Iberomanga:
From mainstream to gafotaku and gendered niches[1]

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In 1992, comics critic Toño Blanco[2] wrote:

> *"Two bombs were not strong enough [...]. Now, Japan is also winning the race in a market that generates many millions of profit every year: superheroes. [...] The Americans created this market and have held its monopoly for many years. No one seemed able to overshadow Superman, Batman, Spiderman and other champions of humanity defending civilization while dressed in multicolored pajamas. However, Japanese manga arrived, exceeding the American comics with their modern samurai and providing more action, fantasy and violence than their veteran American counterparts.*

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1 The prefix "Ibero" has been used lately to target any cultural display as "Spanish"—*Iberotaku* means Spanish otaku, *Ibero-manga* means "manga made in Spain".

2 Toño Blanco (A Coruña 1964 - 1994) was a writer, actor, director, and a promoter of comics in Galicia. He was also co-founder of the TV program "Xabarín Club" (lit. Wild Boar Club), a television broadcast pioneer about anime and comics, music and children's entertainment which has aired *Dragon Ball*, *Mr. Ajikko*, *Dr. Slump*, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Black Jack*, *Doraemon*, *Keroro Gunsou*, *One Piece*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Meitantei Conan* etc. Despite the fact that it was only a regional broadcast, in the second half of the 1990s it became a national phenomenon – under the original guidelines set by Toño Blanco – with more than 100,000 boys and girls affiliated.

Akira and other Japanese warriors who mixed martial arts with the most sophisticated hi-tech, caused a furor among boys and girls in western countries." (Blanco 1992: 5-6)

Despite its irreverence, this quote highlights the revolution that was about to happen in the Spanish comics industry back then. It was part of an article published in a TV magazine which addressed the huge success of manga and anime only two years after the premiere of the *Dragon Ball* anime in different Spanish regional TV channels. "Two bombs were not strong enough" to keep Japan from rising after the horrors of war, reinventing itself as a leading cultural power and the most important comics industry in the world. At the Barcelona Comics Fair 2008, French comics artist Moebius, who had supported Japanese manga artists as well as the popularization of manga in western countries, mentioned a "third bomb" when asked about the impact of manga on the European comics industry:

"Manga is dangerous. Current manga is a destruction machine for young people. It's a mental gum which destroys the brain. [...] I find it appalling how manga artists are made to serve the country's imperialist interests. The Japanese are only interested in you going there and becoming one of them. [...] Manga is a weed. [...]. We must fight it! It would take a third nuclear bomb! Culturally speaking, of course." (MOEBIUS/Jean Giraud 2008 [online]).

Unlike the bitter statement from Moebius, Toño Blanco voiced fascination with a medium just as amazing as unfamiliar, which was opening a new wave of Japonisme in Spain without giving the western industry time to react. Although including just a few interviews and a monthly schedule, the issue of the humble TV magazine where Blanco's article appeared sold thousands of copies, mainly due to the images: its color cover depicting young Son Gokuh, a few pages

with *Dragon Ball* illustrations accompanying Blanco's article and a simple A3 centerfold. While TV magazines like this blew the market away with anime images, the Spanish comics publishers looked stunned at a phenomenon no one had anticipated (Roig 2000: 223). In the early 1990s, people were selling even black-and-white photocopies of these TV magazines, in addition to self-drawn images of *Dragon Ball*. When Panini Publ. finally launched their Dragon Ball trading cards, they sold (presumably 50) millions.

Blanco's article indicated how the western comics industry—whether in the form of American superhero comics or European "author comics"—was being swept away by a 'newbie' like manga (which had had already a long history in Japan). Blanco's statement was both lucky and casual, someway premonitory of the Golden Age of *manganime* in Spain, but also oblivious to the difficulties and challenges the Spanish market would have to face in the next decade as a result of the ignorance of the Spanish publishers regarding the overwhelming Japanese manga industry (Roig 2000: 227). What followed was a dark decade of editorial silence, during which, however, the foundations for the current mature and diverse Spanish manga market were laid.

Below, I shall provide an overview of the evolution of the manga market in Spain and its current status. While its progression may not differ that much from other European countries, it nevertheless presents unique characteristics: the role of *gafotaku*, the boom of 'bizarre manga', and the case of *Golondrina* (by Est Em; Ikki Comix). As for translated editions, it is noteworthy that many manga are available not only in Castilian, but also in the co-official Spanish languages Galician, Catalan and Basque.

1. The position of manga within the Spanish comics industry

Spain's whole comics industry (not just manga) pales in comparison to its European neighbors, both in sales figures and number of published works. Nevertheless, it still presents a rather mature and diversified market. The deep economic crisis in which the country finds itself at present has negatively

impacted the health of manga publishers. However, the domestic fandom is stronger than ever. Nowadays over 20 Manga Festivals are being held in different Spanish cities. The two most important ones take place in Barcelona: the *Comic Festa* (open to all kinds of comics, in the spring season) and, in the fall, the *Manga Festa*[3] which was established in the early 1990s in response to the growth of the Spanish 'otaku fandom' as well as the gradual rise of the manga market in Spain. In 2012, for the first time in history, the Manga Festa had more visitors than the Comic Festa, becoming the major comics event in Spain according to the number of visitors; with more than 125,000 people attending during the event's four-day run (FICOMIC [online] 2012), it has also become one of the five major events dedicated to manga culture outside Japan.

For many western fans, manga and anime make an inseparable unity, despite having an audience and specificity of their own. The symbiosis is due to a brilliant creative and commercial formula, established throughout five decades of unique coexistence in Japan. It becomes particularly visible outside Japan. An approach to Japanese manga without taking into account the impact of anime is not feasible. Both media form the ends of an axis around which a major cultural industry is built. Whereas readers of western comics are not necessarily fans of animation as well, it is almost unthinkable for a western manga fan not to be a regular viewer of anime (Moliné 2002: 54). However, the gradual maturation of the Spanish market is reversing this tendency, and while teenagers and young readers devour a large amount of mainstream manga and anime more or less indiscriminately, the older generation of manga devotees—or aficionados of European and American comics who approach Japanese manga for the first time—is far more selective.

Manga's arrival to Europe, the U.S. and Latin America has been much slower than its current presence in society and media—as well as its good sales figures—might suggest. In spite of the enormous significance of manga within the

3 "XIX Saló del Manga de Barcelona" (19th Barcelona Manga Fair) took place Oct. 31th - Nov. 3rd 2013.

Japanese publishing industry, Japanese graphic narratives were barely exported until the 1980s. As in the case of other occidental markets, Spanish society's first contact with the 'manga universe' took place through anime. In the beginning, the adaptation and distribution of Japanese manga in western countries were very expensive, last but not least because Japanese publishers have been driving hard bargains (Moliné 2002: 73). In addition, one had to reckon with protectionist measures within the different domestic markets as well as with narrative and visual codes mostly unknown to western readers. Moreover, amending and adapting Japanese works to western publishing standards proved to be burdensome (for example with respect to handling onomatopoeia and mirroring pages). In contrast, anime barely needed adaptation, which is why many Spanish fans were introduced to Japanese pop culture firstly through anime.

The first anime series were released in Spain in the early 1970s, but the true takeoff happened in 1975 with the television broadcast of *Heidi*[4], which was a huge hit among audiences of all ages. In 1978 *Mazinger Z*—based on the eponymous manga by Nagai Gô—was released. Its success was even bigger, but the explicit violence of both the fighting and the dialogues led to its cancellation. However, 1977 saw the American TV debut of the series *Gatchaman Ninjatai Kagaku* (1972)—*Battle of the Planets* (in Spanish *Comando G*)—which was also aired in Spain just a few years later. This series came to define a turning point in the import of Japanese manga and anime to western countries. The trigger for its success was the concurrent premiere of the first Star Wars movie. But *Gatchaman* was appreciated for a more complex psychology, that is, fragile, flawed and morally dubious characters, far from the American superhero stereotype (stoic, noble and infallible) that Spanish society was accustomed to. On top of that, *Gatchaman* amazed audiences with a degree of violence and sexuality which would have been impossible in western animation, either American or European

4 Produced by Zuiyo Enterprises (52 episodes). Its popularity led to the arrival of other "*Meisaku Collection*" productions under the tutelage of Nippon Animation.

(Kelts 2007: 12).

A large number of different anime series arrived (mostly targeted to children) up until the mid-1990s[5], when several private TV broadcasters emerged, joining the so far public field. Between 1978 and 1983 more than 80 anime series premiered, many of which had previously been released in Italy and France. Despite major changes in the script and mutilations in the footage, they fascinated an entire generation of Spanish children and youth, paving the way for the arrival of the first genuine manga books. At first, the manga market in Spain was characterized by publishers' uncertainty and a resulting lack of relevant and popular titles. However, in the early 1990s, something unexpected happened that

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5 Some of the anime series aired in the late 80s and the 90s on different Spanish TV channels: *City Hunter* ("Cazador"), *Ranma 1/2*, *Urusei Yatsura* ("Lamu"), *Saint Seiya* ("Caballeros del Zodíaco"), *Captain Tsubasa* ("Campeones"), *Touch* ("Bateadores"), *Mr. Ajikko* ("O Gran Sushi" [Galician]), *Dragon Quest* ("Las aventras de Fly"), *Dr. Slump* ("Arale"), *KOR* ("Johnny y sus amigos"), etc.

The original manga by which these series were inspired, were later published: *City Hunter* ["Cazador", published by Norma Editorial in 1996 (12 volumes, 21 x 17 cm; 64 pages each) and in 2004 by Mangaline (24 volumes, 17 x 11,5 cm; 194 pages each)], *Ranma 1/2* [published 1993-1998 by Planeta de Agostini; and in 2001 by Glenat (whole collection of 38 volumes); republished by EDT since 2011], *Urusei Yatsura* ("Lamu") [published in 1994 by Planeta de Agostini (only 8 volumes, 48 pages each); whole collection of 15 volumes by Glenat 2005-2007]. *Saint Seiya* ("Caballeros del Zodíaco") [published 2001-2002 by Glenat (whole collection, 28 volumes); Glenat/EDT started re-publishing in 2011], *Captain Tsubasa* ["Campeones", published by Glenat 2003-2007 (37 volumes. 192 pages each)], Touch ["Bateadores", published by Norma Editorial1994-1995 (12 volumes, 25 x 17 cm. 64 pages each) and in 2004 by Otakuland [11 volumes, 436 pages each)], *Dragon Quest* ("Las aventuras de Fly", published by Planeta de Agostini 1993-1996), *Dr. Slump* ["Arale", published by Planeta de Agostini 1997-2000 (40 volumes. 21 x 15 cm, 84 pages each) and re-published (ultimate edition) 2009-2013 (14 volumes, 248 pages each)], *Kimagure Orange Road* ["Johnny y sus amigos", published both in Spanish and Catalan by Glenat 2008-2010 (10 volumes, 352 pages each)]. Most manga were published just in Spanish. However, there are several mainstream titles published in Catalan as well, but not in Basque or Galician languages.

would forever change the course of history for both manga and anime in Spain: In February 1990, the *Dragon Ball* anime (based on the manga created by Toriyama Akira[6]) was aired by several regional broadcasters with just a few weeks time lag[7]. Dragon Ball displayed a frantic rhythm, thrilling fights and a unique kind of absurd humor which caused many complaints because of the noticeable dose of violence and sexuality—but it also created a legion of hardcore fans of all ages. Catalonian essayist Sebastiá Roig succesfully defined Dragon Ball as "the dawn of a new era" (2000: 219).

The following years were crucial in the development and expansion of manga and anime in Spain. In 1988, Marvel Comics published Ôtomo Katsuhiro's *Akira* in the U.S.. The almost concurrent release of the homonymous animated film—directed by Ôtomo himself—certainly facilitated the manga's success.

> *"The ambitious feature film adaptation of Akira [...] would create a cult outside Japan, maybe even bigger than the one achieved in its homeland: The film opened the eyes of western people, not only those of the already existent critics of Japanese animation, but also and especially the eyes of those who had not been interested in animation at all, considering it a product just for children"* (Moliné 2002: 62).

Just as it happened in the U.S., both the premiere of *Akira* the movie and the publishing of the *Akira* manga, revolutionized the Spanish comics industry and the whole publishing market. The first Spanish edition of Akira[8] followed

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6 First published in Spain by Planeta de Agostini in 1992, both in Spanish and Catalan; re-published in different formats till 2001. Between 2006 and 2007 Planeta de Agostini published the *Dragon Ball - Ultimate Edition* (34 volumes. 21,5 x 15 cm, 232 pages each).

7 TVG started broadcasting Dragon Ball Feb. 08/1990, translated to Galician as "*As Bolas Máxicas*" . On Catalonian TV3 "Bola de Drac" aired Feb. 15/1990.

8 64 volumes in "album format" (28,5 x 19 cm, 64 pages each): The first 33 volumes were published 1990-1992, while volumes 34 to 38 were published 1995-1996, in the "Dragon

the American model: It was translated from the Marvel edition, with the same mirrored pages to fit the western style[9]. The book was larger than the Japanese edition, and it was entirely colored in a palette of shades similar to the hues used in the movie, by using the newest computer graphic techniques. This was done with the approval from Ôtomo Katsuhiro. Ôtomo's designs and illustrations—exquisitely detailed and fairly realistic—didn't look as exaggerated to western readers as many other manga. Thanks to its undeniable technical quality and conceptual maturity, this cyber-punk adventure set in a post-apocalyptic—both fascinating and frightening—Neo-Tokyo charmed critics and readers alike. Despite the obvious differences between *Akira* and *Dragon Ball*—both of them clearly appealing to different audiences—these two works became milestones in Spanish manga history (Roig 2000: 224).

The arrival of manga to the Spanish publishing market caused a double generational fracture, between veteran readers and local authors on the one side, and new publishers and manga and anime enthusiasts on the other side. Consequently, there was a fracture between mature readers and young readers. The older readers thought that manga were childish and unsophisticated, while the new readers discovered the medium of comics thanks to manga. But there was also a fracture between Spanish local authors and manga publishers. While the first claimed that manga was going to kill the national industry, the publishers argued that manga would shake up the stagnant Spanish market and create new readers[10]. *Dragon Ball* and *Akira* acted as the Trojan Horse of manga and anime

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Comics" Line by Ediciones B, thanks to an agreement with Glenat France (coord.) and Mash-Room Co. (which owned the license). For a highly accurate data-base on comics published in Spain, see Tebeosfera [online].

9 *Akira* was re-published in 1992 (Ediciones B, hardcover, 14 volumes, 28,5 x 19 cm, 180 pages each), in 1999 (Ediciones B, 6 volumes, black and white, 26 x 18 cm), 2005 (Norma Editorial, color edition, 6 volumes, 25,5 x 18 cm) and 2012 (Norma Editorial, same edition, "box set").

10 Spanish comics artist Albert Monteys is quoted to have said: "Many Spanish comics artists

in Spain, and while younger readers got truly interested and enthusiastic, the most traditional sectors of the Spanish comics industry exhibited reluctance and fear (Roig 2000: 223).

In 1992, the publishing company Planeta de Agostini started selling *Dragon Ball* in separate editions, both in Castilian and Catalan languages. The great success encouraged other publishers and sparked the release of many new Japanese works. However, the euphoria of those early years resulted in a hypertrophy of the market, with a target audience uninterested in most of the titles being offered, but also clearly unable to fully absorb the existing supply. Publishers who knew nothing about manga— who were unaware of the vast Japanese publishing industry and unfamiliar with the highly conventional manga style—bought dozens of mediocre works. *Dragon Ball*'s reported sales were excellent, but many other series barely sold 10% of their print run. Consequently, the Spanish manga market dropped and disappeared almost completely. This crisis not only affected the publishers' economy, but also their credibility: Many readers' favorite manga was put on hiatus or was simply canceled overnight. It took many years for publishers to feel confident enough to bet on this medium again, as well as for readers to forget the erratic publishing policy of the 1990s.

Despite the collapse of the manga market in Spain and the naive and inexperienced management by some publishers, interest and enthusiasm for manga and anime rooted deep in a new breed of young fans[11]. Today, the manga publishing industry in Spain is characterized by caution and good judgment, fully aware of the previous mistakes. Indicative of the maturity of the market is the strengthening of those Spanish publishers which specialize in manga as well as the progressive diversification of the audience.

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are [...] truly cross with manga. They believe they are losing readers, that manga is responsible for Spanish comics loosing their appeal. But if they do not sell comics any more is because they do no connect with the people, because they are no longer interesting. Manga does not destroy readers, yet creates new ones. And that's a pretty good thing." (op.cit. Roig 2000: 223)

11 In Nov. 1995, the 1st Barcelona Manga Festa took place.

In the late 1990s, a publishing revolution took place by adopting the original Japanese *tankôbon* format. Previously, each publisher had chosen its own publication format, and often released manga in thin volumes with just a few pages, adapting it slightly to resemble American or European comics. Now the Japanese standard became popular among readers and collectors. However, Spanish tankôbon editions deviate from their Japanese models: they use pure white, more weighty paper; and they are bound as stitched booklets as distinct from the glued Japanese editions. In the 1990s not all the Spanish tankôbon fitted this quality standard, but most of the books from major publishers (such as Glenat or Norma Editorial) did. Due to Spain's recent crisis, publishing companies have reduced quality editions, which resulted in complains from readers and collectors. On the other hand, Spanish tankôbon look beautiful on the shelf—much nicer than the early stapled editions—and collectors love them. Unfortunately, they don't resemble Japanese tankôbon in regards to price[12]: while an average tankôbon from a *Jump* series might cost 350 or 400 ¥, the same volume in Spain is about 7,50 to 9 €, and *kanzenban* editions take 12 to almost 18 € per volume. Nowadays, there are Deluxe and Limited Editions as well (such as the *Death Note* Black Edition[13], or *Rurouni Kenshin* Ultimate Edition[14]) but in the early 1990s, it was the *tankôbon* format which appealed to collectors due to its higher printing quality, but its "truly Japanese" look. Fans started to want more renderings in "Japanese style": they began to prefer the Japanese reading direction, Japanese expressions and slang preserved in translated editions, untranslated onomatopoeia and the use of footnotes rather than modified visuals. Publishers were surprised and delighted since they could finally see their production costs dramatically reduced.

Nevertheless, sales numbers were taking off too slowly, and some publishers

12 For example, 64 volumes of *Naruto* have been published in Spain so far. The whole *Naruto Collection* is expensive both in money (480 €) and in space (90 cm long).

13 Norma Editorial 2013, 6 vols.

14 Glenat España 2008, 22 vols.

were concerned about the possibility of a new commercial disaster. The substrate of readers remained faithful to manga, but without a new trigger to boost profits—something like *Dragon Ball*—sales stayed rather small. The Spanish subsidiary of the powerful eponymous French company Glenat was—along with Norma and Planeta de Agostini—the leading publisher of manga in Spain and maybe the one who had most strongly bet for the renewal of formats and the re-introduction of manga into the domestic market. However, in 1999 it was close to bankruptcy. But another miracle occured related to a new TV anime: *Rurouni Kenshin*[15] (Moliné 2008: 246). Despite being poorly printed and translated from French rather than the original Japanese, *Rurouni Kenshin*'s overwhelming sales saved its Spanish publisher and pushed forward the manga phenomenon in Spain, setting the foundation for a new Golden Age. For the first time in Spain, a manga was being published with the original reading direction and book-jackets, and with success. In the late 1990s, book-jackets (meaning the color cover that protects the paperback edition) were quite unusual. In Spain, both American or European comics had always been hardcover or paperback, without book-jackets. They might have a double flap, but not book-covers as manga tankôbon do. Some manga in the U.S. are published just as paperback editions without book-covers, but most of the *tankôbon* and *kanzenban* manga published in Spain have book-jackets (for example, *Naruto*, *Bleach*[16], *One Piece*[17], *Rurouni Kenshin, Dragon Ball* and all the other *Jump* hits, but also Urasawa Naoki's or Takahashi Rumiko's popular works).

The second miracle arrived once again in the form of a modest anime broadcast on regional TV channels: *Crayon Shin-Chan*. It became a true mass phenomenon appealing to people of all ages. Shin-Chan T-shirts, cookies, sticker

15 Manga by Glenat 1999-2003 (tankôbon edition, 28 volumes).

16 First published in 2006 by Glenat/EDT. Currently published by Panini Comics (ongoing).

17 First published in 1999 by Planeta de Agostini (17 volumes. 96 pages each), re-published in 2004 (tankôbon edition, 67 volumes so far; 208 pages each, ongoing).

albums, figurines, cologne and shampoo were being sold. Cafés were crowded with children, parents and elderly people at times of broadcasting[18]. Thus, the Shin-Chan TV anime challenged the most popular shows of the Spanish mediascape, and it revived the craze about *manganime*; only this time, publishers had a solid marketing strategy.

2. Shôjo manga's decline

Contrary to our neighboring countries, the publishing industry in Spain remains rather opaque, and this applies to all kinds of comics. Publishing houses do not provide sales figures or print runs. The market development is mainly known through the efforts of several researchers who collect statistics based on retailers and comics stores sales. The ultimate bestseller in comics—whether manga, American comics, European or national album—is *Naruto* by Kishimoto Masashi, with each volume selling approximately 60,000 copies. Compared to other markets—not just Japan, but also France—this number may seem ridiculous, but within the Spanish context it is truly remarkable.

The number of annual manga publications increased sevenfold in the first decade of the 21st century, rising from just over a 100 titles published in 2000, to more than 700 released in 2007-2008 (Bernabé [online] 2013). However, the actual state of the industry has been uneven. New manga releases increased from 350 to 450 titles published annually in the last three years (Bernabé [online] 2013). These numbers remain significantly higher than those of 2001, but they are only half of the new publications released in 2008. While the sustained growth

18 "Public viewing" is a common behavior in Spain. Most cafeterias and bars have one (or several) TVs. Football on TV is more a public entertainment rather than a private one. Many bars and cafeterias have several TVs and broadcast different matches at the same time, so people can see their favorite teams simultaneously. News, movies, comedy series, reality shows, events, cartoons (like *The Simpson*), soap opera, are shown in public places. *Shin-Chan* was no exception: on its apex, anyone could side-walk by a cafeteria and see people having "*merienda*" (the 6 p.m. snack) while watching *Crayon Shin-Chan.*

confirms the strength of manga within the Spanish comics market, the economic crisis and the loss of interest from part of the audience will probably further decrease sales over the next decade and urge publishers to rethink their current strategy. Nevertheless, the existence of collectors and a strong substratum of young otaku ensure the health of Spanish manga market. The increased quality of the printed works appeals to bibliophiles and collectors, and makes manga less volatile to the whims of economy. Furthermore, the variety of supply suggests a much larger range of manga readers, with a rising average age that gradually gets close to the age of American and European comics collectors.

Two important events took place in 2012. The first and apparently more trivial one was the emancipation of the Spanish branch of Glenat from the French parent company. Glenat Spain became EDT (Editores de Tebeos[19]). Thus, the largest manga publisher—by number of titles and sales per volume (due to the major mainstream titles of *Shônen Jump*)—started to walk on its own. The second event, far more crucial for the publishing market, involved EDT as well. After fourteen years of collaboration, Shûeisha broke the master agreement[20] with Glénat/EDT (Navarro 2012), which implied the loss all the Shûeisha licenses for EDT[21]: *Bleach*, *Naruto*, *Death Note* and many more superhits. The other big publishers, fully aware of the importance of having a commercial lifeguard such as *Naruto* or

19 Literally, "Comics Publishers".

20 "Master agreement" means that instead of negotiating the license of every single manga title, they agreed about a whole bunch of titles altogether. Thus, in Spain, all Shueisha comics had been published exclusively by EDT.

21 There was no official explanation from either Shueisha nor EDT, only a vague suggestion by EDT director Joan Navarro. Some people said that Viz Europe, owner of the Shueisha licenses in Europe, decided to change the commercial strategy and went for a more aggressive negotiation, as they did in previous years in the US, in order to gain bigger profits. Others suggest that Shueisha stayed with Glenat Spain only as long as it had the protection and economic background of Glenat France. Some people even suggest political reasons: Navarro is well know as a site of Catalonia's independence efforts, and some groups both in Spain and France may have pressed Shueisha to break the agreement and harm Navarro's company.

Bleach in their portfolio, quickly competed for the now available franchises and bought the licenses[22]. Less profitable Shûeisha manga formerly published by EDT were indefinitely discontinued.

But perhaps the most significant trend that reflects the change both in market standards and consumers' tastes is the dramatic decline in shôjo manga sales. The shôjo-manga crisis can be linked to the general economic crisis in Spain, as it is caused by less money, less licenses and less readers. New manga titles have decreased in the last few years, but while this does not seem to affect shônen manga that much, shôjo manga dropped from over 50 new titles in 2008 to 12 new titles in 2012, and by the end of 2013, probably less than 10 new shôjo series will have been launched in Spain[23]. In her article "What did we sink so deep?" Sheila Malchirant, co-director of Pro-Shoujo Spain, suggested several aspects to be considered: publishers' decreased interest (both personal and business-wise); scanlations; the lack of a generational renewal among readers; and the sexist cliches about shôjo which may scare male readers (Malchirant [online] 2013b). Marc Bernabé, who compiles annual statistics of manga sales in Spain (probably the most accurate reports regarding manga, since publishing companies do not provide sales figures) also highlights this huge decline: "The only, and the biggest, victim was shôjo manga, which looks totally jinxed." (Bernabé [online] 2012a).

The lower supply is a direct consequence of the drop in demand, and vice versa. It is hard to believe that teenagers and young men are simply more faithful to manga than female readers. Rather shôjo manga, as a genre, seems to have become out-fashioned in Spain—as distinct from France, Germany and other European countries. Dianika, co-director of Pro-Shoujo Spain, states in an article about *josei manga* how this genre has no critical mass of readers in Spain. She emphasizes that female readers and former shôjo-manga readers demanded josei

22 Planeta de Agostini (*Naruto*), Panini Comics (*Bleach*) and Norma Editorial (*Death Note*).

23 Fo a list of shôjo titles published in Spain since 1984 by year, see MALCHIRANT [online] 2013a.

titles more suitable for their age, just a few years ago. Thus, different publishing companies, such us Norma, Ivrea or EDT, tried to launch josei titles in Spain, but most of them were a commercial disaster (Dianika 2013). Only *Paradise Kiss*[24] gathered enough quorum (although far from most shônen and *seinen* titles published in Spain), but *Love Music*[25] and other manga by Oda Aya were not very successful. *Kimi wa petto* ("Eres mi mascota" by Ogawa Yayoi)[26], *Private Prince*[27] (Enjoji Maki) and *Love x Mission*[28] (Hasebe Yuri) were a total failure commercially. Dianika concludes, "In other words, it appears that the market and the publishers wanted to evolve by offering new products which draw the attention of adult readers, but they only faced truly limited audiences, far from the mainstream", and she suggests that in Spain two kinds of shôjo/josei fandom coexist: fans who support certain shôjo manga online, and the readers who actually may buy the books.

The reasons for the decline of shôjo manga are, nonetheless, much more complex and apply not only to the publishers' commercial strategy, but also to social conditions, leisure trends among teenagers, consolidation, or dissolution, of the female-reader substrate, a taste rift between the Japanese and Spanish markets, a depletion of the stories, a lack of surprise, different perspectives on the role of women in the stories[29], and most importantly, a migration of interest from shôjo towards shônen and seinen manga. From 2004 to 2010 (just before the decline), 20 to 50 new shôjo series were released in Spain by different manga publishers, a trend which culminated in 2008. Apparently, there was a critical mass of female

24 Published by Ivrea in 2003. 5 volumes, 17 x 11,5 cm, 192 pages each.

25 Published by Ivrea 2012-2013. 5 volumes, 200 pages each.

26 Published by Norma Editorial since 2010. 4 volumes (ongoing).

27 Published by Ivrea 2011-2013. 3 volumes (ongoing). 192 pages each.

28 Published by Ivrea 2010-2011. 4 volumes. 184 pages each.

29 There's been some criticism with recent Japanese hits such us *Ôkami Shôjo to Kuro Ôji* (Hatta Ayuko), which many readers and shôjo-manga bloggers consider to be full of clichés, depicting a compliant girl with conservative goals.

readers that made shôjo manga profitable. As in many western countries, in Spain, too, comics were typically a male thing. This was changed by manga: shôjo readers became a truly important target group. According to Pro-Shoujo Spain, about 280 shôjo or josei titles were published since 1984[30].

Scanlations are affecting the market as well, but not that much. Traditionally, in western countries the male reader has far more importance in the comics market, and his role is usually acknowledged as that of a bibliophile and collector. But with manga, the gender divide is different. Manga readers are usually younger than traditional comics collectors. Since the first generation of manga readers in Spain consisted mostly of young boys and girls, the market was filled almost entirely with mainstream shônen and shôjo manga titles. Nowadays, since we can properly speak about a second generation of Spanish manga readers—including teenagers but also mature readers—the average age of manga readers is slowly increasing and getting closer to that of the average comics collector. However, when readers grow up and demand mature works according to their age and interests, the publishing scene cannot offer them much: While young and middle-aged men have at their disposal a broad and high-quality selection, women face a void, and therefore may drift to other narratives. As previously pointed out, publishers were not able to raise a female readership despite some efforts. Different publishing companies, such us Norma, Ivrea or EDT, tried to launch *josei* titles in Spain, but female readers just didn't fall for them. Of course, female readers can still find those 'already published' titles (some of them are re-printed,

30 Among them: Candy Candy (Igarashi Yumiko, 1984), X (Clamp, 1995), Tokyo Babylon (Clamp, 1996), Bishojo Senshi Sailor Moon (Takeuchi Naoko, 1997), Marmalade Boy (Yoshizumi Wataru, 1998), Kimishika Iranai and Mint na Bokura (Yoshizumi Wataru, 2000), Zetsuai 1989 (Ozaki Minami, 2001), Boku no Chikyû wo Mamotte (Hiwatari Saki, 2001), Vampire Princess Miyu (Kakinôchi Narumi, 2001), Versailles no Bara (Ikeda Riyoko, 2002), Angel Sanctuary (Yuki Kaori, 2002), Fushigi Yûgi (Watase Yuu, 2002), Gals! (Fujii Mihona, 2002), Kareshi Kanojo no Jijô (Tsuda Masami, 2002), Random Walk (Yoshizumi Wataru, 2002), Paradise Kiss (Yazawa Ai, 2003), Virgin Crisis (Shinjo Mayu, 2003) (Malchirant [online] 2013a).

some are not). But publishers barely launch new josei manga, while seinen manga are increasing year by year. There are no big titles from well-known *mangaka* such as Ono Natsume or Yoshinaga Fumi available in Spanish so far. Some BL manga were published a few years ago, but the female readership has moved to different genres meanwhile. When asked about josei manga and *shonen-ai* or yaoi titles, Leandro Oberto, president and director of Ivrea, admitted that they were still interested, but cautious in their choice (Oberto 2013). Dianika, co-director of Pro-Shoujo Spain, states that former shôjo manga readers have moved towards new forms of entertainment, while the remaining loyal readers are looking for shônen or seinen stories, in addition to their favorite female mangaka which continue to attract some attention (Dianika 2013).

In my opinion, the major reason for shôjo manga's decline in Spain lies within the shift of readers from shôjo manga to mainstream shônen manga. Shônen manga has absorbed many of the narrative and stylistic characteristics which traditionally appealed to female readers. *Naruto*, *Bleach* and other similar works are read by thousands of women. Some of these popular works emphasize the psychological development of their characters, interpersonal relationships and feelings, or they feature inner voices[31]. *Naruto* and *Bleach* occasionally play with the idea of homoeroticism[32]. Mainstream shônen manga are sometimes full of *bishōnen* images. Whereas such references were formerly limited to *parody dôjinshi*, they are now made unabashedly explicit in official manga publications. Furthermore, a whole generation of young women were attracted to shôjo manga due to TV anime broadcasting[33], but now they have grown out of it. As previously

31 As for differences between former and recent shônen manga, see for example Ito 2011.

32 While employed for funny purposes, Naruto kissed Sasuke in the first volume, and Sakura is fooled in vol. 38 with a romantic depiction of both Sasuke and Sai as nudes. But what Spanish fans find more interesting as well as highly suggestive are non-obvious situations such as the face-to-face reflection of Sasuke and Naruto in vol. 26, or the nude conversation of Sasuke and Suigetsu in vol. 38. The ambiguous role of Orochimaru deserves attention as well.

33 Typical shôjo anime serialized in Spain were *Candy, Candy* (early 1980s) or *Marmalade*

addressed, *Paradise Kiss* gathered enough success, but other titles were failures, especially *Kimi wa Petto*, *Private Prince*, *Ai wo chodai!* ("Culebrón Romanticón", by Kazui Ohya) and *Love x Mission*. EDT published Anno Moyoko's *Tokyo Style*, but this has remained their only josei title so far. Women turn rather to seinen manga than shônen manga, due to the variety of topics and storylines and the lesser number of sexist clichés. After all, seinen manga has always been considered 'unisex' both in Spain and in many western countries.

3. Mature manga readers: The 'gafotaku'

The key to the success of the Japanese manga industry abroad apparently lies within its ability to seduce repeatedly new generations of consumers, who are unaware of the comics sold in previous decades. And those non-Japanese fans have enthusiastically reinvented themselves as a modern collective in Japanese otaku likeness. Unaware of the pejorative attributions associated with the original Japanese term, the word 'otaku' is used to refer to those who profess a great fondness for manga and anime. By extension, it is also used to define a new urban subculture of great economic and social significance, formed by this young generation of fans. The incorporation of the word 'otaku' in the argot of western *manganime* fans has, among other things, helped to transform its original Japanese meaning (Kelts 2007: 156).

Similar to U.S. American popular culture in the 20th century, Japan has exported the manga-fan image —the 'otaku'—to other countries, including Spain. Unlike the Japanese otaku, the self-proclaimed western 'otaku' is far from the idea of a solitaire or taciturn individual, as he belongs to an energetic and enthusiastic community, which sometimes puzzles over some unfamiliar codes and clichés. They are proud members of a community which is visible within society due

Boy (late 1990s), *Gals!*, *Fruits Basket*, etc. *Sailor Moon* was appealing to both female and male viewers. Many boys watched *Sailor Moon* without considering it a female-targeted series. Many other "Magical Gils" stories (*Card Captor Sakura*, and some of Clamp's anime adaptations) are seen as gender-neutral as well.

to conventions, Cosplay festas and the overall image they cast as continuous reviewers of Japanese pop culture. This mutual encouragement and sense of belonging is one of the most notable features of western manga fandom.

However, the gradual evolution and maturity of the manga market in Spain has transformed the average profile of readers and enthusiasts, which in western countries are mostly identified with teenagers. In many ways, the *manganime* fan is still teased or mocked by other nerd groups with 'higher' intellectual pretensions as an uncritical young reader, devouring unconditionally and without distinction most mainstream series. But in recent years, some manga enthusiasts—belonging to the first generation of manga fans in the 1980s and early 90s—seek more mature titles, good printing and a variety of subjects and storylines to choose from. Historically, comics readers in western countries—whether collectors or critics—do not read manga. Therefore, publishers have seen the arrival of the 'otaku' group as a unique opportunity to explore a new market niche and draw new costumers.

During a discussion on Twitter (March 9, 2012; Bernabé [online] 2012b), four of the most influential bloggers and manga researchers in Spain[34] coined the term '*gafotaku*' (Estrada 2012), an acronym for 'gafapasta' (hipster) and 'otaku', to define experienced, mature and critical manga fans, seeking works of outstanding quality; readers who delight themselves with classics and other less commercial manga—groundbreaking graphics, narration and storyline—without giving up reading certain mainstream works. However, for the purpose of this paper I will slightly distort the word 'gafotaku' from its original meaning, so that it serves to illustrate the evolution described above.

The *gafotaku* exhibits many of the attributes of mature manga readers in Spain. Please notice I refer to them as 'mature' but not 'adult', as the generational

34 Marc Bernabé, Raul Izquierdo (both belong to ACDCómic="Asociación de Críticos y divulgadores de cómic de España", Spanish Association of Comics Critics and Promoters), Jesús T. "Chusetto" and Oriol Estrada AKA= "Capitán Urías".

gap is not necessarily linked to the reader's age. One might think that the gafotaku shows contempt or condescension for mainstream consumers and mainstream comics considering them a symbol of intellectual immaturity. Such an attitude is easy to find among European album readers and denotes a certain snobbery in the field of comics. But manga is a medium of mass consumption prone to fashions, and manga artists are very much aware of their role as a cog in this strong industry, refraining from fine-art pretensions (Cf. Berndt 2006: 364). Until recently, Spaniards found manga revolutionary and innovative, but were not really aware of the true nature of this medium in its homeland. However, this perception has changed. Some *mangaka*—who serve specific target groups in Japan—have gained a general status as avant-garde or experimental in Spain due to their unconventional narratives; artists as different as Matsumoto Taiyô, Tatsumi Yoshihiro or Maruo Suehiro. Here, 'experimental' means 'non-mainstream' and applies to all manga which contrast strongly with the so-called "manga style", in regards to topics, visuals, or even artists' citizenship (i.e. not being Japanese but working in Japan)—for example, many of the works published in *Ikki*. The gafotaku shows deep interest in artists who distinguish themselves by escaping fashions. But at the same time, the gafotaku indulges in a typically western desire for an allegedly "authentic Japanese experience," which leads to a different kind of generalization or 'fashion.' At any rate, the gafotaku aims at a reading experience beyond rapid consumption, and interrelates Japanese manga culture somehow with the artistic standards usually applied to European comics. Recently, such mature manga readers are becoming the stronghold for manga publishing in Spain. After the break of the master agreement with Shûeisha, EDT turned towards this group as a lifesaver, successfully.

"Author manga" is a label which targets both manga readers and readers who are familiar with the the European graphic novel, its graphic style (i.e. clean drawings) and narrative conventions (autobiographies, stories of every-day life). For example, Taniguchi Jirô's works is typically addressed as "author manga".

However, some publishers now release also Tezuka's *Ningen Konchûki*[35] or *Hi no Tori*[36], and Ishinomori Shôtarô's *Hokusai*[37] under the same label. While these works do not necessarily pass as experimental or avant-garde today, they nevertheless appeal to non-mainstream consumers because they are "classics". Matsumoto Taiyô's *Tekkon keenkret*[38] is also considered 'experimental' from a Spanish point of view: firstly because of its narration, and secondly because of its layout, which deviate from what most people regard as "manga style". As manga hipsters who pride themselves of reading sophisticated and complex works rather than mainstream or 'childish' series, gafotaku focus on manga which seem to have no room in the traditional Spanish comics market. Thanks to them, manga which may be reasonably successful in Japan, but not really attractive for the average manga fan, have gained renown in Spain, such as: *Hyakushou Kizoku* (Arakawa Hiromu), *Termae Romae* (Yamazaki Mari), *Takemitsu Zamurai* (Matsumoto Taiyô) or *Saint Oniisan* (Nakamura Hikaru). Ten years ago, that would have been unthinkable in the Spanish market, but nowadays, thanks to a mature generation of readers and a growing number of 'snobbish' readers, i.e. the *gafotaku*, such titles have become available in translation.

There is a ferocious debate about the term 'graphic novel'(*La novela gráfica*) in Spain, about its definition and its role for the comics industry, its advantages compared to the vague native words for comics, "tebeo" and "historieta". But it is a sterile dispute which fails to address the actual state of the Spanish comics industry, the evolution of market, the competitiveness of domestic artists, the collapse of publishers due to crisis and so on. Furthermore, both publishers and authors fear that as a result of a deeper dialogue about the reality of Spanish comics, this field might be 'hijacked' by scholars and intellectuals (Cf. Berndt

35 TEZUKA, Osamu. *El libro de los insectos humanos*. Bilbao: Astiberri, 2013.

36 TEZUKA, Osamu. *Fénix*. Barcelona: Planeta de Agostini, 2013.

37 ISHINOMORI, Shotaro. *Hokusai*. Barcelona: EDT, 2012.

38 MATSUMOTO, Taiyo. *Tekkon keenkret*. Barcelona: EDT, 2009.

2010: 11). In some ways, comics researchers are considered 'foreigners' to the true nature of comics by those who work in this field. Publishers want to stay in economic and institutional control, while artists want to retain creative control. They seem to be afraid that scholars may move the center of discussion from practical to theoretical issues. To put it to the extreme: Since scholars do not work in the manga industry, they do not have the right to impose their discourse. Gafotaku don't relate much to this debate, since they are consumers rather that scholars; maybe consumers with a more intellectual interest, but consumers after all.

Within this context, and with obvious commercial implications, publishers began to translate the Japanese word *gekiga* as "*graphic novel*" to appeal to a different kind of reader, akin to *gafotaku*. Several gekiga by Tezuka, Tatsumi, Ishinomori, and Mizuki Shigeru from the 1960s-70s have been published in Spain within the last 30 years, but the word *gekiga* had never been translated as *graphic novel* until the Spanish translation of Mizuki's *Gekiga Hitler* (*Hitler: La novela gráfica*, 2009) which turned out to be a commercial decision and a risky one. Tatsumi Yoshihiro has seen numerous of his works published in Spanish, starting in 1984 with the collection of short stories *Qué triste es la vida y otras historietas* (La Cúpila) which became rather famous due to its translation from Spanish into English (*Good-Bye and other stories*, Catalan Communications 1988). This volume was republished by La Cupula in 2004 and complemented by two more collections, *Infierno* (2004) and *Mujeres* (2006). Other publishers released *Daihakken*(Ponent Mon, 2004), V*enga, saca las joyas* (Ponent Mon, 2004), *Gekiga Hyôryû* (Astiberri, 2009). When Astiberri published *Gekiga Hyôryû*, in the book-flap, they presented Tatsumi as the beginner of "graphic novel" in Japan. However, they did not translate the title word *gekiga* as "graphic novel", but opted for the literal translation *A Drifting Life*. The 1984 collection of Tatsumi's short stories is considered to be one of the very first manga ever published in Spain. But even before, in 1979, La Cupula, an independent, truly Underground publisher, released some short stories by Tatsumi in *El Víbora*, a comics magazine

introducing stories from various authors, often with an in 1979 astonishing degree of violent and sexual contents. Back in 1979, manga was still unknown in Spain, and Tatsumi's works had a shocking impact not for being Japanese but for depicting violent, dark stories featuring crimes, sex and nudity (which later facilitated the idea of manga representations being dominated by sexual and violent content).

By naming *gekiga* "graphic novel" publishers are, first of all, satisfying senior manga readers as well as gafotaku. In addition, they reach out for readers of European and American comics who traditionally reject the typical "manga style". In other words, publishers are now marketing gekiga as "graphic novel" not because of actual similarities due to historical background, but because of the label's reputation and commercial punch. The label "graphic novel" conjoins an elitist approach to comics which is ruled by three maxims: not to be entertaining (at least not primarily); to be "artistic" (experimental storytelling, outstanding graphic style, and taking some creative decisions just for the sake of aesthetics rather than for narrative purposes); and to be intellectually stimulating, meaning that you may learn something from it, historically and/or aesthetically. Somehow, Spanish publishers seem oblivious of the fact that gekiga's achievements have long been absorbed by manga industry and are now part of the mainstream (Cf. Berndt 2006: 107).

However, such diversification of readership resonates with a particularity of the Spanish market: a phenomenon which is called "*manga bizarro*" among readers. It can lean on the tradition of American underground comix as well Japanese horror-manga and ero-manga, but as distinct from these older forms, is totally public, not labeled "underground" or "weird". Bizarre manga are presented as great new titles by publishing companies, and their artists are invited to the Barcelona Manga Fair: in 2012, for example, EDT presented Kago Shintarô's works as their main hit, and the artist himself visited in 2013. Bizarre manga are being sold in bookshops alongside mainstream manga; they are available in public libraries. Publishers do not try to sell bizarre manga as a specific product for a

weird audience, but as sophisticated comics with interesting, surreal stories, a great graphic style, and ulterior artistic goals. Thus, artists beyond the mainstream, who address neither folklore ("authentically Japanese" topics) nor everyday life, are now becoming popular, for example, Maruo Suehiro and Hino Hideshi.

Over the last years, some manga publishers began to include the tagline "For adults only" into the book front cover, to mark stories with explicit sexuality, violence or cruelty. Comics in Spain are not regulated by any agency, and there is no rating system (such as the American PG or Parental Guidance, from the Motion Picture Association of America), but publishers apply a self-imposed censorship code. Manga series such as *Berserk* (Miura Kentarô) or *Saishû Heiki Kanojo* (Takahashi Shin) are clearly marked as 'adult' material, while Maruo Suehiro's *Panorama-tô Kitan* is not – although the three of them are released by the same Spanish publisher[39]. This classification complies with the profile of the prospective buyer rather than the actual level of violent or sexual contents: Berserk or Saikano draw the attention of both teenagers and adults, with a plot similar to many other shônen mainstream manga. However, Maruo's manga is aimed at mature readers and escapes being tagged "adult'" due to its "experimental" or "artistic" orientation.

The gafotaku are the specific target group for both types of non-mainstream manga in the Spanish market: the "author manga", and comics by enfants terribles such as Kago or Maruo, who capitalize on the "experimental, original, and subversive" facet (Berndt 2006:115). Kago's last works published in Spain (*Kasutoroshiki, Fraction*) were surprisingly well received, especially if we consider that they are being promoted as grotesque, politically incorrect, scatological, underground and sordid. "Sordid" has a double meaning in this context: on the one hand, the word points to dirty or squalid environments, decrepit and sticky settings; but on the other hand it connotes ignoble actions and

39 All published by Glenat/EDT: *Berserk* (2011), *Saishu Heiki Kanojo* (2003), *Panorama-tô Kitan* (2009).

motives, brutal violence and sexual atrocities, and what eventually becomes more disturbing: the moral filth of the characters depicted, which does less relate to their crimes (drawn with great artistic beauty) but rather their ambiguous actions[40].

4. Manga's cultural hybridization: the case of *Golondrina*

For many western fans, contemporary manga is the best manifestation of the cultural duality characteristic of modern Japan, and one of the few media capable of intertwining two realities in a single product, among other things, by juxtaposing a world of dense realism with graphically animated characters (Carey 2008: 39), or by interrelating the local and the global. An interesting example in that regard is *Golondrina* by Est Em, at the same time particularly Japanese and stateless (Cf. Napier 2005: 24).

Despite the efforts of Spanish publishers to diversify the supply, mature fans, gafotaku and other readers—especially when looking for "alternative manga"—must rely on scanlations. Being gafotaku is hard, because either in Spanish or in English, scanlations of non-mainstream manga are rare and unstable. However, *Golondrina* is becoming really successful among Spanish fans, despite not being licensed and published in Spain—and that is thanks to English scanlations. For many Spanish fans, the first news about *Golondrina* came with a review at *Mangaland*, the manga blog by translator and researcher Marc Bernabé, in early 2012 (Bernabé [online] 2012a). Ever since, the number of readers interested in *Golondrina*'s story has multiplied. But how come a story about the world of tauromachy [bullfighting] in Spain—although used as a mere pretext—gets so successful with the Spanish audience?

In his post, Bernabé extolled the virtues of *Golondrina*, such as the quality

40 I hereby refer to "crimes" as legally punishable (killing someone, robbing, raping). However, I refer to "ignoble actions" as not against the law but morally twisted and heartless. For example, while some Kago's stories are bizarre because of the grotesque and degenerate topics, some of Maruo's stories are uneasy to read because in his stories he forces children to face adult cruelty.

of the narrative, the fidelity and respect for the references to tauromachy, and the undoubted ability to convey the feelings of the characters. However, as a weakness, he pointed out the "alternative" nature of this manga which makes it unappealing to orthodox fans. Bernabé used the word "alternative" in the same way as film, music or literature critics, meaning "unconventional" and "a challenge to existent norms". However, closer inspection may reveal that *Golondrina* is actually pretty close to some classic shôjo manga narratives and not as "alternative" as Bernabé presumes. Nevertheless, *Golondrina*'s graphic style may look "alternative" to hardcore fans, in comparison to the majority of shônen manga. Yet, while mainstream manga readers, may not like it that much, *Golondrina*'s alternative graphic style, unconventional topic, and extremely well researched background, becomes a virtue for mature enthusiasts and gafotaku. On top of that, its narrative is set in Spain—although not the everyday Spain we know, but a romantic Spain imagined in a postmodern way from the perspective of a Japanese *mangaka*. Many readers perceive it as a phenomenon far apart from Spanish reality. The story, focused on "Chica", blurs the Spanish background and makes us forget, just for a moment, that the action takes place here, in our own country. As most manga, *Golondrina* is pastiche in the sense of Jameson (1983), and precisely this makes the manga appealing for Spanish readers. Here, tauromachy is just a façade to dress the universal drama which forms the core of this extremely detailed fictional world void of historical and social implications. The story remains sufficiently exotic to the domestic reader, who is mostly either unaware of the *taurine* culture, or a pronounced opponent, especially from a leftist and ecologist position. This far, Sechu[41] is the closest character to the average manga reader and Spanish youth, whose attitude to tauromachy he voices, in the 3rd chapter, as follows: "Are you going to act like a macho, dress in an outdated and narcissistic costume and start torturing bulls?". Sechu serves as the focalizer for Spanish readers, who follow him into the unfamiliar bullfighting environment.

41 That name can probably be traced back to José > Josechu > Sechu.

But the manga quickly turns this background into an excuse to explore a universal story, that is, a classic tragedy, in which the protagonist desires death as catharsis. Only the continuous and accurate references to bullfighting allow the reader to locate the story in the surroundings of Seville.

Manga in general, and *Golondrina* in particular, works this way: taking some foreign setting and making this its own; in other words, Japanese in appearance yet pursuing a universal goal. If *Golondrina* was a Spanish comics, it would probably have a much smaller success in Spain. The fact that a Japanese *mangaka* generates an story based on Spanish tradition is surprising and encouraging, but since this story is rendered in a graphic style far from Spanish standards and structured according to Japanese narrative conventions, it appears exotic.

The label "truly Japanese" makes manga like *Golondrina* more appealing in the Spanish market; it is crucial for selling these narratives (Davalovszky 2009). Manga facilitate a romantic idea of Japan as neither real nor fictitious, already in 1891 characterized by Oscar Wildes as follows: "In fact the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people"[42]. At any rate, *Golondrina* succeeds in Spain because it presents Spain from a Japanese point of view.

For Spanish female readers, Chica is the most glaring example of manga's global calling: a woman who refers to a remote cultural reality not always understandable. Some characters in *Golondrina* behave in a way that may appear straightforward according to Japanese social mores, but they would not really behave that way if they were Spanish. The way Chica acts is close to other female manga heroines, which make Spanish readers think of her rather as a Japanese girl in Spain than a Spanish girl. Yet, Chica has much more in common with Spanish female readers than, for example, American heroines. Kelts quotes an anonymous Japanese editor with an observation which might very well apply to Chica as well: "(A female manga protagonist) is not really masculine; she's small and fragile.

42 WILDE, Oscar. "The Decay of Lying". *Intentions*. Hong Kong: Forgotten Books, 2012.

But she's powerful. That's very Japanese. [...] It may well be more satisfying for manga readers to meet heroic characters who are [...] more like themselves" (Kelts 2007: 166).

On top of that, it is noteworthy that *Golondrina* appeals to both male and female readers in Spain. When Bernabé reviews a new manga in his blog, he usually classifies according to genre (shônen, seinen, josei etc.), but he labeled *Golondrina* "alternative", anticipating that for most Spanish readers, *Golondrina* would not easily pass as either *josei* or *seinen*. Indeed, male readers tend to think of it as seinen manga, while female readers find it closer to *josei* stories. *Golondrina* combines the theme of maturation with the motif of "having guts", something not entirely foreign to shôjo readers, but definitely more characteristic of shônen "konjô" stories.

Golondrina is reminscent of classic shôjo manga, especially the artists of the so-called *Hana no 24nen-gumi*, back in the 1970s[43]. Familiar ingredients are:

1) the non-Japanese location and (culturally speaking) exotic background, such is bullfighting. Rather than an exotic vaguely described scenario, *Golondrina*'s accurate depiction of bullfighting feels closer to the idea of a well defined spatiotemporal context as seen in Ikeda Riyoko's *Berusaiyu no bara*; but Takemiya Keiko's research for *Kaze to ki no uta* springs to mind as well.
2) Chica is trapped in her maturation process.
3) While *Golondrina* does not mimic the older drawing style, it employs a visual language closer to shôjo rather than seinen or shônen manga, both in composition and paneling.
4) *Golondrina* carries on the tradition by undermining the classic gender roles in threefold way: in terms of sexuality (Chica loves Maria), physical appearance (Chica is taken for a man several times), and social role (Chica chooses a typically male profession).
5) Subsequently, *Golondrina* draws on the shôjo manga topos of the "woman in

43 Here I am leaning on BERNDT 1996: 93-123.

pants".

6) It employs the recurring theme of suicide for love.
7) It depicts Chica's inner self and makes her inner voice accessible to the reader.
8) Not exclusively a shôjo topos, but recurrent in many classic shôjo manga, *Golondrina* presents the young male characters two-layered: the "friend/brother" (Sechu) and the "rival/lover" (Vicente).

However, Est Em's approach is very mature, taking advantage of the classic shôjo-manga elements to strengthen the intensity of the story. The environment of Spanish bullfighting becomes more than an exotic location but a full contextual support for the 'woman in pants' idea. But the 'woman in pants' idea gets also twisted because it is more than a mere performance: Chica is in love with a girl, and while she does not decline her female role, she dresses herself like a man, and she chooses a *macho* role. Finally, it is remarkable that in *Golondrina* the "suicide for love" idea is not the conclusion, but the narrative point of departure, allowing for psychological development of the characters.

As any good tragedy, *Golondrina* deals with the difficulty of fulfilling one's dreams. As a good manga, it turns this towards a vital change: The childish goal is replaced by the adult goal, in the course of the emotional maturation of the leading character. Furthermore, Chica fights against the world, and as this fight involves death, it may be understood as a defeat by many readers; after all, success is not an option. However, Chica faces adversities with boldness, wrapped in the world of tauromachy, which is traditionally associated with "having guts" and the notion of "macho".

Whether readers do or do not know about tauromachy, is not that important, because the topic itself (bullfighting) is not appealing to most manga readers. Est Em poses a story about life, within a surprising and amazing context, but at the same time, the meticulous information about bullfighting provides a framework of credibility and plausibility to this comics. Without the accurate terms and depictions about tauromachy, the story might appear rather naive. On top of that, *Golondrina* demonstrates once again the traditional shôjo-manga spirit by

dealing with “the forbidden”, and it does so from two different perspectives: bullfighting (a male-dominated world), and lesbianism (a non-normative path even in Spain which is actually a fairly tolerant country towards openly gay people). Nevertheless, in the beginning, *Golondrina* depicts the romantic (lesbian) relationship from a hetero-normative point of view: the female protagonist playing a male role. Maria acts and dresses like a girl according to what is traditionally expected. Furthermore, she appears as the deceiver, the unfaithful, the person not to be trusted. Chica dresses like a man, has short hair and decides to die “like a man” (showing a very macho attitude); her best friend is a young man, and in front of him, she behaves like a man. The situation would have been quite different if she had appeared overwhelmingly feminine and decided to become a female bullfighter, but she is represented as a boyish girl, who decides to act as a male bullfighter, despite her female gender.

There are not many female bullfighters in Spain, but those who are, do not match the cliché of “male acting” lesbian. It may be due to social pressure, but they try to look as feminine as possible outside the arena. We could ask ourselves how differently the story would have evolved if Chica was in love with a man (but not with Maria). But even if Chica and Maria’s relationship remains hetero-normative—reminiscent of conservative *seme/uke* roles—, the idea of a woman choosing to fight in a macho world is truly appealing to Spanish readers, female and male alike.

5. Manga from the far side of the world

Within just two decades, the words *anime*, *manga* and *otaku* have become part of the everyday language in Spanish media, not requiring clarifications or definitions in parentheses anymore. In 2012, the Spanish Royal Academy of Language decided to include *manga* in the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (XXIII Ed., online), succinctly defining it as “Japanese comics”.

However, this did not happen without controversy. At first, everybody had welcomed this decision, but critical voices were raised in view of manga’s initial

definition as a "genre of Japanese comics, with simple drawings, and prevailingly erotic, violent and fantastic stories". This clearly pejorative characterization triggered immediate response from critics, researchers, artists, publishers and fans both in traditional media and social networks. As a result of these complaints, the Royal Academy changed that definition and replaced it by the current succinct one: Japanese comics. This corresponds with the general agreement among the few manga critics and researchers in Spain: for them, "manga" refers to Japanese comics, and not to non-Japanese manga-style productions. However, there are Spanish "manga artists". In order to avoid confusion and controversy, their works are labeled *Iberomanga*. But they don't have a real impact on the market. EDT, for example, launched a so-called "*Gaijin* Line" in 2011, publishing several works by Spanish artists[44]; they used it as a means of differentiation from other publishers after the break of the master agreement with Shûeisha. However, in 2013, due to the general crisis and economic problems, the "Gaijin Line" was given less priority than in the previous years.

Nevertheless, the virulence of the social response to the Royal Academy's initial definition was as surprising as the wide range of participants (politicians, actors, film directors, university teachers, taxi drivers, doctors, kids, elderly, men, women etc.). It attested to the maturity of both Spanish readers and the Spanish manga market, and also to the existence of a respective culture exceeding by far isolated individuals interested in manga. The inclusion of the word "manga" in the Spanish dictionary is a clear symptom of this critical mass: manga is no longer fandom argot, but a genuine Spanish word. And while other social groups share an orientation or ideology, Spanish "otaku" are not defined by economic class, age, gender or sexual orientation; they just love manga. In the 1990s, Spain saw a first Golden Age of manga, but there was no identity as a social group among readers.

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44 For example, *Dos Espadas* by Kenny Ruiz, *Bakemono* by Xian Nu Studio, *Daemonium* by Studio Kôsen, *Himawari* by Belén Ortega and Rubén García, *La Canción de Ariadna* by Irene Roga.

This has clearly changed. “Maybe the manga revolution exemplifies the extent of Japanese manga culture: [...] its enthusiastic reception by young people across the world clearly shows the affinity of preferences and sensibilities that globalization is forcing upon a socio-cultural background, with increasing strength” (Martínez Herrero 2008: 351).

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