Bulletin of Advanced Spanish

Home

Spain – land of oppression and political prisoners.

For many of us it came as a shock that a section of the Catalan population feels that way, and was prepared to take its case on to the streets during October's constitutional crisis.

Most of us are unlikely to have witnessed obvious oppression during our visits to Barcelona, the coast or the hinterland of Catalonia. What have we been overlooking?

This second edition of the Bulletin includes a Catalonia section whose expert contributors reflect on that conundrum and other aspects of the crisis.

In other pages we brace ourselves for Oxbridge interview season and sample the new Pre-U Texts syllabus, with a special focus on Hernández's poetry. With Christmas coming, this edition's Perspectiva hispanófila offers expert guidance on the respective merits of Spain's wine-growing regions.

Finally, thank you for the positive responses to our first edition, which was read on three continents. That edition is now accessible through the archive link below. We envisage our next edition appearing in early February. Comments, letters or submissions are welcome via our email address bulletinofadvancedspanish@gmail.com

Until then, feliz Navidad a todos.

Catalan Crisis

The Bulletin commissioned three guest articles for this Catalonia-themed edition, on the basis of the writers' expertise and engagement with the independence debate.

We commend each article to you – penetrating insights, delivered with a strong personal commitment.

Cataluña: ¿todo cambia para que todo siga igual? – Cambridge's expert in Catalan studies Professor Dominic Keown reports from La Rambla.

"I am Catalan" – Victòria Gual Godó on living the Catalan question at a personal level.

A call for international understanding and solidarity – activists Júlia Muntanyà López and Marta Musić explain why pro-independence Catalans feel oppressed and how they see questions of legality and dialogue raised by the October crisis.

The Spanish Spectre – our fourth article, by BAS editor Robin Wallis, reviews the key political factors in the October crisis and the tradition of political intolerance in Spain.

Reader responses to these articles will appear in the next edition of the Bulletin.

Cataluña: ¿todo cambia para que todo siga igual?

Dominic Keown at the Font de Canaletes

At the top of the *Rambla*, the emblematic boulevard of Barcelona, about twenty yards down from the *Plaça de Catalunya*, stands the *Font de Canaletes*. The famous fountain holds a special significance for all visitors to the Catalan capital. Legend has it that, if you drink from its waters, you will return to this magnificent city.

It was precisely here in 1974, with the country in lock-down awaiting the death of General Franco, that I had my introduction to life under a military dictatorship. I could not have chosen a worse moment. As the autocrat drew closer to death, rather than mellowing with age, his regime hardened with his "bunker" rekindling the authoritarian values of old in the face of change.

At this very spot, in wonder and disbelief, I watched police vans and jeeps speeding up the centre of the pedestrian precinct to put down a demonstration which only existed in the imagination of some paranoid official. Wonder, because as I looked towards the port I saw the parting of a sea of people scrambling out of the way of this convoy, a magical vision like Moses dividing the waves in DeMille's Hollywood classic. Disbelief, since it was only as the motorcade charged towards me that I realised the desperate threat it supposed to life and limb and took evasive action.

It was not until August of this year that I witnessed anything similar, when 22-year-old Younes Abouyaaqoub drove his hired van into an unsuspecting crowd at the self-same place, killing 14 and seriously injuring hundreds more.

Shortly after the atrocity, a multitudinous homage was led by the city's leaders, including dignitaries from elsewhere: King Felipe, the prime minister Mariano Rajoy and, representing the Opposition, Pedro Sanchez (PSOE) and Albert Rivera (*Ciudadanos*). After the ceremony, those assembled heaped praise on the professionalism of the Catalan police who had rapidly tracked down and neutralised the perpetrators, in two perilous gun battles, saving countless more lives. Finally, in a gesture of defiance and civic pride, the assembled multitude broke out in the chants "Som gent de pau" (We're people of peace) and "No tinc por" (I am not afraid). In the face of aggression, life would go on in Barcelona: the people would not be coerced by terror.

Sadly, any apparent solidarity from the rest of Spain was short-lived. Snap elections, called as a plebiscite in 2015 on the single issue of holding a binding vote on independence, had returned an absolute majority of independentist deputies who duly called the referendum for 1 October this year. As such, the poll was manifestly democratic in origin and organisation. The Spanish government, however, moved to declare the consultation illegal, a decision which was confirmed by the Constitutional Tribunal. This outcome was hardly surprising since ten of the twelve judges of Spain's highest court are appointed by politicians in Madrid; and their rulings seldom disappoint their sponsors.

Central government had elegantly ignored a previous consultation on the issue in 2014 and simply declared the result unconstitutional. But this time — with a logic reminiscent of a previous era — the executive resolved to suppress the process at all costs. The *Mossos d'Esquadra* attempted to prevent the poll by restricting voting to those institutions where action to the contrary might provoke violence and injury. The state-police and the Civil Guard, however, would show no such restraint or respect for good policing. Polling stations were ransacked, those queuing to vote manhandled, election officials assaulted, with the result that, after indiscriminate baton charges and the firing of rubber bullets, 893 civilians required hospital treatment. Hands aloft to show they were unarmed, voters repeated the same chants in the face of their Spanish aggressors.

The world bore witness to this brutality which brought denunciations from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the UN Commission for Human Rights. Central government, supported in all areas by the state-wide Opposition, claimed the violence to be "proportionate" and "legitimate". Caucuses in Spain labelled those casting a ballot as "Nazis", "fascists" and

“demophobes”. For the less confused, these epithets are more commonly applied to those who use intimidation to prevent the exercise of democracy.

In the wake of the referendum, the legal recriminations have begun. The director of the *Mossos d’Esquadra* stands indicted for sedition: his force’s policing, which had previously faced down terrorists, was “insufficiently robust”. President Puigdemont is exiled in Belgium with half of his cabinet.The other half are on remand, accused of sedition or worse. Since this offence requires the presence of violence — an option insistently rejected by the Catalans —, the charge appears bogus and the detainees are now considered political prisoners, guilty of fulfilling a manifesto promise. Fresh autonomous elections are called for December as direct rule is imposed by a party which, in 2015, returned a mere 11 seats out of 135 in Catalonia. And with half of the local political leadership in jail or on the run, this “restoration” of law and order is more reminiscent of the “organic democracy” of the Franco dictatorship.

The whole shameful episode is crowned by the indifference shown by the European Union. Brussels, that greatest of moralists, has buried its head in the sand, refusing to apply political pressure or the life-line of mediation. The posture worryingly recalls the 1930s when, with appeasement and non-intervention, Western Europe turned a blind eye to a conflict in the Peninsula to disastrous effect. *Todo cambia para que todo siga igual* intones the Spanish version of a well-known French saying. Once again, as I look down the *Rambla* — which has witnessed repression and violence so many times before — I am left fearing the worst.

Dominic Keown is Professor of Catalan Studies at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge.

“I am Catalan”: el impacto del conflicto Cataluña-España en mi vida

Se ha escrito mucho sobre los orígenes históricos, políticos y culturales de la crisis catalana actual. No tengo mucho que añadir a ello, por lo tanto he decidido simplemente explicar cómo he vivido yo la identidad catalana y la relación conflictiva entre Cataluña y España en mi vida personal.

Nací en Igualada, provincia de Barcelona, en 1965. Mi padre era contable; mi madre profesora de inglés. Los dos eran catalanohablantes. Siempre he hablado catalán con toda mi familia y con la inmensa mayoría de mis amigos. Sin embargo, no recuerdo ninguna época de mi vida en que no hablara y comprendiera el castellano también.

Empecé la enseñanza primaria en 1969 en Escola Mowgli, un colegio privado donde todos los maestros daban las clases en catalán, excepto la profesora de Lengua Castellana y el profesor de Matemáticas. Allí aprendí a leer y a escribir en catalán. Estábamos todavía bajo el régimen franquista y, según parece, el colegio tenía un ingenioso sistema para despistar a los inspectores del gobierno, ya que oficialmente estaba prohibido tanto enseñar catalán como enseñar *en* catalán.
Mis primeros recuerdos de Franco son de los partes médicos diarios en los meses precedentes a su muerte. Era evidente que la salud de ese señor era de una importancia crucial para los adultos que me rodeaban. El dictador murió en 1975 y en 1977 se celebraron las primeras elecciones democráticas desde 1936. Recuerdo perfectamente el intenso ambiente político de esa época.

El 23 de octubre de 1977, el presidente de la Generalitat (el gobierno catalán), Josep Tarradellas, volvió a Cataluña después de un exilio de casi cuarenta años. Ese día escribí en mi diario: “Día histórico. He visto por televisión el reportaje en directo sobre el regreso de Josep Tarradellas. Ha sido muy bonito, emocionante y gozoso.” Yo tenía doce años.

En 1978 se celebró el referéndum para refrendar la Constitución española. En contraste con los otros dos acontecimientos mencionados, no recuerdo absolutamente nada de éste y no tengo ni idea de qué votaron mis padres. Por supuesto, yo no voté. Por eso me irrito cada vez que oigo, actualmente, que “los catalanes votaron a favor de la Constitución”. Sí, pero sólo los muertos y los mayores de 57 años.

Poco después fui a otro colegio privado para cursar estudios secundarios y nuevamente recibí la enseñanza íntegramente en catalán con la excepción de las clases de Lengua y Literatura Castellanas. Ésta última era una de mis asignaturas favoritas. Recuerdo la emoción con que fui a buscar mi copia de *El Cantar de Mío Cid* y el fervor y la avidez con que leí este clásico y otros como *El libro de Buen Amor* o las poesías completas de Garcilaso de la Vega. El colegio no me inculcó ninguna antipatía ni odio hacia la lengua o la cultura españolas.

A pesar de mi amor por la literatura castellana, me incliné por estudiar Filología Anglogermánica en la Universidad de Barcelona. Mis años de adolescente y de universitaria coincidieron con los 80. Fue la primera década de Jordi Pujol, que presidiría la Generalitat durante 23 años. El autogobierno catalán y la democracia en España no me parecían una realidad nueva sino algo estable y consolidado. No me gustaba mucho oír a la gente mayor hablar de la guerra civil o del franquismo: para mí eran períodos lejanos y tristes que sólo podía imaginar en blanco y negro. Yo era hija de la democracia, la libertad y la tolerancia; no quería pensar en épocas trágicas que consideraba definitivamente enterradas. Qué inocente era!

Desde siempre tuve muy claro que ser catalán y ser español no eran lo mismo y durante toda mi vida me he considerado catalana antes que nada. Cuando en 1992 me casé con un inglés y me fui a vivir a Inglaterra, me encontré que muchas personas me preguntaban de dónde era. Durante años, respondí normalmente "España", porque era mucho más fácil (y educado) ofrecer a la gente un cajón conocido donde meterme, que endosarles una lección de historia o un discurso político. Sólo mis amigos íntimos y mis parientes políticos sabían que yo era catalana y lo que eso significaba para mí.

Cuando nació mi hija en 1997 le hablé en catalán desde el principio y todavía lo hago ahora. Ella aprendió también castellano fácilmente en el colegio y en la universidad y ahora habla las dos lenguas.

En el año 2010 tuvo lugar en Barcelona una enorme manifestación contra la decisión del Tribunal Constitucional que anulaba o recortaba una gran parte del nuevo Estatut de Cataluña de 2006, que ya había sido aprobado por los parlamentos catalán y español y ratificado en un referéndum. Quedó claro entonces que el Tribunal Constitucional estaba controlado por el conservador Partido Popular (PP), que lo utilizó para impedir la ampliación de la autonomía catalana.

Desde aquel momento he seguido con pasión los múltiples estadios del llamado "Procés". Vi crecer exponencialmente al independentismo desde la subida al poder del PP, con Mariano Rajoy al frente, en 2011. Llegué a la conclusión de que hacía falta un referéndum sobre la independencia acordado con el estado español. Yo votaría sí a la independencia en este hipotético (y repetidamente negado) referéndum, pero aceptaría deportivamente un resultado contrario. Entiendo muchas de las razones de los unionistas; lo que no entiendo es el españolismo violento de extrema derecha ni la negación del principio de autodeterminación a un pueblo que lo reclama a voces.

Participé en el referéndum informal del noviembre de 2014, haciendo cola durante tres horas en Londres con otros ilusionados catalanes. Voté también por correo en el referéndum del 1 de octubre y vi con horror como en Cataluña padres y madres de familia, ancianos y estudiantes eran aporreados vergonzosamente por la policía y la guardia civil españolas. Se despertó, por lo visto, el fantasma del franquismo.

Ahora el gobierno y la justicia españolas (que parecen ser lo mismo), al encarcelar a dos líderes sociales pacíficos y a varios miembros del gobierno catalán elegidos democráticamente, está criminalizando a una gran parte de la ciudadanía catalana. Y al tomar el control directo del gobierno catalán, está perjudicando a todos los catalanes, incluídos los unionistas, la mayoría de los cuales no vota al Partido Popular. El gobierno español me insulta y no me escucha. El gobierno español me considera una ilusa y una golpista. El gobierno español me ha metido en la cárcel.

Victòria Gual Godó, profesora de lengua española en Winchester College y traductora del inglés al catalán.

Catalonia: a call for international understanding and solidarity

On 27 October the Catalan government declared independence unilaterally. A few days later, Catalan vice-president Oriol Junqueras along with seven cabinet ministers were charged with sedition and sent to prison without bail.
The decision, taken by a Spanish judge, was based on an outdated penal code from Spain's Francoist regime. The same occurred to Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sanchez, the presidents of the civil society organisations Omnium Cultural and the Catalan National Assembly – detained since 17 October. Extradition warrants were also issued for Catalan President Carles Puigdemont and several of his ministers – by then in Brussels – who surrendered to the Belgian police and were subsequently released. Wednesday 8 November marked Catalonia's second general strike this autumn, during which tens of thousands of people took to the streets once again to demand freedom for their political prisoners and to denounce Spain's abuses of power.

Abroad, the situation in Catalonia is often presented by the mainstream media in an ahistorical, de-contextualised way. However, we cannot sufficiently stress that the Catalan question did not appear 'out of nowhere' on 1 October (referendum day); to understand why independence was declared unilaterally, we need to examine current events in their *historical context*.

The Catalan experience of oppression

The history of repression in Catalonia is long, but the history of its people is even longer; it starts centuries before the formation of the Spanish state, with a Catalan Constitution dating back to 1283 (the Spanish one can be traced back to 1812). After the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1714), Catalan institutions were destroyed and an oppressive military rule was established by the Bourbons. Throughout the centuries that followed, these institutions, rights, language and other cultural traditions were abolished and restored numerous times. The repression against Catalans was especially brutal during Franco's fascist regime (1936-1975) and included executions, purges, physical violence, economic repression, social control and cultural domination. As a result, this history of repression became an integral part of the memory of Catalan people and their sense of collective identity.

The repression, however, did not end with Franco. Many Catalans still consider that they are incapable of having a say in the decisions that affect them or make their voices heard under the current status quo. This is largely due to the

constant belittling of their power by the Spanish government, like in 2010, when the Partido Popular (PP) in Spain filed an objection to the Spanish Constitutional Court, leading to serious cuts and amendments of the new Statute of Autonomy – initially agreed upon between Spain and Catalonia and approved by referendum in 2006. Since then, many progressive laws conflicting with the right-wing agenda of the PP were turned down by the Spanish government after being approved by the Catalan Parliament: laws against fuel poverty, fracking and evictions as well as reforms promoting gender equality, social security, taxation on nuclear energy and banks, etc. In total, 25 laws approved by the Catalan Parliament could not come into force because they were repealed by the Constitutional Court at the request of Mariano Rajoy's government.

Dialogue and legality

Calls for dialogue and political negotiations to deal with the Catalan question were issued *eighteen* times by Catalan leaders since 2006. Madrid dismissed them every time. Faced with the impossibility of Spain ever agreeing to a referendum, the Catalan Parliament finally voted in favor of organising one unilaterally. During his speech on 10 October, instead of declaring independence, Puigdemont attempted to reach out to Spain once more by temporarily suspending the declaration of independence with the hopes of starting a dialogue with Madrid. President Mariano Rajoy responded with the threat of direct rule, which he implemented later on through Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution. Yet Catalonia's wish to dialogue with Spain could not be clearer; it is outlined in its new declaration of independence, stating: "[w]e affirm our will to open negotiations with the Spanish state". The declaration of independence also came with a call for tolerance, peace, inclusiveness and collaboration, as well as an explicit willingness to incorporate the voices of those who disagree with independence into shaping the formation of the new Republic.

Where Catalonia has asked for dialogue and understanding, Spain has responded with violence and repression. So far, the number of Catalan political prisoners

amounts to ten. This does not come as a surprise in a country that ranks 58th in the World Economic Forum's ranking of judicial independence, directly below Kenya, Lithuania and Botswana. However, Spain fails to understand that the independence project is not dictated by high-ranking politicians; it is a process led by the *people*. It is precisely the grassroots nature of the pro-independence movement that allowed for the successful organisation of the referendum. It is the people who mobilized *en masse* to prevent the arrest of 14 politicians charged with sedition on 20 September. It is the people who took part in the general strike against police violence after the referendum. It is the people who are now organised peacefully to resist direct rule and defend their institutions. These same people went on general strike on 8 November to demand freedom for their political prisoners. Rajoy's government can imprison as many politicians as he wants, but there are not enough prisons in Spain to imprison all Catalans fighting for independence.

The referendum is presented over and over again as "illegal" – an argument that Spain uses to justify the implementation of direct rule and the detention of political prisoners. However, legality comes to mean very little in a country with a corrupt judicial system, whose government represses the people living in its territory and violates the fundamental right to self-determination of the Human Rights Charter (as recently highlighted by UN Human Rights Council Independent Expert Alfred de Zayas). Indeed, the Spanish Government itself has been acting outside its own Constitution. According to Articles 10.2 and 96, Spain must abide by international law, which includes the right to self-determination. Furthermore, the implementation of direct rule on 27 October, justified through the application of Article 155 of the Constitution, is not within the remit of the Constitution either: Article 155 only enables the central government to issue *instructions* to autonomic governments or authorities, not to take over the autonomic government and its functions, as is currently the case. Taking control of the Catalan government is not only illegal, it is also undemocratic. To implement direct rule and govern a territory where the PP only won 8% of the votes in the past elections would hardly constitute a measure to "restore democracy" and "give Catalonia back to Catalans" as Rajoy previously claimed.

The legitimacy of the ballot box

Many Catalans would have liked nothing more than to be able to vote in a referendum that was not blocked by Spain through the confiscation of letters on voting procedures, shutting down of websites, censorship of media and police brutality, amongst other things. Yet, despite these measures, the people managed successfully to organise and carry out the referedum of 1 October. Despite the Spanish coercion, it is estimated that around 56.8% of the electorate voted on 1 October, but that only 43% of ballots could be counted as the rest were seized by the police. Amongst the votes that could be counted, 90.2% of the voters supported independence. For 'no'

to have won this referendum, over 77.6% of the population would have needed to vote, with all the additional and stolen votes being cast against independence. Considering that the highest turnout in the history of Catalan elections is 77%, it is extremely unlikely that the majority of the population was against independence.
New regional electitons are scheduled for 21 December, which will supposedely determine the road Catalonia will take. Some pro-independence parties have stated that, should a majority of voters support pro-unity parties, they would respect the people's will and drop their demands for independence. However, considering the imprisonment of pro-independence leaders and the great lengths to which Spain has gone to maintain control over Catalonia, the fairness of these elections is not a given.

The future of Catalonia

In legal terms, we are witnessing an instance of 'dual conflicting legality', in which the "Transition Law" (passed by the Catalan Parliament) co-exists with Spain's direct rule (based on an interpretation of Article 155). Both claim to govern Catalonia today. However, ultimately, it is up to the Catalans to decide on their future, and their decision should be understood and respected by foreign countries. This is why so many calls for international solidarity have been issued. After the police violence of 1 October, many people claimed there was no way back. As one pro-independence Catalan said: "[w]e are accused of disobedience, and the Spanish government uses our disobedience to justify the implementation of direct rule. Please know that we have no other options but to disobey". Indeed, had Catalans held off from declaring independence and called for regional elections, the Spanish government would still have implemented direct rule under Article 155. Furthermore, PP leaders recently indicated that, even if pro-independence parties were to win the 21 December elections, direct rule would be maintained so long as their electoral programme advocated Catalonia's independence.

In other words, Catalans were put in the situation of choosing between declaring independence unilaterally or losing all of their autonomy. That choice cannot be condemned, especially when faced with a state that represses people, abuses the justice system and manipulates the media. The Catalan question is not an internal problem; it is an *international* one, which requires the combined mobilisation of people worldwide. So far, solidarity protests have been staged all over the world and (inter)national committees are being set up to put pressure on governments to condemn Spanish repression and

recognise the Republic of Catalonia. In the same vein, this article has sought to provide an analysis of the current situation in Catalonia to an international audience, with the aim of explaining the case for international understanding and solidarity.

Readers who wish to show their support can share this article, write to their representatives, visit supportcatalonia.eu or contact their local branch of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) for information on future events, publications or ways to be involved.

By Júlia Muntanyà López and Marta Musić

Júlia Muntanyà López is a Catalan political activist and epidemiologist who divides her time between Mozambique and Barcelona working on a malaria eradication campaign. She is also involved in advocacy work to increase access to medicines worldwide.

Marta Musić is a Serbian and French political activist, freelance journalist and photographer. She is currently doing research for a PhD project on the Latin American Left, social movements and alternatives to neoliberalism.

The Spanish spectre: Catalan separatism and la intolerancia

Spaniards weren't talking to each other in October 2017 – at least, not the ones who needed to. They were instead broadcasting past each other as though inhabiting two different *telenovelas*.

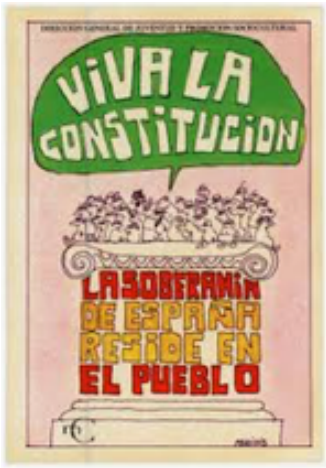
Prime Minister Rajoy took to the television screens on the evening of 1 October to announce that no referendum had taken place that day. Legality and constitutional order must be upheld, and the voting in Catalonia did not qualify on either count. Catalan President Puigdemont went before the cameras to proclaim a victory for democracy and a mandate for independence.

Both sides were in denial. Rajoy failed to acknowledge the aspirations of a large sector of the Catalan population, just as his party has used the courts to chip away at Catalan autonomy for the past decade. Puigdemont neglected that his movement, growing though it may be, had not yet demonstrated enough support across Catalan society to justify a contested, overnight secession. Sensible countries require supermajorities, eg two-thirds of the legislature, for far-reaching constitutional reform. Here in the UK we are all too aware how problematic it is to push through major change on the basis of an unconvincing majority.

More practically, the *soberanistas* lacked the institutional framework for a sovereign state. Once the Catalan parliament had declared independence, they ran out of script, despite the masses howling approval in the street. The *consellers* either handed themselves over to the Spanish courts or absconded, lending an unexpected note of bathos to the end of a dramatic month.

For *independentista* Catalans, it would be comforting to assume that there is a master plan. Perhaps the Generalitat always knew that its referendum and declaration of independence would not really bring about a new republic, but went through with them to highlight the case for self-determination and to polarise Catalan opinion, generating a pro-independence surge in new elections. This in turn would morally oblige Madrid to discuss constitutional reform, opening a legal and legitimate path to 'Catalexit'.

Time will tell.



The argument against independence rests on the principle that Spanish unity is a core element of the 1978 Constitution – the pact which enabled all factions in Spain to sign up to the new democracy. The Constitution represents a delicate balance between the demands for regional identity – quashed by the Franco regime – and the unitary state. The regions became *autonomías*, but they could only change their constitutional status with the consent of the Spanish parliament.

To its proponents, this pact has delivered peace, democracy and prosperity. By contrast, on the streets of Barcelona in October 2017, many Catalans embraced independence as a way of asserting their personal and collective identity. Younger protestors in particular seemed eager to cock a snook at a Spanish central government associated with heavy-handed conservatism and corruption.

Why is Catalonia so essential to Spain when, for example, the British were nonchalantly prepared to contemplate Scotland breaking away? This may be partly historical: the centuries of warfare needed to unite Spain are still commemorated at village *fiesta* level (*moros y cristianos*), giving the concept of national unity particular resonance. Spain was born of the alliance of Castilla and Aragón: Catalonia's departure would break that alliance. There is also the fear that, if one Spanish region breaks away, others may follow, undermining a more fragile economic and political system than that of the UK.

Beyond those practical considerations, many Spaniards resent the Catalan push for independence. The *soberanistas* are suspected of a self-serving agenda: an urge to self-aggrandisement, or to prevent Catalonia's relative wealth from being shared with the rest of Spain. Some accuse Catalan schools of cultural intolerance and indoctrinating pupils – a *leyenda negra* for these times.

October ended without violence. The *soberanista* leadership emphasised the need for protest to remain peaceful and, in practice if not in principle, accepted Madrid's authority to impose direct rule. The Spanish security forces had learned from their 1 October public relations debacle and exercised restraint. The political leadership on both sides was careful to act in a gradual and predictable manner. Everyone remembers where civil violence got Spain in the past, and no one wants to go back there.

Nonetheless, the crisis brought a reminder of the tradition of intolerance in Spanish politics and society. Under Hapsburg rule (and beyond) this was embodied in the Inquisition, which policed what some consider Europe's first totalitarian state. The 19th century was bedevilled by *crispación* between reformers and

conservatives that generated both civil war and coups, prefiguring the breakdown in Spanish society of the 1930s. Even now, the acrimony in televised leaders' debates at election time or exchanges in parliament is sharper than the UK equivalent.

Earlier this year I found an antidote to such tensions in the admirably even-handed displays in the Museum of Catalan History in Barcelona. I was struck by the recurrent historical accidents – dynastic convulsions, foreign influence, political intrigue, etc – that had, often at the last moment, frustrated the formation of an independent Catalan state or kingdom, just when conditions had seemed to favour it.

The question this autumn has been whether 2017 constituted another such opportune moment to form an independent Catalonia. Or should the 21st century be, as Joaquín Sabina recently declared, "*el siglo de borrar fronteras en lugar de hacer fronteras nuevas*"?

One thing is certain: the aspirations of pro-independence Catalans cannot be met while their region remains a part of Spain. The 21 December elections will determine what proportion of the electorate shares those aspirations.

By BAS editor Robin Wallis

Letters

Philip of England

"He referred to historical connections between the British and Spanish royal families, most notably his predecessor Felipe II becoming King of England in 1554 through marriage to Mary Tudor (prompting a requirement that all documents in the English court be available in Spanish – ed.)." (From Bulletin of Advanced Spanish edition 1)

I have this 1554 shilling (or rather, a very similar version). When I first saw it I nearly fainted.

It is the most astonishing documentary evidence of a Spanish prince (who was soon to be king of half the world) becoming king of England.
When he was anointed he was also king of Naples (a title registered in the shilling) AND OF CHILE (a title omitted in the coin…).

From Dr. Carlos Escudé (Ph.D. Yale 1981) Director del Programa de Realismo Periférico, CEA, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Director del CERES, Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano 'Marshall T. Meyer' Investigador Principal (J) del CONICET

The King and Catalonia

Your coverage of the King's visit to London (vol 1, Perspectiva hispanófila) focused on his assured performance at the grand state occasions, where he appears to be at ease.

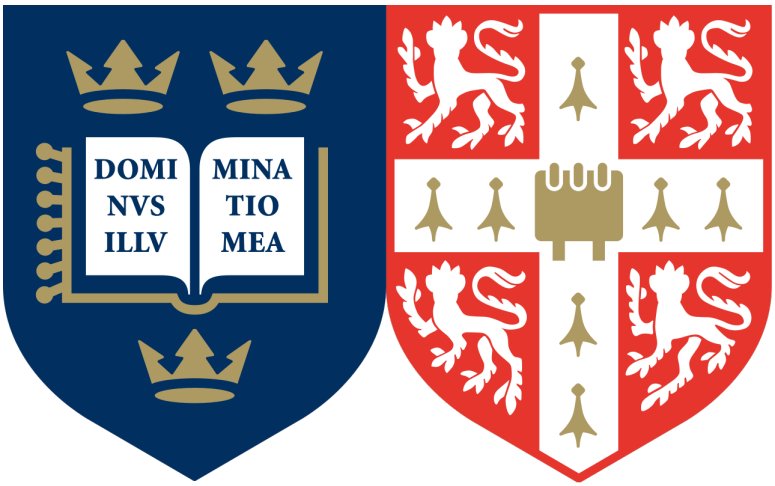
It would be good to think that King Felipe is a modern, cosmopolitan Spaniard aware of and untainted by the errors of his predecessor (and other relatives).

Is that still a realistic hope after his televised address in the aftermath of the Catalan 'non-referendum'? Should the King not speak for all the people? Yet I heard no empathy for the legitimate, long-established cause of the Catalan nationalists. Instead, it was the party line sprinkled with a surfeit of intemperate adjectives and adverbs that made his speech seem more of a rant. The least one would expect from the Zarzuela is some decent editing…

Do you think he regrets not keeping silent?

C James, London

Oxbridge Uncovered



The Oxbridge interview experience for Hispanists has shifted over the years. Some changes take effect at institutional level, such as more formal procedures for preparing the critical commentary, or the introduction of written tests. Others seem more a matter of vogue, such as asking candidates what literature they have been reading in English (not just in Spanish). The accompanying articles reveal other new, unexpected areas coming into the remit of Oxbridge interviewers.

Our thanks to Holly and Rachel for taking time out to offer these insights from their 2014 and 2016 Cambridge experiences. (We tried to tap our Oxford contacts but they were having to work too hard…)

If you are reading this ahead of your own Oxford or Cambridge interview, please do write in after the event to let us know what went on and your reflections on the experience. Oh, and best of luck.

Time to love your language – Holly Twist
The interview: prepare for nerves – Rachel Naylor

Time to love your language

Holly Twist (Cambridge applicant 2014)

The horror stories associated with Oxbridge convinced me that, when I attended interview for Spanish and Arabic at Cambridge, I would be thrown a piece of fruit or asked to describe a saucer. No matter what I put on my personal statement, nothing would prepare me for the inevitable curveball that lay in store.

When I emerged from the interviews, I was relieved to have been spared such excesses. Instead, my depth of interest and awareness of language itself had been probed and scrutinised from many (and at times unusual) angles. Like most interviewees, I second-guessed every answer I had given and battled inevitable feelings of inadequacy, but my more specific regret was not having spent more time sharpening my subject-specific knowledge, and having instead focused on fearing what I would not know.

I'd spent the summer, like many I am sure, putting off my personal statement, daunted by the task of summarising my burning passion for Spanish in 500 words. With hindsight, instead of being intimidated by the enormity of the task, I should have focused on why I was embarking on it in the first place.

I spent the months leading up to my interview exploring a range of Spanish and Latin American literature and cinema, visiting exhibitions and reflecting on my time abroad. I included thoughts on these in my statement. Yet perhaps that statement lacked a depth of insight into the broader cultural significance of what it was that interested me. I should have used the time to delve into what enthralled me about languages, linking this to broader themes.

The links between language and culture are explored at Oxbridge level. It is unlikely that you will be asked an entirely linear question: it is no good writing on your personal statement that you have been fascinated by the poetry of Lorca, for example, if you are unprepared to offer any valuable insight or opinion on the historical context or the significance of the ballad form in his poems

The statement is likely to be used simply as a springboard for conversation. Interviewers want to see how you think about language itself, respond to questions about issues you may not previously have considered, assess whether you will be suited to the intense Oxbridge environment and probe how truly engaged you are. Ultimately, no matter how much interview practice you do, no one can teach you to be excited by your subject, so use the time prior to interview to explore what it is about studying Spanish that so engages you.

Researching your prospective course online will boost your chance of talking confidently at interview. Had I checked out the reading list for the first year, I might have found an area that really fascinated me that I could have drawn upon in my interview. Interviewers are likely to be those who will be teaching you once you arrive, so showing interest in aspects of a course they helped to design will demonstrate that you have a genuine interest in the course itself, and not just going to Oxbridge.

Balancing work on Pre-U/A-Levels and preparing for Oxbridge is tough. However, spending time gaining a deeper understanding of your subject should be rewarding and confirm to you your choice of degree course. Curiosity about and love for languages is not something that can be taught or gleaned from a textbook. However, fully understanding your love for Spanish will give you the best chance to tackle whatever comes up on the day.

The interview: prepare for nerves

Rachel Naylor (Cambridge applicant 2016)

'Nervous' doesn't come close to explaining how I felt before my Cambridge interview.

The best way to control the nerves is to be as prepared as possible. For me, this meant reading. Annoyingly, you can never do too much. For each book I mentioned in my personal statement, I made sure I could say one thing that I liked about it, one thing I didn't like and one aspect I found interesting that I would like to explore further. I made sure I could give my opinions on key themes, and also have maybe a couple of questions about certain aspects I didn't understand so well. Academic articles are also helpful; obviously you're not expected to quote faultlessly from six different journals, but to be able to talk about the main points in one or two shows how you are taking your interests beyond your curriculum.

Actual interview practice is crucial. Interviews are about not just having opinions but being able to articulate them and form clear, coherent arguments. Practice with subject teachers is very helpful, but so too is practice with parents, friends and teachers unrelated to your subject, for reasons I shall explain.

I applied to study Spanish and Portuguese (ab initio) at St John's college. All MML applicants through to this stage have two interviews – one subject-specific and one general – as well as a written exam. First for me was the subject interview, conducted by a professor of Portuguese, a Spanish lecturer and the college's head of Modern Languages – all of us on sofas in the professor's study.

Before the interview I was given a choice of two short texts in Spanish – one prose, the other poetry. I was given 20 minutes to go to the library and, with the use of a dictionary, read over/analyse the text for discussion. This part of the interview scared me most, since at that point in my course I had never studied literature. Before the interview, I made sure I went over some basic terminology, as well as reading up on methods/checklists of what to do when analysing an unfamiliar text.

In my interview, we spent only about two minutes talking about the poem. I was asked to read out a stanza so they could hear my accent, then give a brief summary and comment on what I thought to be the major themes. After that, the conversation moved on to my particular interests; for example, what I'd read and why I wanted to continue Spanish and begin Portuguese. You can't anticipate every question you're going to be asked, but the interviewers usually begin with the basics just to get you talking a bit. Your answers will determine the way in which the conversation progresses.

If there's something you really want to talk about, it is possible to steer the conversation that way. Raising particular interests is likely to count in your favour, and you shouldn't feel scared to take control of the conversation to show this. However, the most important thing is to be ready to justify any position you take. This is an intrinsic part of studying at Cambridge: there's no right or wrong answer, just make sure you can explain your reasoning – you will undoubtedly be asked, 'So WHY do you think this?'

The general interview is very different. Whilst the subject interview is based on uncovering your areas of interest and dedication to your chosen subject, the general interview is more focussed on finding out about your character and whether or not Cambridge would be the right place for you. My two general interviewers were unrelated to my subjects (one I think was a professor of Archaeology) and most of their questions were drawn from my personal statement. Broader questions included 'How do you deal with stress?' and 'Tell us about your extra-curricular interests'.

The final part of the interview process was an entrance exam. Be sure you practise all available past papers. They may seem daunting at first, as the articles to discuss tend to be on unfamiliar topics, but practice lets you understand the mark scheme and get advice from teachers. I did my first practice paper using as much time as I needed, but after that I practised under timed conditions, so I would know how to manage my time.

It's rare to come out of an interview thinking it went well – they are meant to be challenging. The experience is not a horrible one, and it's over in what feels like thirty seconds. The important thing is not to worry; Cambridge interviewers do not set out to be intimidating. If you are asked a question that stumps you, don't panic! It's okay to admit you're not sure, or to ask for a couple of moments to think. In fact, it's probably beneficial: pausing to think and formulate a clearer opinion is better than blurting out the first thing that comes into your head.

Whatever the outcome, knowing that you have prepared and tried your best is what matters most.

Subjunctive Season

With the Lower Sixth now refamiliarised with the indicative tenses they forgot over the summer holidays, November brings the moment to traverse that final frontier of school-years Spanish – the subjunctive.

It is tempting to portray the subjunctive in Spanish as an exotic remnant of the Moorish occupation and the fatalism that the occupiers bequeathed to the peninsular psyche. Having grappled with Persian for a year or two – the language of another culture long dominated by Arab conquerors – I was struck by the similarity between the uses of its equivalent verb form and those of the Spanish subjunctive.

The theory of the Spanish subjunctive as a throw-back to the Caliphate is most convincing for the subjunctive used after cuando when referring to the future. In these circumstances the Spanish present subjunctive provides a more satisfying option than the upstart future in French or the illogical present indicative in English.

In other contexts, my impression is that the Spanish subjunctive is more closely paralleled in French and English than we sometimes acknowledge, eg 'it's essential that you be here on time'. However, the general consensus seems to be that the Spanish use the subjunctive more consistently and in more tenses than English or French speakers.

Beware, however, that when visiting Spain, and more so parts of Latin America, native speakers and even headline writers are not unknown to blunder blithely through subjunctive triggers without batting an indicative eyelid.

At Sixth Form or undergraduate level there are two pressing reasons to learn the subjunctive: one defensive (to avoid unwittingly lapsing into error), the other offensive (an opportunity proactively to display one's linguistic prowess to gain favour with the examiner). Modern Languages mark schemes at Pre-U encourage 'complex sentence patterns' – and in Spanish, we all know what that means.

The uses of the subjunctive in Spanish are perhaps best thought of in terms of call and response: a main clause or phrase 'triggers' the subjunctive. For the student it is a matter of familiarising oneself sufficiently with these triggers to spot the need for a subjunctive, and then understanding the sequence of tenses well enough to get the appropriate form.

Perhaps the most successfully used trigger at this level is the value judgement, which can be reasonably worked in to analytical and discursive essays. The one that can perhaps look most forced is the si clause: hypothetical or counterfactual sentences need careful handling when deployed in academic essays.

The most elusive triggers, and therefore perhaps the most satisfying to get right, are the negative antecedent, best known from the title of the set text El coronel no tiene quien le escriba, and its partner the indefinite antecedent. The latter is popular with politicians, as the El País website has noted, eg Prime Minister Rajoy declaring "Tendremos que corregir lo que haya que corregir" or his predecessor Rodríguez Zapatero, in 2011, referring to "los errores que hayamos podido cometer" – the implication being that the errors in question might not really have been made, subliminally prompting the listener to doubt whether 'we' (subject of the verb) might really be capable of error after all.

Two neuroses can arise from exposing students to the subjunctive: firstly, subjunctophobia, a state of denial about the existence of the subjunctive in which the distraught sufferer vows to press on regardless, defiantly clinging to his or her partially seaworthy grasp of the indicative while hoping that subjunctive triggers are really just figments of an over-eager teacher's imagination; and the converse, subjunctivitis tremens, whereby the student convinces him/herself that within almost any phrase or assertion lurks a core of subjunctive-triggering uncertainty. While philosophically interesting, the latter condition can impel the student into lobbing almost every verb into the subjunctive (sometimes leaving in the indicative only those which should actually be subjunctive).

The consolation for sufferers of these thankfully rare conditions is that their work does at least stand out from the rest…

Above all, the subjunctive makes Spanish more interesting. If there were no subjunctive to master then Sixth Form Spanish would be like a family Christmas with no 1,000-piece puzzle to complete. We should be interested to know of any tips (or cures) that you have found helpful in addressing this singular area of study.

By BAS editor Robin Wallis.

New Pre-U Texts

Our September edition reviewed the new Pre-U Topics that first come up for examination in 2019 – and will thus be first taught during the current 2017-18 academic year. We now turn to the Texts section of the new Paper 4 syllabus and the opportunities it gives for teachers and pupils to discover new writers they may not previously have encountered.

In this edition we look at the first four Texts (numbered 6 to 9 in the syllabus, which arranges them in roughly chronological order), and in our next edition we shall look at the remaining four (numbered 10 to 13). At this point we repeat the warning we issued in our last edition: at the time of writing, the 'Specimen 2019' Paper 4 on the Pre-U website does not in fact use the 2019-21 syllabus!

…

Text 6 remains ***La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes***, the Golden Age novella that brought the *pícaro* to the imagination of the reading public. After five centuries the narrative voice remains fresh and the protagonist's adventures engaging. The uneven structure of the *tratados* hints at some sort of hiatus in its composition, allowing commentators to fill gaps in the story with their own interpretations. However, it remains a classic – even if some argue that it might be better suited to an undergraduate course on the Golden Age rather than being the sole Spanish text studied by a 21st century school-leaver.

Lorca's ***Bodas de sangre*** is a new addition as Text 7. At one stage it featured in the Topic section as part of the *Trilogía rural*, but students (and examiners) will have fuller rein to examine its literary and dramatic workings now that it is in the Texts section of Paper 4. Long a favourite with drama students, it is a more lyrical work than what Lorca called the *documental fotográfico* of rural life in *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, and its surreal elements offer room for dramatic interpretation.

Martín Gaite's ***Las ataduras*** (the novella of that name, rather than the collection of stories published under that title) tells the story of Alina's life from school age to motherhood. The novella focuses on the shifting *ataduras* in her personal life that first bind her to her family and her home area, and then pull her away from

them. Her clinging and immature father's mismanagement of their relationship is in the foreground of the story. However, a positive message emerges as Alina looks to put in place a constructive relationship with her parents as they become grandparents to her children. Her relocation from rural Spain to a modern European (non-Spanish) city is one to which many young Spaniards of the present era could relate. The author's measured tone conspicuously avoids reference to the *franquista* era in which it was written (and in which it is implicitly set) and keeps the focus on human relationships.

Text 9 remains the selection of poems from Hernández's ***Antología poética*** – please see the literary feature section.

Miguel Hernández, Antología poética

Miguel Hernández was the only poet to write (and fight) on the battlefield as well as in prison during the Spanish Civil War. He is a poet like none other in the context of twentieth century Spain and the detailed study of his anthology is an excellent springboard to understanding the conflict through the eyes of *el pueblo*.

His humble origins in rural Alicante, with limited access to formal education, made him an unlikely poet, but his perseverance and the encouragement of a close circle of friends brought him success. The three collections within the anthology each relates to a distinct stage of his life – as a civilian, soldier and prisoner respectively. Understanding his life experience is paramount to comprehend the evolution of his poetry and appreciate the emotions that emanate from its verses.

The publication of *El rayo que no cesa* in 1936, coinciding with the start of the Civil War, catapulted Hernández to the forefront of contemporary Spanish poetry. The collection of twenty-seven sonnets and three poems contains some of his finest lyricism. It is noted for the emotional intensity of the experience of love and sorrow, and the portrayal of death as redemption.

The symbol of the *rayo* infuses these poems with the energy associated with a lightning bolt. At times this applies to the intensity of the poet's feelings, but at other times this powerful symbol applies to objects that inflict physical pain instead. When the *rayo* becomes a *cuchillo*it is metal, cold, sharp, and a threat to the poet's emotions.

Death is an overwhelming presence in *El rayo que no cesa* – the unavoidable fate waiting to redeem the poet from his unfulfilled love. The recurring sorrow of his frustrated romance drives him towards fatalism. Like the *toro* in a bullring, the poet is vigorous and brave in the face of his fatal destiny.

This passionate and even bucolic Hernández was inspired by his failed romances with Josefina Manresa, María Cegarra and Maruja Mallo. The majority of the sonnets are addressed to the latter, as it is thought that Hernández's romance with the Galician surrealist painter coincided with the publication of *El rayo que no cesa*.

The *Elegía a Ramón Sijé* is arguably one of the most celebrated works in Spanish poetry. Hernández draws on natural symbols to recreate his intense emotional state after the loss of his beloved friend and companion.

Only a year after *El rayo que no cesa* Hernández published *Viento del pueblo*. This marks a dramatic shift in the thematic content of his poetry. By this stage he was a member of the *Ejército Republicano*, and his poetry became a means of denouncing social injustice. Romantic love and passion became love for the oppressed campesinos, and his struggle represents the Republican campaign in the Civil War. In this context, the poet conceives of death as part of the struggle for survival and the toll that needs to be paid to free the nation from fascism. His political commitment is reflected in the pointed poetry that he uses to provoke the *pueblo* to fight for dignity and freedom.

Some of these poems become, at times, an *arenga* to the lower classes to instigate rebellion. Such is the case of *Jornaleros*, with its powerful references to *una tormenta de martillos y hoces* alluding to the Communist symbols. *Aceituneros* pays homage to the workers of *el campo andaluz* whom he encourages to rise against the *terratenientes* that exploit men, women and children, whereas *Las manos* or *Primero de mayo de 1937* celebrate the working classes nationally, makes reference to the *hoz* as the icon that unites them.

The last poem in the collection, *Pasionaria*, is dedicated to Dolores Ibárrurri, universally known by the epithet in the poem's title. She would become the iconic leader of the Communist party and a mother figure for many. A lesser known character, but equally heroic in the eyes of Hernández, is the seventeen-

year- old *miliciana* Rosario Sánchez Mora, “La chacha”, whose exploits are described in Rosario, *dinamitera*.

The third instalment of the Antología poética marks the premature end of Hernández’s work.Whilst in jail, between 1938 and 1941, Hernández wrote *Cancionero y romancero de ausencias*, in which he returned to a more elementary and succinct style of poetry. The devastating effect that imprisonment had on Hernández filters through these poems, whose main themes are love and *ausencias*. Separation from his wife and family spurred his literary creativity just as it filled him with sorrow. The intensity of his poetry is heightened by the lack of ornamental expressions and the direct and simple language.

Nanas de la cebolla depicts Hernández’s frustration as both his wife Josefina and their son starve, with not much more to eat than bread and onions. Aware of Josefina’s depression and his son’s unlikely survival, Hernández asserts his love for them as his only source of hope.

However, the poet’s strength begins to crumble and his tragic destiny seems inevitable. Miguel Hernández died of tuberculosis in March 1942 aged only 31, leaving us some of the most inspirational and moving poetry in Spanish literature. The humanity transmitted through his verse would turn him into an iconic figure of his time.

By BAS editor Francisco Compan

La guerra de los vinos

War

Civil war is breaking out in Spain. I'm not referring to mischievous rebellions in the north-east corner of the country but, rather, to the somewhat under-reported conflict which is taking place in bars, restaurants and family dining rooms around the entire country. The War of the Wines has replaced *Mus* to become the biggest source of quarrelling among grown-ups around the tables of Spain. The contention that lies at the heart of this wrangling? "The quality of the wines from Ribera del Duero now surpasses that of those produced in Spain's most famous region for viticulture, La Rioja" – discuss. Ouch! I can sense the equal measures of outrage and cheers bouncing back at me even as I merely type these words on my keyboard! Can a resolution to this conflict be found in just one short article? Let's give it a go.

The case for Rioja

The origins of winemaking in La Rioja date back much further than those of Ribera del Duero. Wine was being produced here as far back as the 11th century BC by Phoenician settlers. La Rioja is protected by mountains, most notably the Obarenes and the Cantabrias, with dramatic escarpments from Sierra de la Demanda to Sierra de Valdezcaray. It has different soils made up of limestones, sandstones, loam, gravels and clays and plenty of sunshine and seasonal rainfall. In short, ideal growing conditions for good quality grape vines. At one point there were over seventy different varieties of grape in the region, but today the

main grape used is Tempranillo, often mixed with smaller measures of Mazuelo, Graciano, Garnacha Tinta and Maturana varietals.

The wines are usually aged for at least two years (known as *Crianzas*) or three years (known as *Reservas*), including one year in oak barrels. *Gran Reservas* are aged at least two years in barrels and then a further three years in the bottle before being sold. Younger (and usually cheaper) wines (*vino joven)* are also released under the Rioja label. Traditional Riojas are matured in barrels made of American oak, which imparts subtle flavours of coconut and dill. However, some producers now use French oak, which delicately adds tones of vanilla and cinnamon to the fruit.

Some of Rioja's best-known producers have been established for many years – one of the oldest being *Bodegas Bilbaínas* – and have developed an international reputation for producing complex, 'earthy' wines of exceptional quality. In fact, the quality of wines from Rioja has been so revered that, the region was the first to be given DOC (*Denominación de Origen Calificada*) status in 1991 and is still one of only two such classified wine regions in Spain (the other being…. Priorat, in Catalonia – not Ribera del Duero!). This is the highest standard in Spanish wine law and is awarded for its particularly stringent quality controls. Not only Spaniards, but wine-drinkers around the globe often save a good Rioja *Gran Reserva* to accompany an important meal to celebrate a special occasion.

Ribera del Duero

In contrast to the region of La Rioja, the wine-growing DO (*Denominación de Origen*) of Ribera del Duero is a most unlikely area for producing good wine. It is a bleak, flat and rugged landscape occupying the northern *meseta* with few picturesque villages, just a handful of generally charmless towns scattered across its wide-open hectares. The buds on the vines are the latest to emerge in Europe, early frosts can be a danger and the season is short and intense. However, on the back of the pioneering obstinacy of a landowner who inherited an area of pine woods and scrubby fields known as Vega Sicilia in the late 19th century, a new wine region was born which would eventually grow in stature. The landowner, Eloy Lecanda, transformed Vega Sicilia into an exemplary agricultural estate by importing vines from Bordeaux and setting up a modern winery using the latest techniques of the time. However, it took several

decades and various new owners of the estate until the exceptional quality of the Vega Sicilia wines was reached and recognised, leading to the establishment of other 'copy-cat' wineries along the banks of the Duero River nearby.

It was not until 1982 that Ribera del Duero finally became a designated *denominación de origen* thanks to the inspiration of Vega Sicilia and new wines being produced in the *comarca* of Pesquera. There were 14 wine-producing estates in 1982. Now, there are over 300 within the boundaries of the region. The principal grape here is also Tempranillo, but occasionally mixed with Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon. The same system for classification as in Rioja is applied in Ribera del Duero, with wines classed as *jóvenes, crianzas, reservas* and *gran reservas,* but being matured more commonly in French oak or a mixture of French and American. Generally, the result is a darker, more intense wine than most Riojas, with concentrated notes of licorice and ripe black fruit.

Go compare!

As the saying goes, *sobre gustos no hay nada escrito*, and in the end we choose the wine we like best. Nonetheless, we can assess quality in the wine to a large extent, even though the wine might have different characteristics to the ones we prefer. For example, you may not like acidic or oaky wines, but the key question when trying a wine is whether it is a good example of its type. In general, the criteria for differentiating between a poor wine, an acceptable wine and a great one include:

Balance (the sweetness and fruitiness should be in balance with the tannin (dryness) and acidity).

Finish (a pleasant finish where the flavours linger for several seconds is the aim).

Intensity (dilute flavours can indicate a poor wine while very intense wines can upset the balance, making them difficult to drink).

Complexity (the greatest wines generally have many different flavours).

Expressiveness (great wines express characteristics of their grape variety and/or their region such as soils and climate).

Geography plays a very important part in winemaking and, in this sense, La Rioja has an advantage over Ribera del Duero. The Tempranillo grape thrives in this moderate climate, producing full or medium-bodied wines with medium acidity, medium tannins and red fruit flavours (strawberry). However, the region is quite large and varied, leading to a diverse quality of grapes. This usually means that single estate wines (produced from the grapes gown in the same area) can be better, but they will vary from one year to the next depending on the local weather. Larger wine- producers will mix grapes grown in different parts of the region to create more consistency (but not always quality). In Ribera del Duero, the intense summers produce stronger black fruit flavours (plum, blackberry). However, the best are still well balanced, with complex, lingering flavours brought out during the winemaking process. The type of barrel (new or old, French or American oak), as well as the time the wine spends in it, contribute greatly to the quality of the wine.

This all means that some Riojas and some Ribera del Duero wines are much better than others from the same *Denominación*. Rioja has become an international brand, and many wine producers make bland, cheap versions, which sell easily on supermarket shelves. The same is happening in Spain with wines from Ribera del Duero. So, *¡ojo!* – whilst the label will give you some idea of the style of the wine, it does not necessarily indicate quality. However, at the top end, with the exception of Vega de Sicilia, Ribera del Duero wines still tend to lack the polish and sophistication found in the best Riojas.

Who wins?

As in most wars, there are so many complexities that to claim one side's cause just and the other's not would be to over-simplify the matter. Better to negotiate around the table, with the most senior Generals strategically poised, un-corked and ready for action. With the aid of some large goblets and freshly prepared country fayre, let the battle commence!

Adam Patterson
Co-owner of Vinehop – a small, independent wine and beer shop in Cheshire

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