

Experimental Laboratory

of Illustrated Greguerías

Constança Araújo Amador

Artist

The journey from literary metaphore to visual metaphore, through the use of illustration, taking as a starting point several greguerías by Ramon Gómez de la Serna...

Greguería, Ramón Gomez de La Serna, illustration, author, metaphor

To speak about metaphore is to draw a bridge between understanding, reading and the way we comprehend the world. It means using a tool to travel beyond a reality (beyond empiric knowledge), and it implies an expression in words, image or other form of expression within the reach of our thought.

Literary metaphore and visual metaphore, the way we understand them and apprehend them vary and come from our conceptual system, the way we think and experience our daily life. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explained, it is only through this that we can understand what is behind the leap that metaphore, literary or visual, finally is.¹

Noël Carroll says that visual metaphore is a sub-class of visual images and that it exists only in those cases where both homospatiality (common elements to one or more of the terms) and compossibility (the occurrence of something that would be impossible in the empirical world of the subject)². However, our visual culture is what allows us to construct not only a whole world of images and metaphoric relationships, but also abstract interpretations. The result of the representation is always a consequence of the interpretation.

Would it be possible that through interpretation, personality, stroke and language, the visual metaphore created by the artist and illustrator would become a piece independent from its origin? What is the role of illustration when it comes to generating a new visual metaphore? How does this process take place? When it goes beyond the literary metaphore, is it not isolating it, making it independent and autonomous? When does it surpass the literary metaphore? Does it then become independent?

Greguerías and their author

Ramón Gómez de la Serna (Madrid, July 3rd, 1888 – Buenos Aires, January 12th, 1963), Spanish

modernist writer and fervent admirer of artistic and literary movements such as the Spanish surrealism. He is the inventor of greguerías, with which he achieved a unique fusion of symbolism, modernism and avant-garde. Between 1910 and 1963 he wrote more than 2,000 of these brief literary compositions, and he also illustrated some of them.

His own illustrations would be worthy of a separate dissertation and evaluation. However, here we will just indicate that in them, the author fo the texts himself carries out the transition from literary metaphore to visual metaphore in two acts.

Ramón Gómez de la Serna's definition of greguería is “daring to define what is undefinable, to capture what is ephemeral, to accurately guess what may be in everybody or in nobody”³.

All things material and immaterial may be the object of a metaphore. All words and sentences die in their correct, literal origin. They only elevate to glory when they are metaphores, because metaphores make them abstract, embalmed.

Metaphore multiplies the world, ignoring the rhetorician, who forbids linking things only because they are unable to achieve such thing.

Gómez de la Serna himself has also defined greguería with the following equation: Metaphore + Humour = Greguería.

On his relationship with humour the writer said, “Defining humourism in a few words, when it is the antidote of the most diverse things, when it actually is restoration of all genres to their reason of being, is indeed the most difficult thing in the world”⁴. He seems to aim at correcting humour, or teaching humour, which has that bitter taste that thinks that everything is a bit of nonsense. “What defines me is a tenderness for things that resides in my innermost self. In the same way that there are protectors of animals, I am a protector of things”⁵. “The supreme ambition would be to find things lacking any easily implied meaning”⁶. Photography, illustration or drawing are but mere visual art media to represent visual metaphores. They are a way to represent the intentions of artist and author, going across borders, they step beyond the line of literary metaphore. Image is, without a doubt, the solution of word.

[Greguerías]

[El ciervo es el hijo del rayo y del árbol.]

Deer is the offspring of ray and tree.

[Hay momentos en que las moscas parecen querer arrancarse la cabeza como desesperadas de ser moscas]

Sometimes flies seem to want to tear their heads off, as though desperate of being flies.

[Todos los días del limbo son domingo.]

In limbo, everyday is a Sunday.

[Los mejillones son las almejas de luto]

Mussels are mourning clams.

[Lo malo del deseo es que vuelve sin avisar]

The worst thing about desire is that it always comes back without a warning.

Bibliography

ALAMÁN, Rafael Cabaña: El recurso auto-epistolar como terapia: motivos temáticos recurrentes y greguerías in Cartas a mí mismo [1956] de Ramón Gómez de la Serna (The Recourse of the Letter to Self as aTherapy: Recurring Themes and Greguerías in Letters to Myself), Saint Louis University, Campus de Madrid, 2011.

ALDRICH, Virgil C.: “Visual Metaphor” in Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 2, No. 1, University of Illinois, 1968, pp. 73-86.

BARTHES, Roland: Image, Music, Text, Fontana Press, London, 1977.

BARTHES, Roland: A morte do autor (The Death of the Author). O Rumor da Língua. Lisboa, Edições 70, 1984.

CARROLL, Noël: Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

FLUFERNIK, Monika; FREEMAN, Donald C., FREEMAN and Margaret H.: “Metaphor and Beyond: An Introduction” in Poetics Today, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1999, pp. 383-396.

GÓMEZ DE LA SERNA, RAMÓN: Greguerías, Madrid, Cátedra, 1993.

GÓMEZ DE LA SERNA, RAMÓN: La sagrada cripta de Pombo (Pombo's Holy Crypt), Madrid, Trieste, 1986.

GÓMEZ DE LA SERNA, RAMÓN: Una teoría personal del arte. Antología de textos de estética y teoría del arte (A Personal Theory of Art. An Anthology of Texts on Aesthetics and Art Theory), (MARTÍNEZ-COLLADO, ANA, ED.), Madrid, Tecnos, 1988.

GÓMEZ DE LA SERNA, RAMÓN: “Las palabras y lo indecible”(Words and the Unutterable), Revista de Occidente, Madrid, volume 51, 1936.

LAKOFF, George, JOHNSON, Mark: Metaphors We Live By - Language, Thought, and Culture, 1980.

LINDEN, Sophie Van der, L'album, entre texte, image et support (The Illustrated Book. Between Text, Image and Support), La Revue des livres pour enfants, no 214, pp. 59-68, 2003.

RANCIÈRE, Jacques: O Destino das Imagens (Le destin des images) (The Fate of Images), tradução Luís Lima, Orfeu Negro, Lisboa, 2011.

SHULEVITZ, Uri: Writing with Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books, New York, Watson-Guption, 1997.

Artist. Student at Master in Illustration and Animation at Polytechnic Institute of Cávado and Ave, Barcelos (Portugal)

Greguerías:

From left to right, top to bottom.

Nothing more desorientating than a phone number we have written down, but forgot whose it is.

— **David Van der Veen**

Through our eyes life passes.

— **Raquel Carrero**

The moon is the porthole in the night's ship.

— **Sara Ferreras**

Dust is full of old, forgotten sneeze.

— **Luis Galbis**

Children keep their dreams in their pencil cases.

— **Sergio Gómez**

Books are the lifebuoy of loneliness.

— **Juan Carlos Martínez Lecina**

Children's balloons were dead scared on the street.

— **Sabina Alcaraz**

Capitalist is a man who, as he speaks with us, pockets our matches.

— **Marta Tortajada**

Dream is a repository of lost objects.

— **Cristina Alonso**

Do not trust too much in your own heart, because it will fail ultimately

— **Carmen Celda Plumé**