

Origins and development of sensationalist crime journalism in Spain (1883-1917)

Orígenes y desarrollo del periodismo sensacionalista de sucesos en España (1883-1917)

Origens e desenvolvimento do jornalismo criminal sensacionalista na Espanha (1883-1917)

Antonio Laguna Platero, Universidad de Valencia, Valencia, España (antonio.laguna@uv.es)

Francesc-Andreu Martínez Gallego, Universidad de Valencia, Valencia, España (francesc.martinez@uv.es)

SUMMARY | This paper posits the existence of a consolidated and influential press of events (in terms of circulation and the journalistic changes it introduced) in Spain during the Restoration (1874-1923). Some editors put into practice this way of attracting the attention and interest of the public, appealing to news marked by tragedy and death. Through the analysis of the weeklies *Las Noticias Ilustradas* (1883), *Los Sucesos* (1904-1917), *Las Novedades* (1908) and *La Semana Ilustrada* (1917), we observe the growing rivalry at the time around sensationalist journalism. We focus on publishers such as Eduardo Sojo, Domingo Blanco Misamigo or the Estampa publishing house to evidence the business bets that consolidate the Spanish version of the red chronicle press, as well as the narrative characteristics employed and the emergence of graphic journalism of events.

KEYWORDS: event press; red chronicle; history of journalism; spanish restoration; sensationalism.

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RESUMEN | Este trabajo postula la existencia de una prensa de sucesos consolidada e influyente (por su tirada y por la entidad de los cambios periodísticos que introduce) en España durante el período de la Restauración (1874-1923). Algunos editores pusieron en práctica esta forma de atraer la atención y el interés del público, apelando a noticias marcadas por la tragedia y la muerte. A través del análisis de los semanarios *Las Noticias Ilustradas* (1883), *Los Sucesos* (1904-1917), *Las Novedades* (1908) y *La Semana Ilustrada* (1917), se observa la rivalidad creciente en la época en torno al periodismo sensacionalista. Se analiza el rol de editores como Eduardo Sojo, Domingo Blanco Misamigo o la Editorial Estampa para evidenciar las apuestas empresariales que consolidaron la versión española de la prensa de crónica roja, así como las características narrativas empleadas y la emergencia del periodismo gráfico de sucesos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: prensa de sucesos; crónica roja; historia del periodismo; restauración española; sensacionalismo.

RESUMO | Este artigo postula a existência de uma imprensa sensacionalista consolidada e influente (em termos de circulação e das mudanças jornalísticas que introduziu) na Espanha durante o período da Restauração (1874-1923). Alguns editores puseram em prática esta forma de atrair a atenção e o interesse do público, apelando às notícias marcadas pela tragédia e pela morte. Através da análise dos semanários *Las Noticias Ilustradas* (1883), *Los Sucesos* (1904-1917), *Las Novedades* (1908) e *La Semana Ilustrada* (1917), foi observada a rivalidade crescente na época sobre o jornalismo sensacionalista. Foi analisado o rol de editores como Eduardo Sojo, Domingo Blanco Misamigo ou a Editorial Estampa para evidenciar das apostas empresariais que consolidaram da versão espanhola da imprensa da "crônica vermelha", bem como as características narrativas empregadas e a emergência do jornalismo gráfico de acontecimentos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: imprensa criminal; crônica vermelha; história do jornalismo; restauração espanhola; sensacionalismo.

INTRODUCTION

Problematizing the tragic events press

The Spanish sensationalist press of the late 19th and first third of the 20th century has often been considered as a mere precedent or footnote to the successful weekly *El Caso* (1952-1997) (Franco, 2004). However, it is worthwhile investigating the relationship between sensationalism and the press market at that time, analyzing the growing competition that induced editors and journalists to attract readers by appealing to news marked by tragedy and death. It is also interesting to study the role that language and image begin to play in this type of news, and the emergence of graphic journalism of events, which connects with a long tradition of emotions emanating from pain and death integrated into popular culture and which is at the basis of the greatest sales successes in the history of the press.

As Moscoso (2015) states, research on the emotional experiences of the past should aim to address the relationship between emotions and social change. In this case, we are interested in the relationship between the emotion created by sensationalist narratives and the changes experienced by a culture moving towards a mass communication society. Sensationalism is part of the essence of modern journalism, and is key to understanding its development (Martínez & Laguna, 2020).

From cordel literature to *folletines*¹: the tragic event as a lure

Journalism did not invent sensationalism: it adapted it. Catastrophes, tragedies, and extraordinary events were proven sales formulas (Lara & Barata, 2009; Sánchez, 2011; Álvarez et al., 2016). It happened with the cordel literature, the *aleluyas*², and other formats. Undoubtedly, “sensationalism, understood as magnification or exaggeration of news, is a very old practice” (Gargurevich, 2002, p. 16; Ettinghausen, 2012).

The incorporation of sensationalism to journalism is a phenomenon of the 19th century, marked by the milestones of the *folletines* and the image. The *folletín* introduces sensationalism as a serialized novel, in the theme and in the plot, and

1. There is not an exact translation, but *folletines* are similar to chapbooks (translator’s note).

2. “The *aleluya* appears with its definitive structure since the end of the 16th century and the best known is the Catalan one by Abadal of 1676, which has 48 vignettes, an almost immutable quantity and maintained, with some exceptions, through two and a half centuries. In fact, the characteristic *aleluya* is a sheet of paper, generally 420 x 305 mm, comprising the 48 vignettes, arranged in eight rows of six each, with varied subjects or developing a particular story or motif. All those of the 18th century were printed in black and white. In the 19th century they were printed on cheap colored paper and, on occasion, some were crudely colored, but the procedure was not successful” (García Castañeda, n.d.).

will make melodrama a way to captivate the reader (Benítez, 2016). The shocking image, first as an illustrative engraving of the news, later as a photograph, was combined with the exaggerated story that characterizes the drama journalism, heir to a long tradition of popular narrative, which will later be part of mass journalism based on exaggeration (hypotypes), when not in the invention of events.

The tragic events press' story burst with force in the French press from 1836 in the serialized novel or *folletín* (Thiesse, 2000; De Undurraga, 2011), which aims to entertain, to be more competitive, linking the sale to the mail subscription and the desire to continue receiving the novel's fragment. Its objective: to engage in order to ensure the newspaper's daily purchase. Democratizing literature was synonymous with introducing sensationalism in its narrative.

Thus, subjected to the market and the need to sell newspapers, romantic literature was born, the first to have a generalized social scope. The *folletín's* impact (or *feuilleton*) on the newspaper economy and on the writers' way of life, who adapted their style and form to the new medium, was transcendental. The author's popularity was born and, with it, the servitude of producing intensely and extensively for a market that rewarded with good income, which meant that the signer of the work was not always the author.

From 1840 onwards, serialized contents were gradually incorporated into the *folletín* in the Spanish daily press, with varied topics, from literature and history to politics (Lecuyer & Villapadierna, 1995). The *folletín* was connected with the popular cultural tradition of the cordel literature, such as the crime of Fuencarral Street –the milestone of crime news in the daily press in 1888– (Carratalá, 2015), but it did not end with the cordel literature. In fact, said crime became one and flew from hand to hand in cities and towns, to places where the newspaper had not yet arrived.

Between the world of the sinister *folletines* and the appearance of the first tragic events press around 1882, the books by instalment of famous causes constituted a node (Caro, 1989; Uribe, 2013), little studied in Spain, by the way (Flores, 2005). For example, in 1858 the Count of Fabraquer edited one, in which he observed that murder was a means of governance in the 15th century, that the Communities of Castile were susceptible to be told as a story of rancor and revenge, that “the lightest passions influenced the fate of the people” in the time of Philip II (Fabraquer, 1858: VI), or that an obscure pastry chef was able to impersonate a king. The following year, José Vicente y Caravantes began his *Anales dramáticos del crimen o causas célebres españolas y extranjeras*, five volumes filled with crimes, challenges, evasions, judicial errors, swindles, and robberies. The famous causes composed a language of crime that absorbed a portion of the popular language and another of

the legal language, a new narrative of a fully journalistic nature, which the crime press would make its own.

The first known tragic events newspaper, the [Police National Gazette](#), was born in New York in 1845 (Sachsman & Bulla, 2013). In 1877 it was bought by Richard Kyle Fox, who created a new editorial and commercial strategy, making the magazine the most widely read in the country. The new owner lowered the subscription price for public premises, especially men's barbershops, and devised a policy of gifts and raffles. He also linked the magazine to the promotion of sporting events, especially the world boxing championships. At the editorial level, he increased the presence of events' images, of sports competitions that the newspaper sponsored, images of half-naked women, and decided to publish on pinkish-colored paper to differentiate from others. Within a year, it exceeded 150,000 copies per issue and had annual revenues of close to USD200,000 (Reel, 2006). Two decades before Pulitzer or Hearst competed to sell a million copies, Fox had turned his magazine into an example of sensationalist publication. Both the American [Police National](#) and the English [Police News](#) are reference models of what, in the first instance, was called the tragic events press and, later, the yellow press or mass tabloids (Chibnall, 1981). In Spain, Moreno Sardá (1973, 1975) was the first to study the tragic events press in historical perspective. Based on the archives of the University of Connecticut, Rodríguez (2016) investigated [Los Sucesos. Revista ilustrada de actualidades, siniestros, crímenes y causa célebres](#), published between 1882-1883, qualifying it as the first of the genre. Some authors (Rodríguez, 2009; Redondo, 2011; Ortega, 2012) investigate the evolution of the information of events in the daily press in certain Spanish cities, but the great titles of specialized press prior to [El Caso](#) (1952-1997) remain to be researched in depth. The tragic events, red, or sensationalist press has gained relevance in Ibero-American historiography (Gargurevich, 2002; Rodríguez, 2007; Pereira, 2013; Vega, 2015; Estrada et al., 2019; Martínez et al., 2020), and in the interest of different European historiographies due to the link between crime and its narration (Kalifa, 1995, 2005; Reisinger, 2007; Campbell, 2016; Bordería, 2020).

Focusing on Spain, the emergence and consolidation of the tragic events press must be linked to the emergence of magazines –or second informative front– and their growth: from 1,347 titles in 1900 to 1,930 in 1927 (Espinet, 1989). Some solid newspaper publishing companies started to publish magazines; for example, business integration was a fact in [Ediciones Rivadeneyra/ Editorial Estampa](#) (Luis Montiel Balanzat), in [Prensa Española Sociedad Anónima](#), or in [Sociedad Editorial de España/Sociedad Editorial Universal](#), among others (Laguna & Martínez, 2020).

The subject matter of the magazines was very varied, with a predominance of professional, confessional, and general information magazines; sports magazines and those dedicated to women were also relevant, and there was ample space for satirical, suggestive, and tragic events magazines, a relevant trident due to their sales success (Litvak, 1993; Salaün, 1992).

On many occasions, its contents were intertwined with manifestations of the new mass culture, such as theater, cinema, or the newsstand novel (Salaün, 2011). In the case of the tragic events press, its concomitance with the detective novel is evident (Sánchez & Martín, 2011). Cinema based on the chronicle of criminal events began in Spain in 1912 and found a niche there (Gómez, 2011).

The establishment of tragic events sections in the press and in magazines specialized in those subjects generated a journalistic specialization: the tragic events reporter, also called court reporter or, in a derogatory way, *gacetillero*. In 1919, Maximiliano Clavo, tragic events reporter for the newspaper *El Sol*, gave a conference at the Ateneo de Madrid on *Tragic events reporting. Justice and the police*. The room was full of colleagues, according to the newspaper *La Correspondencia de España* (En el Ateneo..., 1919). Ten years later, a report in the magazine *Estampa* (1929), recounted the *Vida, triunfos y aventuras del reportero de sucesos* (Life, triumphs, and adventures of the tragic events reporter) (Vida, triunfos..., 1929), describing the activity of some twenty journalists from Madrid. This sector of the profession enjoyed singularity and recognition.

It seems evident that, socially, economically (companies, businessmen, journalists), culturally (connection of tragic events journalism with popular culture), and politically, the Spanish red chronicle has had an impact that deserves to be highlighted and is essential material to configure a history of Spanish journalism. In that regard, the following hypotheses are posited: from the end of the 19th century, the journalistic business used sensationalism to broaden the social base of the press readership; the tragic events press was part of the specialized magazines of a sensationalist nature and the reporting of tragic events penetrated the daily and non-daily press, and, finally, a type of journalist specialized in the red chronicle and graphic journalism of tragic events emerged.

METHODOLOGY

In order to reconstruct and analyze the tragic events press in the period, we conducted a hemerographic search of the publications that were explicitly declared as tragic events and linked to the red chronicle or any of its variants in three digital

libraries (Digital Hispánica, Virtual de Prensa Histórica and Memoria Digital de Madrid), and in the Hemeroteca Municipal de Madrid.

We selected the publications [Las Noticias Ilustradas](#) (1883), [Los Sucesos](#) (1904-1917), [Las Novedades](#) (1908), and [La Semana Ilustrada](#) (1907-1910) because of their greatest sales success or because they represented the best assembled publishing projects.

We analyzed the entire collections of the four magazines and their textual and iconic components. The press was studied from a triple perspective (Charle, 2004): inserted in social history (including the business component, the emergence or consolidation of new professions, such as the court reporter or tragic events reporter); in cultural history, since the analyzed media emerged with a mass vocation and were connected with internalized forms of popular culture, and with political history, since the tragic events press provoked a number of opposing attacks from Catholicism and certain regenerationist visions.

RESULTS

[Los Sucesos. Revista ilustrada de actualidades, siniestros, crímenes y causas célebres](#), published in Madrid in 1882-1883, claimed to aspire to be the Spanish [Police Gazette](#) (Rodríguez, 2016, p. 26). The weekly, with a tabloid format, distributed its contents in three pages of text and one of images. Its subtitle includes the term [causas célebres](#) (famous cases), moving from the bookish genre that collected and popularized criminal facts to a new weekly and topical format.

Another great novelty of the genre would be [Las Noticias Ilustradas](#), a weekly created by the cartoonist Eduardo Sojo (Laguna & Martínez, 2015) on February 4, 1883. [El Liberal](#) (1883) described it as “something less than a newspaper, but something more than an [aleluya](#)” (Cartera de Madrid, 1883, p. 3). For the first time, a newspaper named [Revista semanal de todos los asuntos de actualidad](#) included color and image as distinctive elements.

It was presented as a cheap weekly, with a price of 10 cents –five cents less than any other, although it had only two pages–, and promising to give away supplements to subscribers. To make up for possible losses and while awaiting advertising returns, it was proposed to launch 30,000 copies. The first issue offered nine news items, including chromolithographic representations: from the balloon accident and the death of Captain Mayet, through various crimes, to the execution of Manuel Torme in Zaragoza. Each tragic event –around 16 per issue– was reconstructed with realistic scenes and a profusion of color, mostly red and orange, elements that would end up being distinctive of the genre (Lara & Barata, 2009).

The evolution of *Las Noticias Ilustradas* seemed to be on the right track: three journalists were hired in May, and a public music party was organized with twenty young people playing the cornet to present their first monumental litho-zincotyped issue in the streets of Madrid. The print run of the first issue was 40,000 copies, at a special price of 15 cents.

The costly production process, the scarce development of the Spanish market and, above all, the activity of the printing prosecution, explain why this magazine did not consolidate. After 20 issues, which marked the beginning of graphic journalism of tragic events in Spain, *Las Noticias Ilustradas* ceased publication on July 1, 1883. Eduardo Sojo, its creator, emigrated to Buenos Aires to create two weeklies that became history: *La Mujer* and *Don Quijote*. The suggestive drawings of the former and the political caricatures of the latter would turn him into a publisher of solvent initiatives (Vicens, 2018; Laguna & Martínez, 2015).

After Sojo's initiative, the gruesome event would be a recurring theme in the daily press, consolidated by the crime of Madrid's Calle de Fuencarral (July 1888). The emotional impact of this crime and its widespread coverage constituted a turning point: the tragic events would no longer be a matter of journalistic briefs; they demanded chronicles and reports. The chronicler of tragic events took on his own personality and prominent names emerged, such as Luis Bonafoux Quintero (1855-1918) (Del Arco, 2013), Julio Burell (Peña, 2012), Pedro Mata, Carlos Miranda, or Ángel Torres del Álamo.

Since the 1980s, the number of lurid publications has increased significantly. If the crime novel is consolidated as a genre (Colmeiro, 1994), the newspapers' *folletines* increase their selection of works in this line. As the conservative newspaper of Santander, *La Atalaya*, put it: "How widespread is bad quality literature! The worst is not that there are ten million Spaniards who do not know how to read. The worst thing is the reading that awaits them when they learn" (Panorama, 1906, p. 1).

Periodical publications in the new genre followed one after the other at a rate never seen before: 12 between 1889 and 1913, only in Madrid. The most outstanding by circulation and duration would be the weekly *Los Sucesos*, by Domingo Blanco Misamigo (Menéndez, 2017). It began to be published on March 5, 1904, when Blanco left the newspaper *El Universal*. At 10 cents a copy and four pages –which were soon doubled–, it offered a product characterized by:

1. The preponderance of the image over the text, on the front pages and in the news on the inside pages, mostly drawings that recreate the most shocking moment of the tragic event. Until then, first the satirical press and then the illustrated magazines had opted for placing drawing and photography as

the dominant language, but not the daily press, which was considered the reference model. Although it gave all the details of a great event, it did not include a real or recreated image of it.

2. A design conceived to attract the eye. From the images and the emotions they convey, to the headlines and the bulky adjectives (sensational and horrendous are repeated regularly), to the constant breaking up of the text with visual elements, everything is attractive and lures attention.
3. A content structure specially designed to entertain. In addition to the weekly events, it offered a color comic strip, [Juanito y su perro](#), signed by Richard F. Outcault, the father of [Yellow Kid](#). It was the Spanish publication of [Buster Brown](#), and Domingo Blanco also marketed it in supplements and color notebooks.
4. Contests organized on a regular basis, which caused a great deal of expectation. The first one was on May 7, 1904, with a prize of 100 pesetas for discovering the characters covered with a mask. It is complemented by the contest of inventions, which must be submitted by their authors with an explanatory drawing for publication.
5. The [Rare and New Things](#) section, a direct copy of [Police News](#). It weekly summarizes extraordinary and striking subjects, highlighting people with malformations. It is Phineas Taylor Barnum's Museum of horrors brought to paper in the form of drawings and photographs.
6. Collectible literary supplements under the title [Crimes and Mysteries](#).
7. A constant invitation to participate, to compete, and to send drawings and photographs of tragic events, paid 10 pesetas per original if they were accepted. Surveys were also used to decide on topics as varied as the future wife of Alfonso XIII or whether bullfighting should be banned on Sundays, as the Church demanded.
8. A small editorial staff in Madrid, made up of editors plus an artistic director and the director-owner, Domingo Blanco, but a powerful network of local correspondents, both artistic and literary, as highlighted in [El Adelanto](#) (Cada vez sigue siendo...,1904).
9. A way of narrating the facts adapted to the consumer public, in a popular way: short sentences, brief paragraphs, and basic explanations. For example, on the front page [Los Sucesos](#) publishes the image entitled "Horroroso crimen en la provincia de Cuenca" (Horrific crime in the province of Cuenca) (Horroroso..., 1905). On the second page, with the subtitles "Por una herencia.

Tres personas asesinadas” (For a heritage. Three people murdered), the facts are succinctly explained in barely a quarter of a column of the four on the page.

10. Constant self-promotion in each issue, advancing the summary of the following issues and even starring in scandals, such as the one in August 1911, when some editors, with Blanco at the head, bathed in the Cibeles fountain.

Los Sucesos became a social phenomenon and its editions were sold out one after another. It began with a circulation of 23,500 copies, reached 65,000 in its last issue of 1904, dedicated to the crimes of the Huerto del Francés, and surpassed 100,000 from June 1906, after Mateo Morral’s attempt on the kings. The comic strip of **Juanito y su perro**, converted into notebooks at the price of 10 cents, sold 84,000 copies in four days, 24,000 during the first four hours.

With **Los Sucesos “ganó una millonada”** (he earned millions), wrote the Salamanca newspaper **El Adelanto** (Recuerdos de un Reporter, 1931), recalling Blanco Misamigo. With this income he built one of the best printing presses in Madrid, with at least three rotary presses and their respective engines, back in 1914.

In April 1908, the newspaper **Las Novedades** appeared, a new venture of Domingo Blanco. Its editorial line combined journalism of tragic events, sports, and curiosities, all through many images. It was described by **La Época** (Diarios..., 1908) as the first newspaper to try to practice American-style journalism, following the strategies of Pulitzer and Hearst.

On the same day, the newspaper **ABC**, owned by Prensa Española Sociedad Anónima, was released with significant typographical improvements and more pages for the same 10 cents as the previous day. Something similar happened with its twin magazine, **Blanco y Negro**. The competition was not willing to give **Las Novedades** time to consolidate. Despite the quality of its photogravures, the strength of its reports, and its capacity to provoke (it denounced some corrupt practices), the six pages of **Las Novedades** were scarce compared to the 20 pages of **ABC**’s newspaper, at the same price. On June 1, 1908, **ABC** denounced the editing and falsity of the photos published by **Las Novedades** on the crime of Almagro street in Madrid. Blanco’s newspaper hit back in an article, on July 3, 1908, with the title **El dividendo del Banco** (The Bank’s Dividend..., 1908): it accused **ABC** of having charged for advertising to the banks –specifically, to the Banco de España– what in reality were subsidies in exchange for positive propaganda. The following day, three months after its launch, **Las Novedades** ceased publication, after accumulating considerable economic losses. Its journey showed that sensationalist tragic events journalism would be weekly rather than daily.

Blanco kept up with [Los Sucesos](#), covering the war in Melilla from July 1909, suffering some suspension due to the images published and the chronicles sent by its correspondent, and trying to recover from the losses suffered for this reason. In March 1910, [Los Sucesos](#) absorbed a prominent competitor, [La Semana Ilustrada](#), and expanded its pages to 24. The weekly was published until the beginning of April 1917, after Domingo Blanco was elected provincial deputy, militating in advanced liberalism.

From the second decade of the 20th century, the line separating tragic events journalism from the daily press or current affairs magazines for the middle and upper classes disappeared. The world of crime and tragedy permeated everything. The obligation to compete and not be left behind in the flashy and sensationalist proposals of any media caused the transformation. However, the formula of eye-catching covers, ingenious contests, exaggerated headlines, comic strips, and shocking images had a clear continuity in the following years. The most notorious example would be [Las Ocurrencias](#), a weekly created on May 12, 1912 by José Esaín Raymat, former editor of [El Imparcial](#), which would remain on the streets until December 26, 1913, after 138 issues. The journalism of tragic events, so reviled by some, had become the locomotive of Spanish journalism, and titles such as [El Duende](#) (1910-1914), [Los Sucesos Semanales](#) (1923), [Gran Proyector](#) (1930), [Los Grandes Sucesos](#) (1931), or [La Linterna](#) (1935) reached large print runs. The scoop and the exclusive became one of the great contributions of tragic events journalism. In 1901, [Los Sucesos Ilustrados](#), the first newspaper to publish a photo of a wedding between two women in La Coruña (Coixet, 2019), an event that became famous at the time, illustrated this.

In the first decade of the 20th century, drama and crime journalism was a perfectly identified and proven genre. [El Museo Criminal](#), in its issue of July 15, 1904, pointed out how crimes of passion flooded everything and were the center of public debate (Laguna & Martínez, 2021). “The chronicle of criminality is more interesting every day. Quarrels, robberies, murders, patricides... The newspapers do not talk about anything else. See any issue of [Los Sucesos](#) or [Las Ocurrencias](#)! None of them lacks a knife” (Moya, 1911, p. 1), said veteran journalist Miguel Moya in an article of September 10, 1911 for [El Liberal de Murcia](#). The dimension of the subject justifies that in September 1907 the first social center for court reporters was inaugurated in Madrid, reported on the 24th of that month in [El Correo Español](#).

Sociedad Editorial de España, also known as the Trust of the Spanish press (Laguna & Martínez, 2020), was the first to diversify its products with two magazines: one, [La Moda Práctica](#), with an exclusively feminine content, and the other, [La Semana Ilustrada](#), created in May 1907 to provide graphic information

on the most important tragic events. It was the first time that a large company put its focus on a tragic events newspaper. Prensa Española, Torcuato Luca de Tena's company, which published [ABC](#) and the weekly [Blanco y Negro](#) and which competed with the former to lead the Spanish market, followed with [La Gaceta del Crimen](#), in mid-1908.

With a magazine-type format of eight pages for 10 cents, the image was dominant in [La Semana Ilustrada](#). On the front and back covers, a color drawing recreated a specific scene. There was also a text explaining the topics, some current articles and a color comic strip, [Los sueños de Manolín](#), a half-rogue half-ignorant hero who would have an important effect. If [Los Sucesos](#) had signed Outcault to publish [Juanito y su perro](#), [La Semana Ilustrada](#) did the same with another of the great North American cartoonists, Winsor McCay (1867-1934), demonstrating that the Spanish way to consolidate sensationalist and popular journalism, before the daily press, was to develop through the weekly tragic events stories with famous illustrators.

The formal quality of the magazine was not only evident in the drawings but especially in the photographs, often with a very clear close-up of the corpse, the accidents caused by the new motorized vehicles in Madrid, the derailment of trains, floods, attacks, fires, etc.; thus, the figure of the photojournalist burst in, with Luis Ramón Marín (1884-1944) standing out. [Los Sucesos](#) or [La Semana Ilustrada](#) were newspapers to be seen. Their great contribution to journalism lies in their obsession to show the world in images, unlike the daily press, which would take several years to standardize photography.

The news described with increasingly literary and less precise language emphasized description rather than analysis and used images as the most appropriate language to attract the reader. From 1883 onwards, with an illustrated tragic events press, the formula began to take root and in the first third of the 20th century a series of newspapers emerged that led to the weekly news magazine [La Linterna](#) (1935), with rotogravure photographs. It belonged to Editorial Estampa, one of the largest media conglomerates of the time.

Government censorship and content control had considered text as the main risk to be monitored. Now, they had to learn to read images and value their effects. During the Moroccan War, from July 1909, [Los Sucesos](#) and [La Semana Ilustrada](#), among other publications, covered the front and the tragedy of the battle, i.e., for the first time they put a face to what it meant to die for Spain. Both were suspended on July 30 for publishing [sad images](#), according to the Ministry of the Interior.

Certainly, neither [La Gaceta del Crimen](#) nor [La Semana Ilustrada](#) could compete with [Los Sucesos](#). This did not discourage large newspaper companies, such as

Editorial Estampa, from publishing new tragic events newswEEKLIES after the political impasse of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship and prior censorship, which attacked a press that the Catholic Church and some regenerationist sectors had branded as degenerate.

CONCLUSION

In 1882, five years before the London murders of Jack the Ripper jumped from the [Illustrated Police News](#) to the front pages of the mainstream newspapers, [Los Sucesos. Revista ilustrada de actualidades, siniestros, crímenes y causa célebres](#) emerged. It was an illustrated magazine of current events, sinister events, crimes, and famous causes, the first red chronicle weekly. The following year, an extraordinary cartoonist who used to sign with the pseudonym Demócrito (Eduardo Sojo), began his career as a press editor, launching [Las Noticias Ilustradas](#) (1883). From then until the Civil War (1936-1939), there was a succession of publishing projects, some as solid as the popular magazine [Los Sucesos](#) (1904-1917), edited by Domingo Blanco Misamigo, who became rich with it.

The civil war neutralized one of the most ambitious editorial projects in the field, the weekly [La Linterna](#) of Editorial Estampa, owned by businessman Luis Montiel Balanzat. The newspaper [La Linterna](#) was a worthy successor of [Los Sucesos](#), the response of a specialized press to the development of criminality: "Sagacious journalists dive parallel to the detectives and the official police and compose true stories of even more interest than the writings of Conan Doyle and all his imitators" (*La Linterna...*, 1935) as commented by the newspaper [La Tierra](#) on May 21, 1935. In the months prior to the civil war, all its products were selling well: the newspaper [Ahora](#), with 115,000 copies daily, the magazine [Estampa](#), with 250,000 copies weekly, the sports weekly [As](#), with 55,000, and [La Linterna](#), with more than 100,000, in a progression that aimed to become the great Spanish weekly newspaper of events (Archivo Histórico Nacional, 1980).

Evidently, the red chronicle press was consolidated with [Los Sucesos](#), generated initiatives in the big publishing companies from the first decade of the 20th century, lived a period of certain impasse with the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930), and re-emerged with strength in the 1930s, with very solid business projects. Only the civil war and the resulting regime, the Franco regime, can explain the late reappearance of a tragic events press, with [El Caso](#) starting in 1952.

This work has revealed the deployment of the tragic events press and the strategy to take root and reach large print runs. On the one hand, [Las Noticias Ilustradas](#) (1883) by Eduardo Sojo, showed that the image (initially the drawing that reconstructs

the facts) was the best traveling companion for the red chronicle. The editor had learned it in the satirical press and applied the resource of chromolithography to that of tragic events, with excellent results. All the following red chronicle newspapers made the image their battering ram. Even when photography was used in the press, the tragic events press continued to use drawing in parallel, and even more profusely: it gave freedom to recreate the events with gruesome tones, much more than a black and white photograph.

As for the textual modality of the tragic events press, its strategy consisted of adapting an old success of cordel literature, revamped by the commercial edition of the Romantic period and with a few drops of the legal language emanating from the penal codes of the first liberalism. The **pliegos** of crimes and catastrophes, which since the 16th century had a loyal and growing public, as well as the serialized novels, which ranged from accounts of famous causes (i.e., notorious crimes) to passionate melodramas with violence included, gave rise to the texts of the Spanish red chronicle. As in other contexts, this press allied itself with the detective novel: for example, the Barcelona magazine **Los Grandes Sucesos** (1931-1932) established as its last inside page the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, in the form of comic strips. It was not the first time that Conan Doyle's stories underpinned the pages of the Spanish crime press.

Following Charle's (2004) methodological approach, we have been able to verify that : a) a number of businessmen competed in the sector and became interested in the tragic events press to boost the second news front; b) a specialized journalism and journalists (court reporters or tragic events reporters) emerged who became extraordinarily unique (in the daily press and in specialized magazines, creating the Center of Court Reporters in Madrid in 1907), and who professionalized the profession, and c) the press-reading public expanded, connecting the old readers of cordel literature and romantic **folletines** with the modern readers of the illustrated press. Not in vain, the newspaper **El Fígaro** (Un folletín...,1919) call the cases exposed by the press of events "real **folletines**".

Regarding the relationship of the tragic events press with culture and its transformation, there are several conclusions. The red chronicle is connected with popular culture thanks to the incorporation of the discursive elements of the cordel literature, the literature of famous cases, and romantic melodrama. At the same time, the tragic events press is incorporated into the society of mass communication and participates in the conglomerate of the cultural industry, along with newsstand detective novels, theater, and cinema (which not infrequently copies the plots of the real **folletines**).

Thirdly, the tragic events press also had a political derivation. Most of its editors and journalists were liberals (Blanco Misamigo, Montiel), if not republicans (Sojo). This explains why the Catholic press immediately confronted the red chronicle, considering it a degeneration of journalism. At the height of the success of *Los Sucesos*, the Catholic newspaper *El Lábaro* denounced the enormous (and bad) influence of the tragic events press on the popular strata and called for its illegalization (*La prensa...*, 1907). This coincided with the strong call of the Asociación de la Buena Prensa, which grouped a relevant portion of Catholic newspapers in Spain and which, to a great extent, combined the voice of the confessional newspapers (Sánchez, 2005). This crusade against the sycophantic press and the tragic events press, understood as corrosive to Catholic morals, was notable in the Spanish public debate. The dictator Primo de Rivera put an end to it during his mandate, by means of prior military censorship, although it resurfaced again in the Second Republic.

In short, the history of Spanish journalism, its leap towards the industrial and business press, should not be written without mentioning the tragic events press and the journalists who brought it to life, the court and tragic events reporters. They transformed the journalism language and broadened the competition strategies of the cultural industries and the companies that ran them. Before the outbreak of the civil war (1936), the large Spanish press companies not only had general information dailies and weeklies, but also some tragic events publications, which were necessary to cover a wide range of a consolidated reader's taste.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ANTONIO LAGUNA PLATERO, tenured professor of Journalism at the UV. Member of the Research Group on History of Communication and Media Culture (HISCOMECU, by its Spanish acronym). He chaired the Association of Communication Historians (ASHISCOM, by its Spanish acronym). Among his books are: *El Pueblo: historia de un diario republicano, 1894-1939* (El Pueblo: history of a republican newspaper, 1894-1939) (1999), *Vicente Miguel Carceller: el éxito trágico del editor de La Traca* (Vicente Miguel Carceller: the tragic success of La Traca's editor) (2015), *Salud, sexo y electricidad. Los inicios de la publicidad de masas* (Health, sex, and electricity. The beginnings of mass advertising) (2018), or *Los imaginarios de la gran epidemia de 1918. Miedo y desinformación* (The imaginaries of the great epidemic of 1918. Fear and disinformation) (2021).

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1535-7382>

FRANCESC-ANDREU MARTÍNEZ GALLEGO, professor of Journalism at the UV. He directs the HISCOMECU Research Group. He has published half a hundred articles in scientific journals, a hundred book chapters, and 24 books, among which, *Historia social de la comunicación: mediaciones y públicos* (Social history of communication: mediations and audiences) (2015), *Leopoldo O'Donnell. Biografía breve* (Leopoldo O'Donnell. Short biography) (2017), *El humor y la cultura política en la España contemporánea* (Humor and political culture in contemporary Spain) (2018), *Samuel Ros, del humor nuevo a la camisa vieja* (Samuel Ros, from the new humor to the old shirt) (1905-1945) (2019), or *El Trust. El periodismo industrial en España, 1906-1936* (El Trust. Industrial journalism in Spain, 1906-1936) (2020).

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5996-1314>