

# A Multimodal Approach to Álvaro Cunqueiro's Journalistic Literature: *Faro de Vigo* (1961-1981)



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## Abstract

An analysis of the Spanish Press during the fifties and sixties allows us to approach the Spanish society of the time, which inevitably reflects the social, political and ideological situation of the Spanish state after the Civil war. In the following pages, we will basically decipher the role of images and captions in the literary column 'El Envés' [The Other side (of news)], published by Álvaro Cunqueiro over twenty years in the *Faro de Vigo*, as well as the importance of these images in the regeneration of Galician culture during Francoism. In order to do so, we will analyse the role of these images in the whole communicative process in the journal under a very specific perspective: the multimodal approach.

The historical evolution of Galician culture has been determined by the negation of its own tradition and language within the Spanish state, which only accepted the existence of one of the many languages spoken in the territory. Whereas Spanish literature benefited from the protection of the state, Galician, Basque and Catalan literatures were prosecuted, banned and even subject to a degree of state repression. Peripheral languages and their literatures in Spain were not present at school, college, or media. Even in Galicia, powerful institutions, such as the Roman Catholic Church, were against its use. Galician-Portuguese literature, which developed in the Middle Ages with literary works of enormous importance, was not to be re-discovered until well into the nineteenth century. From this point onwards, the Galician literary

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revival—*Rexurdimento*—as well as later intellectual movements gave place to a process of cultural normalization which is similar, in many aspects, to the linguistic policy established in countries which felt the influence of romanticism. This culminated in the early twentieth century with the work of a number of influential intellectuals, and thus Galicia sought to place itself at the same level of other European nations. Unfortunately, this process was to be dramatically frustrated by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.



**Picture 1** - Medieval zummara players.



**Picture 2** - Symphonia de Cantiga 160, Cantigas de Sta. María de Alfonso X El Sabio, Códice de El Escorial (1221-1284).

As a consequence of the war, the inexistence of local mechanisms for systematic editing and printing until the second half of the twentieth century affected the editorial tradition in Galicia severely. Publishing Houses such as Galaxia, Xerais or magazine *Grial* would be, however, essential in the process of reconstruction. But these specific publications had something else in common: the pictorial representations that quite frequently appeared scattered throughout their editions. Following this tendency, we will analyse how several artists and scholars used 'pictures' in order to bring the readership's attention to the main issues and problems that haunted the Galician illiterate society of the time. One of the followers of this tradition is Álvaro Cunqueiro, who uses the empowering force of images in his journalistic corpus to facilitate reading

comprehension on the one hand, and to play with reality and fiction on the other. Yet before going through Cunqueiro, we shall comment on the works by two of the most representative graphic Galician writers of the twentieth century: Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao (1886-1950) and Luis Seoane (1910-1979). This has been probably the most prolific century in visual arts in Galicia since the Galician-Portuguese Medieval literary tradition.

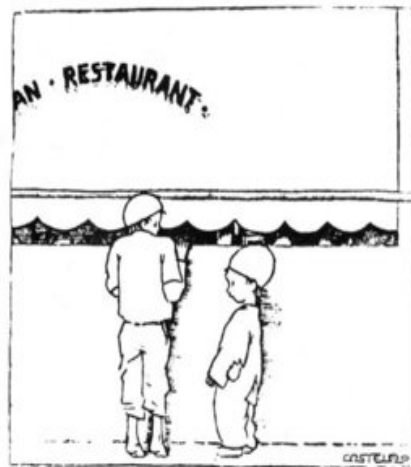
Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao (1886-1950), most commonly known as Castelao, was a Galician writer in the Galician language and one of the main symbols of Galician nationalism. As a politician, caricaturist, painter, and writer, he is one of the leading figures of Galician identity and culture, and one of the main names behind the cultural movement *Xeración Nós*. After the war, exile gave place to a cultural Galician space beyond the borders of the actual Galician territory – a space that would indeed have been an impossibility, at the time, within its borders. For this generation and its predecessors, hence, constructing a Galician identity under Celtic origins was an essential means to self-differentiation from the Mediterranean influence of the Spanish State. They established cultural and literary connections with Ireland as much as with other Celtic nations such as Cornwall, Brittany, Wales or Scotland, while the United States of America and the United Kingdom were also considered relevant sources of information. Within the limits of this spatial creation, Ireland became the main object of affection of Celtic followers such as *Xeración Nós* (*We generation – Sinn Féin*) and *Irmandades da Fala* (*The Language Brotherhood*). A varied range of periodicals such as *A Nosa Terra* and *Nós* would accentuate the relationship between Galicia and Ireland during these initial years. Even *A Nosa Terra* published a series on Irish history from the twelfth century to the present day, paying special attention to the hunger strike of the nationalist Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney (1879-1920). McKevitt explains that this interest could

be based on the Irish magnificent culture, but also on the political struggle and final independence of the present Republic:

*For Irmandades da Fala and Xeración Nós, the parallels between Ireland and Galicia were significant. They included the colonization and repression by a neighboring country, the precarious status of the mother language, the revival of interest in culture and the need for its preservation, the loss of natives due to emigration, a common faith in Catholicism, and struggle for independence. The Galician intellectuals identified with the Irish who, like themselves, were a peripheral European culture struggling for their own cultural and national identity. Consequently, the subject of Ireland and the Irish became an obligatory and ideologically imperative reference (McKevitt 10).*

This cultural nexus between Galicia and Ireland is first a direct consequence of the coming of romantic values to the peninsula and also, more recently, of a new cultural and anthropological trend intended to bring the Galician peripheral culture closer to other peripheral cultures in contact with the common links of the Atlantic Ocean and the Celtic sphere. The result is an Atlantic cultural and mythic space which would be in permanent conflict with a Mediterranean space of culture symbolising the Castilian dominance (Risco 13).

Amongst Castelao's most famous works are *Un ollo de vidro* (1922), *Cousas* (1926, 1929), *Retrincos* (1934), or *Sempre en Galiza* (1944). However, he became extremely famous for his ironic perspective and social realistic caricatures of the Galician society of his time. His texts and images criticise the Galician society at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. Emigration, poverty, starvation, politics and diglossia are some of the key features in Castelao's narratives and pictures as can be appreciated in the two examples below:



—¿Qué miras?  
—Como comen.

**Picture 3**

- What are you looking at?
- The way they eat.



—Ese muchacho dicen que sabe muchísimo.  
—Sí, pero tiene un acento tan gallego!..

**Picture 4**

- Everyone says that boy is so clever.
- Yes, but he has such a strong Galician accent!

Luis Seoane (1910-1979), on the contrary, was a lithographer and artist born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in a family of Galician immigrants. After spending his childhood and youth in Galicia, where his first exhibition was held in 1929, he returned to Argentina in order to escape from the Falangists at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936). Following Expressionism and Picasso's influence, Seoane became then one of the most representative figures of the Galician culture in exile, where he was responsible for the creation of paintings denouncing Galicia's siege under Franco's dictatorship as well as the living conditions of Galician citizens in exile:

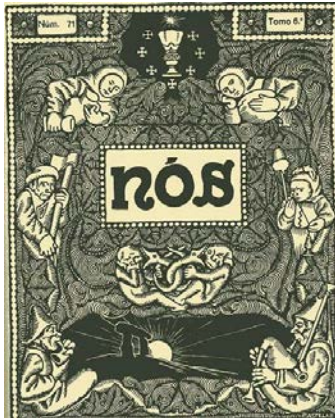


**Picture 5** - 'Emigrante' (1967)



**Picture 6** - '13 estampas para la traición' (1937)

In this sense, it can be said that the Galician intelligentsia at the beginning of the twentieth century was perfectly aware of the power of image and illustration. Magazine *Nós* (1920-1936)—co-edited by Castelao and Vicente Risco, father of Galician nationalism—can be probably considered as the first publication in twentieth century Galicia where the pictorial mode appears to be as relevant as the written texts, commonly dealing with literature, linguistics, arts, anthropology and philosophy. But the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain obviously breaks with the Galician literary and cultural revival as well. Only after the first and most difficult years of the Post-civil war, Galician painters such as Seoane, from exile, and writers like Álvaro Cunqueiro in his periodical articles, would resort again to this visual enhancement between image and text in the Galician literary tradition.



**Picture 7** - *Nós* cover (Number 71, Volume 6)

Álvaro Cunqueiro (Mondoñedo, 1911-1981) should probably be considered as the writer who most contributed to offer an original personal view of Galician myths during Francoism. His major achievements are to be found in novels such as *Merlin and Company* (1955) or plays like *The uncertain Lord Don Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1958). The role of myths, though, and especially the myth of Prince Hamlet, can only be explained if we consider myths as a revealing energy that exceeds the boundaries of censorship and repression of the totalitarian Francoist regime. This is manifested by Cunqueiro when he answers the following question in an interview during his last years:

“Topics such as ancient Greek and Latin literature are often the subject of your books, why do you like classic literature so much?”

“- [...] I experienced the Civil War and subsequent years and I had an intellectual and moral concern about the futility of vengeance. This is what "A man who looked like Orestes" is about. I am a reader of Shakespeare since I was a child and they are all in it. One day I was surprised that "Hamlet" did not fit within his work. There was a missing piece. I came to realise that this great drama of human maturity was the Oedipus complex. In other words, the murderer of his father, who married his mother, was his true father. Then everything fits and the mother wants to marry his son to avoid revenge. After I wrote my Hamlet, other writers would come to this discovery. Clearly,



eternal human passions are all the same since the creation of classic myths. Human beings, since then, had no new passions. Everything is condensed in the Greeks. It is curious, but during the German occupation of France, a Frenchman translated Homer. During Francoism, Segarra, in Catalonia, translated Shakespeare [...]. I know that censorship was ferocious against a few paragraphs in Segarra's translation, as Shakespeare was often a political opinion. Thus, the classics are sometimes the way a man has to say issues that are not allowed to say in a situation without much freedom of speech" (Outeiriño 12).

Nevertheless, it is also quite possible that the publication of any Cunqueirian work can be summed up as a provincial voice that the author wants to highlight and, after reconstructing the whole myth, he builds up again a universal story. Ultimately, the expression of purely local experience is the approach to universal localism or universalism. As we can imagine, the local, the universal, and the myths are essential in order to understand Cunqueiro's cosmogony. In his own words: "I believe in myths—Merlin, Hamlet, Ulysses—and I know that they have a revealing energy which lights our way through this bizarre cosmos every day. There is nothing more powerful than myths nowadays. They are always breaking news" (Outeiriño 25).

Cunqueiro's journalistic career, dispersed throughout newspapers and magazines all over the world for over three decades, should also be approached in this sense, namely his literary column 'El envés' [Inversum], published in the *Faro de Vigo* during the sixties, seventies and eighties. As a prolific writer—narrative, theatre, poetry, essay and journalism—the author is also keen on combining text and image in his works. In this way, the relationship between the verbal and the pictorial modes in any of his works should therefore be considered to be quite common in his production. This is especially relevant in the example of his journalistic production. Other main journalistic skills revealed by the writer in his columns are his close proximity to his readership—sharing

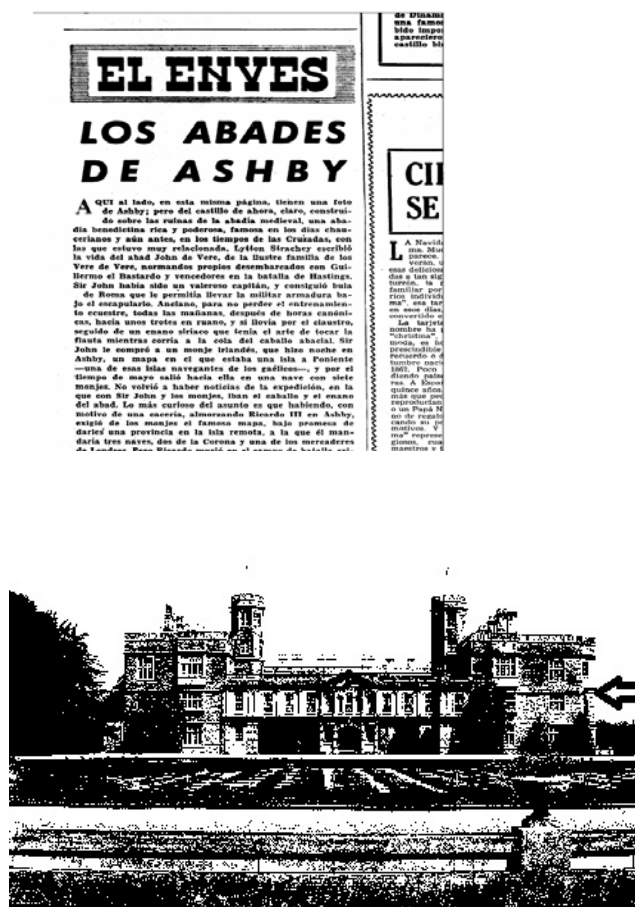


with his readers even the content of his own private letters for 20 years, the blending of fictional and real events and characters, and a narrative style linked to oral tradition—local vs. universal. He usually provides his readers too with very specific, even gossiping at times, information about characters, places, dates, or books.

Mar Fontcuberta (161) points to the existence of two different types of news: direct news, specially designed for providing information to the audience, and (re)creational news—somehow also crossing the boundary between history and myth, fiction and reality—aiming at entertaining the reader, complementing the direct news and creating new narrative styles and languages. In the following lines, we will analyse how Cunqueiro tries to complement this second technique with images and headings in the literary column 'El envés' in the Galician newspaper *Faro de Vigo*. Thus the first example shows that the reader, who is usually addressed by the author in a very direct style—'You should try it. It's impossible' (Cunqueiro, "La Flauta de Arenhim" 10) is appealed by means of attention being caught to an 'arrow' pointing to a window in Ashby. Cunqueiro frequently enhances visual objects to portray a specific event in an article. Images are therefore a key element in the message of his articles. Yet further than that, also, as we will see in the following examples, images and texts are always linked so that multimodality becomes an essential part of the story that Álvaro Cunqueiro is telling the readers.

### Example 1.

Beside, on the same page, there is a photo of Ashby, one of the current castles, of course, built on the ruins of the medieval abbey, a rich and powerful Benedictine abbey, famous in the days of Chaucer, and even before, during the times of Crusades, which was closely related to...<sup>1</sup>



The arrow indicates the window of Castle Ashby, stately home of the Marquis of Northamptonshire, which entered the thieves who stole jewelry valued at more than a million and a half pesetas ... In Ashby, as the whole British castle boasts, there is a night ghost. He is perhaps the thief, who stole with increases in the secret of the foundation and fabulous ancient treasure. (Cunqueiro, "Los Abades de Ashby" 16)

Yet images are not the only elements that create the atmosphere that Cunqueiro depicts in his columns. As it has been already mentioned, the Galician writer complements his stories at times by adding very specific information on characters, places, or dates to the column: "jewelry valued at more than a million and a half pesetas". And this is combined with a mixture of fiction—the ghost is probably the thief—and reality. In the second article below, for example, the author instructs the reader on tribal traditions while recreating far and exotic traditions and crossing the line separating fiction from reality:

## Example 2.



In this photograph, which comes from Nairobi, and shows us some Indian girls who are about to leave Kenya for fear of racist attacks by the Burning Spear police, and Kikuyu gaka becoming Prime Minister, saying goodbye to their relatives who remain in the British country so far. You can see them kissing with their noses, so common of several Hindu tribes, so widely detailed in the 'Amarusataka' or 'Century of Amaru', written in an undetermined time, maybe 1500 years ago, by a guru named Sankara who, through magic arts, managed to get into the body of King Amaru of Kashmir, who married a hundred women (Cunqueiro, "Las acariciadoras de narices" 20).

Fiction and reality are not only intertwined in each article individually, though, but in almost every article Cunqueiro publishes. The author creates a network of articles every time he publishes 'El envés'. In fact, in the following example, he goes back to events that have been previously mentioned in his literary columns: "Last Sunday we published a photo on the last page of beautiful Swedish actress Hathalie Tippi".

## Example 3.



Last Sunday we published a photo on the last page of beautiful Swedish Hathalie (sic) Tippi, who starred in Alfred Hitchcock film entitled 'The Birds.' Hawks, crows, swans, wild lights, mergansers, hawks, larks, and sparrows, flying around the gothic blonde and the oenax hawk prosaically called lagarteiro in our country and the crow of Scania, solemn visitor of cereal lands of genuine Vandals, land on her bare shoulder, gently curved like the moon. And I then remembered I had read something about a beautiful woman living among Vikings who also had a strange friendship with birds (Cunqueiro, "Las aves de Hallenberga" 16).

Example 4 below shows the photograph of actress Nathalie Tippi Hedren which, as mentioned in Example 3, had been already published the previous Sunday by Álvaro Cunqueiro. Again, portrayal of real events such as the premiere of Alfred Hitchcock's 'The Birds' or the information on Tippi Hedren's professional career are intertwined with fiction, or in this case, with Irish mythology (e.g. Deirdre). Once again, the gossiping nature of the article—"Nathalie Tippi Hedren, Swedish-born American, divorced mother of a 5-year-old girl, used to work as a model and usually appear on television advertising"—the profusion of detail favouring the easy combination of fiction and reality—"... in which we will see 8,000 winged characters, including hawks, crows, magpies, sparrows and larks ... Nathalie has behaved valiantly during the filming of the movie, and has come to make friends with some of the crows that gently perched on her shoulder"—as well as the passage from the universal to the local and vice versa to round off the article with a touch of mythology help to give an idea of Cunqueiro's journalistic style—"Hawks, crows, swans, wild lights, mergansers, hawks, larks, and sparrows, flying around the gothic blonde and the *oenax* hawk prosaically called *lagarteiro* in our country and the crow of Scania, solemn visitor of cereal lands of genuine Vandals, land on her bare shoulder, gently curved like the moon. And I then remembered I had read something about a beautiful woman living among Vikings who also had a strange friendship with birds".

## Example 4.



Nathalie Tippi Hedren, Swedish-born American, divorced mother of a 5-year-old girl, used to work as a model and usually appear on television advertising. Alfred Hitchcock chose her for his film 'The Birds', in which we will see 8,000 winged characters, including hawks, crows, magpies, sparrows and larks. [...] Nathalie has behaved

valiantly during the filming of the movie, and has come to make friends with some of the crows that gently perched on her shoulder. [...] Blonde as Deirdre, secret goddess, Nathalie reigns among birds (Cunqueiro, "Nathalie Tippi Hedren" 24).

Cunqueiro's blending of fiction and reality has been studied in detail by Galician scholars (Martínez Torrón 1980, Tarrío 1989, and González-Millán 1991). However, it has been mentioned earlier in the present article that his journalistic corpus, especially those articles published in *Faro de Vigo*, are accompanied by another element in the equation: image. Images in every article, as we have seen, play a relevant role in the configuration of the message that Cunqueiro sends to his readers every week. Indeed, they convey essential information in the articles by the Galician writer. However, not many scholars have paid enough attention to the key role of images until Kress and Van Leeuwen's revolutionary publication *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, which opened a whole new approach to discourse and text in 1996.

Generally speaking, it is now widely accepted that multimodality has a crucial say in meaning-making (Martin and Rose 2003, Thibault 2004, Unsworth 2001; Ventola et al 2004, among others). Kress has pointed out indeed that 'it is now impossible to make sense of texts, even of their linguistic parts alone, without having a clear idea of what these other features might be contributing to the meaning of a text' (Kress and Leeuwen 337). In the case of printed media, though, it is possible to say that, still nowadays, average recipients will normally become only dimly aware of the fact that they are processing information encoded in different modes when 'reading' a multimodal text. In textual practice, modes can shift and blend into one another. A theory of multimodal communication has to meticulously dissect an apparently homogeneous and holistic impression. It has to sensitise us for the essential differences of the modes involved (Stöckl 16). There are two basic ways in which the linguistic and the pictorial mode can come together in a text:

- A verbal text can itself acquire image qualities by means of typography and layout. In this case a peripheral mode (typography) of a medial variant (writing/language) is employed for a partial transfer from one core mode (language) to another (image). Here, the carrier of the linguistic mode emulates the pictorial.
- A verbal text is combined with an image. The two core modes are semantically and formally integrated so that each mode strategically employs its range of sub-modes thus unfolding the specific semiotic potential of each mode and contributing to an overall communicative gestalt. (Stöckl 16).

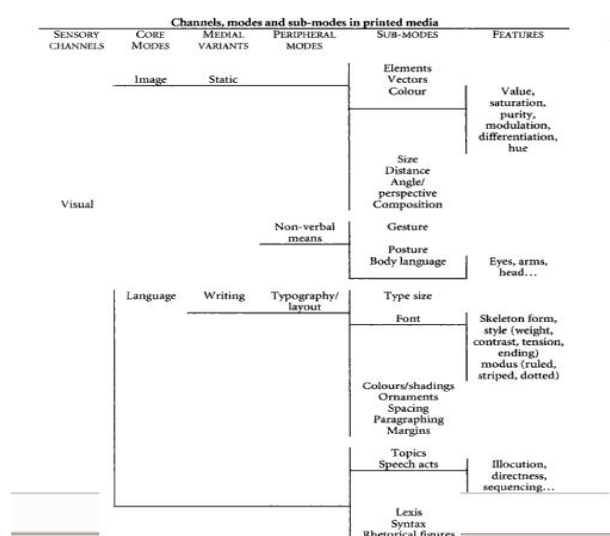


Fig.1. Network of modes, submodes and features in printed media (Stöckl 12).

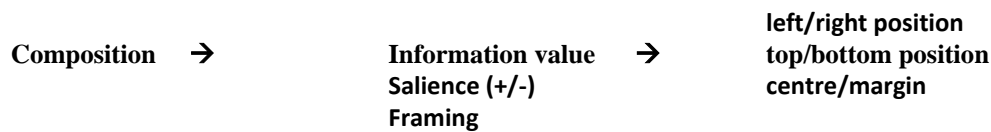
In this sense, the following lines analyse the use of multimodality that Cunqueiro made already in his recreational news published in the literary column 'El envés', published in the Galician paper *Faro de Vigo* and always in the light of Franco's dictatorship and the living and cultural conditions of the period. Galician people living under the outstanding contrasts originated during Franco's dictatorship saw that the beginning of Francoism meant the death of Galician culture as well as the silent, clandestine fight for a new democratic era against an ancient power

which faced the interests of democratic generations. And secrecy itself involves deep conflicts, incongruity, nonsense, isolation and even death in an unequal fight for change. Escaping Francoism and censorship at that time was indeed more difficult than we can imagine. A good example of repression is the need for pseudonyms as a means to avoid political and social castration. This phenomenon is quite noticeable in Álvaro Cunqueiro's literary and journalistic production. The most important of the Galician writer's pseudonyms is Álvaro Labrada. He started to use it from the beginning of the 1940s until his passing and published two books under this alias: *Saint Gonzalo* (1945) and *Baladas de las damas del tiempo pasado* (1945). But it will be as Editor-in-Chief of *Faro de Vigo* (1961-1981) newspaper when Cunqueiro starts to broaden his range of pseudonyms. We should cite: Manuel María Seoane, MMS, Al Farish Ibn laqhim al Galizi, A.L., Mark Tapley, and many others. Many of his translations and reviews from international poetic compositions will be published under an alias too. Thus the reason for recreational news, the permanent combination of myth and reality, local and universal, and the need to reach a wide readership, mostly illiterate, which could follow the author's articles thanks to the pictures he adds to his written texts.

Our analysis of the visual composition of four examples is guided by Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) work in reading images, paying special attention to the composition of the message; that is, where image and text are placed and how they interact. Composition rests upon three main principles: (i) information value, (ii) salience, and (iii) framing. Information value works along two axes: left to right and top to bottom where the horizontal axis (left to right in case of Western culture) refers to the linguistic notion of given versus new information whereas the vertical axis divides information into ideal (placed at the top) and real (at the bottom). Within information value, it can also be distinguished a third contrast: centre as opposed to margins, with more relevant information



occupying a more central position. Salience and framing, on the other hand, are closely related and refer to the different perception of the elements composing the message. In other words, some of these elements are perceived before others in the same message because of their colour, bigger size and the presence of frames—e.g. the use of boxes to frame a relevant element (adapted from Kress and Van Leeuwen 210):



## Example 1.



'Variaciones' FV, 20-IV-77, p. 28.

This first sample shows an example with no semantic relation between the modes: the verbal and the image texts. The meaning conveyed in the written text is not repeated or paralleled in the pictorial mode. It is not even complemented, negated, contradicted or reinterpreted since the written part does not refer at all to the visual one and vice versa. Salience, on the other hand, can be seen in the big size of the picture, calling the readers' attention as an important independent unit able to equal the written part. The picture, already important thanks to its size, appears framed at the end of the two written

articles. It is an independent text, gaining importance over the linguistic part. Also, it is located on the right, as new information.

## Example 2.



‘Bodas de plata con el albariño’ *FV*, 05-VIII-77, p. 40.

Salience is intended to catch the readers’ eyes given the big size of the picture in the second example. This is located on the left, as given information, and occupies the top of the page, representing the ideal world of popular celebrations. The caption besides the picture, framed and top-right located, gets thus importance and conveys a summary of the article. Association is favoured by the picture. The two modes are strategically combined on this occasion. Semantic ties are created so that there is no need for further reading.

## Example 3.



‘El Envés’ FV, 21-VIII-79, p. 40.

This time, also, salience plays a very important role in Cunqueiro's article. The big size of the picture, in central position and covering the space of the two columns, does not only catch the readers' eyes but also highlights the importance of the pictorial mode. Besides, the picture appears at the bottom of the page, as *realia*: the article praises typical Galician grilled sardines. Association is favoured by the picture so that the meaning of the written text is complemented by the meaning conveyed by the picture. Once again, there is no need to read the written text in detail in order to know what the article is about.

#### Example 4.



‘Sin falar de Magos’ FV, 05-I-77, p. 28.

The Three Wise Men Figurines in Cunqueiro's home reproduction of the stable at Bethlehem are depicted in the article in the fourth example. The image appears on the right, as new information, top of the page, representing the ideal world. Salience comes given by the big size of the picture catching the readers' eyes. Association is favoured by the picture so that the meaning of the written text is complemented by the meaning conveyed by the picture.

All in all, Cunqueiro's wide use of images and captions in combination is a good means for the author not only to get closer to his readers but also to reach a wider readership. Given the illiteracy of Galician people at the time, pictures do commonly make the comprehension of the articles easier, with virtually no need to read the verbal text at times. Besides, the two modes—pictorial and verbal—interact in 'El Envés' and hence favour the reception of Cunqueiro's articles as '(re)creational news', aiming at entertaining the reader, complementing the direct news, and creating new narrative styles and languages. Needless is to say at this point that re-creational news, at the same time, were also intended for wider audiences, given their lower level of complexity.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Cunqueiro's journalistic articles are word-for-word translations intended to convey Cunqueiro's original journalistic style.

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