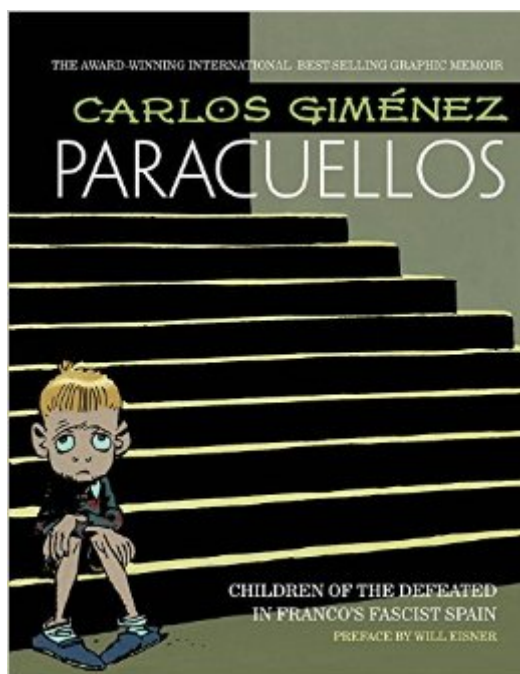


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Paracuellos Volume 1



Synopsis

With a preface by Will Eisner, *Paracuellos* is a work of great courage, created at a time when telling the truth about Spain's political past could get one killed. It is arguably the most important graphic memoir ever created in comics. Carlos Giménez's autobiographical account of the plight of children in post-World War II Fascist Spain has won virtually every comics award in Europe, including "Best Album" at the 1981 Angoulême Festival, and the "Heritage Award" at Angoulême in 2010. In the late 1930s when Spanish fascists led by Franco, and aided by Hitler and Mussolini, overthrew the elected government, almost 200,000 men and women fell in battle, were executed, or died in prison. Their orphaned children and others ripped from the homes of the defeated were shuttled from Church-run "home" to "home" and fed a steady diet of torture and disinformation by a totalitarian state bent on making them "productive" citizens. Carlos Giménez was one of those children. In 1975, after Franco's death, Carlos began to tell his story. Breaking the code of silence proved to be a milestone, both for the comics medium and for a country coming to terms with its past. An illustrated essay by Carmen Moreno-Núñez, Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Kentucky, places the comics in historical perspective. "The stories transcend just being about a historical moment in Spain. Their humanity will speak to everyone. The stories are heartbreakers, but Carlos never loses his sense of humor." —William Stout

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Paracuellos del Jarama is a small town near Madrid. It is also the place where Carlos Giménez spent his childhood. This volume collects Giménez's stories, told in the form of black-and-white strip art, ranging in length from a single page to a few pages. The stories deal with the daily lives of children who are being raised (or held, or abused) in institutions during the 1950s while Spain was under Franco's rule. Some of the children are orphans. Some are the children of parents who are being held as political prisoners. Other kids have been temporarily or permanently abandoned by their parents. Carlos Giménez based the stories on his own life. He is, in fact, one of the characters. Giménez began releasing the stories in the 1970s, after Franco died. Common themes in the stories are hunger and thirst, loneliness, irresponsible parents, unjust punishment, and the ordinary travails of growing up: bullies, pranks, curiosity about sex, friends who become enemies, and dreams of the future. The stories are bleak but hopeful, in the way that kids are often hopeful as they bond, use their imaginations, and dream of a better life. Giménez's dream, of course, was to become a cartoonist, making this volume a testament to the power of dreaming. My favorite stories draw parallels between the church, as embodied by the nuns who run the "homes" in which Giménez resides, and Franco's authoritarian government. Both institutions value discipline above compassion; both are riddled with arbitrariness and hypocrisy. Even children can see the truth behind the lies they are told. Some narrative pieces round out the volume, but I prefer the strip art.

In February 1936, Spain elected a Republican government supported by parties on the left. In July of the same year, a military uprising of the right began led by General Francisco Franco and supported by the fascist governments of Germany and Italy. The Civil War lasted until 1939, ending with Franco's victory. The death toll is estimated to have been approximately 500,000 not counting deaths from malnutrition, starvation and illnesses related to the war. Franco's Nationalists would hold power until his death in 1975. As a result of the war and the government's totalitarian policies, many children were left orphaned or abandoned and were placed in Social Aid Homes. The aim of these homes was to produce "good" citizens loyal to the state. Carlos Gimenez was one of those children. After Franco's death in 1975, he began recording his memories of those days but in comic book form, an act of extreme bravery given the continued dangers of criticizing the Regime. The result is a powerful, occasionally humorous but extremely heart wrenching picture of what life was like in these homes. The children were starved, beaten, and served a daily dose of propaganda wrapped in religious platitudes by sadistic "carers". The story is historically accurate as Gimenez refused to soften the account to make it

more palatable. Eventually, he wrote and drew six volumes to tell his story; this is a review of Paracuellos Vol. 1. This graphic novel is not meant only as an uplifting story of the human spirit transcending evil - the deprivations and abuses these children were forced to endure are heartbreaking made more so because they are told by a survivor. This is Gimenezâ™ honest telling of his own story and this honesty makes it at once painful to read but important to understand.

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