Doncel, and Altea, which give voice and image to national authors, as previously noted, but also to international ones, like Nella Bosnia. This is primarily due to the explosion in all areas (editorial, scientific, and educational), which led the magazine *Peonza* in October 1990 to dedicate its opening pages to this genre, format, or way of understanding illustrated literature, with a brief definition: "es un tipo de libro donde la imagen es prioritaria respecto al texto"⁹ (Editorial Team, 1990, p.4). However, it laments that most of the production is foreign, consisting of translations, arguing that there is excellent quality and variety among Spanish artists who lack their own platforms for dissemination. In the same pages, *Peonza* highlights successful collections in this format, namely, those in full colour and hardcover in Spain. Thus, publishers like SM, Espasa, and Destino have already dedicated part of their efforts to picturebooks. In 1992, Kókinos was founded in Madrid; in 1998, Media Vaca in Valencia; and Kalandraka in Pontevedra. Any of the three contribute to the history of the picturebooks today. From the dawn of the 21st century, the history of this format presents the strength with which we know it today.

5. Conclusions

The evolution of illustration within Spanish children's literature has been a gradual process, marked by a steady increase in both its visual prominence and narrative function. Rather than emerging fully formed, the picturebook as we understand it today is the result of a long trajectory of experimentation and development in which image and text progressively established a more balanced and meaningful relationship.

Understanding the emergence and consolidation of the picturebook requires broadening the analytical lens to include a diverse range of illustrated literary formats. Children's magazines, comic strips, and other graphic works —although not conceived explicitly as picturebooks— played a vital role in shaping its defining features. These forms of visual literature frequently explored sequentiality, narrative-image integration, and experimental page composition, influencing and echoing the evolving conventions of the picturebook.

The deliberate and aesthetically conscious composition of the page, with equal —or even greater— emphasis placed on the image compared to the text, can be traced back to innovative proposals of the seventeenth century. However, it has taken centuries for such visual-narrative equilibrium to become a standard and recurring feature in children's literature, ultimately paving the way for the rise and widespread dissemination of the picturebook as an integrated artistic-literary product.

In the second half of the twentieth century, coinciding with a period of greater cultural openness in Spain following decades of isolation imposed by the Francoist regime, the conditions became favourable for the flourishing of innovative graphic narratives. This era saw the emergence of a more coherent and ambitious graphic conception in children's publishing, supported by the

9 "it is a type of book where the image takes priority over the text" (translation by the authors)

meticulous work of illustrators and designers. At the same time, various professional associations and specialised institutions, such as the Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez and the Organización Española para el Libro Infantil y Juvenil, were established. These organisations –along with national and international initiatives aimed at recognising and promoting Spanish illustration– contributed significantly to elevating the role of visual art in children's literature. Together, these developments consolidated the picturebook as a distinctive and valued literary-visual form within Spain's cultural landscape.

Today, picturebooks enjoy significant recognition among those who mediate children's reading choices, such as educators and librarians, and has become a central feature in bookshops, solidifying its place as both a literary and artistic form within contemporary children's literature.

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