

# Home

Welcome to the summer 2019 edition of the Bulletin (BAS 2.3).

As many of our readers emerge from their exam-season bunkers, the Bulletin offers an opportunity to take stock.

We reflect on developments in Spain: a [new Almodóvar film](#), reviewed by Alicia Bedoya, and a [new political landscape](#) following both general and European elections, assessed by SPG student Natasha Macbeth.



We also take a side-long look at the exam process: Sander Berg writes about [teaching literature for Pre-U](#) while Robin Wallis ponders the *malos y maestros* that catch students' imaginations in [the Pre-U speaking exam](#).

We celebrate the first questions on song lyrics in a Pre-U exam with a multi-faceted study of [Serrat y Sabina en la cultura hispana](#) prepared by students at UCS, while for language enthusiasts we consider the [etymology and evolution of Spanish](#).

We are particularly grateful that in this edition two distinguished writers have chosen freely to share with Bulletin readers their most recent publications: William Chislett's [Forty years of democratic Spain: political, economic, foreign policy and social change, 1978-2018](#), and the Spanish-language edition of Dr Nathaniel Gardner's [Critical Guide to Como agua para chocolate](#). Both authors have written introductory articles for this edition giving some context to these publications, which are available for downloading from those pages.

More broadly, the Bulletin of Advanced Spanish is now completing its second year. Our readership has expanded significantly (the February edition was read on 5 continents) and we are delighted to be receiving ever more submissions from students and teachers, among other enthusiasts.

In September we shall therefore be asking readers to take a short survey to help us keep the publication aligned with your tastes and interests.

We also have a vacancy for a business manager. If you might be interested, or know someone who may be suited to this (part-time) role, please contact us at [bulletinofadvancedspanish@gmail.com](mailto:bulletinofadvancedspanish@gmail.com) - we would be glad to hear from you.

If you do not yet receive our emails and would like to; or you would like to write for the Bulletin or join the editorial team, please get in touch at that same address. The Bulletin is an open forum that welcomes new talent and perspectives.

*Buen verano* to all our readers.

# Spain's snap election: a victory for the right or the left?

On 28 April Spain's PSOE (socialist party) won 29% of the vote in the country's general election. It dominates the new parliament with 123 seats, still short of the golden 176 needed for a majority. The conservative Partido Popular (PP) lost over 3 million votes by comparison with the 2016 election, dropping from 137 to 66 seats - a further blow to its prestige following its removal from power last year in the wake of a corruption scandal.



The result was a triumph for PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez. Since becoming Prime Minister in June 2018, he had resisted calling a snap election until his inability to get a budget through parliament made it inevitable. By using his first months in office to increase the minimum wage and work towards gender equality he shrewdly gained support and infuriated the right.

Despite his success he faces a difficult decision. Even with Unidas Podemos, the socialists' potential left-wing allies who won 42 seats, Sánchez is unable to secure a majority. An alliance with the center-right Ciudadanos (Cs) would secure him a majority, yet even before the election process began Cs' leader Albert Rivera ruled out an alliance with the Socialists because of Sánchez's willingness to enter into dialogue with the pro-independence Catalan government. A coalition with Unidas Podemos and all the other regional parties would also leave the PSOE just short of a majority. As an alternative, Sánchez could choose to govern as a minority party, or call fresh elections if his potential allies don't cooperate.





For Podemos, the party which helped Sánchez's policies through parliament in the last year, this election brought disappointment. In 2016 Pablo Iglesias was an exciting face for the radical left, but 3 years later the party's vote share has halved to just 17% as the radical right swooped in. Although Iglesias has said that another left-wing alliance is on the table, it would be dependent on Catalan independence parties, thereby angering both the far-right parties and the conservative side of the PSOE.

Ciudadanos are likely also to be frustrated by the results. The party failed to overtake the PP and achieve its aim of becoming the main opposition. In third place, Ciudadanos is neither the government nor the opposition and risks being pushed out of the limelight. However, their vote-share increased by 2% and the party remains a stable force and potential coalition option. A coalition with the PSOE would be welcomed by many analysts as a balanced and strong government for Spain.



Many nationalist parties - Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya in particular - had success in the election. ERC is a left-wing Catalan party which has surpassed both the PSC (middle-left) and the Junts (right wing), their regional rivals. Increasing support for far-left separatists is a telling indication of the mood in Catalonia.

Vox has won 24 seats in Spain's parliament, the first Spanish nationalist party to gain a foothold since the end of Franco's rule and the return of democracy. The party rejects the 'far-right' label: its leader, Santiago Abascal, claims instead to lead a party of 'extreme necessity'. Generally regarded as anti-Islam, anti-feminist, anti-immigration and homophobic, their aims include banning same-sex marriage, deporting any legal migrants who commit felonies and repealing the 2004 gender-violence act. Its slogan *hacer España grande otra vez* echoes Donald Trump's mantra.

Perhaps the main driver of Vox's electoral surge has been Catalonia's independence movement and the resulting backlash in other regions of Spain. Vox is fiercely critical of the movement, and suggests that leading socialists have sided with the *enemigos de España*. It is difficult to predict whether Vox will retain their support in future elections: their position reflects the public mood, and their defiance of Catalan independence does not guarantee their electoral success.

The May European elections brought similar results to those of the general election. The PSOE representation increased from 13 to 22 seats. The PP did slightly better than they had feared, suggesting that some Vox voters may have drifted back to the PP fold. Ciudadanos, Unidas Podemos and Vox have also gained representation in the European Parliament, although Unidas Podemos won fewer seats than Podemos and Izquierda Unida did when running separately in 2014.

We now must wait to see with whom Pedro Sánchez chooses to form a government, or whether he decides to stick it out alone. It is perhaps significant that Spain is one of only two EU countries not to have experienced coalition government in the last 40 years. The left may have triumphed, but the right has seen success too. In a multi-party system with multiple tiers of representation, there can be more than one winner.

*By Natasha Macbeth, a Year 10 Hispanist at St Paul's Girls School*

# Forty Years of Democratic Spain

*By William Chislett*

The 40th anniversary of Spain's democratic constitution, ratified in a referendum on December 6, 1978, was a good tag to look at Spain's progress, or not, since the end of the dictatorship of General Franco in

The logo for 'constitución' features the word in a serif font. The number '40' is integrated into the word, with the '4' in red and the '0' in yellow, positioned between the 't' and 'i' of 'ción'.

1975 and refute some of the misconceptions about the country. Preparations for the anniversary, which was celebrated with some fanfare by the government, coincided with the push for independence in Catalonia and the pre-trial imprisonment of 12 secessionists for organizing an illegal referendum on the issue (in October 2017) followed by a unilateral declaration of independence. That trial started in February 2019 and is set to end in June.

As someone who was privileged to cover Spain's transition to democracy for *The Times* between 1975 and 1978 and who returned permanently to Spain in 1986 (not as a correspondent), after working for the *Financial Times* in Mexico and then London, I have witnessed the remarkable changes in the country, and felt that they were not always fully known or appreciated abroad.

I began working for the Real Instituto Elcano (Elcano Royal Institute), Spain's leading think tank, when it started in 2002. It takes its name from the navigator Juan Sebastián de Elcano, who completed the first maritime circumnavigation of the world in 1522. A non-partisan institution, Elcano is the nearest Spain has to an Anglo-Saxon style think tank (it is modelled on Chatham House in London). It receives less than 15% of its funds from the government of the day and the rest from private companies. It is royal because King Felipe VI is our honorary president, and he takes a close interest in what we do. The Board of Trustees includes all Spain's four former prime ministers, Felipe González (1982-96), José María Aznar (1996-2004), José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004-11) and Mariano Rajoy (2011-2018). We were ranked the 15<sup>th</sup> best think tank in the world in the 2018 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report, produced by the University of Pennsylvania, and the ninth in Europe.

Elcano commissioned me to write a paper in English on the country's political, economic and social progress over the last 40 years. The paper was published in October 2018 and is fairly comprehensive. Nine months have passed since it was published and apart from one important change the paper remains basically up-to-date. That change was the arrival of Vox, a far-right party, which entered a parliament for the first time when it won 12 seats in the regional election in Andalucía last December, so ending Spain's exceptionalism in that field, followed by winning 24 seats in the national parliament in April's general election.



Whenever I write about Spain, I make a big effort to marshal the latest and relevant statistics. I felt this was particularly important for the paper on the last 40 years. Some Spaniards were surprised by some of them – for example, the stock of inward foreign direct investment surged from a mere \$5.1bn to \$644.bn and average life expectancy rose from 74.3 years to 83.2 years (higher than in the UK). All in all, Spain has achieved conditions that are similar – in some cases better – than in the rest of Western European nations. I hope you will find the paper useful.

# Language on loan

*Naomi Hudis and Otilie Forsyth on the organic processes that drive linguistic evolution.*

All languages are influenced by historical events and the dispersal of new ideas that ultimately lead to the evolution of the language.



Loan words - known in Spanish as *préstamos* – are integral to this process. Despite the roots of the Spanish language lying in Latin, it is full of words influenced by other languages, ranging from Portuguese to Arabic and those from indigenous America.

The Spanish language was greatly influenced by Arabic from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Much of this was due to Arabic being the official language in parts of the peninsula, but it also reflected the great reputation the Arabic language held in the early Middle Ages. The former reason was responsible for the addition of specific vocabulary that came with the introduction of new concepts and ideas, and the latter caused the replacement of many Castilian words with Arabic ones that held greater prestige.

Many nouns borrowed from Arabic begin with the letters ‘al’, a definite article in Arabic, which the Spanish adopted and incorporated into the noun. During the Reconquest, war-related words filtered into the Spanish language, with words like *almenas* (battlements) and *almirante* (admiral). Arabic helped shape language used for trade and business, for example *ahorrar* (to save, usually referring to money) and *aduana* (customs). The Moors also brought with them the seeds and skills to transform the region’s agriculture, the names of which



embedded themselves in the Spanish language. Some of the most popular examples include *arroz* (rice), *algodón* (cotton), *zanahoria* (carrot), and *aceituna* (olive).

More recently, the internet has facilitated and encouraged the borrowing of English words. With the influx of popular American media in Spanish-speaking countries across the world, including American pop music and television, as well as an increased exposure to English speakers online, Spanish has increasingly become subject to the use of anglicisms, words that derive from English words or phrases. Examples of this include the words *el bestseller* and *el tráiler*.

Español	Árabe
alcalde	<i>al-qadi</i>
albacea	<i>al-wacea</i>
mezquino	<i>mesquin</i>
aduana	<i>al-diwana</i>
alcoba	<i>al-cobba</i>
tarea	<i>tare'a</i>
alberca	<i>al-berca</i>
alférez	<i>al-faris</i>
rehén	<i>rahn</i>
alquimia	<i>al-qimiyá</i>

When it comes to technological advances, often involving the invention of new words in order to name new ideas and creations, these words are also often taken directly from the English. This particularly affects the lexis that surrounds business, technology and sport, including the words *el stock*, *la inflación*, and *el cracking*, often despite the existence of a Spanish version of these words, for example *el craqueo*. These words are often adjusted orthographically and hispanised, so conform graphically to the typical spelling of Spanish words, despite being pronounced the same as the English. An example of this includes the word *el fútbol*, which took rise over the Spanish word *el balompié*, coming from the words *el balón*, meaning ball, and *el pie*, meaning foot.

Some purists argue that the more modern loan words, mostly deriving from English, threaten the integrity of the language. Is the homogenisation of languages a threat to lexical diversity or is it merely an inevitable outcome of a globalised society?

*The authors are y12 students at St Paul's Girls' School*

*For more on this theme, see El auge del Spanglish on page 30 of our February 2019 edition (via our Past Editions tab above).*

# Serrat y Sabina en la cultura hispana

The students of London's University College School (UCS) are among the first to prepare this new Pre-U Paper 4 Topic for examination.

In this collection of essays, five UCS hispanists nearing the end of Year 12 share with us aspects of the *cantautores'* work.



The Bulletin wishes to thank Dr Helen Laurenson for editing this section.

[\*\*The Literary Influences of Serrat and Sabina: Bora Tosun Stone\*\*](#)

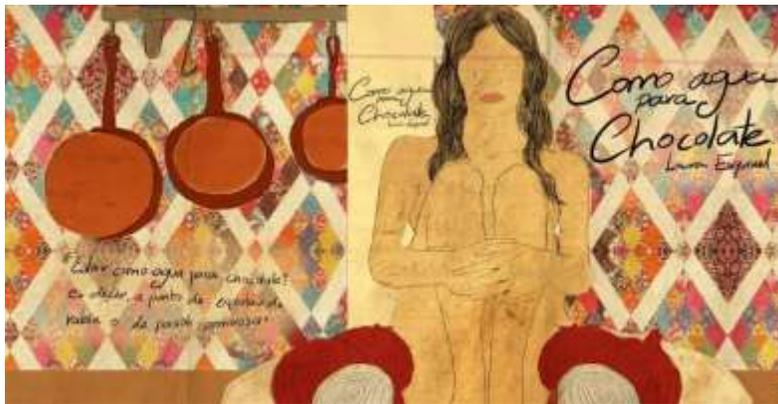
[\*\*La figura femenina en las canciones de Serrat y Sabina: Maria Drel\*\*](#)

[\*\*Una canción inspiradora: Ellie Guaschi\*\*](#)

[\*\*Canciones de Protesta: Fred Buxton-Marsh\*\*](#)

[\*\*Intellectual and Colloquial Discourse in the Music of Serrat and Sabina: Jessica Spanier\*\*](#)

# Como agua para chocolate - la guía crítica

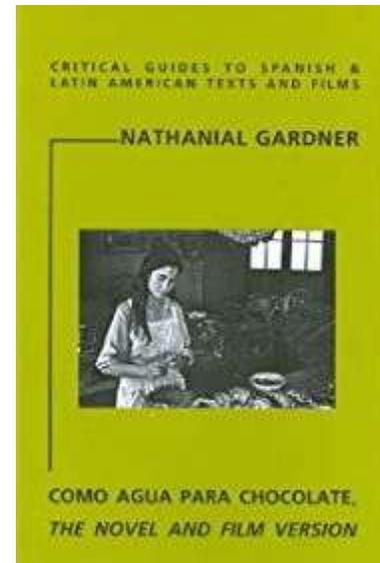


*Como agua para chocolate* is more than food and magic. When the novel was first published in the early 1990s, it was an unexpected success. It won over its intended audience in Mexico, and went on to conquer Latin America, the USA and then the world. Stephen Hart's article on it in *A Companion to Latin American Film* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2004; pp. 171-78) describes how the Mexican cinemas (which had been dominated by Hollywood hits for decades) broke records with this home-grown film. A review of the early literary criticism and cultural journalism showed how the stereotypes that Esquivel used in her narrative played a double role: to create tension and simultaneously to connect with her readers and viewers. To a certain degree, you could argue that Laura Esquivel's first major cultural project played it safe.

On the surface, food and its preparation are center stage in *Como agua para chocolate*. Mexican food is the one Mexican import that most easily crosses borders, whether they are concrete or just lines on maps. The story taps into ideas found in both vernacular and classic literature (think of Lorca): a mother who treats her daughter in a manner that is so unjust that the empathetic reader has no choice but to take her side. Esquivel taps into changing attitudes of women and men in our modern times, and we see her write *soldaderas* into her narrative and give us sensitive men who defy the stereotypes. To write about a story that is both modern and historic can prove challenging and it is from within this contradiction that my guide takes its point of departure.

As I read *Como agua para chocolate*, I saw so much that could be added in the field of literary criticism. It truly is a book for young literary students to learn how to

apply close reading skills in order to unravel the nuances at work. Border politics permeate the narrative. Language is specifically used to delineate class and race (i.e. those delicate details that are obliterated in the English version – for those interested in Translation Studies). Questions relating to the study of gender are central focuses of the book. Careful readings bring these to light, and I considered that a critical guide could lead budding literature and film students to the topics that would help them to engage with these cultural documents in such a way as to provide them with tools to think about the books they read and the films they watch, and discover that the really important ones acquire depth and nuance when they are carefully inspected and interrogated. One example of this is the fact that this book can be read as the tale of the De la Garza's exodus from Mexico. Consider this idea for a moment. Tita's only living relative in Mexico by the end of the narrative (Gerturdis) was not from the De la Garza family, having been fathered by another man. Hope had literally left Mexico as the young Esperanza married the love of her life and followed him to Harvard. What does this tell us about elitism? How does it turn the celebration of *mexicanidad* on its head?



My critical guide offers answers as well as pointing to many other avenues of exploration. This most recent edition of the critical guide (the only one in the original Grant and Cutler series to have been translated into Spanish and distributed in Latin America and the only one to cover both a film and a novel in one guide) shows how the narrative continues to evolve and to be relevant to our times. On the one hand, it is because it offers a narrative that is easily consumed and digested, and on the other because Laura Esquivel continues to update her work. In this most recent edition of my guide, I delve into *El diario de Tita* which offers insight into the decades that pass between the final and penultimate chapters of *Como agua para chocolate*. In it, Esquivel attempts to redeem Tita in ways that engage with current trends. She allows Tita to escape the kitchen and gives her a profession: photography. It is no coincidence that this activity that offers her emancipation from her apron strings was shared by so many strong women in Mexico during that very time, such as Tina Modotti (whom Esquivel's friend, Elena Poniatowska, saw as encapsulating the significance of female cultural creators during the period of Mexico's history covered by Esquivel's novel). These additions to the story make it ideal for students who wish to engage with a living narrative that allows us to reflect upon our times and those of yesteryear.

In many ways *Como agua para chocolate* offers a unique opportunity alongside other new additions to the Latin American literary and filmic canon. Hence, my desire to create a guide that facilitates critical thinking and engagement. My focus on ways to approach the written and the visual narratives can be used as a map with which to navigate the diverse topics they contain and as a critical template that could be applied to other films and narratives as well.

I hope you enjoy this critical guide, and I welcome your feedback. My hope is that this book will help you to uncover the different layers and questions that *Como agua para chocolate* contains.

[Como agua para chocolate - La novela y la película - Una guía crítica](#)

Nathanial Gardner

University of Glasgow

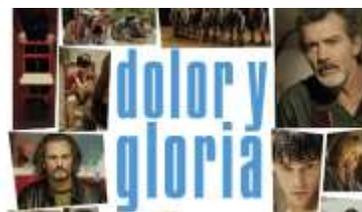
# Dolor y Gloria - Pedro Almodóvar



He tenido el placer (por partida doble) de disfrutar la última obra de Pedro Almodóvar en pantalla grande. Si bien es cierto que, como fiel admiradora del cineasta, nunca (o casi nunca) me he sentido decepcionada por ninguna de sus películas, con excepción de *Los amantes pasajeros*, cuyo sentido todavía intento descifrar, esta última cinta no sólo cumple las altas expectativas puestas en ella, sino que las supera con creces.

*Dolor y gloria* ha tenido una magnífica acogida entre público y crítica, algo inusual para una obra de un director que levanta, a menudo, pasiones enfrentadas. Más de dos meses después de su estreno, continúa estando en la cartelera de muchos cines y ya ha comenzado a recibir lo que probablemente sea una larga lista de premios.

Almodóvar ha vuelto a rodar un drama, género con el que parece sentirse cada vez más cómodo y en que se engloban algunas de sus mejores obras. En este caso, al contrario que *Julieta*, *Todo sobre mi madre* o *Volver*, todas ellas magníficas creaciones con protagonistas femeninas, se podría decir que se trata de una película “de hombres”. El protagonista, Salvador Mallo, es un director de cine que, en su madurez, sufre una crisis creativa; el co-protagonista es un actor con el que éste había trabajado en su juventud. Ambos personajes masculinos, complejos y cautivadores, representados por dos grandes actores: Antonio Banderas y Asier Etcheandia.



A pesar de esto, dos de las “chicas Almodóvar” (Penélope Cruz y Julieta Serrano) tienen papeles femeninos igualmente atractivos. Ambas representan al mismo personaje, pero en diferentes momentos de su vida: la madre de Salvador. Sin olvidar la intervención de Leonardo Sbaraglia, fantástico en su papel de Federico, un antiguo amor de Salvador. Así, Almodóvar cuenta con algunos de sus “asiduos”, incorporando a dos actores revelación que seguro darán mucho que hablar: Asier Flores (que representa a Salvador de niño) y César Vicente (un albañil analfabeto al que Salvador enseña a leer y escribir).

Se ha dicho de esta película que es la más personal del director, que tiene tintes autobiográficos. Lo cierto es que el espectador encuentra difícil discernir la realidad



de la ficción, qué parte es guión, creación, la historia de Salvador Mallo, y cuál pertenece a la vida del mismo Almodóvar. Esta línea trazada de modo tan difuso se debe en gran parte al magnífico trabajo de Banderas, que consigue que identifiquemos a Pedro Almodóvar en cada gesto, cada movimiento, cada expresión, de Salvador Mallo. No sólo está caracterizado como el director (idéntico estilo de peinado y de vestimenta) sino que consigue reproducir sus mismos andares, forma de hablar y hasta su mirada. Sobre su exquisita interpretación, con la que Almodóvar parece estar muy satisfecho, el actor ha comentado “llevo observándolo 40 años”. Así, la intimidad del director se ve, en cierto modo, preservada, ya que nunca sabremos al cien por cien (quizá nunca debemos saberlo) hasta qué punto su biografía ha servido de inspiración a la hora de escribir este film. Sin embargo, él mismo ha declarado que en esta película “impregnada de mí” está “más desnudo de lo que quería”.

En cuanto a los temas que se tratan, la movida madrileña y la adicción a las drogas están muy presentes en la historia, que poco a poco nos va desvelando más datos sobre el pasado y que cuenta con continuos “flashbacks” en los que volvemos a la niñez del director. También, vivimos el despertar del deseo sexual del protagonista y el dolor físico que causa la enfermedad, así como el psicológico, el que provocan los conflictos interpersonales y las “cuentas no saldadas”, las relaciones a las que no se ha puesto final. Y, por supuesto, un concepto clave en la película: el cine dentro del cine. En palabras del director, se trata de un “homenaje a la gran pantalla”.

Un observador de su filmografía encontrará varios elementos comunes con muchas de sus obras anteriores. Desde la admiración por su madre y las mujeres presentes en su vida que apreciábamos en *Volver*, hasta el internado católico de *La mala educación*, pasando por la pasión amorosa de *La ley del deseo*. En esta última, el protagonista era también un director de cine, en este caso en la cumbre de su éxito, y su amante está representado por el mismo Antonio Banderas. Se podría decir que, de esta forma, la última película del director cierra un círculo comenzado hace décadas y culmina una carrera profesional plena, en lo que, en los ojos del espectador, parece ser una vida con más éxitos que fracasos, con menos dolor que gloria.

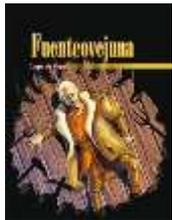
*Por Alicia Bedoya, antigua profesora de Pre-U, ahora residente en Madrid*

# Pre-U and I: teaching the Texts

I have been teaching Pre-U Spanish since it started in 2009. For the first few years I taught the topics in the Lower Sixth and language in the Upper Sixth, while my colleague introduced our pupils to the *Veinte poemas* text. He would play them recordings of Neruda reading the poems in his inimitable way, and by the end of the year it was not uncommon to hear pupils loudly reciting “Cuerpo de mujer” in the corridors.



The first Pre-U text I taught was *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* by Gabriel García Márquez (pictured above with Neruda). It is a clever, rich text, full of twists and turns and marked by a postmodern approach to truth. It is also a whodunnit at one remove: we all know who killed Santiago – his impending death is widely publicised – but who on earth deflowered Ángela? I preferred it to *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*, which I studied with pupils a few years later. Although the latter is a delightful character study to be enjoyed on a lazy afternoon, swinging in a hammock, I found it to be less meaty and rewarding. I probably also spent too long on it.



Having dedicated quite a few years of my life to studying Golden Age literature, one year I thought I might try my hand at teaching *Fuenteovejuna*, which would offer ample opportunity to teach pupils about early modern Spain – *honor* versus *honra* and all that. The class sort of enjoyed the play, although some, who also studied French, kept on comparing it negatively to Racine’s *Andromaque*. And if I’m perfectly honest, I did not disagree.

Despite the exam results being among the best we have ever had, the following year I switched to Borges. If they want something to sink their teeth into, they’ll get it, I thought. It worked out well. The group really took to *La casa de Asterión* and *Emma Zunz* in particular. The following year, I taught a class that was dominated by a few *futbolistas*, who would not want to be seen dead clutching a copy of *Ficciones*, but there were also some quieter girls who wrote magnificently on the stories.





After a few fallow years, I returned to Borges this year. It seemed an obvious choice seeing as nearly everyone in my class was applying to read English, Spanish or Philosophy at university. I enjoyed my renewed acquaintance and gained new insights too. But in spite of my proselytising enthusiasm, not everyone in my class was converted to Borges's particular genius. One pupil – a native speaker – never quite understood why, at the end of *El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan*, Yu Tsun kills Stephen Albert. She could not see the narrative forest for the trees. This can be a problem.

Unlike the English Pre-U, Spanish appeals to pupils for a variety of reasons, Hispanic literature hardly ever being their prime motivation. At my school the subject is often chosen as part of what is jokingly referred to as the holy trinity of Spanish, Economics and football. The trick is to select a text that most pupils will be able to cope with and enjoy.

Fortunately, the syllabus offers a good selection. The texts range from Golden Age classics to poetry to shorter novellas, such as Martín Gaité's *Las ataduras*, to lengthier novels, like Vargas Llosa's *La tía Julia y el escribidor*. Since pupils have to read in Spanish and literature only forms 12.5% of the overall grade, some of the best Hispanic texts will, alas, never be on the syllabus – I am thinking about *Don Quijote*, *Cien años de soledad*, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, *La fiesta del chivo* and so on. But there are plenty of accessible and interesting texts out there that I would be happy to see on the syllabus, like Restrepo's *Dulce compañía*, Vázquez's *Ruido de las cosas al caer* and Lemebel's *Tengo miedo torero*.

Over the years the exam questions have been good. Sometimes they were similar to essay titles I had set. At other times there were questions the pupils had not



necessarily anticipated but were equipped to tackle. I often think they do better with the second type of question as it forces them to approach the material from a new perspective instead of trying to remember snippets from their own essays. Problematic are the cases in which pupils misinterpret the question. A few years ago I had a pupil who understood the term *géneros* in an Almodóvar question to refer to “gender” and not “genre”. She was a native speaker and forgot to look at the asterisk that explained which meaning was intended. This year the term “stylistic features” was not well understood by some, judging from what they told me they had written. I had to put an end to these post-mortem discussions because I could not stop wincing.

I like the fact that pupils are asked to write in English. They are already tested on their ability to write in Spanish twice elsewhere. By requiring them to write in English, you can demand the utmost in intellectual and interpretative terms. This trips up some of the native speakers, who sometimes struggle to write cogently about a literary text. Conversely, some pupils who may not be very good at producing accurate and sophisticated Spanish, excel at analysing literature. Writing a convincing essay in your own language is not as easy as it sounds. What makes it worse is that some pupils have a notion that writing straightforwardly and with clarity is somehow unsophisticated and beneath them.

In short, my experience with Paper 4 literature has been positive. The results have been encouraging and most of the pupils have enjoyed the texts. Besides, for every pupil who does not like a text, there is another who does. This year, to counterbalance the native speaker who did not understand Borges, I had another who wrote on his thank-you card: “*Gracias parce* (he is Colombian) for bringing Borges into our lives; maybe on another path of the garden, I could have been teaching *you*”, a reference, of course, to Borges’ *El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan*.

That is of course why we do what we do and why it is worth taking a risk in choosing a text you really like and that might challenge your pupils. And the Pre-U Paper 4 syllabus offers enough choice to make that possible.

Dr Sander Berg

# 2019 Pre-U exams: malos y maestros

Examiners spend June ensuring a standardised and equitable marking of exams. During this process an initial impression of topic/Topic choices emerges: that's to say, the presentation topic chosen by the candidate for his/her speaking exam, and the cultural Topic on which candidates write an essay in Spanish in Paper 4.

Paper 1 (speaking) inspires an eclectic choice of specialist subjects for candidates' presentations. They range from business tycoons to the Ley de Costas, from Al-Andalus to Latin American presidents, from magical realism to Fernando Alonso. However, the most popular single genre seems to be dictators: maybe this explains the increasing preference for Spanish over French at Sixth Form level - our francophone friends can't match the Spanish-speaking world's repertoire of demagoguery.



An interesting question with regard to these despots is the extent to which *caudillismo* permeates Hispanic culture. There's also the historian's question: do these dictators leave their country in a better state at the end of their rule than it was in when they seized power (ends justifying means...)? In a sense, this latter question is a trick: yes, Franco's regime oversaw reconstruction and the launch of the tourist industry in Spain, with significant economic growth after 1960: but what state would it have been in without the destruction and oppression initiated by his uprising?



Judging by choice of presentation topic, Fidel Castro remains the thinking student's favourite dictator. The most intriguing angle, for me, is his motivation: was he partly driven by a Freudian urge to rebel against his prosperous father? His consistently high popularity across Latin America is another striking part of the story.

Venezuela's dastardly duo - Chávez and Maduro – would jointly edge Franco for second place. Pinochet continues to place respectably in the autocrat stakes. The surprise, perhaps, is that his even deadlier Argentine counterparts in the 1976-83 junta largely pass unremarked. Perhaps the relative anonymity of working as a junta helps to shield Videla, Viola, Galtieri and co. from the attention of later generations.

Another perhaps surprising omission from the lists is Perón, whose achievement in permanently banjaxing a once-thriving nation's politics and economics is one of Latin America's more startling accomplishments. Perhaps the new angle on Perón should be whether he can be counted a precursor to Trump? (Discuss...) For the time being he escapes with less attention than his most famous wife. (Was Eva also driven by a desire to get back at her father..?)



Some students specialise in a current affairs topic - a stimulating choice, especially when it is the subject of breaking news on the day of one's exam. Such was the case for those presenting on Venezuela when Guaidó launched his uprising in Caracas in late April. Nor had those specialising in Spanish politics last winter necessarily expected a general election to be called for 28 April. Coping with such eventualities is good training for life.

After dictators, the next most popular genres would be artists and drug traffickers. This year the *narcos* pipped the *artistas*, buoyed by the Netflix series of the same name that was widely cited as an inspiration. Escobar attracts more attention than El Chapo, with the Cartel de Sinaloa not far behind. Even native speakers couldn't agree on which syllable to stress in the Spanish versions of cartel, singular and plural (I don't dare write those words in Spanish for fear of prompting further debate by where I place or omit the accent...).



Among the artists, Dalí, roughly equal with Picasso in 2018, this year fell back, as did Velázquez and Goya. Picasso is matched only by Frida Kahlo (interest in her having been boosted by the recent production of a Barbie doll in her likeness...). Diego Rivera remains the Perón of the art field: seldom mentioned, and straggling far behind his wife.

Three hot tips for art buffs: firstly, if you're getting over-familiar with Spanish/Mexican artists, consider studying the 'Ecuadorian Picasso' Guayasamín (a good excuse to visit his amazing home and gallery in Quito). Secondly, if you want to reinvigorate your view of Dalí, his *teatro-museo* in Figueres is a superb gallery even by Spain's high standards: it's about one hour north of Barcelona by car. Thirdly, if preparing a presentation on an artist, it's worth taking in to the exam some pictures to discuss



(you're allowed up to three): it brings the subject to life, though beware, it leaves you with less time to discuss other headers.

As to the new Paper 4 syllabus, we hear that nearly all the Topics and Texts were studied. One exception was Vargas Llosa's *La tía Julia*...the comic story of an 18-year old's first adventures in life and love whose subject matter and intellectual pitch is ideally suited to the Pre-U age range. (If anyone has worries about teaching it, please see p14-16 of our February 2018 edition via the Past Editions tab above.) *El cine de Almodóvar* remains the most popular Topic (in Pre-U's early years it was shunned: what ten years of publishing indicative content can do for a Topic...). *Bodas de sangre* was the most popular text, with *Lazarillo* and Borges close behind.

What Papers 1 and 4 both require above all is 'ATQ' ('answering the question'), and a peacock-like display of language skills. See the post-results Examiner's Report for more details...

*BAS editor Robin Wallis*