



Essay Competition 2023: the judges' verdict

In this edition we are pleased to announce the winner of the 2023 Bulletin of Advanced Spanish / University of Glasgow Sixth Form Essay Competition: Aidan Brooke. He duly wins an Amazon voucher kindly donated by the University of Glasgow's School of Modern Languages and Cultures. His winning entry, *Sábado, el incendiario*, is published on a separate page of this edition. So too is the entry by runner-up Lucy Stapledon, *The Fighting Cholitas Bolivianas*.

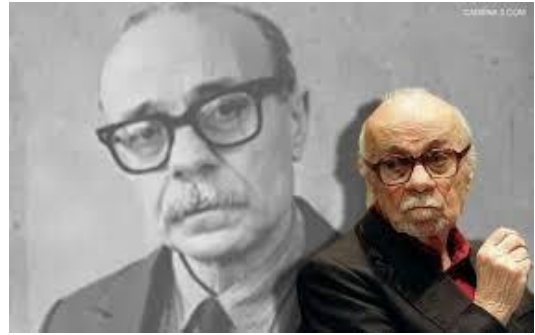


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Our judges had over twice as many entries to pour over compared to the 2022 competition. The subject matter ranged from familiar themes such as bull-fighting, the Spanish Civil War and Pinochet to more innovative topics such as Columbus' *Primera Carta* and Mexico's skeletal celebrity La Catrina. "It would be no exaggeration to say that they were all well written pieces," the judges commented. "The better structured the essay, the more it stood out." The judges also welcomed entrants taking "an unusual and entertaining perspective on their subject matter."

The winning entry and the runner-up caught the eye because they managed to combine elements of both academic analysis and short story. In Aidan's piece, "the focus on Sábato's pyromaniac tendencies added originality and even an anarchic element" to the writing. Lucy, the runner-up, told an "original and engaging story, combining human interest, social and historical analysis, and local colour".



In addition to the winner and runner-up, the judges commended the following entries:

Víctor Andrade (La participación extranjera en la guerra civil española): "good topic, well presented".

Ava Brand (Bad Bunny): "original and very contemporary".

Ottavia Eliot (Cómo influyó la colonización española de México en el siglo 16 en las creencias religiosas en México): "particularly good analysis of the Conquista and the present day".

Eve Mellor (La Catrina): "nice tracing of the development of the figure in a feminist context".

Arman Nedungadi (Columbus in his own words): "the detailed exegesis of a source text was a sophisticated approach at this level and a thoughtful treatment of a contentious historical figure".

Lorenzo Peltretti (Las corridas de toros): "comprehensive analysis".

Orlando Robinson (El Narcotráfico en Colombia): "clear structure, solid analysis".

Joe Smiley (La discriminación y el maltrato generalizados de los latinoamericanos en los Estados Unidos): "a well-developed discursive essay, backed up with statistics".

The Bulletin Team would like to thank all those who took part (and those who encouraged them along the way). We envisage this becoming an annual event, and would welcome feedback from teachers about the optimal time of year at which to run it.



BAS / University of Glasgow Essay Competition 2023: Winning Entry

Winner: Aidan Brooke – a Sixth Form student at Westminster who is planning to study Spanish and French at University. He writes:

'During a Spanish course in Buenos Aires over the summer, I discovered Sábato, read his novel El Túnel and wanted to learn more about him and his work. Principally from watching his interviews online, I was fascinated by his interests and achievements across multiple fields, and the contrast between his wisdom and rationality on the one hand, and the extreme action of burning most of his own writings on the other.'

Sábato, el incendiario

Ernesto Sábato, escritor argentino del siglo XX, dijo muchas veces que quemaba sus novelas y ensayos. En su barrio lo llamaban “el incendiario” según lo que él mismo contó en una entrevista con Mariano Grondona por el canal 9 de televisión en Buenos Aires¹. Estos actos incendiarios los cometía temprano en las madrugadas en el jardín delantero de su casa. Suena muy extremo el quemar la mayoría de tus obras y no publicarlas, pero Sábato se definía como una persona muy violenta. Eso no llega a explicar el porqué de estos actos incendiarios.

Sábato era un idealista. Este idealismo es expresado en su apoyo al comunismo cuando estaba estudiando en la Universidad Nacional de La Plata. En 1933 fue elegido secretario general de la Federación Juvenil Comunista y conoce a Matilde Richter, su futura esposa, en un curso sobre marxismo. Sin embargo, Sábato abandonó su militancia en el Partido Comunista de la Argentina al ver las atrocidades del gobierno de Iósif Stalin.

Cuando después decide dedicarse a escribir, su idealismo se vuelve a reflejar en el tipo de metas que él se propone alcanzar. Sábato describe estas metas como muy grandes e importantes, de cierta manera romanticistas. Él piensa que solo vale la pena

escribir sobre los problemas del corazón como la vida, la muerte, la existencia o la inexistencia de dios, el rencor, la verdad y la mentira. Este idealismo en sus metas podrían haberlo llevado a pensar que sus libros no eran suficientemente buenos, que no escribía bien y que, por lo tanto, tenían que ser quemados.

Albert Camus lo elogiaba a Sábato diciendo que “admiraba su seca intensidad”. Sábato tenía una enorme intensidad en todo lo que hacía, decía y pensaba. El decidir si una de sus obras merecía existir parece no ser una excepción.

Paradójicamente, antes de ser un escritor, Sábato era un científico que obtuvo un doctorado en física y matemática. Uno de sus profesores fue el Dr. Bernardo Houssay, premio nobel de medicina, el cual le consiguió una beca para estudiar junto a la hija de Madame Curie, en el Instituto Curie en París en 1938². Sábato trabajó en radiaciones atómicas y allí fue testigo de la fragmentación del átomo de uranio, un paso decisivo para la fabricación de la bomba atómica. Este trabajo científico durante el día lo hacía sentir vacío y empezó a pasar sus noches en bares de París conociendo a surrealistas como Benjamín Péret y Oscar Domínguez. Aunque las matemáticas y la ciencia le parecían bellísimas, la tecnología no le parecía progresista, sino que pensaba que estaba matando a la humanidad y al planeta. Él quería escribir sobre lo que era importante para los seres humanos. Quería escribir sobre las mismas cosas que escribieron los griegos y que siguen vigentes hoy en día, que son las verdades del corazón. En 1943, Sábato decide abandonar la ciencia para siempre y dedicarse a escribir. Sin embargo, uno puede imaginarse que después de haber perseguido verdades matemáticas, le habría sido muy difícil el aceptar la falta de perfección en sus novelas y ensayos. Esto puede haber jugado una parte en su necesidad incendiaria.

Sábato dijo que el tiempo era lo que decidía si una novela era buena. Si la gente en cien años seguía leyendo la y la novela seguía afectando a los lectores profundamente, esa novela podía ser considerada buena. ¿Pero entonces, por qué no dejar que el tiempo y la gente decidiera si sus novelas eran buenas en vez de quemarlas? Aparentemente, la intensidad y la complejidad de la personalidad de Sábato, el idealista, el científico, el escritor, el crítico, no lo dejaron permitirle que la historia juzgase sus obras. Pero por suerte, su esposa Matilde y sus amigos lo convencieron de salvar y publicar sus tres novelas tan famosas que, inevitablemente, ¡Sábato dijo que eran demasiadas!

¹ “Ernesto Sabato con Mariano Grondona”- Programa Hora Clave conducido por Mariano Grondona para el canal 9 de la televisión argentina. Emitido en Pablo Mur – youtube 10 de Junio del 2013

² “Recordando a Ernesto Sabato”, José Narosky. Diario Ámbito Financiero, 23 de julio 2019.



BAS / University of Glasgow Essay Competition 2023: Runner-Up Entry

Runner-Up: Lucy Stapledon – a Year 13 student of Spanish, French and English Literature at The King Alfred School, who hopes to study Spanish and French at University. She writes:

'I first came across the Fighting Cholitas while watching the documentary series 'Street Food: Latin America'. The episode concerning las cholitas in La Paz, Bolivia, enticed my curiosity the most as I had never heard of them before. After researching them, I found myself amazed by their culture. Learning of las cholitas luchadoras, I wanted to share their story and their fight surpassing centuries. Despite not having experienced one of their matches in real life, I could still fathom their pride, passion, and their desire to empower women and indigenous peoples alike. Experiencing one of their riveting matches from the audience is something I wish to do in the future.'

The Fighting Cholitas Bolivianas: Wrestling Their Way to Empowerment

El Alto, Bolivia – it's a Sunday evening in the 'Multifunctional Coliseum' of La Ceja. The venue is bustling with the shared excitement of women, men, and children, all waiting in anticipation as the ring announcer's projected voice begins: "Señoras y señores, ¡presentemos a los Titanes del Ring!" Applause infects the audience as their cheers and shouts signal the beginning of a performance that they have waited all week to watch, a battle between *las técnicas y las rudas*, between *good and evil*, between two *cholitas* – between two *women*. Their bowler hats, embroidered shawls, and colourful clothing mark their presence within the auditorium. As they step into the ring, not only their energy but also their pride fills the space. We realise this is not just a simple fight of *la lucha libre*, it is a fight that re-writes the script as these cholitas

luchadoras reclaim a place in society that is rightfully theirs, and that rightfully belonged to their predecessors who had been unfairly disregarded for far too long. “¡Vamos la lucha!”

The Fighting Cholitas are a group of female wrestlers, based in El Alto, a city near Bolivia’s capital of La Paz. They are part of ‘Titanes del Ring’ (Titans of the Ring) – a wrestling organisation of both men and women. Performing every Sunday at the Multifunctional Coliseum, these women attract hundreds of spectators, costing audience members just \$1. They are indigenous women of almost entirely Aymara and Quechua descent and are recognised for their wardrobe of bowler hats and multilayered skirts (‘la pollera’), with braided hair and vibrant accessories that they wear in the ring. Rapidly becoming one of the must-see shows in Bolivia, they not only represent the empowerment of women, but also the empowerment of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples after decades of oppression. They essentially fight for their people’s respect both inside and outside of the ring.

People of Aymara and Quechua heritage have been heavily discriminated against for centuries. They suffered greatly during the Spanish colonial rule, subject to labour exploitation. Even before the Revolución boliviana of 1952, they continued to suffer severe ethnic oppression and were denied legal and political rights and couldn’t even freely walk in the central square of La Paz. Despite the emergence of hope for acceptance after the Revolution of ‘52, they still suffered. They had scarce access to basic necessities such as sanitation, education and healthcare. Aymara and Quechua people were perennially precluded from living normal and healthy lives – they were refused the right to be *humans*. In these times, the terms ‘chola’ or ‘cholita’ were derogatory – signifying that they were of little to no worth. However, in 2006, three years after the removal of President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, Bolivia elected its first indigenous president – Evo Morales. Morales’ commitment to protecting indigenous rights triggered positive change. Finally, Aymara and Quechua people were recognised with a true place in the world. They began to reclaim the once pejorative titles of ‘cholo’, ‘chola’, and ‘cholita’, transforming them into symbols of pride.

Now, instead of performing degrading tasks for the upper-class, the Fighting Cholitas showcase their skills for themselves, appreciated in their own right. Their titles and dress are now sources of power, rather than punitive labels.

Staged wrestling has grown in popularity since the 19th century in a number of countries. Wrestling known as ‘lucha libre’, meaning “freestyle fighting”, originated in Mexico, and is widely recognised by performers’ colourful masks and costumes, as well as its overexaggerated “high-flying” manoeuvres. This genre made waves across Latin America, including Bolivia, during the mid-20th century. Wrestling was for many years considered a sport not suited for women. But from the early 2000s women gradually integrated themselves within the art of lucha libre, eventually gaining more

popularity than the men. The Fighting Cholitas started with the aim of battling domestic violence and helping women who had been victims of the machismo culture, that is entrenched in Bolivia, to restore empowerment amongst themselves. The Fighting Cholitas gained acclaim and soon became members of the Titanes del Ring, with their performances garnering the most public appreciation and the most ticket sales. The group of fighting women even attracted international publicity as their iconic cholita fighting style and garb won the hearts of wrestling audiences around the world.

While it may at first appear to be a staged fight, put on between a good, clean-fighting 'técnica' and an evil, rule-bending 'ruda', by stepping up into the ring every Sunday evening, las luchadoras cholitas bolivianas are actively tearing down stereotypes of gender, race and class. They are forging paths to empowerment surrounded by their fellow fighting cholitas, both from the past and present, carrying with them their Aymara and Quechua heritage.



Víctor Ugarte: “Hablar español les cambia un poco la personalidad.”

Por Alfredo Benito, Editor del BAS

Cuando uno intercambia sus primeras palabras con un hombre como Víctor Ugarte, percibe al instante el aura de hombre de mundo, de persona viajada y culta, con la sencillez propia, además, de alguien acostumbrado a lidiar con gentes de todo tipo y condición. Hace poco más de un año, Ugarte (Barcelona, 1963), aterrizaba en Londres, su tercera parada profesional como director de una sede del Instituto Cervantes, tras ocupar esa misma responsabilidad en Sydney y hasta por dos veces en Tokyo.

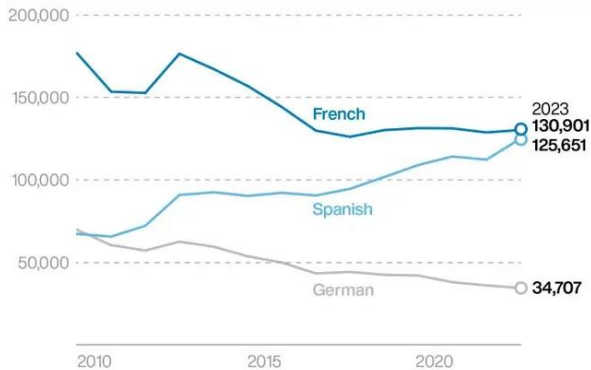


Su perfil académico y profesional nos muestra a un auténtico todo terreno: por un lado, graduado en Historia del Arte y, por otro, curtido desde muy temprano en la gestión del día a día de diversas instituciones privadas y públicas. Una perspectiva holística, ideal para la difícil labor de promover académica y casi comercialmente la lengua y la cultura hispana. Y es que, para empezar, el nuevo director del Instituto Cervantes de Londres de idiomas sabe un rato: inglés, japonés, italiano, y, por supuesto, español ilustran su currículum. Visitamos al nuevo inquilino del imponente y laberíntico edificio de Devereux Court, a un paso de la estación de metro Temple, uno de los primeros días lluviosos del otoño. Algo que nos hace recordar a ambos la

misma lluvia de 365 días atrás cuando Ugarte aterrizaba en una capital británica impactada por el fallecimiento de la Reina Isabel II.

Bulletin of Advanced Spanish. -Hace poco más de un año de su llegada a Londres, al Instituto Cervantes. ¿Qué balance puede hacer de este tiempo al frente de esta sede de la institución?

GCSE entries in French, German & Spanish



PA graphic. Source: JOQ

Víctor Ugarte. -Lo primero es que me he llevado una grata sorpresa al ver que el español es más popular de lo que pensaba. He visto que estamos en un momento de relativo crecimiento en cuanto a lengua extranjera aquí. Además, ha coincidido con una recuperación en cuanto a nuestros alumnos después de la pandemia. Estamos ya en casi un 40% más de alumnos que el año pasado, que ya fue un buen año. Y esa parte siempre es positiva ya que las clases de español son los ingresos principales para

luego hacer el resto de las actividades. También llegué en un momento especialmente histórico por el fallecimiento de la Reina, y viví un poco esos primeros momentos muy interesantes desde el punto de vista histórico. Ya conocía Londres como turista, pero ahora la ciudad me ha sorprendido por su oferta cultural inmensa, poder visitar tantísimas exposiciones, la música, etc...

BAS. -Ahora hablaremos de la buena salud de la lengua española, pero para quién no conozca muy bien la misión del Instituto Cervantes, ¿cómo es el día a día de una institución como esta?

Víctor Ugarte. -Nosotros tenemos distintas áreas de trabajo, por un lado, la parte académica que se centra principalmente en las clases para adultos de lengua española como segunda lengua. Y eso ocupa como un 60% de nuestra actividad. Y luego tenemos los exámenes de certificación, el DELE y el SIELE. Y por otra parte, la formación de profesores.

Este centro, por ejemplo, es pionero en un nuevo diploma que se llama DADIC. Estamos formando a profesores, algunos de ellos ya están dando clase aquí con nosotros. Luego tenemos una parte de colaboración con colegios, institutos, recibiendo o visitando. Aquí en el centro realizamos actividades extracurriculares de estos colegios, tanto de niños que estudian español como los que no lo estudian.



Esta sería la parte académica, pero luego está la parte del hispanismo, es decir, los estudios relacionados con temas hispánicos, no solo la lengua, sino también la música, el cine, sociología, política, etc... Nosotros tenemos esa labor de ponerlo en valor y darle toda la fuerza que podamos. Por ello, colaboramos con muchos congresos, festivales, charlas...



Y en la parte de cultura, tenemos una biblioteca que es una de las más grandes de la red del Cervantes en el mundo. De hecho, aquí físicamente tenemos solo el 40% de esos volúmenes, porque todos no caben. Esa biblioteca tiene mucha vida, porque organiza actividades como el club de lectura, cuenta cuentos para niños, club de conservación... Y, además, ofrecemos ayuda a personas que están preparando temas de investigación en fondos españoles. Mucha

gente no sabe que nuestra biblioteca es una biblioteca nacional, es decir, podemos solicitar fondos a cualquier otro centro de España. En la parte cultural, tenemos además socios locales, por ejemplo, el Festival de Cine Español o en temas de literatura el Festival de Cheltenham, el Festival de música barroca, es decir, estamos colaborando mucho en grandes acontecimientos culturales.

BAS. -En ese reparto de pesos, académico, cultural, en su opinión, ¿qué se necesitaría reforzar en el futuro más inmediato?

Víctor Ugarte. -En el caso particular de Londres y el Reino Unido, en todo lo relacionado con el conocimiento de España y todo lo hispano, hay una visión sesgada, digamos tópica, que es una barrera que queremos romper. Al mismo tiempo, creo que se ha conseguido superar en parte ese elemento estereotípico, quizás por la presencia tan grande que hay en esta ciudad de españoles y de empresas y entidades españolas de mucho peso. Pero sí que todavía queda mucho camino por hacer...

BAS. -Este último año el Instituto Cervantes ha firmado una serie de convenios y acuerdos muy relevantes, con la Universidad de Edimburgo, o con la de Cambridge. Ese tipo de colaboraciones, ¿son un camino a explorar más profundamente en el futuro, especialmente con instituciones de tanto prestigio?

Víctor Ugarte. -Bueno, eso es algo que venimos haciendo, pero sobre todo con la intención de que esos convenios tengan vida, actividad real. La Universidad, muy especialmente en este país, tiene una enorme influencia cultural y social, y es, por tanto, una manera de tener antenas de influencia cultural de nuestra actividad. Por ejemplo, cuando creamos un programa que va a durar varios años, un ciclo de literatura o de música, lo que queremos es que tenga vida no solo en nuestras sedes

sino en otros lugares del país. Si nos visita un cuarteto de cuerda o un escritor famoso que ha venido desde Colombia o México, intentamos aprovechar que está aquí para que también acuda a esas instituciones.



Y también nos interesa conocer qué piensa la gente que lleva muchísimas décadas en este país promoviendo la cultura hispana, y conocer cómo ven ellos el futuro, hacia dónde podemos ir. Por ejemplo, hace unos días hablaba con el embajador de Colombia y comentábamos que ahora hay planes en el Reino Unido para promover en las escuelas el alemán y el chino con subvenciones de decenas de millones de libras-16 millones para el chino y 14 para el alemán –y quizás ven que nuestro idioma crece y que no necesita tanta ayuda, y en cambio, el chino no ha crecido como se pensaba y el alemán está en declive. Pero en mi opinión, tenemos que conseguir que el español tenga también esa ayuda y eso lo tenemos que pedir entre todos los países hispanoamericanos, somos 22 países juntos y eso tiene una fuerza inigualable.

BAS. –¿Cuesta mucho desprenderse de lo español y no pensar en lo hispano?

Víctor Ugarte. –Yo creo que en absoluto. Tengo muy claro que todas las embajadas y centros oficiales nos ven como una segunda casa. Eso es una realidad. Y, de hecho, el 60% de nuestra actividad cultural está vinculada a Latinoamérica, no a España. Dentro del Patronato del Instituto Cervantes hay también miembros de



Hispanoamérica. En nuestra plantilla de profesores aquí, por ejemplo, hay un mexicano, una chilena, tenemos de todos los sitios... Incluso cuando nos pregunta un alumno que quiere inscribirse qué tipo de español se enseña aquí, le decimos que el español universal. Es cierto que a algunas autoridades británicas con las que

colaboramos a veces hay que explicarles que nosotros no solo promovemos la cultura española, y si que les cuesta a veces entenderlo.

BAS. –Hablábamos antes del momento dulce que vive la lengua española en este país. ¿Qué explicación se le puede encontrar a esta tendencia al alza y que se puede hacer para no quedarse de brazos cruzados pensando que todo va viento en popa?

Víctor Ugarte. –Hay un refrán muy español que dice que “*en el país de los ciegos, el tuerto es el rey*”. Esta realidad no es tan abrumadora. Estamos hablando de que el español está creciendo, pero dentro de un panorama en el que el estudio de lenguas extranjeras está muy lejos de parecerse al de otros países. Es decir, que hay muchísimo por hacer. Pero es cierto también que el español sí está creciendo. Por una parte, es importante, especialmente en esta época post Brexit, promover esta apertura hacia el estudio de lenguas extranjeras. Y ahí siempre tenemos las de ganar, porque el español, por lógica demográfica, de número de hablantes y de influencia en el mundo de la comunicación, siempre va a estar ahí.

BAS. –Es cierto que estamos un poco en territorio hostil. Según las estadísticas, Reino Unido es el país donde menos interés hay por estudiar una segunda lengua. A eso añadimos los efectos del Brexit. Ese cóctel, ¿cómo está influyendo para la misión del Instituto Cervantes?



Víctor Ugarte. -En nuestro caso me he llevado la sorpresa de que sí que hay interés sobre todo en gente adulta que quiere aprender español. Y desde luego, hay un factor que es determinante, y es que hay casi 20 millones de británicos que viajan a España de vacaciones cada año. De hecho, es el país al que más viajan los británicos y estos son el primer país de procedencia de turistas. No se puede pensar en una relación más estrecha. Esos británicos que van a España,

como van cada año, llega un momento en que empiezan a interesarse por el español. Y aquí vemos muchísimo ese interés en personas que quieren aprender español porque desean conocer más el país o porque tienen una pareja de allí. Es, de hecho, un típico alumno de nuestro centro, de pareja mixta.

BAS. –Hay otro factor interesante y es que parece que por fin el español es una lengua global. Y ya no solo con fines académicos o personales, sino también, por ejemplo, en algo tan crucial como la empleabilidad. Cada vez vemos con más frecuencia como el alumno británico piensa que para su carrera profesional el

español es un extra muy relevante para su currículum. ¿Este factor está ayudando también a la expansión de la lengua?

Víctor Ugarte. -Sí, sin duda. De hecho, otra de las sorpresas que me he llevado es que hay bastantes alumnos que sí tienen un interés profesional. Han visto que aprendiendo español se diferencian en su currículum y pueden cobrar más. Hay un estudio que habla de que hasta un 20% más de sueldo en muchos países anglosajones por hablar español en muchos sectores profesionales. En el caso del Reino Unido una influencia enorme es lógicamente Estados Unidos, donde la presencia de nuestra lengua ya es abrumadora. No existe una empresa estadounidense que no tenga, por ejemplo, su página web en español. Y esa influencia también tiene mucho peso. Ver que un mercado global incluye ya el español hace que muchas empresas británicas consideren la importancia de dominar esa lengua.

BAS. -Imagino que todos estos aspectos tienen una incidencia directa a la hora de enseñar la lengua y la cultura. ¿Cómo se puede mejorar la práctica docente para incluir todos esos nuevos elementos y que el alumno obtenga las mejores herramientas posibles?

Víctor Ugarte. -En ese aspecto, es algo en lo que sí nos preocupamos mucho. El Plan Curricular que utiliza el Instituto Cervantes implica una enseñanza comunicativa en la que solo se usa el español desde la primera clase. Se le hace intervenir en la clase de una manera activa. Ese entorno comunicativo que es el que marca el Marco Común de Referencia europeo es el que hace que el alumno aprenda la lengua.

Digamos que eso choca con muchos lugares en los que todavía se enseña la lengua memorizando, con listas de vocabulario, incluso el profesor explicando la gramática en inglés. Eso aquí no se permite. Y tiene unos resultados muy positivos.

BAS. -Hay una amenaza que llevamos escuchando en los últimos tiempos de avances tecnológicos que van a provocar, por ejemplo, que casi nadie necesite aprender una lengua extranjera, porque va a haber casi una traducción simultánea. ¿Hay una preocupación real por ese asunto?

Víctor Ugarte. -Una de las cosas que yo creo que es interesante en mi caso personal es mi experiencia en Japón, donde he vivido en total 11 años. Japón es un país especialmente difícil para vivir sin saber hablar japonés. Entonces, aunque puedas tener acceso a las palabras que necesites en un momento específico, puedes, quizás, solucionar la situación. Pero realmente no vas a conocer de ninguna manera esa cultura, no vas a poder vivir allí sin conocer el idioma, aunque tengas una maquina.



Como decías tú antes, la lengua tiene un componente cultural imprescindible y es lo que tiene el español también de rico, porque tiene detrás tantas culturas diferentes. Lo que conlleva esa parte cultural, eso no te lo va a dar la inteligencia artificial. Te va a sacar de un apuro y en eso quizás sea muy útil.

BAS. -Yo siempre hablo de ese elemento seductor que tiene nuestra lengua. Por ejemplo, tengo un compañero de trabajo que es inglés, que siempre dice que cuando habla en español se convierte en una persona diferente, más extrovertida, más alegre...Ese puede ser también otro aspecto que se puede explotar...

Víctor Ugarte. -Eso es importantísimo. Yo siempre decía en Japón que el inglés es como aprender matemáticas. Es algo que es necesario y tienes que saberlo. Pero el hablar inglés está más vinculado con la necesidad que con la cultura. Como una “commodity” que dirían aquí. Pero el español tiene algo más. Y esa reacción que tiene la gente cuando habla español de golpe, es muy gratificante, porque les cambia un poco la personalidad. Al poderse expresar, poder conocer gente, hace que se les contagie un poco la actitud de un hablante hispano.





Rise of the platform-educated linguist

BAS editor Raúl Sánchez Saura

Learning languages has always been a part of the human experience. Whether effortlessly or after long, strenuous effort, billions have discovered the pleasure of communicating with others in a code that used to be unfamiliar. It has therefore made sense to include foreign languages as part of the school curriculum.

Like other subjects, the arrival of the internet (and now AI) has reformulated their teaching and learning. The lay linguist is quite familiar with apps such as Babbel or Duolingo, but in the classroom we find a richer ecosystem. Innumerable students and teachers have found the likes of Quizlet, This is Language, Language Gym, Language Nut or Linguascope helpful, entertaining and perhaps even fascinating.

It's clear that language platforms are here to stay. Indeed, some MFL students have grown up with them and are now starting to create their own, even before leaving university (or starting it!). A new generation will live next to, learn from, and maybe even influence others.

Today we will discuss three of these platforms with their founders: Iacopo di Rico of Estudi-amos (estudiamos.co.uk), Mariella Satow of SignUp (signupcaptions.com), and Olive Halsall of Olea (oleaeducation.com). Our aim will be to discover the unique features of these sites and what they bring to the field of MFL.

Iacopo di Rico is currently studying International Management and Modern Languages at the University of Bath, after completing his schooling at Epsom College. Born and raised in Italy, he is bilingual and has always had a soft spot for Spanish. It was actually one day in the Spanish classroom, while doing his A-Levels, that he felt he was at risk of falling short of the grade he needed. If he could focus on exam technique and have instant feedback, perhaps his revision could prove more efficient.

All the more so with a self-marking, exam-specific platform. That was the birth of Estudiamos.



As he embarked on his university studies, he and his team conducted market research and tested their conceptualised features, ensuring that users would find the benefits they needed. He was greatly helped by Bath's Dragon's Den and its various start-up events. Indeed, he would go on to receive funding from them and associated companies to fulfil his dream. In March 2023 Estudiamos was launched, offering worksheets and reading activities in Spanish for GCSE and A Levels. Dozens of schools have already signed up for it, generating much positive feedback ahead of new features emerging from the pipeline.

SignUp is a quite different project. Mariella Satow, a Rugby School alumna who is currently studying English Literature and Computer Science at Stanford University, has always wanted to learn sign language. Driven by her lifelong passion for decoding, she taught herself American Sign Language while sheltering from the pandemic in New York. Soon enough, she thought about helping others to learn. This would be the growing seed for SignUp. In her words, "An idea that began as an educational tool for sign language students has actually morphed into an accessibility tool for the deaf." Accessibility would prove crucial, given the very reduced amount of resources and attention that the deaf community receive in her native country: "I learnt that fewer than half of deaf children in the United States reach the expected standard of reading by middle school, which meant that either they could not read the closed captions or read them fast enough. Three-quarters of hearing parents do not learn to sign with their deaf children."



Her research involved interviewing deaf people, asking what their needs were, and doing online polls and cold calls. After much effort, SignUp was up and running in August 2021. It is now a free Google Chrome Extension that provides a pop-up window with a sign language interpreter signing the content. It is available through the Chrome store with a simple one-click installation for movies and TV shows on Netflix and Disney+. Thanks to it, she has facilitated her dream: that families with deaf members can all sit together and watch a film. And users turned up for it – SignUp would crash out of the sheer number of downloads, a challenge quickly fixed by its hard-working IT department. Quite a nice problem to have so early on, and understandable, given that the platform and Mariella have been featured on the BBC and in The Times. The testimonial section at <https://www.signupcaptions.com/> says it all.

Mariella is quite pleased with the educational dimension to SignUp, as the platform is used in schools for the deaf both in the US and the UK. They are also used in sign language teaching programmes and now eye the Indian market. Quite the journey for a company initially launched thanks to Mariella's savings from dog walking!

Much like Mariella and her movie interpretations, there is an overt entertainment dimension to Olive's project. She came into contact with foreign languages during her family vacations in Calais, mesmerised by her mother's efforts to speak French. The possibility of being fluent soon took root in her imagination, and some 20 years later she holds a 1st Class BA (Hons) in Modern Languages (French & Mandarin) with Business Management, in addition to an MPhil in Education from the University of Cambridge.

She founded Olea in June 2021. It comprises both a card game, Private Joke, and a free online version. The goal of Private Joke is to invent new words for shared human experiences, igniting any user's inner linguist. Private Joke rewards creativity rather than perfection, an approach which Olive has found to work with non-conventional, underdog linguists, including dyslexic and neurodivergent people. The online game is suitable for Year 7 students onwards.

After kickstarting Olea through crowdfunding and her Olea Ambassadors and producing the game's first edition, Olive dreams of expanding it into more languages and seeing it become a household game like Scrabble or cards. She warms to the idea of developing the game into new themes such as Girls' Night In, New Dads or Children's Private Joke.

Iacopo, Mariella and Olive are excited about what lies ahead for their ventures, which, despite their differences, are all driven by the desire to help people communicate better. As members of the first generation of language platform-educated entrepreneurs, all three express hope that their users will find their companies useful, enlightening, and entertaining.

As they prepare to move onwards, they are organising their companies as follows:

Iacopo – Estudiamos

- Is your platform free? No
- Do you currently offer content for more than one language? For now, just Spanish, but we are adding French, German and English
- Do you have specific content for GCSE, A Levels, etc? Yes

Mariella – SignUp

- Is your platform free? Yes
- Do you currently offer content for more than one language? American and British Sign Language, and we are about to launch Indian Sign Language. Our next launch after that will be in Australia with Auslan.
- Do you have specific content for GCSE, A Levels, etc? Yes, now that a GCSE in British Sign Language is being introduced.



Olive – Olea

- Is your platform free? Yes. The physical game is priced at £33 excluding shipping.
- Do you currently offer content for more than one language? Yes. Private Joke (Limited Edition) comprises around 15 languages.
- Do you have specific content for GCSE, A Levels, etc? No

Strong points

Iacopo – Estudiamos

- Fully self-marking
- Exam specific
- Lets teachers customise and create their own self-marking worksheets

Mariella – SignUp

- Employment for deaf people – an underemployed section of society.
- Language acquisition for deaf children and sign-language students.
- Providing entertainment and inclusion for the deaf community who have been poorly served by Big Media.

Olive – Olea

- We elicit curiosity for languages. There is no pressure to find the perfect word – the funniest word will do.
- Encourages out-of-the-box thinking – popular with neurodivergent and dyslexic players. Our font was designed specifically for dyslexics.
- The platform is still in its early stages, but it should be intuitive for MFL teachers.

Readers can check them out at estudiamos.co.uk, signupcaptions.com and oleaeducation.com



Orwell in Spain: a political awakening

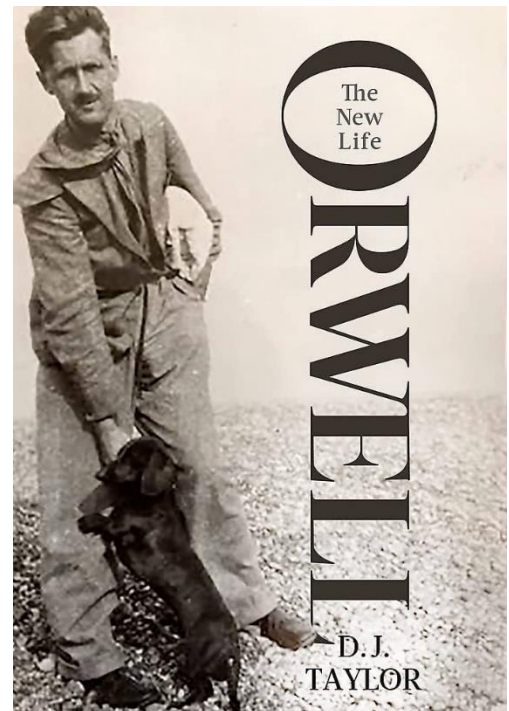
BAS Editor William Chislett

*'To see what is in front of one's
nose needs a constant struggle'*
George Orwell, *Tribune*, 22/III/1946

Spain's 1936-39 Civil War had a profound impact on George Orwell's writing and life, as a new biography of him shows. But for his experience there, particularly the hunting down and silencing of Communist dissidents by the Stalinist party and the deceit that surrounded this, he might never have written *Animal Farm* and *1984*, his two classic novels.

"It is not an exaggeration to say that Spain altered the way in which he looked at the world, and dominated his life after returning to the UK", says D.J. Taylor, author of the richly detailed and illuminating biography *Orwell: The New Life*, published by Constable in the UK and Pegasus in the US. Spain is mentioned on 84 of its 540 pages.

Orwell arrived in Barcelona at the end of 1936 and stayed in Spain for around six months. He spent just



over half that time on the Aragon front, where he was wounded in the throat by a sniper's bullet which missed his carotid artery by a few millimetres. This wound probably brought on his early death from tuberculosis in 1950, at the age of 46, an infection he reportedly picked up while recovering in a Spanish hospital.

Orwell's aim was to fight against "fascism" by joining the International Brigades, which attracted around 35,000 volunteers from across the world and another 5,000 in militias. However, Harry Pollitt, the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Great Britain, thought Orwell politically unreliable (which he was, and dangerously so as he was to discover) and turned him down. Orwell then approached the Independent Labour Party, a small, maverick socialist party allied to Spain's anti-Stalinist Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), which welcomed him.



Before coming to Spain, Orwell closely followed events in the country. There is a reference to the battle for Madrid towards the end of his non-fiction book *The Road to Wigan Pier*, published by Victor Gollancz in a Left Book Club edition. Orwell arrived politically naïve, not least about the role the Communists were playing in Spain, and with little political consciousness. This quickly changed

when he discovered he had come to the attention of the spy network of the Communist International (Comintern) for being politically suspect.

The Soviet Union, the main supplier of arms to the beleaguered Republic, prioritised winning the war over revolution, while the POUM and the anarchists felt that victory without revolution was impossible. José Díaz Ramos, General Secretary of the Spanish Communist Party, denounced the POUM as "agents of Fascism, who are carrying out their major missions as agents of our enemies in our own country".

The tensions between leftist factions boiled over in Barcelona in May 1937 when they fought one another in the streets, in a civil war within a civil war, after the Communist Party and its Catalan branch tried to take over an anarchist-controlled telephone exchange. Orwell spent three nights on the rooftop of the Poliorama cinema with a rifle to help defend the POUM headquarters across the road.

The street fighting produced a death toll of 218 and the demonisation of the POUM. In the nightmarish climate that ensued, a Special Tribunal for Espionage and High Treason was created. Andreas Nin, the leader of the “Trotskyist-fascists” of the POUM, was arrested and subsequently killed after being savagely tortured. The POUM was outlawed, and most of the 40 members of the executive committee were arrested and jailed, including Georges Kopp, Orwell’s commander, who was interrogated, tortured and moved between prisons and detention camps in and around Barcelona for 18 months. Orwell’s friend Bob Smillie died in jail. The room of Orwell and his wife Eileen, who had joined him, was raided, and plainclothes policemen spent two hours examining his papers and books. A warrant was subsequently issued for their arrest as ‘pronounced Trotskyists’ conspiring with dissidents in Moscow.



Orwell was particularly incensed by a poster reading “Tear the mask”, which depicted a hammer-and-sickle mask being ripped off to reveal a snarling, swastika-tattooed maniac, allegedly the true face of the POUM. His eyes were also opened by a presumed agent for Stalin’s secret police, known as “Charlie Chan”, who proclaimed that the street violence was an anarchist putsch to undermine the Republic and aid Franco. “It was the first time I had seen a person whose profession was telling lies,” Orwell wrote. One of those lies was that the Communists had managed to “dismantle” a network of anarchist traitors who had been communicating –via secret radio stations and messages written in invisible ink– with the Fascists about assassinating Republican leaders.

“What was at stake”, writes Taylor, “as well as Orwell’s desire that Spain should be free of Franco, was his distaste for the strong-arm tactics of left-wing political movements bent on suppressing unorthodox views”.



It was Eileen who convinced Orwell of the danger they were in, and that they had to get out. She made him tear up his militiaman’s card and a photograph of a group of soldiers with a POUM flag flying in the background.

Spain remained uppermost in Orwell’s mind after he returned to England at the end of June 1937. “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism,” he declared in his 1946 essay “Why I

Write.” He filed many pieces of journalism that reflected in some way on the conflict and reviewed books on Spanish subjects, including *The Forge* by Arturo Barea and Gerald Brenan’s *The Spanish Labyrinth* in *Horizon*, the leading literary magazine.

The atmosphere of terror in Barcelona so permeated Orwell that he was reluctant to visit various Islington pubs in the mid-1940s for fear of their harbouring hostile Stalinists who might remember him from Spain. As well as politicising him, Spain pushed Orwell towards activism. A year after returning to England, he joined a political party for the first time in his life.

To his dismay, but not surprise, he found in England the same deceit he had witnessed in Barcelona. The Communist fellow-traveller Gollancz refused to publish *Homage to Catalonia*, and Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman*, turned down Orwell’s essay about the war. He found another outlet for the essay, titled *Spilling the Spanish Beans*, in which he wrote: “People who ought to know better have lent themselves to the deception on the ground that if you tell the truth about Spain it will be used as Fascist propaganda”.



The Franco regime allowed a censored edition of *Homage* to be published in Spain in 1970. The changes demanded included deleting the word “national” in the phrase “Catalan national flag” and the word “terrible” used to describe Franco’s dictatorship. These changes were kept in subsequent editions until 2003, Orwell’s centenary year, when an unexpurgated edition was published. *Animal Farm*, however, was published uncensored in 1963, as the censors believed the target was the Soviet Union and not all totalitarian regimes.

Orwell looms large today in the war between Russia and Ukraine, which Vladimir Putin still calls, in Orwellian doublespeak, a “special military operation”.

Adapted from a version originally published by the Elcano Royal Institute.



Malcolm Deas: British eccentric, Colombian hero

Colin Harding

When the post-graduate course in Latin American Studies was getting off the ground at St Antony's College, Oxford, in the late 1960s, revolution was in the air. Radical students attracted to the college's brand-new Latin American Centre (LAC) by the prospect of learning from Fidel Castro's Cuba and guerrilla movements all over the continent were surprised to discover that Malcolm Deas, a leading member of the (very small) teaching staff, who was only a year or two older than them, was sceptical about their enthusiasms and scornful of the general ignorance about the complexities of a vast and little-studied continent. His subtle and nuanced understanding of politics and historical circumstances did not lend itself to rhapsodising about popular heroes and fashionable trends.

Malcolm was, nevertheless, always happy to debate with his student critics. Relations were invariably cordial, and the Centre flourished and grew. He remained a leading member of the LAC until his retirement in 2008, when he was made an Emeritus Fellow of St Antony's. One of Malcolm's many accomplishments over the years was to bring a stream of Latin American, and particularly Colombian, graduate students to the Centre. One of them, he later confessed, ended up in prison, but others achieved great things in the political and intellectual life of their country. Among the most notable Colombian imports to the LAC was Alvaro Uribe, a former governor of Antioquia department who was later a highly controversial President of Colombia from 2002 to 2010. Malcolm came to know him well during his time as a visiting fellow and remained in touch with him thereafter.

Malcolm Deas was born in Dorset in 1941, the son of a British army officer, who died when he was five. This background may help to explain his life-long fascination with wars and military matters in general. He first went to Colombia in 1963 as a young Prize Fellow of All Souls, with the vague idea of studying civil wars, of which that country had had several



since independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century. I recall a seminar he gave us post-graduate students on the 'military organisation of New Granada' (as newly-independent Colombia was known for several years), and later being invited to his house to admire an ancient rifle and other memorabilia he had collected from the time of the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902), a civil conflict that led to the separation of Panama from Colombia in 1903.

The choice of Colombia as his main focus of research owed a lot to chance. As a young graduate casting around for ideas on what to do and where to go next, he decided that Mexico sounded like an interesting destination. But when he discovered that 20 million American vacationers headed there every year, he changed his mind and opted for somewhere, as he later remarked, where there were few foreign visitors, especially from his own country.



He spent two years in Colombia, reading voraciously and travelling widely, and his youthful preoccupation with civil wars was soon superseded by a broader interest in Colombia's nineteenth and twentieth-century history. His field of study later extended to neighbouring Venezuela and Ecuador, the other two countries that made up the short-lived Gran Colombia federation, which broke up in 1833. Malcolm's bibliography of more than 130 pieces of work included articles and chapters of books on all three countries. He also wrote prolifically for many non-academic publications in Britain, ranging across the spectrum from the *New Statesman* to the *Spectator*. He also wrote

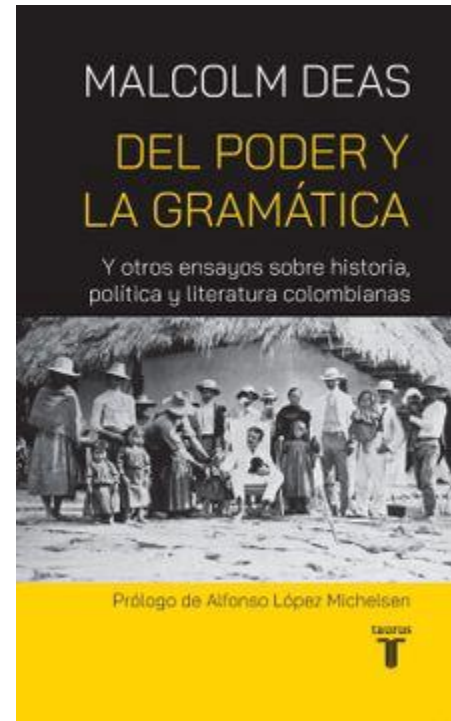
leaders on Latin America for *The Times* in the late 1990s. One item conspicuously missing from this list was *the* definitive history of Colombia, which he was certainly capable of writing. This was apparently a deliberate decision: his temperament seemed better suited to writing to deadlines.

Malcolm's works in Spanish, including a wide-ranging collection of essays, *Del poder y la gramática y otros ensayos sobre historia, política y literatura colombianas* (1992), were not just influential with international students and academics but were also greatly admired in Colombia. In the words of Sergio Jaramillo, who designed the peace process that finally ended Latin America's longest guerrilla war in 2016: "Malcolm spent his life helping us Colombians to understand ourselves."

This was no mean feat for a foreigner, and his achievements were recognised with many academic awards, including honorary doctorates from the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá and the Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla, on Colombia's Caribbean coast – an institution to which he bequeathed much of his massive collection of books and documents.

He also found time to advise both the British and Colombian governments on various occasions. Many politicians, diplomats and journalists in both countries benefited from his wise counsel; one such was President César Gaviria (1990-94), who sought his advice on dealing with a challenging public order situation in Colombia, where high levels of political and social violence were endemic. His contribution, which included recommendations on modernising the national police and keeping the military off the streets, was recognised with the award of Colombia's highest honour, the Cruz de Boyacá.

His long involvement with Colombia was finally crowned with the granting of Colombian citizenship in 2008. The high regard in which he was held in Colombia was reflected in the obituaries and appreciations carried by all the major media outlets as soon as his death (in Oxford) was announced – which was not the case in Britain (with the honourable exception of the *Financial Times*). *El Espectador* hailed him as 'el historiador inglés con corazón colombiano'.





In Britain his expertise came in handy at the time of the Falklands conflict (1982), when he gave evidence to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee on the origins of the sovereignty dispute with Argentina. He was awarded an OBE by the British government, and later expressed ironic satisfaction at the prospect of being a footnote in future histories of Britain under Margaret Thatcher.

Malcolm was for many years an active member of the South Atlantic Council, a London-based pressure group set up in the wake of the Falklands War, and he wrote a magisterial summary of its achievements and pending

issues when it was finally wound up in 2022, only a year before his death at the age of 82.

As befitted a Colombian citizen, Malcolm came to speak fluent Spanish, but always with the same idiosyncratic delivery and educated accent with which he spoke his native language; he apparently never tried to do anything about this. He married a Colombian, too, though that did not last very long, and he divided his time in later years between his house in Oxford and an apartment in Bogotá, where he remained much in demand in academic and government circles.

Latin America in general and Colombia in particular may have been lifelong interests, but Malcolm's attention sometimes wandered much further afield.. On one occasion he found a battered Chinese painted scroll in an old house owned by St Antony's in Oxford, and by happy chance he had recently met a young Colombian who had just qualified as a restorer of ancient artefacts. The scroll, which measures some three metres by one, is destined to hang on the wall of the Senior Common Room at his old college as a permanent memorial to its distinguished fellow.

Colin Harding is a journalist who has been writing about Latin America for more than 50 years.



Fridamania

BAS editor Nathaniel Gardner

Not too long ago a friend of mine came back from Germany and asked me with a hint of exasperation, but also with genuine interest: “What is going on with Frida Kahlo? Why are so many people interested in her?”

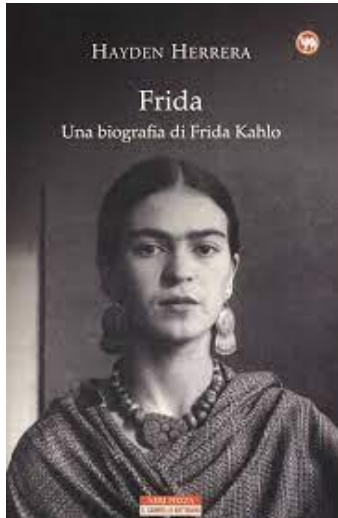
There had been a minor exhibition of Frida’s work in the German city that my friend had visited, and the queue to see it had been over two hours long. My friend had been pressed for time, so hadn’t been able to see what so many others were willing to stand in line for.

I too have been a first-hand witness to the huge growth in interest in absolutely anything Frida-related. Only a little over ten years ago, anyone could walk up to the Frida Kahlo Museum in the leafy and quiet Mexico City suburb of Coyoacán and buy a ticket that cost roughly £1 to see her home and her art. Never once did I wait in line to get in (and if you were a student or a teacher they would even let you in for free). Once inside, the venue was quiet and you could easily have a room to yourself to contemplate for a while.

Today, everything has changed. Gone are the days when you could simply walk up and buy a ticket. Now you have to purchase them online many days (and sometimes weeks) in advance. The average ticket will set you back around £30 (US\$36) if you are visiting from afar (admission is cheaper if you are a Mexican, a teacher, or a student). Cameras require permits. Carefully coordinated queues of people slowly make their way in at their allotted time. There is a constant murmur of visitors around you, carrying you through the museum on the steady rhythm of their tide.



Frida is big business. In Mexico she is omnipresent. You can find her on t-shirts, bags, posters, trinkets and magnets. You name it, and some aspect of her likeness is probably part of it. Frida is becoming integrally associated with Mexico, and even in some ways with Latin America. But why?



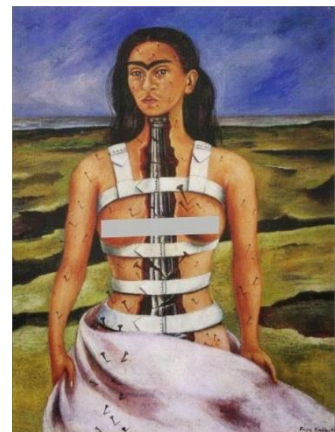
The answer is not straightforward. Some will point to Hayden Herrera's 1983 biography of Frida Kahlo as a watershed moment. This publication (which started out as her PhD thesis in Art History) came at just the right time. Many of Kahlo's family and associates were still alive and could be interviewed as part of the project. This meant that her book has personal insights from those close to the artist that help shape an intimate portrait of her. It is a moving and inspiring story that has surely contributed to the increased excitement around the artist.

This book also appeared at a time when some high-profile buyers in the Global North acquired some of Kahlo's paintings. Some conspiratorially-minded people think that the Frida hype is to help increase the value of those investments. And curiously, the number of 'lost' Frida pieces that have recently been 'found' makes some suspect that art forgers are hard at work trying to cash in on the heightened profile of the artist.

Whatever the case may be, it is obvious that Frida arouses interest. People like her art and her persona. But why Frida? What did she do?

In her day, Frida was firstly known as the wife of Diego Rivera, and secondly as an artist. At that time her muralist husband Diego was possibly her biggest fan, and a huge promoter of her art (though that didn't stop him promoting himself over everything else). Diego Rivera was also a womaniser, and the suffering this caused Kahlo is evident in her work. Yet this may not have been her greatest cause of pain.

Frida lived in a body afflicted by polio and a devastating tram accident in her youth that affected her every day of her life. She suffered great pain in her spine and had multiple miscarriages, as well as dozens of operations. Towards the end of her life, she lost her foot and part of her leg to gangrene. Hence, she was admirable, but not necessarily envied. Yet, who does not identify with some aspect of suffering in their own life?



Perhaps one of the biggest reasons why Frida is so popular is that she is a figure from the past whose life touches aspects of our present and has qualities of modern-day influencers. She was an international traveller. She was friends with the wealthy and the powerful. She spoke more than one language. She loved animals. She had a tormented relationship with someone

who adored her, yet who also treated her terribly. She was afflicted with pain in both body and spirit. Yet she found solace in creativity, and her talent was (and continues to be) recognised by many critics and admirers. Perhaps it's because at least one aspect of her varied and fruitful life is relatable to those who know her work that she is so popular.

Even so, I am increasingly convinced that we are now reaching a point where Frida is



becoming like Che Guevara – a Latin American icon who is universally recognised and ubiquitous, but about whom relatively few people are well informed. Having reached that state of 'Frida saturation', stardom hollow in substance is definitely a possibility.

How to avoid this? We can begin by learning more about her. Herrera's book is a great starting point, with excellent references and solid scholarship. Be wary of texts written about Kahlo by those who have very little knowledge about who she is or what she did (there are more of these than you might imagine). Study her paintings. Do this either online or in person if you have the possibility to travel to Mexico. Kahlo does have a body of work worth contemplating, and the Museum in Coyoacán remains the best place to see it. Just be

sure to book your ticket in advance. Where will Fridamania go? I'm not sure, though it is likely that over time the current level of popularity may diminish at least somewhat. In the meantime, one way of thinking of this phenomenon is that, in some small way, Fridamania is a kind of revindication. There was a time when Kahlo would have been known as the wife of Diego Rivera. Now the tables have turned. For someone who loved himself and his own art over everything else, to know his wife's fame has surpassed his own can be seen as a type of cosmic vengeance.



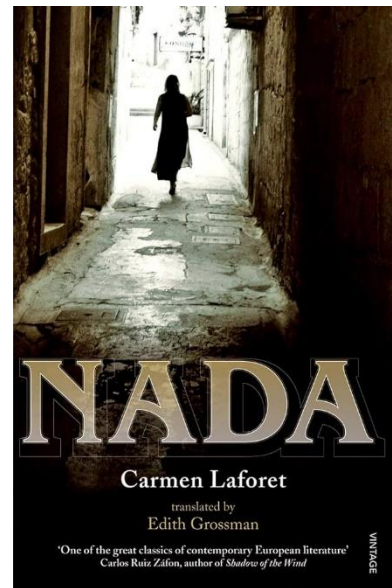


Carmen Laforet: Nada y los fantasmas de posguerra

BAS editor Francisco Compán

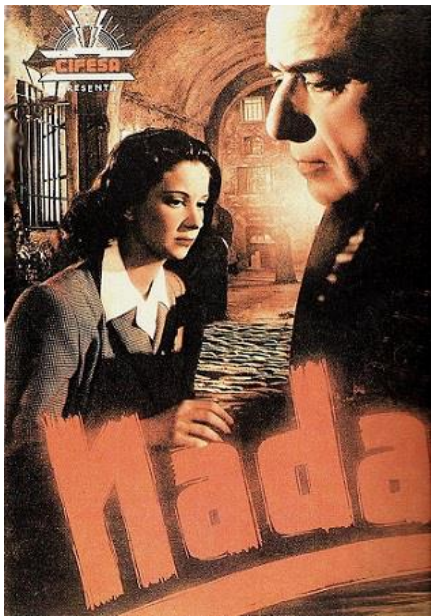
Rosa Montero describió *Nada* de Carmen Laforet como una novela de “tono febril y delirante” creada por una escritora “tocada por la gracia”. Esta innovadora novela sorprendió al público y a la crítica con un contenido que refleja la triste realidad de la posguerra española aunque sin hacer referencias directas. Incluso el mismo estallido de la Segunda Guerra Mundial es mencionado de paso, como si fuera algo ajeno al contexto histórico de la obra. Publicada en pleno franquismo, el permiso de publicación fue autorizado por la Junta de Censura debido a que uno de los miembros del comité censor era eclesiástico y estimó que las alusiones que Laforet hace a la religión católica, principalmente a través del personaje de Angustias cuando se santigua y bendice a la familia, eran positivas.

Nada es una novela autobiográfica completamente carente de sentimentalismo y llena de expresividad en la que Laforet presenta la dramática realidad y las consecuencias de la Guerra Civil en la España de los años cuarenta. La Guerra aparece entre las líneas de la narración que señala recurrentemente la pobreza, la miseria, el miedo, la falta de libertades y los desequilibrios psicológicos que afectan a los personajes empezando por Andrea. El trauma de la protagonista la hace casi incapaz de amar a Pons, mientras que Gloria, por su parte, sufre constantes palizas de su marido. Las amigas de la tía de Andrea, que otrora fueron mujeres felices, son descritas como “pájaros envejecidos”. A su vez, la tía Angustias en la que



“todo parecía horrible y destrozado” representa el poder represivo a través de su fuerte personalidad y del control que impone sobre los otros personajes. Esta atmósfera asfixiante y siniestra, que sugiere un futuro incierto para los protagonistas, nos da un sentimiento de la dimensión de la represión franquista.

La casa de Aribau, a la que Andrea se muda, y que está llena de muebles astillados y chinches, fue en su tiempo un hogar de familia burguesa, feliz y próspero, y es ahora un símbolo de la decadencia a la que ha llegado el país. Al mismo tiempo, la locura fratricida de la Guerra Civil está representada por Juan y Román, los hermanos que se odian y se aman al mismo tiempo echándose en cara traiciones del pasado que parecen irreconciliables.



La búsqueda de la emancipación femenina y la lucha contra el patriarcado está presente en la línea argumental de la novela de principio a fin. La llegada de Andrea a Barcelona por la noche no es casual, y es una prueba de la autonomía femenina que contrasta con la molestia que le supone a Angustias y a los otros miembros de la familia de la calle de Aribau, en un contexto en el que no está bien visto que las mujeres salgan solas por las noches. La opresión ejercida por la propia Angustias quien la ningunea y le restringe sus movimientos, exagera sus “sueños de independencia”, y simboliza el fracaso de Andrea en su búsqueda de una vida nueva, alejada de molestias y órdenes.

La represión contra la mujer es recurrente en Nada e ilustra el retroceso social dado por el franquismo respecto a los derechos de la mujer durante la Segunda República. La primera víctima de la represión social en la novela es la tía Angustias cuando sus padres se oponen a su boda con un joven de baja clases social. Este rechazo tiene un impacto en la psicología de Angustias que se convierte en una persona insegura y confusa, lo que afecta sus relaciones con otros miembros de la familia creando tensiones con Gloria. De manera similar, Margarita, la madre de Ena, está subyugada a la decisión de su padre de prohibir su matrimonio con Román.

El anhelo de Andrea de tener un sentimiento de libertad y vivir su propia vida parece ser la motivación real que la lleva a Barcelona más que estudiar Filosofía y Letras. Sin embargo, sus ilusiones chocaron con la



realidad de una Barcelona destruida por la Guerra física y socialmente. Laforet nos presenta a una Andrea tenaz que no cesa en su empeño al abandonar Barcelona al final de la novela, tras tocar fondo emocionalmente tras la muerte de Román, y encaminarse a Madrid como una mujer libre. Aunque “no tenía las mismas ilusiones” esta vez, sintió una “liberación” al superar sus miedos y barreras personales para empezar una nueva vida escapando de lo que Andrea describe como su “vida corriente”.

Pese a la negatividad y el pesimismo que emana la novela, Andrea se destaca como el personaje que encarna la esperanza en una sociedad decadente y opresiva que no parece dar tregua. La esencia del existencialismo que caracteriza *Nada* se percibe por una parte en esta autenticidad que Laforet transmite a Andrea, y que le hace rebelarse contra la autoridad de su tía y romper con la obediencia y las convenciones. Asimismo, lo único que le permite salvarse de aquel universo tan negativo es refugiarse en los sueños y los recuerdos, escapar de su familia y del determinismo social que la oprimen, y luchar por el individualismo y la libertad personal. Laforet nos revela a través de las experiencias de Andrea su percepción de la necesidad de pasar por dificultades y desafíos como proceso de maduración moral e intelectual, y encaminarse hacia la edad adulta.



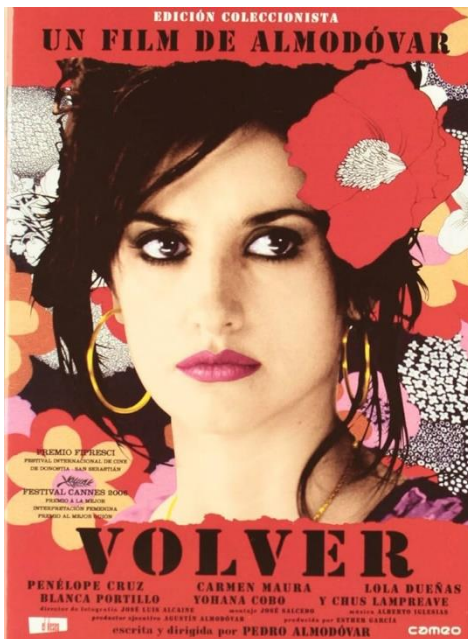


To what extent is Pedro Almodóvar continuing the work of Federico García Lorca?

Millie Jeffries, Year 13 student of Spanish

There are a curious number of similarities between Federico García Lorca (poet and playwright, 1898-1936) and Pedro Almodóvar (scriptwriter and film director, 1949-).

Both are gay artists whose work has explored themes of women, rural life, and society. Both are key figures in Spanish cultural history. Almodóvar has cited Lorca as one of his creative inspirations, but to what extent is Almodóvar continuing a social movement that Lorca began?



Initially, we can compare their creative work. For example, comparisons can be made between Lorca's 1936 play, his last, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*, and Almodóvar's 2006 film *Volver*. The key theme running through both these works is women and their place in society. They tell their stories and present their struggles while showing the complexity of the relationships between them.

Equally, both stories feature men in a very minor role. The specific similarity is that, in both stories, a male character is central to the plot – Paco and Raimunda's father in *Volver*, Pepe in *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* – yet does not appear in person. In *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*, there are no men on the

stage at any time, while in *Volver* the male characters are secondary and mainly a source of difficulties.

Perhaps a notable difference is that Lorca does feature some less favourable female characters, such as Bernarda herself, which could be said to show that Lorca was not idolising women but simply trying to give them greater and more diverse representation in Spanish theatre. Furthermore, many of the women Almodóvar brings to life pull together in ways that make them stronger, a concept seemingly lacking in the way Lorca arranges his female narrative.



The rural setting is a vital part of both works. *Volver* returns to Almodóvar's place of birth in La Mancha and explores the differences between rural life and city life in terms of beliefs and culture. In this way, he is very much commenting on Spanish society. Lorca, on the other hand, made a more direct attack on society. A pertinent example of this would be in his play *Yerma*, whose title character is a woman trapped by societal expectations to be an obedient, child-bearing wife when she is unable to conceive. This pressure leads her to madness and eventually the murder of her husband – an act arguably symbolic of the patriarchal attitudes that Lorca felt women were fighting against. Lorca's exploration of how women were valued in contemporary Spain attacked the fixed attitudes of 1930s rural society. While there is no alternative lifestyle portrayed, there is an implied hope for improved rights and a future for women.

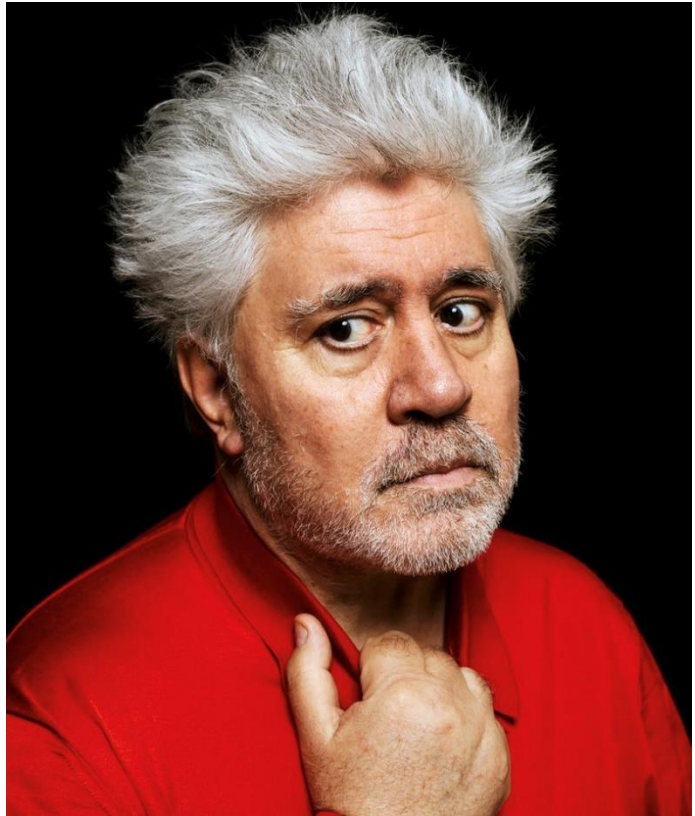


Despite the similarities in the subject matters they have explored, they both had different reasons for doing so. Almodóvar's interest in the female narrative came from his background and upbringing in which his father was largely absent and he felt more attachment and acceptance from his mother and his sisters. On the other hand, Lorca had more issues with society's treatment of women, which made his approach less personal and more implicitly political.

Much of Lorca's work was revolutionary in its thematic breadth, and it's clear that he was brave enough to go against the current in a bid to change society. His influence and ability to affect how people thought are evident in the tragic way he was eliminated by extreme right-wing sympathisers.

More than 40 years later, Almodóvar was a leading figure in the Movida madrileña following the end of the dictatorship in Spain. The Movida was a tongue-in-cheek cultural resurgence which helped Spanish society 'catch up' after years of creative repression. The art being created was deliberately irreverent and subversive. The bold strokes of Almodóvar's films and music inspired this cultural revolution and helped to make Spain the thriving culture that it is today. In many ways, Almodóvar rekindled the ideas that infused Lorca's work before his tragic death.

Although there is much mystery surrounding the exact circumstances of Lorca's execution, it is widely agreed that he was persecuted for his sexuality as well as his pioneering socio-political beliefs. Almodóvar, by contrast, can acknowledge his sexuality and be seen as a figurehead for LGBTQIA+ pride. He brings gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Hispanic characters to the screen without fanfare, focusing on their humanity rather than their 'difference'.



Overall, the divergence in how the two men's lives played out shows how Spanish society has changed. It is now a progressive society in which institutionalised homophobia and stifling of creativity is outdated and unacceptable. If Lorca had lived to see modern Spain, I think he would be proud of how far society has come and the way in which his work continues to influence the fight for female representation and the freedom to be who you are.

Bulletin Roadshow

The Bulletin of Advanced Spanish presents

Spanish: Connections – a roadshow by our Senior Editor Robin Wallis.

Today's Spain and Spanish America have been shaped by the clash of outlooks and ideas: Catholics versus Moors, Conquistadors versus Indigenous, Conservatives versus Reformers.

Understanding these forces is essential for understanding the Spanish-speaking world, but syllabus and timetable constraints mean that they are often overlooked.

Spanish: Connections redresses the balance by highlighting key points in the history, literature, politics and culture of the *mundo hispano*. Robin's experience as a traveller, teacher, examiner, writer, diplomat and tour lecturer enable him to paint a revealing portrait of this world, tailoring his presentation to the particular study focus of each audience.

For bookings or further information please contact bulletinofadvancedspanish@gmail.com or use the Contact Us tab from the Bulletin menu bar.

Spanish: Connections – feedback:

'All the Sixth Formers that I spoke to after the talk were really enthused – including the ones I hadn't expected to be!'

'Truly enjoyable. I never thought I could learn so much about history and culture in an hour! I'm now contemplating studying Spanish at university as I have realised that I can do so much more with it in a future career.'

'Our hispanists really enjoyed the way you linked Spanish and Latin American History together, showing how one influenced another.'

'It is wonderful to encounter anybody as passionate and experienced as this.'